

VOYAGE



Travel Trunks

Beverly Hills: Southern California's Unique and Chic City

*Come listen to my story 'bout a man named Jed
A poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed.*

*Then one day while shootin' for some food
Up from the ground come a bubblin' crude.*

...oil that is... black gold... Texas tea.

*Well, the first thing you know, old Jed's a million-
aire*

The kinfolk said, "Jed, Move away from there.

*Said, "Californie is the place ya outta be."
So they loaded up the truck and moved to Beverlee*

...Hills that is... swimmin' pools... movie stars!

For those of us of a certain vintage (or who have access to certain niche cable channels), that refrain might sound familiar...

Such is the pop culture vision of the southern California community known as Beverly Hills. Now, while some of our readers may have done well in the oil patch, it's doubtful that many of us struck oil shooting for possums with our shootin' iron!

Jed Clampett's 'hood is nestled in the heart of the urban sprawl known as greater Los Angeles, just north of the airport and west of Hollywood, towards the ocean. Today's Beverly Hills is populated by around 35,000 residents and is home to many estates and properties owned by the "beautiful people" of Hollywood. It is also a city of extravagance where if one wanted to ride a pink elephant down Santa Monica Boulevard, someone would have an agency there to set that up.

Way back in the 1700's when there was nothing but tumbleweeds, this posh city took on a much different shape. Under the umbrella of a Mexican governed California, the place was famous for its most valuable

resource, that being water. In fact it was then known as El Rodeo de las Aguas or the Gathering of the Waters. In its many incarnations it was a cattle ranch, a site for failed oil drilling, a sheep ranch and finally a bean field before, in 1900, it was purchased by the Amalgamated Oil Company and was renamed Beverly Hills, after Beverly Farms in Massachusetts.

Landscapers were hired with the intent of developing the area and that act launched it into its own level of exclusivity. In 1912 the stately Beverly Hills Hotel was constructed and essentially the whole city has been built around it. Still standing today, this pink palace is a throwback to another time and remains a site, particularly the Polo Room, where major Hollywood deals are still swung. A \$100 million restoration in 1992 by its owner, the Sultan of Brunei, has returned it to all its magnificence.

Not to be outdone, Beverly Hills has its fair share of other upscale and unique accommodations. The Regent Beverly Wilshire has been around since 1928 and was the site for the movie *Pretty Woman*. Raffles L'Ermitage is a small boutique hotel which is likened

to an art gallery, specifically the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia, and is rated as one of the finest accommodations in all the USA. The Beverly Hilton is also one of the mainstays of the city and is home to the splashy Golden Globe Awards. TV icon Merv Griffin was a long time owner of this property, which has also undertaken a recent \$30 million face lift (this is Hollywood, after all). One might mention that at its opening in 1955, there actually were pink elephants on hand to spice up the proceedings.

The old city has rejuvenated itself many times over and from the first elegant estate, Pickfair, which was established by Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks back in 1919, it has been home to the stars. Up in the hills and around, many famous persons reside. That in itself may or may not be interesting, but what it does do is attract a lot of ancillary services you just won't find anywhere else.

That being said, if one wants to come to Beverly Hills, then one will likely want to crack open the vault and stroll down Rodeo Drive. Perhaps the most expensive three block shopping mecca in the world, this famous





street is home to all of the fashion heavyweights. Think Gucci, Polo/Ralph Lauren, Cartier, Armani, Christian Dior, Valentino, Coco Chanel and you get the picture. In fact Rodeo Drive also features perhaps the most expensive shop in the world, Bijan. You need an appointment to get in the door and many customers there will drop over \$100,000 on fragrances and attire.

The Two Rodeo stroll is also located in the area and was built to house more exclusive shops and eateries, including Ginza Sushi-Ko, the most expensive restaurant in southern California. Non-descript and rather plain inside, there is no menu here as you eat what the chef prepares... and yes... you will like it.

If you wish to simply tire-kick like many other visitors, there are a number of "sidewalkie type" places to people watch, including Café Rodeo. This is indeed limousine alley, as many famous faces pull in here to begin assorted spending sprees. All in all, the Rodeo Drive area is pleasant, if not a bit plain on the outside and very walkable. It's inside these fab stores where the opulence takes hold.

Depending upon your length of stay, there are restaurants of many flavours and shapes to seduce your taste buds, with Wolfgang Puck's Spago and Trader Vics being two of the most famous.

The city itself is also a nice place to wander around with many cultural attractions. There are many incredible art galleries including the Getty Museum and the Los Angeles County Art Museum. Another very interesting place is the Museum of Television and Radio. Pretty much anything and everything you've ever seen or heard on TV or radio is here.

A nice escape is also the Virginia Robinson Gardens which is an immaculate estate that was home to one of the grand ladies of Beverly Hills. She entertained guests from the roaring 20's right through to the 70's, at which point she passed on at age 99. The house and all inside remain intact, though rumours persist that she still holds swanky soirees at the pearly gates.

Because Los Angeles is such a complex animal, there is much to see and do all around and it's a matter of planning ahead a bit and picking your spots. Shopping and eating are must-do's. Immersing yourself in the Hollywood experience can mean studio tours, sitting in on television tapings or simply imagining yourself as a star on the Hollywood walk of Fame. Take in a concert at the Hollywood Bowl, a place which has hosted many diverse performers such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Jimmy Buffett and even Bugs Bunny.

LaLa land is a unique place in the world and the center of pop culture as its movies and various entertainment vehicles spread their influence around the world. It's a land of make-believe sometimes, yet it remains a fascinating place to spend a few days. Drink in the culture. Order that impossibly expensive glass of wine. Dance on a rooftop or even take a cheesy drive-by tour of the stars homes. Visitors are always welcome here and in the words of Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs...

Set a spell

Take y'shoes off

All come back now... hear?

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