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TRAVEL

A Perfect Long Weekend in Palm Springs

Here’s how to maximize three days in the California desert, with critical intel on where to stay, binge on Midcentury Modern design, soak in hot springs and swill Bloody Marys

By Sara Clemence

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THE AVERAGE age is deceased,” novelist Sidney Sheldon said of Palm Springs, Calif., two decades ago. Back then, the city’s renaissance had only just begun. Settled by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and rendered a resort town by the Southern Pacific Railroad, Palm Springs blossomed in the middle of the 20th century. Starting in the 1940s, Hollywood celebrities flocked there to enjoy the weather—and to heed studio contracts stipulating they travel no more than two hours from Los Angeles. In Palm Springs, Liberace and Elvis Presley were unlikely neighbors, and Marilyn Monroe was discovered at a local racquet club. Inspired by the desert’s drama, architects such as Richard Neutra, William Cody and Albert Frey designed hundreds of stark modernist buildings, from banks to gas stations to celebrity estates.

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Thank sheer neglect for the buildings’ survival. Tastes

changed, money migrated, and for decades Palm Springs was a retiree backwater. More recently, the town has become an oasis of creative energy, inspired by midcentury style but not trapped by it. You can just as easily find an exceptional vintage clothing store as a trendsetting boutique. Barry Manilow still has a home here, as does Leonardo DiCaprio. Winter is peak season, with daytime temperatures that linger in the 60s and 70s and a string of major events. The Palm Springs International Film Festival finishes up on Jan. 13; in February comes Modernism Week and the Tour de Palm Springs, followed by the BNP Paribas Open, then Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival and the Stagecoach Country Music Festival. Pick almost any weekend for your escape: It’s almost guaranteed to be sunny.

Day 1: Friday

6 p.m. Arrive in Palm Springs. If you've come by air, pick up a rental car at the airport; the city is small and ride-shares are available, but you'll appreciate the convenience.

Palm Springs offers an abundance of design-minded hotels. Among the newest is the 11-room Dive, named for a neon sign of a swimmer that the owners stumbled upon last year while transforming the western-themed motel into a quirky boutique property (*from \$275 a night, 1586 E Palm Canyon Dr., divepalmsprings.com*). A classic alternative, the Colony Palms treats you to suzani fabric headboards, marble vanities and a large pool surrounded by fluttering umbrellas (*from \$160 a night, 572 N. Indian Canyon Dr., colonypalmshotel.com*).

7:30 p.m. For dinner, drive to the midcentury Holiday House hotel, designed by Herbert W. Burns. It was renovated in 2017, and every Friday night chef Gabriel Woo hosts a fried chicken feast (it's crucial to call ahead to reserve a spot). The menu changes slightly from week to week but includes a welcome cocktail and platters of moist, golden-crust chicken served at communal tables (*\$55 per person, 200 W Arenas Rd., holidayhouseps.com*).

9:30 p.m. If you have an ounce of appetite left—including for socializing—head to the Parker Palm Springs. Hand the car keys to the valet and ask for directions to Counter Reformation. You'll never find the entrance, tucked among the hedges in the back, on your own. Belly up to the zinc bar and order a glass of wine from the small but global selection. The truly gluttonous can pair it with *Jamón Ibérico pan con tomate*. Afterward, stroll the 13-acre hotel grounds. Shrubbery acts as architecture here, framing fountains, sculptures and fire pits. Relax in a hammock strung between towering palms before heading back to your hotel (*4200 E Palm Canyon Dr., parkerpalmsprings.com*).

Day 2: Saturday

7:30 a.m. Grab a water bottle, sunscreen, some layers and drive just south of the city to Indian Canyons. The ancestral lands of the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla Indians are home to more than 60 miles of hiking trails. Andreas Canyon is an easy 1.5-mile walk among extravagantly skirted fan palms, along the base of steep rock walls and across Andreas Creek. Palm Canyon, which stretches for 15 miles, is slightly more challenging (*\$9 a person, indian-canyons.com*).

9:30 a.m. Drive north to Wexler's at the Arrive hotel. Started in Los Angeles, the modern take on a classic Jewish deli opened this location in 2018. Choose a seat outside so you can admire the hotel's rusted-steel butterfly roof hovering over the pool and below the mountains. Menu highlights include the pastrami hash, the pancakes topped with blueberry compote and crème fraîche and the house-smoked fish (*1551 N Palm Canyon Dr., wexlersdeli.com*).

10:45 a.m. Grab a to-go cup at Cartel Coffee Lab next door, then motor 10 minutes south to the Saguaro hotel. A facade painted in rainbow pastels has made the hotel one of the valley's most Instagrammed buildings. It's also where Kurt Cyr, the voluble owner of Mod Squad Palm

The Balm of Palm Springs

A few of the spots featured in our long-weekend guide to the California desert town



Brunch at Cheeky's, a local institution JAY CARROLL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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Andreas Creek in Indian Canyons PHOTO: JAY CARROLL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Springs, will pick you up for a whirlwind 90-minute tour of Desert Modern architecture. He'll discuss cantilevers and brise-soleil, point out landmarks like Bob Hope's John Lautner-designed house and lesser-

known sites like Eva Gabor's erstwhile interior design shop (\$75, psmodsqquad.com).

12:30 p.m. You can work up an appetite learning to distinguish your Richard Neutras from your John Lautners. Sparrows Lodge, a sister property to Holiday House, is just

down the street; call ahead to ensure there's room at the Barn Kitchen. Its Barn Burger gets a kick from the house sauce ([1330 East Palm Canyon Dr.](http://1330EastPalmCanyonDr.com), sparrowslodge.com). Or drive to the Uptown Design District and request a seat on the patio at Jake's, a grown-up spot despite the

disco balls hanging out front. The menu features 10 varieties of Bloody Mary, and the gem lettuce salad is topped with tender strips of steak and delicately tart vinaigrette. If you have room for dessert, towering layer cakes are a specialty (*664 N. Palm Canyon Drive, jakespalmsprings.com*).

1:30 p.m. For a different perspective on the city, drive north to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Acrophobes might want to skip this one. First built in 1963 as a way to access San Jacinto Peak, it now has rotating cars that provide 360-degree views of the Coachella Valley and the deep, rugged Chino Canyon below. Bring a warm jacket, since there's likely to be snow at the top. Though you can camp on the peak, on this visit you'll just walk around a bit, take in the view and head back down (*1 Tram Way, pstramway.com*).

3 p.m. Palm Springs is known for its excellent design and vintage shops. On the way back south to the Uptown Design District, pause at Gypsyland to browse the barkcloth dresses, patchwork '60s skirts and psychedelic Hawaiian-print caftans (*2675 N. Palm Canyon Dr., 760-641-8600*). Pull into the strip mall down the road to eye the rare finds at Modern Way. On a recent day, its wares included a John Cotter ceramic dining set (\$12,000) and a custom dining set designed by Arthur Elrod, in lime and lemon with snakeskin-wrapped chairs for \$27,000 (*2500 N Palm Canyon Dr., psmmodernway.com*). In the same strip mall, Re[x] is larger and more accessible (*rex.haus*).

Then park near West Via Lola in the Uptown Design District so you can browse on foot up and down N. Palm Canyon Drive. Among the standouts: Dazzles has a huge selection of vintage Bakelite jewelry; Bon Vivant showcases colored glass (*gmcb.com/shop*); Frippery arranges vintage kimonos, caftans and dresses by color (*thefrippery.com*); and the dozen-plus vendors, including Soukie Modern, at Shops at Thirteen Forty Five sell curated antiques, rugs, menswear and more (*theshopsat1345.com*).

5 p.m. Many locals were less than thrilled when seven-story Kimpton Rowan Palm Springs Hotel opened in 2017. It towers above the town—which also makes it a choice spot for a sundowner. Sip a Super Bloom (made with gin and prickly pear shrub) at High Bar and watch the sun make the mountains blush deep pink as it sets (*100 W. Tahquitz Canyon Way, rowanpalmsprings.com*).



Taib Lotfie at Soukie Modern PHOTO: JAY CARROLL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

6 p.m. High-tail it over to Rooster and the Pig. The décor is simple, the location in a strip mall beyond low-key, and the modern Vietnamese food that chef-owner Tai Spendley serves up means there's often a wait. Every dinner starts with a petite bowl of savory rice congee topped with crispy garlic; the menu often changes, but if the pork and date spring rolls and the mushroom clusters are on it, don't miss them (*356 S. Indian Canyon Dr., roosterandthepig.com*).

8:30 p.m. Cap off the night at local favorite Paul Bar. Hidden in another humdrum strip mall, it has the affable vibe of a neighborhood joint but serves impeccable classic cocktails thanks to owner Paul O'Halloran, who some say was the best bartender at locally loved steakhouse Mr. Lyons (*3700 E. Vista Chino, paulbarps.com*).

Day 3: Sunday

7:30 a.m. Spend the early morning hours on the North Lykken Trail, whose north trailhead is near the end of West Cielo Drive in the Little Tuscany neighborhood. Park in the tiny lot and head up the narrow, boulder-littered switchback trail—you'll be rewarded with views over (and into) dazzling midcentury estates, including the former homes of Elvis Presley (845 W. Chino Canyon Rd.) and "Camelot" composer Frederick Loewe (815 West Panorama Road). You might even glimpse a bighorn sheep.

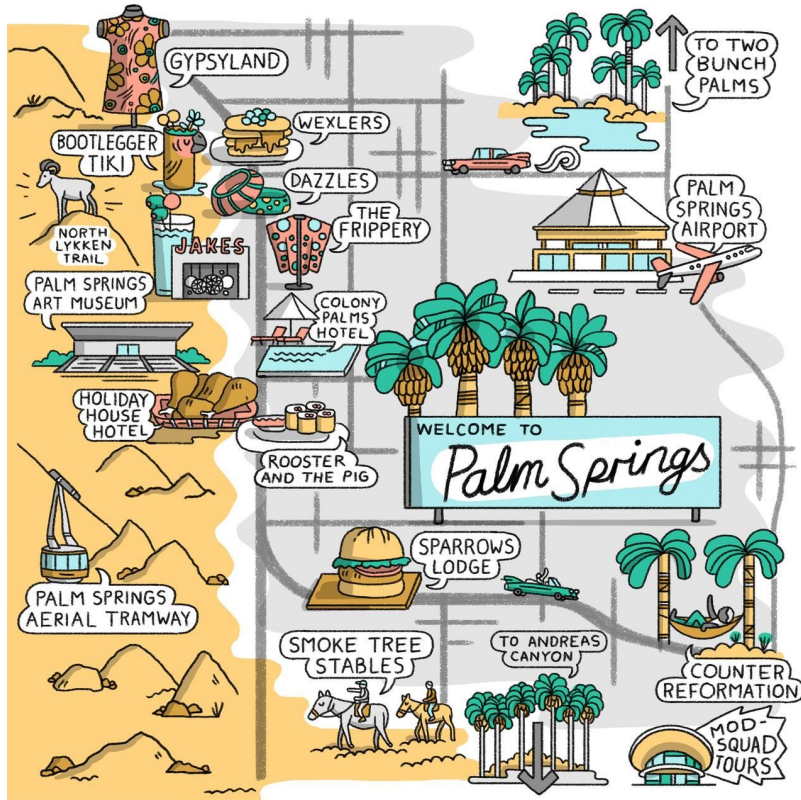


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design; in its collection are works by Louise Bourgeois, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Richard Neutra, Frank Gehry and other notables. Browse the permanent galleries as well as the exhibition of ebullient designs of 20th century designer Alexander Girard, on until March 1. (101 Museum Drive, psmuseum.org).

12 p.m. Drive five minutes north and request a seat on the tree-shaded patio at contemporary Italian restaurant Birba. The wood-fired Neapolitan-style pizzas—including one topped with potato, pancetta, pecorino, egg and green onion—are the stars of the brunch menu (622 N. Palm Canyon Dr., birbaps.com).

1:30 p.m. Zip about 10 minutes south to Smoke Tree Stables, in plenty of time to join a one-hour trail ride along the base of the Santa Rosa Mountains. Not to worry if you lingered too long over a brunch spritz at Birba—the 93-year-old operation has a tour every hour (\$60 per person, smoketreestables.com).

9 a.m. Have a well-deserved breakfast at charming Azucar in La Serena Villas hotel (339 S. Belardo Rd., azucarpalmsprings.com). The small indoor-outdoor restaurant is studded with Frida Kahlo portraits, overlooks the pool, and serves decadent dishes such as duck-egg omelet and pumpkin bread french toast with bourbon-infused maple syrup. Take note, the restaurant only welcomes patrons 21 and over and you'll likely need a reservation.

10:30 a.m. Small but strong, the Palm Springs Art Museum is focused on 19th- and 20th-century art, architecture and

3 p.m. Retreat to the hotel for some poolside lounging.

6 p.m. Sushi is not the most obvious dinner option in the desert. But chef Engin Onural's two-year-old Sandfish Sushi & Whiskey owns the irony. The décor is as clever as the name—a back wall is paved with oversize fish-scale tiles, and the pendant lights are made from brass portholes. Go for the black mussels, steamed in an umami-rich miso sake broth, a signature roll and a cocktail made from one of the restaurant's many smooth Japanese whiskies (*1556 N Palm Canyon Dr., sandfishsps.com*).

8 p.m. Round out the evening a few blocks away at Bootlegger Tiki. It has the dim lighting and campy blowfish lights you'd expect of a classic tiki joint, but the cocktails have been updated with housemade Falernum and carefully selected rums. Even the garnishes—orchids, tiny plastic camels—are a delight (*1101 N. Palm Canyon Dr., bootleggertiki.com*).

Day 4: Monday

8 a.m. Spend a little more time at the pool, then check out of the hotel.

9:30 a.m. Cheeky's is a local institution, which is why you're better off hitting it on a weekday, when a wait is more avoidable than on a busy weekend. The eclectic menu changes constantly; the chilaquiles are always a good bet (*622 N. Palm Canyon Dr., cheekysps.com*). Or duck into Grand Central, carved out of a 1930s department store. Three words: Palm sugar waffles (*160 La Plaza, grandcentralpalmsprings.com*).



The cactus garden at Sunnylands PHOTO: JAY CARROLL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

11 a.m. Sunnylands, where the Reagans danced away the New Year for nearly 20 years, is about 15 minutes from Palm Springs. The visitors' center and gardens are open to the public and perfectly pleasant. But the actual estate that Walter and Leonore Annenberg commissioned from A.

Quincy Jones in the 1960s is thrilling—and only accessible by small tour. Book ahead for an intimate look at the iconic house, which hosted everyone from Frank Sinatra, who was married in front of the living room fireplace, to Queen Elizabeth (*\$48 a person for a home tour, 37977 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage, sunnylands.org*).

12:30 p.m. Drive about 20 minutes north to Desert Hot Springs, stopping for lunch at Don Tacorriendo, a humble spot known for its authentic Mexican cooking and housemade tortillas. Order judiciously—the portions are large (*13900 Palm Dr., Desert Hot Springs*).

2 p.m. Make your final stop a restorative one. Drive about 30 minutes north to the aptly named Desert Hot Springs. Spread over 72 acres, Two Bunch Palms has a 600-year-old spring that runs with lithium-rich water and fills a large main mineral pool and several smaller pools and soaking tubs (*67425 Two Bunch Palms Trail, twobunchpalms.com*). You don't have to be a guest to take a dip, but you do need a day pass, which costs \$125 and should be booked ahead. The effects of the soak will hopefully last all the way home.

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