



explore

UNCOVERING
THE HEALING POWERS
OF THE DESERT IN

Palm Springs, CA

Over the last 18 months, I've learned a lot about self-care. Mostly, I needed to do more of it. I learned self-care comes in many forms: spa treatments, joyful activities, learning new skills, getting outside, eating well (including indulging in my favorite foods), admiring art, and taking small vacations even if it's just for a change of scenery. Luckily, Palm Springs, which has seen a revival in the last decade or so, is the perfect place to cater to practically every one of my wellness demands. Come away with me – you're worth it.



GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Sure, you can fly into Palm Springs via Palm Springs International Airport (PSP), but it's arguably more fun to make the two-hour drive from either Los Angeles or San Diego. Driving from LA, you'll score desert mountain views and have the opportunity to stop at the famous Cabazon Dinosaurs where you can climb inside of a T-Rex, shop dino merch, or just get your picture taken next to these massive concrete and steel dinosaurs.



WHERE TO STAY

When the **Ace Hotel & Swim Club** came on the scene around a decade ago, it tempted visitors with its hip vibe, stellar pool parties, and laid-back atmosphere. With a spacious layout, two pools, restaurant, bar, and amenities like room service, bike rentals, free parking, stocked (and I mean stocked) minibars, and excellent service, this is the most resort-style property in the brand's portfolio. Its convenient location centers you in just the right place – five minutes from Downtown Palm Springs and approximately 15 minutes from Desert Hot Springs to the north or Rancho Mirage to the south. Industrial chic rooms feature polished concrete floors, AC, record players with select vinyl, Rudy's Barbershop toiletries, and comfy sustainable beds. Select rooms have furnished private patio space, perfect for taking advantage of the warm desert nights and providing a safe space for pets (sorry, no kids allowed).



WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

For breakfast, you can start the day off right at Ace Hotel's diner-style **King's Highway** restaurant. The menu isn't marked, but options like chia pudding and yogurt and granola are gluten-free. If you order an egg dish, be sure to ask them to use a safe spot on the grill and sub your house potatoes for salad. Late riser? Starting at 11 a.m. the menu expands to offer snacks and salads – things like beet salad with whipped feta and grilled stone fruit, maitake mushrooms with sour cream and caramelized onions, and nearly all the salads appear to be gluten-free (but always ask to make sure – you know the drill).

A few minute's drive to downtown and you'll find a California-casual cafe, **MidMod Cafe**, offering up eats from acai bowls, smoothies, breakfast bowls, and a popular root hash for breakfast, to patty melts, salads, soups, and bowls for lunch – oh, and they've got GF French toast, too. If you tell them you have celiac, they will offer to prepare items in ways to reduce cross-contamination.

Also in Downtown Palm Springs, **Roly China Fusion** has a fun drag brunch, though I recommend going here for dinner since the brunch menu features dim sum, none of which is gluten-free. Besides, how often do we get to have safe, good Chinese food? You'll want no distractions as you dive into dishes like pineapple fried rice (with shrimp and Chinese sausage), 5-Spiced Short Ribs, Szechuan Brussels Sprouts, Mongolian or Hong Kong Beef, Kung Pao Chicken, and Veggie Stir-Fry. The menu is marked, but flag that you have celiac and they'll adjust their prep in the kitchen. Dishes here are meant to be shared family style, but trust me, you won't mind having leftovers.



Photos of the Ace Hotel courtesy of Ace Hotel & Swim Club Palm Springs

Whatever you do, don't skip **FARM**, a Palm Springs take on the vibe and food of Southern France. Walking back through the strip mall entrance you'll be transported to a French garden full of trellised plants, cafe-style tables, and pleasant live music. The lunch menu is full of crepes, salads, and sandwiches, while dinner is three-course prix-fixe with GF items marked. During my visit I had a dried fruit and nut mixed green salad, roasted lamb (a generous eight-rib portion) with haricots verts, tomatoes, and au gratin potatoes, plus a mixed berry sorbet topped with fresh berries. Note that several celiacs are regular diners here, the wine list is delicious, they make many sauces and spirit infusions in house, and the ambiance is unforgettable.

Over at **Eight4Nine Lounge**, you'll find a prix-fixe dinner option and marked menu with several gluten-free dishes. However, it's worth asking how the dish will be altered. This quirky spot reminded me of a modern art take on Alice in Wonderland and has a large outdoor garden seating area. Places on my list that I didn't have time to visit this go-around included **Rick's Desert Grille**, **Rooster and the Pig**, and **Ruben & Ozzy's Oyster Bar**.

If you're looking for the familiar, consider East Palm Canyon Drive/Highway 111 your yellow brick road to a massive selection of popular chain restaurants. Spots like **Olive Garden**, **Chipotle**, **Jersey Mike's Subs**, **Red Lobster**, **Ruth's Chris Steakhouse**, **Cheesecake Factory**, and more dot the backbone of this major road heading down toward Palm Desert.



Photo of the LaQuinta Spa courtesy of the LaQuinta Resort & Club



WELLNESS ACTIVITIES

A half-day trip over to Desert Hot Springs is a must – it's the only place you'll find true hot spring waters. To truly transport yourself, head over to **El Morocco Inn**, a renovated motel property boasting two heated mineral pools, a huge serene spa garden with hammocks, infrared saunas, and seating areas; plus a modest spa with truly indulgent treatments – all with a very detailed Moroccan theme played out in white-washed walls, bright blue doors, bold tapestries and fabrics, and undeniably serene music wafting through the air. The day spa rate is \$55 for four hours or you can book a treatment for free access. I recommend the two-hour Moroccan Mystic Ritual which includes whole-body lymph brushing and clay wrap using Rhassoul clay from the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, and a full-body rain massage using seven different essential oils that are warmed and dropped along the spine.

While El Morocco is pleasantly unpretentious and laid-back, you can go full luxe with a treatment at **LaQuinta Resort & Club** – but you'll have to be a guest to visit the spa. I enjoyed one of their signature massages, which allows you to pick the perfect aromatherapy blend for your treatment before starting off with a new grounding ritual aimed at shifting your focus to the present to maximize the benefits of the treatment. Since I arrived slightly late and anxious, it turned out to be





just what I needed. I practically melted into the table. They've also got Thai massage, which is a rare find.

Since wellness isn't always about becoming a piece of wagyu beef, it's worth noting that Palm Springs is also well known for golf and tennis – so I took some lessons to get into the swing of things. Over at the **Westin Mission Hills Golf Resort & Spa**, home to a challenging but not aggressive public Pete Dye course, I learned the basics, honed my putting skills, and smacked a few good shots on the driving range. I left feeling like I could play at least nine holes without utterly embarrassing myself. The \$110 hour-long private lessons include equipment, or you can reserve a tee time and bring your own clubs (or rent them in the pro shop).

Tennis was a different story, but no less fun. My instructor at the **JW Marriott Desert Springs** was so personable, helpful, and encouraging that I briefly entertained coming back once a month to keep working on my weak forehand. Hour-long one-on-one lessons (\$100) take place on your choice of clay, grass, or hard courts, and include equipment. During the hot summer months, the tennis club is only open until 11 a.m., and the resort's club is closed to the public during big events such as the PBI Tennis Camp and BNP Open. Why learn here? It's ranked in the top 10 tennis resorts *in the world* for the last 10 years.

A few other recommendations:

- Sound bath at the Integratron (1 hour drive)
- Vintage shopping in Downtown Palm Springs
- Palm Springs Art Museum
- Stargazing in Joshua Tree National Park (1 hour drive)
- Hiking in Tahquitz Canyon
- Bike tours
- Mid-Century architecture tour of the Tennis Club Neighborhood
- Ride on the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway [SGF](#)



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