Oak Glen Ripe for the Picking

A Nearby Haven of Fall Colors and Crisp Apples

By: Maggie Downs

At Moms Country Orchards the produce is plentiful and pesticide-free. Moms has also claimed the title of the widest selection of jams, jellies and preserves in the country. Sometimes it seems like summer never wants to leave the desert. On those dog days of fall, while heat still clings to the Coachella Valley, the mile-high climate of Oak Glen provides the perfect backdrop for autumn family fun.

An easy, hour-long drive from Palm Springs, Oak Glen is a 15 square-mile hamlet of soft hills, orchards and farms. Because Oak Glen is 10 to 15 degrees cooler than the desert, the air is as crisp and cool as a green apple, often laced with the scent of a cozy fire. This is where trees try on the new fall fashions, displaying brilliant leaves of blazing orange, crimson and gold.

Along this scenic loop of more than 30 ranches, farms and businesses, Oak Glen is ripe for visitors who have a penchant for produce, particularly apple lovers. The first Oak Glen apple orchards were planted in 1876, followed by dozens more. Many of the original ranches are still in operation today, even if ownership has changed hands over the years. More than 100 varieties grow on these hills, including favorites like Pink Lady and Roxbury Russet, and the more exotic Mutsu.

Labor Day ushers in apple season, which lasts until Thanksgiving. Visitors can pick their own apples or pumpkins. If fresh fruit isn't your thing, make fresh cider your main squeeze. A local favorite is Moms Country Orchards, where the produce is plentiful and pesticide-free. Moms has also claimed the title of the widest selection of jams, jellies and preserves in the country. Other goodies include spicy peanut butter, homemade mustards and vineripened heirloom tomatoes.

"You know the saying — an apple a day keeps the doctor away? I really believe there's something to that," says Alison Law-Mathisen,

HOURS: Most Oak Glen ranches are open daily. The Wildlands Conservancy is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS: From Palm Springs, take I-10 West . Take the CA-79/Beaumont Avenue exit, Exit 94. Turn right onto Beaumont Avenue, which becomes Oak Glen Road. Estimated driving time is 55 minutes.

TIPS: Before hiking the trails at the Wildlands Conservancy in Oak Glen, stop by the office to pick up one of their charming hand-drawn maps. Also, check their calendars for upcoming activites, events and guided walks. Remember to wear sturdy walking shoes, sunscreen and a hat, and carry plenty of water and snacks. Bring a light jacket for cooler weather.

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