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home abroad.

Relocation Guide to Los Angeles, California

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IOR makes every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide is as current as possible. If you notice errors, or information which is no longer accurate, please contact us immediately so that we may correct the issue.

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WELCOME AND OVERVIEW



Photo courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The city of Los Angeles (also known simply as L.A., and nicknamed the "City of Angels") is the most populous city in California. Located on a broad basin in Southern California, the city is surrounded by vast mountain ranges, valleys, forests, beautiful beaches along the Pacific Ocean, and nearby desert. The metropolitan area is the second-most populous in the United States and home to over 17 million people who hail from all parts of the globe. Los Angeles is an important center of culture, business, media, and international trade, but it is most famous for being the center of the world's television, motion picture, and recording industry, which forms the base of its status.

The sprawling city we see today began as a small settlement by the Tongva Indians. It initially was part of Spain, then Mexico and finally became part of the United States in 1847 after the Battle of Rio San Gabriel. Soon after becoming part of U.S. territory, LA and the California area was flooded with settlers due to the Gold Rush. By 1950, Los Angeles' population hit 1,970,358, surpassing Detroit as fourth in the nation, first attracting some "folks" from the Midwest and East Coast with warm winters, and then becoming a gateway to a remarkable diversity of immigration from throughout the Pacific Rim and Latin America.

Today, many parts of the city have changed compared to 20 years ago. The economy is no longer based on manufacturing, aerospace activity has moved and so has a large portion of the entertainment industry in order to avoid high taxes. In addition, there has been a huge inflow of immigrants from the Pacific Rim and Latin America in search for employment opportunities. This has led to an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, making Los Angeles one of the most socioeconomically divided city in the United States. Despite these issues, LA still is a vibrant city with many attractions that keep on alluring people from all over the world and remains one of the most substantial economic engines within the United States.

City of Los Angeles Overview

- [Official Website of the City of Los Angeles](#)
- [Mayor of the City of Los Angeles](#)
- Population: 3,857,799
- Land Area: 502.7 square miles (1,302 km²)
- Los Angeles is divided into over 80 districts and neighborhoods
- 9 % sales tax in the city of Los Angeles.
- [Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department](#)
- [Los Angeles Public Library](#)
- [Weather Today in Los Angeles](#)
- [Recycling in Los Angeles](#)

History of Los Angeles

- [Historical Timeline of Los Angeles](#)
- [UCLA - A Short History of Los Angeles](#)
- [Los Angeles City Historical Society](#)

Recommended Reading (available in print and on www.amazon.com):

- *Frommer's Los Angeles* (Frommer's Complete Guides) by Tara di Lis
- *Lonely Planet Los Angeles San Diego & Southern California* by Benson, Bender and Skolnick
- *The Kid's Guide to Los Angeles County* (Kid's Guides Series) by Eileen Ogintz

What to See, Sightseeing Tours, Value Packages and Passes, Tourist Information

- [Los Angeles Visitors Center](#)
- [Information on attractions](#)

- [Save money on attractions](#)
- [Los Angeles for free](#)
- [Los Angeles with kids](#)

Where to Find Arts & Entertainment

- [Los Angeles Times](#)
- [LA Weekly](#)
- [Theatre tickets and schedules](#)
- [Museums/ Art Galleries](#)
- [Cinema listings and schedules](#)

Where to Eat

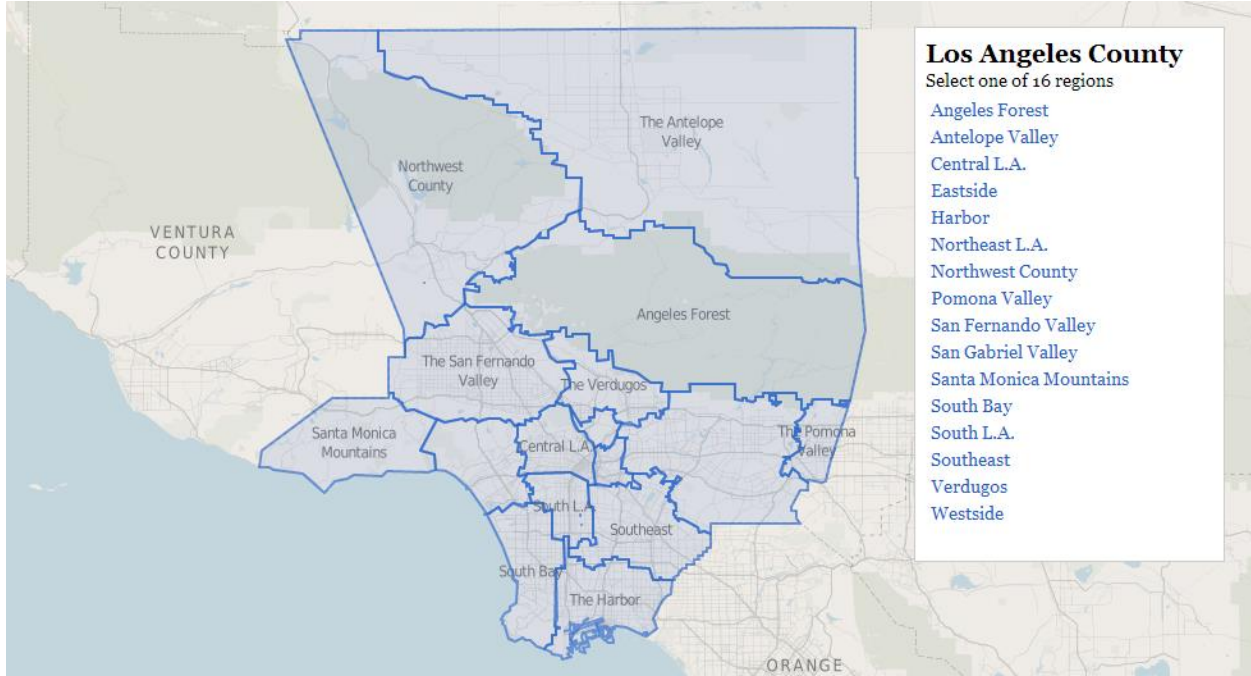
- [Yelp](#)
- [Los Angeles Restaurants Dining Guide](#)
- [Epicurious](#)
- [Zagat](#)
- [Food Blog Links](#)
- [Make online restaurant reservations](#)

[LA Restaurant Week](#) DineLA's Restaurant Week is a 14-day dining event showcasing Los Angeles as a premier dining destination, highlighting the diversity of culinary experiences LA has to offer. Locals and visitors have the opportunity to enjoy a selection of specially priced prix fixe lunch and dinner menus from some of LA's best restaurants.

Tipping & Sales Tax

When you eat in a restaurant in America, you are expected to leave your server a tip, as it is not included. In a bar, café, or modest restaurant, 15% of the total bill is acceptable. However, in an upscale restaurant (fine dining), a tip calculated on 20% of the total bill is now the norm in Los Angeles County. In addition, you will be paying the 9 % sales tax in the city of Los Angeles.

[Interactive Neighborhood Map of Los Angeles](#) – Preview:



EMERGENCY

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY
DIAL 911
FOR FIRE, POLICE & AMBULANCE**

Language line: If the person calling 911 is unable to speak English, they can tell the operator what language they speak. The 911 Operator will have an interpreter on the line within one minute to assist with the translation.

They will ask for the following information so keep this page close to your phone:

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE _____

If you accidentally call 911, please do not hang up. The police will automatically be dispatched to your home to make sure there are no problems. Explain to the Operator the call was an accident.

[POISON CONTROL](#) 1-800-222-1222

[ANIMAL POISON CONTROL](#) 1-888-426-4435

Other Important Numbers:

CLOSEST CONSULATE OFFICE _____
PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN _____
WORK PHONE NUMBER _____

DIAL 311 to reach any City of Los Angeles agency, or to request a City Service (such as replacing a broken street-lamp or removing an abandoned vehicle).

- [Find your Consulate in Los Angeles](#)
- [Primary Care Physician](#)

Hospital & Clinics

- [Cedars-Sinai Medical Center](#)
- [Huntington Memorial Hospital](#)
- [Keck Hospital of USC](#)
- [Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center](#)
- [University of California Irvine Medical Center](#)

Other Resources

- [Primary Care Physicians List](#)
- [US News Best Hospitals for LA](#)
- [Yellow Pages directory of medical clinics](#)

Veterinary Clinics Los Angeles

- [VCA Animal Hospitals](#)
- [Animal Emergency Clinics](#)
- [spcaLA](#)

Pharmacies

There are several major pharmacy chains in Los Angeles, found on nearly every block on commercial streets. Click on “Store Locator” and enter your zip (postal) code to find the pharmacy near you. Several pharmacies are open 24 hours. Check for hours of operation. Also the main grocery stores like Ralphs, Vons, Albertsons, Pavilions, Target, and Wal-Mart have full service pharmacies.

- [Walgreens](#)
- [CVS](#)
- [Rite Aid](#)
- [List of pharmacies in Los Angeles area](#)

US Leasing/Housing Guide

A lease is an agreement that outlines the obligations of the owner and the tenants of a house or apartment. It is a legally binding document, so it is important for you to know the exact terms of the lease agreement before you sign it. Please do not sign a lease without reviewing it with your IOR DS Consultant.

Types of rental properties

- **Apartment**

An apartment is rented from a company or individual that owns the property. Apartment buildings are usually multistory with people over, under and beside each other with common hallways or walk ways. Apartments are often rented from a company or individual in the form of an individual lease with no bearing on the other tenants of the building (besides noise complaints, property damage, etc.)

- **Studio Apartments**

A studio apartment is basically a one room apartment with sleeping, dining and kitchen all in one room plus a full bathroom. A “convertible” or “alcove” studio may have a nook or area which can be sectioned off separately for sleeping.

- **Condominium**

A condo is a communally owned estate and the owners share the ownership of the common areas such as grounds and hallways. Condominiums may be apartment style buildings or town house type buildings, but condo owners do not usually own the land. Condo owners are required to pay monthly common maintenance charges, although these might be reflected in your rental rate (it is important to clarify this with your landlord).

- **Townhouse**

A Townhouse is a kind of structure where the individual properties are flush against each other with tiny front and back "yards" and shared walls between them. Almost always they are multistory single family. Usually townhouse owners own the property under their townhouse.

- **Single Family Houses**

Single-family houses are free-standing rental properties that are habited by one person or a family. As you do not share this rental space with any other tenants, single-family homes offer the most amount of privacy. Homes also often come with a parking spot and/or garage space, but may require that you handle certain maintenance items (i.e. your lawn, minor repairs, etc.)

Rental Agents

In most situations, your IOR consultant will partner with a local realtor to have access to the most current and extensive property listings as well as the realtor's expertise in preparing and negotiating leases. This agent receives a commission for their assistance, in most US locations this commission is paid by the Landlord, not the tenant. Your IOR DS Consultant will discuss this with you.

Renter's Rights

Tenants who lease or rent property are protected against discrimination by [The Fair Housing Act](#). If you think your rights have been violated, you may write a letter or telephone the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office nearest you. You have one year after the alleged violation to file a complaint with HUD, but you should file as soon as possible.

While you can generally expect the same service from landlords, it's important to know your state's laws. Each state and most major cities have their own tenant rights, laws and protections. Here are [Los Angeles'](#).

You can also visit the [HUD website here for a full guide to renters' rights by states](#).

If your rental property ever suffers any defects that make your place uninhabitable, your landlord has a duty to fix it. While some apartments let you make online requests for repairs, as well as provide a phone number for "emergencies," always make sure you document your request in writing. The landlord will then have a certain amount of time to make those repairs.

Privacy

You have the right to privacy. While the landlord owns the property, they can't access it anytime they want. All states have laws stating renters have a right to privacy while renting. Pretty much the only time the landlord can come into your rental without permission or notice is when they're responding to an emergency that threatens injury or property damage.

Any other time the landlord wants to enter your apartment, they need to have your permission and in most cases give you 24-hours' notice before entering.

What to expect from the landlord:

In most states, you are legally entitled to:

- Safe structural elements including floors, walls, roofs, and secure doors and windows.
- Privacy as described above.
- All electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems function.
- Working hot and cold water.
- Exterminating infestations of rodents and other insects.
- Access to trash receptacles.
- Landlords cannot discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities.
- Apartment buildings sometimes come with laundry and dryer machines in the basement.
- Water, electricity, and gas bills are up to you to pay. **Your IOR consultant will assist you with this process.**

Utilities and Appliances

Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you or provide information on connecting your utilities. It is possible some will be included in your rent, but typically most are not.

If you are moving from Europe to North America, you might be surprised at the relatively large size of the kitchen appliances in your accommodation, especially the refrigerator! It may also surprise some expats that properties are rented **with** appliances. In the US it is standard for properties to include a refrigerator, stove, and oven. Properties may also include a dishwasher, microwave, washer and dryer depending on the location, size, and price point.

****Note that you will need a social security number in order to register and pay for utilities****

Recycling

Los Angeles provides [recycling services](#) for accepted products to residents.



The Lease Process

Review your housing budget with your IOR DS Consultant

Your IOR DS Consultant can help you understand what kind of property you can afford. You also need to take into account that you may be responsible for some of the utility costs of your rental.

Know what you want

What are you looking for in a property? Do you want a studio or a single bedroom? Maybe you want to rent a single family home? Do you need the property to come with appliances, including washer and dryer? Do want it to be close to school or your work? Do you want it to be within walking distance of retail, like groceries or coffee shops? Are you looking for a child friendly area?

Keep in mind that outside of the city center in major cities, there is not much public transportation and most locals drive everywhere.

Identify potential apartments

IOR offers home finding services to aid you with this process. Your consultant may work with a local broker who will help to organize appointments and visit properties. They will also assist in the rental application and the leasing process.

Common Abbreviations and Acronyms used in rental housing listings

Acronym	Meaning	Acronym	Meaning
24-hr mtn	24-hour emergency maintenance	LA	Living area
AC or A/C	Air conditioning	LR	Living room
Appls	Appliances	MBR	Master bedroom

Apt	Apartment	MBTH	Master bathroom
BA	Bathroom	Neg	Negotiable
BR	Bedroom	Ofc	Office
Bsmt	Basement	OSP	Off-street parking
CAC	Central air conditioning	Pkg	Parking
DA	Dining area	PM	Property manager (management)
Det	Detached	Pvt	Private
Dk	Deck	Pwdr rm	Powder room (1/2 bath)
DR	Dining room	RE	Real estate
Dw (D/w)	Dishwasher	Renov	Renovated
Eff	Efficiency	Rf	Roof
EiK	Eat-in kitchen	Rm	Room
Fin bsmt	Finished basement	SF	Single-family
FDR	Formal dining room	SFA	Single-family attached
FHA	Fair Housing Act	SFD	Single-family detached
FMR	Fair market rent	Sp, Pl (S/p)	Swimming pool
FP	Floorplan	Sq. ft	Square feet
Gar	Garage	Th (T/H)	Townhouse
H/A	Handicapped accessible	Vw (vu)	View
H/W	Hardwood floors	W/A	Wheelchair accessible
Hi ceil	High ceilings	W/W	Wall-to-wall carpeting
HVAC	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning		

Visit

Make this process as efficient as possible by visiting as many potential properties as you can in one or two days. Try to go sometime during the week if possible. Your IOR DS consultant will work with you to set an appropriate schedule and to ensure that the properties you visit meet your needs as closely as possible.

What to do once you're there

As you look at the rental unit, be sure to ask a lot of questions. While you should keep small concerns to yourself about the unit while looking at it, feel free to ask the landlord or apartment manager any questions you might have that will help in your decision. Here are some possible questions you may consider asking:

- What's the monthly rent?
- Are any utilities included with the rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- When is rent due? Do you have auto-pay?
- What's the make-up of the other tenants? Are they mainly younger students? Married couples with families? Older folks?
- What's the parking situation like? Do you pay for a parking spot?
- Do you take care of small maintenance issues or am I responsible for some of the repairs in the property?
- Am I able to re-paint the walls or make other modifications?

Again, be friendly and polite when you ask these questions.

The Application

The next step in the leasing process for an apartment is to submit a rental application for the location you want. The manager or landlord will be able to give you the application as well as anything else that they may need to have filled out. Your IOR DS Consultant will assist with this process. For a single family home there will likely be a rental application.

You will need your passport, Social Security number, Visa, and proof of employment. Some landlords may charge you an application fee which could be between \$20 to \$400 dollars, depending on the landlord. This could be a combination of an application fee and move-in fee.

Once you've done this, it can take up to a few days to hear back from the property manager. Once your application has been approved the lease approval process will begin with IOR and likely your employer.

Signing the lease

DO NOT SIGN THE LEASE until your IOR DS Consultant has reviewed it in full and given their approval.

The lease is a binding contract, so it is very important to pay attention as a leasing agent goes over it with you. It is perfectly normal for you to take your time and read all the fine print for yourself. If you are working with an IOR DS Consultant, make sure to talk with them and receive approval before signing. You will also be given a copy of the lease to take with you and keep for your records, but it is very important to know everything included in your lease from the start.

Some things to look for in a lease:

- Term of the lease and any important dates such as when the rent is due.
- Extra fees for parking spaces or storage, garbage collection, and pets.

- Information regarding utility providers and whether you or the landlord is responsible for those bills.
- Notification requirements in case of renewal.
- Requirements/responsibilities of the tenants to do routine repairs such as lawn maintenance, cleaning or notification of repairs.
- Clauses that allow the landlord to change the terms of the lease after it is signed.
- Restrictions that would prevent you from living normally or comfortably in the home.

Sometimes landlords will ask for a security deposit before you sign the lease. This is normal, but you shouldn't pay in cash. Make sure all payments are made out as a check or money order just in case.

What to expect from the lease

Most leases in the United States include the following or a variation thereof:

- Your employer requires that all leases include a Break Clause in the case that you are transferred for work or personal needs.
- Contracts will often be for periods of a year or more.
- Minimum stay. Typically three fourths of your lease contract time. If you choose to move out before this date, you will lose your security deposit. If you move out afterwards, you are still required to give a specified number of days notice.
- Security Deposit. Landlords will expect you to leave them with a deposit (usually about one to two month's rent) that they will hold for the duration of your lease. You will receive your security deposit back at the end of the lease provided you don't break any specific clauses in your lease, such as moving out without proper notice, not paying rent, causing damages to the property, etc.
- Landlords should not be given unchecked access to your apartment. If there isn't anything in your lease about landlord's rights to enter the leased premises, suggest the following clause:

Entry by the Landlord. Landlord or his agent will not enter Tenant's home except to deal with an emergency; to make necessary or agreed repairs; to supply necessary or agreed services; or to show the unit to potential purchasers, tenants, or repair persons. Unless there is an emergency, Landlord will give Tenant at least 24 hours' written notice of the date, time, and purpose of the intended entry and will schedule entries during normal business hours, Monday–Friday.

Most landlords will be hard-pressed to say no to such a reasonable clause. If the landlord refuses, it's a sure sign that he won't be reasonable in other respects, too. Continue on in your housing search.

Moving In

On your selected move-in date, after the lease has been signed, and deposits have been paid...you should be given your keys and more than likely a move-in form to fill out. Your IOR Consultant will assist you with an initial walk through of your apartment. Look for dings in the walls, cracked windows, or other irregularities and report them on this form. This will indicate that these things were there before you moved in and you will not be held responsible for them at the end of the lease term.

Get Renter's Insurance

Renter's insurance covers any loss to your personal property due to robbery or accidents. It also covers any damage you might cause to other tenant's property. For example, let's say your washing machine springs a leak and water seeps through the floor and ruins your neighbor's antique dresser. Renter's insurance would cover that.

Renter's insurance will cost approximately about \$15-125 a month, less if you tack it onto another policy (like auto) you have with an insurance company. A few popular options are [Allstate](#) and [StateFarm](#).

When relocating internationally, your children's education is of great concern. IOR eases this concern by exposing you to the various school options available for your child and helping you to work within the framework of options to find the best solution for your family.

I. Overview and Philosophy of the United States Educational System

In most U.S. locations you will have the choice of sending your children to either a public or private school. A public school must accept your child for enrollment if you live within its designated district. A private school may have a general curriculum similar to that of public schools, but may or may not accept your child depending on availability of space, your child's prior academic history, language ability in English, or the result of entrance exams. Private schools charge a fee, which can be quite high. If you are considering private school, be sure you have a clear understanding of your employer's policy regarding reimbursement. In the U.S. approximately 85% of the children attend public schools for ages 5 to 13, and approximately 93% of the children attend public school at the high school level. Many, though not all, private schools are parochial, or religiously affiliated schools.

A third option called 'charter school' is sometimes available. Charter Schools are similar to public schools in that they are free, non-religious, publicly funded, and are held to state and federal academic standards. Each charter school is governed by its own local school community, which often includes parents and teachers - rather than a district. This freedom allows teachers to be more innovative, and communities to shape their local school. Charter schools can set their own hours and adjust their curriculum to fit their student needs, and give teachers the opportunity to experiment with next-generation teaching models including technology and the virtual classroom. Charter schools typically admit students by random lottery and do not restrict enrollment based on location, academic achievement, or other factors private schools may consider.

Most Americans, regardless of their level of education and income, send their children to public schools. Because each town or community typically has its own school system funded by local municipal taxes and state revenues, residents in an area with a higher tax base can usually be assured of quality public education. IOR is very conscientious about placing assignees and their families in areas with good public school systems.

Private schools do not receive state revenue, although they may be entitled to assistance with transporting students and providing for special needs such as speech therapy and assistance of the learning disabled. Private schools are funded through tuition paid by the student's parents. Typically, there are additional fees for books, uniforms, and school supplies, and the parents are usually solicited for additional charitable donations. There may also be book or activity fees at public schools.

The public education system in the U.S. is administered by local and state government, rather than by the federal government. Each state has a board of education which sets policy for all school districts and standards which all students must achieve. In addition, each local district has a board of education which sets local policy and curriculum within the parameters set forth by the state.

School districts can provide specialized programs and services for children with special needs. The general philosophy of education in the United States is to educate the entire diverse, ethnically mixed population with equal educational opportunity for all, while serving the educational needs of the individual student.

If you choose public education for your child, the particular school your child attends is determined by the school district boundaries containing your residential address. The school may or may not be within walking distance to your home. Generally, if the distance to the school is greater than one mile, the school district provides bus transportation to and from school. For those children who do not live far enough away from the school for bus service but are too far to walk comfortably, parents may have the option of paying for bus transportation, or they may choose to drive their children to and from school. Very often parents form 'car pools', sharing the responsibility of driving groups of children.

Generally private schools do not have residential boundaries for their students' families. In most cases, parents rely on car pools to ease the burden of transporting their students to and from school. In selecting your home, consider the driving distance and time to and from the private school.

Ultimately, the school your children attend is determined by your residential address, so it is a good idea to include visits to potential schools and properties in your pre-trip visit. Your pre-trip visit will consist of selected sample houses in a variety of communities, along with information, or perhaps visits, to the appropriate schools. However, there may be a limited selection of homes available within each community. It is possible you may find a school you like, but there may not be any available housing options within that school's enrollment radius. We will show you housing in school districts with proven academic standards, but be aware there are cases when certain schools are unavailable due to housing concerns.

If you are considering a private school, you may wish to visit it as well as a public school to compare. It would be advisable, however, to first determine if the private school has space available for your child. Additionally, you will want to know the amount of tuition and fees for the school, as that may be a factor in your decision.

II. Academic Standards

A. Curriculum:

The overriding objective of elementary and secondary education, public or private, is to prepare students for higher learning and future employment. Each school district or private school will have a unique curriculum which meets the above overriding goals.

Elementary School:

The elementary years (kindergarten through fifth grade) focus on fundamental academic skills, language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics in addition to introduction to technology, art, music, physical education, and sometimes foreign languages. Students' personal development is energized through emphasizing strong work habits which provide a positive feeling toward learning.

Middle School:

Middle School helps children in early adolescence (sixth through eighth grade) transition from elementary to high school and from childhood into young adulthood. The structure of the school day includes contact with several teachers who specialize in their subject matter; students usually move from one classroom to another. Curricular content focuses on expansion of skills in math, science, reading, writing and social studies. Further exploration of foreign languages, practical and fine arts, music, health, physical education and computer literacy are also provided. Middle school students are able to enhance their formal education by participation in school sponsored adult supervised competitive athletics and a variety of clubs and special interest groups.

High School:

The premise of elementary and middle schools is to prepare students for the academic, social, and physical challenges of high school. All high schools maintain defined academic requirements for graduation, however great flexibility of classes is usually available within this framework. Most schools provide more challenging academic courses entitled honors or advanced placement which award college credit to successful students. High school extracurricular and athletic activities are more competitive than those found at lower levels and often provide talented students with opportunities continue this activity in college or university.

B. Grading Systems/Assessment of Child Progress

Schools typically report students' progress to parents with written report cards, which may be either mailed or carried home by the student. Many schools also set one or two days aside each semester for parent/teacher conferences. These conferences are an opportunity for parents to meet with their children's teachers and hear the teacher's evaluations of their student's performance in school. At the elementary school level, where children usually have one primary teacher, a teacher conference may last from fifteen minutes to an hour in length. At the middle school and high school levels, you may meet with your child's teachers for a period of five or ten

minutes. If you need additional time with the teacher, you may schedule a follow-up visit allowing time for a more complete discussion. It is a good idea to participate fully in teacher conferences. Your children's teachers may be able to provide valuable insight regarding your children's academic and social adjustments. Should there be concerns, they may be able to assist you with helpful suggestions of additional resources to contact.

C. Standardized Testing

Challenged to prepare students for higher learning and future employment, all school districts and private schools utilize standardized testing to measure student progress over time and compare themselves to national standards. Such tests are prepared by national groups of parents and educators as well as business and academic leaders. Tests vary from state to state, but typically students in prescribed grade levels (for example, grades 3, 6, 8 and 10) are tested in the areas of reading, mathematics, writing science and social science. Colleges and universities use the ACT and SAT tests to measure incoming student abilities; the results of these tests are nearly as important as high school grades when students apply for entrance into US colleges and universities.

III. Definition of School Groupings

A. Pre-School or Nursery School

In the U.S., 3, 4 and some 5 year olds have the opportunity to attend a pre-school under a private system. These schools can be located in a local school, a church, or an independent free standing building. Pre-school is not publicly funded and is fee-based. Typically children are grouped by age. Most of the schools are play-based, although different philosophies of formal education can be found. Typically, 3 year olds attend 2 half days a week and 4 year olds may attend 3 half days a week. Some preschools also serve as day care centers for families in which both parents work. Typically reading is not taught in pre-school, although a few programs can be found which include reading fundamentals. Concentration of learning is on small and gross motor skills, and basic academic readiness skills. Some pre-schools offer a full-day Kindergarten option for those parents who work. The public school kindergarten programs are typically only half day programs with no before or after school care. If a Kindergarten program is offered it follows the state curriculum guidelines, and teaches pre-reading and math skills.

B. Elementary School

Elementary school provides education for children ages 5 to 11, Kindergarten and Grades 1,2,3,4 &5. While kindergarten at age 5 is not required, most families send their children to kindergarten. Elementary school is the beginning of publicly funded school. In the U.S. children are grouped by age and advanced in school by age. There are usually opportunities within the grade for different levels of learning, with opportunities for advanced learners and remedial learners. The public elementary school is usually neighborhood based and the source of playmates for your child. In the U.S., pre-reading skills are introduced in kindergarten (age 5) along with early math skills. Formal reading begins in the 1st grade (age 6). Studies have shown that while children learn to read at different ages, the difference between early and late readers

is not a predictor of reading skills by about the age of 8 or 9 years old. In addition to reading and math, elementary school also has a broad base of writing, science, social studies, art, music, computer, personal development and physical education. Only in a few schools will a 2nd language be introduced at the elementary level. English as a Second Language (ESL) is offered starting at the elementary level in the public school. Parents are allowed to visit the schools, and there are many opportunities for parents to volunteer their skills, particularly at the elementary school. Parents may approach teachers and administrators with suggestions and concerns with their child. Usually the personnel are willing to consider changes if they feel it would be in the best interests of the child. With a child coming to a new country and sometimes starting a new language, feel free to talk to the school if you think something could be done to ease your child's adjustment. The school day is from approximately 8:30a.m. to 3:00p.m. with recess (playtime break) and a lunch break at the school.

C. Middle School

Middle school provides education for children ages 11 to 14, grades 6, 7 & 8. The children attend school in a different location and in the public school system several elementary schools will combine into the same middle school. A middle school is usually 2-4 times the size of the elementary school. Middle school is considered the transition between elementary school and high school and from childhood to young adulthood. Because of this philosophy, U.S. students at this age level are all introduced to the same academic curriculum. The school day is structured differently with the children changing class rooms and teacher with each subject. There are 6-8 different class periods daily. Within the grades children may be separated by academic ability in classes, particularly math and English. Often an introduction to foreign languages is offered. For those who choose, the student may have the option to complete one year of high school foreign language during middle school. If your home country requires more advanced language development at this age, you may want to consider outside supplemental language instruction. Middle school is a time when extracurricular activities such as theatre, music, sports and clubs become important activities in adolescent life.

D. High School

High school provides education for children ages 14 to 18, grades 9, 10, 11 & 12. It is the final level of education before the university, community college, or trade school. The terms Freshman (9th), Sophomore (10th), Junior (11th) and Senior (12th) are also used to identify grade level. At the high school level the student has more specific choices of course work. Each district has a set of minimum graduation requirements, which will include courses in English, math, science, social studies, physical education and a combination of foreign language, fine arts and practical arts. Within this framework the student has various choices from more remedial levels, average levels, and more advanced levels. If a student is prepared for the material, by the 11th or 12th grade a student may have the opportunity to take a college level course for advanced credit in the U.S. university system. In high school competitive sports are offered along with theatre, orchestra, instrumental and vocal music and clubs. Your child will have an opportunity to meet more U.S. children by participating in a school extracurricular activity. Each

school district has 1 or more high schools with 800-2500 students. A student's high school performance may determine the type of university or higher education program they pursue upon graduation. During high school national tests are given to determine the student's potential to advance to various higher education levels.

If your child anticipates returning to your home country to continue higher education within your university system, you might want to consider the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. This program is recognized internationally for entrance to universities. In contrast to the typical high school college preparatory curriculum, the IB semester consists of fewer subjects, studied in greater depth and with a bilingual proficiency. Developed in Switzerland, the curriculum was intended as a secondary education program which could be utilized and accepted worldwide. Not all US schools will offer an IB curriculum.

E. Post-Secondary Education

While most families on international assignment do not bring their older children (19 years+) for education in the U.S. we include a brief description of the US university system. Some form of post-secondary education is available to those U.S. students who seek it. Each state offers a public university system which the tuition is partly subsidized by the state for state residents. Residency of at least 1 year is necessary. Some are medium to large institutions (with undergraduate and graduate level programs). Some can be quite competitive for admission while others may not be competitive at all. Student's admission to the university is in part determined by their high school academic performance and course selection and as well as the results of a national standardized test (SAT or ACT). Post-Secondary is the educational level that students in the U.S. study subjects in great depth and select their majors and career choices. Graduate level programs on the master level, professional level, and PhD level are pursued after completing the 4 years of undergraduate studies.

IV. Life in Schools

A. Atmosphere

It is valuable to visit your child's school to understand the academic and non-academic atmosphere that prevails. Administrators or counselors are happy to serve as tour guides and should always be contacted in advance. Do not be alarmed if your visit takes place during the lunch hour if the children seem a bit rambunctious. Students in American public schools generally enjoy a great deal of personal freedom in the cafeteria, on the playground, and in the halls before and after class. They are supervised by teachers or members of the school staff, but they generally are more relaxed in the lunch room and in the halls. If you are visiting on a rainy day, you may observe "indoor recess" in the gymnasium which could be noisy. Rest assured that when they are in the classroom, students do settle down and work quietly and diligently. Some classrooms are more informally arranged than others. For instance, some teachers prefer to have the children's desks in a circle rather than in rows. Teachers will sometimes assign group projects, where several students work together and are thus not seated at their desks during a part of the classroom period. Teachers are expected, however, to have good control of

their classrooms. Private school policy regarding these issues of personal freedom varies. Some private schools function as the public schools do, while others may have a more closely supervised approach. Again, it is always a good idea to visit the school so that you are comfortable with that particular school's management style.

B. Parental Involvement

In addition to participating in parent/teacher conferences, most American schools encourage parents to become involved in the volunteer activities of the school. Most schools have a "PTA" (Parent Teacher Association) or "PTO" (Parent Teacher Organization). These organizations usually work with the school administration, dealing with issues such as student safety, communication to parents, academic concerns, etc., as well as fundraising and planning special programs to enhance the school experience for the student population.

Getting involved with the PTA or PTO is a great way to become well informed about your child's school. It also provides you with an opportunity to meet and really get to know other parents. There will probably be a choice of committees on which you could work; you do not have to commit to a leadership role. Some volunteer opportunities may involve actually working in the school, volunteering in the school library on day a week or one day a month for example. Be sure to alert the school administration that you would like to get involved, and ask for the name and phone number of the head of the parent volunteer organization at the school. Parent volunteers are usually welcomed and encouraged at all levels at all schools, both public and private.

C. Extracurricular Activities

A well-rounded education requires that students learn their academic subjects as well as develop socialization skills and learn nonacademic skills. Belonging to a group can be a rewarding connection with peers and a good way to develop self-confidence. These are the reasons that schools, public and private, provide numerous extracurricular activities from which their students can choose to participate. At each level of education the opportunities and choices increase. For example at the elementary school level, all students are introduced to art, music, drama and a variety of athletic experiences. At the middle school level, students have required courses in some of the above areas but are provided opportunity to participate in after school activities of their choice. For example, competitive football, soccer, swimming, track, lacrosse, basketball etc. In addition many clubs allow students to pursue other interests, for example, computers, drama, fine arts, forensics, jazz band, photography, yearbook and student council. Almost universally, each activity or club is sponsored by adults, using specialized instruction, who demonstrate a working knowledge of the activity and a desire to teach children. An even greater variety of extracurricular experiences are available at the high school level, many of which help students identify strengths, talents and interests which may direct them to future colleges, vocations or avocations.

D. Facilities

All schools maintain facilities other than classrooms which enhance or support their educational mission.

Libraries and Media Centers

Libraries are universally available and are accessible to students throughout the day and often after hours. Libraries often contain a “media center” which maintains and makes available other types of educational materials including computers and software, audio and video tapes, slides, sound sequences, projectors and recorders of various types for use individually or in groups. The wide availability of computers and access to the internet has provided almost unlimited opportunities for students and teachers to obtain information that can enhance and facilitate learning.

Fitness Facilities/Gymnasium

Fitness facilities, or ‘gyms’ as they are typically referred to, are supplied by almost all schools in the United States. Gyms often consist of a large indoor court with various sports equipment. They are open during lunch hours and for specific hours before and after school for athletes or students who wish to exercise. Many gyms will be accompanied by a weight room and a locker room with a shower. Students are sometimes expected to use these communal showers following Physical Education classes or general use of the gym’s facilities.

SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA

In a city as sprawling as Los Angeles, education options are in no short supply. Second largest in the nation, the Los Angeles Unified Public School District (LAUSD) enrolls more than 640,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, at over 900 schools, and 187 public charter schools. The boundaries spread over 720 square miles and include the mega-city of Los Angeles as well as all or parts of 31 smaller municipalities plus several unincorporated sections of Southern California.

Parents will need to carefully evaluate their priorities, and then choose an institution that can best satisfy their preferences. The following are useful links on schools in Los Angeles. For more information contact your local IOR DS Consultant.

Los Angeles and Surrounding Area - Public Schools Districts

Most of the districts listed below offer Magnet School choice options, such as IB programs, language immersion, STEM, Arts, and Technology focus.

- [Los Angeles Unified School District](#)
- [Santa Monica-Malibu Public School District](#)
- [Orange County Public Schools](#)
- [Conejo Valley Unified School District](#)
- [Ventura County Unified School District](#)
- [Las Virgenes Unified School District](#)
- [School Report Card](#)

Private Schools in the LA area

There are some very good public schools in LA County. But if, for whatever reason, you are looking into sending your child to a private or parochial school, the city has some top ranking education choices -- from experimental arts schools to single-sex prep schools.

- [Catholic Schools](#) - More than 250 Catholic schools serve three counties in the Greater Los Angeles Region; Los Angeles County, Santa Barbara County and Ventura County.
- [Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Orange County](#)
- [Southern California Montessori School](#) – pre K to age 7
- [International School of Los Angeles](#) (Lycée International de Los Angeles)
- List of [private schools](#) in Los Angeles County
- List of [private schools](#) in Orange County
- List of [private schools](#) in Ventura County

General Information on LA Area Schools

- [California Public and Private Schools](#)
- [LA Magazine Best High Schools](#)
- [US News and World Report Best High Schools](#)

Informative Resources:

[Top-Rated Los Angeles Public Schools](#)

The Great Schools website (linked above) also provides excellent information about private schools in the area, from early childhood to grade 12. They include schools with religious affiliations, international schools, and schools with special programs.

Colleges and Universities

- [California State University Los Angeles](#)
- [Los Angeles City College](#)
- [Occidental College](#)
- [The Art Institute of California- Los Angeles](#)
- [University of California Los Angeles](#)
- [University of Southern California](#)
- [Loyola Marymount University](#)
- [Claremont Colleges](#) - 5 consortium colleges



[University of Southern California](#)

BANKING

Banks and other financial institutions, such as credit unions, offer a variety of services. These services include:

- checking and saving accounts
- credit and debit cards
- online bill pay
- loans
- insurance
- financial planning

Banks in the United States are insured by the Federal Government for deposits up to \$250,000 per depositor per bank. The bank or credit union will display the letters FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) as proof.

Checking and Savings Accounts

To open a checking or savings account you will need the following information:

- Two forms of picture identification including but not limited to your passport, driver's license, or work ID.
- Social security number. If you have not yet received your social security number, the bank can open an account with a W8 Temporary Tax ID form (available at the bank). You will need to call the bank with your social security number once it arrives in the mail.
- Local mailing address. You may use your office address as your mailing address, but be prepared to call your bank branch as soon as you have your permanent address.
- Letter of Employment
- Cash for the initial deposit can range from ~\$25-\$150 dollars.

Checks

More businesses and banks are offering online or automatic bill paying options. However, you may still need to pay some bills by mail. **NEVER SEND CASH!** You will want to order at least the minimum quantity of checks. This will cost a set fee that the bank will charge you. The checks will be pre-printed with your name, address, telephone number and account number and will be mailed to your home.

ATM or Debit Card

The most popular way of obtaining cash is by using an ATM (Automated Teller Machine) card, also referred to as a debit card. ATM's are located in most banks, malls, airports, grocery stores, and in many other public places. You will be given a PIN (Personal Identification Number) for using your card. It is important that you memorize this number and not keep written record of it with your card in order to protect your account. Most ATM's will take all cards, but many banks will charge a service fee for using another bank's ATM. Through the ATM you may deposit, transfer, and withdraw funds. There will usually be a limit to the amount of money you can withdraw in any 24-hour period.

Credit Cards

For many international transferees, the lack of a US credit history can be a challenge. In most cases, you will not be approved for a US credit card initially. One suggestion to assist in building your US credit history is to open a **secured credit card**. With approval from the bank, you can put a certain amount of money in a savings account that will remain in the account. The secured credit card would have a credit limit equal to the amount deposited in the savings account. You will need to use your secured credit card and make the minimum monthly payments, you may also pay in full the amount due. After 9 months or so, if the bank sees that you have a good payment record, they may approve you for a regular credit card.

Security

Always pay attention to the other people around you at an ATM. Do not use the machine if you are suspicious of someone's behavior. It is safer to find another ATM or to come back later. Do not put your PIN number in with anyone close enough to see it.

Credit card theft is another increasing problem. In order to protect your card from being abused, never give your credit card or credit card number to a service provider you have not called. Another precaution is to destroy or shred copies of receipts and bills. Criminals will not hesitate to dig through the trash to find a copy of your credit card number.

Major US Banks

Below is a list of links to some of the larger US banks. Not every bank is represented in all US locations, in some cases you may find that the local bank is a better option for you than some of the larger banks. Your IOR DS Consultant can help you in selecting a bank by sharing the various options available locally, as well as the products they offer to support expatriates.

- [Bank of America](#)
- [Chase](#)
- [Citibank](#)
- [HSBC](#)
- [TD Bank](#)
- [US Bank](#)
- [Wells Fargo](#)
- [List of local banks in Los Angeles](#)

Driving in Los Angeles

Residents of Los Angeles County spend an estimated 4 days of each year stuck in traffic. However, since there is no real effective alternative for getting around for the vast majority of trips outside the downtown core, traffic is an inescapable part of the Los Angeles lifestyle. When traveling on a Los Angeles freeway it is important to remember slower traffic keeps the right. Many LA drivers do well over 20 mph of the posted speed limit and cutting them off or remaining in the fast lane at a slow pace will cause frustration with other drivers.

Despite the infamy of Los Angeles' traffic situation, people from other major cities may not be surprised. The real issues are the sheer length of the rush hour period and the volume of traffic therein. The assertions of driving difficulty and danger will most likely seem unfounded to residents of large cities, especially comparatively frantic northeastern locations such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Washington, who often see Los Angeles traffic as relatively easy-going. Indeed, the New Jersey Turnpike, the Beltway and the Schuylkill Expressway offer easily comparable volume and far less forgiving conditions.

[Los Angeles Interactive Traffic Map](#)

Public Transportation

Although the Los Angeles area has numerous bus routes, several transit agencies, a fairly new subway and elevated network to boot, this is still not adequate enough considering the region's population and size. For instance, a few bus routes may have service every 15 or 20 minutes, while others (especially away from the main tourist areas) may have service every 30 to 90 minutes. Also keep in mind there is not a bus line to reach every nook and cranny, and as such, it is not uncommon to find yourself walking up to a mile or so to your destination after you've gotten off the bus at the closest stop.

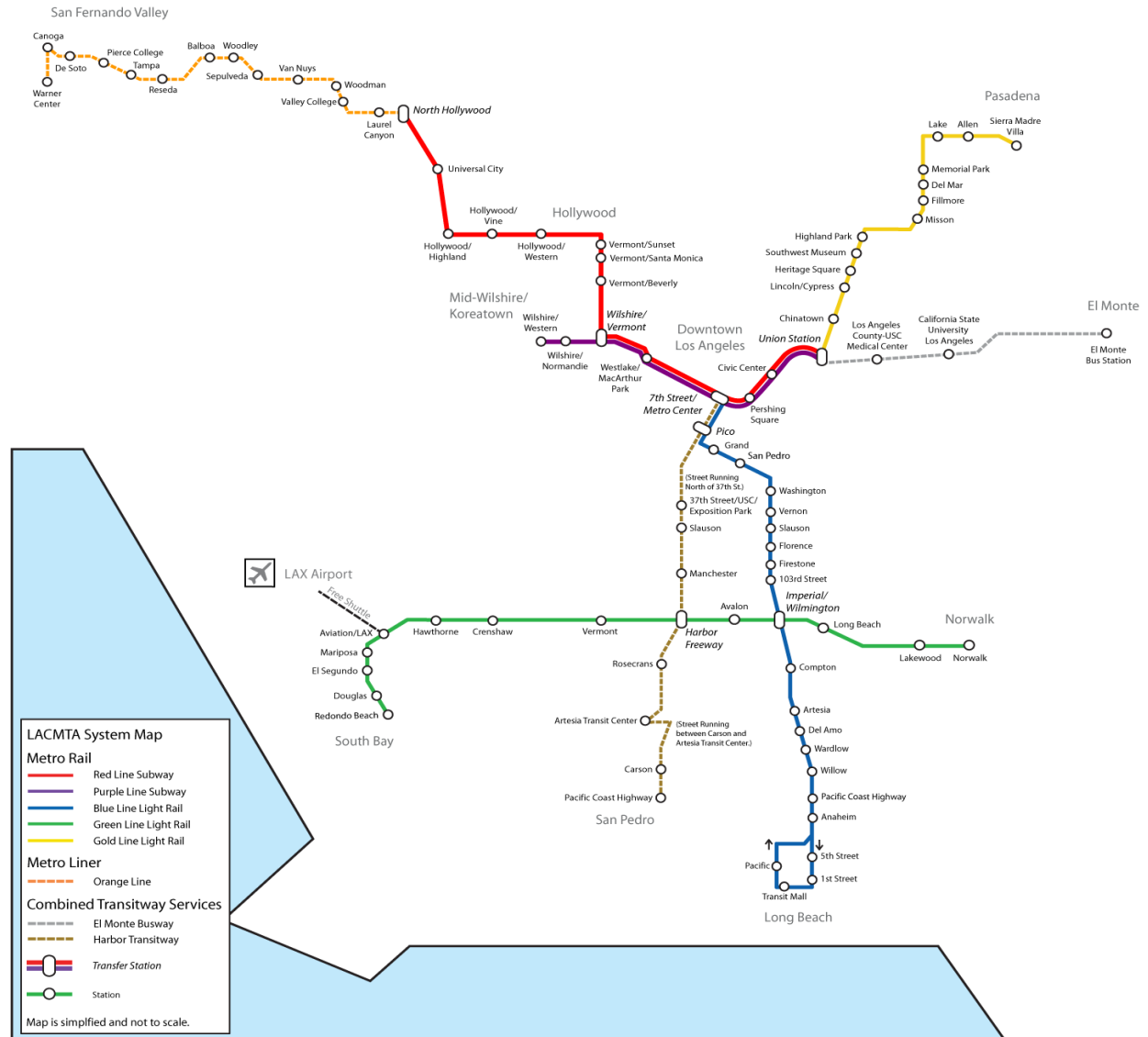
Los Angeles also has a medium-sized, and expanding, subway/light rail system to help speed up journeys around the city. The [Metro Rail](#) station may suffice to take you to some of the tourist areas such as Hollywood, Universal Studios, Chinatown and Long Beach. However, those who plan to go to outlying areas would have to take multiple buses. A single-trip fare can be purchased from ticket vending machines located in the stations.

The other rail system is [Metrolink](#). Metrolink is a commuter rail system that reaches as far as Ventura, Lancaster, San Bernardino, and Oceanside (northern San Diego County) but runs limited night and weekend service. Metrolink does not accept Metro passes and requires the purchase of separate tickets.

Another option to the railways is the Metro Rapid buses. They come more frequently and make fewer stops than local buses and should be used when possible. Remember that many cities in the metro area

(including Santa Monica, Culver City, Long Beach, Santa Clarita, and Ontario to name a few) operate their own bus agencies, independent of the Metro, thus charging different fares.

- [Metro Rapid Bus and Rail](#) – Major operator of bus and rail service in Los Angeles.
- [MetroLink](#) – A commuter rail system that links Los Angeles to the surrounding areas.



LA Metro Map courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#). Find the full resolution map [here](#)

Taxis

Taxis can be expensive in LA. You cannot flag them down on the street, but can call one of the taxi companies to send a cab to pick you up. You may have to wait awhile for a taxi to get to you depending on where you are. Remember, this city generally experiences a lot of traffic and is very spread out. Thus the overwhelming majority of citizens have their own vehicles; hence, cabs are expensive and less involved in the movement of people than in cities like New York, Chicago or Washington, DC.

Taxi companies:

- [Yellowcab](#)
- [Taxicab LA](#)

Taxi Alternatives/Car Rentals

There are number of car rental companies operating in Los Angeles. Many of these companies have locations close by the airport. Some of the following are suggestions depending on your budget.

- [Dollar Rent A Car](#) or [Budget Rent A Car](#)
- [Hertz](#) and [Avis](#) are generally more expensive.
- [Zipcar Rental](#)
- [LA Times Car Rental Tips and Tricks](#)

Bicycle

Cycling in Los Angeles accounts for less than one percent of all work commutes. This small number despite the mild weather is mainly due to the roads. There are not enough cycle lanes and the city is way too big. Recently, the city unveiled a new 2.2-mile bike lane stretching along 7th Street from Catalina Avenue in Korea town to Figueroa Street downtown. Similarly you can bike along the Hollywood Walk of Fame or one of Los Angeles's famous beaches. In order to get to these places, both the Metro Bus and Metro Rail services are bicycle accessible. For Los Angeles bike maps, click [here](#).

Airports

The Los Angeles metro area is served by five major commercial airports and more than a dozen private airports. Three of the major airports are in LA County proper while the other two are nearby. **Los Angeles International Airport** is one of the major ports of entry for international flights to the United States as well as a major destination for domestic flights so it can be quite busy, especially around holidays. Most of the major airlines as well as some smaller regional airlines fly into LAX. All of the major rental car agencies have a location near the airport with hundreds of cars available for rent. **Bob Hope Airport** has Alaska, Delta Airlines, JetBlue, US Airways, Southwest, and United Airlines as their carriers and the airport is located north-east of Downtown. Alaska Airlines, Delta, US Airways, and JetBlue Airways fly into **Long Beach Airport** airport located in southern Los Angeles County. **Ontario International Airport** is a 40 minute drive east of Downtown Los Angeles and **John Wayne Airport** is Located 40 mi (64 km) and a 45 min drive south-east of Downtown Los Angeles.

- [Los Angeles International Airport](#)
- [Bob Hope Airport](#)
- [Long Beach Airport](#)
- [John Wayne Airport](#)
- [Ontario International Airport](#)

Map Websites

- www.maps.google.com
- www.expedia.com
- www.mapquest.com
- www.mapblast.com

Transportation “App” Options

Several web based phone applications to secure a driver are available throughout the area. The driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS. Payment is automatic through the app and fares may be cheaper than a taxi.

- [Uber](#)
- [Lyft](#)

AAA Travel Protection

AAA is a membership organization that offers benefits such as roadside service and towing, discounts on car products and services, maps, reference materials, etc.

Call 1-800-352-5382 for additional information and cost. www.aaa.com

Social Security Procedures

United States Social Security Administration

1-800-772-1213

www.ssa.gov

Upon arrival in the United States, employees holding work visas will be required to apply, in person, for a Social Security number. The Application for a Social Security Card (SS-5) can be used by anyone who has never been issued a card, needs a replacement card or has changed his or her name. Your IOR Destination Services Consultant will assist you with this process and can answer any questions you might have.

THIS SERVICE IS FREE.

To get an original number and card, you'll need to complete an Application for a Social Security Card ([Form SS-5](#)), and show the following documents IN PERSON at the local social security office.

- Passport
- [I-94](#)
- Work Visa
- Any other documents received by US Immigration

If all of your information is confirmed, your Social Security card will arrive in the mail in approximately 2-4 weeks. Several days after you have successfully completed the application process, you may be able to take your identification with your receipt back to the Social Security office to inquire about your Social Security number before you receive your card.

L-2 Visa Employment Opportunity Law Changes

The L-2 visa allows the dependent spouse and minor, unmarried children of qualified L-1 visa holders to enter into the U.S.

Changes took place on July 27, 2006 that apply to spouses of L-1 Visa holders in the US on an L2 Visa. Prior to that date, spouses on L-2 Visas were not permitted to obtain a social security card and were denied the right to be employed in the US. The law change now permits L-2 Visa holders (spouses only, not dependent children) to work on a full-time basis in the U.S. with proper employment authorization from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The L-2 Visa holder must apply for a social security card in addition to applying for an Employment Authorization Document before they can begin employment.

Social Security Numbers

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has issued guidelines, which permit E-1, E-2, and L-2 spouses to obtain Social Security Numbers without having to first obtain employment.

Authorization Documents (EADs) from the CIS. They must show proof that their spouse is in E-1, E-2 or L-1 status, and present an original marriage certificate, in the native language. However, before they are authorized to work, they must obtain an EAD. [The new SSA guidelines are online here.](#)

Employment Authorization Document (EAD): L-2 Visa holders can apply for this document utilizing USCIS Form 1-765, Application for Employment Authorization. They must provide the following forms of identification: valid passport, 1-94 Arrival-Departure Document, Marriage Certificate from home country, two identical, and color photographs taken within 30 days of application. Currently, the process from application to EAD issue takes 3 to 4 months. The L2 Visa holder may also engage in full-time study in the US. A dependent child still may not apply for an EAD card except in cases of severe hardship. Local offices are open Monday thru Friday 9am to 4pm.

****Notice**** Social Security offices are closed on all US Federal holidays.

Obtaining a Driver's License

In the US, a driver's license is issued by each individual state and not by the federal government in Washington DC. Since there is no national identity card in the USA and many Americans don't have a passport, a driver's license issued by your state is the only official piece of identification for many citizens. Since 9/11, you will need to show a valid driver's license to enter many big office buildings.

If you are a visitor in California over 18 and have a valid driver license from your home state or country, you may drive in this state without getting a California driver license as long as your home state license remains valid.

If you become a California resident, you must get a California driver license within 10 days. Residency is established by voting in a California election, paying resident tuition, filing for a homeowner's property tax exemption, or any other privilege or benefit not ordinarily extended to nonresidents.

To apply for an original driver license if you are over 18, you will need to do the following:

- Make an appointment before visiting a DMV office (walk-ins are only accepted at our [Driver License Processing Centers](#)).
- Complete application form DL 44 (An original DL 44 form must be submitted. Copies will not be accepted.)
- Give a thumb print
- Have your picture taken
- Provide your social security number. It will be verified with the Social Security Administration while you are in the office.

- Verify your [birth date and legal presence](#)
- [Provide your true full name](#)
- [Pay the application fee](#)
- Pass a vision exam
- Pass a traffic laws and sign test. [Sample Test](#))

Note: To allow you sufficient time for testing DMV will not be administering written or audio exams after 4:30 p.m.

- [For information on how to obtain a driver's license, see the website of LA's DMV](#)
- [General Information about drivers licenses](#)
- [For information on how to obtain a driver's license, see the website of LA's DMV](#)
- [General Information about drivers licenses](#)
- [Special information for drivers from other nations](#)

Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you with this process.

TV, Cable, Telephone, and Internet

The main service providers for TV cable, landline telephone and internet all offer combination packages. They are in stiff competition with each other, so special offers change monthly, sometimes even weekly.

- [AT&T](#)
- [Comcast](#)
- [DirectTV](#)
- [Dish](#)

Mobile Phones

There are four major wireless carriers in the area.

- [AT&T Wireless](#)
- [Verizon Wireless](#)
- [Sprint](#)
- [T-Mobile](#)

Computers, Electronics, Cameras

- [Fry's Home Electronics](#)
- [Best Buy](#) is a national chain: Apart from sales, their [Geek Squad](#) repairs PC computers.
- [Apple Stores](#)

Housewares and Furniture

- [Bed Bath & Beyond](#)
- [Ikea](#)
- [Pottery Barn](#)
- [Williams-Sonoma](#)
- [Rooms to Go](#)
- [The Container Store](#)

Food Shopping

The people in Los Angeles go to a wide range of places to shop for groceries: open air farmers markets, large gourmet markets, small specialty shops and conventional supermarkets. The main conventional supermarkets are **Ralph's, Von's, Albertson's, Pavilion's, Gelson's, Bristol Farm and Trader's Joes**. They are located all over town and the surrounding areas.

[The Grand Central Market](#) offers fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, poultry and fresh fish from California and around the world. The Grand Central Market has been a hub of bustling activity since 1917 and is a great place to experience the international diversity of Los Angeles.

[Whole Foods Market](#) specializes in organic products and has several locations.

[Farmers Markets](#): For those looking to get their goods directly from the producer, there are a growing number of farmers markets popping up across LA. From fresh produce to prepared foods, here you can find popular places doing the mobile market concept right.

List of Ethnic/ International Markets in Los Angeles:

- [Yellowpages](#)
- [Food Lover's Guide to Los Angeles](#)



Sightseeing

It would take several lifetimes to experience all the activities that the city of Los Angeles has to offer. There are world famous theme parks like Universal Studios Hollywood, Six Flags Magic Mountain and Disneyland, while there are also studios like Universal, Warner Brothers, Paramount Pictures and Sony Pictures that offer the ultimate movie and TV fan experience. Attractions like the USS Iowa and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library offer something for the entire family. Shop at retail meccas like The Grove and the Beverly Center, or browse eclectic shopping neighborhoods and bargain outlets. Recreational activities include spectacular beaches, hundreds of miles of hiking and biking trails, and relaxing at LA's top spas.

The sights of Hollywood are great places to check out in Los Angeles. There are Hollywood landmarks located throughout the city, including Grauman's Chinese Theater, the Hollywood Sign overlooking the area, and the Hollywood Walk of Fame where more than 2,400 five-pointed terrazzo and brass stars are embedded in the over 15 blocks. If you have a celeb obsession, walking in the glamorous neighborhoods of Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, and Malibu may increase your chances of running into one of them. Even if you don't, the area is a great area to see the glamorous celebrity mansions and fancy restaurants.



For those more into the history of LA will also have a great time going through Olvera Street in Downtown. Olvera Street is the site of the original *pueblo* (village) the city derived its name from (*Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Ángeles* - Our Lady the Queen of the Angels) and is the historic central of LA. The oldest building in the city is also located here and is open to visitors, as are a number of Mexican restaurants and shops. Across the street is another historic site: Union Station, the main railway hub for the city.

- [Beverly Hills](#)
- [Grauman's Chinese Theatre](#)
- [Hollywood Sign](#)
- [Hollywood Walk of Fame](#)
- [Malibu](#)
- [Olvera Street](#)
- [West Hollywood](#)



Photo of Chinese Theatre

Arts and Culture

One of the best ways to experience Los Angeles is by visiting its incredible cultural attractions. LA has more museums and theaters than any U.S. city, and a thriving music and gallery scene. The LA Philharmonic performance at Walt Disney Concert Hall is a must-see, as well as an outdoor concert at the Hollywood Bowl and shows at other famous music venues. LA's world class museums include the stunning Getty Center in Brentwood and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Museum Row. Monthly art walks take place throughout the city, including popular events in Downtown LA and Venice Beach. And of course, when it comes to film and television, LA is the entertainment capital of the world.

One venue you cannot miss is the Walt Disney Concert Hall at the Music Center. It is considered to be an architectural masterpiece by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry, and is a modern marvel/ Los Angeles icon. It is a dynamic, 293,000-square-foot concert hall that features a wavy, steel exterior designed to look like a ship with its sails at full mast. The arena stage, allows for seating on all four sides of the stage. It was designed to be one of the most acoustically sophisticated concert halls in the world, providing both visual and aural intimacy for an unparalleled musical experience. Currently, it is home of the LA Phil and the Los Angeles Master Chorale, a perfect location to experience the acoustic and vocal range of these world-famous performing companies.

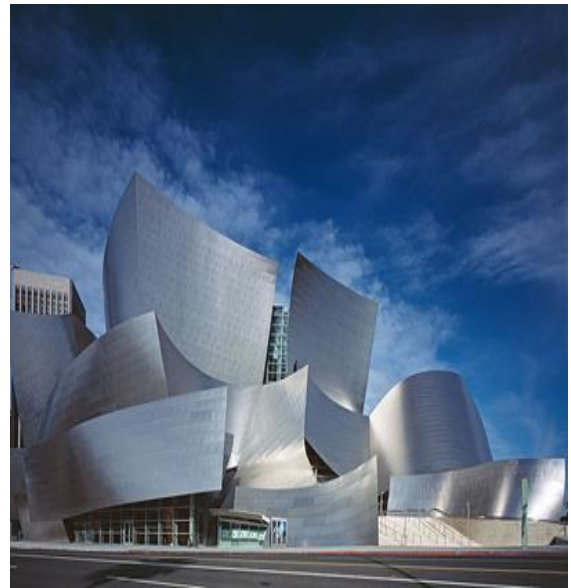


Photo of Walt Disney Concert Hall

There are also other venues that host excellent performing arts in Los Angeles. Theater is a huge deal in LA and has the highest number of theaters in the US and more than 1,500 productions per year. At the top of the theater companies lay the Center Theater Group, producing world-class dramas and musicals at the Mark Taper Forum and the Ahmanson Theatre located at the Music Center. Iris by Cirque de Soleil is also a fun option. IRIS is a lyrical, fanciful, kinetic foray through the world of cinema bringing together dance, acrobatics, live video and filmed sequences and takes spectators on a fantastic voyage through the history of cinema and its genres. IRIS is performed exclusively at the world-renowned Kodak Theatre at Hollywood & Highland Center.

World class cultural attractions are also located throughout Los Angeles. LA has more museums than any other city in America. Downtown LA's Exposition Park includes the California Science Center, the Natural History Museum and the California African American Museum. Museum Row features the LA County Museum of Art, the La Brea Tar Pits and the Petersen Automotive Museum. The collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum can be viewed at the Getty Center in Brentwood and the Getty Villa in Malibu. Pasadena is home to the Norton Simon Museum and the Pacific Asia Museum, while history buffs can tour the

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum in Simi Valley. LA's thriving gallery scene can be experienced in Chinatown, Bergamot Station and the NoHo Arts District, as well as monthly artwalks.

Cultural Attractions

- [California African American Museum](#)
- [California Science Center](#)
- [Center Theater Group](#)
- [Getty Center](#)
- [Iris by Cirque de Soleil](#)
- [La Brea Tar Pits](#)
- [LA Philharmonic](#)
- [Los Angeles Master Chorale](#)
- [Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Museum Row](#)
- [Monthly art walks](#)
- [Natural History Museum](#)
- [Norton Simon Museum](#)
- [Petersen Automotive Museum](#)
- [Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum](#)

Parks/ Studios

The glam and attraction of LA also comes from the top-notch amusement parks and shows in the area. Universal City is home to the Universal Studios Hollywood theme park, while nearby Burbank is home to the Warner Brothers Studios and NBC Studios, among others. On the West Side in Culver City, you will find the historic Culver Studios and Sony Pictures. In Fairfax, CBS Television City, and the headquarters of 20th Century Fox in Century City. Walt Disney Land is located 30 minutes from the city in Anaheim and Six Flags Magic Mountain is up north 40 minutes in Valencia. With so many diverse amusement parks, it is most likely that there is a park just fit for you and your family's needs. Browse away and find the best one just for you!



- [Universal Studios Hollywood theme park](#)
- [Walt Disney Land](#)
- [Six Flags Magic Mountain](#)
- [Warner Brothers Studios](#)
- [Culver Studios](#)
- [Sony Pictures](#)

Festivals and Holidays

Los Angeles is famous for their music festivals. They are divided by genres and held mostly over the spring and summer. The following are some of the festivals; L.A. Live is three days and nights of the most popular music and entertainment today held in June. The Ragga Muffins Festival takes place every February at the Long Beach Convention Center. It features two full days of entertainment from top reggae acts from around the world, as well as related Rasta vendors and food. The Sunset Strip Music Festival is a 3-day multi-venue event that takes place in August at clubs and Saturday on outdoor stages on the Sunset Strip through West Hollywood. The Central Avenue Jazz Festival takes place annually in July in South Los Angeles. The free, family-friendly event features, jazz, blues and Latin jazz from high school bands to internationally renowned musicians.

There are other festivals surrounding arts such as the Los Angeles Film Festival. It is the best of American and international independent cinema and includes panels, seminars, music video showcases, high school programs, family-friendly activities, and numerous special events, including everything from gala premieres to free outdoors screenings. The Los Angeles International Short Film Festival held in September is also interesting as it is the largest short film festival in the world. The festival screens over 400 short films with informational panel discussions, workshops, and a development market.

As a multiethnic area there is no absence of international festivals. There are huge Chinese New Year celebrations accompanied by the Golden Dragon Parade. The Latino Community also has various events such as the largest celebration of Cinco de Mayo within the United States. Olvera Street and Fiesta Broadway are some examples of where this ethnic street festival takes place. The Japanese Community also sponsors festivals such as Japanese New Years and Children's Day.



In addition, all nationwide holidays are celebrated extravagantly with LA flare such as 4th of July at various points throughout the city, the Hollywood Christmas Parade during the Holiday seasons, New Year's Rose parade followed by the countdown in downtown. Due to an abundance of events and festivals going on in the area, it is impossible to list all. Go to the events sites below and look for ones that best fits your taste!

- [Chinese Community](#)
- [Cinco De Mayo LA](#)
- [LA Film Festival](#)
- [Los Angeles International Short Film Festival](#)
- [Los Angeles Music Festivals List](#)

- [L.A Live](#)
- [List of events](#)

Spectator Sports

LA has great opportunities for seeing live pro sports. For baseball lovers there is the major league baseball team, **LA Dodgers** playing at the Dodger Stadium. Who wouldn't want to grab a Dodger Dog and enjoy watching a game of baseball in this venerable stadium which opened in 1962 and home of 6 time world champions? Also, you can get all-you-can-eat hot dogs, sodas, and nachos at the Right Field Pavilion.

Those who have passion for basketball there is the NBA team, **LA Lakers** playing at the Staples Center. Ticket prices are very high (the most expensive ticket in the NBA) but you will rarely be disappointed with the team and the beautiful Staples Center. LA has a second NBA team, **LA Clippers**. The Los Angeles Clippers are a rising NBA team and tickets are slightly cheaper than Lakers tickets. The basketball season runs from late October to June. For those looking for more basketball to follow, LA also has a women's team, the **LA Sparks**. The Sparks are a good, inexpensive family outing and a chance to be shown that women are just as capable of dazzling the crowd with their athletic prowess as men!!

LA also boasts an amazing hockey team, **the LA Kings**. They are one of the NHL's brightest young teams. The game guarantees a fun hockey experience and a great, affordable way to experience the Staples Center. The city also has two soccer teams—**Chivas USA** and the **LA Galaxy** of Major League Soccer play at the Home Depot Center in Carson.



Participant Sports

Los Angeles surprisingly offers various outlets to exercise and be involved in the community. There are number of parks both large and small throughout the city. One great park in the area for hikes, picnics or hanging around with friends is **Griffith Park**. It is the second largest park within a city in the whole country (and in LA, where you'd least expect it!) and the hiking trails lead up to Mulholland Drive, and provide great views of the city. Griffith park has several options for kids, including the L.A. Zoo, "Travel Town" which is a free exhibition of old trains and model trains with trains rides for children, the Autry western museum, pony rides, a golf course, driving range, horseback riding, a Christmas light drive in December (expect traffic), and The (Space) Observatory.

In addition, LA's 75 miles of coastline include world famous beaches from Malibu to Santa Monica, the South Bay and San Pedro where people can engage in activities like swimming, skateboarding and surfing. Skate boarding is especially a big sport in Los Angeles with many impressive [skate parks](#) featuring ramps, bowls and rails. Some to note are Belvedere Skatepark, Culver City Skatepark and the cove.



Hiking

There are also many [hiking trails](#) in the area. Most of the hikes in the list below are easy to moderate, so it's not necessary to be an experienced hiker to enjoy them. However, it's always wise to keep a few things in mind when you're planning an excursion. Wear sturdy hiking shoes, carry plenty of drinking water, use sunscreen and wear sunglasses. Take along a camera, make sure you stay on the trails and have fun.



Golf

Finally, Los Angeles is also home to beautiful [public golf courses](#). For example Trump National Golf Club Los Angeles is the pinnacle of the luxury public golf experience. Located on the luxurious Palos Verdes Peninsula, Trump National serves as a perfect getaway for the busy executive. The grand 45,000 square foot clubhouse offers stately locker rooms, a stunning pro-shop, three dining options, secluded conference rooms, and a magnificent grand ballroom. It's a great getaway from everyday life and where everyone can spend a special moment.

Shopping and Dining

Shopping is one of the best activities in Los Angeles, whether it's digging through vintage stores or window-shopping for extravagant luxury goods. The Los Angeles shopping experience begins in the sprawling LA Fashion District in Downtown LA, and from there it's choosing from top shopping centers like [The Grove](#), Beverly Center, Hollywood & Highland, The Americana at Brand, Third Street Promenade or Santa Monica Place. Eclectic shopping neighborhoods can be found throughout Los Angeles, while the city's numerous museum gift shops offer a variety of unique cultural gifts. If you've got deep pockets, Rodeo Drive and Robertson Blvd. are must-sees, while bargain hunters will want to check out the outlets in Camarillo, the Citadel, Desert Hills and Ontario Mills.

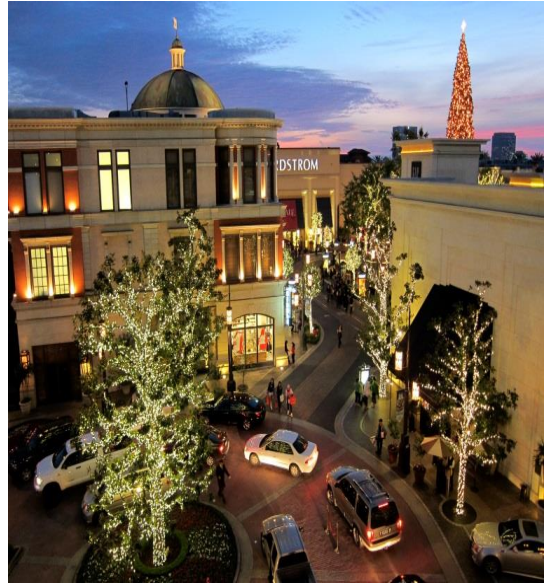


Photo of The Grove

In terms of dining, Los Angeles has one of the most dynamic dining scenes in the country, offering everything from street food to 5-star restaurants. From California cuisine to organic ingredients, food trucks, and dine LA Restaurant Week, LA's culinary influence can be felt across the country. Food aficionados can experience the fine dining of Wolfgang Puck, Thomas Keller and Nobu Matsuhisa, as well as a new generation of culinary stars like Kogi BBQ Truck founder Roy Choi, Top Chef champion Michael Voltaggio, and Ricardo Zarate, named Food & Wine's Best New Chef in America. Global kitchens can be found in culinary neighborhoods across the city, while LA's beach cities offer some of the best oceanfront dining in Southern California.



Photo courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Expat Resource Guide

- www.expatechange.com

Google Translator

- [Translate](#) 90 languages to and from language of choice using iTunes.

Volunteer Opportunities

- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [United Way](#)

Parent & Children Resources

- [Mom's Clubs](#) - social groups offering events and outings with mothers and their young children.

Smart Phone Apps for Travel:

- [Uber](#) : Similar to a taxi service but all web based. Payment also handled online, do not pay or tip driver directly. Uber driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS.
- [Lyft](#) : Wherever you're headed, count on Lyft for rides in minutes. The Lyft app matches you with local drivers at the tap of a button. Just request and go.
- [Google Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Apple Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Map Quest](#) : Map by direction
- [Waze](#) : Community based traffic & navigation with alternate route suggestions
- [CityMaps2Go](#) : The #1 travel app lets you discover exciting new places. Beautiful photos and insider tips at the touch of a button. You will receive stories about places you like and can instantly save and find them on your maps and in your lists.

Smart Phone Apps for Communication:

- [WhatsApp](#) : Free local & international Real Time messaging
- [Line](#) : Exchange free instant messages with friends whenever and wherever with one-on-one and group chats. LINE is available on all smartphone devices (iPhone, Android, Windows Phone, Blackberry, Nokia) and even on your PC.
- [Viber](#) : Free text, calling, photo messages and location-sharing with Viber users. No registration, alias or invitations required. Instantly integrates with your own contact list. Best-quality mobile calls using 3G or Wi-Fi.
- [Skype](#) : Stay in touch with your family and friends for free on Skype. Download Skype today to chat and call on desktop and mobile.

Smart Phone Apps for Local Information/Reviews:

- [Angie's List](#) : Referrals for doctor, dentist, child care, maid, mechanic, painter, plumber, etc.
- [Yelp!](#) : Find local businesses, restaurants, bars, clubs, events, etc. with map, lists, and reviews
- [Next Door](#) : Neighbors share community events, items for sale, recommendations for babysitters, doctors and handymen, crime reports, ideas about how to improve their neighborhood and more.
- [Meet Ups](#) : Meetups are neighbors getting together to learn something, do something or share something. Cultural groups advertise gatherings here as well.

Smart Phone Apps for Weather:

- [WTHR13](#) : Local weather and closings; includes radar and forecast
- [Weather Channel](#) : National and international time, temperature & weather
- [Tornado](#) : Set up tornado alerts & siren

U.S. IDIOMS

Idioms are words, phrases, or expressions that are not taken literally- they have meaning beyond a literal translation of the words. Idioms are generally used in casual, familiar conversation but can also come up in certain business settings. Here are some examples of commonly used American English idioms:

better off - in a more fortunate position

Big deal! - So what? That doesn't really matter.

(to) blow things out of proportion - to exaggerate; to make more of something than one should

(to) call it a night - to stop an activity for the rest of the night

dime a dozen - so plentiful as to be nothing special; common

(to) do the trick - to achieve the desired results

(to) give someone the cold shoulder - to ignore someone on purpose; to snub someone

(to) get the ball rolling - to get started

(to) go back to the drawing board - to start a task over because the last try failed; to start again from the beginning

happy camper [slang] - a happy person; a satisfied participant

(to) have a heart of gold - to be very kind and giving

(to be) head over heels in love - very much in love

(to) hit the nail on the head - to be right

(to) learn the ropes - to learn the basics

(to) lose one's touch - to no longer be able to do something well

made of money - very rich

needless to say - obviously

piece of cake - very easy

(to) pitch in - to help

(to) pull an all-nighter - to stay up all night to do work

rule of thumb - a useful principle

(as) sharp as a tack - very intelligent

(to) sit tight - to wait patiently

(to) stab someone in the back - to betray someone

(to) tell someone off - to scold; to tell someone in strong words what one really thinks

When pigs fly! [slang] - never

(to) twist someone's arm - to persuade someone; to convince someone

(to be) up in the air - not yet determined; uncertain

Many common American idioms come from sports, here are some examples:

strike out- to fail or to do poorly at something (*baseball*)

(to) call the shots- to make the decisions; to be in charge (*basketball*)

ballpark- a guess or an estimate (*baseball*)

down and out- lacking money or prospects; penniless or destitute (*boxing*)

down to the wire- to the very end or last minute (*horse racing*)

drop the ball- to make an error, to miss an opportunity (*football, baseball, rugby*)

hands down- with great ease; unconditionally; often (and originally) in the phrase “to win hands down” (*horse racing*)

(to) have someone in your corner- to have the support or help of someone (*boxing*)

(to) hit it out of the park; home run- to be wildly successful, to do a great job (*baseball*)



To learn even more idioms, visit the following links:

- [Everyday American English Idioms](#) - with example sentences.
- [Useful Idioms for Lower-Intermediate to Advanced Students \(Teacher's Resource\)](#)
- [Idiom Site A-Z](#)
- [Sports Idioms](#)
- [English Language Learning: American English Idioms](#)

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

[Federal Holidays listed through 2020](#)

[California Legal Holidays](#)

The following are legal holidays in California and need to be treated as such by employers:

- New Year's Day January 1*
- Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday January 21
- Good Friday March 29
- Memorial Day Last Monday in May
- Independence Day July 4*
- Labor Day First Monday in September
- Veterans' Day November 11*
- Thanksgiving Day Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day December 25*

*If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the day following is observed as the legal holiday.