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CULTURE: TRAVEL

Kissing in Claremont

By Ximena Herschberg



There are more ways than one to dip at Hip Kitty Jazz and Fondue Club. (Credit: Emanuela Cariolagian, Be In The News, Inc.)

A few months ago, I fell in love. It happened by chance. Not with a person but with a charming, whimsical city full of love and romance. Claremont is a college town, but its campuses lie on endless fields of green pastures and its small streets are lined with rows upon rows of deciduous trees reminiscent of autumns I spent on the East Coast.

I stayed at **Hotel Casa 425** (425 W. First St.; [casa425.com](#)) located in the center of it all. This beautiful, modern and minimalist hotel resembles a Spanish hacienda with rooms built around a courtyard. You won't find souvenir bottles of soaps, shampoos, lotions or conditioners in this place. They make a big effort to be earth friendly. Instead, you will find a king-size Tempur-Pedic bed, a bathtub made for two in the center of the room (separated by sheer, white curtains) and a flat-screen television. While the hotel encourages you to conserve and be responsible with water, they don't skimp on luxury or comfort. You can rent videos and watch them on your flat-screen while you soak in the tub!

For a fun ride around, you can borrow one of the hotel's bicycles to explore the "old" village of Claremont and everything it has to offer. Nothing is more romantic than a cheese shop. Cool, young hipsters who are passionate about the cheeses they carry and don't shy away from giving samples run **Cheese Cave** (325 N. Yale Ave.; [claremontcheese.com](#)). The location is somewhat hidden but worth looking for.

There is also the **Folk Music Center & Museum** store (220 Yale Ave.; [folkmusiccenter.com](#)) founded by Ben Harper's grandparents that houses all sorts of unique instruments. This place is magical! They had an instrument called the "gut bucket" that uses a washtub as a resonator and a washboard as a percussion instrument. It originated in 1900's New Orleans among African Americans.

There is an array of quirky shops to wander in and out of as well as an ample selection of restaurants to try. The local people I encountered and asked suggestions of were incredibly gracious and helpful. They were delighted to give me recommendations or direct me to where I was headed next.

Once you're finished exploring the "old" village, return to the "new" village (around Hotel Casa 425). Here, you'll find more amazing restaurants like **The Back Abbey** (128 N. Oberlin Ave.; [thebackabbey.com](#)), with beautiful wooden interior, amazing burgers and an impressive selection of beers and wines. Right next door you can opt to check out a fun, artsy, indie film at the magnificent **Laemmle Claremont 5** (450 W. 2nd St.; [laemmle.com](#)).

Around the corner is a one-of-a-kind shop called **Bath Junkie** (175 N. Indian Hill Blvd.; [bathjunkie.com](#)) that sells all sorts of goodies for a fun bath. You can combine your own scents and create your own bath balls, scrubs, creams and more with over 200 fragrances to choose from. The store's home base is Arkansas, and this is the only shop of its kind in California. Their products are all natural, and their salt scrub exfoliator followed by a splash of body dessert is divine! What girl wouldn't love this place?

After you've finished purchasing your sexy concoctions, head over to the **Packing House** (532 W. First St.; [claremontpackinghouse.com](#)). This warehouse was once the site for mass production for the shipping, packing and storing of citrus, the main source of income for the city for years. Elements of the warehouse have been preserved, and it now functions as a shopping center filled with various restaurants, clothing shops and art galleries. This is where I found the awesomeness that is the **Hip Kitty Jazz and Fondue Club** (502 W. First St.; [hipkittyjazz.com](#)). I walked into this restaurant and a 10-piece live salsa band was playing on stage while patrons were dancing their bums off on the dance floor. (The bands change nightly.) There were plenty of couples indulging in variations of fondue.

These are just a few reasons why I fell in love with Claremont, and why it's worthy of a Valentine's getaway. Who knew you could find romance 34 miles east of Los Angeles?

For more information, visit [thevillageclaremont.com](#).

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