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PALM DESERT IS PARADISE

PALM DESERT, CA – If it looks, feels, and sounds like paradise, it must be Palm Desert. With its year-round sunshine, friendly people, breathtaking scenery and unparalleled selection of diversions, this desert resort in the heart of southern California's Coachella Valley is the ideal destination for pleasure-seekers who can be as active or as laid back as they like.

When much of the nation is digging out from snowstorms, Palm Desert boasts average daytime temperatures in the mid-70s. This desert oasis is ringed by three majestic, snow-capped mountain ranges, sheltering it from southern California's coastal pollution and cold weather – and ensuring remarkably blue skies. With 350 days of sunshine each year, the weather is nearly perfect all year round.

Palm Desert is the ideal place for outdoor enthusiasts. Begin your adventure with an up-close look at the desert's flora, fauna and unique geology with an adventurous jeep tour. Then, for a completely different perspective, hop aboard a hot-air balloon or charter a private plane and check out the verdant polo fields and date groves to the east, and the awesome rock formations around the San Andreas fault to the west.

No trip to the Coachella Valley is complete without a ride on the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway to the top of Mount San Jacinto. You ascend 2.5 miles in 15 minutes to a pristine wilderness aboard glassed-in rotating tramcars – the world's largest. At the top, enjoy breathtaking views of the Valley and surrounding mountain ranges from the restaurant, lounge or observation deck, or hike one of the dozens of well-marked trails. Cross-country skiing, snowboarding, snow-shoeing, and even snow camping are also available in season.

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Back on the desert floor, don a bush hat and discover The Living Desert Zoo and Botanical Gardens – 1,200 acres of blooming, scampering, flying, howling fun. Here you'll find wild creatures and creature comforts for the entire family including nearly 450 native and exotic animals from the world's deserts, scenic trails, and beautiful botanical gardens. Picnic areas, a café and gift shop, Native American exhibits and year-round special events make this one of the area's most popular attractions.

You also can take a self-guided tour of Palm Desert's outstanding "Art in Public Places" which features more than 150 works of art. Palm Desert was the first city in Riverside County to create a public art program.

If golf's your game, hold onto your clubs. Palm Desert alone has 32 public, private and country club courses, and there are more than 100 courses in the entire Coachella Valley. World-class Desert Willow Golf Resort, the City-owned public golf course, features two 18-hole championship courses that rival the area's private clubs. The Mountain View and Firecliff courses not only have earned golfers' respect for their challenging layouts, but *Smithsonian* magazine has recognized their stunning landscape design that blends natural desert terrain with manicured greens.

If watching golf is more to your liking, you can see the pros as well as some celebrity amateurs up-close and personal at such renowned events as the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic, the Skins Game, the Frank Sinatra Celebrity Invitational, and the LPGA Nabisco Championship – nationally televised tournaments that take place in the desert.

Tennis anyone? Watch some of the world's leading players at the nearby Indian Wells Tennis Tournament (formerly the Pacific Life Open). If participating is more your style, take a lesson or even a week-long clinic, as Palm Desert is home to numerous public and private courts.

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The region also offers an eclectic mix of other events throughout the year. They include the Art of Food & Wine Palm Desert in November, the whimsical Palm Desert Golf Cart Parade in October, the Palm Springs International Film Festival in January, the Indio Desert Circuit Horse Shows from January through March, the National Date Festival in February, and an Art Walk through the galleries on El Paseo on the first Thursday of each month from October through May.

When it's time for some "retail therapy," Palm Desert has a reputation as the desert's retail oasis. From the elegant El Paseo to the bargain-hunter's paradise known as the College of the Desert Street Fair, you'll find everything you need – and more.

El Paseo is the desert's most exclusive shopping district, a mile-long mix of upscale art galleries, jewelry stores, beauty salons, haute couturiers, home décor stores, specialty boutiques, and apparel shops. There also are more than two dozen restaurants, bistros, coffee shops and bakeries along El Paseo, many with outdoor seating that affords a great vantage point for people-watching.

The popular Gardens on El Paseo, a beautiful complex of shopping, dining and entertainment, is anchored by Saks Fifth Avenue. The complex is built around a series of courtyards and lush gardens where jazz and classical concerts are held under star-filled skies. Soon it will be joined by El Paseo Village, a new retail and dining center scheduled to open in November 2010.

When the mall calls, you have a choice. There are 14 shopping centers including the indoor Westfield Palm Desert, which recently underwent a \$50 million renovation and expansion and will soon be home to Nordstrom. Currently anchored by Macy's, JC Penney, and Sears, there's also a 10-screen cinema, newly expanded food court, and nearly one hundred shops and boutiques. Others include Desert Crossing and One Eleven Town Center, which boast nationally known "big-box" retailers of clothing, home furnishings, sporting goods, electronics, and toys for every age and inclination.

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Locals and visitors alike flock to the weekend College of the Desert Street Fair. You can find practically anything at this friendly, down-home open-air market, including arts and crafts, jewelry, clothing, silk plants, cosmetics, home furnishings, golf clubs, new and used items, and fresh produce from local farmers.

At the end of a busy day of sightseeing and shopping, relax and rejuvenate with a pampering massage or therapeutic soak at one of the desert's superlative spas. Many feature signature treatments borrowed from the area's Native American ancestors.

Once you're recharged, head out for an evening of fine or casual dining at one of Palm Desert's remarkable selection of more than 150 restaurants. With outdoor dining a year-round luxury, many restaurants offer charming patios heated and cooled for your comfort and a chance to take in the local scenery. Whether you're in the mood for French, Italian, Japanese, Mexican, Greek, Thai, Chinese, seafood, traditional continental cuisine, a juicy mid-Western steak or even a boiled dinner at an Irish pub – there's a restaurant here to please every palate and pocketbook.

Ready for some nightlife? The Valley has it all: high-energy dance clubs, clubs for blues, jazz and country-and-western aficionados, intimate piano lounges and lively sports bars. The area's half-dozen casinos offer live entertainment as well as gaming fun. The McCallum Theatre for the Performing Arts offers a stellar line-up of dance, music, comedy and theater from some of the top names in the entertainment world. And several other area venues, including the Annenberg Theater at the Palm Springs Art Museum, host jazz, classical and popular music performances.

Information: For complete visitor information on Palm Desert and for a free Vacation Guide, call the Palm Desert Visitor Center at 800-873-2428, or visit online at www.palm-desert.org.

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