

GO ESCAPE

WINTER 2023

EXPLORE
DESERTS, CANYONS,
COASTS AND FORESTS

■ **EXPERIENCE**
NATURAL WONDERS
AND URBAN CUISINE

■ **KICK BACK**
CHECK OUT LODGES,
RETREATS AND RESORTS

Amazing!

**EXPLORE
AMERICA
REGION-BY-REGION
GUIDE**

Islamorada, gateway to the Florida Keys

Evolving Oasis

WHAT'S NEW AND NEXT IN ICONIC PALM SPRINGS

BY KIT BERNARDI

Palm Springs, Calif., has always been a dreamy destination, but visitors returning after even a short absence will find an evolved desert cultural scene of new attractions, hotels, wellness retreats and dining.

The new **Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza** takes center stage at Palm Springs' oldest tourism attraction — the natural **Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring**. For more than 8,000 years, the **Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians** has used the water to cook, bathe and heal. Since the 1800s, visitors have been invited to experience

the spring's curative mineral water on land the tribe considers sacred.

Cahuilla Indians' descendants recently opened the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza on the site, a 5.8-acre complex that includes a museum, native plant garden and luxurious spa. The plaza's accessible **Oasis Trail** replicates the landscape of the tribe's ancestral **Indian Canyons**.

The plaza's presence clearly frames the region's history. Before Palm Springs' celebrated Hollywood glitz and glam, there was *Séc-he*, which means "the sound of boiling water" in the

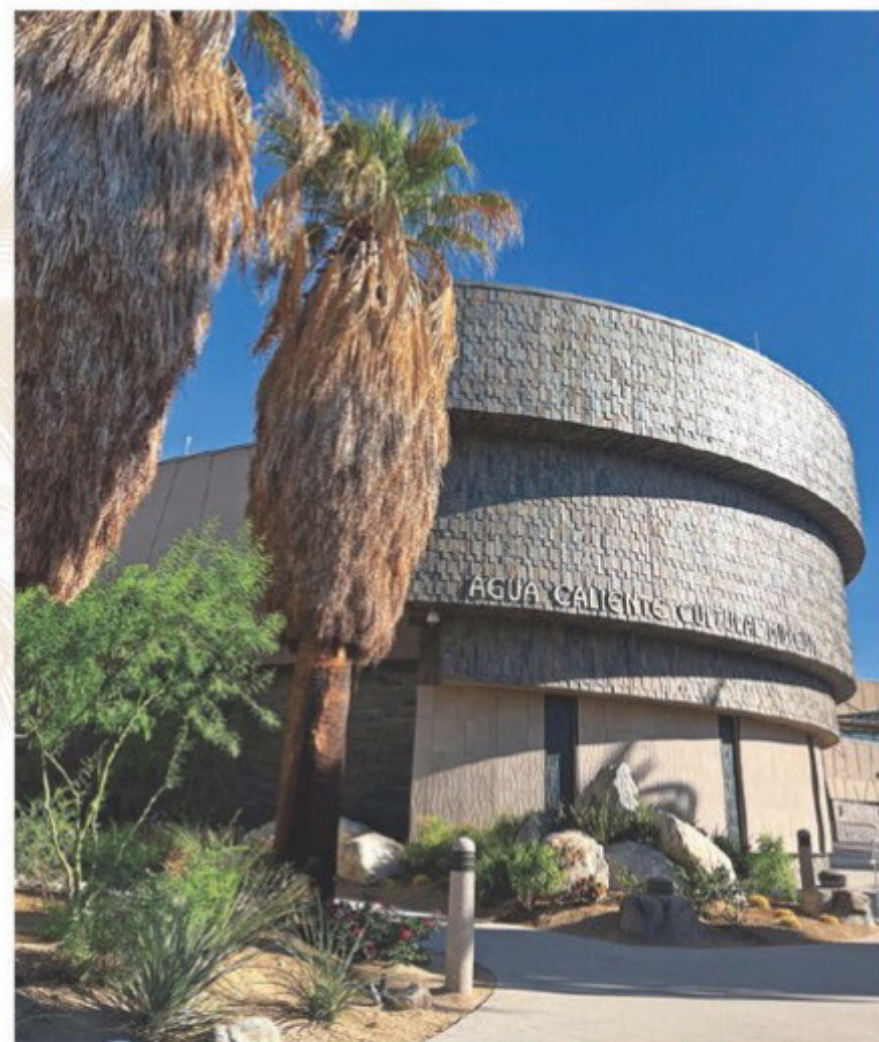
Cahuilla language. The Agua Caliente tribal government owns and operates the plaza and adjacent casino.

Tribal Chairman Reid D. Milanovich's eyes light up when talking about the plaza's meaning for the 520 tribal members he represents. Educational priorities, not economics, he says, drove the tribe's vision for this project, 30 years in the making.

"The Cultural Plaza's significance is monumental because it says in our own words and ways, 'This is us. This is who we are as a people. The tribe is still here,'" Milanovich says. >

GETTY IMAGES

KATE ANDERSON; KIT BERNARDI; PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Hot tip

Download the free **GREATER PALM SPRINGS WELLNESS PASS** for savings and discounts at the region's spas, fitness facilities and yoga studios.



Bath house at Agua Caliente circa 1926



The Spa at Séc-he

"Sharing our culture with our own people and visitors preserves our culture moving forward."

The 48,000-square-foot **Agua Caliente Cultural Museum** is one of the nation's largest Native American cultural centers. Multimedia presentations tell Cahuilla creation and migration stories, and galleries display archeological artifacts and artisan objects. A Smithsonian Institution affiliate, the museum hosts traveling Native American exhibitions.

The Spa at Séc-he's design immediately immerses guests in tribal culture. The 73,000-square-foot building's wide, curving hallways connect sumptuously appointed locker rooms to 22 private mineral baths and 15

treatment rooms.

Traditional Cahuilla practices and technology are blended into healing treatments and soothing experiences. Start by "taking the waters," a 15-minute warm mineral spring bath ritual, followed by a massage on a table covered by an infrared heated, crushed gemstone pad. You can also relax in an acoustic audio therapy lounge chair or experience a zero-sensory floatation tank or cryotherapy.

All the Desert's a Stage

Dramatic desert landscapes originally drew filmmakers to the region, and Hollywood stars have claimed Palm Springs as their desert playground since the 1920s. The **Plaza Theatre** built in 1936 hosted film premieres and stars' nationally broadcast radio theater programs. In late 2024, the historic 700-seat venue's curtain is scheduled to rise again to reveal a \$16.5 million restoration.

The \$300 million **Acrisure Arena** in Palm Desert has put the Coachella Valley on major artists' touring schedules. Opened in 2022, the 11,000-capacity venue has hosted Harry Styles, Dierks Bentley, Sting, Leo Dan and Stevie Nicks. Artists booked so far in 2024 are Luis Miguel and Madonna.

Acrisure Arena's entertainment lineup has contributed to a surge in visitors to the region, and multiple new hotels and resort renovations are poised to accommodate that increase.

"The region is becoming a year-round destination with increased visitors (coming) during summer months," says Colleen Pace, chief sales and marketing officer for Visit Greater Palm Springs. "From the beginning of 2023 through July, our hotel occupancy rate has seen an increase of 3.3 percent over the same period in 2022."

The **Tommy Bahama Miramonte Resort & Spa** is the island lifestyle brand's first hotel. Located in Indian Wells, the 215-room Miramonte resort recently completed an \$8 million transformation. Bougainvillea vine-covered, Spanish colonial-style adobe buildings and villas surround the swimming pool. The Call-coastal cuisine restaurant's name, **Citrus & Palm**, references the 11-acre resort's fragrant citrus trees. Guests can partake in yoga, art and culinary programs.

In Desert Hot Springs, there are two new, adults-only, pet-friendly boutique retreats — **The Good House** and **Onsen Hotel & Spa**. Both feature spas, pools fed by natural springs, and SoCal cuisine. **The Paloma Resort** in Cathedral City recently completed its renovation of the first Elizabeth Arden beauty retreat's 1950s bungalows and poolside lodge.

Trendy and techy, **Drift** is an Airbnb-meets-hotel hybrid in downtown Palm Springs. Drift looks like an 84-unit contemporary condo complex: There's valet car service, but no front desk. The sprawling modern guest rooms have a fully stocked kitchen open to the minimalist furnished living area. After a moonlight swim in the pool, you can sway in your balcony hammock.

Dining Stars

Palm Springs' evolving dining scene landed it on the Michelin Guide's radar for the first time in 2023. The city now boasts eight Michelin-recommended restaurants.

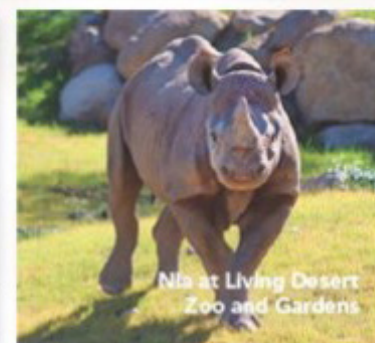
At **The Colony Club**, tucked into lush poolside gardens at **The Colony Palms and Bungalows**, chef Michael Hung reimagines the storied, art deco-style restaurant's classic continental cuisine. His Chef Series brings >



Drift



The Colony Club



Nia at Living Desert Zoo and Gardens

top-shelf cocktails was once the stage of the desert region's first movie theater. The farm-to-table restaurant received a 2015 James Beard Foundation Award for its concrete-centric, brutalist design, and the fried oyster mushrooms and seared diver sea scallops are equally notable.

Family Fun

Several favorite family attractions also have made major upgrades.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens in Palm Desert recently debuted **Australian Adventures** and **Rhino Savanna** where **Jaall**, a 1-ton black rhinoceros, shares his 4-acre home with young female **Nia**.

These daily, \$50 semiprivate encounters are powerful educational experiences. "Visitors gain an appreciation for the endangered animals, which potentially leads to awareness of how their lifestyle and purchase decisions impact conservation efforts," says COO RoxAnna Breitigan.

Palm Springs Air Museum's five hangars house restored World War II, Korean and Vietnam war planes. The complex is open during a \$2.5 million expansion and renovation slated for completion in 2025. Exhibits recently updated by the museum's skilled volunteer restoration team are a F-117 Nighthawk Stealth Fighter and nose section with cockpit of a B-29 Superfortress. You can also book a flight on one of six vintage warbirds.

Palm Springs Windmill Tours explain how the farm's wind turbines generate renewable energy. Coming in January is an outdoor art installation composed of 25-foot-tall wind turbine blades painted by local artists.

After a \$3 million renovation, the interactive **Children's Discovery Museum of the Desert** in Rancho Mirage is scheduled to reopen in March. ■

in national culinary stars for memorable multicourse dining events.

From the Rowan Hotel's rooftop **4 Saints**, views of the San Jacinto Mountains against lavender sunset skies are almost as beautiful as the delicate ube gnocchi shaped like small, purple baroque pearls.

Tac/Quila is a festival of good taste. The lively restaurant's eclectic, stylish hacienda interior, innovative tequila cocktails and extensive menus of scratch-made, elevated Mexican fare make this place a local favorite. The margarita tasting flight pairs perfectly with carne asada and raw oysters topped with kicky aguachile shrimp.

Workshop Kitchen + Bar's contemporary bar crafting

Hot tip

Take a ride on the **PALM SPRINGS AERIAL TRAMWAY**, a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark, opened in 1963. It climbs 8,516 feet up Chino Canyon's sheer cliffs to the summit's hiking trails, where, when it snows, you can rent snow shoes and cross-country skis at the Adventure Center.

GETTY IMAGES; RT BE ENARDI

DRIFT: LIVING DESERT ZOO AND GARDENS; WONDHO PHOTO FOR THE COLONY CLUB; GETTY IMAGES