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MELTING POT doesn't quite do Los Angeles justice. This is a city where people speak at least 224 languages, revere eclectic artistic styles and cook everything from Mexican mole to Cantonese barbecue to Persian pizza (and much in between). Anything goes in LA, and here's where to find it.

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PHOTOS BY JESSICA SAMPLE





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Let's embrace the Los Angeles strip mall once and for all. Often maligned as an emblem of SoCal sprawl and there-lessness, the ubiquitous miniplaza is actually the ultimate symbol for everything inclusive and global about LA. Consider the cluster of cultures under one slatted signpost at Airport Plaza not far from LAX, where a Jamaican/Ethiopian grill, Pakistani/Indian café and Thai takeout place are within throwing distance of restaurants serving Mexican street food, Persian kebabs and Cuban vegan. Plus, there's a 7Eleven. Oh, the places you'll go without ever leaving America's second-largest metropolis.

Los Angeles does not have a "majority" population. This is a city where at least 224 languages are spoken by people from more than 140 countries, and that vibrant stew ultimately flavors how people eat, drink, shop, entertain and enrich themselves. It's not just well-traveled ethnic enclaves such as Koreatown, Little Armenia, Historic Filipinotown or Hollywood's Thai Town—districts that serve up tastes and experiences you normally need a passport to enjoy. From El Segundo to the San Gabriel Valley and multilingual strips in between, a dazzling mashup of influences makes Los Angeles a gateway to the world—even if you're strolling the city a few short blocks at a time.

Downtown's Historic Core

Begin in Chinatown. From Hill Street, **Far East Plaza** looks like a pedestrian pass-through, but you could easily spend an entire Sunday dining, shopping and people-watching in that mesmerizing breezeway. This is where chef Roy Choi famously launched the global food truck frenzy a decade ago with the ultimate LA combo: the Korean taco. At **Howlin' Ray's**, an appreciative, stylish crowd waits (sometimes for more than an hour!) for Nashville hot chicken. **East/West Shop** sells vintage Levi's mix-matched with patches applied in the Japanese country quilting technique known as *sashiko*. **Now Serving** is a cozy international cookbook and culinary store by former Wolfgang Puck chef de cuisine Ken Concepcion and his wife, Michelle Mungcal.

Walking southeast from there, the world is your oyster. Peruvian chicken at super down-home **Intiraymi**. Immigrant history adapted for digital attention spans at the interactive **Italian American Museum of Los Angeles** and **Chinese American Museum**. There's a hidden 1932 fresco by Chicano muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros that's viewable from the observation deck of the **América Tropical Interpretive Center**. **Olvera Street**, with its kitschy tourist kiosks and LA's oldest standing residence, is known as the city's birthplace, dating back to the 1781 arrival of 44 settlers of mixed Spanish and African descent. **LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes** is a 2.2-acre campus of landmarked buildings and a garden with live performances and exhibits on the region's Mexican-American heritage. The onsite boutique sells one-of-a-kinds like churros plushies and a watercolor print of an instant ramen cup alongside a bottle of Tapatio hot sauce. *Così LA!*

San Gabriel Valley

Jonathan Gold, the beloved Pulitzer Prize-winning food critic who died last summer, put San Gabriel's food scene on the culinary map. His classic reviews still draw hungry hoards, whether it's for palate-numbing dan dan noodles in chili oil at **Chengdu Taste** in Alhambra or beefy *xian bing* "hot pockets" at **Beijing Pie House** in Monterey Park. Still, the SGV can be intimidating for the day-tripper, particularly if Mandarin, Thai or Vietnamese are not native languages. **Six Taste Food Tours** points you in all the tastiest directions.

Born and raised in a Vietnamese family in Los Angeles, Sally Tiongco

Boiled fish with green pepper sauce, chicken with red and green pepper, mung bean jelly noodles with chili sauce, toothpick lamb with cumin and Sichuan dan dan noodles at Chengdu Taste in San Gabriel Valley.



cofounded the walking food tour company 10 years ago to help visitors immerse themselves in LA's most diverse neighborhoods. The 3.5-hour "New Chinatown" outing starts, naturally, in a miniplaza in the middle of San Gabriel Square. Think of it as a crash course in dim sum, Cantonese barbecue and Taiwanese desserts you might otherwise never order. The multistop adventure opens with beef bao, shumai and plates of braised chicken feet—they're flavorful but watch the bones—at **Five Star Seafood**, a dim sum spot that packs in thousands upstairs at Focus Plaza. Next, it's Taiwanese beef rolls and crinkly, tea-infused chicken legs at **Happy Kitchen**; roasted duck and noodles at **Sam Woo BBQ**; and traditional Chinese breads at **Kee Wah Bakery**. **168 Market** in Alhambra is a megagrocery that feels more like Hanoi than Los Angeles. There are large bags of rice, aisles of shrimp-flavored puffs and crisps, and Costco-sized displays of durian, the infamous stinky Asian fruit. Oh, and if you need oxtail or golden dragon fruit, this is definitely your SoCal go-to.

PAGE 71, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Jon & Vinny's in Fairfax; Poketo owners Ted Vadakan and Angie Myung at The Line Hotel in Koreatown; Beef tartare at Here's Looking at You in Koreatown; Canter's Deli in Fairfax; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Doughnuts stuffed with ice cream at B Sweet on Sawtelle Boulevard; Far East Plaza in Chinatown; Making margaritas at Guelaguetza in Koreatown.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: East/West Shop co-owners Dennys and Erin Han in Chinatown; Now Serving in Chinatown; A chicken sandwich at Howlin' Ray's in Chinatown.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Festival de Mole platter with margaritas at Guelaguetza; Viewing *The 20th Hour of the Poem* and *Clockwork for Oracles* by Ugo Rondinone at The Marciano Art Foundation in K-Town; The bar at Here's Looking at You.

K-Town

Meander even a few blocks through Koreatown, preferably in a jetlag haze—the area pulsates 24/7—and you'll find the best abalone porridge and lavender lattes this side of Seoul; Mexican mole chicken as dark and bittersweet as anything in Oaxaca (at James Beard award-winning **Guelaguetza**) and the oldest Jewish congregation in Los Angeles. K-Town is all-in-one like that. More than half of the neighborhood's population identifies as Latin, with a heavy Salvadoran influence, which explains why **El Flamin' Taco**, a humble taco food truck, has lines down Vermont Avenue. Higher on the hog at **Here's Looking at You**, chef Jonathan Whitener fuses Pacific Rim, Spanish, Korean and Italian flavors around a 21st-century tiki vibe. Or scrap all that and head to **Sun Nong Dan** or, better still, **Seongbukdong** for the long-braised Korean short ribs known as *galbi jjim*.

Even the local feels exotic here: Angie Myung and Ted Vadakan handpick the vibrant pan-everywhere collection of clothing, stationery and knickknacks at **Poketo** inside **The Line Hotel**. Golfers on Tokyo or London time cream tee shots until 10 p.m. inside the four-story outdoor driving range at **Aroma Spa & Sports**. Boisterous **Cafe Brass Monkey** will still be open afterward for karaoke (in multiple languages), and there's bowling and Belgian beer until 2 a.m. at dive-y **Shatto 39 Lanes**. Later still at **Wi Spa**—the brightly lit oasis never actually closes—there are offerings to soothe whatever ails you. It's refreshing to find bulgogi tacos and Southern fried chicken on a spa menu and even more restorative to plant yourself face down for a hybrid 85-minute deep-tissue/shiatsu treatment. Try to stay awake: **The Marciano Art Foundation**, a boundary-busting contemporary art collection in a renovated former Scottish Rite Masonic Temple, opens at 10 a.m. on weekends (advanced timed tickets required).

Fairfax

The Original Farmers Market is one of those dependable tourist haunts that even lifelong LA residents can't get enough of. The colorful 1934 landmark exudes pluralism with a round-the-map collection of food stalls and shops, including **Monsieur**

Marcel Gourmet Market (you won't believe the international craft chocolate selection), **The Gumbo Pot**, **Singapore's Banana Leaf**, **Pampas Grill** churrascaria and **Moishe's** for Mediterranean. There's a free Friday night music series with world beat soul, Latin jazz and Brazilian swing starting May 31.

Wander from there in either direction along Fairfax and you're on what's been dubbed the coolest street in Los Angeles. It is certainly a diverse stretch. Ten years ago, the area mostly catered to the neighboring Orthodox Jewish community, and a handful of Judaica shops and kosher butchers remains. **Canter's Deli**, a Fairfax hub since 1948, is still a fine place to nosh, though today you might be slurping matzoh ball soup alongside a hungover millennial hoping for a choice spot in line next door at one of the global "hypebeast" streetwear retailers: **Supreme**, **Golf Wang**, **Joyrich**, **RIPNDIP**, **Dope** and **Diamond Supply Co.** Those pricey fashion brands—and others that inevitably sprung up since this piece went to print—reflect what's swaggy in skatewear and the club scene not just in LA but in Tokyo, Brooklyn, Reykjavik and beyond. If there's a menu equivalent, it's right there at **Jon & Vinny's**, a sort of Italian-meets-West Coast hip-hop joint where the hand-thrown pizzas have names like Ham & Yeezy and All Hail Black Kale. Across the street, the meatier sister establishment, **Animal**, turns out plates *sans frontières*, like the dish of Cuban boniato yam, lemon crème fraîche, pepita, salsa verde and za'atar. Either restaurant will save your global soul.

For a world of culture, hit the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, which this month is showcasing its first comprehensive survey of Sri Lankan art and an exhibition of Central Asian textiles from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Spend the evening in East Africa by way of one of Fairfax's many Ethiopian eateries. The very best is **Meals by Genet**, another Jonathan Gold discovery, where chef Genet Agonafer makes a celebratory Ethiopian doro wat chicken stew that faints off the bone.

Sawtelle

The 10 or so blocks of Sawtelle Boulevard between Santa Monica and Olympic are officially designated as Sawtelle Japantown, but "Japangeles" is more like it. Minutes from the UCLA campus, the area benefits as much from Westside ocean breezes and chill LA attitude as it does from whatever's fresh at the strip's student-packed sushi bars, noodle houses and yakitori cafés. Japanese Americans began moving to Sawtelle due to race-based restrictions on home buying from the early 1900s to the 1950s. Now it's a center of J-pop, with stores including **Giant**

BELOW, FROM LEFT: Jon & Vinny's; The vegetarian combination at Meals by Genet in Fairfax.



Cream puffs at Beard Papa's on Sawtelle Boulevard.

Robot (among the curated cuteness, you can buy a \$180 plush flower cushion by Takashi Murakami) and the fluorescent-lit, if-we-don't-have-it-you-don't-need-it madness of **Daiso Japan**, a Japanese answer to the dollar store. **BlackMarket** sells everything from quirky home décor to clothes from Billionaire Boys Club and backpacks from trendy Swedish outfitter Fjällräven.

It's the cheap eats that draw most people (though if you stray a few blocks west to Purdue, you'll come to **Janss Family House**, the first residential design by architect Frank Gehry). Maybe boost your energy first with an espresso shot and baked pretzel at **Coffee Tomo**, which roasts its own beans and excels at delicate latte art. **Tsujita LA Artisan Noodle** is steamy heaven for fans of "dipping ramen," which uses noodles soaked in broth for impossible richness. It's popular, so expect a wait. For all-day



Pasta at Jame Enoteca

STRIP MINING

These minimal standouts reflect L.A.'s global tastes

JAME ENOTECA

Hand-rolled Italian pastas at a new El Segundo crowd-pleaser that shares a parking lot with a Havana sandwich counter, a Cal-Mex café and a Memphis BBQ.

KING'S BURGERS/GOT SUSHI?

Wedge between an urgent care and Dunkin' Donuts, the low-key burger joint in Reseda has a revered sushi counter hidden within.

PETIT TROIS

The fading Raffalo's Pizza sign on the Hollywood cinder block strip is a decoy for one of LA's buzziest French dining experiences by celebrity chef Ludo Lefebvre.

JITLADA THAI

The mother of all LA strip mall hot spots—like, five-alarm fire-in-your-mouth hot—is a Thai sizzler next to a barber shop, a kids' shoe store and a Hollywood flower shop.

LILIAN'S BREADS & SWEETS

One of LA's finest Filipino bakery-café is hidden inside Cruisers Car Wash at the Northridge Costco.

slurping, **Tsujita LA Annex** is open across the street, and there's **Tsujita Sushi**, too, though the original is the one and only for ramen connoisseurs. **Furaibo** is where you get plates of umami-drenched fried-chicken wings for ten bucks. **ROC** consistently turns out the westside's best Chinese soup dumplings. **Kato**, with a multicourse, ever-changing Taiwanese/"Asian American nostalgic" menu, is slightly off-route but 100 percent worth finding for what one critic calls a "tasting menu spot that might sway even the most anti-tasting menu people." Back on Sawtelle, **B Sweet Dessert Bar** takes its cues from the Philippines, with sweet *halo halo* shaved ice and ube hot bread pudding. For something less purple (as both those treats are), a good alternative is **Beard Papa's**, which fills cream puffs with flavored custards and somehow makes them Japanese. Or how about this for LA globalism: **The Bombay Frankie Company** is a highly acclaimed Indian burrito shop inside a Chevron gas station!

Westwood's Persian Square

A quick rideshare or e-scooter from Sawtelle is the epicenter of Los Angeles' Iranian community, often called Little Persia but known more casually as "Tehrangeles." The area on Westwood Boulevard between Pico and Wilshire boulevards took shape after the 1979 overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi sent families fleeing to the U.S., bringing with them traditions and recipes as captivating as *One Thousand and One Nights*. Persian hospitality, in and out of the home, is just as legendary—rest assured you will not go hungry in this part of town.

Shaherzad warms the heart with succulent beef *koobideh* kebabs on basmati rice and stews bubbling with chicken and sautéed ground walnuts in pomegranate sauce. The specialty at **Attari** sandwich shop is the tongue sandwich served in a hollowed-out baguette with mayo, lettuce, tomatoes and pickles. The deli counter in the back of **Super Sun Market** feels like a hidden gem, with beef and chicken kebabs grilled to order. Persian pizza sounds like an American invention but it's actually a Tehran street food import, and there's no better place to try

BELOW, FROM LEFT: BlackMarket boutique on Sawtelle Boulevard; Tsujita LA Annex on Sawtelle.



The Mediterranean Diet

In 2019, shawarma, shakshuka and hummus are like gold. Superstar chefs such as Ori Menashe at Bavel, Sara Kramer and Sarah Hymanson at Kismet, and Conor Shemtov at Mh Zh (pronounced "mah zeh") are adding California twists to traditional dishes from Israel, Morocco, Lebanon and Turkey, and Los Angeles is suddenly America's pita capital.



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Salmon kebabs, hummus and cucumber salad at Shaherzad in Westwood's Persian Square; Super Sun Market in Persian Square. BELOW: Dining at Shaherzad.

it than **Café Glace**. The standard order may raise an eyebrow, but it works: a hot dog pizza with cheese, and you eat it with ketchup! If nothing else, visit Westwood for a taste of Persian ice cream at **Saffron & Rose**. Free of preservatives or artificial anything, the gelatolike scoops are flavored with rose water and fresh ingredients like white rose and real pistachio.

There's culture, too. Nearby at **The Hammer Museum**, Seoul-born California painter **Yunhee Min** this month makes a canvas of the gallery's floors rather than walls in a colorful exploration of painting's potential beyond the picture plane. And on view in June is the first American survey by influential British artist Sarah Lucas. Her photography, collage and sculptural works turn everyday objects like vegetables and cigarettes into social statements about gender and identity.

One final—and we do mean final—destination worth visiting is tucked behind office towers on Wilshire Boulevard, and it poignantly embodies the melting pot that is Los Angeles. At **Pierce Brothers Westwood Village Memorial Park**, famous names from near and far rest for eternity in a serene, gardenlike setting. Zsa Zsa and Eva Gabor from Hungary are buried here. So is the French-born actor Louis Jourdan and Romeo Vasquez, a matinee idol of Philippine cinema. Billy Wilder was born in Austria but known for directing the American classics *The Seven Year Itch* and *Some Like It Hot* with Marilyn Monroe. She's here, too, among dozens of other dreamers who flocked to LA only to make the world their own. ▼

