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THE WEIGHT!"

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stay fit in... palm desert

With 350 days of sunshine per year, breathtaking scenery, and ecotours galore, this California oasis is the perfect hot spot for outdoor enthusiasts.

BY ELLEN MILLER



Grab a seat at a coffee shop on El Paseo; it's ideal for people watching

Springs. We loved the Desert Journey, a relaxing exfoliating body treatment (\$195 for 90 minutes). Bonus: *Shape* readers will get a 10 percent discount on any treatment between March 1 and April 30! Finish the day with a stroll on **El Paseo**, a mile-long stretch of shops residents call "the Rodeo Drive of the Desert." Don't miss the 18 large-scale sculptures on the center median; they've helped make the area a modern art destination. Near the western end of the strip, you'll find **Diane's Beachwear** (73-580 El Paseo), the perfect place to pick out a colorful bathing suit. The store—which counts reality stars Lauren Conrad and Audrina Patridge as fans—allows you to mix and match bikini tops and bottoms of different sizes so you'll get the most flattering fit.

While much of the nation is digging out from snowstorms, Palm Desert is enjoying average daytime temperatures in the 70s. From January to May, active travelers flock to this artistic Coachella Valley enclave to take advantage of all those rays, whether on the golf course and tennis court or in the mountains and desert. (Locals head outside to revel in the mild weather before the sweltering summer heat sets in.) There's no beach here, but with plenty of pools as well as boutiques, galleries, and healthy dining options to top off all your calorie burning—trust us, you won't miss the shoreline.

FRIDAY

Start your trip by toting your clubs to the **Desert Willow Golf Resort** (38-995 Desert Willow Drive), which has two scenic and nationally ranked courses to choose from. Both offer amazing views of the surrounding Santa Rosa Mountains and are eco-friendly: The resort relies on reclaimed water to keep its fairways green. If you've



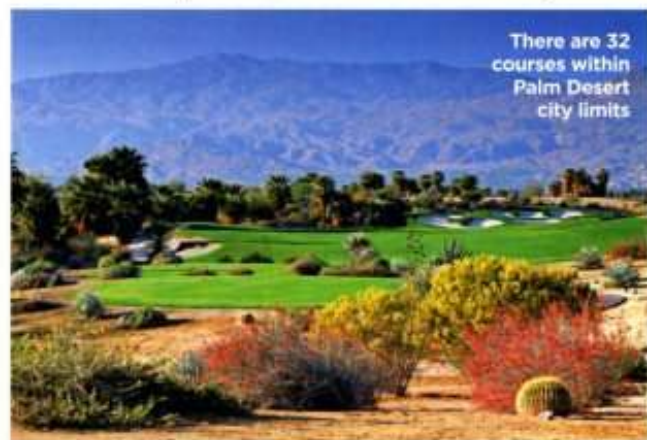
Walk the links to burn 311 calories an hour

never swung a club, start out at **Palm Desert Golf Academy**, located on the grounds, for a lesson (\$100 per hour).

If tennis is more your speed, reserve one of the 20 grass or clay courts at the **Desert Springs JW Marriott Resort & Spa** (74-855 Country Club Drive), where tennis pros Venus and Serena Williams

have swung their rackets (from \$22 per hour for nonguests; free for guests).

Afterward, check out the resort's spa and fitness center, the Spa Desert



There are 32 courses within Palm Desert city limits

shape your weekend



Palm Desert is a mecca for former tennis pros

SATURDAY

Today's the day to explore, from the mountains to the desert. Prepare by stocking a backpack with sunglasses, sunblock, and a warm layer or two, as temps in the mountains can be up to 40 degrees cooler. Get a bird's-eye view of the entire area with a ride on the **Palm Springs Aerial Tramway** (1 Tramway Road, Palm Springs). The glassed-in rotating gondola cars will take you 5,873 vertical feet from the valley floor—two-thirds of the way up San Jacinto Peak—in about 15 minutes. (Try to arrive several minutes before your departure time to ensure a choice spot near a window.)

Grab a map of hiking trails at the information center when you exit at the top, then make your way down about a third of a mile to the Long Valley trailhead, where all the trails converge. You have your choice of difficulty here, from a strenuous six- to eight-hour trek to the top of San Jacinto to an easy three-quarter-mile hike to check out the area's flora and fauna.

After you're all hiked out (for now), head down on the tram and drive east for about 25 miles on Interstate 10 to **Desert Adventures Tours** (38-000 Monroe St., Indio). The Nightwatch Tour—in an open-top jeep—begins just before sunset and takes you to the San Andreas Fault (\$99 if you book online at red-jeep.com). A local naturalist will show you how constant seismic activity—much of which goes unnoticed—visibly shifts rocks in the area. Once the sun finally dips behind the mountains, you'll have a chance to stargaze.

SUNDAY

Power up with breakfast at **Luscious Lorraine's Deli and Juice Bar** (73910 Highway 111). Don't miss the Mexican burrito, which is made with organic scrambled eggs, avocados, and chiles from the farmers' market. Once you've had your fill of nutritious fare, walk



Spa Desert Springs' private pool

Around town

✓ **WHERE TO STAY** **Desert Springs JW Marriott Resort & Spa** is an 884-room complex that boasts six restaurants and one amazing spa (rooms from \$259; desertspringsresort.com). If you're in the mood for star treatment, check out the **Viceroy Palm Springs Spa Resort**, where Brooke Shields and Eva Mendes have stayed. This boutique hotel has 65 recently renovated rooms (from \$209; viceroypalm Springs.com).

✓ **WHERE TO EAT** The patio of **Cork Tree** (74950 Country Club Drive) is the perfect place to go for a glass of California vino. Chef Herve Glin has complemented the locally sourced wine list with dishes that include regional ingredients. For a treat, pop into **Shields Date Garden** (80-225 Highway 111, Indio) for a date shake. The café on this working farm blends the fruit with vanilla ice cream.



An episode of *The Bachelorette* was filmed on the Tramway



Learn about plants and animals with Desert Adventures Tours

three doors down to the **Body Deli** (73910 Highway 111), a natural-beauty boutique that sells skincare products with ingredients so fresh, most actually have to be refrigerated. The Peaches & Cream Masque, made with organic peach purée and cultured yogurt, is the ideal hydrating treatment to tote home if

you've gotten too much sun. (They'll give you an insulated bag so your purchase stays cool during the trip home.)

End your whirlwind weekend with a walk on the wild side at the **Living Desert Zoo** (\$13 for adults; 47-900 Portola Ave.), where you can see gazelles, zebras, and camels on land similar to their natural habitats. Finish up with a can't-miss photo op at the giraffe exhibit at the northeastern end of the park. Ask a docent for a handful of pellets, stroll up to the viewing platform, and watch as one of the 18-foot creatures slurps a snack right from your palm.