

# Rock 'n' roll tour of America



Finding glamour in Tinseltown is not easy, writes **Mary Bolling**

**S**OMEWHERE over Colorado, the panic hits. I've left New York, Los Angeles is still a couple hours away and, suddenly, I don't want to land.

I can blame the terror on Virgin America. Flying with the budget carrier means pay-per-view movies (\$12 to watch *Mamma Mia!*, I think not). Instead, I opt for free VH1 — and can't tear my eyes away from *Rock of Love*. A touching reality program, it sees a bunch of recent trailer park escapees battle for the affection of Poison lead singer, hair metal hero Bret Michaels. It's train-wreck television and probably the worst of what Tinsel Town can do to rock 'n' roll.

And, yet, that's where I'm heading. Home of heroes the Doors and the Beach Boys (and anti-heroes Guns N' Roses). More recently it's where the Pussycat Dolls got their start (as a burlesque act at the famous Sunset Strip venue the Viper Room). Something for everyone, then.

For me, it's too late for regrets. As they say on *American Idol*, I'm going to Hollywood, baby.

I arrive to typical LA blue sky and sun — a welcome change from wintry New York. I'm staying with life-long Californian, Alexx, whose apartment is just off Hollywood Blvd.

Alexx mentions the Red Hot Chili Peppers used to live in his building. It's a good start to exploring the city's music history.

The band first hit the charts with Anthony Kiedis's song *Under the Bridge*, essentially a love song to LA (weirdly featuring a drug deal under a bridge).

The block is a gorgeous example of LA architecture.

From the roof of the building you can see the spectacular Hollywood hills and, in the other direction, across the city to the Pacific Ocean. The well-known, if completely weird, Capitol Records building is down the boulevard.

Capitol, the first West Coast record label, helped kick off the careers of many.

Designed to look like a stack of records, the flashing light on top spells out Hollywood in Morse code.

Like anywhere in LA, get up high and the view is spectacular — but for the best photo opportunities, you can't go past Mt Lee and the Hollywood sign.

You can't actually get up to the sign — allegedly, the city closed off



## links

**I saw the sign:** For the best directions to the Hollywood sign, and a fairly pointless live webcam view, visit [www.hollywoodsign.org](http://www.hollywoodsign.org)

**Hollywood's hurting:** Veer off the tourist strip and find bars desperate for your dollar at lush Velvet Cantina on North Cahuenga Blvd. Basic margaritas are reduced to \$5 until the end of the recession, [www.velvetmargarita.com](http://www.velvetmargarita.com)

**Magic moments:** Have your Grammy moment at the Grammy Museum on Figueroa St, down from Metro Station, adults \$14.95 [www.grammymuseum.org](http://www.grammymuseum.org)

**Rich and famous:** The complete celebrity experience is easy if you're a backpacker. Stay at USA Hostels Hollywood and \$25 means you can tour LA by stretch limo, with all you can drink champagne, [www.usahostels.com/hollywood](http://www.usahostels.com/hollywood)

Blog with Mary at <http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/rockrolltour/>

**Hollywood highs:** Mary and host Alexx have smiles for the world's most photographed sign. Then it's off to see Hollywood's favourite rockstar son, Jim Morrison, immortalised on a Venice Beach apartment block, then it's time to watch the sun set at Venice Beach and last, a late-night visit to the Grammy Museum.

access after unsuccessful female actors started throwing themselves off the top of it.

But head up the right hills — the only way you can do it is by car, or on a tour bus that will also offer glimpses of the mansions of the stars — and you can get close enough for photos.

Not tempted by mansions, instead Alexx drives me up. The bare mountains are beautiful and below the sprawling city shines in the sun.

But like almost everything in Hollywood, a closer inspection dispels the myth.

While the Walk of Fame along Hollywood Blvd looks ultra-glitzzy on

screen, usually amid a flurry of flashing paparazzi cameras, in reality the strip is not unlike Swanston St. Just with more tattoo shops, more bong shops and more homeless people. Oh, and there are some pavement stars with names on them.

To again inspire faith in glamorous Hollywood, the Grammy Museum is dedicated to rock 'n' roll's most thrilling moments.

It is in the downtown area and is one of the few places you can get to use the subway system. Buses mean hours spent stuck in traffic. Hire a car and you face the same gridlock. The Beach Boys lied about Californian cruising being fun, fun, fun.

At the museum, the comprehen-

sive collection includes a letter from Elvis, politely refusing the marriage offer of a mysterious Betty, and stacks of the usual guitars, posters and costumes.

Better is the film and sound archives. While I was there, the inspiring multimedia exhibition featured the history of protest music, titled *Songs of Conscience, Sounds of Freedom*.

Not quite as important, but great fun is watching a short film about *The Making of a Grammy Moment*.

Building up to Beyonce and Tina Turner singing *Proud Mary* at the 2008 Grammys, it's hard not to get swept up in the enthusiasm.

So, with newfound love for glamorous LA, I hit the bars on Grammy night, hoping for a glimpse of the triumphant rock stars.

Sunday night queues for Sunset Strip rock destinations (Whisky a Go Go is my favourite — historic, fun, funky, but priced for tourists and rock stars, unfortunately) wind along the footpath and the aspiring rich and famous are wearing their red carpet best.

In jeans and motorbike boots, and carrying a camera, I can't get in. There's no Grammy Moment for me.

**Next week: I left my heart in San Francisco: Frisco, and the search for a late-night beer**

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