

CALIFORNIA

Escape from L.A.

When you've soaked up enough stars, surrealism – and smog – head out into the Southern California hinterland for a real breath of fresh air

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Outdoor pursuits are within easy distance of Los Angeles.

SAN DIEGO

Distance from L.A. - 193 kilometres

San Diego may be America's eighth-largest city, but it's nothin' but water and sky as you pierce the bay on an International America's Class yacht.

"This is not something you can do just anywhere," says Lynn Hanna, captain of the vessel, which is called Stars and Stripes.

In fact, it's the only place in North America where you can charter this type of boat, defined by its 11-storey mast and speeds of up to 12 knots per hour.

"We're basically going twice as fast as the other boats," says Hanna. "The keel goes down 13 feet and weighs 40,000 lbs., acting as a counterbalance to the mast."

Hanna encourages participants to raise the sails, grind the winches and even take the helm.

"It's not a booze cruise. There are no cup holders on board," he warns.

Panic ye not, thirsty sailors: the boat is designed to sail hard for three hours max, not nearly enough time to bring on beer scurvy.

Reb Stevenson is a Toronto-based freelancer. Reach her at www.rebstevenson.com. Her trip was subsidized by the California Travel and Tourism Commission.