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Instant Guide to Los Angeles Downtown

4 hours on the go

Fodor's



Downtown Los Angeles has maintained its status as the cultural and historic heart of the city, and its energy continues to grow. Added to the rich mix of ethnic communities—including Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and El Pueblo de Los Angeles—is a

wave of new attractions and lofts, architectural landmarks, parks, museums, and markets. It's here that you'll find the stunning Walt Disney Concert Hall, Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the L.A. Live/Nokia Theater. Our top picks will give you the best Downtown experience.



■ **The Standard:** Take the elevator up to this lounge for a spectacular view of the city and its oh-so-L.A. rooftop swimming pool. Grab a seat on one of the circular waterbed pod couches or an S-shaped tanning chair. By night, nearby skyscrapers serve as video projection screens and the in-house DJ attracts an influx of L.A.'s beautiful people.

■ **Union Station:** Evoking an era when travel and style went hand in hand, this is one of the country's last great rail stations. Built in 1939, it combines Spanish colonial revival and art deco styles. The waiting hall's commanding scale and enormous chandeliers have appeared in countless films and TV shows.

■ **Bunker Hill Steps:** Threading a peaceful path through Downtown's urban towers, a fountain stream spills down the center of this monumental staircase. Its quiet beauty is reminiscent of Rome's Spanish Steps. If you're not inclined to

walk up, hop on the escalator parallel to the stairs.

SHOPPING BLITZ

■ **Grand Central Market:** Visit the city's largest and best food market for handmade white-corn tamales, warm olive bread, dried figs, and Mexican fruit drinks. Stop by Del Rey, at stall A7, for a remarkable selection of rare chilies and spices. Even if you don't plan to buy anything, the market is a great place to browse and people-watch.

■ **Olvera Street:** Go to this busy pedestrian block for piñatas, mariachis, puppets, leather goods, sandals, serapes, handicrafts, and Mexican food. It's the major draw of the oldest section of the city, known as El Pueblo de Los Angeles.

IN-THE-KNOW

At the beginning of Olvera Street is **the Plaza**, a Mexican-style park with benches and walkways, shaded by a huge Moreton Bay fig tree.

At the **Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels**, make sure to go underground to wander the mazelike white-marble corridors of the mausoleum. Free guided tours start at the entrance fountain at 1 on weekdays.

GET HERE FAST

The garage at 725 South Figueroa Street is your best bet. Get three hours free with validation from a shop or restaurant; otherwise, it's \$7 after 4 PM and on weekends.

DON'T MISS

■ **Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels:** The unconventional and austere design for this church drew controversy when it opened in 2002, but judging from the swarms of visitors and the standing-room-only holiday masses, it's clearly become a local favorite.

■ **Museum of Contemporary Art:** The MOCA's permanent collection of American and European art from 1940 to the present includes heavy hitters such as Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Susan Rothenberg, Diane Arbus, and Robert Frank.

■ **Walt Disney Concert Hall:** Designed by Frank Gehry, this stainless steel-clad masterpiece is part of a complex that includes a public park, gardens, and shops as well as two outdoor amphitheatres.

QUICK HITS

■ **Bradbury Building:** Stunning wrought-iron railing, pink marble staircases, a Victorian-style skylit atrium, and birdcage elevators make this 19th-century building worth a stop. Visits are limited to the lobby and the first-floor landing due to a constant stream of filmmakers on location.

