

# Travel

The New York Times

## Check In / Check Out

### SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

#### Hotel Shangri-La

##### THE BASICS

For years, the modestly priced Hotel Shangri-La in Santa Monica, Calif., was a fraying but funky Art Deco gem. Sheets were rough and the carpet stained, but it had one terrific attraction: nearly every room had views of the ocean. Now, thanks to a \$30 million renovation completed last August, the 71-room Shangri-La, which was built in 1939, has been tastefully buffed and polished. Rates are higher, too, but at least the rooms are now worthy of the hotel's gleaming white exterior, which looks like a classic ocean liner poised to set sail.

##### LOCATION

In the heart of laid-back Santa Monica, on the southeast corner of Ocean and Arizona Avenues. The Santa Monica Pier, with its arcades, amusement rides and fishing, is within an easy walk, as is the Third Street Promenade, a popular pedestrian mall featuring restaurants, movie multiplexes and stores.

##### THE SCENE

This is the hotel where Madonna and Sean Penn courted a quarter of a century ago, and it still resonates with a feeling of Hollywood at play. The restaurant and rooftop bar draw a local crowd, including hustling would-be Hollywood agents and producers, the ladies-who-lunch junior division, and those swarms of pouty young beauties — overdressed and yet skimpily clad — unique to Los Angeles.

##### THE ROOM

I stayed in Room 409, a suite that included a living room and bedroom, each bigger than my first studio apartment in Manhattan, and two bathrooms. (The hotel's Web site listed suites from \$405, but I got mine on Expedia for \$288.75, plus tax.) In a pleasingly stark palette of black, gray and brown, the rooms had wooden floors, a king-size bed, comfortable seating and workspace, and generous closets. A welcome improvement: soundproof windows, which effectively blocked the noise of buses on the street.

##### THE BATHROOMS

Both were roomy. One had a sunken oval tub on a raised platform (with a

stool for clambering in); the other, a conventional tub with a handheld shower. Both were stocked with Frette bathrobes, magnifying make-up mirrors and the usual toiletries. Niftiest touch: dual-flush toilets, which save water in a city where every drop counts.

##### ROOM SERVICE

Prompt and perfect. I ordered oatmeal with blueberries (delicious!), fresh squeezed orange juice and tea, all of which arrived in exactly 15 minutes, as promised. The kitchen even got right my request for extra skim milk, a rarity with room service. Total cost: \$23.31, not including tip. There is a ground-floor restaurant, the Dining Room, flooded with afternoon sunlight. It features California cuisine made with seasonal ingredients from a nearby farmers' market.

##### AMENITIES

There's a serviceable gym, valet parking (\$30 a night, plus tax) and a rooftop bar called Suite 700 that offers sensational ocean views and fresh air.



DAVID GUETTLER

The cabana at the Hotel Shangri-La.

Most inviting is a bright courtyard with a small pool (heated by solar panels), whirlpool tub, plentiful seating, private cabanas and, come evening, a blazing fire pit.

##### THE BOTTOM LINE

A renovation superbly done. The Shangri-La is so relaxing and roomy, you'll be tempted to invite local friends over, order drinks and just stay in your room with the windows open, watching the sun set over the Pacific and enjoying the breezes. Standard rooms start at \$335.

Hotel Shangri-La; 1301 Ocean Avenue; (310) 394-2791; Shangri-la-hotel.com.

LEAH ROZEN