

HOT TICKETS

PALM SPRINGS:

December is the time to go posh Palm Springs. It's a month shy of the prime season (i.e., hello crowds), and it's hard to beat 80-degree days and cool evenings. And if you think this Beverly Hills of the desert isn't affordable outside the scorching summer months, get ready for a brand-new boutique hotel, the **Mojave Desert Resort**. Just a block from El Paseo (think Rodeo Drive boutiques and galleries), this 24-room hotel with 40's flair (reproductions of French Moderne armchairs, bleached-oak furniture based on 1940s originals, outdoor spa cabanas, plush robes, and palm and citrus trees all over) right now has rates for double rooms as low as \$99 per night through



THIS MONTH'S BEST TRAVEL BETS

December 31. (Starting in January, rates rise to \$139-\$225.) Though you'll have to book online to get the \$99 rate (www.HotelMojave.com), the hotel also has three affordable weekend packages that don't require Web reservations. For \$339, you can get two nights and your pick of extras. The **Romance package** gets you a dinner for two on El Paseo (Café des Beaux Arts), a bottle of champagne, and chocolate strawberries; the **Shopping weekend** comes with lunch for two at a nearby bistro, discounts at El Paseo stores, and a designer bag. But if you've really come to unwind, the **Spa package** brings you breakfast in bed, lunch on the town, and a one-hour spa treatment (800-391-1104).