

# Los Angeles is the endless city

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Los Angeles has been described in endless ways: The fourth largest Canadian city, because of its high concentration of former Canadians; the world's largest city, because it extends over more than 4,000 square miles; Nowhere City, because it has no centre.

Many of those who have not walked its streets are familiar with Los Angeles. If you watch TV at all, you have vicariously driven its freeways and strolled its beach boardwalks.

But TV isn't reality. The little screen can never prepare you for the immensity of its urban sprawl, nor for the difficulty of orienting yourself. It's a difficulty that's shared even by long-term residents, most of whom seem to be comfortably familiar only with the neighborhood in which they live, and the district where they work.

"It's so big that it must be seen, for the most part, as a city of very long streets or freeways or rides, and the places of interest as events along the way," writes architect Charles Moore in his *The City Observed: Los Angeles*.

The only overall concept of Los Angeles that the visitor is likely to get is the one that might be gained from a window seat on an airplane approaching the international airport (a huge but smoothly functioning complex that was beautifully renovated for the 1984 Summer Olympics).

#### PICK A PLACE

If you are visiting Los Angeles, take your cue from the Angelenos: Abandon any thought of "doing" the city, get behind the wheel of a car (public transit is frustrating if not impossible), and select a part of this vast area that you can come

to grips with.

The choice is broad, but your decision shouldn't be a hasty one: Hollywood is famous, but sleazy in some high-profile areas. Beverly Hills is beautiful, but pricey and cool to strangers. "Downtown" strikes many people as sterile.

One area that will almost surely fulfil any visitor's dream of Southern California is an enclave called Marina del Rey, on an inlet of Santa Monica Bay - a quiet, smiling retreat with the "feel" of a beach resort, but located less than 10 minutes' drive from the busy international airport.

Until 1980, it was a wasteland of swamps and scrub, bordering the bay. Then it was imaginatively transformed into a pleasant, water-oriented community with slips for thousands of boats, ringed by a park-like crescent of beaches, low-rise hotels and apartments, and a string of interesting restaurants. There are several harbor and deep-sea fishing tours available, a Fisherman's shopping (and fast-food) village, and undersea gardens.

#### MARINA HOTELS

One of the first buildings to be constructed was the two-storey Marina del Rey Hotel, with 160 guest rooms and 480 boat slips of its own.

"This hotel is more like a resort than the typical hotel," says manager Pierre Rozier. "A businessman at six o'clock can take his tie off, and smell the breeze from the sea."

Regular room rates at the Marina del Rey Hotel range between \$140 and \$185 U.S., with 25-per-cent discounts on Friday and Saturday nights. Seniors pay \$90 single and \$105 double, while families of up to four people (in one room) are offered a three-night package for \$279, which includes

breakfast, a marina cruise and discount on a Hertz rental car.

Set farther back from the water, the 17-year-old Marina International Hotel - with a total of 136 rooms, suites and villas - has lower regular rates, beginning at \$117. But from early June to Labor Day, its room rates will be cut to \$79, for either single or double occupancy, with free parking. A weekly highlight is a magician's appearance at Sunday brunch.

Newest and largest hotel in Marina del Rey is the 300-room, nine-storey Marina Beach, a Mobil Guide four-star hotel where rates start at \$160 single, \$180 double.

Less than three years old, the Marina Beach is a thoroughly modern hotel: Every room has a computerized safe, built-in refrigerator, three telephones - and a balcony overlooking a white-sand beach. An even more sweeping view of Los Angeles and the ocean can be had from the Skyfan, a roof-top restaurant with an open-air section. The main dining room, Stones, was recently rated as one of the top 10 restaurants in Los Angeles by *Business Traveler* magazine.

Of specialized interest is the Marina Beach's top-floor Signature Club, a "conciierge lounge" where the walls are hung with framed signatures of the famous - George Washington, Alexander Graham Bell, Henry Ford and the like.

#### MAPLE LEAF DAYS

All three of the hotels at Marina del Rey offer guests complimentary transportation to and from the international airport, and all offer discounts of 20 per cent or more to Canadians during Maple Leaf Days, a promotion sponsored each winter (usually Nov. 1 to Feb. 28)

by Air Canada and California's state Office of Tourism.

In the winter just ended, the airline offered discounts of from 58 to 75 per cent off its regular Canada-California full economy fares to stimulate more off-season tourism.

This summer, however, Air Canada is holding another "seat sale" on its Canada-California routes, with savings as high as 64 per cent.

On Toronto-Los Angeles flights, the full economy return fare between June 17 and Sept. 8 will be cut by 55 per cent to \$439 when passengers use westbound flight 793, leaving Toronto at 6:30 p.m., and eastbound flight 794, leaving Los Angeles at 11 p.m. and arriving in Toronto the following morning at 6:30.

To qualify, purchasers must book and pay for their flights at least 30 days in advance. Minimum stay is the first Sunday, and maximum is 30 days.

Air Canada this summer will have a total of three daily flights in each direction between Toronto and Los Angeles, as well as three on most days to San Francisco.

#### RENT A CAR

In conjunction with the summer seat sale and with Maple Leaf Days, Air Canada passengers have

access to special low rates on rental cars from Avis. A car is indispensable in Los Angeles, as is a large-scale, detailed map of the city - and of neighboring Orange County, for good measure.

The freeways and "surface" streets (as Angelenos call them) are so well designed and so clearly marked that driving is almost a pleasure - except, of course, in the morning and afternoon rush hours.

Take a good guidebook, since Los Angeles is not the kind of city that reveals itself spontaneously to the wandering stranger.

One of the most useful guidebooks is the *Movie Lover's Guide to Hollywood*, by Richard Alleman, travel editor of *Vogue* (published by Harper and Row). Not nearly as specialized as its title suggests, the book is a goldmine of tips on interesting areas and structures throughout Los Angeles, that could easily be missed otherwise.

For a more general guide to the state, consider *Crown Insiders' Guide to California*, by Jane E. Lasky (Crown Publishing Inc.). Another good state-wide guide, that nevertheless provides much useful detail on Los Angeles, is *California: A Guidebook*, by Randolph Delahanty, published in 1984 by Academic Press Canada.

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What a wonderful relief to see the sun again, and bask in the warm weather. It does all sorts of nice things for everybody, including people in real estate. When the weather is nice, it brings most people out of the woodwork, and they start browsing through houses again. The itch to move becomes like poison ivy and with the downturn in interest rates to boot, I think we will see a fairly active market again. It is good news for everyone, buyers and sellers alike, for a nice steady market is everyone's best market to work in.

There are lots of open houses around at present, so on these nice sunny weekend afternoons, why not drop into some of them, and see what your money can buy now. The market has changed somewhat since January and February, and I think you will be pleased to see the difference. You now have lots of choice in your given price range, and don't forget with the lower interest rates, you can juggle your figures a bit now. I have heard through some pretty reliable sources that the rates will continue to slide downwards gradually, over the next six months, so that should make you very happy.

In case you did not know, you can lock into funds for a mortgage 60 days in advance of your closing - and if the interest rates go down before your closing, you will get the lower interest rate. It doesn't work the other way fortunately, for when you lock in your funds, you also lock into the current rate - and if it goes up before you close, you will have the rate that you locked into when you applied. A nice little bit of information to have. We ourselves, locked into such a deal, and managed to get 1/2 per cent lower rate by the time we signed our final papers: It adds up over the years, and on the monthly basis, it can provide you with an evening out, depending upon how much mortgage you have. So, there is no need to wait to see if the interest rates are going to move down any more, you can make a purchase, and still take advantage of what happens over the next several months. Treat yourself to the pleasure of owning a new home, and start looking while the market is just right.

Have a great long weekend - the weather is looking pretty nice on the long term forecast - just perfect for house hunting.

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