

TO / FROM THE AIRPORT

Prime Time Shuttle310/536-7922, primetimeshuttle.com

Reliable transportation serving all L.A.-area airports. Sedans, private vans, and luxury cars are all available, but the best choice for the money is a shared van. Prices depend on where you're headed. A shared van that makes drop-offs at any location, provided others are traveling to the same neighborhood, is around \$15 per person; a shared sedan for up to three people going to midcity runs around \$57.

\$ SPLURGE Beverly Hills Rent-A-CarAt LAX and all over L.A., 800/479-5996, bhrentacar.com

Cruise Rodeo Drive in style or arrive at the hotel like a celebrity in a Lamborghini, Rolls-Royce, or '59 Cadillac convertible. There's even a selection of the latest hybrid models to help save the environment and gas money. From \$55/day for a premium model Toyota to \$3,995/day for the Rolls.

“In Hollywood, if you don't have happiness, you send out for it.”

—Rex Reed

GETTING AROUND

Metro Transportation Authority Buses800/266-6883, mta.net

Even though public buses can be crowded and slow, they're a good option if you don't have your own set of wheels, and they run on schedule. Exact change only; tickets also available at Ralphs and Pavilions supermarkets. Purchase day passes from the bus driver. All buses are equipped for bicycles. Check website for routes and schedules. \$1.25/ride, \$3 for a day pass.

City of Los Angeles Taxi Servicestaxicabsla.org

Because L.A. is so spread out, taxis aren't always easy to find, except in prime travel areas like LAX, Downtown, and some of the more popular bar/restaurant neighborhoods, such as the Sunset Strip. Don't get in a cab unless the City of Los Angeles Dept. of Transportation seal is visible on the exterior. These are the only cabs regulated by the city, and anything else is risky. Yellow Cab (310/808-1000) is a safe choice. Major credit cards accepted for rides over \$10. Initial fare \$2.20, each additional mile \$2.20; flat fare for travel between LAX and Downtown \$38.

ScooterBiz

Corner of Venice Blvd. and Ocean Front Walk, 310/450-0669

Rents bikes in Venice Beach for use on, or around, the famed boardwalk. Helmets and locks are not included in the price of rentals, so bring your own. \$5/hour, \$10 for the day.

Downloaded free from BudgetTravelOnline.com

WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND TOWN

LA Weekly (laweekly.com) for arts and entertainment around town, extensive listings. At most newsstands and in some coffee shops, stores, and restaurants. Free

Los Angeles Times (latimes.com) for city and national news, 50¢ Mon.–Sat., \$1.50 Sun.

Los Angeles magazine (lamag.com) for events, local issues, restaurant reviews, \$3.95

TOURS

Sony Pictures Studios Tour

10202 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City, 323/520-8687,

sonypicturesstudios.com/tourssection/tours.html

Two-hour walking tours of classic soundstages, including *The Wizard of Oz* and *Wheel of Fortune*. The rich coverage touches on scene production, props, and the studio's golden days. Reservations recommended. Four tours daily, 9:30 A.M.–2:30 P.M., Mon.–Fri. No children under 12. \$25, includes parking.

Beverly Hills Trolley ToursN. Rodeo Dr. at Dayton Way, 310/285-2438, beverlyhills.org

A whirlwind fantasy drive that blends art and architecture with celebrity gossip and glimpses of Rodeo's expensive clothiers. The 40-minute tours also pass art galleries, the Museum of Television and Radio, and the William Morris Agency (whose clients include many of Hollywood's A-list actors). Buy tickets from the trolley guide; space is on a first-come, first-served basis. 11 A.M.–4 P.M., Tues.–Sat., early May through late Dec. Tours depart on the hour, weather permitting. \$5, kids \$1.

Red Line Tours6773 Hollywood Blvd., 323/402-1074, redlinetours.com

Huge variety of senior- and family-friendly walking tours of behind-the-scenes Hollywood and Downtown. Also offers bus drive-bys of stars' homes. Each tour has a different running time and schedule. Check the website or call ahead for specifics. Reservations recommended, especially during school vacations. Walking tours: from \$20, kids from \$15. Bus tours: from \$62, kids from \$48.

Los Angeles Conservancy Tours523 W. 6th St. Suite 826, 213/623-2489, laconservancy.org

Enthusiastic docents share hidden histories and facts about L.A. architecture. Each two-and-a-half-hour walking tour (departing Saturdays at 10 A.M.) is sprinkled with interesting tidbits, such as rumored hauntings, neighborhood gossip, and protests over renovations. Offerings include Downtown's Art Deco tour and a visit to the industrial port of San Pedro. Reservations required. \$10.

NUMBERS TO KNOW

Information 411 Emergency Police, fire, ambulance 911**Metro Transportation** 800/266-6883**Consortium of taxi services** 310/808-1000**Sports & concert tickets** Ticketmaster, 213/480-3232, ticketmaster.com

Budget Travel Los Angeles / Sleep

SNAP GUIDE

When calculating the cost of a trip, don't forget to factor in L.A.'s hefty taxes: 14 percent per room per night on all hotel stays and an 8.25 percent sales tax on food, clothing, and other merchandise.

BEVERLY HILLS **Beverly Terrace**

469 N. Doheny Dr., 310/274-8141, hotelbeverlyterrace.com
Quaint tropical retreat with an upscale veneer but a laid-back vibe. Not far from Rodeo and Sunset. Rooms are decorated with Asian and retro influences—straw window blinds, palms, and fresh-cut bamboo stems for luck. The casual, compact swimming pool and garden lounge area often erupts into what feels like a backyard party. From \$99, includes continental breakfast and parking.

BEVERLY HILLS **The Crescent**

403 N. Crescent Dr., 310/247-0505, crescentbh.com
A no-frills boutique hotel that's surprisingly comfortable. The black-and-white rooms are quiet havens. An entertainment center has CDs and DVDs, and there's an indoor/outdoor fireplace in the lobby lounge. From \$165.

“This is California.
Blondes are like
the state flower or
something.”

—From Beverly Hills, 90210

DOWNTOWN **Millennium Biltmore Hotel Los Angeles**

506 S. Grand Ave., 213/624-1011, millenniumhotels.com
Historic and grand, the 1923 monument makes visitors feel like royalty. Once home to a few Academy Awards ceremonies, this Italian-inspired beauty has towering columns, and frescoes on the ceiling. Guest rooms feature gold and ivory tones and classic furniture. Some have marble bathrooms. From \$150.

HOLLYWOOD **The Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel**

7000 Hollywood Blvd., 800/950-7667, hollywoodroosevelt.com
Said to be haunted by ghosts of Hollywood past. Recent renovations have preserved its Spain-meets-Old Hollywood exterior, and chocolate-brown rooms have been freshened with modern decor. The poolside lounge, Tropicana Bar, is one of the hottest spots in town (see p. 6). From \$139.

LA BREA/MIRACLE MILE **Farmer's Daughter Hotel**

115 S. Fairfax Ave., 323/937-3930, farmersdaughterhotel.com
The ultraclean staff members take pride in their work, and it shows. Country charm fuses with a playful decor that gives a nod to the neighborhood farmer's market. Murals of waving wheat line the walls, and vintage lattice furniture is upholstered in gingham and denim. Formerly a cheap spot for Hollywood hopefuls to get their footing (including Charlize Theron when she first moved to L.A.). From \$129.

MANHATTAN BEACH **The Belamar Hotel**

3501 N. Sepulveda Blvd., 310/750-0300, thebelamar.com
Just a few blocks' walk to downtown Manhattan Beach. Rooms have sumptuous beds with down comforters, as well as flat-screen TVs. Accents include silly portraits of Chihuahuas. The hotel's bar and performance venue, Vibe, features live music most evenings. From \$149.

WEST HOLLYWOOD **The Grafton on Sunset**

8462 W. Sunset Blvd., 323/654-4600, graftononsunset.com
All of the rooms use feng shui principles and feature ergonomic furniture, but the plush, themed suites on the fourth floor are the most fun—options include a cutesy starlet's pad, a Rat Pack hangout, and a graffiti artist's playground. A Mediterranean courtyard and elegant swimming pool complete the eclectic picture. The hotel provides a free shuttle (a green PT Cruiser) to bars and restaurants within a three-mile radius. From \$169.

\$ SPLURGE **Avalon Hotel**

9400 W. Olympic Blvd., Beverly Hills, 310/277-5221, avalonbeverlyhills.com
The modern, tropically decorated rooms have funky bamboo accents, designer linens and bathrobes, and CD players. In-room spa treatments and 24-hour room service assure guests a true Beverly Hills experience. The balconies and Blue on Blue, the popular poolside restaurant with cabanas, are good for people-watching. From \$239.

\$ SPLURGE **Maison 140**

140 Lasky Dr., Beverly Hills, 310/281-4000, maison140beverlyhills.com
Looks like a small historic Parisian hotel from the outside. Inside, guests are greeted by chic modern decor, but the ambience isn't cold; it feels like a private Beverly Hills home. Fine Asian reproduction furniture in vibrant colors and abstract art add flair to the 43 rooms. From \$189.

AREA CODES DECODED

In a city infamous for sprawl, it's no surprise that area codes have struggled to keep up. On August 26, 2006, 424 will join L.A.'s three main area codes, and some rules will change. Those in the 310 and 424 regions will need to dial 1, then the area code and the seven-digit phone number, when making all calls. Local and long distance rates will remain the same.

213: Downtown, Financial District, Chinatown, Echo Park, Westlake, Koreatown. **323:** Encircles the 213 area, covering most of Hollywood, Huntington Park, and parts of Beverly Hills, Pasadena, and West Hollywood. **310:** Coastal areas to the northwest, west, and southwest of the city center, such as Santa Monica, Malibu, and Venice. **424:** New phone numbers in the 310 region issued as of August 26, 2006.

Budget Travel Los Angeles / La Brea & Miracle Mile

SNAP GUIDE

Contemporary architecture and large mall multiplexes define Wilshire Boulevard, a stretch of which is called Miracle Mile. The surrounding streets are filled with independent art galleries and retailers.

SEE La Brea Tar Pits

5801 Wilshire Blvd., 323/934-7243, tarpits.org

Active tar pits are an unexpected reminder of what was here long before tall buildings. The surrounding park is pleasant for strolls or picnics. There's also a small educational museum with fossils and woolly-mastodon skeletons. \$7.

SEE LACMA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

5905 Wilshire Blvd. 323/857-6000, lacma.org

The must-see of museum row has old masters and new rebels, with a regular slate of exciting installations. The best time to go is Friday evenings for the jazz series. Closed Wed. \$9, free for kids under 18, and for all visitors after 5 P.M. on the second Tuesday of each month.

“Hollywood’s a place where they’ll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss, and fifty cents for your soul.”

—Marilyn Monroe

EAT Flora Kitchen at Rita Flora

468 S. La Brea Ave., 323/931-9900, florakitchen.com

A hit with the health-conscious and gourmets alike. Fresh food, mainly hearty sandwiches and salads, is the focus of this flower shop turned restaurant. Most dishes are made with organic ingredients. Start with the Flora Italia—mozzarella on a baguette or olive bread slathered with olive tapenade—and finish things off with an amazing traditional chocolate chip cookie. The dining room is full of beautiful blooms.

EAT Mäni’s Bakery

519 S. Fairfax Ave., 323/938-8800, manisbakery.com

Casual café with outdoor seating that’s great for pancakes or burgers any time of day. The fresh breads and homemade desserts are all made with organic whole grains. Most meat dishes can be made with tofu instead, and there are even vegan and sugar-free desserts. The multigrain pancakes are superb, and the gazpacho packs zing.

\$ SPLURGE Locanda Veneta

8638 W. 3rd St., 310/274-1893, locandaveneta.com

Upscale Italian in understated surroundings. The New York-style close-quartered seating allows for literal elbow-rubbing with the celebrity clientele (including Dustin Hoffman). You can’t go wrong with the fresh pastas and rich sauces, but the daily specials are always a good bet too, with surprises such as pastry-wrapped halibut and spinach-and-ricotta gnocchi. Anything the sage butter sauce touches is a must.

DRINK Lola’s

945 N. Fairfax Ave., 213/736-5652, lolasla.com

Classy and sassy martinis rule at this romantic nightspot; some 60 variations are on the menu. The chocolate mint is sweet and refreshing, and the pumpkin tastes like Thanksgiving in a glass. A fashionable yet mellow crowd.

SHOP The Grove

189 The Grove Dr., 323/900-8080, thegrovela.com

Shops at the grandiose outdoor mall range from the large Nordstrom department store to little carts selling imitation designer bags and jewelry. There’s also a movie theater and a handful of restaurants.

SHOP Paul Frank

8101 W. 3rd St., 323/653-6471, paulfrank.com

Cool graphic-art T-shirts and accessories for men, women, kids, and babies. The artist’s lovable cartoon characters—Julius the monkey, Skurvy the dead pirate, and a new line of Warhol-inspired friends—appear on everything from handbags to housewares.

SHOP The Way We Wore

334 S. La Brea Ave., 323/937-0878, thewaywewore.com

Hipsters and fashion mavens agree that this is the best vintage collection in L.A. The couture shop upstairs is the place to pick up gowns worn by movie stars past. The store also sells shoes, hats, and antique costume jewelry.

\$ SPLURGE Room Service

5901 W. 3rd St., 323/692-9221, roomservice-la.com

A housewares dreamland that can give even the most decor-challenged a touch of cool. Large silk-screened canvases adorn the walls, chic minimalist couches conjure martinis and jazz, and the groovy cups and plates are perfect for parties. The staff stays out of the way and lets customers test the repro-Eames furniture.

PLAY The El Rey Theatre

5515 Wilshire Blvd., 323/936-6400, theelrey.com

An art deco performance space that hosts up-and-coming bands, and also provides a venue for big names like Beck to do surprise concerts. Grand winding staircases, chandeliers, and plush velvet decor make for an interesting spot to catch a favorite act or learn about a new one. Purchase tickets online. From \$10.

TIP Earthquakes If an earthquake hits while you’re inside, protect yourself under a heavy table or stand in a door frame, away from windows and anything that can break or topple over. Outdoors, stay away from trees, buildings, and electrical lines. For more info: lafd.org

Budget Travel Los Angeles / Santa Monica & Venice

SNAP GUIDE

Santa Monica is the city's biggest beach community, known for its pier, beautiful people, and pedestrian-only Third Street Promenade. Eclectic Venice Beach, laced with canals, is home to many artists.

SEE Venice Beach Boardwalk

From Rose Ave. to Washington Blvd.

More of a sidewalk of sights than a traditional boardwalk. The promenade is lined with street performers, psychics, and struggling artists who look like they've been there since the late 1960s. Cheap eats and crazy T-shirt shops, too.

EAT Blue Plate

1415 Montana Ave., Santa Monica, 310/260-8877

Serves omelets, pancakes, and soups to brunching Hollywood starlets and power players. Lunchtime is less hectic, and once you're in, the waitstaff will make sure you're well taken care of.

EAT C & O Trattoria

31 Washington Blvd., Marina del Rey at Venice Pier, 310/823-9491, cotrattoria.com

Singing waiters, heaping portions, and great prices make it a prime spot for family and friends to enjoy a no-frills Italian feast. The table Chianti is self-serve (it's on an honor system), the garlic rolls are free-flowing, and the menu is surprisingly varied. Dishes like *fettuccine al limone* arrive on plates big enough to share. The lively atmosphere keeps the place packed, so be prepared to wait. Never fear: C & O has been known to serve samples of its killer garlic rolls out on the street.

EAT Hal's Bar & Grill

1349 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, 310/396-3105, halsbarandgrill.com

Unpretentious neighborhood joint that showcases works by local artists and serves wholesome, filling brunches on week-ends. Diners are greeted with complimentary warm muffins and biscuits. The mimosas and Manuel's scrambled eggs, a healthy Mexican twist on a breakfast classic, are exceptional; the Dungeness crab sandwich is savory but messy.

EAT Mao's Kitchen

1512 Pacific Ave., Venice, 310/581-8305, maoskitchen.com
Cheap Chinese food. Almost everything can be made for meat lovers or vegetarians. For example, the dumplings come three ways: chicken, shrimp, or tofu with black mushroom and vegetables. Portraits of Mao Tse-tung hang on the brick walls. Outdoor seating.

DRINK Veranda

Hotel Casa Del Mar, 1910 Ocean Way, Santa Monica, 310/581-5533, hotelcasadelmar.com

It doesn't get much posher than sipping drinks in this glamorous hotel's oceanside lobby lounge, where there's usually someone tickling the ivories. The 1920s decor is inviting; you'll melt into the large, comfortable couches. Quality people-watching guaranteed.

SHOP Firefly

1413 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, 310/450-6288, shopfirefly.com

Quirky collections of cards, books, and artistic creations of all kinds—from pottery to hand-decorated T-shirts—are crammed into every corner. It's hard to leave empty-handed.

SHOP Third Street Promenade

Third St., Santa Monica, 310/393-8355, thirdstreetpromenade.com

Good for the clearance racks at popular clothing stores like Banana Republic and for finding bargains at quirkier stores like Kenzie (contemporary women's fashions from Canada) and Lush (known for its all-natural beauty products).

PLAY Nitespa

1301 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Suite 33, Venice, 310/396-5122, nitespa.com

After-hours spa-bar with slumber party ambience. Try a massage (from \$25) or facial (from \$85) with a cocktail. Neapolitan-ice-cream-colored walls make for a cheery backdrop, and a D.J. spins tunes until 2 A.M.

PLAY Santa Monica Pier

Colorado Ave. and Ocean Front Walk, 310/458-8900, santamoniciapier.org

A coastal landmark where there's always something going on. For a cheap date, ride the Ferris wheel at Pacific Park, eat hot dogs, and take pictures at a photo booth (\$3 for color, \$1 for black and white) in the bustling arcade. Ride pass from \$20, kids from \$10.

ESCAPE

Santa Barbara Wine Country santabarbara.com/winecountry

About 40 miles north of the luxury shopping and high life of Santa Barbara and 120 miles from L.A., day-trippers can visit the beautiful countryside and wineries made famous by the movie *Sideways*. You can even download a map from the region's official website and take the same route as the characters in the movie. Most wineries are clearly marked. Firestone Vineyard and Winery is large and popular; but you'll have to fight your way past the crowd of ladies in search of Andrew Firestone from *The Bachelor*, who is one of the owners (5000 Zaca Station Rd., Los Olivos, a few minutes' drive from Hwy. 101, 805/688-3940, firestonewine.com). Koehler is a quieter, more easygoing experience; it's a great spot to uncork a bottle and picnic (5360 Foxen Canyon Rd., Los Olivos, 805/693-8384, koehlerwinery.com). Area oddities include: Ostrich Land (610 East Hwy. 246, between Buellton and Solvang, 805/686-9696, ostrichland.com), where you can feed ostriches and emus in exchange for donations; and the town of Solvang, known for its touristy Danish souvenirs.

Budget Travel Los Angeles / Beverly Hills & W. Hollywood

SNAP GUIDE

Beverly Hills, with its grand gated homes, tall palm trees, and expensive boutiques, epitomizes Hollywood glamour. Just to the north lies much funkier (and very gay) West Hollywood, a.k.a. WeHo.

EAT Sprinkles Cupcakes

9635 Little Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, 310/274-8765, sprinklescupcakes.com

Each day's flavor choices are different. Favorites include the red velvet with cream cheese icing and the lemon with coconut icing. \$3.25 each, \$36 for a dozen.

EAT Urth Caffé

267 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, 310/205-9311, store.yahoo.com/urthcaffe

Organic coffees and teas are the specialty, but there's also a selection of wholesome salads, soups, sandwiches, and more creative healthy fare, like veggie lasagna and tofu and vegetable nori wraps. Kirsten Dunst and Cameron Diaz are regulars.

\$ SPLURGE The Ivy

113 N. Robertson Blvd., Beverly Hills, 310/274-8303

Enjoy comfort food, such as meatloaf or crab cakes, next to Hollywood's elite. English floral decor and comfy pillows make for a shabby-chic atmosphere, and lunch on the patio, though hectic, is charming and glamorous at the same time. The sweet little garden café has been the scene of many a paparazzi showdown. Signature drinks include the Ivy Gimlet and champagne with raspberries.

DRINK Barney's Beanery

8447 Santa Monica Blvd., W. Hollywood, 323/654-2287, barneysbeanery.com

One of the L.A.'s oldest restaurants, Barney's is beloved for its unpretentious atmosphere. Beers, beans (the chili combos are famous), and ball games are specialties.

DRINK Fiesta Cantina

8865 Santa Monica Blvd., W. Hollywood, 310/652-8865

Known for two-for-one margarita happy-hour specials, 4 P.M.–8 P.M. daily. The fish tacos are a WeHo favorite. Entrées range from \$4.50 for burritos to \$10 for fajitas. The jukebox is always rocking with guilty pleasures—classic Madonna, Elton John, and Bon Jovi—and the friendly bartenders like to sing along, often without their shirts.

The Getty Center

1200 Getty Center Dr., 310/440-7300, getty.edu

The Getty Center Los Angeles, one of the most impressive private art collections in the world, charges no admission. There are thousands of works in all, including Van Gogh's *Irises*. The museum is high in the Santa Monica Mountains; visitors park at the base and take the tram up. Closed Mon. Self-guided audio tour \$3. \$7 parking fee. (Note: Reservations to park are no longer required.) To get there: Take the Getty Center Drive exit from the San Diego freeway (I-405) near the intersection of the Santa Monica freeway (I-10), and follow the signs. A second site, the Getty Villa in Malibu, opened in January 2006 (17985 Pacific Coast Hwy., Pacific Palisades).

SHOP Out of the Closet

99 N. La Cienega Blvd., Suite 200, Beverly Hills, 310/657-9353, aidshealth.org

Finding a great deal at this treasure-filled thrift store is easy, as secondhand clothes, housewares, and more go for scandalously low prices. All proceeds benefit the AIDS Healthcare Foundation. The window displays are dazzling, with decorations rivaling those at famous department stores.

“Los Angeles is a geometropolitan predicament, rather than a city.”

—TV producer Jonathan Miller

SHOP Wasteland

7428 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, 323/653-3028

Melrose's best supplier of secondhand clothes and accessories for men and women. The shop stocks vintage garb (up to the 1980s), as well as current designers like Seven Jeans and Juicy Couture.

\$ SPLURGE Kitson

115 S. Robertson Blvd., Beverly Hills, 310/859-2652, shopkitson.com

Designer duds for men and women, as well as funky gifts and trinkets for any credit-card limit. Even if you can't afford the rich-kid price tags (the Hilton sisters are regulars), there's fun to be had simply browsing.

PLAY The Groundlings Theatre

7307 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, 323/934-4747, groundlings.com

Hilarious improv and written sketch shows nightly. There's never a dull moment on this legendary stage, where the biggest funny names in Hollywood made their debuts. Walls are lined with photos of geniuses past, like Will Ferrell. Reservations recommended, especially for weekend shows, which can sell out three weeks in advance. From \$10.

Runyon Canyon

Enter off N. Fuller Ave., Mulholland Dr., or N. Vista St. from Hollywood Blvd., runyon-canyon.com

A 130-acre park where hikers enjoy breathtaking views of the city. The chances of spotting coyotes, snakes, deer, and the odd celebrity walking a dog are high, and there are trails for hikers of all levels.

Budget Travel Los Angeles / Hollywood & Los Feliz

SNAP GUIDE

Formerly the film industry's center, Hollywood is now filled with more tourists than movie execs. The L.A. Zoo and Griffith Park, one of the biggest green spaces in any U.S. city, are nearby in calmer Los Feliz.

SEE Hollywood Forever Cemetery

6000 Santa Monica Blvd., 323/469-1181, hollywoodforever.com

A haunt that's pure Hollywood. This functioning funeral home and cemetery is the resting place for Rudolph Valentino and Cecil B. DeMille, among many others. Curious visitors can view the deceaseds' "LifeStories" on television screens found on kiosks throughout the park. In summer, cult movies are shown, and the grounds turn into a picnic area. Call for a calendar of events. Screenings are \$10.

EAT Lucy's el Adobe Cafe

5536 Melrose Ave., 323/462-9421

One of the best places for Mexican food in all of L.A.—everyone from studio executives to neighborhood regulars agrees. The cheap margaritas and hefty portions of chili and cheese enchiladas and arroz con pollo can't be beat.

\$ SPLURGE Geisha House

6633 Hollywood Blvd., 323/460-6300, geishahousehollywood.com

A lot of Ashton Kutcher's money has gone into creating a unique experience at this übertrendy dinner hotspot. The decor is flashy and the clientele even flashier. Fireplaces, red lacquer tables, and pink and red lighting all work together to create a dramatic, almost theatrical, environment. The menu features new twists on old Japanese favorites (for sushi, try the Marilyn Monroll or Green Lawn Roll), and the cocktails are fit for an emperor. Great for large groups—sharing food is encouraged. Try the Five Spice Chocolate Mousse for dessert.

DRINK The Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel

7000 Hollywood Blvd., 800/950-7667, hollywoodroosevelt.com

Just about any night of the week there's a private poolside party at the revitalized Hollywood hangout. Skip the hassle of bouncers and guest lists and go before sundown to have drinks in the linen bungalows at the new Tropicana Bar alongside the likes of Jake Gyllenhaal, Jessica Simpson, and Owen Wilson.

SHOP Uncle Jer's

4459 W. Sunset Blvd., 323/662-6710

Uncle Jer's sells Eastern-inspired treasures—toys, jewelry, gifts, cards, magic potions—and the latest fashions from groovy higher-end brands like Free People, as well as surprisingly cheap vintage items. Free gift-wrapping.

SHOP Y-Que Trading Post

1770 N. Vermont Ave., 323/664-0021, yque.com

Famous for its T-shirts silk-screened with topical celeb slogans: FREE MARTHA, FREE WINONA, and RUN KATIE RUN. Y-Que strikes a mean bargain, offering slightly less-than-perfect tees for five smackeroos. They print custom-tees, too.

PLAY Dodger Stadium

1000 Elysian Park Ave., 323/224-1500, losangeles.dodgers.mlb.com

Check the L.A. Times sports pages or the Dodgers' website for a schedule of home games. From \$12 for Reserve (midlevel) seats; from \$75 for Field Box MVP; and for those who don't mind having a hot dog without the beer, there are alcohol-free Pavilion seats in the outfield, from \$8.

PLAY Lucky Strike Lanes

6801 Hollywood Blvd., entrance on N. Highland Ave., 323/467-7776, bowlluckystrike.com/hollywood

Parties every night of the week make this an unlikely hotspot. It also supports up-and-coming video artists; check out the projection screens for the next big thing. Only bowlers of legal drinking age are allowed in after 7 P.M. From \$5 per person, depending on the time and day of the week; \$4 for shoe rental.

PLAY Upright Citizens Brigade Theater

5919 Franklin Ave., 323/908-8702

Improv comedy at its best. Every weekend the one-hour shows pack 'em in, and there's no extra charge when celeb guest stars, such as Janeane Garofalo or Andy Dick, make surprise appearances. \$8 weekends, \$5 weeknights, sometimes no admission fee.

Disneyland

1313 S. Harbor Blvd., 714/781-4565, Anaheim, disney.go.com

About 35 miles south of LAX, Disney's first theme park has been recently rejuvenated for its 50th-birthday celebration, with new additions to Space Mountain and Sleeping Beauty's Castle. Some tips:

- Looking for cheap souvenirs? For 50¢, penny-press machines create mementos emblazoned with one of 51 different events in park history. The most popular one—marking opening day in 1955—is in the Penny Arcade.
- Disneyland offers a few unexpected and unadvertised extras. There's a baby-care center off Main Street with changing tables, rocking chairs, and nursing stations. If it's your birthday, swing by City Hall, where you can get a call from Goofy and an IT'S MY BIRTHDAY! sticker. Waiters at park restaurants may even sing to you or give you a dessert when they see the sticker.
- On busy days, Splash Mountain quickly runs out of its allotted number of Fastpasses. Snag one in the morning, even if you don't want to get soaked until the sun comes out. You won't be allowed on earlier than your assigned time, but you can board late (works with other rides, too).

Budget Travel Los Angeles / Downtown L.A.

SNAP GUIDE

The location of much of the city's corporate activity, Downtown has undergone serious gentrification in recent years. Amid the historic and modern high-rises is a surprising mix of ethnic restaurants.

SEE Museum of Contemporary Art

250 S. Grand Ave., 213/626-6222, moca.org

Excellent interactive museum with works by modern masters, including Jackson Pollock, Diane Arbus, and Andy Warhol. The gift shop sells an impressive array of cards, T-shirts, prints, and art books. \$8, free Thurs. 5 P.M.–8 P.M. Closed Tues. and Wed.

SEE Olvera Street

125 Paseo de La Plaza, 213/485-6855, olvera-street.com

Colorful Mexican street market with vendors selling tacos, sombreros, and handcrafted maracas. Mariachis roam the street on weekends, and it bustles during fiestas like Day of the Dead (Nov. 1–2) and Cinco de Mayo (May 5).

SEE Walt Disney Concert Hall

111 S. Grand Ave., 323/850-2000, musiccenter.org/wdch

Frank Gehry's metallic masterpiece draws visitors to Downtown for its exterior, but the stunning interiors, the gardens, and the thrilling performances of its resident companies, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Los Angeles Master Chorale, are also noteworthy. \$15 for one-hour guided tours of the building and gardens (check the calendar for schedule); \$10 for self-guided audio tours, available most days 10 A.M.–3 P.M.; \$10 for the 30-minute Lunchtime Express Tour. Note: The auditorium itself is off-limits to tours because of its constant use for rehearsals and performances. Your best bet for access is to buy a ticket and experience the acoustics first-hand. Tickets from \$15.

EAT Grand Central Market

317 S. Broadway, 213/624-2378, grandcentralsquare.com

Wall-to-wall booths sell every kind of cheap food and drink, but this is more than a source for quick-bite tacos or to-go bowls of pad thai; you'll also find exotic spices and fresh produce.

EAT Yang Chow

819 N. Broadway, 213/625-0811, yangchow.com

General Tseng's chicken, moo shu pork, steamed dumplings, kung pao shrimp, and an even more authentic selection of well-priced lunch specials. The kitchen is accommodating and can make some dishes with veggies only.

DRINK Rooftop Bar at the Standard Hotel

550 S. Flower St., 213/892-8080, standardhotel.com

This alfresco party spot is still going strong, and it's made André Balazs's ultramodern hotel a landmark. Hop in the pool if it's hot out, or watch the city light up at dusk. Weekend nights can get raucous. Call ahead to make sure there isn't a private party. Free; \$20 after 7 P.M. Fri. and Sat.

SHOP American Apparel

312 W. 5th St., 213/593-1394, americanapparel.net

T-shirts, retro running shorts, and underwear that have taken the fashion basics world by storm with sweatshop-free production and fabrics, including unbleached organic cotton. Items come in every color.

SHOP Santee Alley

East of S. Santee St., between E. Olympic and E. 12th Sts., fashiondistrict.org

The city's best designer knockoffs. Well-made faux Fendis and Louis Vuittons start at \$20 for wallets and \$100 and up for luggage and pet carriers. It's hard to find (there are no location markers to help out, and street signs are small), so park at one of the many rooftop parking areas nearby (from \$5/day) and walk to the alley. Not recommended for claustrophobes.

PLAY L.A. Derby Dolls

derbydolls.com

All-female roller derby. Team names include the Trust Fund Terrors and the Tough Cookies. The website has schedule and locations (and killer photos).

ESCAPE

The South Bay Beach Cities

A string of seaside communities, old-school surf towns, and beautiful beaches that are literally a breath of fresh air.

Redondo Beach: Spend a lazy day strolling the scenic esplanade with a view of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, and then browse the charming homegrown shops in Riviera Village, such as Harmony Works (1705 S. Catalina Ave., 310/791-7104) and Soil (1799 S. Catalina Ave., 310/791-2265, soil.us). The Redondo Beach Brewery (1814 Catalina Ave., 310/316-8477, redondobrewery.com) is a local favorite.

Hermosa Beach: To the north of Redondo Beach. A good place for nightlife. Catch Jay Leno testing new material at the Comedy and Magic Club (1018 Hermosa Ave., 310/372-1193, comedyandmagicclub.info, from \$13.50 for smaller acts); get a manicure with your martini on Wednesdays at the Lighthouse Café (30 Pier Ave., 310/376-9833, thelighthousecafe.net); or chill out with rowdy old-timers at the kitschy Mermaid bar (11 Pier Ave., 310/374-9344).

Manhattan Beach: A few blocks north of Hermosa Beach. The most upscale beach city on the South Bay, with trendy shops and fine dining. For after-hours dancing, try Chakra (304 12th St., 310/545-1881, \$5).

To get to all three, follow the Pacific Coast Highway south. Redondo Beach, the furthest away, is only 20 miles south of Los Angeles.