

# The US west coast

The US west coast is a popular destination for overseas students due to its international and business links, its varied natural attractions and mild climate.

I think colleges and universities on the west coast are underrated compared to our east coast counterparts," says Eric Pedersen, Associate Director of Admission at Whitman College in Washington state. "The reason for this has to do with the younger age of western institutions [which means that] many [do] not yet have well-known reputations."

While many of the USA's most prestigious and long-established institutions - such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton - are on the east coast, educational institutions in the west coast states of Washington, Oregon and California are keen to promote the benefits of a west coast education.

Pedersen asserts that institutions situated on the west coast have a powerful commitment to growth and continual improvement due to the fact that they are unable to fall back on the tradition and reputation enjoyed by those institutions on the east coast. "Many of us boast new programmes, progressive programmes and innovative services for our students," he says.

## Selection of institutions in the US west coast

	Use agents	Total no. students	% overseas students
California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA		1,250	14
Education Unlimited, Berkeley, CA	✓	1,300	2
Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA		2,800	10
Pitzer College, Claremont, CA	✓	750	8
Rainbow Air Academy, Long Beach, CA	✓	165	15
St Mary's College of California, Moraga, CA	✓	3,200	3
University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA		2,600	1.6
Western Oregon University, Monmouth, OR	✓	4,520	2
Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA		1,200	1
Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA		1,350	4
Whitworth College, Spokane, WA		2,100	6

This approach is a big attraction for international students, especially when combined with the west coast's association with the fast-moving computer industry. California is home to Silicon Valley, an area dominated by businesses at the cutting edge of the computing and technology industry, and many international students keen to study in this field opt

for colleges and universities in the surrounding area.

"We are seeing more students who want to become a part of the fast-paced high-tech industry through the computer science and business majors," says Kelly Mills, Director of International Education and Services at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon.

According to *Open Doors 2001*, mathematics and computer science is the third most popular subject area

studied by international students in the USA - after business and management, and engineering - with 12 per cent of the international student population studying in this field.

Carrie Penner, International Student Coordinator at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington state, agrees that the west coast's business and international links are a big pull for international students. "Companies like Microsoft, Starbucks and Intel are just three of the many 21<sup>st</sup>-century companies you will find in the Seattle/Tacoma area," she says.

While the west coast is an attractive destination for international business and computing students, other attributes of the area also provide ideal conditions for students participating in less mainstream areas of study. Students at Rainbow Air Academy in Long Beach, California, are able to train at one of the busiest airports in the world while making the most of very favourable flying conditions.

"We have a very comfortable climate in southern California that allows us to complete the training in a very reasonable time frame due to lack of delays [from] the weather," says David Parsons, Vice President of Rainbow Air Academy. "California has the most challenging and scenic terrain in the whole of the USA. Attractions for pilots [include] flying to Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon [and] San Francisco."

The US west coast's location on the Pacific Ocean means that the largest international student nationalities in this area are predominantly from Asian countries. "Asia, specifically Japan and Taiwan, is our largest market," says Mills. "We are a liberal arts college in a safe environment that Asian undergraduates and parents appreciate."

However, institutions such as Whitman College, which do not offer business, computer science and engineering programmes popular with many Asian students, are starting to explore other markets. "For the last two years, we have made recruiting trips to South America and found greater interest, compared to Asia where we have travelled before," says Pedersen. "Perhaps because of the European influences in many South American nations, students there have a greater appreciation for, and interest in, the liberal arts."



While the US west coast can offer attractive academic opportunities in a number of fields, the climate and diverse natural attractions of the area also provide a wide range of activities for students taking a break from their studies. "The west offers lots of opportunities to explore and enjoy outdoor recreation," says Judith Lang, Director of English Language Programmes at Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington state. "Students who come to Washington state can see nearly every geographical climate the USA has to offer [including] high glacial mountains, rainforests, deserts, hundreds of lakes [and] powerful rivers."

Further down the coast in California, Sandy Lyon, International Student Coordinator at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, is keen to draw attention to the natural beauty of the area. "I think California can't be beaten," she says. "Westmont is located in the foothills of Santa Barbara overlooking the Pacific Ocean, amongst trees and flowering plants. A more beautiful campus is hard to find." ○

## Agent comments

"There are many Taiwanese students who want to get course information [about] the USA, especially the west coast and California. I think the reason [for this] is that California is the most popular state for future study [plans]. Most of our clients like the west coast, especially San Diego and San Francisco. [There is] good weather, friendly people and an interesting lifestyle. The prices in the big cities are expensive but still better than the east coast like New York City or Boston. [In] other cities such as Portland, the price is very good. Compared with other countries, [costs] are [less] than big cities in the UK but more expensive than the cities in Australia or New Zealand."

**Astra Hu, Dragon Worldwide Educational Service, Taiwan**

"The US west coast is actually in the North Pacific while Chile is in the South Pacific. Oregon and Washington are extremely similar to the south of Chile and we get a lot of enquiries for programmes in this area. I was an exchange student in Portland and feel at home in Oregon. I share my own experiences with my students and tell them that this part of the USA is the best [place] to live and study or just travel for fun. The feedback [from my students] is excellent, in fact most of them want to go back. Most of my students really fall in love with the west coast."

**Alan Robinson, Director of WES-InterEstudios, Chile**

PHOTOGRAPH: WASHINGTON TOURISM