



The new kid-friendly HyTides Plunge Waterpark features a pair of massive waterslides, a lazy river and a splash pad. *HYATT REGENCY INDIAN WELLS*

FAMILY TRAVEL

# CALIFORNIA DREAMING IN ‘TENNIS PARADISE’

IF YOU GO

*Family-friendly Indian Wells resort, Palm Springs attractions come up aces*

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Attending the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells has been on my husband Curt's wish list for more than a decade. The fact that it takes place in the sun-drenched Coachella Valley, affectionately coined “tennis paradise,” and sponsored by Moët & Chandon, is all the convincing I needed to be his plus-one.

Typically, California's top tennis tournament runs in early March; however, after cancelling 2020 due to the pandemic, organizers postponed the 2021 event until October last year. With travel having just reopened, the rescheduled dates were to our advantage, so we seized the opportunity and embarked on our first international trip in almost two years.

The short, direct flight, balmy fall pool weather and host of outdoor sights and activities make greater Palm Springs an ideal, stress-free vacation for families.

We went with a mid-week tournament package, which tends to be the most cost-effective. Due to current COVID-19 health and safety measures, the BNP Paribas Open requires ticket holders to show valid proof of full vaccination and be at least 12 years of age to attend. While slightly inconvenient, the new age restriction wasn't a massive issue for us because, for our daughter, watching live tennis loses its lustre when the alternative is swimming in a resort pool.

Fortunately, our package

included three nights at the Hyatt Regency Indian Wells — a fabulous property for families travelling with children. The resort's hallmark kid-friendly feature is HyTides Plunge Waterpark, a new three-storey outdoor attraction with a pair of nine-metre waterslides, 137-metre lazy river and splash pad. In addition to the waterpark, the Hyatt features seven outdoor pools, including a dedicated adults-only pool with cabana rentals.

A free tournament shuttle gets you poolside to courtside within minutes, and professional babysitting services are available through the hotel concierge. Curt spent most of his time watching matches, with me joining him for top events, like dinner at Nobu in the Tennis Garden and lawn games in the Moët & Chandon tent. I also sneaked in an age-defying fruit enzyme facial at the Hyatt's Agua Serena Spa, in between matches and the waterpark, to help counterbalance the desert's UV rays.

After two tournament days, most members of our family were ready to explore Palm Springs. The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens was first on the agenda.

The sprawling, immaculate grounds are stroller-friendly, and there are exhibits and activities for kids of all ages. We spent about three hours wandering through the African Safari, Wild Americas, Australian Adventurers and three nature trail loops. Highlights of our



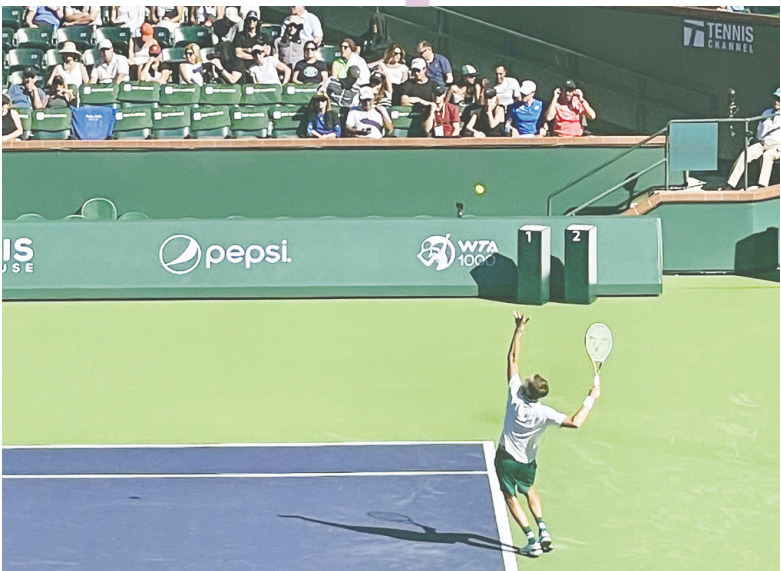
The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens offers family fun for all ages.

visit include walking amid the free-roaming kangaroos, feeding the giraffes and watching a sedated cape porcupine have her teeth cleaned in the zoo's Tenuity Hospital and Conservation Center.

We also loved the Bighorn Railroad G-scale model train display, featuring one kilometre of track winding through miniature scenes of the Coachella Valley, Grand Canyon and the Rocky Mountains.

Having worked up an appetite at the zoo, we drove to Eureka! in Indian Wells for an al fresco lunch. Bar snacks and scratch-made gourmet burgers make up most of the restaurant's menu — well suited for family dining. The crispy brussels sprouts, char-grilled cauliflower and Fresno fig burger were favourites at our table, as was the butterscotch pudding.

After lunch, we drove to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway in hopes of soaring 800 metres up the sheer cliffs of Chino Canyon. Rated as one of greater Palm Springs' top family attractions, the experience includes sweeping valley views from the top Mountain Station, a network of wilderness trails to explore and guided nature walks. Unfortunately, just as we arrived at the base, the Tramway temporarily closed due to mechanical issues. Rather than hanging about in hopes of it reopening, we pivoted



Tennis lovers catch the action on centre court in Stadium One at the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells. *CURT WOODHALL*

and drove 20 minutes to my personal paradise: Desert Hills Premium Outlets. California's largest collection of luxury outlets is a behemoth of coveted couture, featuring 180 stores that range from Gucci to Gap. Sadly — for me — we only had an hour and a half to power shop before heading downtown, which means a followup trip is required.

Every Thursday night, historic downtown Palm Springs transforms into a vibrant pedestrian street fair for VillageFest, along Palm Canyon Drive.

We arrived early, around 4 p.m., to check out the boutiques, public art, galleries and Palm Springs

Walk of Stars before VillageFest kicked off at 6 p.m. The event is popular, drawing an eclectic crowd that we enjoyed watching from the patio at Lulu California Bistro. The local dining hot spot has an extensive menu, including all the standard kid-friendly staples; however, it was the prime location and atmosphere that won our family over.

Following dinner, we spent our last night in Palm Springs strolling through VillageFest, shopping for trinkets, listening to live music, cheering on buskers, and satisfying our sweet tooth with mini doughnuts fresh from the fryer.



Enjoy craft cocktails and gourmet burgers at Eureka! in Indian Wells.