USA

CALIFORNIA

California, or the Golden State, is the most populous state of the USA. It is located in the West, bordered by the Pacific Ocean. California has a long coast but most of the diving is done in SoCal, the southern part of the state.

You can dive the whole year round but most divers like fall and winter most. Sea temperatures at depth (18m/60ft) stay around the same amount of degrees, 11C/52F. Only at the surface they change more, from 15C/60F to 22C/72F. It is recommended to wear at least a 7mm full wetsuit or dry suit, a hood, gloves and booties. Dives are done from shore or from boats.  
Visibility can change lots. A normal day has a vis of 5m/16ft. It can be worse (3m/10ft) or lots better (15m/50ft). Check the tides table. High tide brings better visibility. Around the islands, the vis can be even better.

California diving is world-famous for its kelp forests. Kelp is a brown macro-algae that can grow up to 60cm/2ft a day. They form a habitat for many marine mammals and fish, like Seals, Sea Lions, Sea Otters, Horn Sharks, Rock Fish, Garibladi and Grey Whales. Wear a divers knife while diving the kelp. You can easily get stuck.

There are 4 main diving areas in SoCal. Around San Diego, you can dive La Jolla Cove Eco Reserve or La Jolla Point. You cruise through the kelp forest trying to find sea lions or leopard sharks. People that like wrecks more, can go to Wreck Alley. Different ships, some sunk intentionally, a fighter aircraft, a NOSC tower and a bridge form artificial reefs. Some of these wrecks are at 40m/130ft depth, so you need to have your Deep Spec or be a tech diver.

Catalina Island is part of the southern Channel Islands. It lies 35km/22mi to the south-southwest of LA. A roundtrip with the ferry from LA to Avalon, the islands biggest city, takes around an hour.  
Catalina has the Avalon Underwater Dive Park, the first non-profit underwater park in the US. In the waters surrounding the island, you will see flying fish, the orange Garibaldi, Leopard sharks, Giant Seabass, Seals and Sea Lions. Maybe you can spot a Great White too!

The Northern Channel Islands, Santa Barbara, San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Anacapa and Santa Cruz are a National Park. Together, they form a National Marine Sanctuary. The “Look but don’t touch” rule is for certain in place. You reach the separate islands by boat leaving from Ventura or Oxnard. The islands are surrounded by kelp forests and sea lion rookeries. More than 150 boats sunk around the islands but only 25 are discovered and some are diveable. There is also a guardian plane wreck near Santa Cruz.  
Migrating whales pass through the islands channels. Grey Whales (winter), Humpback Whales (summer), and the largest of them all, the Blue Whales (summer) can be seen.

As last we have Monterey Bay, south of San Francisco and San Jose. Just like the other SoCal diving places, Monterey Bay has its kelp forests. Sea otters, harbour seals and elephant seals are inhabitants of the bay. In migrating season, Humpbacks and Grey Whales pass by, sometimes followed by Orcas preying on the Grey Whale calves.