

Whether it's a day of fabulous bargain shopping and spa treatments, savoring the enduring glamour of Old Hollywood or a perfect romantic weekend at a classic lake-side chateau, it's all here close at home.

BY KATHY STRONG

Goodbye, *(not really)*

WHILE WINTER DESERT DWELLERS DEPARTED FOR COOLER CLIMES WEEKS AGO, many of us are here for the long, lazy days of summer. We know it won't be long before we're dreaming of some perfect little escapes from the routine.

If lack of time, tightening budgets and the rising cost of filling the gas tank have you poo-pooing your vacation plans, here are some creative options that might make staying very close to home a much better choice than dealing with the hassles of summer travel.

Visitors from all over the world arrive in the desert, summer included, to experience our paradise. The draw of Old Hollywood glamour, world-class shopping, spa pampering, refreshing libations poolside and hidden, charming overnight escapes is all here for us to enjoy, as well—along with those welcoming summertime savings. So why not consider these local getaway ideas that guarantee to transform your summer blahs into unforgettable moments. Can you say, “Another grapefruit mojito, please”?

HIDDEN RENDEZVOUS IN LA QUINTA

World-class resorts and small inns fill the desert, but for a unique and memorable escape from it all, consider a hidden retreat behind the exclusive gates of Lake La Quinta Inn. Tucked in among the estates that line the lake's sparkling shoreline, the location is so discreet that you may not be aware it's there. But once you've stayed, you'll want to return to the romantic, French chateau-style boutique hotel.

Lake La Quinta Inn holds only 13 just-updated, luxurious rooms and suites. They're furnished with in-room mini bars stocked with wine, champagne and hard liquor, fireplaces (go ahead, turn up the air conditioning) and Jacuzzi tubs.

Toast the sunset on your private patio overlooking the lake, lounge by the pool, have a massage in the inn's massage room or take a short journey to sample Old Town La Quinta's boutiques and restaurants and play "tourist."

Stays at the "adults only" inn include a daily complimentary hot, gourmet breakfast featuring changing inn specialties from omelets to French toast, as well as evening lemonade and cookies. Summer specials are very alluring: Stay the first night for the reduced summer price, and a second night is only \$99. The stay includes breakfast and a welcome bottle of champagne. Or opt for a two-night stay in a Chateau Room for \$225. The stay includes breakfast, a welcome bottle of champagne and two poolside lunches. The inn does not charge resort and parking fees.

PLAY AMONG THE STARS

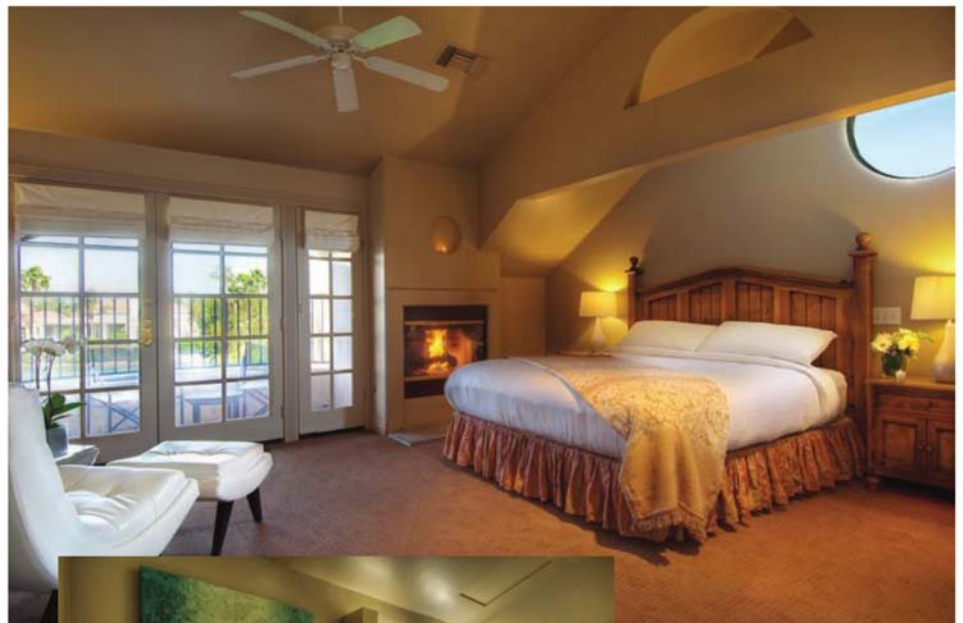
Old Hollywood royalty, from Lucy to Hope and Sinatra, found Palm Springs to be a coveted getaway. The glamour remains today, from the gracious former estates of the stars to their former hangouts. Plan a Palm Springs play date full of celebrity lore and glamour. And while you're getting a close-up look at the "stars," experience some star treatment along the way.

Tour the celebrity homes

The best introduction to your celebrity experience is a home tour, complete with

interesting stories about your favorite stars from Hollywood's golden days. Board a bus on Celebrity Tours for a 2 1/2-hour excursion through the posh neighborhoods known for housing stars now and in the past, from the Rat Pack to the Reagans. Choose a bus tour or a private tour for one to six for a few dollars more. No matter how long you've lived in the desert, you are sure to discover some fun stories about the celebrities who have made the valley both famous and infamous to share at your next dinner party.

The "Grand Tour" not only takes you past dozens of famous abodes, but also imparts interesting information on local history, culture, geography, weather, vegetation, as well as places to see, dine and visit—from museums to churches and cemeteries. It stops beyond the windmills for the valley's most authentic date shake and then winds through neighborhoods drenched in both star history and ancient citrus trees. A Saturday tour, "Sinatra on Saturday," includes the "Grand Tour" offerings as well as Sinatra's historical locales and Ol' Blue Eyes stories in Rancho Mirage and Cathedral City.



Lake La Quinta Inn, above and opposite, has 13 just-updated, luxurious rooms and suites complete with in-room mini bars stocked with wine, champagne and hard liquor, fireplaces and Jacuzzi tubs.