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## Santa Monica's Huntley hotel

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Article Last Updated: 12/03/2006 02:15:46 PM MST

**SANTA MONICA, CA.** -- If you want advice on where to stay in Santa Monica, in Southern California, don't believe everything you read in the travel magazines. If you took those annual hotel ratings lists for gospel, you could find yourself at the south end of town paying more than \$400 a night for name recognition and the dubious privilege of being right on the sand.

Instead, try one of those "best-kept secrets," the Huntley Hotel, where local residents send out-of-town friends. Recently re-launched after a complete \$12 million renovation, the 188-room, 21-suite Huntley is every bit as posh as the competition and more centrally located, with rooms that cost from one-quarter to one-third less.

Built on Second Street at the edge of a quiet residential neighborhood, the 18-story hotel is a 10-minute walk from downtown, close to a cornucopia of award-winning restaurants and shops. Montana Avenue, now Santa Monica's most exclusive shopping street, is around the corner.

Even entertainment -- what there is of it in this sun-washed beach town -- is within reach, from a couple of multi-screen movie theaters, a scattering of art galleries and some lively night clubs to the street scene on the Third Street Promenade, a pedestrian mall.

That said, there's a downside to being near the town center. Though the Huntley says it's a "beach" hotel, you won't really be steps away from the sand, but up on the cliffs where most of Santa Monica is located. From there, the beach is a 10-minute walk down the bluff on a paved sidewalk and across the coast highway.

The Huntley's rooms, sleekly contemporary, come in several styles, each planned for a different kind of traveler, from parents with kids to couples and business travelers. Though the hallways, paneled in wood, are oddly dark, the tunnel effect heightens the airy brightness inside the rooms.

Here, natural light, enhancing a palette of pale earth hues -- off-whites, ivory, wheat and latte -- create a clean fresh look and the clever use of space makes the rooms look larger. All rooms have wireless Internet access, 42-inch plasma screen televisions, CD and DVD players, mini-bars, electronic safes and 24-hour room service.

The ground-floor lobby also has that minimalist, art gallery look, blending black, white, chocolate browns and off-whites. A small sitting area with sculpted laminated-wood chairs, faux-fur pillows and throw rugs and several large African carvings highlight the room's eye-catching art installation, the Piranha Wall, a "school" of 300 white ceramic fish. The hotel also has a small business center, a workout room with weights and machines, an indoor/outdoor cafe with wonderful food and a sundries and gift shop with a coffee, soup and sandwich counter.

There's on-site and valet parking, but you won't really need a car for the first couple of days. Take a cab from Los Angeles International Airport (a flat rate of \$28 door to door), and rent wheels later, when you're ready to take on Los Angeles and the mysteries of Beverly Hills, the Sunset Strip, the Getty Museum and Disneyland.

As for the 18-story hotel's best asset, I like the rooftop restaurant with its panoramic windows and 360-degree views. At twilight, the city lights twinkle, the coastal mountains fade to purple, the bay curves out and away and the sun sets over

the blue Pacific.

**INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE:**

Ask for the promotional rate for a City View room with one queen bed, at \$259 per night. Listed room rates run from \$299 to \$750. Larger suites and the penthouse cost more.

The Huntley is 9.2 miles north of Los Angeles International Airport, at 1111 Second Street, Santa Monica, Calif. 90403. Call 310-394-5454, or go to [www.thehuntleyhotel.com](http://www.thehuntleyhotel.com). Also contact the Huntley, a member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, at [www.preferredhotels.com](http://www.preferredhotels.com).

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