

Pacific contrasts

The USA's Pacific states of California, Oregon and Washington offer international students an experience of America that is as varied and as action-packed as they want it to be, as GILLIAN POOLE reports.

Both Oregon and Washington share the same beautiful scenery – wide-open landscape, mountains, thick woodlands and quiet beaches. Outdoor activities abound, while the main cities of Seattle and Portland have plenty of cultural attractions. However, among international students, these two states are often eclipsed by California, whose celluloid reputation goes before it. As Kari Topzand, Director of the School of English Achievement in La Jolla, puts it: “California is famous for being California.”

“California is probably most famous for the weather, beaches and of course the allure of Hollywood,” continues Shawn Kristy, Assistant Director at Global American Language Institute (Gali) in San Diego.

Californians certainly live life to the full, and this is reflected in the activities organised by the schools, which range from whale watching to city tours and surfing. “We can

organise just about anything a student requests as long as it is available – probably the most unusual request to date has been helicopter-flying lessons,” says Topzand. However, she adds, “The most popular daily activities for students are going to the beach, shopping, rollerblading and surfing.”



Right down in the southern corner of California, just south of Los Angeles, is San Diego, a good location for students who want to explore parts of southern California – such as the eerie volcanic craters and salt pans of Death Valley – as well as Mexico. That is, if they can tear themselves away from the city itself.

“San Diego offers something for everyone,” says Shelley Herron of the American Language Institute at San Diego State University. “The weather is good all year, so those who enjoy sports and recreation – we have 100 golf courses – can enjoy even sailing in January. We have museums and

concerts as well, [and] San Diego offers a dynamic business environment for those with a professional focus.”

About 75 miles north of Los Angeles is Santa Barbara, a small beach town with plenty of restaurants and a lively nightlife. It is also, according to Carol Crabtree, Vice President of the English Language Center (ELC) in Santa Barbara, “the most famous location in the world for diving”, and from the beginning of this year, ELC is offering an English plus scuba diving course.

For those students who prefer a quieter town, Azusa is an ideal location. Situated between a 30-to-60 minute drive away from Los Angeles, Hollywood, Disneyland and the beaches, Azusa is home to the Azusa Pacific University, where, as Ester Attebery reports, students studying at the university enjoy staying on campus. “On our campus, as a Christian campus, students often spend time in events that develop meaningful friendships,” she says.

At other schools, host families play an important role in making the student feel



welcome. "We encourage integration into the American way of life by [participation] in family events. Our students find that they gain friends for life," says Kristy.

"A key part of most American Cultural Exchange language and culture programmes is the opportunity to stay with an American family," confirms David Woodward, President and CEO of American Cultural Exchange (ACE) in Washington state.

International House (IH) has three centres in California, in San Diego, Santa Monica and San Francisco, as well as one in Oregon. "In Santa Monica you will find an explosive [array] of public art, museums and

galleries, two first-class beaches and more than 400 restaurants, pubs and cafes," says Amber McKenzie, IH Marketing Administrator, while in San Francisco students can "visit Alcatraz, ride the trolley cars, take a Golden Gate Bay cruise, tour the wine country, [and] see Chinatown...".

"San Francisco is one of the most cosmopolitan, diverse cities in the world," continues Penny Larson, Coordinator at the Institute for International Students, City College of San Francisco. Leslie Kanberg, Academic Director at the English Language Programme at the University of California Berkeley, explains that the city's assets are used in all their English courses. "The four-week course in spoken English uses the city as a language laboratory – the curriculum intertwines the city's sights and sounds."

Football, baseball and basketball are all popular in California, Oregon and Washington. Famous professional teams include the Portland Trailblazers (basketball), the LA Lakers (basketball) and the LA Dodgers (baseball), and most schools organise trips to see them play. "We often take groups of

Tehachapi Wind Farm in California (above left); a view of Seattle in Washington state from Lake Umon (centre); California's rich diversity of scenery includes the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (below)

Agent viewpoint

"We send students to the Los Angeles area, San Diego, the San Francisco area and Santa Barbara. They are most attracted by the climate, and generally enjoy the more informal way of life on the west coast."

Mauro de Baptista, Student House Ltd, Brazil

"We send students to San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Palo Alto, Santa Barbara, and Bradenton. They enjoy the theme parks, shopping malls, coast and other sights. They also like the American lifestyle, the open-minded, flexible and friendly people, and the countryside."

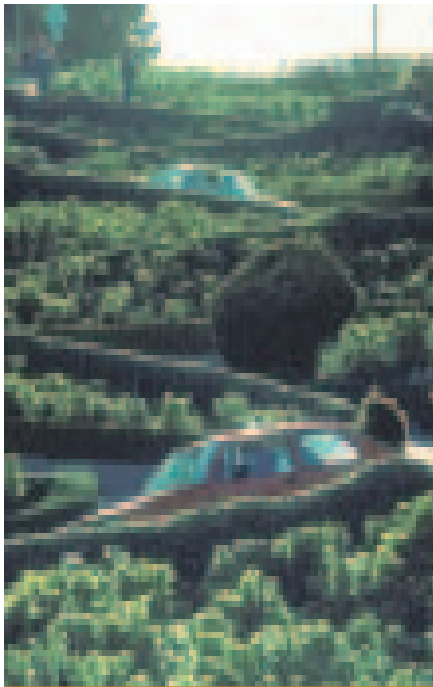
Milena Langer, GLS Sprachenzentrum, Germany

"California – San Francisco in particular – is the most popular area among these three states, [where] we send our students. These areas are well known by most people in Japan. San Diego is also a popular destination with students who like beaches and like to surf."

Recently, Portland has been getting more popular as well because of its safe image. Students enjoy the activities at the schools, their homestay, shopping and making international friends."

Many students think the USA is expensive for them but they don't seem to care because America is very attractive to them. Most of them think England is more expensive because of the air fare from Japan."

Maki Oizumi, Aeon Nice Network, Japan



The facts

- **Flying** is a very cost-effective way to explore the USA. However, to really see the country, the best method for travelling around is to **rent a car** – California boasts some of the cheapest car rental rates in the country. Petrol is also relatively inexpensive.
- The Amtrak **rail network** links many of the major cities. Frequent services run between LA and San Diego, stopping at Fullerton for buses to Disneyland. The nearest stations to San Francisco are Oakland and Emeryville. One daily service runs from LA right up to Seattle. Portland is well connected to Seattle and California by train and bus services. Greyhound and Green Tortoise **buses** link most major cities and towns. Hitch hiking is inadvisable anywhere in the USA, and it is illegal to hitchhike in Oregon.
- Only those aged over 21 are permitted to **drink alcohol** in the USA, and bars often demand proof of age.
- There are many **shopping** opportunities in most of the major cities and towns of California, as well as in Portland and Seattle. There are also many out-of-town discount outlets to which some schools arrange excursions.
- The **climate** in southern California is generally characterised by hot and sunny days and warm dry nights. LA's smog is at its worst when the temperatures are highest in July to September. In San Francisco, it can be cool all year and there is often fog. Further northwards in Washington and Oregon, it is generally cooler and wetter than in the south.

Lombard Street in San Francisco – the city of countless car chases – is said to be the “crookedest street in the world” (above left); Colombia Rover Gorge in Oregon typifies the astounding natural environment for which Oregon is famous (above right)

students to see a Padres professional baseball game,” says Herron. “ALI also sponsors its own soccer team, which plays against other recreational teams.”

Because of the fame of its southern neighbour, Oregon is often overshadowed by California, as Terrie Wolff, Assistant Administrator at Western Pacific College in Portland, concedes. “Oregon is sometimes overlooked by students wishing to study in California. But if they take a look north, they would find a state which respects its environment. First-time visitors are always amazed at our natural beauty.”

Outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping, rafting, windsurfing, kayaking and biking are plentiful. “Oregon is famous for its natural environment and beauty as well as the independent spirit and commitment of its residents to maintaining high standards of liveability,” explains Joann Geddes at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, where there is plenty going on.

Portland boasts more theatres per capita than any other city in the USA, while natural wonders, such as the Multnomah Falls are just a short drive away. Capitalising on the wide variety of activities in and around the city, most language schools arrange a whole timetable of excursions. “Students take part in a wide variety of class- and programme-related field trips to the coast, mountains and nearby businesses and cultural attractions,” says Geddes. “They are also invited to join all campus-sponsored activities.”

Just a few kilometres outside of Portland is Oregon City, where Clarkamas Commu-

nity College is situated. “We are a community college which offers affordable tuition at a beautiful campus,” explains Molly Williams at the college. “We’re 20 minutes from shopping and nightlife in downtown Portland, the largest city in Oregon. There’s a large shopping mall near Oregon City too, [and it] is a very clean and safe city.”

Wolff adds that, as there is no sales tax in Oregon – “the price you see is the price you pay” – it is popular for shopping not only with international students but also with “out-of-staters”.

Further north is Washington, a state renowned for its geographical beauty – from the Pacific beaches to snow-capped mountains with glistening lakes, from dry, dusty desert to rolling wheat fields and vineyards, all within easy reach of the main cities, such as Seattle.

“Washington State is one of the few places where one can sunbathe and ski on the same day in locations one hour from each other,” points out Woodward at ACE.

As well as its idyllic setting, Seattle boasts several higher education institutions, including the University of Washington, which has a student population of 35,000. It is also the location of many corporation headquarters – Microsoft, aircraft manufacturer Boeing, Starbucks Coffee and the on-line shopping giant, Amazon.

Despite its high-tech residents, however, Seattle retains its traditional roots, hosting a Pow-Wow for Native Americans each year, while authentic cowboys gather at the Ellensburg Rodeo not far away. □