



desert springs

UNA VIDA DE CALIDAD
GOLF Y OCIO



Desert Springs in Andalusia: a surprising habitat for cacti and other Succulents

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A totally recreated landscape

For twelve years now, situated in the North of Andalusia, the Desert Springs golf course and resorts has become an inescapable place for golfers, holiday-makers, naturalists, desert lovers, walkers, but also cactophiles and succulentophiles.

Indeed, due to its unique characteristics, Desert Springs attracts not only a very diverse population, but also more and more journalists and artists. The place is a golf course obviously, but this one offers a dimension never reached in other resorts; its creation from a land intended for agriculture and abandoned for many years is a pure example of a rejuvenation area and an exceptional management of the water where cacti and other succulent plants planted there are living alone, receiving only the rare rainfall of the Almerian desert, with sun shining most parts of the year.

Desert Springs was honoured in 2007 with an Environmental Prize (Madera Verde). Its landscape, an aspect of integration, where human habitats are placed next to any sort of succulent plants, themselves used by a wild fauna coming and settling down on the complex thanks to all the offered opportunities: plants, water, reconstituted rocky shelters and food in abundance: predators and herbivores can find a good life there!

Symbiosis and harmony

A close-up photograph of a yellow cholla cactus flower in full bloom, perched on the edge of a sandy, textured cliff. The flower has numerous long, thin petals and a bright yellow center. The background is a clear blue sky. The cliffside is composed of light-colored sand and small rocks, with the cactus's green, segmented stems visible as they grow down the face of the rock.

So here, about 200 different species of cacti and other succulent plants live in harmony with the native wild plants which have recolonized the area, and which represents by now, more than 400 species, some rare like *Caralluma europaea*. The golf course, of 6.5 kilometres, which can be made on foot or with an electric buggy, is unforgettable. The guests remain astonished by the unexpected encounters in the bend of roads: black cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) drying their feathers in front of immense *Pachycereus pringlei* planted near an artificial lake populated with a whole aquatic fauna; a huge Eyed Lizard (*Timon lepidus nevadensis*) crossing the track, carpets of coloured flowers, or flying Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) transport them into another world, that of Desert Springs.

For different reasons which we are going to explain here, Desert Springs is not a botanical garden or a park: you will not find identification labels, plants are not classified by region, nor in a scientific way. We just tried to show a recreated landscape with plants in an aesthetic way which gets as close as possible to their habitat. It is more about a journey through Arizona, South Africa, Argentina or Baja California, but without a constantly bounded geography: no borders to limit, we enjoy discovering everything everywhere, behind a bush, under a tree, among the grass, in a crack or in the shade of a rock.

The difficulties of landscaping in arid zone

Probably the most gratifying aspect is to have experimented with, most of the time successfully, plantations of cacti and other succulent plant species outdoors, in a region where the temperatures can reach 40°C in summer and light frost occurs on some winter nights. Minimum temperatures recorded this last winter of 2012 were -4°C on the golf course, installed on a plateau and -7°C in the nursery, situated in the valley of Almanzora. Plants growing on the golf area underwent these extreme temperatures free from problems, most were not affected, some others more fragile got stained, but already show signs of recovery. It is evident that these temperatures are low only during a very short period of





Aloe dichotoma



Ferocactus gracilis



Harrisia tetracantha



Mammillaria parkinsonii



Aloe peglerae



Lithops sp.



Opuntia arrastradillo



Gasteria acinacifolia



Fouquieria macdougalii



Stetsonia coryne



Trichocereus peruvianus



Cylindropuntia molesta

time, generally before the sunrise, but rise up very quickly during the morning. It is important to remember that this is exceptional, these low temperatures are only experienced approximately every 50 years.

Among the great majority of plants which withstood frost while everything would have been able to indicate the opposite are *Hylocereus guatemalensis*, *Borzicactus samaipatanus*, *Euphorbia triangularis* or still *Kalanchoe tomentosa*.

Some species are rare to observe outdoors, outside their habitat, notably small plants like *Lithops* sp., *Fenestraria aurantiaca*, or *Airampoa* spp. Others which become huge in their region of origin develop in a way more than satisfactorily: *Pachycereus pringlei*, *P. pecten-aboriginum.*, *Vatricania guentheri*, *Trichocereus terscheckii* or *Aloe dichotoma*. Many of these plants are over 30 years old. It is useful here to clarify that none of these plants was taken from their habitat, and that they came from a big nursery where I worked during 7 years in the Canary Islands, on Tenerife: Canary Cactus. Almost all of them now produce flowers and reproduce.

We hope to see blooming soon our *Cephalocereus senilis*, but in the case of *Neoraimondia herzogiana*, it will be necessary to wait still for a little bit more!

Then, when can we go there?

There is no particular season to visit Desert Springs and thanks to the choice of the many species, we can find, flowers all year round, but it can be hot at the end of summer. There are two high-quality restaurants (El Torrente and The Crocodile Club) where we can take any sorts of refreshments, and eat well in a particularly pleasant location. Especially, you should not forget your hat and the camera!

We also have to underline that the visits are free of charge, but it is necessary to call enough time in advance to benefit from a personalized tour. Desert Springs is opened all year round.

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