

Understand California

CALIFORNIA TODAY..... 716

Growing pains are par for the course in California, an ongoing social experiment and multicultural mosaic.

HISTORY 718

From Native Americans and Spanish missions to robber barons and Silicon Valley, here's how California evolved.

THE WAY OF LIFE 727

Bust the myths and stereotypes, uncover the realities and find out what Californians really dream about.

ON LOCATION: FILM & TV 731

California just wouldn't be the same without 'The Industry' and Hollywood's A-list stars and animators.

MUSIC & THE ARTS 734

Get in touch with California's soulful side and a New World of architecture, art and sound.

BY THE BOOK 740

Hollywood screenwriters, noir crime novelists, Beat poets, social realists and sci-fi visionaries have all found inspiration here.

THE LAND & WILDLIFE 742

Meet the state's iconic wildlife and find out what makes California shake, rattle 'n' roll sometimes.

California Today

California is not a finished work. The nightmares faced by the region in the 1990s – race riots, the Northridge earthquake – already belong to a different age. Today's issues revolve around growth. In a state that has an economy bigger than Canada's and is the headquarters for cutting-edge industries, from space probes to Silicon Valley, how to manage a burgeoning human population – with accompanying traffic gridlock, housing shortages and a sky-high cost of living – is challenging.

Best on Film

The Maltese Falcon (1941) Humphrey Bogart as a San Francisco private eye.

Sunset Boulevard (1950) A classic bonfire of Hollywood vanities.

Vertigo (1958) Alfred Hitchcock's noir thriller, set in SF.

The Graduate (1967) Surviving life in 1960s SoCal suburbia.

Chinatown (1974) LA's brutal 20th-century water wars.

Bladerunner (1982) Ridley Scott's futuristic cyberpunk vision of LA.

Pulp Fiction (1994) Quentin Tarantino's outrageous interlocking LA stories.

LA Confidential (1997) Neo-noir tale of corruption and murder in 1950s LA.

The Big Lebowski (1998) Coen brothers' zany LA farce starring 'The Dude.'

Crash (2004) Racial tensions play out in contemporary LA.

Best in Print

The Tortilla Curtain (TC Boyle) Mexican-American culture clash and chasing the Californian dream.

My California: Journeys by Great Writers (Angel City Press) Insightful stories by talented chroniclers.

Where I Was From (Joan Didion) California-born essayist shatters palm-fringed fantasies.

California Dreams vs Reality

Even if you've seen it in movies or on TV, California still comes as a shock to the system. Venice Beach skateboarders, Santa Cruz hippies, Rodeo Drive-pillaging trophy wives and Silicon Valley millionaires aren't on different channels; they all live here, where tolerance for other people's beliefs, be they conservative, liberal or just plain wacky, is the social glue. Yet as LA police beating victim Rodney King famously asked, 'Can we all get along?' Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

Until recently, the most divisive political hot-potato topic was same-sex marriage, until a state constitutional amendment to ban it was struck down for good in 2013. Still controversial elsewhere in the USA, medical marijuana is not a big deal for most Californians, who approved a state proposition allowing its use back in 1996 – although the proliferation of marijuana clubs and raids by federal agents have raised eyebrows.

Environmental Roots

There's no denying California's culture of conspicuous consumption, exported via Hollywood flicks and reality TV (hello, *Real Housewives of Orange County*). But since the 1960s, Californians have trailblazed another 'greener' way by choosing more sustainable foods and low-impact lifestyles, preserving old-growth forests with tree-sitting activism, declaring nuclear-free zones, pushing for environmentally progressive legislation and establishing the USA's biggest market for hybrid vehicles. Over 60% of Californians admit that, yes, they've actually hugged a tree.

That shouldn't come as a surprise. It was Californians who helped kick-start the world's conservation movement in the midst of the 19th-century industrial revolution, with laws curbing industrial dumping, setting aside swaths of prime real estate as urban greenspace,