



ABOVE: Phoenix is located in the Sonoran Desert, a striking landscape dominated by huge saguaro cactus.

RIGHT: The Desert Botanical Garden has short trails that feature wildflowers, cactus and desert plants in various environments. | ROBIN AND ARLENE KARPAN PHOTOS



## Phoenix has a natural side that is worth exploring

### TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

The most surprising part of Phoenix, Arizona, is the easy access to nature and outdoor activities, even though it is one of the larger cities in the United States.

Phoenix is in the Sonoran Desert, a striking landscape dominated by huge saguaro cactus. The best place to get oriented is at the Desert Botanical Garden where short trails feature wildflowers, cactus, and desert plants in various environments. Experts at stations along the way talk about cactus identification and uses, and practically anything else you might want to know about the desert. Be sure to allow enough time for a visit; we intended to spend an hour or two, and stayed all morning.

Next door is Papago Park with a network of hiking trails around red butte formations (free admission). The highlight is the Hole-in-the-Rock, accessible by a short uphill walk. The sandstone butte has a large window-like hole where you walk through for great views over the city. Though this popular spot gets a lot of visitors, we had the place to ourselves one morning shortly after sunrise.

Hikers are spoiled for choice with a series of trails in parks scattered throughout the city and nearby. Urey Mountain Regional Park in Mesa offers extensive hikes, some



The Hole-in-the-Rock sandstone butte is accessible by a short uphill walk.

with sweeping views, a nature centre, and even a campground if you fancy sleeping in the desert. Another area we enjoyed was the McDowell Sonoran Preserve in Scottsdale, a huge natural area with a vast network of trails and free admission as a bonus.

If you prefer exploring sitting down, horseback trips abound. We did a short trek with Fort McDowell Adventures through unspoiled desert terrain against a mountain backdrop. On our two-hour ride,

we travelled across dry rolling hills where we zigzagged among giant saguaros, along the contrasting greenery of the tree-lined Verde River Valley, then across the river itself. Hawks and eagles soared above, though the highlight was getting close to some of the legendary wild horses that live in the desert.

The most unusual thing we did was kayak in the desert. A stretch of the Salt River near Phoenix makes for a pleasant half-day trip. We



A stretch of the Salt River near Phoenix makes for a pleasant half-day kayak trip.

mostly just steered in the steady current, yet there were enough ripples and obstacles to keep things interesting.

The desert looks different from the water, as we pass through a narrow strip of greenery with shrubs and tall trees, interspersed with red cliffs. The water was fairly shallow, but things here can change quickly. A week before we arrived, heavy rains produced a flood that carried debris that was now caught in the trees about two metres up.

Phoenix is a hot air ballooning hotspot, with more fly-able days per year than anywhere in the country. We were picked up well before dawn and driven to the lift-off site for Hot Air Expeditions where they were already unrolling the massive balloon. Powerful fans fill it with air, then once it starts to inflate, they turn on the propane burners, and the gigantic bulb soon takes shape. Pilot Gary

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The area offers plenty of horseback trips, including this one with Fort McDowell Adventures. Here, riders cross the Verde River.

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checks that it's ready, then everyone jumps into the over-sized wicker basket.

The ground crew unties the ropes, then it's up, up and away as we rise almost straight up, just as the sun clears the nearby mountains. We have a sensation of effortless floating with no feeling of movement since we travel at the same speed as the light wind. Other than the occasional blast from the burners, there is no sound either. We gradually glide away from the edge of the city, over the highway, and towards open desert.

Near the end of the flight, Gary aims for a flat clearing he's spotted with few rocks. We skim the tops of low bushes then gently bounce down as the ground crew grabs onto the basket to slow it to a stop.

Then it's time to celebrate. Champagne has long been a ballooning tradition, though here we not only toast the trip with a glass or two of bubbly, but also enjoy breakfast served on tables set up in the midst of the Sonoran Desert.

For more information, see [www.visitphoenix.com](http://www.visitphoenix.com)

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# Dying former spouse deserves to expect some space

## SPEAKING OF LIFE



JACKLIN ANDREWS, BA, MSW

**Q:** We have a difficult situation.

It started years ago when our son and his high school sweetheart graduated from high school together.

They got married shortly afterward, had two very fine boys and tried to settle into life in our little town. But they were too young and the marriage did not work out. They got a divorce, and worse still, fell into a fair amount of acrimony when they were trying to figure out how best to share raising their children and what to do with the small estate they had acquired.

Time passed. Eventually both of them remarried and for both of them their new starts have been great. Both are supporting their sons who are studying at university, each has a wonderful house to call home and both appear to be committed to their new relationships.

But here is where we have a problem. My son's high school sweetheart is ill. Her oncologist told her the other day that she should start putting her house in order and preparing herself and her family for her ultimate end.

My son does not know what to do, and I do not know how to advise him. Should he stop over to visit with his former wife? Or should he respect her territory and back off entirely? What about their sons? Should he make a point of reaching out to them in light of what is going on with their mom or should he let her and her family work that out?

I just don't know. What do you think?

**A:** This is indeed a difficult time for all of you.

If we lived in an ideal world the answer to all of your questions would be easy. Your son and his first wife should get together for a few moments to "clear the air."

Most of our relationships have unfinished business. Probably that is more true in those relationships that ended in difficult divorces. Things were said and done back then for which each of them likely has regrets, but it has not been forgotten.

I suspect that the sting of the pain for what happened then is still around and will be there until rightful apologies manage to capture a moment between the two of them.

Unfortunately, few of us live in that ideal world.

That being so, what is important for you and your son is that you recognize and respect the personal territory protecting his first wife. If she specifically asks to speak to him then, of course, we would expect him to spend some time with her. But if she doesn't, then perhaps it would be best if he left her alone and figured out some other way to work through those regrets he will feel when his first wife finally dies.

It would be wrong for him to count on her to forgive him for whatever was his part in the separation. But it would not be wrong for him to forgive himself.

If he cannot do that with your help maybe he could talk to a counsellor familiar with the process of grief and work through some of that unfinished business on his own.

That counsellor might want to work with their sons, with the blessing and permission from their mom.

This must be difficult for them. They should have an opportunity to search out the appropriate support.

Jacklin Andrews is a family counsellor from Saskatchewan. Contact: [jandrews@producer.com](mailto:jandrews@producer.com).

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