

Sunset



David Zaitz

Lily Rock rises above the Strawberry Valley and has more than 200 established climbing routes.

Academy, a first-rate jazz festival swings in August, and the wild country that surrounds the town beckons.

Rising above Idyllwild are steep, forested slopes broken by granite domes reminiscent of the Sierra Nevada. It was these internationally known climbing rocks that first drew local restaurateur Hubert Halkin to the area.

After coming here to climb in the 1970s, the emeritus professor of mathematics at University of California, San Diego, made what he describes as a "progressive move" to Idyllwild. A native of France's mountainous Auvergne region, he loved Idyllwild's natural setting. He also discovered a town with many resident artists — screenwriters, musicians, and painters.

"These are people who came here to do the work they want to do," Halkin says. "Sometimes they may need to go to Los Angeles, but the rest of the time they can ply their craft in peace and serenity."

Halkin's restaurant, Café Aroma, is one of Idyllwild's creative hubs. Here you can dine under the stars and catch poetry readings or sets by jazz musicians. Inside, there's a library area, where people often just hang out and talk. And if it seems like everyone knows everyone at Café Aroma, that's no accident. "This is quite a bit of a social club," says Halkin. "We wanted to keep the place relaxed, arty, and a little funky."

Art and outdoors in Idyllwild

With more galleries per capita than most big cities, a jazz festival, and an enviable setting in Southern California's San Jacinto Mountains, the town is pretty idyllic

by Matthew Jaffe

[Idyllwild travel planner: art, nature, restaurants, and inns](#)

In the rugged San Jacinto Mountains on the edge of arty Idyllwild, the silence is broken by a primal sound: a castanet-like rhythm that freezes a pair of hikers in their tracks. There, next to a log maybe a foot off the trail, is a coiled rattlesnake, nearly black with a prominent diamond pattern and eight quivering rattles.

The rattler's sudden appearance is a reminder of Idyllwild's dual nature. Situated in a wooded canyon above Palm Springs, the mile-high village of 3,500 has a cultural life that towns many times its size might envy. With its out-the-door access to wilderness, it's also a destination for hikers, climbers, and other fresh-air fanatics.

Summer is prime season in Idyllwild. Its many galleries are joined by a busy schedule of events at the Idyllwild Arts



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Café Aroma is as much a community center as an eatery; it features events like the "Shakespeare Smackdown" plus a lending library, live music, and an art gallery.