

Manhattan Beach is the birthplace of beach volleyball. The shore teems with thousands of visitors daily—surfers, locals strolling on the shore, sunbathers, and volleyball players—who enjoy 300 days of sunshine a year.



LA Beach Life

GARY SINGH gets acquainted with the varied character and charm of LA's beaches



Photo by Stephen Saks / Lonely Planet Image

Amber sunsets like this have cast their spell on Hollywood stars. Self-confessed beach bums like Cameron Diaz, Kate Hudson, and Matthew McConaughey have been spotted in LA's beaches. And who could forget "Baywatch?" Shot on Malibu and Huntington beaches, the show was one of the world's most watched TV shows.



Photo by Richard Cummins / Lonely Planet Images



Vanilla skies radiate over Huntington Beach (photo above), also known as Surf City. It has the most consistent wave zone in Southern California, and boasts of eight miles of shoreline, the largest uninterrupted beachfront on the west coast. Local surfer champ Charlotte Dellea (photo below) does some pre-surf yoga to enhance her body control. Longer and heavier than the Titanic by 35 tons, The Queen Mary (bottom photo) is one of the world's most luxurious liners. Winston Churchill even stayed in a royal suite during the Second World War.

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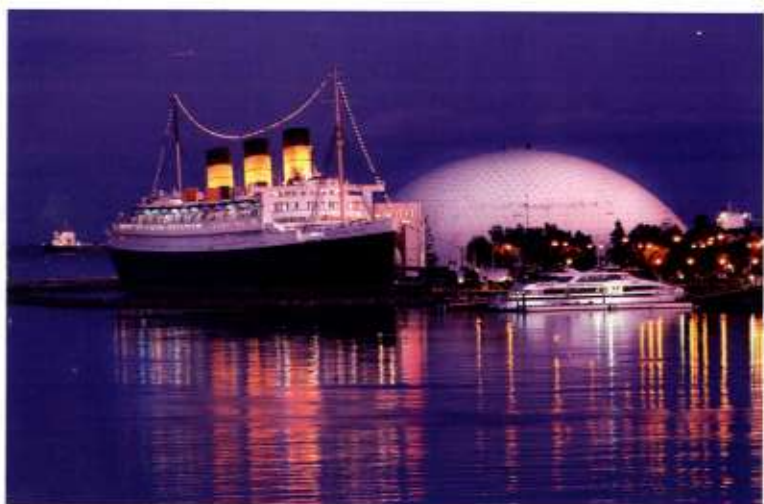
HE QUEEN MARY, POSSIBLY THE MOST luxurious ocean liner in history, sits permanently berthed in Long Beach Harbor, where it first arrived 40 years ago. Originally embarking on her maiden voyage in 1936, The Queen was larger than the Titanic and faster than any other ship. Countless celebrities, monarchs, and later, over 800,000 soldiers during WWII, all had their days upon this mammoth craft.

As I mosey down the length of the deck, I set my sights across the water at the bold cityscape of Long Beach, California, in the background. I am in a postcard, I think, and the entire scene decidedly becomes a perfect launching pad for a lazy sojourn up through the beach cities south of Los Angeles International Airport.

Now included in the National Register of Historic Places, the Queen Mary is one of Long Beach's signature attractions, and these days it constitutes an entire entertainment industry in itself, featuring daily ship tours, a 365-room hotel aboard ship, and a number of restaurants, cafes, banquet halls, and memento shops. Hundreds of weddings take place aboard each year.

Long Beach itself has remarkably turned the corner over the last few years, and old-timers who remember it as a seedy port town will be pleasantly surprised. Looking out over Queensway Bay, I don't even realize at first that this is the place where all the harbor footage for the TV show *CSI: Miami* are taken. Countless movies have also used this panoramic area for stock harbor shots.

"With all the boats and the apartments in the background, you can see why a lot of movies are shot here," local expert Bob Maguglin tells me, adding that every Wednesday, when doctors have their days off, like clockwork they come out and sail their boats. "It's called Wet Wednesday," he says.



Photos of Huntington and Charlotte Dellea by Mark Dimalanta; Queen Mary photo courtesy of Long Beach Tourism

Beach Vibe

The Los Angeles beach area each has its own vibe. Malibu, in Western Los Angeles County, is home to numerous movie stars and is the most picturesque with white sandy beaches and famous sunsets. Mansions creep up into the hills above the stretch of Pacific Coast Highway below. Eastward towards LA proper, one finds Pacific Palisades, another affluent community straddling the Santa Monica Mountains. Coming into The Bay, one finds Santa Monica, home to a famous pier district of the same name, as well as Pacific Park. Tourists flock to this area for the laidback beachfront, the rides, shopping, nightlife, and entertainment. Right next door sits Venice Beach, the funkiest beach community in all of California. It's a topsy-turvy place where sidewalk vendors hawk their wares and all sorts of Bohemian personalities crawl out of the woodwork to parade up and down the oceanfront walkway. Street performers and circus sideshow-acts set up shop on a regular basis. The South Bay Beaches are smaller and more intimate, each with its own agenda, Hermosa, Manhattan, and Redondo Beach being the three most common. Finally, Orange County, Huntington Beach is the surfing capital of Southern California—"Surf City," as the tagline goes.



Because of its wide and smooth shore, Redondo Beach is also a perfect place for beach volleyball. Olympic gold medalist Kerri Walsh hails from Redondo and must have practiced her spikes here.

Long Beach is also known as one of the water sports capitals of the US. Swimming, kiteboarding, jet skiing, and all sorts of offshore aqua-based exploits are part of the social fabric here.

Every beach city along this particular stretch of Southern California has its own character and charm, and while Long Beach rightfully claims to be host to world-class conventions—plus a Grand Prix and the most luxurious ocean liner the world has ever seen—Redondo Beach has Pete the Pelican and Old Tony's on the Pier. So, naturally, that's where the muse of lazy travel directs me next.


Redondo is old school. It is a laid back, uncrowded place. Sure, there's a 10K marathon, a quintessential lobster festival, and probably more beach volleyball than you'd witness anywhere, but despite it all, Redondo soaks in cozy, hassle-free charm. The locals are proud of the town's quirky history and they are dedicated to ecological preservation. Several independent boat-ride businesses set up shop in the harbor and a wealth of waterfront eateries dot the landscape. Redondo Beach would also not be itself without Old Tony's on the Pier, a landmark restaurant and bar overlooking the entire marina.

A throwback to the 1950s, Tony's is named after Tony Trutanich, the original owner, and his family still runs the place. A WWI veteran, Trutanich was a personal friend of both Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. "When people find Redondo, they really feel that even though it has a real slow-looking pace to it, they love it because it's not plastic-and-glass," explains JoAnn Turk, the Marina's director of marketing. "It's more real and there's more real people going around. All these fishermen and all the operators of these small businesses, they all have distinctive personalities. That's what I see as the beach culture here. Hermosa is more of a partying atmosphere, Manhattan Beach is a little more upscale."

Those last two cities border Redondo and each one presents its own slice of SoCal beach culture. And all three are only a few miles from LAX.

One of Hermosa's major attractions is the Hermosa Shorts Film Festival, which runs every August and features everything one would expect from an independent film-gathering on a beach: models, celebrities, over-the-top alcohol promotions, nightclubs, outdoor screenings, and lots of sand. Nearby Manhattan Beach is an upscale community with stately houses and tree-lined streets, a place where many celebrities and famous athletes have resided over the years. ■



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