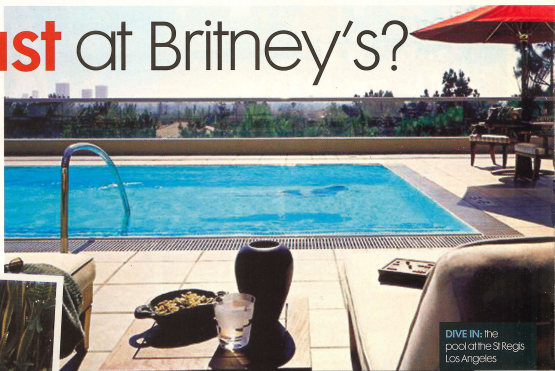


Breakfast at Britney's?

Fancy cocktails with Puffy? Coffee with CZ-J? If you're an unashamed celeb groupie, bespoke LA tour guide Anne Block will sort you out. John Ariidge puts her to the test for 24 hours



DIVE IN: the pool at the St Regis Los Angeles



TOUR PARTY: Anne Block and John Ariidge plan the celeb-filled day (left). LA's have-to-have-it Hummer (this photo)

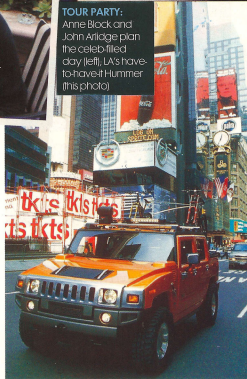
It's 2am. I'm lying on a heated water bed on the terrace of the 31st-floor penthouse of the St Regis Los Angeles, sipping a prickly-pear margarita and gazing at the Hollywood Hills. It's the end of my first day in LA.

Since I woke up this morning I've hung with Mike Tyson and had breakfast with Britney Spears, Michael Douglas and CZ-J. I've shopped and gawped at the cosmetic-surgery queens of Rodeo Drive; had a massage so violent I passed out with pain (or was it pleasure?); shopped in the world's biggest sex supermarket; eaten the latest LA food fad – Italian/Japanese – with Scarlett Johansson; and tried to have tea with rapper-turned-*Starsky-and-Hutch* star Snoo Dogg.

It was all Anne Block's idea. I've known Anne now for 48 hours, although it feels a lot longer. We met on the phone when I was in a cab heading for Heathrow airport and she was in Hollywood. Anne is LA's leading bespoke tour guide, specialising in celebrity culture. With just 12 hours' notice, she promises to arrange your perfect day. All you have to do is to tell her what you want and who you want to see – after 12 years in the business, she knows who will be where, and when.

Anne meets me at LAX in her 1998 Sedan De Ville. 'I've got you one of the best rooms in the City – the St Regis Penthouse,' she says. 'Let's go there now so you can rest. We've got an early start tomorrow.'

She wakes me the next morning with the



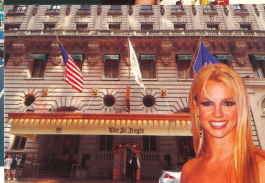
words, 'Therapy. In LA, nobody goes out without beauty therapy.' So we head to the St Regis spa. My masseuse, Gilma, is a real Jekyll and Hyde. One moment she's gently rubbing my spine, the next she's pushing and pulling me so violently it feels as if she's stretched my legs all the way to Vegas. Amazingly, the Raindrop Therapy (a reflexology/aromatherapy/reiki combo that involves having organic oils dripped on to your body like raindrops) feels fantastic, and after an hour I'm so relaxed I fall asleep.

'Wake up! There's hair next,' barks Anne. 'You've heard of feng shui homes? Well, the latest thing is to feng shui your hair.'

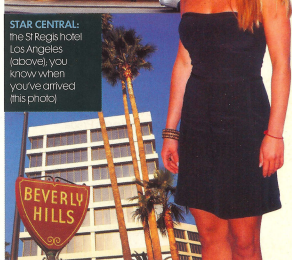
At Spa Mystique on the Avenue of the Stars, Sarah, my colourist, wants to discover ➤



NICE TO MEET YOU: guess who rubbed shoulders with CZ-J, Michael Douglas (this photo) and Britney Spears (bottom)?



STAR CENTRAL: the St Regis hotel Los Angeles (above); you know when you've arrived (this photo)





my 'chi'. 'I think you're silver—a metal. I need to soften your hair by introducing bronze and copper highlights.' I run for the door faster than you can say Nicky Haslam.

There's only one place for your first day in LA—the Four Seasons in Hollywood, Anne tells me as we leave the St Regis. 'It's power-breakfast central.' Over a So-Cal (Southern California) omelette, I get a front-row seat at the Hollywood show, and I'm in eavesdropper heaven. 'My agent's got a better table than your agent,' one actress crows as she walks in. 'I've got one hundred million I need to park,' announces a wealthy-looking gent in the corner, and, alarmingly, from another, 'Have you ever killed anyone before?'

As I sip my tea, I spot Britney plus entourage across the room, then get distracted by Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas as they walk in. It's Oscar week and the A-list über-couple are meeting their stylists to plan their wardrobe. 'See, I promised you tea with the stars!' says Anne triumphantly.

It's a short run at the Beverly Hills Hotel to Rodeo Drive. As we park, Anne says, 'You can shop here, but it's far more fun to watch people prance and preen. Look!' A woman who's been nipped and tucked to Californian perfection is stepping out of LA's wheels *du jour*—a canary-yellow convertible Hummer. She lifts her two yappy spaniels, Sparkles and Puccini, who've just been permed at Petco (the top pet parlour), out of the glamorous gas guzzler and walks towards Prada.

It gets better. As I walk past Gucci, a short man in a grey Sean John tracksuit struts out. He looks familiar. Hey, it's former World Heavyweight Champion boxer Mike Tyson. 'Nice to see you, Mike,' I say. Tyson smiles and holds out his hand before disappearing into a \$400,000 Rolls-Royce Phantom. Ah, feel the love!



BEVERLY HILLS 'N' THRILLS (clockwise from top left): the terrace at the St Regis Los Angeles, Rodeo Drive; a menu from Cinch; John outside the Hustler Superstore; Rodeo Drive; Tiffany's shopping heaven; the Walk of Fame

It's all too LA. I need some air, but I can't just go for a walk. In a town that's bigger than most island nations, you don't walk anywhere, you drive. What's more, you can't make do with a car, you need the car—the kind that gets you the best dates and the best tables. Anne has a friend up the road in Santa Barbara called Gabriella who can help. Right on cue, she cruises up in a bright red BMW convertible—so new it's not even officially on sale yet. But thanks to Anne's clout, we get to borrow it for the afternoon. We head out to feel the sea breeze on Pacific Coast Highway 1.

As I drive and enjoy the envious glances, I wonder who would appreciate this car more even than Mike Tyson. A light blings on in my head. 'Can we go to Snoop Dogg's house now and have tea?' 'No way,' says Anne. 'All his people are armed. It's too dangerous.'

Silence. 'But, Anne continues, 'if you can't have a rap star, would a porn star do?'

We swing back off Pacific Coast Highway 1, cruise along Sunset Boulevard, park the BMW outside the Hustler Superstore and walk in under a sign that reads 'Relax. It's just sex.' I wander down the aisles, where DVDs are



LA LOWDOWN

ANNE BLOCK TAKE MY MOTHER* PLEASE (*OR ANY OTHER VIP) **CUSTOM-DESIGNED TOURS** From around £166 for half a day (for up to three people), PO Box 35219, Los Angeles, CA 90035; enq (001 323) 737 2200; www.takemy motherplease.com.

THE ST REGIS LOS ANGELES Midway between downtown and the coast, this is ideally placed for exploring LA. 2055 Avenue of the Stars; enq (001 310) 277 6111; www.stregis.com. Doubles from around £183.

SPA MYSTIQUE Century Plaza Hotel, 2025 Avenue of the Stars, Los Angeles; enq (001 310) 551 7577; www.spamystique.com.

CINCH 1519 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica; enq (001 310) 395 4139; www.cinchrestaurant.com.

BRITISH AIRWAYS Flies from London Heathrow to LAX. Los Angeles from £357 return; enq 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com.

GENERAL INFORMATION LA INC, the Convention and Visitors Bureau; enq (020) 7318 9555; www.seemyla.com.

arranged in neat, consumer-friendly categories: Ethnic, Fetish, Asian, Gay. It all seems so normal I feel like waving to Hustler boss Larry Flynt when I arrive back at the Four Seasons. His \$300,000 Bentley with the HUSTLER licence plate is parked outside.

But it's getting late, so Anne and I head out to eat LA's latest fusion-food fad, Italian-Japanese. Chef Chris Behre—who set up the Mju restaurant in London and now runs the fashionable Santa Monica eatery Cinch (a fave of Kate Hudson, Leonardo and Gisele, Tom Hanks and Scarlett Johansson)—serves up his speciality edamame risotto with hijiki seaweed jus. What would mamma think?

After supper, we head back to the St Regis, where the valet parker almost hugs me hello when he sees our new car. We take the private elevator upstairs for one last drink and a view of the Hollywood Hills. And that's how I come to be relaxing on the terrace of the St Regis penthouse, enjoying a prickly-pear margarita and an unreal check. As I look out across the scattershot city, Anne asks, 'How was your day?'

'Weird,' I reply.

'That,' smiles Anne, 'is LA.' ■