





# SANTA MONICA

*Artsy. Casually Chic & Classically Californian*

By Linda Barnard

**The only drawback to choosing Santa Monica as a base for a Los Angeles vacation is that you might not want to go anywhere else.**

This small coastal city has classic welcome-to-California good looks, framed by a long, sandy beach and the Santa Monica Mountains. The local scene is artsy, active and casually chic, with an added shot of surfer and skateboard culture. There are restaurant choices from beachfront tacos to Michelin-star dining rooms, plus excellent cocktail bars. "This is a living, breathing creative hub. It has that genuine local feel," says Lauren Salisbury of Santa Monica Travel & Tourism.

Just how does Santa Monica fit into an L.A. getaway? Los Angeles is both a city and a sprawling county of 88 cities, including Beverly Hills, Malibu, Santa Monica and the megacity of Los Angeles. While Santa Monica is in LaLa Land, it has its distinct personality.

It's handy to Los Angeles International Airport, about 17 kilometres away, and close enough to Disneyland, the beaches of Malibu, West Hollywood and more to make it easy to load up on all the memorable experiences of a Southern California getaway.

You may not even have to go to Tinseltown for a celebrity sighting. Robert Downey Jr., Bradley Cooper, Jamie Lee Curtis and beloved former Toronto Raptor Kawhi Leonard all live in Santa Monica.

Here is some inspiration for your L.A. getaway, Santa Monica style.

## **SEIZE THE DAY**

With tall palms reaching into the blue sky to set the SoCal scene, make the most of a perfect day with a morning stroll to the historic Santa Monica Pier. Join the joggers and dog walkers following the bluff-hugging path at Palisades Park, past signs that mark the end of fabled Route 66.

Ready for breakfast? Drop in at Dogtown Coffee for one of their legendary burritos. The coffee house is on the site of skateboard and surf history, in the former workshop of Zephyr Productions and Jeff Ho Surfboards. The décor pays homage to the coolest Cali surfers and skateboarders who helped give birth to a new kind of acrobatic, edgy skateboarding in the mid-'70s.

The massive Munchies Breakfast Burritos (the secret ingredient is the handful of crispy tater tots) sets you up for a busy day of exploring and relaxing, Santa Monica style.

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### BARBIE WORLD

Some of the scenes for the hit movie Barbie were shot in Santa Monica. Margot Robbie's Barbie and London, Ont.-born Ryan Gosling's Ken rollerbladed in '90s neon along a stretch of the Marvin Braude bike trail, known as "the Strand." It links Santa Monica to neighbouring beach towns like Venice along a paved trail that's great for biking or rollerblading. Perry's Café & Beach Rentals and Santa Monica Public Bike Rental have bikes, inline skates and skateboards for rent.



Blue Plate Taco is among the varied restaurants in Santa Monica. Many have beach views.

### WHERE TO EAT

Calabra Restaurant and Bar at the Santa Monica Proper Hotel makes rooftop dining feel like an intimate experience with alcoves and quiet areas framed by lush plants. The menu skews Med-Californian. My favourite area in the hotel is the main-level Palma lounge. The relaxing retreat for "all-day dining, coffee or canoodling" also has a well-stocked library nook.

True Food Kitchen, founded by Dr. Andrew Weil, focuses on keeping food simple, healthy and tasty, like my Gouda-topped turkey burger with avocado. It's at the Santa Monica Place Shopping Center.

Courtyard Kitchen is a worthy stop midway on a retail therapy session on boutique-lined Montana Avenue shopping street. The brunch all-day menu is a winner. Pair it with a Hibiscus Aperol Spritz. You are on vacation, after all.

### DONUTS RULE

While Santa Monica embraces a healthy, outdoor lifestyle, locals balance it out with a passionate love of donuts. There are daily lineups at Sidecar Doughnuts &

Coffee for fresh-made beauties like the epic Basil Eggs Benedict, where a complete single-serving benny is encased in a savoury doughnut.

Located amid the cute indie shops and restaurants on the Main Street shopping stretch, Holey Grail Donuts & Bakery fries taro doughnuts to order in coconut oil. Rotating flavours include Hawaiian vanilla bean and honey, miso and black lava sea salt. Fresh cashew-coconut milk is on tap to add to coffee or chai.

### SHOP

Main Street is home to diverse shops and galleries, like Cabin Creek Crystals. It's a kind of clubhouse for West Coast cool, with weekly concerts and wellness classes in the back garden. Theresa Ireland was minding the shop for her friend and called Santa Monica and area communities "our little bubble," where locals are creative, artistic and mindful of wellness.

Shoppers can find bigger retail chains along the three-block, car-free 3rd Street Promenade in downtown Santa Monica. Street performers entertain and there



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Santa Monica Proper Hotel is a luxury stay in residential Santa Monica with interiors by celebrity designer Kelly Wearstler.



The art deco Aero Theatre opened in 1940 on Montana Ave. It screens movies regularly, sometimes with the cast or director on hand for a post-film talk.

are bars and restaurants to refuel after a shopping spree. The entrance to the Metro E Line is here, too. The light-rail system travels to downtown Los Angeles.

Santa Monica Place is a fancy mall: there's a valet parking station. Retailers include Nordstrom, Tori Burch and Tiffany & Co.

Montana Avenue is a dreamy stretch of interesting stores, like Divine Vintage, a combo wine shop and tasting bar with racks of vintage clothing. Drop in at Zibby's Bookshop and colourful Poketo, which has everything from kitchenware to stationery. The true gem of Montana is the Aero Theatre, which opened in 1940. Movies are screened here regularly on a single screen, often with a talk by one of the actors, writers or directors. It is next door to Hollywood, after all. And the popcorn has real butter.

### STRETCH AND PAMPER

Santa Monica Yoga has a variety of drop-in yoga classes. I can vouch for the gentle restorative power of the morning yoga flow. I followed that with a dreamy relaxation massage using essential oils at Alchemie Spa on Main St.

### GETTING AROUND

Downtown Santa Monica and area can easily be covered on foot. Use Uber for longer trips or L.A. Metro to get to downtown Los Angeles. The car rules in California, so you may want to rent some wheels to explore further. Be patient and prepared for snarled highway traffic.

### WHERE TO STAY

Santa Monica Proper Hotel opened in 2019 in a quiet residential neighbourhood and is as popular with locals as it is out-of-towners. Celebrity designer Kelly Wearstler, dubbed "the mother of eclectic interior design" has left her arty mark, from the curved, upholstered headboards in the rooms, to art and furnishings in public spaces that range from whimsical to avant-garde. There's a rooftop pool. Luxury spa Surya offers Ayurvedic facials and scrubs.

### PLAN YOUR TRIP

For more Santa Monica inspiration and information, go to [SantaMonica.com](https://www.santamonica.com)

*Linda Barnard was a guest of Santa Monica Travel & Tourism, which did not preview this story.*