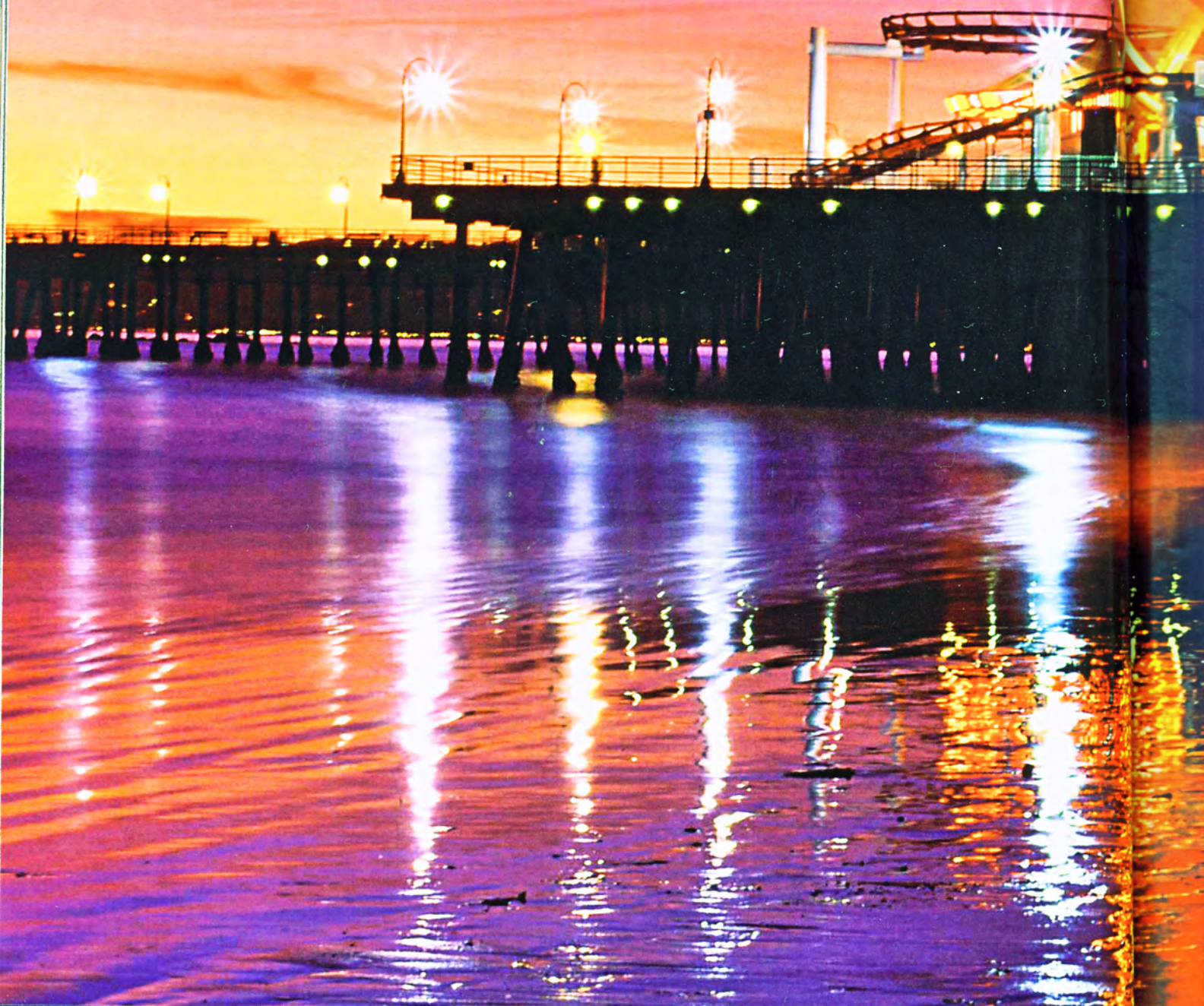


A HIP KIND OF HEAVEN

GARY SINGH shows us Los Angeles' vibrant triple treat that makes it one of the coolest cities in Southern California. After all, it's not named City of Angels for nothing





It's not just all fun. The Pacific Wheel at the Pacific Park is the world's only solar-powered ferris wheel. So while you're riding in it at daytime and enjoying the views of the Pacific Ocean, the wheel is actually generating electricity—without buttons or switches to control it.

(Photo courtesy of SMCVB)



Clockwise from top left: The chic poolside of Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel; enjoying the fun and casual vibe at Santa Monica pier; the only LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified garage in the US; interesting exercise equipment are found in Santa Monica Beach for the fitness buff.
(Photos by Sandra Stocker)



A block away from Santa Monica beach is Main Street, where a long row of various boutiques, restaurants, and cafes will surely keep you busy (Photo by Greg Peterson).

Ask a few million residents what Los Angeles means to them, and at least five million answers will erupt. Tourists will add even more reasons why they continue to descend upon the City of Angels. Since choices are tough and many good things come in threes anyway, allow this author to present a trio of traditions that only Los Angeles could be proud of. We're talking about the beach, the skyscrapers and the literary underbelly. As they say in SoCal, "That's so LA."

When Angelenos declare they're "going to the beach," more often than not, Santa Monica is the beach they're talking about and that city's natives refer to their shoreline as "LA's beach." This is where much of the television series *Baywatch* was filmed and its white sandy beaches constantly attract tourists of all shapes and sizes. Since the beaches are so huge, nowadays anyone can even hire a "beach butler" who will bring towels, set up beach chairs, pour beverages, and even schlep peoples' belongings. With three and a half miles of pure beach, that's a job one only finds in Los Angeles.

Just last month, the Santa Monica pier celebrated its 100th anniversary. Several ocean barges lined the beach, each with its own fireworks apparatus for the Centennial Sky Show Spectacular. The world-renowned attraction also now features the planet's only solar-powered Ferris wheel. This month, Cirque de Soleil, currently celebrating its 25th anniversary, returns to the Santa Monica pier, taking place under the Grand Chapi-

teau. Since Santa Monica was one of the first US locations the Quebec-based circus troupe ever performed in, it's a special occasion for everybody involved.

The Third Street Promenade comprises Santa Monica's main pedestrian-only shopping drag, where block upon block of open-air retail and dining come together. Various street performers and sidewalk oddities populate the place on a nightly basis.

Getting to Santa Monica is easy, as it's only eight miles from LAX. A taxi costs US\$30, but a direct city bus is only 75 cents. For accommodations, Santa Monica offers 37 hotels with more than 3,500 hotel rooms, ranging from deluxe to the absolute bottom of the barrel. There's even a cheap hostel located right next to a brick structure that is the oldest building in the city. From Santa Monica, one only has to drive up Highway 10 for about 15 miles to get to the skyscraper area of Los Angeles proper—a route also taking the visitor right past the southwestern edge of downtown, where it fades into South Park, site of the high-flying and flamboyant LA Live project.

Perhaps no recent spectacle could best symbolize the grandiose-on-purpose ambition of the City of Angels than LA Live, a US\$2.5 billion mixed-use sports and entertainment development comprising six city blocks across the street from the Los Angeles Convention Center and the Staples Center. Designed to catalyze new downtown real estate, as well as inject some life into an underachieving convention center, LA Live's initial phase debuted in 2007 with the opening of the Nokia Theatre, a



7,100-seat, 210,000-square-foot concert venue that is now the permanent home of the Emmy Awards, the American Music Awards, and the ESPYs. Other venues followed in 2008, including ESPN's new West Coast broadcast headquarters, the brand-new Grammy Museum, Lucky Strike Bowling Lanes, and Club Nokia, a smaller music venue similar to House of Blues.

Opening in 2010 will be the staggering 54-story JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton Hotel and Residences, both on the same property. The Ritz-Carlton will be a 123-room "all-club" hotel on the upper floors of the tower, along with a luxurious collection of one-, two-, and three-bedroom homes with floor-to-ceiling windows. California governor and former Hollywood muscleman Arnold Schwarzenegger has already purchased one of the residences, which will undoubtedly command the best views in all of Southern California.

It doesn't take much for the spectacle to sink in. All one has to do is wander through the LA Live courtyard or promenade, pre- or post-sporting or music event, or on any jam-packed weekend night. Giant video screens abound. Hordes of bored teenagers just show up and hang out. Throngs of sports fans usually congregate at ESPN Zone, a huge two-story sports bar and restaurant with uncountable amounts of high-definition TVs including miniature private screens at many booths. Other opulent eateries include Katsuya, a high-end Japanese restaurant, as well as Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar.

Such a grand elaborate project wouldn't make sense, especially in Los Angeles, without the Grammy Museum, which opened its doors in December of 2008. It features four floors of cutting edge exhibits celebrating all forms of enduring music. Although smaller than those previously mentioned facilities, the Grammy Museum still takes at least an entire afternoon to fully explore. And it's much more than just a museum. For example, various public programs take place 50 times per year, including town hall meetings, artist-in-residence programs, emerging artist showcases, and several other events. The museum already featured a special exhibit dedicated to Michael Jackson and when the King of Pop passed away, the exhibit was extended indefinitely.

But Los Angeles is not all glitz and glamor. In fact, some of the most intriguing historical tidbits of the city emerge post mortem through the efforts of Esotouric, a tour company specializing in underground literary bus escapades. Patrons meet at a prescheduled location, bring their own food and board the bus for the four-hour tours.

Charles Bukowski, everyone's favorite boozing laureate of lowlife, wrote novels from the dive bars,

junkie hotels, and pawn shops of East Hollywood and downtown LA, so Esotouric's "Haunts of a Dirty Old Man: Charles Bukowski's LA" bus tour takes attendees through those exact places he mentioned in his books, adding some hysterical and brainy commentary about his life's work. Another tour, "Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles: In a Lonely Place," explores the crime-ridden streets that appear in that author's fiction. If you're a Philip Marlowe fan, the Raymond Chandler tour is for you. Even popular and contemporary folks like author James Ellroy have lent their talents to Esotouric's adventures. A few years ago, Ellroy hosted his own special Esotouric tour of the crime-ridden neighborhoods that inspired his famous novels, *LA Confidential*, *The Black Dahlia*, and more.

CITY OF ANGELS


Los Angeles got its name from one of the first groups of Spanish explorers who settled beside a river. They called the river El Rio de Nuestra Señora la Reyna de Los Angeles de Porciuncula or The River of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels of Porciuncula. Over time, it became known as the City of Angels, and by April 4, 1850, it officially became the City of Los Angeles.

Stay

After a US\$30-million redesign, the classic Hotel Shangri-La in Santa Monica (<http://www.shangrila-hotel.com>) now exudes even more art deco drama. Situated on Ocean Avenue overlooking the sea, the property offers 71 elegant guest rooms with all the amenities. In downtown Los Angeles, the Millennium Biltmore Hotel (<http://www.millenniumhotels.com>) remains a bastion of old-school elegance and a regular place for weddings, pageants, corporate events and more. Built in 1923, the Biltmore was home to the Academy Awards during the late '20s and '30s.

Dine

Santa Monica overflows with restaurants. What's repeatedly referred to as the World's Greatest Hamburger is located at the legendary Father's Office (www.fathersoffice.com), where crowds consistently line up to get in. Not too far away sits Bottega Louie's Restaurant and Gourmet Market (<http://www.bottegalouie.com>), featuring a rollicking Italian atmosphere and marble décor.

 PAL flies between Manila and Los Angeles daily. Swingaround tour packages are available. For more information, call PAL reservations office (+632 855 8888 and +632 855 7777) or log on to www.philippineairlines.com.



Mabuhay

>> www.philippineairlines.com



LOS ANGELES
A Hip Kind of Heaven

Gone Native in Ormoc • Camiguin Calling • Caving in Mulu • Intramuros