

Search for clues and learn a thing or two about Los Angeles during CityRace adventures

The thrill of the hunt

Staff Reports

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CITYRACE URBAN ADVENTURES

The three-hour "urban adventure hunts" require teams of two to four people to scour one of L.A.'s diverse neighborhoods on a quest to solve a challenging set of clues. Here's a look at the next three hunts:

– The Great Chinatown Hunt will immerse participants in the "sights, smells and sounds of Asia." 10 a.m. Sunday; \$35 per person.

– The L.A. Metro Art Adventure will send participants on a "subterranean quest" through L.A. Metro stations. 10 a.m. Feb. 27; \$35.

– The Downtown L.A. -- Center of the City of Angels Adventure will lead participants through the heart of Los Angeles. 10 a.m. March 20; \$35.

Once participants register, they'll receive details on where the hunts will begin. Each person can expect to spend about \$10 during the events. For more information, visit <http://www.racela.com>.

RACE/LA

This all-day adventure hunt, now in its fifth year, will take place at 9:30 a.m. May 15. Registration will begin in early April. Visit <http://www.racela.com> for information.

Courtesy of Philip Rodak
John Hennessy, creator of the Los Angeles-centric Race/LA and CityRace Urban Adventure hunts, is thinking about branching out to Ventura -- and even Asia. "Hong Kong would be the most incredible city to do this," he says.

John Hennessy loves "The Amazing Race," the CBS reality show in which pairs of contestants follow clues and complete challenges around the globe, with the winner taking home a cool \$1 million. The graphic designer even hoped to compete on the show with his sister, but the amount of time it would have taken him away from work was too extensive.

So Hennessy did the next best thing. He created his own "Amazing Race." In 2004 he started Race/LA, a daylong competition held around Los Angeles. In 2007, its continuing popularity spawned CityRace Urban Adventures, an ongoing series of three-hour, neighborhood-specific events in which teams of two to four people look for specific sites based on a set of clues.

The next three CityRace events will be Sunday's Great Chinatown Hunt, to be followed by the L.A. Metro Art Adventure on Feb. 27 and the Downtown L.A. -- Center of the City of Angels Adventure on March 20. The next Race/LA competition will be May 15.

Though Hennessy felt he had a good idea, he had no idea if it would become popular.

"That first race I begged all of my friends to do it," he said. "We had about 12 teams. Everyone who did it loved exploring the city. I got such positive feedback I decided to formalize it and make it a regular thing."

Race/LA, because of its complexities, can be done only once or twice a year. Hennessy needs time to get permission from museums and other locations that are to be destination points in the race.

Setting up the different Urban Adventures is a bit easier, though they still take time and research. Hennessy combs the neighborhood -- or in the case of L.A. Metro Art Adventure he rides the subway -- and takes extensive notes.

"Then we need to try it out on actual people, to see if it works, and if it's fun," Hennessy said. "We want it to be challenging, but not too hard. For the L.A. Metro one I think we need to let people know what lines they need to be on or it would take too long."

Hennessy said the events force residents to open their eyes and discover new things about the city. In the Metro Art Adventure, for example, participants will learn a thing or two about L.A.'s artist-designed subway stations. The Hollywood/Vine stop, for example, is covered with film canisters and features palm tree statues.

"I moved here from New York and I didn't know the city well," Hennessy explained. "People who participate see places and things they never have, from tiny museums to a hidden Japanese garden in Little Tokyo."

Teams for CityRace can complete the race in any order. Each question the team receives leads to a location, which will provide the answer. There's also a scavenger hunt component, and competitors receive bonus points for finding those scavenger items.

Team members must travel together. The team with the highest point total wins, and in the case of a tie, whoever completes the race first takes the title. Prizes are awarded, but the point of the competition is to have fun.

Hennessy plans in the next couple of years to expand his operation, possibly creating a race for Ventura and a few other cities in California.

"After that I'd like to go even further," he said. "I recently was in Asia, and Hong Kong would be the most incredible city to do this."

– E-mail freelance columnist Jeff Favre at jfavre@gmail.com.