

Californians heed 'stay-at-home' order

March 20 2020

Southern California residents on Friday appeared to heed calls to stay home as the most populous state in the US battles the coronavirus pandemic.

Along the Hollywood Walk of Fame, usually teeming with tourists taking pictures next to the "stars" that dot the avenue in the heart of Tinseltown, only a few people could be seen on the sidewalks—many of them homeless.

The many souvenir and T-shirt shops that carry just about everything Hollywood were shuttered as was the famous TCL Chinese Theatre, giving an eery feeling to the area.

The tourist buses which were still operating on Thursday—though serving very few die-hard customers— were also gone.

"It's pretty strange because you always see these streets full of people, crowded," said Pablo Navas, one of the rare tourists spotted on Hollywood Boulevard.

"We decided to just be outside and get some fresh air and walk around," the Spaniard, travelling with a friend, added.

Elsewhere throughout Los Angeles, only restaurants serving take-out, pharmacies, and supermarkets remained open as people rushed to stock up on supplies.

At the Santa Monica Pier, another hot spot for tourists, a sign that read "Temporary Pier Closure, Until Further Notice" greeted visitors.

Still, that didn't discourage a family of five from Finland who were on a road trip to snap some pictures from afar to at least prove they made it to the landmark.

"I think we just need to come back after the virus," sighed Eevi Virtanen, 23. "We really liked California."

Nearby at Venice Beach, the famed boardwalk usually crowded with visitors was mostly empty with only young skateboarders and some surfers in the water.

'Smart decision'

"It's a way to clear your head and get some fresh air and exercise," said Alfred Santos, 25, as he left the beach carrying his surfboard.

"You've just got to stay positive, that's it," added Santos, who works at a [grocery store](#).

In other parts of the city, more than a dozen people interviewed said they were taking the lockdown order in their stride and planned to follow official advice to isolate and only go out for exercise, errands and essential jobs.

"I think it's a smart decision," said Nicole Sotolongo, 41, as she walked around her neighborhood of Los Feliz with her two small children.

"It's hard to slow down and to say I'm going to do something different... but a lot of it is kind of a mental game too and you got to stay positive."

Local authorities in northern California earlier this week had issued a stay-at-home order for several counties in the region but on Thursday, Governor Gavin Newsom extended the order statewide.

"It's a good idea because we want to contain the virus," said Stella Dermenjian, a bank employee in Los Angeles. "I think if we just stop everything for some time and just hope it doesn't get too contagious, I think it's the right thing to do."

Alex Romero, 40, who picks up garbage and cleans benches at [bus stops](#) for an advertising company, said he was all for the lockdown as it would save lives.

"I'm concerned, everybody should be concerned because we need to take care of one another," he told AFP.

One point about the lockdown that everyone seemed to agree on was the lack of traffic jams that symbolize Los Angeles.

"I've never seen the freeways so sparse," said an Uber driver. "It's great but it's also creepy."

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