

TRAVEL



Edited by Daragh Keany

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WORK, REST AND PLAY

GOLDEN HOUR: The AC Hotel Downtown Los Angeles/Moxy Hotel: (right, from top) Que Barbaro restaurant, Gavin Brennan from the eBike Tours LA, Crypto.com stadium, a genuine sign from a bike tour in the Hollywood Hills



SET YOUR FACE TO STUNNED: Daragh at Level 8 of AC Hotel Downtown Los Angeles/Moxy Hotel, which is popular with the local Angelenos



SURPRISE Mexican wrestling in a gothic 8th-floor nightclub, dining with the man who (boastfully) took the FIFA World Cup to the US back in 1994, dodging rattle snakes on e-bikes in the LA hills, sneaking backstage at LA Fashion Week as models prepared to walk the runway, a leather pride festival outside our hotel and getting an tour from an ex-pat Aussie who visits his family in Drimnagh several times a year were absolutely NOT on my L.A. 2024 bingo card on a recent trip to the city... but isn't that just so classic of the never-disappointing City of Angels?

LA has swanky new hotels, exciting bars, must-do tours, hidden-gem neighbourhoods and amazingly wonderful locals. By **Daragh Keany**

OK, full confession, the e-bike tour was, technically, on my to-do list but little did I know that a three-hour trek around the undulating and meandering hills, that house the famous Hollywood sign, would be one of the absolute highlights of my year so far. And to think it is all fronted by a mad-cap Aussie named Gavin Brennan, who turned his two-wheeled hobby into an utterly exhilarating and

must-try business venture (ebiketoursla.com; €150). The trip into the hills is the ideal way to prove that this sometimes chaotic and surprisingly expansive city has so much more than a walk of fame and fancy hotels and clubs. The beauty of Los Angeles is that you will get whatever you want from it. And with some planning you can explore almost-untouched neighbourhoods like Glendale, Larchmont,



HANG WITH THE LOCALS: Outdoor dining at Larchmont

Culver City, Silverlake and even suburbs like the Spanish district on the cusp of Chinatown. You don't find El Salvadorian pupusas or melt-in-your-mouth pumpkin ravioli without a little researching but Six Taste's food tours (sixtaste.com; from €75) have done all the hard work so when you meet the friendly and informative guide at the bottom of Angel's Flight tram line all you have to do is ensure you have your comfy pants on because the nearby Food Market, the Maccheroni Republic pasta shop and the vegan donut shop get hit hard in between the fun talks and

rambles around the lesser known area. It is such a far cry from the \$20 beer and less-than-palatable food at the Crypto.com centre the previous night where we watched the LA Lakers beat the 76ers. Of course, none of the group was there to sample the food but rather watch LeBron James and his teammates do their thing. In advance of travelling across the Atlantic, the prospect of seeing the basketball legend in his natural habitat was without doubt the crowning jewel in the busy itinerary laid on by LA Tourism and Aer Lingus, but after five

days of excursions, tours, shopping trips, the aforementioned e-bike trip, roof top restaurants, museum visits and a well-earned saunter along Venice Beach, it is genuinely hard to choose a highlight. The first hotel we checked into was the all-new AC which is joined at the hip with the Moxy. If having the hotel's reception on the 34th floor wasn't novel enough, the rooms are stunningly created to offer everything you need and more. And wait until you get a load of what is on the 8th floor! On arrival (after a fun 11-hour Aer Lingus flight direct from Dublin) we

LA has so much more to offer than a walk of fame and fancy hotels and clubs

were surprised to see so many well-dressed socialite types queuing up to get in, but two days later when we finally ventured into the building's utterly incredible Level 8 (level8dtla.com) I finally knew why the spot was so popular with the locals as it was with us tourists. Divided into eight separate areas, the 8th floor of the hotel (accessed from a separate door beside the hotel entrance) is a mecca for foodies, party animals and well-heeled Angelenos. Although the night finished with some random Nacho Libre-style wrestling in a nightclub decked out like a cathedral, we were

there to eat and the South American grill Qué Barbaro (quebarbarodtla.com) was one of the nicest meals I have ever eaten. No word of a lie. It offered the perfect sojourn for the amazing cocktails in the Mr Wanderlust bar before we retired to the 'you had to be there to believe it' Saints & Sinners club. While the club and swanky bar were amazing it was the food at Que Barbaro that stood out. The same can't be said for my panic-purchase the next day at the Original Farmers Market (farmersmarketla.com) located at the corner of Fairfax and Third. See what happens

when you try to be spontaneous and go rogue? The LA version of 'spicy' is different to our version. I'm sure the chicken burger was fabulous. I just couldn't taste it behind the sprinkling of lava sauce (not its real name). Anyway, lesson learned and it was on to the adjoining Grove (thegrovela.com) shopping mecca which is a bigger and better version of Kildare Village, with no stress and pomp. The high-end mall has appeared in too-many-to-mention TV shows and movies and houses brands like Maje and Byredo and

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has gigantic versions of Lululemon and Sephora. There is even a Vegas-style fountain in the middle.

Another shopping mecca that hasn't appeared on screen is Larchmont Village (*larchmontla.com*) that filled a few gorgeous hours on a Saturday morning that even managed to neutralise the disappointment that I hadn't packed a raincoat and we were standing in a torrential downpour.

One of the big new attractions in Los Angeles is the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures (*academymuseum.org*; €20) and is an absolute must-visit for movie lovers. Not even be three years old, it already has a mature feel about the place with exclusive access to film props, footage and real Oscar statues makes for a unique few hours in a four-floor movie mecca.

They even have an Oscars Experience that allows you to channel your inner Walter Mitty and pretend, for five minutes anyway, that you are a bona fide Oscar winner. There's a plinth, a tracking camera, a fake audience and a real-life Oscar. By the time you have handed the statue back and got your belongings together your email notification pings on your phone to say the video is in your inbox. Very cool.

Another very cool experience on my recent trip was the Silver Lake Pool and Inn hotel (*palisociety.com*) in the low-rise area of the same name. A far cry from the fast-moving lifestyle of Downtown, the two-storey (yes you read that right) hotel was the perfect contradiction to our previous hotel, yet as equally memorable.

It didn't even bother us one iota that our Uber was diverted several times to accommodate the leather pride festival on one of the adjoining streets.

The chilled-out vibe was extremely welcome after the madness of LA Lakers games, rooftop bars, shopping sprees and that wrestling match the previous night.

Nestled in a quiet neighbourhood, you would have no idea that the chaotic Walk of Fame was only eight minutes in a car or that you could be back in Downtown LA in only 20 minutes.

The laid-back atmosphere oozes out of every nook and cranny around this suburb and even in the fancy tapas restaurant Bacari (*eatwithbacari.com*) we were greeted and treated to a sumptuous selection of Mediterranean-influenced dishes by renowned-chef Lior Hillel. The umami-glazed pork belly and the caramelised cauliflower were the high-



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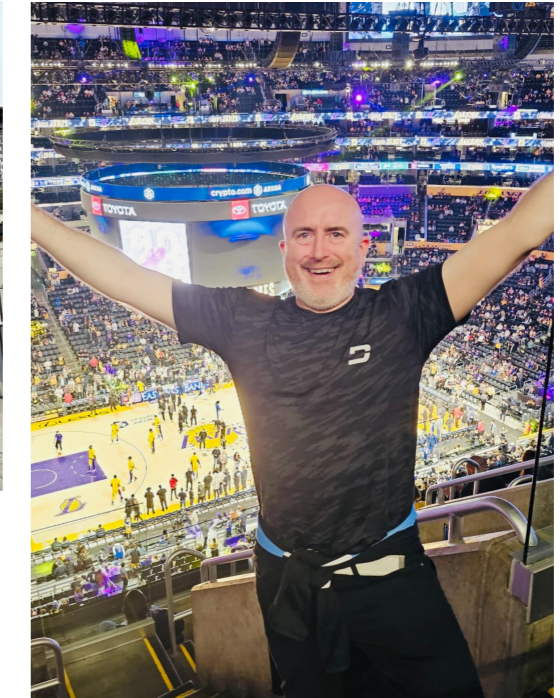


ANGEL' DELIGHT: Clockwise from top: The Griffith Observatory; Echo Park, Daragh at the LA Lakers game; Breaking Bad's Walter White's RV; Angels Flight tram; and a stroll along Venice Beach



FACTFILE: LOS ANGELES

- For more information on Los Angeles go to discoverlosangeles.com
- Aer Lingus operates daily direct flights from Dublin to Los Angeles. Economy fares from €299 each-way with Business Class from €2,699 return. Check out aerlingus.com for deals.
- Daragh stayed at the AC Hotel, Downtown (rooms from €192 per night) and the Silver Lake Pool & Inn, Silver Lake (rooms from €300 per night).



lights for me.

The next day we headed to the Echo Park area of Los Angeles where transport took a very different form as we boarded giant pedal-powered swans (*wheelfunrentals.com*) and spent an hour floating around the stunning lake in the middle.

All we had to worry about for that serene 60 minutes was bumping into one another or disturbing the baby turtles that we shared the water with.

While our ultimate goal on this trip was to discover areas and elements that are off the beaten track, we also found ourselves drawn to some obvious attractions. A studio tour is nothing new and no one reading this will be currently thinking 'wow I never would have thought of that', but Sony have a Pictures Tour (*sonypicturesstudiotours.com*; €48pp)

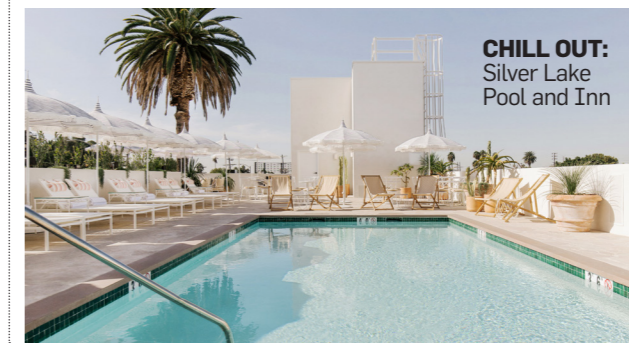
of their active set and it is worth every cent.

For a few hours you are whisked away to the worlds of Breaking Bad, Seinfeld and several blockbuster movies. The actual RV that Walter White used to cook meth is visible and touchable (and smellable if you get really close) and it sits beside the original Ectomobile from Ghost Busters.

It's not all legacy shows on view, though. As the tour continues, you are brought into the working studio of shows like Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune (only on non-filming days) but the highlight for me was the music department where we were under strict orders to put away our camera phones as the guide let us in on Oscar-worthy trade secrets. I could have sat there for days but there was a flight home to catch.

Before we made our way to LAX we headed to Venice Beach, which has had a newfound rejuvenation since the Barbie movie last year. All the usual landmarks are there with tatty-but-fun merchandise stores, kooky convenience shops and innumerable rental companies trying to lend you their e-bikes, scooters, roller skates and skate boards for a few of your dollars.

One last drink in the



CHILL OUT: Silver Lake Pool and Inn

sun-drenched rooftop bar at Hotel Erwin was on the agenda before our taxi got us to the airport in plenty of time for some completely-unnecessary retail therapy before flying directly back into Dublin (the trip is at least an hour shorter on the way home).

I've 'done' LA four times now and I've only repeated myself once in all those visits (a mouth-watering saddle ranch-style breakfast on Sunset Boulevard).

That means that I have spent 20 days in total in LA over the years and I have only reached the tip of the iceberg. With a FIFA World Cup and a Summer Olympics coming up in the next four years, the infrastructure will improve dramatically meaning better public transport and less traffic, allowing locals as well as visitors discover that there is so much more than a handful of tourist traps.

While I can't guarantee some of the fun and crazy interactions I had on my recent trip, the nature of La La Land means that you won't have to look far and long for wild and memorable meetings on any trip. You will make your own memories.

The people are not the reason you travel there but they certainly add a little bit extra to one of the most exciting and entertaining cities on the planet.

TRAVEL NEWS

DUNBOYNE Castle's spa is back open and TUI has some big news for summer 2025.

TUI'S CYPRUS THRILL
TUI has announced Cyprus as a weekly holiday option direct from Dublin Airport next summer.

Starting from Wednesday May 14, 2025 Irish holidaymakers will have the opportunity to discover stunning resorts including Ayia Napa, Nissi Beach, Protaras and Alaminos across a range of hotels and guest experiences including



TUI's premium club brand Robinson; two TUI Scene hotels found in the heart of some of the biggest and best party destinations; two TUI Splash-world accommodations that offer the ultimate in waterpark and family fun, and four TUI Blue hotels for a tailor made holiday with a focus on fitness, food and wellness.

This new route to Cyprus also offers holidaymakers the opportunity to set sail on the Marella Cruise around the Eastern Mediterranean, giving customers even more choice when booking their next holiday.

They have also added Tunisia for next year too with options from Dublin and Cork.

See tuiholidays.ie



NEW SPA IS WELL DUN'

THE Spa at Dunboyne Castle Hotel has reopened with a host of new luxurious facilities and treatments available to guests.

Highlights include a brand new thermal suite and a sleek and elegant manicure and pedicure salon space to complement the spa's hydrotherapy pool.

Each of the suite's six state-of-the-art wellness areas offers unique benefits like the infrared sauna, the Himalayan salt room, the herb sauna, steam room and a cold bucket shower.

See dunboynecastlehotel.com/spa

