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Blending the hip with the healthy is an enduring trademark in the SoCal city that loves reinvention. In Santa Monica, the body is a temple – nurtured by fine food, a focus on fitness and the simple pleasures of sun, sand and civic chic.



LIFE

ON THE EDGE

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Annenberg
Community Beach
House pool; Tongva
Park (opposite)



Clockwise from left:
Annenberg Community
Beach House pool; hit the
beach; Tongva Park



NOWHERE SAYS AMERICAN WEST COAST quite like a Santa Monica sunset. As the light fades over the Pacific Ocean, casting a rose-coloured glow across the city's brightly festooned 105-year-old pier, it's hard to imagine a more indelibly Californian image. This is, after all, the end of the line, the golden edge of the continent, and the official western terminus of Route 66, the legendary highway that writer John Steinbeck called the "Mother Road".

Throughout the years, Santa Monica has exercised a potent, if somewhat faded, appeal for visitors and residents, a progressive population that includes artists, film stars and, a bit more recently, technology entrepreneurs. With its 5.6km of shimmering coastline, rubberneck-worthy sights such as the kitschy original Muscle Beach, and quaint, walkable neighbourhoods, the city could survive on its nostalgic charms alone. But Santa Monica hardly rests on its old-school cachet. Like its neighbour, Venice Beach, which has become one of the West Coast's most in-demand places in which to live, Santa Monica's narrative is one of constant reinvention.

Exhibit A is the new Tongva Park (1615 Ocean Avenue, tongvapark.squarespace.com), a sprawling paradise named after the Native Americans who once occupied the Santa Monica area. Centrally located between the ocean and Santa Monica City Hall, it features beautifully realised, seamlessly interconnected areas, including Tongva Park and Ken Genser Square, designed by James Corner, one of the visionaries behind New York's successful High Line park.

Like the High Line, this is not your average park. The resulting \$US42.3m (\$45m) space is a 21st-century evocation of what a park should be, with a series of spaces decorated with native and drought-tolerant plants. Tongva feels, despite its previous incarnation as a car park, as if it's been here for decades, with Corner envisioning "a new heart for Santa Monica – a new destination and gathering place of great social, ecological and symbolic value". The park's four main hills offer glorious ocean views, absorbing public art by artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, picnic groves, water features and playful



design flourishes such as the unique basket-shaped lookouts that are popular with Instagrammers.

The Annenberg Community Beach House (415 Pacific Coast Highway, beachhouse.smgov.net) is another masterstroke of civic design. This adventurous public facility that's become *the* place for locals to hang out during the warmest months is courtesy of a \$US27.5m (\$29.3m) grant to the city by the philanthropist Wallis Annenberg. The centre sits on the formerly private 1920s oceanfront estate of silent film star Marion Davies, built by her paramour, press baron William Randolph Hearst. Today, a modern beach centre built to achieve LEED Gold certification has joined the original pool and guesthouse, both designed by Hearst Castle architect Julia Morgan. Like many buildings in Santa Monica, the architectural styles – Gatsby by the beach and sunny 21st century modernism – work in tandem to achieve something totally fresh. Reservations to swim in the fabulous pool, however, can be hard to come by.

This glorious design tension between the old and the new is not that unusual in Santa Monica, where stark architectural homes >

Clockwise from right: Shutters on The Beach; Palihouse Santa Monica; Fred Segal signage; bartenders at Palihouse

can often be found next to simple clapboard cottages. For a generation, the classic five-star hotel Shutters on The Beach (1 Pico Boulevard, 310 458 0300, shuttersonthebeach.com), defines laid-back California chic. Twenty years after opening, it remains *the* Santa Monica address, with Cape Cod style dwellings just steps from the sand, a fleet of retro bicycles available for loan, and marvellously opulent guestrooms that were recently refreshed by White House decorator Michael Smith.

In keeping with Santa Monica's recent rejuvenation, there are two new boltholes worth knowing about. The recently constructed LEED Gold certified Shore Hotel (1515 Ocean Avenue, 310 458 1515, shorehotel.com) exudes chilled SoCal charm with its sandstone and glass walls, colourful and luxe surfer-style rooms and sustainable design elements. By contrast, Palihouse Santa Monica (1001 Third Street, 310 394 1279, palihousesantamonica.com), located in a 1927 Spanish revival building, possesses a rebooted silver-screen glamour. Just blocks from the beach, the property boasts residential features including kitchens and full bathrooms, and a knowing elegance with whimsical animal-print wallpaper, velvet-upholstered couches and original art.

For those who know where to look, Santa Monica has always been one of Southern California's great shopping locales. Venture beyond the Third Street Promenade, with its big stores and chain brands, for idiosyncratic boutiques and fashion stores. Of note is the coastal outpost of iconic fashion emporium Fred Segal, long favoured by discerning *Angelenos* over its Hollywood counterpart (500 Broadway). Hennessy + Ingalls (214 Wilshire Boulevard, hennessyingalls.com) is the largest independent bookstore in the US, dedicated to art and architecture. Then there's a trash and treasure Nirvana at the bi-monthly Santa Monica Airport Outdoor Antique and Collectible Market (Airport Avenue, santamonicaairportantiquemarket.com).

Another new retail destination, which was also developed to achieve LEED Gold certification, is Santa Monica Place, a multi-purpose venue that sought to redefine the ho-hum mall experience. Three decades ago, a then little-known architect named Frank Gehry created a three-storey indoor shopping centre in the heart of Santa Monica. A multimillion-dollar renovation, unveiled in August 2010, has completely upended Gehry's design, preserving the building's footprint while opening the space up, adding open-air *galleries*, a ground-floor plaza and wide public walkways that >



PALIHOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY: DYLAN + JENI; SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH: COURTESY SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH



open directly onto the busy Third Street Promenade (395 Santa Monica Boulevard, santamonicaplace.com).

Yes, Santa Monica Place is home to luxury retailers such as Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Tory Burch, but there's plenty besides shopping to draw visitors in. Afternoons can be spent bathing in the sun in the rooftop area, which offers vistas of the sparkling ocean, plus DJs and live entertainment. Gourmands gravitate to The Market, a multi-vendor food emporium. Along with independent purveyors offering local cheeses, cold-pressed juices and fresh produce, there are some innovative dining options such as Matthew Kenney's MAKE, an elegant, raw vegan restaurant that's managed to win over even hardened foodies.

Then again, blending the hip with the healthy is an enduring Santa Monica hallmark. It wouldn't be LA without a serious dose of wellness. In this part of the world, the body is a temple, the Sunday farmer's market is church and green juice is tantamount to holy water.

Keeping fit comes easily here: there's the ever-popular, meandering South Bay Bicycle Trail, the new Trapeze School on the pier (losangeles.trapezeschool.com) and the original Muscle Beach, with its rings, workout benches and swings. Among the newer developments are many hybridised fitness classes, for example, SoulCycle (120 Wilshire Boulevard, soul-cycle.com), a West Coast branch of the spinning phenomenon; and YogaHop's popular classes (1612 Montana Avenue, yogahop.com), which team yoga moves with a hip-hop soundtrack.

Then again, it really comes down to your definition of wellness. The city's frontier roots have made it one of the most open-minded places in America. Here, you can find freaks and geeks, spray-tanned muscle men who could be plucked out of a Herb Ritts photo shoot and hipster yogis tricked out in upscale workout wear.

Everything goes in Santa Monica. While type As will happily splurge on high-octane group-fitness classes, others prefer a glass of rosé and fresh oysters on the oceanfront deck of Shutter's Living Room Terrace. And there will always be the sentimental pleasure of a stroll along the pier, with its honky-tonk amusements and old-time food vendors. It's a simple ritual that represents the timeless appeal of this West Coast wonderland.

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Clockwise from top left: Santa Monica Place rooftop; MAKE Plantlab Cheeses, and chef; Muscle Beach; South Bay Bicycle Trail

