

# some like it HOT

by thomas wilmer



Scotty's Castle

With names like Furnace Creek, Dante's View and the Devil's Playground, a visit to Death Valley offers plenty of inspiration.

Death Valley is hot – in more ways than one. Claiming the title as the hottest spot on planet earth (based on average daily temperature), Death Valley also sizzles with an abundance of attractions and activities.

A place of dynamic contrasts, contradictions and extremes, the region offers the outdoor enthusiast the opportunity to climb to the peak of snow-capped 11,000-foot-tall Telescope Peak and gaze down upon Badwater – 282 feet below sea level and the lowest spot in the Western Hemisphere. The vertical drop is twice the depth of the Grand Canyon.

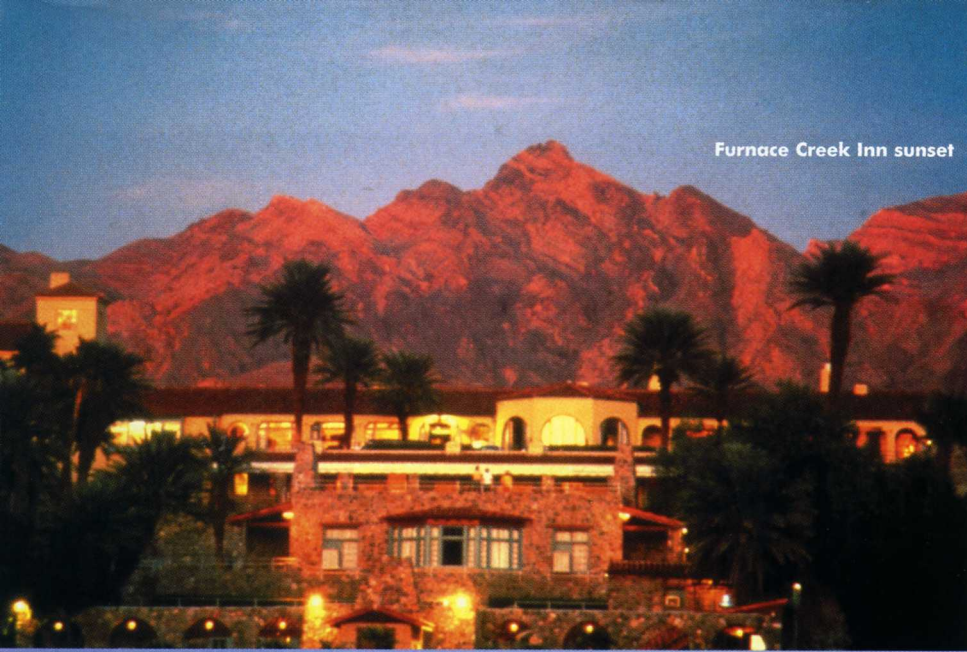
Death Valley is also the driest (average annual rainfall, 1.8") spot on earth, galoshes can be left in the closet. Although, should one encounter a flash flood, hip waders would be in order. Remarkably, a mere eighth-inch downfall can readily generate a raging 3-foot wall of water careening down gullies and washes. Catchments and cisterns wouldn't do much good, but fortunately for the locals and visitors, natural springs provide ample water to sustain an 18-hole golf course, swimming pools, lush tropical gardens, resorts and residences.

July is the hottest month, followed by August. A time when one would imagine ample availability at the inn, paradoxically, the peak occupancy month at Death Valley's historic Furnace Creek Inn is August when Europeans, notably Germans, arrive in droves to savor the ultimate broiler-esque experience.

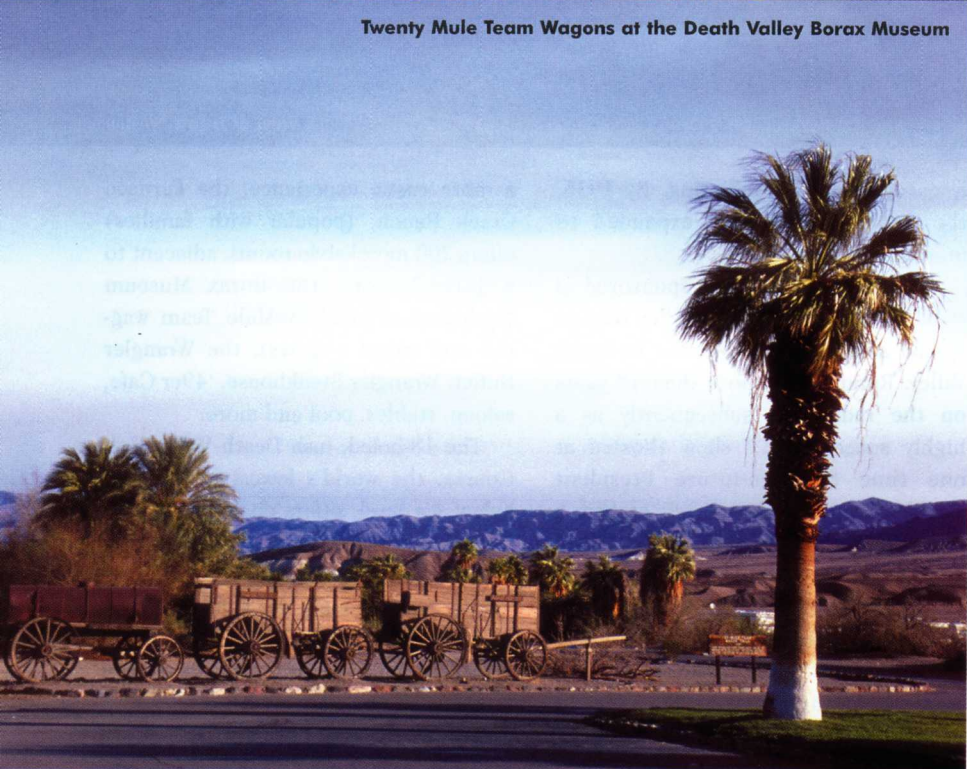
Toni Jepson, innkeeper at the historic Furnace Creek Inn says, "The record high, recorded in 1913, was 134 degrees. We always read the temperature in the shade. I don't think anyone would dare read it in full sun, as ground temperature can exceed air temperature by as much as 80 degrees."



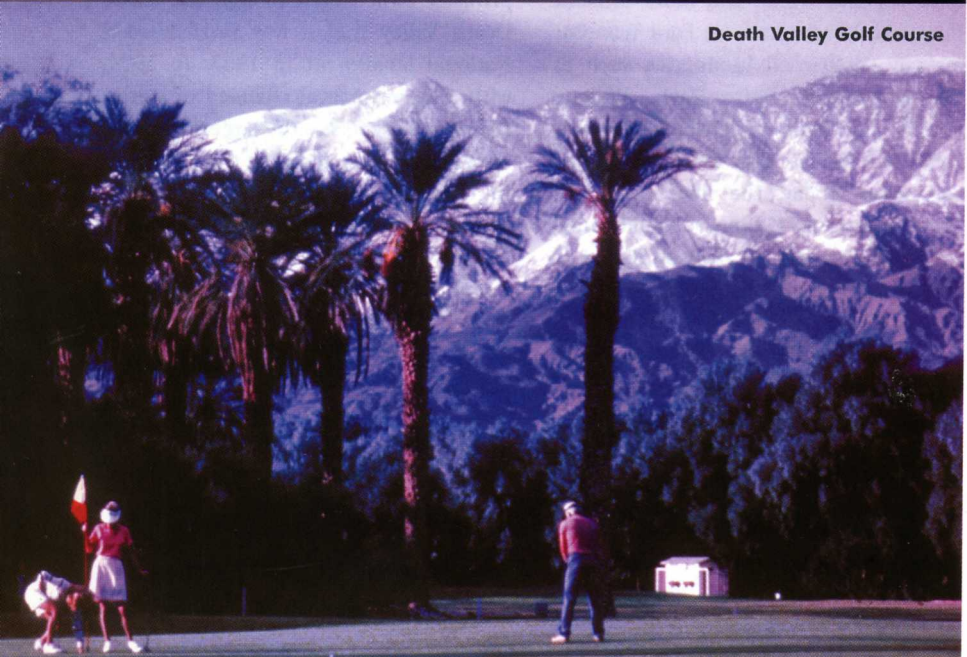
Furnace Creek Inn sunset



Twenty Mule Team Wagons at the Death Valley Borax Museum



Death Valley Golf Course



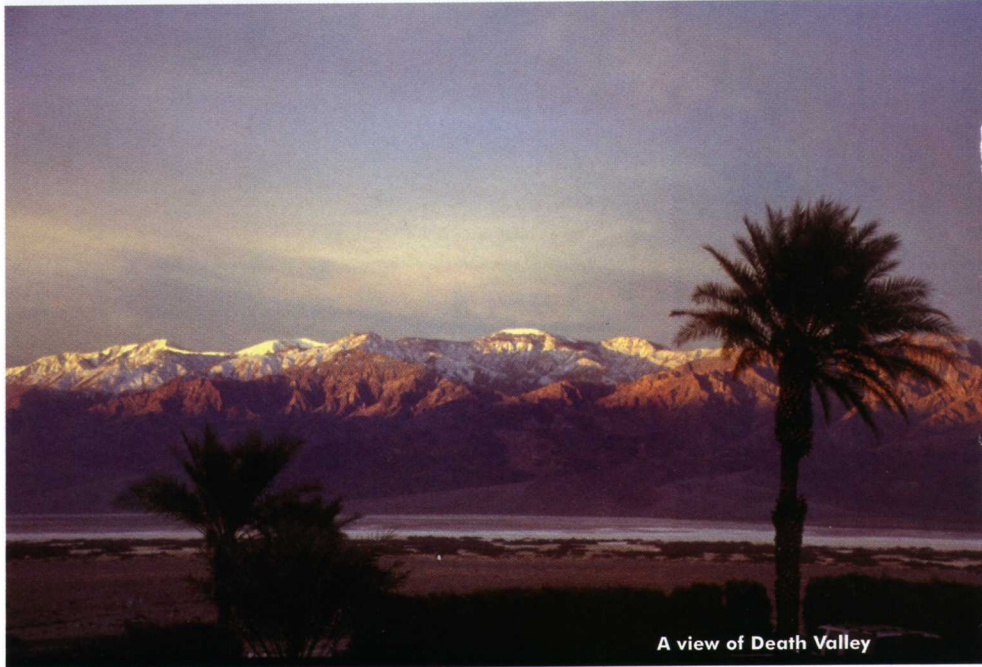
People take it real slow and easy in the midst of summer, but from late fall through late spring, the weather is typically sublime. Biking, horse back riding, golfing, tennis, back-country hiking, savoring the desert solitude and evening star-gazing are all popular pastimes that have attracted visitors and vacationers to Death Valley for more than 75 years.

Insider secret – the best time to come to Death Valley is from the end of September through April. Daytime temperatures typically range in the high 70s and low 80s throughout the winter months, but equally attractive is the absence of tourist throngs.

Most people perceive Death Valley as a flat, monochromatic, desolate wasteland, but the antithesis of that view is much closer to reality. Throughout the 100-mile-long valley a dramatic diversity of land forms, from 85-foot-tall undulating sand dunes to rugged mountains. The hillsides and salt-encrusted valleys radiate a spectral palette of color, from soft whites, lavenders, pinks, vibrant reds and ochre-yellows to deep purples. This ancient geological wonderland is truly a work in progress – discordant mountains of sandstone and starkly contrasted, multi-hued hills appear to have been dumped in place by one of God's earth movers mere days, rather than eons, ago.

One does not move to Death Valley by happenstance – this is definitely a place where people love it or leave it, pronto. Fortunately, those who work in the valley tend to be hardy souls with a passion for life and the desert. Furnace Creek Inn employee, Dave Woodruff, is a shining example. With a perpetual smile, he's likely to be up long before dawn to lead a group of inn guests on a sunrise hike down a mountainside past Zabriski Point (named for the movie). Two hours later, at breakfast at the Inn, there's Dave the naturalist, except he's jettisoned his 60-pound pack, shorts and lugged-sole hiking boots for a crisp, white and black waiter uniform.

In the same gracious style as Woodruff, the venerable Furnace Creek Inn has been playing host to guests for 75 years. Built by the Pacific Coast Borax Company in 1927 as a private retreat, the original six-room inn quick-



ly garnered a fond following. By 1935, the remote resort had expanded to 66-rooms and suites.

The Borax Company sponsored a radio show entitled Death Valley Days to spread awareness and interest in Death Valley. Running for more than 18 years on the radio and subsequently as a highly successful TV show (hosted at one time by then-future President Ronald Reagan), the series etched a fascination about this mysterious land as well as a near universal recognition of the term "20 Mule Team" into the minds of multiple generations of Americans.

During the 1930s, most guests who came to the Inn arrived in the valley by train (transported the last 25 miles by auto service), while the more affluent flew from Los Angeles via Ford Trimotor aircraft. Hollywood luminaries such as Jimmy Stewart, Bette Davis, William Powell and Claudette Colbert regularly retreated to the Inn for respites and relaxation. Today, the likes of Goldie Hawn or Anthony Quinn are found lounging by the spring-fed pool or dining in the restaurant with its panoramic valley and mountain vistas.

The adobe walled, red tile roofed, Four Diamond-AAA rated Furnace Creek Inn retains all of its vintage 1920s architectural enchantment and allures while incorporating modern conveniences, amenities and fine culinary offerings. For

a more rustic experience, the Furnace Creek Ranch, (popular with families) offers 200 motel-style rooms, adjacent to a general store, the Borax Museum (including original 20-Mule Team wagons and steam engines), the Wrangler Buffet, Wrangler Steakhouse, '49er Cafe, saloon, stables, pool and more.

The 18-holed, lush Death Valley Golf Course, the world's lowest at 214-feet below sea level, offers challenging play. Designed by Perry Dye, the 6,215-foot course has a full-time pro (and hosts an annual invitational) in addition to a pleasant course-side 19th Hole eatery – complete with a golf cart drive-thru burger pick-up.

Furnace Creek Inn and Ranch are privately owned even though the entire Death Valley region was proclaimed a National Monument in 1933. In 1994, with a governmental change of status, Death Valley became the largest National Park (3.3 million acres) in the Continental United States.

Rates at Furnace Creek Inn range from \$155 to \$380; Furnace Creek Ranch rates range from \$97 to \$184. For further information contact the Furnace Creek Inn & Ranch Resort, P.O. Box 1, Death Valley, CA 92328, telephone 760-786-2345, Web site: [www.furnace-creekresort.com](http://www.furnace-creekresort.com) (includes links to related sites such as Death Valley National Park). **lvw**