

Viva La Baja! Travel Guide



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Photographs of pelicans on Coyote Bay by Molly McHugh

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Ready to Go Baja?

Make sure you have a Mexican auto insurance policy; passports for all family members; spare gas can – *empty*; extra cash hidden in a secret location (so never stranded without); and an Emergency Evacuation policy, especially if going on an extended trip. Listings of Emergency Evacuation Insurance providers are included in *Viva La Baja! Relocation & Real Estate Guide to the Baja California Peninsula* available for purchase at: <http://www.vivalabaja.com/buynow.html>. Don't forget your sunglasses!

It may be smart to have a full gas can onboard (fill up the gas can *after* you cross the border). Not just in case you happen to run out, but in the event you are unable to purchase gas at a gas station. When electricity goes out, as it does on occasion in the summertime in Baja California Sur (due to high-levels of humidity causing disruptions with cable lines) the service stations will be unable to pump gas.

Another situation that can occur, especially during high-tourist travel times during winter, is for stations to run out of petrol. Million-dollar RVs, traveling in packs, descend upon a local station and empty out the tanks.

Once across the border, getting from one place to another is fairly straightforward. The Transpeninsular Highway, completed in 1973, runs through the middle of the Peninsula, from Tijuana to Cabo San Lucas. When traveling The Transpeninsular Highway, or Highway 1, to Cabo San Lucas from Tijuana with no side trips east or west, driving time is approximately 22-24 hours.

The Transpeninsular Highway is almost exclusively two-lanes, with little to no shoulder; wide enough for the mammoth RVs that cross its path, but just barely. Speed limit is 80 km (50 mi) per hour. Some stretches are 60 kmp (37 mph) or 40 kmp (25 mph). A solid center line means "No Passing." A dashed line means that it's OK to pass if it's clear. Many speed racers on the road, stay alert.

Safety Tip: Don't let a hotheaded driver riding your cars rear-end endanger your safety. When you can see it is viable for him or her to pass, flick on your left-hand turn signal and let them zip by. Signaling in this way is common practice and courtesy in Baja.

Cows on the loose, inadequate fencing... who knows, pero (but) keep an eye out when driving

the East Cape road, La Paz to Los Cabos, for cattle crossing the road. Sharp curves around Los Barriles and beyond will often turn into a sight of one of these massive creatures lying in a permanent belly-up position – a testament to the sorry end they suffered. I'd rather not know what happened to the car and driver.

The ones still able to inflict damage make wonderful photo opportunities (another reason to slow down) but I would not want to (or want you to) come across one head-on at high-speed around a bend in the road. This is a danger throughout the Peninsula, on all roads in all locations.

Avoid driving the Peninsula at night. Cows are attracted to the heat retained in the asphalt from the daytime sun, and become hard-to-miss accident triggers on the highway. It is estimated that ninety percent of all fatal vehicular accidents occur after dusk.



Mexican Auto Insurance: U.S. and Canadian auto insurance policies will not cover you in Mexico. You have to have Mexican auto insurance. Even when not at fault in an accident, you need to have proof of insurance. It will be a good thing to have in the event they want to detain you in jail until the authorities determine fault.

If you are found at fault, you are responsible for all damages, and will possibly be required to post a bond covering the estimated costs before they will release you. Talk about a crummy end to an expected good time.

*Photograph of Hummer & Cardon Cactus
by Ken Bondy*

Discover Baja Travel Club offers insurance services including online enrollment and a 24-hour toll-free bilingual assistance line to report an accident while in Mexico and start the claims process. They donate a portion of

the proceeds from insurance sales to non-profit organizations serving Baja. More information here: <http://www.discoverbaja.com/insurance/insurance5.html>.

Additional information on auto insurance policies, including coverage for motorcycles, boats and recreational vehicles is in *Viva La Baja! Relocation & Real Estate Guide to the Baja California Peninsula*: www.vivalabaja.com.

Driver's licenses: You can drive in Baja with a valid U.S. or Canadian driver's license or an International Driver's Permit. When living in Mexico for an extended amount of time, you can apply for a Mexican driver's license. You need to have an FM-2 or FM-3, photo identification, proof of blood type, and to take a written exam – in Spanish. I have been told the exam is easy to pass. There is no driving test required.

If you choose to purchase a Mexican automobile, you will need to obtain a Mexican driver's license. Other than that, it is unnecessary from a legal standpoint, but may be convenient or prudent to have. As an example, one Los Cabos full-time resident from the U.S. recently got a Mexican driver's license. Not because she was required to, but because when stopped for a traffic violation the police officer wanted to confiscate her American driver's license. Now if stopped she will hand over her Mexican license if forced to, but keep the other.

You can drive your U.S. or Canadian automobile with a Mexican driver's license as long as the car is registered in your name. If you are driving a car not registered in your name and using a Mexican driver's license you need to have written permission from the owner.

Importing a Vehicle: The Baja California Peninsula is currently a Free Trade Zone. You are exempt from having to obtain a car permit and from posting a bond when driving across the border onto the Peninsula. If you travel to mainland Mexico these items are needed, but not for travel within Baja. Just make sure you have Mexican auto insurance!

If you live in Baja for more than six months out of the year, and have an FM-2 or FM-3 Visa, you can still keep your U.S. or Canadian-registered auto with foreign plates in Baja indefinitely but the registration must be current. If you relocate to Baja and choose to purchase an automobile in Mexico, you will then need to obtain a Mexican driver's license.

Green Angels & Emergency Assistance: If you have an emergency while driving, the equivalent of '911' in Mexico is '060'. The Green Angels are a government-funded emergency vehicle assistance program serving the Baja California Peninsula.

Baja Missions – A Trip Back in Time

Mission Santa María de los Angeles was founded in 1767 as the last mission established by the Jesuits before they were expelled from the Peninsula early in 1768. The Franciscans, who replaced the Jesuits in Baja California, built the adobe structures (pictured below) at the mission in 1768.



Photograph by David Kier

The ‘Spanish missions and vistas of Baja California’ section of David K’s Viva Baja website can be viewed online at: <http://vivabaja.com/bajamissions/>. There are numerous photos of missions located throughout the Peninsula as well as dates when they were built and other historical information.

A Green Angel emergency assistance vehicle is white with green trim and white lettering on the side. They travel the Peninsula 24-hours daily, theoretically passing a single location twice. Heaven indeed to know that you can never be stranded in the hot, barren desert areas of the highway for days on end.

They carry gas, spare parts and can help arrange for your vehicle to be towed to the nearest car repair facility or assist with an emergency telephone call. They do not accept money but you will need to pay for any parts used in a repair.

The toll-free number for the Green Angels (dispatched from Mexico City) is (01) 800-903-9200. You can also call the Ministry of Tourism's hotline at (01) 55-5250-0027, 0123, 0292, and 0493.

1966 Baja explorers

Jack & Choral Pepper – publishers of “Desert Magazine” (1960’s) – visited the peninsula with mystery novel writer and creator of the Perry Mason series, Erle Stanley Gardner.



These giant cave paintings, located South of Los Angeles Bay, were visited using helicopters. Several were previously unknown, as they could be seen from the air, but not from the canyon trails below.



Photos are courtesy of David Kier. To learn more about the Choral Pepper Collection, click here:

<http://www.choralpepper.com>

Map of Baja, Towns & Highlights

From Tijuana to the Los Cabos Corridor there are a ton of Mexican towns. Large and small, the cities and towns I am listing here are the travel-worn and tourist-friendly ones. From town to town I have included mileage and approximate travel time. An easy guidepost, yet in-between these destinations and off-the-beaten track may await some of your best Baja adventures.

The highlights listed for each city or town are primarily family with kids oriented. Children are often the toughest customers to please. A pool here, a fun, interactive museum there, and the trip becomes more enjoyable for everyone. Miles upon miles of serene, desert scenery is usually more appealing to adults. Highlights for the adults in the crowd include: wine tasting, restaurants, hunting, scuba diving and more.

There are few restaurant or hotel listings – the ones included have a worthwhile activity or are the highlight for the specific area. I have included a link at the end of each brief write-up for you to click on for additional travel information about the town. Most of those websites have hotel and restaurant listings for the area. A map of Baja California norte and of Baja California Sur is located below within the text.

Most of the population numbers are approximate from 2005 Mexican census counts, unless otherwise indicated. When a new Mexican census report from CONAPO (Consejo Nacional de Poblacion), is released, this itinerary will be updated for all cities and towns.

For those who want more extensive data on population, one good source is The State Government of Baja California website. They have an online article 'The Evolution of the Population' that contains information on birth rate, historic growth of population and related factors, as well as population strategy:

http://www.bajacalifornia.gob.mx/english/Our_State/population.jsp.

I have included some side trips: Tecate and Mexicali (for those who cross the border at Mexicali or at Tecate), San Felipe, Bahia de los Angeles (from Punta Prieta), Magdalena Bay (from Ciudad Constitucion) and directions to Cabo Pulmo (from Los Barriles). A side trip means you leave the Transpeninsular Highway, or Highway 1, and head east or west. Or in the case of Mexicali and Tecate – you crossed the border at either town instead of Tijuana.

When crossing at the Tecate border (open 6a.m. to 12a.m) you take Highway 2 – Cuota (Toll

road) to Mexicali. From the Mexicali border (open 24 hours) you take Highway 5 to San Felipe.

To go straight to Cabo San Lucas from the Tijuana border (open 24 hours), without any diversions, stay on Highway 1. The total driving time from TJ to CSL on Highway 1 is approximately 22 – 24 hours (1711 km /1063 mi). NASCAR fans may make it in twenty.



Photograph of Mexican Federal Preventative Police (PFP) by Ken Bondy

The only time you do veer off of Highway 1 when going straight to CSL via TJ is when taking the West Cape route (after La Paz). If you continue on Highway 1 you will travel the East Cape. A short distance from La Paz (10 miles or so) on Highway 1 you need to choose to head east or west.

The next town on Highway 1 past La Paz is San Pedro. The turn-off for Highway 19 heading west (to Todos Santos) is after you get to San Pedro. From La Paz, Los Barriles is on the East Cape (via Highway 1), and Todos Santos is the primary town on the West Cape (via Highway 19).

Here are the list of towns with highlights, mileage information from one destination to the next and a link to more information. The itinerary begins at the border town of Tijuana and ends at

the southern tip of the Peninsula – Cabo San Lucas. A map of Baja California norte is on p. 10 and a map of Baja California Sur is on p. 16.

Baja California is the northern state of the Baja California Peninsula from Tijuana to Guerrero Negro. Baja California Sur is the southern state of the Baja California Peninsula beginning at Guerrero Negro and ending in Cabo San Lucas. Baja Norte and Baja Sur are not official names or designations, but are used at times to refer to each respective state.

Driving Itinerary - North to South

Tijuana (pop. 1,490,000, estimated by CONAPO for 2007) Border town that is hard to miss. Hip, up-dated main drag Revolution Avenue with jewelry and leather goods galore and mega-pharmacies on every block. Get your last taste of Americana, and specialty beer, at the Hard Rock Café before heading south.

Highlight: El Parque de la Amistad (Friendship Park). An oasis amidst the traffic fumes, El Parque de la Amistad contains over 40 acres of lush gardens, walking paths, picnic areas, food stands and peddle-carts to rent.

Driving time to Playas de Rosarito from Tijuana: 20 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 17 mi (27 km)

More info about Tijuana: Tijuana.com - <http://www.tijuana.com/en/index.html>

Playas de Rosarito, or Rosarito Beach (pop. 73,000) Party on the beach town for college crowd. Golf course retirement town for expats. Horse and pony riding on the beach for kids and adults.

Highlight: Foxploration – www.foxploration.com. Fox Studios original “Titanic” movie-set. Eight movies have been filmed here. Kids can create their own ‘Cinemagic’ complete with lights, camera and action!

Map of Baja California norte



This section of the map of the Baja California Peninsula is of Baja California norte, from Tijuana to Guerrero Negro.

One mile = 1.609 km

One km = .621 miles

Approximate driving time from Tijuana to Guerrero Negro is eleven hours.

Driving time to Ensenada from Rosarito Beach: 1 hour.

Mileage between towns, 56 mi (90 km)

More info about Playas de Rosarito: Rosarito Beach website –
<http://www.rosarito.org/eindex.htm>

Ensenada (pop. 390,000) A cruise-ship stopover town with many permanent residents as well. All that you would expect to appeal to these population segments is here: shopping, restaurants, RV parks, hotels/motels, and tourist-tours in excess.

Highlight: Home to the Valley de Guadalupe – a primary winemaking area and production center – join the sophisticated crowd and visit a winery or two. A month-long grape harvest

celebration occurs every August: <http://www.sdoro.com/cotucoeda/winery2.htm>. Take the kids to see the natural blowhole at Bufadora.

Driving time to San Quintin from Ensenada: 2 hours.

Mileage between towns, 116 mi (187 km)

More info about Ensenada: Enjoy Ensenada.com (official site of the Ensenada Tourism Board) – <http://www.enjoyensenada.com/english/aboutensenada.jsp>

San Quintin (pop. 60,000) Not an overly attractive or interesting town, the surrounding areas have the most appeal. It is the last coastal (Pacific Ocean) town on Highway 1. A popular fishing and hunting destination. Home of the “Baja Bash” (read: party!) at Gypsy Beach in March.

Highlight: Catch yourself a quail, duck or goose (in the winter) in the marshland south of town. Just remember to use only a BB gun, Air gun or Pellet Rifle. Other guns are illegal in Mexico.

Non-hunting fans and young children will appreciate the hiking, bird watching and kayaking available in Bahia de San Quintin (San Quintin Bay). A total of six bays are located in this area: <http://www.discoverbajacalifornia.com/various/sq.html>.

Driving time to El Rosario from San Quintin: 35 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 37 mi (56 km)

More info about San Quintin: SignOn San Diego.com – <http://www.signonsandiego.com/bajaguide/quintin.html>

El Rosario (pop. 35,000) A good place to buy fuel if driving straight down Highway 1. The next Pemex station on Highway 1 is at Guerrero Negro, 190 miles (306 km) south, unless Hotel La Pinta Pemex in Cataviña is pumping petrol (service in Cataviña is unreliable). Not much else here.

Highlight: Mama Espinoza’s Restaurant – but maybe just for a beer, skip the tacos. A favorite haunt of Baja off-road racers, the walls of the restaurant feature many race participants (obviously having a very good time!). There is a Foosball table for kids.

Update as of November, 2008 - Many Baja Nomad travelers complain of becoming ill from eating at Mamas. To sign-up to the listserv click here: <http://www.bajanomad.com>.

Whale watching season is from January to March



Photograph to the left – courtesy of Shari Bondy – is of the double blowhole of a Baleen whale.



Popular whale watching locations include Laguna de Ojo de Libre (Scammon's Lagoon) outside of Guerrero Negro, Laguna San Ignacio and Bahia Magdalena. A few types of whales that may be encountered include California Gray, Blue, Baleen and Finback whales. The photograph above is of a Blue whale near Loreto taken by Ken Bondy.

Driving time to Cataviña from El Rosario: 1 hour 30 minute.

Mileage between towns, 76 mi (56 km)

More info about El Rosario: Baja Expo – <http://www.bajaexpo.com/cities/elrosario.html>

****** If you are making a beeline down Highway 1, from Tijuana to Los Cabos, you will not need this section. Skip to Cataviña below, the next main stop on Highway 1 from El Rosario. ******

Note: This section is for when you cross the U.S./Mexico border at the towns of Tecate or Mexicali. From Tecate you can travel to Mexicali via Highway 2 and then on to San Felipe via Highway 5. After San Felipe, you can get on the straight-track south to Cabo San Lucas via Highway 1.

From Mexicali you can travel straight to San Felipe via Highway 5 (approximately 2.5 hours). There are no fuel stops on Highway 5 from Mexicali to San Felipe, make sure you have filled-up your spare gas can in Mexicali!

Tecate (pop. 91,000) Town with a border between Mexico and the U.S. open from 6 a.m. to 12 a.m.

Highlight: Beer brewery... maybe for a quick visit. Then head out of town to Rancho Tecate Resort and Country Club. Play a little golf and/or take the kids for a swim in the pool.

Driving time to Mexicali from Tecate: 1 hour 45 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 89 mi (143 km)

More info about Tecate: Total Escape: California, Off the Beaten Path – http://www.totalescape.com/destin/all_towns/tecate.html

Mexicali (pop. 856,000) If you need a dose of a large, industrial city, or a bite of Chinese food, you've come to the right place. Visit China Town and indulge in ethnic delights.

Highlight: Bullfight if you are not opposed, or at least view the bullring. Head into the outlying areas for an array of activities including; ATV off-roading, horseback riding and hiking.

Driving time to San Felipe from Mexicali: 3 hours.

Mileage between towns, 149 mi (240 km)

More info about Mexicali: Mexicali Official Website for Tourists – <http://www.mexicaliturismo.com/>

San Felipe (pop. 25,000) A popular retirement and tourist town. One of few small Baja towns that host a Mardi Gras celebration (February 16th – 20th). Has an evening Dinner Theatre... how Norteño Americano (North American) is that!

Highlight: Check out the San Felipe racing stadium – the only one in Mexico. Attend an event such as the SCORE San Felipe 250 in March or the Grand Prix in June. Low tides great for seashell collecting kids. Collecting shells is actually illegal, but a few small treasures most likely will not be noticed.



Photograph of Punta San Francisquito by Ken Bondy.

To view more of his Baja pics click here: <http://www.kenbondy.com/baja.htm>

Driving time to Cataviña from San Felipe: 6 hours, depending on road condition.

Mileage between towns, 143 mi (230 km)

More info about San Felipe: BlueRoadRunner.com – <http://www.blueroadrunner.com/>

** South of San Felipe the paved road continues to Puertecitos. You then travel a dirt road through Gonzaga Bay and end up back on Highway 1 south of Cataviña **

Cataviña (pop. 640) Small oasis, very small. Fill-up at the *Hotel La Pinta* Pemex if it is working. Home of the Desierto Central de Baja California (Central Desert of Baja California). Go cacti hunting and view a beautiful boojum tree (cirio in Spanish).

Highlight: Hotel La Pinta, take a break and let kids enjoy the pool and playground. View info here: <http://www.lapintahotels.com>.

Driving time to Guerrero Negro from Cataviña (when continuing straight on Highway 1 without any side trips): 2 hours 55 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 146 mi (235 km)

More info about Cataviña: CaboBob's Cataviña Desert –

<http://www.cabobob.com/03Ctvna/00Ctvna.htm>

**** Side Trip to Bahia de los Angeles **** To get to Bahia de los Angeles you need to take Highway 12 (heading east). The turn-off from Highway 1 is near Parador Punta Prieta, a small town 65 miles south of Cataviña. Punta Prieta used to have a Pemex station at the turn-off but it is now closed. From Parador Punta Prieta it is approximately 43 mi (69km) to Bahia de los Angeles on Highway 12.

Bahia de los Angeles (pop. 600) Wash off some road-dust and bask in the beauty of the Sea of Cortez. Stroll the bay of the same name – Bahia de los Angeles (Bay of the Angels). Swim or rent a boat to take a trip out on the calm, blue waters.

Highlight: Visit the Museum of Nature and Culture to view displays of shells, sea turtles, whale skeletons plus native cultures (Cochimi artifacts) and rock art – and you didn't have to hike to see it!

More info about Bahia de los Angeles: Baja Motion Tours –

<http://www.2gobaja.com/bahia.html>

Guerrero Negro (pop. 12,000) You're crossing the 28th parallel – the official, geographical dividing line between the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur. If you

didn't obtain a tourist visa when at the border, purchase one here at the Immigration office located next to the military checkpoint. Cost is approximately \$20 USD. Don't forget the time zone changes from PST (Pacific Standard Time) to MT (Mountain Time).

Highlight: Head out of the 'no accessible beach but a couple of decent low-cost motels' town to Laguna Ojo de Liebre (Lagoon of the Free Eye). Also known as Scammon's Lagoon, it is approximately 2 miles south of Guerrero Negro – watch for the sign with the whale drawing and turn-off on your right.

Map of Baja California Sur

This section of the map is of Baja California Sur, from Guerrero Negro to Cabo San Lucas.

The driving time from Guerrero Negro to La Paz is approximately 9.5 hours.

Staying on Highway 1 via the East Cape route to Cabo San Lucas from La Paz is approximately 3 hours.

Taking the West Cape route from La Paz via Highway 19 to Cabo San Lucas is an hour shorter, approximately 2 hours.



It is a 40-minute or so, bumpy ride to the Pacific Ocean and mating spot for California Grey Whales. On the way you will see frothy-white, crystalline piles of salt on the side of waterways & inlets – sea-salt that is part of the ESSA saltworks (Exportadora de Sal, S.A.), a salt exporting company. Joint-owned by the Mexican Government (51 %) and Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation (49%), it is Baja's largest corporation, at present time.

Driving time to San Ignacio: 1 hour 45 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 90 mi (145 km)

More info about Guerrero Negro: Baja Expo – <http://www.bajaexpo.com/cities/guerre.htm>

San Ignacio (pop. 4,000) A pretty little town with quaint zocalo (main square), a spring-fed river that runs through it (almost), and small church. Whale watching trip jump-off point in February and March.

The beach pictured here is at Bahia Asuncion located in the central Baja region.



Photograph by Shari Bondy

For information on the area including driving directions, accommodations and activities available both in the water and out, visit the Bahia Asuncion website at:
http://bajabnb.com/php/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1.

Highlight: A day trip to the rock art of the Sierra de San Francisco. Head to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia (INAH) for information and to obtain a permit to visit the sites. Be a Baja nomad, spend the night sleeping in a yurt (deluxe accommodations, breakfast

included) at San Ignacio Springs: <http://www.ignaciosprings.com/>. Free use of kayaks and fishing poles. Can swim in the river.

Driving time to Santa Rosalia: 50 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 46 mi (74 km)

More info about San Ignacio: Baja Whales –
<http://www.netconnection.com/bajawhales.html>

Santa Rosalia (pop. 10,500) Old mining town (1911 and up) with wooden clapboard houses surrounded by white picket fences, many of that seem to not have been renovated since. Feels like walking through the old Wild West... or quite possibly the new one. Car repair and new tires available if needed. Stock up on supplies: food, gas and money. Has an Internet café.

Highlight: Visit the bakery for fresh bread, rolls and homemade treats.

Driving time to Mulege: 40 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 39 mi (63 km)

More info about Santa Rosalia: Mexonline.com –
<http://www.mexonline.com/santarosalia.htm>

Mulege (pop. 4000) A small Baja town some say is hard to beat. After a visit to the town center, stroll the river road, on either side of the mangrove-lined estuary. If lucky, catch a glimpse of a Pelican or Osprey diving into the waters, grabbing their meal and soaring off.

On the north side of the river, romantic seaside restaurant *El Patron* awaits your patronage with fresh seafood served 20 feet or so from the rolling surf. The lighthouse is a short stroll away via sandy beach.

Highlight: Drive past the town entrance and continue on the Highway 1 for about two to three more miles, looking to your left for a sign 'The Serenidad Hotel' and a dirt turn-off. If you have a future aviator on your hands, it's a must-do: <http://www.serenidad.com/>.

Restaurant, bar, swimming pool and steady flow (most days) of small aircraft coming and going from the adjoining runway. If you're there at the right time, you might have the opportunity to meet a Baja Bush Pilot (<http://www.bajabushpilots.com/>) – one of the amazing folks who donate their time and money to meeting the needs of the native peoples of Baja.

Driving time to Loreto (see below after Conception Bay): 1 hour 30 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 85 mi (137 km)

More info about Mulege: Mulege.net – <http://www.mulege.net/>

Conception Bay or Bahia de Conception (population = lots of cool transients & part-time residents) No, not a town, but if you didn't stop somewhere along it's breathtakingly beautiful 30 km (22 mi) stretch of tranquil, transfixing-blue water plus wetlands, rocks and sand I would have some serious concerns. Rent a palapa and stay awhile. Laid-back Mulege is at your disposal for supplies.

Ana's at Santispac beach is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner starting at 7a.m. They have hot showers; a few basic, small rooms; canoe and kayak rentals; and give snorkeling or Island tours in a large panga that holds up to twenty people. Private tours are available upon request.

Heading south from Mulege a few popular beaches (playas in Spanish) on Conception Bay are: Playa de Arena, Playa de Naranjos, Playa de Santispac, Playa de Posada Concepcion, Playa de Escondido, Playa de Burro, Playa de Coyote, Playa de Requeson and Armenta.



Photograph of a Seagull at home in Coyote Bay by Molly McHugh

Bertha's Restaurant at Playa de Burro serves breakfast, lunch and simple Mexican fare dinners. Opens at 8 a.m., closes at 9 p.m. The next beach heading south, Playa de Coyote, is the home of the newly-opened 'Pub Estrella del Mar de Josue'. The pub has a pool table and dart board, opens at 3 p.m.

Highlight: Rent a kayak and paddle to Coyote Island, an easy one-half to hour-long excursion from Posada, Escondido, Burro or Coyote beach. In the mornings the water is usually calm, but can get choppy in the afternoon when the wind picks-up, something to keep in mind especially

if children are onboard. The 'backside' of the island has a sandy beach great for overnight camping.

Afterwards – for cocktails, a meal, and chit-chat with the loco locals – don't miss *The Jungle*, a three-generation, Mexican-owned town landmark (and restaurant/pub). It is located just off the highway to your right when heading towards Mulege from the beaches (third of a mile or so north of the *Serenidad*). Children are welcome. Opens at 3 p.m. and closes when the party ends (usually around 9-10 p.m.).

More info about Conception Bay: Cruise the Sea of Cortez – <http://www.cruisecortez.com/concepcion.htm>

Loreto (pop.12,000) Up-scale town with numerous restaurants and boutiques. Wander the streets and enjoy a meal in a local restaurant with a bottle of wine; hold the tacos.

Highlight: An 800 square mile marine sanctuary – Loreto National Marine Park – in the Bay of Loreto. Five islands are contained in this sanctuary, the largest of its kind in Mexico, as well as dolphins, sea urchins, hordes of fish, blue whales and other natural wonders.

Many Eco-tour outfitters in this area ready to assist you and your family have an experience of a lifetime. One option for scuba diving is *Dolphin Dive Center*: <http://www.dolphindivebaja.com/>.

Viva La Baja! Relocation & Real Estate Guide has listings for eco-trip outfitters throughout the Peninsula: www.vivalabaja.com.

Driving time to Ciudad Constitucion: 1 hour 20 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 75 mi (121 km)

More info about Loreto: Loreto.com – <http://www.loreto.com/>

Ciudad Constitucion (pop. 370,220) Located in the agricultural valley of Santa Domingo, this is a working town. A stop-through for gas, cash and chicken, if hungry. Dos (two) *Super Pollo* restaurants. Three Pemex stations and two ATMs. There is an Internet Café.

Highlight: Entryway into the wonderland of Magdalena Bay on the Pacific Ocean. Popular gray whale viewing spot from January to March. Many Eco-tours available with *Mag Bay Tours*: <http://www.bajatravel.com/guidebook/cconst.html>.

**** Side Trip to Magdalena Bay **** To Magdalena Bay from Ciudad Constitucion you take Highway 22 (heading west). It is approximately 35 mi (57 km). Hotel Brennan is located in Puerto San Carlos. They can arrange tours to Magdalena Bay and otherwise help rest your travel-weary troops: <http://www.bajaquest.com/sidetrips/hotel-brennan.htm>.

Isla Los Islotes (Baja California Sur) is the last island in the chain of Espiritu Santo, Partida and Islotes. It is a popular location for swimming with the sea lions and scuba diving. It is a protected nesting ground for the sea lions and their pups.



Photograph of bottlenose dolphins taken above water from a boat by Paul Buelow

One eco-tour company that offers scuba diving excursions in the area is the Cortez Club: <http://www.cortezclub.com/scubadivesitesbaja.html>.

Driving time to La Paz: 2 hour 30 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 132 mi (212 km)

More info about Ciudad Constitucion: Escapist.com – <http://www.escapist.com/baja/constitution.htm>

La Paz (pop. 189,180) Known and loved as an 'authentic Mexican town' La Paz does not have mega-hotels/condominiums (due to development restrictions) or an over-abundance of foreigners as of yet. Is home to the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California – <http://www.uabc.mx/> (also in Tijuana and Mexicali) and satellite campuses of other colleges. Marine sciences a specialty here.

Free (donations welcome), small-scale aquarium with tanks housing many varieties of local marine animals. On the south side of town is a Reptile Zoo (El Serpentario) with over a 100 species of Baja creatures on display. If so inclined, you can ask to go with the owner on a 'snake hunt' in the after-hours. A water park for children is being constructed on the malecon, may be completed in 2009.

Out of a zillion pizza parlors in this town – Mexican-owned *Big Kauna Pizza* is yum with a capital 'Y'! Tel. 612-125-6290. Servicio (service) to your domicilio (where you are staying).

Highlight: Take a swim with the Sea Lions at Los Islote (The Small, Barren Islands in English) in the Sea of Cortez. Hire a boat off the malecon (waterfront boardwalk) just across from *Burger King*. Life jackets will be provided if jumping in, still a sight to see if not. Other tour operators available, ask around.

Make sure you go to Playa Balandra or Espiritu de Santo after Sea Lion Rock. Both are gorgeous, secluded coves with azure-colored sparkling waters. Bring drinks, snacks and lots of sunscreen. There are no restaurants or palapas – just sand, sun and the sea – lucky you!

Driving time to Todos Santos: 55 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 48 mi (77 km)

More info about La Paz: Enjoy Mexico – <http://www.enjoymexico.net/la-paz-mexico.php>

Now the road splits in two... well, not exactly, but it is an easy way to look at it! Heading to the West Cape you take Highway 19 and have the Pacific Ocean on your right while heading east from La Paz to Cabo San Lucas you continue on Highway 1 and have the Sea of Cortez on your left (though neither are always visible).

Todos Santos (pop. 4,000) Known as an upscale, artists Mecca it fails to disappoint. Locals rave about the quality of natural light in this area of the Peninsula, it most likely will be shining on you.

Highlight: Lunch at the lovely Hotel California café complete with plant-filled, outdoor patio. Afterwards stroll the adjoining arts gallery. Now that you are inspired, visit a few of the other galleries and historic buildings in town. Buy some helado (ice cream) for the kids, and adults too!

Driving time to Cabo San Lucas from Todos Santos: 55 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 48 mi (77 km)

More info about Todos Santos: Todos Santos, The 'Pueblo Magico' of Baja Sur – <http://www.todossantos.cc/>

Los Barriles (pop. 600) A popular and growing expat destination, small-time compared to the Los Cabos (why is popular). Windsurfing capital of the East Cape, some would say of Baja. La Ventana, forty-minutes southeast of La Paz, is considered a world-class surfing destination as well.

Highlight: Learn to Kitesurf (also called Kiteboarding) or Windsurf with the most sport-obsessed. Kid-friendly Vela Windsurf Resort has lessons (for all ages and skill levels) and a pool: <http://www.velawindsurf.com/baja/index.html>.

Note: From Los Barriles, you reach San Jose del Cabo via Highway 1, before you reach the end of the rainbow... I mean Cabo San Lucas. From Todos Santos your first major town of Los Cabos (The Capes) via Highway 19 is Cabo San Lucas.

Driving time to Cabo Pulmo from Los Barriles: 40 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 33 mi (53 km)

More info about Los Barriles: East Cape Property Rentals & Vacation Properties – <http://abajavacation.com/eastcape-baja-activities.html>

**** Side Trip to Cabo Pulmo **** From Los Barriles you travel south on Highway 1 until the intersection of Los Cuevas and La Ribera. The turn-off is about 10 minutes south of Buena Vista (town after Los Barriles). Head east to La Ribera. Just before La Ribera, there is Y in the road, go right and continue to Cabo Pulmo, looking for *Tito's Bar* as a landmark you have arrived... and

deserve a cerveza. Approximately 40 - 50 minutes from Highway 1.

Cabo Pulmo (pop.110) Where Jacques may be retired if still alive today. Home to Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, the only living coral reef in the Sea of Cortez and one of two national parks in Baja Sur (the other is the Bay of Loreto National Park). Both parks are protected areas administered by Mexico's Federal National Commission of Protected Natural Areas (CONANP).

*No Bad Days!
Squid from Bahia de Los Angeles*



*Photograph courtesy of David Kier. Visit his Viva Baja! website at:
<http://www.vivabaja.com/>*

Baja California (norte) has three protected natural areas: Archipelago de San Lorenzo National Park, Constitucion de 1957 National Park and San Pedro Martir National Park. There are sixty-seven federally-recognized national parks in Mexico in total.

Highlight: Be a mermaid, snorkel in Mermaid cove. Spot a rare reef fish such as the stone scorpion fish, found nowhere else in the world. Pepe has moved to Los Barriles with his family but has left others in charge who can take you diving or snorkeling and offer an overnight stay:
<http://www.cabopulmo.com.mx/divereport/>.

Note from Pepe: “For more information about Pepe’s Dive Center and the Marine Park, please check out our website at: <http://www.vanwormerresorts.com>. You can call me on my cell in Mexico 011-521-624-168-2232. From the U.S. call (858)964-3716. Have a Great Diving Day!” Pepe Murrieta

Driving time to San Jose del Cabo from Cabo Pulmo: 1 hour 30 minutes.

More info about Cabo Pulmo: Cabo Pulmo Marine Park – <http://www.cabopulmomarinepark.com/>

San Jose del Cabo (pop.60,000) Catching up to the crazy pace of Cabo San Lucas is San Jose del Cabo, the less frenetic Los Cabos town. They party hard here too, but the crowd is a bit less raucous and prefers to get some shut-eye before the sun rises.

Highlight: Escape the Cabo Corridor traffic and take a trip to a waterfall or go kayaking. Nomadas de Baja has multiple adventures for you to choose from. More info here: <http://www.nomadasdebaja.com/>.

Driving time to Cabo San Lucas: 25 minutes.

Mileage between towns, 20 mi (32 km)

More info about San Jose del Cabo: San Jose del Cabo, Los Cabos, Mexico – <http://www.sanjosedelcaboguide.com/>

Cabo San Lucas (pop. 90,000) You’ve reached the end of the world... I mean the Baja California Peninsula. Congrats! Tons of people live here and many more travel through annually to party and fish. If you like to be incognito, this is one of the few Baja towns you may be able to accomplish that goal.

Find a taco stand or buy deli-products (a luxury in Baja) for a picnic at one of the many superstores and head to the lighthouse for a picnic. On the Los Cabos Corridor between Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo is deli *La Europea* ‘the size of a Safeway’ to meet all your cheese, wine and salami needs! <http://www.loscabosguide.com/laeuropeacabo/index.html>.

There is a fish museum in downtown Cabo San Lucas with mounted specimens of many types of sport fish highly sought-after in Baja. Your kids may like it too.

Swim with Dolphins in Cabo San Lucas



Photograph courtesy of George Bergin

If you have dreamed of swimming with dolphins Cabo Dolphins may be the place for you. There are programs for children (ages 4 and up) and adults. For more information visit their website at: <http://www.cabodolphins.com>.

Highlight: Ahoy Matey! Take a pirate cruise aboard the 'Buccaneer Queen', a 95ft long, tall ship that has been used in movies and T.V. commercials. *Pirate Ship Cabo* offers a variety of trips to choose from aboard the Buccaneer Queen including whale watching, snorkeling and sunset cruises. Just watch out for the pirates... I wouldn't want you or your children caught up in a mutiny! <http://www.pirateshipcabo.com/>.

More info about Cabo San Lucas: *The Los Cabos Visitor's Guide –* <http://www.loscabosvisitorsguide.com/>

Taking the Ferry

From mainland Mexico you can take a ferry across to Baja from Guaymas, Topolobampo and Mazatlan. Guaymas is located on the mainland in the state of Sonora while Topolobampo and Mazatlan are both in Sinaloa. Websites for all routes are listed below.

Dorado tournament in Mulege – photograph courtesy of Cathy Perrigo.



Approximate Travel Time and Costs:

The private cabins listed below contain two bunk beds, and may or may not have a private bathroom. Children up to age 11 are half-price on all routes. Infants up to one year of age are free.

Guaymas to Santa Rosalia: approximately 7 hours, \$65 USD per person, \$75 USD for a private cabin.

Topolobampo to La Paz: approximately 9 hours, 710 pesos (\$71 USD) per person, 760 pesos (\$76 USD) for a private cabin with bathroom for up to four people.

Mazatlan to La Paz: approximately 18 hours, 800 pesos (\$80 USD) per person, 250 pesos (\$25 USD) for a private cabin for up to four people; bathroom separate.

All three ferry systems have food and bar service, car and overnight accommodations. For more information on Baja Ferries, including the cost to transport a vehicle, click here:

<http://www.bajafferries.com/modules/content/index.php?id=2&lang=english>.

The Santa Rosalia to Guaymas route has an additional website:

<http://www.ferrysantarosalia.com/htm/rates.htm>.

Riding a Bus

Buy your boleto (ticket) at the taquilla (no, that is not Tequila!) and be on your way. First-class bus service in Baja is comfortable (movies & commodes), efficient (minus unavoidable road construction delays), and low-cost. Just be prepared for varied service and bus stations. No two are alike.

There are two primary bus companies serving the Baja California Peninsula: *ABC* and *Aguila*. *ABC* (*Autotransportes de la Baja California*) operates in the Peninsula from Tijuana to Los Cabos. *Aguila* serves travelers in Baja California Sur venturing from Guerrero Negro to the Los Cabos... and back! *ABC* has a website, currently in Spanish-only: <http://www.abc.com.mx/>.

Baja California Sur

In La Paz, anyone will give you directions to the main bus terminal (estacion del autobus mejor), on the malecon with: Sea of Cortez view, air conditioning and magazine and snack kiosk. If purchasing a premier plus ticket to ride on Peninsula Ejectivo, you also have a private room with computer terminals at your service – top of the line serving a direct route from La Paz to Los Cabos (only).

Wandering the off-streets a mile or so away, you may come across the less-fancy bus station with *ATP* (*Autotransportes La Paz*) service. First class busses as well but at less cost. *ATP* charges 130 pesos (\$13 USD) to Cabo San Lucas whereas *Aguila* on the malecon charges 145 pesos (\$14 USD). Premier plus service will cost you 198 pesos (\$19 USD).

Routes vary from one company to the other. *ATP* has no service to the East Cape, only to Todos Santos and other towns in the West Cape. As well, when you pay for a taquilla (ticket) one-way to a town, do not expect the same price heading back in the other direction. On *ATP*, a one-way fare to Cabo San Lucas from La Paz is 130 pesos, but returning to La Paz will cost you only 100 pesos.

Baja California norte

Two terminals for Tijuana – old and new. Old downtown terminal at Calle Comercio and Avenida Madero that serves local bus lines. The Central Bus Terminal (Central de Autobuses), with all the bells and whistles you would expect, is located at the corner of Lazaro Cardenas and Alamar.

ABC covers the entire Peninsula. You can take the red eye from Tijuana and arrive in Cabo San Lucas in approximately 24 hours. Cost is approximately 1543 pesos (\$ 153 USD). All first-class buses are comfortably air-conditioned, have bathrooms (bring your own TP just in case), multiple ceiling-mounted T.V. screens for videos (often in English, once we had one in French... go figure) and reclinable seating.



From the U.S., tourists or North American escapees can tap into the entire system at the main Greyhound bus terminal in downtown San Diego and ride across the border into Tijuana.

Photograph by Ken Bondy

Hot Tip: Planning a bus trip? Buy Dramamine, even if you have never taken an aspirin in your life. This goes

triple if traveling with children. Also, even in the heat of summer bring a blanket. It is not uncommon for air-conditioning to be set on high and left there even as icicles form on the windows.

In summary, it is hard to know what to expect from one bus terminal to the next. Some have snacks and drinks available only, others a selection of these plus sandwiches and magazines as well as tourist trinkets. Then you stop through Los Barriles expecting a cold soda, and find a brick shell of a building with no amenities, only a primitive baño outback. Each town is different, plan ahead accordingly.

As well, bus drivers may stop for a few minutes at a snack kiosk when on a long stretch, but often times he or she will cruise straight through to the next scheduled stop. Unpredictability seems to be law in Baja.

Crime, Safety & Consulates

Theft and drug trafficking are the most common criminal activity in Baja. It is estimated that at least two-thirds of cocaine consumed in the U.S. enters the country via the Mexican-U.S. border. Three hundred people (known cases) died in 2006 in Tijuana in drug cartel-related violence.

Unless involved in drugs, most residents and visitors have a relatively low risk of being the victim of a violent crime. An exception may be those who live in or near the border cities of Tijuana, Mexicali and others. In these areas where drug cartels reign supreme, kidnapping of foreigners and murder (most found to be drug-related) is on the rise. A recent Travel Alert posted by the U.S. Department of State (April, 2008) can be read here:

http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_3028.html.

Violent crime in other areas of the Peninsula is not common, yet does occur. The U.S. Department of State and the Foreign Affairs International Trade Canada issue warnings and travel advisories regularly for tourists and travelers to Baja. For current information visit their respective websites listed below.

If you or anyone you know has been a victim of crime in Baja the U.S. and Canadian consulates want to help. Please use the links below to obtain current information on how and where to report a crime. Travel warnings are regularly issued from both countries regarding other pertinent issues such as natural disasters as well.

Viva La Baja! Blog has information on crime and safety issues including 'Safety in Baja & What is the Risk of Travel' and 'Men in Black – Who are These Masked Men in Baja?' To read these and other entries click here: <http://vivalabaja.blogspot.com/2008/04/new-crime-alert-issued-for-baja.html>.

That written and hopefully read – now don't worry! If you are drawn to the Baja California Peninsula, you will connect with other like-minded, adventurous, good-hearted souls almost guaranteed. Enjoy and 'buen viaje'. Safe travels.

United States Consulates & Embassy

The official website of the U.S. Department of State is located at:

<http://travel.state.gov/index.html>. It contains information on: immigration issues; how to

report a lost or stolen passport; notary services; oversees absentee voter registration; emergency and evacuation assistance; medical care services, and other topics.

In order to be contacted in an emergency by relatives, you can leave travel details of your trip (where you are going and when) with consular officers. If you are unfortunate enough to land in jail the consulate can visit you, offer lists of attorneys and otherwise protect your welfare.

American consulates in Baja are at the following locations:

U.S. Consulate (Baja California norte) – Tijuana:
http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/tijuana/contact_us.html

U.S. Consulate (Baja California Sur) – Cabo San Lucas:
http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/tijuana/contact_us.html

American Embassy: The American Ambassador to Mexico is living at the American Embassy in Mexico City. Embassy of the United States-Mexico website: http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/eng/citizen_services.html.

Canadian Consulates & Embassy

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada website is located at:
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/consular_home-en.asp. They can assist you with: international driving permit; passports; traveling with children; registration of Canadians living abroad, and other issues.

Canadian Consulates in Baja are at the following locations:

Canadian Consulate (Baja California norte) – Tijuana: <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/mexico-city/consular/tju-en.asp>

Canadian Consulate (Baja California Sur) – San Jose del Cabo: <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/mexico-city/consular/sjc-en.asp>

Canadian Embassy: The High Commissioner of Canada assigned to Mexico resides at the Canadian High Commission, or Embassy, located in Mexico City. Here is the website for the Canadian Embassy - Mexico: <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/mexico-city/menu-en.asp>.

Other Embassies and Consulates in Mexico

For information and listings of embassies and consulates of all countries with a presence in Mexico visit the Mexico Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at: <http://www.sre.gob.mx/english/>.

Passports & Visas

Passports: New passport requirements for Mexico, and the hassles in getting one, are making travel difficult for many North Americans wanting to visit the Baja California Peninsula, and for families traveling with children. Children under the age of 18 must have a valid passport for entry into Mexico and re-entry into the U.S when traveling by airplane.

Canadians need to have valid passports to transit though the U.S. by air when going to Mexico: <http://www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/report-en.asp?country=184000>. If you have a direct flight from Canada to Mexico, or if you're traveling over land, you must show proof of identity and citizenship – such as a birth certificate and driver's license.

The most recent guidelines were posted on December 3, 2007 on the Embassy of the United States website in Mexico City: http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/eng/eacs_warden_passports.html.

As of January 31, 2008 U.S. and Canadian citizens need to present a government-issued photo ID (such as a driver's license, U.S. Passport or SENTRI/NEXUS/FAST card) and proof of citizenship to travel to Mexico, Canada, and the Caribbean by land or sea. The proof of citizenship can be a birth certificate; it does not need to be a passport. Again, when *flying* into Mexico or the U.S. you need a passport.

In the U.S., they granted exceptions to the passport requirement through September 30, 2007 for persons traveling by air. You now need a current passport – no exceptions – for all family members when traveling to and from the U.S. into Mexico by air.

Traveling by car or by boat the new U.S. passport regulations are set to be in-effect by June 2009. For more information: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html.

FM-T or Tourist Visa: When you drive across the border into Mexico they do not require you to fill out paperwork for an FM-T because if you are staying in the country for less than 72 hours you do not need one. If you stay longer than 72 hours or are traveling outside of the Border Zone i.e. past San Quintin for the Pacific side, south of San Felipe for the Sea of Cortez side – you will need an FM-T Visa in order to be legal. You can stop at any immigration office (at the border or further south) and purchase one.

Note: Waiting until after Guerrero Negro to get your FM-T Visa when heading south to La Paz or Los Cabos can cost you an approximate \$50 USD fine.

When you fly into the Baja California Peninsula, this is part of the paperwork you are compelled to do before departing from the plane. When you hand the paper to immigration they will stamp it and tear-off a portion for you to keep. Upon departing Mexico you may or may not be asked to show this to verify the length of your stay. If you lose it, you can be charged for an over-stay, at the discretion of the Immigration official.

The form asks you to select the number of days you are planning to visit Mexico, with 30, 90 and 180 days as options. Select 180 if staying for six months or longer. Six-months are the maximum length of stay granted by a tourist visa. If you have selected 30 days or other and want to stay longer the visa can be extended (for up to 180 days) at an Immigration office. Offices are located in Tijuana, Ensenada, Guerrero Negro (at the military checkpoint), La Paz, and Cabo San Lucas. They will give you forms to complete, ask to see a valid passport; possibly a copy of a bank statement and request approximately \$20 USD in cash for the fee. It usually takes 30 minutes or less.

If you stay in the country longer than six months, you need to apply for an FM-3. You should start the application process for an FM-3 thirty days or more prior to your FM-T expiring or you could be charged over-stay fees of approximately 80 pesos (\$8 USD) per day if your FM-T expires before being granted an FM-3.

You cannot work in Mexico as a tourist with an FM-T Visa. If you or a family member is planning to work in Baja or start a business, you need to obtain an FM-3 Visa.

Information on applying for an FM-3 Visa, FM-2 Visa and on obtaining Mexican citizenship can be found in *Viva La Baja! Relocation & Real Estate Guide to the Baja California Peninsula*: www.vivalabaja.com.

End of Travel Guide

This Travel Guide is courtesy of ***Viva La Baja! Relocation & Real Estate Guide to the Baja California Peninsula*** written by Molly McHugh.

To order the eBook click here: <http://www.vivalabaja.com/buynow.html>. It will be sent to your email in-box within 24 hours.



Photograph of sunrise at San Quintin by Ken Bondy

Viva La Baja! Relocation & Real Estate Guide is an eBook with over 100 pages on 86 topics to make your transition or travels to Baja effortless and enjoyable.

To read the full table of contents click here:
http://www.vivalabaja.com/table_of_contents

Viva La Baja! Blog is located at: <http://vivalabaja.blogspot.com>

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