

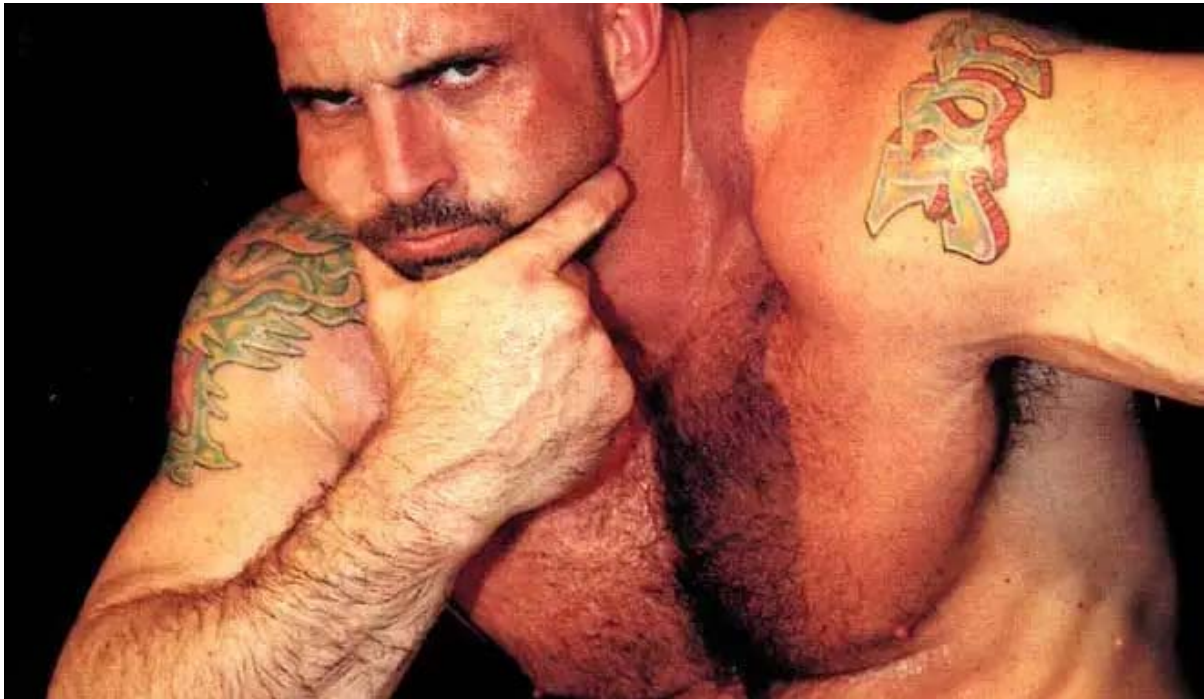
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FEATURED NEWS

All About Bears



by Gay Desert Guide



Here's how the bear community began, a breakdown of popular identifiers, and where you can find your tribe in the desert.

To call Palm Springs “a bear-friendly city” is like saying Los Angeles contains just a few aspiring actors. During a typical day (beyond the Covid-19 pandemic), you can pop into any queer bar in the city and find a diverse group of LGBT people (and often many straight folks, as well).

According to J.R. Roberts, a Palm Springs resident and former city councilmember, the town has become almost synonymous with bears. “We host a huge event — the International Bear Convergence — here each year,” Roberts says. “The city not only acknowledges it, but it promotes and celebrates it.”

Bear History

It’s debatable when the bear community first emerged, but most gay elders concede that it evolved as an offshoot of the leather scene in the late 1970s-early 1980s. Jack Fritscher, an editor and writer for *Bear* and *Drummer* magazines, two vintage gay publications which regularly featured furry men on their covers, recalls the Hirsute Club and its newsletter thriving as early as 1982. Fritscher also edited the San Francisco-based *California Action Guide*, which featured an article titled “Hair Balling,” allegedly the first ever published about the bear community.

Fritscher says the formal bear movement began sometime between 1984-87 largely due to Richard Bulger and his life partner, photographer Chris Nelson. As an antidote to the abundance of clean-shaven gay men feature in most adult magazines, the couple launched *Bear* (originally as a xeroxed ‘zine), as well as Brush Creek Bear Video, which created adult video content that starred more natural looking guys.

“Because gay culture is always inventing itself, we are always needing to coin words to cover new concepts,” Fritscher says. “As the pop-culture concept of *Bear* grew, it diversified along lines of age and size and created new categories and new identifiers.”

Popular Identifiers

Since our formative years, we’re taught against labeling others. Yet, if there’s one subculture where this practice is not only acceptable but expected, it’s within the bear community, which is probably the most all-inclusive of all the queer subsections. Men who self-identify as bears have sought not only a

sense of brotherhood but also created subcategories such as “muscle bear,” “chub,” “otter,” and “panda.” None of these are considered derogatory classifications. “There’s a camaraderie that comes with those labels,” suggests Roberts, who identifies as a “muscle bear.”

Below are some of the most common terms associated with bear identities.

Bear: A husky, hirsute gentleman

Muscle Bear: A muscle-bound version of the above

Polar Bear: A gay man covered in silvery-white hair

Panda bear: An Asian man who identifies as a bear

Cub: A young bear

Otter: Typically, a man of medium build with a bounty of body hair

Wolf: A guy with a lean, muscular build; think next-level otter

Chub: A man who identifies as a bear but who is heavier set than most others

Chasers: Men who might not exhibit bear-like traits but are down for some bear lovin’

Ursula: Wait for it ... this more obscure term refers to a lesbian who identifies as a bear (trust us, they’re out there)

Like we said, the bear communities are all-inclusive.

Local Bear Spotting

“We tend to be an older community,” Roberts shares. “You’ll probably see more bears and bear flavors in Palm Springs than anywhere. You’ll see them everywhere, but you’ll definitely be among a bear community at the Tool Shed, the Barracks, and the Eagle.”

Here are a few places in the desert where you can find frisky, furry, fun-loving bears.

The Barracks

67625 E Palm Canyon Dr, Cathedral City

BarracksPS.com

Eagle 501 Bar

301 E. Arenas Rd., Palm Springs

Eagle501Bar.com

Tool Shed

600 E. Sunny Dunes Rd., Palm Springs

PSToolShed.com

Palm Springs Leather Weekend

It’s canceled for 2020 due to Covid-19 concerns, but will take place in October 2021

PalmSpringsLeatherPride.org

International Bear Convergence

February 18-22, 2021

For more information, go to IBC-PS.com

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