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By Freda Moon Photographs by Philip Cheung

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With its kitsch, color and [joyous queer scene](#), Palm Springs is all in on earthly pleasures. December through March is the city's sweet spot: Highs average in the 70s, and there's just enough rain to replenish seasonal waterfalls and encourage cactus blooms. Deep in the driest corner of California, the Coachella Valley is a land of oases, from its [sacred mineral springs](#) to its [fabulous pool culture](#). In winter, the population swells as snowbirds flock south and grateful tourists soak up the sunshine and [Rat Pack nostalgia](#). But Palm Springs is not trapped in time: A [futuristic pyramid art installation](#) awaits at Sunnylands Center & Gardens, the glamorous winter home of the Nixon-era diplomat-philanthropist Annenberg family; a [new hot spring spa](#) opened downtown last year; and one of city's hardest-to-book restaurants, Bar Cecil, is opening a new lounge next door in the spring.

# Recommendations

## Restaurants and bars

- **Peninsula Pastries** bakes irresistible and authentic French delicacies and breads to go.
- **Nature's Health Food & Cafe** whips up an unconventional take on the area's quintessential beverage, the date shake.
- Order a light lunch of ceviche and tacos in **Crudo Cervicheria's** flower-filled courtyard.
- Among the city's newest restaurants, **Lola Rose Grand Mezze** offers elegant and distinctive Middle Eastern dishes in a choose-your-own-adventure format.
- **Cafe La Jefa** is a casual spot offering bagels, pastries and drinks to go, as well as more substantial breakfast options.
- **Wilma & Frieda** serves huge, hearty riffs on diner classics and breakfast cocktails to a fun crowd of locals and tourists.
- **La Boisson** serves rosé and champagne from a closet-size, pink-doored bar to a floral-themed courtyard at [Fleur Noire Hôtel](#).
- **Barbara Bar** at [Trixie Motel](#) offers a glimpse into the creative mind of the drag star Trixie Mattel.
- Hidden inside the [Parker Palm Springs](#) hotel, **Counter Reformation** is a wine-and-tapas bar that's a dark and moody break from the Palm Springs party scene.
- **Pappy + Harriet's**, a desert roadhouse that serves California-style tri-tip, has walls papered in yellowing photographs, Georgia O'Keeffe-esque paintings and concert posters.
- Board the aviation-themed **PS Air Bar**, where servers dress as captains and cotton-ball clouds hang overhead.

### 8 p.m. Hotel bar-hop

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Flit between some of the town's most interesting hotel bars, where much of the local nightlife happens. Start on the north end, at the rosé-and-champagne-centric and neon-lit [La Boisson](#) at [Fleur Noire Hôtel](#). Take your glass to the hotel's poolside courtyard, which has fire pits and walls adorned with lush flower motifs. Around the corner, the [Barbara Bar](#) at [Trixie Motel](#) is the product of a hit [renovation reality TV show](#). The motel is as colorful, fun-loving and over-the-top as its creator, the "RuPaul's Drag Race" alum Trixie Mattel. Hop in a car to wind down at the [Parker Palm Springs'](#) [Counter Reformation](#), an appealingly dark and moody bar with a confessional in the corner and a small, excellent list of wines in three sizes (all starting at \$11), which allows for sampling, drinking or indulging.