Desert Hot Springs & Coachella Valley

By

Slim Barnard

Courtesy of your Southern California Ford Dealers

Map No. 61

Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gasoline</td>
<td>$ 7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel (2)</td>
<td>7.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mineral Baths</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabot's Museum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals for 2 days</td>
<td>11.40</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$29.25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Travelogue

Scenery similar to that of the Persian Gulf, a land of date palms, tortured mountains and sun-seared sands, exists only 150 miles from Los Angeles.

In a setting where you would expect to see a caravan of camels — and well you might, in February — the oasis area and date orchard region of Desert Hot Springs and Coachella Valley invites visitors to a Near East-like atmosphere at this time of year.

The climate is much like the Middle East: dry, warm and with heavy-scented nights, but the people are certainly Southern Californian, warm, friendly and hospitable to travelers.

The region is reached via the San Bernardino Freeway, following the new Highway 86 signs. La Quinta Road, a few miles south of Thousand Palms, leads to Highway 111 and the date country.

Shields Date Shop is one of the landmarks of this remarkable agricultural effort, where one of the most romantic fruits of the Orient has found a home in America. The sight of this, Sniff's Date Garden and other groves of feathery palms prompts the visitor to stop at the Chamber of Commerce for more information.

The Chamber's headquarters adjoins the National Date Festival grounds, where the annual celebration will next be held February 12-22, 1965. Bob Fuller, clad in the grounds, which comprise a scene out of the Arabian Nights.

One of the oldtimers who remembers the early days when growers struggled to produce a date crop, is Arthur Woods. Art, now 84, came to Coachella Valley more than 50 years ago, and he is an authority on the area's number one product.

Art guided us through several groves, where we learned dates are native to North Africa. There, where the Persian Gulf controls the climate, the weather is much as it is in the Coachella Valley.

(Continued on back)
Date Land

Coachella Valley now produces about 90 per cent of the dates consumed in the United States, and its groves include varieties of dates found hardly anywhere else in the world.

If you are visiting the desert during the weekend, one of the most enjoyable places to stay is the Hotel Plaza, in Indio. Although it is one of the oldest hotels in the area, it is clean, modern and reasonably priced. A room for two is $7, and a single is $5.

Indio is the center of a beautiful region whose attractions range from ancient Indian relics to a unique date shop. About 11 miles from the center of town, on Highway 86, Valerie Jean's Date Shop tempts travelers to stop for refreshment and a glimpse of desert life as it once was.

The enterprise was begun by Russ Nicoll, who, with his wife, came to the desert in 1928. With a borrowed $500, the couple started what was to become one of the best-known businesses of its kind.

Much of the shop's charm comes from its construction, for, as Russ pointed out, its framework is as much a part of the desert as sand and sagebrush and the date palms, themselves.

Flood Relics

The redwood rafters were telegraph poles that in 1887 carried wires parallel to the Southern Pacific line to Yuma. Pillas and beams were bridge timbers, supporting the rails over the gullies of dry washes.

The heavy wooden pieces became desert Scots when the Colorado River broke its banks in 1905, flooding Imperial Valley and creating the present Salton Sea.

They lay on the desert floor for more than 50 years, acquiring a weather-beaten patina that could never be duplicated.

Hidden Palms

Some of these trees are estimated to be 50 to 75 years old, but nobody knows their origin. They are called Washingtonia, but another variety called Biskra exist in a canyon often used as a movie location.

About 1914 the Biskra palms were the setting for a film and a mineral bath, where guests would be transported from Indio by camel. The promoters went broke, but it was an interesting idea.

Dillon Road also passes hundreds of small houses on five-acre plots, where desert lovers have homesteaded their weekends. The road soon leads to the motorist to Desert Hot Springs, one of the fastest growing communities in Southern California.

As its name implies, the town grew up around hot mineral springs that, in numbers and quality, rival the famous spas of Europe. There are many baths open to the public at a nominal charge, but the largest and most famous is the $1,000,000 Desert Hot Springs Spa.

The resort features a new giant swimming pool and five thermal pools which range in temperature from 162 to 108 degrees. The water has to be cooled to those levels, for it actually gloves from the ground at 148 degrees.

WHAT TO WEAR...

Days are warm on the desert, and evenings are inclined to be chilly. Dress according to the hour.

FOR WOMEN:

Sun dresses or capri; sweaters or a coat to combat the cold night air. Take a swim suit, but remember hot mineral water can ruin elasticity. Dress informally.

FOR MEN:

Blue denim, khaki pants or slacks; sport shirts; sweater or sports jacket for evenings. Take two pairs of modern American mingle in a pleasing and happy combination.

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