

Downtown Los Angeles is experiencing a renaissance; get ready for The Bloc



An artist's rendering of what the revitalized Sheraton Downtown Los Angeles will look like.

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

LOS ANGELES - In the city of Los Angeles (www.discoverlosangeles.com), the downtown area is known for a fabulous convention centre, the magnificent Staples Center, the LA Live Entertainment complex and a number of other attractions.

This is actually a pretty good place to base yourself, specifically because of an excellent Metro (subway) system which I was very impressed with. Not only was it quicker to reach our destinations than a cab, but the monetary savings were significant. The Metro Trip Planner is a great tool to use when navigating your way around LA. It generates detailed instructions on how to get to and from your destination. You can also download the Go Metro Los Angeles V2 mobile app to help you get around the city while on the go. All transit rates start at a base fare of \$1.50. In addition to a single-ride fare, options include the Metro Day Pass (\$5) and the Seven-Day Pass (\$20). On the Metro Rail and the Metro Orange Line, single-ride fares, passes and stored value must be loaded on a Metro TAP card. TAP is a durable plastic card that you can use again and again. Buy and add value to a reusable TAP card from TAP vending machines located at Metro Rail or Metro Orange Line stations. The TAP card allows you to add money and/or choose from a daily, weekly, or monthly pass to add to your card. Buying a pass is often less expensive than the base fare price per ride. For more information on fares, passes, and TAP, visit: www.metro.net/riding/fares The Metro is fully wheelchair accessible, with elevators that transport you to the necessary level.

I am told that Downtown Los Angeles is experiencing a renaissance. Things to do in include world class entertainment venues and museums, incredible restaurants, a thriving nightlife scene and walkable streets. LA Live is a spectacular entertainment complex offering nightlife, restaurants and live music venues, including the Grammy Museum, ESPN Zone, Lucky Strike Lanes and Regal Cinemas. Across

the street, Staples Center hosts major concerts and sporting events. The arena is home to the Lakers, Clippers, Kings and Sparks. Walt Disney Concert Hall is a modern architectural masterpiece anchoring the Music Center, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the Ahmanson Theatre and the Mark Taper Forum. Nearby, Silver Lake offers low-key dining and trendy boutiques with a neighborhood feel. We spent part of one day in Hollywood, accessing the famous Walk of Fame via Metro. I must confess it was a bit of a letdown. On a positive side, the Hollywood and Highland Metro stop let's you right off to visit a nice outdoor mall, the famous TCL Chinese Theatre (formerly Grauman's), the Dolby Theatre, Ripley's Believe it or Not, the wax museum and the home of Jimmy Kimmel Live. Spotting the names of famous stars on the endless Walk of Fame is cool, but also be prepared for an array of tourist traps and salesmen trying to fill tour buses.

The Sheraton Los Angeles Downtown Hotel (www.sheratonlosangelesdowntown.com) turned out to be a great place to stay. Located in the heart of the downtown financial district, this large facility boasts 495 guest rooms, two restaurants, a lobby lounge, a full-service business center and a fitness center. The hotel is an easy walk to the Convention Center, the Staples Center and LA Live. They are also minutes from museums, theatre, sports, and must-see attractions. A Macy's Department store is located right next door.

Located on preferred floors, Sheraton Club guest rooms offer upgraded amenities, and complimentary fitness center access. Club guests also have special access to the Club Lounge, a relaxing, upscale space offering complimentary breakfast, afternoon hors d'oeuvres and a variety of beverage options. A copier/fax/printer and complimentary office supplies are ready to go. We had access to this room and let me tell you it was a huge bonus.

Guest rooms are completely smoke-free. They feature 37 inch flat screen TVs. Bathrooms are accessible with grab bars, the option of roll in showers and baths and TDD (Telecommunications Device for the

Deaf).

There is a guest services concierge desk, which I found to be very helpful in terms of recommendations of where to dine and visit.

Officials at the hotel are excited about a huge makeover which is about to occur in their area, dubbed The Bloc. The hotel is being renovated and upgraded from the bottom up by highly accomplished interior designer Colum McCartan. Sitting high in the heart of the city, Sheraton Los Angeles Downtown Hotel on The Bloc promises to be a transformative experience for both business and pleasure. This will amount to a \$40 million renovation of the property as part of a \$160 million development of the The Bloc itself. Over the course of seven months, the guestrooms of this prominent hotel will receive an Art Deco transformation that draws inspiration from the city's significant historical architectural details.

Expressing a modern interpretation of time-honored classics, the design will include Sheraton's signature offerings and technological amenities geared towards the connected traveller: Sheraton Sweet Sleeper® bed, designed to meet AAA's Five Diamond Award® Criteria; distinctive, decorative lighting, including power outlets at the base of all fixtures; completely renovated marble tile bathrooms; technologically-enabled guestrooms, with high-

speed Internet, an LCD flat panel television and an MP3 docking station; and state-of-the-art wireless radio frequency identification locks that allow for guests to bypass the front desk and check-in remotely. Other features will include an in-room safe, refrigerator and new carpeting. The hotel's 26,000 square feet of transformed flexible indoor and outdoor event space and many new amenities will include a swimming pool for everyone, plus an outdoor spa and cabanas on the third floor, along with adjacent meeting space for social and corporate clients wanting easy access to the pool area. Food and beverage service will be available.

A variety of new dining choices will accommodate the needs of guests in the hotel and the new eateries to be located in the adjacent mall, where a convenient new Metro subway station will serve visitors, local residents and business commuters.

We requested a fridge in our room. With a Walgreen's Pharmacy right across the street, I was able to get the necessary grocery items to make our own breakfast and lunch. A Jimmy John's gourmet shop is close by as well, with a virtual army of staff to serve you. I was also happy to dine at an IHOP location just around the corner. As for the Metro, the entrance is a crosswalk away from the hotel's entrance.



The shopping plaza anchored by Macy's will get a makeover as well.