



HUNTLEY SANTA MONICA BEACH HOTEL

The Huntley Santa Monica Beach hotel is a luxurious retreat with sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean.

10 things do in Palm Springs

Take to the shops, spas and trails of Coachella Valley

SHELLEY FRALIC
POSTMEDIA NEWS

Where once snowbirds flocked to Palm Springs, Calif., for the sun and the golf, the desert oasis is today a vibrant hotbed of arts, nightlife and music.

Here are 10 cool things to do in Palm Springs and the eight other desert oases that make Southern California's Coachella Valley a must visit.

1. The Coachella Valley is gaining a reputation for shopping, from the high-end El Paso retail district, often called Rodeo Drive East with its Saks Fifth Avenue, to the outlet malls in Cabazon, where you'll spend an entire day, to the Uptown Design District, where you'll want to check out the trendy Trina Turk, Shag and Just Fabulous boutiques.

2. Even the night markets are chi-chi. The 20-year-old VillageFest street fair is held every Thursday from 6 to 10 p.m., on downtown's Palm Canyon Drive with outdoor food, artisans, street musicians, chefs, handcrafted souvenirs and, yes, even a pot-bellied pig named Stuart.

3. Walter and Leonore Anneberg of Chicago bought 81 hectares in the middle of Palm Springs and built a winter getaway called Sunnylands complete with a nine-hole golf course. Today, you can tour the 25,000-square-foot, 1966 Quincy Jones-designed house with its original furniture and extensive art collection, along with the manicured grounds. In mid-February, U.S. President Barack Obama entertained President Xi Jinping of China at Sunnylands.

4. In the 1950s stars like Frank Sinatra and Cary Grant discovered the perfect getaway from the glare of Hollywood. Coupled with architects looking to indulge their love of the Desert Modern style, the two made for a perfect marriage. From Donald Wexler and John Lautner to E. Stewart Williams and William Krisel, Palm Springs soon boasted what many consider the finest collection of mid-century modern homes in North America. To celebrate it all is Modernism Week, a mid-February, 10-day festival (with a fall version in mid-October) of films, tours, lectures, live entertainment, parties and, of course, all those fabulous homes.

5. The mountain ranges that ring the Coachella Valley and dwarf its nine little towns, including Palm Springs, provide a soft backdrop for the oranges and purples of the spectacular desert sunsets. One of the region's most popular old-school attractions remains the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, providing access to mountaintop hiking trails, a view of the Salton Sea and a mountain and desert vista that will literally leave you breathless (thin air up there).

6. It's billed as the biggest professional tennis tournament outside of the Grand Slam four. The BNP Paribas Open attracts tennis buffs from around the world who gather to watch the top pros. The \$78-million Indian Wells Tennis Garden features 16,000 seats in the Main Stadium and thousands more in seven other match courts.

7. The Purple Room, which bills itself as "the place where Palm Springs plays" could be the hippest little watering hole this side of the Blue Note Jazz Club in Manhattan. The 1960s-style supper club, located in Club Trinidad and once the haunt of legendary partiers like Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr. and Frank Sinatra, was refurbished and reopened last October, with a new sound system, white walls, purple accents, life-size photos of the Rat Pack, an intimate dance floor surrounded by dining spots for 140 people and a stage with acts that range from rockabilly to bossa nova. This Dean Martin bon mot covers one wall: "I once shook hands with Pat Boone and my whole right side sobered up."

8. You might think Palm Springs is just for duffers (there are more than 100 golf

There are more than 20 mineral springs in Desert Hot Springs alone.

courses in the region) and outdoor enthusiasts, what with the living desert, botanical gardens and all those miles of hiking trails. But Palm Springs offers so much more. Desert Art Tours offers tours of art and architecture. There's the El Paseo Art Walk in Palm Desert, Fashion Week El Paso, free concerts at Palm Desert Civic Centre Park, the Palm Springs Air Museum, the Palm Springs Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and even an Oktoberfest and Stampede Wild West Show. And, of course, a must-see is the venerable Palm Springs Art Museum. Check it out on your way back from the celebrity-packed Coachella Music Festival in Indio.

9. The Coachella Valley began attracting health tourists in the early 1900s. They were drawn to the dry desert air, 300 days of sunshine and abundant mineral springs. Hotels and sanatoriums became a destination and the Hollywood crowd began building desert-friendly houses and spending their weekends partying poolside. There are more than 20 mineral springs in Desert Hot Springs alone, including clothing-optional retreats. Don't say you weren't warned.

10. When was the last time you went to a polo match? Exactly. Polo season in Indio runs from January to March, with two matches on Sundays and some matches played at night. General admission bleacher seats and tailgate spots on the side of the field are free, or you can pony up for a private cabana or a VIP seat.



LORI FRALIC/POSTMEDIA NEWS

Walter and Leonore Anneberg built the Sunnylands estate. U.S. President Barack Obama visited in February.

Choice L.A. hotels offer off-season deals

VISITORS CAN CHOOSE beachside Venice, exclusive Beverly Hills and other cool spots

ROCHELLE LASH
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The first Hotel Week LA will happen in Los Angeles from Nov. 29 to Dec. 14, with low-season discounts available at 15 choice establishments.

A variety of three- and four-star hotels, some of whose regular rates run \$200 to \$600 US per night, will dip to \$200 to \$300 during the event, which will actually last a little more than two weeks.

Visitors can choose their favourite L.A. neighbourhoods: the cool beachside communities of Santa Monica and Venice, exclusive Beverly Hills, businesslike downtown, trendy Koreatown, tranquil Westwood and iconic Hollywood.

Hotel Week LA was created to attract travellers during quiet periods, which in Los Angeles is pre-Christmas and pre-awards season. Movie stars, directors and producers will flock to L.A. for the Golden Globes and Screen Actors Guild Awards in January and the Oscars in February, but autumn is quieter.

"It is win-win for both the hotels and visitors," said marketer Nancy J. Friedman, who created the event and launched Hotel Week NYC four years ago. The next New York event is Jan. 3 to 18, with savings at 25 hotels and rates as low as \$100 US per night.

One West Coast bonus is that Hotel Week LA will include U.S. Thanksgiving weekend, Nov. 27 to 30 — the unparalleled shopping bonanza when Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman-Marcus, Bloomingdale's and most other shops



THE LONDON WEST HOLLYWOOD

The London West Hollywood is a chic British-inspired hotel with a Gordon Ramsay restaurant.

will hold major sales.

Even the posh zip code 90210 is accessible during the discount period. Among the participating hotels are Avalon Beverly Hills (800-670-6183) and SIXTY Beverly Hills (800-441-5050), where rates will start at \$200 US.

With these savings, visitors can enjoy fancy neighbourhood attractions such as the famed shopping street Rodeo Drive and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Also this fall, the Beverly Hills artSHOW, which uses stylish typography to radiate creativity, will showcase the works of 240 artists on Oct. 18 and 19 along Santa Monica Blvd.

The Front Porch Cinema features movies under the stars every Friday on the Santa Monica Pier in autumn. The screenings are free and people bring blankets, picnics and beach chairs. The new Vegan Oktoberfest will present food,

oompah bands, Bavarian costumes and dancing and lots of beer on Oct. 4.

For discounts, you can book online at hotelweekla.com or call the individual hotels and mention Hotel Week LA.

Some of the other participating hotels are: The London West Hollywood (866-282-4560), a chic British-inspired luxury hotel where rates start at \$300 instead of \$500 or \$600; the boutique Redbury @ Hollywood & Vine (877-962-1717), across the street from the circular Capitol Records tower and near Grauman's Chinese Theatre; the Huntley Santa Monica Beach hotel (310-394-5454), a luxurious retreat featuring sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Monica Pier; the stylish new Line Hotel in Koreatown (213-381-7411); the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza in Century City (310-228-1234), a film industry classic; and Hotel Erwin in funky, hip Venice Beach (310-452-1111).

The hotel scene is booming in L.A., with several new buildings planned by 2016 for Sunset Blvd., the famed street known for nightclubs such as the House of Blues, the Rainbow Bar & Grill, the Viper Room (created by Johnny Depp) and the Whisky a Go Go. The new builds will include an Edition Hotel by Ian Schrager, who, with the late Steve Rubell, created the boutique scene 30 years ago at Morgans in New York.

For more information: hotelweekla.com, discoverlosangeles.com, lovebeverlyhills.com, santamonica.com, westhollywood.com.