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Stay the Night: Venice Suites, California



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A 1920s building where Marilyn Monroe once lived provides Kirsty Hathaway with a prime spot for Venice people-watching

KIRSTY HATHAWAY | Saturday 03 August 2013

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Los Angeles can be a difficult city to get to grips with. It's vast, spread out and you're stuck without a car. That's where Venice Suites come in. These unpretentious and affordable apartments are the best way to experience Venice, LA's anomalous seaside neighbourhood

Unlike the urban sprawl that largely characterises Los Angeles,

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Venice is a community to which artists, writers and musicians flock to set up home, where independent coffee shops,



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bars, restaurants and boutiques line the streets. It's vibrant, fun and above all, liveable.

Sitting on prime real estate on Venice Boardwalk, Venice Suites comes with uninterrupted views of the vast expanse of Venice Beach. The 1920s building retains its historical character outside, with simple, colourful interiors. It is a gem of a find, not to mention the best spot in this

part of LA for people-watching.

The rooms

Each of the 32 studios and one-bedroom suites comes with a fully fitted kitchen, which is ideal for solo travellers and families. The one-bedroom options at the front of the building are all corner suites with panoramic beachfront views. The higher up you the building you go, the lighter and brighter the rooms and better the views. Marilyn Monroe used to live in unit 42 on the top floor, the room I called home during my stay.

The decor is clean and simple with colour schemes inspired by the varying shades of the Pacific Ocean and beachfront outside. The sunlight streams in through the windows and bounces off violet blues, sea greens, and tepid yellows.

There's cable TV in the sitting room and bedroom, plus free speedy Wi-Fi throughout the building. In-room guides – courtesy of owner and foodie Carl Lambert – recommend not only the best places to eat in town but those that will deliver straight to your door. It also lists local supermarkets, gyms, pharmacies, wine shops, cabs and so on. Who needs a concierge when you have Carl's secret black book to hand?

Writers and artists favour Venice Suites for longer stays, making for interesting encounters and spontaneous barbecues up on the roof terrace. And even when they're not present, you can sit up there soaking up the Californian sun or supping sundowners as the sun sets dramatically behind the Pacific.

Out and about

Get the most out of this affluent seaside neighbourhood with Jonathan of Vintage Venice Tours (001 424 999 8687; vintagevenicetours.com; tours from \$25/£17 for two hours), who will point out everything from where Charlie Chaplin made his first film appearance to where The Doors played their first session together. Venice is also where the Beat writers called home in the 1950s and has been the backdrop to movies including *Grease*, *White Men Can't Jump* and *American History X*.

Unlike the rest of LA, the mode of transport here is the bicycle, so pick one up at Perry's Café (001 310 939 0000; perryscafe.com;

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\$40/£27 per day). The beachside bike path goes all the way from Santa Monica to Redondo Beach and is the most idyllic way to see other local beaches including Manhattan and Hermosa (labikepaths.com).

Surfing goes hand in hand with the local culture and Venice, with its sand break, is ideal for learners. Peter Paris is the man for the job (001 310 428 9870; gosurfla.com; lessons from \$80/£53).

Food and drink

For a post-sunset glass of wine, there's no better place in town than Venice Beach Wines (529 Rose Avenue; 001 310 606 2529; venicebeachwines.com), simply clad in wood and lit by dripping candles.

Situated on Abbot Kinney Boulevard – cited by US GQ as the "coolest block in the States" – Gjelina (1429 Abbot Kinney Blvd; 001 310 450 1429; gjelina.com) draws foodies and A-listers from all over Los Angeles. Worn wooden-clad walls, vintage iron chairs and a small luscious garden provide the setting for a well-thought-out pizza menu. Note that this is serious pizza, with interesting flavour combinations – no substitutes or changes allowed. Try squash blossom, courgette, cherry tomato, burrata and parmesan for \$15 (£10).





The Tasting Kitchen (633 Abbot Kinney Blvd; 001 310 392 6644; thetastingkitchen.com) is half-wine bar, half-restaurant and is the best spot for a weekend brunch. The restaurant is built around a 90-year-old olive tree and has exposed wooden beams; tuck into short rib hash with baked egg and gremolata for \$18 (£12).

The essentials

Venice Suites, 417 Ocean Front Walk, Venice, California (001 310 566 5224; venicesuites.com). Studio suites start at \$154 (£103), self catered.



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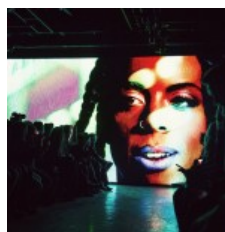
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