

welcome to California



Natural Beauty

Don't be fooled by its perpetually fresh outlook and gung-ho attitude: California is older than it seems. Coastal bluffs and snow-capped peaks were created over millennia of tectonic upheavals that have threatened to shake California right off the continent. After unchecked 19th-century mining, logging and oil-drilling threatened to undermine the state's natural splendors, California's pioneering environmentalists rescued about 2.5 million acres of old-growth trees, aged from 150 to 5000 years old. Conservation initiatives by John Muir and his pioneering conservation group the Sierra Club resulted in the creation of Yosemite National Park and Red-

wood National and State Parks. Unesco has named them World Heritage sites; visitors call them simply breathtaking.

Food & Drink

To start a conversation in California, don't bother opening with "Nice weather we've been having." Of course it's nice – this is California. Instead, walk into any crowd and ask, "Does anyone know where I can get a decent taco around here?" Now we're talking. Since California produces most of the fresh produce and specialty meats in the US, minor menu decisions have nationwide impact. Every time they sit down to eat, Californians take trend-setting stands on mealtime moral dilemmas: certified

Everyone heads to the Golden State to find fame and fortune – but you can do better. Come for the landscape, stay for sensational meals, and glimpse the future in the making on America’s creative coast.

(left) Surfer at Silver Strand beach (p622), near San Diego
(below) Wine tasting at Iron Horse Vineyards (p195) in Sebastopol, Sonoma County



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organic versus spray-free, grass-fed versus grain-finished, farm-to-table versus urban-garden-grown, veganism versus humanely raised meats. But no matter what you order, it’s likely to be local and creative, and it better be good – Californians compulsively share best and worst dining experiences via social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Yelp, all created in California. For a chaser, try a stiff drink: California produces 99% of the nation’s grapes and its most prestigious wines, and has three times more breweries than any other state.

Earth-Shaking Ideas

From the Gold Rush to the dot-com bubble, California has survived extreme booms

and busts – and in the current US recession, Californians are once again getting by on their wits. Hollywood still single-handedly produces most of the world’s movies and TV shows, fed by a vibrant performing arts scene on stages, in parks and balancing on barstools across the state. Trends are kick-started here not by moguls in offices, but by a motley crowd of surfers, artists and dreamers concocting the out-there ideas behind skateboarding, interactive art and biotechnology. The Creative Class research institute predicts that California has the talent, technology and tolerance to stage another stunning economic comeback – and if you linger in California galleries and cafes, you may actually see the future coming.