

# Understand Coastal California

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# Coastal California Today

Coastal California is today the creative culmination of generations of big dreamers. The fantasies spun by Hollywood and the cutting-edge tech of Silicon Valley have come to dominate the cultural trends of the entire planet. Meanwhile, the state's iconic images of tanned surfers and sunny sands endure, never mind thornier real-life questions about how to manage a burgeoning human population and its accompanying challenges of never-ending traffic gridlock, housing shortages and a sky-high cost of living.

## Best on Film

**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.

**Sideways** (2004) Wacky, wine-soaked romantic comedy.

## Best in Print

**The Tortilla Curtain** (TC Boyle; 1995) Mexican-American culture clash and chasing the Californian dream.

**My California: Journeys by Great Writers** (Angel City Press; 2004) Insightful stories by talented chroniclers.

**Where I Was From** (Joan Didion; 2003) California-born essayist shatters palm-fringed fantasies.

## People & Politics

Even if you've seen it in the movies or on TV, coastal California may still come as a shock to the system. Venice Beach skateboarders, Humboldt hippies, Marin County wild-mushroom hunters, 'Bezerkely' professors and Silicon Valley millionaires aren't on different channels. They all live here, a place where tolerance for other people's beliefs, be they conservative, liberal or wacky, is the necessary social glue.

The most divisive political hot potato of recent years was same-sex marriage, until a voter-approved state constitutional amendment to ban it was struck down for good by the US Supreme Court in 2013. Still controversial elsewhere in the USA, medical marijuana is old news for Californians, who approved a state proposition allowing its use back in 1996 – although the proliferation of raids on MMJ dispensaries and rumors of Mexican cartel intervention have raised eyebrows. Now the burning question is: will California follow Colorado's lead in legalizing marijuana for recreational use? Whoa, dude.

## Environmental Roots

There's no denying that California's culture of conspicuous consumption is 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 urban nuclear-free zones, pushing for environmentally progressive legislation and establishing the biggest US market for hybrid vehicles. Over 60% of Californians admit that yes, they've actually hugged a tree.

That shouldn't really come as a surprise. It was Californians who helped kick-start the world's conservation