

Just half an hour northwest of Palm Springs the Whitewater River cuts a narrow channel through a wide valley. Mountains rise up dramatically on either side.

"It's 2,000 miles to Canada," says a man we meet on our fourth morning near the start of a trail that's part of the Pacific Crest Trail. The PCT runs all the way from the Mexico/California border to the Washington/B.C. border. We're not ready to go home just yet, but a four-mile hike sounds about right. A switchback trail leads to lush meadows that recall the Swiss Alps. It's unbelievably green and wildflowers are ready to burst into bloom. Seven miles later — we missed a turn-off — we're back at the parking lot, laughing at our good fortune to have gotten temporarily lost.

Our final day proves you don't even have to leave the city to enjoy a wilderness hike. Tahquitz Canyon is less than a five-minute drive from our hotel and another of the so-called Indian Canyons owned by the Agua Caliente Band, the largest landowners in the city. It's an easy three-km hike past bright green sycamore trees, yellow-flowering mesquite, red-blossomed chuparosa and — at the end of the canyon — a small but exquisite waterfall.

As the trail book writer promised, we saw strikingly different topography and flora on each of the five trails we hiked. We can't wait to do the other 135.

If You Go

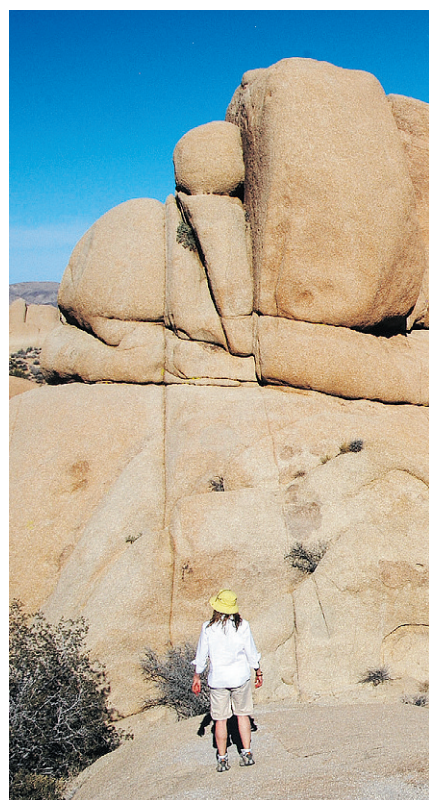
Stay: The 16-room Del Marcos Hotel is a delightful mid-century modern classic one block from downtown, with a salt-water pool and surrounded by towering palm trees.

Information: Palm Springs Visitors Centre — VisitPalmSprings.com
Phone: 1-800-347-7746

Hiking guidebook: 140 Great Hikes in and near Palm Springs by Philip Ferranti, Westcliffe Publishers, 2011



A hiker is dwarfed by towering fan palm trees at the Lower Palm Canyon oasis in Palm Springs' Indian Canyons. Fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*) are native to the Southern California desert and once provided food and shade to the local indigenous people.



Joshua Tree National Park is prized for its weird rock formations, a result of long-ago volcanic activity and more recent water and wind erosion.

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