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## 36 Hours in Santa Monica, Calif.



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FROM LEFT at L&M Arts, Los Angeles, work by the Los Angeles-based artist Paul McCarthy; dining with a view of the ocean at the food court at Santa Monica Place; at the Blue Plate Oysterette.

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WHEN Angelenos think of the perfect beach town, they think of Santa Monica. Venice (to the south) has its countercultural charms, and Malibu (up north) is celebrity central, but only Santa Monica feels homey. Residents enjoy cultural institutions, athletic facilities, and stores and restaurants of the highest order. Now, there's even more. In August, [Santa Monica Place](#), a sprawling indoor-outdoor mall a few blocks from the beach, reopened, with offerings both high (Louis Vuitton and Tiffany) and low (a food court with priceless sunset-over-the-ocean views).

### **Friday**

#### **4 p.m. 1) ART DEPOT**

The local art scene heated up this fall with the arrival of [L&M Arts, Los Angeles](#) (660 Venice Boulevard; 310-821-6400; [lmgallery.com](#)), a branch of the blue-chip

New York gallery. The space — in a former power station in Venice near the Santa Monica border — was inaugurated with new works by the Los Angeles-based conceptual artist Paul McCarthy, on view through Nov. 6. From L&M, it's a short drive to [Bergamot Station](#) (2525 Michigan Avenue; 310-453-7535; [bergamotstation.com](#)), a former streetcar depot that houses some 35 galleries. Highlights include the Santa Monica Museum of Art (310-586-6488; [smmoa.org](#)), with a show of lushly colored abstract paintings by Alberto Burri, through Dec. 18.

### **7 p.m. 2) OYSTER SHACK**

You're at the sea, so why not enjoy all that it has to offer? The year-old [Blue Plate Oysterette](#) (1355 Ocean Avenue; 310-576-3474; [blueplatesantamonica.com](#)), one of the dozen or so Santa Monica restaurants that face the ocean, may be the most ocean-y, with its raw bar (bivalves from \$1.50) and daily specials such as pan-seared rainbow trout (\$16). The casual blue-and-white restaurant, with a tin-pressed ceiling and blackboard menus, draws a chic flip-flop-wearing crowd.

### **10 p.m. 3) VENICE VIEWS**

For one of the best views of Santa Monica, head to the top of the [Erwin Hotel](#) (1697 Pacific Avenue; 310-452-1111; [hotelerwin.com](#)), just south of the border in Venice. Its rooftop lounge, High, opened last year with banquettes that seem to hang over the beach. If you're concerned about getting past bouncers, just reserve a table (you can snag a slot for up to four hours through the hotel's Web site; look for the OpenTable link). Signature cocktails include the Venice Vixen (\$13), made with pear-flavored Grey Goose, St. Germain elderflower liqueur and Graham Beck sparkling rosé.

## **Saturday**

### **8 a.m. 4) BREAD LINES**

The lines spill out the door, so arrive early at [Huckleberry Bakery and Café](#) (1014 Wilshire Boulevard; 310-451-2311; [huckleberrycafe.com](#)). Breakfast favorites include green eggs and ham, made with pesto and prosciutto (\$12.25), and duck hash with sunny-side-up eggs (\$12.50). The cheerful room — which feels like a large country bakery with pale wood tables and colorful accents — is tended by equally cheerful employees. Opens at 8 a.m.; by 9 it's packed.

### **10 a.m. 5) BEACHSIDE WALK**

James Corner, the landscape architect who helped design the High Line in Manhattan, has begun transforming a parking lot near Santa Monica City Hall into a six-acre park and a one-acre town square (the project will take years). In the meantime, stroll over to Palisades Park (Ocean Avenue at Santa Monica Boulevard; [smgov.net/parks](#)), the iconic strip of land with manicured lawns, swaying palm trees and sinuous paths overlooking the beach and Santa Monica pier.

### **Noon 6) FOOD MALL**

Since reopening in August, Santa Monica Place (395 Santa Monica Place; 310-394-5451; [santamoniacplace.com](#)) has become a neighborhood focal point. The glassy open-air complex, which replaced a mall designed by [Frank Gehry](#) in 1980, spreads across 500,000 square feet and three stories, and spills onto the Third Street Promenade. [Bloomingdale's](#) is one of the anchor tenants, but you didn't come here just to shop. The third floor is all about food. In early visits, the high-

end restaurants were disappointing; you can do just as well at Pinches Tacos ([pinchestacos.com](http://pinchestacos.com)), which serves handmade tacos, and Sarku Japan ([sarkujapan.com](http://sarkujapan.com)) in the food court — mixing and matching to create your own fusion cuisine.

### **3 p.m. 7) BARN RAISING**

The [Brentwood Country Mart](http://brentwoodcountrymart.com) gives shoppers new reasons to cross the Santa Monica border into Brentwood (225 26th Street; [brentwoodcountrymart.com](http://brentwoodcountrymart.com)). Opened in 1948 as a faux-rustic farmers' market, the barn-red complex has recently been invaded by trendier retailers like Diesel, a bookstore, and Turpan, which sells contemporary housewares. Among the newest is the Monocle Shop (310-395-4180; [monocle.com](http://monocle.com)), a retail offshoot of the fashion and business publication Monocle. Travel-savvy items include a zipper bag named Boston (\$400) and back issues of Tyler Brûlé's magazine to fill it with.

### **8 p.m. 8) SEASONAL BISTRO**

There are lots of stylish hotels in Santa Monica, and some of them offer very good food. Case in point is [Fig](http://figsantamonica.com), a contemporary American bistro that opened last year at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel (101 Wilshire Boulevard; 310-319-3111; [figsantamonica.com](http://figsantamonica.com)). The menu, which features seasonal ingredients, recently included a halibut “chop” (\$29) and snap peas with mint (\$9). There is seating indoors, in an elegant room with starburst mirrors, as well as on the terrace, with views of the ocean though the lush gardens. The huge Moreton Bay fig tree, from which the restaurant gets its name, will make you feel like climbing.

### **11 p.m. 9) DISCO NIGHTS**

Santa Monica may be known for sunshine, but there's plenty to do after dark. For a taste of the local night life, head to [Zanzibar](#) (1301 Fifth Street; 310-451-2221; [zanzibarlive.com](#)), a cavernous club that manages to be both cozy and contemporary. It is also the rare venue that seems able to please young and old (you could imagine [Joni Mitchell](#) on the dance floor with her grandkids). The D.J.'s play a mix of hip-hop, R&B and top 40. Even the décor has crossover appeal; hanging from the ceiling are perforated copper lanterns (for a vaguely African feeling) and disco balls.

## **Sunday**

### **10 a.m. 10) WARMER DIP**

Even in warm weather, the waters of Southern California can be frigid. For a more comfortable swim, duck into the Annenberg Community Beach House (415 Pacific Coast Highway; 310-458-4904; [annenbergbeachhouse.com](#)), a sleek public facility that opened in 2009. The spectacular pool stays open weekends only (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) through October, with day passes for \$10 (less for youngsters and oldsters). After October, your best bet is the public but country-club-stylish Santa Monica Swim Center (2225 16th Street; 310-458-8700; [smgov.net/aquatics](#)), where the adult and children's pools are kept at 79 and 85 degrees, respectively, and passes for nonresidents are \$5.

### **2 p.m. 11) SUNDAE BEST**

At [Menchies](#) (732 Montana Avenue; 310-393-4242; [menchies.com](#)), no one comes between you and your frozen yogurt. Pull the handle at one of the 14 yogurt stations, choose among 34 toppings, and plop your sundae on the scale —

it's 41 cents an ounce. That makes it possible to have a great dessert without overeating (or overspending). This is where the locals go and, given how well Santa Monicans live, that's exactly the recommendation you're looking for.

## **IF YOU GO**

Santa Monica is about a 20-minute drive from [Los Angeles International Airport](#). According to a recent Web search, several airlines, including JetBlue, Virgin America, Delta and American have round-trip flights from New York starting at \$297, for travel this month.

Santa Monica has a terrific bus system ([bigbluebus.com](#)), but most visitors drive.

**The Hotel California** (1670 Ocean Avenue; 310-393-2363; [hotelca.com](#)) is a surfer-style hotel, with 35 rooms, all recently updated with flat-screen TVs and dark wood furniture. Doubles from \$189.

The storied **Shangri-La Hotel** (1301 Ocean Avenue; 310-394-2791; [shangrila-hotel.com](#)) is a bright-white apparition on the bluffs high above the Pacific. The 71 rooms, which were extensively renovated last year, start at \$295.