

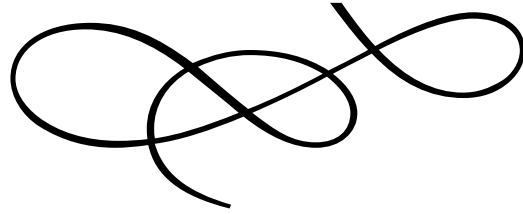


SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Mecca of International Hospitality



Kelly Oto explains why the Orange County is such a popular destination for studying international hospitality



With four decades of living and working in this community, I hold a regional expertise of sorts by sheer default – like that of any other native Californian. Although my passion is travel and I’ve seen a good part of the world, something always brings

me back home to Orange County. It has little to do with nostalgia or apron strings. It is the sense that Southern California is on the pulse of all that is new and forward-looking, and the future is extremely bright. That’s why students looking for the best education in international hospitality are making their pilgrimage to Southern California.

“California, here we come...”

The Golden State has always been the destination of dreams. The Gold Rush days. Hollywood glamour. Disneyland. Beautiful beaches and year-round tans. Surfing and skateboarding, the ultimate in cool – the only thing that even comes close to being as hip as snowboarding, thanks to Olympic gold medallist Shaun White, one of Orange County’s own. Southern California has long been a land where people converge, diversity is a hallmark of the culture, and the force of creativity continues to hold us in awe, be it film, fashion or the latest entrepreneurial idea. Orange County has helped to further solidify the region as the Mecca of international hospitality. The Anaheim Convention Center in Orange County is the largest on the West Coast, and one of the largest in the world. Recently ranked #2 in the nation for hotel occupancy, “the OC,” as some call it – an integral part of the second largest market in America with a vast number of major industries and service organizations

– is a magnet for talented people in every field imaginable and has become a microcosm of the world.

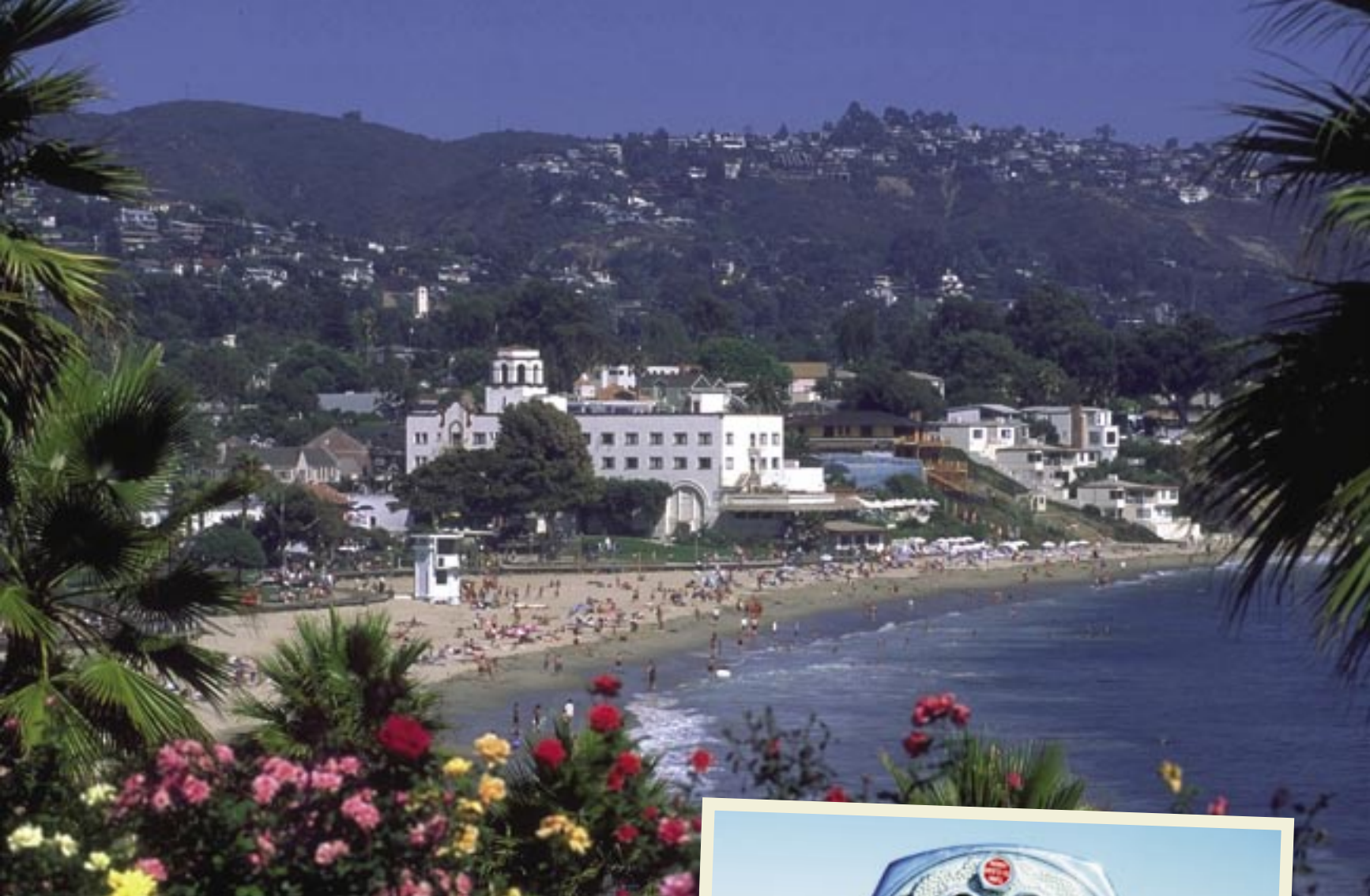
Where business is pleasure

So, it’s not just vacationers looking for fun in the sun and roller coaster rides. As a major center of the hi-tech and finance industries, it’s a place where businesses thrive and organizations flock to for annual conventions. Many high-end hotels and resorts now populate the 42-mile Orange County coastline and offer visitors golf with a view of the ocean, Michelin-quality fine dining, not to mention all of the spa destinations emerging to keep up with the phenomenal boom of that industry. For the business community, hospitality is essential, and this wonderful blend of business and pleasure is part of what makes Southern California so inviting.

A model for global industry

The word is definitely out. Students from around the world come to this international hub of business and hospitality, this full-service destination, to learn and experience firsthand what customers want, need, and are going to demand in today’s global economy. With the quality of customer service increasing, the industry has become highly competitive, and you need that professional edge to get your foot in the door. What’s more, as English continues to be one of the major languages in global business, immersion in the language, dialect (if you’ve ever had the good fortune to visit Australia, you’ll never underestimate the power of slang) and culture is an added bonus that brings invaluable exposure.

Serving global customers is charming and complex at the same time. For example, throughout hotels worldwide, not just in Asia, many hotel breakfasts offer not just the regular fare of waffles, bacon and eggs but full Japanese breakfasts of Miso soup, eggplant, meat and *salad* of all things, which might be considered unusual to the American palate at that hour of day. But the hotels understand and cater to their Japanese patrons. Likewise, hospitality students »



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getting a formal education in the important management aspects of the industry also benefit from simply being abroad and interfacing with other people from different cultures, becoming aware of such nuanced and subtler aspects of global hospitality.

The OC as classroom for overseas market

How important is formal study in this industry? To be recognized as a professional, a certificate establishes necessary credibility. Along with tourists and businesspeople, this melting pot and bubbling area of growth is drawing international students for study in hospitality management programs where they gain not only an American perspective but also a multicultural experience that translates into job opportunities when they return to their home countries. Along with a certificate, internship opportunities in world-class hotel resorts and spas, restaurants, airlines, travel bureaus and convention boards are an ideal way for international students to gain hands-on experience with an emphasis on customer service. Internships, often the deciding factor in selecting a program, provide big advantages: a wealth of exposure in a short amount of time, and work experience to put on your resume, significantly increasing one's marketability in the industry.



The best programs integrate academic site visits as well as trips to local attractions as a part of the curriculum, so that in addition to learning the business aspects of hospitality management such as the HR function, marketing and how to hire and support an excellent staff, they get to walk in the shoes of their customers.

From a global perspective, tourism and hospitality for many countries is the foundation that supports the rest of their economy. When you think about it, international hospitality management involves working with so many people and cultural layers that it has the opportunity to help shape international relations – and change the world. A noble profession, indeed. 

Kelly Oto is a world traveler and Associate Director of Professional Programs, English & Certificate Programs for Internationals at the University of California, Irvine. UC Irvine has an International Hospitality Management Certificate Program under development for 2006