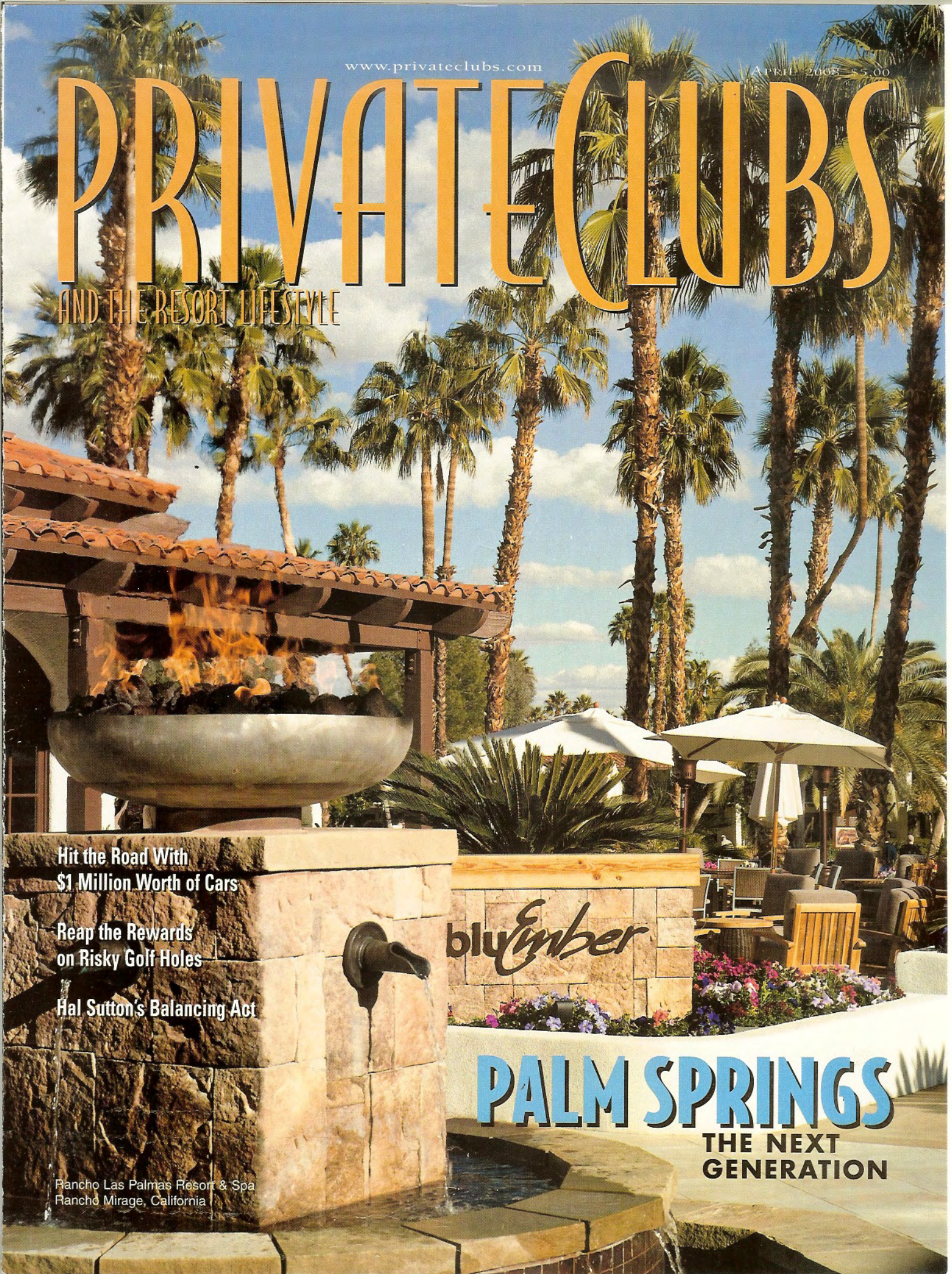
www.privateclubs.com

April 2008 $5.00

PRIVATE CLUBS

AND THE RESORT LIFESTYLE



Hit the Road With $1 Million Worth of Cars

Reap the Rewards on Risky Golf Holes

Hal Sutton's Balancing Act

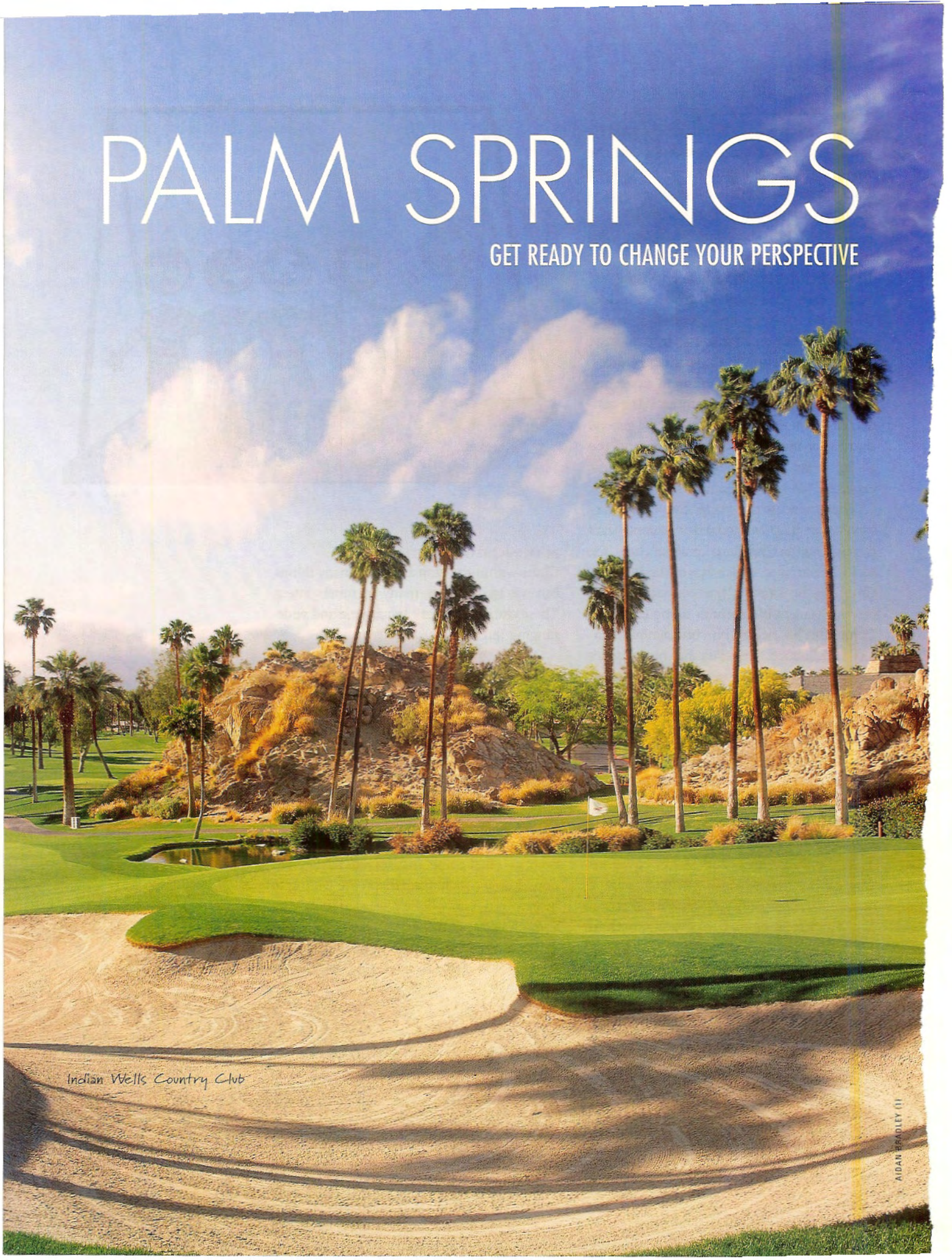
PALM SPRINGS

THE NEXT GENERATION

Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa
Rancho Mirage, California

PALM SPRINGS

GET READY TO CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE



Indian Wells Country Club

AIDAN BRADLEY (1)

WEEKEND

ON AN OLD FAVORITE.

EVEN AS YOU READ THIS, PALM SPRINGS IS FIGHTING A misperception. Mary Jo Ginther, director of the Palm Springs Bureau of Tourism, claims that "the farther away people are, the older their perception is about our city. It's no longer a traditional retirement community. We're experiencing a surge of younger, more affluent people who've bought vacation homes here or left their lives in larger urban centers to open businesses here." With that comes younger visitors, too.

Why the influx? The city's been undergoing a transformation in recent years toward being more of a destination for a new, more vibrant generation —

BY SCOTT KRAMER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN L. SITREN

Palm Springs is multigenerational, appealing to adults,

much like fellow desert cities Scottsdale and Las Vegas have before it. Everything from tourist attractions to hotels to water parks has begun catering to a fresh clientele. As a result, Palm Springs now offers plenty to do for all ages and has become a popular getaway among residents from San Diego to Santa Barbara, golfers from all around the country, and professionals seeking an overdue escape. Especially this time of year — with near-perfect sunshine and temperatures hovering in the high 70s — the entire Palm Desert area is bustling with activity.

WHERE TO START?

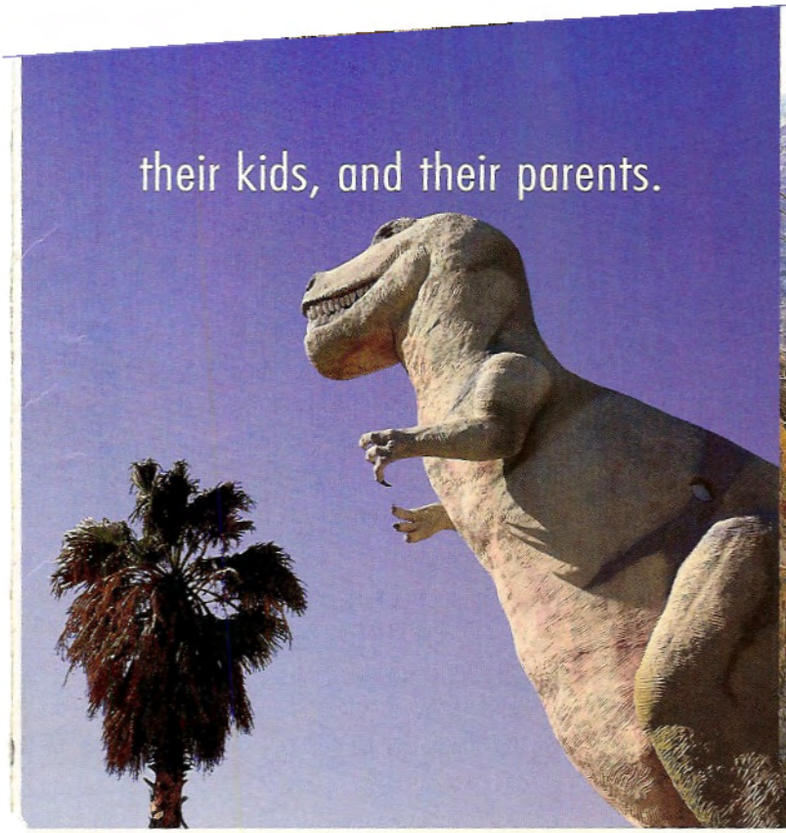
Beyond relaxing by the pool — the area's seemingly most popular pastime — there are plenty of spas, golf courses, tennis

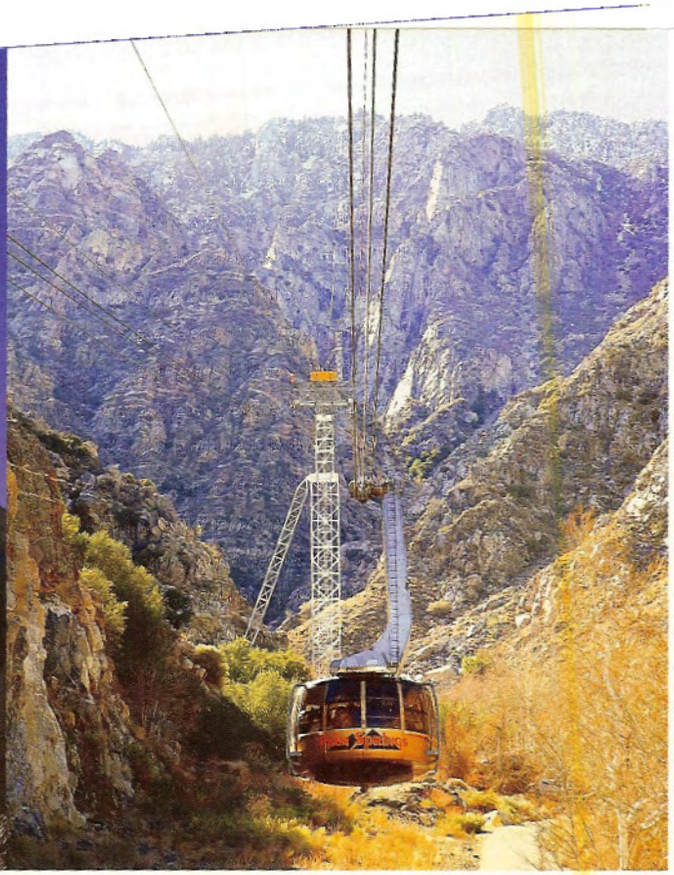
THE REVITALIZATION OF RANCHO LAS PALMAS

Since 1979, the 240-acre, 444-room **Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa** has served visitors who prefer traveling in style. In the heart of Rancho Mirage, this posh resort sits amid a vibrant area of shops, restaurants, and entertainment complexes in the hub of Palm Desert. And to keep up with the blossoming neighborhood, the resort just underwent a $35 million "revitalization" that includes a spacious new lobby, enhanced early California-style guest rooms, renovated spa, and a new 1.2-acre water feature — Splashtopia — that has its own 425-foot lazy river, two 100-foot waterslides, pool, Jacuzzi, sandy beach, and waterplay zone. There are other swimming options, including a tranquil pool for adults and a spa courtyard pool. But the intent of the remodel was to gracefully bring the resort into the 21st century. Mission accomplished.

"We are excited to unveil the renovations, designed to make us the best destination in the desert," says Victor Woo, vice president and general manager. "Rancho Las Palmas is the ideal getaway with something for everyone."

Guests will enjoy rooms that have raised the aesthetic bar with luxurious appointments, such as rich wood accents and crown moldings. Plush down comforters and custom duvets top premium mattresses, while 42-inch plasma televisions grace the walls. Baths feature slab granite countertops and beautiful millwork cabinetry. Even if you aren't a guest, you can enjoy the resort's three brand-new restaurants, including the signature bluEmber, which showcases the rich California harvest in warm, lively settings that range from the alfresco plaza, with fire pits and a dramatic fire-topped fountain, to interiors that flow from an open dining area to private dining rooms and cozy alcoves. The bar offers a tapas-style menu and a wine list that accents





courts, art and music festivals, restaurants, sports events, theaters, museums, nightlife, and architecture to discover. In other words, the city offers a lot of culture. Downtown Palm Springs' VillageFest every Thursday evening is a fashionable street fair. A ¾-mile stretch of Palm Canyon Drive — the town's main strip and home to a Walk of Stars tribute to Hollywood — transforms into an outdoor fair of crafts, artwork, flower stands, and produce markets. Street performers entertain pedestrians and patio diners at the many outdoor restaurants.

"It's multigenerational, appealing to adults, their kids, and their parents," Ginther says. "There's so much to do here now, in general. You're not waiting in line for the next ride, like you would at other vacation destinations in Southern California. The beauty of Palm Springs is that you can have a real vacation where you actually spend time together with your spouse, friends, or family, doing things everyone can enjoy."

There are timeless drawing cards here for travelers — even when everyone might not agree on what to do. For instance, travel 15 minutes west along Interstate 10 to the Cabazon Outlet/Desert Hills Premium Outlets' 130 shops and restaurants. While shoppers hit the malls, children can spend time enjoying the adjacent Cabazon Dinosaurs, which are giant statues of prehistoric creatures that they can walk through. Nearby is the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, which since 1963 has taken tourists on a scenic journey to Palm Springs' only snow spot (yes, it's even white in the springtime). Revolving

labels from California's finest vineyards. Also new is R Bar, with a classic Rat Pack vibe that's depicted by sleek leather seating, flat-screen TVs, a pool table, and shuffleboard table. Palms Café serves Starbucks coffee, brick-oven pizzas, and light fare all day — amid several computer stations offering Internet access.

Completing the resort's transformation is Waterfall Terrace, a new outdoor event area with a quaint setting. The 20,000-square-foot Spa Las Palmas offers 26 treatment rooms where guests can unwind with a tempting selection of internationally inspired massage treatments, body therapies, and facials. A tranquil spa courtyard features a heated sanctuary pool and stunning mountain vistas. The resort's fitness center is fully equipped with the latest state-of-the-art equipment and machines. Rancho Las Palmas' famed Yamaguchi Salon is part of a chain run by celebrity stylist Billy Yamaguchi. The resort is also home to one of the desert's largest tennis centers, with 25 courts — including 22 hard and three clay. Eight courts are lit for evening play.

And, of course, golf remains one of the resort's main draws. The Rancho Las Palmas Country Club is home to a 27-hole Ted Robinson design. More than 1,500 palm trees line the fairways that meander over gently rolling terrain and around six lakes. The club also features practice facilities, a tiered grass hitting area, and Bermuda grass practice putting greens.

tramcars were installed in 2000, which slowly turn as they travel the 2.5 miles to the top of Mount San Jacinto State Park and Wilderness, offering a 360-degree view of the region. At the 10,834-foot peak are hiking trails, cross-country skiing, and sledding.

GOLFERS PARADISE

Back down in town, golfers have dozens of great courses to choose from. The town's best private golf facilities remain popular — and no wonder. **Mission Hills Country Club** in Rancho Mirage, which annually hosts the LPGA's Kraft Nabisco Championship (scheduled for April 3-6 this year), recently opened a state-of-the-art, 16,000-square-foot Spa & Sports Center that features a full spa and nail salon. The club's tennis complex is also the new home of the renowned Dennis Ralston Tennis Camp. The 7,000-yard **Desert Falls Country Club** in Palm Desert commands a whopping 145 slope rating. But it's the details that earned the course a four-star rating from *Golf Digest's* "Best Places to Play" list, such as the perpetually outstanding course condition, the quick rate of play, and the 18,000-square-foot green on No. 14, which is the largest green west of the Rockies. **Indian Wells Country Club** now offers two courses — the 6,478-yard Classic Course and 6,558-yard Cove Course — as well as a golf academy, 70,000-square-foot clubhouse with a fitness center, grill, and four private dining areas. Those who can never get enough of the links will enjoy the Jude E. Poynter Golf Museum, a shrine to the desert golf scene that features equipment from all over the world, celebrity memorabilia, and a nostalgic look at the history of the sport.

Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa

new gathering spots are infusing an entirely fresh pulse.

NEW HORIZONS

But just as these established golf facilities and tourist attractions ingrain the city's fabric, new gathering spots are infusing an entirely fresh pulse. The River at Rancho Mirage restaurant and entertainment mega-complex is perhaps Palm Desert's newest primary social hub. At the corner of Highway 111 and Bob Hope Drive, it's jammed nightly with people visiting the 13 restaurants, 19 shops, and 15 movie theaters. An outdoor amphitheater hosts free live concerts on Friday and Saturday nights. A large, man-made river runs the length of the complex, providing water-view tables at many of the larger restaurants. Locals claim the real key to hanging out here is timing your visit: Parking spots are tough to come by, but you can always valet.

Directly across the street is the renovated **Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa** *(see story, page 32)* and its many brand-new features. "As the valley grows, the larger resorts like Rancho Las Palmas are adding resort-type activities for children and adults alike," Ginther says. "The whole valley is cosmopolitan, so parents don't have to give up that feel when they have their kids here." Likewise, adults traveling without children will definitely be able to capture that sleek sophistication on their trip. In fact, many hotels sport a cool L.A. vibe. For example, you can take advantage of the recently renovated Viceroy and Le Parker Meridien Palm Springs, which are spurring a resurgence of younger, hipper people seeking their own desert oasis. The Hard Rock Hotel is also coming. Gamblers are filling Morongo Casino Resort & Spa's 150,000-square-foot gaming floor and the chic Fantasy Springs Resort Casino, as well.

Because Palm Springs is somewhat seasonal, great travel values can still be found, particularly starting in April, when hotels and condo rentals drop prices while the weather remains ideal. Although many visitors drive two hours here from the coast on weekends — crowds filter in every Friday afternoon — the Palm Springs International Airport fields direct flights to and from 18 major North American cities. Just expect to have fun … and revise your perception of Palm Springs weekends of days gone by. ♦♦

Carlsbad, California-based freelance writer Scott Kramer enjoys Palm Springs golf getaways, although they typically come at the cost of spa treatments for his wife.

AIDAN BRADLEY (1)