

Hidden treasures await in California

Tasty places await those willing to explore unknown

California wears a number of hats and you won't have a difficult time finding one that fits. It's synonymous with glamour, stars, delectable wine regions, beaches and scenic highways.

The Golden State, however, runs deeper. Treasures are waiting to be discovered. Secret islands, mythical boiling mud pits and culture help define this magical state. Don't limit your ambitions; spark your curiosities. There are places waiting to be untapped if you're willing to venture away from the popular destinations.

Once such place is Palm Springs. It's set among ancient rocks and the elaborate palms of the Coachella Valley. Geography hatched an architectural style known as Desert Modernism.

Palm Springs Aerial Tramway is one of only three rotation tramcars in the world and the only one in North America. The cars rotate 360 degrees, allowing visitors to have an uninterrupted view of the scenic Coachella Valley and the Salton Sea – a vast inland waterway and one of the lowest points on Earth.

Step through four life zones once you step out at the Mountain Station at 8,516 feet. The short trip is equivalent to taking a road trip through the



DEEP INTENTIONS – A sunset landscape enhances the beauty of the Coachella Valley in Palm Desert, California. Image: Sundry Photography. Adobe Stock.

Sonora Desert. Flora and fauna change before your eyes and the temperature can change by nearly 40 degrees from top to bottom.

Encounter 16 acres of boiling springs, mudpots, hissing steam vents and roaring fumaroles in Bumpass Hell – located in Northern California's Lassen Volcanic National Park. A

three-mile trail leads to the site and the scent of rotten eggs warns that you're getting close. Stop by the Big Boiler. Sweltering steam spews from its vent, once measuring as hot as 322 degrees – making it worldwide one of the hottest fumaroles.

Denmark springs, along the state's central coast, is the tiny town

of Solvang. The authentic Danish town boasts windmills, bakeries and a smorgasbord restaurant. Featured in the film "Sideways", it's slice of Scandinavia that has the power to surprise travelers while they cruise Highway 101.

The Channel Islands are labeled the Galapagos Islands of North America. They create one of the U.S.'s more unique national parks. The islands are located off the central coastline and showcase animal flora and fauna – from colorful wildflowers that bloom in the spring to the sea lion rookeries and the elusive Island Fox that is found nowhere else on Earth. The islands are accessible from Oxnard, Ventura and Santa Barbara by Island Packer concessionaire boats.

Badwater Basin sits in Death Valley National Park – one of the hottest, driest and lowest places in North America. It drops 282-feet below sea level. Paradoxically, Mount Whitney – the highest point in the contiguous U.S. – is only 76 miles away. The vast salt flats are mostly dry but can transform into a ready-made lake following a major rainstorm.

The left coast will steer you in the right direction – even if you're heading off the beaten path.

Find a vehicle that fits your lifestyle

Focus on needs, budget; what defines your persona?

Questions abound in all aspects of our lives. Some are more significant than others. Some are rhetorical. And many are necessary – especially when purchasing a new vehicle.

How do you find the perfect fit? What is your budget? What is the purpose of the vehicle? Leisure or work? Are you interested practicality or personality? These questions barely scratch the surface.

Choosing a vehicle often reveals your persona. A convertible might appeal to someone sporty and active. Practical thinking could lead to a four-door sedan. Color also plays a role. An outgoing personality might prefer red or blue. A more preserved person might choose an ivory or cream.

Gauge your response to vehicles on the road. Which ones grab your attention? Which ones have you yearning to visit a dealership and make a purchase?

Your initial response often reveals your intentions. Anything is fair game – including a vehicle's skin-deep appearance – in your quest to purchase a new vehicle.

The reflection of your personality is important, but so is visualizing whether it will meet your everyday needs. Simply put, which type of vehicle will best fit your lifestyle?



PICKING A WINNER – Purchasing a new vehicle is a vigorous process that takes time, patience and research. Image: HBS. Adobe Stock.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do you take road trips?
- Tow or haul?
- Do you have or plan to have kids?
- Do you live in a cold-weather region with harsh winters?

Another question is likely the most important. What meets your budget? Estimate your monthly income before subtracting the following:

- Estimate monthly bills/utilities and rent/mortgage payments.
- Include other recurring payments like credit cards, personal loans.
- Be sure to leave room for unexpected or miscellaneous expenses.

Calculate the number, then see what remains. This an excellent indicator as to what you can afford monthly.

Perhaps the most frustrating step is haggling over a price. It can deter the enthusiasm of most shoppers – even if you're dead set on buying the vehicle.

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Brake noise tell-tale sign pads are thin

Ignoring indicators could lead to more damage

Replacing brakes is a nuisance we wish we could avoid but know it's inevitable. It's among the more common repairs and dangerous to ignore.

Be aware of indications letting you know they need to be replaced. A vehicle pulling or unusual noises when brakes are used are signs they are wearing and they should be inspected.

Squeals, scrapes and grinds are indicators that the pads are thinning and need to be replaced. Brake pads worn to a certain point are designed to scrape against the rotor and make noise. Allowing them to reach the "metal-on-metal" stage is dangerous and costly.

Here are some warning signs that it's time to have your vehicle's brakes inspected by a professional:

Brake light is on – Unless the parking brake is in use, this light often is an indication that your brake fluid is low or there's a problem with your ABS system.

Brakes feel spongy – Pressing the brake pedal harder or deeper to stop is an indication there might be a problem.

You see or smell brake fluid – This points to a leak. Brake fluid is a light amber color. Once you smell its pungent odor, you're not likely to forget it.



BREAK DANCE – Worn out pads could have a negative impact on the vehicle's rotors if they aren't replaced in a timely manner. *Image: Анатолий Савицкий. Adobe Stock.*

Brake pedal or wheel vibrates – Vibrations can indicate issues developing on the surface of the rotor.

Brakes squeal when you come to a stop – Squealing brakes usually indicate a need for servicing, but sometimes brakes keep squealing after they are replaced. Semi-metallic brake pads often are to blame, but squeaky brakes can be an indication of mismatched

or lower-quality parts.

Brakes grabbing – This can signify problems with the braking system or components.

Brakes grind or growl – The sound of metal-on-metal is evidence that the brake pads are completely worn down.

Brakes also could squeal when a vehicle has been off the road for an

extended period of time. Rust forms on the braking surface of the rotors and drums. Apply the brakes lightly the first few feet of driving to remove any rust buildup. Brake dust – the sooty, black residue that collects on the exterior of a wheel – is a normal byproduct of your brake pads being worn away by friction.

Low brake fluid results in more lining wear in the braking system. The alert system that indicates your vehicle's pads are worn is defeated if a service facility tops off the brake fluid with every oil change. The only time brake fluid should be at full level is when all braking-system components are new.

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