

TRAVEL • CULTURE • STYLE • ADVENTURE • ROMANCE

PASSPORT



THE STYLE ISSUE!

AMSTERDAM • MOROCCO • LISBON • TORONTO • VANCOUVER • ZÜRICH & MORE!



Photo: Holibox

Los Angeles Sunset

Doing business in...

LOS ANGELES

by Jimmy Im



If you haven't heard, Los Angeles is the next best everything. Critics, pundits, celebrities, and jetsetters alike have claimed that Los Angeles' "rebirth" now warrants global bragging rights, and with good reason. Downtown LA has been deemed a world's best "it" destination thanks to its contemporary revival. West Hollywood has been marked as one of the nation's most livable cities. And Beverly Hills' recent centennial brought back its spotlight with international attention. In LA, the food scene is exploding, nightlife has expanded, and famous NYC faces (like Moby) have publicly switched coasts. There's a boom in tourism, and business travelers benefit exceptionally, merging business and leisure in a city that will produce the best of both worlds: affective meetings and, naturally, vacation memories. Further, the number of visitors is record breaking. According to LA Tourism, a record high of 45.5 million visitors in 2015 (an increase of 2.8 percent from the previous year) made Los Angeles a thriving city, and 19 percent of visitors were strictly business travelers. Cory Abke, openly gay, national director of hotel sales for Discover Los Angeles (LA's official tourism board) says, "We have put more resources into advertising to the gay market. We are a gay-friendly city, but the message is much stronger. Gay business travelers can go to mainstream bars, clubs, or restaurants and feel comfortable. I do it often, with or without my partner, and also with other gay business associates. It's just not an issue. I am in all neighborhoods regularly with my partner often holding hands or just going on a date to a random restaurant, and we never feel uncomfortable. Because Los Angeles is a cosmopolitan city with all varieties of diversity, gay people feel at home here in our hotels and restaurants and venues because it's not unusual."

What makes the city of Los Angeles attractive is its ability to grow without restriction. Unlike other top business travel cities, Los Angeles (the second-largest city in the US) sprawls to more than 80 districts and neighborhoods, and lesser-known areas are quickly gentrifying, like Koreatown,

North Hollywood, and the quiet west side (Brentwood, Westwood, Century City). Business travelers even get a sample of LA's renaissance before leaving the airport. **Los Angeles International Airport** (LAX) is undergoing a multi-billion improvement program with more than 20 individual projects to modernize the airport, currently in progress. Not only did LAX recently unveil a brand-new Tom Bradley International terminal equipped with celebrity-chef restaurants and a Fred Segal, all terminals are receiving multi-million renovations and enhancements, which include updated escalator, elevator, and walkway systems (to be completed by year's end) and a dramatically enhanced curbside look with modern LED street lighting. January 2016's unveiling of the brand-new Terminal 2 proved LAX is future forward, and The Los Angeles Suite, a terminal strictly for celebrities (naturally, only in LA), will debut this summer.

Perhaps the biggest transformation to take place in the City of Angels is **Downtown Los Angeles** (DTLA), which happens to be the central business district of Los Angeles. For decades, DTLA was a no man's land with only art deco architecture and an industrial skyline wooing design junkies who spent little time exploring here. But change was due when the Staples Center opened in 1999, the Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall opened in 2003, LA Live opened in 2007, and Ritz Carlton and JW Marriott opened in 2010. The latter two hotels gave business and leisure travelers the option to actually stay overnight in downtown LA, and the neighborhood began to flourish. Guests spilled out of their swanky quarters to create lively pedestrian traffic, and various neighborhoods (like the Warehouse District and the Arts District) begun development. Now, Downtown LA is home to dozens of cool boutiques, trendy bars, stylish hotels, and plenty of activities like the popular **Downtown Art Walk**, a program launched by LA Tourism to explore some of Downtown LA's newest and finest galleries. While a number of notable, buzzing restaurants have made DTLA a competitive, foodie paradise, **Grand Central Market** has



Evening at The Garland Pool

John Currin at the Broad Museum



Photo: Shalunts

Critics, pundits, celebrities, and jetsetters alike have claimed that Los Angeles' "rebirth" now warrants global bragging rights, and with good reason.

remained the best place for a meal and a meeting. Ninety-nine years old this year, Grand Central Market underwent a renaissance much like DTLA, where diners can please their palate at innovative eateries like **Eggslut** and **Belcampo Meat Company** in a historic building.

Finally open after years in the works, **The Broad Museum** is a privately owned, 120,000-square-foot contemporary art museum that showcases engaging artwork by world renowned artists like Jeff Koonz, Damien Hirst, and Basquiat. Reservations are mandatory and must be booked weeks before a visit to get your arts and culture fix.

Thanks to last year's opening of three gay establishments, nightlife options abound for LGBT travelers to DTLA who can experience a riveting gay scene outside of West Hollywood. The most popular is **Precinct**, a hipster-laden, rock and roll gay bar with weekly themed nights and even weekend brunch. It's crawling with all types of night owls, from drag queens to muscleboys, and the outdoor patio is where singles like to mingle. Racking up accolades across the nation, **Q Sushi** is the businessman's dream restaurant. With only 26 seats, Q is an intimate den that serves up an exquisite omakase experience, perfect for low-key business meetings in an elegant environment. If work brings you in town for longer stays, **Level** is a brand-new hotel-style residence where spacious, furnished one- to three-bedroom suites are equipped with kitchens and balconies. Guests can experience LA like a local in this glittery high-rise, and amenities like a full facility gym, 24-hour concierge, grocery service, and one of LA's largest outdoor pools makes it hard to leave.

While DTLA has become the ultimate destination for business and leisure travelers, neighboring **Koreatown** is hot on its heels as an emerging neighborhood. Most locals will credit its hip factor to the 2014 opening of **The Line hotel** (operated by Sydell Group, who manages Nomad Hotel in NYC). The 12-story hotel inside a mid-century, modernist tower has become the stomping ground for cool locals and visitors alike with Korean-inspired Pot restaurant by famed Roy Choi (who is credited for spearheading the food truck scene) and **Break Room 86**, a 1980s-inspired bar and lounge produced by LA's notable nightlife duo, The Houston Brothers. All 388 rooms are industrial chic and minimalist with floor-to-ceiling windows, many with views of the Hollywood Hills and Griffith Observatory. Naturally, a visit to Koreatown isn't complete without trying BBQ, and **Kang Ho Dong Baekjeong** is as authentic as it gets. It's all about marbled beef, fatty pork, delicious marinades, and an infectious, joyful atmosphere destined to amp the mood for client meetings.

The city that put Los Angeles on the map, **Hollywood** is at the brink of a hotel renaissance. Many say it's late in the game considering the city's decades-long allure, but 2016 is seeing dramatic changes. While **EDITION Hollywood** will debut in 2018, **James Hotel** is slated to open this November in a groundbreaking, ten-story project, and **Dream Hotels** announced a Hollywood location scheduled to open this summer. For now, travelers can still book the gay-friendly **London West Hollywood**, which recently unveiled a major renovation with 21 new suites designed by Vivienne Westwood, in addition to a fancy, 2,600-square-foot fitness center that replaces its notori-



ous gym dungeon. What hasn't changed? The personalized service, the outdoor, heated pool, and the rooftop bar that flaunts some of the best views of the city (making it an ideal spot to show off to business partners).

The biggest Hollywood hotel makeover story is a few miles north. Built in 1972 for famed-actress Beverly Garland, **The Garland** received a massive, \$25-million overhaul last year. The hotel offers 257 chic guest rooms, an outdoor pool and signature restaurant The Front Yard that serves casual California coastal cuisine. For business travelers, the convenient location is just minutes away from Hollywood's iconic attractions like Universal Studios (the hotel provides complimentary trolley service), Warner Bros Studios, and even the original *Brady Bunch* house. This urban oasis is home to more than 16,000 square feet of newly designed indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, including a gorgeous, newly added 4,000-square-foot outdoor area, Beverly Park. A short drive away, **Idle Hour**, a historic café built in the shape of a barrel in 1941, reopened last year after an extensive renovation by the 1933 Group. With an intimate back patio built around a ficus tree, the hipster joint offers live music on the weekends to an eclectic, creative bunch that love craft cocktails on tap and classic, American-inspired bites.

Food-loving business travelers have rejoiced in the crop of excellent new restaurants opened on famed Sunset Boulevard. All the cool kids book tables at **Estrella**, opened last fall by Top Chef's Dakota Weiss. Inspired by the bohemian bungalow culture of Laurel Canyon in the 60s and 70s (conjuring movers and shakers of the time, like Mama Cass and Joni Mitchell), Estrella celebrates food, music, and artistry under one roof. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner with a dining concept embracing innovative California cuisine, Estrella offers a hidden private room behind the kitchen, a unique lounge, and patio that hosts meetings, events, and performances.

Meanwhile, **Maia** has won over locals for its under-the-radar location and high-concept Asian dishes (think Kobe beef tataki and spicy tuna poke), with a sexy, outdoor courtyard that's a magnet for Hollywood types. Opened December 2015, **ROKU** celebrates all things sushi (America's first sushi restaurant opened in Los Angeles in 1970) in an 8,000-square-foot contemporary space that merges traditional sushi and a teppanyaki experience with forward-thinking dining. The décor is just as notable as the cuisine, evoking an Asian resort setting with manicured Bonsai trees and oversized silk pendant fixtures, and it's quickly become the stomping ground for stylish locals thanks to its riveting bar scene.

Speaking of Asian culture, H. Wood Group, LA's most established nightlife gurus that runs celebrity hot spots like Boosty Bellows and The Nice Guy, recently opened **Blind Dragon**, an upscale karaoke bar and lounge that's wooed gay celebrities like Johnny Wujek, Adam Lambert, and Brian

Lichtenberg. Expect 80's, Asian-themed cocktails like Godzilla (Absolut Elyx, Midori, and pineapple juice) and Lotus (Don Julio Silver, Viniq, pineapple juice, grapefruit juice, and Sprite). Openly gay co-owner Markus Molinari says, "We welcome all personalities in this exclusive atmosphere that allows you to experience more than just the mainstream gay nightlife and lets you get your karaoke on. So many gays love to sing their hearts out!"

The last place one would suspect to dramatically evolve in LA has surprisingly become a hip spot for business travelers: **West LA**. Between Beverly Hills and Santa Monica, the relatively quiet neighborhoods of Century City, Brentwood, and Westwood have been making noise. **W Los Angeles-West Beverly Hills** not only unveiled a \$25-million transformation but it also touts a brand-new name (formerly W Westwood). The unassuming hideaway offers refreshed, contemporary guest rooms and a new STK restaurant serving some of the hood's best steaks.

For those who want to go full-on carnivore and rub elbows with the A-list, **Baltaire** has been the talk of town among celebrities. Opened last March, the midcentury modern-inspired steakhouse (with French-oak flooring and brass-foot chairs) has become the preferred dining spot for notable couples like Judd Apatow and Leslie Mann and Fergie and Josh Duhamel. Executive Chef Travis Strickland brings his background from Blackberry Farms and Cut in Chicago to dish out top-notch prime steaks and Wagyu with other dishes like Dover sole prepared tableside.

Considered one of LA's best restaurant openings last year, **Maple Block Meat Company** is all about barbecue, serving up brisket sandwiches that rival those in the deep South. And while LA isn't particularly known to be a mall city, shopaholics will stagger at **Westfield Century City's** massive \$800-million makeover (to be completely redone by 2017) with Mario Batali's Eataly, a three-level Nordstrom, and 70 new shops and restaurants (including eight acres of outdoor event space). **Intercontinental Los Angeles Century City** also spruced up its 363 rooms and suites with a multi-million dollar renovation last year. Brand-new terrace suites have huge, furnished outdoor spaces with living plant walls and cabanas. Don't even get me started on the sprawling, breathtaking views.

Closer to the ocean, Venice has witnessed an explosion of new restaurants, bars, and cool shops that makes it more of a complete destination rather than a day trip. Making waves with the young and stylish is **Mar Vista Art Department**, a one-stop boutique for clothing, accessories, beauty products, and more. Opened last November, MVAD also hosts regular workshops on crafts like brewing, digital art, and candle making. **Willie Jane**, a Southern-inspired, California coastal restaurant helmed by former Iron Chef contestant Govind Armstrong, is still Venice's best place for brunch. The outdoor patio feels worlds away from Abbot Kinney's bustle, and fried organic chicken and waffles are served to perfection (best gobbled up with the house-made multi-chili hot sauce). For those with a hankering for sweets, **Salt & Straw** opened on Abbot Kinney this past January. The family-run ice cream purveyor scoops out creative flavors like sea salt with caramel ribbons and honey lavender.

The ideal hotel near Venice is **Ritz-Carlton Marina Del Rey**, which not only unveiled a light renovation to all rooms but also the exciting new signature Cast & Plow restaurant. One of the coolest attractions is the hotel's partnership with Salon D'Art to debut a large-scale art exhibition using a new technology that allows art enthusiasts to take guideless tours using their phones and iPads. The AAA-Five Diamond hotel also sports the best spa in the area. Among luxurious treatments, **Spa del Rey** offers diamond facials, algae wraps, and knackerings massages, in addition to an outdoor pool, Jacuzzi, and fitness center to round out the experience. It's the perfect spot to unwind before catching your flight (LAX is a ten-minute drive away), but considering all the new action happening in Los Angeles, you may never want to leave. ■

GENERAL INFO

Discover Los Angeles is the official CVB and tourism organization for Los Angeles. www.discoverlosangeles.com

Frontiers is the official gay, bi-weekly magazine of Los Angeles, serving the LGBT community for more than 35 years. www.frontiersmedia.com

Los Angeles International Airport is the main international airport serving Los Angeles. www.lax-ishappening.com

ACCOMMODATIONS

The Garland, 4222 Vineland Avenue, Tel: 818-980-8000. Newly reopened historic hotel that has become Hollywood's favorite urban oasis. Rooms from \$289. www.thegarland.com

InterContinental Los Angeles Century City, 2151 Avenue of the Stars, Tel: 310-284-6500. Recently renovated, 343-room hotel that now boasts new terrace suites with sprawling views. www.intercontinentallosangeles.com

Level, 888 South Level Street, Tel: 213-873-8400. Swanky new hotel-style residence in Downtown Los Angeles. Better rates are guaranteed weekly or monthly, though two-bedroom suites are approximately \$409 per night. www.stayinglevel.com

The Line Hotel, 3515 Wilshire Boulevard, Tel: 213-381-7411. Spearheading Koreatown's cosmopolitan boom, The Line Hotel offers comfy rooms, a fabulous restaurant, and strong nightlife scene. Rooms from \$249. www.thelinehotel.com

London West Hollywood, 1020 North San Vicente Boulevard, Tel: 310-854-1111. A perennial favorite for longtime West Hollywood visitors, this posh hotel is home to sexy suites and an outdoor rooftop sanctuary. Rooms from \$299. www.thelondonwesthollywood.com

Ritz-Carlton Marina Del Rey, 4375 Admiralty Way, Tel: 310-823-1700. Right on the marina, this AAA-Five Diamond hotel offers a new signature restaurant and excellent spa. Rooms from \$429. www.ritzcarlton.com

The World-Famous Landmark Hollywood Sign



Photo: Bamnosuke

W Los Angeles, West Beverly Hills, 930 Hilgard Avenue, Tel: 310-208-8765. After being injected with new life last year, W Los Angeles dazzles with brand new guest rooms and an STK restaurant. Spectacular King Suite from \$499. www.wlosangeles.com

ACTIVITIES

The Broad Museum, 221 South Grand Avenue, Tel: 213-232-6200. The most anticipated opening in DTLA, The Broad contemporary art museum showcases major works of art. www.thebroad.org

Downtown Art Walk, 411 Main Street. Non-profit organization that hosts Downtown LA art walks on the 2nd Thursday of each month. www.downtownartwalk.org

Mar Vista Art Department, 12513 Venice Boulevard, Tel: 310-601-6383. A cool retail shop and event space that offers workshops and classes. www.mvartdept.com

Westfield Century City, 10250 Santa Monica Boulevard, Tel: 310-277-3898. Massive mall receiving an ongoing \$800 million overhaul, currently in the works. www.westfield.com/centurycity

DINING

Baltaire, 11647 San Vicente Boulevard, Tel: 424-273-1660. Swanky, celebrity-spotting steakhouse in West LA. www.baltaire.com

Estrella, 8800 Sunset Boulevard, Tel: 310-652-6613. Executive chef Dakota Weiss' new restaurant on the Sunset Strip that draws inspiration from the Laurel Canyon bungalows. www.estrellasunset.com

Grand Central Market, 317 South Broadway, Tel: 213-624-2378. Historic food emporium with contemporary eats since 1917. www.grandcentralmarket.com

Kang Ho Dong Baekjeong, 3465 West 6th Street, Tel: 213-384-9678. One of Koreatown's top, authentic Korean BBQ restaurants with prime meats and cool, Seoul-like atmosphere. No website.

Maia, 8768 West Sunset Boulevard, Tel: 310-360-0366. Exciting new Asian/California restaurant with excellent outdoor patio scene. www.maiaweho.com

Maple Block Meat Company, 3973 Sepulveda Boulevard, Tel: 310-313-6328. Considered one of LA's best openings last year, Maple Block serves up award-winning BBQ in Culver City. www.mapleblockmeat.com

Q Sushi, 521 West 7th Street, Tel: 213-261-3479. Award-winning, 26-seat restaurant with high-end omakase dining experience. www.qsushila.com

Salt & Straw, 1357 Abbot Kinney Boulevard, Tel: 310-310-8429. Famed Portland ice cream shop giving Angelenos innovative flavors. www.saltandstraw.com

Willie Jane, 1031 Abbot Kinney Boulevard, Tel: 310-392-2425. Modern Southern cuisine serving up terrific brunch in an outdoor patio in Venice. www.williejane.com

NIGHTLIFE

Blind Dragon, 9201 Sunset Boulevard, Tel: 310-274-7500. Exciting, modern karaoke bar that's become a magnet for gay celebrities. www.hwoodgroup.com/blind-dragon

Breakroom 86, 3515 Wilshire Boulevard, Tel: 213-381-7411. 1980s-inspired bar with vintage video games and retro collages with live DJs. www.thelinehotel.com

Idle Hour, 4824 Vineland Avenue, Tel: 818-980-5604. Originally built as a tap room in 1941, this historic bar is the stomping ground for a young, creative set that chills out in one of LA's best outdoor patio restaurants/lounges. www.idlehourbar.com

Precinct LA, 357 South Broadway, Tel: 213-628-3112. Bad-ass new gay bar and lounge that features weekly themed nights and wild shenanigans on its outdoor patio. www.precinctdla.com

Roku, 9201 Sunset Boulevard, Tel: 310-278-2060. Glamorous hot spot with teppanyaki experience, sushi room, and lively bar. www.innovatedining.com



ROKU