

FEATURE

## *18 Reasons to Drive to Palm Springs*

BY LESLEY BALLA | OCTOBER 24, 2016



Weekend jaunts to the desert are an Angeleno's rite of passage. Sometimes they're planned, other times it's just on a whim: "Let's get out of town. Now." Fall, winter and spring are the great times to take in the area's sites and indulge in hot spring dips and leisurely spa treatments and – thanks to Palm Spring's constantly evolving food scene – explore the city's many great places to eat and drink.

Some of the culinary push in Palm Springs comes from a hotel resurgence, which only boosts the culinary options; after all, with hotels come restaurants and bars vying to become the next hot spot. Look for new offerings at several places around town, including at the luxe Arrive in the hip Uptown Design District (Ezra Callahan, Facebook's sixth employee, is one investor); at L'Horizon Hotel, a fabulous refurbished 1950s icon that reopened with all the glamour one would expect from designer Steve Hermann; and at the tony Ritz-Carlton Rancho Mirage, which has some of the best service and best views in the valley, among others.

The fall brings events like Palm Springs Pride (November 1-6) and the Desert Arts Festival (November 25-27) and lots of snow birds returning to their vacation homes and resorts. In high season, which begins during the holidays and runs right through important happenings like the Palm Springs International Film Festival (January) and Modernism Week (February), the hotels and restaurants are bustling. If you're going to Coachella in 2017 (April 14-16 and 21-23) or Stagecoach (April 28-30), plan on being overrun everywhere in town, even during the week – people need a place to crash and play between the two weekends, after all. Whatever the game plan, here are newcomers and perennial favorites for sustenance.



Credit: SOPA

### SO.PA

This all-day destination dining room and glorious outdoor setting at L'Horizon Resort and Spa has finally opened to the public for dinner nightly. It's almost entirely outdoors, and there's a fire pit, fountains, Lindsey Adelman chandeliers and a mix of intimate and communal tables for small luncheons or group dinners. Even here the menu changes with the seasons, but you'll find globally inspired things like foie gras fries with chives; lebneh with grilled naan; braised oxtail with crispy polenta; and pan-seared filet of beef with bone marrow and bee-pollen beets.

1050 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-323-1858



Credit: Pho 533

### Pho 533

A popular strip-mall pho joint is now a gleaming Vietnamese and Pan-Asian spot with a cocktail and spring roll bar. But don't worry: There's still flavorful, fragrant bowls of pho, plus other noodle dishes, salads and new spring rolls like ones made with collard and mustard greens, local lettuces and shaved apples; or spicy tuna with sliced mango, cucumber, lettuce and noodles. The cool stuff is just what you need when it's boiling during the summer in the desert, with the soulful soups great during winter – even if it's still 75 degrees.

1775 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-778-6595



Credit: Colony Palms

### Purple Palm

The Colony Palms restaurant was inspired by the hotel's original owner, bootlegger and Purple Gang member Al Wertheimer, who opened a casino in the desert in the 1930s. It's said the property served as a hangout and clubhouse for the gang, where they had a speakeasy in the basement during Prohibition. While there's still a dash of history throughout the property, the restaurant is keeping up with the times with new chef Nick Tall, who's revamped the menu and all-day offerings. Look for modern American fare with a few global touches from breakfast through dinner, plus cheeky cocktails at the bar. The room feels intimate and removed from the more ubiquitous midcentury-modern aesthetic of the desert, with a great poolside patio when it's bearable to eat outside.

572 N. Indian Canyon Dr.; 760-969-1800

### Eight4Nine

The crisp white space was once the Palm Springs Post Office, and it serves almost like a blank canvas for the colorful menu and art. There's a convivial dining room, private rooms, a patio with views of the mountains and a bustling lounge. It's all pretty swanky for the desert yet still laid-back...because it's the desert. Chef Chuck Courtney's menu is full of eclectic dishes like mushroom and Brussels sprouts toast; grilled oysters with applejack barbecue sauce; caramelized cauliflower pappardelle; and poblano chile relleno with pinto beans.

849 N. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-325-8490



Credit: El Jefe/Saguaro

El Jefe

the fun and frolicking spot at the colorful Saguaro has always been a great stop for tequila, tacos and other Mexican-inspired street food. But now, with the larger restaurant closed (it was most recently Rocco's), El Jefe is now serving breakfast and lunch, along with its famous happy hour and long-running Taco Tuesday specials.

1800 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-322-1900

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Credit: Elixir/V Palm Springs

### Elixir Pool Bar & Grill

This poolside restaurant and bar at the V Palm Springs Hotel wows with Polynesian-inspired cocktails and Pan-Asian dishes that combine a little throwback vibe with contemporary panache. For food, there's everything from tuna tartare cigars to "bacon and egg" fried rice; to drink, things like the Cucumber Crush (citrus-infused vodka, cucumber juice, Velvet Falernum and pineapple), frozen drinks and things served in coconuts. Paper umbrellas are de rigueur.

333 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 877-544-4446

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Credit: Reservoir

### Reservoir

The stylish restaurant at the very hip Arrive Hotel is open to the public for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as weekend brunch. This is contemporary Southern California cuisine, with dishes that are interesting enough to bring in non-guests, but mainstream enough so no one feels out of place. Think Benedict sopes, lemon-ricotta German pancakes and King's Hawaiian French toast at breakfast; ceviche, tacos, big salads, Wagyu sliders and mahi mahi burgers at lunch; a selection of crudos, adobo Jidori chicken and grilled skirt steak with chimichurri at

dinner. The bar is open every night until 2 AM.

1551 N. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-507-1640

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#### Mr. Lyons

The team behind Palm Spring's super-popular Cheeky's and Birbia – Tara Lazar and husband Marco Rossetti – took over the long-shuttered Lyons English Grille to open this contemporary steakhouse. It's full swank: dark woods, green velvet, Beef Wellington, classic Manhattans and martinis and more. There are, of course, prime rib dinners to sate the longtime fans of the Lyons of yore, but also house-butchered cuts, roasted bone marrow and seasonal side dishes to keep the new generation interested. The bar has its own menu of snacks, things like hamachi crudo, meaty chili and crispy Brussels sprouts.

233 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-327-1551

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Credit: Rooster and the Pig

#### Rooster and the Pig

Tucked into the back corner of a strip mall, this is not an easy restaurant to find – once you park, just look for the line; there's almost always one. The casual, bustling little space has become a hot spot for chef Tai Spendley's Southeast Asian fusion dishes, things like charred Brussels sprouts with sausage and garlic; Vietnamese crispy rice paper rolls with wood ear, cabbage and glass noodles; crispy whole snapper with

pineapple, tomato and lotus stem; and shrimp poppers with mung bean and scallions. Get a few per person, share around the table, and don't forget a cocktail or two.

356 S. Indian Canyon Dr.; 760-832-6691



Credit: Sparrows Lodge

### The Barn Kitchen at Sparrows Lodge

The Sparrows is such a lovely getaway, an intimate boutique hotel filled with rustic-chic charm. Guests could always grab a bite from the complimentary continental breakfast offerings in the barn, but now there's a lunch menu with a few sandwiches and salads on offer, plus a one-seating family-style feast on Wednesdays, which features chicken, and Saturdays, which features steak. The best news is that both lunch and dinner are open to the public (no reservations needed for lunch, but they are required for the dinners). The barn, which is central to the property, becomes a lovely communal space at night. Chef Gabriel Woo is at the helm; he's even spent a little time training at Ad Hoc and The French Laundry (Thomas Keller is part of the hotel's pool of investors).

1330 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-327-2300



### Chi Chi

The former Viceroy Hotel is now the Avalon (owned by the same group behind the Avalon Beverly Hills), and with the change came this new restaurant to replace Citron. Now called Chi Chi, the restaurant is helmed by chef Tara Lazar, chef and co-owner of other Palm Springs hot spots like Cheeky's, Birba and more. The menu is full of things like flash-fried cauliflower with cotija cheese, lime and capers; beef picadillo empanadas; shrimp-stuffed banana chiles with aji amarillo sauce; crudo; coconut-oil fried chicken; collard enchiladas; and steak with potatoes bravas. If a poolside happy hour is in order, check out the restaurant at 5 PM daily, when nothing on a special menu of snacks and drinks tops \$10.



### The Edge Steakhouse and State Fare Bar & Kitchen

The two restaurants inside the slammin' Ritz-Carlton Rancho Mirage are close enough to Palm Springs proper to add to any itinerary. They both have a killer view of the valley below, clear across the Coachella Valley and the Little San Bernardino Mountains. The newest is Edge, a classic steakhouse with modern twists, where tony locals and hotel guests are going for huge dry-aged steaks, bone-marrow flan, grilled lobster, pork chops, decadent side dishes and a solid wine list. Prices are as steep as the edge of the mountain it's perched on, but it feels worth it. State Fare is the all-day restaurant with a fabulous patio, a good burger and other comfort staples, and a great breakfast buffet (for \$28) on the weekends.

68900 Frank Sinatra Dr.; 760-321-8282

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Credit: Lesley Balla

### Kings Highway and the Amigo Room

The Ace Hotel's all-day diner got a refresh from Brooklyn's Five Leaves crew, the same group that operates L.A. Chapter, the restaurant at the Ace Hotel in Downtown LA. The menu is a combination of elevated comfort food and classic Five Leaves dishes, dishes like housemade ricotta with figs on nut bread and a burger, but also sage scrambled egg sandwich at breakfast, and mahi mahi fish tacos and buttermilk fried Jidori chicken with habanero honey for the afternoon and evening menu. The Amigo Room bar still has craft cocktails and beers, but now there are also Latin-inspired dishes on the menu, all of which can be enjoyed while checking out the DJs, live bands, comedians and performance artists lined up on the bar's calendar.

701 E. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-325-9900

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#### Workshop Kitchen + Bar

Since debuting in the summer of 2012, this stunning spot has been heralded as much for its approachable seasonal menu as for its high design. It has everything that would make a homesick Angeleno proud: octopus carpaccio, housemade pickles, wood-fired pizzas and huge shareable bone-in rib eyes. Dishes not to miss include venison-neck shepherd's pie; shaved Brussels sprouts with pomegranate and pecorino; and glazed black cod. Brunch is extremely popular for dishes like frittatas with walnut pesto and arugula; blue crab eggs Benedict; and duck huevos rancheros (served on Sundays from 10 AM-2 PM).

800 N. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-459-3451

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#### Cheeky's

This felt like one of the first new Palm Springs restaurants to cater to what we all love: seasonal ingredients and bacon. The menu changes weekly, but there's always a bacon sampler available in flavors like ginger-sesame, jalapeño and apple-cinnamon. The Uptown Design District spot bustles with locals and visitors taking up every translucent orange chair in the place. Staples like smoked salmon soft scrambles; frittatas with egg whites, greens and feta; and buttermilk and fresh corn pancakes are reasons to go. While breakfast is served all day, a lunch menu kicks in at 11:30 AM, adding dishes like fried chicken sandwiches with bacon, slaw and fried onions, and green goddess salads with tuna conserva, potatoes, green beans and avocado.



Credit: Birba

### **Birba**

From the folks behind favorite breakfast and brunch spot Cheeky's comes this small space, which is sleek and modern with long couches and fire pits on the garden patio and has a small bar and fresh, seasonal global eats. The menu changes regularly, but the bresola and farro; egg, panchetta and spring onion pizza; short rib and celery root ravioli with brown butter; braised lamb shepherd's pie; and swordfish conserva are all hits. The owners also turned the aged Pepper Tree Inn into a chic boutique hotel, Alcazar, with sleek all-white rooms befitting the Design District. Both Cheeky's and Birba are adjacent to the property.



Credit: Lesley Balla

### **Smoketree BBQ Bar & Grill**

This isn't the easiest restaurant to find, but it is very close to the Saguaro and Ace, so it's worth a scamper to seek it out. It's tucked in a strip mall – really tucked, behind the burger joint and pizza place, past the vegetarian restaurant, sort of in the middle of the complex – and you'll probably smell the smoke before you find it. That's because the smoker is outside; if you eat here during the day (great lunch deals, like pulled-pork sandwiches with coleslaw or brisket smothered in barbecue sauce and cheese), you'll see the chef come out and grab trays of meat to take inside. Create your own plate of smoked pulled pork, brisket, tri-tip, beef and pork back ribs, chicken and andouille sausage links. The creamy mac 'n' cheese is dynamite. There's a full bar with an emphasis on mezcal, tequila and whiskey cocktails. P.S. The same owners run Guiseppe's, the homey Italian spot out front, and Bar, a hip newish bar in Downtown Palm Springs.



Credit: Bootlegger Tiki

### Bootlegger Tiki

Super-small but fun to find in the Uptown Design District – just look for the tiki torches – this is an all-out tiki experience with sweet, fruity and very boozy cocktails. Located in the same space as the original Don the Beachcomber restaurant that opened in 1953, it's a modern take on the classic with thatched palm walls, blowfish light fixtures and some racy "aloha" art. Happy hour has half-priced drinks, 4-6 PM. The tiki bar is owned by the duo behind the adjacent Ernest Coffee shop (if you need your Stumptown fix, get it there). The two spots share a patio, and when the tiki bar opens at 4 PM, the coffee shop transitions into a beer and wine bar with charcuterie plates and more.

1101 N. Palm Canyon Dr.; 760-318-4154

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