

25 Good Things That Happened in 2025 Around Here

by

J. Chen and M. Keil¹

1. According to Census numbers, the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario Metropolitan area (MSA) became the 12th most populous MSA out of 390 in the U.S. with 4.7 million residents after passing the San Francisco MSA. There are some sources, which claim that we have passed the next in line already, Boston-Cambridge. We will keep the champagne on ice until Census confirms. And then? Phoenix-Mesa.
2. Strong hiring in Health Care and Public Education (Local Government) prevented the Inland Empire and Southern California from falling into an employment recession. An example of the expanding local health sector is America's first all-electric acute care hospital, which opened on the UC Irvine medical campus on December 10. The hiring in these two sectors offset the particularly poor showing of the Logistics sector ("Freight Recession") toward the end of the year.
3. The Los Angeles Dodgers won the National League pennant and the World Series in November, beating Toronto in a seven game series. Attendance during 2025 pushed past the 4 million mark for the 82 home games at Dodger Stadium, an all time record high. A Japanese pitcher was named the World Series MVP, and his name is not Ohtani. The Los Angeles Rams, now with an 11-5 record, are in the NFL playoffs again and could advance to the Super Bowl in February 2026; and the Chargers beat the two teams from last year's Super Bowl in back-to-back games.
4. Increases in American tourism to SoCal offset the decline in Canadian visitors to the region, which is estimated to have fallen by a third. Palm Springs International Airport (PSP) saw a 4.3 percent increase in passenger traffic during the first six months of the year, resulting in more than 2 million visitors. We can only hope that the Canadian snowbirds are reconsidering cancelled travel plans to SoCal after couples like Trevor McKinsey and his French Canadian wife, Nadine Fortin, see daily highs of 20 degrees in Calgary (with a wind-chill factor of -100). Daughter Arielle-Marie refuses to go to the ice rink for curling on Saturday nights. We would love to have you here and hope that some arctic vortex ice storm does not keep Calgary International Airport (YYC) closed.
5. The government shutdown ended after a historical record setting 43 days. We will never get the October unemployment rate numbers, which is good news because they most likely would have shown an increase in the unemployment rate.
6. In the Year of the Snake, not only did snakes find their home in *Zootopia 2*, but the Inland Empire leaders could also benefit from considering ancient Chinese characteristics

¹ Chen: Senior Analyst, Lowe Institute of Political Economy, Robert Day School of Economics and Finance, Claremont McKenna College. Keil: Chief Economist, Inland Empire Economic Partnership, Associate Director, Lowe Institute of Political Economy.

associated with the snake: careful planning, strategic patience, and embrace change. Keep these in mind when developing a strategic plan for the Inland Empire 2045.

7. Despite initial fears generated by news on Liberation Day, the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have seen a record number of container imports for the year. The various versions of tariff policies have not yet shown the dreaded impact on the economy of Southern California. Decreased imports from China, and Asia in general, would significantly hurt Southern California's logistics industry.
8. There were some refreshing dramas to watch on various entertainment services. *The White Lotus* third season showed us that Black Pink member Lisa can also act, *Severance* gives us new ideas on how to separate our private life from work experience, and the success of *Slow Horses* indicates that we are still willing to get into clever English non-traditional plots.
9. Given the rise in popularity of weight loss drugs, some Inland Empire residents will see their life expectancy go up, and the labor force will be healthier.
10. Only one more year to go to the Football (soccer) World Cup. The U.S. national men's team will open in SoFi Stadium against Paraguay. We don't have to worry about Canadian tourists not coming to SoCal since Canada will most likely not make it to the Round of 32 knockout match on June 28, which is their only scheduled game in SoCal. Still, we would love to have you here to watch some higher quality teams play, especially if you are willing to pay those SoFi Stadium ticket prices. For those of you who don't understand soccer, here is what famous Tottenham and England forward Gary Lineker once said in an interview: "Football is a simple game: 22 men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win."
11. Green Day got back together and performed at Coachella in front of 124,999 people last April. We can now feel again like "American Idiot" and "Basket Case".
12. Ontario International Airport celebrated a theme "Reclaimed. Revived. Ready." to commemorate the decade-long independence from Los Angeles World Airports. Also good news is that we still only have to find Terminals 2 and 4 when we go there and not have to search for Terminals 1, 3, and 5. Hawaiian Airlines has a daily flight from ONT to Honolulu if January/February temperatures get too chilly for you here, with Southwest announcing the same for next year.
13. The high-speed rail, Brightline West, is making progress (outside of the Inland Empire). Still working on the projection that we can go from Rancho Cucamonga to Vegas when the Olympics start in 2028. The trip is supposed to take two hours with top speeds of 200 mph (although we doubt that it reaches that speed between the Hesperia and Apple Valley stops - coming to think about it, why would there be two stops? Is it to check on the breaks before you go down the hill next to the I-15? Can't you just turn off the train engine and have all passengers hold their arms in the air?).
14. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has boosted productivity growth in California and the Inland Empire this year, generating quarterly estimates of up to 4.0 percent increases in output

amid virtually no job creation. It has also maintained California as the epicenter of AI innovation and adoption.

15. There were some ups and downs in the stock market, but generally speaking, stocks had a great year, which is good for our retirement accounts and California's budget. The Dow Jones and the S&P 500 have posted annual gains of over 16 percent, which is an extraordinarily high return even if you take into account the 3 percent inflation rate. Gold prices even had a better performance.
16. Being about "Good Things," we don't have to report about the fires and immigration raids nor their impacts on our regional economy. Perhaps we can mention the continued possibility of decent tax and mortgage relief programs being provided to those who lost their homes in the Altadena and Palisades fires.
17. Only 500 more years that we "may find" something in the year 2525, "if man is still alive, if woman can survive" according to Zager and Evans.
18. The Long Beach Tattoo Arts Festival, SoCal's largest, was held July 18-20 at the Long Beach Convention Center. The seriously good news for the city of Long Beach is that the city had 5.5 million tourists this year, who contributed almost \$2 billion to the local economy. A slowing economy, we might add, since the city reduced the speed limit by 5 mph across all roads, and, remarkably, without a cost-benefit analysis.
19. No more need to ask the driver in your taxi/Uber/Lyft ride "how are you today" or "how is business going" or "how many hours have you been working" since Waymo has arrived in SoCal. No worries about the number of "stars" the driver gives you.
20. Jesus Christ Superstar played to three sold out performances at the Hollywood Bowl. Brought back childhood memories for one of the two authors (the other was not born yet...). Jesus transcends gender (Cynthia Erivo), and prior perceptions of Judas (Adam Lambert) can change.
21. Despite annoying prices at the gas pump, hotel rates, parking tickets, and traffic nightmares, California welcomed 271.6 million visitors in 2025, up roughly 0.8 percent from last year, and is expected to see another 1.7 percent increase in 2026. Also, we are no longer the nation's 8th most congested city, just the 10th most congested.
22. After a ceremonial groundbreaking in 2017 and official start of construction in July 2020, the *LA Metro A Line* finally opened its 9-mile extension to Pomona, officially making it the world's longest light-rail line. We hope the repeatedly delayed opening of the LAX People Mover project will follow in step and begin its passenger service in 2026, getting us closer to higher quality public transportation connections seen in other world class city airports such as London, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Frankfurt, etc.
23. After years of playing the Dutch national anthem on loop, Lando Norris finally beat Max Verstappen in the 2025 season, reminding fans that Formula 1 is in fact a competition instead of a traveling tribute tour. And soon we can take the Brightline West to watch the Vegas F1 formula race live by going there and coming back the same day while relaxing in a comfortable place on the way.

24. Disneyland celebrated its 70th anniversary. Turns out Mickey and Pluto have survived 12 economic recessions, the COVID-19 shutdown, and many changes in culture/taste since the opening. Today, the Disneyland Resort supports 36,000 jobs and attracts around 17 million visitors annually, anchoring Anaheim's economy and reminding So Cal that nostalgia can be a growth industry. Sadly, the company sold the Anaheim Mighty Ducks in 2006 but the team remained in So Cal. At least the new owners did not change the name to "Los Angeles Ducks of Anaheim" as they did with their next-door neighbor, the Angels.
25. To stop productions from exiting to Georgia or Canada, California more than doubled its Film and TV Tax Credit Program from \$330 million to \$750 million, projected to generate \$1.2 billion in statewide economic activity, employ more than 5,000 cast and crew, and pay \$487 million in qualified wages. The current estimate of the total impact from the first two rounds of the expanded program has exceeded \$2.5 billion.

California has taken the sole lead when it comes to highest unemployment rates among U.S. states. Wait, coming to think of it, delete, this is not good news.

Look forward to 26 good news items next year, perhaps starting with "we experienced a return to low inflation and high growth, while keeping the unemployment rate from rising." In the words of the Everly Brothers, "Dream, Dream, Dream."