

TRAVEL AGE

EXPLORING TRAVEL FAVORITES AND FRONTIERS

WEST

An Ideal Itinerary for Pasadena, Calif.

By Mindy Poder



Colorado Blvd., Old Town Pasadena
// (c) Florian 2010

The city of Pasadena, Calif., which sits just above downtown Los Angeles is known for mainly two things — the annual Rose Parade on New Year’s day and well, you know, that golden oldie from the 1960’s. Fast forward to 2010, however, and you and your clients will discover that Pasadena has much more than just flowers or catchy tunes. In fact, it’s become a major epicenter of food and wine for Southern California —something I recently tasted — and savored — firsthand.

In fact, the most recent winner of television’s “Top Chef” reality competition series, Michael Voltaggio, helms the kitchen as chef de cuisine for The Dining Room at The Langham Hotel, an eatery with one Michelin star. And

while Voltaggio may be one of the newest reasons to visit Pasadena, the city’s historic architecture, art collections, entertainment and shopping also offer sophistication that parallels expensive, far-off destinations for clients with limited travel time or money to spend.

Here is an ideal two-day itinerary.

Day One

11 a.m.

Brunch at Noir Food & Wine

Evoking the charms of a sidewalk Parisian cafe, Noir offers big flavors in small and intimate packaging. Two rows of white-clothed tables, a four-seat bar and an outdoor patio of ornate ironwork provide a cozy atmosphere in which to enjoy small plates by Claud Beltran and an extensive wine list boasting 800 choices by Mike Farwell. Served with fig bread, honeycomb, quince paste and glazed pecans, the lunch fromage board of Saint Andre, Humboldt Fog, Bucheron and Saint Nectaire cheeses is a great starter plate to share, while the decadent chocolate terrine with creme anglaise should be a mandatory conclusion to the internationally inspired fare.

www.noirfoodandwine.com

1 p.m.

Art Appreciation at The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens

Literature lovers will gravitate to an original Gutenberg Bible, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and my personal favorite — original drafts of Thoreau's Walden — while art aficionados will enjoy 18th- and 19th-century British and French pieces including "Pinkie" and "The Blue Boy." Outside, more than 14,000 plant species fill 12 themed gardens, including the Shakespeare Garden, which features many plants from Shakespeare's plays, accompanied by a plaque containing a relevant quote, and the new Chinese Garden which evokes harmony through a manmade lake, Chinese architecture and native Chinese plants. Clients can get in free on the first Thursday of every month as long as they reserve a ticket online in advance.

www.huntington.org

4 p.m.

Shopping in Old Town Pasadena

Though more than 200 buildings in Old Pasadena date back to the late 1800s, this 22-block stretch offers an up-to-date mix of specialty boutiques, retail shops, art galleries, eateries and entertainment. Tree-strewn alleys, 19th-century architecture and specialty shops such as Beyond the Olive, a purveyor of high-quality extra virgin olive oil, and 21 Flavors, a frozen yogurt shop that mixes rich toppings with daily flavors on a cold stone, make this shopping experience a thoroughly charming one.

www.oldpasadena.org

6 p.m.

Playing Wine Detective

Wine Detective includes an innovative tasting room with Enomatic Machines that facilitate sampling in more than 48 bottles, a wine bar, a wine store and food pairings. While sampling can get pricy, the happy hour held Mondays through Fridays from 4-7 p.m. offers \$5 house wine and 25 percent off of appetizers.

www.winedetective.com

8 p.m.

Dining at Cafe Santorini

Located in a historic brick building in the Old District, Cafe Santorini offers Mediterranean fare, an extensive wine list and a full bar that are sure to alleviate post-shopping hunger and guilt. Clients can cuddle up under heat lamps on the light-strewn rooftop patio, or enjoy their meals in the intimate dining room. Grilled meats, seafood, pastas and family-style appetizers are among the cafe's variety. A mezze tasting platter heaped with tabouleh, hummus and grape leaves; a soft butternut squash filled with herbs, tomatoes, Japanese eggplant, rice and grilled vegetables; and an apple tart with cinnamon ice cream are among the restaurant's highlights.

www.cafesantorini.com

11 p.m.

Get Your Pub On at Lucky Baldwins

This British pub delivers with more than 60 beers on tap and hearty English pub fare like Cottage Pie, fish and chips and bangers and mash. Visitors during the month of February will love the annual Belgian Beer Festival, which features more than 80 of the country's beers on tap.

Day Two

10 a.m.

Wake Up at Arroyo Vista Inn Bed and Breakfast

While your client's stomach might still be full from the day before, it won't refuse a helping of this B&B's superb breakfast offerings. Dishes include sweet blueberry cobbler, pumpkin pancakes, spiced muffins, eggs Florentine, hearty whole-wheat toast and zucchini and butternut squash frittata. In addition to freshly squeezed orange juice, lattes, vanilla-nut coffee and a selection of teas, guests can also enjoy afternoon wine and appetizers and homemade toffee and cookies throughout the day. However, it's not only the food, but the inn's Lester Moore Craftsman-style architecture that meets South Pasadena's bed-and-breakfast criteria for historical significance. Up-to-date and comfortable, its nine distinctly themed and decorated rooms — including the Forest Room with its French chaise sitting area, chrome bed, antiques and oversized bathroom — round out a very pleasant stay.

www.arroyovistainn.com

Noon

Take a Gamble at The David B. Gamble House

Several of the Arts and Crafts buildings of Greene and Greene can be found among Pasadena's impressive architecture, but The David B. Gamble House is the most complete and conserved of the brothers' nature-inspired work. Every detail in the house was designed — from the furniture, paneling, woodcarvings, rugs, lighting, iridescent stained glass, accessories and built-in cabinetry to the air vents, pegs and downspout — and can still be appreciated due to the preservation and programming of the City of Pasadena and the nearby University of Southern California. Docents, all of whom are able to distinguish Port Orford cedar from hand-rubbed maple and oak, lead hour-long afternoon tours as meticulous as the house itself, from Thursday through Sunday.

www.gamblehouse.org

1:30 p.m.

Go Baby Go at Santa Anita Park

Though Kentucky is a long plane ride away from Pasadena, Santa Anita Park is only a few miles away in nearby Arcadia. With almost daily thoroughbred racing from December to April, thoroughbred fans have many opportunities to display their best derby hats while sipping on Bloody Marys (Mint Juleps, unfortunately, are not served here). Clients can save money for their wagers on Friday, when admission is free and beer, soda, popcorn and more is only \$1, and on Thursday, when seniors' admission is free.

www.santaanita.com

4 p.m.

Art Smart at Norton Simon Museum

In only 30 years, industrialist Norton Simon was able to accrue a rich collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, in addition to 2,000 years worth of South and Southeast Asian art. Thankfully, the public can view 1,000 pieces from the permanent collection of some 12,000 pieces. Housed in a California Modern building renovated by Frank Gehry, the compilation features works by Degas, Raphael, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Monet and Picasso. Admission is free on the first Friday of every month from 6 to 9 p.m. www.nortonsimon.org

8: 30 p.m.

Fine Dining at The Dining Room

Voltaggio — a young, tattooed chef known as much for his food as his pout — heads the formal, Michelin-rated The Dining Room at The Langham. While the traditional wood-paneled and sailboat-adorned room ostensibly clashes with the playful innovations of Michael Voltaggio's cuisine, the dining experience is one that continually shocks and surpasses expectations. Here, diners can enjoy a four- or five-course meal but I would advise them to trust Voltaggio and select the seven-course Tasting Menu that includes his favorite dishes such as langoustine, served with lobster mushroom lasagna, young fennel and porcini mushrooms. Fun and personal touches, like eating instructions from the chef and a post-dessert panel of jellies in edible rice-paper wrappers and lollipops of dark chocolate and pop rocks, can make guests feel as though they were eating in their own dining rooms. Though a renovation date has not been finalized, the restaurant is expected to temporarily close during late March or early April so clients should plan accordingly.

www.thediningroom-langham.com

Beyond the Itinerary:

If clients are looking to explore more of Pasadena, here are a few more suggestions:

Arroyo Seco Park

Active clients will enjoy the hiking, running and biking trails in this gorgeous break from urban and suburban space.

www.arroyoseco.org

The Pacific Asia Museum

One of four U.S. museums dedicated to Asian art, The Pacific Asia Museum also holds classes in tai chi, yoga, Chinese Brush painting, meditation and haiku.

www.pacificasiamuseum.org

Pasadena Civic Center

The 3,000-seat Pasadena Civic Center has been the venue of choice for Broadway musicals, ballet, symphony orchestras and celebrity speakers in addition to the Prime Time Emmy Awards, and the People's Choice Awards. Clients can check the events calendar to catch a performance.

www.pasadenacenter.com

The Pasadena Museum of California Art

The Pasadena Museum of California Art is dedicated to California art, design and architecture from 1850 to the present day.

www.pmcaonline.org

Rose Bowl Flea Market

Perhaps better known as the home stadium for the UCLA Bruin football team and the venue for the Tournament of Roses football game, the Rose Bowl turns into the spot for bargain-hunting on the second Sunday of every month. With more than 2,500 vendors and 20,000 visitors each month, the Rose Bowl Flea Market has little in common with the smaller community swap meet. The market opens at 9 a.m., but clients can dig through trash and treasures until closing at 3 p.m.

www.rosebowlstadium.com

For More Information:

Pasadena Convention & Visitors Bureau

www.visitpasadena.com
