

From Then To Now: The Luxury Hotel Evolution

Written by Nichole Brophy

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Though one of the youngest states in the union, Arizona is home to some of the West's most historic hotels. From a private residence turned romantic hot spot to a consistent presidential hangout, the following resorts are steeped in history and modern amenities.



For a retro-inspired respite, locals and visitors know the trendiest spot in town is the Hotel Valley Ho. To say that the sleek hotel grew to fame would be an understatement. To steal a line from Lady Gaga, it was born this way. Since its inception, Hotel Valley Ho has welcomed A-list celebs like Humphrey Bogart, Bette Davis and more recently the likes of Hugh Jackman and Luke Wilson. Entertaining its first guests in 1956, Hotel Valley Ho's unique mod aesthetics have been one of its primary appeals throughout the years. Originally housing only 99 guestrooms in 1956, additions to the hotel have helped thousands of visitors get a taste of its individuality. In 1961, 78 additional rooms were added and 54 more accommodations came into existence during a massive renovation in 2005. The hotel also has plans to add another 50 rooms in the coming years. ZuZu and Trader Vic's, the on-site dining options at the hotel, not only satiate guests' appetites but have earned their culinary stars in the Scottsdale dining scene. Just as it did in the 1950's, the Hotel Valley Ho continues to host ever-so-popular poolside fashion shows, a staple that has set the resort apart from others in town. It is this out-of-the-box mentality, essentially applied to all aspects of the property, that has propelled the hotel to the top of must-stay lists.



RESORT STATS

Accommodations

Then: 99 rooms (1956)

Now: 231 rooms and suites

Guests per Year

Then: 32,000

Now: 88,500

Room Rates

Then: \$7.50 - \$10 per night (1956)

Now: \$199 - \$299 per night

Amenities

Then: Rollaway sofa beds, Motorola Console TV's with rabbit ears, central air-conditioning and a diving pool

Now: Wi-Fi, 32- to 40-inch LCD HD flat panel TV's, private bars, underground valet parking and a roof terrace



THE WIGWAM

For more than 150,000 visitors each year, thoughts of The Wigwam located in Litchfield Park are likely to conjure up images of world-class golf, old western-style architecture and first-rate accommodations. One item undoubtedly absent from vacationing minds: tires. Ironically, a tire-centric appeal was the main draw for The Wigwam's establishment in 1918. It was then that executives of Goodyear Tire & Rubber found that the West Valley was ideal for growing cotton to produce rubber for tires. When interest gained around Arizona's warm climate, the resort expanded in 1929 to include accommodations for 24 guests, each of which received a horse along with their room key.

The amenities at The Wigwam may be updated and better equipped to cater to lovers of luxury these days, but the historic feel of the resort remains in tact. From wood beams to desert-inspired vegetation and even the resort's original fireplace made from horsehair and mud, guests of the resort find nuances of the Old West at every turn.

A recent \$7 million refurbishment of The Wigwam by JDM Partners, spearheaded by Jerry Colangelo, revamped the resort, which holds 331 guest casitas. Colangelo, during the renovation, said he desired to bring back the history of the resort while restoring its meaning.

Spread out across 400 acres, the expansive property offers modern-day guests more than just horseback rides into the sunset. Three championships golf courses (two of which were designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr.), a stand-out tennis operation, an acclaimed Red Door Spa, a bevy of pools and a new signature restaurant, whose menu was designed by James Beard award-winning chef and Valley restaurateur Chris Bianco, all converge to add a contemporary spark to The Wigwam's historic glow.

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Accommodations

Then: 24 rooms

Now: 331 rooms

Guests per Year

Then: 11,238

Now: 157,059

Room Rates

Then: \$36 per night (1929)

Now: From \$189 per night

Amenities

Then: Shuffleboard, horseback riding, stables, badminton, archery, swimming, campfire songs and dining hall

Now: Three pools, seven dining options, three championship golf courses, championship tennis facility, on-site Red Door Spa, fitness center, business center and several outdoor events venues



THE ARIZONA BILTMORE

Teeming with elegance, the Arizona Biltmore's sophisticated reputation has served as the ultimate invitation for a bevy of high-profile guests since it opened in 1929. Aside from the resort's well-noted Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired architecture, the Arizona Biltmore presents to visitors what other Southwest destinations can't: recreation, but not in the form you'd think. Arizona visitors would be hard pressed to find another locale where one could recreate Marilyn Monroe's position as she lounged at the property's Catalina Pool. Or recreate what it must have been like for every president since Herbert Hoover to walk through the halls and lobby of the historic hideout. What the Arizona Biltmore has presented since its inception is a truly experiential treat from the moment guests arrive.

Originally, the Arizona Biltmore was a seasonal retreat open only from Nov. 1 to April 1 each year, and most guests would stay the entire time. Right before the resort's second season, the stock market crashed, which delayed the season's opening until Nov. 10. That year, post crash, William Wrigley became the sole owner of the Arizona Biltmore.

Nowadays, the resort caters to thousands of visitors year round (the year-round schedule began in 1973) and provides a menu of amenities rivaled by few. Two championship golf courses on site provide the ability to roll out of bed and onto the Biltmore's historic fairways. From basketball and croquet to chess and bocce ball, guests can recreate in the same forms as their historic counterparts or opt for the resort's state-of-the-art fitness and spa operations.

Throughout its history and for generations to come, the Arizona Biltmore proves to be a timeless gem in the desert.

RESORT STATS

Accommodations

Then: 243 rooms

Now: 740 rooms

Guests per Year

Then: 65,974

Now: 253,227

Room Rates

Then: Averaged around \$25 per night (1929)

Now: \$399 per night

Amenities

Then: Full-service resort with beauty parlor, barber shop, soda fountain, sundries, stables and horses, Catalina Pool, skeet-shooting range, tennis courts, life-size chess and shops (women's wear, western wear, milnor and a flower shop)

Now: Full-service resort with spa, salon, recreational activities, eight swimming pools, six unique dining venues and shops (including Lilly Pulitzer, Brighton and Tommy Bahama)



ROYAL PALMS RESORT AND SPA

It's not hard to understand the magnificence of the Royal Palms once its roots are exposed. In 1926, just as any custom homeowner, Delos and Florence Cooke had visions of what their Spanish Revival winter home was to look like upon completion. Set on 65 acres, El Vernadero, meaning "winter haven," as the Cookes affectionately called it, was completed in 1929. The mansion was sold in 1937 following Delos's death. After being bought and sold by investors, The Royal Palms Inn came to fruition in February 1948. Composed of 15 casitas, citrus groves and date palms, the inn established a purpose for the land, to which numerous additions were made in the latter half of the century.

Over the years, the Royal Palms has grown to include a multimillion dollar Alvarado Spa, a signature on-site restaurant called T. Cook's, and modern guestrooms, yet visitors still flock to the resort specifically for its whimsical architecture in a desert setting.

In 1996, during the resort's most expansive renovation to date, a heart-shaped pool that graced the grounds was removed. Paradoxically, the

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symbol of love's absence has, in a sense, made thousands of vacationing hearts grow fonder. Today, the Royal Palms is an "I do" hot spot, sought after by brides and grooms in search of the romantic Spanish architecture that the Cookes dreamed up.

RESORT STATS

Accommodations

Then: 15 casitas

Now: 119 rooms

Guests per Year

Then: Historical figure not available

Now: 129,000

Room Rates

Then: \$35 per night (1948)

Now: From \$399 per night

Amenities

Then: Tennis courts, horseback riding and a heart-shaped swimming pool

Now: Valet/self parking, 24-hour fitness center, cabana pool, wireless Internet, in-room flat-screen LCD TV's, mini bars, 24-hour room service, Director of Romance, Director of Shopping, twice-daily housekeeping, iPod clock/radios, daily newspaper, dry cleaning, access to spa facilities, business center and pet-friendly throughout

TO LEARN MORE

The Arizona Biltmore 602.955.6600, www.arizonabiltmore.com.

Hotel Valley Ho 480.248.2000, www.hotelvalleyho.com.

Royal Palms Resort and Spa 602.840.3610, www.royalpalmsresort.com.

The Wigwam 623.935.3811, www.wigwamarizona.com.