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CHEWING THE SCENERY Gum-magnate William Wrigley bought Catalina Island in 1919 and commissioned many of its landmarks. JESSICA SAMPLE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

TRAVEL | OFF DUTY TRAVEL

## 3 Quick Escapes From Los Angeles

From a tycoon's breezy island to a mountain bohemia, these SoCal getaways are at their best in summer

*By Rico Gagliano*

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### Catalina

Once a popular weekend getaway for dance-crazed youths and the stars of Golden-Age Hollywood, this laid-back island still packs some sun-drenched glamour.

**BEST FOR** Families, nostalgia hounds, Chicago Cubs fans



ILLUSTRATION: JOAO FAZENDA

**WHAT IT HAS THAT L.A. DOESN'T** An absence of car envy. Catalina regulates the number of automobiles allowed on the 76-square-mile island. Most everyone gets around on golf carts. To score one, step off the ferry at the main port of Avalon and you're a minute walk away from cart rental spots. Two

hours is plenty of time to chug around the town's paved, occasionally precarious scenic trail—some stretches curve up into the hills hundreds of feet above the ocean.

**CLAIM TO FAME** Avalon Casino, the most iconic remnant of the days when [William Wrigley](#), the chewing gum tycoon and principal owner of the Chicago Cubs, owned the island. He bought Catalina in 1919 and commissioned the casino. There's no gambling on the premises—in Italian, *casino* means “gathering place.” And when this 11-story Art Deco rotunda opened in 1929, it fulfilled that promise: Every weekend, thousands packed into the 12,000-square-foot circular ballroom to dance to big band music beneath an arched ceiling hung with Tiffany chandeliers. The ballroom's been restored, as has the opulent 1,200-seat movie theater below it—the first cinema ever to show talkies. First-run movies still screen there nightly. [visitcatalinaisland.com](#)

**BUT DON'T MISS** The bison. A dozen or so of the animals were imported for a movie shoot back in 1924, and then left behind. The unlikely herd now numbers 150 and they're the star attraction of the Catalina Conservancy's jeep tours of island wildlife.



ILLUSTRATION: JOAO FAZENDA

#### ESSENTIAL

**FORTIFICATIONS** Tucked on a side street just off Avalon's main tourist drag, C.C. Beau Deli sells cold-cut sandwiches, homemade pickles and bottles of wine from Rusack—the island's only vineyard. Carry it all a half-block to Avalon Bay for an

upscale picnic. *117 Clarissa Ave.* Later, spend happy hour at Descanso Beach Club, a short, palm-tree-lined stroll past Avalon Casino. For a \$2 fee, nonmembers can use a portion of the club's private beach cove, and, from 5 to 7 p.m., sip half-price froufrou tropical drinks at the beachside bar. *1 St. Catherine Way.* [visitcatalinaisland.com](#)

**IF THE FERRY LEAVES WITHOUT YOU** Mt. Ada inn, once Wrigley's summer home, makes a fine place to bunk down. Non-guests are welcome to visit for the \$58 prix fixe lunch (reservations essential), served on a wraparound porch overlooking Avalon's marina. *Rooms from \$500 a night,* [visitcatalinaisland.com](#).

**GETTING THERE** From L.A., drive 40 minutes south to the Catalina Express ferry terminals in either Long Beach or San Pedro. The 75-minute boat trip to Avalon runs multiple times a day.

[catalinaexpress.com](#)