

Palm Springs

Palm Springs! So, what's the big deal? I've been there. It's in the middle of a desert (a really desolate desert...the only green is the trash thrown from cars); it's subject to horrendously strong winds (there are acres and acres of wind turbines in the distance). In fact, the last time I was there I had parked under a palm tree, but had to move the car because I was afraid that palm fronds were going to come crashing down). And, of course, the temperatures are the stuff of legends.

So why is Palm Springs the playground of the elite?

It was in the early 1900s that Palm Springs began to establish itself as the world-class destination it is today. Many of its first residents came here because the dry, hot climate was beneficial to their health, particularly if the person was infected with tuberculosis (John McCallum relocated his family here for that reason). In the 1930s, Palm Springs became the #1 desert getaway for Hollywood stars (Las Vegas didn't become a Hollywood destination until the late 1940s). Palm Springs is known today as the Golf Capital of the World, but the initial sport associated with the area was tennis, exemplified by the Palm Springs Racquet Club and the Palm Springs Tennis Club.

There was another reason why Hollywood stars flocked to Palm Springs, and it may have been the most important of all. A star's life in the 1930s could easily be destroyed by gossip or scandal. America was much more puritanical in those days and every star lived under a constant veil of surveillance and paranoia. An extramarital affair or revelation that a star was gay could take you from riches to rags – literally overnight. Gossip columnists like Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper wielded immense power with an insatiable readership of millions who devoured every one of their salacious stories. But word soon spread that there was a beautiful desert sanctuary where one could be relatively safe from prying eyes.

America was in the throes of the Great Depression while Parsons, Hopper and numerous publications had their spies feverishly trailing every Hollywood star for the next juicy scandal. These gossip reporters worked for pennies, but survived because they would be reimbursed for their travel expenses, but only up to a range of 100 miles...Palm Springs is 107 miles from Los Angeles.

It wasn't foolproof, but it quickly gained Palm Springs an enduring reputation as a safe haven beyond the reach of the gossip columnists. Many stars visited or bought homes here including Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, John and Lionel Barrymore, Leslie Howard, Bing Crosby, Jimmy Durante, Spencer Tracy, John Wayne, Errol Flynn, Robert Wagner, Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope. In 1934, Ralph Bellamy and Charlie Farrell bought a large parcel of land and created the Palm Springs Racquet Club, inviting their fellow Hollywood stars to join them. They did.

Today, their names and hundreds of other celebrities are enshrined forever on the Palm Springs Walk of Stars. [<https://www.palmsprings.com/history/>]

