

History

Traipsing around Baja you'll encounter an odd collage of historical sites alluding to the peninsula's peculiar past: English flour mills near San Quintín; pre-Columbian cave paintings in the Sierra de San Francisco; a French mining town on the Sea of Cortez; splendid stone missions plunked into the middle of nowhere; and businesses everywhere named after pirates.

HOMO MIGRATORIUS (YO, IS THAT A BRIDGE?)

It's generally accepted that human settlement of North America began at least 12,000 years ago with one of the most significant human migrations in history. The ancestors of Amerindians, taking advantage of lowered sea levels during the Pleistocene epoch, walked from Siberia to Alaska via a land bridge across the Bering Strait. They weren't exactly speedy about moving south and, according to radiocarbon dating of artifacts like shell middens, stone tools and arrowheads, it took the descendants of these migrants a good 2000 years to reach the Baja Peninsula. We know from middens at Punta Minitas in northwestern Baja that shellfish was a primary food source for these peoples, who also engaged in hunting, gathering and, later, rudimentary farming.

Michael C Meyer's and William L Sherman's *The Course of Mexican History* is one of the best general accounts of Mexican history and society.

INDIGENOUS BAJA CALIFORNIANS

Until Europeans reached the peninsula in the 16th century, upwards of 48,000 mobile hunter-gatherers lived on the Baja Peninsula, belonging to three major linguistic groups, subdivided into several tribal entities. They lived in groups that became known as *rancherías*, ranging in size from a few families to upwards of 200 people.

While the Maya and Aztecs of mainland Mexico were building their pyramids and living the complex society life, people on the isolated peninsula hardly advanced beyond the early Stone Age. They usually slept in the open, in caves or in simple dwellings near a dependable water source, and spent their waking hours finding enough sustenance for survival. The men hunted and fished while the women gathered wild plant foods such as pine nuts and the fruit of the *pitahaya* cactus. They had no written language, formal religious beliefs or agriculture and they practiced polygamy, apparently because tribal warfare had led to a surplus of women. However, they created the most spectacular petroglyphs and cave paintings in the western hemisphere, still visible at sites throughout the peninsula, including the most impressive of all in the Sierra de San Francisco (p164).

Baja's most famous cave paintings are in the Sierra de San Francisco, but there are literally hundreds of other rock-art sites – most of them rarely visited – throughout central Baja.

While the Yumano in the north and the Guaycura in the south enjoyed a fairly dependable subsistence, by most accounts the Cochimi of central Baja, the peninsula's harshest desert, were often destitute. In times of stress they even collected *pitahaya* seeds from their own excrement and toasted them in what Spaniards jokingly called their 'second harvest.'

Few survived European colonization, and the only remaining indigenous *bajacalifornianos* (people from Baja) live in the northernmost part of the peninsula. Collecting pine nuts for food is an important seasonal activity and women still produce attractive basketry and pottery.

TIMELINE 100 BC–AD 1500

Indigenous Baja Californians create the rock art of Sierra de San Francisco

1532

Conquistador Hernán Cortés sends first Spanish expedition from mainland Mexico to Baja California

ADIOS CORTÉS

After the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the early 16th century, there was much fanciful speculation about a golden island beyond Mexico's western coast. That island was California, named – even before it was explored – after a mythical island queen in a Spanish novel, *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (The Adventures of Esplandián). The precise etymology and meaning of the name 'California' have never been convincingly established, but there is wide consensus that it is a derivation of 'Calafia,' the book's heroine queen, who ruled a race of gold-rich black Amazons.

Of course, rumors of gold and women have a way of making conquistadors fidgety. Not content with his spoils on mainland Mexico, Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés dispatched a series of expeditions to find the island. The first set out in 1532. Rather than babes in bracelets, however, the explorers found men with sharp objects who killed many of the intruders and forced the survivors back to the mainland. A second expedition was equally unsuccessful.

Determined to get his hands on more gold, Cortés finally joined a third expedition in 1535 and went ashore at present-day Bahía Pichilingue, near La Paz (p189), where he founded the colony of Santa Cruz. He also found pearls, but the harsh desert, disease, hostile indigenous people and several food and water shortages forced the colonists, once again, to beat it back to Mexico.

Still, Cortés wouldn't give up. In 1539 he sent out a fourth expedition under Francisco de Ulloa, who would be the first to discover that Baja was a peninsula, not an island. After Ulloa's ship disappeared near Bahía Magdalena (p184), Cortés finally threw in the towel. He returned to Spain in 1541, leaving the 'golden land' to other adventurers.

BOATS & BUCCANEERS

The peninsula became important in other ways – in particular, as a stopping point for trade ships between Mexico and the Philippines. For 250 years, starting in 1565, these 'Manila galleons' traveled west from Acapulco across the Pacific to Manila, where they loaded up on Asian luxuries. The bloated vessels then embarked on their arduous six- to eight-month return to Mexico. After crossing the Pacific, the crew were often out of water and starved of food. Because the Baja Peninsula was the first land, the Spanish sought (for years in vain) to establish some sort of permanent harbor in the southern cape.

Creating a settlement on the peninsula to re-equip the crew became even more crucial after bounty-hungry buccaneers caught wind of the seaborne riches and started to attack the overloaded vessels. Sir Francis Drake was among the first to stage these raids. Many other pirates, mostly from England and the Netherlands, followed suit. The Spaniards tried to hide from the marauders by seeking shelter in the bays of the Cape Region, but they were still outfoxed. In the biggest attack ever, in November 1587, Englishman Thomas Cavendish lay in wait at Cabo San Lucas, then sacked the prize galleon *Santa Ana* in a surprise attack.

Meanwhile, a desperate Spanish crown dispatched a skilled admiral, Sebastián Vizcaíno (after whom a major bay and a large desert in Central Baja were later named), to look for alternative sites to stop the riches

Written by the peninsula's premier historian, Harry Crosby, *Last of the Californios* is out of print but an absolute must for California history buffs, Baja fans and bibliophiles.

The infamous pirates Thomas Cavendish and Sir Francis Drake both plied the waters off Cabo San Lucas in their search for the Manila galleons' booty.

For a peek into piracy and the Manila galleons, peruse Peter Gerhard's succinct and readable *Pirates of the Pacific, 1575–1742*.

1587

English privateer Thomas Cavendish sacks Spain's Manila galleon, *Santa Ana*, in surprise attack from Cabo San Lucas

1683

Jesuit missionaries make their first incursion into Baja California, beginning nearly 100 years of mission building along the peninsula

CALIFORNIA: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In late Spanish colonial times, the general term 'California' meant Baja California (Lower California), and the present US state of California – then a backwater – became known as Alta California (Upper California). Rather than use the latter term, an anachronism except in its historical context, this chapter uses the more appropriate (if not precisely accurate) term 'mainland California' to refer to areas north of the Mexican border.

Use of the abbreviated 'Baja' – rather than 'Baja California' – to describe the peninsula became popular among folks north of the border, largely as a result of the Baja 1000 (the peninsula's world famous off-road race from Ensenada to La Paz). Many native *bajacalifornianos* wince at the term 'Baja' (which means low or under) when used alone to describe the original California. You're asking for flack from an immigration official if you write 'Baja' in the destination section of your tourist card. Use the more appropriate Baja California (the name of the peninsula's northern state) or Baja California Sur (the name of the southern state).

When necessary for clarity, this book refers to the individual states as Baja California (Norte) and Baja California Sur.

from falling into enemy hands. Although he never found a site that would safely harbor the Spanish galleons, he did finally land in a sheltered bay on the Sea of Cortez that would serve as an excellent port; he named the place La Paz.

MISSION IMPROBABLE

Having been thoroughly humiliated by repeated failures to colonize Baja, the Spanish crown felt it was time to bring in the army – of God, that is. The first Jesuit foray into the peninsula came in 1683 when Isidro de Atondo y Antillón crossed the Sea of Cortez with Jesuit priest Eusebio Kino. Together they established a settlement at La Paz, which was soon abandoned because of hostile native inhabitants.

It would take another 14 years before a Jesuit priest named Juan María Salvatierra and six soldiers finally managed to do what had eluded countless explorers for a century and a half: establish the first *permanent* Spanish settlement in Baja California. Loreto, where they set up the first mission (p177), soon became the peninsula's religious and administrative capital. From here, other Jesuits swarmed out to establish a total of 23 missions over the next 70 years.

The Jesuits may have meant well in converting the peninsula's indigenous inhabitants to Christianity and in instructing them in farming techniques and various crafts, but their altruistic intentions backfired. Along with God, grapes and greener pastures, the missionaries also brought an invisible evil – European microbes to which native peoples had no natural defenses. Epidemics decimated the indigenous population and several revolts against missionization caused further loss of life. By the end of the Jesuit period (1767), the indigenous population had dwindled to only about 8000.

Then a decision was made halfway around the world that doomed the Jesuits for good. As word spread that the Jesuit Order had accumulated inordinate power and wealth, King Carlos III of Spain had all Jesuits arrested and expelled from their missionary postings around the world, and the Baja Jesuits were subsequently deported back to Spain.

Harry Crosby's robust *Antigua California* is a well-written, engaging and comprehensive history of early colonial times (1697–1768), with considerable focus on the Jesuits.

Loreto, in Baja California Sur, was the first capital of the Californias.

1767

King Carlos III of Spain expels all Jesuits from their missionary postings around the world; Baja's Jesuits forced to leave

1821

Mexico wins independence from Spain

In their stead came another order – the Franciscans – under the authority of Padre Junípero Serra, who closed or consolidated several of the Jesuit missions before turning his energies toward mainland California.

In 1773 another order, the Dominicans, got into the mission game, setting up nine new missions north of El Rosario (p121). They also continued to operate the former Jesuit missions until after Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821. Three years later, Baja California became a federal territory, headed by a governor. In 1832 a newly appointed governor put an end to the mission system by converting nearly all of them into parish churches.

THE MEXICAN–AMERICAN WAR

Meanwhile, on the Mexican mainland, momentous events were taking place that would bring war as far west as the peninsula and forever alter the map of Mexico. Before 1848 most of what is today the southwestern USA belonged to Mexico. North American settlers, initially welcomed by the Mexican authorities, declared Texas independent in 1836 in a surprise move. In 1845, when the US Congress voted to annex Texas and US President James K Polk (1845–49) demanded further Mexican territory, Mexico resisted. And so it came to the Mexican–American War (1846–48).

The main battles occurred on the Mexican mainland, but Baja was drawn into the conflict as well. American ships arrived in La Paz in 1846 and in San José del Cabo the following spring, where they brought local authorities under their control. In response, the Mexican government swiftly sent in troops under Captain Manuel Piñada. Fighting took place in Mulegé, La Paz and San José del Cabo, with Mexicans putting up such fierce resistance that the US troops had to repeatedly call for reinforcements. It wasn't until March 1848 that they finally captured Piñada and his cohorts. Both sides were oblivious to the fact that war had ended one month earlier.

With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a destabilized Mexico was forced to sell most of New Mexico and mainland California to the USA. Mexico did, however, retain sovereignty over Baja California.

FOREIGN INTERESTS & INVESTMENT

Since war didn't land the peninsula in US hands, the country attempted to acquire it in other ways – namely through private investment (encouraged by the Mexican government) and agricultural colonization schemes. In 1866 the Lower California Colonization & Mining Company gained title to all Baja lands roughly between San Quintín and La Paz. It embarked on a transparently fraudulent colonization attempt – even issuing bogus paper money – but failed scandalously in the end.

In the 1880s, under autocratic President Porfirio Díaz (1876–80 and 1884–1911), Mexico began encouraging US and European capital investment throughout the country. Eager to raise much-needed funds to grow the Mexican economy, Díaz granted major mining, railroad, manufacturing and other concessions to foreign investors. As a result, northern Baja in particular, which until then had been a complete outback without infrastructure, was transformed.

The main investor was the US-based International Company of Mexico (ICM), which constructed port facilities and flour mills at Ensenada and San Quintín (p119) but failed miserably in its deceptive propaganda campaign

With history, links, a timeline and forums, PBS's outstanding US–Mexican War website (www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar) offers an in-depth look into the war that permanently transformed the US–Mexico border.

Norris Hundley's *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s–1990s* details the controversy between the USA and Mexico over the Colorado River delta.

1848

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ends Mexican–American War

1910–21

Period of the Mexican Revolution; autocratic President Porfirio Díaz cedes power to revolutionary Francisco Madero in 1911

to attract many colonists. After too many rainless years, ICM cut its losses and surrendered its 'perfect title' to a gullible English syndicate for US\$7 million. Again the rains failed and harvests were nil, and those colonists who didn't end up in San Quintín's first cemetery returned to England or moved to other parts of Baja, where British surnames like Jones and Smith were not unusual.

If agriculture proved to be a futile endeavor, mining did not. Several important mineral discoveries occurred around the peninsula, including massive silver strikes at El Triunfo and San Antonio (p201), in southern Baja. One of the largest mining projects, operated by the French syndicate Compañía del Boleo at Santa Rosalía (p166), produced copper until the 1950s and left a fascinating architectural mark on central Baja.

REVOLUTION & REFORM

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 lasted a decade and temporarily interrupted growth on the peninsula. Warfare had very little impact on most of Baja, except in 1911, when the Magonistas (see opposite) attempted to establish a power base in northern Baja.

After the Revolution, Baja continued in isolation, excluded from most of the grandiose political and economic development plans underway in Mexico City. Ironically, it was the passage of legislation in the USA that pump-primed the peninsular economy. The Eighteenth Amendment to the US Constitution – better known as Prohibition – outlawed alcoholic beverages north of the border, causing mainland Californians to flock to Tijuana, Ensenada and Mexicali for drinking, gambling and sex.

Border towns both prospered and suffered from this US invasion. Along with the money came an assortment of corrupt characters, and both Tijuana and Mexicali soon had a reputation for tawdriness and sleaze.

A major turning point in the history of Baja came in 1938 with the election of reformist President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), who instituted sweeping reforms throughout Mexico. He banned casino gambling, cracked down on crime and built the Sonora–Mexicali railroad to reduce the territory's economic dependence on the USA and its isolation from mainland Mexico. Reforms later continued with President Miguel Alemán (1946–52), who built hydroelectric stations, irrigation projects and an expanded road system. In 1952, still under Alemán, Baja's political status improved as its northern half became the Mexican state of Baja California.

FISH TALES & TOURISM

After WWII, tales of fish, perpetual sunshine and beautiful bays filtered north to mainland California, spurring the wealthy and the famous to explore the frontier south of the border. With no access road, private planes and yachts were the only means of access. In 1948 Hollywood bigwigs including Bing Crosby, John Wayne and Desi Arnaz put money toward Baja's first private resort at Las Cruces, just south of La Paz. In 1956 Rod Rodríguez (son of Abelardo L Rodríguez, the Mexican president from 1932 to '34) built the Hotel Palmilla in Los Cabos Corridor. W Matt (Bud) Parr's Hotel Cabo San Lucas, nearby, and Herb Tanzi's Rancho Buena Vista, on the eastern cape, followed in 1962. Development came to Cabo San Lucas in 1967, when Rodríguez built the Hotel Hacienda, Luís Coppola put up Hotel Finisterra

Lowell Blaisdell's *The Desert Revolution* tells of Ricardo Flores Magón's quixotic attempt to influence the Mexican Revolution from the Baja periphery.

Author John Steinbeck's book *The Pearl* is based on stories surrounding the famous pearl divers of La Paz. The oyster fishery there was wiped out by the 1940s.

1934–40

Reformist President Lázaro Cárdenas leads Mexico; in 1938 he bans gambling, and casinos close throughout northern Baja

1952

The northern half of the peninsula becomes Mexico's 29th state: Baja California

ANARCHO-TOURISM

In Baja California, tourism has long played an important role – but perhaps never as strangely as it did during the Mexican Revolution. One of several political factions operating throughout the country was the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM), run from Los Angeles by exiled anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón. With Magón calling the shots from Los Angeles, his comically ragtag army of escaped convicts, socialists, soldiers of fortune and sympathetic workers (few of whom were Mexican) marched on Tijuana on May 9, 1911. Americans from San Diego flocked to the border to watch the battle from the safety of the US customs house.

Lead by a Welshman named Caryl Pryce, the 200 Magonistas (as Magón's forces were known) took Tijuana in a day and sent local residents fleeing in terror. After a period of looting, Pryce hoisted the Magonista flag over Tijuana's post office and the troops settled in to wait for orders and funds from Los Angeles – neither arrived.

Taking the funding of his army into his own hands, Pryce turned to tourism. He reopened casinos and saloons and began charging tourists from north of the border US\$0.25 to witness the Magonista stronghold. A percentage of all winnings from the gaming houses funded the army and looted goods were sold for a fraction of their original costs to pay for provisions. There were even reports of troops charging tourists to enter stores and take anything they could carry. Photographers flocked to Tijuana and within days curious visitors could purchase postcards featuring corpses in the dirt and troops posing with Mauser rifles.

As the Mexican Revolution progressed and Mexicans turned to the more moderate ideals of revolutionary leader Francisco Madero, the radical Magonistas lost what little support they had. That most of the Magonistas hailed from north of the border contributed to Mexican distrust of the faction. At one point, an American actor named Dick Ferris entered Tijuana, declared himself the Magonistas new leader, designed a flag and proposed to purchase the 'New Republic of Lower California' from Mexico. Needless to say, it helped undo the Magonista image.

On June 22, 1911, the Magonistas were finally quashed by federal troops under the command of Madero – to the oohs and aahs of spectators north of the border.

and Luís Bulnes erected the Hotel Solmar. These five families are commonly considered the founders of Los Cabos.

Despite these developments, tourism stagnated, largely because of inaccessibility. This changed in 1973, when paved México 1 – the Transpeninsular from Tijuana to Cabo San Lucas – opened. The population grew so quickly that less than a year later, south of the 28th parallel, Baja California Sur became Mexico's 30th state. Southern Baja's fate as a 'destination' was sealed when the international airport near San José del Cabo opened in 1986.

THE 1980S & THE FALL OF THE PRI

Following the oil booms of the 1970s, the Mexican economy went into a tailspin in the '80s from which it did not recover until drastic measures to introduce private enterprise and free trade were taken under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–94). By the time the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect on January 1, 1994, things seemed to have stabilized and started to move forward. Then all hell broke loose.

On New Year's Day, about 2000 indigenous-peasant rebels calling themselves the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista National Liberation Army) surprised Mexico by taking over several towns in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Two months later, Luis Donaldo

The Latin American Network Information Center (Lanic; <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/mexico>) houses links to websites covering Mexican history, culture and more, and has a special section dedicated to NAFTA.

1974

The southern half of the peninsula becomes Mexico's 31st state: Baja California Sur

1994

On New Year's Day, NAFTA goes into effect; Zapatistas take over several towns in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas

Colosio, Salinas' chosen successor as Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) presidential candidate, was assassinated in Tijuana. Conspiracy theories abound about the killing – relations between Salinas and Colosio had deteriorated markedly – but the only person convicted was the one who pulled the trigger.

After ruling Mexico for 71 consecutive years (primarily through rigged elections), the PRI finally lost its hold on the presidency in 2000. In that year's historical elections, with the world watching as Mexicans went to the polls, National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox, a former Coca Cola executive, broke the PRI reign by winning 42% of the vote. The PAN victory clearly signified the country's desire for reform and dissatisfaction with PRI corruption and the power of drug cartels, but deep-rooted change has been slow to come.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

For years, Mexico's drug cartels have wielded significant political and popular power throughout the country and especially in the state of Baja California (Norte), a major gateway for illegal drugs moving into the USA. At the center of this drug trade stands the powerful, Tijuana-based Arellano Félix cartel. Notorious for its violence and accused of moving tons of cocaine, marijuana, heroin and other drugs across the border, the organization is slowly losing its leaders to a joint US–Mexican effort to topple Mexico's cartels. In 2002 the organization's top man, Benjamin Arellano Félix, was captured and his brother gunned down by police. Two years later Mexican police nabbed Efraín Pérez and Jorge Aureliano Félix, two of the cartel's alleged senior leaders. Finally, in 2006, kingpin Francisco Javier Arellano Félix was captured by the FBI while he was sportfishing near Cabo San Lucas. At the close of this edition he faced the death penalty in the USA, accused of racketeering and conspiracy.

Despite such problems, Baja California continues its growth in economic power, population, and popularity as a tourist destination. In the 1990s Los Cabos' population tripled, and countless new hotels, condominium complexes and golf courses opened. Nearing completion in early 2007, the colossal 2000-acre (800-hectare) resort development of Puerto Los Cabos (p229) has transformed the coastline north of San José del Cabo. Near Santa Rosalillita, the controversial Escalera Náutica project (see p25) is billed to turn Baja's Sea of Cortez into the next Cancún, and between Tijuana and Ensenada, high-rises have hidden the coastline from view.

As Baja develops, growing pains are inevitable and the peninsula's natural environment takes the hardest hits. Awareness and participation by tourists in both ecologically sound travel activities and in programs that seek to minimize the effects of tourism will help the peninsula remain the astounding natural playground it has long been.

Secret tunnels are still dug beneath the US–Mexico border to smuggle drugs and people into the US. The discovery of the 732m (2400ft) 'El Grande Tunnel' between Tijuana and San Diego in 2006 added one more known tunnel to the seven yet to be filled.

2000

National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox wins presidency, breaking 71-year reign by Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)

2006

Francisco Javier Arellano Félix, leader of the Tijuana-based Arellano Félix, is captured by the FBI while sportfishing off Cabo San Lucas

The Culture

REGIONAL IDENTITY

While *bajacalifornianos* (people from Baja California) are Mexican in every sense of the word, they do share their own peninsular identity. The ancestors of today's *bajacalifornianos*, who settled the peninsula beginning over three hundred years ago (and as recently as 100 years ago), faced a harsh life in an unwelcoming desert. Baja's geographical distance from mainland Mexico and the Mexican government's lack of interest in the peninsula (until recently it invested very little here) meant *bajacalifornianos* faced life, in a land devoid of infrastructure, on their own. Real *bajacalifornianos* were – and continue to be – a grittier breed of folk.

The occasional traveler to Baja, defining in his or her mind what is 'authentically Mexican' by stereotypical images of mainland Mexico, laments the cultural influence of the USA on the peninsula. With all the *gringos* living and traveling in Baja – especially today – it's an understandable sentiment. But Baja California has *always* been influenced by its northerly neighbor as much as by its country across the Sea of Cortez. Many *bajacalifornianos* have close ties with family or friends in the USA, have lived or worked in the USA themselves, or have American friends or family who live or travel on the peninsula.

Once you're south of the border region, and especially as you move into central Baja, you begin to encounter the people whose families have lived on the peninsula for generations. In many ways, these are the real *bajacalifornianos*, and they can tell you stories ranging from long droughts that nearly ruined the ranch to eccentric *gringos* who journeyed down the peninsula decades ago. Many of these folks, while wholeheartedly Mexican, identify closely with Baja California. More recent immigrants – those who have come here in search of work over the last 50 years or so – may identify more with mainland Mexico, but still carry with them a sort of frontier spirit.

Of course, *bajacalifornianos* new and old, all share their Mexican heritage. But the Mexican identity is not easily pinned down. Mexicans love fun, music and a fiesta, yet in many ways are deeply serious. They work hard but relax to the max in their time off. They're hospitable and warm to guests, yet are only truly themselves within their family group. They will laugh at death, but have a profound vein of spirituality. You may read about anti-*gringo* sentiment in the media, but as a visitor to their country, you will be treated by Mexicans as an individual and with refreshing warmth and courtesy. Ask for help or information, and people will go out of their way to give it. (The word *gringo*, incidentally, isn't exactly a compliment, but nor is it necessarily an insult; the term can simply be, and often is, a neutral synonym for 'American' or 'citizen of the USA.')

LIFESTYLE

Daily life for *bajacalifornianos* depends first and foremost upon place. For those who live in Tijuana or Mexicali (Baja's two largest cities), life is vastly different than it is in the small towns and empty spaces that make up the rest of the region.

Most residents of Tijuana inhabit tightly knit, multigenerational family homes or multistory apartment buildings. Streets are bustling and noisy with traffic, and there are few parks or open areas. On the outskirts of the city, the poorest people live in shacks without electricity or steady water supply.

Revised and republished in 2006, Oscar Martínez's book *Troublesome Border* deals with current borderland issues such as population growth, economic development, ecology and international migration.

Tune into the art, culture and history of the US–Mexico border with *Puro Border* (Luis Humberto Crosthwaite et al), an eclectic collection of essays and stories by journalists, artists and poets.

Some neighborhoods are literally jammed up against the corrugated metal fence that separates the city from the US on the other side.

In affluent neighborhoods, houses are closed off by fences and electric gates to protect the building and flashy SUVs from the world outside, while the owners work in air-conditioned buildings here or in San Diego, California. Satellite dishes stand atop roofs, and housekeepers and tradespeople come and go.

The contrasts between poor and rich couldn't be greater: while kids from rich families go out nightclubbing in *carros del año* (new cars) and attend private universities or schools in the US, poor kids are lucky to complete primary education and often begin working before they're 15 years old. In other towns, families crowd into ramshackle dwellings and work in the fields or in *maquiladoras* (factories producing goods primarily for export) – in the case of the latter, for an average of between US\$2 and US\$2.50 per hour.

Elsewhere in Baja, things are strikingly different. In the smallest towns, people regularly take siestas and life maintains a slower pace, especially further south where the midday summer heat is oppressive. In Baja California Sur, some people still live on *ranchos* (rural settlements), both in the mountains and on isolated stretches of the coast, where life is much the same as it was 300 years ago. Take a drive up to La Candelaria (p252) from Cabo San Lucas and you'll find a village, similar to many others in the region, where families still slaughter pigs and goats, grow some of their own food and live a unique semisubsistent lifestyle.

Over the past decade – and especially over the past few years – Baja has experienced a massive real estate boom. While this development has undoubtedly had negative effects upon the landscape and environment, it has also brought wealth to many local residents. For example, families living in San Felipe, who several years ago were only scraping by, have sold their extra land holdings or entered construction businesses, and are today parking brand new SUVs in brand new driveways. This growth has also brought immigration from mainland Mexico, which has swelled some town populations and strained local resources and services (Loreto is a perfect example).

Gender roles are relaxing among the middle class, with education and jobs increasingly accessible to young women. Among the poor, women still tend to play out traditional domestic and mothering roles, though they may also have part-time jobs or sell produce at the market.

Mexico is more broadminded about sexuality than you might expect. Gays and lesbians tend to keep a low profile but rarely attract open discrimination or violence. Relatively open gay scenes exist in Tijuana and, to a lesser extent, Mexicali.

ECONOMY

Traditionally, Baja California's economy was based on agriculture and fishing. While these remain important industries, real estate, tourism and related service industries have become the motors beneath the economy's hood. This growth has been largely promoted by the federal government, which has continued to pump significant amounts of capital into tourist development on the peninsula. One of the government's largest current undertakings is the Escalera Náutica (Nautical Staircase), a massive project involving the construction of harbors along the length of the entire east coast in hopes of turning the Sea of Cortez into a major yachting destination. As for the real-estate boom, the areas seeing the heaviest development include the entire stretch of coast between Tijuana and Ensenada, the areas north and south of San Felipe, around Loreto and throughout Los Cabos.

You could spend days combing through the information, links and other educational goodies on the University of Texas' The Borderland Encyclopedia (www.utep.edu/border).

Luis Alberto Urrea's *By the Lake of the Sleeping Children: The Secret Life of the Mexican Border*, a combined effort with photographer John Lueders-Booth, takes a look at garbage pickers (the ultimate recyclers) in Tijuana.

As more North Americans head south for holidays or retirement in Baja, thousands of unauthorized Mexican and other Latin American workers cross north into the USA, most of them in search of better wages. The minimum wage in Mexico is around US\$4.50 a day for unskilled laborers and most trained workers earn less than US\$10 a day. Even some Mexican professionals are poorly paid: a full-time university professor may earn less than a minimum-wage laborer north of the border.

One alternative to the massive illegal exodus to 'the other side' has been the promotion of long-term foreign investment to create jobs in Mexico. Much of this foreign investment has taken the form of *maquiladoras*, factories (usually foreign-owned) that are allowed to import raw materials, parts and equipment duty-free for processing or assembly by inexpensive Mexican labor. Nearly half of all *maquiladoras* in Mexico are in Baja California (Norte).

A huge contributor to the recent increase in *maquiladoras* was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which took effect on January 1, 1994. Known to Mexicans as the Tratado de Libre Comercio (TLC), NAFTA has gradually eliminated restrictions on trade and investment between the US, Mexico and Canada. The purported hope was that it would bring Mexico increased employment and growing exports, as well as cheaper imports. Opponents charge that the gap between rich and poor has widened as new imports – such as maize grown cheaply by US agribusiness – undercut sectors of the Mexican economy and force small-scale growers off the land.

POPULATION

Anyone who's happiest barreling down an empty road whistling the old Cole Porter tune *Don't Fence Me In* will appreciate this: 85% of the peninsula's population lives in the northern state of Baja California, and 94% of those folks live in Tijuana, Mexicali or Ensenada. That leaves a *lot* of sparsely inhabited country. The biggest towns in Baja California Sur are La Paz (196,900), Los Cabos (San José and Cabo San Lucas combined; 150,000) and Loreto (11,800). The Cape Region's burgeoning tourism and housing developments (principally in and around Los Cabos) have generated a great need for service-industry personnel and construction workers, who migrate from mainland Mexico and continue to swell the region's population. The number of people in the border cities and the Cape Region is probably higher than official statistics suggest.

SPORT

Two sports that are classically Mexican – bullfighting and soccer – are as prevalent in Baja as they are on the mainland. Tijuana's Plaza de Toros Monumental (p81) is one of the world's most important bullrings, attracting matadors from Spain and throughout Latin America. There's also an important bullring in Mexicali (p136).

As in Latin America, soccer in Mexico is of utmost importance. The Mexican national soccer team is known as El Tricolor or simply 'El Tri'. The team qualified for the 2006 World Cup, but was knocked out by Argentina in the Round of 16.

Bajacalifornianos also take *béisbol* (baseball) very seriously. The peninsula's most important team is Mexicali's Águilas de Mexicali, which plays in the Liga Mexicana del Pacífico. The league begins its official season in October, shortly after the World Series in the USA. The season ends in January, when a series of playoffs determines the league's representative to the Caribbean Series, which rotates among Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

California's Latino population suddenly disappears and chaos ensues in Sergio Arau's mockumentary film *A Day Without a Mexican* (Telvisa Cine; 2004).

Though the humor is far from subtle, it's worth a peek for the pondering.

The state of Baja California Sur has the lowest population of any Mexican state: 512,170 people.

While you may not consider it a sport, cockfighting is prevalent throughout Baja, and most sizable towns have a cockfighting ring. If you're interested in seeing a cockfight, simply flag down a taxi and ask driver to take you to the *palenque* (cockfighting arena).

On the more comical side of sports, *lucha libre* (free-form wrestling) is as Mexican as anything and seeing a match, which involves two sweating, wildly masked men throwing each other about a ring, is an experience in kitsch and pop culture that is difficult to imagine. The best place to see a *lucha libre* match is Tijuana (p75).

MULTICULTURALISM

Baja's population consists largely of *mestizos*, individuals of mixed indigenous and European heritage, mostly immigrants or descendants of immigrants from mainland Mexico. But you'll also notice the peninsula has its share of fair-skinned, light-haired Mexicans. This is due partially to Baja's proximity to the USA, but also to the number of English and other European immigrants who came to the region in the late 1800s (see p29).

Baja's 1500 or so remaining indigenous people, often known by the generic term Cochimí (after the now extinct peoples of the Desierto Central), live mainly in the Sierra San Pedro Mártir, the Sierra de Juárez and the lowlands near the Río Hardy (near Mexicali). They belong to groups including the Tipai, Paipai, Kiliwa, Cucupah (Cucapá) and Kamia, but few follow the traditional subsistence economy of hunting and gathering. Nearly all speak Spanish, but indigenous languages are still common among the Tipai, Paipai and Cucupah.

In the 19th century, Baja's first fishing villages, ranchos and secular towns appeared, along with mining operations that attracted fortune-seekers from around the world. Many established *bajacalifornianos* are descendants of settlers whose roots were in mainland Mexico or in other parts of the world – some trace their ancestry to the USA, southern and northern Europe, and even China. Thanks to these enclaves, unexpected surnames like Smith, Jones and even Crosthwaite and McLish are not unusual on the peninsula.

Mexicali has a small but visible Chinese population (see p132), and a group of Russian pacifist refugees left their cultural print in the Valle de Guadalupe (p109), near Ensenada. The French even had their stay in and around the central Baja town of Santa Rosalía (p166).

The past decade has seen the influx of large numbers of indigenous people from central Mexico to the city of Tijuana in particular, often as a staging point for crossing the US border. Thousands of Mixtecs from rural Oaxaca (a state in southern Mexico) have settled in the San Quintín area, driven there by poverty and the attraction of farming jobs, despite relatively low wages.

Tossed into this continually changing cultural landscape are the Americans and Canadians (and a few Europeans) who have been steadily buying property along the coast. They make up a small percentage of Baja's population, but the number is growing as real estate moguls and smalltime investors do everything they can to attract foreign homebuyers.

Recent large-scale developments, such as Puerto Los Cabos (p229) near San José del Cabo, have forced local populations from their land and homes. Not surprisingly, it foments deep resentment both toward foreigners buying land and towards the Mexican developers selling it off to the *yanquis* (Americans). On the flip side, tourism in Baja California has given the peninsula one of the country's highest standards of living and most locals are wonderfully welcoming toward foreigners.

Delve into the indigenous culture and history of Baja California by visiting Adesu (www.adesu.org) or the anthropology website www.bajacalifologia.org.

For a frightening look at the state of the US–Mexico border, read Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway*, the brutal story of 26 men who tried to cross the desert into the US in 2001.

THE BORDER BY NUMBERS

- 1952 – length in miles of the US–Mexico border
- 105 – approximate miles of existing fence along the US–Mexico border
- 700 – miles of new fence promised for the border by President George Bush
- 9790 – number of Border Patrol agents working along the US–Mexico border
- 6000 – number of new agents to be added under the US Secure Fence Act by 2008
- 2500 – average price in US dollars a coyote charges to smuggle a person across the border by car
- 1,171,428 – number of illegal crossers apprehended by Border Patrol agents in 2005*
- 95,718,829 – value in US dollars of seizures along the US–Mexico border in 2005*
- 473 – number of migrant deaths along US–Mexico border in 2005**
- 330 – number of migrant deaths along US–Mexico border in 2004**
- 350 million – approximate number of people crossing the US–Mexico border each year*

*US Department of Homeland Security

**Migration Policy Institute (www.migrationinformation.org)

RELIGION

Like other Mexicans, the majority of *bajacalifornianos* are Roman Catholic. Although Baja California lacks the monumental religious architecture of mainland Mexico, many of the original Jesuit, Franciscan and Dominican missions still survive, at least in ruin. Some of these, such as Misión Santa Gertrudis in central Baja, are important pilgrimage sites despite their remoteness. Roadside shrines bear witness not just to victims of traffic accidents but also to revered religious figures like the Virgin of Guadalupe. Some of these shrines are intriguing examples of folk art and are well worth a stop on the highway.

Mexico's 'patron saint' – not actually a saint but a manifestation of the Virgin Mary – is the dark-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe, who made her appearance before an indigenous Mexican in 1531 on a hill near Mexico City. Universally revered, she's both the archetypal mother and the preeminent focus of Mexican spirituality, which has its roots both in Spanish Catholicism and in the complex belief systems of Mexico's pre-Hispanic civilizations.

Many Mexicans, when sick, prefer to visit a traditional *curandero* – a kind of cross between a naturopath and a witch doctor – rather than a modern *médico* (doctor). Mexicans also retain the awareness of death and afterlife that was so central to the pre-Hispanic cultures. The famous Día de Muertos festival (Day of the Dead, November 2; p258), when the departed are believed to revisit the living, is perhaps a way of building a bridge between this life and whatever follows it.

ARTS

Music

In Baja, as in the rest of Mexico, music starts up spontaneously on streets, plazas or even buses. These musicians play for a living and, in Baja, usually play in trios and quartets or, especially in tourist areas, *mariachi* bands (trumpeters, violinists, guitarists and a singer, all dressed in flashy costumes). *Mariachi* music – perhaps the most 'typical' Mexican music of all – originated in the Guadalajara area. In bars and at outdoor tables and plazas, roving

musicians regularly solicit your money for a few songs. It's one of the joys of Mexico and you should do as the Mexicans do every once in a while: buy a song or two and enjoy!

REGIONAL STYLES

The most common sounds blaring from boom boxes and car stereos in Baja are those of *norteño* music. *Norteño* is rooted in Mexican *corridos* (folk ballads), though the genre today is dominated largely by *narcocorridos* (see opposite). First popularized by Los Tigres del Norte in the early 1970s, *norteño*'s most characteristic sound is the accordion, although backing for the singer is also guitar-based, with bass and drums. Los Tigres del Norte, who got their start in San Jose, California, are still the superstars of the genre, and their lyrics are more socially conscious than any other *norteño* band out there.

Banda is a 1990s development of *norteño*, substituting large brass sections for guitars and accordion and playing a combination of Latin and more traditional Mexican rhythms. If you're not used to it, it's almost painful to listen to, as the trumpets and tuba mercilessly pound out the rhythm behind often raspy vocals. Banda Recodo, Banda Machos, Banda Cuisillos and Banda Aguacaliente are big names.

Ranchera is Mexico's urban 'country music.' Developed in the expanding towns and cities of the 20th century, it's mostly melodramatic, sentimental stuff with a nostalgia for rural roots – vocalist-and-combo music, maybe with a *mariachi* backing. Eugenia León, Juan Gabriel and Alejandro Fernández are among the leading *ranchera* artists.

ROCK

Baja California has a particularly vibrant *rock en español* (Spanish-language rock) scene, most evident in Tijuana and Mexicali. The latter holds an annual progressive rock festival that promoters claim is the biggest of its kind in the world. Mexican rock bands that have made it big include Staura (a sort of Sonic Youth clone), Solución Mortal (hard-core punk), Tijuana No (The Clash-inspired salsa-punk), Paradoxa (thrash), Mercado Negro (UK-style punk), Beam (California punk), Crime of the Century (a Kiss clone with members from both sides of the border) and Giovanna (pop). Julieta Venegas – who got her start with Tijuana No, and has received MTV awards and several nominations for Latin Grammys – is proving to be one of *rock en español*'s powerhouses. Ensenada's claim to fame is heavy-metal act Yeo.

Popular bands from other parts of Mexico include Los Jaguares, Gran Silencio, Elefante and King Crimson-inspired La Barranca. Talented and versatile Mexico City bands such as Café Tacuba and Maldita Vecindad often roar from the jukebox at hip bars. These two bands took *rock en español* to new heights and new audiences (well beyond Mexico) in the '90s, mixing a huge range of influences – rock 'n' roll, ska, punk, bolero and *mariachi*.

ELECTRONICA

In 2000 Tijuana's Nortec Collective officially released its album *The Tijuana Sessions Vol 1*, after it became an internationally downloaded hit on the internet. Fusing the sounds of *norteño* music with techno beats – hence the name Nortec – the recordings made their way into clubs around the world. The collective has since released two more albums and collaborated on numerous other musical projects. Nortec effectively turned the world's artistic eyes toward Tijuana, stoking the fire of creativity in that city far beyond the realm of just music. The group has spawned offshoots in Tijuana, making the city a great place to groove to some unique techno sounds.

Take a fictitious romp through the world of *narcocorridos* (drug ballads) in *The Queen of the South*, written by Spanish novelist and journalist Arturo Pérez-Reverte and based on a Los Tigres del Norte song.

Elijah Wald's superbly narrated *Narcocorridos: A Journey Into the Music of Guns, Drugs & Guerrillas* makes an excellent introduction into *norteño* music (which you'll surely hear in Baja).

Guitar legend Carlos Santana began his musical career in Tijuana, where he played with bands like The TJs in the late 1950s.

CLASSICAL

Baja's larger cities, most notably Tijuana and La Paz, support classical music at venues such as Tijuana's Centro Cultural. Ensembles also tour smaller towns and cities. One of the most renowned groupings is Tijuana's Orquesta de Baja California, which has an international ensemble of musicians and performs throughout the world.

Film

Early Hollywood directors gave such insulting treatment to the Mexican borderlands through their depictions of casinos and prostitution that Baja California's first cinematic production in 1927, *Raza de Bronce* (Race of Bronze), was a nationalistic response to what director Guillermo Calles perceived as racist stereotyping. During the 1970s Tecate built a cinema village to attract American directors of western films to Baja California, but local talent did not flourish until the video format became an inexpensive alternative.

Mexican regional music (*norteño*, *banda* etc) accounts for over half of all Latin music sales in the USA. Ricky Martin, ha ha ha.

NARCOCORRIDOS: BAJA'S GANGSTA RAP?

*I have an illegal business
I don't like to lie, I'm sincere
I buy a kilo, sometimes two
And I sell them as I can.
What's more, I'm my own boss
I buy and sell whenever I want
– Los Tucanes de Tijuana*

Unless you sequester yourself within a resort in Los Cabos and refuse to leave, odds are you'll hear a *narcocorrido* or two while in Baja California. If you're from California, Arizona, Texas or New Mexico, odds are you've heard plenty already. It is, after all, the highest selling genre in the Latin American music industry.

Loosely translated, *narcocorridos* are 'drug ballads,' but the genre encompasses topics ranging from gangbanging and illegal immigration to disdain for US politics. The trials of smalltime smugglers and drugrunners trying to survive amid big-time corruption and crime is a favorite theme. *Narcocorridos* are outrageously controversial and draw comparisons to gangsta rap from the US. The Mexican government officially banned some songs and Tijuana's radio stations voluntarily banned them in general from the air. Today, it's common for a wealthy tough or gang leader to pay a band to write a *narcocorrido* in his honor, memorializing his valorous deeds (fictitiously or not).

Before *narcocorridos*, there were just *corridos*, Mexican folk ballads which, in their earliest forms, dealt with Latino-Anglo strife in the borderlands during the 19th century and themes from the Mexican Revolution. Until the 1980s, Latino youth considered *corridos* outdated throwbacks best left for the turntables of old-timers. That began to change in the 1980s, thanks to a singer named Chalino Sanchez, a raw Sinaloan country kid with a raspy voice and a penchant for posing on his album covers with a pearl-handle pistol. When Chalino, as fans refer to him, was shot and dumped on a Sinaloa roadside in 1992, he became a legend overnight. And the popularity of *narcocorridos* exploded.

The first *narcocorridos* were actually recorded in the late 1970s by superstars Los Tigres del Norte, who later turned to *cumbia* (dance music that originated in Columbia) and mainstream styles. The band's most recent albums have returned to the *corrido* as its vehicle of choice for expressing some of the finest stories told within the genre. The biggest names in *narcocorridos* today are Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Grupo Exterminador (with subtle songs like 'I Like To Do Powder' and 'One-Gram Nostrils'), El As de la Sierra (whose rough singing style is influenced heavily by Chalino Sanchez), Los Huaracanes del Norte and Los Originales de San Juan. Pick a few CDs up for the drive – you'll find yourself addicted in no time.

Listen to everything from *rock en español* and *norteño* to *banda* and *mariachi* music at Batanga (www.batanga.com).

With support from the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, *bajacalifornianos* have produced documentaries on such topics as the Jesuit colonization and the Chinese community of Mexicali.

In the mid-1990s Hollywood went south again when 20th Century Fox custom-built a studio just south of Playas de Rosarito for the filming of James Cameron's epic, *Titanic*. Originally intended as a one-time facility, it has been turned into the permanent Fox Baja Studios and was used for other major movies, including *Tomorrow Never Dies*, *Deep Blue Sea* and *Master and Commander*. See p92 for more details.

Theater

Tijuana, Mexicali and La Paz – all of which have outstanding performance facilities – are Baja California's dramatic centers. Like film, dance and painting, peninsular theater grew with the universities and the Casa de la Cultura. Numerous theater companies have offered aspiring actors the opportunity to develop their talents.

Visual Arts

Few visitors appreciate what a fertile environment Baja California has provided for the visual arts. Throughout the peninsula, from Tijuana to Los Cabos, evidence of cultural links with mainland Mexican movements like the muralist tradition are apparent, but sculpture and painting flourished even before the creation of the Instituto de Ciencias y Artes del Estado (ICAE, now part of the Instituto de Bellas Artes) and the Universidad Autónoma in the 1950s. Both institutions supported local artists and others who had relocated from mainland Mexico.

After the Universidad Autónoma abandoned the arts community, individual artists combined to form groups such as the *Círculo de Escultores y Pintores* (Circle of Sculptors and Painters) and the *Profesionales de Artes Visuales* (Visual Arts Professionals). Since 1977 the *Bienal de Artes Plásticas del Noroeste* (Northwest Sculpture Festival) has been an important competition for artists from the region.

One informal movement in the local scene is *cholismo*, the equivalent of European or North American punk, often expressed in street murals featuring traditional Mexican figures like the Virgin of Guadalupe in unconventional contexts. Artists from both sides of the border are active in groups like the *Taller de Arte Fronterizo* (Border Art Workshop) and in the women-only *Las Comadres*. Both have direct ties to the *Centro Cultural de la Raza* in San Diego and the *Centro Cultural* in Tijuana, and often stage performance-art shows and events with borderlands themes.

ART GALLERIES

There are several excellent art galleries in Tijuana (p82), but Baja California Sur offers the most opportunities for gallery-hopping. *Todos Santos* (p210) has a booming art scene which partly but by no means exclusively derives from North Americans who have relocated to the area. Their work, however, lacks the urgency of borderland artists' work; it more closely resembles styles and themes of artists from Taos and Santa Fe in the US state of New Mexico. The numerous recently opened galleries in San José del Cabo (p227) feature far more local and mainland Mexican artists.

In the excellent documentary *Maquilapolis* (2006), filmmakers Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre tell the story of two women who work in one of Tijuana's many *maquiladoras* (assembly plants).

Environment

THE LAND

Baja California is a desolate but vastly scenic peninsula of mountains, deserts, headlands and beaches flanked by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Sea of Cortez (also known as the Gulf of California) to the east. Its irregular, snakelike outline stretches 1250km (775 miles) from mainland California to Los Cabos, though its width ranges only from 50km to 230km (30 miles to 145 miles). On its northeastern edge, Baja also shares short borders with the US state of Arizona and the Mexican state of Sonora, both across the Río Colorado delta. (The southern part of the cape, loosely from La Paz south, is known as the Cape Region.) With a total landmass of about 143,000 sq km (55,000 sq miles), it is about the size of the US state of Illinois, or of England and Wales combined. And here's the best part: more than 4800km (3000 miles) of spectacular and varied coastline wrap the peninsula.

Baja's unique topography is partly the result of tectonic uplift, during which the peninsula tilted westward over millions of years to form three of the four main mountain ranges: the granitic Sierra de Juárez near the US border, home to the Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (p111); Parque Sierra San Pedro Mártir (p114), crowned by the 3046m (10,154ft) Picacho del Diablo; and the Sierra de la Giganta (p176), which stretches from Mulegé nearly to La Paz. The fourth range, Sierra de la Laguna (p203), is volcanic in origin. With peaks up to 2100m (7000ft), it divides the southern cape in half.

Similar to mainland California's Sierra Nevada, the western slopes of Baja's ranges feature low foothills gradually giving way to pine forests and granitic mountain peaks. On the eastern side, the mountains rise up abruptly and the landscape is more arid and rugged.

Dotting Baja's gulf waters are numerous islands, which are undersea extensions of peninsular mountain ranges. The largest island, Isla Ángel de la Guarda (p151), is 68km (42 miles) long and 16km (10 miles) wide.

The Tropic of Cancer runs almost precisely through the towns of Todos Santos and Santiago, about midway between La Paz and Cabo San Lucas.

WILDLIFE

Although Baja California is mostly desert, its far from lacking in wildlife. It has some of the best whale-watching in the world, not to mention the other rich sea life and land critters within its boundaries. The peninsula is home to surreal landscapes, made all the more spectacular by bizarre flora as such as the *cardón* cactus, the *cirio* tree, and the stunted, baobab-like elephant tree.

Animals

BIRDS

Baja California's bird habitats strongly correlate with the peninsula's plant communities, varying with climate, elevation and latitude. The mountainous Sierra San Pedro Mártir, the deserts of central Baja and the cape each have characteristic bird species. The salt marshes around Guerrero Negro (p155) and the Sierra de la Laguna (p203) both offer wonderful bird-watching.

Large colonies of nesting seabirds populate the many islands in the Sea of Cortez. Among the most noteworthy species are black storm-petrels and least storm-petrels, brown pelicans, cormorants, frigate birds, boobies, Craveri's murrelets, Heerman's gulls, yellow-footed gulls, elegant terns and brown noddys. Bird-watching is good year-round; in winter and fall, lagoons, marshes and lakes are particularly alive with migratory birds.

At 1250km (775 miles), Baja is the third-longest peninsula in the world, after the Antarctic Peninsula and Russia's Kamchatka.

For an in-depth look at Baja's birds, pick up a copy of the excellent *Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas*, by Ernest Preston Edwards.

THE SAD TALE OF THE SEA TURTLE

Baja California is an important nesting area for sea turtles, surely one of the planet's most endearing creatures. The future of several species – including the loggerhead, leatherback, hawksbill and olive ridley – hinge upon human actions, but none as precariously as the Pacific green turtle.

Endangered throughout the world, the Pacific green turtle (*caguama negra*, or *tortuga prieta* in Baja) is a grazing reptile that feeds on marine grasses in tropical and subtropical seas. They can weigh up to 360kg (800lb), though most weigh 135kg (300lb) or less. Males rarely leave the sea, but females migrate long distances and haul themselves onto sandy beaches of isolated tropical islands to lay their eggs.

For millennia the green turtle has provided protein to people in the tropics with its meat and eggs, but the Europeans' exploration of the globe marked the beginning of the species' decline. Northern European sailors netted the abundant turtles of the Caribbean, for example, and kept them aboard ships as sources of fresh meat on their trips around Cape Horn. Outside the tropics, turtle has long been a delicacy, and commercial pressures resulted in overhunting in such important areas as the Caribbean coasts of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Baja's turtles shared this unfortunate history. At Bahía Tortugas (p160) on Península Vizcaíno, one 19th-century ship netted almost 200 turtles in a single pass. As recently as the 1960s the Empacadora Baja California in Ensenada was canning up to 100 tons of turtle soup in a single season.

In the 1970s increasing concern over the green turtle's declining numbers resulted in its placement (and that of all other sea turtles) on the endangered species list. Mexico officially outlawed sea-turtle hunting in 1990, but the turtle populations continue to decline. Pollution, illegal hunting, egg collecting, ATV use on nesting-site beaches, boat traffic and other factors contribute to the turtles' demise.

Several Baja-based nonprofit agencies focus their energies on turtle preservation, including the **Sea Turtle Conservation Network of the Californias** (<http://baja.seaturtle.org>) and **Asupmatoma** (☎ 624-143-0458; www.mexonline.com/tortuga.htm), which operates a turtle nursery about 15 minutes north of Cabo San Lucas. At Bahía de Los Angeles, Semarnap (the Mexican ministry of the environment) operates a modest turtle conservation project, where it's possible to see leatherbacks, hawksbills and greens (see p151).

Turtles are a common sight in Baja waters and the green has been spotted as far north as Ensenada. The warmer waters of Baja California Sur are better turtle habitat and the turtles appear in many of the same areas frequented by calving gray whales, including Laguna Ojo de Liebre, Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena.

Besides getting informed and getting involved (see p216 for another possibility), there are simple precautions you can take so you don't contribute in a negative way. There are nesting sites on both the eastern and western capes, but, for the most part, sites are usually in remote areas. Still, never drive on beaches in Baja unless you're certain they're not nesting grounds. Don't buy anything made from a turtle carapace and, of course, never eat turtle eggs. If you're lucky enough to see a turtle crawling ashore on a moonlit night, keep your distance and refrain from flash photography and bright flashlights that might disorient the turtle.

LAND MAMMALS

Baja is home to a variety of unique mammals, including the black jackrabbit of Isla Espíritu Santo (p200) and the fish-eating bat of the Sea of Cortez. More characteristic, however, are animals like the mule deer, peninsular pronghorn antelope and endangered desert bighorn sheep. The Cedros mule deer is an endangered subspecies on its namesake Pacific island (p158). Smaller and more common land mammals include the coyote, rabbit, fox, squirrel, chipmunk and gopher.

MARINE MAMMALS

From January to April, visitors flock to the lagoons of central Baja to view the migration and mating of the California gray whale (p46). Other whale species (including finback, blue, orca and humpback) and dolphins also frequent the waters of the Pacific and the gulf.

Daniel Gotshall's *Marine Animals of Baja California: A Guide to the Common Fish & Invertebrates* has lavish color photographs of Baja's sea life.

Other marine mammals include the endangered Gulf of California harbor porpoise, the recovering but still threatened southern sea otter, the threatened Guadalupe fur seal, and the more common sea lion, northern elephant seal and harbor seal. The most easily accessible sea lion colonies (where you can even snorkel with the friendly creatures) are at Bahía Los Frailes (p209), Cabo San Lucas (p235) and Isla Espíritu Santo (p200).

FISH & MARINE LIFE

The waters of the Pacific support a cool temperate flora and fauna resembling that off the coast of mainland California, with kelp and mollusks, sea urchins and barnacles. Shallow areas, like Laguna San Ignacio (p166) and Bahía Magdalena (p184), support more tropical life forms.

Because of the range of temperatures in the Sea of Cortez, its flora and fauna are relatively limited in numbers of species, especially in the northern half. Mangrove swamps in some shallow lagoons, especially toward the south of the peninsula, are incubators for oysters. Crustaceans such as spiny lobsters and rock crabs were already popular fare in aboriginal Baja. The venomous yellow-bellied sea snake frequents the inshore waters of southern Baja.

Most of today's important marine life, especially that of interest to tourists, is pelagic (native to open seas). More than 800 species of fish inhabit the Sea of Cortez. The *totuava*, known commonly as sea trout or weakfish, is an endangered species in the Sea of Cortez. Parque Nacional Cabo Pulmo (p207), northeast of San José del Cabo, is home to the only living coral reef on North America's west coast.

REPTILES

Desert environments support many reptiles, including snakes, lizards and turtles. Baja has an abundant and varied snake population, including king, gopher, whiptail and, of course, rattlesnakes, which are a serious concern throughout the peninsula. Isla Santa Catalina, southeast of Loreto, is home to the endemic rattleless rattlesnake, so called because it has only a single rattle segment, which by itself is incapable of making any sound. It is also poisonous.

Sea turtles, all of which are endangered species, inhabit the coastal areas, mostly on the Sea of Cortez side. See opposite for more information.

Pacific manta rays, common in the Sea of Cortez, can have a wingspan up to 7.5m (25ft) across and weigh up to 1800kg (4000lb). Good thing they're friendly!

Grunions are fish that inhabit the waters off northern Baja California and southern California. Every year, they swim ashore at night in one of nature's strangest spawning rituals. The gulf grunion spawns day and night near San Felipe. Read more at www.grunion.org.

THE LEGACY OF STEINBECK & RICKETTS

In the spring of 1940, Nobel Prize-winning author John Steinbeck and marine biologist Ed Ricketts set sail from Monterey, California aboard a sardine boat named *Western Flyer*. Their six-week, 6400km (4000-mile) journey took them around the cape of Baja California to the Sea of Cortez, where the two collected samples of marine life for Rickett's continued studies of California's intertidal organisms. Ricketts, upon whom the *Cannery Row* character 'Doc' is based, took a great interest in the interconnectedness of marine life – a radical notion for the time and a sort of early deep ecology.

During their voyage, the pair discovered 35 new marine species, which they detailed a year later in the book *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*. Long out of print (and fetching over US\$2000 for a mint copy), the work was part scientific study and part travel narrative, full of philosophical meanderings. Fortunately, Steinbeck memorialized the journey in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951), the narrative portion of the previous book – and still in print.

In 2004 a group of scientists and scholars re-created the voyage from Monterey to the Sea of Cortez, and they did so with the same spirit that fired the original: low on luxury and high on love for adventure and the natural environment. Check out the trip at www.seaofcortez.org.

Norman C Roberts' excellent *Baja California Plant Field Guide* has 285 color photographs to accompany descriptions of more than 400 of Baja's plants.

The tallest cactus in the world is in northern Baja – a *cardón* topping out at 19m (63ft).

Ron Mader's Planeta: Ecotravels in Latin America (www.planeta.com) is one of the best resources for environmentally conscious travel in Latin America, and his Baja pages (www.planeta.com/baja.html) are no exception.

Plants

Most people think of Baja as a desert largely devoid of vegetation. Fact is, the desert is alive with more than 3000 native and introduced plants, some of which grow nowhere else on earth.

In botanical terms, much of semi-arid northern Baja is a continuation of southern California. At sea level and in the lower elevations, plants like agave, buckeye, buckwheat and bladderpod dominate. Away from the coast, these give way to chaparral vegetation including manzanita, California lilac, chamise and other plants. Above the chaparral belt, the upper slopes of the Sierra de Juárez and San Pedro Mártir support a lush forest studded with pines, spruce, cedar, fir, aspen and oak.

East of the sierras, the Sonoran Desert botanical region comprises several distinct subregions. From the US border as far as Bahía de Los Angeles, there are small-leaved shrubs like ocotillo, the closely related *palo adán*, the cactuslike *nopal* (prickly pear), and the cholla and saguaro cacti.

South of Bahía de los Angeles almost to La Paz, a narrow coastal strip on the Sea of Cortez features imposing cacti like the *cardón*, which reaches heights over 18m (60ft), and many species of *biznaga* (barrel cactus). The giant *cardón* cactus is one of the species endemic to Baja California. Others with this distinction are the *datilillo*, a yucca variety related to the Joshua tree in Southern California, and the curious *cirio* tree (see p147). Further south, on the Pacific slope, the Desierto de Vizcaíno and the Llano de Magdalena support different species of agave, plus cacti like the *cardón* and the galloping cactus.

The Sierra de la Giganta, running from Loreto nearly to La Paz, is home to many common trees and shrubs like acacia and mesquite, a handful of native palms and many cacti, including nopal, the organ pipe cactus and the *pitahaya dulce*, which yields a sweet fruit that was a staple of the Cochimi diet.

South of the Sierra de la Giganta, most of the Cape Region is an arid tropical zone of acacia and other leguminous trees and shrubs, sumac and fan palm. Pines and oaks, however, appear side by side with palms and cacti at higher elevations in the well-watered Sierra de la Laguna.

In addition to these major zones, more localized plant associations exist that are botanically significant and constitute critical wildlife habitat, especially for birds. These areas include coastal dunes, coastal salt marshes, freshwater marshes, mangrove swamps and vernal pools.

PARKS & RESERVES

National Parks

Mexico has established four major *parques nacionales* (national parks) on the Baja Peninsula. On the plateau and eastern slope of the Sierra de Juárez, the 49-sq-km (19-sq-mile) Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (p111) is barely an hour's drive from Ensenada and a great spot for camping and rock climbing. Its shallow Laguna Hanson is a major stopover for migratory birds.

Reaching altitudes above 3000m (10,000ft) in its namesake mountain range, Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir (p114) contains Baja's highest point, the Picacho del Diablo (3046m; 10,154ft). Due to the park's remoteness and difficult access, it receives few visitors and has little infrastructure. It's a good destination for backcountry camping and backpacking in the spring.

The 2077-sq-km (799-sq-mile) Parque Marino Nacional Bahía de Loreto (p179) protects the fish, sealife, islands and water around Loreto. The 70-sq-km (27-sq-mile) Parque Marino Nacional Cabo Pulmo (p207) protects the only living coral reef on the west coast of North America.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

World Heritage sites are selected for their 'outstanding values' to humanity by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco). Three are in Baja California:

- Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaíno – Unesco's title for the gray-whale mating and calving bays of Laguna San Ignacio (p166) and Laguna Ojo de Liebre (p157).
- Rock art of the Sierra de San Francisco – Deemed 'the most outstanding collection of rock paintings in the world' by Unesco; see p164.
- Islands & Protected Areas of Sea of Cortez – Baja's newest World Heritage site encompasses the islands, islets and coastal areas within the Sea of Cortez, including Bahía de Los Ángeles (p150), Cabo Pulmo (p207) and Isla Espíritu Santo (p200).

Biosphere Reserves

Baja also has three Unesco Biosphere Reserves: Islas del Golfo Biosphere Reserve includes all the islands in the Sea of Cortez. The 25,566-sq-km (9833-sq-mile) Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve stretches across the central peninsula just south of the Baja California Sur state border and is Latin America's largest single protected area. In the Cape Region, Sierra de la Laguna Biosphere Reserve (p203) protects a truly unique mixture of coniferous, deciduous and palm forests.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Baja California's fragile desert and maritime environments face a variety of challenges. Urban population growth has caused serious pollution of the Río Tijuana (which flows through San Diego into the Pacific) and the New River, which enters California from Mexicali. The latter is considered North America's most polluted waterway.

Overfishing – primarily commercial – is another major problem. The Mexican government allows longline fishing within 15 miles offshore and billfish are considered incidental catches. Gillnets and longlines have also decimated the formerly vast numbers of pelagic species in the Sea of Cortez, including whale- and hammerhead sharks, manta rays and a variety of other predator fish. **Sea Watch** (www.seawatch.org) estimates that marlin populations have been reduced to 12% to 15% of their former numbers. As big-fish populations plummet, fishermen turn their gillnets to reef fish, which face a similar demise if the practice isn't curtailed. If you plan to sportfish, be certain you head out with an operator who adheres to bag limits and catch-and-release of billfish.

Other environmental issues include deforestation in the Sierra de Juárez of northern Baja and toxic mining residues at sites like Santa Rosalía. The proliferation of off-road races throughout Baja has done inestimable damage to its flora and fauna. The surge in housing developments has severely impacted the landscape, especially in hot spots around Los Cabos, along the coast between Tijuana and Ensenada and near Loreto (see p180). The continued construction of golf courses around Los Cabos puts a serious strain on the desert. The massive Escalera Náutica project (see p25) will likely take a serious toll on both coasts.

Familiarize yourself with the plight of sea turtles through the excellent news archive at Wild Coast (www.wildcoast.net). Through the website you can also learn how to help save these majestic creatures from extinction.

'Adopt a sea turtle' through Pro Península – donate or just log on (www.propeninsula.org) and learn about the fate of Baja's sea turtles.

Baja Outdoors

For nature-lovers, Baja is a dream. Outdoor adventure has always been the peninsula's highlight, with endless opportunities to frolic in nature, from sea kayaking and diving in the Sea of Cortez, to whale-watching in the Pacific, to sportfishing just about everywhere.

WHALE-WATCHING

From mid-December to mid-April, the coastal lagoons of Baja California Sur are calving grounds for the California gray whale, and thousands of visitors, both Mexicans and foreigners, gather to observe mothers and their calves cavorting in the lagoons' shallow waters. Witnessing a mother nudge her calf right up to your boat is truly a spectacle to behold.

In winter you can spot whales from shore from Ensenada all the way to Cabo San Lucas and into the Sea of Cortez. But the whales' primary calving grounds – and the best places to see them – are within three sheltered bays on the Pacific. North to south, they are Laguna Ojo de Liebre (p157), Laguna San Ignacio (p166) and Bahía Magdalena (p184).

Whale-Watching Sites

The closest town to Laguna Ojo de Liebre is Guerrero Negro (p154), about 32km (20 miles) inland. While definitely not the most attractive town, it has a good choice of midrange hotels, or you can camp near the lagoon. The bay itself gets more whales than the other two bays.

San Ignacio (p162) is the closest population center to Laguna San Ignacio. It has better accommodations than Guerrero Negro and, because it's a delightful, historic town, it makes a great place to stay. There's also a sprinkling of *cabañas* and camping areas at the lagoon, nearly two hours – but only 64km (40 miles) – from San Ignacio proper. The lagoon is known for having the 'friendliest' whales.

Bahía Magdalena has two main centers: Puerto López Mateos (p185) and Puerto San Carlos (p185). The latter is the bigger of the two and has better, more comfortable, accommodations. Both are right on the bay, meaning you can get out on the water as soon as you can drag your butt out of bed and to the piers. Boca de Soledad, an inlet near Puerto López Mateos, boasts the highest density of whales of all these sites. Both see fewer tourists than the more northerly sites.

Tours

Although it's possible to see the whales from land (especially near Puerto López Mateos), the best way to really see them is by *panga* (skiff). You can set up *panga* tours in three ways. The cheapest option is to negotiate directly with the *pangueros* (panga owners) down at the piers. They usually charge US\$40 to US\$50 per person for up to six people. The downside to this is that the *pangueros* generally don't speak English and won't be able to explain – from a 'naturalist's' perspective – what's going on.

The next step up is to arrange a trip through one of the hotels or operators in the towns closest to the lagoons. There will often be a bilingual guide in the boat and transport is provided. These trips cost about US\$60 per person. Similarly, tour operators in La Paz (p194) and Loreto (p180) offer full-day trips to Bahía Magdalena and Laguna San Ignacio.

Finally, you can set up a trip from the USA or elsewhere. These multiday tours are the most expensive way to do it, but are also the most extensive and

Heading to Baja for a little whale-watching? Log on and learn your species at the American Cetacean Society (www.acsonline.org). There are even links to Baja's lagoons and the organization's annual whale-watching tours.

Pacific gray whales tend to spy hop, tail-slap and breach more than other types of whales, making them one of the most exciting cetaceans to watch.

GRAY WHALES OF BAJA *Keith Jones*

There is nowhere else in the world where you can get as close to a wild whale as you will get at the lagoons of Baja. Friendly whale activity, where the whales come very close to your boat, is common in these lagoons. If you are visiting Baja in January, February or March, you should take at least one trip on a whale-watching *panga* (skiff).

The Migration

Each year, gray whales make one of the longest migrations of any animal on earth. Triggered by a drop in water temperature, these 35ft- to-45ft-long mammals migrate south from their winter feeding grounds in the Alaskan and Siberian waters beginning in October or November. The first to migrate are usually pregnant females, followed closely by the breeding-age adults. Juvenile whales also make the migration, but their drive to arrive isn't as intense. They are known to linger along the way, frequently stopping well short of the Mexican lagoons.

Swimming day and night, gray whales travel between 5000 and 6000 miles, pausing only for brief 10- or 15-minute catnaps. Although some whales have been observed feeding along the way (they have a set of bristly filters that hang down from their upper jaws called a baleen), it's uncommon. The Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve biologists estimate that an adult migrating whale may lose up to 15,000lbs of body weight during the migration. (They weigh up to 75,000lbs.)

Arrival in Baja

Baja's Laguna Ojo de Liebre and the two more southerly bays of Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena are the three protected waterways where the gray whales spend three months each year to give birth and mate. The first whales normally enter Laguna Ojo de Liebre between December 15 and 20 and arrive a few weeks later at the other lagoons.

The whale-watching season doesn't officially open until January 1. By then hundreds of whales have arrived inside Laguna Ojo de Liebre. The whale count peaks around February 15, when the average number of whales in Laguna Ojo de Liebre is 1500. (In 2004 the official Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve census was 2000 whales.) In Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena, the whale count usually peaks at around 200 to 350 whales. Although the eastern North Pacific gray whale population has been estimated at between 16,000 and 26,000, the population has declined the last few years, likely due to a food shortage.

Mothers & Babies

Female gray whales normally give birth to one baby, weighing in at 1500lbs to 2000lbs. The lagoons of Baja provide a unique environment ideally suited for bringing baby whales into the world. The shallow water (20ft or 30ft deep) is warmer than in the open ocean, providing needed warmth for the babies, which are born without an insulating layer of blubber. There are virtually no waves inside the lagoons. Orcas, the number-one threat to baby gray whales, never enter Laguna Ojo de Liebre or Laguna San Ignacio because of this shallow water. As baby whales don't know how to swim, the mother whale must assist the newborn to the surface for his first breath of air, then teach him essential survival skills.

The mother whales are tremendously protective of their newborn babies. The mother and baby constantly touch one another. The baby uses his mother as a platform to rest upon, to sleep on and play on and under. Frequently, we see a mother whale swimming with her pectoral fin extended to the side so her baby can swim and rest almost simultaneously.

If you're lucky, you may be able to catch mother whales teaching the youngsters how to breach (leaping out of the water and crashing back down). By early February the youngsters are commonly seen attempting to breach, but they usually aren't strong enough until mid-February, when for just one or two days the mother whales will breach (an unusual sight). Some days you'll see dozens of mothers jumping at the same time, or just before, their baby jumps. It's an exciting time to be on the water.

By late February, the babies have grown large enough to swim away from their mother's side, and groups of whales will play together. The mothers hover around the fringes of this playtime activity.

informative. An English-speaking naturalist guide will always be in the boat, so you'll learn and see a lot. Tours are usually in February and March, and include lodging, ground transport, optional charter flights, food, excursions and guides. If you need specific dates, make reservations one to three months in advance; most operators offer no more than five departures per season.

A five-day trip usually gets you three days of whale-watching. There are also 12-day cruises aboard 30-person yachts. Sailing from San Diego and ending in Cabo San Lucas, these take you to the Pacific lagoons (usually San Ignacio) as well as to the Sea of Cortez where you can see blue, sperm and humpback whales. You'll have chances to snorkel and hike on islands as well.

Following is a list of recommended USA-based tour operators. Rates are all per person, double occupancy. Those traveling alone will likely pay a hefty single-occupancy surcharge. Cruises do not include return flights from Cabo San Lucas.

Baja Discovery (☎ 619-262-0700, 800-829-2252; www.bajadiscovery.com) Land-based.

Boat-in base camp at Laguna San Ignacio, right on a deepwater channel. Superb location, great outfitter. Four- to five-day trips run US\$1200 to US\$2175.

Baja Expeditions (☎ 858-581-3311, 800-843-6967; www.bajaex.com) Land-based or boat-based. Highly regarded outfitter, long in the business. Base camps at Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena. Land-based trips start about US\$1350; boat-based about US\$1795.

Baja Jones Adventures (☎ 909-923-8933; www.greywhale.com) Five- and six-day land or air-charter trips to Ojo de Liebre cost US\$1695 to US\$1995.

Natural Habitat Adventures (☎ 800-543-8917; www.nathab.com) Deluxe eight-day boat-based trips start at US\$3900.

Oceanic Society (☎ 800-326-7491; www.oceanic-society.org) Twelve-day cruises cost US\$3090. One departure in mid-March.

Pacific Sea Fari/H&M Landing (☎ 619-226-8224; www.hmlanding.com/newseafari.htm) Eight- to 11-day cruises from US\$2700.

Searcher Natural History Tours (☎ 619-226-2403; www.bajawhale.com) Twelve-day cruises cost US\$3275.

SEA KAYAKING

Baja California is a top-rated destination for sea kayaking, which is often the only way to access some of the most pristine and beautiful coves and inlets along the coast and the offshore islands.

The Sea of Cortez offers calmer waters than the Pacific and is a great place to learn or hone your kayaking skills. The most interesting areas are the gulf islands of the Midriff from Bahía de Los Ángeles (p150) south to the Isla Espíritu Santo (p200) near La Paz. These feature abundant wildlife and countless anchorages for well-equipped campers. Sheltered Bahía Concepción (p174), south of Mulegé, is another major hot spot for recreational kayakers and is especially suited for novices. Kayaking can be excellent along the eastern cape (p204) as well.

Rougher seas on the Pacific side attract more advanced and adventurous kayakers, although most beginners should also be able to cope with the waters in sheltered Punta Banda (p108), south of Ensenada. Isla San Martín (p119), a volcanic island near San Quintín, offers excellent multi-day kayaking opportunities.

Hazards to sea kayakers include the large swells of the open Pacific and high winds on the gulf, both of which can swamp unsuspecting novices. But even experts should respect these natural phenomena and inquire about local conditions. Note also that Mexican government regulations prohibit sea kayaking when whales are present in the Pacific coastal lagoons of Baja California Sur.

For your coffee table, it's hard to beat Stanley Minasian's *The World's Whales*. Incorporate people and politics into your research with Serge Dedina's *Saving the Gray Whale: People, Politics and Conservation in Baja California*.

The Sea of Cortez boasts some of the longest uninhabited stretches of kayakable coastline in the world, which makes for some of the planet's best paddling.

Many aficionados bring their own equipment, but kayaks are also for rent at hotels, resorts and sports outfitters, many of whom also offer guided tours. Loreto and especially La Paz are two of the best places to arrange kayaking tours. Several outfitters operate in La Paz, offering everything from half- and full-day trips to Espíritu Santo (about US\$80 per person) to multiday camping trips, starting around US\$1000 per week. You can also rent equipment from several operators in La Paz and arrange shuttle service to/from the islands, allowing you to kayak and camp alone and get picked up when you want. You can even set up meeting points to have your food carried and cooked for you. Outfitters that provide such services (see p194) also offer radios, maps, information and assistance if you get into trouble.

To arrange a trip from home, contact one of the outfitters in La Paz or one of the US-based operators listed here.

Baja Expeditions (☎ 858-581-3311, 800-843-6967; www.bajaex.com) Based in San Diego.

Sea Kayak Adventures (☎ 208-765-3116, 800-616-1943; www.seakayadventures.com) Based in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho.

Sea Trek (☎ 415-488-1100; www.seatrekkayak.com) Based in San Francisco.

DIVING & SNORKELING

Both the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez are water wonderlands for divers and snorkelers. Rock and coral reefs, shipwrecks and kelp beds all invite exploration and attract a great variety of ocean dwellers and tropical fish.

Dive sites on the Pacific side, in general, are better suited for advanced divers and, thanks to chilly water temperatures, wetsuits are advisable year-round. Both Islas de Todos Santos (near Ensenada; p109) and Islas de los Coronados (p86) are popular playgrounds for Southern Californians. Species you're likely to encounter include rockfish, the luminescent garibaldi, moray eels and bat rays.

Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkeling Baja California*, by Walt Peterson, makes for excellent companionship for those taking the underwater plunge.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

Please consider the following tips when diving and help preserve the ecology and beauty of reefs:

- Never use anchors on the reef, and take care not to ground boats on coral.
- Avoid touching or standing on living marine organisms or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. If you must hold on to the reef, only touch exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. Take care not to kick up clouds of sand, which can smother organisms.
- Practice and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time within them as possible as your air bubbles may be caught within the roof and thereby leave organisms high and dry. Take turns to inspect the interior of a small cave.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy corals or shells or to loot marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks).
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find as well. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life.
- Do not feed fish.
- Minimize your disturbance of marine animals. *Never* ride on the backs of turtles or manta rays.

The central and southern Sea of Cortez beckons with calmer and warmer waters and an even greater diversity of species: you'll feel as if you're diving in a giant tropical aquarium. There are sites for snorkelers as well as divers of all skill and experience levels. Hubs for underwater explorations are (north to south): Bahía de Los Ángeles (p150) and the Midriff Islands to the south; Isla Santa Inés near Mulegé (p171) and Bahía Concepción (p174); La Paz (p189) with Isla Espíritu Santo, Isla Partida, Los Islotes and El Bajo Seamount (famous for schooling hammerhead sharks, mantas and whale sharks); the eastern cape's Cabo Pulmo (the only coral reef on the North American west coast; p207); and Land's End (p240), Playa Santa María (p230) and Playa Chileno (p230), near Cabo San Lucas (p235).

Dive shops at or near all of these areas lead tours and rent equipment, though you may prefer to bring your own.

San Diego-based Baja Expeditions (p48) and **Horizon Charters Diving** (☎ 858-277-7823; www.horizoncharters.com) both organize multiday diving excursions. Another outfitter with an outstanding reputation is **Baja Diving & Service** (☎ 612-122-1826; www.clubcantamar.com; Paseo Obregón 1665, Local 2), based in La Paz. It owns the only recompression chamber in La Paz.

Most outfitters charge about US\$25 to US\$30 per day for full diving-gear rental, provided you're diving with them. A two-tank boat-based dive through an outfitter in Mulegé or Loreto will set you back about US\$100 to US\$135, depending on how far you have to travel. A PADI Open Water course costs between US\$350 and US\$400.

Snorkel tours cost anywhere from US\$45 to US\$90 per day and include transport to islands or bays accessible only by boat. You can also rent snorkeling gear and go on your own in Cabo Pulmo. Bring your own gear if you can; it will allow you to snorkel whenever and wherever you want, which is especially handy if you're bouncing around the eastern cape (p204).

FISHING

Sportfishing, for good reason, is one of the most popular activities off the Pacific coast and in the Sea of Cortez. The waters of Baja are among the most fecund anywhere and few places offer a greater variety of fish. The southern peninsula enjoys a legendary reputation for big game fish like marlin and dorado.

Also see the fishing information that appears in the popular sportfishing destinations of San Quintín (p119), San Felipe (p139), Bahía San Luis Gonzaga (p149), Bahía de Los Ángeles (p152), Loreto (p179), La Paz (p194) and Cabo San Lucas (p241).

When to Fish

You can catch fish in Baja waters year-round, but what's biting, how many, where and when depends on variables like water temperature, currents, bait supply and fish migrations. In general the biggest catches occur April to July and October to December. Keep in mind that summer through late fall is also prime tropical-storm and hurricane season. This book includes fishing calendars (indicating at what time certain species are most prevalent in a particular area) in the most popular sportfishing destinations, as listed above.

Where to Fish

The waters around Ensenada and San Quintín are known to be rich in yellowtail, halibut, sea bass, bonito and albacore tuna. On the Sea of Cortez side, grouper, sierra and corvina are common off San Felipe. Mulegé and Bahía Concepción have many of the same species as well as yellowtail, dorado and even the occasional marlin. Loreto is famous for roosterfish.

The Divers Alert Network (DAN; www.diversalertnetwork.org) houses a series of excellent articles on dive-related medical issues. This nonprofit organization offers medical advice and assistance to its members around the world.

Planning to fish? Don't leave home without a copy of Neil Kelly and Gene Kira's *The Baja Catch*, the definitive book on fishing around the peninsula.

The most abundant fishing grounds are in the Cape Region. Both Los Cabos and the east cape are rich in migratory species such as dorado, tuna and wahoo, but Cabo San Lucas especially is the epicenter for year-round billfish such as marlin, sailfish and swordfish. Roosterfish swarm around the east cape.

Charters

Fishing charters are available at all of Baja's fishing hubs, and you'll find reputable local companies listed throughout this book. Always ask what's included in the rates. Fishing licenses, tackle, crew and ice are standard, but sometimes charters may also include bait, cleaning and freezing, meals, drinks and tax. Tips for the crew are at your discretion, but US\$20 (per angler) for a successful eight hours is considered adequate. Bring along a hat, sunscreen, polarized sunglasses and Dramamine (or equivalent) if you suffer from seasickness.

Prices depend on boat type and size, ranging from US\$300 for a 26-footer to upwards of US\$1600 for a 42ft fishing yacht. The cheapest boats are *pangas*, the vessel of choice of Mexican commercial fishermen, as they put you right up close with the sea. These sturdy outboard skiffs are made from fiberglass and wood, cruise up to 40km/h (25mph) and are capable of beach landings. *Superpangas* are larger and more comfortable, and they often

For in-depth information on the types of commercial fishing practices threatening the Sea of Cortez, or to get involved yourself, check out Sea Watch (www.seawatch.org).

HERE, FISHY FISHY FISH...

Who's gonna believe you if you can't even tell them what kind of fish you caught? This little angler's glossary should help. It will also help you communicate with Mexican guides and captains, who can usually tell you what you're most likely to catch.

■ barracuda	<i>picuda</i>
■ black marlin	<i>marlín negro</i>
■ blue marlin	<i>marlín azul</i>
■ bonito	<i>bonito</i>
■ dolphin fish (mahimahi)	<i>dorado</i>
■ halibut	<i>lenguado</i>
■ mullet	<i>lisa</i>
■ red snapper	<i>huachinango, pargo</i>
■ roosterfish	<i>pez gallo</i>
■ sailfish	<i>pez vela</i>
■ sea bass	<i>corvina</i>
■ shark	<i>tiburón</i>
■ Spanish mackerel	<i>sierra</i>
■ striped marlin	<i>marlín rayado</i>
■ swordfish	<i>pez espada</i>
■ tuna	<i>atún</i>
■ wahoo	<i>peto, guahu</i>
■ yellowfin tuna	<i>atún de aleta</i>
■ yellowtail	<i>jurel</i>

The phrase that will serve you most, however, may turn out to be *se me fue* (it got away). Then throw your hands up and say *te lo juro* (I swear it)!

feature toilets and a canvas shade top. *Pangas* usually hold up to three anglers and start from US\$100 to US\$150 (for the boat) per day.

Licenses & Bag Limits

Anyone of fishing age (ie old enough to hold a rod) or older aboard a private vessel carrying fishing gear must have a Mexican fishing license, whether they're fishing or not. Licenses are usually included in any charter but can also be obtained in the USA, by mail or in person, from the **Mexican Fisheries Department** (Conapesca; ☎ 619-233-4324; 2550 5th Ave, Suite 15, San Diego, CA 92103). The cost of the license is US\$22.90 per week, US\$32.80 per month and US\$42.70 per year. In Mexico licenses are issued by the Oficina de Pesca in the respective towns.

The daily bag limit is 10 fish per person with no more than five of any one species. Billfish like marlin, sailfish and swordfish are restricted to one per day per boat; tarpon, roosterfish and halibut to two. Please take the catch-and-release of billfish seriously, as these majestic lords of the deep are being disastrously overfished, both by sportsmen and Japanese commercial fleets (also see p242). Protected species like *totuava* (a relative of white sea bass) and sea turtles, as well as mollusks and crustaceans, may not be taken at all.

US Customs allows fish caught in Mexico to enter the USA as long as it conforms with Mexican bag limits, the species is somehow identifiable (an ice chest filled with fillets is a no-no; the head, tail or part of the skin should be left on) and you can produce a Mexican fishing license. Airlines do not allow ice in the hold, so make sure it's been frozen up until the moment you check your luggage. In Cabo San Lucas, you can have your fish smoked or vacuum packed, too.

Contact the **California Department of Fish & Game** (☎ 858-467-4201; in Sacramento 916-653-6281; www.dfg.ca.gov; 4949 Viewridge Ave, San Diego, CA 92123) for information about declaration forms, permits and limits.

Thanks to perfect wind and wave conditions, Punta San Carlos (p122) is widely considered the best wavesailing destination in the world.

SURFING

Virtually the entire Pacific coast of Baja and areas along the east cape as far north as Punta Arenas contain a multitude of surf sites. To reach the best spots, surfers need sturdy vehicles and should carry extra parts, gasoline, plenty of water and all supplies.

The best book on surfing in Baja is Mike Parise's *The Surfer's Guide to Baja*. The useful *Baja/Mexico Surf Map* is available at surf shops and online.

For more insider tips, surf spots up and down the peninsula and suggested surfing tours, see p55.

WINDSURFING & KITE SURFING

Baja's windsurfing capital is Los Barriles (p205), a fast-growing settlement on the east cape, but Bahía de la Ventana (p201), southeast of La Paz via a good paved highway, has more consistent wind and is rapidly gaining popularity. The season runs from mid-November to early March. In these areas, equipment is easy to come by, but elsewhere windsurfers have to bring their own.

On the Pacific side, popular spots include Punta Baja (p122), Punta San Carlos (named 'best wave sailing spot in the world' by *Windsurfing* magazine; p122) and remote Punta Abreojos (p161) on the Vizcaíno Peninsula. Another insider spot is Bahía de Los Angeles (p150). The season here runs from February to October, peaking in the summer.

Vela Windsurf Resorts (p205) and Baja Expeditions (p48) both organize windsurfing trips.

HIKING

Hiking and backpacking are less common in Baja than they are north of the border, but the peninsula offers some outstanding opportunities to put some wear on your walking boots. Baja's national parks, particularly those in northern Baja, have the best trail infrastructures (sometimes even following the routes walked by indigenous people hundreds of years ago), but even these tend to be minimally maintained. In central and southern Baja, trails are even less worn, and it's fairly easy to get lost. Even locals rarely venture on multiday trips and many recommend taking a guide.

Part of the reason hiking can prove difficult throughout Baja California is the lack of reliable maps. The **Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática** (Inegi; www.inegi.gob.mx) publishes large-scale topographical maps covering the entire country, but these are rather outdated. For more on maps, see p260.

No matter how long you intend to hike, always carry plenty of water and food supplies with you, and be aware of potential hazards like rattlesnakes (p278), flash floods in *arroyos* (riverbeds) and unanticipated heat, even during winter.

When to Hike

Hiking in the mountains is best in summer, when temperatures are mild; in winter be prepared for snow and icy conditions. Spring flower season peaks in April and May in the northern ranges, and September and October in the Cape Region mountains.

Where to Hike

Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (p111), offers great wilderness hiking around Laguna Hanson, the park's aqueous centerpiece. Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir (p114) is home to Baja's highest peak and attracts hardy wilderness hikers willing to brave the often unmarked, high-mountain backcountry. The area around Cataviña (p147) offers some of the peninsula's most splendid desert scenery. The *mesas* surrounding the village of San Ignacio (p162) offer another wonderful opportunity for exploring the desert scenery on foot; it's strikingly different from what you'll see near Cataviña.

In the Sierra de San Francisco (p164), you can take multiday guided hikes to see cave paintings, and people usually hire mules to carry their food and gear. More cave paintings can be found by taking adventurous hikes (which involve swimming up gorges!) in the Cañón la Trinidad (p175), west of Loreto and Mulegé; these are best done with guides as well.

In southern Baja's lush Sierra de la Laguna (p203), hikers with experience in orienteering can navigate their way across the peninsula's most biodiverse region, from one side of the cape to the other. The Sierra de la Laguna section lists guides if you'd rather entrust your whereabouts to locals.

BICYCLING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

Cycling the Transpeninsular is becoming increasingly popular as both bicycles and roads improve. However, the distance between settlements and the lack of water in some areas can be serious drawbacks. Narrow shoulders on most highways can be potentially hazardous, although most drivers are courteous.

Even better than biking along the highway is getting off-road into the backcountry. Tracks take you along ridges, past remote ranches and through cactus forests. Self-sealing tubes and Slime are essential on these thorn-paved trails.

Anyone straying from the beaten path, whether up mountains, into sea caves or off to isolated beaches, will be glad to have a copy of Walt Peterson's *The Baja Adventure Book* along. It's poorly organized but packed with outstanding information.

Dust to Glory – a high-octane documentary about the Baja 1000, the world's most grueling off-road race – is a must-see. The film was directed by Dana Brown, son of Bruce Brown (the creator of legendary surf flick *Endless Summer*.)

PUTTING DOWN THE GUIDE *Matthew D Firestone*

No, we're not talking about insulting the local guy who is leading you through the desert. We're talking about closing this book that you have in your hands and leaving it behind. We're talking about following your own trail, catching your own wave and paddling up your own stream. It is bound to be an adventure more memorable than the one you'll find along the Gringo Trail.

We at Lonely Planet are dedicated to providing comprehensive coverage of every country and region that we cover, but we recognize the sometimes detrimental effect of places being 'discovered.' Even more than that, we are dedicated to creating a sustainable global traveler culture, and we recognize the universal benefit of 'discovery.'

So put your guidebook down for a day or – even better – a week. Explore the places that are not covered in the pages of this guidebook. And discover your own lonely planet.

Rental bikes are readily available in resort areas like Loreto, La Paz and Los Cabos, but the quality is generally mediocre. **Pedaling South** (📞 707-942-4550, 800-398-6200; www.tourbaja.com), based in Northern California, offers some excellent mountain biking trips throughout the peninsula.

The Baja border areas – particularly the cities of Tecate, Playas de Rosarito and Ensenada – host a variety of cycling events annually. For additional information about cycling in Baja, see p268.

GOLF

With spectacular championship courses flanking the Sea of Cortez, the Los Cabos Corridor reigns supreme when it comes to golf. The flip side to this golf Mecca is that the development has irrevocably transformed the pristine coastline into a 'Palm Springs by the Sea.' For a rundown of golf options in the Corridor, see p232. There are also two 18-hole courses near Ensenada (p100).

Baja Outdoors

For nature-lovers, Baja is a dream. Outdoor adventure has always been the peninsula's highlight, with endless opportunities to frolic in nature, from sea kayaking and diving in the Sea of Cortez, to whale-watching in the Pacific, to sportfishing just about everywhere.

WHALE-WATCHING

From mid-December to mid-April, the coastal lagoons of Baja California Sur are calving grounds for the California gray whale, and thousands of visitors, both Mexicans and foreigners, gather to observe mothers and their calves cavorting in the lagoons' shallow waters. Witnessing a mother nudge her calf right up to your boat is truly a spectacle to behold.

In winter you can spot whales from shore from Ensenada all the way to Cabo San Lucas and into the Sea of Cortez. But the whales' primary calving grounds – and the best places to see them – are within three sheltered bays on the Pacific. North to south, they are Laguna Ojo de Liebre (p157), Laguna San Ignacio (p166) and Bahía Magdalena (p184).

Whale-Watching Sites

The closest town to Laguna Ojo de Liebre is Guerrero Negro (p154), about 32km (20 miles) inland. While definitely not the most attractive town, it has a good choice of midrange hotels, or you can camp near the lagoon. The bay itself gets more whales than the other two bays.

San Ignacio (p162) is the closest population center to Laguna San Ignacio. It has better accommodations than Guerrero Negro and, because it's a delightful, historic town, it makes a great place to stay. There's also a sprinkling of *cabañas* and camping areas at the lagoon, nearly two hours – but only 64km (40 miles) – from San Ignacio proper. The lagoon is known for having the 'friendliest' whales.

Bahía Magdalena has two main centers: Puerto López Mateos (p185) and Puerto San Carlos (p185). The latter is the bigger of the two and has better, more comfortable, accommodations. Both are right on the bay, meaning you can get out on the water as soon as you can drag your butt out of bed and to the piers. Boca de Soledad, an inlet near Puerto López Mateos, boasts the highest density of whales of all these sites. Both see fewer tourists than the more northerly sites.

Tours

Although it's possible to see the whales from land (especially near Puerto López Mateos), the best way to really see them is by *panga* (skiff). You can set up *panga* tours in three ways. The cheapest option is to negotiate directly with the *pangueros* (panga owners) down at the piers. They usually charge US\$40 to US\$50 per person for up to six people. The downside to this is that the *pangueros* generally don't speak English and won't be able to explain – from a 'naturalist's' perspective – what's going on.

The next step up is to arrange a trip through one of the hotels or operators in the towns closest to the lagoons. There will often be a bilingual guide in the boat and transport is provided. These trips cost about US\$60 per person. Similarly, tour operators in La Paz (p194) and Loreto (p180) offer full-day trips to Bahía Magdalena and Laguna San Ignacio.

Finally, you can set up a trip from the USA or elsewhere. These multiday tours are the most expensive way to do it, but are also the most extensive and

Heading to Baja for a little whale-watching? Log on and learn your species at the American Cetacean Society (www.acsonline.org). There are even links to Baja's lagoons and the organization's annual whale-watching tours.

Pacific gray whales tend to spy hop, tail-slap and breach more than other types of whales, making them one of the most exciting cetaceans to watch.

GRAY WHALES OF BAJA *Keith Jones*

There is nowhere else in the world where you can get as close to a wild whale as you will get at the lagoons of Baja. Friendly whale activity, where the whales come very close to your boat, is common in these lagoons. If you are visiting Baja in January, February or March, you should take at least one trip on a whale-watching *panga* (skiff).

The Migration

Each year, gray whales make one of the longest migrations of any animal on earth. Triggered by a drop in water temperature, these 35ft- to-45ft-long mammals migrate south from their winter feeding grounds in the Alaskan and Siberian waters beginning in October or November. The first to migrate are usually pregnant females, followed closely by the breeding-age adults. Juvenile whales also make the migration, but their drive to arrive isn't as intense. They are known to linger along the way, frequently stopping well short of the Mexican lagoons.

Swimming day and night, gray whales travel between 5000 and 6000 miles, pausing only for brief 10- or 15-minute catnaps. Although some whales have been observed feeding along the way (they have a set of bristly filters that hang down from their upper jaws called a baleen), it's uncommon. The Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve biologists estimate that an adult migrating whale may lose up to 15,000lbs of body weight during the migration. (They weigh up to 75,000lbs.)

Arrival in Baja

Baja's Laguna Ojo de Liebre and the two more southerly bays of Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena are the three protected waterways where the gray whales spend three months each year to give birth and mate. The first whales normally enter Laguna Ojo de Liebre between December 15 and 20 and arrive a few weeks later at the other lagoons.

The whale-watching season doesn't officially open until January 1. By then hundreds of whales have arrived inside Laguna Ojo de Liebre. The whale count peaks around February 15, when the average number of whales in Laguna Ojo de Liebre is 1500. (In 2004 the official Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve census was 2000 whales.) In Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena, the whale count usually peaks at around 200 to 350 whales. Although the eastern North Pacific gray whale population has been estimated at between 16,000 and 26,000, the population has declined the last few years, likely due to a food shortage.

Mothers & Babies

Female gray whales normally give birth to one baby, weighing in at 1500lbs to 2000lbs. The lagoons of Baja provide a unique environment ideally suited for bringing baby whales into the world. The shallow water (20ft or 30ft deep) is warmer than in the open ocean, providing needed warmth for the babies, which are born without an insulating layer of blubber. There are virtually no waves inside the lagoons. Orcas, the number-one threat to baby gray whales, never enter Laguna Ojo de Liebre or Laguna San Ignacio because of this shallow water. As baby whales don't know how to swim, the mother whale must assist the newborn to the surface for his first breath of air, then teach him essential survival skills.

The mother whales are tremendously protective of their newborn babies. The mother and baby constantly touch one another. The baby uses his mother as a platform to rest upon, to sleep on and play on and under. Frequently, we see a mother whale swimming with her pectoral fin extended to the side so her baby can swim and rest almost simultaneously.

If you're lucky, you may be able to catch mother whales teaching the youngsters how to breach (leaping out of the water and crashing back down). By early February the youngsters are commonly seen attempting to breach, but they usually aren't strong enough until mid-February, when for just one or two days the mother whales will breach (an unusual sight). Some days you'll see dozens of mothers jumping at the same time, or just before, their baby jumps. It's an exciting time to be on the water.

By late February, the babies have grown large enough to swim away from their mother's side, and groups of whales will play together. The mothers hover around the fringes of this playtime activity.

informative. An English-speaking naturalist guide will always be in the boat, so you'll learn and see a lot. Tours are usually in February and March, and include lodging, ground transport, optional charter flights, food, excursions and guides. If you need specific dates, make reservations one to three months in advance; most operators offer no more than five departures per season.

A five-day trip usually gets you three days of whale-watching. There are also 12-day cruises aboard 30-person yachts. Sailing from San Diego and ending in Cabo San Lucas, these take you to the Pacific lagoons (usually San Ignacio) as well as to the Sea of Cortez where you can see blue, sperm and humpback whales. You'll have chances to snorkel and hike on islands as well.

Following is a list of recommended USA-based tour operators. Rates are all per person, double occupancy. Those traveling alone will likely pay a hefty single-occupancy surcharge. Cruises do not include return flights from Cabo San Lucas.

Baja Discovery (☎ 619-262-0700, 800-829-2252; www.bajadiscovery.com) Land-based.

Boat-in base camp at Laguna San Ignacio, right on a deepwater channel. Superb location, great outfitter. Four- to five-day trips run US\$1200 to US\$2175.

Baja Expeditions (☎ 858-581-3311, 800-843-6967; www.bajaex.com) Land-based or boat-based. Highly regarded outfitter, long in the business. Base camps at Laguna San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena. Land-based trips start about US\$1350; boat-based about US\$1795.

Baja Jones Adventures (☎ 909-923-8933; www.greywhale.com) Five- and six-day land or air-charter trips to Ojo de Liebre cost US\$1695 to US\$1995.

Natural Habitat Adventures (☎ 800-543-8917; www.nathab.com) Deluxe eight-day boat-based trips start at US\$3900.

Oceanic Society (☎ 800-326-7491; www.oceanic-society.org) Twelve-day cruises cost US\$3090. One departure in mid-March.

Pacific Sea Fari/H&M Landing (☎ 619-226-8224; www.hmlanding.com/newseafari.htm) Eight- to 11-day cruises from US\$2700.

Searcher Natural History Tours (☎ 619-226-2403; www.bajawhale.com) Twelve-day cruises cost US\$3275.

SEA KAYAKING

Baja California is a top-rated destination for sea kayaking, which is often the only way to access some of the most pristine and beautiful coves and inlets along the coast and the offshore islands.

The Sea of Cortez offers calmer waters than the Pacific and is a great place to learn or hone your kayaking skills. The most interesting areas are the gulf islands of the Midriff from Bahía de Los Ángeles (p150) south to the Isla Espíritu Santo (p200) near La Paz. These feature abundant wildlife and countless anchorages for well-equipped campers. Sheltered Bahía Concepción (p174), south of Mulegé, is another major hot spot for recreational kayakers and is especially suited for novices. Kayaking can be excellent along the eastern cape (p204) as well.

Rougher seas on the Pacific side attract more advanced and adventurous kayakers, although most beginners should also be able to cope with the waters in sheltered Punta Banda (p108), south of Ensenada. Isla San Martín (p119), a volcanic island near San Quintín, offers excellent multi-day kayaking opportunities.

Hazards to sea kayakers include the large swells of the open Pacific and high winds on the gulf, both of which can swamp unsuspecting novices. But even experts should respect these natural phenomena and inquire about local conditions. Note also that Mexican government regulations prohibit sea kayaking when whales are present in the Pacific coastal lagoons of Baja California Sur.

For your coffee table, it's hard to beat Stanley Minasian's *The World's Whales*. Incorporate people and politics into your research with Serge Dedina's *Saving the Gray Whale: People, Politics and Conservation in Baja California*.

The Sea of Cortez boasts some of the longest uninhabited stretches of kayakable coastline in the world, which makes for some of the planet's best paddling.

Many aficionados bring their own equipment, but kayaks are also for rent at hotels, resorts and sports outfitters, many of whom also offer guided tours. Loreto and especially La Paz are two of the best places to arrange kayaking tours. Several outfitters operate in La Paz, offering everything from half- and full-day trips to Espíritu Santo (about US\$80 per person) to multiday camping trips, starting around US\$1000 per week. You can also rent equipment from several operators in La Paz and arrange shuttle service to/from the islands, allowing you to kayak and camp alone and get picked up when you want. You can even set up meeting points to have your food carried and cooked for you. Outfitters that provide such services (see p194) also offer radios, maps, information and assistance if you get into trouble.

To arrange a trip from home, contact one of the outfitters in La Paz or one of the US-based operators listed here.

Baja Expeditions (☎ 858-581-3311, 800-843-6967; www.bajaex.com) Based in San Diego.

Sea Kayak Adventures (☎ 208-765-3116, 800-616-1943; www.seakayadventures.com) Based in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho.

Sea Trek (☎ 415-488-1100; www.seatrekkayak.com) Based in San Francisco.

DIVING & SNORKELING

Both the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez are water wonderlands for divers and snorkelers. Rock and coral reefs, shipwrecks and kelp beds all invite exploration and attract a great variety of ocean dwellers and tropical fish.

Dive sites on the Pacific side, in general, are better suited for advanced divers and, thanks to chilly water temperatures, wetsuits are advisable year-round. Both Islas de Todos Santos (near Ensenada; p109) and Islas de los Coronados (p86) are popular playgrounds for Southern Californians. Species you're likely to encounter include rockfish, the luminescent garibaldi, moray eels and bat rays.

Lonely Planet's Diving & Snorkeling Baja California, by Walt Peterson, makes for excellent companionship for those taking the underwater plunge.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

Please consider the following tips when diving and help preserve the ecology and beauty of reefs:

- Never use anchors on the reef, and take care not to ground boats on coral.
- Avoid touching or standing on living marine organisms or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. If you must hold on to the reef, only touch exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. Take care not to kick up clouds of sand, which can smother organisms.
- Practice and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time within them as possible as your air bubbles may be caught within the roof and thereby leave organisms high and dry. Take turns to inspect the interior of a small cave.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy corals or shells or to loot marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks).
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find as well. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life.
- Do not feed fish.
- Minimize your disturbance of marine animals. *Never* ride on the backs of turtles or manta rays.

The central and southern Sea of Cortez beckons with calmer and warmer waters and an even greater diversity of species: you'll feel as if you're diving in a giant tropical aquarium. There are sites for snorkelers as well as divers of all skill and experience levels. Hubs for underwater explorations are (north to south): Bahía de Los Ángeles (p150) and the Midriff Islands to the south; Isla Santa Inés near Mulegé (p171) and Bahía Concepción (p174); La Paz (p189) with Isla Espíritu Santo, Isla Partida, Los Islotes and El Bajo Seamount (famous for schooling hammerhead sharks, mantas and whale sharks); the eastern cape's Cabo Pulmo (the only coral reef on the North American west coast; p207); and Land's End (p240), Playa Santa María (p230) and Playa Chileno (p230), near Cabo San Lucas (p235).

Dive shops at or near all of these areas lead tours and rent equipment, though you may prefer to bring your own.

San Diego-based Baja Expeditions (p48) and **Horizon Charters Diving** (☎ 858-277-7823; www.horizoncharters.com) both organize multiday diving excursions. Another outfitter with an outstanding reputation is **Baja Diving & Service** (☎ 612-122-1826; www.clubcantamar.com; Paseo Obregón 1665, Local 2), based in La Paz. It owns the only recompression chamber in La Paz.

Most outfitters charge about US\$25 to US\$30 per day for full diving-gear rental, provided you're diving with them. A two-tank boat-based dive through an outfitter in Mulegé or Loreto will set you back about US\$100 to US\$135, depending on how far you have to travel. A PADI Open Water course costs between US\$350 and US\$400.

Snorkel tours cost anywhere from US\$45 to US\$90 per day and include transport to islands or bays accessible only by boat. You can also rent snorkeling gear and go on your own in Cabo Pulmo. Bring your own gear if you can; it will allow you to snorkel whenever and wherever you want, which is especially handy if you're bouncing around the eastern cape (p204).

FISHING

Sportfishing, for good reason, is one of the most popular activities off the Pacific coast and in the Sea of Cortez. The waters of Baja are among the most fecund anywhere and few places offer a greater variety of fish. The southern peninsula enjoys a legendary reputation for big game fish like marlin and dorado.

Also see the fishing information that appears in the popular sportfishing destinations of San Quintín (p119), San Felipe (p139), Bahía San Luis Gonzaga (p149), Bahía de Los Ángeles (p152), Loreto (p179), La Paz (p194) and Cabo San Lucas (p241).

When to Fish

You can catch fish in Baja waters year-round, but what's biting, how many, where and when depends on variables like water temperature, currents, bait supply and fish migrations. In general the biggest catches occur April to July and October to December. Keep in mind that summer through late fall is also prime tropical-storm and hurricane season. This book includes fishing calendars (indicating at what time certain species are most prevalent in a particular area) in the most popular sportfishing destinations, as listed above.

Where to Fish

The waters around Ensenada and San Quintín are known to be rich in yellowtail, halibut, sea bass, bonito and albacore tuna. On the Sea of Cortez side, grouper, sierra and corvina are common off San Felipe. Mulegé and Bahía Concepción have many of the same species as well as yellowtail, dorado and even the occasional marlin. Loreto is famous for roosterfish.

The Divers Alert Network (DAN; www.diversalertnetwork.org) houses a series of excellent articles on dive-related medical issues. This nonprofit organization offers medical advice and assistance to its members around the world.

Planning to fish? Don't leave home without a copy of Neil Kelly and Gene Kira's *The Baja Catch*, the definitive book on fishing around the peninsula.

The most abundant fishing grounds are in the Cape Region. Both Los Cabos and the east cape are rich in migratory species such as dorado, tuna and wahoo, but Cabo San Lucas especially is the epicenter for year-round billfish such as marlin, sailfish and swordfish. Roosterfish swarm around the east cape.

Charters

Fishing charters are available at all of Baja's fishing hubs, and you'll find reputable local companies listed throughout this book. Always ask what's included in the rates. Fishing licenses, tackle, crew and ice are standard, but sometimes charters may also include bait, cleaning and freezing, meals, drinks and tax. Tips for the crew are at your discretion, but US\$20 (per angler) for a successful eight hours is considered adequate. Bring along a hat, sunscreen, polarized sunglasses and Dramamine (or equivalent) if you suffer from seasickness.

Prices depend on boat type and size, ranging from US\$300 for a 26-footer to upwards of US\$1600 for a 42ft fishing yacht. The cheapest boats are *pangas*, the vessel of choice of Mexican commercial fishermen, as they put you right up close with the sea. These sturdy outboard skiffs are made from fiberglass and wood, cruise up to 40km/h (25mph) and are capable of beach landings. *Superpangas* are larger and more comfortable, and they often

For in-depth information on the types of commercial fishing practices threatening the Sea of Cortez, or to get involved yourself, check out Sea Watch (www.seawatch.org).

HERE, FISHY FISHY FISH...

Who's gonna believe you if you can't even tell them what kind of fish you caught? This little angler's glossary should help. It will also help you communicate with Mexican guides and captains, who can usually tell you what you're most likely to catch.

■ barracuda	<i>picuda</i>
■ black marlin	<i>marlín negro</i>
■ blue marlin	<i>marlín azul</i>
■ bonito	<i>bonito</i>
■ dolphin fish (mahimahi)	<i>dorado</i>
■ halibut	<i>lenguado</i>
■ mullet	<i>lisa</i>
■ red snapper	<i>huachinango, pargo</i>
■ roosterfish	<i>pez gallo</i>
■ sailfish	<i>pez vela</i>
■ sea bass	<i>corvina</i>
■ shark	<i>tiburón</i>
■ Spanish mackerel	<i>sierra</i>
■ striped marlin	<i>marlín rayado</i>
■ swordfish	<i>pez espada</i>
■ tuna	<i>atún</i>
■ wahoo	<i>peto, guahu</i>
■ yellowfin tuna	<i>atún de aleta</i>
■ yellowtail	<i>jurel</i>

The phrase that will serve you most, however, may turn out to be *se me fue* (it got away). Then throw your hands up and say *te lo juro* (I swear it)!

feature toilets and a canvas shade top. *Pangas* usually hold up to three anglers and start from US\$100 to US\$150 (for the boat) per day.

Licenses & Bag Limits

Anyone of fishing age (ie old enough to hold a rod) or older aboard a private vessel carrying fishing gear must have a Mexican fishing license, whether they're fishing or not. Licenses are usually included in any charter but can also be obtained in the USA, by mail or in person, from the **Mexican Fisheries Department** (Conapesca; ☎ 619-233-4324; 2550 5th Ave, Suite 15, San Diego, CA 92103). The cost of the license is US\$22.90 per week, US\$32.80 per month and US\$42.70 per year. In Mexico licenses are issued by the Oficina de Pesca in the respective towns.

The daily bag limit is 10 fish per person with no more than five of any one species. Billfish like marlin, sailfish and swordfish are restricted to one per day per boat; tarpon, roosterfish and halibut to two. Please take the catch-and-release of billfish seriously, as these majestic lords of the deep are being disastrously overfished, both by sportsmen and Japanese commercial fleets (also see p242). Protected species like *totuava* (a relative of white sea bass) and sea turtles, as well as mollusks and crustaceans, may not be taken at all.

US Customs allows fish caught in Mexico to enter the USA as long as it conforms with Mexican bag limits, the species is somehow identifiable (an ice chest filled with fillets is a no-no; the head, tail or part of the skin should be left on) and you can produce a Mexican fishing license. Airlines do not allow ice in the hold, so make sure it's been frozen up until the moment you check your luggage. In Cabo San Lucas, you can have your fish smoked or vacuum packed, too.

Contact the **California Department of Fish & Game** (☎ 858-467-4201; in Sacramento 916-653-6281; www.dfg.ca.gov; 4949 Viewridge Ave, San Diego, CA 92123) for information about declaration forms, permits and limits.

Thanks to perfect wind and wave conditions, Punta San Carlos (p122) is widely considered the best wavesailing destination in the world.

SURFING

Virtually the entire Pacific coast of Baja and areas along the east cape as far north as Punta Arenas contain a multitude of surf sites. To reach the best spots, surfers need sturdy vehicles and should carry extra parts, gasoline, plenty of water and all supplies.

The best book on surfing in Baja is Mike Parise's *The Surfer's Guide to Baja*. The useful *Baja/Mexico Surf Map* is available at surf shops and online.

For more insider tips, surf spots up and down the peninsula and suggested surfing tours, see p55.

WINDSURFING & KITE SURFING

Baja's windsurfing capital is Los Barriles (p205), a fast-growing settlement on the east cape, but Bahía de la Ventana (p201), southeast of La Paz via a good paved highway, has more consistent wind and is rapidly gaining popularity. The season runs from mid-November to early March. In these areas, equipment is easy to come by, but elsewhere windsurfers have to bring their own.

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HIKING

Hiking and backpacking are less common in Baja than they are north of the border, but the peninsula offers some outstanding opportunities to put some wear on your walking boots. Baja's national parks, particularly those in northern Baja, have the best trail infrastructures (sometimes even following the routes walked by indigenous people hundreds of years ago), but even these tend to be minimally maintained. In central and southern Baja, trails are even less worn, and it's fairly easy to get lost. Even locals rarely venture on multiday trips and many recommend taking a guide.

Part of the reason hiking can prove difficult throughout Baja California is the lack of reliable maps. The **Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática** (Inegi; www.inegi.gob.mx) publishes large-scale topographical maps covering the entire country, but these are rather outdated. For more on maps, see p260.

No matter how long you intend to hike, always carry plenty of water and food supplies with you, and be aware of potential hazards like rattlesnakes (p278), flash floods in *arroyos* (riverbeds) and unanticipated heat, even during winter.

When to Hike

Hiking in the mountains is best in summer, when temperatures are mild; in winter be prepared for snow and icy conditions. Spring flower season peaks in April and May in the northern ranges, and September and October in the Cape Region mountains.

Where to Hike

Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (p111), offers great wilderness hiking around Laguna Hanson, the park's aqueous centerpiece. Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir (p114) is home to Baja's highest peak and attracts hardy wilderness hikers willing to brave the often unmarked, high-mountain backcountry. The area around Cataviña (p147) offers some of the peninsula's most splendid desert scenery. The *mesas* surrounding the village of San Ignacio (p162) offer another wonderful opportunity for exploring the desert scenery on foot; it's strikingly different from what you'll see near Cataviña.

In the Sierra de San Francisco (p164), you can take multiday guided hikes to see cave paintings, and people usually hire mules to carry their food and gear. More cave paintings can be found by taking adventurous hikes (which involve swimming up gorges!) in the Cañón la Trinidad (p175), west of Loreto and Mulegé; these are best done with guides as well.

In southern Baja's lush Sierra de la Laguna (p203), hikers with experience in orienteering can navigate their way across the peninsula's most biodiverse region, from one side of the cape to the other. The Sierra de la Laguna section lists guides if you'd rather entrust your whereabouts to locals.

BICYCLING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

Cycling the Transpeninsular is becoming increasingly popular as both bicycles and roads improve. However, the distance between settlements and the lack of water in some areas can be serious drawbacks. Narrow shoulders on most highways can be potentially hazardous, although most drivers are courteous.

Even better than biking along the highway is getting off-road into the backcountry. Tracks take you along ridges, past remote ranches and through cactus forests. Self-sealing tubes and Slime are essential on these thorn-paved trails.

Anyone straying from the beaten path, whether up mountains, into sea caves or off to isolated beaches, will be glad to have a copy of Walt Peterson's *The Baja Adventure Book* along. It's poorly organized but packed with outstanding information.

Dust to Glory – a high-octane documentary about the Baja 1000, the world's most grueling off-road race – is a must-see. The film was directed by Dana Brown, son of Bruce Brown (the creator of legendary surf flick *Endless Summer*.)

PUTTING DOWN THE GUIDE *Matthew D Firestone*

No, we're not talking about insulting the local guy who is leading you through the desert. We're talking about closing this book that you have in your hands and leaving it behind. We're talking about following your own trail, catching your own wave and paddling up your own stream. It is bound to be an adventure more memorable than the one you'll find along the Gringo Trail.

We at Lonely Planet are dedicated to providing comprehensive coverage of every country and region that we cover, but we recognize the sometimes detrimental effect of places being 'discovered.' Even more than that, we are dedicated to creating a sustainable global traveler culture, and we recognize the universal benefit of 'discovery.'

So put your guidebook down for a day or – even better – a week. Explore the places that are not covered in the pages of this guidebook. And discover your own lonely planet.

Rental bikes are readily available in resort areas like Loreto, La Paz and Los Cabos, but the quality is generally mediocre. **Pedaling South** (☎ 707-942-4550, 800-398-6200; www.tourbaja.com), based in Northern California, offers some excellent mountain biking trips throughout the peninsula.

The Baja border areas – particularly the cities of Tecate, Playas de Rosarito and Ensenada – host a variety of cycling events annually. For additional information about cycling in Baja, see p268.

GOLF

With spectacular championship courses flanking the Sea of Cortez, the Los Cabos Corridor reigns supreme when it comes to golf. The flip side to this golf Mecca is that the development has irrevocably transformed the pristine coastline into a 'Palm Springs by the Sea.' For a rundown of golf options in the Corridor, see p232. There are also two 18-hole courses near Ensenada (p100).

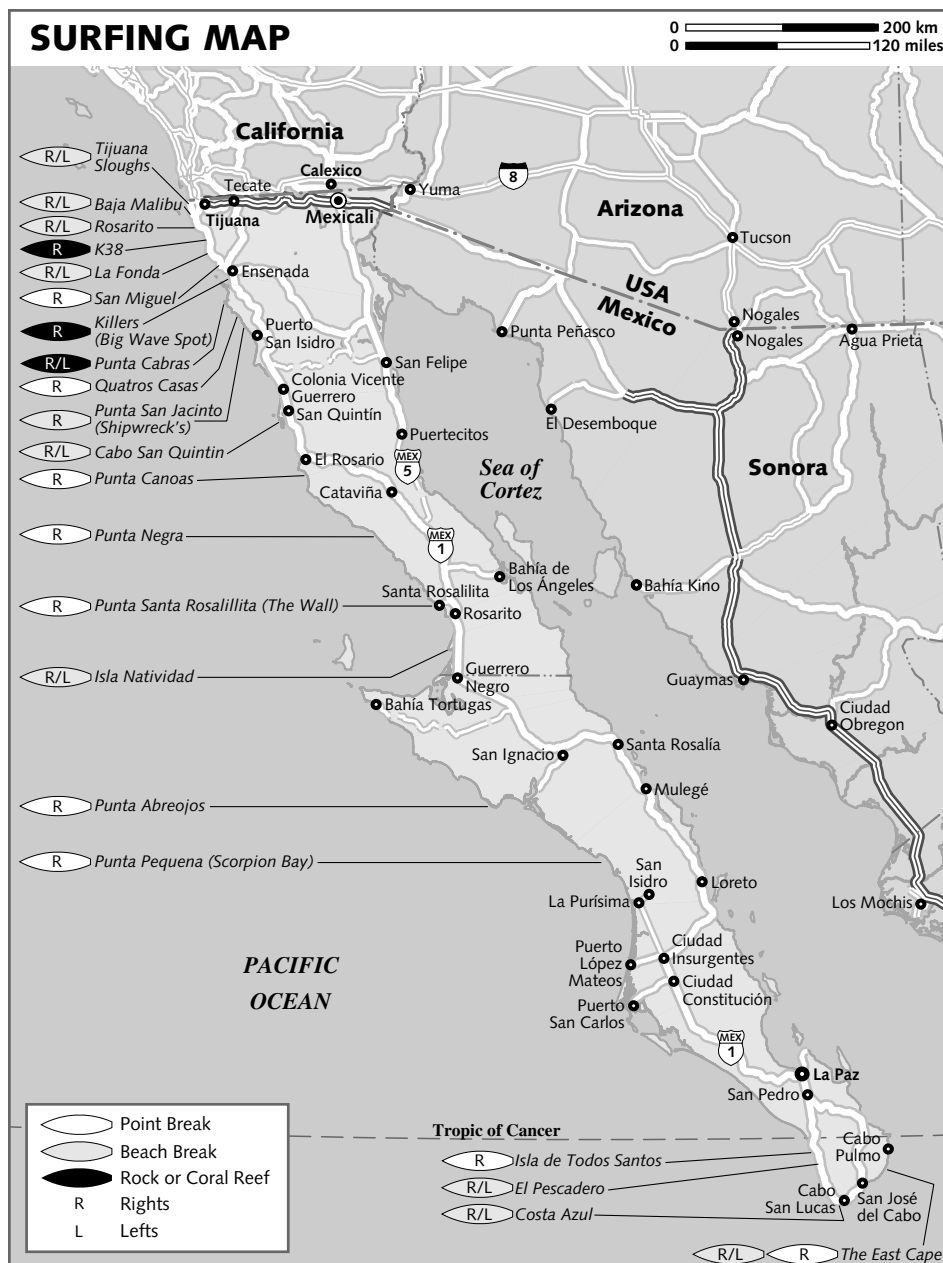
Baja Surf

Jake Howard

Jutting out 1250km (775 miles) before abruptly coming to an end just south of the Tropic of Cancer, the Baja Peninsula, with its sandy beaches, lonesome points and rocky reefs, offers something for surfers of every ability level. Set out down the Transpeninsular, and with enough gas, time and ambition, you may just find your very own perfect wave.

HISTORY OF BAJA SURFING

For surfers, Baja California has long been considered a land of adventure, opportunity, and at times, high drama. The first incursions into areas south of Tijuana began in the late 1940s. By 1963 *Endless Summer* star Mike Hynson, along with Huntington Beach's Bill Fury, ventured 120km (75 miles) south of Ensenada. Two years later the Windansea Surf Club made the first voyage out to Isla de Todos Santos (p109) to tackle the giant surf.



The Los Cabos region was first ridden in 1967 and by 1973 the Transpeninsular Hwy opened and surfers began ferreting out new surf locales. Fast-forward to present day and the action continues. In 2006 San Diego's Brad Gerlach made history by successfully riding a 68ft wave at Isla de Todos Santos. It was deemed the biggest wave of the year by a panel of surfing experts (see www.billabongxxl.com for more).

WHEN TO GO

For thorough coverage of surfing in Baja California, pick through the Baja pages of www.wannasurf.com. For surf reports, subscribe to Surfline (www.surfline.com).

The winter months (December through February) are often considered better for northern Baja. This is due to the area's direct exposure to northern hemisphere swells, generated by low-pressure systems thousands of miles away in the Gulf of Alaska. Northwest winds come up strong during the spring, which can make for blown-out conditions. In terms of wave-heights, it's possible to find surf ranging anywhere from knee-high to the biggest waves of your life.

In the summer (June through October), attention shifts down to southern Baja and its myriad point breaks. Unless the coastline is experiencing hurricane conditions, which isn't uncommon this time of year, waves don't get quite as big in the summer, averaging surf in the 1m to 2m (3ft to 6ft) range. Bigger days are the exception, not the rule.

WHERE TO GO

Northern Baja

Baja's Islas de Todos Santos, near Ensenada, is home to some of the world's biggest waves, rivaled in size in North America only by Mavericks and Cortes Bank. The big break here is aptly called 'Killers'.

If you're driving into Baja from San Diego, you'll find that this is where the surfing action begins. You'll see more surfers here, as people from southern California often make trips down to catch swells. The water's always cold, so a wetsuit is a must. Bigger boards may be required during winter months.

- Tijuana Sloughs – straddling the US/Mexico border and suffering huge pollution problems due to outflow from the Tijuana River, the waves can pump on northwest swells; don't surf after it rains.
- Baja Malibu – in the fall and winter big peaks form up and down the mile-long beach. Even on small days it has power.
- Rosarito (p87) – good sandbars north and south of the pier. After a day of surfing, head to Puerto Nuevo (p92) for a lobster feast.
- K38 – located 38km south of the border, this series of left and right reefs is fun for both longboarding and shortboarding
- La Fonda (p93) – well-exposed sandy beach. What it lacks in perfection, it makes up for in consistency. There's convenient camping.
- San Miguel (p94) – just before Ensenada, a long right point break that peels across a cobblestone bottom. Best at low tide on northwest swells. Solid local crew here; surf with courtesy.
- Killers (Big Wave Spot) – considered one of the biggest waves in the world, Killers breaks out at Isla Todos Santos (p109), a tiny island just outside of Ensenada Harbor. Hire a small fishing boat and take a ride out for the day. It'll cost about \$100. Unless you know what you're doing, plan on just watching.
- Punta Cabras – good camping and fishing along a mixture of beach and reef breaks. Picks up most swells. The wind can be unrelenting, which makes for cold water.
- Quatros Casas – clean right-hand point break several miles past Colonet. Breaks best on south swells; enjoys protection from coastal bluffs.
- Punta San Jacinto (p116) – a long, right point 7 miles south of Quatros Casas. Breaks off of an old shipwreck and is best on a higher tide.
- Cabo San Quintín (p117) – a series of rocky right points that work best on west swells. Afternoon winds almost always offshore. A good place to buy supplies and there's great fishing here too.

LOCAL RULES

As with any time you go traveling, respect for the people, culture and customs is imperative. Localism isn't a huge problem in the lineups of Baja. Spots around the bigger urban areas (Cabo and Ensenada mainly) seem to be where the only issues take place. 'It's easy to understand,' says Pedro Gonzales, who lives in Ensenada and surfs San Miguel. 'If you are going to come down here to surf, think of all the people that live here first. It's hard when Americans come here and act like they own the place. Just have respect for the locals and they'll have respect back.'

Central Baja

Beach access through this stretch requires long stints on bumpy dirt roads, but is worth it, with point breaks littered along the coastline. Longboards are handy for the smaller days and big-wave guns are seldom required. Wind can be an issue and the water's still pretty cool.

- Punta Canoas – a series of points that pick up any swell. The roads are often bad and may disappear altogether after a rain. Head 22.5km (14 miles) south of Rancho El Progreso (p147), then 64km (40 miles) out a dirt road.
- Punta Negra – idyllic sandy beaches, rock reefs and a lighthouse mounting a rocky headland. Strong offshore winds on winter mornings and evenings.
- Punta Santa Rosalillita (The Wall) – relatively fickle, but when it's on, this long right-hand point is one of the best in Baja. Needs a straight west swell. There are a variety of other spots in the vicinity.
- Isla Natividad (p160) – the hollow tubes of this dusty, wind-torn island, located at the mouth of the Bahía de San Sebastián Vizcaíno, have been enticing surfers since the 1980s. It's hard to find a fishing boat that will take you out, leaving a hired bush plane the only reliable way of accessing the island.
- Punta Abreojos (p161) – the main break, Razors, is located at the end of a packed-salt airstrip south of a tiny fishing town and offers heavy tubes. Bring all your own supplies.
- Punta Pequena (Scorpion Bay; p177) – a fickle series of right-hand points, breaking only on direct south swells. In recent years Punta Pequena has experienced an influx in crowds. Ride one wave and you'll see why.

Southern Baja

This is where the water finally gets warm and the closer to Cabo you get, the more the Corona commercial comes true. A shortboard or longboard work equally well here and unless there's a hurricane swell hitting, bigger boards are unnecessary. A longboard is nice to keep handy for the small days. Wetsuits help in the northern reaches of this zone, but are unnecessary as you head further south.

- Isla de Todos Santos (p109) – several hours north of Cabo, this is a good place to relax and shop. Fun beach breaks in the area.
- El Pescadero (p215) – a great breach break north of Cabo that sucks in most swell. Good fishing and camping in the area.
- Playa Costa Azul (p230) – the closest break to San José del Cabo, Costa Azul holds three separate spots: Playa Acapulquito, The Rock and Zipper's. Needs significant swell.
- The East Cape (p229) – with a 4WD and just the right hurricane swell, you can explore the endless nooks and crannies, but take care not to get lost.

If you're looking for lazy afternoon's reading, pick up a copy of Kem Nunn's novel *Tijuana Straits*. With Tijuana as the backdrop and an ex-con/surfer-gone-worm-farmer as the main character, Nunn weaves an intriguing story definitely worth a read, especially if you're headed southbound.

NUTS & BOLTS

The name of the game for most seasoned Baja travelers is self-sufficiency. Unless you're in Cabo or Ensenada, there isn't much in the way of surf shops or civilization, so bringing all your own boards, wetsuits and gear is imperative. Bring a good ding repair kit; a lot of the spots are somewhat rocky, which makes dings common.

To research more about the surf, pick up surf guides for both northern and southern Baja from *Surfer* magazine at www.surfermag.com/travel. For up-to-the-minute surf and weather forecasts visit www.surflines.com.

TOURS

Baja Surf Adventures (☎ 760-744-5642, 800-428-7873; www.bajasurfadventures.com)

Offers three- to seven-day tours throughout northern and southern Baja.

WaterWays Adventures (www.waterwaystravel.com) With expert guides based throughout Mexico, WaterWays can help customize any trip you may be planning.

Wave Hunters (www.wavehunters.com) Offering the perfect weekend-getaway package to Cabo. For prices on all-inclusive trips see the website.

Food & Drink Jim Peyton

Baja California is not simply an extension of Southern California – it is *puro Mexicano* with its own distinctive ambience and food. Much of its uniqueness comes from its two oceans, the Pacific and the Sea of Cortez, the latter of which has been described as ‘a perfect fish trap.’ Together these bodies of water provide a quantity and variety of seafood found almost nowhere else. In addition, Baja’s inland *ranchos* and farms produce a surprising amount and quality of beef and produce, not to mention some truly fine wines.

If regions rather than restaurants received stars for culinary excellence, the two Mexican states of Baja would recently have vaulted to five big ones. For years the area stretching from Tijuana in the north to Los Cabos at the southern tip was known primarily for its simple but delicious renditions of seafood and charbroiled beef. Although they were prepared with traditional simplicity, the main ingredients were of such pristine quality and so lovingly rendered that the cuisine was still worthy of four stars.

In recent years the development of deluxe resorts, especially in the Los Cabos area, has attracted acclaimed chefs from Mexico and other parts of the world. To provide for their needs, boutique growers have sprouted from traditional farm land. The result is that the area now offers world-class cuisine at all levels, from the Mexican equivalent of Chicago’s old-time steak houses to the haute cuisine of New York’s upscale restaurants. In addition, you’ll find a surprising number of Chinese restaurants, particularly in the north. All this with the special flavor and relaxed atmosphere of Baja!

STAPLES & SPECIALTIES

Although Baja honors many of the traditions of other parts of Mexico, in most places the meal schedule has been adapted to that of its visitors, many of who come from the USA. This means you can usually find lunch at 11:30am or noon instead of considerably later and a main-meal dinner rather than a light supper. You will also find few items, even in nontourist establishments, that do not appeal to the Western palate.

Meals

Breakfast in Baja consists of everything from a light continental-style affair – crispy French-style rolls (called *bolillos*), *pan dulce* (Mexican-style sweet breads) and toast served with butter and, if you are lucky, a local jam, jelly or honey – to more elaborate dishes. A regional favorite is *chilaquiles*, crispy tortilla chips topped with either a red or green chili sauce, often including meat or chicken and a fried or poached egg. They are often garnished with cheese and a thick dollop of cream.

You will also find the Mexican standby, *huevos rancheros* (lightly fried corn tortillas covered with fried eggs and a mild tomato and chili sauce) served with refried beans and garnished with crumbly white cheese, called *queso añejo* or *queso cotija*. Omelets are popular and often filled with *chorizo* (a chili and vinegar-flavored Mexican sausage), mushrooms, *rajas* (mild green chilies fried with onion) and/or a delicious Mexican cheese such as *asadero*, *ranchero* or Chihuahua. Eggs are often scrambled with the area’s delicious shredded dried beef, *machacado*.

Baja has an abundance of fresh, tropical fruits and berries that are served at breakfast, often with yogurt and granola. Pancakes (or hot cakes) are also common and often are accompanied by homemade syrups and jams.

Cooking with Baja Magic Dos (2005) is Ann Hazard’s second volume of her favorite regional recipes. Hazard is an experienced Baja traveler who lives on the eastern cape.

By themselves, no grain, legume or vegetable offers complete protein... but if you wrap pinto beans (legumes) in a corn tortilla (grains) – viola! A hundred million Mexicans can’t be wrong.

For lunch and dinner you will find a truly amazing variety of choices, from *antojitos mexicanos* (Mexican-style corn and tortilla specialties such as tacos, enchiladas and quesadillas often made with fish or shellfish) to delicious seafood and steak entrées. And those same luscious fruits that were served at breakfast with yogurt and granola come to the lunch table as salads, tossed with creative dressings and sometimes seafood and sliced avocado.

Seafood-lovers interested in light meals will take particular delight in the abundance of seafood cocktails and *ceviches* (seafood ‘cooked’ in lime juice, chopped and mixed with onion, tomato, green chili, cilantro or more exotic spices). Most are far more interesting than the usual North American shrimp cocktail and standard ceviche.

Dessert brings sweet pastries called *coyotas*. These thin, round pastries sandwiching sweet fillings are originally from the Mexican state of Sonora and are often made with local dates. Flan flavored with tropical fruits is also popular.

Covering everything from beverages and breakfasts to tamales and tortillas, www.mexicanfood.about.com offers a trove of information on Mexican cuisine.

Fish & Seafood

Tacos, enchiladas, quesadillas and tamales are often rendered with local seafood. The most famous example is the fish taco that originated in Ensenada, a short drive south of Tijuana. Made with an intriguing combination of fish filets fried in beer batter and garnished with shredded cabbage and a special tartar sauce–like salsa, its popularity has recently spread throughout the USA and to other parts of the world. Other examples of the genre include *burritas de langosta* (lobster burritos, often made with guacamole and garlic butter), steaming shrimp and seafood tamales, tacos made with charbroiled fish and either fresh corn or paper-thin flour tortillas, and elegant enchiladas made with crab in both tomato and cream sauces.

One lobster specialty, *langosta estilo Puerto Nuevo*, originated in this northern Baja fishing village, turning the tiny community into a bustling restaurant metropolis. Although the lobster seems to be broiled, it is actually deep-fried *without* a coating of batter or bread crumbs. It’s served with rice pilaf, black beans, lemon-garlic butter, special salsas and *tortillas de agua* – huge, thin, Sonora-style flour tortillas.

In Baja, shrimp, scallops, clams, abalone, octopus and squid are prepared in myriad ways. Perhaps the most popular is *al mojo de ajo* – with garlic sauce. Two of the most unique seafood dishes are an enchanting *chorizo* made with abalone, and shrimp served with a tangy tamarind sauce. Fish and shellfish shish kebobs (*alambres*) are also popular, and not to be missed.

Baja is famous for its seafood soups, which come in all forms and showcase Baja’s fresh *fruit de mer*: light, brothy concoctions; thicker tomato-based versions; and those made with *albóndigas de pescado* (fish meatballs). *Caldo Siete Mares* (Soup of the Seven Seas) is a good choice – mixed seafood in a broth flavored with tomato and green chilies.

You will discover a large number of dishes referred to as *en escabeche*, or pickled. Although foods such as quail are sometimes featured, the most common selections are of seafood. They are prepared by lightly sautéing fish or shellfish and adding vegetables, herbs and spices in a mild solution of vinegar and sometimes wine. The liquid is then reduced to an essence, allowed to marinate and cool; the dish is served at room temperature. The result is a light, flavorful meal that can reach epic levels of delectation due to the quality and balance of the ingredients.

Beef & Pork

Baja takes full advantage of the fine beef – much of it grass-fed – that is raised on its numerous inland ranches. Throughout the region you will find beef in everything from tacos to burritos to huge entrée steaks, usually broiled to

The Caesar salad was invented in Tijuana by Caesar Cardini in 1924. The dish is still served at the original digs and almost everywhere else in Baja – and the world (also see p77).

perfection over mesquite charcoal. Tijuana is famous for its *tacos al carbón* (charbroiled tacos, often made with the New York cut). *Machaca* (sun-dried beef jerky), usually called *machacado* when it is finely shredded, is used in everything from egg dishes to tacos and burritos. Also made with fish, it is often part of upscale culinary creations in the area's best restaurants.

Carnitas, which means 'little meats,' is a specialty of the Mexican state of Michoacán but is also very popular in Baja. Chunks of pork are slowly simmered in pure lard until golden and crispy, then they're shredded and wrapped in corn tortillas with guacamole. *Carnitas* are surprisingly light and are often found in restaurants that serve virtually nothing else.

DRINKS

Alcoholic

For wine-lovers, one of the joys of travel is to sample local vintages, and Baja California is one of a handful of places in Mexico where you can do this.

After Spain banned vineyards, Mexicans grew accustomed to other alcoholic beverages, and wine never became a tradition. Even though vineyards were permitted after Mexican independence, the nation's turmoil and tastes retarded the development of wine to nearly zero. Recently growers found the hot days, cool nights and water necessary to yield premium grapes just inland from Ensenada. Now the region produces nearly 90% of Mexican wines. Study abroad, experimentation and cooperation with foreign producers has vaulted the quality of Mexican wines to international standards. Some of the best brands are Domecq, Monte Xanic and Chateau Camou, all with wineries and tasting rooms in Valle de Guadalupe (p109). Major wineries welcome visitors and have tasting centers in Ensenada.

Visitors to Baja are often in a partying mood and tequila has become the favorite catalyst. Bars and liquor stores, especially in Tijuana and the Los Cabos area, provide admirable selections of the national liquor, as well as a profusion of mixed drinks. Baja is one of the few places in Mexico where bartenders know how to make margaritas that both meet and surpass the expectations of their *norte americano* visitors. Some of the finest margaritas include the native Baja liqueur *damiana* (see p227).

In addition to tequila, Mexico produces some of the world's finest beers and Baja brews one of the best: Tecate (see p123).

Nonalcoholic

Mexico has a long tradition of nonalcoholic drinks, and many of them are common in Baja. The most popular are *tamarindo*, made with tamarind pods; *jamaica*, made with dried hibiscus leaves; *horchata*, a combination of fruit and seeds and/or rice; and lime-aid. These delicious fruity drinks are sold from large, keg-shaped glass containers, often garnished with mint leaves. Note that although these are prepared with boiled water, sometimes the ice is untreated.

You will also discover a variety of smoothies and milkshakes called *licuados*, made with milk, fruits, yogurt and honey. Orange juice, nearly always fresh-squeezed, is available everywhere, as are juices of other fruits and vegetables. Many of these are found in street *puestos* (stalls) and in larger, barlike establishments.

Some of the best coffee in the world is grown in Mexico, and the uniquely Mexican way of making it is called *café de olla*. This 'coffee from the pot' is brewed in a special clay vessel with a raw sugar called *piloncillo*. *Café con leche* (coffee with milk) is also very popular. Waiters will often pour both coffee and cream at the table according to your instructions. For ordinary coffee, with cream on the side, simply ask for *café con crema*.

Ralf Amey's comprehensive and readable *Wines of Baja California* (2003) is an excellent companion for anyone visiting Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico's premier wine region.

The Baja liqueur *damiana* is made from a native plant (of the same name) reputed to have aphrodisiacal qualities. Similar to Triple Sec, Cointreau and Grand Marnier, it gives margaritas that 'something extra.'

Chocolate originated in Mexico and it often includes cinnamon and some crushed almonds, giving it a unique flavor and texture. As a drink, it is mixed with milk or water and sugar, then whipped to a cappuccino-like froth with a decorative wooden implement called a *molinillo*.

CELEBRATIONS

Besides being great entertainment, *Like Water for Chocolate* conveys the importance of food in Mexico, and the magic-realism used in the book/film showcases the way so many Mexicans view life.

Bajacalifornianos celebrate the same feast days as other parts of Mexico, but they are more casual in their observations. For the most part they do not allow their traditions to interfere with the enjoyment of their visitors. However, be aware that on Christmas, New Years, Holy Week and the Day of the Dead (first two days of November), nontourist establishments may be closed. During these times special items are often available, including *pan de muertos* (bread of the dead). Vegetarian specialties are popular during Holy Week, and at Christmas and New Years *bacalao* (dried cod) is often served in a mild chili sauce.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

The number of places to eat will thrill you and where you end up will depend on your mood and budget. Perhaps the most typical places are oceanside *palapas*. These casual thatched-roof structures are found nearly everywhere there is an easily accessible beach. You will discover delicious traditional seafood cocktails and entrees at moderate to low prices. While you are ordering, it's not uncommon to see a boat pull up and deliver the fresh catch you will be served!

Baja's urban areas are filled with *puestos* that usually specialize in a single item – tacos, burritos etc. Many of them serve dishes passed down through generations. As always, take precautions when eating at such informal places. Check overall cleanliness, and especially the availability of bathroom and hand-washing facilities. Slightly more formal are *loncherías*, *comedores* and *taquerías*, small sit-down establishments often found in private homes in villages and at markets in towns and cities. A step up are cafés that serve Mexican specialties such as *antojitos* and simple but delicious meat and seafood entrées, usually accompanied by homemade soups, steaming rice pilafs, beans and fresh vegetables.

Resorts and large cities offer upscale dining with local atmosphere – indoor-outdoor dining areas with tropical landscaping and birds – and a combination of international foods and elegant Mexican creations. Many of their chefs practice Mexico's upscale version of fusion cooking, called *nueva cocina mexicana* or *alta cocina* (new Mexican cooking), where regional Mexican ingredients, techniques and recipes are combined in delicious, aesthetically pleasing new ways.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Mexico Connect (www.mexconnect.com) does a comprehensive job of covering both Mexico and its foods.

Tourist establishments have learned to cater to their patrons, including vegetarians. However, being in the arid north, Baja's produce is not nearly as prolific as in other parts of Mexico. Most cities have a smattering of vegetarian restaurants and suitable offerings are usually easy to arrange at other places. One item of special interest to vegetarians is *nopalitos*: a Baja favorite, made by boiling, grilling or frying sliced cactus paddles and sometimes combining them with other ingredients, such as onions and cheese. *Chiles relenos*, stuffed mild chilies, are another good option, but be sure to specify the ones filled with cheese rather than meat.

Most waiters in the larger establishments are knowledgeable about what they serve and are anxious to please. However they are often not aware of the specific requirements of vegetarians, and especially vegans, and may find

the concept difficult to understand – most Mexicans do without meat only because they cannot afford it, and many Mexican vegetarians eat what they do purely because they believe vegetables are healthy, rather than for ethical or philosophical reasons – so you must make your requirements very plain. One specific problem is that your server may believe he is bringing you a vegetarian meal when the items have been flavored with beef or chicken broth, or cooked in lard. Just to be safe, you can ask *¿Tiene productos de carne, como caldo o manteca?* ('Is it made with meat products, such as broth or lard?') The more upscale the restaurant, the better your chances of being understood and accommodated.

EATING WITH KIDS

Mexicans adore children and Baja is a child-friendly place. Most waiters will cheerfully do anything within reason to please your child and virtually all restaurants have highchairs; just ask for a *silla para niños*. Supermarkets carry a full range of American and international brands of baby food.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Baja's eating customs are less formal than in other parts of Mexico, and those of their visitors are accommodated whenever possible. Baja's attitude toward liquor is quite liberal, but be aware that in many communities liquor cannot be sold on election days or when the president is visiting. Also, while alcoholic beverages are usually considered a normal part of life, drinking while driving is a serious no-no!

In establishments with table service, tipping is expected. Ten percent is considered on the low side with 15% the norm; tip 20% and above for an exceptional experience. Most restaurants add on Mexico's value-added tax of 15%, which is noted as IVA.

COOKING COURSES

There are very few opportunities for organized cooking courses in Baja. One interesting place to hone your skills at the stove is Nancy's (p209) in Southern Baja's Cabo Pulmo.

EAT YOUR WORDS

For non-Spanish speakers, travel and dining in Mexico is no problem; English is understood almost everywhere. However a few words in Spanish will indicate a respect for Mexicans and their culture, not to mention a willingness to risk embarrassment, and that can make a huge difference.

For pronunciation help, please see the Language chapter.

Useful Phrases

Are you open?

¿Está abierto?

e-sta a-be-er-tow

When are you open?

¿Cuándo está abierto?

kwan-do e-sta a-be-er-tow

Are you serving breakfast/lunch/dinner now?

*¿Ahora, está sirviendo desayuno/
la comida/la cena?*

a-o-ra e-sta ser-vyen-do de-sa-yoo-no/
la ko-mee-da/la se-na

I'd like to see a menu.

Quisiera ver la carta/el menú.

kee-sye-ra ver la kar-ta/el me-noo

Do you have a menu in English?

¿Tienen un menú en inglés?

te-en-nen oon me-noo en een-gles

Can you recommend something?

¿Puede recomendar algo?

pwe-de re-ko-men-dar al-go

Diana Kennedy's *The Essential Cuisines of Mexico* (2000) captures the essence of Mexico's complex cuisine and is a must for anyone interested in Mexican cooking.

Jim Peyton's website, www.lomexicano.com, is updated quarterly and offers regional Mexican recipes, food-related travel articles and a large glossary of Mexican food terms.

I'm a vegetarian.*Soy vegetariano/a. (m/f)*

soy ve-khe-te-ree-a-no/a

I can't eat anything with meat or poultry products, including broth.*No puedo comer algo de carne o aves, incluyendo caldo.*no pwe-do ko-mer al-go de kar-ne o a-ves
een-kloo-yen-do kal-do**I'd like mineral water/natural bottled water.***Quiero agua mineral/agua purificada.*

kee-ye-ro a-gwa mee-ne-ral/a-gwa poo-ree-fee-ka-da

Is it (spicy) hot?*¿Es picoso?*

es pee-ko-so

The check, please.*La cuenta, por favor.*

la kwen-ta por fa-vor

Food Glossary

a la parrilla	a la pa-ree-ya	grilled
a la plancha	a la plan-cha	pan-broiled
adobada	a-do-ba-da	marinated with <i>adobo</i> (chili sauce)
agua mineral	a-gwa mee-ne-ral	mineral water or club soda
agua purificado	a-gwa poo-ree-fee-ka-do	bottled, uncarbonated water
al carbón	al kar-bon	charbroiled
al mojo de ajo	al mo-kho de a-kho	with garlic sauce
al pastor	al pas-tor	rotisserie-cooked (usually pork)
alambre	al-am-bre	shishkabob
albóndigas	al-bon-dee-gas	meatballs
antojitos	an-to-khee-tos	'little Mexican whims,' corn- and tortilla-based snacks like tacos and gorditas
arroz	a-ros	rice
arroz mexicana	a-ros a la me-khee-ka-na	pilaf-style rice with a tomato base
asado/a	a-sa-do/a	grilled
aves	a-ves	poultry
azúcar	a-soo-kar	sugar
biftec	beef-tek	steak
brochete	bro-che-ta	shishkabob
cajeta	ka-khe-ta	goat's milk and sugar boiled to a paste
calabacita	ka-la-ba-see-ta	squash
calamar	ka-la-mar	squid
caldo	kal-do	broth or soup
camarones	ka-ma-ro-nes	shrimp
cangrejo	kan-gre-kho	crab
carne	kar-ne	meat
carne de puerco	kar-ne de pwer-ko	pork
carne de res	kar-ne de res	beef
carnitas	kar-nee-tas	pork simmered in lard
cebolla	se-bo-ya	onion
cerdo	ser-do	pork
chilaquiles	chee-la-kee-les	fried tortilla strips cooked with a red or green chili sauce, and sometimes meat and eggs
chile relleno	chee-le re-ye-no	chili stuffed with meat or cheese, usually fried with egg batter
chorizo	cho-ree-so	Mexican-style bulk sausage made with chili and vinegar
chuleta de puerco	choo-le-ta de pwer-ko	pork chop
coco	ko-ko	coconut
coctel de frutas	kok-tel de froo-tas	fruit cocktail
costillas de res	kos-tee-yas de res	beef ribs

empanada	em·pa·na·da	pastry turnover filled with meat, cheese or fruits
empanizado	em·pa·nee·sa·do	sautéed
enchiladas	en·chee·la·das	corn tortillas dipped in chili sauce, wrapped around meat or poultry and garnished with cheese
ensalada	en·sa·la·da	salad
filete	fee·le·te	filet
filete al la	fee·le·te a la	Tampico-style steak: a thin grilled tenderloin served with chili strips, onion, a quesadilla and an enchilada.
tampiqueña	tam·pee·ken·ye	
fresa	fre·sa	strawberry
frijoles	free·kho·les	beans
frito	free·to	fried
helado	e·la·do	ice cream
huevos fritos	hwe·vos free·tos	fried eggs
huevos rancheros	hwe·vos ran·che·ros	fried eggs served on a corn tortilla, topped with a sauce of tomato, chilies and onions
huevos revueltos	hwe·vos re·vwel·tos	scrambled eggs
jaiba	khay·ba	small crab
jamón	kha·mon	ham
jugo de manzano	khoo·go de na·ran·kha	orange juice
jugo de naranja	khoo·go de pee·nya	pineapple juice
jugo de piña	khoo·go de man·sa·na	apple juice
langosta	lan·gos·ta	lobster
leche	le·che	milk
lomo de cerdo	lo·mo de ser·do	pork loin
mantequilla	man·te·kee·ya	butter
mariscos	ma·rees·kos	seafood
nieve	nye·ve	sorbet
nopalitos	no·pa·lee·tos	sautéed or grilled sliced cactus paddles
ostiones	os·tyo·nes	oysters
pan	pan	bread
papas	pa·pas	potatoes
papas fritas	pa·pas free·tas	French fries
pastel	pas·tel	cake
pechuga de pollo	pe·choo·ga de po·yo	breast of chicken
picadillo	pee·ka·dee·yo	a ground beef filling that often includes fruit and nuts
piña	pee·nya	pineapple
platano	pla·ta·no	banana
pollo	po·yo	chicken
postre	pos·tre	dessert
pulpos	po·so·le	a soup or thin stew of hominy, meat, vegetables and chilies
pozole	pool·po	octopus
quesadilla	ke·sa·dee·ya	cheese folded between a tortilla and fried or grilled
queso	ke·so	cheese
sopa	so·pa	soup
té de manzanillo	te de man·sa·nee·ya	chamomile tea
té negro	te ne·gro	black tea
tocino	to·see·no	bacon
verduras	ver·doo·ras	vegetables

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