

West coast attractions

The west coast of America is well known for its mild weather, varied landscape and numerous outdoor activities. BETHAN NORRIS finds out what language students might remember most about their stay in this area of the USA.

The US west coast states of Washington, Oregon and California incorporate a wide range of different geographical features, most of which provide international students with the chance to experience activities and sights that are very different to those in their own country.

“The west coast of the USA is a very dynamic place,” relates Andrea Insley, from Seattle Central Community College in Washington state. “[Here], there is the natural beauty of the mountains, ocean, lakes and rivers.”

Tanya Knebel, from the International Center for American English in La Jolla, California, describes nearby San Diego as a “mecca for outdoor enthusiasts” and emphasises the wide range of activities that students can experience in the surrounding area. “While our school is located next to a beach, our students also have the opportunity to explore the nearby desert,” she says.



Sierra Nevada, CA
The Sierra Nevada mountains span almost the whole state of California and evidence of past settlements depicting the harsh realities of the old frontier lifestyle still survive

“Well known desert attractions, such as Palm Springs and Anza Borrego, are just a couple of hours away.”

Anza Borrego State Park is the largest desert state park in the USA and provides a unique opportunity for visitors to experience the true wilderness of the Colorado desert. Natural inhabitants of the park include golden eagles, roadrunners,

desert iguanas and four different types of rattlesnake, as well as the wildflowers that provide visitors with a breathtaking display of colour when they come into flower between January and March.

Finding out about and interacting with some of the USA’s indigenous wildlife often proves to be one of the more memorable and fascinating experiences for students visiting the west coast states. Students at Skagit



Valley College, located 60 miles north of Seattle in Washington state, study in an area “known for its scenic beauty and abundance of outdoor activities to enjoy”, according to Susan Adams, Coordinator

of International Programs at the college. “The abundant wildlife of the Skagit Valley can be enjoyed while floating down the Skagit River,” says Adams. “Visitors can watch salmon runs and eagles feed in the

Agent viewpoint



“The west coast of the USA is a very popular destination for Brazilian students. The climate is very similar to ours and even in the winter, considering that our students come from a tropical country, the cold is not too much, so it is easy for them to adapt. Students can visit places like Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and Santa Barbara, adding value to their trip. I agree with the students when they say that the climate

and the tourism options of the region are great. The Californian culture [is] more relaxed and informal and [therefore] makes Brazilians feel easy. I would say that the biggest problem is that, depending on the city, students can hear Portuguese on the streets. There is a large colony of Brazilians living in cities like San Diego, San Francisco and Los Angeles and there are also many Brazilian students. So, you have to inform the student of the real [consequences] of his/her choice. For

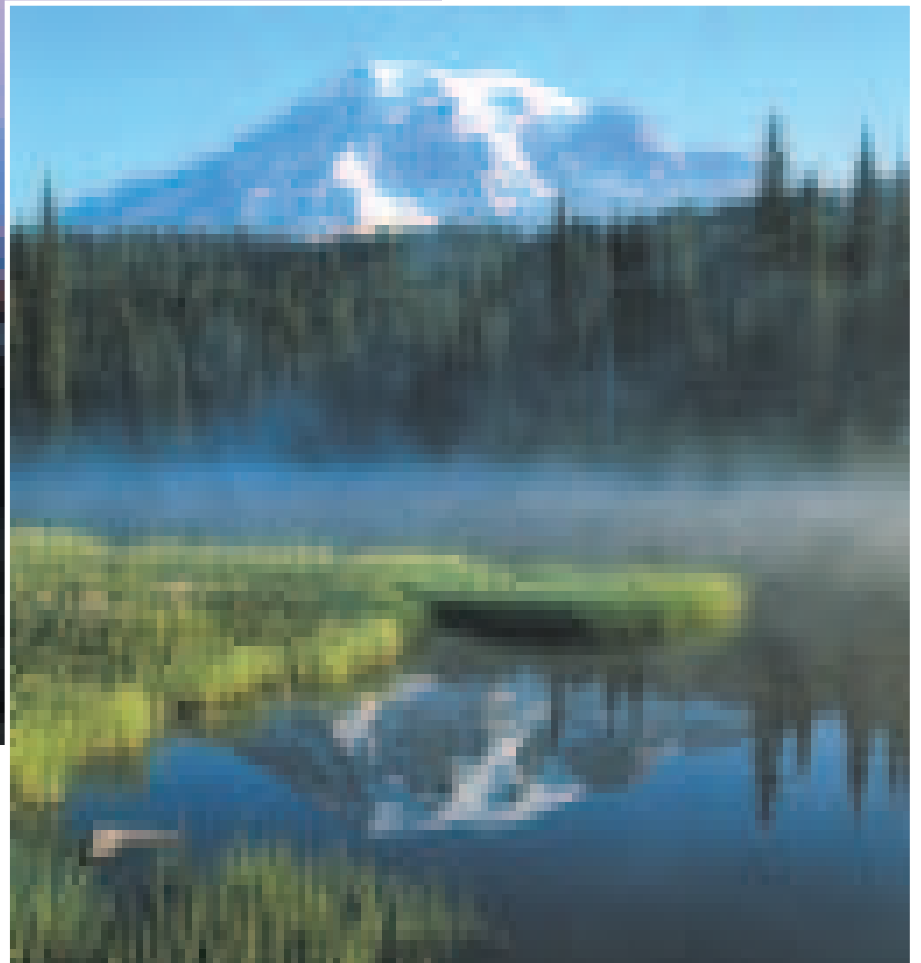
example, that they will probably share the class with [other] Brazilian [students].”
María Helena Senna, Link Viagens Culturais, Brazil



“Many students enquire about schools and courses located in the west coast. The west coast is closer to Korea, the weather is warmer all year and students enjoy the scenic combination of mountains and



The Golden Gate Bridge (left) is one of San Francisco's top attractions, while Mount Rainier National Park in Washington (below) offers a view of the area's natural beauty



many parks that frame the upper Skagit River. Numerous rafting outfitters provide visitors with white water and slow wildlife float trips.”

The college also offers students “spectacular kayak trips through the San Juan Islands where groups can study marine technology through our Oak Harbour campus”, she adds.

Language schools located near the coast are in a prime position to introduce their students to the spectacle of the seasonal migration of whales. “In January, the grey

whales migrate from the north to Baja, California,” says Knebel. “We charter a yacht complete with a guide to view these magnificent creatures as they pass by the San Diego coast.”

The diverse geographical attributes of the west coast states provide opportunities

for students to take part in many sporting activities too. “Santa Barbara is located between the Santa Ynez Mountains and the Pacific Ocean – the perfect year-round environment for sports and outdoor activities,” says Fatmanur Erdogan, from the University of California Santa Barbara Extension

oceans. I consider the west coast area as one in which there is less racism, a more flexible lifestyle and a deep concern for the natural environment. Many Korean students probably regard this area as a good place for their personal lifestyle, in addition to their academic studies. Students enjoy the well-known tourist attractions of Disneyland, Hollywood, Universal Studios and Sea World, but also the many beaches and nearby mountains for hiking, camping and beach sports. Trips to San Francisco,

San Diego, Los Angeles, nearby Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe, and various national parks are all within driving distance.”

Yongwoo Kim, Uhak.com, Korea



“Most Japanese students feel really comfortable [living] in the state of California [as] the people who live in this area are really friendly to Japanese [students]. I feel it is the best location if I were to choose

an area in the USA. The people are really friendly and there are lots of Japanese goods in this area. Due to the [differences in] public transportation between Japan and the USA, students [sometimes] have difficulty in getting around. Most students who are studying in the west coast area – except San Francisco and Seattle – feel that is difficult for them to go anywhere they want to go.”

Kinya Yumoto, Gio Club Study Abroad, Japan

(UCSB). “[There are] water sports, mountain activities, beach activities, city sports and other activities [such as] horseback riding, flying lessons, hang-gliding, whale watching, international cultural events and seasonal festivals,” she adds.

Natalia Cordoba, from the English Language and International Programs Department of the University of California Santa Cruz Extension, says that, for some students, extra-curricular sporting activities can provide invaluable help with practising language skills. “I remember a Brazilian student who came here with less than zero

English level and a surfboard. With time we started to hear his voice. He learned a lot in the water - I'd say more than in class,” she says.

Exploring the history and culture of the local community is an important part

of any language learning experience and many schools in the west coast area encourage their students to take part in local activities. Students studying at Central Washington University, situated in Ellensburg – which is described by Steve Horowitz at the university as a “comfortable small town” – have a number of opportunities to experience the culture of the local area.

“Ellensburg has several regionally famous yearly events [such as] the Rodeo and County Fair, Jazz Festival and Western Art Show,” says Horowitz. The Ellensburg Rodeo is a celebration of the old local frontier tradition of round-riding up cattle, when

cowboys would show off their skills in riding and roping cattle, and today is one of America’s top 25 professional rodeos.

The Kittitas Valley, in which Ellensburg is situated, is also one of the ancestral camping grounds of the Yakama Indian Nation, who participate in the Ellensburg Rodeo by performing a traditional dance to open each evening’s activities. The Central Washington University organises excursions for their students to visit the nearby Yakama Indian Cultural Centre, which is part of the 1.4-million acre Yakama Indian reservation.

Here, visitors learn about the legend of Spilyay, who, in the guise of a coyote, taught mankind how to survive and live harmoniously with nature.

Excursions offered by Skagit Valley College also give

students the chance to get a flavour of a more traditional way of life. “College excursions include Winthrop, Washington, where participants can enjoy horseback riding in the Cascade Mountains and white water rafting on the Methow River,” says Adams. “This excursion includes lodging at a true western ranch where participants enjoy an evening bonfire complete with marshmallows.”

The southernmost west coast state of California is home to a vast array of world famous tourist attractions, as well as being the centre of the US film industry. According to William Price, Vice President of Osula Education Center in Los Angeles,



Redwood Forest Road, CA
Redwood forests – the tallest living things on our planet – once covered this area before logging began in the 19th century. Today, redwood trees can still be seen in preserved parks and reserves

California, the highlight for many students at the school is “sighting a movie star if they are lucky”. He adds that the school is “10 minutes from Universal Studios in Hollywood”.

The UCSB makes full use of the area’s association with the US film industry, as Erdogan explains. “UCSB’s Arts and Lectures department offers many lectures, films, theatres and operas that are

among Santa Barbara’s most popular events. It is typical to see famous names [such as] Michael Douglas, Steven Seagal, George Stephanopolis [or] Bill Clinton in a talk at [the university].”

California’s connections with the rich and famous means that some cities in the state boast a glittering nightlife. “Bars, restaurants and nightclubs are popular in the evenings,” says Erdogan. “Downtown Santa Barbara is rich with many clubs.”

Knebel agrees that experiencing San Diego’s colourful and vibrant nightlife is a popular pastime for many of their older language students. “There are numerous bars, clubs and discos to choose from,” she says. “Other students prefer the movies, the theatre, or trying one of the many different ethnic cuisines available at the multitude of local restaurants.”

Socialising in clubs and bars can be a good way for international students to meet local people, but there are many other ways for students to integrate themselves into the local population. “The Santa Cruz community always has a warm welcome for international students,” says Cordoba. “Students like to interact with the community by participating in different events and social activities. There are also internship opportunities and informal social gatherings.”

Insley, from Seattle Central Community College, emphasises the importance of the “warm connections” made between their international students and the local people. “Many international students volunteer in local schools and organisations through our service learning projects, enrol in community education courses, participate in religious organisations or are actively involved with American host families or their American conversation partners.” □



Portland, OR
The city of Portland is a ‘green’ city and has an extensive public transport system. Its famous Metropolitan Area Express (MEA) light rail system provides access to all the city’s tourist areas