



## Los Angeles: a guide for art lovers

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**Telegraph Says**—A guide to seeing art in Los Angeles, including information on the Getty Museum and the Huntington, as well as advice on booking guided tours and accommodation

Most cities' art treasures are best explored on foot. A museum here, a basilica there, a famous ruin (or a celebrated hat shop) just a metro stop away. Los Angeles doesn't allow for that, and, if you don't want to waste precious hours hurtling between Pasadena and Pacific Palisades, you need to get organised.

I'd been to LA only once before, on a 48-hour stopover en route home from the South Pacific in 1985, and I remember being forcibly whizzed through a few key attractions – a film studio, a beach and a rather dismal strip mall. This time it was going to be 10 solid days of pre-war art and architecture as research for my next novel.

Los Angeles has some of the world's great art collections but not only are the must-see houses and galleries long drives apart, they are mostly run by private foundations that set their own, quixotic opening times (see panel). The free, no-nonsense Art Concierge app really comes into its own here, but you still practically need a spreadsheet to achieve a workable timetable. The larger galleries deserve the best part of a day each, but few actually operate on a nine-to-five basis.

Pasadena's airy, elegant Norton Simon Museum is closed until noon and the remaining hours are barely enough to savour its matchless collection of old masters, Impressionists and Asian sculpture, let alone the gorgeous gardens that surround it. There are moments, walking through this voracious collector's treasury of recognisable but distinctly unfamiliar paintings, when you get the sense of crossing into a parallel universe, in which Cézanne, Renoir and Degas existed but chose completely different subjects to paint.

Simon's rival collections include the Getty Museum, now housed in the Getty Centre, high on a ridge above Brentwood. The views of the city and its coastline (smog permitting) are worth the trip by themselves. Richard Meier's temple of glass and travertine limestone is home to a mouthwatering array of Mantegna, Titian and Rembrandt as well as van Gogh's irises, and the immense four-gallery layout demands a full day. The complex has various excellent cafés and restaurants but also permits picnicking in the surrounding gardens – unlike the mean old Huntington Library over in San Marino, where the catering is on the dull side but which expressly prohibits any food or drink not bought on site.

It has some incredible art, mind. The railway magnate Henry Huntington began snapping up 18th-century British portraits when there was a glut on the European market after the First World War. The galleries feature Gainsborough's Blue Boy and Lawrence's Pinkie, as well as Joshua Reynolds's luminous 1775 portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.

The Huntington's weekday opening hours, like those of the Norton Simon, are restricted to an almost impossibly brisk noon-4.30pm, but a midweek visit does at least allow time for a morning detour to Pasadena's Gamble House, a short drive to the west.

This Arts and Crafts gem was built by Charles and Henry Greene in 1908 as a winter retreat for the Cincinnati-based soap king David B Gamble and his family.

The heavily gabled three-storey structure has the hybrid look of a Japanese Swiss chalet, with a sleeping porch for each family member. The house is a masterclass in designed-through aesthetics – Greene and Greene bossily specified the furniture, the rugs and even the piano. Gamble's heirs were on the point of selling the place but decided to convert it into a museum in 1966 after a potential buyer was overheard planning to revamp the gloomy hardwood interior with a coat of brilliant white.

LA's public transport system is considerably better than advertised but only a fool would rely on it, and nothing beats the flexibility of a rented car.

Using the freeways in LA undoubtedly saves time, but de-selecting "highways" in the satnav menu allows you to stick to the older "surface" streets. If you then tap in the addresses of sights, you can slow down or pull over and admire their façades on your way to other attractions.

This kind of planning can take almost as long as the trip itself, so if you haven't done your homework or have only a few hours between planes or business meetings, it might be worth booking a private tour.

The excellent Architecture Tours LA, run by the art historian Laura Massino, offers a crash course in anything from Frank Lloyd Wright to Frank Gehry as well as trips specifically tailored to a client's private passions. The tour I picked focused on the Silver Lake area east of downtown LA and offered a feast of Twenties modernism by Richard Neutra, including a visit to his one-time headquarters on Silver Lake Boulevard. Neutra was a pioneer of the flat-roofed, plate-glass-and-concrete International style that's so suited to the sun-kissed Californian landscape. His work and that of his imitators can be found all over the city.

### Art

The usual concessions are available for all galleries that charge admission. Most offer a weekly or monthly free day, although these can get very crowded. Prices quoted are for weekday admission for adults.

**Norton Simon**, 411 W Colorado Blvd, Pasadena; [nortonsimon.org](http://nortonsimon.org); noon-6pm (closed Tuesdays), Fridays noon-9pm; \$10 (£6).

**Huntington Library**, 1151 Oxford Rd, San Marino; [huntington.org](http://huntington.org); weekdays noon-4.30pm, weekends 10.30am-4.30pm (closed Tuesdays); \$20 (£12).

**The Getty Centre**, 1200 North Sepulveda Blvd, Brentwood; [getty.edu](http://getty.edu); 10am-5.30pm, Saturdays 10am-9pm (closed Mondays);

free, parking \$15 (£9).

**Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, 5905 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills; lacma.org; weekdays 11am-5pm, weekends 10am-7pm (closed Wednesdays); \$15 (£9).

**Frederick R Weisman Art Foundation** (a private collection of 400 works by Cézanne, Picasso, Kandinsky, Warhol, Rothko and others), 265 N Carolwood Dr, Holmby Hills; weismanfoundation.org; Monday-Friday 10.30am-2pm; free tours but booking essential.

#### Architecture

**Gamble House**, 4 Westmoreland Pl, Pasadena; gamblehouse.org; Tuesdays 11.30am-1.30pm, Thursday-Sunday noon-3pm (closed Monday and Wednesday); bookable guided tours only; \$13.75 (£8).

**Schindler House**, 835 N Kings Rd, West Hollywood; Wednesday-Sunday 11am-6pm (closed Mondays and Tuesdays); \$7 (£4).

**Neutra House**, 2300 Silver Lake Blvd, Silver Lake; neutra-vdl.org; Saturdays 11am-3pm; tours \$10 (£6).

**Hollyhock House**. The reopening of this unmissable Frank Lloyd Wright gem has now been postponed while a painstaking restoration is completed. Call first (but don't hold your breath). Barnsdall Art Park, 4800 Hollywood Blvd, East Hollywood; hollyhockhouse.net.

#### Worth a look

**Bradbury Building**. This 1893 Renaissance revival landmark was immortalised in Chinatown and Blade Runner. It's also included in the LA Conservancy's two-and-a-half-hour Historic Downtown walking tour at 10am on Saturdays (\$10/£6). 304 S Broadway, Downtown; laconservancy.org/locations/bradbury-building

**Paramount Studios**. This has none of the rides or stunts but the small-scale tours offer a chance to admire this handsome studio, once home to Valentino, Dietrich and the Marx Brothers. 5555 Melrose Ave, Hollywood; paramountstudiotour.com; daily 9.30am-2pm; \$53 (£31).

**Snow White Cottages**. Built in 1931 and allegedly the inspiration for Disney's 1937 classic. 2910 Griffith Park Blvd, Los Feliz.

**Spadena House** (aka the Witch's House). Bizarre storybook mansion built in 1921. 516 Walden Dr, Beverly Hills.

**Architecture Tours LA**. Laura Massino's tours cost from \$70 (£42) per person, depending on the length of the tour (architecturetoursla.com).

#### Where to stay

Researching the best galleries and houses to visit took a bit of time, but choosing where to stay was far harder, particularly once I'd decided that the only way to get a sense of LA's amazing range of domestic buildings was to spend time living inside them. This option has been made easier by the growth of the private rental phenomenon Airbnb but, if deciding on a museum shortlist was time-consuming, it was nothing compared with working my way through the 1,000-plus lets available in my modest £110-a-night price bracket.

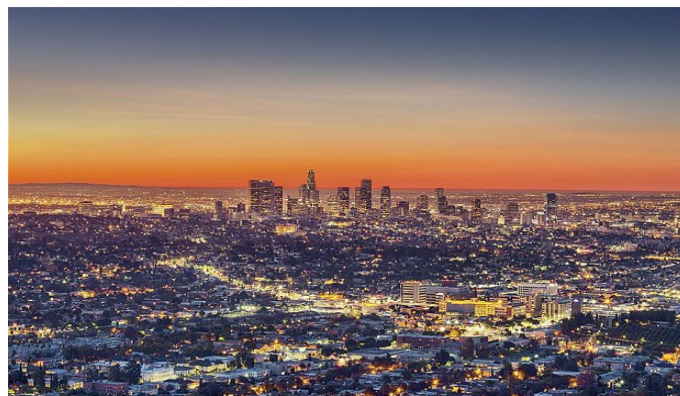
I ended up opting for three separate rentals in wildly contrasting neighbourhoods: a West Hollywood loft in one of LA's "storybook" cottage complexes; an immaculate Thirties hillside bungalow with sunset views in Silver Lake; and a balconied backhouse (with use of kayak) on the exquisite Venice canals flanked by pint-size examples of all the great Angeleno building styles.

The up-to-the-minute feedback on Airbnb's glossy website ensures landlords have to work hard to maintain their reputations, but the chummy sense of community spirit fostered by the site's founders means reviews – unlike the often withering ones on TripAdvisor – are occasionally on the generous side.

Make sure you scan the professional photographs carefully, avoid lets with coloured bedding and beware anything with less than a straight five stars in the cleanliness category. I would be extra picky about any property whose landlord was clearly just crashing elsewhere for the duration of the let. It's always nice to have a few spices in the kitchen, but there is something faintly disgusting about a half-full laundry basket. Great material for the novel, of course...

#### Getting there

Countless airlines fly to the city but, if you opt for British Airways (ba.com), click on "Flight Details" and the pop-up box will tell you whether your chosen flight is on a new Airbus A380 or a boring old 747. Same price, completely different experience.



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