

Two Days in Los Angeles: Westside & Central, Without Living on the 405

A tight, honest 2-day plan for a Santa Monica base, a beach morning, one canonical viewpoint, one world-class museum (the free Getty), a proper taco run, smoothies, and a great dinner. Every half day stays in one zone so you spend your time enjoying LA, not staring at brake lights.

o) Your Trip at a Glance

Item	Detail
Dates	Saturday, September 26 to Sunday, September 27, 2026 (1 night)
Group	2 adults
Budget	Up to \$800 total
Must-haves	Beach, one canonical viewpoint, Getty or Broad, a great taco run, tacos + smoothies + one nice dinner
Special request	Neighborhood-by-neighborhood routing: one area per half day (Westside day, then a central-ish day), honest drive times with traffic, never two far-apart anchors in one half day
Transport	Rental car picked up at LAX
Lodging area	Santa Monica or West Hollywood, whichever routes best

1) At a Glance

Element	Pick	Key facts (as of June 2026)
Base	Santa Monica	Puts the beach, tacos, smoothies, dinner, and the Getty all on the Westside. West Hollywood would add freeway miles to nearly everything you asked for.
Lodging	Shore Hotel, 1515 Ocean Ave	Coastal Escape offer advertises rates starting at \$236, plus a waived guest amenity fee and discounted overnight valet parking. Confirm the exact rate for 2 adults on September 26, 2026 at the booking step. Phone 310-458-1515.
Beach	Santa Monica State Beach + the Pier	Free. Steps from the hotel, so day one starts on foot.

Element	Pick	Key facts (as of June 2026)
Canonical viewpoint	Griffith Observatory, 2800 E Observatory Rd	Free admission. Weekends open 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM; confirm the exact Sunday September 27, 2026 hours on the official site. The city-and-Hollywood-Sign view.
World-class museum	The Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Dr	Free admission (timed reservation required). Saturday 10:00 AM to 9:00 PM. Paid parking, confirm current rate on arrival.
Taco run	Tacos Por Favor, 1408 Olympic Blvd	Open daily 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM. Cash-friendly, classic Mexican, walkable-ish from downtown SM.
Nice dinner	Rustic Canyon, 1119 Wilshire Blvd	Wine bar & seasonal kitchen. Saturday 5:00 PM to 10:00 PM (last seating 9:30 PM).

Because The Getty and Griffith are both free, almost your entire budget goes to the room, the rental car, food, and parking. That is very comfortable for two adults with an \$800 ceiling.

1b) Recommendation and why (plus the alternative)

Recommendation: base in Santa Monica, not West Hollywood. Your list is Westside-heavy: beach, Getty, tacos, smoothies, and a nice dinner all cluster around Santa Monica. The Getty Center is in Brentwood, just off the west side of the 405, roughly 8 to 10 miles from Santa Monica, a 20 to 35 minute drive depending on traffic. West Hollywood would push most of your day back across town.

For the room I recommend the **Shore Hotel** because it is literally across the road from the sand, so day one needs zero driving. Its downtown location puts the Santa Monica Pier, the Third Street Promenade, and the beach just steps away. Its Coastal Escape offer advertises rates starting at just \$236, plus a waived guest amenity fee and discounted overnight valet parking. Confirm the exact rate for 2 adults on September 26, 2026 at the booking step. The valet parking cost is charged separately and is not bundled into the room rate, so confirm the exact valet rate at the booking step.

Named alternatives (same criteria: Santa Monica, walkable, 2 adults):

- **Ocean View Hotel**, 1447 Ocean Ave, Santa Monica: also directly on Ocean Avenue facing the beach, typically a notch below the Shore on price. Guide value from roughly \$200 to \$260/night. Confirm the exact-date price at the provider's booking step.
- **Sea Blue Hotel (Santa Monica)**, 1670 Ocean Ave: smaller, simpler, usually the cheapest of the three on Ocean Avenue, guide value from roughly \$180 to \$240/night. Good if you want to keep the most budget for food.

The routing alternative: if you ever wanted West Hollywood instead, you would flip the days (central/WeHo day first, beach day second), but you would trade your easy walk-to-the-sand mornings for more 405 and Sunset Boulevard time. For this specific wish list, Santa Monica wins.

💡 Tip: All three alternatives sit on Ocean Avenue within a few blocks, so you can compare live prices for your exact date and pick the best value without changing your routing at all.

1c) Book Now

What	By when	Where / link
Hotel room (Shore Hotel or an Ocean Ave alternative)	4 to 8 weeks ahead; September is still busy	shorehotel.com , You will see the binding price for your exact dates and occupancy at the provider's booking step, it changes daily.
Getty Center timed-entry (free)	1 to 3 weeks ahead for a Saturday	getty.edu/...
Rustic Canyon dinner reservation	1 to 2 weeks ahead for a Saturday	rusticcanyonrestaurant.com (Book a table) or call 310.393.7050
Rental car at LAX	ASAP for best rate	Your preferred rental provider's site

💡 Tip: The Getty is free but a Saturday timed slot can fill up. Grab a late-afternoon entry (say 4:00 to 5:00 PM) so you catch the famous sunset views, since Saturday hours run to 9:00 PM.

2) Day-by-Day Plan

Day 1, Saturday September 26: Westside (Santa Monica + Brentwood)

Everything today is on the Westside. The only real drive is the short hop up to the Getty.

Morning, on foot from the hotel (no car).

- Pick up your rental car at LAX. LAX to Santa Monica is about 9 miles, typically 25 to 40 minutes depending on traffic on the 405 or Lincoln Blvd. Check in (or drop bags) at the Shore Hotel, 1515 Ocean Ave, then leave the car with valet.
- Walk across to **Santa Monica State Beach** and the **Santa Monica Pier**. Toes in the Pacific, ocean air, zero parking stress. This is your beach box, checked, for free.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

Late morning: smoothie stop (walkable).

- **Backyard Bowls**, 1317 7th St, Santa Monica: açai and smoothie bowls plus blended smoothies, a couple of blocks off the beach. Check the opening hours before visiting.
- Alternative: **Rawberri** or any Third Street Promenade juice bar within a short walk if you want variety.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

Lunch: the taco run.

- **Tacos Por Favor**, 1408 Olympic Blvd, Santa Monica. It is open daily from 8 am to 8 pm; the address is 1408 Olympic Blvd, Santa Monica, CA 90404, phone (310) 392-5768. Classic, no-frills, beloved Westside tacos and burritos. Bring an appetite and expect a line at peak. Budget roughly \$12 to \$20 per person.

- Alternative taco option (still Westside): **HomeState** or a nearby taqueria if you want a second style. But Tacos Por Favor is the canonical Santa Monica taco run, so lead with it.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

💡 Tip: Tacos Por Favor is famously cash-friendly and busy, order at the counter, grab a table, and don't expect table service or valet.

Afternoon into evening: The Getty Center (the museum + a viewpoint bonus).

- Short drive up to Brentwood. If using a GPS device, be aware that some give wrong directions to the Getty Center; to reach the only public entrance, use this address: N Sepulveda Blvd & Getty Center Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90049. The Getty official address is 1200 Getty Center Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90049. From Santa Monica this is about 8 to 10 miles, roughly 20 to 35 minutes with typical Saturday traffic on the 405.
- Admission is free and requires a timed-entry reservation, and there is a fee for parking; on Saturday the Center is open 10am to 9pm. A tram carries you from the parking structure up to the hilltop galleries and gardens.
- Parking: there is a paid parking fee, so budget for it and confirm the current rate on arrival. Getty parking fees have gone cashless, all major banking/credit cards are accepted, and rates include Los Angeles City Parking Occupancy Tax.
- Spend 2 to 3 hours on the collection, the Richard Meier architecture, the Central Garden, and the terrace views over the city and ocean. Staying into early evening rewards you with a sunset skyline, a legitimate "canonical viewpoint" in its own right.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

Plan B (weather or crowds): If it is a rare gray, blustery day, the Getty is entirely indoors-friendly, so no change needed. If your Getty slot sells out, swap in **The Broad** downtown on Day 2 morning instead of Griffith (free timed tickets, contemporary art), but that pulls you off the Westside, so only do it if needed.

Dinner: back in Santa Monica.

- **Rustic Canyon**, 1119 Wilshire Blvd, Santa Monica, your one nice dinner. On Saturday it is open 5:00pm to 10pm, with last seating at 9:30pm; the address is 1119 Wilshire Blvd, Santa Monica CA 90401, phone 310.393.7050. Seasonal California cooking and a serious wine list. Note there is no valet service; street parking only. Reserve ahead. Budget roughly \$70 to \$110 per person before tax and tip.
- Alternative nice dinner (also Santa Monica): **Élephante** (rooftop Italian, ocean views) or **Forma Restaurant** (pasta and a cheese cave) if you want a different vibe or Rustic Canyon is fully booked.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

💡 Tip: In the US, tip 18 to 20 percent at a sit-down dinner like Rustic Canyon, and remember California sales tax (about 9.5 percent in Santa Monica) is added on top of posted menu prices.

Day 2, Sunday September 27: Central (Griffith Observatory + Los Feliz)

One anchor, one neighborhood. Griffith is the canonical LA viewpoint, and you frame the day around it so you drive once and enjoy the rest.

Morning: check out and drive to Griffith.

- Check out of the Shore Hotel by the posted time (usually 11:00 AM). Santa Monica to Griffith Observatory is about 16 to 18 miles, typically 35 to 55 minutes depending on traffic (take the 10 to the 110 to the 101, or surface streets via Sunset). Go earlier rather than later; Sunday midday is calmer than weekday rush.
- Griffith Observatory is at 2800 East Observatory Road, Los Angeles, CA 90027, phone (213) 473-0800, and weekend (Saturday to Sunday) hours are 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; because posted hours can vary by season, confirm the exact Sunday September 27, 2026 hours on the official site before you head up. It is a free-admission facility; access to Griffith Park is free, though there is paid parking closest to the Observatory. Visitors may look through telescopes, explore exhibits, see live shows in the Samuel Oschin Planetarium, and enjoy spectacular views of Los Angeles and the Hollywood Sign.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

💡 Tip: Most mobile phones have difficulty getting a clear signal near the Observatory, so pin the parking location and take a screenshot of directions before you head up the hill.

Midday: lunch in Los Feliz (same neighborhood, no far hop).

- Los Feliz Village sits right below Griffith, a 5 to 10 minute drive. Keeps you in one zone. Good options: **HomeState** (Texas-style breakfast tacos and queso) at 4624 Hollywood Blvd, or **Little Dom's** at 2128 Hillhurst Ave for a relaxed Italian-American Sunday lunch.
- Alternative: grab a light bite at the **Café at the End of the Universe** on the Observatory grounds if you'd rather not come back down. Food and drinks are not permitted inside the building, and café seating is for café patrons.

Map: [Open in maps](#)

Afternoon: wind down and head to LAX.

- If your flight is later, add a short walk in Griffith Park or a stroll through Los Feliz's boutiques before pointing the car back toward LAX. Griffith Observatory to LAX is about 22 to 26 miles, and this one is genuinely traffic-dependent: budget 45 to 75 minutes and pad extra on a Sunday afternoon.

💡 Tip: Fill the rental's gas tank near LAX (stations on Sepulveda or Century Blvd) rather than in Los Feliz, so you're not paying a premium and doubling back.

Plan B (heat or heavy crowds at Griffith): Griffith's grounds are exposed and can be hot and packed midday. If so, do the indoor exhibits and planetarium first, then step onto the terraces for the view when it cools. If parking near the top is full, park lower in the park and walk up, or use a rideshare for the final stretch.

3) Practical Notes, Checklist, and Cost Overview

Practical notes

- **Driving reality:** LA traffic is real but your one-neighborhood-per-half-day routing keeps it sane. Your only meaningful drives are Santa Monica to the Getty (about 20 to 35 min) and Santa Monica to Griffith (about 35 to 55 min). Everything else on Day 1 is on foot.
- **Parking:** Getty is paid parking (confirm the current rate on arrival, cashless, card only); Griffith is paid parking at the lot (arrive earlier for a spot). Your hotel uses valet, which is an extra charge that is not included in the room rate, confirm the exact rate at booking. Rustic Canyon is street parking only.
- **Reservations:** Getty (free timed slot) and Rustic Canyon both need booking ahead for a Saturday.
- **Tipping (US):** 18 to 20 percent at sit-down meals; a couple of dollars at counter spots like Tacos Por Favor is friendly, not required.
- **Sales tax:** Santa Monica/LA sales tax (roughly 9.5 to 10.25 percent) is added to posted food and retail prices, budget "plus tax."
- **Connectivity:** No cell signal in the Getty garage or up at Griffith, so screenshot your reservations and directions.

Checklist

- ☐ Hotel booked for 9/26 (confirm valet parking cost)
- ☐ Getty free timed-entry reserved (late afternoon for sunset)
- ☐ Rustic Canyon table booked (Sat, before 9:30 PM last seating)
- ☐ Rental car reserved at LAX
- ☐ Sunscreen, layers (beach mornings cool, Griffith afternoons hot), comfy shoes
- ☐ Cash for Tacos Por Favor
- ☐ Screenshots of directions to Getty and Griffith (no signal)

Estimated cost overview (2 adults, mirrored against \$800)

Item	Estimate (USD)	Notes
Hotel, 1 night	\$236 to \$300	Coastal Escape rate starts at \$236; confirm the exact-date price with the provider. Add valet parking if used.
Hotel valet parking (1 night)	Confirm at booking	Charged separately, not included in the room rate; confirm the exact rate when you book
Rental car (1 day from LAX)	\$60 to \$110	Guide value, varies by class/provider; plus taxes and fees
Gas	\$15 to \$25	For the local driving described
Getty parking	Confirm on arrival	Paid, cashless (card only); confirm the current rate on arrival
Griffith parking	\$10 to \$20	Paid lot near the Observatory

Item	Estimate (USD)	Notes
Beach + Getty + Griffith admission	\$0	All free
Smoothies (2)	\$20 to \$30	Backyard Bowls or similar
Tacos Por Favor lunch (2)	\$25 to \$40	Plus tax
Los Feliz lunch (2)	\$30 to \$55	Plus tax and tip
Rustic Canyon dinner (2)	\$160 to \$260	Plus ~9.5% tax and 18–20% tip
Total	~\$556 to \$840 plus valet and Getty parking	Comfortable if you pick mid-range room and rental; tightens if you splurge on dinner wine

Honest budget note: this fits \$800 if you keep the room near \$236 to \$270, choose a modest rental car, and are sensible with the dinner wine list. If you order generously at Rustic Canyon or add valet parking, you can nudge past \$800, so that's the lever to watch. The two free anchors (Getty and Griffith) are what make this trip so budget-friendly.

4) Sources

Checked June 2026.

Attractions

- The Getty Center, hours and admission: [getty.edu/...](https://www.getty.edu/)
- The Getty Center, parking and transportation: [getty.edu/...](https://www.getty.edu/)
- The Getty Center, main visit page: [getty.edu/...](https://www.getty.edu/)
- Griffith Observatory, visit/hours/admission: [griffithobservatory.lacity.gov/...](https://www.griffithobservatory.lacity.gov/)

Lodging

- Shore Hotel, Santa Monica (rates, location, phone): [shorehotel.com](https://www.shorehotel.com)

Food & drink

- Tacos Por Favor, Santa Monica (hours, address, phone): [tacosporfavor.us/...](https://www.tacosporfavor.us/)
- Rustic Canyon (hours, address, phone, parking): [rusticcanyonrestaurant.com](https://www.rusticcanyonrestaurant.com)
- Backyard Bowls, Santa Monica (smoothie/açaí bowls): [backyard-bowls.square.site](https://www.backyard-bowls.square.site)

Alternatives referenced

- The Broad (backup museum): [thebroad.org](https://www.thebroad.org)
- Ocean View Hotel and Sea Blue Hotel (Ocean Ave alternatives): confirm exact-date pricing at each hotel's own booking page

A note on prices: attraction admissions and opening hours above are exact from the official pages. Room, rental-car, hotel valet parking, and Getty parking figures are guide values or confirm-at-booking because they sit behind live booking widgets or vary by season, so confirm your exact-date, exact-occupancy price at the provider's booking step before you commit.

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