

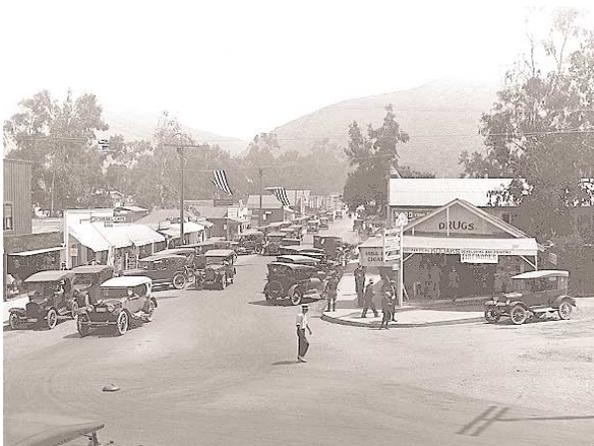
# History and Demographics

## A Brief History of Laguna Beach

Its dramatic coastal location, the growth of tourism, the influence of the arts, the impact of natural disasters, and an active citizenry with a strong internal sense of community have shaped the City's history. The Ute-Azteca Indians first inhabited Laguna's coastal plain characterized by the hidden coves of the Pacific coastline and a unique blend of steep cliffs, rolling hills, and deep canyons. Homesteading families arrived in the late 1800s to stake their claims in downtown Laguna and South Laguna, which unlike surrounding areas, had not been given away as Spanish or Mexican land grants. After planting their requisite ten acres of trees in accordance with the Timber Culture Act of 1871, many of these early homesteaders served summer vacationers seeking rest and relaxation by the sea.

Hotels were among the first establishments in Laguna Beach, with the Laguna Hotel (1896) still accommodating tourists from all over the world. The community has always welcomed visitors as illustrated by the Laguna Beach "Greeters" and the Laguna Gate at the head of Forest Avenue that bears the message "This gate hangs well and hinders none. Refresh and rest, then travel on."

When Norman St. Clair arrived in the picturesque village of Laguna Beach in 1903 he started a tradition. As the first important artist to come to Laguna Beach, St.



Clair and some 30 to 40 other artists seeking ideal weather and magnificent scenery, collectively established the City as an artist colony in 1917. During the Depression, these same artists envisioned the Festival of Arts as an income-producing event, again establishing a creative tradition that also includes the world-renowned Pageant of the Masters. Together these events attract millions of visitors annually. Other festivals, art galleries, the Art Institute of Southern California, and the Laguna Art Museum also contribute to a vibrant arts community.



Officially founded in 1887, Laguna Beach incorporated as a city in 1927. From the beginning, preservation and forward planning played a role in maintaining a character attractive to residents, visitors and Hollywood film producers. After the first subdivision ordinance in 1953 promoted development in the pristine hillsides and canyons, Lagunans developed the first access standards in 1964 in an effort to control and slow development. This was the precursor to the Laguna Beach Greenbelt Plan, an effort to preserve the City's surrounding natural environment from further development. Consequently, the City and private citizens have purchased as much open space as possible. To "outsiders" this foresight and activism gives Laguna Beach residents the title of "eccentric", but these principles have maintained the community's village character for both residents and visitors in spite of growth and commercialism.

In recent years, fires, floods and land and mud slides have dominated Laguna Beach news. 1978, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997 and 1998 are all years when Mother Nature delivered events with incredible force. These events served to bring Laguna Beach residents together, harkening back to the “pull-it-together spirit” exhibited by early pioneers.<sup>1</sup> Natural disasters, although unwanted, have developed Laguna Beach into a safer and wiser community.

Today, all of the above continue to shape Laguna Beach. By its topography, the City still remains relatively isolated from the rest of Orange County. However, the extreme pressures of rapid growth and development are being felt in many areas including increased traffic and congestion, the rising cost of living and housing, increasing urban runoff, a greater number of day tourists, and a greater demand on infrastructure and services. Now more than ever, the historical tradition of forward-thinking planning and an active citizenry will be called on to meet the challenges and visions for the City’s future.

### Demographics

Who we are and how we may be changing is important for future policy. Generally speaking, the Laguna Beach population is predominately older, well-educated and white, with higher-than-average incomes. Figure 2 offers a glimpse at the demographic profile of Laguna Beach in comparison to that of Orange County.

In the forty years from 1950 to 1990, the population of Laguna Beach has grown from about 6,000 to 24,000 residents (see Figure 3). This is an increase of over 400% but includes the 5,000 residents that were added when South Laguna was annexed in 1989. Even without this annexation, however, the City’s population during this forty year period still grew by over 300%.

For the ten-year period from 1990 to the present, population growth has begun to level off and has increased by only 5% or 1,100 residents.<sup>2</sup> Over the next twenty years, it is expected that growth will continue to level off. From 2000 to 2020, the demographic projection is that population will only grow by 1.7% or 430 residents. By comparison, during the same period, the population for the County of Orange is expected to grow by 13.2%. (See the section on **Neighboring**

**Figure 2  
LAGUNA BEACH AND ORANGE COUNTY  
COMPARISON**

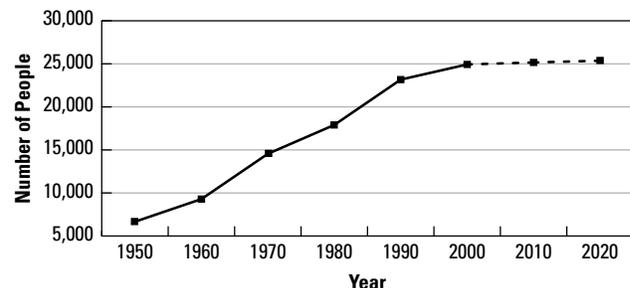
	Laguna Beach	Orange County
<b>1999 Population:</b>	24,325	2,775,619
<b>Population growth 1990-1999:</b>	5%	13.5%
<b>Population Projection 2000-2020:</b>	1.7%	13.2%
<b>1999 Median Age:</b>	45.4 years	34.5 years
<b>Median Household Income:</b>	\$65,382	\$56,352
<b>Per Capita Income:</b>	\$52,128	\$25,746
<b>Demographics:</b>		
White:	85.7%	55.6%
Hispanic:	11.0%	29.7%
Asian & Pacific Islander:	2.4%	12.5%
Black:	0.7%	1.5%
Other:	0.3%	0.4%

Source: Marketview Comparison Report for Laguna Beach and Orange County. Claritas, Inc. 2000.

**Communities** for a more full description of Orange County growth).

Like many communities, Laguna Beach is aging. In 1970, 52.7% of the population was 35 years or older. Today 71.2% of the population is 35 or older, with a median age of 45.4 years. The percentage of the population between ages 35 and 54 has also grown dramatically, from 24% in 1970 to 42% in 1999. Orange County’s population has also aged, but its median age is only 34.5 years.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 3  
LAGUNA BEACH POPULATION GROWTH (1950-2020)**



Source: Center for Demographic Studies, California State University, Fullerton