

Santa Monica... More Than Just The Pier

Americans love their history and celebrate each and every anniversary of sometimes the most miniscule things like it is the only thing going on. Their passion is 2nd to none...

Most Kiwis will know Santa Monica as the place where Route 66 from Chicago ends in LA...at the world famous Santa Monica Pier. Here are a few other things that are being celebrated in Santa Monica in 2019/20...in 'age' order.





1 - Camera Obscura - 120-year anniversary:

If you haven't visited the Santa Monica Camera Obscura in Palisades Park, then you have the perfect excuse to do so in 2019. The brainchild of one of Santa Monica's earliest boosters turns 120 years old this year and the Santa Monica Cultural Affairs department has teamed up with the Echo Park Film Center collective to develop a short film titled, 'I'll Be Your Mirror'. The short film is a poetic documentary that utilises analog film tools and animation techniques along with archival imagery and first-person accounts.

A camera obscura, which comes from the Latin phrase "camara obscura" for dark chamber/darkened room, is a device in a shape of a box or a room that lets the light in through a small opening on one side and projects it on the other. The image projected is upside down, while more sophisticated cameras use lenses to project an image upwards and right-side up.

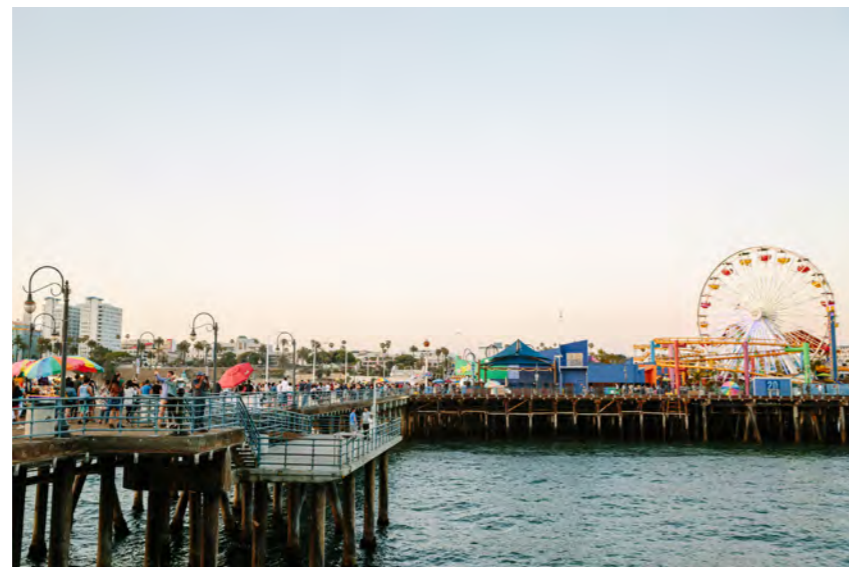
Camera obscuras became immensely popular during the late 1890's before the days of silent films and later, television. It was then that Santa Monica Mayor Robert F. Jones constructed a large camera obscura on the beach as an attraction to help draw more visitors to Santa Monica, which was rapidly becoming a tourist destination. The mayor charged a relatively hefty admission fee: 10

cents...roughly US\$3 today.

Camera Obscura was moved to its current mid-century modern home in Palisades Park in 1955, a building designed by noted architect Weldon J. Fulton and donated to the City of Santa Monica by Marcellus Joslyn. Visitors can experience the optical device Monday through Friday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. and Saturday 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission is free.

2 - Santa Monica Pier - 110-year anniversary:

On September 9th 1909, after sixteen months of construction, the Santa Monica Municipal Pier opened to the public. Thousands of people swarmed onto the 1,600-foot-long concrete pier to enjoy a festive day of band concerts, swimming races and the



novelty of walking above the waters of the Pacific Ocean. While originally built to satisfy the City's sanitation needs, the Pier quickly became a magnet for the fishing community and fuelled the imagination of many local entrepreneurs.

Within just a few years, plans were put forth to build an amusement pier adjacent to the Municipal Pier. Famous carousel manufacturer Charles I.D. Looff arrived in February 1916, purchasing the land immediately south of the Municipal Pier for development.

In 1973, the fate of Santa Monica Pier seemed to be the same as that of its neighbours. The City Council had slated the Pier for destruction in favour of a man-made island, which would host a resort hotel. Santa Monica, often referring to itself as a 'sleepy little beach town' woke up - its citizens in a rage over the thought of losing the last of its famous landmarks. After much publicity and the deliverance of a petition to their attention, the Council rescinded their plans to build the island. Three of the councilmen who had voted to destroy the Piers were overwhelmingly defeated in their run for re-election and their replacements saw to it that the Pier would never be destroyed.

In 1983 Mother Nature was determined to accomplish what the former City Council could not. A pair of violent winter storms destroyed over one-third of the Pier's length.



Gone were the cafes, the bait shop, the rock shop and the harbour patrol station.

3 - Santa Monica's Clock Tower Building - 90-year anniversary:

The Pier in its entirety seemed too badly beaten to survive. But the people, true to their mission in 1973, put forth the effort to save the Pier again. The City formed the Pier Restoration and Development Task Force, which later became the PRC, to oversee the reconstruction and the day-to-day operations of the Pier. By April 1990 the entire western structure had been rebuilt. The harbour patrol station reopened, along with a bait shop and restaurant - today known as Mariasol.

This 12-story Art Deco office tower, built in 1929, was for over forty years the only high-rise in the city. Visible from many parts of Santa Monica, it is the city's most prominent designated landmark.

The Bay Cities Guaranty Building takes its name from the firm that built it to serve as its

headquarters—Bay Cities Guaranty and Loan Association. Mostly forgotten now, the firm was the leading lending institution in Santa Monica during the late 1920s and helped to finance the vast boom in real estate development that came with dramatic population growth during that decade.

The building's location was an excellent choice for the firm's flagship, situated on what was then the principle access route from Los Angeles in the city's central business district. Bay Cities Guaranty selected Walker and Eisen, a prominent Southern California architectural firm known for well-appointed office buildings, banks and hotels, to design the tower.

When the building opened in January 1930 the Outlook newspaper declared it "a step forward in the advancement of the business section of Santa Monica and a vast change in Santa Monica's skyline." At least the latter was true. Soon after the structure opened, Bay Cities Guaranty and Trust Company plunged into financial crisis and folded as the stock market crash of 1929 reverberated around the globe.

4 - Miles Memorial Playhouse - 90-year anniversary:

Located in Reed Park, this historic playhouse has entertained audiences since 1929. Santa Monica Cultural Affairs offers youth programs, as well as the world-class 'Fireside at the Miles' performance series every January and February. The rest of the year, the venue is available for rent to local and regional non-profit performing arts companies.





5 - Hotel Shangri-La - 80-year anniversary:

The Shangri-La Hotel (Hotel Shangri-La), built in 1939, is situated on the southeast corner of Ocean Avenue and Arizona Avenue with the Pacific Ocean a quarter mile to the west. Evoking the form of a grand ocean liner, the seven-story structure was constructed in the Streamline Moderne style with characteristic details including stucco exterior surfaces, emphasis on curvilinear walls, projections above doorways and windows, casement windows, restrained detailing, horizontal accents and flat roofs.

On October 30th 1938, the Los Angeles Times reported that plans were being prepared for one of the 'largest apartment buildings constructed in Southern California in a decade'. A building permit for a new concrete apartment hotel for 62 families was filed on February 15th 1939.

The developer, Tulsa-Santa Monica Corporation/F.A. Gillespie & Sons under the direction of Frank A. Gillespie, had the objective of bringing to Santa Monica 'people of wealth and distinction from every part of the globe'. Roughly one year and \$400,000 later, this objective

became a reality. The Shangri-La Apartment Hotel, advertised as 'America's New Design for Living' opened on May 1st 1940.

Shangri-La is a fictional locale described by author James Hilton in the 1933 novel Lost Horizon. In this novel, Shangri-La was an isolated earthly paradise populated by immortal and ageless residents. Four years after the novel was published, the film adaptation of Lost Horizon, directed by Frank Capra, premiered. In the wake of the Great Depression, Americans were taken with the idyllic imagery and exoticism of Shangri-La.

The property has functioned both as an apartment and hotel, providing extended stay accommodations for guests and as a contemporary daily-rate hotel. During World War II, the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), a military aviation arm of the U.S. Army, used the Shangri-La Hotel as a rehabilitation station. The Los Angeles Times reported on August 8th 1948 that a \$125,000 improvement was completed after the USAAF vacated the property. Despite the change in use that occurred during World War II, the minimally altered exterior of the Shangri-La Hotel exhibits a high level of integrity.

6 - The Aero Theatre - 80-year anniversary:

On January 30th 2020, the Aero Theatre celebrates its 80th anniversary and the 15th anniversary of the Cinematheque's stewardship. The Aero is one of the few remaining single-screen neighborhood theatres in the Los Angeles area. The Aero Theatre's history begins in 1939 with Donald Wills Douglas, aviation pioneer.

Douglas decided to invest in real



estate on Montana Avenue in Santa Monica. The \$45,000 development included a movie theatre and five stores in an area covering 100-by-100-feet. The architect, R.M. Woolpert, designed the structure in a French-Norman style. Construction began in 1939 and was completed 60 days later.

It was named Aero as a reference to the aerospace industry. In the 1940's the theatre showed double features of second-run films that changed three times a week. Admission was 20 cents for adults and 10 cents for children.

The Aero changed hands over the years. The current owners are James S. Rosenfield, a retail real-estate developer who lived near the theatre and was fond of it, and his Chicago based partner, John Bucksbaum, who purchased the theatre on November 8th 1997. A 2015 exhibit featured early photographs of the Aero including photos of its 75th anniversary celebration and rare movie posters.

7 - Chez Jay - 60-year anniversary:

Chez Jay, on Ocean Avenue, has been serving locals, celebrities and visitors since 1959. They have been known as a celebrity hang out, 'dive bar' or 'classy joint' since it opened. Chez Jay is one of the premiere steak and seafood neighbourhood restaurants in all of Southern California. Offering

its unique and friendly atmosphere to everyone including those famous faces that still call Chez Jay their favourite place.

Chez Jay became the social crossroads of an incredible cultural revolution that has impacted movies, television, music, art, politics and more. In recognition of its importance Chez Jay was declared a Santa Monica Historic Landmark in 2012.

Chez Jay is just half a block south of the Santa Monica Pier on the east side of Ocean Avenue right next to the incredible Tongva Park. It is in the heart of the civic centre district, steps from the Third Street Promenade and many of Santa Monica's best hotels and of course, the famous Santa



Monica beaches are just steps away. A stroll to Chez Jay is an easy one.

8 - Third Street Promenade - 30-year anniversary:

On November 8th 1965 Third Street reopened...to pedestrians only...as the Santa Monica Mall. At first, the pedestrian mall did lure shoppers to Third Street, but it ultimately failed to arrest the decline of Santa Monica's business district. The addition of new garages on Second and Fourth streets only compounded problems by killing street life in the surrounding neighbourhood, and the 1980 opening of the indoor Santa Monica Place shopping centre at the mall's southern end accelerated the exodus of shoppers and retailers. By the mid-80's, discount shops and vacant storefronts outnumbered thriving businesses.

The Santa Monica Mall's struggles were anything but atypical. Across the U.S. pedestrian malls installed in the 1960s and '70s to combat 'urban blight' fell on hard times in the '80s and '90s. (A 2013 study pegged their success rate at 11%). Many have since reopened to automobile traffic -- including former pedestrian malls in Burbank, Oxnard and Pomona.

The Santa Monica Mall might have met the same fate, but in 1987 the city opted to double down on the pedestrian-oriented concept. A two-year, \$10-million renovation addressed many of the mall's



shortcomings: a lack of entertainment and dining options and a design that seemed to thwart rather than encourage the flow of foot traffic down the street and into stores.

When the mall reopened September 16th 1989, as the Third Street Promenade, a twenty-foot roadway snaked down its centre, flanked by thirty-foot sidewalks. But though autos did initially share the Promenade during off-peak hours, the renovated mall exceeded all expectations, and swollen crowds of shoppers, diners and moviegoers soon made vehicular traffic impractical. Bollards went up at the Promenade's entrances to keep Third Street car-free. They remain in place to this day.

9 - Bergamot Station - 25-year anniversary:

From 1875 to 1953 the site served as a railroad station for the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad, then later the Santa Monica Air Line. When the trolley cars stopped running in 1953, the site's warehouse buildings housed a celery packing operation, then an ice-making plant and finally a factory for the manufacture of water heaters. Thereafter, the City of Santa Monica purchased the property which then sat abandoned, with plans for it to once again serve as an eventual transit stop, this time for a proposed light rail line running from Los Angeles to Santa Monica.

Plans for the light rail were eventually shelved, so the City sought to find an interesting use for the site. They

approached Wayne Blank, developer and co-owner of the Shoshana Wayne Gallery and asked him to conceive of an artistic use for the property. Blank established Bergamot Station, a nearly 5-acre, campus-like complex, which officially opened on September 17th 1994.

The property returned to its roots on May 20th 2016 with the opening of the Expo Line and the adjacent 26th Street/Bergamot stop situated at the North end of Bergamot Station. In 2018, the Santa Monica City-owned property went under new management with Worthe Real Estate Group.

Today, Bergamot Station is an internationally renowned creative arts complex, boasting some 30 venerable galleries and creative businesses. The fine art galleries present regular and diverse rotating exhibitions featuring artists from all over the globe and across all mediums. Bergamot Station is a unique and unparalleled collection of fine art galleries. Throughout the year Bergamot Station hosts vibrant community and cultural activities and facilitates educational, non-profit and charitable events.

10 -The Lobster - 20-year anniversary (under current ownership):

Situated at the corner of Ocean Boulevard and the Santa Monica Pier, The Lobster seafood restaurant is an internationally recognised dining destination that is as much a part of Santa Monica's history as the pier itself.

Originally opened in 1923, it wasn't until dishwasher-turned-owner, Mateo Castillo took the helm in 1950 that The Lobster became the quintessential 'seafood shack', so beloved by LA residents and tourists alike throughout the 1950's, 60's and 70's.

The Lobster shut its doors for several years in the 1980's and 90's, before being reinvented, expanded and reopened by a family of investors in 1999. While the original structure was incorporated into the new building's main entrance, The Lobster as it stands today is a modernly appointed, two-story cantilevered building with glass walls and seating for hundreds.

As a final stop at the western conclusion of Route 66, The Lobster is an internationally recognised destination for travellers and visitors. Its prime situation at the onset of the Santa Monica Pier, and its sweeping ocean views make it one of Los Angeles's premiere locations to celebrate the special events in life. Meanwhile, The Lobster's menu, designed by renowned Celebrity Chef, Govind Armstrong, is crafted to satisfy the palates of tastemakers and food lovers throughout the region.

www.santamonica.com

