



Bar/fly

Shandelle Battersby gets a Catalina welcome

A stroll around the bars and restaurants in the pretty Mediterranean-style township of Avalon on Santa Catalina Island reveals an unusual drink on most of their menus — Buffalo Milk.

But this local delicacy has very little to do with the shaggy bovine creature — properly called a bison — that used to freely roam the North American grasslands and nearly became extinct in the 19th century thanks to hunting and disease.

Catalina — a small mountainous desert island off the coast of Orange County, Southern California — has a long and storied history, the most interesting bit of which came about when chewing gum king William Wrigley jnr bought a controlling stake of it in 1919.

Wrigley built the island's famous and fabulous art deco Catalina Casino — not a gambling house at all, rather an entertainment venue — in 1929 and over the years the island attracted many Hollywood stars to its shores, including Charlie Chaplin, Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe. Actress Natalie Wood drowned off its coast in 1981 at the age of 43.

Hollywood's interest in Catalina led to it being used as a film location hundreds of times, and 14 bison were shipped to the island in 1924 for the silent film version of Zane Grey's novel *The Vanishing American*.

The animals were left behind when filming wrapped (they didn't make the final cut) and there are thought to be at least 150 of their descendants still living on it today.

The island is a popular destination from several towns on the Orange County coast, especially



Checklist

CATALINA

GETTING THERE

Hawaiian Airlines flies to from Auckland to Los Angeles via Honolulu. Return fares are currently \$1165 until June 29.

hawaiianairlines.co.nz

Ferries depart regularly for Catalina from several points along the Orange County coastline. Long Beach, about a 30-45 minute drive from Los Angeles Airport, is the closest port and the journey takes an hour.

catalinaexpress.com

ONLINE

santacatalinaisland.com
bluewatergrill.com

for daytrippers and overnighters because it only takes about an hour by ferry to get there.

There are loads of activities on offer across its 195sq km, from zip-lining to scuba diving, and if you take one of the tours that zoom around the rugged terrain (adrenaline junkies, go for the open-air Hummer option), you might see a buffalo yourself. We met Chuck, a huge male, who was calmly chewing on some grass as we idled close by.

The giant beasts, known for their bad temper, are one of the most dangerous animals in the US: despite their size, they can reach speeds of up to 60km/h and they can be mean — two tourists have been gored near Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, in the past few weeks.

So Buffalo Milk has become a Catalina "thing", although it's not milk from a buffalo at all, rather a common cow.

The drink is actually an alcoholic milkshake made of vodka, Kahlua, creme de banana, creme de cacao and regular milk, topped with fresh whipped cream and nutmeg.

One at the Bluewater Avalon, a waterfront seafood restaurant and bar decorated with striking ye olde photographs of well-dressed men and women posing with enormous game fish, cost just under \$12.

As he's serving the cocktail up in a hipster Mason jar, the barman tells me Buffalo Milk is used to welcome people to the island.

He'd been living there about six weeks, he said, and on his first day he was served about five or six of them.

That's quite an effort.

Frothy from the blender, the drink wasn't as sweet as I'd expected — the nutmeg seemed to neutralise the sugar — but it was very rich and creamy and though I contemplated making myself *really* at home on Catalina, one Buffalo Milk was definitely enough.

The writer travelled courtesy of Hawaiian Airlines and the Anaheim Orange County Visitors Bureau



Flight check

Grant Bradley flies aboard Etihad EY461 from Melbourne to Abu Dhabi

The plane: A Boeing 777-300, less than 2 years old.

On time: Got away five minutes earlier than the 10.40pm scheduled departure.

How full: Close to capacity — eight in First Class, 40 in Business and 280 in Economy.

My seat: I was originally destined for Economy 25K but got the call at the gate for an upgrade to Business Class so I ended up in 13A, towards the back of the Business Class section. The cabin is arranged 1-2-1 and the seats, particularly those on the window side are nice, private spaces, full lie-flat beds, and plenty of entertainment on screen. There's lots of storage against the wall of the fuselage, and a swinging tray table to allow you to get out of your seat at any time. In keeping with Middle Eastern airlines, conservative styling.

Price: Fares start from \$5000.

Food and drink: Out of Australia it is catered by Qantas and its own airline catering facility looks after its home base. International flavour, underpinned by an Arabic dish at every course. The requisite Champagne on arrival and a very well-stocked drinks cabinet. Huge range of meals in Business and its "Dine Anytime" menu allows you to order whenever you feel like it. Presentation was very polished, with sharp detailing around the crockery and cutlery trays and linen. In Economy there's not that flexibility, but there are five services during the flight time of just under 14 hours.

The extras: An amenity bag (which itself was fairly stylish) holding all the necessities plus PJs.

Staying connected: You can use your mobile phone — international roaming rates apply — and the internet is available for a fee.

The service: This is where every full-service airline aims to stand out from rivals who, with a bit of variation, all have modern, well-appointed fleets. Etihad is targeting the higher-yielding luxury market and the service has to match. It did on my flight: attentive, not obtrusive. Like Emirates, its bigger and older UAE cousin, Etihad has a multinational staff. Among our 13 cabin crew they spoke English, Arabic, Thai, Serbian, Dutch, French, Romanian, Hindi, Punjabi, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Afrikaans and Mandarin. They are all based in Abu Dhabi. One nice touch is the flying nanny; a London nanny school-trained flight attendant keeps an eye on the little ones throughout the plane. Another nice touch was a feedback card that was handed out by the cabin manager, Alisa.

The toilets: Roomy with very large mirrors and in good shape throughout.

The bottom line: Etihad is growing aggressively in this region, with its showcase apartment-equipped A380 service to Sydney just starting. Dreamliner flights to Brisbane, and a second daily 777 service to Melbourne later this year. Its agreement with Air New Zealand and Virgin Australia means Kiwis can feed into its services out of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne without Etihad doing the cut-throat Tasman leg with its own planes. The three airlines are able to provide a Middle East offer to compete with the Emirates-Qantas alliance, so this is yet another very comfortable way to get to the Middle East and beyond.

● Grant Bradley is the *Business Herald's* aviation reporter and flew courtesy of the International Transport Forum.

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