

## **Palm Springs hotels provide guests bicycles**

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If your idea of great hotel amenities are limited to room service or wireless Internet, you're missing out.

How about a bike?

Bike fleets like the clunky blue cruisers seen parked in front of the Saguaro Palm Springs, or the cute his and her Electras available to guests at the Viceroy Palm Springs, are an increasingly common amenity hotels are providing.

"The amenity is very popular with our guests," said Don Devine, director of guest services and public relations at the Viceroy, noting the hotel has had bikes for about six years.

(VIDEO: Viceroy offers bicycles to guests)

"It provides them a pleasant alternative opportunity to explore Palm Springs," Devine added in an email. The bikes are made available by Celebrity Bike Rentals of Palm Springs.

And like other hotels, the bikes function as a welcome perk for visitors, but also serve as an extension of the hotel's brand and style.

"Each bicycle is named after a celebrity of yesteryear," Devine explained. "For example Lucy and Desi, Frank and Ava, Elvis and Priscilla, Marilyn Monroe, Dean Martin, Audrey Hepburn, Bing Crosby.

"Each bike also has a 'Viceroy Hotels & Resorts' 'Palm Springs' license plate under the seat, with the celebrity name on a plate on the basket by the handlebars," he added.

"Not only do they serve as an appreciated guest amenity, but also as rolling billboards around town," said Michael von Wittenau, director of sales and marketing at Saguaro. The Saguaro started out with 10 bikes, and may add more due to popularity with guests.

Amenities like cleverly designed bikes can add to the overall experience a hotel can help create, said Martin Greenwood, general manager of the Renaissance Palm Springs, adding it's a feature he would like to add to the Renaissance.

"The latest trend in the hotel industry is to offer more 'experience' related amenities and activities as opposed to finer bath amenities, robes, bedding, etc.," said Greenwood.

The Alcazar Palm Springs, a small boutique hotel in Palm Springs' Uptown Design District, has six cruisers it lends to guests, said Robert Hunt, general manager, adding the hotel plans to add more when the city develops more bike lanes and other cyclists related infrastructure.

Other hotels like the Westin Mission Hills Golf Resort and Spa in Rancho Mirage offer bikes, said Denise Harnett, marketing manager for the hotel, adding that Mission Hills just replaced its fleet. In the past, the bikes were not allowed off property, though the hotel now allows riders to roam the streets of Rancho Mirage as long as they are back by dusk.

Big Wheel Tours in Palm Desert provides bikes to four hotels in the area, said Evan Trubee, founder of the company, adding the trend is growing.

"Over the years we have worked with about a dozen hotels where we put bikes on site," he added. "Some

properties decided to do it in house, and some others decided that it is just too much trouble and use us on an on call basis to deliver bikes when guests need them.”

Increasingly, cities are waking up to adding bicycle infrastructure like dedicated bike lanes and a broader availability of bike racks as a measure to increase business and tourism activity. About 40 people from across the community met with April Economides, founder of Green Octopus Consulting in Long Beach, to discuss how to create bike-friendly business district. And in Palm Springs and other cities in the Coachella Valley, where tourism is big business, making the communities more bike-friendly is a vital part of growing the tourism economy, say business and city leaders.

In Palm Springs bike lanes are planned for streets like Baristo and Via Caballeros, said Savat Khamphou, assistant city engineer in Palm Springs. The city also will be adding at least a half-dozen bike racks around town.

“We have the plan now, and we are currently in the process of trying to obtain grants. And some of the bike lanes are actually going to be constructed, actually in the next couple of months,” Khamphou told the group attending the meeting Wednesday to discuss biking and some of the issues cyclists face. “Anything that we repave will now have a bicycle lane.”

Though invariably, making Indian Canyon and Palm Canyon drives more bike-friendly has to be a priority, nearly everyone stressed.

“Your two streets are not going to attract a lot of bicyclists the way they are,” said Economides, speaking of the two north-south thruways, which have multiple auto lanes and are absent of bike lanes.

Wednesday afternoon Cassie Ragsdale and Jeff Jones climbed aboard their Lucy and Desi bikes from the Viceroy they’d attached to the small fence lining the outdoor seating area outside Starbucks on Palm Canyon Drive after some time shopping. The Redlands couple found the bikes to be a great idea, especially given Palm Springs’ village-like setting.

“It’s really bikeable, if you stay on the back streets,” Ragsdale remarked, adding to the general consensus that Palm Canyon and especially Indian Canyon drives are not bike-friendly streets.

“A dedicated bike lane would be nice,” remarked John Prout, of Ontario, Canada, who was biking around downtown Palm Springs on Wednesday with his wife Chris. Both say the city is a great size for easy biking, however streets like Palm and Indian Canyon drives are a challenge for the pedaling crowd.

The lack of bike lanes can lead to some irritable and unsafe behavior on the part of cyclists who take to the sidewalks or head wrong way up a one-way street.

“My biggest frustration right now are the other cyclists,” said Mindy Reed, a cyclists and local restaurateur who owns Zin American Bistro, recalling an incident where a cyclists was heading the wrong way on Indian Canyon Drive — a busy street with at least four lanes of auto traffic — and was nearly in an accident.

“And I don’t even call them cyclists,” she added dismissively.

“They’re people on bikes.”

For their part, hotel officials say they try to educate riders about bike safety.

“Guests are asked to read and sign our ‘Bicycle Safety’ document before we issue the bike —which includes wearing a helmet and understanding that they must abide by local and State highway traffic

regulations,” said von Wittenau.

Viceroy officials say they are rewriting the safety language riders are required to read to stress local and state road rules bicyclists should follow.

“We do mention the bike lanes around town, and some routes through our neighborhood and the Las Palmas neighborhood, which have less traffic than the main streets,” said Devine.