

Never
leave

The Spring or Two Bunch Palms, Desert Hot Springs

On the surface, Desert Hot Springs, a suburb of Palm Springs, hardly appears to be a vacation spot. But as you drive through the streets strewn with tumbleweeds and pickup trucks, you'll see stately hedges framing the occasional iron gate—evidence of the town's famous spas. Pick either one of these two, and the dry heat of the desert, aided by the willing hands of a strong masseuse, will wing the soggy winter chill out of your spirit.

Though a number of natural hot springs attached to spas here give the town its name, none run hotter than the 170-degree aquifer at the **Spring**. It's the source for the spa's three mineral pools—cooled to 86, 101, and 105 degrees—which are the heart of this quiet retreat. Guests spend their day moving blissfully from one to the next. The only good reason to rouse from the water is to make the short walk to the spa, where you can warm yourself in the Finnish fire sauna before taking your place on the table for one of the resort's signature treatments.

The 10-room resort is hyperminimalist, with a modest strip of rooms bordering the main pool. Most rooms have an expansive, pillow-topped bed and a kitchenette—the lovely staff here will do the shopping if you provide a grocery list.

A short drive away, **Two Bunch Palms** offers a different kind of spa experience. This 256-acre resort was once a hideout for Al Capone; today it serves as a hideout for movie-industry types who take refuge in the comfortable suites and relax in the mineral-rich mud baths. The spa here offers over 45 treatments, including watsu-like shiatsu in a tub—and a chai soy mud wrap, which sounds like what happens when you spill your Starbucks but is actually a protein-enhanced clay treatment followed by a wrap in warm towels and a rubdown.

After a day of detoxing at the spa, the resort's **Casino** restaurant offers a welcome opportunity to relax. Go for a bloody-rare New York sirloin, a bottle of pinot noir, and a hot fudge sundae. This is one resort that understands the importance of balance. —JAN NEWBERRY

THE SPRING, 12099 REPOSO WAY, DESERT HOT SPRINGS, 760-251-6700, WWW.THE-SPRING.COM, RATES: \$119-\$259.
TWO BUNCH PALMS, 67425 TWO BUNCH PALMS TRAIL, 800-472-4334, WWW.TWOBUNCHPALMS.COM, RATES: \$107-\$916.



Cedar House Sport Hotel, Truckee

After a winter day spent playing in the mountains, half the fun is getting out of the snow. Truckee now gives you a cushy reason to get off the beaten path.

Used to be, most Tahoe lodges had all the charm of a roadside motel: orange shag carpeting, wafer-thin walls, gilt-framed watercolors of mountains and rainbows. The **Cedar House Sport Hotel**, perched on a bluff a few minutes from Truckee's historic main drag, is changing all that. A modernist alpine retreat that's more Le Corbusier than gold-flecked Formica, this year-old boutique hotel brings indoor luxe to an area known for its outdoor wonders.

All wood beams, raw concrete, and recycled steel, the hotel is a study in green design, with a garden on the roof and a heating system that cuts the power bills in half. Good deeds will take you only so far, though; luckily, the place is also comfy as all get-out. Owners Jeff and Patty Baird aimed to create a modern American version of a traditional European ski lodge.

What that translates to is a perpetually roaring fire flanked by leather couches in the lobby and a pint-size bar with three stools—the catbird seats for an après-ski drink. Most afternoons, an ancient, easygoing border collie named Jake sprawls near the fire, overseeing it all. The rooms, meanwhile, are every bit as sleekly cozy as those you'd find in an upscale San Francisco hotel, with cavernous tiled showers and flat-screen TVs.

But this being Tahoe, you won't want to spend the whole trip in your room. **Alpine** and **Squaw** are a 20-minute drive away, and Cedar House sells discounted lift tickets at the front desk. If you're feeling adventurous (or don't like waiting in lift lines), the lodge can arrange guided back-country skiing on a snowcat as well as snowshoeing and dogsledding excursions in the Sierra.

Once you're done playing outdoors, hit the spa. Due to Truckee's stringent planning code, Cedar House's spa was a long time coming, but it's finally open, with a 10-person hot tub on the back patio and a cedar sauna. At the end of your day, belly up to the tiny bar for a nightcap. Jake will have gone off to bed, but the fire will still be going strong. —CHRIS SMITH

CEDAR HOUSE SPORT HOTEL, 10918 BROOKWAY RD., TRUCKEE, 866-582-5655, WWW.CEDARHOUSESPORTHOTEL.COM, RATES: \$140-\$300.

Downtown San Diego

Nightlife just seems sweeter when you're in a tank top, so a midwinter night out in cosmopolitan downtown San Diego is very sweet indeed.

These days, downtown is a far cry from the military ghost town it once was: its population has nearly doubled since 2000, there's something new opening almost daily, and the Gaslamp Quarter's clubs and restaurants draw even Angelenos down for the weekend.

Downtown's grande dame, the 97-year-old **U.S. Grant**, recently had a \$52 million face-lift that has returned the hotel to its glory days. But it's not all old-school: for its new "sleep with art" program, French artist Yves Clement spent months drip-painting headboards. On the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum lies the bold new **Keating** hotel. While car shopping, Keating owner Edward Kaen was so inspired by Ferrari design that he decided to have its design team, Pininfarina, turn his 19th-century building into a hot hotel. The interior stanzas are stocked with Bang & Olufsen electronics, Pininfarina-designed espresso machines, and Frette linens. But you'd better be comfortable with your date: the only thing separating bedroom from bathroom is the change from red to blue color scheme.

If you're staying at the Keating, you'll get a taste of the beautiful crowd, but head out and experience San Diego's new nightlife, which has hit Hollywood heights. Within walking distance from the Grant and the Keating are megaclubs like **Stingaree** and **Confidential**, with lofty interiors, VIP tables, and bottle service. Those looking for a more low-key experience will find dozens of vibrant bars in the Gaslamp Quarter and a great rooftop bar at the **W**.

No worries if you're not up for wild nights; San Diego's daytime diversions remain as plentiful as the butterflies at the famous **San Diego Zoo**, which is always worth another visit. So is **Balboa Park**—with its 15 (15) museums. Through December, 24 Dead Sea scrolls will be on exhibit at the park's **Natural History Museum**, and in January the Cattleya orchids in the **Botanical Building** are in full bloom. —NATASHA SARKISIAN

U.S. GRANT, 326 BROADWAY, SAN DIEGO, 866-837-4270, WWW.USGRANT.COM, RATES: \$429-\$3,500. THE KEATING, 432 F ST., 619-814-5700, WWW.THEKEATING.COM, RATES: \$309-\$2,500.