



Weekend Travel

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A Palm Springs fling

Hippy charm and old Hollywood glamour converge in a 'wonderfully bonkers' break in southern California. Nicola Brady wanders from low-slung, mid-century houses to Joshua Tree national park in a city where 'even the flora wants you to have a G&T'...

Im floating on a giant lilo in a swimming pool that's illuminated with candles, arranged in clusters at the water's edge. The sun has just set, the palm trees silhouetted against an inky sky. Two people, up to their knees in the shallow water, wrap me in a blanket, dry my feet and put a pair of fluffy socks on me.

"I feel like a giant baby," I say. "Well, you're going to feel like more of a giant baby in a second," says a woman I can't quite see, as she gently tucks the blanket around me and pushes me slowly towards the middle of the pool. A few feet away, two people softly bang a gong and run crystals around the edge of different-sized bowls, creating wobbly waves of sound as I drift on the surface of the water.

This is a floating sound bath (€167, [goodvibesoundbath.com](https://www.goodvibesoundbath.com)). And just like everything in Greater Palm Springs, it's wonderfully bonkers.

This desert haven (technically a collection of nine different cities) is a blend of dreamy, hippy charm and old Hollywood glamour — after all, this was the playground

for classic film stars, who would flock here for pool parties and secret excesses.

Something about it makes me want to swan around in a slinky kaftan, a gold-rimmed coupe of Champagne in hand as *Zou Bisou Bisou* plays on repeat from vintage speakers. Palm Springs is all about classic, vintage style, and everything from the low-slung, mid-century houses to the angular post boxes feel like they haven't changed since the 1950s.

Even the street signs nod back to a glamorous heyday — you can turn left on Frank Sinatra Drive, cruise down Ginger Rogers Road or sail along Dean Martin Drive (and in the #MeToo era, it's a miracle that none have had to be renamed).

And you don't have to limit yourself to just driving past these mid-century homes. Book into The Modern Tour (from €200pp, [moderntour.com](https://www.moderntour.com)) and you'll get to peek inside some of the most impressive modernist properties in town, chosen not just for their architectural merit but their dedication to the theme.

On my tour, I see a house built into the mountain, the rock protruding into the living space. I walk around Leonardo DiCaprio's house (which once belonged to Dinah Shore, who had a secret gate to her neighbour Kirk Douglas's house). There's a cocktail bar, sunken lounge and every inch of it is a love letter to modernism — and FYI, you can rent it from €3,650 a night ([432hermosa.com](https://www.432hermosa.com)).

In one (slightly more modest) gaff, the owner potters around the kitchen as tour guide Michael Stern shows us the thick shag carpeting, geometric landscaping and the pool surrounded by trees dripping with fat limes — because in Palm Springs, even the flora wants you to have a G&T.

It's easy to imagine the parties that take place around pools like this one — chic neighbours gathering with martinis, lovable dogs scuttling between their feet for fallen scraps of artisanal charcuterie, before heading home through silent streets at 10pm.

That's one of my very favourite things about Palm Springs — this is a place that calls it a night early, and

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strict noise control laws keep everything blissfully quiet come bedtime. If New York is the city that never sleeps, Palm Springs is a place where everyone turns in early with a melatonin gummy and tart cherry mocktail, ready for a 6am hike the next day.

And what a place this is at sunrise. On the balcony of my room at Hotel Paseo (rooms from €205, hotelpaseo.com) in Palm Desert, I watch the mountains turn pink at dawn, waves of colour dripping over the rock like a lava lamp as the sun sneaks over the peaks, lighting the tips of the palm trees like birthday candles.

While some of the cities in Greater Palm Springs are all about opulence, that's not the only vibe. You might associate Coachella with insufferable hipsters in micro-shorts, but the city itself is laidback and modest, with exceptional Mexican bakeries, street art and taco joints.

Visit when the huge music festival is in play, and presumably these streets are overrun with influencers shooting looks in front of the murals. But at any other time, you can amble around with a *trenzas de queso* (sweet cheese pastry) and check out the Coachella Walls, a series of murals on formerly drab city buildings that highlight the plight of local farmers and citizens. On Shady Lane, there's a 1.4km-long wall painted by local artists, which tells the stories of Chicano history.

Beyond that wall, where palm trees heave with the weight of dates, the desert draws ever nearer. Just a 30-minute drive away is Joshua Tree, a national park where two deserts — the Mojave and the Colorado — meet.

I drive around the park guided by the free National Park app (nps.gov), where an endlessly jovial voice pings with facts about historic murders and missing people. It's hard to get bummed out about a gruesome crime when the anecdote ends with a jolly "And his body was never found!" In the visitor centre, I pick up a patch embroidered with their motto: "Don't die today" (though I think that refers to ill-advised tourists hiking in scorching temperatures).

The macabre aside, Joshua Tree is one of those places that doesn't feel real. It's a blend of wide, dusty deserts, patches of gigantic cacti and huge piles of boulders that look like they've fallen from the sky.

I pull over to walk through a sea of cholla cacti, their fuzzy arms reaching out over onto the pathway like thick, fluffy cat tails. There are warnings everywhere not to touch, or go anywhere near, these spikes — brush against them and the nodules will jump off the cacti and stick you, the barbed thorns jutting into your skin and not coming out in a hurry.

But the stars, of course, are the namesake Joshua trees. They stand in clusters, branches reaching out like arms to heaven. Which is how they got their name — Mormon pioneers believed they looked like worshippers, and named them after the biblical figure Joshua. Famously, they also feature in the artwork for U2's 1987 album, *The Joshua Tree*.

There's another famous landmark just beneath the park — the San Andreas Fault line. Look at it from above, and it resembles a thick spine, running through the desert in a ridge of mountains. "Imagine an Oreo cookie," says Marv, my guide from Red Jeep Tours (from €168, red.jeep.com).



Clockwise from right: Joshua Tree National Park; a mountainous view in Palm Springs; Nicola at the San Andreas Fault; The Spa at Séc-he; and Nicola's unique pair of Converse designed at Superbloom

Take Three: Palm Springs restaurants



Bar Cecil

The hottest reservation in town and a top celebrity hangout, Bar Cecil serves up fat burgers, comte onion tarts and excellent cocktails — there's even a Fifty Dollar Martini with caviar. Don't miss a photo op in the quirky toilets. barcecil.com



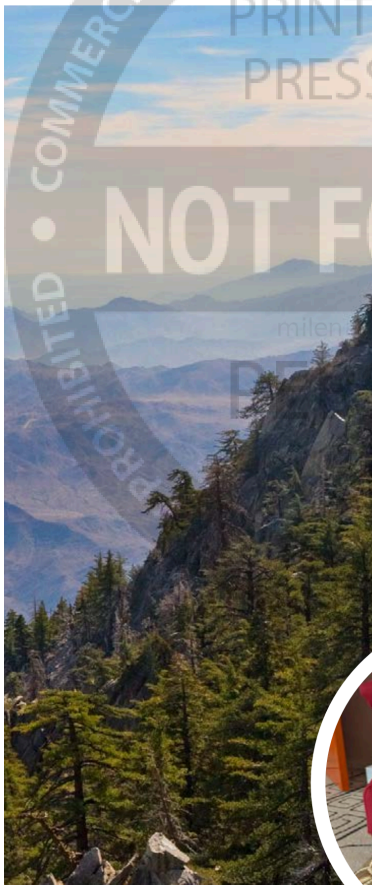
Farm

A little slice of Provence in downtown Palm Springs, Farm is the place to go for grilled chicken sandwiches, crepes and glasses of rosé, enjoyed in the sunshine in a flower-filled courtyard. farmpalmssprings.com



Lola Rose Grand Mezze

Set in the new Thompson hotel, this poolside restaurant serves up dishes with a Mediterranean/Middle Eastern bent — its 'celebration bread' with za'atar and lemon zest is divine, as is the baharat-spiced chicken wings. lolaroseps.com



"The fault line is getting squeezed up like the filling."

He drives us right into the fault line, pulls over the jeep and leads us into a slot canyon, where I climb up the sides of the rock, my feet gripping the sandy stone of the interlocking boulders. As someone who studied the San Andreas fault at length in school, it's thrilling to stand inside it – I fight the urge to google my old geography teacher and send him a photo. "You couldn't get more in the fault zone than we are right now," he says. As my hands slide along the rough surface of the canyon, he adds, "We haven't had a major earthquake here since 1857. We're overdue."

It's something of a mind bender, when you look out at the desert, to believe there are hot springs just below the surface. There's even one right in the middle of downtown Palm Springs. Sacred to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, the Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring feeds the waters at The Spa at Séc-he (thespaatseche.com).

At first glance, it seems like a typically Palm Springs set-up – a kidney-shaped pool surrounded with wide armchairs, palm trees and vats of natural sunscreen. But the waters here are packed with minerals, and around 12,000 years old to boot. I'm not saying that soaking in them made me innately more attractive, peaceful or intelligent, but they did make me feel damn good.

As did a trip around the corner to Superbloom. The creation of two artists, the impossibly good-looking Alexis and Chris Ramirez, Superbloom is a studio where every inch of the space is splashed with colour, from the rainbow walls to the paint-splotted chairs (experiences from €91, superbloom.world). Over 90 minutes, I sip sparkling wine and splat paint haphazardly onto a pair of Converse, gently guided by Alexis, who insists "there's no wrong way to do this".

Get there

Palm Springs is a two-hour drive from LA, so you can either fly to LAX direct from Dublin Airport with Aer Lingus, or transfer in San Francisco to fly direct into Palm Springs airport, just two miles from downtown; aerlingus.com

Nicola was a guest of Visit Greater Palm Springs; see more at visitgreaterpalmsprings.com



The result? A pair of high-tops unlike any other on the planet, and quite possibly the only item of clothing I own that's cool enough for dinner in Mister Parker's.

This speakeasy-style bistro is hidden behind a thick, velvet curtain in the Parker Palm Springs (rooms from €796, parkerpalmsprings.com), a wildly eccentric yet sleek boutique hotel where hammocks are slung between palm trees and the rooms are surrounded by bougainvillea bushes.

In Mister Parker's, the lights are so dim that branded torches are handed out with the menu, and the butter comes in the form of a candle, melting in a puddle as the flame flickers, ready for me to mop it all up with tangy sourdough, ripped into chunks with my hands. On the wall, there are retro portraits of naked pin-ups, and there's a mirrored ceiling overhead.

It's decadent. It's wacky. And it's oh so Palm Springs.



Attention All Pig Owners

Food waste containing animal products originating in infected zones or countries can cause devastating diseases in pigs such as Foot-and-Mouth Disease and African Swine Fever

It is illegal to feed food waste which contains meat products or which has been in contact with meat products to pigs

❌ Do not feed your pigs

- Catering waste from any restaurant, commercial kitchen or food premises
- Domestic kitchen waste or scraps (e.g. meat, meat scraps, pizza, sausage rolls, etc.)
- Picnic leftovers e.g. sandwiches, food bin waste
- Raw, partially cooked or fully cooked meat and fish
- Dog and cat food

✅ Do feed your pigs

- Specially formulated, commercial pig feed and grain rations that are obtained from registered sources
- Fruit and vegetable material that has never entered a kitchen or come into contact with meat, meat products or any products of animal origin e.g. orchard apples, field vegetables

Remember:

- Always dispose of food waste carefully away from livestock
- Ensure that pigs kept outdoors cannot get access to rubbish or food waste
- Register your pigs with your local Regional Veterinary Office. You must obtain a pig herd number for your pigs even if you only have one or two pigs (including pet pigs)
- If you suspect the presence of an exotic pig disease, contact your Regional Veterinary Office during office hours or the National Disease Emergency Hotline at 01 492 8026 outside of office hours

Find out more about Foot-and-Mouth Disease at www.gov.ie/fmd and about African Swine Fever at www.gov.ie/asf. You can find contact details for Regional Veterinary Offices at www.gov.ie/agriculture/contact.

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Éil agus Mara
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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