

Los Angeles Times

TRAVEL
The 40 best
California outdoor
experiences. Period.



By CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS | LOS ANGELES TIMES EXCLUSIVE

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This is the California we've been pining for — 40 summer destinations that call to us loudly in good times and bad.

To build this list, I thought about the places I was most eager to see, hear, feel, smell and taste again after decades of traveling the state and 14 months of staying home. There are no deserts here, because we're talking about summer. And no theme parks, because they get enough attention. But what epic, irresistible wonders there are! I've road-tested them all, except for one spot 14,505 feet above sea level. (Fortunately, my colleague Mary Forgione, of "[The 50 Best Hikes in L.A.](#)," has that summit covered.)

If you're getting to know California, these 40 are great places to begin. But we've tried to make this list more than a starter kit. Even if you're an old hand, there will be destinations that you've missed, and I've added a pro tip to every destination.

Has the pandemic changed these places? Yes. Scores of restaurants and other businesses are gone. Among those remaining, there are smaller staffs, more patio seats, shorter hours and tighter crowd limits. All those circumstances are evolving, so check websites.

If you have a nomination for this collection, send it to [@mrcsreynolds](#) ([Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#)), christopher.reynolds@latimes.com or [tell us here](#). Like us in the face of adversity, this list needs to grow and change.



(Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

Catalina Island

By CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS

When you need an island escape with creature comforts and Hawaii is too far, here is your answer. The ferry ride is about an hour (about 22 miles) and you may encounter playful dolphins or a breaching whale on the way. In tiny downtown Avalon, traffic is a matter of bikes and golf carts. Back in the day, Zane Grey wrote westerns here and chewing gum potentate William Wrigley Jr. built a mansion ([Mt. Ada](#), with room rates at potentate prices). Nowadays there are just enough options to fill a weekend: [boat rides](#), [submarine tours](#), [snorkeling](#), [miniature golf](#), cycling, [Descanso Beach Club](#) and the [Catalina Zipline Eco Tour](#), which will set you zinging above eucalyptus trees. Round-trip ferry rides with [Catalina Express](#) to Avalon from Long Beach, San Pedro or Dana Point cost about \$75.

Pro tip: There are hiking and [camping near Two Harbors](#) and beyond, including a 38.5-mile, four-day adventure known as a [Trans-Catalina Trail](#). Begin in Avalon, end at Two Harbors. [And beware of bison.](#)

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