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Officers told not to arrest people who scream obscenities because the courts won't convict



TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLY. ONE MEMBERSHIP PER HOUSEHOLD. OFFERS NOT AVAILABLE OUTSIDE THE UK

IT HAS long been a playground for Hollywood stars, a place where they can escape from the showbusiness spotlight. Nestled at the foot of the San Jacinto Mountains, Palm Springs in California enjoys year-round sunshine and, as GARETH HUW DAVIES discovered, there's plenty for visitors to enjoy...

1... WHERE EAGLES DARE

IN 1935, a young engineer called Francis Crocker nurtured the crackpot idea of transporting visitors by tram from the floor of the Coachella Valley to the top of San Jacinto Mountains. The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway was finally opened in 1963 – the cable-car route snakes up the bare rock face to a station at 8,600ft. I was apprehensive about making the trip at first, but once aboard the gently rotating car and put at ease by our nonchalant exiled English operator, taking the eagles' route gained an instant place on my list of lifetime experiences. The views from the station's restaurant are thrilling. www.psttramway.com

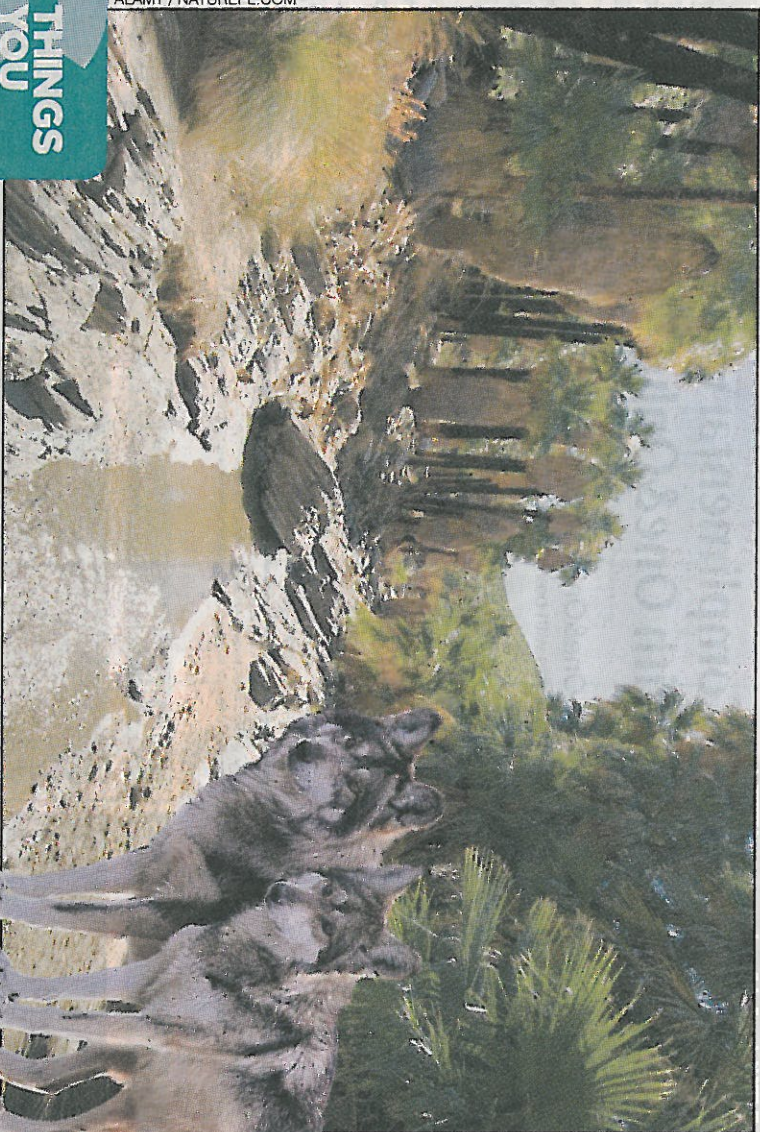
2... FINDING FAULT

THE famous San Andreas Fault – where the Pacific and North American tectonic plates meet – runs close to the city. As we bumped along through the desert in a red Jeep, our guide Morgan deciphered one of the most twisted and tormented landscapes on Earth. It's her job to check, after the frequent minor quakes and flash floods, just how far her territory has been rearranged. Her tour also led us through a replica Cahulla Indian village – the tribe settled in this area many centuries ago. www.red-jeep.com

3... ALONE WOLF

THE nearby Living Desert is a super little zoo. It's a tribute to private giving (there are signs everywhere naming the rich local benefactors), the efforts of volunteers and the work of experts who have saved threatened desert animals and plants. A Mexican wolf, extinct in the wild since 1981,

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THINGS YOU MUST DO IN...

PALM SPRINGS

looked at me intently as a zoo volunteer told me about plans to reintroduce the species to an area east of Phoenix, Arizona. www.livingdesert.org

4... DATE TO REMEMBER

ROMANCE And Sex Life Of The Date is the title of a 15-minute film shown continuously at Shields Date Garden. The title sounds daring enough today – imagine how it came across in the Thirties, when Floyd Shields started his roadside outlet with his wife Bess and gave his daily talk of the same name, explaining how he propagated the

zahidi, jumbo royal medjool and deglet noor dates, and his own unique varieties – the blonde and brunette. The place has a wonderful retro feel about it. www.shieldsdates.com.

To continue the retro mood, Palm Springs has plenty of attractive buildings dating from the Forties to the Sixties. Look for the semi-circular home on Ladera Circle where Elvis Presley and his bride Priscilla stayed after their wedding.

5... FRENCH FANCY

THERE are many contenders for the best French maître d' in southern California, but I nominate the amiable Antoine Babai in the casually elegant Le Paon. His tables spill out on to a first-floor balcony above the gilded El Paseo shopping district. Antoine greets everyone like an old friend, while his brother – executive chef Eddie – sends out traditional French marvels from the kitchen. The whole experience is enhanced by some splendid Napa Valley wine. I was also ordered to leave room for a miraculous soufflé. www.lepaonrestaurant.com

This fine formula was repeated at the Citron restaurant in the

OASIS OF CALM: Water trickles through a valley in Palm Springs. Inset: Endangered Mexican wolves

Viceroy Hotel, a place notable for its vibrant yellow walls and cool white furnishings. Our table was in the open air by the pool, where Clark Gable, Carole Lombard, Joan Crawford and Bing Crosby swam when they stayed in one of the single-storey, lemon-tree-shaded villas from the Thirties. www.viceroypalm Springs.com

6... BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

WATCHING the blades of 3,500 turbines turning may seem about as exciting as watching paint dry. But thanks to guide Ken Huskey, a visit to the San Geronimo Wind Park on the edge of Palm Springs, was interesting. The turbines produce enough energy to power a city the size of Cardiff. We drove past several generations of turbines, all turning to their own tune – from antique versions to the latest sleek giants. Ken answered all of our questions – we learned that the blades rarely kill birds and the new turbines are quieter than the old ones. And guess which company operates the site? None other than BP. It replaced 139 old turbines with eight new models, and now produces almost double the amount of power. www.thebestofthebesttours.com

● Gareth Huw Davies was a guest of Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa (www.rancholaspalmas.com). British Airways (www.ba.com) offers a seven-night fly-drive to Los Angeles from £725 per person, including return flights from Heathrow and Avis car hire. For further information, visit www.palmspringsusa.com.