

LEISURE & TRAVEL

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Hollywood, the historical centre of American movie studios, boasts a lively vibe and makes a great destination for family fun. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Hooray for Hollywood!

■ 'Tinseltown' and Santa Monica a great combo for family travel

CATHY DONALDSON
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

HOLLYWOOD, CALIF. • It's not every day you get to snuggle with Justin Timberlake. Or strike a pose with Beyoncé.

Hooray for Hollywood!
If you're looking for a great family getaway, "Tinseltown" is the ticket, even if you don't go gaga for celebrities – real or wax versions.
Since Hollywood is a fun junket on any trip to Greater Los Angeles, my clan wasted no time soaking up the scene during a California stay earlier this year.

We learned from a family excursion eight years earlier that the Hollywood area is jam-packed with super attractions. (Translation: prepare to do some hoofing!)
But before hitting the streets of the movie mecca on foot, get the lay of the land with a drive along Sunset Boulevard from the Pacific Coast Highway (Route 1) in Pacific Palisades, past landmarks such as UCLA in Bel-Air and the palm-tree-lined streets of Beverly Hills.

While in Beverly – "the playground of the rich and famous" – stop by Rodeo Drive for a millionaire-style browse at stores like Dior, Cartier and Versace. Only three blocks long, Rodeo is worth a stop to people- and car-watch, even if you haven't won the lottery. (We happened upon a Bugatti Veyron parked in front of the House of Bizan boutique. Pricetag: about \$1.7 million. Welcome to Hollywood!)
If you really want to play tourist, consider one of Hollywood's hop-on, hop-off bus tours, such as Starline's "Movie Stars' Homes Tours" or TMZ's "Secrets of Hollywood Tour."

We passed several tour operators with open-topped rigs packed with customers who seemed to be having a grand time listening to animated hosts dish out the dirt on their favourite stars.



No visit to Hollywood is complete without a photo of the iconic Hollywood Sign in the Hollywood Hills. One of the best vantage points is in Griffith Park. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

With its fame as the historical center of American movie studios, it's hard not to get caught up in Hollywood's celebrity vibe.

Incorporated as a municipality in 1903, Hollywood merged with the City of Los Angeles in 1910, the

movie trade beginning to grow not long afterwards.

Feel like a taste of vintage Hollywood? Drop by the Hollywood Palladium, which opened in 1940 and currently houses the Emmys and Grammys. Or make a stop at the Pantages

Theatre, the former locale of the Academy Awards.

To discover where stars now gather on Oscar night, check out the Hollywood and Highland Center, which features the Dolby Theatre, the permanent home of the Academy Awards.

(We happened upon the site a few days before the Oscars. Lots of excitement in the air but also lots of security so no sneak peeks!)

We found our fair share of celebrities just down the street at Madame Tussauds Hollywood, a wax museum where visitors can ditch the velvet ropes to interact with their favourite stars in elaborate sets. We rubbed elbows with the incredibly-lifelike stars I mentioned off the top and many other awesome dubs, from John Travolta to Robert Pattinson, Sandra Bullock to Marilyn Monroe.

A fine encore to Tussauds is a stroll along the Hollywood Walk of Fame, a popular stretch of public sidewalk on Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street. More than 2,500 five-pointed terrazzo and brass stars are embedded along the 18 blocks, each bearing the name of an actor, musician, director or other celeb.

Don't be surprised if you come across a superhero or two along the Walk. We encountered Spider-Man and Darth Vader among others, and joined throngs of tourists posing for photos with the local actors who oblige, hoping for small tips.

For those wanting more movie magic, try a studio tour that takes you behind the scenes, such as those offered by Sony, Warner Bros, Universal Studios or Paramount.

Another way to see Hollywood up close and personal: become part of a studio audience at a TV show taping. (I tried for tickets to *Ellen*, taped in nearby Burbank, but could only get overflow seats so opted to try again next visit. Take note – book early!)

Of course, no visit to Hollywood is complete without a photo of the iconic Hollywood Sign in the Hollywood Hills. Built in 1923, the massive letters originally read "Hollywoodland" and promoted a local real estate development. In 1949, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce began a contract with the City of Los Angeles to rebuild the sign, with the deal stipulating that

PLEASE SEE → GRIFFITH, G2



Stop by Rodeo Drive for a millionaire-style browse at stores like Dior, Cartier and Versace. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT



Plan to spend a few hours strolling the colourful Santa Monica Pier, perhaps taking a spin on the world's only solar-powered Ferris wheel. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT



The Maryland State House towers over downtown Annapolis, Md. It is known for a number of historic events, including the resignation of General George Washington's commission as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. It also was the nation's capitol for nine months in in 1783 and 1784. PHOTO: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

5 free things to do in Annapolis, Maryland

■ City's historical ambiance is a big draw, as well as its restaurants, shops and taverns

BRIAN WITTE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANNAPOLIS, MD. • This picturesque state capitol near the Chesapeake Bay is known for its history, sailing and seafood. Annapolis served as the capitol of the United States for nine months in 1783 and 1784.

The city also is known for its colleges – both the U.S. Naval Academy, and St. John's College, founded in 1696 as King William's School. The city's historical ambiance is a big draw, as well as its restaurants, shops and taverns. Some of the city's main attractions can be visited for free. The quaint downtown layout over a compact area is better suited for pedestrians than cars, making it ideal for a walking tour.

Maryland State House

Maryland's state capitol is known as the oldest in continuous legislative use in the nation, as well as the first peacetime capitol of the United States. The Continental Congress met inside from November 1783 until August 1784.

The Old Senate Chamber, which is undergoing renovations to be finished late this year, was where Gen. George Washington resigned his commission as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

Washington's resignation set a precedent for placing control of the military under civilian authority. In 2007, the state of Maryland bought Washington's personal copy of his resignation speech, and it is scheduled to go on display when new exhibits are installed. Congress also ratified the Treaty of Paris in the building to officially end the Revolutionary War. Lawmakers still meet for an annual 90-day session in the building.

The exterior of the wooden dome was completed in 1788. It was built out of timber with no metal nails. The lightning rod on top is a "Franklin" rod, constructed and grounded to Benjamin Franklin's specifications.

U.S. Naval Academy

Visitors can walk the academy grounds and enter some buildings free of charge. Parts of Bancroft Hall, home to the entire Brigade of Midshipmen and known as the largest college dormitory in the

nation, are open, including the main entrance and Memorial Hall.

There is a museum, which has two floors of exhibits about the history of the Navy and the role the academy has in producing officers.

There is also the U.S. Naval Academy Chapel and the crypt of John Paul Jones, the famed Revolutionary War naval leader. There also is a restaurant open to the public.

African-American History

The Banneker-Douglass Museum, named for Benjamin Banneker and Frederick Douglass, is dedicated to preserving Maryland's African American heritage.

The museum, which has free admission, serves as the state's official repository of African-American material culture. Annapolis also is home to the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Memorial by the City Dock.

The memorial commemorates the 1767 arrival of the African slave written about in Alex Haley's book *Roots*. A statue of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, a Baltimore native who was the first black justice on the high court, is on a mall next to the capitol.

Walking Tour

Annapolis boasts more original standing colonial buildings than any other city in the nation. The visitor's centre offers free maps of downtown historic sites.

From May to September, visitors can watch sailboat races, a tradition that dates back to the 1950s. Maryland is the only state where the homes of all four of its signers of the Declaration of Independence still stand, and they are in Annapolis.

The home of Charles Carroll, the only Catholic signer, is open for free public tours for individuals and groups of up to six people on weekends from June through October. The waterfront home also has one of the most intact 18th century garden designs in the Chesapeake region.

Maritime Museum

The Annapolis Maritime Museum, housed in the city's last oyster-packing plant, is a small free museum overlooking the Chesapeake Bay.

The museum highlights the oyster and its role in shaping the history and maritime culture of Annapolis. The waterside museum has a small beach and a place for people with kayaks and canoes to enter the water.



The main entrance to Bancroft Hall, the dorm for the Brigade of Midshipmen, at the U.S. Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Md. The Naval Academy is one of a number of free places to visit and see in Annapolis. PHOTO: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



This Bugatti Veyron, worth an estimated \$1.7 million, is frequently parked in front of the House of Bizan boutique on Rodeo Drive. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Griffith Park offers spectacular views of city

GRIFFITH → G1

the last four letters be removed.

(Travellers' tip: One of the best vantage points for a sign picture is near the Griffith Observatory in Griffith Park. Spectacular views of the sign and the city!)

If you feel like a break from the hustle and bustle of Hollywood, pair your time in Tinseltown with some down time in nearby Santa Monica, a seaside city with its own wealth of attractions but with a beachy culture that makes it easy to unwind.

My family loved this pedestrian-friendly city on the western edge of Los Angeles, just 20 km from Hollywood, and especially enjoyed the base for our LA-area stay – the Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows.

I'm a bit biased about the Fairmont brand, not only because I've had outstanding experiences at Fairmont properties but also since one of my daughters works at Fairmont's Global Reservation Centre in Moncton (and loves it!)

It's hard not to be impressed with the Fairmont Miramar as you turn off Santa Monica's Wilshire Boulevard, pass under the canopy of the hotel's majestic Moreton Bay fig tree, and pull up to the front entrance, cordially greeted by a line of spiffy parking attendants. Star treatment!

In fact, since it opened in 1921, the elegant property, nestled atop the scenic bluffs of Santa Monica State Beach, has served as an exclusive playground for Hollywood celebrities and a quiet retreat for guests. (We saw some very fashionable partygoers attending events at the property each night of our stay.)

Though the nightlife was slightly more subdued for my party of four, we were quite happy meandering through the Fairmont Miramar's grounds, admiring the gardens of tropical flowers, and taking a dip in the luxurious pool. Back at our spectacular suite, we settled in to our contemporary yet comfy surroundings, so content we pondered becoming full-time occupants. (If it's good enough for former occasional resident Marilyn Monroe, it works for me!)

Don't miss the variety of dining options onsite, including the Fairmont's FIG Restaurant, a funky bistro serving local and organically-grown ingredients straight from Santa Monica Farmer's Market. We joined a full house of patrons for a glorious Sunday brunch, feasting on an amazing frittata verde with fresh greens and scrumptious breakfast burritos – a memorable start to our next adventure, a trip to the Santa Monica Pier.

Plan to spend at least a few hours strolling the Pier, watching buskers



Cathy Donaldson's daughters, Sidney, left, and Sarah, right, hit the dance floor with Beyoncé at Madame Tussauds Hollywood. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

perform, trying a trapeze, picking up a souvenir or grabbing a snack (hit the fruit vendor for freshly-sliced mango – delish!). Other options abound, from taking a spin on the world's only solar-powered Ferris wheel to viewing sharks at the Pier's Aquarium.

No Santa Monica trip should be without a wander along the magnificent State Beach, just north of the Pier. At two miles long, it seems to go on forever and offers plenty of space for a volleyball match on the sand or some inline skating on the ample sidewalk.

If hunger strikes, head back to an eatery near the Pier or one of the restaurants on beautiful Ocean Avenue.

Squeeze in a sunset walk along the cliffside paths of Pallasades Park – the perfect ending to a SoCal day.

• Planning a trip to Hollywood and/or Santa Monica? Check out VisitCalifornia.com, the state's official consumer website. Canadians can also receive travel planning info on California by calling 1 (877) 225-4367.

Cathy Donaldson

A travel writer and communications consultant, Cathy Donaldson is based in Moncton. Watch for more articles in her series on California family travel in upcoming editions of the Times & Transcript.