

California offers visitors diversity and beauty

By David Warner

California is a state of remarkable geographic diversity and natural beauty. Its terrain varies from the steep and majestic Sierra Nevada to the bone-dry Mojave Desert to the sunny beaches of its southern coast. Visitors can downhill ski in the morning, take a leisurely drive at noon and go surfing in the afternoon.

The Golden State also is a state of many "countries" and attractions. There's the Mother Lode Country, the Wine Country, the Redwood Country, the Russian River Region, the Feather River Country, the Desert Country, the Big Sur Country, the Eastern Sierra Region, the southern coast. Each has its own distinct flavor and personality.

San Diego is famous for its clean air, miles of beaches, perfect weather and crescent bay. San Diegans call it a garden, America's finest city.

San Francisco, by contrast, is a confederation of neighborhoods — the Mission District, Chinese, Nob Hill — adding to its cosmopolitan appeal. And the haze and fog punctuate the mystique of this curious city, which columnist Herb Caen dubbed "Baghdad by the Bay."

Los Angeles is, of course, the mother of glamorous Hollywood and opulent Beverly Hills.

The state attracts caravans of cold-weather refugees from December through April, but the best rates are available in the off season. May and September are particularly good times to visit, offering low prices, few tourists and beautiful weather.

Among California's most enduring and popular attractions are its 21 missions — stretching from San Diego, where the first mission (San Diego del Alcalá) was founded in 1769, north to San Francisco Solano, where the last of the mission chain was founded in 1823. Along the way are missions in San Jose, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Juan Bautista, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and San Juan Capistrano among others.

The guiding hand behind the missions was Father Junipero Serra, a Franciscan friar whom historians call the founder of California. His goal — aided by 15 monks in gray-brown cowls — was to dedicate themselves to the task of civilizing the Indian natives and winning them for God.

The missions formed a chain of civilized outposts along the Pacific coast. Each had its herd of cattle, its fields and vegetable gardens tended by Indians whom the padres taught to build irrigation systems. They became weavers, masons, carpenters and blacksmiths. Thus, the missions could be nearly self-sustaining, although they did receive clothing, furniture, implements and tools from New Spain in exchange for their surplus of meal, wine, oil, hemp, hides and tallow.

Presidios with small military staffs were estab-



lished to protect the missions from hostile natives and possible invaders. Gradually, small towns, later cities, began to grow around the missions and presidios. The missions were more than churches, and their establishment more than religious. "Mission style" buildings, for example, continue to strongly influence architectural style in California. And Father Serra and his monks definitely left their mark, baptizing some 6,000 Indians and confirming almost 5,000.

For more information on California, travelers may contact the California Office of Tourism, 1121 L St., Suite 103, Sacramento, CA 95814, or call a travel agent.

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