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PALM DESERT: A NATURE LOVER'S DELIGHT

PALM DESERT, CA – Don't let the term "desert" mislead you. While it may conjure up images of a flat, parched expanse of sand dotted with cacti, Palm Desert is actually a lush desert oasis filled with botanical gardens and wildlife preserves, surrounded by three dramatic mountain ranges. One visit to this destination resort and its many natural wonders will give you a new appreciation for what makes this "desert" so appealing.

One of Palm Desert's most popular natural wonders is The Living Desert Zoo and Botanical Gardens, a 1,200-acre nature paradise dedicated to preserving the fragile ecosystem of the desert, which contains an astonishing variety of animal and plant life – many species of which are rare and seldom seen.

Established in 1970, The Living Desert today is one of the most successful zoological parks in the country, attracting more than 350,000 visitors each year.

At The Living Desert you'll discover nearly 450 fascinating desert animals representing more than 140 species including coyotes, bighorn sheep, oryx (also known as the "unicorn of the desert"), zebras, cheetahs, and meerkats. There are botanical gardens representing ten different desert ecosystems, and a journey to Eagle Canyon, with its streams, mountain lions, bobcats, Mexican wolves and golden eagles, is a definite must-see.

Plus, you can take a safari without leaving the desert at The Living Desert's African exhibit, Village WaTuTu, a recreation of a 19th century Nigerian village. The exhibit features leopard, camels, hyenas, tortoises, birds, and the Petting Krall with sheep, goats, and Ankole cattle. Recently added were three giraffes and three ostriches which now call the Living Desert home.

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From late November through early January, take in WildLights at The Living Desert. This spectacular seasonal attraction features a twinkling Smoke Tree forest filled with illuminated, animated displays of desert animals and giant holiday figures. The Living Desert also offers wilderness hiking trails, Native American exhibits that honor the natural history of the Cahuilla Indians (this area's original residents) and special events and programs.

For another perspective of our desert community, visit the Santa Rosa Mountains Scenic Area, which forms the City's southern boundary. The Visitor Center, located on Highway 74 at the north base of the Santa Rosa Mountains, provides information on the nature, culture, and history of the area. It also serves as a gateway to myriad hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails. Newly complete hiking and mountain biking trails beckon with a variety of easy to difficult trails named after such famous residents as Hopalong Cassidy and Randall Henderson, one of Palm Desert's founders. In addition, the Center is home to a Cahuilla Garden of plants used by Native Americans.

Highway 74 – also called the Palms to Pines Highway – is a 130-mile scenic road that takes you through a contrast of landscapes, from the barrel cactus and palm trees of the desert to a subalpine forest of pine and fir.

Information: For complete visitor information on Palm Desert and 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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