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## UNITED STATES

# Fun in the sun

Whether it's eating in a restaurant frequented by Hollywood Rat Packers or taking in views from its magnificent pier, Santa Monica is beguiling. **David Challenger** visits Los Angeles' beautiful little sister



**W**ALKING through the streets of this beachfront city in Los Angeles County, don't be surprised if you start humming Sheryl Crow's breakthrough 1994 hit ... the one where "all (she) wants to do is have some fun, until the sun comes up over Santa Monica Boulevard".

But the fun doesn't stop with sunrise in this perpetually clear-skied metropolis; just make sure you remember the sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat.

Sitting on a sparkling bay with a broad, curving golden beach, LA's little sister is mostly void of her elder sibling's rougher edges – a comparatively safe and vibrant municipality that oozes a bit of hippiness, a touch of surf and skater grunge, and a splash of outright affluence. All encompassed by a population with progressive views on

social and environmental issues.

Santa Monica wears its history on its shirt sleeve with pride, especially when it comes to Hollywood's Golden Age. There are times when it seems impossible not to eat in a restaurant or drink in a bar where one of the Rat Pack once sipped a Jack Daniels or where Marilyn Monroe pouted.

First-time visitors could do worse than start at the Santa Monica Pier and the Third Street Promenade area, Santa Monica's main hub and spiritual heart. High-end shops, restaurants, carnival attractions, cinemas and talented street artists are all within a 20-minute walk.

Here are some highlights to consider next time you're planning to meet up with Sheryl.

### **SITES** **Third Street Promenade**

Located just a few blocks back from the beach between Wilshire Blvd and Broadway, Third Street Promenade is a clean and car-free public space that is the most popular shopping and dining street in the city.

You can catch free outdoor movies in summer at Cinema on the Street and watch street performers.

Every Wednesday (8.30am to 1.30pm) and Saturday (8.30am to

1pm), the Downtown Santa Monica Farmers' Market on the corner of the promenade and Arizona Ave covers four blocks and offers a huge selection of food.

**See downtownsm.com**

### **Santa Monica Pier**

If there's one landmark that embodies Santa Monica's seaside spirit, it's her pier. Tourists and locals alike swarm here, especially over summertime



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when free concerts and outdoor movies entertain the masses.

Built in 1909 and located at the ocean end of Colorado Ave, the pier offers superb coastal views. Restaurants and bars dot the jutting walkway, while Pacific Park keeps kids amused with its arcades, rollercoaster and Ferris wheel. Rides range between US\$4 and US\$8; unlimited rides from US\$16.95 to US\$28.95. Park hours vary due to season, so best to call (310)

260-8744 ext 0 to confirm on the day.

Keep a look out for the iconic horse carousel at the pier's entrance. Just underneath the carousel is the access to the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium (Tue-Fri, 2pm-5pm, Sat-Sun, 12.30pm-5pm), home to more than 100 species of marine animals and plants. Kids under 12 free; all others US\$5.

Free walking tours that include stories on famous pier regulars, such as Marilyn Monroe and Charlie Chaplin, are available on Saturdays and Sundays at 11am and noon.

**Santa Monica Pier, see**

**[santamonicipier.org](http://santamonicipier.org);**

**Pacific Park, see [pacpark.com](http://pacpark.com);**

**Santa Monica Pier Aquarium, see [healthebay.org/santa-monica-pier-aquarium](http://healthebay.org/santa-monica-pier-aquarium)**

## SLEEPING

### The Georgian Hotel

With its baby-blue exterior and black

and yellow awning, this gorgeous early 1930s art-deco building was once the meeting place for A-list Hollywood stars like Clark Gable and Carole Lombard. The lobby, with its marble floors, recalls the hotel's bygone era. It sits on the Santa Monica coastline.

See [georgianhotel.com](http://georgianhotel.com)

## EATING

### Chez Jay

Frank Sinatra, Steve McQueen, Lee Marvin (who drove his motorcycle through the front door after winning his 1965 Best Acting Oscar), Julia Roberts, Sean Penn and scores of other stars have made the Chez Jay in Santa Monica their eating and drinking hole. Despite the impressive history, it's unpretentious. Try one of their signature Angus New York steaks and wash it down with a cosmopolitan. If you're a writer, sit in the booth at the back for inspiration –

it's where a youthful Ben Affleck and Matt Damon wrote parts of *Good Will Hunting*.

See [chezjays.com](http://chezjays.com)

## Aussie Pie Kitchen

Feeling a little homesick for some local fare and an excellent coffee? Look no further than this cafe near Venice Beach, where you can munch on a variety of Down Under-inspired fare. But forget the notion their meat pies are like the handheld variety eaten at the footy. These re-engineered pies, made by award-winning chef Joe Youkhan, take three days to make and are served with garlic mash and peas on a plate. Coffee snobs will also be impressed: they fly in Australian-roasted Vittoria beans and then use Faema espresso machines to make their signature flat whites.

See [aussiepiekitchen.com/](http://aussiepiekitchen.com/)

## DRINKING

### Harvelle's Blues Club

With its dark walls and atmospheric red lighting, this 1931 era speakeasy is one of the oldest live music venues in the city. Management is proud of its high-quality music system. If pressed for time, choose Sunday night's show to watch Toledo, a vocalist who's been compared to Tom Waits, Marvin Gaye and Barry White.

See [santamonica.harvelles.com](http://santamonica.harvelles.com)

## MUSEUM

### Jadis

This unique and quirky museum, which wouldn't be out of place as a movie set for *Hugo*, displays pre-digital technology and Steampunk sculpture such as old robots, gears, laboratory equipment and other assorted odd scientific instruments.

See [jadisprops.com/moderne](http://jadisprops.com/moderne)

**G02**

## SANTA MONICA

### GETTING THERE

Virgin Australia, Delta, United, American Airlines, Qantas and Air New Zealand fly direct to Los Angeles. From LAX, it's about a 30-minute drive to downtown Santa Monica. Taxi fare is about \$US55 (\$75), inclusive of LAX surcharge and 15 per cent tip.

### GETTING AROUND

The EXPO Light Rail Project, which will get passengers from Santa Monica into downtown LA in 45 minutes, is due to be completed early 2016. Until then, the best option is to use the city's Big Blue Bus ([bigbluebus.com](http://bigbluebus.com)). Better still, get a centrally located hotel and walk. Santa Monica is dead flat.

### TRAVEL TIP

If you temporarily lose your sanity and decide to rent a car, be overly careful when parking. Santa Monica's meter maids are notoriously strict and vigilant when it comes to illegal parking. Carry plenty of nickels (5¢), dimes (10¢), and quarters (25¢) to feed parking meters. Or use one of the city's many public parking lots.

### MORE

**City of Santa Monica,**  
see [smgov.net](http://smgov.net)

**Santa Monica Visitor Information,**  
see [santamonica.com](http://santamonica.com)



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**SEASIDE BLISS:**

(clockwise from main) Santa Monica Pier; tourists flock to the attractions; The Georgian Hotel; a pier food stand; and Third Street Promenade.

**Pictures:** iStock, David Challenger, Santa Monica Travel & Tourism