

In Transit

TRAVEL NEWS, DEALS AND TIPS

Q. AND A. DAMIEN CHAZELLE On Los Angeles And Its Charms

Damien Chazelle, the writer and director of the musical “La La Land,” never had any doubts about Los Angeles as an artistic canvas.

From the film’s opening, with commuters dancing and singing on a congested freeway exit ramp, to the visually stunning final sequence, the city is depicted as a place where dreamers may struggle but where optimism also abounds.

Growing up in New Jersey, Mr. Chazelle said, “I had some negative conceptions of Los Angeles, but I was willing to try something other than the East Coast because I wanted to do movies.” He added: “For a few years, there were ups and downs, but I slowly became smitten. I had never lived in a city with palm trees, and now I’ve been here for almost nine and a half years.”

His debut directorial film, “Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench,” was first shown in 2009, followed by the drama “Whiplash” in 2014. Mr. Chazelle, who recently won the 2016 Golden Globe Award for best director for “La La Land,” recently discussed his current film, Los Angeles and some of his travel forays. Below are edited excerpts from that conversation.

Q. In famously car-centric Southern California, what logistical issues did you face with the opening scene of “La La Land”?

A. After searching for a filming location, we decided on the FasTrak ramp that connects Interstate 105 to Interstate 110, since it would be easier for the city to shut down. We rehearsed in



DALE ROBINETTE

The director Damien Chazelle on the set of “La La Land,” which included scenes at the Griffith Observatory and a freeway exit ramp.

parking lots, and were able to shut down the ramp to film on a Saturday and a Sunday. On both days, there was a heat wave.

In the film, Mia and Sebastian, played by Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling, visit the beloved Griffith Observatory. What was it like to shoot there?

We were able to film there on a Monday, which is the only day that they’re closed, but you can’t change or touch anything. Filming isn’t allowed in the planetarium at the Griffith, so professional designers built a replica of the actual planetarium on a sound stage. However, we could light the Observatory on the outside.

What’s the story behind the Rialto Theater in South Pasadena, where Mia and Sebastian watch the James Dean

classic “Rebel Without a Cause”?

The theater is used for special events, but it hasn’t been a functioning commercial movie theater in a while. [The Rialto closed in 2007.] It’s a beautiful old structure, inside and outside.

What led you to film in nearby Pasadena?

Pasadena is really wonderful. The city is one of the best places for architecture in the Los Angeles area since so much has been preserved there. The Colorado Street Bridge [which features a scene with Mia and Sebastian] is one of those places. There are also the homes of silent movie stars. Pasadena seemed far away from where I was living.

What has traveling been like since

you’ve been promoting the movie internationally?

There’s been a fair amount of travel. I’ve had a mini East Asia tour; the film opens in China and Japan in February. I’d never been to Japan and had been dying to go there forever. My father is French, so I have a lot of relatives in Paris and France, which is nice. France is like a third home.

When you’re headed out of town, what do you usually bring?

Ever since I was a kid, I have been fond of long train trips. I like the idea of forced sitting time. I always bring a couple of books and headphones, and weigh down a backpack. If I have something to read and music to listen to, I’m fine.

JOHN L. DORMAN

CHASING THE DEAL



JIM WILSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Whales spotted off Monterey Bay in California.

Whale-Watching Tours

Whale-watching season is in full swing in the Pacific through mid-April, and travelers have their pick of themed hotel packages and tours on Maui; in Monterey, Calif.; and on Mexico’s West Coast.

In Monterey, where as many as 7,000 gray whales pass along the coastline between December and March, Portola Hotel & Spa at Monterey Bay has a whale-watching package that includes accommodations, breakfast and a boat tour. From \$240 a night for two.

Independent of hotels, Monterey Bay Whale Watch runs year-round whale-watching boat excursions — guests are accompanied by a marine biologist. From \$44 a person.

In Baja California Sur, Mexico, Pachcio’s Eco Tours offers half- and full-day whale-watching boat tours through April 15 to San Ignacio Lagoon, a breeding ground for gray whales. Half-day tours are \$75 a person; full-day tours, which include lunch, are \$110.

Humpback whales are the attraction through March along Mexico’s Riviera Nayarit, and the St. Regis Punta Mita Resort is offering a Whale-Watching Package that includes two nights’ accommodations, breakfast and a humpback-encounter boat trip. From \$700 for two people. Available through March 31.

On Maui, the island’s Honua Kai Resort & Spa has the Whale Adoption Adventure, which includes five nights’ accommodations and a whale-watching boat excursion. Three hundred dollars a night for two. Available through April 15. SHIVANI VORA