

The mahogany interiors of Musso & Frank Grill are portals to an older world. Best known for its steak and chops, it starred in *Ocean's Eleven*, in the scene where George Clooney and Brad Pitt plan their heist.

Los Angeles on my Plate

Starring classic American favourites and recipes from kitchens around the world

BY MALAVIKA BHATTACHARYA

The city of angels brims with celebrity-studded restaurants where the stars and the starry-eyed eat. But peel away the layers and Los Angeles reveals a history of iconic institutions—both classic American diners and food that celebrates the life of its migrant communities. Korean barbecues, vegan cafés, and Japanese sushi places abound, as do more modest joints where age-old recipes rule hearts. Here's where Tinseltown loves to tuck in:

Old-School Institution

Among the oldest surviving institutions on Hollywood Boulevard, 100-year-old Musso & Frank Grill is older than the Hollywood sign. Stepping into its dimly lit interiors with a mahogany bar and booths with red-leather seats is like walking in to a *Mad Men* set. Little wonder that Musso's did actually make an appearance on the cult TV show. As the liveried maître d' leads me to my table, he reels off a list of who's who that were once regulars here. "That's Charlie Chaplin's booth by the window. He'd sit there so he could watch his horse. Hemingway and Fitzgerald spent hours in here," he says. When I ask for menu recommendations, he points to the classics and tells me, "The Rolling Stones

always came in for the liver and onions."

I'm seated at Frank Sinatra's favourite booth, and handed the opposite of a James Bond-style martini—stirred, not shaken—one of Musso's best-known offerings, before tucking into a gigantic pork chop. Well-loved for its steak and chops, the restaurant also serves oyster stew and veal schnitzel (thin slices of veal dipped in egg, coated in flour and fried gold). It has a way of taking you back in time; maybe it is the classic interiors retained from its early days, or the original charcoal grill from 1919. Or maybe it's the fact that there have been only three executive chefs in the restaurant's 100-year history.

Cultural Hotpot

In the slick business district of Downtown, 102-year-old Grand Central Market brings together food and memories from streets around the world. Early one morning, I walk past the bright red umbrellas on the sidewalk, into the covered food market that recently made an appearance in the film, *La La Land*. Inside, bright neon signs advertise everything from Mexican roasts, Filipino *sisig*, and Japanese bento to freshly roasted coffee, deli food and a brewery.

The market sits across the Angels Flight funicular railway, which runs to the top of Bunker Hill. Back in 1917 when the market first opened, affluent residents of Victorian mansions on the hill would ride the railway down to shop for essentials

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Griffith Observatory, which featured in the film *La La Land*, offers dreamy views of the Hollywood sign and skyline. When you've had your fill of the sight, head to In-N-Out (bottom) for their "secret menu" which offers burgers with three or four patties.

Grand Central Market is the liveliest during lunch hour, when people step out of Downtown's swank offices and grab seats at the market's communal tables for a melange of cuisines from around the world.



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like eggs and dairy. Since then, the bazaar has evolved into a culinary hotpot hawking American favourites and classics brought in by LA's migrant communities.

I grab a fresh brew from G&B Coffee and join the snaking queue at EggsIut for a burger. The stall's much-Instagrammed sandwich is worth the hype, with gooey cheddar oozing out of a hot brioche stuffed with smoky bacon and a melting egg. While curious crowds flock to the hip eatery in the morning, afternoons typically see long-term loyalists head to the market's legacy vendors, who have been here for more than 30 years. Latino grocers, Chiles Secos, is one such establishment. Craving Chinese? Wolf down wonton soup or chow mein from China Cafe. For creamy cheese slices made locally and abroad, head to DTLA Cheese and Kitchen. In Grand Central, you're never too far from great flavours.

Celebrity Haunt

At the achingly hip Dream Hotel's Highlight Room restaurant, everybody—other diners and wait staff—looks like they've stepped out of magazine covers and onto the poolside rooftop restaurant. Leonardo DiCaprio had his birthday party here once. Hollywood hopefuls frequent this spot dreaming to be spotted. My eyes, however, are drawn to the chessboard-tiled floors, sweeping views of Hollywood's skyline and then to the hipster selection of foods on the table. Of course, there's avocado toast—the creation that's captured California's culinary conscience—along with açai and poke bowls



Eggslut in Grand Central Market gives a delicious gourmet twist to eggs, serving warm brichoe buns with ground angus beef, chives, and seared wagyu steaks.

accompanied by sweet potato fries and taro chips. I like to imagine Beyoncé and Jay-Z dined similarly when they threw a grand birthday bash at the hotel's nightclub, Beauty & Essex.

City Icon

Outdoors in the California sunshine with a view of spindly palm trees, I bite into a delicious, artery-choking cheeseburger at LA's reigning fast-food diner, In-N-Out. With this meal, I've stepped right into the American pop culture TV shows of my teenage years, where high-school students would hang out over burgers and shakes after school. In-N-Out is an institution Angelenos swear by for its fresh produce and fuss-free menu consisting of just three quintessentially American items: burgers, fries, and shakes.

A long queue extends outside the diner door at its Hollywood branch, but service is swift. In-the-know locals order from a "secret menu" which features mustard-grilled burger patties and Animal Style fries, which are a glorious, messy bowl of hot fries doused in cheese, sauces, pickles, and grilled onions.

Revival Road

The Arts District, with its mural-splattered buildings, art galleries, and trendy eateries is the epitome of LA cool. But what we see today is a gentrified version of a former industrial district. Warehouses and factories defined the locality in the

late 19th century but gradually fell into disrepair by the mid-1900s. In the 1970s, artists cashed in on low rents and moved into these abandoned buildings, leading to a boom in creative ventures in unlikely quarters. Today, coffee roasters and craft breweries stand shoulder to shoulder with galleries and design studios. I step into popular ice-cream shop Salt & Straw to sample some of the most innovative flavours I could have never imagined. I taste a piquant goat cheese with black olive ice cream, a creamy olive oil flavour, and a tangy pear with blue cheese. The coffee and bourbon scoop I settle for turns to be rather tame, but I'm not complaining. The creative pairings truly embody the spirit of the district. ✂

ESSENTIALS

There are no direct flights between India and Los Angeles. Flights from Mumbai and Delhi have at least one layover at Chinese gateway cities like Beijing and Shanghai, or a Middle-Eastern city like Abu Dhabi. The LAX FlyAway buses regularly ply between the airport to various locations in the city. The Metro bus and rail connect several parts of the city, and cabs are an equally popular way to get around.