

Ride the scenic Pacific Coast Highway and treat yourself to a true Southern Californian experience.



Southern wonders

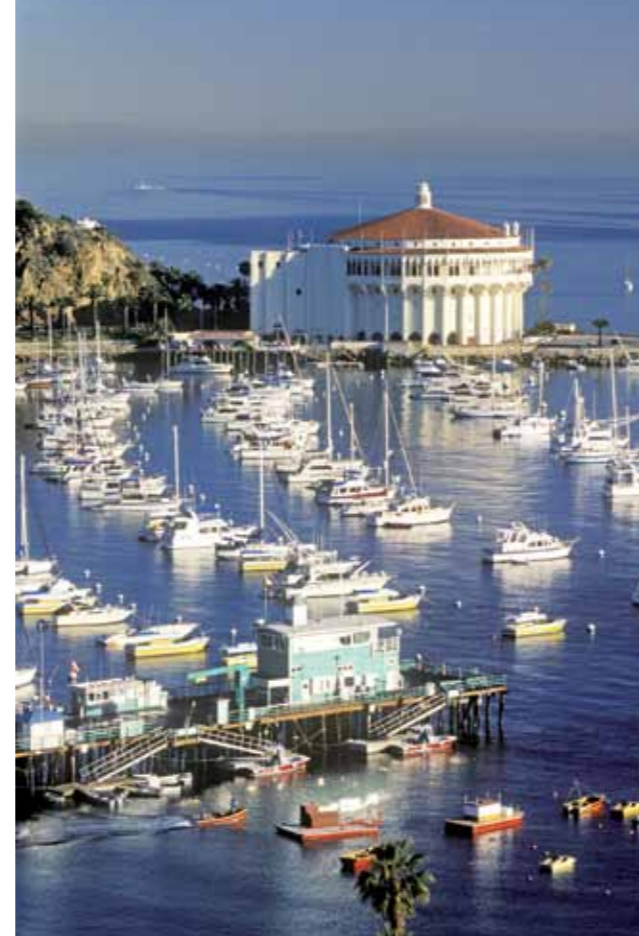
From stunning scenery to unbeatable entertainment, Southern California offers a mix of both rural and urban. **Michael Franco** takes a tour of this mega-region.

Southern California is known for many things: beautiful beaches, scenic coastlines, stunning desert landscapes, unbeatable entertainment and, of course, Hollywood. From modern comforts to nature adventures, Southern California offers an exciting mix of rural and urban. Los Angeles provides a great base for a truly Southern Californian experience.

Like the movie stars and rock gods that hide out in its hills and strut its streets, L.A. is famous for reinventing itself. Sure, there's still the Sunset Strip "scene", the kitsch of Grauman's Chinese Theatre and the cartoon chaos of Disneyland, but look behind the Hollywood special effects and a different L.A. begins to emerge.

In the spotlight of L.A.'s most recent transformation is Downtown Los Angeles. Previously a soulless enclave of skyscrapers that emptied out on weekends, the area is showing that it can shine long after the nine-to-five grind. This is partly due to the opening of L.A. LIVE, a 520,257-square-metre complex of hotel and residential space set among restaurants, concert halls, movie theatres and The GRAMMY Museum. And the glitz and glamour don't just stop there – L.A. LIVE's premier tenant is The Ritz-Carlton.

Occupying just four floors of a 54-storey gleaming tower (which also houses a brand-new JW Marriott hotel), The Ritz-Carlton is a pocket



of peace and elegance above the amped-up offerings below. Even the so-called "standard" rooms are anything but: each of them feature three 42-inch high-definition televisions (with one set into the mirror in the palatial bathroom) among other niceties. Go above and beyond these entry-level rooms with a stay in The Ritz-Carlton Suite, where plentiful use of marble and mahogany create a sense of sophisticated warmth from the executive study to the dining area with seating for 10.

While L.A. LIVE has an impressive assortment of chain restaurants (Flemings Prime Steakhouse & Winebar and the Philippe Starck-designed Katsuya, to name but two), true foodies will be heartened to know that Downtown Los Angeles has also seen a culinary rebirth in the past two years, especially around the corner on Seventh Street. This stretch has become known as L.A.'s Restaurant Row since the Italian-themed market and eatery Bottega Louie opened in 2009.

Bottega Louie now keeps company with nine diverse neighbours including SUGARFISH, a sushi restaurant that keeps it simple and superb; Soi.7, a modern Thai restaurant serving lemongrass-marinated lamb chops and Mekong Whiskey-infused baby back ribs among many other tongue-tingling choices; and Mas Malo, a Mexican restaurant in a grand, ballroom-like space where dishes such as the Baja shrimp and soy chorizo tacos aim to take guests' tastebuds on a holiday south of the border.

After exploring the city's entertainment and culinary scene, head out of the City of Angels and explore the rest of Southern California. First up is the resort town of Santa Monica, located further

west from Downtown Los Angeles. Ride the scenic Pacific Coast Highway and treat yourself to a true Californian experience: the ocean drive to Santa Barbara, a mere one and a half-hour ride. Along the way, you might want to spend a night or two at the Malibu Beach Inn. A multi-million dollar renovation has turned this beachfront gem into the only luxury option for lodgers along this stretch of roadway. The cosy hotel is situated on Carbon Beach, also known as "Billionaire's Beach" thanks to the profusion of estates owned by bigwigs such as legendary producer David Geffen and Oracle founder Larry Ellison. Here, you can enjoy dinner on the beachfront terrace before retreating to your room or suite – all come with ocean views and balconies, and some even have fireplaces for those crisp autumn nights.

Continuing up the coast, you'll eventually arrive at the eclectic and dazzling Santa Barbara where you'll find the Bacara Resort & Spa. The resort's location between the Pacific Ocean and Santa Ynez Mountains means you can enjoy activities such as horseback riding through fragrant lemon groves, biking along oceanfront trails, trekking along babbling streams or setting sail on exclusive sailboat or catamaran excursions. At night, spacious and elegantly understated rooms in Mediterranean-style villas provide the perfect place to recharge for the next day's adventures.

GETTY IMAGES



Above: The Santa Barbara County Courthouse, one of Southern California's famed iconic structures. Below: The Joshua Tree National Park's breathtaking desert landscape.

For a real taste of the west, head to San Ysidro Ranch, an exquisite lodging option featuring private cottages and suites. John F Kennedy honeymooned here and it's easy to see why from the minute you turn into its long and stately driveway lined with olive trees. All rooms feature fireplaces, with suites and free-standing cottages offering outdoor hot tubs and rain showers on private patios.

If you catch the nature bug from your time in the mountains, two other locales warrant a visit: Catalina Island and the Joshua Tree National Park.

Catalina Island, once owned by gum magnate William Wrigley Junior, is just a one-hour ferry ride from Long Beach. By mandate of Wrigley's will, much of the island has been left wild. If you're lucky, you will be able to catch a glimpse of the descendants of the buffaloes that "starred" in the 1925 film, *The Vanishing American*. Without a doubt, the most luxurious spot to stay on this otherwise down-to-earth island would be the recently renovated Pavilion Hotel, where the beautiful courtyard offers the perfect place to have a drink and gaze out at the multi-million-dollar yachts bobbing in the harbour.

Finally, it might seem unlikely when you're in the heart of L.A., but you're only about 240 kilometres from one of the most starkly beautiful parks in the US, the Joshua Tree National Park. Explore the desert landscape and get striking photos of the park's eponymous residents – scrubby, cactus-like trees that are covered in yellow flowers in early spring. Afterwards, wash off the desert dust at any of the three pools located at the posh Parker Palm Springs hotel – a heavenly end for a visit to The City of Angels.

Singapore Airlines flies to Los Angeles daily.



TOP: PHOTOGRAPHY

An insider's guide

From cocktails in a bowling alley to a fine chardonnay enjoyed while gazing over the Pacific, Los Angeles and its environs offer visitors an exquisite experience.



Malibu Beach Inn

HOTELS

W Los Angeles – Westwood

The fab “Whatever, Whenever” chain just opened another high-design win in Westwood. Dazzling suites by celebrity designer Thom Filicia. 930 Hilgard Avenue
Tel: +1 (310) 208 8765
www.whotels.com

Malibu Beach Inn

This luxury inn features 47 rooms and suites with million-dollar views. The sound of the surf will make you forget you're anywhere near a city. 22878 Pacific Coast Highway Malibu
Tel: +1 (310) 456 6444
www.malibubeachinn.com

Bacara Resort & Spa

Supreme luxury situated between the mountains and the sea. Be sure to book into the resort's Miró restaurant, which serves exquisite organic French-Californian cuisine. 8301 Hollister Avenue Santa Barbara
Tel: +1 (805) 968 0100
www.bacararesort.com

San Ysidro Ranch

Understated luxury, where getting to your private cottage through the paths bordered by stunning gardens and creeks is half the enjoyment. 900 San Ysidro Lane Santa Barbara
Tel: +1 (805) 565 1700
www.sanyisidororanch.com

Pavilion Hotel

A recent refreshing makes this the obvious choice on Catalina, especially if you can get into one of the two luxury suites offering sweeping ocean panoramas. 513 Crescent Avenue, Avalon
Tel: +1 (800) 626 1496
www.visitcatalinaisland.com

FOOD

WP24

Enjoy modern Chinese as only Wolfgang Puck could render it. “Pod” seating provides privacy, but never to the point of obstructing the panoramic views. 900 West Olympic Boulevard
Tel: +1 (213) 743 8824
www.wolfgangpuck.com

Bottega Louie



Bottega Louie

The restaurant singlehandedly responsible for sparking the development of Seventh Street as LA's new Restaurant Row. Dine in or get gourmet goodies from the shop for a picnic on the coast. 700 South Grand Avenue
Tel: +1 (213) 802 1470
www.bottegalouie.com

SUGARFISH

His attention to fresh, quality ingredients here has earned chef Kazunori Nozawa the moniker “sushi nazi.” Sit at the bar and order the “Trust Me” menu. You won't be disappointed. 600 West Seventh Street
Tel: +1 (213) 627 3000
www.sugarfishsushi.com

Soi.7

LA's modern take on traditional Thai served up in a grand space. 518 West Seventh Street
Tel: +1 (213) 537 0333
www.soi7la.com



San Ysidro Ranch

Mas Malo

Dramatic Mexican cuisine in an even more dramatic setting made all the more so by the huge selection of tequilas.
515 West Seventh Street
Tel: +1 (213) 985 4332
www.malorestaurant.com

DRINK

Lucky Strike Bowling Lounge

If you never thought bowling could be cool, think again. Best to do so with a cocktail in hand while waiting for your chance to score at this bowling venue.
800 West Olympic Boulevard
Tel: +1 (213) 542 4880
www.bowlluckystrike.com

Seven Grand

You can't really say it better than their own website: Seven Grand serves up 271 premium whiskeys, rare ryes and small batch bourbons on a hand-carved black walnut bar under the stony gaze of freshly-hunted Jackalopes. Except perhaps to add that they have cigars dipped in bourbon.
515 West Seventh Street
Tel: +1 (213) 614 0737
www.sevengrand.la

SHOP

Beverly Boulevard

Here's a chic, sophisticated and uber cool place to snag the latest in fashion. Do visit Beige, one of the best boutiques in the city.

Melrose Avenue

Since the early 1980s, this strip between Fairfax and

Santa Barbara Winery Tours



La Brea avenues has been attracting fashionistas with its chic selection of international boutiques that are in themselves considered works of pop art.

Robertson Boulevard

This street could be small by Los Angeles standards but it's a perfect diorama of stylish LA, exuding the exclusiveness of Beverly Hills and the cutting-edge cool of Melrose. A great place to spot celebrities, too.

Rodeo Drive

Rodeo Drive is the still the strip to get your glitz on in LA. The newest resident on this brand-bedecked avenue is Stephen Webster, a jewellery shop whose opening party had the likes of Kate Beckinsale and Rosanna Arquette in attendance.

DO

Private Helicopter Tours

Elite Adventure Tours offers high glam trips for visitors who want to discover Southern California in style. Step aboard a private helicopter and buzz through the city and along the Pacific Coast. Tours can be customised to include winery visits or an exotic animal encounter in the nearby Angeles National Forest.
www.eliteadventuretours.com

San Andreas Fault, Palm Springs

For the ultimate Palm Springs adventure, check out "It's Our Fault" tour offered by Elite Land Tours, a company that specialises in nature adventure excursions. Onboard a luxury Hummer, you will have the chance to



see the most dramatic section of the more than 800-mile San Andreas Fault. Drinks and gourmet snacks are provided throughout the four-hour excursion.
www.elitelandtours.com

Santa Barbara Winery Tours

Take a guided wine tour of Santa Barbara aboard a luxury sedan or limousine. Customise your adventures by picking your own wine trail or choose from RockStar's recommendations. The limosines are equipped with flat screen televisions, mirrored ceilings, plush leather interior and a well-stocked bar, among other niceties. Each limo can accommodate up to 20 persons.
www.santabarbara.com
www.rockstarsb.com

Seven Grand

