



An American Tour: 24



California's Catalina Island

Santa Catalina Island, often called Catalina Island, or just Catalina, is a rocky island off the coast of California, 22 miles south-southwest of Los Angeles. The island is 22 miles long and 8 miles wide.

Over a span of 7,000 years, various native American groups inhabited Catalina, but after 1820, Spanish rule gave way to Mexican occupation. Since tariffs were the Mexican Government's only source of revenue, they established a customs house at Monterey in 1821. This provoked many trade-merchants to look for ways to circumvent the system. Skippers, fed-up and frustrated, began to smuggle most of their valuable goods past customs to avoid paying high duty. This is when Catalina Island became a smuggling Eden; a cove was even named after the activity: Smugglers Cove.

One of Catalina's most notable transactions took place in 1887 when investors of the Lick estate resold Catalina for \$200,000 to George Shatto, a businessman and entrepreneur who was perhaps ultimately responsible for the Catalina we know today. He intended to turn the island into a tourist resort, beginning his five year reign by surveying the land and building a hotel. To expand Avalon's tourist base further, Shatto used steamships to ferry tourists to and from the mainland. Some island tourists arrived to purchase lots in Avalon, which Shatto auctioned off for \$150 to \$2,000, depending on location and size. However, Shatto racked up some hefty bills and defaulted on his mortgage payments and soon lost the island. William Wrigley (Wrigley's Gum) eventually took over and constructed the famed Casino in 1929, which he figured would improve his revenues by attracting more tourists. Though the Casino was never used for gambling, it was a place for people to gather and enjoy some camaraderie and entertainment. It held a variety of functions after its grand opening, but the Casino's earmark during this era was ballroom dancing to the live music of a big band.



Today, Avalon remains Catalina's principal tourist attraction. Catalina contains all essential utilities such as electricity, water and phones. Rainwater is stored in reservoirs throughout the island's interior, which is subsequently purified then piped to the towns of Avalon and Two Harbors. A desalination plant also services Avalon, which, most importantly, supply's water during periods of drought. All electricity and water service is furnished by the Edison Company, while Pacific Bell provides telephone utilities. [<http://www.visitingcatalina.com/history.html>]