

Palm Springs

WAYS

Tamara Hinson discovers that good things really do come in threes in this beautiful desert city

**W**eirdly, Palm Springs, AKA America's most beautiful city, has shopping mall giant Westfield to thank for its recent upgrade.

Westfield's proposed plans for a sprawling retail complex in the city went down like a lead balloon, and the retailer eventually plumped for nearby Palm Desert. But the subsequent realisation that residents were being lured

away by its big-name brands persuaded local authorities to find a happy medium, and that's where the downtown development project came in.

So with a fresh lease of life, what else is there to discover in this southern Californian city?

**DOWNTOWN**

Today, Palm Springs' centre is in the early stages of a huge



PICTURES: ROWAN PALM SPRINGS; DESERT ADVENTURES RED JEEP TOURS; VISIT PALM SPRINGS

**RIGHT:**  
Andaz Palm Springs

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Lappert's Ice Cream store

**BELOW:**  
Palm Springs Aerial Tramway



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**SAMPLE PRODUCT**

**Travel 2** offers a week-long break with three nights at the four-star Lux Rodeo Drive Hotel and four nights at the four-star Hyatt Palm Springs, from £1,259. The price includes United Airlines flights from Heathrow to Los Angeles and car hire, and is valid for travel between November 5-26. [travel2.com](http://travel2.com)

**North America Travel Service** offers a seven-night break to Palm Springs, staying at the Hyatt Regency Indian Wells, with flights from London to Palm Springs via Dallas. From £1,895 per person, based on travel in August. [northamerica.travelservice.co.uk](http://northamerica.travelservice.co.uk)

➔ makeover, albeit one which respects the city's unique architecture. Take the Kimpton Rowan Palm Springs (from £139 per double), a mid-century modern-style building with a low-slung frontage, clean lines and a light-filled interior.

A local tells me that several designs were submitted before this property, which opened in 2017, got the green light. It's part of the first phase of a redevelopment of the downtown area.

With that comes the first California-based Tommy Bahama restaurant, whose neighbours include shiny new Mac, Kiehl's and H&M stores, although there are plenty of more-exclusive newcomers too, including chic interior design store West Elm. Even the new Starbucks is special - it's a Starbucks Reserve, which offers a wider range of coffee blends, in a more luxurious, lounge-like setting.

Behind the Kimpton, a huge plot of land has been flattened to make way for a Virgin hotel (due to open in 2022) and, nearby, construction has started on the Dream Hotel which, when it

“**We spot a rattlesnake basking on a boulder, and we try the palm tree seeds which are part of the Cahuilla Indians' diet**”

opens in late 2019, will comprise 169 rooms and more than 10,000 square feet of meeting space. The Andaz Palm Springs will open in the same year.

Despite these newcomers, I'm glad to see some of Palm Springs' quirkiest stores remain, including one of my favourites, Lappert's Ice Cream. At this Hawaiian-themed ice cream bar, the most popular items are date shakes, otherwise known as Palm Springs' unofficial drink - appropriate given that 90% of the world's dates are said to come from this part of California. And I'd bet my bottom dollar that you can't get one at the Westfield.

**DESERT**

As much as I pity the workmen toiling under the hot sun in their efforts to regenerate downtown Palm Springs, their exertion pales into insignificance compared with the efforts of those who built the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway in 1963. The uppermost station took more than two years to build, with a fleet of helicopters making 23,000 flights to deliver supplies.

I know this because the base station is now home to a small museum area which documents its history, complete with breathtaking, faded photographs showing huge chunks of concrete dangling beneath airborne helicopters.

At the top I find the beautiful, alpine-like scenery that will always be my favourite bit of Palm Springs. And yet, years after my first visit, I make the same mistake of underestimating how dramatically a landscape can change in the space of a cable car ride. I arrive at the base station in an overheating hire car struggling to cope with the brutal combination of dust and searing desert heat. At the top, I walk out ➔



PICTURE: MARC GLASSMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

→ into a blast of cold, pine-fragranced air and the soundtrack of woodpeckers.

I spend an hour hiking along the well-marked trails, stopping off at viewpoints to take in breathtaking views of the city, a colourful oasis of tiny, pastel-hued buildings surrounded by vast expanses of desert.

After a windy descent back down the mountain, I'm relieved to return to terra firma - a phrase to be used with caution in this part of California.

"You can tell your friends you experienced 200 earthquakes during your week in Palm Springs!" grins Les, the Desert Adventures guide who leads my tour of the San Andreas fault zone (\$139 per person).

The last significant quake occurred two years ago. The tour winds through the canyons and valleys which surround Palm Springs, much of which is owned by the Cahuilla Indians.

At one point, we clamber over boulders and through tiny gaps in the rock before coming to a stop in an area where the canyon walls widen. It's eerily silent, and here, in some places, wind erosion and animal activity have left smooth, deep holes in the stone.

Les tells me that his biggest finds have been made following earthquakes, when shifting rock formations reveal ancient treasures such as arrowheads. Later, we spot a rattlesnake basking on a boulder, and we're invited to try the palm tree seeds

which once formed a crucial part of the Cahuilla Indians' diet.

Suddenly, those date shakes seem rather appealing.

## DESIGN

Don't know your breezeways from your button tufting? Get to grips with the basics during an architecture tour - an essential for anyone keen to learn about the city's most famous buildings and residents.

Sadly, local legend Robert Imber is no longer running his Palm Springs Modern tours, but the three-hour PS Architecture Tours (from \$95 per person), run by his former colleague, Trevor O'Donnell, are just as good.

You'll see some of the city's most

famous buildings, including the UFO-like house where Elvis and Priscilla honeymooned. But there are recent additions too, including three new homes by modernist architect Hugh Kaptur and a minimalist stone and steel creation designed by world-renowned architect Sean Lockyer.

One of my favourite buildings is City Hall, where three palm trees poke through a circular hole carved out of the entrance lobby. And the Palm Springs Visitors Center isn't just a great place to pick up some leaflets (although I recommend grabbing one of the self-drive architecture tour maps). If you're arriving via Route 111, it's the first thing you'll see, thanks to its distinctive roof, an enormous cantilevered canopy.

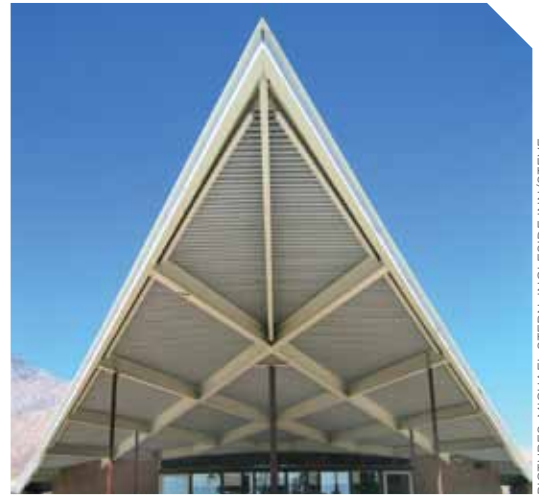
Make sure you check out the display of Palm Springs memorabilia, including a wonderfully retro pop-up flyer for the Doll House restaurant, which opened in 1946. Jazz legend Peggy Lee was a regular. Although the Doll House is long gone, I learn that some of Palm Springs' oldest, most iconic venues have recently been given a spruce-up. This includes The Ingleside Inn and Melvyn's restaurant, where walls heave with framed photos of former guests including John Travolta, Bob Hope and Frank Sinatra, who held his wedding reception here.

The hospitality group that now owns it has done an admirable job of restoring the property to its former glory, repainting the walls in the original charcoal grey. It's not a shade I'd choose for my kitchen but, like most of Palm Springs, this historic property wears it very, very well. **TW**



**RIGHT:**  
Palm Springs  
Visitors Center

**BELOW:**  
Melvyn's restaurant



PICTURES: MICHAEL STERN; INGLESIDE INN/STEVE KEPPEL; MARC GLASSMAN PHOTOGRAPHY



## ASK THE EXPERT



**Ross Sinclair, senior product manager, USA, Caribbean and Canada, Travel 2**

"This year sees a range of openings in Palm Springs. Visitors can savour Mediterranean dishes and craft cocktails at the new 4 Saints restaurant, while Chef Tanya's Kitchen serves up delicious vegan sandwiches, tacos and burgers. For outdoor adventures, The Willow Creek trail has reopened following the fires in 2013."

