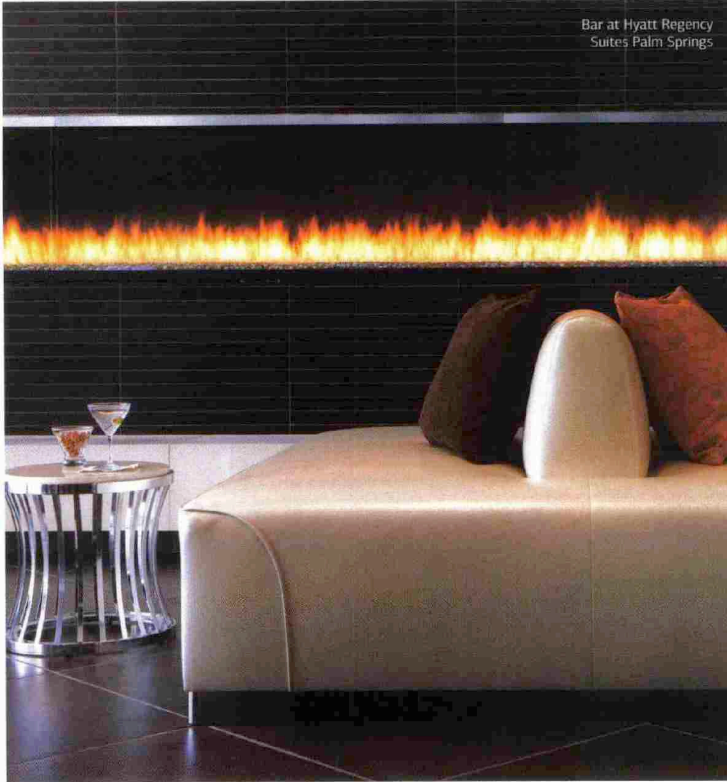


## » TRAVELS | by Adam Elder



Bar at Hyatt Regency Suites Palm Springs

Thankfully, a \$15 million renovation has transformed the Hyatt from an embarrassingly tacky '80s relic into an unashamedly contemporary, fun hotel.

This old cougar has been redone top to bottom in a consistent color palette of whites, browns and oranges. Tasteful in-room furniture looks like it's all been selected from high-end, modern stores. Happily, the funky architecture remains. Among the curiosities are the massive central atrium (the dining area is on the ground floor) and the interior windows, through which one can spy on the rest of the atrium—but whose function is otherwise a mystery. The bar too is aesthetically elegant, with a small lounge area, trendy automatic wine dispensers, and a thin strip of fireplace spanning the lounge; the entire bar opens up to a remodeled swimming pool deck.

**AFTER OGLING DREAM KITCHENS** at Standards of Excellence (off Highway 111), you start to wonder what a trained professional can do with those amazing appliances. Fittingly, the night's demo by chefs from three participating Restaurant Week eateries kicked off soon enough at the kitchen-and-bath showroom. Matchbox Vintage Pizza Bistro's Dennis Cheek whipped up an exotic

# Desert Dining

## Restaurant Week is one more reason to retreat to Palm Springs

**IT'S THE YIN TO OUR YANG.** Palm Springs and the desert have long been an ideal escape from coastal California when it's time to unwind: more sun, more heat, more golf courses, more swimming pools. It's the get-away playground for our region.

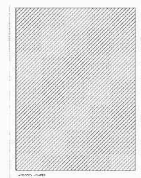
Yet food seems like an afterthought compared to all of Palm Springs' other attractions, which is a shame. Riffing on the success of similar events elsewhere, the Palm Springs Desert Resorts Restaurant Association aimed to change that with Palm Springs Restaurant Week, now in its third year. It's held in June, no less (San Diego's weeks are in January and September), as the tourist low season begins and hotel rates decline—and sweetening the pot, many resorts are offering deals during Restaurant Week.

The gist: From June 4 through 13, diners can partake of a three-course prix-fixe meal for \$24 or \$36, depending on the restaurant. More than 100 restaurants are participating this year, offering nearly every cuisine imaginable—in every city across the Coachella Valley, from Palm Springs to Indio. Participating restaurants offer a combination of the new and the familiar to San Diegans. Inasmuch as it's a good deal, it also appears to be a big deal: Last year, Restaurant Week drew nearly 25,000 people, according to organizers.

I was fortunate to experience a taste of the upcoming Restaurant Week during a recent media preview. I stayed at the Hyatt Regency Suites Palm Springs, an exquisite location for such an event—in the heart of the old city's downtown, on North Palm Canyon Drive.



Parsley- and lavender-crusted rack of lamb from Copley's



Dungeness crab salad lettuce wrap to start things off. Andrew Copley, of Copley's on Palm Canyon, charmed guests with his British cool while making the preparation of coffee-scented braised prime beef short ribs look easy. And Zin American Bistro's pastry chef/owner Mindy Reed capped the evening with a memorable chocolate-cappuccino mousse cake.

Wine came from Napa Valley's Grgich Hills Estate. Its seasoned owner, Miljenko Grgich, immigrated to the United States from Yugoslavia in his youth. On this night, he made an impassioned toast simultaneously celebrating the American dream and dissing communism.

The following afternoon at the Gardens on El Paseo, seven restaurants set up samples in the courtyard fronting Saks Fifth Avenue. They included eateries familiar here, such as Pacifica Seafood (also found in Del Mar), Rockin' Baja and, of course, Sammy's Woodfired Pizza—all of which were on par with a San Diegan's expectations. Native to the desert were Le Donne Cucina, with delicious house-made pastas and exceptional vodka sauce; Sullivan's Steakhouse, offering nicely cooked steaks; the Desert Springs Marriott's Tuscany Restaurant, with more tasty Italian fare; and Trio, which brought samples of several of its desserts to finish off the lunchtime samples.

The coup de grâce of the weekend was an evening of dining at one of the desert's newer phenomena, the recently renovated Riviera Hotel, on the outskirts of Palm Springs. Part Vegas sheen, part L.A. sophistication, the hotel's Circa 59 restaurant was something memorable. Although you won't find these on the Restaurant Week menu, you can't help but respect an establishment that starts off by nailing the now-ubiquitous beet salad, proudly serves skate wing and makes impossibly delicate and flavorful short ribs.

Depending on how you look at it, this focus on restaurants is one more reason—or more than 100 more reasons—to escape to the desert. ■

## If You Go

Palm Springs and Palm Desert are two to three hours by car from San Diego, depending on traffic. For information on Palm Springs Restaurant Week, go to [palm Springsrestaurantweek.com](http://palm Springsrestaurantweek.com). For more about the Hyatt Regency Suites Palm Springs, visit [palm Springs.hyatt.com](http://palm Springs.hyatt.com) or call 760-322-9000.