

# Movie magic

As the Hollywood Sign turns 100 this year, **Tracey Davies** shines a spotlight on Los Angeles' film-themed attractions

**G**osh, what an honour! I would like to thank my producer Chloé Zhao, director Greta Gerwig, and, of course, my leading man Ryan Gosling," I sob, before raising the heavy gold statuette to roaring applause. I have been practising my Oscars acceptance speech since I was 10 years old, so I was delighted to finally deliver it at the Oscars Experience at the Academy Museum. Well, everyone comes to Hollywood to be discovered, don't they?

Hollywood is home to the world's oldest movie industry, and with this legacy comes a plethora of attractions that put it centre stage across the city. Celebrating its centenary this year, the iconic Hollywood Sign is the original starlet of Tinseltown. Staggered across Mount Lee in Beachwood Canyon, this famous landmark was originally a temporary sign for a real estate company that was promoting a residential area called Hollywoodland, and thanks to

its position you can see the 13-metre-high letters from almost everywhere in LA.

One of the best views of the sign is from the Griffith Observatory, backdrop to scenes from *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Jurassic Park* and *La La Land*. Of course, everywhere's a film set in Hollywood, from the wig shops lining the Walk of Fame (*Pretty Woman*) and Randy's Donuts (*Iron Man 2*) to Downtown's Millennium Biltmore hotel (*Ghostbusters*).

#### AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

I spend an afternoon at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, which opened in 2021. It's dedicated to the art of movie-making, and the \$25 entrance fee allows a deep dive into the silver screen, with ever-changing exhibitions and memorabilia collected from a century of cinema. These include 'Bruce', the only surviving model shark from *Jaws*, and the actual horse head from *The Godfather*. ➤

Academy Museum  
of Motion Pictures

PICTURE: Josh White/JWPictures/  
Academy Museum Foundation



## DESTINATIONS

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#### Los Angeles

##### Conrad Los Angeles

Designed by Frank Gehry – who imagined the surreal Walt Disney Concert Hall opposite – five-star Conrad Los Angeles has a swanky rooftop terrace, a pool deck and San Laurel, a SoCal-meets-Spain restaurant by star chef José Andrés. Rooms from \$500 per night. [hilton.com](https://www.hilton.com)

##### Tommie Hollywood

A block from Hollywood Boulevard in the Vinyl District, the hip younger sister of the Thompson Hollywood has wowed since it opened in December 2021. On the ground floor is Mexican restaurant Ka'teen, while the rooftop pool and Desert 5 Spot bar has a Palm Springs vibe. Rooms from \$199. [hyatt.com](https://www.hyatt.com)

##### Short Stories

Across from CBS Studios and The Original Farmers Market, this boutique hotel is on the edge of buzzy Fairfax and perfect for exploring West Hollywood. It has a pool area, Parisian-style courtyard and Peruvian-Californian dining. Rooms from \$274. [shortstorieshotels.com](https://www.shortstorieshotels.com)



FROM LEFT: Hiking in Griffith Park, with the Hollywood sign in the background; Universal Studios

PICTURE: Universal Studios Hollywood



## top tips

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I love seeing the iconic Oscars outfits, particularly Cher's 1986 'revenge dress', which she wore after being denied a nomination for her role in *Mask*. It also allows a peek into the world of casting via the personal archive of legendary casting director Marion Dougherty, who scouted for *Grease*, *Batman* and *Midnight Cowboy*. Her collection includes rare Polaroid pictures of hundreds of now-stars, including Stanley Tucci and Nicolas Cage.

Even dining out in Hollywood offers an insight into the movie industry. I spend the evening at the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel, which held the first Oscars ceremony back in 1929. It was also where Marilyn Monroe lived for two years early on in her career, Shirley Temple did her first tap dance, and Clark Gable and Carole Lombard conducted an illicit affair. More recently, Angelina Jolie booked the penthouse suite for a period during the pandemic; I wouldn't be surprised if she was, like me, tempted by the amazing burgers from 25 Degrees, the hotel's burger joint.

Its 45-minute studio tour, included in the price, is more to showcase what the studio can do rather than provide a peek behind the scenes. Trams wind through sets like *Jaws* and *Psycho*, where I spot Norman Bates putting a body in the trunk of his car at the Bates Motel. But with Hollywood being Hollywood, it's all about the special effects, demonstrated in the petrifying King Kong 360 3D experience, the earthquake scene in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* and a hair-raising *Fast and Furious* scenario.

To increase my chances of being discovered in Hollywood, I also book on the Warner Bros Studio Tour. The three-hour experience exposes more behind-the-scenes elements than Universal, as it explores original sets and working sound stages from shows such as *Gilmore Girls* and *Young Sheldon*. There's also much more memorabilia on show, including Harry Potter, DC and a full *Friends* experience in Central Perk.

#### HOLLYWOOD ON WHEELS

Everyone drives in LA, so it's a real treat to take an e-bike tour of Hollywood, with Bikes and Hikes LA. Led by Mickey, a local musician, we cycle down Santa Monica Boulevard to the LA Farmers Market, through Hancock Park, the original Beverly Hills, past Paramount Pictures and through the Hollywood Forever Cemetery, where you can pay tribute to everyone from Judy Garland to the Ramones. On the final stretch, we glide past the 2,700 stars of the Hollywood Walk of Fame and I wonder if there's space for one more. **TW**

#### BEHIND THE SILVER SCREEN

Studio tours are big business in Los Angeles, with Paramount, Sony Pictures, Universal and Warner Bros all offering tours to the public. Universal Studios, albeit a working studio, has grown into a theme park with rides and attractions themed around *The Simpsons*, *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* and the new Super Nintendo World, which opened in February with giant mushrooms and Venus flytrap-inspired Piranha Plants.

## BOOK IT

**Ocean Florida** offers five nights in the Millennium Biltmore Los Angeles, room-only, from £989 per person, based on a family of four sharing a Deluxe Room, departing on June 27. The price includes flights. [ocean-florida.co.uk/agents](https://ocean-florida.co.uk/agents)