

Understand California

CALIFORNIA TODAY..... 734

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

HISTORY 736

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

THE WAY OF LIFE 745

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

ON LOCATION: FILM & TV 749

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

MUSIC & THE ARTS 752

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

BY THE BOOK 758

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

THE LAND & WILDLIFE 760

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

California Today

California is a crazy dream that has survived more than 150 years of reality. The Golden State has surged ahead of France to become the world's sixth-largest economy. But like a kid that's grown too fast, California still hasn't figured out how to handle the hassles that come along with such rapid growth, including housing shortages, traffic gridlock and rising costs of living. Escapism is always an option here, thanks to Hollywood blockbusters and legalized marijuana dispensaries. But California is coming to grips with its international status and taking leading roles in such global issues as environmental standards, online privacy, marriage equality and immigrant rights.

Best on Film

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

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

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

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

Blade Runner (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) Through myriad misadventures in the Coen brothers' zany LA farce, 'The Dude' abides.

Best in Print

On the Road (Jack Kerouac; 1957) The epic road trip that inspired free spirits everywhere to come to California.

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

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

Hollywood Babylon (Kenneth Anger; 1959) The tell-all book that exposed the scandals behind Hollywood's silver screen.

California Dreams vs Reality

Even after you've seen it 1000 times on movies and TV, California still comes as a shock to the system. Venice Beach skateboarders, Santa Cruz hippies, Rodeo Dr poseurs and Silicon Valley billionaires aren't on different channels here – this is their natural habitat. California is all over the map politically: by turns liberal and conservative, Californians have also cultivated a certain wackiness that blurs party lines. California's long track record of conspiracy theories and fringe movements can only partly be explained by the state's legendary fondness for marijuana, legalized here in 2017.

Californians may not seem to have much in common, but they're not afraid to take controversial stances on issues affecting their communities. California's trailblazing support for LGBT rights was instrumental in securing marriage equality in 2013. With first- and second-generation immigrants making up more than half the state's population, Californians vocally opposed federal immigration bans by nationality and religion in 2017. Even under threat of federal defunding, Californians continue to march, file lawsuits and support passing a statewide sanctuary law to ensure that all are welcome here.

Environmental Roots

California's culture of conspicuous consumption is world famous, thanks to soda-shilling Hollywood movies and reality TV stars who have spawned entire butt-padding industries. But ever since John Muir established the Sierra Club in the 19th century, many Californians have deliberately sought out a more sustainable way of life. In the midst of lumber and oil booms, Californians helped kick-start the world's conservation movement. They passed trailblazing laws curbing industrial dumping, set aside swaths of prime real estate as urban green space, and protected California wilderness as national, state and county parks.