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Page 1 of 2

# Spot the celebrity in Santa Monica

## ROOM AT THE INN

**CHRISTINE McCABE**

It's difficult to imagine a hotel more consummately LA than the storied pile that is Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows at Santa Monica. It's so City of Angels, from the brunch-time lemon ricotta egg-white pancakes in FIG — where the bright-eyed clientele are so shiny they might have come straight from the facialist — to the lushly landscaped swimming pool where Doris Day and Cary Grant frolicked in *That Touch of Mink*.

Perched on a manicured bluff overlooking the sun-crumpled Pacific, the property dates back to 1924, when Greta Garbo was an early, long-term guest and Betty Grable was talent-spotted singing in the bar. Over the decades the hotel has grown organically to embrace 302 guestrooms and suites; a 10-storey tower was added in 1959 and for a long while was the tallest building in town. A recent mid-century makeover perfectly captures that seductive LA mood conveyed in movies of the era. In Room 924 there's an Eames chair at the window and sunny balcony from where I can admire the broad, groomed beach and Santa Monica neighbourhood shining brightly beneath slender palm trees.

Attention to detail is spot-on. There are tea pods to supplement the coffee varieties (an odd way to make a brew but better than nothing), an iron and board, even linen water, and scrumptious Le Labo unguents with my name typed on the labels. It's glam but also homey, a feeling that takes hold the moment we pull into the carriage-way off Wilshire Boulevard and under the spreading branches of a monumental Moreton Bay fig. A listed Santa Monica landmark, the tree was traded as a sapling by an Aussie sailor in 1890 to settle a bar bill, or so the story goes. More recently it served as a film backdrop for

some last-minute fillers for *Modern Family*'s Australian-filmed episode.

The Miramar's private garden bungalows date back to Hollywood's golden era and have long been popular with politicians (Senator John F. Kennedy was a fan) and movie stars, including Marilyn Monroe who frequently hid out here. More recently, one of these Baja-style bolt-holes has been transformed into a buzzy bar and lounge that's become one of the hottest spots in Santa Monica. Sadly, though, being a hotel guest won't help you jump the long and snaking queue but if you do manage to get inside, the place fairly heaves with man-buns and lovely young things. (The margaritas are excellent.)

I prefer the slower pace of dinner in FIG, the hotel's light, bright eatery, for which executive chef Yousef Ghalaini does much of his shopping at the Santa Monica

Farmers Market. There's a biodynamic chocolate shop onsite, just off the lobby, where the delicious ZenBunni sweets are fashioned from "artisanal stone ground" cacao and "wild foraged" spices and each box comes with a crystal.

The Miramar is ideally located to explore Santa Monica on foot. Pop over the road to the beach or take a stroll on the famous pier (and perhaps a spin on the solar-powered ferris wheel). Retail therapy is to be had on Montana (between 7th and 17th Streets), where a growing number of independent retailers and local designers are making the move from Venice Beach's touristy Abbot Kinney Boulevard.

"There's a sense of community here and you won't find a ton of tourists," says Jenna Knadel, store manager at the very cool Clare V. You will find good coffee, design

stores, "curl experts", "lash lounges" and Rachel Ashwell's only LA Shabby Chic outlet. In the tiny Yellow Lotus I buy some stylish lacquer earrings that will look right at home in mid-century Room 924 and where the store attendant is very excited to learn I am Australian. Do I know his friend Phillip Noyce or that blonde actress? "Cate Blanchett? Naomi Watts?" He can't remember.

And now I'm off to get my lashes curled and my curls straightened before borrowing a teeny-weeny handbag-sized dog to take to lunch.

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*Christine McCabe was a guest of Qantas and Visit California.*

### CHECKLIST

Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows, 101 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, California; +1 310 576 7777; 1800 720 825; fairmont.com/santa-monica.

### TARIFF

Rooms from \$US349 (\$447).

### GETTING THERE

Qantas operates daily services from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to Los Angeles on a mix of A380 and B747 aircraft. The hotel is 14km from the airport.

More: qantas.com.au.

### CHECKING IN

Popular for weekend wedding parties; Bill Clinton was a guest in the 1990s.

### WHEELCHAIR ACCESS

Yes, in all public areas; four adapted guestrooms.

### BEDTIME READING

*The Teleportation Accident* by Ned Beaman, a novel set in LA, Berlin and Paris.



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Page 2 of 2

### STEPPING OUT

Ashland Hill at 2807 Main Street is one of the coolest, and noisiest, places to eat in Santa Monica. Grab a table in the crowded Wine Garten and tuck into the edamame hummus or signature burger. If you're famous (or just fabulous) you might be lucky enough to score the hottest dessert in town, the "pie you can't buy", banana cream with an Oreo crust.

### BRICKBATS

A little more gluten, a few egg yolks and a kettle and tea bags wouldn't go astray.

### BOUQUETS

Location, location, location, coupled with a beguiling sense of old-world glamour and great views make this a perfect Los Angeles hideaway.



**Clockwise from main:**  
the Fairmont Miramar  
Hotel and Bungalows,  
Santa Monica; the  
Ocean Tower Suite; a  
Living Room