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Rodeo Drive is one of the world's great streets for designer label and haute couture boutiques and shops.

Shopping, dining and a rich and diverse cultural history

Beverly Hills, California

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

BEVERLY HILLS — Synonymous with luxury, from world famous Rodeo Drive to five star restaurants and hotels, Beverly Hills (www.lovebeverlyhills.com) is one must stop on any visit to California. During our recent visit we were fortunate to secure reservations at the Sofitel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills.

Besides its reputation as a shopping and restaurant paradise, Beverly Hills has a rich and diverse art and cultural history. Sightseeing tours are popular for discovering architectural highlights, famous landmarks and celebrity haunts. From Anne Fontaine to David Yurman, more than 100 retailers are located on swank Rodeo Drive. This is one of the world's great streets for designer label and haute couture boutiques and shops. Near there is another popular tourist attraction, the Paley Center for Media, where visitors can select, view and listen to titles from a library of 120,000 TV shows and radio programs.

The Saban Theatre is an art deco venue built in 1930, formerly known as the Fox Wilshire and one of 20th Century Fox's premier movie theatres for several decades before it was renovated into a stage theatre in 1981. Run by the City of Beverly Hills, the Trolley Tour is a great introduction to the neighbourhood. As the name suggests, an old-fashioned-looking trolley car transports riders through the city, while the tour leader shares information on its art, architecture and history, over the course of 40 minutes.

The sprawling Greystone Mansion, built in 1928, serves as the location for many movie shoots and weddings. Since it functions as a public park, the outdoor areas of the estate, including the manicured lawns and courtyard areas, are all free of charge — even parking is free. Unfortunately, access inside the Tudor-style home is not permitted except at very special private events.

Following an excellent experience at the Sofitel in New York City, we found accommodations at the Sofitel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills. There is nothing quite like awakening to sweeping Hollywood Hill views and sun lit French doors. The hotel boasts a prime location, one mile from Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, at the epicentre of LA style. It is located across the street from the Beverly Shopping Center. There are 295 rooms here on 10 floors, including 26 suites and two Presidential Suites. The staff is extremely polite and helpful, with a top-notch concierge desk at your disposal. The latter helped me out a lot with directions, restaurant options and tour stops.

In zeroing in on one fine dining spot to sample, people kept pointing towards Mastro's Steakhouse at 246 North Canon Drive, for which there are locations in California, Nevada, Arizona, Illinois and soon New York City. We made a reservation, arriving towards 8:30 p.m. on a weekday evening. The place was packed. Recognized as one of the top 10 steakhouses in the U.S., it is also recognized for its sumptuous seafood selections and one of the best desserts I have ever tasted — the irresistible warm butter cake.

There was a wide choice of appetizers and salads to choose from. We targeted our attention towards the signature Iced Seafood Tower to start. You basically build your own tower. In our case we opted for the Dungeness crab cocktail and some large shrimp.

It was a delicious combination, with three side sauces available to complement the taste. The next decision was to go with meat or seafood? We settled on sharing a 12-ounce bone-in filet, which was out of this world. In addition, we split a two-and-half pound lobster, which our two waiters brought to the table and cut up so neatly we only needed our own knives and forks to enjoy every morsel.

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