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ISLAND RELIEVER

Grab a Tee Time with History on Catalina, the Oldest Golf Course in the West



SO CAL

Catalina Island

www.visitcatalinaisland.com

A PLAYER'S PACKAGE: A special Catalina golf package includes accommodations at the Pavilion Lodge or Hotel Atwater, round-trip on the Catalina Express and nine holes of golf at the beautiful Catalina Island Golf Course. Stay at the Pavilion Lodge, located 14 steps from the beach, or the historic Hotel Atwater located right in the center of town. Ride over to the island on the sleek and comfortable Catalina Express with many ports and times to choose from. Restrictions may apply.

Palms and Pars: It's a stellar start from the first tee at Catalina Island Golf Course (above), with an elevated tee shot to a craftily configured fairway.

Club Med: Make that "Mediterranean," which is exactly how Catalina (opposite) feels weather-wise and in its slower, more carefree pace. And it doesn't take an epic plane flight to get there.

Although golf doesn't date back as far as the caveman period, it's been part of mankind for as long as we've been around. Golf's genesis is up for debate, but the strongest theory falls to the Scots, who are credited with originating the modern game. China claims their nobles played a more primitive version of the game as early as the 10th century, 500 years before St. Andrews was globally established as the fount of golf. America adopted the

hobby many years later. New Jersey caught wind of the game in the late 1880s, which sparked the wildfire of popularity in the United States.

Honors for the oldest golf course west of the Mississippi belong to the Catalina Island Golf Course, located 22 miles off the coast of Los Angeles. The 76-square-mile, Southern California islet boasts year-round sunshine, a laid-back atmosphere and a golf course with tight fairways and small greens.

that stacks up as a worthy challenge for anybody.

Opened in 1892, the Catalina Island Golf Course started with just three holes. The Banning Brothers, who owned Catalina, spearheaded the project. Under the guidance of this entrepreneurial family, the island's first roads, electricity and water source were implemented. To put these endeavors in perspective, Catalina was using carrier pigeons to transport messages between the island and the mainland until 1899. Resources were limited. Perhaps a golf enthusiast from across the channel attached a note to his pigeon requesting a larger course, because in 1895 the Bannings increased the links to seven holes. One year later, further demand warranted a clubhouse, and the course grew to nine holes.

World War I took its toll on the island with decreased visitation. By 1919, the Banning Brothers sold the majority of their Catalina Island Company shares to the chewing gum magnet, William Wrigley Jr., who immediately launched several new projects. Wrigley also owned the Chicago Cubs baseball team, so they held spring training on the island, and the Catalina Island Golf Course grew to 18 holes. A new golf clubhouse was erected, and in 1928 the first Catalina Open Golf Tournament attracted top-flight professional golfers from around the world. Catalina became a sport mecca.

Wrigley's goal of turning his sleepy little enclave into a resort destination was coming to fruition. At any given time, the S.S. Catalina, better known as the Great White Steamer, could be seen docked at the end of Green Pleasure Pier unloading tourists. In her 50-year career, she carried more than 22 million passengers across the San Pedro Channel to Catalina Island, while folks in a hurry could catch a hop on Catalina Airline's Grumman G-21 Goose seaplanes. Residents would watch the twin-engine bird fly down through the canyon and touch down in Avalon Bay.

Hotels and restaurants began popping up around the 1-square-mile city of Avalon. Hollywood stars and city dwellers in need of a vacation were descending upon the playground in the Pacific Ocean. Clark Gable, Bing Crosby, Mickey Rooney, Jackie Cooper, and numerous other celebrities were fixtures on the golf course. An all-day play on the 18-hole course cost \$1.

In 1931, a 29-year-old Georgia boy by the name of Bobby Jones decided to start an annual golf event on the island — thus the Bobby Jones Golf Tournament was born. Top amateurs vied for a spot in the coveted competition. When Jones wasn't practicing law, he was practicing his swing at Catalina along with Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Jackie Cooper and others.

Jones presided over the tournament for



Catalina Island Golf Course

THE GOLF

CATALINA COUNTRY CLUB

www.visitcatalinaisland.com

310.510.2530 | 310.518.7421 (golf course)

310.510.7404 (club)

RATES: Members: \$32/18 holes and \$18/9 holes

Non-members: \$52/18 holes and \$30/9 holes

TAYLORMADE CLUB RENTAL: \$25 per set/per day

CARTS: \$14 per day

Pull-cart rental \$5 per nine holes

GETTING THERE

The Catalina Express

The Catalina Flyer

PHONE FOR TICKETS: 800.368.1212 (Express)

or 800.830.7144 (Flyer)

www.catalinaexpress.com

www.catalina-flyer.com

Getting to Catalina is simple. High-speed cruisers zoom the Pacific waters from Dana Point, Long Beach, San Pedro and Newport Beach, at up to 20 departures a day. Trip length varies from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes, depending on your departure location. Round-trip prices to Avalon range from \$56.50 to \$58.50, with discounts for seniors and children. Airline-style seats, snacks and a cocktail bar assure comfort.

ISLAND EXPRESS HELICOPTER SERVICE

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www.islandexpress.com

For the time-crunched vacationer, the helicopter service provides daily flights, cutting travel time to 14 minutes. Price per person is \$173 round-trip (\$85.30 one-way). Children fly free.

STAY IN STYLE

HOTEL VILLA PORTOFINO, AVALON

www.hotelvillaportofino.com | 888.510.0555

\$125-\$345 per night

Located four blocks from the golf course, this oceanfront, European inn is the perfect place to lay your head after a taxing 18 holes. Styled after an Italian chalet, the 34-room property offers views of Avalon Bay, a private rooftop sundeck with cabanas, and continental breakfast. In-room fireplaces, marble baths and deep tubs that allow guests to sink to their chin and soak, make this the ideal spot. Positioned just steps away from the beach and shops, non-golfers can partake in island activities while you play a round or two. Package deals are offered. Delicious!

AT A GLANCE





25 years, with the exception of the game's six-year hiatus during World War II. Numerous events slowed during combat. Steamers and Grumman's that once carried passengers to Catalina were being used to transport thousands of troops overseas. Land was a commodity, and the Catalina golf course was no exception. The course

than 1 million annual visitors, and to protect the island from over-development and overuse.

The public golf course remains nine holes, but two sets of tees and some imagination stretch it to 18, with a variation on holes 2, 7 and 9.

This carefree course exudes fun. The

Mix and Match: Though Catalina's course remains nine holes, you can switch up the tee boxes and play it as an engaging, short-but-tricky 18. And try to team up with some locals who can clue you in on its idiosyncrasies.

No. 2 tee box. In the summer, deer walk onto the course in pursuit of fruit from the fig trees sprinkled among the fairways. A loud "FORE" will suffice to scamper the critters back into the brush. Years of communal living have kept things copacetic between man and beast.

The No. 1 tee box is poised on a knoll high above the basin, providing a 180-degree view of the course. Below sits Avalon Canyon Road. Players send their balls surging across the street, willing them to land perfectly on the 325-yard par 4. A combination of 3-pars and 4-pars round out the course to par 32 for nine holes. The course record is 26, set by local Mike Reyes in 1954; fitting for a man who continued to play golf into his '90s.

Catalina's quirky style promotes an *our course is your course* attitude. It resides on the flip side of trendy — the side that will look the other way if you choose to play in flip-flops and a safari hat, the side that has a Flying Fish as its logo. This funny creature

Pre-WWII, Hollywood stars and city dwellers in need of a vacation descended on the Pacific playground.

shrank back to nine holes, with the remaining property used for barracks. Within a few years, the Cubs moved their spring-training camp to Indiana.

After the war ended in 1945, Catalina slowly regained its resort status. Today, it again thrives as one of Southern California's premier vacation destinations. Express ferries, cruise ships and helicopters have replaced the steamers and seaplanes. Santa Catalina Island Company and the Santa Catalina Island Conservancy share responsibility to entertain the island's more

manager and resident golf pro, Mark Phelps, is a PGA professional who was born and raised on the island. Locals make up roughly 65 percent of all play, and Phelps knows most by name.

The longest hole is No. 4 at 328 yards; the shortest, No. 6 at 100 yards. With 30-yard-wide fairways and two or three sand traps per hole, skill is a prerequisite. There are no water holes — odd for a golf course on an island, but H₂O is scarce. And don't be flustered if you see a few horses trotting across the fairway; there's a stable beside the

has been adorning Catalina Island's golf paraphernalia for 15 years. The fish, which can be found in the water off the island, has large pectoral fins allowing it to take short, gliding flights through the air — the same trajectory as a golf ball.

In keeping with the neighborly manner, Phelps hosts more than 100 amateur tournaments annually. Players from the mainland — or "overtown" as the locals say — converge on the island to test their skills. Resident golfers' insular nature is ruffled by the unpredictable shots of the visitors. Tournament strategy is paramount. The home team has the advantage, knowing the course plays heavy out of bounds on the right side.

Five days a week, island residents Richard, Ed, Steve, Bark (yes, Bark) and Dick have a standing tee time. They are deemed "the 12:30 girls." These "ladies" hold numerous course records. Richard has the most holes-in-one (23), and Dick is the only player to win seven club championships in a row. After two hours on the links, they compare scores at the proverbial 19th hole, a small tavern beside the last green, appropriately named The Sandtrap, where "brewskis" and ice tea flow. These diehards are only a few of the 200 members in the

Essence of Avalon: The Hotel Portofino is the place to stay if you want full immersion in the Catalina way of life — and a dose of sun if the mainland is fogged in.



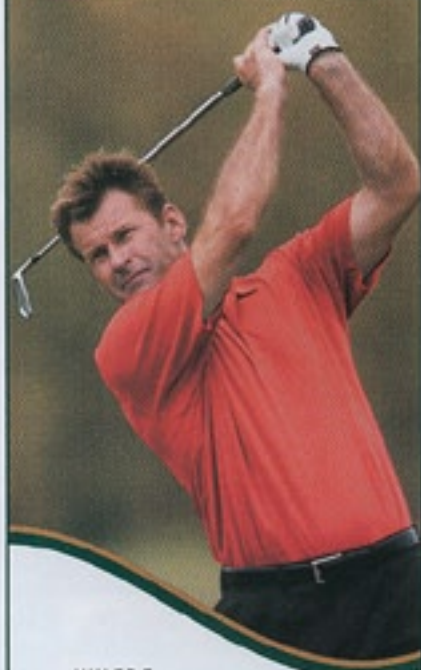
Catalina Island Men's Club. The women's club has a small presence, only 20 strong.

The golf course shares land with the Catalina Country Club, which is open to the public; no membership required. Three different calibers of dining are offered. The Pub, which sits where the old Chicago Cubs locker room once stood, offers a casual atmosphere. Golf photos share the space with baseball memorabilia and the Bobby Jones trophy. Jones' tournament is still near and dear to the locals' hearts, 50 years after the last club was swung. The Fountain Terrace, directly outside of the bar, offers delicious menu choices al fresco.

Got a bigger budget? Step up to the museum-like Dining Room. Floor-to-ceiling windows swath the inside with dramatic lighting, better to accentuate the collection of original Catalina Plein-Air paintings covering the walls. Cathedral ceilings are punctuated with wrought-iron chandeliers. This four-star restaurant is open for lunch and dinner. A first-class meal, fantastic bottle of wine and decadent dessert is the perfect end to a day on the course.

There's speculation that within five years, the Catalina Island Golf Course will once again be 18 holes. In fact, Jack Nicklaus has walked and designed the future layout. Money is holding up the project. No matter the outcome, there's little doubt this little course will maintain its old Southern California charm and character. **FG**

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