

HOLLYWOOD



Jump for joy: Kids playing by the iconic sign. Opposite, Santa Monica Beach; Night+Market Thai restaurant; at play on Venice Beach; go hungry for an In-N-Outburger



GOING LALA

If Los Angeles were a celebrity, **Laura Goodman** would be its stalker. You'll go crazy for the place, too — her weekend guide spills all the city's juicy secrets

Photography: **Mark Edward Harris**

I never look where I'm going. I can do a journey 20 times as a passenger and still not know the way when I have to go it alone. But in LA, I'm a different person. 'You go right on Wilshire; straight over Hollywood; left onto Sunset.'

The words trip off my tongue; I am thrilled to say them. My eyes are wide as I take on the role of expert navigator and delighted tourist simultaneously. I can't do this in London, where I've lived most of my life. But here, it feels easy.

That's how I feel about LA in general – it feels easy. Being in LA is the simplest thing in the world for me, because every bit of me wants to be there. It's my other home – the one without the work. Or the drizzle.

Is it the sky? The sunshine? The swagger? Or the avocados (so green!)? Whatever it is, I just keep on coming back to LA (10 trips and counting). It's one of those rare places where I feel the wind is in my hair even when the car windows are closed. And my perfect four days in the city? They look like this. Ready?

Thursday

Jet lag can be brutal and very useful at the same time. On the first morning, you might be up before both the sun and the joggers. That means you can go for the kind of cult breakfast you'd have to queue for if you showed up after 9am.

Sqirl is a tiny cafe in hip, indie Silver Lake that's changed the way I think about breakfast, with dishes such as brown-rice porridge, a sorrel-pesto rice bowl and buckwheat pancakes. It's in a quiet spot a little way down Virgil Avenue, marked by a sandwich board that (usually) says 'Coffee & Toast'. This is probably the most understated sandwich board in the world, because Sqirl's 'toasts' include a great slab of *brioche* topped with an ocean of fresh ricotta and your choice of homemade jam (in flavours such as plum and thyme, or blueberry and rhubarb). The shaded little outdoor patch to the side of the restaurant is a perfect place to try a bit of everything (720 Virgil Avenue; sqirlla.com; breakfasts about £8).

Folks round here spend the whole morning with a coffee in their hands, so in proper LA style, take a three-minute drive to the Silver Lake branch of Intelligentsia Coffee (3922 West Sunset Boulevard; intelligentsiacoffee.com). Through a grand, terracotta-coloured arch is a gorgeous space full of light, with beautiful sky-blue tiles and a big marble bar in the middle. Get a trendy cold brew and skip back out.

Now the sky is really getting going, and so are you. If you're worried LA isn't as photogenic as NYC, stick with me. I recommend a (relaxed 30-minute) hike from the Fern Dell entrance of Griffith Park up to the Griffith Observatory, but you can drive to it, too (griffithobservatory.org; free). The observatory has telescopes and a planetarium, but what's even more cosmic is the way the domed white building looks against the blue sky. You can see the Hollywood sign, Downtown LA and the Pacific Ocean from here.

If you think you can take the heat (and you love the Hollywood sign as much as I do), one of the longer trails goes right up Mount Lee to deliver you behind DOOWYLOH, via the original Bat Cave (as seen in the '60s *Batman* TV series).

Later, worn out and glammed up, you'll find the Sunset Strip has everything you need for a WeHo (West >

BOWLED OVER

Sqirl's sorrel rice bowl is 100 per cent California, and it's one of the most talked-about dishes in town right now. Bright, zingy sorrel-flavoured rice is topped with radish, Feta, avocado and a poached egg. Despite its green credentials, it's as tasty as that toast



Beach babe: above, Venus, LA-style, on Venice Beach; Madcapra falafel wraps in Grand Central Market; lifeguard hut on Santa Monica Beach; the bright lights of Sunset Boulevard





Art attack: above, Jeff Koons's *Tulips* at the Broad contemporary art museum. Opposite, centre of attention on Venice Beach

Hollywood) night out – it's a two-and-a-half-kilometre stretch of Sunset Boulevard known for its rock clubs and ginormous billboards. There are good bits and sketchy bits, old dives and new haunts, but it's all electric.

The Rainbow Bar & Grill (9015 Sunset Boulevard; 00 1 310 278 4232, rainbowbarandgrill.com) used to be beloved of John Lennon and Ringo Starr, and feels like home by the second drink. 'You want another beer?' a beautiful member of staff will ask. Of course you do... From here, it's a minute's walk to Night+Market, a fabulous, bright pink Thai restaurant that makes beaded curtains and vinyl tablecloths look chic. It's fun to sit at the bar with a couple of cold Beerlaos and some salty snacks: grilled pork satay skewers bathed in condensed milk; grilled fatty pig neck; and party wings (9043 Sunset Boulevard; 00 1 310 275 9724, nightmarketsong.com; snacks about £6.50).

Friday

As the weekend vibe arrives (but before the crowds do), make a break for the beach. Venice is no longer an eccentric playground for hippies and muscle men – it's actually a serene and pleasant place for a stroll, a swim and a latte.

Park somewhere behind Pacific Avenue at Windward, where the Venice sign is strung over the top of the road with a view out to the sea behind it – it's an instantly uplifting sight. Hit the boardwalk alongside the Rollerbladers, taking in the ocean on one side and the world's most extensive supply of souvenir T-shirts on the

other. If you're ever going to buy a tie-dye vest, now's the time. Muscle Beach's outdoor gym – and its bodies – is worth a cursory look, but you'll want to gawp a little longer at the brave skaters, 'bladers and 'boarders who criss-cross the big, brash, swirling skatepark, which is an impressive sight whether you're into wheelies or not.

'Cool Venice' is easy to locate – it's all on Abbot Kinney Boulevard, between Venice Boulevard and Main Street. This stretch is a thoroughfare of lovely things, such as Japanese bento boxes and teapots at Tortoise General Store (No. 1208; tortoisegeneralstore.com) and sunglasses at Warby Parker (No. 1422; warbyparker.com). There's coffee and green juice galore, of course. But for brunch, it's all about Gjelina – a dreamy haven of zingy oysters, braised pork meatballs, and pizza topped with squash, thyme and burrata (No. 1429; 00 1 310 450 1429, gjelina.com; mains about £14).

Once I've spent enough cash, I love to walk or cycle the whole beach from Venice to Santa Monica and watch the path, people and even the sand get smoother. You can hire bikes from Perry's on the beach (perryscafe.com; £16 for two hours) – wiggling along the bike path takes about 20 minutes each way, and is easy as pie.

Speaking of which, a mean slice of boysenberry cream pie awaits at the Apple Pan, on your way back into town. This real-deal burger joint has been going since 1947; it's nothing more than a horseshoe-shaped bar with red leather stools. Its steakburger comes with a cinnamon-laced relish, and is packed neatly in greaseproof paper – ➔

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the perfect hand-held precursor to the pie (10801 West Pico Boulevard; burgers about £6.50).

Saturday

A few years ago no-one would've sent you Downtown. It was a dull wasteland of office blocks, but now it's revived, and I'm sending you there. It's a dazzling mix of old and box-fresh – and it's also walkable.

There are some dramatic old dames round here: the Art Deco City Hall; the Millennium Biltmore Hotel (its frescoed ceilings and carved marble columns appeared in *Mad Men*); and the Central Library, with its limestone sculptures and ancient Egypt-influenced architecture. The LA Conservancy runs 'Historic Downtown' walking tours on Saturday mornings at 10am – they meet at Pershing Square and usually have space for walk-ins. They're surprisingly fascinating, and offer an LA experience that's quite different to the starriness you might've expected (laconservancy.org; £12).

In the thick of things, Grand Central Market has been *in situ* since 1917, but has just recently become a hotbed for the hungriest and most creative locals. You can get four different and genius types of falafel wrap at Madcapra (my favourite contains cauliflower, pickled fennel and coriander); proper *pupusas* (Salvadoran corn tortillas stuffed with cheese, beans and pork) at Sarita's Pupuseria; and macadamia-nut iced lattes at G&B Coffee (317 South Broadway; grandcentralmarket.com; open 8am–10pm every day).

The glorious Broad contemporary art museum opened in the autumn of 2015. It's not too big or challenging – it's bright, soothing and well-paced, dotted with pieces by Warhol, Hirst, Twombly, Basquiat and more. Jeff Koons's giant stainless steel 'balloons' make absurd, So-Cal centrepieces, especially those technicolour tulips. If you want your minute inside Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrored Room*, you'll need to make some preparations – there's a digital queue on the website that usually fills within the first two hours of the museum opening (thebroad.org; free).

Sunday

Hop to it. Sunday mornings in LA mean working up a sweat before you sit down to brunch. Barry's Bootcamp was born in Hollywood and styles itself as the Best Workout in the World. It takes place in a dark room and involves red lights, 30 minutes of treadmill time, 30 minutes of strength training, and a muscular person barking orders – it's intense, and that's why it's frequented by people who look like (and often are) movie stars (1106 North La Cienega Boulevard; barrysbootcamp.com; £22).

Of the other only-in-LA workouts, stand-up paddleboard yoga is the best because you can do it in the lovely marina. Try YOGAqua in Marina del Rey (13977 Palawan Way; yogaqua.com; £36).

Otherwise, take a hike. Angelenos love to hike, and when they say 'hike', they mean 'go for a walk'. Give yourself about two hours to walk Runyon Canyon in Hollywood, which is a lush (and actually quite steep) peak complete with wildflowers, cacti, killer views, cute pooches and genuine celebrities – Natalie Portman, Justin Bieber and Orlando Bloom are all Runyon fans. It's best to use the Mulholland Drive/Pyramid Place entrance,

FILM-STAR LOOKS

In the glittering movie *La La Land*, starring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone (out January 2017), aside from glorious footage of the Griffith Observatory, there's also an enticing shot of Grand Central Market – look out for the neon Sarita's sign



Back to front: view of Hollywood from behind the sign; huge servings of pie at the Apple Pan; ceramics at Tortoise General Store; working out on Muscle Beach

parking wherever you can along Mulholland. If you fancy an air-conditioned drive afterwards, Mulholland is magical – it snakes dramatically through the Santa Monica mountains (but can get busy with motorbikes).

As far as brunch goes (it can still be brunch, even if it's lunchtime), the best meals in Hollywood are created by Jon Shook and Vinny Dotolo. Go for spicy vodka fusilli and life-changing pizza at Jon & Vinny's (412 North Fairfax Avenue; 00 1 323 334 3369, jonandvinnys.com; mains about £15), or shrimp-toast sandwiches and lobster rolls at Son of a Gun (8370 West 3rd Street; 00 1 323 782 9033, sonofagunrestaurant.com; mains about £12).

Then, I'd spend the rest of the day milling about West Hollywood. North Fairfax is good for strolling and it has the Grove – this is the mall of your dreams. It's outdoors, looks a bit like Disneyland, and has all your favourite brands (189 The Grove Drive; thegrovela.com).



If you want to see some comedy, the Upright Citizens Brigade (UCB) counts Amy Poehler and Tina Fey among its alumni. The Saturday improv nights tend to sell out in advance, but on Sundays, at the Sunset Boulevard location, there are no reservations – you just have to queue. You'll almost certainly see someone you recognise from Netflix (5419 West Sunset Boulevard; sunset.ucbtheatre.com).

Another thing about the UCB is that it's just a 10-minute drive – *in a straight line* – from a late-night In-N-Out burger bar (7009 Sunset Boulevard). To my mind, there's no finer Sunday dinner than a 'Double-Double, Animal-Style' (two mustard-cooked beef patties, two slices of cheese, grilled onions, tangy sauce), eaten with your feet up on the dashboard. So, just minutes after the UCB valet has returned your car, you're taking your first bite of the best cheeseburger the world has ever made. I did tell you LA was easy. ■

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS: 123RF.COM, GETTY



Get Me There

map: Scott Jessop

Go independent

Norwegian (norwegian.com) has flights from Gatwick from £308 return (book well ahead), but you pay extra for luggage and food. **Virgin Atlantic** (virgin-atlantic.com) flies from Heathrow from £522 return.

Where to stay

The Line, in Koreatown, has rooms with views of the Hollywood sign, and great food (00 1213 3817411, thelinehotel.com; doubles from £160, room only). Or try the elegant **Palihouse West Hollywood**, a short walk from the Sunset Strip (00 1323 656 4100, palihousewesthollywood.com; suites from £260, room only). Alternatively, go for a classic – the **Standard Downtown** is in the thick of it with a flashy rooftop (00 1213 892 8080, standardhotels.com; doubles from £159, room only).

Get around

Alamo (alamo.co.uk) has hire car from LAX from £29 a day or £150 a week. Check how much your hotel charges

for parking – at the Palihouse West Hollywood, for instance, valet parking costs £22 a day. Visitors are increasingly choosing to rely on taxis these days. An **Uber** from Downtown LA to Silver Lake costs about £6 (15 minutes), and from Downtown LA to Venice costs about £15 (30 minutes). The Metro and buses are fine for short journeys, but not for day trips to the beach (you could be stuck on the bus for hours if you time it badly) or nighttime use (bit scary). Find maps and prices at metro.net.

Go packaged

Virgin Holidays (0344 557 4321, virginholidays.co.uk) has five nights in LA at the Grafton on Sunset from £915pp, room only, with Heathrow flights and car hire. If you're after a longer trip, **Audley** (01993 838000, audleytravel.com) can tailor-make California adventures from £2,250pp, including hotels, flights and car hire.

Further information

See discoverlosangeles.com and visitwesthollywood.com.