Celebrating gastronomy

International Media Production Zone

Travel Arabia

The Voice of Salt & Sand

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Arabian Experience
The food equals the affection

Gastronomy Diaries
Afternoon tea at the Conrad London
Novikov Nights

Gourmet Voyage
Where to eat when in Maldives, London and Turkey

12 TRAVEL TREATS

Couples Season · Classic Indonesian cuisine

Masterchef Judge in Souq Al Bahar · Abu Dhabi in Moscow

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BHR bd 1.5 QATAR qr 15 KUWAIT kd 1.5
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CALIFORNIA HOLIDAY DONE

but get the Insider Information before you go Road Tripping!

BY MONICA KAPILA

It's possible to fly direct to either Los Angeles or San Francisco from Dubai or Abu Dhabi but we chose to go via Virgin Atlantic as that way we got to stop over in London for free and the premium economy cabin fares on Virgin were actually quite reasonable.

OUR ITINERARY

From Dubai to Los Angeles, then a 20 minute drive to
Santa Monica : Shutters on the Beach hotel – 3 nights then
another 30 minute drive to Beverly Hills: The Montage hotel : 2 nights
On to San Louis Obisbo via Malibu (stay a night in Santa Barbara, this is a long drive)
Then stopping overnight in Carmel at the Carmel Country Inn (having spent the day exploring the Big Sur beaches) and finally
4 nights in San Francisco at the Zetta hotel South of Market.

FIRST STOP : SANTA MONICA IN LOS ANGELES

I wouldn't bother looking at any other hotel in Santa Monica but Shutters on the Beach. Yes it's pricey but stay a couple of days less and really enjoy all this hotel and it's location has to offer.

THE LOCATION OF SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH

A perfect, wide beach with the Pacific ocean stretching out in front of you means you really don't have to travel far from the hotel itself. But do explore downtown Santa Monica, we loved the Farmers Markets and one day hired bikes and rode through to the Montana Avenue area. It's a very cool, genteel suburban place with cold pressed juiceries and independent coffee shops you'll love. See the place like a local and stop to take in the Pacific Palisades park on the way. Santa Monica has been voted as one of the top 10 Beach Cities in the world!

THE ACCOMMODATION AT SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH

This really is a unique feature of the hotel. The rooms I was told before coming resembled a shoot out of a Ralph Lauren magazine. Rumour was reality. It's very difficult for a hotel to make it's rooms really feel like a home, but Shutters on the Beach has managed to do just that. Super soft, floral and patch quilts with sky high thread counts on our beds, books you'd want to read on the shelves and scented candles in the bathroom made us forget we were in a hotel room at all. We were lucky and got rooms facing the ocean, it's a view worth waking up to, at least once in your life. And remember coming from our time zone, you'll be watching the sun rise!

THE FOOD AT SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH

I was so skeptical about the quality of food we were going to eat in America, despite it being California. We're very spoilt by the high quality produce we get here in the UAE, but our whole family was DELIGHTED with our meals at Shutters. We had

breakfast every morning at Coast, the in house restaurant that I am convinced is a favorite with locals who seemed to be doing business deals in the morning. The white picket fence is all that's between you and the sea and this setting just adds to the overall deliciousness! The grapefruit juice is the best I have ever had in my life and all the food, be it toast, eggs, waffles, fruit or pancakes were fresh, beautifully presented and genuinely tasty.

THE DOWNSIDE OF SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH.

Well there really isn't any downside, but from the point of view of us Dubaians and UAE types, the pool and deck area is a lot smaller than we are used to and will seem a little less luxurious than we have come to expect, but that in no way would deter me from staying at this hotel again in a heartbeat, just wish California was nearer!

NEXT STOP THE MONTAGE IN BEVERLY HILLS.

Just a 30 minute drive way by car but really a whole world away in terms of experience! Everyone from Dubai must experience Beverly Hills once in their lives and again, like Shutters for Santa Monica, if you can afford it, don't think, just stay at the Montage and let the magic of Beverly Hills do the rest.

THE LOCATION OF THE MONTAGE

You may have heard of the Golden Mile in Dubai's Palm Jumeirah but Beverly Hills has it's own Golden Triangle with The Montage being right in it's centre. It's immediately opposite the very good Sugar Fish sushi restaurant (do go early as they don't take bookings) and is adjacent to a very stylish almost European type mini park area complete with fountains, grassy areas and wrought iron tables and chairs for you to picnic on. High class picnic food is available from the gorgeous Paninoteca, the little sister of The Montage's grown up Scarpetta Italian restaurant and Bar Bouchon of French Laundry fame sits on the other side of the park. There are any number very good restaurants literally on one straight road from the Montage, so you really are spoilt for choice here.

SHOPPING AROUND THE MONTAGE.

Rodeo Drive is an iconic shopping area and just 2 minutes walk from the Montage. The shopping of Rodeo Drive is legendary with some flagship stores showcasing products specifically just at this location. The Louis Vuitton store even has it's own private roof top terrace where coffee, tea and even champagne is sometimes served to high spending customers. Shopping here has been elevated to much more than a mere transaction of money for goods. It's now a whole experience to remember and even used as a milestone in life for a lucky few. The shop even has a special My First Louis Vuitton event! Do you remember when you bought your first bag? You can even monogram your items in different fonts and choose your leather. Like the sound of Crocodiliens? Eels and heels caught my eye in the store, boots with the highly recognizable Louis Vuitton motif as a heel, and eel skin for the actual boot.. There was even a Louis Vuitton monogrammed punch bag with it's own trunk.

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Some eminent basketball players were thrilled and one immediately What's Apped a picture to his father with a view to buying it!

FOOD AT THE MONTAGE

The Rooftop Grill is a celebrity destination in its own right and their breakfast salad comprised of the freshest, greenest mix of leaves, avocados and baby tomatoes I have ever seen, topped with perfectly soft boiled quail eggs with some magic maple vinaigrette! The tastiest gluten free meal I am ever likely to see! You really need to eat this meal as a brunch more than a breakfast. The views were as tempting as the food, it almost felt like we were in Europe except that portion sizes were far more generous. The Rooftop Grill breakfast area overlooks the pool deck which is where various celebrities sometimes relax in the cabanas.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND FACILITIES AT THE MONTAGE

I experienced a Deluxe Caviar facial at their 20, 000 square foot Spa – simply called The Spa Montage and was hugely impressed with the competence of my therapist, the quality of the products and the treatment suite. My session involved me literally falling asleep under a soft duvet like cover in a warm cocoon type room filled with floating music! My facial really was worth it, and I haven't investigated whether these products are available here but I am on the look out. Don't forget to spend some time and browse at the spa shop. The modern, colourful glass bracelets work really well in Dubai.

UNIQUE FEATURE OF THE MONTAGE

The Montage really is a magnet for celebrities, it's only been open about 7 or 8

years but has already become the go to hotel for so many of Hollywood's finest. Age doesn't really come into it from young teenage pop sensations to older more seasoned stars, they choose The Montage. The hotel also has it's own resident celebrity Personal Shopper Joe Katz. Very accessible and hugely knowledgeable, it's really worth booking an appointment with Joe because he will be able to open doors you can't. I tried on a 10 carat diamond ring at Harry Winston shop which resembled a jewellery box. (That's the shop not the diamond!) Just to see how it looked on my finger of course, not to buy, at least not this time! The Montage is only a 10 minute drive to the legendary Hollywood sign, which apparently was first erected to bring attention to the real estate for sale in the area!

In my view the combination of Shutters on the Beach for a relaxing beach break and Santa Monica's finest with a couple of nights of fine dining and shopping in Beverly Hills makes for a perfect long haul break from Dubai. High standards of cuisine, service and accommodation together with delicious weather practically all year round make this an ideal choice. The drive to Malibu from Beverly Hills or Santa Monica really isn't long at all and it's worth having lunch at the original Nobu Japanese restaurant, set right by the sea. The next logical place to stay at if you're on a driving holiday is Santa Barbara or drive on to San Luis Obispo and enjoy some of the laid back beaches, we loved Avila - a very local beach and feasted on fish tacos at Ruddles Smoke house in Cayucos. No luxury here, just amazing food and views. Drive through the fishing village of Morrow and be mesmerized by the mists on the water then take your time exploring the Big Sur beaches. Don't miss the elephant seals and Hearst Castle on the way, and save lots of memory space for the incredible picture postcard perfect Juila Pfeiffer Burns McWay falls view along the way. Nepenthe restaurant was a good choice for a substantial meal before you get to Carmel.

Clint Eastwood was once the mayor of the tiny town of Carmel and it's a place like no other in America! A quaint, charming town that oozes wealth, it's definitely worth a stop, we stayed at the Carmel Country Inn in a 2 bedroom apartment set up that suited our family very well. Breakfasts were warm and expansive, everything you could need for a day out at the beach was provided and the large house was very welcoming indeed. I loved the spacious rooms with their own terrace, ideal for a special stay. The 17 mile drive is something you have to do, we stopped at the Pebble Beach Golf Course and had drinks and snacks, took lots of photos of more beaches and sea birds before heading out to the very classy Zetta hotel in San Francisco.

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THE LOCATION OF THE ZETTA

The Zetta is located just in the South of Market area of San Francisco, literally in the heart of the downtown, shopping area. A super location for all of the city's major department stores, independent shops and walking distance to China town. I would suggest getting a taxi to Pier 39 and the water front area as it's a little far to walk all the way. Ideally you need a car to drive across the Golden Gate Bridge to see Sausalito on the other side. The Zetta is very well located to walk to the main cable car stops as well, but these were very crowded when we visited, so walk a bit further to take them.

ACCOMMODATION AND SERVICE AT THE ZETTA

Large, extremely modern rooms with bathrooms boasting lovely Aesop's toiletries from Australia (just opened a shop on Marylebone High Street as well) meant we spent a very comfortable 4 nights here. The service at this hotel was the best I have ever experienced considering it was bang in the middle of a very busy city. The speed of response to any of our requests no matter how small was phenomenal and that makes such a difference to a good stay. This is a very contemporary hotel and each stairwell boasted paintings and murals from local artists that had taken part in a recent art competition. A great idea and one that would definitely work for Dubai as well I think.

I was also impressed the local knowledge of the staff at the Zetta. We wanted Chinese food the first night we arrived and they recommended Mission Chinese. Yes we had to get a taxi to reach the restaurant and then wait in line for a while but I was thrilled with the choice and would definitely visit again.

Remember San Francisco can get quite cool so you do need some extra layers, especially in the evening. Try the incredible By rite ice cream in the Dolores Park area before you go, but again be prepared to queue if it's the week end!

Just remember also that San Francisco airport where we left California from is actually quite limited in it's choice of restaurants and facilities compared to Dubai or London.

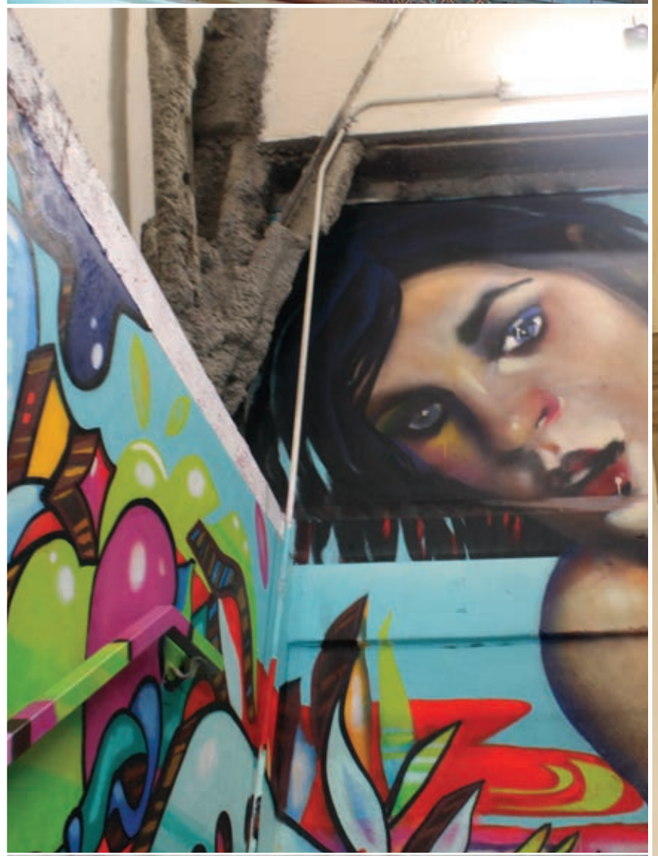

Photo courtesy of Monica Kapila