

THE WESTIN MISSION HILLS

Calm, cool + connected in Palm Springs



The living desert

Slanting, late afternoon sunlight paints a soft glow on the rugged San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountain ranges rimming the desert communities of Palm Springs. The mountains funnel wind currents coming in from the Pacific, softening the hot desert sun with cooling breezes. And hundreds of tall crooked palm trees evoke an oasis-like sense of nature in delicate balance, creating an all-encompassing calm in the Coachella Valley.

We're here in Palm Springs with planners from around the country for the 16th Annual Incentive Invitational, hosted annually by the [Incentive Research Foundation](#) (IRF). The purpose of the gathering is networking, fundraising, a series of roundtables, and the chance to scope out the desert activities and hotels.

The event was deftly organized by [The Opus Group](#), while [Access Services DMC](#) [ACCESS Destination Services] handled group excursions.

GOLF, GROUPS + A HUNKA HUNKA

The roundtables took place at [The Westin Mission Hills Resort & Spa](#). The elegant coral-hued resort's 472 low-lying rooms are designed with a Spanish Mission-style architecture, which blends beautifully with the lush green golf courses and California fan palms.

"There's an immediate sense of place here with the architecture embracing local Spanish culture and Native American heritage," says Michael Macleod, director of sales/marketing. "The design creates an engaging sense of arrival, just very serene, warm and welcoming. There's nothing else like it in the Coachella Valley."

The 44 meeting spaces, the largest of which is 17,200 sf, are set off to the side of the grand entrance away from public traffic but just seconds from the lobby. Wicked fast WiFi throughout the public spaces and rooms, too.

Seated dinners and tapas during the receptions soared—a mix of sushi, Southwestern and SoCal seafood. And we should mention some of the most attentive service we've seen lately.

Of the two golf courses, in-house groups typically play the meandering Pete Dye layout wrapping around the hotel. The first tee is just seconds from the main pool. Macleod says, "It's not a walk in the park, and that's not typical for a lot of hotel courses.... But we're about so much more than golf."

We participated in the popular jeep tour, where guides discuss the local wildlife in this "living desert," the San Andreas fault and the intriguing wind farm. The hundreds of 70-ft windmills generate more power than Palm Springs requires.

We also like the tram to the top of San Jacinto Mountain, 8,500 feet above the desert floor. The tram car holds 80 and the best part is the ride up past the towering spires. Many locals and attendees hiked the pine-scented mountain paths.

And this was fun and memorable. During the Palm Springs Celebrity Home Tour, we stop to check out Elvis' "Honeymoon House," where the King and his missus lived when Lisa Marie was born (nine months to the day of the wedding night.) So we're touring the home when suddenly an Elvis impersonator appears, singing *Steamroller Baby*. Elvis asks why we're in town. We explain our situation, and he says he hopes group business picks up too, before breaking gently into *Love Me Tender*.

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