

LIVE FROM LOS ANGELES

Add some film starlet + rock star style to your next event



You're having dinner and drinks at The Beverly Hilton with Lucille Ball. As dessert is served, a spot-on Dean Martin walks in, dropping by the hotel as he would have decades ago. He has a drink or two. "Well whataya know," he says, "maybe I'll sing a song."

So Frankie Sinatra gets wind that Dino's at The Bev Hilton and stops by for some bourbon and smokes. Sammy Davis Jr. slides in snapping fingers, and all the sudden you've got a swinging little shindig goin' on.

"It was one of those nights that really, really worked," says Kristen Coleman, sales manager for Access Destination Services. "Some of the women in the audience were doing a kicking line with the impersonators, singing and taking pictures," she says, touting her Rat Pack theme event.

Coleman explains that entertaining people with world-beating style and Hollywood star power is a passion in Los Angeles. Nothing's impossible, she promises, whether it's lunch on the set of Wisteria Lane at Universal Studios Hollywood, team-building with pro dancers from "Dancing with the Stars," or an awards dinner at the legendary Conga Room.

L.A. LIVE

Last winter, the \$30 million Grammy Museum opened in downtown LA, celebrating the history of music spanning all genres from the Delta blues to Detroit hip hop. A massive array of memorabilia as well as interactive, educational exhibits explore the creative processes behind music-making and recording. Especially notable is the "Songs of Conscience, Sounds of Freedom" exhibition about music's role as a political force in society.

"There's so much revolving around the recording industry here these days," says Coleman. "It was due to take the spotlight." Access offers a Rock n' Roll History Tour starting at the music museum. Attendees also visit venues like The Troubadour where Elton John, The Doors and James Taylor got their big breaks. "I don't think it's really changed much since then," she laughs.

The Grammy Museum is part of the sweeping new L.A. Live complex—a whopping 5.6 million sf of glam group space covering six city blocks near the Los Angeles Convention Center. It includes the Nokia Theatre (home to the latest American Idol finale), Staples Center and a host of restaurants and nightlife options. Both the JW Marriott Hotel Los Angeles and The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles are scheduled to open here mid-2010, completing the \$2.5 billion project.

"It's all one campus," says Michael K. Krouse, senior vp of sales for [LA INC.](#)—brand name for the Los Angeles CVB. "There's the Conga Room and the Club Nokia and all these different venues, so a group never has to leave."

Sounds good. But is it flexible, or will smaller groups feel swallowed up? What if we want a private luau party at Trader Vic's, or box seats for Madonna? Can you hook a girl up?

"You know, I can fix L.A. Live and tweak it and make it anyway you want to make it," says Krouse. "What customers love about it is, they're thinking I don't have to get in a typical square box in a typical hotel. I can go to all these great places, all within two seconds of my session at the Nokia Theatre, or my exhibit at the Convention Center, or a Madonna concert at Staples. Our ability to link all those things is critical."

Now anyone who knows just a bit about LA will tell you that the downtown area has enjoyed a major renaissance, with L.A. Live and all the trendsetters moving in. It's very much a walkable area and nothing's too far away—really a monster selling point in Los Angeles. And the whole Westside scene is 15 minutes away.

"Downtown LA has come a long way from the days when it shut down at 5 o'clock," says Nasser Pazirandeh, president of Virginia-based Meeting Insights International. He recently handled logistics for 7,800 delegates in 15 downtown hotels for the Association for International Educators. "We could not believe all there was to do there. Everyone loved the diversity and flexibility of the city," he says.

Pazirandeh set up receptions at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), the shimmering, Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the rooftop terrace at the Grammy Museum, which can host up to 400.

"The whole L.A. Live concept has a very cool, cosmopolitan feel to it without being ostentatious," explains Pazirandeh. "The people from NAFSA are international, well-traveled, smart. They love to see the real culture of a destination. So they did their research and went to the theaters, took city buses and the subway. They saw as much as they could—maybe even places Angelenos don't know about."

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WESTSIDE STORIES

You'll detect a decidedly different vibe just 20 minutes away when you spot Hugh Jackman striding into The Peninsula Beverly Hills, or Jennifer Aniston secreting out of Chateau Marmont in West Hollywood. That's the biggie attraction in Hollywood and Westside, where out-of-towners crave some of the glamorous LA life-style they see on TV.

For a group booked at Renaissance Hollywood Hotel & Spa, Access Services put together an all-out, Oscar-style party next door at the Kodak Theater, home of the Academy Awards. "We had actors dressed up as vintage paparazzi with big flash bulbs," says Coleman. "The attendees got to walk the red carpet exactly where they see their favorite actors walking up, with Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise-lookalikes. People eat that up. They absolutely loved it."

For mod rooms at friendly prices, we've been keeping our eye on Andaz West Hollywood since it opened this winter. The 257-room hotel caters to the style-conscious planner with a rooftop Sundeck and the Panorama Ballroom hosting 150 seated. Fun "Andaz Hosts" check in guests in an informal social space, who also act as personal concierges and answer questions about the area's hip happenings.

Many of the rooms feature glass sunrooms overlooking the glow of Sunset Boulevard, while public spaces show off temporary art installations. Keep an eye out for the hired guy in Paul Smith pj's walking around and reading the day's newspaper to anyone who'll listen.

Open just over a year, The London West Hollywood sits perched in the Hollywood Hills over the Sunset Strip. Nothing personifies LA like a rooftop pool in the Hills, so look into hosting dinners here for 300, receptions for 600. There are English gardens on the third floor, 200 suites designed like a fashion photographer's live/work flat in Notting Hill, and over 15,000 sf of indoor/outdoor function space. Given that the hotel's usual clientele are creative types current on technology, culture and style, expect a high degree of flexibility.

All culinary and catering operations at The London are orchestrated by famed chef Gordon Ramsay. "Where else can you have food catered by a Michelin-star chef?" asks Deborah Lisboa, director of sales. The restaurant has five private dining rooms, but do book early.

"Being that we're in West Hollywood, we're pretty much used to anything. Nothing is out of grasp here," says Lisboa. "We're close to the Viper Room, Key Club, Whisky A Go Go and The Roxy. And we're just steps away from Santa Monica Boulevard." The Key Club restaurant/bar hosts up to 500.

Another swank, group-friendly club with oodles of fashion, music and publishing street cred is Foxtail, designed with a blend of Art Deco and Art Nouveau ambience representing the golden age of Hollywood. But before you sashay in there, grab a bite at Katsuya at Hollywood and Vine. The sushi is among the best in town, Phillipe Starck decorated the place, and the Burning Mandarin cocktail enjoys a cult-like status, mixing Mandarin vodka and jalapenos.

Starck's been a busy boy on the West Coast, having designed the new 297-room SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills. The deal here is a dual lobby concept where one side is for the guest's private check-in, while the other half is a public, social/dining nexus called The Bazaar. Imagine 18th century objets d'art everywhere. Chic chef José Andrés oversees the main bar and 30-person communal table, the casual tapateria and the fine-dining Saam restaurant, all designed to create a "fête extraordinaire," he says. Lobby networking just entered a new era, and SLS indeed: Something Lovely's Started.

If Bizet's Carmen was working her formidable charms in LA, she'd be well acquainted with the new 201-room Montage Beverly Hills, inspired by the design of Seville's magnificent Hotel Alfonso XIII. The 5-diamond property hosts private dinners for 20 at the signature 44-seat Muse restaurant. Or consider a chef table event for 12 besides the European-style view kitchen at Parq, with an antique stone fireplace and two Molteni ovens. Look into the corporate cooking classes and demonstrations where participants are provided monogrammed chef jackets. Lastly, we feel compelled to mention Montage has a in-house "certified" shoe butler.

Bring your group back down to earth at the Original Farmers Market, an LA landmark celebrating its 75th anniversary. It started out with just a few farmers bringing in produce to an empty lot on the corner of 3rd and Fairfax. Now it's filled with family-owned food kiosks, where groups can indulge in authentic shawarma at Moishie's, a warm piece of pie at Dupar's and the ubiquitous frozen yogurt from Pinkberry.

L.A. Live; lalive.com

Access Destination Services; accessdmc.com

The Beverly Hilton; beverlyhilton.com

Renaissance Hollywood; renaissancehollywood.com

The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles; ritz-carlton.com

JW Marriott Hotel Los Angeles; lalivemarriott.com

The London W. Hollywood; thelondonwesthollywood.com

Andaz West Hollywood; westhollywood.hyatt.com

SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills; slshotels.com

Montage Beverly Hills; montagebeverlyhills.com

Original Farmers Market; farmersmarketla.com