

# BIG WIDE WORLD

SUMMER 2022 ISSUE 03

## Summer Lovin'

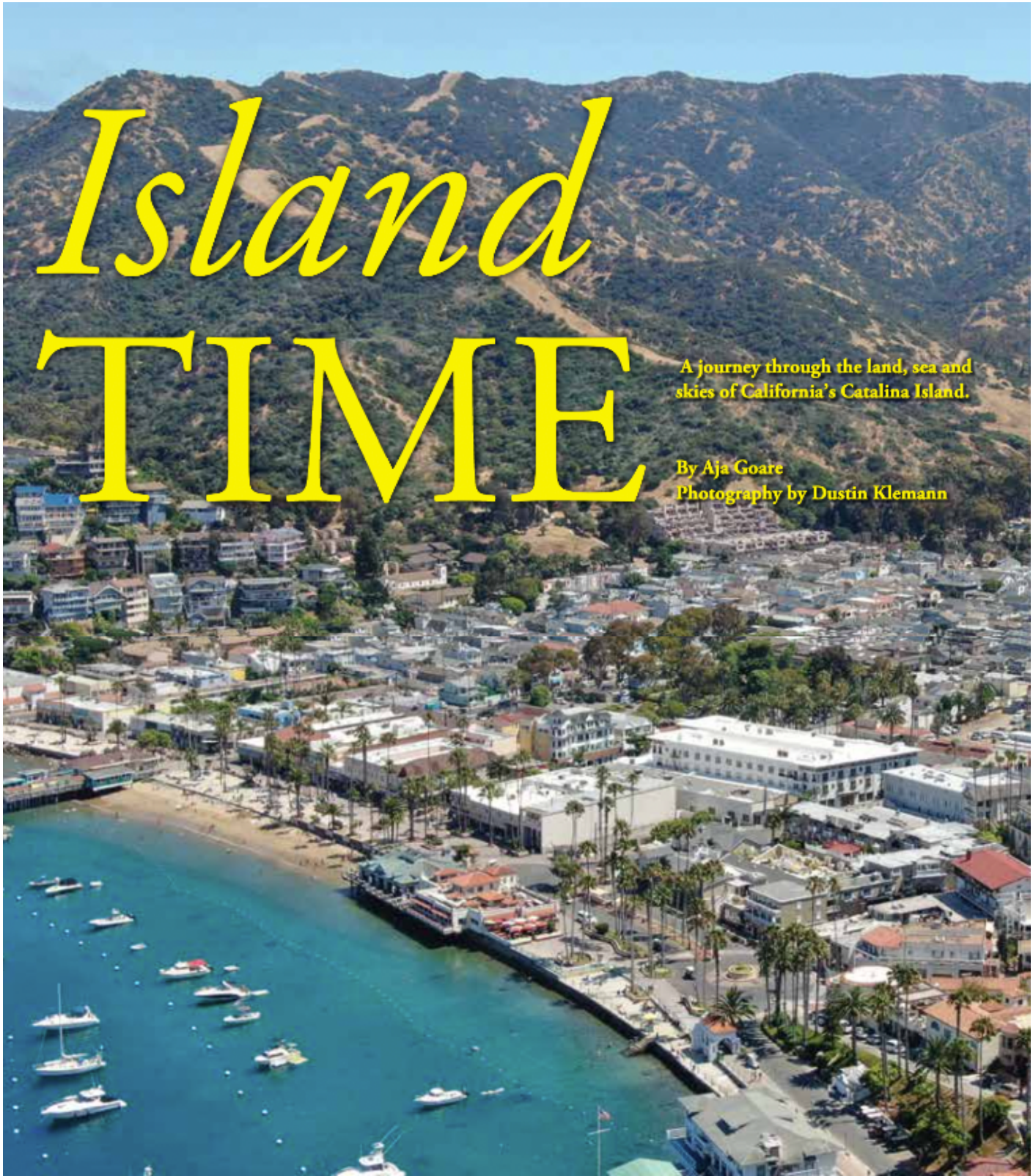
EXPERIENCE EPIC HIKES

TIKI PARADISE AWAITS IN PALM SPRINGS

COLOMBIA: THE LAND OF EXTREMES



*Be a  
Traveler,  
not a  
tourist*



# *Island* TIME

A journey through the land, sea and skies of California's Catalina Island.

By Aja Goare  
Photography by Dustin Klemann



From a clearing at Buena Vista Point, a popular scenic overlook on Catalina Island, a trio of planets glints among a curtain of constellations. Here, about 26 miles off the coast of Los Angeles, star gazers can observe unobstructed a scatter of planetary pearls glowing in the night sky.

"Saturn is my favorite," says Kathleen Hill Carlisle, an amateur astronomer who guides The Astronomy Experience through Catalina Coastal Tours & Fishing. She focuses her Dobsonian 8-inch reflector telescope on the ringed planet and invites guests to lean in for a peak. "In L.A. it's not as crisp because of all the light pollution," she says, turning her lens to the largest planet in the solar system. "But here, you can see the stripes of Jupiter and its Galilean moons."

Kathleen is not only well-acquainted with the celestial but also with the town of Avalon, Catalina's only incorporated city, where she has lived since birth. With just 4,000 full-time residents and a single K-12 school, Catalina is the most densely populated of eight Channel Islands and can only be accessed by small plane or boat. Each year, about 1 million people visit it.

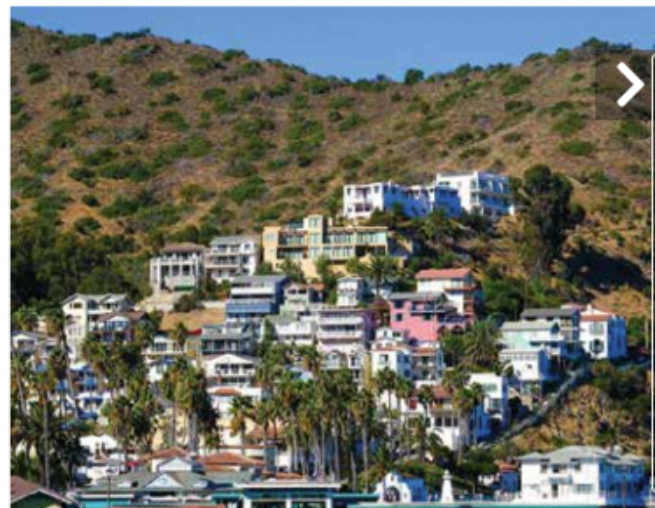
"[In 2021] We're on track to have a record year even with a rough first quarter," says Rock Gosselin, who owns the 15-room Avalon Hotel. "By the end of September, we were 82 percent sold through October."

The boutique hotel is perched on a hillside just above Crescent Street, the main drag referred to by locals as Front Street. As the first hotelier on the island to be registered with the California Association of Boutique & Breakfast Inns, Rock prides himself on the quaint European-style rooms adorned with terracotta tiles hand made by local artist Robin Cassidy. "Many California travelers aren't used to this style," says Rock. "A person expecting the Vegas-style room service at 3 a.m. won't like it here very much."

With a Friday night wine gathering on the outdoor patio and continental breakfast served daily, Rock and his wife aim to bring visitors together. "We've had three sets of couples out drinking wine on our patio — didn't know each other — and by the end of it, they're deciding what restaurant to go to together," says Rock.

Whether it's Mexican cuisine at Maggie's Blue Rose, American fare at Steve's Steakhouse and Seafood or Italian at M Restaurant, the common denominator of every menu is fresh seafood. And with an ocean full of white sea bass, tuna and yellowtail amberjack swimming just a stone's throw from the dinner table, it's easy to see why ahi nachos, shrimp burritos and lobster rolls are so accessible.

Opposite page: Catalina's iconic coastline. This page, from top: Kayaking and boating are some of the many outdoor activities that visitors flock to Catalina for; Fresh seafood is the common denominator of every menu; Catalina's colorful hillside looks down into the bay.



**While on the island, here are some adventures to embark on.**



**Catalina Island Conservancy Eco Tour**

(2 or 3 hours)  
\$79 for 2 hours  
\$119 for 3 hours



**Bison Expedition Tour**

(2 hours)  
\$84.95 for adults



**Catalina Coastal Tours & Fishing's Astronomy Experience**

(2 or 3 hours)  
\$79 for 2 hours  
\$119 for 3 hours



**Undersea Sub Expedition**

(45 minutes)  
\$39.95 for adults



**Catalina Aerial Adventure**

(2 hours)  
\$49.95 on weekdays  
\$59.95 on weekends



**Paddle Boarding and Kayaking**

Equipment rentals and guided tours available at Descanso Beach Ocean Sports

Rentals: \$22 for 1-person or \$32 for 2-person kayak  
\$25 for 1 paddle board



**Glass-Bottom Boat Tour**

(2 or 3 hours)  
\$79 for 2 hours  
\$119 for 3 hours



**Zip Line Eco Tour**

(2 hours)  
\$119/person on weekdays  
\$129/person on weekends



**Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Gardens**

\$8





Opposite page, clockwise from top: Catalina Island Conservancy estimates 100 bison live on the island, believed to have been left behind after the filming of a movie in the 1920's; Fish and chips with an ocean view; Paddleboards add to the vibrant colors of the island; Cacti grow well along the hillsides. This page: Views of Catalina Casino, a famous attraction on the island.

After dinner, when the darkness creeps in and the fog rolls over, guests on this small castaway island navigate like a school of fish to a drinking destination like Luau Larry's, where you earn a straw hat for getting your "wiki wacked" with a cocktail aptly called the Wiki Wacker. The official drink of the island, according to local tourism officials, is the creamy blend of crème de cocoa, Kahlua, crème de banana, vodka and half and half called Buffalo Milk.

Live music floods the street and social hour peaks as visitors young and old crisscross the small brick thoroughfare from one bar to the next. For those with morning reservations at one of the island's many attractions — kayaking, glass bottom boat touring or ziplining, to name a few — the night may come to an early end but not without a stop by the hot dog cart selling your choice of traditional, bison or veggie dogs.

With access to golf cart and bicycle rentals, many visitors will claim to have seen the "whole island." But as the Catalina Island Conservancy reports, most people only see a small fraction of the island's nearly 48,000 acres. That's because, unless you're a skilled hiker, the rugged terrain of what's called the "interior" is only accessible by foot or authorized vehicle. Behind the wheel of an electric Toyota RAV4, a tour guide leads a small group of visitors to the Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden. The centerpiece of the garden is the memorial, which honors William Wrigley who not only founded Wrigley gum

company but also bought Catalina Island in 1919 and played a key role in the development of the island from installation of public utilities to a hotel and the Casino building, as well as extensive plantings of trees, shrubs and flowers. Many of these plants are endemic, meaning they are only found on the island, making them incredibly rare and sometimes considered endangered species.

Throughout the island, the conservancy estimates 1,800 endemic foxes scamper, and about 4,000 deer and 100 bison — believed to have been left behind after the filming of a movie in the 1920s — graze on the hillsides. Thanks to its video surveillance program, the conservancy recently confirmed a type of shrew believed to have vanished from the island in fact still exists. Because 88 percent of the island is owned by the conservancy, the state agency goes to great lengths to protect that natural environment and the 60 unique species that can only be found here.

In the final hours of a visit to the island before the Catalina Express sounds its three horns and departs for the mainland, a view of the sunset seals the visit with a kiss. "It's called Belt of Venus," explains Kathleen, of the curious tinge of pink and baby blue that color the sky and water. "We're opposite the sunset so the longest rays that go past these hills are the blue layer. The pink is scattered rays from the atmosphere. We don't get that glowy orange sunset you see elsewhere, but it's really something special here."