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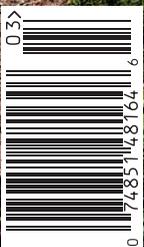
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Escapes

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Wine Down

Although there's never a bad time to visit Sonoma's wine country, the spring marks cool, comfortable temps and the last days of the rainy season. The charming town of Healdsburg is near three prominent wine-producing regions, and it's offering new places to stay.

The landmark Madrona Manor Inn, a Victorian home dating back to 1881 with views of Dry Creek Valley (pictured), is getting a makeover and will reopen as **The Madrona** this May. Interior designer Jay Jeffers purchased the property and is upgrading the guest rooms and its in-house Michelin-star restaurant (still helmed by chef Jesse Mallgren), while preserving the building's history. **Jordan Winery** recently renovated its chateau suites—its first remodel in 40 years—with modern guest spaces that

showcase the winery's collection of French antiques. Get acquainted with Sonoma's chardonnay and pinot noir at **Bacchus Landing**, where you can sip wines from several local boutique vintners all in one space. Downtown, **Marine Layer Wines** opened a new tasting room, and **Orsi Family Vineyards** is taking reservations for its new tasting room. Add a meal at **The Matheson**, a new restaurant from chef Dustin Vallette, to your itinerary: It has a sushi bar, a full dining room with a nightly tasting menu, and a chic rooftop lounge. Looking ahead to the fall, the owners of SingleThread Farm and Restaurant are opening **Little Saint**, a plant-based restaurant, café, and wine shop, downtown. Alaska Airlines has nonstop flights from San Diego to Santa Rosa Airport, or you can get to Healdsburg in about ten hours by car. Cheers! —Marie Tutko



FLY HIGH

There's no commercial airline service to the island, but those with access to a private aircraft can fly into Airport in the Sky, which is 10 miles inland from Avalon.

Island Charm

Like the gift shop T-shirt says, a visit to laid-back Catalina Island is “time well wasted.” The island’s primary port, Avalon, is quaint even when buzzing with visitors. Off the main drag, you’re never too far from a fresh catch or island-inspired cocktail. While Catalina may be part of Los Angeles County, there’s hardly a hint of La La Land glitz. Instead, you’ll find that the stylishly casual island town, which has also served as the location for over 500 films, exudes its very own kind of movie-like magic.

by **Ron Donoho**

Getting There

Catalina Island’s two mainland departure points are in Orange and Los Angeles counties, and San Diegans can make the voyage by ferry from Dana Point. The **Catalina Express** offers two trips a day from the Dana Point Wharf straight to Avalon. Get to the wharf early to check in, secure tickets, and move your car to a dedicated parking lot. (Arrive even earlier and grab a light meal at the wharf.) The 23-mile ferry ride takes less than 90 minutes, with indoor and outdoor seating, restrooms, and a full bar (get the bloody mary!). Once in Avalon Bay, the ferry delivers you directly to Crescent Avenue, the tiny city’s colorful main drag.

Note: Pack your walking shoes! Few cars or taxis exist on Catalina (and you don’t need them). Golf carts can be rented and hotels are within easy walking distance.

Stay

Settle into the “island deco” vibe of the casually elegant **Hotel Atwater**. Just half a block off Crescent Avenue near the Avalon city center, the 100-year-old property has 95 recently renovated rooms and suites. Celebrate your arrival with your two free splits of sparkling wine. Rates for both high season (spring and fall) and off season (summer and winter) are very reasonable. The hotel’s airy lobby area is filled with cozy gathering spots and has a cabinet filled with board games to keep you entertained. Take a moment to admire the harp and accordion displays—both were previously owned by hotel namesake Helen Atwater Wrigley, a respected entertainer.

If you’re looking to splurge, search out availability at **Mt Ada**. This sophisticated bed-and-breakfast was the mountainside getaway of former island owner William Wrigley Jr. (of chewing gum and Chicago Cubs fame). There are just six guest suites. The property has a billiards room, a den and bar area, and a wraparound terrace that overlooks Avalon Bay. Guests get complimentary use of a golf cart for forays into town.

Outdoorsy types will want to explore the unincorporated community of **Two Harbors**, a narrow strip of land between Isthmus Cove and Catalina Harbor. Check into **Banning House Lodge**, a Craftsman-style bed-and-breakfast, or scout out one of the four campgrounds on the west end





of the island for more solitude—Parson’s Landing has remote beach access, and Black Jack places you just below Catalina’s highest peak.

Explore

Get a feel for both the history and natural beauty of the island by signing up for a **Jeep Eco-Tour**. The guided tours are run by the Catalina Island Conservancy, which nearly 90 percent of Catalina is deeded to. It’s why the island is largely unspoiled and undeveloped. Tours take you from the Crescent Avenue trailhead up into the mountainous island interior. Buckle up in a six- or nine-seat open-air Tundra or Jeep. On the two-hour tour, you might catch a glimpse of the local bison herd. Fourteen of them were imported in 1924 for the film version of one of Western novelist Zane Grey’s books, *The Vanishing American*. After production wrapped, it proved too expensive to export the huge animals back to the mainland. The Wrigley family sagely decided to keep and grow the herd, making it a unique tourist attraction.

Seek out **Cartopia Cart Rentals** to

get a self-guided, bird’s-eye view of Avalon: Four-passenger golf carts can be rented in advance, but some same-day rentals are available. Follow the provided map to drive out of town along the coast and ascend Mount Ada, where photo ops abound. You’ll circle behind the city and descend through a canyon toward Descanso Beach Club as you pass by **Zip Line Eco Tour**, where five separate zip lines run down to the beach from an elevation of 600 feet. Total distance: three quarters of a mile. The fastest zip line can reach a speed of 30 mph.

Once you’ve zipped, you’ll land at the back entrance to **Descanso Beach Club**. The island’s lap of luxury offers an abundance of rental chaise lounges to relax on. Vacationing here looks like a cocktail in hand, catch-of-the-day ceviche en route, and a DJ spinning beats while you lose track of time.

If you aren’t the type to sit still, there’s more to explore on the **Trans-Catalina Trail**. The 38.5-mile hiking trail begins in Avalon and winds through the interior to Two Harbors (serious hikers can expect to complete it in about four days).

Dine

Crescent Avenue also serves as the island’s culinary hub. The finest dining is found at **Avalon Grille**. The restaurant has a lively central bar area, high ceilings, and large windows that open onto the bay.

Nearly every island eatery has a seasonal menu; be on the lookout for the Grille’s andouille and lobster linguine, or the Pacific sea bass.

Blocks away is the two-story double punch of **Steve’s Steakhouse** and **Maggie’s Blue Rose**. Steve (second floor) and Maggie (ground floor) are a married couple. Steve’s offers expansive bay views, juicy rib eyes, and the catch of the day. Maggie’s offers authentic, housemade Mexican dishes. You’ll be impressed with the corn and crab empanadas and the mole-braised duck enchiladas.

Speaking of the catch of the day, the only place to get sushi is newcomer **NDMK Fish House**, whose poke bowls are lip-smacking and lively. Ask about seasonal sashimi. One other welcome restaurant addition: The indoor/outdoor **Naughty Fox** at the Bellanca Hotel. Stop in for breakfast classics with a twist (their Naughty Baked French Toast changes daily) or easy lunch shareables, like the Korean spiced calamari or ahi poke nachos.

Want to dine like a local? Summon the shuttle to **Buffalo Nickel** and head just out of town. You can blend in with the regulars over a slice of pizza or plate of fresh mahi mahi tacos. The islanders who frequent the spot are welcoming, and much like the rest of Catalina, the unassuming charm of this rustic eatery off the beaten path will quickly reel you in.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: Catalina from above, view from the sun room at Mt Ada

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Hotel Atwater, Zip Line Eco Tour, famous Catalina bison

