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OFF DUTY TRAVEL

## The Spa Getaway That's Been a Hollywood Hideout Since the 1940s

At Desert Hot Springs, a glitz-free escape for Angelenos, the agenda is simple:  
Sink into a mineral pool, rinse, repeat



Mineral pools of all different sizes are scattered around the grounds at Two Bunch Palms.

PHOTO: DYLAN + JENI

IN ROBERT ALTMAN'S devastating Hollywood satire, "The Player," Tim Robbins plays an  
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amoral studio executive pursued by police who suspect him of murder. As cops close in on him at the airport, he hits on an escape plan: “I know this great hideaway in Desert Hot Springs,” he says to his female companion. “It’s a two-hour drive.” When we next see them, they’re pulling up in a Range Rover to a gated oasis in the desert, dotted with towering palms and stone cottages surrounding a grotto filled with gurgling waters. “It comes right out of the ground,” the Robbins character explains as guests frolic nearby in steaming mineral pools. (Spoiler alert: This romantic idyll is soon interrupted by a phone call from his lawyer.)

Last October, seeking an escape of another sort, I set out on the same auto route, with my grown daughter at the wheel, and headed for Two Bunch Palms, the sprawling spa resort that Altman had chosen for this location shoot. Aside from its brief cameo in the 1992 film, the property has long had a reputation as a refuge, for celebrities seeking privacy and even some real-life crooks: Al Capone is rumored to have holed up at the oasis of Two Bunch Palms during the 1920s.

Desert Hot Springs, which sits on a swath of arid land in the Coachella Valley, styles itself as “spa city” after its most unusual feature: It sits atop two aquifers, one hot and one cold, that supply the mineral waters that flow into the spa resorts and their ubiquitous mineral baths and pools. Those waters are the main draw, whether you’re staying in a posh spa hotel like Two Bunch Palms, the smaller Hope Springs or even a motel.