



The first major wave of European settlers did not arrive at the USA's west coast until the first gold rush in 1849. Since then the many attractions of this beautiful coastal area have succeeded in making California the most populous state in the USA today. With its population mostly concentrated in the three main conurbations of Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego, California boasts cities brimming with culture and entertainment as well as vast, under-populated areas of breathtaking natural beauty. It is not surprising, therefore, that California has become such a popular destination for overseas students. Attracting 66,305 international students last year, California is the number-one study destination in the USA for overseas students, according to statistics from the Institute of International Education.

California's temperate climate is one of its major attractions for overseas students, many of whom have been seduced by television programmes and movies depicting beautiful people relaxing and exercising on beaches under a predictable blue sky and hot sun. And, while California cannot guarantee perfect weather conditions all year round, the reality is often not that far from the images portrayed on our televisions. Temperatures in California vary depending on the season and location, but some areas in the south are consistently warm all year. Valentina Petrova from Bulgaria, who is currently studying at Whittier College near Los Angeles, says, "A lot of people come here because of the weather. It is now December and it is 70° Fahrenheit outside. It is sunny and we haven't seen any rain for a long time."

While the weather gives California the edge when overseas students are deciding where to study, it is the enthusiasm and determination of the locals to make the most of their environment that ensures they keep coming back. The list of amusements, fun parks, outdoor activities, cultural amenities and entertainment areas throughout California is immense. Wherever they choose to study, students are guaranteed to be within striking distance of a large number of attractions. According to Karen Shah, International Adviser at Taft College, the central location of Taft means that overseas

# Colourful California

The favourable weather and friendly atmosphere experienced by students studying in California has ensured that the state remains a popular choice as an education travel destination.

students studying there are well placed to sample the wide variety of entertainment opportunities on offer. "Some of the most popular attractions are Disneyland, Magic Mountain, Hollywood, Las Vegas, San Francisco and the California Coastline," she says.

The diversity of the landscape in California means that there is a wide range of outdoor activities available, such as skiing, sailing, surfing, diving, hang-gliding, wine tasting, riding, canoeing and abseiling. Jacquelyn Slotkin, Programme Director at California Western School of Law in San Diego, says that her students find San Diego an ideal environment for pursuing their studies. "San Diego has amazing weather, miles of beaches, [and nearby] mountains for skiing and hiking. My students have taken sailing lessons and flying lessons."

According to education consultant Bianca Bugane from STI Travels in Italy, all the students she sends to study in California come back satisfied. "We tell the students that they will get the most out of it and will be very happy because of the kindness and friendliness of the inhabitants."

The relaxed nature of Californians means that overseas students often settle into their new life very quickly. Randy Rutledge, Associate Director of Admissions at the Anderson School at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), says that overseas students find that California has a much more relaxed and fun ambience than most other states in the USA. "LA is much more diverse than other US cities. It has a huge mixture of cultures."

The multicultural nature of California, which has large immigrant populations from South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and Mexico, can be helpful to the many overseas students who experience a culture shock when they first arrive. Jim Sparks, Director of Admissions and Marketing at the College of Oceanering in Los Angeles, says, "Every race and nationality in the world are represented in southern California. Being accepted is no problem."

While the reputation of the US education system is highly regarded by students and employers around the world, California has an advantage over other US states in that it has developed areas of expertise which are reflected in the educational institutions nearby. The most notable of these is Silicon Valley, a world-leading centre for micro-electronics near San Francisco. Johnnie Hafernik, from the University of San Francisco, believes that this is a big attraction for overseas students to study at the nearby universities. "The area is a hub

of technology as it is close to Silicon Valley. This provides many study opportunities for students," he says.

The quality and reputation of the educational institutions is a major consideration for many students seeking courses overseas, but for Tatyana Khromchenko at Takt & Partners in Russia, her clients are often pleased to be able to combine a quality education in California with other less serious activities. She says, "I think [California is] a great place to study and enjoy the free time. [Students are keen] to visit famous places, those they see on the television." ○

## On a budget

Accommodation can be expensive and prices for shared accommodation start from around US\$600 per month.

The price of a cinema ticket varies from US\$2 to US\$10 depending on whether the cinema is in a big city or smaller town. Student discounts are available in some cinemas.

There is a wide variety of restaurants in California, catering for all tastes and budgets. Large immigrant populations mean that there are many restaurants serving ethnic cuisine. Prices for a basic meal start at about US\$4 and can rise to US\$15.

California is the USA's leading agricultural producer so food is not too expensive. A bag of basic groceries to last a week costs around US\$50 but could be cheaper depending on where you shop.

When available, bus travel is cheap but in many areas of California, it is slow and the routes are not very extensive. Most students buy their own car or share a car with other overseas students. A single bus fare costs around US\$1.

Alcoholic drinks in a pub or bar start at about US\$2 and can increase to US\$15 if the pub is particularly popular or frequented by famous people. Alcohol can only be bought and consumed by over-21 year olds.

## The facts

Los Angeles International Airport is the third busiest airport in the world and with four domestic airports nearby, provides connections to just about anywhere in the USA. If you are going to San Diego you will probably fly into Los Angeles and get a connecting flight which takes 35 minutes. San Francisco has three international airports or can be reached by a connecting flight from Los Angeles.

Greyhound is the only regular long distance bus company operating in the area and has frequent services to Los Angeles, which takes between eight and 10 hours; Seattle, which takes 19 to 25 hours; and Lake Tahoe, which takes five to 10 hours.

Temperatures vary widely depending on where in California you are. The south is hotter with average temperatures in Los Angeles of 70° Fahrenheit. Further north in San Francisco, the climate is more variable. During summer the bay is often foggy, while inland it can be hot and dusty.

Full-time students can work for up to 20 hours per week at the educational institution they are attending.