

# L.A.'s best day trip

Contributing editor Carolynn Carreño takes us on a low-key “daycation” of strolling canals, bohemian shops, and gourmet cafés in her favorite local neighborhood, Venice Beach



Crowds stroll the Venice beachfront.



Denim and more at The Stronghold



Writer Carolynn Carreño

One Saturday I was walking down Abbot Kinney Boulevard, the main commercial drag in Venice, when I ran into two friends whom I’d recently introduced having lunch together—because Venice is like that. “We were just talking about you!” one said. “We were just talking about you!” one said. Oh ... yeah? What were you saying? “We were saying that you should totally, like, *move here!*”

A quick bit of geography: I live 12 miles from Venice, in the Hollywood Hills, just a half-hour drive away. I make the trip to Venice so often that acquaintances, shopkeepers, and restaurant servers are astonished when I reveal that I actually live “in town,” which is code for L.A. But I like visiting Venice. And in fact, retreating to this seaside community from “town” is what first put it on the map.

Originally called Venice of America, it was founded in 1905 by tobacco millionaire Abbot

## ONLY IN VENICE BEACH

- **Fall weather:** highs in the 70s, consistently 10° cooler than L.A.
- **The buzz:** Newly opened Intelligentsia, selling hot coffee and tea in a hip space
- **Community pride:** The 25th Annual Abbot Kinney Festival (September 27), a celebration of the town’s beach-meets-chic vibe

Kinney as a seaside resort, and had been on a decline since the Great Depression. But in the five years since I came to Los Angeles, I have seen Venice transformed from a borderline neighborhood defined by grungy beach culture to a cool, clean-air alternative for stylish urbanites. It’s characterized by an eclectic mix of classic California bungalow style and notable modernist architecture that makes the most of the town’s small lot lines. Abbot Kinney, the mile-long stretch that runs diagonally through town, is one of the few streets in L.A. where outdoor cafes and galleries, antiques and design stores, clothing boutiques and restaurants turn strolling into a stimulating activity. “Meet me on AK!” is a typical text that I send to friends. People talk about a “staycation.” For me, getting away to this laid-back village is what I call a perfect “daycation.” >





California throwback



One of the city's Technicolor murals



A "walk street" house



Explore the area like a local: on two wheels.



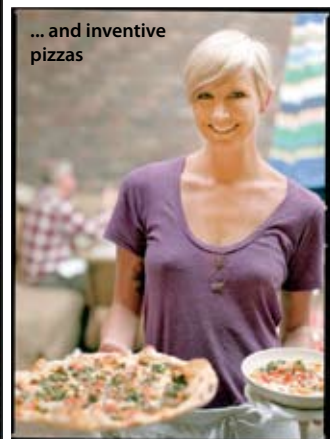
Surfing Cowboys



Carolynn finds a new wish list item.



Gjelina's tasty small plates



... and inventive pizzas



Venetian canals, West Coast style

## retail therapy

**The Stronghold** (1625 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/399-7221) is still known for California denim cut and made by hand, just as it was when it was founded in 1895. The store is a throwback to another era, with antique oak furnishings, a small sitting area where customers are offered a drink from a cut-

crystal decanter, and, most importantly, merchandise. In addition to off-the-rack and made-to-measure denim (including indigo high-waisted "pin-up shorts" that I covet), you'll find Bay Rum aftershave (a barbershop classic), vintage eyewear and timepieces, Filson coats and bags, Pendleton blankets, suspenders, vests, and boots.

Everything you need for a new Old California life.

No matter where else I'm headed on the boulevard, I try to make time to scan the shelves at **Equator Books** (1103 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/399-5544 or equatorbooks.com). I also love the bright, fresh atmosphere of **Vert** (1121 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/581-6126 or vertla.com), a sunlit shop showcasing natural products from perfumes and lotions to makeup, baby products, and candles—all chosen for being organic, environmentally

friendly, or otherwise qualifying as, well, vert.

The name **Surfing Cowboys** (1624 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/450-4891 or surfingcowboys.com) pretty much sums up the way Venice residents seem to feel about themselves, at least the husband-and-wife former artists who turned their studio into an antiques shop specializing in midcentury modern furniture and accessories. I love their retro cowboy boots, but it's also the place to find a vintage fireplace, and much more.

The high-end antiques store **Double Vision** (1223 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/314-2679) is what I call aspirational, in that I aspire to own just about everything within its four walls. The store's collection of mostly European art and antiques is all the evidence necessary to prove that Venice has evolved. (Take a virtual tour of the merchandise at 1stdibs.com.)

## lunch

The west side of Los Angeles isn't known for its restaurants, but **Gjelina** (1429 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/450-1429 or gjelina.com), which opened last year, is challenging that. It's packed day and night—both the front room, with a large bar counter and floor-to-ceiling windows that open onto AK, and the lovely brick patio, where regulars lounge comfortably on couches around a fire pit as though in their own backyards. The kitchen turns out thin-crust wood-fired pizzas

with such toppings as grilled radicchio, bacon, fontina, and tomato confit. The roasted half chicken alone, with its crispy, perfectly rendered skin, is worth whatever it takes to get there.

The best-dressed crowd on the west side—or maybe in all of Los Angeles—can be found on weekends eating breakfast in the spare, airy, architectural room of longtime neighborhood fave **Axe** (1009 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/664-9787 or axerestaurant.com). The restaurant, pronounced >

“Meet me on AK!” is a typical text that I send to friends

—Carolynn Carreño



"AH-shay," committed to sustainability long before it became a buzzword. The kitchen prepares old-school health-food staples such as quinoa, brown rice, and braised greens in a way that doesn't taste like health food, which is pure Southern California and quintessentially Venice. The nine-grain pancake is a dense patty of whole grains barely bound together and served with maple syrup, and a Vietnam-inspired rice bowl is heaped with fresh local veggies. Both have cult-like followings.

With an outdoor café at least twice the size of the restaurant, and full virtually any time of day, **3 Square Café** (1121 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/399-6504 or [rockenwagner.com](http://rockenwagner.com)) says all you need to know about the Venice lifestyle. The short chalkboard menu strikes the ideal balance of familiarity and intrigue with such offerings as a half-pound burger on the bakery's famous pretzel roll, *huevos rancheros* with a small stuffed charred



Street performers entertain all ages.



Venice's famous beach



green chile and a side of avocado fries (fried avocado wedges), and seasonally inspired homemade soups.

### sip

You might have to wait to get in. You can count on it

being too noisy for real conversation. Don't go (or get) hungry, because they do not serve a speck of food. And no, there is no ocean view. Still, of all the bars on all of Abbot Kinney, **The Other Room** (1201 Abbot Kinney Blvd.; 310/396-6230 or [theotherroom.com](http://theotherroom.com)) is the place to wander into. End of story.

### walk or bike

To explore the Venice everyone knows—the beach—I borrow a bike (you can rent) and head down Windward and across Ocean, to the epicenter of the bohemian madness: skaters, bikers, vendors, and general nuttiness. One pass north to Rose Avenue is all I need to >



ILLUSTRATION: MATT CASERTA





The Stronghold



Eco Cottage rentals are solar-powered retreats four blocks from the beach.



Venice sunset

## HOUSE HUNTING

### Venice Beach, CA 90291

Venice offers a little bit of everything, from century-old Craftsman houses to modern homes by California's hottest architects, says broker CJ Cole of Venice Beach Living. A starter home runs about \$800,000 (welcome to Cali!), while newer and larger residences run several million and more.



#### 1071 Superba

Two-bedroom, one-bath Spanish-style home with fireplace and two covered parking spots. \$799,000; homeasart.com.



#### 242 Sherman Canal

Three-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath home with sweeping canal views. Quick walk to restaurants and beach. \$2,995,000; pbsrealty.com.



#### 736 Amoruso

Three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath two-story Craftsman. On a "walk street" double lot, has separate office. \$2,850,000; 736amorosoplace.com.

I should be embarrassed to admit this, but here it is: I had lived in Los Angeles for years, and had visited Venice several times, before I learned that there were actually canals here that acted as streets, with *houses* on them, much like the canals in ... you know ... that other Venice. Finding the canals can be challenging, but find them you must, because walking them is as delightful as you can imagine.

### stay awhile

Venice doesn't have a hotel, per se. For that, you have to go a couple miles to Santa Monica. For a unique lodging experience, check into the **Eco Cottages** (447 Grand Blvd.; 866/802-3110 or [venicebeachecocottages.com](http://venicebeachecocottages.com)). The three houses, each with its own decor, offer the amenities of home—an albeit tiny but adorable home.

For a more traditional experience, go north a mile to Santa Monica, to the recently redone **Fairmont Miramar Hotel and Bungalows** (101 Wilshire Blvd.; 866/540-4470 or [fairmont.com/santamonica](http://fairmont.com/santamonica)) or the swanky **Viceroy** (1819 Ocean Ave.; 800/670-6185 or [viceroy.santamonica.com](http://viceroy.santamonica.com)).

Want to stay a little longer? Rent for a week or a month at the darling **Venice Beach Cottages**. (Weekly rates start at \$1,595; [vrbo.com/117220](http://vrbo.com/117220); can sleep up to six.) This would be my perfect daycation home. 🌴

■ *Contributing editor Carolyn Carreño lives in Hollywood. When she isn't noshing at nearby Osteria Mozza, she can be found strolling Abbot Kinney Boulevard. Her next cookbook collaboration, about the foods of Mozza, is scheduled to be published in 2010.*

remember that it was not always the bourgeois mecca that it is today.

I consider walking to be a hybrid of recreation and exercise, and in Venice, I do as much as I can. The town has everything a walker wants: amusing people-watching and significant architecture. I love to stroll the "walk streets"—essentially sidewalks with houses on both sides, and no roads. (I know you're wondering: Residents park in the alleys in the back.) One day, I'd like to have a daycation cottage here myself.