

# HEAD FOR THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS

*A breeze through Los Angeles provides a glamorous escape into the urban adventures of the beautiful people*

By Doug Wallace



“Okay, now turn your right foot to face the Hollywood Sign and set up your back foot for Warrior One.”

*I am really not in Kansas anymore, I think.*

I’m on the roof of the Thompson Hollywood hotel, trying to keep my bald pate out of the sun and my right hip pulled back. I’m getting a good stretch not too far from a very lovely swimming pool that will eventually provide a refreshing post-yoga dip. I’d had lunch at an adjacent café the day before – a *niçoise* salad, naturally, this being the land of health and wellness – so I can skip that today. But I say, “Hey” to some of the blue-and-white-striped wait staff I recognize, all of them gorgeous. Actors, of course. They’re everywhere in this town.

Normally, I would be swinging with the hipsters in West Hollywood, L.A. Gay Central. But this time, I’m living the dream in Hollywood proper – watching the shiny Escalades ferry around the beautiful people who make the movie machine hum, and connecting with the rhythm of the regular daytime people who make this part of town run. Everybody is going about their business, good-naturedly pointing tourists in the right direction.

Me, I get lost. I’m looking for a fancy tequila store, and in making a course correction, I find myself on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in all its terrazzo and brass glory. In a moment of total kismet, within the first five metres I see my favourite movie star – Angela

Lansbury. Trying not to step on a homeless person, I inadvertently step on Angela Lansbury. It really doesn’t get any gayer than Angela Lansbury. Except maybe Linda Evans.

With iconic stuff practically everywhere you look, it’s hard to determine exactly what to do first in Hollywood. There are numerous, extremely fun bus tours – of celebrities’ homes and the beautiful surrounding hillsides. Universal Studios Hollywood is one of the biggest tourist attractions and Hollywood Boulevard itself is a sea of kaleidoscopic, head-spinning things to transport you to Hollywood’s golden era, while rubbing you up against its tawdry underbelly.

We decide to branch out a bit, heading over to Burbank to the Warner Bros.’ Studio Tour and instantly turning into kids again. We’re still in the lobby, but already taking selfies with a bronze Bugs Bunny. The Instagram moments that follow include Scooby Doo, *The Big Bang Theory* living room, the Harry Potter Sorting Hat, and the *Friends* fountain and famous orange couch, which ends up being made of rock-hard fibreglass – make-believe is big in this town. We follow this visit with one to the new Academy Museum of Motion Pictures on Wilshire Boulevard, which is featuring a brilliant exhibition on animation, including a thorough retrospective of Japanese animated filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki. A small corner of the museum’s top floor exhibits a *Toy Story* zoetrope, an age-old optical toy wherein a rotating platform gives still figurines the impression of continuous motion. I can’t seem



to pry myself away from it, watching it five times over, seeing something new each time.

### Other times, I eat

Americans love their food, of course, and Los Angeles is the land of plenty. Hollywood itself has a number of destination restaurants. I plop down on a bar stool at Peruvian hot spot Los Balcones, across the street from Netflix, and order a creamy Pisco Sour and a plate of ceviche, perfectly spicy, sprinkled with crispy corn kernels. This Peruvian theme continues the next day at Smorgasburg, a weekly food truck festival at a produce market in Downtown, where the first thing in my mouth is a pork belly taco from Little Llama Peruvian Tacos. I follow this with Chimmelier Korean fried chicken, and brave the lineup at Lobsterdamus.

Little wonder, then, that I'm not hungry when I sink into a red leather booth later at Musso & Frank restaurant, a Hollywood classic at 103 years old. It's on my list due to its special appearance as the favourite haunt of Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin in *The Kominski Method*. My plate of duck confit is heaven itself. I grab a quick shot of the gorgeous frescos above the banquettes before I leave, only to be scolded by the manager for intruding on the privacy of his patrons in this way. Tsk-tsk. Being Canadian, I naturally apologize, before harumphing, "There's nobody here anyway," on my way out. It's not like I'm paparazzi-ing Al Pacino or anything.

When we're not eating, we're drinking, of course. Hollywood is chockablock with cocktail bars, each one seemingly more inventive than the next. 71 Studio Bar at Grandmaster Recorders pays homage to the location's former life as a recording studio, favoured by the likes of David Bowie and Stevie Wonder. Sunset & Vinyl spins actual vinyl in a retro rumpus room-style environment, replete with velvet furniture and low lights. The glam Tramp Stamp Granny's is owned by *Glee* star Darren Criss – that's enough of a draw for me. And the Black Rabbit Lounge is the only magic-themed bar in town, featuring table-side magic tricks and nightly live music.

Rooftop bars are still all the rage in Hollywood, most of them anchored to a boutique hotel, all of them filled with more beautiful people per square metre than I've ever seen in my entire life. Desert 5 Spot – a country bar, of all things – tops the roof of the boutique Tommie Hollywood around the corner from my headquarters, the Thompson. People are actually wearing cowboy hats. What seem like a couple of rock bands loll about in the cabanas ringing the pool at The Highlight Room Grill on the roof of the Dream Hollywood hotel, another see-and-be-seen scene.

The Mamma Shelter Los Angeles hotel has what seems like the most popular rooftop lounge, gauging by the stylish crowd surrounding the doormen, who are carefully counting the bodies up and down the stairwell. I decide to call it a night and head home. I got yoga in the morning.

