

La Carmina pauses outside the Shadbolt
Centre for the Arts in Burnaby

PHOTO BY KK LAW. HAIR STYLING BY
STEPHANIE HOY OF STRATOSPHERE HAIR

Globetrotting
with
**La
Carmina**



Never judge a book by its cover—or a travel blogger by her hair colour.

Whatever you may conclude about La Carmina based on her rainbow-coloured coif and striking sartorial choices is probably wrong. This twenty-something Vancouverite is an astute businessperson with a thriving career as a blogger, author and television host, not to mention a degree from Columbia University and a law degree from Yale. We talked to La Carmina about the possibilities of virtual reality travel, why customs agents sometimes search her hair, and her most unusual travel destination so far (hint: it's in Wisconsin). **BY SHERI RADFORD**

Back in 2007 and 2008, La Carmina was studying law, but she had an inkling it wouldn't be the career for her. Almost on a whim, she started her blog, www.lacarmina.com. "Initially the site was more focussed on Japanese street fashion and pop culture," she says. "I had no game plan." She discovered that she loved telling stories and connecting with like-minded readers. Soon Travel Channel's *Bizarre Foods* invited her to be on their show in Tokyo, a lucky break that led to other television gigs with Discovery, National Geographic and Food Network Canada. As her media presence grew, her blog's focus expanded outside Japan to all international travel, but always with an emphasis on underground culture and street style.

Though she won't be arguing in a courtroom any time soon, La Carmina doesn't regret the time spent toiling away at her law degree: "It's helped me enormously, because now blogging has become a much more complex and multifaceted career involving so many different types of contracts." She's also had to decipher literary contracts. *Cute Yummy Time* is her

adorable collection (complete with colour photos and her own anime-style illustrations on every page) of 70 recipes that use healthy Western ingredients to make *kawaii* (cute) dishes, including a risotto-ball hedgehog and a blue-cheese blowfish. Her book *Crazy, Wacky Theme Restaurants: Tokyo* is the result of a three-month research trip that involved (among other things) monkey waiters, eyeball cocktails and dining in a jail cell.

If there's one thing that's remained constant throughout La Carmina's career, it's change. When she started blogging, it was still a new medium. Now she's exploring how to tell more immersive travel stories using new technologies. On a recent trip to Morocco, she and her crew used a virtual reality camera to capture footage of a snake charm-

er in Marrakesh: "It's like you're right there, the snake darting at you." Besides technology, the other thing that keeps changing is social media. La Carmina has been there for all of it, from the days of Myspace to the current big three of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to the next frontier, Snapchat. Despite being on every social media platform imaginable, La Carmina isn't glued to her iPhone—and, quite frankly, she's puzzled by those who are. She prefers to "experience and enjoy and take it all in."

La Carmina's travel schedule is hectic by anyone's standards. Averaging one destination per month, she's visited New Orleans, Hong Kong, Japan, England, Iceland, Singapore, Bali, Portugal, Spain, Morocco and Vietnam in the last year alone. Her most unusual destination ever? "Milwaukee in Wisconsin," she says with a laugh. "The show [The Huffington Post's *Travel TV*] wanted me to go somewhere that you would never expect to have anything cool," she explains. "There were some crazy themed spy bars and a bizarre love hotel where there were swings and handcuffs in the rooms."

It seems like she's been everywhere in the world at this point, but South America still eludes her. She's hoping to arrange a trip there at some point, especially to Easter Island, citing her fascination with "ancient places, mysteries, archaeology." Also tops on her bucket list: Egypt.

You might expect a world traveller known for her Harajuku style to be immaculately dressed for every airplane flight, but you'd be mistaken. "I am happy being a mess on the plane," she says, choosing comfy clothes over trend-setting ones. She does, however, care about her hair, often getting it styled right before a flight and then keeping it protected: "I'll look like a complete weirdo with a hairnet on the plane, wearing whatever clothes." The hairnet may keep her 'do looking fabulous,

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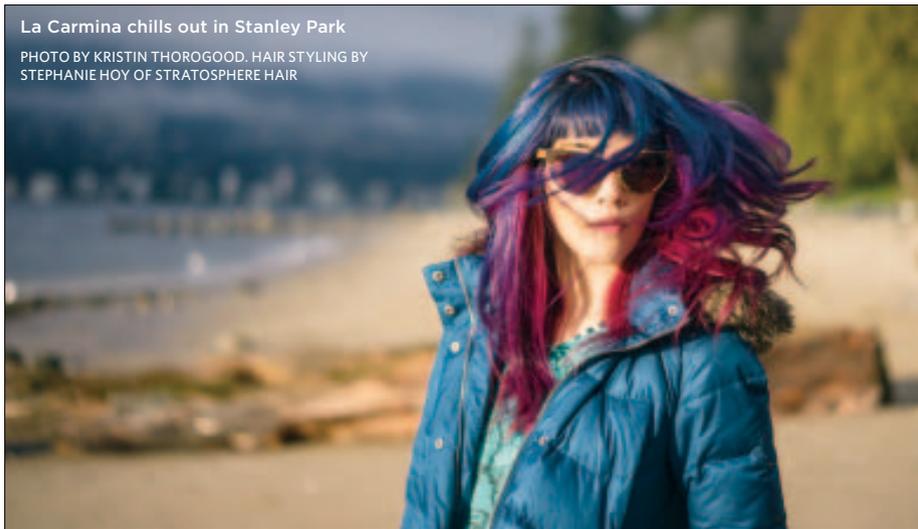
La Carmina gets back to nature
in Burnaby's Deer Lake Park

PHOTO BY KK LAW. HAIR STYLING BY
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La Carmina chills out in Stanley Park

PHOTO BY KRISTIN THOROGOOD, HAIR STYLING BY STEPHANIE HOY OF STRATOSPHERE HAIR



but it also causes suspicion among customs officials: more than once, her hair has been searched for contraband. Such inconveniences don't bother La Carmina. In her Zen approach to travel, problems are just "part of the experience." She especially enjoys a long flight, because it offers a distraction-free chance to relax or watch a movie. And even when minor catastrophes strike, she and her crew try to stay calm and have fun: "No matter what happens, we just turn it into an adventure."

Wherever she goes in the world, the West Coast remains home. "Vancouver is simply awesome—the weather, the people, the food. We really have lucked out."

She adds, "The more I travel, the more I appreciate our sushi scene." She cites Tokiwa Sushi as a personal favourite, praising their brown-rice rolls. Other hometown faves include indie and vintage clothing stores such as New World Designs, with its gothic styles, and Deadly Couture, which creates unique latex bodysuits and accessories.

Every time La Carmina returns to Vancouver, she appreciates anew the clean, clear

air here, spending as much time as possible outside. "I love to go on long walks," she says. "I call it my own little urban exploration, just walking around different neighbourhoods and finding little paths, little hidden alleyways that you may never expect." She mentions picturesque Deer Lake Park in nearby Burnaby as a preferred location for her outdoor rambles.

Sushi and fresh air may be great, but what, truly, is the best thing about arriving home in Vancouver? La Carmina's answer is immediate, no pondering required: "My cat, Basil Farrow." A cream-coloured Scottish Fold, he frequently appears on La Carmina's Instagram feed. His charm may tempt her to stay

at home, but her wanderlust keeps taking her back to far-flung locales. "The more people see of the world, the more they want to travel and see more," she says.

We're happy to follow online wherever La Carmina's adventures take her. [W](#)

Where will La Carmina travel next? Check www.lacarmina.com to find out, and follow her on social media @lacarmina.

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