Grapefruit Festival

By: Kathy Strong photos by Sam Webb

Big horn sheep inhabit Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Springs

The drive from our desert to the tiny town of Borrego Springs is a reminder of our valley's agricultural treasures, from majestic date groves and fruit stands past Thermal to grove upon grove of sweet-smelling citrus. A bend in the road just before the Salton Sea leads to a mini Grand Canyon excursion through the Borrego Badlands into the center of this quiet desert oasis, reminiscent of Palm Springs several decades ago. Even the Chamber of Commerce will readily admit that the only traffic congestion you are liable to encounter is "a couple of lizards vying for the same rock to sun themselves on."

Lacking crowds doesn't mean there is a lack of activity, however. Borrego Springs has some interesting events, a handful of well-respected golf courses, including Rams Hill, some unique accommodations and restaurants, and its worldwide claim to fame — the Anza Borrego Desert State Park. The state park is a destination within itself with exceptional hiking and picturesque canyons, hills and valleys. Considered one of the most spectacular state parks in America, it is without a doubt the largest and one of the most scenic.

It was through Borrego Valley that Juan Bautista de Anza discovered the first land route to California. The north end of the valley was called Coyote Canyon and it provided a natural staircase over the mountains. More than 200 years later Borrego Springs has moved to become a special hideaway. Much of the history of the area can be found inside the walls of La Casa del Zorro, a now grand resort that began as a 1937- built adobe ranch house. Accommodations are varied from mini-suites to private casitas; day guests come to enjoy the fabulous cuisine in the Butterfield Dining Room. The Palms at Indian Head, a celebrity hideaway in the 1940s, is another great choice for a memorable meal at its Krazy Coyote café.

A stop at the Anza-Borrego Desert Visitor Center, carved into the earth at the edge of the park, will get you oriented as well as educated into the geology and history of the 600-acre park.

If you want to time your trip for a special event, consider the Grapefruit Festival this February 26-27. Called the "sweetest festival in California," the event takes place on Christmas Circle in the heart of town. Pleasure yourself with grapefruit delicacies, enjoy local art and entertainment and browse the shops.

Your Trip to Borrego Springs

How to Get There:Take Highway 111 east to Highway 86 around Thermal. Just before the Salton Sea, make a turn on Route S22 that will take you on a 21-mile scenic route to Borrego Springs. The 70-mile drive from the desert takes about 1 1.2 hours.

Where to Stay & Dine: La Casa del Zorro 3845 Yaqui Pass Road 760-767-5323 800 824-1884 The Palms at Indian Head 2220 Hoberg Road 760-767-7788

Visitor Information: Borrego Springs Chamber of Commerce 786 Palm Canyon Drive 760-767-5555 800-559-5524 www.borregospringschamber.com Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Visitor's Center 200 Palm Canyon Drive 760-767-4205

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