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Venice Walking Tour



The Venice Ocean Front Walk's background is explained during the Venice Walking Tour. photo courtesy of Venice Papparazi

Lynne Bronstein, Mirror Staff Writer

Tourists and residents alike don't know what's really happening on the Ocean Front Walk. That's why it's great that Jeffrey Solomon, membership chair for the Venice Chamber of Commerce and a longtime resident, is conducting the "Venice Walking Tour" every weekend.

The Mirror went along with Solomon (he's a friendly dude so for the rest of this article we'll call him Jeffrey) on a typical Friday late morning tour. These are some of the highlights.

Jeffrey took us first out on the beach to a place at the end of a concrete walkway that he called "Heaven." "You can see Malibu to the north, Palos Verdes to the south-on a clear day." Someone had written "heaven" in the concrete and Jeffrey added that when he conducted his maiden tour on the fourth of July, a homeless guy sat there playing John Lennon's "Imagine" on the guitar, making it seem so heaven-like that some tourists cried.

He explained that the vendors on the OFW have been fighting for years with local government about selling their crafts on the walk. The current lottery system requires that vendors compete for spaces on the ocean side of the walk, and vendors who create their own wares feel they are being pushed out by those who sell pre-fab goods.

Along the walk southward, we would meet several of these vendors.

There was Mick, who "sings Beatles songs all day long," and Abraham, who paints protest slogans, religious messages and paintings of Venice buildings and people, including his wife Diane. A sign on his table read "Free Speech is Not a Lottery Prize."

There was Tiffany Bromley, who sells wigs on the east side of the Walk, where vendors must pay monthly rent. But Jeffrey includes her among his pals because she sells her wigs at reasonable prices. Tiffany demonstrated her wares by putting on a long blonde wig over her shorter hair.

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And there was Gille, the “man who paints with his nose.” Gille sells his art from his wheelchair and also on the Internet. Looking at one of his postcards, it was hard to believe he had painted this landscape with his nose.

We went into the Israel Levin Senior Center, where the director, Rosalie Fromberg, told us about the Center’s services (including a \$1.25 lunch). The Levin Center also provided a glimpse of Venice’s mural art, with its exterior homage to Marc Chagall, painted by Christina Schlesinger.

Further south, Jeffrey pointed out the murals “Endangered Species” by Emily Winters, recently restored after being marred with graffiti, and the two “Starry Night” murals by Rip Cronk.

There was also time to visit Sponto Gallery at 7 Dudley Avenue, to hear how it used to be the Venice West Café, “Back when I had hair longer than yours”, Jeffrey said to one of the female tour-takers.

Near Windward Avenue, we strolled on to the beach to watch the skaters at the Disco Skate area, the guys working out on the iron at Muscle Beach, and the paddle-tennis games at the courts.

The tour wound up with stops at the Venice Post Office’s mural of Abbot Kinney, founder of Venice, at the restored Venice Sign over Windward, and a walk over to the headless female statue in the Windward Circle. Sculptor Robert Graham designed both a female and a male headless statue, for the last Olympics. Somehow it’s just the female one that stands in Venice now, covered with a substance that repels graffiti.

The bonus for all tour-goers was a free lunch at Danny’s Deli. There, while we munched on the likes of pastrami, Greek salads, and burgers, Jeffrey explained that every one of his tours is different.

“I don’t call [the vendors and other Venice people] up to say I’m coming,” he said. “We meet whoever we meet. I’ve been here 40 years so I pretty much know everyone.”

The tours will be continuing every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday at 11am. For information go to venicewalkingtours.com or call 310.968.4797.

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