



Understand Southern California

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TODAY..... 410

Growing pains are par for the course on this Pacific coast of dreams, an ongoing social experiment and multicultural mosaic.

HISTORY 412

From Native Californians and Spanish missions to water scandals, earthquakes and race riots, here's how SoCal evolved.

LIFE IN SOCAL 421

Find out why people here work so hard – and play even harder.

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What would SoCal be without 'the Industry'? But it's not just all about Hollywood's A-list.

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Meet some of SoCal's iconic native wildlife and most famous migratory visitors, from gray whales to monarch butterflies.



population per sq mile

USA

California

Los Angeles



↑ ≈ 80 people

Southern California Today

New Natives

Today's Southern California, or 'SoCal,' is the culmination of the efforts of generations of big dreamers. Bear in mind that we're talking about one half of a single American state that has an economy roughly the equal of Spain. Its universities are plentiful and renowned. From Los Angeles the imagery spun by Hollywood dominates the digital transmissions and cultural trends of the entire planet. Surf, sand and sex will endure as long as there is a SoCal coast.

But SoCal is not a finished work. It remains one of the most dynamic places on earth in which to live and play. Just consider space probes, Disneyland, the internet, automotive and fashion design, and the movie industry and its media slaves – all are headquartered in or managed from here. The nightmares of the 1990s – including the race riots and the Northridge earthquake – seem already to belong to a different age.

Growing Pains

The biggest problem now is growth itself. Perhaps because of its very adaptability, SoCal has found that the human wave of domestic migration and international immigration continues to crest. Every New Year's Day the largest commercial for living here – Pasadena's Rose Parade – snares the imaginations of folks freezing in Wisconsin or struggling to make ends meet in the Rust Belt. Many who heed the mid-19th-century advice to 'Go West, young man!' wind up on SoCal's sunny shores.

With this burgeoning humanity comes horrific traffic and the skyrocketing costs of living and real estate. Public transport is woefully inadequate, so everyone hits the tortured freeway systems, which move ever more slowly. Sheer human impaction is a palpable force and begs the question that Rodney King so famously asked: 'Can't we all get along?'

- » Size: 45,065 sq miles
- » Population: 22 million
- » GDP: \$792 billion
- » Average per capita income: \$20,683
- » Median single-family home price: \$360,000

Top Books

- » **The Tortilla Curtain** (TC Boyle) Engrossing tale about the clash of Mexican and American cultures and the elusive Californian dream.
- » **My California: Journeys by Great Writers** (Angel City Press) Insightful stories by

such talented chroniclers as Pico Iyer and Michael Chabon. Some proceeds benefit the California Arts Council.

- » **Where I Was From** (Joan Didion) California-born essayist shatters palm-fringed fantasies while skewering the

stinking rich and exposing the violence and shallowness of this warped shore.

- » **Hollywood Babylon** (Kenneth Anger) Pulp 'tell-all' book about the tawdry and scandalous lives and times of Hollywood's Golden Era stars.