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Celebrating inclusive communities

*Star of the Bachelor on ABC*

## Special needs teacher Grimaldi launches No Better You Foundation

By *Wendy Singer* and *Mike Cohen*

Until recently, Vanessa Grimaldi was a much loved, passionate and devoted special education teacher at Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North. When she participated in ABC's popular reality television show *The Bachelor* last year, her life transformed in more ways than she could imagine.

Grimaldi not only won the heart of bachelor Nick Viall and was engaged to him by the end of the show, she also saw the opportunity to realize her lifelong dream of helping people with special needs beyond her classroom. "I knew since I was a child that I wanted to do something on a larger scale to help those in need," she said. "While I was on the show, I realized that this was the perfect platform to start my foundation."

After completing the show, Nick and Vanessa moved to Los Angeles where he was a contestant gunning for the coveted mirror ball trophy on *Dancing With The Stars*. This gave Grimaldi plenty of time to conceptualize the No Better You Foundation, which raises funds and awareness to better education programs across Canada.

On July 16, Grimaldi hosted her first No Better You fitness fundraising event at Luxe Rentals Showroom in Montreal. She welcomed over 300 guests to enjoy a seamlessly organized, healthful afternoon where guests had the opportunity to workout with Jennifer Bellinfante and Grimaldi, and learn important exercise tips from Clinical

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*Vanessa Grimaldi is seen here with some of her students from Galileo Adult Education Centre, event emcees Laura Casella from Global TV and Catherine Verdon Diamond from Breakfast TV. Nick Viall is at the top left.*

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and Health Psychologist and No Better You board member Dr. Crystal Holly. Samples of healthy products were offered at booths such as Top Nutrition and David's Tea. All enjoyed a delectable Italian buffet with fresh pasta, salads, sumptuous pastries and a coffee bar. Co-emcees Catherine Verdon-Diamond of Breakfast Television and Laura Casella from Global Television kept the event rolling smoothly. Grimaldi's contagious positive energy, great music, dancing, and a host of raffle prizes, fueled the cheerful atmosphere.

Soon after, the storybook romance of Nick and Vanessa ended. *"It's with a great amount of heartbreak for the both of us as we have decided to end our engagement,"* Nick and Vanessa said in a statement. *"We gave this relationship our all and we are saddened that we did not get the fairytale ending we hoped for. We will continue to be there for each other no matter what. This hasn't been an easy decision, however, as we part ways, we do so with lots of love and admiration for each other."*

At the fundraising event, Nick and Vanessa were front and center and looked very happy.

Grimaldi's Galileo students have supported her every step of the way, and were by her side at the event. When she brought Viall to Montreal for the traditional Bachelor "hometown" visit, she insisted that her students be involved in the process. Grimaldi's eyes sparkle when she is asked about her students. *"They are amazing,"* she said. *"You can see how much energy, love and life they bring into the room. That's why I want to give back to them."*

The \$35,000 in proceeds raised from the event will help fund a sensory room at an English Montreal School Board school. Grimaldi has been visiting the schools with board commissioners to determine where the funds are most needed. *"The sensory room will be for everyone in the school,"* she said. *"It's a therapeutic space for students to go to stimulate or calm down, decrease anxiety, take a break. If any funds remain, I would like to help Galileo."*

The No Better You Foundation begins by helping schools in Montreal, but Grimaldi hopes to spread out to include the expanse of Canada, and ultimately, worldwide. She also envisions herself back in the classroom



Vanessa and Dr. Crystal Holly at the event.

teaching in her future.

Sophie Beauchamp, senior director of marketing and visual at Ardene, was present to represent her company as event sponsor. Beauchamp explains that she met Grimaldi through contacts. *"We love how authentic she is and how passionate she is about her students,"* she said. *"We are excited and wanted to be a part of her mission."*

During the Q & A session, an event attendee named Anne asked Grimaldi how young women can overcome negative comments such as those that Grimaldi faced during her run on The Bachelor. *"We always remember the negative comments even if they are surrounded by positive ones,"* She replied. *"We have to remember that other people's opinions of us don't matter. It's about how you feel about yourself. There is no better you."*

For information or to donate to No Better You visit [www.nobetteryou.org](http://www.nobetteryou.org).



Vanessa and her nephew.

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# Explore Southern California's most eclectic stretch of coastline in Marina del Rey

By Mike Cohen



The beautiful pool at the Ritz-Carlton Marina del Rey has handicapped lifts.

## MARINA DEL REY

Ever since I can remember, the Marc Jordan song with the lyrics “Living in Marina del Rey” has been ringing in my head. So when I planned our trip to California, the tune indeed led me to this destination.

Set in the heart of the Los Angeles coastline, Marina Del Rey (<http://www.visitmarinadelrey.com>) is a waterfront playground with endless harbor views and a relaxed “California cool” vibe on LA’s bustling Westside. Its prime location is four miles from LAX, steps from world-famous Venice Beach and is easily accessible to major Los Angeles attractions like Santa Monica and the Getty Museum.

With year-round sunshine and average temperatures in the mid-to-high 60s, the breezy, cool and idyllic way of life in the Marina appeals to visitors and locals.

## WHERE TO STAY

Tucked along the Pacific coast between Venice Beach and peaceful Playa Vista, The Ritz-Carlton Marina del Rey ([www.ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/california/marinadel-rey](http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/california/marinadel-rey)) is one of the most ideally located luxury hotels near Culver City, to explore Southern California’s most eclectic stretch of coastline. Literally meaning “sea coast of

the king,” Marina Del Rey is aptly named, as it is home to more than 7,000 pleasure boats and yachts in one of the largest man-made marinas in the world, as well as shopping and gourmet dining.

The hotel is conveniently located near some of the most sought after tech companies such as YouTube, IMAX and the future Google campus. It recently underwent extensive guest room enhancements, finishing one of its premier ballrooms that overlooks the marina.

We are big fans of the Ritz-Carlton property in our native Montreal, so it was very exciting to spend the day at this Marina del Rey location and get a private tour of the facility. From private Juliet balconies off of every guest room, or from a restaurant terrace where handcrafted cocktails around a fire pit stir inevitable conversation, this is one of the finest luxury hotels in Marina del Rey. It features 304 guest rooms and suites with private balconies featuring marina and city skyline views. There are Exclusive key-access-only Ritz-Carlton Club® Level rooms, L.A.’s only waterfront pool and whirlpool and a newly renovated lobby lounge. I was thoroughly impressed with the state-of-the-art fitness center, with eucalyptus steam rooms, full showers, restrooms and keypad lockers with safe.

My family and I were escorted to the poolside and shown to a beautiful private ca-

bana. Inside there was an extremely comfortable couch, a television with a remote control, a fridge stocked with waters, soft drinks and fresh fruit and a basket full of delicious snacks. On a small table were a selection of nice magazines. Outside the covered structure were three nicely padded lounge chairs with towels and large umbrellas to block the sun. We were provided with a menu to the Waves Poolside Bar & Grill. After one of the staff members brought us a bottle of champagne we placed our order, a superb hamburger with salad, a chicken sandwich and some chicken strips. It all arrived promptly and perfectly prepared.

The pool was refreshing and the whirlpool even more refreshing. Using our pass key, we took a leisurely stroll outside the grounds to admire the marina and the many different boats.

Director of Sales and Marketing Ed Curry gave me a tour of the facility. The Cast & Plow Restaurant off the lobby offers one of the prettier patio layouts I have seen. At the gift shop Curry told me that skateboards actually represent the top-selling item. “We can’t keep them on the shelf long enough before we need to order more,” he said.

Up we went to the 12th floor to see one of the beautiful guest rooms with a view and then down a short flight of stairs into the exclusive Ritz-Carlton Concierge Club Lounge. This beautifully designed room

is open to all guests for an extra charge of \$250 a day for snacks, drinks and a private place to relax.

This is definitely a hotel I’d like to enjoy an extended stay at some time in the future.

## SPECIAL NEEDS

With regards to special needs guests this hotel absolutely has accommodations for guests in all areas. “It is worth sharing that California is very sensitive to people with special needs,” he said. “Hotels, restaurants and even recreational facilities are required to make accommodations for guests with special needs.”

The Ritz-Carlton Marina del Rey complies with all ADA requirements. They offer especially outfitted guestrooms and make special provisions in all areas of the hotel. There are ramps to the pool and lifts for both the pool and the Jacuzzi. The restaurant, Cast & Plow, has a wheelchair lift as well to ensure that guests have access to all areas of the restaurant.



# A look at LA: From the Montage Beverly Hills to the Warner Brothers Tour

By *Mike Cohen*

## BEVERLY HILLS

Should we stay in Los Angeles, Hollywood or Beverly Hills? This was the decision we had to make for the second leg of our trip to California. Downtown LA is best suited for the business crowd; Hollywood, in my opinion, is just a little too busy; and Beverly Hills ([www.lovebeverlyhills.com](http://www.lovebeverlyhills.com)) is simply one of world's most sought-after locales.

Centrally located in Greater Los Angeles, this is recognized as a premier vacation and business travel destination, boasting beautiful weather year-round, acclaimed full-service and boutique hotel accommodations, sumptuous dining, and incomparable shopping. Synonymous with Hollywood glamour, Beverly Hills enjoys an international reputation as the home and playground of A-list movie stars. The city is not only known worldwide for its grand mansions and trends shops along Rodeo Drive, but also for its multitude of art and architecture, spas and salons, and exceptional walkability.

There are self-guided walking tours of Beverly Hills, screenings at The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the historic Greystone Mansion, museum exhibits, art shows, concerts and film festivals.

## THE MONTAGE

We were thrilled to experience the beautiful Montage Beverly Hills ([www.montagehotels.com/beverlyhills](http://www.montagehotels.com/beverlyhills)), ideally situated for shopping and dining among Rodeo Drive's storied collection of shops, restaurants and galleries. The hotel features 201 well-appointed guestrooms, including 55 suites as well as 20 private residences and Spa Montage Beverly Hills. We stayed in a luxury one bedroom 875 square foot Beverly Suite, which features a king-sized bed, a private living room and one and one-half bathrooms. There is a very large book shelf, with reading material. Overlooking stunning views of the Beverly Hills skyline, the living room offers a comfortable sitting area with a queen-sized sleeper sofa and a dining table for two in select suites. Every indulgence imaginable is provided, including stunning marble and mosaic-tiled bathrooms with generous tubs and dual sinks, an executive desk with a 42-inch LCD television and an in-room guest tablet featuring access to all of the hotel's amenities and services at the touch of a button. There is complimentary champagne awaiting for you in the mini-bar upon arrival.

Montage Beverly Hills was the first hotel and residences to receive Gold LEED certification in Southern California. In 2015, Montage Beverly Hills was named the #1



*The front of the gorgeous Beverly Hills Montage Hotel.*

Hotel in Los Angeles in the Condé Nast Traveler Annual Readers' Choice Awards.

Guests here have access to the rooftop retreat, complete with a saline swimming pool and an exceptionally large whirlpool. Private poolside cabanas, The Rooftop Bar & Grill and lush landscaping are set against the backdrop of panoramic views of the Beverly Hills cityscape and the Hollywood Hills. The Rooftop Grill serves fresh California cuisine in a comfortable atmosphere that perfectly complements an afternoon by the pool. We were absolutely enthralled with this setting and the welcoming staff, who set us up so comfortably and kept checking on us.

The valet parking system works beautifully. Call from your room and your vehicle is waiting outside.

The Montage has 10 ADA Accessible rooms (two are suites). Three of the rooms have roll in showers and seven rooms have grab bars in the shower. There are two emergency evacuation chairs in case the elevators are out during a power outage. The hotel provides escorts for guests with disabilities or those coming from the hospital. All of the entrances and exits and food and beverage outlets are ADA Compliant. I noticed lift chairs located at the ninth floor for the pool and Jacuzzi usage. Elevators access every

level. There is a ramp on the second floor, with direct access to rooms 214 to 226.

## DINING OUT

Montage Beverly Hills has partnered with chef and restaurateur, Geoffrey Zackarian who brought two new concepts, Georgie (<http://www.georgierestaurant.com>) and The Garden Bar, to the hotel and local community. Georgie, Zakarian's first Los Angeles restaurant, is a lush and textured space with a relaxed and playful ambience. Located on the ground floor of the hotel, The Garden Bar is a bustling, dynamic lounge adjacent to Georgie and offers classic cocktails and all day fare in a comfortable yet refined setting. Both concepts feature indoor and outdoor seating overlooking the spectacular Beverly Canon Gardens.

Georgie, with its warm and welcoming environment, is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and offers vibrant, thoughtfully balanced dishes that showcase Zakarian's Modern American cuisine. The Garden Bar serves as a glamorous neighborhood gathering place with a robust beverage and cocktail program, in addition to a lighter food menu offered morning to night.

We thoroughly enjoyed our dinner at





Georgie, where our wonderful server Olivia guided us perfectly through a very impressive looking menu. For starters we shared some delicious Dungeness crab and a dozen East and West Coast oysters. For main courses we opted for the smoked beef cheek, the poached Dover sole and the New England rack of lamb, each beautifully presented and tantalizing. Olivia surprised us with an order of beet risotto, something I would not have selected on my own. It was superb! So was another appetizer, the pâté en croute and a side of mushrooms (stuffed with more mushrooms). Dessert was an absolute delight, with some Georgie donut bites, lemon basil roasted peaches, pineapple upside down cake and house made sorbet and gelato. It was a warm summer evening, so we dined on the lovely outdoor terrace. Whether you are staying at the Montage or are anywhere near the LA/Beverly Hills area, make Georgie a stop on your dining tour!

The restaurant and terrace are completely handicapped accessible.

## THE PALM

Last summer we experienced the Palm Restaurant (<http://thepalm.com/Beverly-Hills>), for the first time while in Atlantic City. When we found out there was a relatively new Palm location in Beverly Hills it moved to the top of our list. Just a few blocks East of Rodeo Drive at 267 North Cannon Drive, this 6,000 square foot 185 seat dining establishment opened its doors on November 7, 2014. It did so at the same time as the long-established West Hollywood location was closing its doors.

General Manager Jeff Kops and Executive Chef Pedro Inoscencio run a well oiled machine here. We had the novelty of walking only a few doors away from our hotel. There is valet parking for those who drive there.

Leather booths dot the main dining room. There is private dining area in the back, as well as a large window-side table directly in the front. As per the Palm's signature, the main wall depicts iconic L.A. destinations. In fact it serves as a living wall where caricatures of new "regulars" are being painted over time.

We started off with one of their outstanding house drinks, a cherry blossom- CIROC Vodka, PAMA Pomegrante Liqueur, hand-squeezed lemon juice, cane syrup, topped with Nicola Feuillet Brut Champagne. As an appetizer we shared a delicious order of baked clams, served on top of some superb sauce which our server recommended we dip our bread in. It was a good tip. The Monday Night "Chop Chop" Salad (finely chopped romaine, iceberg, tomato, onion, roasted pepper, radish, scallion and anchovies) was amazing. Then came the main course, a fabulous surf and turf we put together – a 28 ounce prime Porterhouse steak and a four pound lobster. The steak was cut nicely from the bone and divided in two. A staff member then came over and cracked the lobster for us, something I always appreciate. We added some whipped potatoes with roasted garlic on the side. What a spectacular dining experience this was! And it was not over. For dessert we had the house speciality, warm cinnamon sugar donut holes with raspberry and chocolate sauce along with whipped cream and some ice cream

Signature dishes at The Palm also include jumbo shrimp, stellar bacon-wrapped scallops, classic Italian fare like chicken parmigiana, prime steaks, seafood staples such as jumbo lump crab cakes and swordfish steak, with a cherry tomato olive relish and signature sides such as Half & Half, cottage fries and fried onions and asparagus fritti with lemon garlic butter.

The restaurant is completely handicapped accessible and on one level. For reservations call 310-550-8811 or do so directly via their website.

## WARNER BROTHERS TOUR

When in LA you really should not miss an opportunity to experience the Warner Brothers Studio Tour (<https://www.wbstudiotour.com>) in Burbank. This is a three hour visit inside a real working Hollywood studio. Guests get to explore outdoor sets and soundstages used to create productions such as Gilmore Girls, The Big Bang Theory and Argo. Each tour includes exclusive access to original props, costumes, picture cars, and sets used from Batman to Friends. Additionally, studio tour guests stop at the DC Uni-

verse - DC Comics Exhibit, the real Central Perk Friends set, spots used for the motion picture La La Land (such as the café where Emma Stone's character worked), the original Batman Museum - Batmobile Collection, and so much more. We went into the buildings where the Ellen Degeneres and Conan O'Brien shows are recorded. There is plenty of time to pop out of your trolley and take photos.

While we were at the WB, we went behind the scenes of the hit tween drama Pretty Little Liars. We had the opportunity to see and experience a collection of authentic props and wardrobes from the show for the first time, including iconic costumes worn by the

beloved Harry Potter films. Highlights of the Fantastic Beasts experience include costumes worn by Eddie Redmayne (Newt Scamander), Katherine Waterston (Tina Goldstein), Alison Sudol (Queenie Goldstein), Dan Fogler (Jacob Kowalski) and Colin Farrell (Percival Graves), as well as Newt's case of creatures. Tour guests are now able to explore how J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World has been brought to life on the silver screen over the past 15 years.

Soundstage and Backlot availability is subject to change daily due to production on the lot. No two tours are alike. A studio and deluxe tour experience is unique every day of the week. And with more than 450,000



*A scene from the Warner Brothers Studio tour.*

show's five lead characters: Aria Montgomery (Lucy Hale), Hanna Marin (Ashley Benson), Emily Fields (Shay Mitchell), Spencer Hastings (Troian Bellisario), and Alison DiLaurentis (Sasha Pieterse). In addition to authentic character wardrobes from the series, *Pretty Little Liars: Made Here* also showcased a variety of memorable set design elements from the show, including a recreation of A's lair, complete with costumes, props, and décor; all five *Pretty Little Liars* dolls; select pieces from the Caleb, Ezra, and Toby characters, including Toby's Rosewood police uniform; the Liar's Lament "endgame" board; Radley Sanatorium; Halloween/Masquerade Ball episode costumes; and an interactive green-screen photo opportunity.

On December 9, 2016, a reimagined exhibit opened offering an up-close look at authentic props and costumes from *Fantastic Beasts* and *Where to find them* and the

registered artifacts, the Warner Bros. Prop Department contains countless treasures used in nearly a century's worth of entertainment. The latter was established in the early days of the Studio to house the antiques from the very first Warner Bros. productions. Today, it has grown to over 200,000 square feet and four floors of set dressing. From *Casablanca* to *The Hangover*, you'll see history unfold right before your eyes during your journey through arguably the largest prop department in the world.

Stage 48: Script to Screen features an interactive soundstage exploring phases of the film and television production process. Here is where you see how Hollywood is made. The knowledgeable tour guides, like

*(Continued on page 11)*



# Santa Monica is well-known for being disability-friendly

By *Mike Cohen*

## SANTA MONICA

After spending a week in San Francisco and five days in Beverly Hills, we decided to conclude our trip with a relaxing five day stay in Santa Monica (<http://www.santamonica.com>).

Santa Monica sits perched on the Pacific Ocean at the crossroads of Pacific Coast Highway and California Interstate Highway 10, a mere eight non-freeway miles from Los Angeles International Airport and within close proximity to all of LA's most famous landmarks and attractions. It is a great spot to walk on the beach, take in all of the rides and fun at the pier and do some shopping at the 3rd Street Promenade.

## DOUBLETREE EXPERIENCE

Just a short walk from the pier you will find the DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Hotel Santa Monica ([www.SantaMonicaSuites.DoubleTree.com](http://www.SantaMonicaSuites.DoubleTree.com)). When you check into this all-suite hotel, a warm DoubleTree chocolate chip cookie awaits you. You are only three blocks away from the beach.

The two-room suites provide room for work or for the whole family. A private bedroom and separate seating area with a sofa bed means that everyone can have their own space. You can watch a movie on one of the two 55 inch flat-screen TVs, or surf the web while you make a snack. A

wet bar with microwave, refrigerator and coffeemaker gives you some of the freedom of being at home.

We especially appreciated their outdoor pool, the Fourth Street Grille and the unique free shuttle service to points of interest provided by Santa Monica Free Ride and the hotel. This souped-up four seat golf cart runs seven days a week, from Noon to 8:45 pm. All you need to do is send a text and allow 10 to 15 minutes for pickup. It was great to leave the car at the hotel, which offers a super valet parking service, and save money on any taxi or Uber expenses.

The hotel has elevators leading to every floor, easy wheelchair access to the pool and health clubs and handicapped lifts for the pool and whirlpool.

## THE LOEWS

Meanwhile, after experiencing a Loews resort in St. Petersburg, Florida last winter, we were excited to check out the Loews Santa Monica (<https://www.loewshotels.com/santa-monica>).

This hotel has 347 luxurious guestrooms including 21 suites (all including white noise machines). There is 17,000 square feet of indoor function space, with ocean views, an Eco-friendly full-service spa offering organic treatments and the Ocean & Vine restaurant, which serves locally caught seafood and fresh farmers' mar-



*The Loews Santa Monica poolside.*

ket produce. There is also the Bar Belle Lounge, a tribute to Santa Monica's famed "Muscle Beach" female body builder Abby Stockton. There is Wi-Fi in all guestrooms and public spaces.

Located at 1700 Ocean Avenue, you can consider the sound of waves to be the soundtrack of your stay. Here, you can stroll along miles of perfectly maintained beaches and take in front-row views of the Pacific Ocean. We spent the day at the two-tier pool deck overlooking the sea, the perfect place to soak up the sun as you recline on a comfortable chaise. While you unwind, enjoy extras such as Evian Mist, chilled fruit and tropical smoothies thanks to some signature poolside pampering. In the summer, the attentive poolside concierge delivers all that and more. A soak in the Jacuzzi represented a nice treat. The pool itself is so beautifully heated that I just did not want to get out.

After a workout at the very spacious fitness center, you can relax in the Eucalyptus steam room or spoil yourself with an Aroma Massage or Pure Fiji Guava Anti-Aging Nourishing Wrap at the Ocean Spa. Very soon, the hotel will begin offering outdoor workouts on a grass setting at the beach. If work is calling, they have a full-service Executive Business Center. If you prefer to return emails poolside, there is Wi-Fi.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch and some

smoothie's poolside via the Blue Streak Restaurant, where you can enjoy sandwiches and snacks served with a side of stunning Pacific views every day from 11 am to 10 pm.

The hotel offers 12 ADA rooms, one of which is a suite. Some rooms are hearing accessible and some have a roll-in shower feature. As demonstrated by the tour area Director of Public Relations Jaclyn Slifer gave me, there is a ramp at the pool deck to get to the lower Ocean Terrace area with fire pits, and the elevators take guests right to beach access, where another ramp leads straight to the beach.

## DINING OUT

For an upscale, but not stuffy dinner with the ocean just outside, Water Grill's ([www.watergrill.com](http://www.watergrill.com)) Santa Monica location at 1401 Ocean Avenue offers a seafood dining experience for the adventurous at heart. The menu has an entire page just for the raw bar, featuring oysters from all up and down the east and west coast. For the seafood lover, there are a number of different whole fish entrees, such as European sea bass or New Zealand pink bream. For over 25 years, the Water Grill has pleased the palates of seafood lovers in Southern California. Water Grill delivers a remarkable experience through its devotion and inspiration for seafood. Hailed as "the best





seafood in Southern California” by the internationally recognized Zagat Guide, it consistently offers dazzling fish preparations of superior quality and freshness.

On the night we visited the place was packed, with people happily waiting for a table. Everyone I asked told me that this is the best dining establishment in all of Santa Monica. I could tell this place was going to be good as early as the bread plate arriving at the table. Yes, the bread was that good.

We started off with a drink, the appropriately named Ocean Avenue, containing vodka, fresh strawberry & lemon juice, with tarragon essence and served over ice. Our charming server Alicia then provided some background on the menu. We shared an order of Baja Stone Crab to start and I had my personal favorite, a bowl of New England clam chowder. For the main course the Wild Black Cod Miso (sablefish), served seared with eggplant, blistered shishito pepper and red miso sauce, called out to two members of our party. This is a favorite fish of family members and not something you see on many menus. I had my eye on the Wild New Zealand Sword Fish, with marinated zucchini and caper brown butter. In addition, I ordered some Yukon gold mashed

## ACCESSIBILITY

Santa Monica is well-known for being disability-friendly. They have beach access paths that go to the water’s edge, electric beach wheelchairs that can be borrowed for the day, assisted listening in a number of public buildings, and walk signals that talk to the blind. Santa Monica has in fact launched a campaign to make the entire city more pedestrian friendly for persons of all abilities. This not only helps people with mobility devices, but also people with strollers and personal shopping carts.

Property owners are responsible for keeping the sidewalk in front of their homes and businesses clear of plants, debris, trash cans and automobiles. At least a four-foot contiguous sidewalk width must be kept clear for pedestrian passage at all times. Some wheelchairs have wide wheel bases. Overgrown plants can scratch arms as persons walking or wheeling by. Individuals with walkers and mothers with strollers also

need to be able to walk along sidewalks without having to go around obstacles into the street. Excessive leaves become slippery and a hazard when they are wet.



*The oceanfront view at the Water Grill Restaurant.*

All public facilities, meetings, events and programs in Santa Monica are accessible to persons with disabilities. Santa Monica Pier is not just a fishing pier but the hub of lively Southern California beach life with an amusement park, restaurants, bars and street entertainers. The secret is to park on the pier-level lot, not below. Then it’s an easy journey down to the end of the pier, where you can see the amazing sweep of the coastline at its absolute best.

Santa Monica’s Third Street Promenade is another one of LA’s heavenly all-year open-air strolling areas. Because it is a pedestrian mall (closed to cars except at cross streets) there are broad walkways, plenty of ramped curbs and easy-to-cross streets.

Venice Boardwalk, one of those you-have-to-see-it-to-believe-it spots, is one of the most accessible places in the city. The perfectly flat walkway draws thousands of visitors on weekends to enjoy the carnival atmosphere — the wildest street performers, cheap eats, cool breezes and the sun setting over the Pacific

Metro and the Big Blue Bus have reduced fares for riders with disabilities. Access Services operates curb to curb transportation in Los Angeles County. WISE and

communities of Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Marina del Rey and Santa Monica.

I got the family settled in, returned my Sixt Rent a Car vehicle only a few blocks away and came back to 5400 West Century Blvd. What a good decision this was. We had a deluxe corner king non-smoking suite, with a separate living room, a nice balcony and a large washroom. Both rooms were outfitted with white noise machines, something I sleep with every night of the year. Being next to an airport, this is a very bright move by the hotel. We had a small fridge, a hide-a-bed and a large sofa, a desk for me to write this very story on my computer and Wi-Fi connections for up to four devices. This was an absolutely fabulous setup which really helped us conclude our trip on a very positive note. The room also gave us access to the 12th floor Westin Executive Club Lounge. Westin Executive Club Room guests and SPG® Platinum members enjoy exclusive access. It includes complimentary wireless high speed internet access, computer workstations, access to business news, and Starbucks® coffee 24 hours a day. Breakfast is served Monday through Friday mornings, and hors d’oeuvres are served Monday through Thursday evenings. The hotel does provide a shuttle to and from the airport every 20 minutes.

There is a nice outdoor pool and whirlpool, 24/7 workout facilities, a top-notch business center, accommodations for dogs up to 40 pounds, superb meeting facilities and several options of where to dine. The 1930’s-style Daily Grill Restaurant & Bar is inspired by the great city grills of yesteryear; it’s a great spot in which to toast the end of a successful day. Daily Grill features an all-American menu for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as an expansive appetizer and cocktail menu, available from 4 to 7pm daily. We had a nice dinner there.

I would definitely recommend this place for more than a one night stay. They even have a shuttle to Manhattan Beach. Their airport shuttle is completely handicapped accessible, with a lift for a wheelchair. The hotel is completely handicapped accessible.

For more information call (310) 216-5858.

Healthy Aging operates a Dial-A-Ride curb to curb service (limited door through door now available) in Santa Monica.

Info: <https://www.smgov.net/Portals/AccessibleSM/content.aspx?id=16031>

## WESTIN LAX

Rather than rush to checkout of our Santa Monica hotel to get to the airport for our return flight home, we decided to stay at the Westin Los Angeles Airport (<http://www.westinlosangelesairport.com>) for the final night. This is a beautiful property which many travellers use as a base for an entire trip.

Located just four blocks from LAX, The Westin Los Angeles Airport is ideally situated for your convenience. Whether traveling for business or pleasure, this sophisticated hotel puts you within easy reach of everything you need for a successful trip. Major companies such as Boeing, Raytheon and Mattel are just a short drive away, as are the quintessential Southern California



# All Canadians should see the Broadway smash hit *Come from Away*

By *Alexandra Cohen*

*Come from Away* ([www.comefromaway.com](http://www.comefromaway.com)), the new Broadway musical by Canadian husband and wife duo Irene Sankoff and David Hein, tells the often-forgotten story of the 38 planes that were diverted to Gander, Newfoundland on September 11, 2001. While the tragedy of 9/11 does not sound like the most uplifting premise for a musical, the show's creators refer to it instead as a story about 9/12 and the days that followed. *Come from Away*, to put it simply, is a 100-minute musical celebrating human empathy and kindness. It is showing at Broadway's Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre (236 West 45th Street).

The small town of Gander nearly doubled its population, turning itself upside down to accommodate the visitors, many of whom spoke different languages and came from different cultural backgrounds. *Come from Away*, which was nominated for seven Tony Awards including Best Musical, features an outstanding ensemble of actors who work together to tell this deeply moving story. Each performer plays multiple roles, and they transition seamlessly from Newfoundlanders to the people on the planes under the expert direction of Tony Award-winner Christopher Ashley.

Of particular note in the cast is Tony-nominee Jenn Colella, who amongst other roles, plays Captain Beverly Bass. Bass was, as sung by Colella, "the first female American captain in history," and her plane flying from Paris to Dallas was one of the 38 di-

verted to Gander. She has been to see *Come From Away* a whopping 61 times thus far. "I never get tired of it," Bass told the *New York Times*, also adding "I can't believe I've seen it that many times – but I'm ready to go back."

Leaving the theatre following the show, I couldn't help but feel exceptionally proud to be Canadian. *Come from Away* is laced with inside jokes meant just for us, like references to Tim Hortons and Molson beer, along with stereotypical jokes like a moose standing in the middle of the road and the communal disappointment felt when hockey is cancelled. While history largely forgot about the incredible people of Gander, that cannot be said anymore. In June, it was announced that for their hospitality and kindness, the town of Gander will be honored as the first municipality to win an international humanitarian award from the Values-In-Action Foundation.

*Come from Away* will also launch a North American tour across the United States and Canada at Seattle's 5th Avenue Theatre in October 2018, and a third production has been announced to play Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre beginning on Tuesday, February 13, 2018.

The theatre is not completely wheelchair accessible. While there are no steps into the building from the sidewalk, there are within the facility. Seating is accessible to all parts of the Orchestra without steps. There are



*The cast of Come from Away.*

no steps to the designated wheelchair seating location. On the Mezzanine level, there are approximately two steps down per row (entrance to Mezzanine is behind row K). Handrails are available at the end of every stepped seat row in the Mezzanine. A wheelchair accessible restroom (unisex) is located on the main level.

## MOMA

When in New York City, we strongly recommend a visit to the fabulous Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), dedicated to being the foremost museum of modern art in the world.

MoMA recognizes the diversity of the general public's abilities and needs, and offers a variety of programs and services to ensure the accessibility of the Museum and its collection. All public areas of the Museum and entrances are wheelchair accessible. Entrances with power assist doors are located on Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth streets between Fifth and Sixth avenues. Wheelchairs are available free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis and are located in the checkroom in the main lobby. Motorized wheelchairs are permitted. Wheelchair-accessible restrooms, each situated next to a water fountain, are located on all floors except the Theater 2 level and the entry level of The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building. Elevators are located throughout the Museum. FM assistive listening devices (headsets and neck loops) are available for all Gallery Talks. Sign language interpretation is available for all events with at least two weeks

advance notice and CART captioning is available for all events with at least three weeks advance notice. MoMA Audio is T-Coil compatible, and transcripts of all audio programs are available upon request from the audio desks. All MoMA theaters, lobby desks, ticketing desks, audioguide desks, and one of The Edward John Noble Education Center's classrooms are equipped with induction loops that transmit directly to hearing aids with T-Coils. Foreign-language films include English captioning. Public telephones with volume control and TTY are located on the ground floor, in the vestibule of the public restrooms. The floor plan and select special-exhibition brochures are available in large print and Braille from the lobby information desk. Service dogs are welcome. An audio program for blind and partially sighted visitors that provides detailed descriptions of key works from the Museum's collection—is available free of charge at the audio desks. Transcripts of this and all audio programs are available in large print upon request.

MoMA is open seven days a week at 11 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. For more details and to find out about present and upcoming exhibitions log on to [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).

## WHERE TO STAY

Is there really any better place to stay in New York City than the historic Algonquin Hotel ([www.algonquinhotel.com](http://www.algonquinhotel.com)). On our most recent trip, we were fortunate enough to secure reservations again. Located in the

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heart of Midtown Manhattan, this jewel of historic New York hotels commands the center of 44th Street, just a block and a half away from Times Square. The Algonquin first opened its doors in 1902. Today it is part of the Marriott chain's Autograph Collection, an evolving ensemble of strikingly independent hotels. Each destination has been selected for its quality, bold originality, rich character and uncommon details. From near to far, iconic to historic, the result is an array of properties that is nothing less than unique. The Algonquin Hotel was the first New York City property to become a part of the collection.

Each of the 181 rooms and 25 suites features a comfortable well-lit work desk, as

well as complimentary Wi-Fi. Always one step ahead of everyone else, the hotel was the first to offer accommodations to actors and single women travellers. Delighting thirsty revelers when it opened at the demise of the Prohibition in 1933, The Blue Bar has moved – both physically and eruditely – through decades of Times Square hotel bar trends. There is also The Round Table Restaurant and the casual Lobby Lounge.

The Algonquin, its bar and restaurant, have easy access for wheelchairs from the street. There is valet parking. The hotel has six ADA rooms and one ADA suite. There are two elevators. Staff are very helpful and friendly.

tions, cruise ports, and hotels.

Sixt expanded to the United States in 2011 and is now present at 50 locations in 14 States. This includes the following airport locales: Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW), Las Vegas (LAS), Los Angeles (LAX), Phoenix (PHX), Seattle (SEA), Fort Lauderdale (FLL), Miami (MIA), Orlando (MCO), San Francisco (SFO), San Jose (SJC), Atlanta (ATP) and Tampa (TPA). Up next will be San Diego and San Antonio. According to Daniel Florence, the co-president for Sixt USA, operations began at Miami Airport and rapidly expanded both within Florida and to key on- and off-airport locations throughout the US.

The company's strengths lie in the high proportion of premium cars in its vehicle fleet, the consistent service orientation of employees, and a good price-performance ratio. Taken together, these strengths have given the company an excellent market position. "We are proud to maintain alliances with renowned brands in the hotel industry, well-known airlines and numerous prominent service providers in the tourism sector," stated Florence.

Sixt has a wide range of categories and models, including SUVs, convertibles, sedans, pick-up trucks, vans, and sports cars. The majority of its vehicles are from premium brands such as Mercedes-Benz, Volvo, Cadillac, and BMW.

There is a lot of buzz around hidden costs when renting a car. Which are the advantages of renting with Sixt? "We always say that with Sixt, you can drive first class and pay economy, and it's really true," says Florence. "Our cars are generally no more than nine months old, and we offer premium brands at extremely competitive prices. Additionally, the Sixt experience is just unique – our customers are impressed by everything from the sleek design of the stations to our friendly rental agents, who might offer a chilled bottle of water on a hot day. A couple of weeks ago in Miami Beach, we surprised our customers with popsicles, beach balls, sunglasses, and photos. We

strive to keep our rates as transparent as possible, and our rental agents are always happy to explain in-depth how our coverage packages and other additional sales products work, so that there are no surprises in the end."

Sixt rent a car offers handicap accessible vans, for as much time as you need it for one day up to a month. These vehicles are maintained to the highest quality making sure that you are sure that everything is always 100 percent operational. Sixt officials note how they pride themselves on quality vehicles at affordable rates and they promise you will be able to get the same standards in their wheelchair ones. Sixt currently only offers one type of wheelchair accessible vehicle, the Dodge Grand Caravan. With the Dodge Grand Caravan there is a ramp that comes out which makes it easy to load a wheelchair on and off. With the Dodge Grand Caravan you will be able to fit total of five passengers in the wheelchair accessible van. Below you will be able to see which locations carry this vehicle. Sixt rent a car wishes you a great trip!

## A new rental car experience at Sixt

By *Mike Cohen*

For our recent trip to California, renting our own car was a priority. In researching all of the different options I came across one I was frankly not familiar with called Sixt Rent a Car ([www.sixt.com](http://www.sixt.com)). After collecting our luggage at Los Angeles International Airport, we headed to the shuttle area where a Sixt van pulled up and brought us to their large garage very nearby. It was seamless check-in process. I was pleasantly surprised to drive away with a significant upgrade - a white Mercedes. This was a first for me. Customer Service Branch Manager Maria Vigil patiently explained the operation of the vehicle. It drove so smoothly, I was very sad to return the keys at the end of my trip. We also met the new branch manager, Amar Tankha, who told us that Sixt also

has branches in West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Venice Beach and Santa Monica.

Sixt Rent a Car was founded in 1912 in Munich, Germany, and started out with a fleet of just three vehicles. As one of the first and most important international car rental companies in the world - with over 100 years in operation – the business seems to have earned a trusted reputation as a global leading car rental provider. Sixt was the first car rental company with a website and the first to accept mobile reservations. Today they are present in over 100 countries with branches in over 4,000 locations. You will be able to find Sixt car rental services internationally, in almost every major city and tourist destination worldwide and at convenient locations such as airports, train sta-



Customer Service Manager Maria Vigil at Sixt Rent a Car.





# Atypical: High School Through The Eyes of Autism

By *Amanda Papoulias*

Atypical, a television program now streaming on Netflix, is about Sam, an 18 year old boy on the Autism Spectrum who decides that it's time to get a girlfriend. This is also a journey that sets Sam's mom on her own life-changing path as he seeks his independence.

This show doesn't only present to us life through the eyes of a kid on the Autism Spectrum, but it also shows us the reality of having a kid with autism, and what parents have to deal with to keep things calm and collected in their child's life. Another thing showrunner Robia Rashid provides viewers is how hard it could be for their siblings, and how they are cast aside in the family.

Living with someone on the Autism Spectrum does present its challenges, having to deal with when they are upset and have fits. The parents have to make sure that they are okay to walk around in society, and how their entire lives are flipped upside down to help their child's needs. Some parents fold under the pressure and others rise up to the challenge so that their children can live moderately normal lives, or as normal as it can really be.

Autism has so many different forms that sometimes it's hard to even notice that someone can even be on the spectrum. Sam is somewhat of an example of one who is high functioning. Nonetheless there are some aspects of his personality that can prove that he is on the spectrum. For example, some individuals seem to focus on a certain subject, and use that in every day conversations.

Rashid has shown something very special to people on the spectrum and to people who want to know. He introduced us to the Gardners, a very special family, and he takes us inside their lives to see the reality inside, outside, and around the spectrum.

Keir Gilchrist, who portrays Sam, says that he likes taking on challenging roles because he wants to help people. He once portrayed the son of a woman who had dissociative



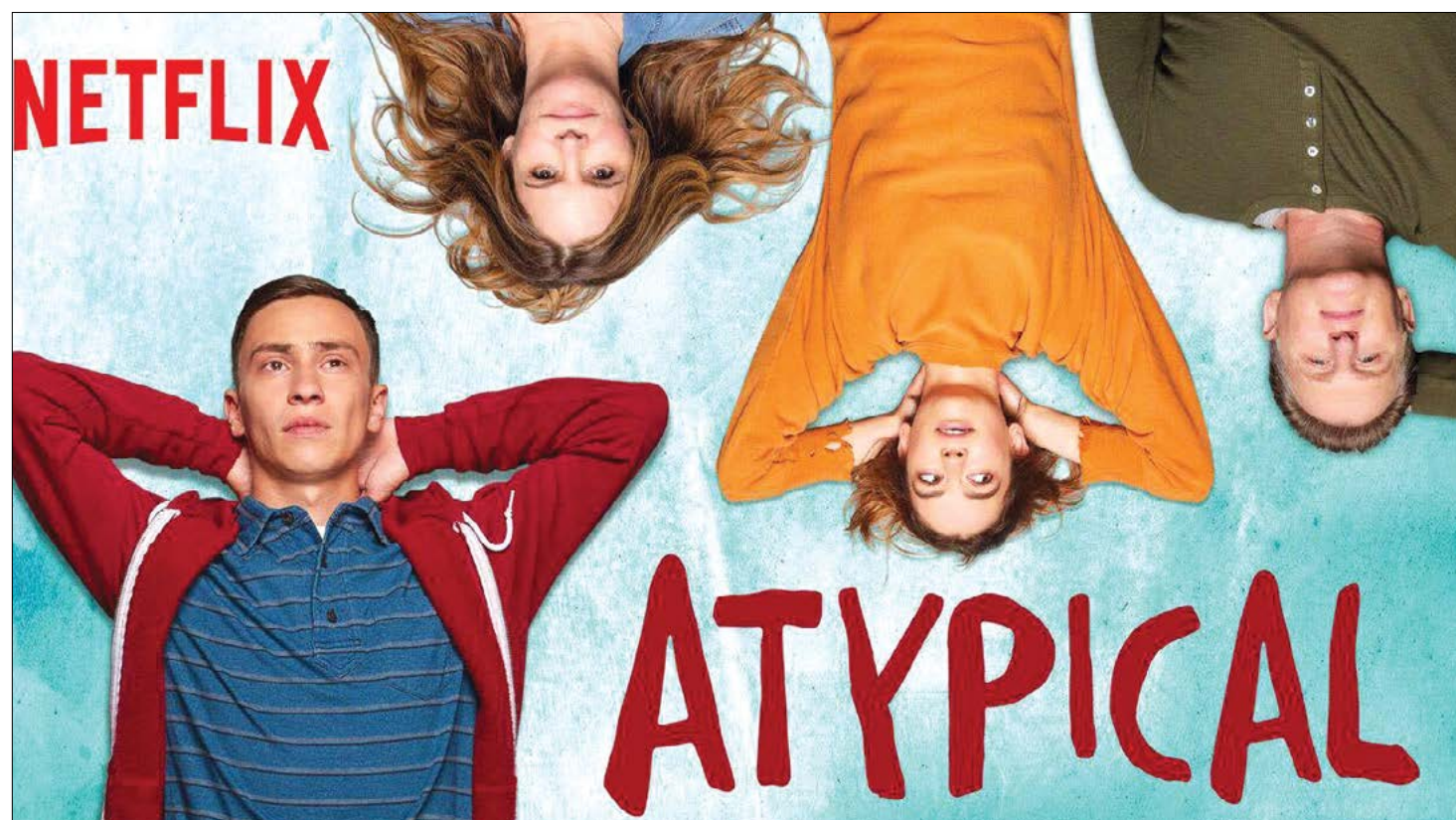
*The cast of Atypical.*

identity disorder, and people thanked him for his performance. He feels that his challenging characters, including Sam, could positively affect someone's life and help them through something. It also helped that he had certain high school experiences that related to his character, like the anxiety of crushes and the discomfort of feeling different.

character being within the Autism Spectrum without offending anyone, so it's nice to see that such a powerful show sends the message out there without hurting anyone's feelings.

Atypical is now streaming on Netflix

It's hard to create a comedy with the main







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ours named Tim, will happily answer all of your production-related questions—and reveal even more of Hollywood’s best-kept secrets—during this 45-minute, self-guided experience at one of the best things to do in Los Angeles. From screenwriting and casting, to audio mixing and the glory of awards season, guests will enjoy a truly immersive look at how the magic of Hollywood is made. I even got to hold a real Academy Award trophy for the camera, weighing in at eight pounds.

The best way to purchase tickets is online via [wbstudiotour.com](http://wbstudiotour.com) and clicking the “Buy Tickets Now” button, located at the top of the website. Online purchases allow you to print your tickets at home for your convenience. The parking lot is located at 3400 Warner Blvd. Burbank, CA 91505.

Warner Bros strive to create an environment that is accessible to all guests. If you or a member of your group has questions regarding special assistance, call 1-877-4WB-TOUR or email [studio.tour@](mailto:studio.tour@)

[warnerbros.com](http://warnerbros.com) in advance. In the event that someone in your party requires a loaned wheelchair, this can be provided free of charge. Registered service dogs are allowed on the tour. However, pets and all other animals are not permitted. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are available upon request. If you require an interpreter during your visit, contact the tour Center 72 hours in advance so that they may guarantee this service for you.

## MORE ON ACCESSIBILITY

Los Angeles is one of best cities in the country to visit for those with disabilities, offering convenient access to transportation and attractions throughout the city. LAX provides various services for the disabled, including ground transportation and wheelchair services. Access Services is the LA County Consolidated Transportation

Services Agency (CTSA), which provides a shared ride service. All Metro Rail lines and stations are accessible to persons in wheelchairs, while Metro buses are equipped with automatic wheelchair lifts. LA’s most popular attractions provide disabled access, including elevators and ramps at the California Science Center, wheelchair seats at Dodger Stadium, wheelchair service at The Grove Shopping Plaza, various rides and attractions at Universal Studios Hollywood, and many more. Los Angeles airports are committed to ensuring the best travel experience and equal access to all of its passengers and visitors, including those with disabilities and special needs. The following sections highlight disabled access and services provided by Los Angeles International Airport, Bob Hope Airport, and LA/Ontario International Airport.

For the most current information on passenger and baggage screening, visit the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov). Los Angeles is one of the most disabled-accessible cities in the world according to the true experts — not bureaucrats, but disabled visitors themselves who know what really works and what doesn’t. They know that a couple of high steps at the front entrance can make a place off-limits. In LA, visitors with disabilities can they really enjoy themselves and fully participate.

Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. You can email him at [mcohen@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:mcohen@inspirationsnews.com) and follow him on Twitter and Instagram @mikecohencsl.

# Spider-Man and friends help special needs kids

Spider-Man rappelled down a building in downtown Montreal September 26 as part of the Société des enfants handicapés du Québec’s Drop Zone fundraiser, which raises funds and awareness for disabled children in Quebec.

Spider-Man was on hand in advance of his show MARVEL UNIVERSE LIVE! AGE OF HEROES, which will be presented at Laval’s Place Bell November 10-12, 2017. This newest installment will see Spider-Man accompanied by his Guardians of the Galaxy friends, including Star-Lord, Gamora, Groot, Rocket and Drax; The Avengers, including Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, Black Panther, Hulk and Black Widow and many more.

Info: [www.enfantshandicapes.com](http://www.enfantshandicapes.com) and [www.evenko.ca](http://www.evenko.ca)

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