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California Fun For A Few, A Hardship For Many

BY KERRY JACKSON

California is the most fun state in the country. So says the website WalletHub. It can't be fun for everyone, though. Many would say living in California is a miserable existence.

If the standard for fun is measured by the vast opportunities of things to do, things to see, no state can compare. California clearly offers the most fun. There are nearly 900 miles of coastline. No one has more beautiful mountains. There's wine country in the north, and in the south. Big Sur, El Capitan, and Mount Shasta are matchless treasures. As is Lake Tahoe and the many other fresh-water retreats around the state.

California has big-city energy, quiet countryside, and three separate deserts. The state has 16 teams in the four major sports leagues, more than 1,000 museums, and is overflowing with concert venues, amusement parks, fine restaurants, movie theaters, performing arts theaters, and nightlife.

Yet living in California is a grim experience for far too many.

There's nothing more joyless than the steep housing costs, a bleeding wound that leaves millions without enough money left over to enjoy what the state has to offer. After paying household expenses, the bulk of which go to mortgage payments or rent checks, a median California household earning \$2,453.19 per paycheck has just 7.58% of its income left over, according to Cameron Huddleston,

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the life and money columnist at GoBankingRates. Only in the playland of Hawaii do the residents have fewer dollars remaining after household expenses are paid.

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Worse than living in an unaffordable home is having no home at all, which is for many their Golden State experience. Though 12% of the U.S. population lives in California, it's "home" to as much as 25% of the country's homeless.

Part of the "fun" of living in, working in, or visiting San Francisco is stepping around human feces and hypodermic needles left on the streets by the homeless, whose numbers spiked 17 percent over 2018. In Los Angeles, where the homeless population has increased by 12%, "amusement" means dodging heaps of trash around Skid Row, and avoiding catching one of the medieval diseases or other ills nearly eradicated by modern medicine but showing a resurgence in the city.

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Further ruining California fun are the stiff taxes residents pay. Income taxes are more burdensome in only one state, sales taxes in just seven. State Controller Betty Yee has called California's income tax regime "outdated, unfair, and unreliable."

Businesses are increasingly finding California is a no-fun zone. Taxes are high, regulations smothering, the legal climate uniquely treacherous. So they leave. Joe Vranich, who ran a relocation service in Irvine before escaping to Pennsylvania, found that at least 13,000 companies left the state from 2008 to 2016.

The flight didn't stop there, though—it continues today. Vranich recently told PRI that "in just the last three months I've discovered another 32 companies disinvesting in California. In some instances, companies moved multiple facilities out of state, so the number of events is higher at 39."

The list of companies that have either recently fled or relocated a significant part of their operations includes notable names such as Apple, Aeromax Industries, Blue Buffalo, Crocs, SpaceX, and McKesson Corp.

Who else isn't having fun in California? The victims of the recent upswings in both violent and property crimes. The middle class that is leaving in search of better opportunities. The working class that, as Chapman University professor Joel Kotkin has put it, "suffers the consequences" of ideas from progressives, who "in their militant certitude, support left-wing policies that often don't affect them." The independent-minded weary of the state's wholly unnecessary virtue-signaling war on plastic and other modern consumer conveniences, such as electricity produced by fossil fuels.

Neither have the farmers who've been left dry by man-made drought, nor the residents and business owners who've lost so much to the wildfires that have raged due to policymakers' neglect had much fun in recent years. The future is cloudy for workers who rely on the gig economy, as it is for those who cannot break into the workforce because they're being blocked by cruel occupational licensing requirements.

Too much of the fun has been ripped out from under the warm California sun.

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