

# LUCHFORD APM

Title: The Independent  
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## Oscars star-spotting in LA: Here's how to do Los Angeles like a bonafide A-lister

Want to blend in with the Hollywood A-list? You don't need a Tinseltown budget if you have a bit of chutzpah, as Christian Koch discovers

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The Beverly Hilton is ground zero for celeb spotting *AFP/Getty*

“Would you please mind turning round? A very well-known customer is here and doesn't like other guests facing him...”

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Hollywood's Sunset Tower Bar is a place of murmured conversations, film-noir lighting and raffish 1940s golden-age charm. If Errol Flynn swooped in, chasing skirts and guzzling gimlets at the walnut-panelled bar, you wouldn't be surprised. As befits a saloon described by its owner as somewhere "a celebrity can dine with his family one night and his mistress the next", a white-jacketed bartender has just told me to swivel 180-degrees in my chair, lest his A-list patron catches a glimpse of my unsightly visage.

Not being looked at. It's up there with Mariah "not doing stairs" or Kanye demanding somebody iron his "bumpy" dressing-room carpet. Still, for some pathologically English deferential reason, I agree.



Jennifer Aniston proved elusive during Christian's stay (Getty)

It doesn't stop me from ogling his table on (now-regular) sorties to the loo. Hang on! Isn't that Sid Owen? The hen-pecked hubbie from *EastEnders*? A further glance reveals Sid's no more than a doppelganger, but I recognise his scopophobic friend, a movie-player of such stratospheric fame that I dare not mention them here. It's definitely not, I can at least say, Jennifer Aniston, who's a regular at the hotel.

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I'd arrived in Los Angeles with a mission. Could I, with my decidedly English teeth, threadbare budget and new Primark blazer, infiltrate the very same turf as Hollywood's genetically blessed gentry? Not only that, but could I do it on a budget in a city where this weekend's Oscars guests will tuck into **gold-dusted popcorn**?

No frills airline **Norwegian** whisks me to LA, where I check into the **Beverly Hilton**. It may not be budget digs (although you can often find rooms going for a song if you luck out and book it on a "secret" website like **Hotwire**, which offers rock bottom rates but doesn't disclose the name of the hotel until you book). I've chosen it for its rock solid celeb credentials: it hosts more than 150 red carpet events a year, including the Golden Globes, and, famously, was where Whitney Houston died.

Stumble into the lobby and you could, as I did, bump into Pharrell, Denzel Washington and Viola Davis participating in a photo-call – I arrived to find it was the American Black Film Festival Honors. Alas, any bid to get up close and personal is thwarted by a billion retina-blinding flash-bulbs and suited security muttering into ear-pieces.



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According to *People* magazine's entertainment journalist George Stark, the practice of "hotel-hopping" represents our best chance of high-wattage celeb-spotting. Not only are these rare beasts dining in hotel restaurants and drinking in hotel bars, but they can also be hanging out in the lobby, waiting for their agents.

First, though, I have to get red-carpet ready.



Christian gets a free makeover from Beyoncé's makeup artist (Christian Koch)

Sephora beauty stores offer free 15-minute makeovers across the US, but here in Hollywood, my jet-lagged complexion is tended to by Tracy, who has also worked her magic on Beyoncé and the Kardashians. Colour "corrected", pores "humidified", I catch an Uber to Sunset Boulevard. Uber is, it turns out, another great way to glean celeb gossip – tonight, my driver is Jay Z's ex-bodyguard; another night I get a woman who knows Brangelina through the school run.

Although the 1.5mile Sunset Strip doesn't have the same cachet as 20 years ago, celebrities often waft through its hotel bars, which are so murkily lit that gawkers have to squint hard to see them.



The infamous Chateau Marmont is less impenetrable than you'd think (Discover Los Angeles)

Swanning into the fragrant lobbies of Chateau Marmont (where Johnny Depp boasted of making love to Kate Moss in every single room, and Lindsay Lohan ran up an infamous \$46,000 bar bill) or the Sunset Marquis (Cheryl Cole, Russell Brand and Robbie Williams are all fans) requires remarkably little chutzpah. On George's advice, I just walk up in my Primark blazer as if I belong there, and find all the bar staff charming. Celeb-spotting,

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however, proves futile. I loiter 20 minutes in The London West Hollywood's pearly lobby, convinced some woman brandishing Louis Vuitton bags is the elusive Jen Aniston. She isn't.

There are other ways to rubber-neck stars on a budget. Attending game shows such as *The Late Late Show with James Corden* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (tickets from [1ota.com](http://1ota.com)) won't cost a cent but involve turning up three hours in advance and surrendering your mobile. If you're really keen, you can even be an extra in a movie with [beinamovie.com](http://beinamovie.com).



Malibu beach is a prime celeb hunting ground (Discover Los Angeles)

With hotel-hopping producing mixed results, I decide to go full-on stalker and trudge around Malibu's celebrity beach homes. Paparazzi and plebeians alike can walk, swim or sunbathe on any Malibu beach, much to A-listers' chagrin. A quick Google unlocks the seafront Malibu Colony and Carbon Beach homes of Tom Hanks, Leonardo DiCaprio and Sting. After wading through crystalline-blue surf and ignoring useless "NO TRESPASSING" signs, I only spot swooping pelicans. When somebody inside Linda Ronstadt's apparent home starts peering from the window, then speaking-into-their-phone-from-the-window, my escapade is up. I don't belong here, but it was fun while it lasted.

## Essentials

### Getting there


The writer flew as a guest of [Norwegian](#), which flies from Gatwick to LAX from £179 one way.

### Staying there

The writer stayed as a guest of the [Beverly Hilton](#). Doubles start from \$237 (£189), room only. ●

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