

The L.A. Experience

Ever wonder what a summer in L.A. was like? Cassandra Tarrataca takes us with her on her unforgettable experience.

Los Angeles. City of dreams. Many dancers I met when I was in L.A. have less than one hundred dollars to their name, and yet over nine million call L.A. their home. Moreover, millions upon millions travel to Los Angeles to get a taste of the entertainment capital of the world; all in search of fame and fortune but how many really make it?

I recently visited Los Angeles with *Be Discovered* based out of Toronto. Every summer they have "Summer in L.A." that gives Canadian dancers the chance to experience L.A.'s professional dance world. Earlier this year I was introduced to *Be Discovered* when I attended 'You Got Served' choreographer Shane Sparks' Toronto workshops. Just a week later, I ran into them again at a pageant that I was competing at as Ms. Teen London East. A dancer I met at this pageant had gone to L.A. not once but twice with *Be Discovered* before. She met Mya and sat in on her private rehearsal as well as attended Christina Aguilera auditions. I definitely knew that I wanted to do this program this year before I started my first year at Ryerson. I am taking sociology as I want to have something to fall back on when my dance career is over. As a dancer, you need to be realistic and know that you can not dance your whole life.

I'm 17 years old and I started dancing when I was three. I was sixteen when I went to L.A. and met dancers in the program who ranged in age from 15 to 36. Having danced most of my life and my mother being a dance instructor, I was always surrounded with music and dance but I didn't feel satisfied with my opportunities as a dancer here. I figured that there had to be more to dance than just the Canadian side of it. I felt like I was missing out on something by not dancing in the United States. When Diana Uribe of *Be Discovered* offered me the chance to travel to Los Angeles for a week, I didn't hesitate. This was the opportunity of a lifetime that I had been searching for all my life. Was L.A. all it's hyped up to be? Did I really have what it takes?

Myself as well as seventeen other ridiculously talented dancers arrived in

California. We went to take classes at Millennium Dance Complex in North Hollywood the same day that we arrived in L.A. Talk about getting right into things, I loved it! This studio is known as the "studio to the stars". The first thought that ran through my head was, 'What am I doing here?' I was really nervous but an excited type of nervousness, I couldn't wait to start dancing.

I was amazed to see so many people from all over the world working on choreography in the different studios. They all appeared to have been born to move that way, while I thought to myself 'It took me years to do that'. My gut reaction was to run, but knowing all that was invested in the trip, I walked into my first Hip Hop class with Rhapsody. Rhapsody has choreographed for Eve, Busta Rhymes and Fat Joe. She mainly teaches in NY so it was good to also be able to have some East Coast flavour while I was in L.A. I slowly became more confident in my abilities to dance as I realized that what I was doing didn't look that much different than what she was doing. I stopped stressing and was able to just allow the choreography to run through me.

That same night I couldn't wait to work with Shane Sparks again as I loved his Toronto workshops. His class did not disappoint and there were hundreds of dancers in attendance. Now I saw what all the L.A. dance scene hype was all about and I had just only arrived. We could have stayed to take another dance class that would have ended after 11 PM but we were all jet lagged and beat from the two intensive classes that we had taken. With the time change, our bodies thought that it was 2 AM and we knew we had six more days of these unbelievable classes.

As the week and the classes progressed, I found L.A. to be a second home to me. The people were surprisingly friendly and the experience was more than I could have ever imagined. I took classes in as many dance forms possible including hip-hop, jazz, and ballet. I did as many classes as my body would allow me, and yet, I could never get enough. My dreams about L.A. had been less exciting than the actual experience was.

We worked with some of L.A.'s top choreographers including Rino who is one of Gwen Stefani's dancers. The calibre of the classes was really high and where in Canada can you take classes from 9 AM until

midnight? Marty Kudelka's class was one of those that ended at this time. Marty has choreographed for Justin Timberlake, Janet Jackson and Pink. These are people I couldn't have ever imagined meeting in my lifetime, much less learning from.

If that wasn't enough, the *Be Discovered* group took private workshops with Shane Sparks who told us about his upcoming appearances and choreography on 'So You Think You Can Dance'. We also had the chance to work with Mihran at Synthesis Dance Studio. Mihran has choreographed for the Black Eyed Peas and has toured the world with Madonna and Britney Spears. We had mock auditions with Mihran and he was able to critique us and offer us his expertise. These privates were great as it was a one-on-one learning experience. Although we all had so much talent and gave it our all, his feedback was to keep dancing as we were not yet ready to dance professionally. Shane also thought that we needed to train more and their opinions meant a lot as they are working professionals.

I was so excited to see Omarion and Outkast rehearsing at the studio. Recently Omarion captured my attention with his performances on *You Got Served* and in his music videos. He is someone that I aspire to dance for and knowing that I was training at the same facilities was a thought beyond comprehension. Shane Sparks also choreographs for Omarion so this was really cool too.

One of *Be Discovered's* outings was to Key Club to watch a show The Carnival Choreographer's Ball. This is a once-a-month happening that showcases the works of top choreographers and hundreds of L.A.'s hottest dancers. The show was not only amazing but inspiring.



We also had the chance to work with two-time Tony Award winner Grover Dale at his Career Power Workshop at Alley Cat Studios. I was able to learn from the industry's best, interact and talk with them. These are the type of experiences that I would not be able to have if I was not in L.A. with *Be Discovered*. LA's top dance and choreography agents from MSA were in attendance, as well as Lee Cherry who is the 'Pussy Cat Dolls' photographer. He photographed the whole day as well as we will be a part of a documentary on Grover's workshops. They all answered a ton of questions that any aspiring dancer would have. I was thrilled to have had the chance to be one of those dancers.

On our last day, we took a sightseeing tour and experienced L.A. at its best. We went to Hollywood, Beverly Hills, shopped on Melrose and saw stars' homes or should I say mansions. These homes on the hills are breathtaking. I really loved the mountains and the palm trees too.

I would most definitely recommend the 'Summer in L.A.' experience to other dancers because *Be Discovered* gave us opportunities that visiting on your own wouldn't have. Diana also allowed us to take whatever classes we wanted to at the studio which we were all highly grateful for. We met so many choreographers and made so many friends from all over the world. One of the dancers with the *Be Discovered* group joined us all the way from Australia so the program is not just for Canadians. Dancers worldwide would greatly benefit from this regardless of where they are from or how old they are.

For any Canadian dancer, the possibility of making it in L.A. is good if you have the look, the talent, the will power and enthusiasm to stick it out. It takes a lot of self motivation to make it as it's not going to happen over night and it is not easy. To tell you the truth, you need connections to make it in Hollywood. It's not who you know but who knows you. A dancer's life in L.A. won't be easy, be it money strains as the city is very expensive, injuries as you're dancing so much or dealing with rejection when you attend auditions because sometimes you will attend one hundred calls to land just that one. The reality is that you may just not even land that one. However, these downfalls are experienced by all dancers, not just

Canadians and not just in L.A. I won't let them discourage me as I also see so much that is positive from trying to make it.

Experiencing Los Angeles gave me the confidence and the will to pursue dance because I realized just how big an industry it is, and how blessed I am to be able to dance. Los Angeles was an awesome trip and one that I highly suggest to all dancers to experience for themselves. I have no regrets other than not being able to stay longer. We were all really sad to come back home. Don't get me wrong, I just moved to Toronto from London to go to school and I love it but it's not L.A. though. We do have a lot of opportunities here at home so we are lucky for this. I am going to focus on making it here first.

Now I understand why millions travel to L.A. and all the reasons why so many people love L.A. I love L.A. and I can't wait to go back. I may not have what it takes right now, but one day soon I will make it! It won't just be California Dreaming it will be my reality, my life.

- Cassandra Tarrataca



Anyone up for some shopping on Rodeo Drive?

