

## PALM DESERT GETAWAY

# Desert Stars



This time of year, when much of California is socked in with dreary gray weather, it's easy to wax poetic about the year-round sunshine found in the Desert Cities. But the stars deserve their due too — and not only those shining down from the cosmos. Indeed, there are many stellar attributes of the Desert Cities that merit lauding, from excellent accommodations to activities that bring out the best of the desert landscape. Even better, it's all just 127 miles from San Diego.

Making the exodus from San Diego to Palm Springs on May 13 is a convoy of sorts. This is the day Highway 74 comes alive with transport of the two-tire variety — the Amgen Tour of California's 750-mile route making its first venture into the area. Sixteen of the world's top professional cycling teams will be in full gear as stage two of the eight-day race takes them through Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage and Cathedral City.

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Rancho Las Palmas

Discovery's Full Moon Hike is the ticket. Sunset also gets attention, as the tour departs one hour prior to that spectacular desert event. From here, trekkers explore the Palm Springs foothills, getting an education in the desert's flora, fauna, geography and history. The moderate-level hike (2½ miles round trip with 300-foot elevation gain) wends to a special locale for taking in the moonrise and city lights.

Glimpse other stars on a desert night in the Palm Springs Art Museum's Annenberg Theatre during several seasonal events. Throughout May, the Festival of (In)Appropriation is in full swing. Free to the public, the festival showcases "contemporary, short audiovisual works that appropriate film or video footage and repurpose it in 'inappropriate' and inventive ways."

June 6 through August 15, catch Global Lens 2013. Thursdays at 6 p.m., the series features works such as *Life Kills Me* from Cuban director Sebastián Silva and *The Parade* from Serbian director Srdjan Dragojević.

## LA QUINTA RESORT & CLUB AND PGA WEST

**THERE ARE STARS, AND THEN THERE ARE AWARD-WINNING LUMINARIES.**

Such is the case with La Quinta Resort & Club and PGA West. The prestigious honor that's been bestowed? Well, there are four, actually: SpaFinder® 2012 Wellness Readers' Choice Awards in the categories of Best for Golf, Best for LGBT, Best for Weddings and Best for Pet-Friendly. Frequent guests of La Quinta wouldn't be surprised by this; these are just a few reasons they consider the resort a home away from home.

As for PGA West, it's no stranger to accolades. Indeed, it's been given the moniker of 'The Western Home of Golf in America' along with being named "North America's Golf Resort of the Year." Of PGA West's nine courses, five are award-winning, four private, designed by a string of golf notables: Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Greg Norman and Tom Weiskopf.

Thrilling news from PGA West came in January with the announcement that the Golf Academy is now open to the public, making its adult and junior golf school accessible year-round. Besides top-notch instructors, the academy also uses portable, state-of-the-art JC Video units and TrackMan, the world's leading ball flight monitor, to help players improve their game. Available, too, are club-fitting, coaching and

### THOSE WHO PREFER SOAKING IN THE DESERT SCENERY AT A SLOWER PACE SHOULD CONSIDER TWO NEW AREA TOURS.

From Desert Adventures comes the five-hour Wonders of the Coachella Valley. In keeping with its name, the outing begins at the Coachella Valley Preserve, where participants disembark from a climate-controlled vehicle to check out the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve. Skyward views reward with a canopy of native palms. Beneath unsuspecting feet is the San Andreas Fault. From here, the tour continues to Desert Hot Springs and a locale listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Cabot's Pueblo Museum. This hand-constructed, Hopi-inspired pueblo built from reclaimed and found objects is considered America's oldest "green museum." Still to be seen: the mineral-rich medicinal waters for which the region is famous, followed by wind turbine and solar farms creating alternative energy sources. Finally, there's a stop at the Whitewater Preserve, where a stroll along the river holds myriad rewards, like catching sight of grazing bighorn sheep.

Prefer hiking under desert stars? Trail





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wellness/fitness training.

Another crown jewel at the resort, Spa La Quinta, just underwent a renovation. Already stealing hearts is the spa's idyllic Sanctuary Courtyard with built-in ambience via fireplaces, fountains, lush flora, cool mist system and views of the Santa Rosa Mountains. Another way to spend time in nature: six soaking tubs with private garden locales. Allowing more open-air time are four signature La Quinta Celestial Showers. Inside Spa La Quinta's doors, bliss-inducing indulgences.

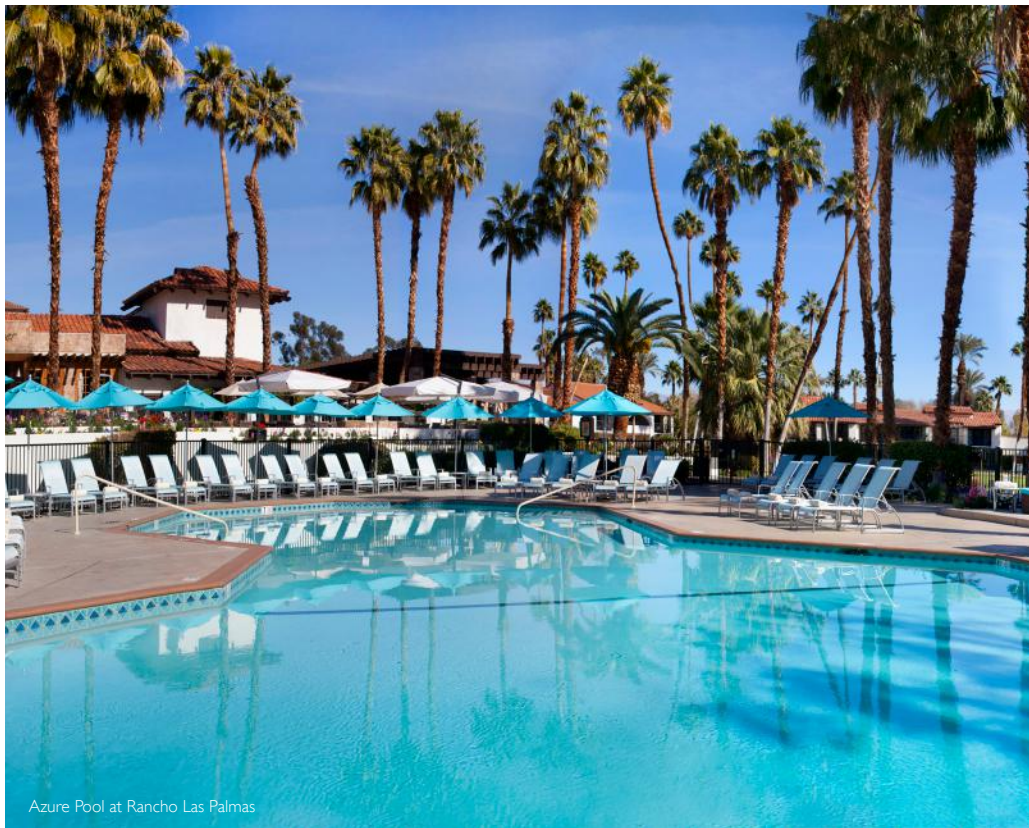
Thirty-eight newly renovated treatment rooms tempt with indigenous and organic offerings, including mainstay favorites like Sacred Stone Therapy massage and the Coffee Blossom Body Latte scrub and wrap. Kids and pets are welcomed with treatments targeted for them. On the menu, too, are exciting additions such as HydraFacial™, a hydradermabrasion technology for noninvasive resurfacing and skin rejuvenation. The BT-Micro Natural Facelift uses both ultrasonic and micro-current technologies to firm facial muscles, diminish fine lines and improve elasticity and collagen production. Not to be left out is Spa La Quinta's full-service salon, with its organic/vegan nail and hair care line and mineral makeup.

Time should be allotted for the adjacent fitness center with Life Cycle, Life Step, Life Stride and Paramount ETX equipment — and the movement studio with classes ranging from Pilates to Zumba. There's the resort's renowned tennis program helmed by Tom Gorman, captain and coach of America's most successful Davis Cup team. The 23 professional-grade courts appeal to all tastes with both hard-court and Har-Tru clay surfaces. La Quinta's 41 swimming pools are just right for water aerobics, lap swimming or kicking back. After all, this is the desert. How better to appreciate it than by immersing oneself in a pool and admiring the surroundings?

## AGUA CALIENTE CASINO RESORT SPA

**SOMETIMES IT'S NICE BEING CLOSE TO THE STARS.** There's more than one way to

do so at Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa. At registration, this means going for VIP accommodations with the Presidential Suites on the top two floors. The 1,650-square-foot suites offer various vantage points of the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. A separate dining room and living space beckons for toasting a lively night ahead. Ready for relaxation are flat-screen televisions, jetted spa



Azure Pool at Rancho Las Palmas

tubs and relaxing deluge showers. But first, there are other stars to be seen.

Fitting for the flawless night is an intimate dinner at The Steakhouse. Big appetites will be appeased with starters such as the "Surf Meets Sand" chilled seafood display with king crab, ahi poke and halibut ceviche, fresh oysters, poached shrimp and steamed/chilled mussels. Room should be saved for the prime chateaubriand for two, carved tableside. Dessert? Perhaps later. There's gaming to be tackled.

Excitement is afoot in the casino with table games including blackjack, mini-baccarat and roulette. Card fans will enjoy Texas Hold 'Em or three-card poker. There are two poker rooms for trying one's luck: an 18-table room and a nonsmoking 20-table room. Those who prefer the thrill of high-stakes poker, slots and table games will feel right at home in the Primrose Room.

Still to come: those aforementioned stars that can only be accessed at The Show at Agua Caliente. Some of the best seats in the four-level theater are the 12 luxury box/suites. Ready for that dessert? Numerous packages will satisfy those with a sweet tooth. One that spells pure satisfaction is Stimulation and Libation, which comes with a three-minute chair massage, chocolate truffles, fresh-fruit smoothies and daiquiris.



La Quinta Spa and Salon

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La Quinta Gold Course

Die-hard chocolate fanatics will want the Dark Chocolate Fountain Extraordinaire.

When the curtain rises, all else is forgotten save for the stars taking The Show's stage. Some to catch as the schedule heads into summer: Penn & Teller weave their magic on May 10; the legendary Tony Bennett croons on May 16; The Steve Miller Band gets the audience rocking on May 24; and on June 7, Jewel prompts sing-alongs with her beloved songs. Not to be left out: Bad Company on June 15, Art Laboe's Summer Love Jam on June 22 and Sara Evans on July 27. How the audience feels by the end of the night? Starry-eyed.

## DESERT WILLOW GOLF RESORT

### WHERE DOES ONE GO TO SEE GREEN IN THE DESERT?

Golf courses, of course. Two in Palm Desert that are an oasis unto themselves: the Firecliff and Mountain View Courses found at Desert Willow Golf Resort.

These world-class, award-winning, 18-hole public courses designed by Michael Hurdzman

and Dana Frye appeal on many levels.

Tournament-quality Firecliff keeps golfers on their toes with 7,056 yards of natural hazards, water features and 100 bunker/waste areas. For those who prefer a smoother game, 6,913-yard Mountain View provides landscaping that ranges from generous fairways to flowing water, all blending seamlessly with the natural habitat.

Moving about the courses is a breeze on golf carts equipped with Global Positioning Systems (GPS), which are especially handy when trying to line up the consummate shot to hit the green. Keeping things cool during play: ice chests on the carts, ice- and water-dispensing machines scattered throughout the courses, and the perpetually circling refreshments cart.

Then there are the drinks the "19th hole" is most noted for: cocktails. Where does one obtain a frosty glass? There are two lounges on property, the Vista Bar and Lobby Bar. Quick meals and beverages can also be had at the Cook's Grill. Observe other golfers' skills over a leisurely lunch and glass of wine at Lakeview Terrace, which overlooks the ninth and 18th fairways of the Firecliff course. Chef Francois Gaetner serves up gourmet specialties like the signature Desert Willow cobb salad and lobster mac 'n' cheese.

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La Quinta Front Drive

An optimal time to partake of Gaetner's cuisine is Desert Willow Uncorked: A Night of Food, Wine and Spirits on May 3. Wine tastings and samplings of fine, high-end spirits are at the ready for pairings.

A definite occasion for making reservations at Lakeview Terrace is May 12, for Desert Willow's annual Mother's Day Brunch. Buffet items include everything from braised lamb shank to mousse-encrusted salmon. Carving stations will lure carnivores with prime rib, roasted turkey and glazed ham.

If a desired golf skill in action is spied on the course while you're savoring an egg dish from the omelet station, it may be time to up the ante with private lessons through the Palm Desert Golf Academy. PGA-certified instructors can hone skills through golf clinics, featuring state-of-the-art teaching and swing-comparison capabilities and the Titleist Performance Institute Full Swing Golf Flexibility Program. Next time a cocktail is ordered at the Vista Bar, it will be in celebration of an improved game.

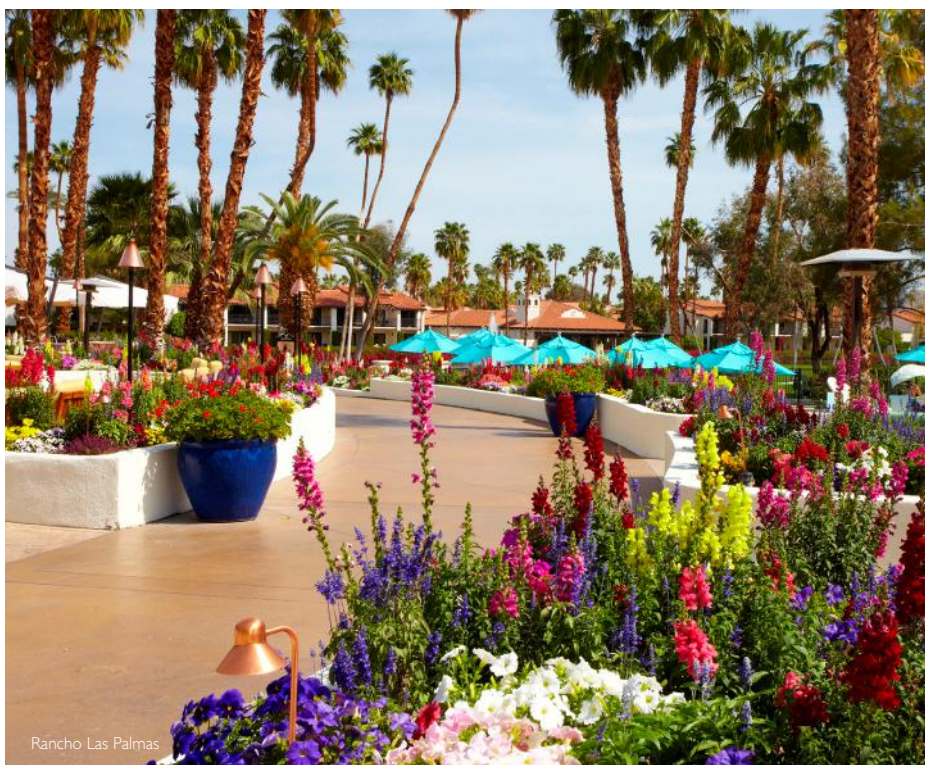
## RANCHO LAS PALMAS RESORT & SPA

### SOME STARS COME WITH DEBUTS AND RED-CARPET PREMIERES.

One such deserving star harkens from the culinary realm: Chef de Cuisine Ethan Holmes of Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa's



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signature restaurant, bluEmber. Holmes serves up regional and sustainable ingredients with a California modern/seasonal approach, such as sautéed barramundi with garlic chive gnocchi, green garlic chimichurri and spring peas and Chardonnay butter. Adding a “soundtrack” six nights a week is live music. Another place to catch these melodies, along with a vista of stars, is the outdoor lounge and Rancho Las Palmas’ plaza with its updated color scheme, additional seating and fire pits.

A Rancho Las Palmas hot spot with changes of its own is Azure, the adult-only pool. Setting a mood of relaxation is sleek décor and modern furniture. Pampering happens poolside with attendants delivering chilled drinks and food.

In contrast to Azure, Splashtopia offers up an experience that’s all about adrenaline rushes. Heart-pounding fun is in full play on the two 100-foot water slides, unique water-play zones and kid-gear fountains and sprinklers. More laid-back pursuits: drifting along the 425-foot Lazy River in an inner tube, or lazing in a cliff-side Jacuzzi. Hungry, but in chill mode? No need to leave. Splash Grill happily prepares food for famished swimmers.

Unwinding comes full circle at the Spa Las Palmas Tranquility Pool. Here, the temptation to step inside the spa to be truly spoiled is one worth succumbing to. After all, Spa Las Palmas has recently undergone a makeover of its own. It’s only polite to give it a look-see. What to admire? The updated spa boutique, relaxation rooms and pool area. The fitness center has also doubled in size and has upgraded equipment.

Like bluEmber, Spa Las Palmas draws on the desert’s assets with a treatment menu featuring pure essences of desert botanicals (many native to California), healing plants, flowers and herbs, along with organic essential oils and extracts. Among the many optimal treatments for a desert getaway is the Dilo Passion Hydrating Wrap, which uses the exotic oil of the dilo nut to replenish and moisturize dehydrated and sun-damaged skin.

As spa treatments lull guests into nap mode, it’s only natural for thoughts to drift toward how to end the perfect day. Dinner at bluEmber? Definitely. If it happens to be a Wednesday, though, there’s no reason to leave the spa. This special night of the week, the spa hosts its own happy hour under the stars. Alongside champagne and tapas, there are specials from the treatment menu, including all 50-minute treatments for \$99. Then again, snuggling up next to a fire pit and listening to live music allows for staring at the heavens and identifying the desert constellations.

**// BEKAH WRIGHT**