

4 PHOTOS

DESTINATION SPA

Castle Hot Springs

\$\$\$ |  HOT LIST 2020

Old west combines with new luxe in Arizona's dreamy Sonoran desert.



5050 East N Castle Hot Springs Rd, Morristown, Arizona 85342, United States

 (844) 348-1601

 www.castlehotsprings.com

AMENITIES

Spa
Free WiFi
Bar
Pool

ROOMS

32

TL;DR

A little slice of Old West meets old school resort

FIRST IMPRESSION

BED & BATH

John Wayne would have loved it

Yes to the outdoor spring-fed soaking tub

FOOD & DRINKS

Field to fork



THE CROWD

Tanned, toned, ready hike

Our Review

By REBECCA MISNER

What was it like to arrive at this hotel?

The final 10 miles of the 50-mile drive north from the Phoenix airport to Castle Hot Springs follows a dusty, boulder-filled road that, when the summer monsoons rip through, can go from sandy way to rushing river in minutes. It's like you've landed on the set of a John Wayne movie. There are wild burros on the side of the dirt road—descendants of donkeys set loose in the 1890s after the gold and copper mines in the Bradshaw Mountains went bust. There are steep canyons dense with Saguaro, a cactus that only grows in the Sonoran Desert and whose individualized arm positions make it impossible not to anthropomorphize (there's a disco dancer, that one's doing King Tut). The driveway into the resort is lined with every imaginable type of citrus tree and seeing the main lodge—a lemon yellow, almost victorian-feeling building—you can't help but feel like you've gone back in time to some sort of dessert oasis, a respite for passengers traveling by stage coach. A closer look reveals modern, mid-century-esque bungalows. There is an overwhelming sense of being far, far away. Of slowing down. Of going back in time.

What's the backstory?

This place has a wild backstory. The hotel first opened in 1896, as Arizona's first wellness retreat. Before that, the indigenous Yavapai journeyed here to bathe in the property's mineral-rich hot springs. And in the early 20th century, America's industrial elite, the Roosevelts, Wrigleys, and Astors wintered here, taking the waters, horseback riding, and sun bathing. After WWII, the U.S. Government leased the property and turned it into a convalescent retreat for wounded soldiers. JFK spent time here recovering. It then went back to being a resort for wealthy sun seekers and it would have kept on as such if a fire hadn't shuttered the resort in 1976, leaving the springs for trespassing, skinny-dipping teens. Now, fifty years since it saw its last paying guests, a local Phoenix couple has reopened the hotel.

Tell us all about the accommodations. Any tips on what to book?

The majority of the rooms are free standing bungalows or cottages. Mine was by a little hot spring-fed creek that runs from the source through the property (and also fills the swimming pool). The cottages have a mid-century feel and each have indoor and outdoor fireplaces and a smart nouveau-southwest look. Many have outdoor soaking tubs with hot and cold handles, and then a special faucet that delivers water directly from the hot springs for an ultra-private soak. I would definitely come back to this room—it felt totally private, but also right between the main lodge, where the bar and restaurant and lobby are, and the hot springs.

Is there a charge for Wi-Fi?

No charge for Wi-fi. There is Wi-Fi in the main lodge area, but not it's strong throughout the property, which is intentional. The hotel is hoping people disconnect while they're here.

Drinking and dining—what are we looking at?

The restaurant Harvest is fantastic and led by chef Christopher Brugman (young, energetic, was on the show Chopped). He's very into foraging and using what the onsite farm grows in inventive ways, and pickling or fermenting any unused produce. He works closely with the farm team and they have created a really cool, interactive farm to table program. The property is putting up a new building near the farm where there will be cooking classes and other immersive food/farm experiences. The farm team leads fabulous tours where they walk guests around and let them taste the different vegetables and herbs they are growing.

And the service?

The staff is friendly and easy going. You are really in the middle of nowhere, so most of the staff lives in nearby housing. There is almost a summer camp feel among them, and many do more than one job. It's the sort of chat-while-you-drink place and a bartender will likely be experimenting while talking to you and pouring you a little sample of their work in progress. There are a few characters—the cowboy who leads horseback rides through the canyon (straight from central casting, but totally legit), or the guide who takes you hiking into the dessert who knows how to survive on cactus and insects and also feels the presence of Navajo ghosts.

What type of travelers will you find here?

Well off professional Phoenicians, late-30s and older. Sun-kissed, fit, no strangers to long hikes through the dessert but who appreciate good food and wine.

What about the area? What else is here?

There is absolutely nothing around. It is the antithesis of the hotel scene in Scottsdale, where day drinking on rafts in huge swimming pools, golf courses, and afternoon shopping trips rule the day.

Is there anything you'd change?

Nope. I loved it.

Any other hotel features worth noting?

The hot springs are really, really special. They are simple pools carved from the rock and flow right back into the canyon. There are lovely lounging areas with showers and water and towels. The play is to go late at night. It's about a 5 minute walk from most bungalows and is lit just enough that you can see where you're walking, but it's not at all bright. You're likely to have the pools to yourself and you just float and look up at the stars (there's no light pollution) and breathe in the desert night air.

Bottom line: Worth it?

So worth it. Cannot wait to go back. It's wellness without feeling wellness and the natural setting is magnificent.

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