



Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

WEEKENDER

Long Beach goes beyond waterfront

By Christine Delsol

Decompressing from a long, hot drive, I took a walk along Ocean Boulevard to work out the physical kinks and mental cobwebs. Along the promenade, at least a dozen columns of water danced in a fountain in front of the Performing Arts Center. Double-decker foliage — skyscraping palm trees with an understory of shade trees — lined median and sidewalks, and the sinking sun ignited sleek office and hotel tower windows, some whose copper-colored glass turned the last rays of sunlight into glowing embers.

This wasn't the Long Beach I remembered.

Certainly not the one where I attended college, when it was a rough-and-tumble port city. The Pike seaside amusement park was the closest thing to a tourist attraction, and hard-partying sailors were the closest thing to tourists.

Nor was this the Long Beach I visited in later years, when the Queen Mary supplanted the Pike and was soon joined by such aquatic attractions as Carnival Cruise Lines, the Aquarium of the Pacific and gondola rides through the canals of the man-made Naples Island.

Now the downtown waterfront has the allure of a stately European capital, with venerable older buildings refurbished and lending texture to the skyline.

Having visited the waterfront attractions multiple times, I focused this time on the city's land-bound neighborhoods. Besides downtown's appealing mix of architecture, an active pursuit of art was the most conspicuous element of the city Long Beach has become.

The Performing Arts Center includes the 3,000-seat Terrace Theater, whose lobby has a three-story glass wall looking onto the many-spouted fountain, and the intimate Beverly O'Neill Theater, which hosts the resident International City Theatre company.

Sundry other theaters scattered around town range from the 80-year-old Long Beach Playhouse to the Art Theatre, with its repertoire of independent films and documentaries, to the avant-garde Garage Theatre.

The city has bloomed with large-scale murals since last summer's Pow Wow Long Beach. Originating in Hawaii, the expanding weeklong art event convenes internationally known artists to create murals



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and other artwork on buildings, in parking lots and in breezeways.

Leaving my hotel through the side lobby's door, I was greeted by three fantastical egrets painted on a stairway wall along the walkway. I found a psychedelic black-and-white image of a girl that could have adorned T-shirts on Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue in the '70s on the side of a boutique hotel, and three-story purple faces pelted by slashes of color looming over a parking lot.

This year's Pow Wow installed 20 more murals in mid-July. There's hardly a neighborhood left that lacks for a huge work of art.

The Long Beach Museum of Art offers more traditional surroundings, but its perch on a bluff overlooking Long Beach Harbor and the Pacific Ocean is anything but common. "Vitality & Verve: In the Third Dimension," featuring a varied lineup of urban contemporary artists, sculptors and ceramicists, runs through Oct. 16.

The Museum of Latin American Art, in the up-and-coming East Village Arts District, is unique among Western U.S. museums for its dedication to modern and contemporary art from all over Latin America. The Smithsonian-affiliated museum celebrates its 20th anniversary in November.

I saw "Somewhere Over El Arco Iris, Chicano Landscapes; 1971-2015," a series of landscapes from Southern California Chicanos. The exhibition marked a departure from its previous policy of exhibiting only artists who live and work in Latin America.

"We opened up the definition of Latin American Art," said museum representative Susan Golden. "The young artists riff off of more established artists in these works. A lot of them became artists through graffiti."

The museum's anniversary exhibition, the largest show to date from its 1,300-piece permanent collection, runs through January.

Waterfront redevelopment created the tourist-oriented Shoreline Village and the Pike (may it rest in peace) at Rainbow Harbor shopping complexes, but my preference for the venerable "Retro Row" is unwavering. It's all vintage, all the time — clothing, furnishings, record stores, barbershops, you name it. (Although it has picked up a not-so-retro mix of craft beers and curated wine lists of late.)

Hollywood costume and set designers have prowled this stretch of Fourth Street between Cherry (or Walnut, depending on whom you ask) and Junipero for 20 years; "Mad Men" set designers conjured ad agency



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Clockwise from top: The Art Theatre on Retro Row in Long Beach. A mural by Hueman and Mark Paul Deren (a.k.a. Madsteez) was made last year for Pow Wow Long Beach, which returned this summer. A bicycle rack — made out of bicycles, among other things — on Retro Row. A mural at the Varden Hotel.

IF YOU GO

WHERE TO STAY

Hyatt Regency Long Beach: 200 S. Pine Ave., (800) 222-8733 or (562) 491-1234, www.longbeach.hyatt.com. Spaceship-modern luxury with a view of the marina and the Queen Mary. From \$179.

Varden Hotel: 335 Pacific Ave., (562) 432-8950, www.thevardenhotel.com. Downtown boutique hotel in updated 1920s building. From \$149.

WHERE TO EAT

Monorom Cambodian Restaurant: 2150 E. Anaheim St., (562) 434-1919, www.monorombodianrestaurant.com. Entrees \$9.95-\$16.95.

WHAT TO DO

Performing Arts Center: 300 E. Ocean Blvd., (562) 436-3636, www.longbeachcc.com

Pow Wow Long Beach: www.powwowlongbeach.com

Long Beach Museum of Art: 2300 E. Ocean Blvd., (562) 439-2119, www.lbma.org. \$7 general, \$6 students/seniors, under 12 free.

Museum of Latin American Art: 628 Alamitos Ave., (562) 437-1689, www.molaa.org. \$9 general, \$6 students/seniors, under 12 free.

Retro Row: Fourth Street between Junipero and Cherry avenues, www.4thstreetlongbeach.com

Cambodia Town: Anaheim Street between Atlantic and Junipero avenues, www.cambodiatown.com

Sterling Cooper's Midcentury Modern interior from Retro Row furnishings. Personally, I'm partial to Meow, for its exceptional selection of vintage duds — and how can you not love a place whose dressing rooms are entered through 1950s refrigerator doors?

But let us not forget what truly makes a great city: cultural diversity. Long Beach is one of the most diverse cities in the country, but no place in the world outside of Southeast Asia has more residents of Cambodian descent — nearly 20,000 at last count.

Cambodia Town is absolutely the best place to indulge in the spicy, aromatic Khmer cuisine, and Monorom Cambodian Restaurant, tucked behind an unassuming storefront in a strip mall, is my pick. Its monn cha kreung — chicken or beef redolent with lemongrass and a complex blend of spices, served with fried rice — is addictive enough to pull me off the 405 any time I'm in Southern California.

Long Beach is proud of the retinue of name chefs who have ventured into its domain, but a destination restaurant that tries only to be an exemplary local restaurant — that's a real city.

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