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Borrego Springs and the Borrego Valley

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Borrego Springs is a quiet, comfortable and serene community of unincorporated San Diego County that's nestled near the center of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and surrounded by a spectacular 680,000 acres of protected desert wilderness. Though small in population—3,000 year-round residents, 10-12,000 in the busy seasons—Borrego Springs offers many amenities: art galleries, boutique shopping, health spas and fine dining. If inclined, shoppers can spend the day browsing stores that carry gourmet food and wine, elegant clothing, fancy handbags, fine art and gift items. But they'll want to travel about the area, too, for it's the great outdoors that attracts most residents and visitors. The dazzling sunsets, breathtaking vistas and wide range of outdoor activities are the first and foremost attractions of the Borrego Springs area.

It's a unique place in many ways. One has to drive 60 miles from town to run into a stoplight, and even further to find a chain store of any kind. Such a locale is a quickly vanishing commodity in Southern California. That's why people from SoCal and far beyond are awed by the sound of silence during the day and a sky full of shooting stars at night. Not to mention the amazing abundance of flora and fauna throughout the region—the spring wildflowers, the ocotillos and the cacti; the big horn sheep, the coyotes, the peregrine falcons. And dry weather means golf and tennis in every season, though an early-morning start and ice-cold drinks by the pool afterwards is the best way to enjoy such activities come summer.

Borrego Springs is just two hours by car from San Diego and three hours plus from Los Angeles. It's an accommodating destination all year, but particularly popular from October through April, the relatively cooler portion of the year when fresh, dry air and

mild temperatures make for an incoming migration of ‘snowbirds’. Outdoor and camping enthusiasts are drawn by hundreds of miles of trails and roads for hiking, horseback riding, cycling and off-roading. Others simply appreciate the beauty and serenity of the valley—the panoramic views and natural color schemes that make the area an artist and photographer’s paradise. And art lovers can appreciate the harvest of the artists’ toil in March during the town’s annual Circle of Art showcase, which coincides with the height of the wildflower season.

Fred Jee, supervising ranger at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, has worked at the park and lived in Borrego Springs for more than thirty years. He explains that the park itself is three-quarters the size of Rhode Island, and ranges in landscape scenery from desert basins that rest just above sea level (43 feet) to mountain crags topping 6,200 feet of elevation. “Best of all,” Jee says, “is that everything is so accessible and available. It’s become popular not only for recreational visitors but also for students and researchers interested in archaeology, anthropology and geology.”

Borrego Springs has been known as a magnet for tourism and a second-home buyers for the past fifty years or so. But its Native American history goes back thousands of years when the Cahuilla Indians lived in what is today’s northern section of the park, and the Kumeyaay Indians inhabited the southern side. These tribes along with the Cupeno and Luiseno all existed in the area long before European explorers, like Juan Bautista de Anza, arrived in California. According to Betsy Knaak, executive director of the Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association, “More than 50 sites of Kumeyaay rock art (petroglyphs, pictographs, sculptures) have been discovered in the park.” These indigenous tribes are still located primarily in San Diego County, and people can learn more about their histories and cultures by visiting the Borrego Desert Nature Center in Borrego Springs.

Residents and visitors of Borrego Springs and the surrounding valley find themselves in the midst of a surreal-like setting teeming with desert wildlife. From creosote bushes to palm trees, there are more than 1,000 species of plant life in the area. And hikers

shouldn't be surprised to spot a big horn sheep scampering along a mountain edge, nor drivers surprised to find a roadrunner crossing a mirage in the asphalt ahead. Besides these popular animals, others that are often spotted include coyotes, bobcats, desert hares and dozen of others. Of course, there's also the reptiles and arachnids—rattlesnakes, scorpions, tarantulas and the like.

Creepy crawly creatures, however, aren't for everyone. And for those who prefer the rest and relaxation of resort living, it's hard to do better than Borrego Springs. In addition to the variety of upscale dining and accommodations, the fresh air, clear skies and all-encompassing views add to the enjoyment of an afternoon on the course or a few hours on the court. And when the temperature surges too far north, then it's simply time to head to the pool. Whatever the case, though, the surrounding natural beauty always enhances such leisure, making Borrego Springs an ever-more popular travel destination.

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