

# Ethnic enclaves in L.A.

The big city north of Orange County is one of the most diverse in the U.S. Angelenos speak more than 200 languages, celebrate a myriad of nationalities and practice countless religions. Within the city a number of official and unofficial ethnic enclaves can be found – from the established Chinatown to the new Salvadoran Community Center.



KEVORK DJANSEZIAN, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
A woman walks in front of a large mural in Leimert Park at 4333 Degnan Blvd.



KILIAN, ZUMA PRESS  
A sign marks the Central Plaza of Chinatown at 937 N. Broadway.



ARMANDO ARORIZO, ZUMA PRESS  
People gather for a festival at Mariachi Plaza, 1804 E. First St., in Boyle Heights.

## 1 Persian Square

**Say hello (Farsi):** Salam

**History:** Dedicated in 2010 and also called Little Persia or Tehranangeles. The Westwood-Wilkins intersection is of particular significance, as the location of the city's first Persian business. Persian Square was born out of the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, in which Ayatollah Khomeini ascended to power and many citizens fled the country.

**Food:** Most menus focus on traditional cuisine, while some restaurants offer fusion pizzas and sandwiches. Persian food focuses on maintaining the body's balance by eating a combination of fruits, vegetables, poultry, herbs, seeds and petals.

## 2 Little Osaka

**History:** While Little Tokyo represents tradition, this unofficial area serves up modern-day Japanese treats and goods.

**Modern:** The California roll is somewhat synonymous with how Little Osaka fuses California tastes with Japanese standards. Los Angeles chefs introduced the crab, avocado and cucumber roll in the late 1970s as a modern and westernized sushi roll. Coffee Tomo offers pretzels stuffed with red beans and cheese. Blockheads serves up blocks of ice cream shaved in flavors such as green tea and black sesame, while Plan Check offers burgers with kimchi mustard and sweet potato waffle fries with beef tallow and peach ketchup.

## 6 Little Armenia

**Say hello:** Pavev

**History:** A small but growing Armenian community in East Hollywood that was designated in 2000.

**Food:** Be careful not to eat too much of the first appetizer course, traditionally meats, salads with cheese, herbs, yogurt-based sauces, soups and bread such as lavash. Main dishes generally include meat or fish and can include, or be followed by, pilaf (steamed rice, possibly served with apricots and plums). Dessert usually includes fresh fruit and possibly cake, baklava (a thin pastry filled with honey and nuts), halvah (sesame seed paste) or rice pudding.



## 10 Historic Filipinotown

**Say good afternoon (Tagalog):** Magandang tanghali po

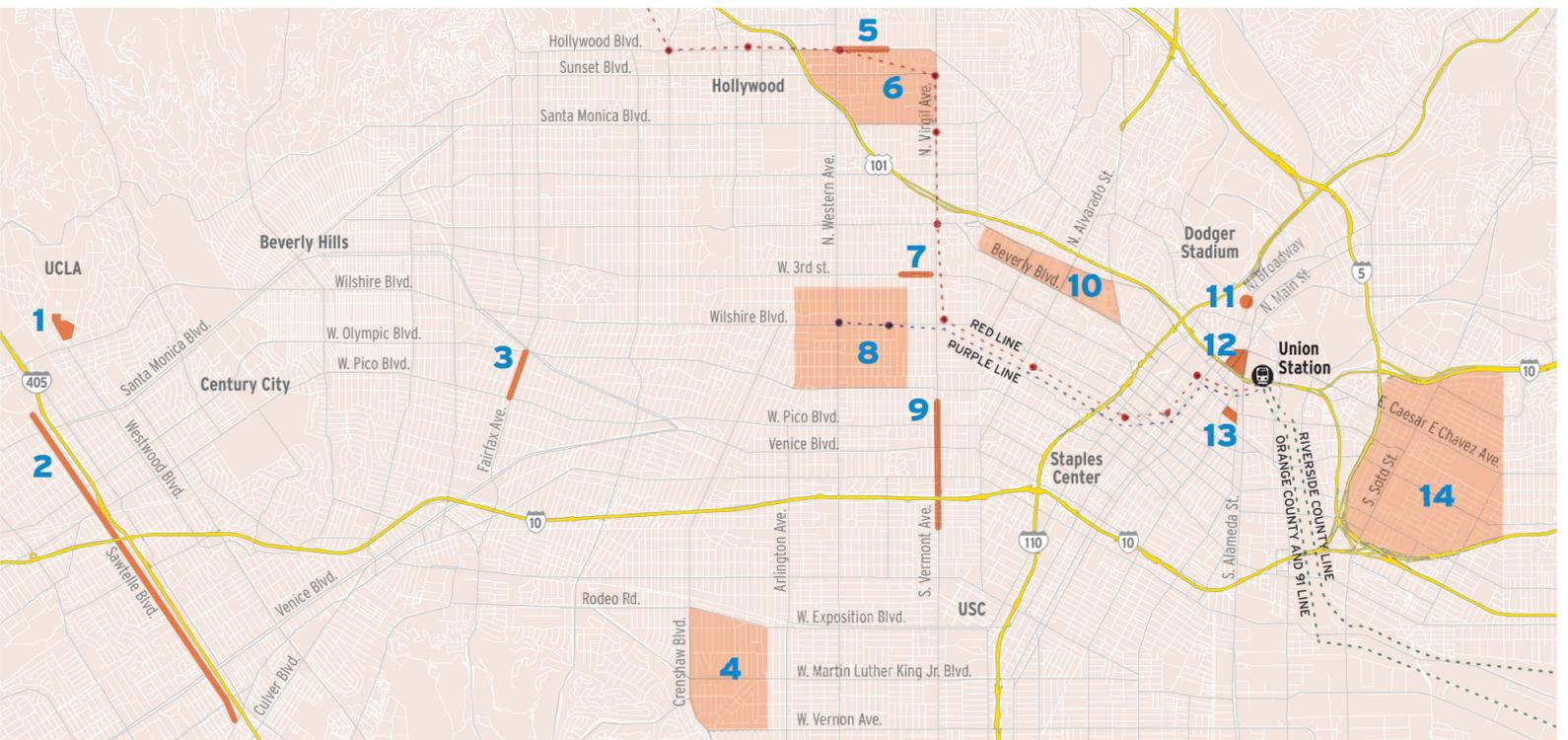
**History:** Officially designated in 2002 and known as "Hi-Fi" among residents.

**Landmarks:** A mural at 1660 Beverly Blvd. honors the progress of Filipino Americans with Philip Vera Cruz in the middle. Cruz, a Philippines-born labor leader, worked with Cesar Chavez to organize Filipino and Mexican agricultural laborers. Also, at Lake Street Park (227 N. Lake St.) is the first monument dedicated to Filipino soldiers who fought for the U.S. in World War II. The memorial includes five slabs of polished black granite and a bench reading "Kagitingan," for "valor."

## 11 Chinatown

**Say hello:** NeeHOW

**History:** Chinese settlement in L.A. began in the late 1850s in a 50-foot by one-block alley known as Calle de los Negros. A land fight in the early 1900s ended in 1931 when the California Supreme Court condemned the land for construction of Union Station. After two failed attempts at relocating Chinatown, Peter Soohoo found land available to purchase. The Chinese community-funded project was a distinct blend of Chinese and American architecture, celebrated with a June 25, 1938, grand opening.



## 3 Little Ethiopia

**Say hello:** tah-dee-yas

**History:** Fairfax Avenue was host to many Jewish shops, but two Ethiopian men started a trend in opening two restaurants on the busy street, Rosalind's and Messob. The number of businesses grew and the area was officially recognized in 2002.

**Food:** Traditional Ethiopian food is served on a blanket of injera, a pancake-like bread made of the almost exclusive Ethiopian grain, tef. Another traditional part of the meal is t'ej, a honey wine that is at least 2,000 years old and that was once only available to royalty.

## 4 Leimert Park Village

**History:** The center of the African American community in Los Angeles is around Leimert (rhymes with alert) Park Village complete with galleries, restaurants and shops. Originally an all-white neighborhood, in the 1940s African Americans started moving in as Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles and other stars bought homes. After the Watts riots, African American entrepreneurs opened businesses in the area.

**Music:** The neighborhood enjoys the sounds of open-air bongo drumming sessions, while live jazz, blues and open-mike nights take over cafes and bars.

**Landmarks:** The Vision Theatre, formerly Leimert Theater, seats 1,050 people in a Howard Hughes-built 3,200-square-foot centerpiece of Leimert Park that opened in 1930.

## 5 Thai Town



**Say hello:** sa-wa DEE Krab (girl), sa-wa DEE kah (boy)

**History:** The first Thai cultural center in the U.S. and dedicated in 2000.

**Food:** Thai people migrated from southwest China to form Thailand between the sixth and 13th centuries and melded Chinese cuisine with locally sourced ingredients such as lemongrass, galangal, mango, coconut milk, shrimp, kaffir limes, jasmine rice and fish. The country's position along East to West sea routes brought influences such as Indian curry, Portuguese sweets and chilies. Dishes are crafted to harmonize all five tastes: sweet, sour, bitter, salty and spicy.

## 7 Little Bangladesh

**History:** Local Bangladeshis asked the city for official designation of land generally considered Koreatown. The council responded by officially designating Koreatown, while marking four blocks Little Bangladesh in 2010. The area is developing, with a handful of Bangladeshi businesses mixed in with other ethnic establishments.

## 8 Koreatown

**Say hello:** An-YOH HASHim-ni-kah

**History:** Koreans first settled around Bunker Hill, and then near USC (an area known as Old Koreatown) and then along Olympic Boulevard. The area was officially recognized Aug. 20, 2010.

**Night life:** The area has the highest concentration of night life businesses in the city, with more than 500. A traditional part of Korean cuisine is soju, a 24 percent alcohol made from rice or sweet potatoes that can be sipped straight, dropped as a shot in a beer or mixed in as a vodka replacement. Another staple is visiting a karaoke club where a room can be rented by the hour or half-hour for belting "Gangnam Style."



## 12 El Pueblo De Los Angeles

**History:** The point where 44 settlers of Native American, African and European heritage journeyed from present-day northern Mexico and established a farming community in 1781. The area is a living museum with 27 historic buildings, 11 of which are open as businesses or museums.

**Olvera Street:** Originally called Vine Street and renamed in 1877 after Agustin Olvera, the first judge of Los Angeles County. Christine Sterling organized other wealthy citizens to restore the area's historic buildings and to open the street to the public in 1930.

## 13 Little Tokyo

**Say hello:** Koh-NEE-cheewah

**History:** Served as the foothold for arriving Japanese immigrants and recognized as a National Historic Landmark. As Japanese Americans were forcibly sent to internment camps in 1942, the area became an African American enclave known for jazz clubs and churches and rechristened "Bronzeville." After the war, Japanese families moved back and the community remains the largest Nihonmachi (Japantown) in the country.

**First business:** In 1884 Japanese sailor Hamanosuke Shigeta opened the area's first business, an American-style café.



## 9 Salvadoran Community Center

**History:** The newest official ethnic district in Los Angeles. The recognition helps Salvadorans stand out from other Spanish-speaking groups, and stands for the struggles that many faced in fleeing the Salvadoran Civil War during the 1980s.

**Landmarks:** A bustling Salvadoran population lives south of downtown near Pico Boulevard and Vermont Avenue, where the square was dedicated Oscar Romero Square in honor of a Catholic archbishop killed in 1980 during El Salvador's civil war. An elementary school in the area is named for Jose Castellanos, a Salvadoran colonel who saved thousands of Jews from Nazi persecution by providing them with false Salvadoran citizenship papers.



## 14 Boyle Heights

**History:** First inhabited by Jewish immigrants who later migrated west.

**Landmarks:** The neighborhood is known for having as many colorful murals as taco trucks. Of note are the murals inside a 106-year-old building, the oldest cultural center for Mexicans in L.A. In the center, Hugo Martinez Tecoahtli has painted images such as Aztec gods, bicycles, skeletons and tributes to Pancho Villa up 30- to 40-foot walls and across ceilings. A cultural landmark from the Jewish history of the area is Congregation Talmud Torah, known as the Bred Street Shul, 247 N. Bred St. The Byzantine Revival building was visited by rabbis and cantors from across the country for celebrating sacred occasions and is the last remaining of some 30 synagogues that once dotted the area.



Sources: Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board; National Park Service; NBC; LittleArmenia.com; Frommer's; KCET; Los Angeles Times; Temple of Thai Cooking; ThaiGrocer Cooking School; Images of America: "Los Angeles's Little Tokyo; Little Tokyo Historic District;" The Book of Sushi, Kinjiro Omae and Yuzuru Tachibana; Los Angeles Chinatown 50th Year Guidebook; University of Southern California Korean Alumni Association; "Los Angeles's Koreatown;" The New York Times; Armenian Studies program, Fresno State University; Los Angeles Little Armenia; Tour Armenia; City of Los Angeles; Historic Filipinotown Neighborhood Council; Culture of Iran; Register archives; The Boyle Heights Historical Society; Canter's Deli; Bred Street Shul Project, Inc.; Washington Post; The Vision Theatre; Calle Olvera; CNBC; Little Ethiopia Business Association; "Mesob Across America: Ethiopian Food in the U.S.A.;" African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania. Photos by AP, Shutterstock and Zuma Press.