

TRAVEL > UNITED STATES > CALIFORNIA

ALTERNATE ARRANGEMENTS



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARKER PALM SPRINGS HOTEL

The hallway area of the flamboyant Parker Palm Springs Hotel which occupies five hectares of downtown Palm Springs.

JUST THE FACTS

THE PARKER Palm Springs is spread across five hectares in the heart of Palm Springs on East Palm Canyon Dr.

The grounds are Hollywood history. Formerly Gene Autry's Melody Ranch and Merv Griffin's Givenchy Resort and Spa, the Parker Palm Springs has welcomed celebrities such as Angelina and Brad, Taye Diggs and Britney Spears.

ROOM RATES start at about \$300 (all prices U.S.) per night. Your best deal for a quick getaway is the Spa Junkie package, which offers nightly rate of \$199 Sunday through Thursday or \$299 on weekends and you get a \$200 credit to use at their nautically themed PSYC (Palm Springs Yacht Club) spa.

FOR MORE information, visit theparkerpalmsprings.com

A place where anything goes — s'more or less

No one bats an eye if you cook marshmallows in the hotel hallway

HEATHER GREENWOOD DAVIS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

PALM SPRINGS, CALIF.— The waitress, dressed in white and carrying a white melamine tray, smiles at us as we sit by the crackling fire pit in the hallway of the swanky Parker Palm Springs Hotel.

"Your s'mores, ladies," she says as she hands each of us a long silver skewer, points out the marshmallows, chocolate bark and graham crackers and offers tips on roasting.

No one who passes us as we cook, and then eat the sticky mess bats an eye.

There are two reasons.

Firstly, this is Palm Springs, an oasis born out of sand and rock. The town where Frank Sinatra had a

pool built in the shape of a piano, where George and Brad and the boys filmed much of *Ocean's Eleven*, where much of the population may be older but certainly doesn't look it (thanks in part to a booming plastic surgery market). Roasting marshmallows in a hotel lobby seems normal here.

The second reason? This is the Parker. A funky hotel whose sister New York property has always been a hot spot for socialites, celebrities and an almost-anything-goes vibe. If any hotel was going to let this happen, this is the one.

Designed by Jonathan Adler to give the feel of an eccentric aunt's home, there are two words that stay with me during the visit: colour and kitsch.

From the sky-high tangerine entry doors and the hot pink-sweated front-desk staff to the knightly armour that guard the lobby bathrooms and the pharmacy sign read-

ing "drugs" that hangs over a second (faux) fireplace in the lobby, this clearly isn't not your parents' hotel.

Or so you would think.

But the steady stream of guests of every race, sex, sexual orientation and age includes your parents, your grandparents and your kids, and all of them are hip. You can't really go wrong in what you wear. Jeans and newsboy caps are as common as flamingo earrings and plaid pants. No matter how loud your wardrobe, you're never going to outshine the flamboyant hotel.

General manager Thomas Meding says it's all part of the Parker plan.

"Breakfast in your bathrobe is okay here," he says as we sit beneath the "drugs" sign, a glass cowboy hat the only centrepiece on the coffee table between us. "It's luxury without the stuffiness."

It's not so much that everything

goes but that you should be as relaxed as possible while you're here.

"There's a fine line and if you get close, we tap you on the shoulder or on the knee and nudge you a little to the left."

The laissez-faire philosophy is key to the hotel's latest offering, Camp Bespoke (a British word meaning custom-made) offers you your own camp counsellor who will set up a tailor-made themed visit just for you.

Want a sexy bachelorette weekend complete with a limo pub crawl? They can do that.

A Roaring '20s competition in petanque while sipping a Pastis? They can do that, too.

A girlfriends-only camp weekend reminiscent of your childhood? Just say the word.

It's why our group donned go-go boots in the morning and toured

PALM SPRINGS continued on T11