

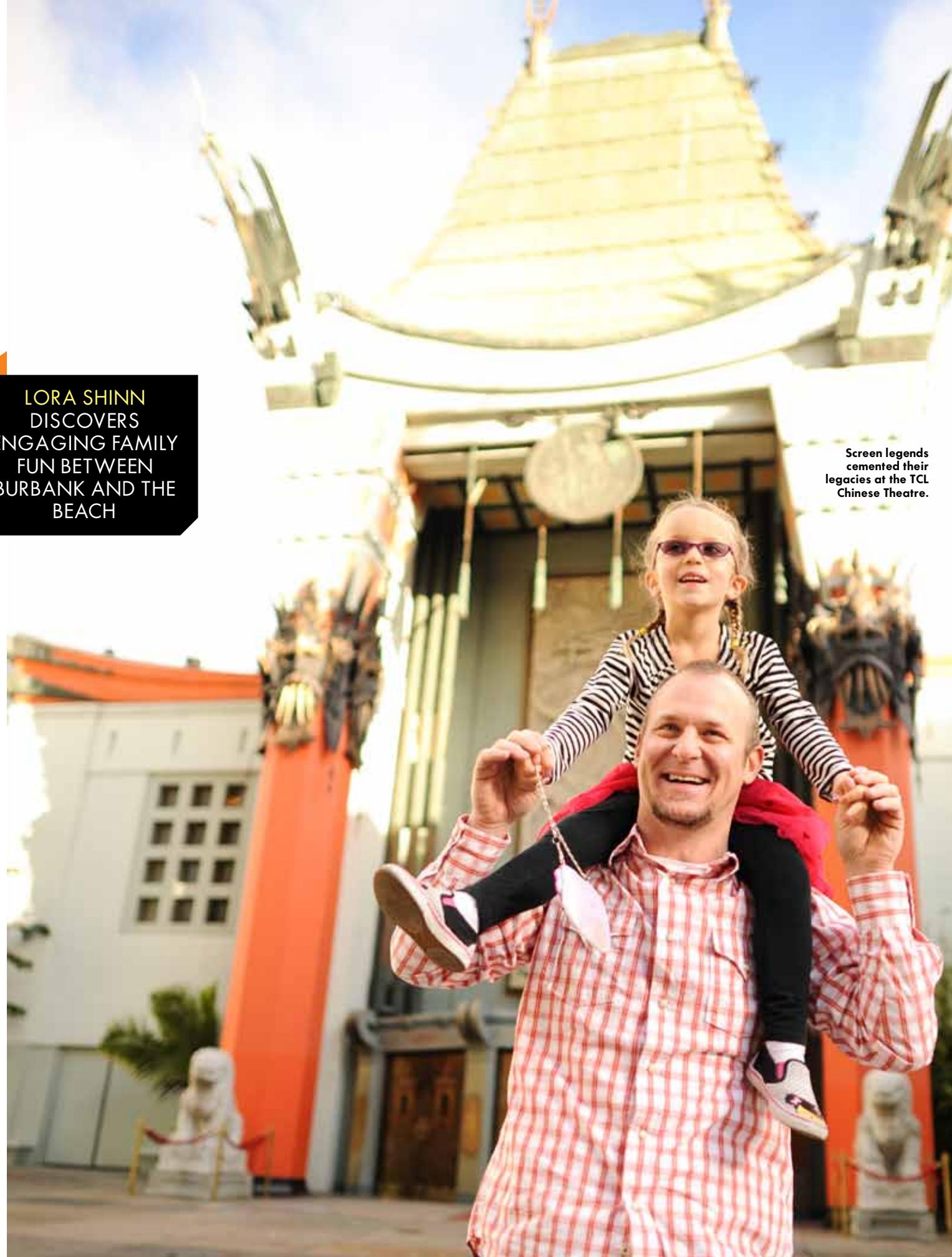
3 days L.A.

When I mentioned Los Angeles in the context of an upcoming family vacation, my friends assumed we were headed for Southern California's amusement parks. The city of Los Angeles itself is often perceived as a complex mix of urban grit and celebrity chic best navigated by aspiring actors and their entourages. But as my husband and I discovered on a sunbreak last winter with our daughter (13) and son (7), the City of Angels also entertains families, with characteristic Hollywood-style flair, of course.

PHOTOGRAPH by SABRINA HELAS

LORA SHINN
DISCOVERS
ENGAGING FAMILY
FUN BETWEEN
BURBANK AND THE
BEACH

Screen legends
cemented their
legacies at the TCL
Chinese Theatre.



DAY 1

WHILE MY HUSBAND and son lazed by the pool at our hotel (Le Parc Suites Hotel in West Hollywood), my daughter and I drove about 20 minutes to Burbank, where we explored backstage lots on a 12-person Warner Bros. Studio VIP Tour. (The Warner Bros. lot is just a few miles from Universal Studios Hollywood, the theme park offering rides, studio excursions, a shopping complex and more.)

In a studio auto garage, we saw the Anglia Ford—the flying car from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*—while other stops on our tour (via extended golf cart) allowed us to curl up on the couch from the café in *Friends* and take a picture outside a theater facade seen in *The Artist*.

When we were through, we collected the boys for a drive to the one destination where Mickey Mouse, Halle Berry and Jerry Lewis hang out together—the Hollywood Walk of Fame. More than 2,000 five-point, brass-rimmed pink terrazzo stars line the sidewalks along Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street. I earned “cool mom points” by using my iPhone to locate my kids’ favorite celebs on walkoffame.com.

This path of legends brought us to the TCL (formerly Grauman’s) Chinese Theatre. Here, my musical-loving daughter could slip her sandal into Julie Andrews’ dainty shoe outline, while my son got a kick stepping into the footprints of Roy Rogers—and the hoofprints of his horse, Trigger.

All that tinsel left us a bit light-headed, but we discovered a more cerebral side of the city in the Los Feliz neighborhood at Griffith Park, home to the Los Angeles Zoo, the Autry National Center and Griffith Observatory. At the latter, we peered at the sun through special telescopes and discovered our weight on multiple planets, while a life-size sculpture of Albert Einstein inspired my daughter to snap a “selfie” next to the brass likeness of the immortal genius.

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The Page Museum brings L.A.'s prehistoric past to life.

DAY 2

AFTER BREAKFAST alfresco on Melrose Avenue, we buzzed over to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), where two whimsical outdoor installations greeted us. *Urban Light* offered a forest of 202 restored street lamps; *Penetrable* presented thousands of neon-yellow hanging tubes.

With approximately 100,000 objects dating from ancient times to the present day, LACMA claims to be the largest art museum in the Western United States. We visited the museum's modern art galleries, where playful installations, such as a 6-foot-tall enamel-on-wood comb, captured my son's attention—and his imagination.

Next door, the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits brought L.A.'s prehistoric past to life with fossil displays excavated from the site's natural asphaltic deposits. My son tried counting a wall of dire wolf skulls (404, to be exact); the noggins fell into bubbling tar more than 11,000 years ago. "I'd never get stuck in there," he boasted. That smugness melted at an interactive exhibit that asked him to move small poles through the tar. "Impossible!" he declared. In the picnic-ready park outside, the smoky, rich scent of liquid asphalt bubbled up. Gates surrounding the ooze keep contemporary mammals—including curious kids—safe.

After an early dinner, we drove along Sunset Boulevard's graceful curves, past mansions noted on movie-star maps, to the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center. For a small parking fee (just \$10 after 5 p.m.), we admired art by European masters and priceless views of the city, the San Gabriel Mountains and the Pacific Ocean.

The evening sun created the perfect palette for appreciating the hilltop museum's expansive courtyards, gardens and Italian travertine exterior. From the cactus-and-palm-fringed curved balconies, we watched the sun perform its slow dive into the Pacific Ocean.

DAY 3

NO TRIP TO Los Angeles would be complete without a walk on the beach. With this in mind, we began our final day with a stroll along Santa Monica's 3.5 miles of palm tree-lined sand, where we soaked up sights of early-morning surf, shore and power-walkers.

The people-watching improved after a 10-minute drive south to Venice Beach, where the pedestrian-only Ocean Front Walk seemed to embody L.A.'s diversity. Families slowly pedaled by on beach cruisers. Skateboarders ollied on the skate bowl's pavement, kids scrambled on a beachside playground, and bodybuilders pumped up biceps at Muscle Beach.

We darted and dodged our way through the crowds, punctuating stops with shouts of "cool!" and "look at this!" Our reactions might have marked us as tourists anywhere else, but in Venice Beach, others seemed just as amazed by the action as we were.

Later, as we waited for our plane to lift off from the tarmac, both kids pleaded for one more day, already beginning to miss L.A.'s weather and kid-friendly show-stoppers. "But I don't want to go home," might be the sweetest words to a traveling parent's ears. I promised them that we'd return—but the plane must go on. **||**

Kids get a hands-on look at gold panning in Griffith Park's Autry National Center.

