

Directory

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ACCOMMODATIONS

California offers all kinds of overnight lodgings, from campgrounds, hostels and B&Bs to chain motels, big-city hotels and luxury oceanfront resorts. Accommodations in this book fall into one of three categories: budget (double-occupancy rooms starting under \$125), midrange (starting over \$125, up to \$225) and top end (over \$225). Prices listed in this book are for peak-season travel (typically summer) and, unless stated otherwise, don't include taxes.

Budget travelers will be checking in at campgrounds, hostels and basic motels and hotels. Midrange accommodations are generally the best value, and most of our reviews fall into this category. You can expect a clean, comfortable, decent-sized room with a private bathroom, cable TV, a telephone and often a coffeemaker, a microwave and a minifridge. Some midrange properties have outdoor swimming pools and hot tubs too.

Top-end hotels offer resort-class amenities and, if you're lucky, a scenic location or historical ambience. Standard amenities include swimming pools, fitness rooms, business centers, concierge desks, even spas and high-caliber restaurants.

You can almost always save money on room rates midweek or in the low-season (usually winter). Membership of an automobile association (p733) or the American Association of Retired Persons (p717) may get you modest savings (usually 10%) at any time of the year. Also look out for freebie ad magazines packed with hotel discount coupons at gas stations, tourist offices and online at **RoomSaver.com** (www.roomsaver.com).

For deeper discounts, try booking online via the property's own website; these often have special internet rates, promotional deals and packages not available anywhere else. Also search for more deals using an online travel booking agency, such as **Expedia** (www.expedia.com), **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com) or **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com), or a travel discounter like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com) or **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Another handy Web resource is **TripAdvisor**

PRACTICALITIES

- Major newspapers include the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Sacramento Bee*.
- Major TV networks are ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and PBS (public broadcasting).
- Major cable TV channels are CNN (news), ESPN (sports), HBO (movies) and the Weather Channel.
- National Public Radio (NPR) is at the lower end of the FM dial.
- Electrical supply is 110V AC, 60Hz.
- The NTSC system (not compatible with PAL or SECAM) is used for videos.
- The imperial system is used for weights and measures, but road signs may be written in both kilometers and miles. For conversions, see the inside front cover.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

(www.tripadvisor.com), which ranks user reviews of accommodations statewide.

Reservations are always a good idea year-round. They can be essential for travel during the busy summer months, especially July and August. Prices jump and rooms are scarce around holidays (p718), when you should expect minimum-stay requirements. For more advice about the best times to travel in California, see p23.

Where available we've listed toll-free reservations numbers in this book. If you book a reservation by phone, always get a confirmation number and ask about the cancellation policy before you give out your credit-card information. If you plan to arrive late in the evening, call ahead on the day of your stay to let them know. Hotels overbook, but if you've guaranteed the reservation with your credit card, they will accommodate you somewhere else and pick up the tab. If they don't, squawk.

Those properties with an internet-connected computer terminal available for guest use are designated with the internet icon (☎). More and more properties are offering free or fee-based wireless internet access (wi-fi). But advertising can be deceiving: sometimes a property's high-speed network may only be available in the lobby or other public areas, not in your room. If this matters to you, inquire when booking. For more tips on getting online in California, see p722.

In Southern California, nearly all lodgings have air-conditioning, but in Northern California and in coastal areas as far south as Santa Barbara, where it rarely gets hot, the opposite is true, and even fans may not be provided. Many lodgings are now exclusively nonsmoking. Where they exist, smoking rooms are often in less desirable locations and may be the last ones to be renovated. Owners may levy a hefty 'cleaning fee' (over \$100) on guests who light up in specially designated nonsmoking rooms.

B&Bs

If you want an atmospheric, occasionally romantic alternative to impersonal motels and hotels, bed-and-breakfast inns typically inhabit fine old Victorian houses or other heritage buildings, bedecked with floral wallpaper and antique furnishings. People who like privacy may find the USA's B&Bs too intimate. Rates typically include a lavish home-cooked breakfast, but occasionally breakfast is not included (never mind what the name 'B&B' suggests). Amenities vary, but rooms with a TV and a telephone are the exception; the cheapest units share bathrooms. Most B&Bs require advance reservations, although some will accommodate the occasional drop-in guest. Smoking is generally prohibited and children are usually not welcome. Minimum-stay requirements are common, especially on weekends and during busy times. Many places belong to the **California Association of Bed & Breakfast Inns** (☎ 800-373-9251; www.cabbi.com).

Camping

In the Golden State, camping is so much more than just a cheap way to spend the night. The best sites in California will have you waking up on the beach, next to an alpine lake or underneath a canopy of redwoods. For the lowdown on camping, see p67.

Hostels

California currently has 21 hostels affiliated with **Hostelling International USA** (HI-USA; ☎ 301-495-1240, reservations 800-909-4776; www.hiusa.org), as well as a growing number of independent hostels, particularly in the cities. The latter have more relaxed rules and often no curfew. Indies also tend to have a more convivial vibe, with regular parties and organized events and activities. Some hostels include a light breakfast in their rates, arrange local tours or will pick up guests at transportation hubs. Some say they accept only international visitors (basically to keep out destitute locals), but Americans who look like travelers may be admitted, especially during slower months. A passport, a HI-USA membership card or an international plane ticket can help establish your credentials. Reservations are always a good idea, especially in peak season. Most hostels take bookings online and by phone, and some also via email. Many independent hostels belong to online booking services such as www.hostels.com, www.thehostelhandbook.com and www.wanderlodge.com.