

Frommer's

Los Angeles

2005

by Matthew Richard Poole

Here's what the critics say about Frommer's:

"Amazingly easy to use. Very portable, very complete."

—Booklist

"Detailed, accurate, and easy-to-read information for all price ranges."

—Glamour Magazine

"Hotel information is close to encyclopedic."

—Des Moines Sunday Register

"[*Frommer's Los Angeles*] . . . Filled with frank reviews of the latest dining, shopping and nightlife spots, this hip guidebook to the nation's second largest city covers TV tapings, cemetery tours, scenic drives, star-gazing opportunities, celebrity drive-bys and other L.A. highlights, with side trips to Disneyland, Catalina and the Orange County Coast planned out as well."

—Paper Clips, Bridgewater, NJ



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About the Author

Matthew Richard Poole, a native Californian, has authored more than two dozen travel guides to California, Hawaii, and abroad, and is a regular contributor to radio and television travel programs, including numerous guest appearances on the award-winning *Bay Area Backroads* television show. Before becoming a full-time travel writer and photographer, he worked as an English tutor in Prague, ski instructor in the Swiss Alps, and scuba instructor in Maui. Highly allergic to office buildings and mortgage payments, he spends most of his time traveling the globe and searching for new adventures. His other Frommer's titles include *California*, *California from \$70 a Day*, *San Francisco from \$70 a Day*, the *Irreverent Guide to San Francisco*, and *Portable Disneyland*.

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—Matthew R. Poole

An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

Other Great Guides for Your Trip:

Frommer's Irreverent Guide to Los Angeles

Los Angeles & Disneyland® For Dummies

Frommer's Portable Disneyland®

Frommer's California

California For Dummies

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

- Finds** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
- Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
- Kids** Best bets for kids, and advice for the whole family
- Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
- Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
- Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
- Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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Now that you have the guidebook to a great trip, visit our website at www.frommers.com for travel information on more than 3,000 destinations. With features updated regularly, we give you instant access to the most current trip-planning information available. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the best prices on airfares, accommodations, and car rentals—and you can even book travel online through our travel booking partners. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the following:

- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Los Angeles

L.A. and Madonna have a lot in common: They're always one step ahead of the trends. Trying to keep up with the constant changes in this amorphous metropolis is a full-time job because what was *in* last year is probably *out* this year. But fear not, fellow adventurers, because I've crammed this new edition with dozens of new clubs, restaurants, hotels, special moments, and insider tips.

ACCOMMODATIONS It seems like wherever you turn, L.A.'s hotels are upping the ante with multimillion-dollar face-lifts and mood-enhancing feng shui elements. The new **Ambrose**, 1255 20th St., Santa Monica (☎ 877/262-7673), for example, blends the Arts and Crafts movement with soothing Asian influences such as a tranquil Japanese garden, a koi pond, and trickling fountains. Rates start at a very reasonable \$165 for an upscale boutique, so book a room while it's still a bargain.

Also new to this edition is **Le Merigot**, 1740 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica (☎ 800/228-9290), a low-key luxury hotel and spa that's right on the ocean. Package deals include convertible Porsche Boxster or BMW Z4 Roadster rentals, surfing lessons, and full-session Swedish massages—if you can drag yourself out of your “Cloud Nine” bed.

If you like big hotel rooms with great views, the regal **Park Hyatt Los Angeles**, 2151 Avenue of the Stars, Century City (☎ 800/778-7477), is all over it. The private balconies have great views of the city, the location is

central to everything, and the executive suites are so big that I didn't even notice the other bathroom.

I also discovered a great budget motel: The **Farmer's Daughter**, 115 South Fairfax Ave., Midtown (☎ 800/334-1658). It's a cheery little lodge with lots of bright colors, a country-kitsch theme, and plenty of free perks. It's right across the street from the Farmers Market—easy access to an entire block of inexpensive foodstuffs, great shopping, and some wild weekend entertainment

See chapter 5 for complete details.

DINING It's been an insane year for the L.A. restaurant scene, with so many excellent restaurants opening in the past 12 months that they're calling this the “Golden Age” of dining in L.A. I couldn't get them all in this year, but I've included 10 of the best, such as **Le Dôme**, 8720 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood (☎ 310/659-6919), an old Sunset Strip hangout of Frank Sinatra that recently reopened after a \$2 million makeover by designer *du moment* Dodd Mitchell. Feast on Japanese black pig baby back ribs and Kumamoto oysters with L.A.'s pretty people at the outdoor terrace while the tourists walk by.

Maple Drive, 345 N. Maple Dr., Beverly Hills (☎ 310/274-9800), has a new look and a new menu by chef Eric Klein, the former executive sous-chef at Spago. Celebrities and entertainment bigwigs arrive nightly to dine on Klein's signature thin-crustured tarte flambées while listing to live jazz.

I finally made it to **La Cachette**, 10506 Santa Monica Blvd., Century City (☎ 310/470-4992), a very elegant and romantic French restaurant presided over by Jean François Meteigner, one of America's most influential French chefs. His *cuisine naturelle* is light on cream and butter but heavy on flavor (the braised Kurobuta black pork shank with braised baby back ribs and Banyul vinegar sauce is *le bomb*).

Being a fan of a good steak, I've included two great steakhouses this year: **Mastro's Steakhouse**, 246 N. Canon Dr., Beverly Hills (☎ 310/888-8782), where even big eaters have trouble finishing the Fred Flintstone-size slabs of hand-cut USDA beef; and **Arnie Morton's Steakhouse**, 735 S. Figueroa at Seventh, Downtown (☎ 213/553-4566), a classic old-fashioned Midwestern-style steakhouse where tuxedoed waiters perform show-and-tell presentations of the main courses.

Some of the finest and most authentic Mexican food I've ever had is being served at **Frida**, 236 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills (☎ 310/278-7666), a newcomer to the Beverly Hills dining scene (the mole dishes alone are worth the drive over here).

Joachim Splichal's **Patina**, 141 S. Grand Ave., Downtown (☎ 213/972-3331), has relocated to the new Walt Disney Concert Hall and is more popular than ever. The après-show crowd creates quite a din as they dine on sautéed black-truffled Brussels sprouts with a sweet potato puree and crispy skinned yellowtail snapper served on a bed of fava bean puree.

If you love sushi as much as I do, you're in luck: I've included two new Asian restaurants that are fantastic. **Koi**, 730 N. La Cienega Blvd., West Hollywood (☎ 310/659-9449), is one of L.A.'s hottest new restaurants, with regulars ranging from George Clooney to Jennifer Garner, the

Osbornes, and Demi and Ashton. Start with the baked crab roll with edible rice paper and a glass of Koi sake.

Dodd Mitchell strikes again at the opium den-like **Zen Grill & Sake Lounge**, 1051 Broxton Ave., Westwood Village (☎ 310/209-1994). Bathed in a soothing amber glow, this sexy new restaurant serves wonderful pan-Asian cuisine and more than 50 brands of premium sake.

See chapter 6 for complete details.

WHAT TO SEE & DO There's all kinds of exciting new stuff to see and do in L.A. in this edition. **Universal Studios Hollywood** (☎ 818/662-3801) has a new thrill ride called **Revenge of the Mummy**, a super-high-tech indoor roller coaster with really creepy animatronics Warrior Mummies that drop down and scare the hell out of you. **Six Flags Magic Mountain** (☎ 661/255-4500) beefed up its thrill ride selection as well with **Scream!**, a coaster in which riders are strapped into a "flying chair" and raced upside down seven times at 65 mph.

The stunningly beautiful **Walt Disney Concert Hall**, First Street and Grand Avenue (☎ 323/850-2000), design by world-renowned architect Frank O. Gehry, now offers 45-minute self-guided audio walking tours narrated by actor John Lithgow.

I'm not sure if they consulted the Singing Cowboy on this one, but the Autry Museum of Western Heritage has been renamed the **Museum of the American West**, 4700 Western Heritage Way (☎ 323/667-2000). It's still one of the country's finest and most comprehensive museums of the American West.

Red Line Tours (☎ 323/402-1074) is now offering two 90-minute great walking tours of Downtown L.A.: the Inside Historic Downtown L.A. tour and the Contemporary Downtown L.A. tour, which includes the new Walt Disney Concert Hall

Paramount Pictures, 5555 Melrose Ave. (☎ 323/956-1777), the only major studio still located in Hollywood, is once again offering a 2-hour walking tour around its Hollywood headquarters on a first-come, first-served basis, giving visitors a real-life, behind-the-scenes look at working movie and television facilities in day-to-day operation.

I've also added a few fun day trips, including visiting scenic **Topanga Canyon**, where the itinerary includes guided horseback riding, great shopping for vintage clothes and accessories, and plenty of cold margaritas; betting on the horses while enjoying a picnic in the infield of the historic **Santa Anita Racetrack**, 285 W. Huntington Dr., Arcadia (☎ 626/574-7223); and spending the day lounging under a big oak while watching polo matches at the **Will Rogers Polo Club**, 1501 Will Rogers State Park Rd., Pacific Palisades (☎ 310/573-5000).

On a final note, the **Griffith Observatory** is still closed for a major renovation and expansion, and probably won't reopen until 2006. However, a temporary **Griffith Observatory Satellite**, located just south of the Los Angeles Zoo at 4800 Western Heritage Way (☎ 323/664-1181), hosts planetarium shows and provides a telescope to view the moon and planets at night.

See chapter 7 for complete details.

SHOPPING This year I enlisted my resident L.A. shopping expert, Tracy Larrua, to fill me in on all the hot new stores. There are far too many new entries to list here, but some highlights include: the new **TASCHEN** bookstore in Beverly Hills, 354 N. Beverly Dr. (☎ 310/274-4300), displaying a wide selection of art, design, and erotic books within a dramatic interior by French designer celebre Philippe Starck; **Cloud's**, 2719 Main St. (☎ 310/399-2059), where you'll find the most

heavenly scented candles; **Arts & Letters**, 2665 Main St. (☎ 310/314-7345), a stationery haven that includes invitations by the owner herself, Marilyn Golin; **Sun Precautions**, 1600 Montana Ave. (☎ 310/451-5858), specializing in 100% UV protection apparel; and **GR2**, 2062 Sawtelle Blvd. (☎ 310/445-9276), and **Giant Robot**, 2015 Sawtelle Blvd. (☎ 310/478-1819), two Japantown stores specializing in Asian-American pop-culture items ranging from T-shirts and books to music, stationery, and toys.

I've also added new stores along my favorite shopping street, **Abbot Kinney Boulevard**: For one-of-a-kind designed jewelry (aka "metals with an edge"), check out **Nagual**, 1326 Abbott Kinney Blvd. (☎ 310/396-8500). **Strange Invisible Perfumes**, 1209 Abbot Kinney Blvd. (☎ 310/314-1505), can make a custom scent to match your own. **Firefly**, 1413 Abbot Kinney Blvd. (☎ 310/450-6288), is one store you can go into to find that great baby gift, stationery, books, quirky handbags, and clothing.

And, of course, there's always a new mall to include. The **Westside Pavilion**, 10800 West Pico Blvd. (☎ 310/474-6255), located on the west side of Los Angeles, attracts a very fashion-conscious crowd with a taste for the finest in women's fashions, handbags, and shoes. It boasts a roster of more than 160 specialty shops and its own Westside Pavilion Cinemas.

See chapter 9 for complete details.

AFTER DARK I'll tell you, there's no shortage of weird and wonderful in this city. I finally checked out a few late-night L.A. legends I've been wanting to visit, such as **World on Wheels**, 4645½ Venice Blvd., at San Vicente Blvd. (☎ 323/933-3333), a cavernous roller rink (ca. 1970s) with sparkly disco balls where guest DJs spin disco, classic, Top 40, and gospel roller boogie. You can even drink beer

while you skate and bowl. **Karaoke Night at the Farmers Market**, 6333 W. Third St. (☎ 323/549-2140), is another insider hotspot where talented wannabes meet and compete at an open-air beer-and-wine bar (it's a surreal scene). On Friday nights, producer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist legend **Jon Brion** plays at **Largo**, 432 N. Fairfax Ave. (☎ 323/852-1073), making up songs on the spot, usually from titles shouted from the audience.

Other nightclubs I've included are **The Avalon Hollywood**, 1735 N. Vine St., Hollywood (☎ 323/462-8900), a good place to imbibe, dance, and cavort until the wee hours of the morning; **Babe's & Ricky's Inn**, 4339 Leimert Blvd., Leimert Park (☎ 323/295-9112), where great blues guitarists are the rule, not the exception; and **Nacional**, 1645 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood (☎ 323/962-7712), the hottest dance floor in Hollywood and a magnet for the hip and gorgeous crowd.

As for cool bars, newcomers to this edition include **Hank's Bar**, 840 S. Grand Ave. (☎ 213/396-7718), a classic Downtown watering hole on the ground floor of the Stillwell Hotel with battered booths and well-liquored patrons; and **The Standard Downtown**, 550 S. Flower St. (☎ 213/892-8080), an ultrahip rooftop hotel bar where lovely ladies sip exotic cocktails amid waterbeds and bent-plastic loungers.

And be sure to catch a movie at the "The World's Most Private Public Theater," the new **ArCLight Cinemas**, 6360 W. Sunset Blvd. (☎ 323/464-4226), where each seat is reserved in advance, ushers keep it quiet, late arrivals are forbidden, and there's even a full bar and lounge serving appetizers.

See chapter 10 for complete details.

SIDE TRIPS FROM L.A. Everything new in the side trips chapter is all about romance and adventure, starting with **The Sky Room** restaurant in Long Beach, 40 S. Locust Ave. (☎ 562/983-2703). You'll get a sense of what fine dining must have been like during Hollywood's Golden Age at this romantic retro supper club, where spiffily dressed doormen in top hats and coattails escort arriving diners to the penthouse-level restaurant.

Farther south in Laguna Beach is a spectacular new 30-acre resort called **Montage**, 30801 South Coast Hwy. (☎ 888/715-6700). This neo-Craftsman-style hotel and spa is right on the beach, and everything about it is spacious, immaculate, tasteful, and expensive—but worth the splurge.

Also new to this edition is the **San Ysidro Ranch**, 900 San Ysidro Lane (☎ 800/368-6788), near Santa Barbara. Considered one of the most romantic destinations in the world, it's been a hideaway for the rich and famous for decades and was the honeymoon retreat for John and Jackie Kennedy.

As for the adventure part, I risked my life to review **Barnstorming Adventures** (☎ 800/759-5667), an aviation company in Carlsbad that gives nonpilots the chance to fly in a 1920s-era biplane ride and to actually fly—as in, control the stick—a World War II fighter plane. Other toys on the tarmac include a pair of modern prop-driven dogfighters that you fly as well, and a beautifully restored Beech Belle C-45 WWII transport plane that seats eight.

The Best of Los Angeles

Like Las Vegas, the allure of L.A.—for better or for worse—is undeniable. Los Angelenos know their city will never have the sophisticated style of Paris or the historical riches of London, but they cheerfully lay claim to living in the most entertaining city in the United States, if not the world. It really is warm and sunny most days of the year, movie stars actually do live and dine among the commoners, and you can't swing a cellphone without hitting a roller-blading blonde in Venice Beach.

This part of the L.A. mystique—however exaggerated it may be—truly does exist, and it's not hard to find. In fact, it's fitting that L.A. is home to the world's first amusement park because it regularly feels like one, as the line between fantasy and reality is often obscured. From the unattainable, anachronistic glamour of Beverly Hills to the vibrant street energy of Venice, each of the city's diverse neighborhoods is like a mini-theme park, offering its own kind of unique adventure. Drive down Sunset Boulevard and you'll see what I mean: The billboards are racier, the fashions trendier, the cars fancier, the bodies sexier, the sun brighter, and the energy higher than any place you've ever been. Darlin', you ain't in Kansas anymore—you're in LA-LA land. Let's go play.

1 Frommer's Favorite L.A. Experiences

- **Driving Along the Coast:** Driving along the sunny coastline with the top down and your hair blowing in the warm wind is the quintessential Southern California experience—one that never loses its appeal, even for the natives. The ocean has a spirit all its own in every season of the year: August's smog-free respite from the glaring inland heat, January's surprise warmth under wide blue skies, and the first warm breezes of summer in June. Stop wherever you fancy: a Malibu cantina, the famous Santa Monica pier, or a South Bay beach—a casual cruise along the shoreline is good for the soul. BYO Mustang convertible.
- **Watching One of Your Favorite TV Sitcoms Being Taped:** Alternately boring and fascinating (the old hurry-up-and-wait syndrome), being in the audience is your chance to wander the soundstage, marvel at the cheesy three-wall sets that look so real on TV, and get an inside look at the bloopers that never make it to broadcast—and are often far more entertaining than the scripted dialogue. See p. 201.
- **Cruising Sunset Boulevard:** It's a must for first-time visitors because you'll see a cross-section of everything that is L.A.: legendary clubs, studios, hotels, and zip codes that you'll instantly recognize from the silver screen and TV shows. The journey ends with a trip to Malibu's fabled beaches, where those classy *Baywatch* episodes are filmed (how perfect). See p. 160.

- **Dining at Spago (or The Ivy or Koi or Maple Drive):** Far less expensive than a day at Universal Studios or Disneyland, dining at one of L.A.'s ubertrendy A-list celebrity haunts is an experience to be filed under "Only in L.A." Hear dialogue straight out of *The Player* while eating fine food prepared for the world's pickiest eaters ("I can't eat *that!* Take it away."). See chapter 6.
- **Going to the Getty Center:** See the result of unlimited funds and very expensive taste at this multifaceted cultural center looming large over the city. The ultramodern facility, more airy and inviting than it looks from below, features a museum housing the impressive art collection of deep-pocketed industrialist J. Paul Getty, a post-modern garden, and breathtaking views of L.A. A sleekly high-tech funicular whisks you from freeway level to this city in the clouds. Best of all, it's free (J. G. don't need yo' money). See p. 167.
- **Paying Your Respects at the Cemetery of the Stars:** Spend some down time with Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Karen Carpenter, and all their famous pals at L.A.'s most enduring celebrity hangouts. Six public cemeteries showcase the final performances of Bette Davis, Lucille Ball, Marilyn Monroe, and dozens more famous names. It's so popular that people are just dying to get here (or am I being too cryptic?). See p. 202.
- **Going Gidget:** This is, after all, L.A.—so get thy buttocks to a beach. Watch a volleyball tournament in Manhattan Beach or the world's vainest weight lifters pumping themselves up at Venice Beach. Surfers carve waves at Malibu, and families pitch umbrellas at Zuma. Pack swim trunks and plenty of sunscreen. See chapter 7.
- **Visiting the "Happiest Place on Earth," the Disneyland Resort:** Go on a weekday to avoid the crowds or during the off season, between January and April. And fer gawd's sake, use that new FASTPASS system unless you enjoy standing in line. The resort's worldwide appeal is evident in the virtual United Nations of revelers traipsing through Adventureland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and the Disney's California Adventure park. And don't forget to constantly hum the "It's a Small World" song that's now stuck in your head. See chapter 8.
- **Spending a Day Downtown:** If you're looking for a healthy dose of ethnic culture, you'll find it in Downtown L.A. Take a self-guided tour of the mind-blowing Walt Disney Concert Hall or cutting-edge Museum of Contemporary Art, stop in for a snack at the bustling Grand Central Market, pick up some inexpensive Mexican handicrafts along colorful and historic Olvera Street, and have dim sum in Chinatown. See chapter 7.
- **Taking an Atypical Tour of the City:** If you think guided tours are for lazy-butts, consider a self-guided bicycle tour through the flat, landscaped streets of Beverly Hills, Hollywood, or Venice Beach. Or how about an only-in-California jogging tour of homes of the rich and famous? See p. 200.
- **Taking a Sunset Margarita Horse Ride:** Whoever thought this one up is a genius: Drive to Sunset Ranch Hollywood Stables in Griffith Park, hop on a big ol' horse, and take a scenic ride through the park to a Mexican restaurant in Burbank. Eat, drink, and be Mary Hartman; then ride back to the ranch under warm, starry skies. Viva L.A.! See p. 165.

- **Power Shopping:** You'll see "I'd Rather Be Shopping at Nordstrom" license-plate frames on Lexuses all over L.A., evidence that spending money is a major pastime here. Whether it's \$5 vintage bowling shirts, \$10,000 Beverly Hills baubles, or anything in between, you're sure to find it in L.A.'s cornucopia of consumerism. My favorite shopping zones are the eclectic shops along Abbot Kinney Boulevard, the endless ethnic oddities at the Grand Central Market in Downtown L.A., and the ultratrendy stores such as GR2 and Giant Robot along Sawtelle Boulevard in Japantown. And only in L.A. will you find great deals on costumes from famous movies, TV show wardrobes, and castoffs from celebrity closets (flip to the "Dressing the Part: Where to Find Hollywood's Hand-Me-Downs" sidebar on p. 254 for details). See chapter 9.
- **Strolling Wilshire Boulevard's Museum Row:** Natural history meets pop culture meets modern art with the La Brea Tar Pits, the Petersen Automotive Museum, the Craft & Folk Art Museum, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art all shoulder to shoulder in the heart of L.A. The only problem is that it's too much to see in a day. Pick your favorite for an in-depth visit, and just browse the bookstore/gift shops at the others. See chapter 7.
- **Visiting Venice's Ocean Front Walk:** You haven't visited L.A. properly until you've rented some skates in Venice and embarrassed yourself in front of thousands while taking in the human carnival around you. Nosh on a Jody Maroni's haute dog, buy some knock-off sunglasses, and realize how pathetically out of shape you are compared to all the tan and trim locals—all while enjoying the wide beach, blue sea, and assorted performers along the boardwalk. Can't skate? Sissies can rent a bicycle and pedal along the bike path. See p. 162.
- **Taking a Gourmet Picnic to the Hollywood Bowl:** What better way to spend a typically warm L.A. evening than under the stars with a picnic basket, a bottle of wine, and some world-class entertainment? In addition to being the summer home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Bowl hosts visiting performers ranging from chamber music quartets to jazz greats, to folk humorists. The imposing white Frank Lloyd Wright–designed band shell always elicits appreciative gasps from first-time Bowl-goers. See p. 272.
- **Attending a Concert at the Walt Disney Concert Hall:** No, not boring. Amazing. You would have to fly to Spain to see Frank O. Gehry's other architectural masterpiece. The dramatically curvaceous stainless-steel exterior houses one of the most acoustically perfect concert halls in the world. Built with a lot of Disney money but without a trace of Goofiness. See p. 168.
- **Taking a Studio Tour:** It's why you're vacationing in L.A.—to see where movie magic is being made. Studio tours are an entertaining opportunity to see the actual stage sets for shows such as *ER* and *West Wing* (sometimes during filming), and you never know who you're going to see emerging from his or her Star Wagon. See p. 198.
- **Cruising Mulholland Drive:** Cruise past the homes with million-dollar views, and then pull over at the public viewing platform to see the splayed-out city yourself. It's even more romantic

at night, when the lights of the city and the valley twinkle below. See p. 195.

- **Learning How to Surf:** What could be more fun during your L.A. vacation than learning how surf on the same breaks that the Beach Boys surfed? Surfing schools such as Pure Surfing Experience in Manhattan Beach will guarantee you'll get up on a long board and be surfing the easy waves in one short lesson. See p. 213.
- **Flying a WWII Fighter Aircraft:** Don your parachute, strap yourself into the 600-horsepower fighter aircraft, and prepare to

have your mind blown as you (yes, you) perform aerobatic maneuvers—loops, rolls, lazy-8s—high above the Carlsbad coastline. It's an experience you'll never forget. See p. 290.

- **Visiting Santa Catalina Island:** Taking a day trip to Catalina makes for a most adventurous day: a scenic boat ride; oodles of shopping, snorkeling, and scuba diving; golf; hiking trails; waffle cones; sunburns; and DUI-free bar hopping. **Tip:** The helicopter taxi is a lot cheaper than you'd expect. See chapter 11.

2 Best Bets for Accommodations

- **Best Luxury Hotel:** Spending at least one night at the **Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows**, 9641 Sunset Blvd., Beverly Hills (☎ 800/283-8885), is well worth the heavy hit to your credit card. Take afternoon tea in the famous Polo Lounge next to Ozzy Osbourne, swim laps in the same pool Katharine Hepburn once dove in fully clothed, and eat pancakes in the fabled Fountain Coffee Shop. Ah, yes, The Pink Palace is still the place to relive Hollywood's Golden Age. See p. 82.
- **Best Historic Hotels:** Modeled after an elegant Loire Valley castle, the 1920s-era **Chateau Marmont**, 8221 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood (☎ 800/242-8328), oozes Old Hollywood. Secreted above the Sunset Strip, it has ghosts from the past that include Greta Garbo, Errol Flynn, Natalie Wood, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, and Jean Harlow. The eye-popping and architecturally magnificent **Millennium Biltmore Hotel Los Angeles**, 506 S. Grand Ave., Downtown (☎ 800/245-8673), has been hosting royalty, U.S.

presidents, and international celebs since 1923. You've seen it in *Chinatown*, *Ghostbusters*, *Bugsy*, and *Beverly Hills Cop*—now see it for real. See p. 89 and p. 102, respectively.

- **Best Boutique Hotel:** You'll want to redecorate your own bedroom by the time you check out of **The Mosaic**, 125 S. Spalding Dr., Beverly Hills (☎ 800/463-4466). Huge rainforest showerheads, Frette linens, Bulgari bath products, Wolfgang Puck refreshments, and piles of pillows all add up to hotel heaven. It's the perfect blend of art, luxury, service, prime location, and value.
- **Best New Hotel:** Take a break from the fast-paced L.A. scene at **The Ambrose**, 1255 20th St., Santa Monica (☎ 877/262-7673), a stylish new 77-room boutique Arts and Crafts hideaway that offers a soothing, peaceful environment and plenty of free perks (including complimentary London taxi shuttle service). Book a room fast while it's still a bargain. See p. 77.
- **Best for Business Travelers:** With an oversize work desk, a fax machine, two-line phones, a

terrific business/copy center, extensive recreational facilities, plus 24-hour room service and a wet bar for late-night, report-due-in-the-morning munchies, the guest office suites at the **Westin Bonaventure Hotel & Suites**, 404 S. Figueroa St. (☎ 800/WESTIN-1), are Downtown's best accommodations for business travelers. See p. 103. The top Westside choice is **Raffles L'Ermitage**, 9291 Burton Way, Beverly Hills (☎ 800/323-7500), where the technology is incomparable, extending well beyond the standard fax/printer/copier and extralarge executive work desk to include a 40-inch TV with CD/DVD player and a state-of-the-art direct-dial, three-line phone system (including a cellphone you can take with you around town). Flexible check-in/check-out plus free printed stationery, business cards, and fax cover sheets with your direct-dial numbers are part of the package. See p. 87.

- **Best for Beachfront Romance:** If a luxurious oceanfront room at **Shutters on the Beach**, 1 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica (☎ 800/334-9000), or sister hotel **Casa del Mar**, 1910 Ocean Way, Santa Monica (☎ 800/898-6999), doesn't put a spring in your relationship, it's hard to imagine what will. Which one is best for you depends on your taste: Shutters is dressed up like a really rich friend's contemporary-chic beach house, while the glamorous Casa del Mar is an impeccably restored Deco-era delight. See p. 74 and 69.
- **Best-Kept Secret:** Romance-seeking couples who want oceanfront luxury for less should skip Santa Monica's on-the-beach hotels for the **Beach House at Hermosa Beach**, 1300 The Strand, Hermosa Beach (☎ 888/895-4559),

a beautiful boutique resort comprised of plush, luxury-laden studio suites that go for roughly half the price of an average room at Shutters or Casa del Mar. Book one overlooking the sand and sunbathers for the ultimate beach getaway. See p. 75.

- **Best for Families:** With a great location close to both beach and boardwalk, a terrific oceanview pool, and a kids-stay-free policy (plus welcome goodies and special menus for young ones), the **Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel**, 1700 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica (☎ 800/23-LOEWS), tops my list as L.A.'s best family hotel. See p. 73. Families on a tighter budget might prefer **Best Western Marina Pacific Hotel & Suites**, 1697 Pacific Ave., Venice (☎ 800/786-7789), located right next to the carnival-like Venice beach and boardwalk. You get free continental breakfast and indoor parking, and large suites with full kitchens and a pullout sofa. See p. 79. If you're heading to Universal Studios, stay at the **Sheraton Universal Hotel**, 333 Universal Terrace Pkwy. (☎ 800/325-3535), which offers free shuttle service to the theme park and adjacent Universal CityWalk, both just a minute away. See p. 107.
- **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:** The well-maintained **Casa Malibu**, 22752 Pacific Coast Hwy., Malibu (☎ 800/831-0858), has a terrific beachfront location and rates left over from more carefree days. Innkeepers don't come any friendlier, and oceanfront accommodations don't get more affordable. See p. 80. For a more central location, stay at the **Carlyle Inn**, 1119 S. Robertson Blvd. (☎ 800/332-7595), another hidden gem cleverly tucked away in the heart

of West L.A. A pleasing courtyard setting, a dash of Deco-inspired style in the guest rooms, and abundant freebies—including a generous breakfast spread and weekday wine and hors d'oeuvres—make the Carlyle a real find for those in search of value-priced comforts. See p. 94.

- **Best Budget Hotel:** The bargain of the beach is the friendly, family-run **Sea Shore Motel**, 2637 Main St. (☎ 310/392-2787), whose motel-basic but beautifully kept rooms couldn't be better located, in the heart of stylish Main Street shopping and dining, and just a stone's throw from Santa Monica's pier and sand. See p. 81. My favorite Downtown lodging is **Figueroa Hotel**, 939 S. Figueroa St. (☎ 800/421-9092), a 1925 building re-created as a stunning Spanish Colonial–Gothic palace with an eye for detail and commitment to the needs of budget travelers. Rooms have tons more style than your average budget hotel; what's more, this spitshined corner of Downtown offers easy, car-free Metro Line access to Hollywood and Universal Studios. See p. 104.
- **Best B&B:** If you crave the slower pace and personal attention that only a bed-and-breakfast can offer, book a room at the **Inn at Playa del Rey**, 435 Culver Blvd., Playa del Rey (☎ 310/574-1920), which merges easy airport access with a one-of-a-kind natural setting, thoughtful service, and luxury comforts. The spacious View Suites—complete with a two-sided fireplace that casts a romantic glow on the king-size bed and the Jacuzzi for two—are the ideal choice for celebrating couples. See p. 76.
- **Best Suite Deals:** Suites aren't just for big spenders anymore: Regular folks who crave comforts above and beyond what a standard hotel room can offer have options, too. The best-value suites in town are found at the **Wyndham Bel Age Hotel**, 1020 N. San Vicente Blvd., West Hollywood (☎ 800/WYNDHAM), where you can have a mammoth, stylish suite and a prime, just-off-the-Sunset Strip location for often less than the price of a standard room at most neighboring hotels. See p. 93.
- **Best for Travelers with Disabilities:** With 25 accessible rooms, the **Sheraton Universal Hotel**, 333 Universal Terrace Pkwy., Universal City (☎ 800/325-3535), offers the most extensive facilities for wheelchair-using and vision-impaired visitors. Two bathrooms have roll-in showers; the rest have tubs with available benches, lowered closet rods and peepholes, and raised vanities and toilets. There are also Strobe kits for door and phone, and Braille symbols on the restaurant menus and on all public facilities. See p. 107. Downtown, the **Westin Bonaventure Hotel & Suites**, 404 S. Figueroa St. (☎ 800/WESTIN-1), boasts 39 rooms with similarly extensive auxiliary aids, 15 with roll-in showers. See p. 103. For more information on resources for travelers with disabilities, see “For Travelers with Disabilities” in chapter 2.
- **Best Hotel Spa:** The Spa Mystique at the **Century Plaza Hotel & Spa**, 2025 Ave. of the Stars, Century City (☎ 800/WESTIN-1), dominates L.A.'s spa scene. Within a record-setting 35,000 square feet of space, features include an epic menu of traditional and Asian treatments; hydrotherapy features that include two Japanese *furo* pools, complete salon services, and a 21st-century fitness center with cardio machines that let you surf