

# Baja California



Baja is the earth's second longest peninsula – more than 1200km of the mystical, ethereal, majestic and untamed. Some people sip something special while the sun plunges into the Pacific. Some feel the rush of adrenalin as they surf that perfect wave. Others hike in awestruck wonder through sherbet-colored canyons...then sleep beneath scattered-diamond stars. Still others head for the beaches, or the all-night parties that are like spring break year-round. More people each year arrive in Baja and never get around to going home, and even *they* realize there's always more to see and do here.

Don't be afraid to hit the road: Baja's one place where it pays to rent a car. Roads are less trafficked and you generally won't need a 4WD, so get out and discover things for yourself. The Transpeninsular (Hwy 1) runs from Tijuana all the way to the Cabos, with stunning vistas at every turn. You'll find the middle of nowhere is more beautiful than you ever imagined. Side roads pass through tiny villages or wind drunkenly along the sides of mountains. A condor carves circles into unblemished blue sky. Even a quick day trip will leave you breathless, wanting more.

Unfortunately, the clock is ticking: the unchecked development is turning deserts into golf courses, hillsides into hotels, majestic cardón cacti into condos...and there's little reason to think this trend will stop. It remains to be seen whether visitors to Baja in a decade will enjoy it...or think of Joni Mitchell's immortal lyric, 'They paved Paradise and put up a parking lot.' Either way, come see Baja *now*, while it lasts.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Kayak with whale sharks at **Espíritu Santo** (p303) as the big Baja sun drops into the bay
- Ride the perfect Pacific swell at **San Miguel** (p284) as Jim Morrison's ghost looks on
- Dive or snorkel at mystical **Las Sirenitas** (p308), in Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, home to the Sea of Cortez's only living coral reef
- Hike through majestic cardón cacti and maybe glimpse a cougar in the **Sierra de la Laguna** (p308)
- Slip across the world's most crossed border in **Tijuana** (p276) to gawk, shop or party to your heart's content



■ TIJUANA JANUARY DAILY HIGH: 20°C | 68°F

■ TIJUANA JULY DAILY HIGH: 29°C | 84°F

## History

Before Europeans arrived, an estimated 48,000 mobile hunter-gatherers were living in today's Baja; their mysterious murals grace caves and canyon walls. European settlement failed to reach Baja until the Jesuit missions of the 17th and 18th centuries, and the missions soon collapsed as European-introduced diseases ravaged the indigenous people. Ranchers, miners and fishermen were the next inheritors. During the US prohibition era of the 1920s, Baja became a popular south-of-the-border destination for gamblers, drinkers and other 'sinners,' and the border towns remain popular for those same reasons. Baja continues to grow in economic power, population and popularity, with problematic ecological and environmental consequences.

## Climate

Baja makes people think 'warm,' but temperatures range from the suffocatingly hot to the downright frigid. The Pacific cools air temperatures along the west coast, making the cape region humid but comfortable all year. Elsewhere, it's a different story: locals will confirm that you don't know the meaning of the word 'hot' until you've been to Mexicali in August.

## Parks & Reserves

Baja's parks and reserves are some of Mexico's most varied and most beautiful – ranging from the surreal desertscape of the grand Reserva de la Biosfera El Vizcaíno (p292) to the underwater reef wonderland of Cabo Pulmo (p307). Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (p288) and Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir (p288) offer highland pine forests and glimpses of bobcats and bighorn sheep. The Sierra de San Francisco (p295), part of the Vizcaíno reserve, holds over 60 cave painting sites. At Baja's southern tip, Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra de la Laguna (p308) is great for trekking through cardón and palo verde forests, with jewel-like springs or even waterfalls along the way. These places harbor fragile creatures and plants that exist nowhere else on the planet; now development of surrounding land and pressure from tourism is causing serious problems – do your part by asking your guide what steps they take to protect these resources, stay on marked paths and adhere to conservation

regulations. Many reserves require an entry fee of M\$20 to M\$40.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Basic caution and awareness, such as making an effort to keep valuables (including surfboards) out of sight and doors locked, will minimize risk, but most crime is not tourist-related.

Sanitation standards in Baja are generally higher than in other parts of Mexico, and water – even tap water – is usually safe to drink. As in mainland Mexico, toilet paper is usually discarded in the trash can, not flushed.

## Getting There & Around

There are six official border crossings from the US state of California to Baja. At any crossing, Mexican authorities will issue and stamp tourist cards and process car permits. US and Canadian citizens can cross without a tourist card, but only if they are staying north of Ensenada or San Felipe, and only for 72 hours, or they can get a free tourist card with a seven-day limit and the same restrictions on movement. Any longer stay (up to 180 days) requires the standard tourist card (M\$237).

Mexican mainland, US and international flights leave from and arrive at La Paz, Loreto and San José del Cabo. Ferries from Santa Rosalía and La Paz connect Baja California to the mainland by sea. A vehicle permit is not required for taking a car into Baja, however, it is necessary to have one if you are shipping a car to mainland Mexico. These can be obtained at La Paz but not at Santa Rosalía. If you intend to take a vehicle by boat from Santa Rosalía, you need to get the permit beforehand.

Air-conditioned, nonsmoking and reasonably priced buses operate daily between towns all along the peninsula; however, car travel is often the only way to reach isolated villages, mountains and beaches. Rent cars in larger cities and major tourist destinations, such as Los Cabos, La Paz, Loreto and the border towns.

Highways are good and there are few toll roads. Drivers using the 'Scenic' (Cuota) route to Ensenada will need M\$81; the Tijuana–Mexicali route costs M\$163. Denominations larger than US\$20 or M\$200 are not accepted.



**BAJA'S BEST BITES...**

(...and we don't mean restaurant reviews.) Some of Baja's coolest creatures are well worth getting to know, but don't get too close – these critters are sporting nature's meanest defenses and an encounter could send you to the hospital.

**Scorpion** Glowing under UV light, Baja's scorpions sting, especially if stepped on. Shake your shoes in the morning, use netting at night and look before you sleep.

**Black Widow Spider** This pea-sized black spider packs a potent (though rarely fatal) punch. Look for the crimson hourglass on the underside of the abdomen for positive ID.

**Stingrays** Painfully common in the shallows of many popular beaches, the stingray usually flicks its tail and stabs heels or ankles with a poisonous barb. Minimize risk at the beaches by wearing surf booties and/or dragging your feet until you're in deeper water.

**Portuguese Man O' War** Also known as *Agua Mala* (Bad Water), these jellyfish are stunningly pretty, but their bright-blue tentacles can sting long after the animal is dead. Don't pick one up on the beach, and minimize risk during water sports by wearing a full-body rash guard or wetsuit.

Whether you think they're cool or creepy, these are creatures that will rarely cause you harm if they are left alone. For more information, track down a copy of *Baja California Plant Field Guide* by Norman C Roberts or Roger Tory Peterson's book *A Field Guide to Venomous Animals and Poisonous Plants*.

## NORTHERN BAJA

Tijuana, Mexicali and Tecate form the northern border, also known as La Frontera (not the border line itself), which extends as far south as San Quintin. Dominicans established nine missions north of El Rosario from 1773 to 1821. Recently, the Ruta del Vino (between Ensenada and Tecate) has gained Napa Valley-like fame for its boutique, award-winning wines. Though northern Baja's border cities and beaches are undeniably hedonistic, Tijuana and Mexicali are major manufacturing centers, and the area is a hot retirement spot for Canadian and US snowbirds.

### TIJUANA

☎ 664 / pop 1.28 million

Tijuana has a bad reputation that, sure, it partly deserves. Bars, brothels and strip clubs are brazenly frequented, and prescription meds and drugs loudly advertised. Hawkers brashly proclaim to 'have it' (no matter what you might be looking for), and if they don't, they know someone who does.

Yet the town on the 'most crossed border in the world' remains a remarkably friendly jungle, a fascinating, vibrant cocktail of cultures that's fun for people-watching even if you're not planning on participating. A stroll on La Revo is required, and the touts can be answered with a firm but friendly 'no.'

### History

Older locals will confirm that at the beginning of the 20th century, this was literally 'just a mud hole.' At the end of WWI the town had fewer than 1000 inhabitants, but prohibition drove US tourists here for booze, gambling, brothels, boxing and cockfights, causing Tijuana's population to balloon to 180,000 by 1960. With continued growth has come severe social and environmental problems. On a positive note, a large middle class is on the rise, bringing greater stability and safety. Tourists need to be wary of thefts of opportunity, but they are rarely the targets of violent crime.

### Orientation

Located 19km south of downtown San Diego, Tijuana lies directly south of the US border post of San Ysidro, California. Tijuana's central grid consists of north-south *avenidas* and east-west *calles*. South of Calle 1A, Av Revolución (La Revo) is the main commercial center. Tijuana's Zona Río upscale commercial center straddles the river. Mesa de Otay, to the northeast, has another border crossing, the airport, *maquiladoras* (foreign-owned assembly-plant operations), neighborhoods and shopping areas.

### Information

#### BOOKSTORES

**Sanborns** (☎ 688-14-62; Av Revolución 1102) This department store has a large selection of US and Mexican newspapers and magazines.

**EMERGENCY****Tourist Assistance hotline** (☎ 078)**INTERNET ACCESS**

Internet access is available in many places along Av Revolución and its side streets.

**World Net** (☎ 685-65-14; Calle 2a No 8174; per hr M\$15; ☎ 7am-11pm) Cheap, with lots of computers and English-speaking staff. Free bread with coffee purchase.**INTERNET RESOURCES****See Tijuana** (www.seetijuana.com) A Tijuana tourism site.**Tijuana Online** (www.tijuanaonline.org) Run by Cotuco.**LAUNDRY****Lavamaticas 'Danny'** (☎ 638-50-69; Av Constitución 1821; ☎ 7am-10pm) Self-service and wash-and-fold service.**MEDICAL SERVICES****Hospital General** (☎ 684-00-78; Av Padre Kino, Zona Río) Northwest of the junction with Av Rodríguez.**MONEY**Use caution when changing money, especially at night. Everyone accepts US dollars. Travelers heading south or east by bus can use the *casa de cambio* at the Central Camionera. Most banks have ATMs, which is often the quickest and easiest way to get cash. Banks in town include Banamex, Banorte and HSBC.**Banjerquito** (☎ 683-62-44; www.banjerquito.com.mx; Calle José María Larroque s/n) The only bank in town to process vehicle permit payments.**POST****Central post office** (☎ 684-00-78; cnr Av Negrete & Calle 11a)**TOURIST INFORMATION****Cotuco** (Comité de Turismo y Convenciones, Committee on Tourism & Conventions); airport visitors center (☎ 683-82-44; airport baggage claim; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat); Av Revolución visitors center (☎ 685-31-17; Av Revolución btwn Calle 3a & Calle 4a; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Thu, 10am-7pm Fri-Sun); head office (☎ 684-05-37; Suite 201, Paseo de los Héroes 9365; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri); pedestrian border-entrance visitors center (☎ 607-30-97; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri & Sat, 9am-3pm Sun)**State Tourism Office** (Secretaría de Turismo del Estado; ☎ 682-33-67; Cile Juan Ruiz de Alarcón No 1572, Zona Río; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun)**Dangers & Annoyances**If you're not looking for trouble (and it's there, no question), you'll probably be fine. 'Almost free,' 'Cheaper than Wal-Mart!' and other invitations are best answered with '*no necesito*' (I don't need it).

Don't drink on the streets or carry drugs without a doctor's prescription.

*Coyotes* and *polleros* (both mean 'people smugglers') congregate along the river west of the San Ysidro crossing. After dark, avoid this area and Colonia Libertad, east of the crossing.**Sights & Activities**South of Calle 1a, **La Revo** (Av Revolución) is the heart of Tijuana's tourist area. A brief stroll and you'll see crowded discos, restaurants, bars, loud hawkers, brash taxi drivers and souvenir shops.Tijuana's funky **Centro Cultural Tijuana** (Cecut; ☎ 687-96-50; www.cecut.gob.mx; cnr Paseo de los Héroes & Av Independencia; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) is a cultural center of which any comparably sized city north of the border would be proud. It houses an art gallery, the **Museo de las Californias** (admission M\$20; ☎ 10am-6:30pm Tue-Sun), a theater and the globular **Cine Omnimax** (tickets from M\$45; ☎ 1-9pm Tue-Sun). Until 1998 *frontón* (jai alai, a type of handball) tournaments were held at the **Frontón Palacio Jai Alai**. The oddly attractive building, built over two decades from 1926 to 1947, remains a landmark and centerpiece for La Revo.**Vinícola LA Cetto** (LA Cetto Winery; ☎ 685-30-31; Cañón Johnson 2108; ☎ 10am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat), southwest of Av Constitución, offers tours and tasting (M\$20, M\$50 with souvenir glass). LA Cetto produces a range of tasty varietals, as well as sparkling wines and a decent brandy.Most of the motley crew at the **Museo de Cera** (Wax Museum; ☎ 688-24-78; Calle 1A No 8281; admission M\$15; ☎ 10am-6pm) look mildly constipated, but it's fun anyway. Madonna appears to have had open-heart surgery, Michael Jackson looks creepy and John Lennon, yep, appears appropriately stoned.

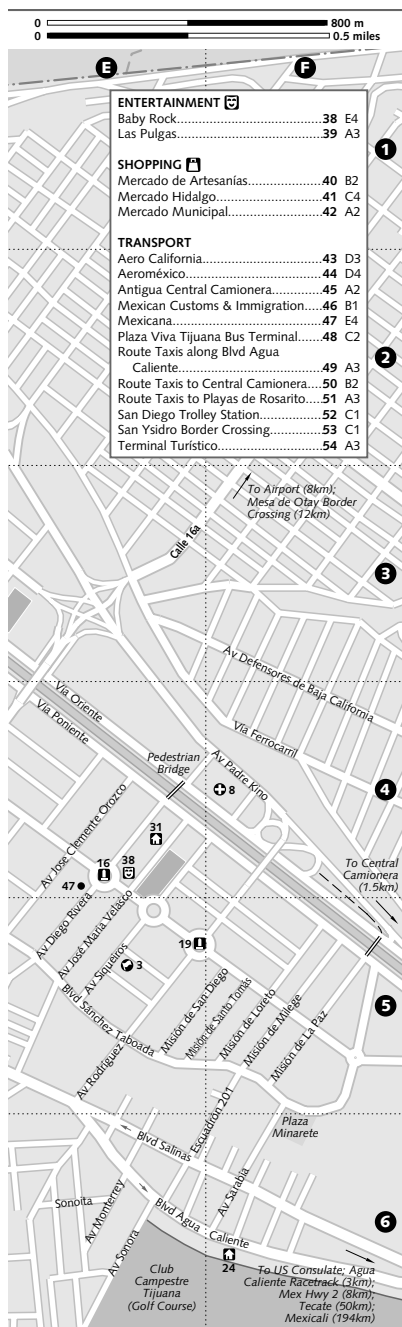
Scattered all over town are monuments to everyone from Abraham Lincoln to Migueal Hidalgo.

**Festivals & Events**

As Tijuana's reputation as a cultural center continues to grow, so does its annual calendar of cultural events.







**Muestra Internacional de Danza** (International Dance Festival) Held in April. Local and international groups compete to celebrate and demonstrate contemporary dance.

**Feria Del Platillo Mexicano** (Mexican Food Festival) Held in September. Plates are piled high with goodies – and gobbled down.

**Festival del Tequila** (Tequila Festival) Held in October. Mmm... tequila!

**Festival Hispano-Americano de Guitarra** (Hispanic-American Guitar Festival) Held in November. National guitar graduates and professional players from around the world demonstrate the richness and beauty of the guitar. Rock bands do their best to remind people that the instrument can also just make a lot of noise, too.

**Día de Muertos** (Day of the Dead) This nationwide November festival mixes traditional celebration with US-style Halloween festivities.

**International Craft Beer Festival** ([www.tjbeerfest.com](http://www.tjbeerfest.com)) First week in November, so you can hit Oktoberfest in Germany and then stumble over here. Some of the best beers, both new and old, can be chugged down here. Mix with Clamato for the true Mexican experience.

## Sleeping

The cheapest rooms in Tijuana are often shared with, ahem, hourly-rate clientele and are often shabbier than most folks are ready for. La Revo can be noisy, so try the side streets if you're keen on getting your Zs.

## BUDGET

**Hotel Catalina** (☎ 685-97-48; cnr Calle 5a & Madero 2039; s M\$220, d M\$260-320) This inexpensive, clean and secure hotel, a block away from Av Revolución, is comparable to the Lafayette but quieter.

**Hotel Arreola** (☎ 685-90-81; cnr Av Revolución & Calle 5A 1080; s/d M\$270/330) A cheap place that's anything but fancy, but has clean tile floors with plastic over the furniture. Rooms are over-chlorined but have TV. The lobby is fancier than the rooms due to recent remodeling, with interesting pics of the Tijuana of yesteryear.

**Hotel Lafayette** (☎ 685-39-40; Av Revolución 926; r M\$295) Downtown's most popular budget hotel is the Lafayette, above Café La Especial. The rooms overlooking the cacophonous Av Revolución are not tranquil havens; request one in the back.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Caesar** (☎ 685-16-06; Av Revolución & Calle 5a No 1079; s/d M\$390/450) The lobby is spotless... actually empty, due to a recent remodeling.

The snazzy white tile looks nice though, and rooms are small and clean, with TV and orange bedspreads. Bottled water is included when you check in.

**Hotel Nelson** (☎ 685-43-02; Av Revolución 721; r M\$398 Mon-Thu, s/d M\$499/560 Fri-Sun) The friendly Nelson is a longtime favorite with high ceilings and 1950s-era touches such as a real live barber-shop of old. Tidy, carpeted rooms come with color TV. Rooms can be musky, but some have a view of the (less-than-soothing!) Av Revo.

**Hotel La Villa de Zaragoza** (☎ 685-18-32; www.hotellavilla.biz; Av Madero 1120; s/d M\$490/580; (P) (X) (☎) (📺) ) Rooms at this modern hotel, directly behind the Frontón, include TV and telephone, with attractive arched columns outside. There's laundry, wi-fi, a restaurant, a leafy courtyard and room service.

## TOP END

**Hotel Real del Río** (☎ 634-31-00; www.realdelrio.com/index\_english.html; Av Velazco 1409A; r/ste M\$945/2595; (P) (X) (☎) (📺) ) The modern, characterless and efficient Real del Río provides excellent service and well-appointed, comfortable rooms. It's a high-end option that's reasonably priced, but you'll need to use a taxi to get to Av Revo. Prices jump for US holidays.

**Grand Hotel Tijuana** (☎ 681-70-00; www.grandhoteltij.com.mx; Blvd Agua Caliente 4500; r/ste from M\$1674/2272; (P) (X) (☎) (📺) ) Classical music wafts through the lobby and makes for a soothing check-in, though the hallways are a bit dark. The two 23-story buildings also have a shopping mall, offices, restaurants and convention facilities, and there's even an adjacent golf course.

## Eating

Avoid the 'free' drink offers from hawkers on the street and head to the real deals listed below for some great cheap eats or fun surprises.

**La Belle Claude** (☎ 685-07-44; Calle 7a 8186A; ☎ 7am-10:30pm Mon-Thu, 7am-11pm Fri-Sun; pastries M\$10-35) Get mouthwatering pastries and creamy lattes perfect for a morning stroll or a late-night snack. The jars of pickled goods are homemade.

**La Cocina de Nina** (cnr Av Madero & Hidalgo; tacos M\$10, mains M\$30-50; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) In addition to tacos and quesadillas served with all the accoutrements, this family-run place also serves platters of fish, beef or pork, with the usual sides of rice and beans.

**Restaurant Ricardo's** (☎ 685-31-46; Av Madero 1410; breakfast M\$41-67, tortas M\$34-55; ☎ 24hr) One of Tijuana's best-value places is this bright and cheerful diner-style joint, with two hours of free parking. Excellent breakfasts and *tortas* (sandwiches), among the best in town, are served around the clock. The waterfall adds to the ambience.

**Café La Especial** (☎ 685-66-54; Av Revolución 325; dinner mains M\$41-121) A mainstay since 1952, this restaurant (look down at the bottom of the alley stairs) offers decent Mexican food at reasonable prices and is far quieter than the average eatery on La Revo.

**Vittorio's** (☎ 685-17-29; Av Revolución 1691; pizzas M\$95, pastas M\$120; ☎ 10am-1am) For years this cozy Italian restaurant has been serving generous portions of reasonably priced pizza and pasta. Head to the back and you'll feel like the Godfather in the plush leather booths with dim lighting. Daily specials cost only M\$66.

**Chiki Jai** (☎ 685-49-55; Av Revolución 1388; dinner mains M\$150; ☎ 11:30am-9pm) Gorgeous tiled walls and a spectacular painted ceiling make this small eatery stand out from other La Revo options. Try the salmon or the paella if you're in a seafood mood, or the tongue or *menudo* (tripe stew) if you're feeling adventurous. Three hours of free parking is included.

## Drinking

If you want to get plastered you'll feel like a dog that's found too many fire hydrants. Start your well-deserved bender at the **Hard Rock Café** (☎ 685-02-06; Av Revolución 520), then ask around. Head to Plaza Fiesta at Zona Río for the local club scene, where you'll also encounter a dozen or so restaurants and bars – the names change frequently but the party never ends.

## Entertainment

If you get sick of stumbling down La Revo, try some of the city's diverse sporting and cultural offerings. The tourist information booths will have current suggestions, and entertainment listings are available at www.seetijuana.com. Most fancier discos are in the Zona Río.

**Baby Rock** (☎ 634-24-04; Av Diego Rivera 1482; Sat cover M\$100) Zona Río's old standard nightclub: look for the giant fake rock and fake petroglyphs. Way tacky, but fun.

**Las Pulgas** (☎ 685-95-94; Av Revolución 1127) Av Revo's fave spot to hang, dance and drink. Offers three floors of fun with a nice mix of locals and tourists. The cover charge varies.



**Centro Cultural Tijuana** (☎ 687-96-00; www.cecut.gob.mx; cnr Paseo de los Héroes & Av Independencia; films M\$44) The theater here is the city's apex of drama, dance and musical performance, with several events scheduled each month. It sports one of the world's largest 3D movie screens.

## Shopping

If you can't find a souvenir in Tijuana you're either hopeless or dead, but be cautious when buying gold and silver – much of it is fake (at those prices it would *have* to be, right?). Jewelry, blankets, furniture, baskets, silver, pottery and leather goods are available in stores on Av Revolución and Av Constitución, at the **Mercado Municipal** (Av Niños Héroes; ☎ 8am-6pm) and the sprawling **Mercado de Artesanías** (Av Ocampo) just south of Comercio (Calle 1a).

**Mercado Hidalgo** (Blvd Taboada & Av Independencia) is where locals come to buy spices, dried chilies, exotic produce, fresh tortillas and seasonal specialties made from Aztec grains. Be sure to check with Customs before taking fruits or vegetables over the border. Dried hibiscus flowers make excellent tea.

## Getting There & Away

Mexican tourist cards are available 24 hours a day at the San Ysidro–Tijuana border in the Mexican **immigration office** (☎ 682-64-39). They are also available – although less dependably – at a small office in the main bus terminal (Central Camionera, below). You are required to have one as you cross the border, but this is rarely enforced north of Ensenada.

### AIR

The **Aeropuerto Internacional Abelardo L. Rodríguez** (☎ 683-24-18) is in Mesa de Otay, east of downtown.

**Aero California** (☎ 684-21-00; Plaza Río Tijuana) Flies to La Paz and serves many mainland destinations from Mexico City northward.

**Aeroméxico** (☎ 683-84-44, 684-92-68; Local A 12-1, Plaza Río Tijuana) Serves many mainland Mexican destinations, and has nonstop flights to La Paz and flights to Tucson and Phoenix, both via Hermosillo.

**Mexicana & Click Mexicana** (☎ 634-65-66; Av Diego Rivera 1511, Zona Río) Flies daily to Los Angeles (but not from Los Angeles) and also serves many mainland Mexican cities.

### BUS

About 5km southeast of downtown, the main bus terminal is the **Central Camionera** (☎ 621-29-

82), where **Elite** (☎ 621-29-58; www.estrellablanca.com.mx) and **Estrella** (☎ 621-29-55; www.estrellablanca.com.mx) offer 1st-class buses with air-con and toilets. Destinations in mainland Mexico include Guadalajara (M\$1000, 36 hours) and Mexico City (M\$1400, 42 hours). All lines stop at major mainland destinations. Autotransportes del Pacífico, Norte de Sonora and ABC also leave from the Central Camionera and operate mostly 2nd-class buses to mainland Mexico's Pacific coast and around Baja California. **ABC** (☎ 621-24-24 ext 7472) offers buses to the following destinations:

Destination	Fare	Duration
Ensenada	1st-class M\$121	1½hr
	2nd-class M\$111	1½hr
Guerrero Negro	M\$723	12hr
La Paz	M\$1510	24hr
Loreto	M\$1147	16hr
Mexicali	deluxe M\$236	3hr
	1st-class M\$206	3hr
	2nd-class M\$187	3hr
San Felipe	M\$362	5-6hr
Tecate	M\$60	45min-1hr

**Suburbaja** (☎ 688-00-45; ☎ 6am-9pm) uses the handy downtown **Antigua Central Camionera** (☎ 686-06-95; Av Madero & Calle 1A), with buses leaving for Tecate (M\$45, 1½ hours, every 15 minutes) and Rosarito (M\$14, one hour); these are local buses that make many stops.

For border crossings by bus, **Mexicoach** (www.mexicoach.com) runs frequent buses (US\$5) from its **San Ysidro terminal** (☎ 619-428-95-17; 4570 Cam de la Plaza) to the **Terminal Turístico** (☎ 685-14-70; Av Revolución 1025) between 8am and 9pm. It also runs to Rosarito (M\$90, one hour, between 9am and 7pm).

Between 5am and 11pm, buses leave from the **San Diego Greyhound terminal** (☎ 619-239-32-66, in the US 800-231-2222; 120 West Broadway, San Diego) and stop at **San Ysidro** (☎ in the US 619-428-1194; 799 East San Ysidro Blvd), en route to Tijuana's Central Camionera bus terminal or the airport. Fares to both locations are US\$15 one way, US\$29 round trip.

### TROLLEY

San Diego's popular **trolley** (☎ 619-233-30-04) runs from downtown San Diego through to San Ysidro (US\$2.50) every 15 minutes from about 5am to midnight. From San Diego's Lindbergh Field airport, city bus 992 (US\$2.25) goes to the Plaza America trolley

stop in downtown San Diego, across from the Amtrak depot.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The San Ysidro border crossing, which is a 10-minute walk from downtown Tijuana, is open 24 hours, but motorists may find the Mesa de Otay crossing (also open 24 hours) less congested; it's 8km to the east of San Ysidro.

Rental agencies in San Diego are the cheapest option, but most of them only allow journeys as far as Ensenada. **California Baja Rent-A-Car** (☎ 619-470-7368; www.cabajarentacar.com), in Spring Valley, California, 32km from downtown San Diego and 24km from San Ysidro, is a pricey option but allows you to continue driving beyond Ensenada.

### Getting Around

#### BUS & TAXI

For about M\$8, local buses go everywhere, but the slightly pricier route taxis are much quicker. To get to the Central Camionera take any 'Buena Vista,' 'Centro' or 'Central Camionera' bus from Calle 2a, east of Av Constitución. Alternately, take a gold-and-white 'Mesa de Otay' route taxi from Av Madero between Calles 2a and 3a (M\$10). Regular taxis will charge about M\$100.

To get to the airport, take any 'Aeropuerto' blue-and-white bus (M\$5) from the street just south of the San Ysidro border taxi stand; from downtown, catch it on Calle 5a between Avs Constitución and Niños Héroes. Sharing can reduce the cost of a taxi (about M\$150, if hailed on the street).

Tijuana taxis often lack meters, but most rides cost about M\$60 or less. However, beware of the occasional unscrupulous taxi driver and make sure to agree to a fare beforehand to avoid misunderstandings.

### AROUND TIJUANA

#### Playas de Rosarito

☎ 661 / pop 56,887

Once a deserted, sandy beach that marked the original border between California and Mexico, then a Hollywood film location, Playas de Rosarito is finally coming into its own. Developments and condos are everywhere, but despite the construction clamor, Rosarito is a quieter place to party and is an easy day trip (or overnight) from Tijuana or San Diego. Hotel Rosarito (now the landmark Rosarito Beach Hotel) and its long,

sandy beach pioneered local tourism in the late 1920s. Fox Studios Baja, built in 1996 for the filming of *Titanic*, has since served as a primary filming location for *Pearl Harbor* and, recently, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* and the greatly esteemed *Jackass*.

Despite the studio's influence, in many ways Playas de Rosarito remains a one-horse, one-street town. The amphitheater at the beachfront **Parque Municipal Abelardo L Rodríguez** contains Juan Zuñiga Padilla's impressive 1987 mural *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Liberty).

Bvd Juárez, Rosarito's only major street (and part of the Carretera Transpeninsular, Hwy 1) has many restaurants, clubs and accommodations where the prices balloon to the outrageous during spring break.

#### SLEEPING

**Motel Sonia** (☎ 612-12-60; Juárez 781; s/d M\$300/600; Ⓟ) Rooms are basic to the point of grungy, with no TV, but there's no cheaper place to stay so close to beaches or clubs, and there's off-street parking. A deposit (M\$300) is requested on top of the room fee.

**Hotel del Sol Inn** (☎ 612-25-52; Juárez 32; s/d M\$440/550; Ⓟ ☒) A definite step up from the Sonia, Sol has clean, carpeted rooms with TV, bottled water and simple furniture. Some rooms are reserved for non-smokers. Note that prices double during the spring-break holiday.

**Festival Plaza Hotel** (☎ 612-29-50; www.hotel-festivalplaza.com; Juárez 1207; r Sun-Thu M\$850, Fri & Sat M\$1096; Ⓟ ☒) Small, bland rooms with colorful names like 'Rock & Roll Taco.' The vibe is the college party crowd. And in case you didn't notice, there's a ferris wheel.

#### EATING & DRINKING

**Panadería La Espiga** (☎ 612-14-59; Juárez 298; ☎ 6:30am-9pm Mon-Sun) The scent of fresh-baked rolls, sweets and breads will have your mouth watering long before you enter Panadería La Espiga. Some items are naturally sweetened with Baja honey from La Paz.

**Tacos Manuel** (☎ 8am-2pm; tacos M\$11) Well-regarded place near Rosarito's north entrance. Serves mainly beef.

**Tacos El Yaqui** (cnr Palma & Mar del Norte; tacos M\$23; ☎ 10am-4:30pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 8am-9:30pm Fri-Sun) This delicious taco stand is so popular that

they often close early when the ingredients run out.

**Capuchino's** (☎ 612-29-79; Juárez 890; pastries M\$35; ☎ 8am-9:30pm) If you're tired of partying or it's the morning after, head here for a hot cuppa joe and a homemade pastry.

**Los Arcos** (☎ 612-04-91; Juárez 29; mains M\$55; ☎ 8am-7pm Thu-Fue, later on weekends) For shrimp or fish tacos try this family-owned place, which has tacos and various *antojitos*, excellent salsa and friendly staff.

**Papas & Beer** (☎ 11am-3am) Foam dances, a mechanical bull and drunken reveling.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

From downtown Tijuana, *colectivos* for Playas de Rosarito (M\$15) leave from Av Madero between Calles 3a and 4a. Look for a yellow station wagon with a triangular white patch on the door. You can catch a Mexicocoach shuttle (M\$90) to Tijuana from the parking lot of the Rosarito Beach Hotel every two hours between 10am and 8pm.

### Tecate

☎ 665 / pop 59,124

Tecate isn't just a great beer, it's a fun town too. Of all the Frontera towns, Tecate is the closest to a mainland Mexican village, and it's pretty laid back. The December 2007 assassination of the city's police chief and discovery of a drug tunnel into the US have brought Tecate into the headlines for unfortunate reasons, but tourist-related crime is uncommon.

Its landmark **Cuahtémoc Moctezuma Brewery** (☎ 654-94-78; Hidalgo & Obregón; free tours ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) produces two of Mexico's best-known beers, Tecate and Carta Blanca, but *maquiladoras* drive the local economy.

For lodging, the best value in town is offered by **Motel La Hacienda** (☎ 654-12-50; Av Juárez 861; s/d M\$400/500; P ♻), which has clean, carpeted rooms with TV and pretty orange trees in the courtyard. A nice outdoor **market** at the corner of Juárez and Hidalgo has fresh fruit, shoes, clothes, pottery and *aguas* (watery juice drinks) of all varieties.

Tecate is 55km east of Tijuana by Hwy 2, the east-west route linking Tijuana and Mexicali. The **border crossing** (☎ 6am-10pm) is less congested than either Tijuana or Mesa de Otay.

## ENSENADA

☎ 646 / pop 260,075

Ensenada, 108km south of the border, is hedonistic Tijuana's cosmopolitan sister. The city has a quirky mix of just-off-the-boat cruise shippers, drive-by tourists from Cali, tourists from mainland Mexico and seen-it-all locals. In case you've forgotten you're in Mexico (what with all those US dollars and the English menus) just look up: a Mexican flag so large it's probably visible from space flutters proudly over the tourist zone. Wander here and you'll find almost anything: ceramics, hammocks, textiles, jewelry...side by side with tasteless T-shirts, raunchy gifts and a host of items you definitely wouldn't give grandma for the holidays. Some of Mexico's best wines come from this region; if you're an oenophile, don't miss the Ruta del Vino and its vineyards and museums - lately this region has come to the attention of vintners world-wide.

Av López Mateos (Calle 1a), a landscaped, pedestrian-oriented artery, is lined with interesting shops, cafés, restaurants, sidewalk seating and many hotels, but outside the tourist zone the prices drop, food gets authentic and hotels become cheap. Singer Jim Morrison, of Doors fame, used to sip tequila and watch surfers just north at San Miguel (p284).

Ensenada's first permanent settlement was established in 1804. The discovery of gold in 1870 at Real del Castillo, 35km inland, brought a short-lived boom. Ensenada was the capital of Baja territory from 1882 to 1915, but the capital shifted to Mexicali during the revolution. After the revolution the city catered to 'sin' industries until the federal government outlawed gambling in the 1930s...but judging from the strip clubs, peep shows and bars, sin still goes on as big here today as it did in days of old.

### Orientation

Coming south from Tijuana keep to the water to enter the tourist zone - where you could easily never leave. Hotels and restaurants line Blvd Costero (aka Blvd Cárdenas). Av López Mateos (Calle 1a) lies parallel to Blvd Costero a short distance inland (north). The official tourist district is between Av Ryerson and Av Castillo - the further away you get, the cheaper, dicier and more authentic your Ensenada experience will be. Hwy 3 heads northeast to Tecate; at the southeast edge

of town it leads east toward Ojos Negros and Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (Laguna Hanson) before continuing south to Valle de Trinidad and San Felipe. The Ruta del Vino is north, just before San Miguel. Hwy 1 continues southward all the way to Los Cabos

## Information

### BOOKSTORES

**Librerías de Cristal** (☎ 178-84-48; Av López Mateos 690; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Good selection of books in Spanish and English.

### EMERGENCY

**Municipal Police** (☎ 066, 176-45-96)

**State Police** (☎ 066, 177-05-51)

**Tourist Assistance** (☎ 078)

### INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are sprinkled throughout the tourist zone; most charge M\$15 to M\$25 per hour.

**equinoxio c@fé** (☎ 174-04-55; Av Cardeñas 267; per hr M\$20; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun)

### INTERNET RESOURCES

**Discover Baja California** ([www.discoverbajacalifornia.com](http://www.discoverbajacalifornia.com)) The state's tourism site.

**Enjoy Ensenada** ([www.enjoyensenada.com](http://www.enjoyensenada.com)) Ensenada's tourism site.

### LAUNDRY

**Lavemática Blanco** (☎ 176-25-48; Plaza Bahía Shopping Center, cnr Calz Cortez & Av Reforma)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hospital Del Carmen** (☎ 178-34-77; cnr Av Obregón & Calle 11)

### MONEY

Most banks and *casas de cambio* are near the intersection of Av Ruiz and Av Juárez. There are numerous ATMs throughout Ensenada, and banks can change money or perform the usual transactions during business hours.

### POST

**Main post office** (cnr Avs López Mateos & Riviera)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Proturismo tourist office** (☎ 178-24-11, 078; [cotucoe@telnor.net](mailto:cotucoe@telnor.net); Blvd Costero 540; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) Dispenses maps, brochures and current hotel information. There's another booth in the Plaza Cívica.

**State tourist office** (☎ 172-54-44; Blvd Costero 1477; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) Carries similar information to the Proturismo office.

## Sights

Opened in the early 1930s as Hotel Playa Ensenada, the extravagant **Riviera del Pacífico**, a Spanish-style former casino on Blvd Costero, is rumored to have been a regular haunt of Al Capone. It now houses the small **Museo de Historia de Ensenada** (☎ 177-05-94; admission M\$20; ☎ 9am-5pm) and Bar Andaluz (p287), and the Casa de Cultura offers classes, retrospective film screenings and art exhibitions.

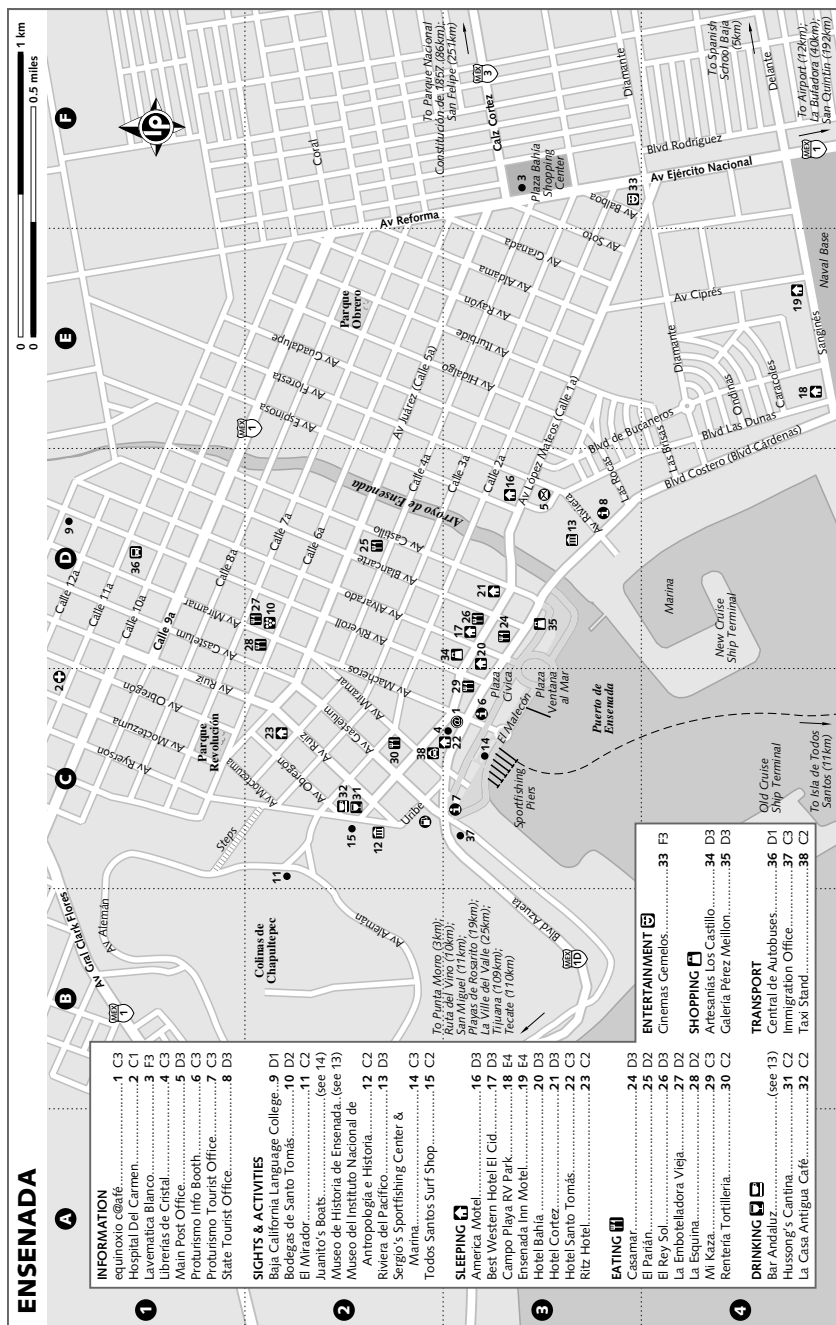
For an informative introduction to Baja's wine industry, **Bodegas de Santo Tomás** (☎ 178-33-33; Av Miramar 666; tours M\$50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) holds tours of its cellars and wine tastings hourly from 10am to 1pm and at 3pm. Sample its signature big red, the award-winning 2000 Cabernet. Alternatively, tiddle your way along the Ruta del Vino (p286) and discover things for yourself.

Built in 1886 by the US-owned International Company of Mexico, Ensenada's oldest public building, formerly the Aduana Marítima de Ensenada, houses the **Museo del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia** (Museo del INAH; ☎ 178-25-31; Av Ryerson 99; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), a historical and cultural museum. It has a relatively small but comprehensive collection of artifacts, and discusses (mainly in Spanish) the area's history from prehistoric times up to now.

Atop the Colinas de Chapultepec, **El Mirador** offers panoramic views of the city and Bahía de Todos Santos. Climb or drive to this highest point in town, up Av Alemán from the western end of Calle 2a in central Ensenada.

## Activities

The beach at **San Miguel**, 11km to the north of town, has a wonderful point break and often hosts surfing contests and was once a hangout for Doors legend Jim Morrison. Camping (M\$120 per car, M\$180 per RV, parking M\$30) is available. When the waves are big it's an awesome ride. For something a little less predictable, head west of Ensenada by boat to the **Isla de Todos Santos** (an island off Ensenada's coast, not to be confused with the town near Los Cabos), where you'll find a legendary spot called **El Martillo** (The Hammer) with swells rising 4m to 5m. Boats run out to the breaks every day; check at the harbor.





**Todos Santos Surf Shop** (☎ 175-71-79; Av Ryerson 59; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun), in the tourist zone downtown, rents boards (M\$330 per day) and wetsuits (M\$150 per day).

Oenophiles should head posthaste to the **Ruta del Vino**, just north of the city before San Miguel. Maps are available at the tourist info desks and at many hotels, but it's fun to just meander and discover it on your own. Vineyards stretch for miles through rust and ochre hills; many are dotted with dolomites and at times look like a moonscape. **Jatay** (☎ 109-97-31; www.jataytours.com) offers half- and full-day tours.

Ensenada is known the world over for its excellent **sportfishing**. Most charter companies also offer **whale-watching tours** from late December to March. The following options are well regarded and can be found on the sportfishing pier off El Malecón.

**Juanito's Boats** (☎ 174-09-53; www.sailorschoice.com/juanitos) Day-trip rates start at M\$2700 for up to four people, not including fishing tackle or park admission. Juanito's also does diving and Todos Santos surfing charters.

**Sergio's Sportfishing Center & Marina** (☎ 178-21-85; www.sergios-sportfishing.com) Expect to pay M\$660 per person for day fishing trips, including gear and Mexican fishing license. Private charter boats start at M\$3300 and go up to 10 times that.

## Courses

The following language schools offer similar immersion programs with homestay opportunities.

**Baja California Language College** (☎ 174-17-21; www.bajacal.com; Av Riveroll 1287) Courses cost from M\$250 per hour or M\$2790 per week.

**Spanish School Baja** (☎ 178-76-00; www.spanishschoolbaja.com; Calle Felipe Angeles 15) Costs start at M\$2800 for a week plus M\$300 materials fee.

## Festivals & Events

The events listed below constitute a tiny sample of the 70-plus sporting, tourist and cultural happenings that take place each year. Dates change, so contact tourist offices for details.

**Carnaval** Mardi Gras celebration in mid-February, though the date depends on Ash Wednesday and Easter. The streets flood with floats and dancers.

**Rosario-Ensenada Bike Ride** Twice-yearly bicycle race in April and September.

**Fiesta de la Vendimia** Wine harvest, held throughout August. Cheers!

**International Seafood Fair** Sample September's scrumptious seafood surprises.

**Mexican Surf Fiesta** Grand finals of local surf competition in mid-October. Everyone just hangs loose.

**Fiesta del Tequila** Last week in October. Punish that liver to your heart's content.

**Baja 1000** Baja's biggest off-road race, held mid-November. See 'truggies' (truck-buggies) tear up the desert to the cheers of just about everyone.

## Sleeping

Although Ensenada has many hotels, demand can exceed supply at times, particularly on Saturday and Sunday and in summer. Rates vary substantially between weekdays (Monday to Friday) and weekends (Saturday and Sunday)...and they jump up even more for the Baja 1000 or other big events.

## BUDGET

**Campo Playa RV Park** (☎ 176-29-18; cnr Blvd Las Dunas & Sanginés; car or camp site M\$198, motor home M\$275) A bit spartan and dusty when the wind blows, but the Campo Playa offers secure, well-maintained facilities, a restaurant and some palm trees for shade.

**Ritz Hotel** (☎ 174-05-01; explotur@prodigy.net.mx; Calle 4a 379; s/d/tr M\$295/320/460; ☎) Not at all ritzy, but friendly and inexpensive. Carpeted rooms are small and dark, but friendly staff and easy access to the tourist zone, restaurants and the bus station make up for it.

**America Motel** (☎ 176-13-33; Av López Mateos 1309; s/d M\$320/400; (P)) One of the finest budget options, the friendly America motor lodge is quiet, clean and yet only a five-minute walk from the tourist zone. Many rooms have a kitchenette at no extra charge.

## MIDRANGE

**Ensenada Inn Motel** (☎ 182-98-91; www.sdoro.com/ensenadainn; Sanginés 237; s/d M\$650/850; (P) ☎ ☎) A bit far away from the tourist zone, but clean and quiet, with secure parking and rooms with kitchenette. Excellent choice for drivers planning to get an early start for a southward journey. Prices are lower during the week.

**Hotel Bahía** (☎ 178-21-01; www.hotelbahia.com.mx; Av López Mateos 850; s/d M\$699/935; (P) ☎ ☎) Welcome margaritas, a nice pool and balconies that look out at the port are why folks keep coming here. Psychedelic tiles in the lobby add to the fun.

## TOP END

**Best Western Hotel El Cid** (☎ 178-24-01; www.mexonline.com/elcid.htm; Av López Mateos 993; s/d M\$1062/1540;



(P) (☎) (📺) (📺) This four-star hotel has unique rooms, an outstanding restaurant and a lively bar. Prices include continental breakfast with fresh juice. Beds are firm and the bilingual staff are friendly.

**Hotel Santo Tomás** (☎ 178-15-03; hst@bajainn.com; Blvd Costero 609; r up to 3 persons M\$1072; (P) (P) Slick and snazzy, with satellite TV in each room. The lobby elevator, on a raised platform with mirrors, will make you feel like you're stepping into a Star Trek teleportation device. Rates increase on Friday and Saturday. Beam me up, Scottie.

**Hotel Cortez** (☎ 178-23-07; fax 178-39-04; Av López Mateos 1089; r M\$1078; (P) (P) (📺) This large, family-friendly hotel has a gym, a basketball court and a popular bar and restaurant.

**Punta Morro** (☎ 178-35-07; www.punta-morro.com; Transpeninsular Km 106; s/d M\$1550/2850; (P) (P) (📺) One of Ensenada's newest and fanciest resorts, the Punta Morro – located slightly north of town – has an unbeatable location overlooking the Pacific, posh suites with all the services one expects from a top-end place, and a restaurant that's worth visiting even if you're staying in town.

**La Ville del Valle** (☎ 183-92-49; www.lavilledelvalle.com; d M\$1750; (P) (X) (P) A beautiful B&B overlooking the rolling vineyards and fields in the Ruta del Vino. The owners grow their own lavender, make their own personal care products and have fantastic meals. No pets or children.

## Eating

Ensenada has eateries ranging from corner taco stands to places serving the best of Mexican and international cuisine. Seafood lovers, in particular, will leave sated and smiling.

**Rentería Tortillería** (☎ 178-35-79; Calle 2a No 558; ☎ 5am-4pm) Tiny little grocery store with freshly made flour tortillas for M\$10 per kg. Enjoy both smells and smiles as you watch them being made.

**Mi Kaza** (☎ 178-82-11; Av Riveroll 87-2; breakfasts M\$35-70, dinner mains M\$59-129; ☎ 6:30am-10pm) Enjoy inexpensive Mexican or American dishes at this not-so-greasy greasy spoon. Princess Diana lovers will enjoy the tribute wall of photos at the back.

**El Parián** (☎ 178-82-32; Calle 4a & Castillo 401; dinner mains M\$40-85; ☎ noon-midnight Thu-Tue) Great enchiladas, quesadillas, burritos, *agua de jamaica* (hibiscus water) and friendly service make this perfect for anyone watching their pesos. Flat-screen televisions at every corner mean

you (or the wait staff) never have to miss a moment of that cheesy Mexican soap.

**La Esquina** (☎ 178-35-57; Av Miramar & Calle 6a 666; mains M\$80-140) Tucked away at the back of the old distillery, La Esquina lets you dine in quiet elegance... and escape from the tourist zone. Be sure to look up at the copper piping and old distilling tanks.

**Casamar** (☎ 174-04-17; Blvd Costero 987; dinner mains M\$114-455, lobster dishes M\$210-370) This family-owned restaurant features elegant seafood dining and a full bar that offers great views of the port. Try the Abalone Casamar with crabmeat. Yum.

**La Embotelladora Vieja** (☎ 178-16-60; cnr Av Miramar & Calle 7a; dinner mains M\$145-205) This elegant establishment was once a wine-aging warehouse. Beautiful brick arches, wax-dripped candleabras and an outstanding wine selection make this a spot to seek for that special celebration. The delicious tuna *Embotelladora* is a treat.

**El Rey Sol** (☎ 178-17-33; Av López Mateos 1000; dinner mains M\$150-235) This venerable Franco-Mexican institution has elegant French food with unusual fusion delicacies, but the treats like table-side Caesar salad or the Bananas Foster are what set this place apart.

## Drinking

Ensenada is a perfect place to start (or continue) that long-awaited vacation bender. On weekends, most bars and cantinas along Av Ruiz are packed from noon to early morning. If that's not your scene, head for one of the many quality hotels and fine restaurants where you're likely to find a laid-back spot to sip a top-shelf tequila.

**Hussong's Cantina** (☎ 178-32-10; Av Ruiz 113; ☎ 10am-2am) The oldest and perhaps liveliest cantina in the Californias has been serving tequila since 1892. It's one of the few bars filled with people who aren't just 20-somethings trying to get plastered.

**Bar Andaluz** (☎ 177-17-30; Blvd Costero; ☎ 11am-11pm) For a complete change in ambience, visit the cultured bar inside the Riviera del Pacífico, where having a drink is an exercise in nostalgia. It's quiet, perfect for a nightcap with friends.

**La Casa Antigua Café** (☎ 175-73-20; lacasaantiguacafe@hotmail.com; Av Obregón 110; coffee M\$35, sandwiches M\$30-60; ☎ 8am-11pm) Vintage photos and clapboards separate this place from the coffee megachains. Delicate pastries, good bagels and sandwiches and rich coffee are all worth ducking away from the strip for.

## Entertainment

Entertainment opportunities in Ensenada are primarily of the drinking, eating, shopping and sinning varieties. **Cinemas Gemelos** (☎ 176-36-16; crn Avs López Mateos & Balboa; tickets M\$44) has recent Hollywood fare, often dubbed into Spanish.

## Shopping

**Galería Pérez Meillon** (☎ 171-61-27; Blvd Costero 1094; ☹ 9-5pm) In the Centro Artesanal de Ensenada, this gallery sells authenticated pottery from the Paipai (one of Baja California's indigenous peoples known for fine craftwork, particularly pottery and baskets) and Mata Ortiz (a major pottery center in central north Mexico) and Kumai weaving. Opening time can vary.

**Artesanías Los Castillo** (☎ 178-29-62; Av López Mateos 815; ☹ 10am-7pm) Taxco silver is available here, at cruise-ship prices that let you know it's genuine.

## Getting There & Away

The **immigration office** (☎ 174-01-64; Blvd Azueta 101; document delivery ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, document pickup 1-3pm) sells tourist cards.

## AIR

Primarily a military airport, **Aeropuerto El Ciprés** (☎ 177-45-03; Carretera Transpeninsular Km 114.5) is just south of town off the Transpeninsular. The only regularly scheduled flights serving Ensenada are run by **Aerocehdros** (☎ 177-35-34), which flies to Guerrero Negro and Isla Cedros.

## BUS

Ensenada's **Central de Autobuses** (☎ 178-66-80; Av Riveroll 1075) is 10 blocks north of Av López Mateos. **Elite** (☎ 178-67-70) serves mainland Mexican destinations as far as Guadalajara (M\$1100, 38 hours) and Mexico City (M\$1553, 48 hours). **ABC** (☎ 178-66-80) is the main peninsular carrier, and offers buses to the following destinations.

Destination	Fare	Duration
Guerrero Negro	M\$614	9hr
La Paz	M\$1401	20hr
Mexicali	1st-class M\$301	4hr
	2nd-class M\$278	4hr
Rosarito	M\$76	1hr
San Felipe	M\$248	4hr
Tecate	M\$97	2hr
Tijuana	M\$111	1½hr

## Getting Around

The main taxi stand is at the corner of Avs López Mateos and Miramar; taxis also congregate along Av Juárez. Most fares within the city cost from M\$50 to M\$80.

The asking price for a taxi trip to the airport is M\$150 for one to four passengers. Surfers can get a trip out to San Miguel and a pick-up later in the day for M\$100 each way.

Ensenada's main avenues are well served by buses and vans; most routes are designated by street name and charge M\$7 for the first 5km.

## AROUND ENSENADA

**La Bufadora** is a popular tidewater blowhole 40km south of Ensenada. Technically just a notched rock, it sends a jet of water up to 30m into the sky, drenching cheering onlookers. Catch a taxi (M\$100 per person round trip) or a shuttle tour (M\$150), or drive south on the Transpeninsular to the 'Bufadora' sign, then follow the road all the way around to the Pacific side. Parking is M\$20.

## PARQUE NACIONAL CONSTITUCIÓN DE 1857

At the end of a fun 43km dirt road out of Ojos Negros (east of Ensenada at Km 39 on Hwy 3), Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 has beautiful conifers, fields of wildflowers and a sometimes-dry lake, **Laguna Hanson** (also known as Laguna Juárez) at an altitude of 1200m. **Cabañas** (M\$700) or campsites are available, but livestock contaminate the water so bring your own.

It's a sublime spot for mountain biking, hiking or just getting away from it all, as long as everyone else isn't getting away at the same time – in peak holiday times it can be busy, but it's a beautiful spot any time of year. The park is also accessible by a steeper road east of Km 55.2, 16km southeast of the Ojos Negros junction. The **Restauran y Hotel Ojos Negros** (☎ 646-153-30-06; Entrada principal; r M\$250), which has basic rooms and a great restaurant, is a very convenient stop for anyone wanting to get to the park early the next morning. Some rooms open onto the sunny courtyard; others face a wall.

## PARQUE NACIONAL SIERRA SAN PEDRO MARTIR

Bobcats, deer, bighorn sheep and condors await visitors to San Pedro Mártir national

### NOTHING LIKE TAKING A GOOD PISMO...

Tiny San Quintín is the pismo clam capital, but these mouthwatering, meaty morsels are well worth stopping for anywhere along this northerly part of the Transpeninsular. Look for 'Almeja Ahumada' signs as you drive southwards...or if time and itinerary permits, stop in at **Palapas de Mariscos El Paraíso** (☎ 616-165-29-06) and bring your appetite – it serves big, juicy smoked clams with garlic, tomato and a side of broth. If you're really a do-it-yourselfer, sharpen your clam rake, get a license (M\$250 per week) from the Oficina de Pesca (Fisheries Office) and dig them on your own. Yum!

park, east of San Telmo de Abajo and west of San Felipe. Conifers scrape the sky, the air is pine-scented and clean, and the (tortuously winding) drive passes through boulder-studded, ethereal landscapes that seem otherworldly.

The **Observatorio Astronómico Nacional** (☎ 646-174-45-80; ☎ 10am-1pm) is the country's national observatory, from where it's possible to observe both the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez. On clear days one can see all the way to the Mexican mainland. To reach the park, turn left at the sign at approx Km 140 on the Transpeninsular, south of Colonet. A paved road climbs 80km to the east through an ever-changing desert landscape, affording satisfying vistas all along the way. Climbers should contact **Baja Vertical** (☎ 646-178-23-83; bajax\_treme@hotmail.com) for this and other local climbing adventures. Camping is possible (no toilets, bring water) in designated areas, but there are no *cabañas* or other facilities.

## MEXICALI

☎ 686 / pop 653,046

Mexicali is what Tijuana must have been before the tourist boom – gritty and authentic, even scary – but the city offers some decent restaurants and outdoor activities. Be particularly careful around the border areas after dark. The Zona Hotelera, far safer at night than the border, is on the east side, along Calz Juárez from Plaza Azteca to Independencia and beyond.

## Information

Plentiful *casas de cambio* keep long hours, while banks (including Banamex) offer exchange services Monday to Friday mornings only. Most banks in Mexicali and Calexico have ATMs. On Av Reforma and Av Obregón, near the US border, are many health-care providers offering quality services at a fraction of the cost north of the border.

**Bancomer** (cnr Azueta & Av Madero)

**Hospital Hispano-Americano** (☎ 552-23-00; fax 552-29-42; Av Reforma 1000)

**Librería Packy** (☎ 165-39-23; Av Madero 400;

☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Good maps, not much else.

**Main post office** (☎ 552-25-08; Av Madero; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

**Mexican Tourism and Convention Bureau** (☎ 551-98-00; cnr Calz López Mateos & Camelias; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Similar offerings to the state office; it's in front of Museo Sol de Niño.

**State tourist office** (☎ 566-12-77; Calz Juárez 1;

☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Patient, bilingual staff and plenty of information about regional attractions and events.

**Tourist Assistance** (☎ 078)

## Sights & Activities

**Plaza Constitución** is a good place to hear *banda* groups rehearse in the late afternoon (hence its nickname: Plaza del Mariachi).

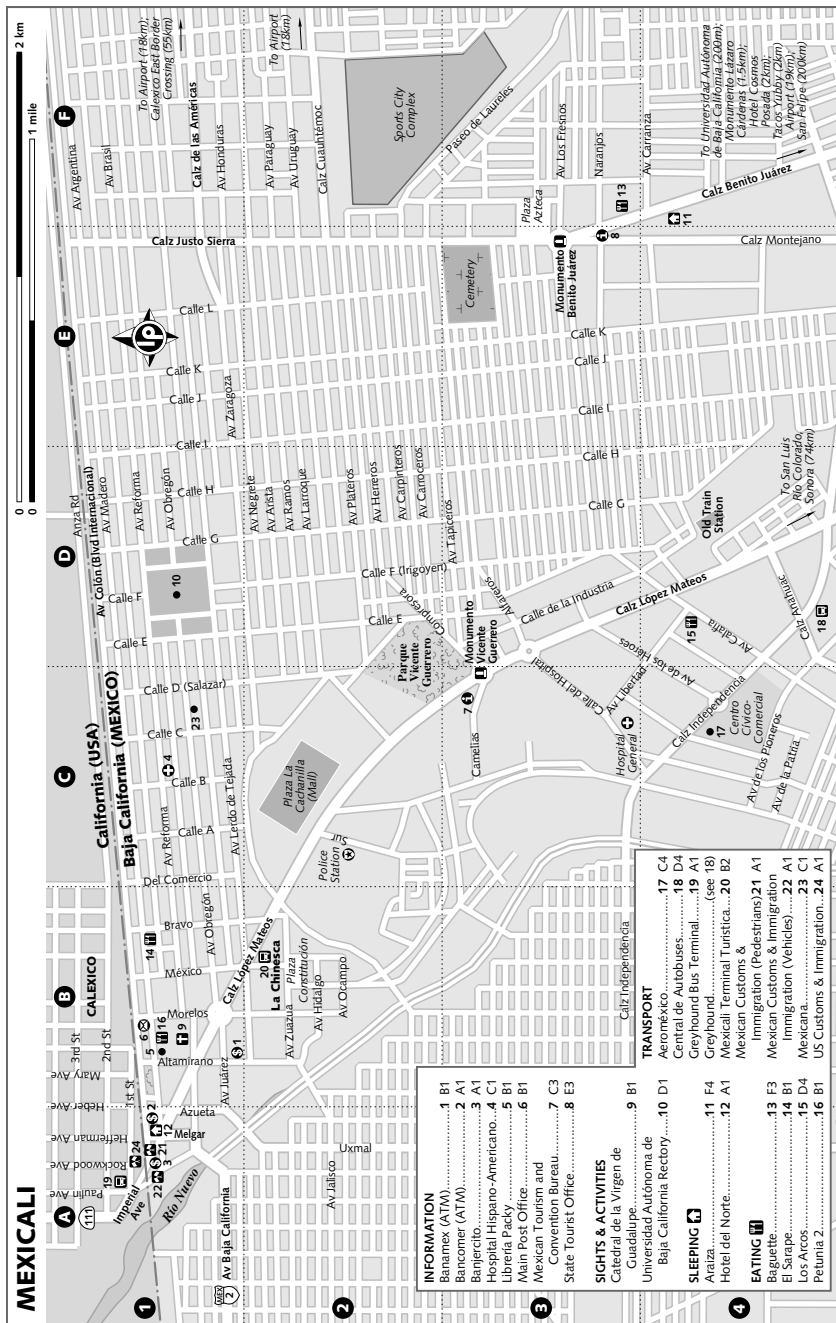
Most of Mexicali's historic buildings are northeast of Calz López Mateos. The **Catedral de la Virgen de Guadalupe** (cnr Av Reforma & Morelos) is the city's major religious landmark. Now the rectory of the **Universidad Autónoma de Baja California**, the former Palacio de Gobierno, built between 1919 and 1922, interrupts Av Obregón just east of Calle E.

## Sleeping

If you don't fancy sleeping in a hotel that has iron bars on the reception windows and hourly-rate customers, you're better off in the pricier Zona Hotelera.

**Hotel Cosmos Posada** (☎ 568-97-44; Juárez 4257; s/d incl breakfast M\$450/550; ☎ ☎) Rooms here are dark but clean, with decorative columns outside and deep-green tiles. It's nicely located for anyone going south.

**Hotel del Norte** (☎ 552-81-01; hoteldelnorte@hotmail.com; Av Madero 205; s M\$500-600, d M\$600-700; ☎ ☎ ☎) The most pleasant of the border options, the landmark Hotel del Norte has carpeted rooms, some with color TV, and friendly, English-speaking staff.



**MEXICALI**

- INFORMATION**
- 1 B1 Banamex (ATM).....1 B1
- 2 A1 Bancorner (ATM).....2 A1
- 3 A1 Banjericto.....3 A1
- 4 C1 Hospital Hispano-Americano.....4 C1
- 5 B1 Librería Paqy.....5 B1
- 6 B1 Mexican Tourism and.....6 B1
- 7 C3 Convention Bureau.....7 C3
- 8 E3 State Tourist Office.....8 E3
- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- Catedral de la Virgen de Guadalupe.....9 B1
- Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Rectory.....10 D1
- SLEEPING**
- Altaza.....11 F4
- Hotel del Norte.....12 A1
- EATING**
- Baguette.....13 F3
- El Sarape.....14 B1
- Los Arcos.....15 D4
- Petunia 2.....16 B1

- TRANSPORT**
- Aeroméxico.....17 C4
- Central de Autobuses.....18 D4
- Greyhound Bus Terminal.....19 A1
- Greyhound.....19 B1
- Mexicali Terminal Turística.....20 B2
- Mexican Customs & Immigration (Pedestrians).....21 A1
- Mexican Customs & Immigration (Immigration).....22 A1
- Immigration (Vehicles).....23 A1
- Mexicana.....23 C1
- US Customs & Immigration.....24 A1

- 19 Imperial Ave
- 20 3rd St
- 21 2nd St
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**Araiza** (☎ 564-11-00; www.araizahoteles.com; Calz Juárez 2220; d M\$1560; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This family-friendly deluxe hotel has well-appointed rooms, two excellent restaurants, bar, tennis courts, a fountain and a convention center. There are lobby computers for guests who need them.

## Eating

Mexicali's strongest draw is the variety of its restaurants. Almost any kind of food can be found here and it's all good.

**Baguette** (☎ 568-32-73; Calz Juárez 1799-13; bread M\$5-10, coffee M\$23; ☎ 7am-9pm) Coffee, ice cream and wi-fi mix well in this sunny, spotless café. Cheap breads are great for the road.

**Tacos Yubby** (cnr Juárez & Churubusco; tacos M\$12; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) Clean and quick and served with flair, Yubby's pork, chicken or beef tacos are as good as cheap food gets. If you're lucky, there'll be a drunken mariachi or two blaring out a tune.

**Petunia 2** (☎ 552-69-51; Av Madero 436; breakfast M\$59, lunch M\$60) Huge *jugo natural* (fresh squeezed juice) and delicious quesadillas are a great way to start the day at this cheap eat close to the border.

**El Sarape** (☎ 554-22-87; Bravo 140; dinner mains M\$75-140; ☎ 10am-3am) Mariachi band at the ready, this traditional Mexican restaurant has a menu that will delight carnivores, as well as margaritas that, though small, pack a cool, refreshing ice-cream headache.

**Los Arcos** (☎ 556-09-03; Av Calafia 454; dinner mains M\$123-230) Mexicali's most popular seafood restaurant. The *shrimp culichi* (shrimp in a creamy green chili sauce) is spectacular. Live music brightens the night Thursday and Friday.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

#### Aeropuerto Internacional General Rodolfo

**Sánchez Taboada** (☎ 553-67-42) is 18km east of town.

**Aeroméxico** (☎ 557-25-51; Pasaje Alamos 1008D, Centro Cívico-Comercial) Flies to La Paz, Mexico City, Mazatlán and other mainland points.

**Mexicana & Click Mexicana** (☎ 553-59-20; Obregón 1170) Flies daily to Guadalajara, Mexico City and intermediate points.

### BUS

Long-distance bus companies leave from the **Central de Autobuses** (☎ 557-24-15; Calz Independencia), near Calz López Mateos. Autotransportes del Pacífico, Norte de Sonora and Elite serve

mainland Mexican destinations, while ABC serves the Baja peninsula. Destinations and sample fares include the following.

Destination	Fare	Duration
Ensenada	M\$278	3½hr
Guadalajara	1st-class M\$1030 2nd-class M\$870	30hr 30hr
Guerrero Negro	M\$837	14hr
La Paz	M\$1556	24hr
Loreto	M\$1229	18hr
Mazatlán	M\$745	18hr
Mexico City	M\$1323	48hr
San Felipe	M\$171	2½hr
Tijuana	1st-class M\$236 2nd-class M\$163	2½hr 2½hr

**Greyhound** (☎ Mexicali 558-79-95, Calexico 760-357-18-95; www.greyhound.com) has offices in Mexicali and directly across the border in Calexico. Several departures daily go to Los Angeles (one way/round trip M\$380/713) and four to San Diego (M\$299/598) as well as anywhere else in the US.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The main Calexico–Mexicali border crossing is open 24 hours. Vehicle permits are available at the border, as are tourist cards for those traveling beyond Ensenada or San Felipe. US and Mexican authorities have opened a second border complex east of downtown to ease congestion. It's open 6am to 10pm.

## Getting Around

Cabs to the airport cost M\$160 but may be shared.

Most city buses start from Av Reforma, just west of Calz López Mateos; check the placard for the destination. Local fares are about M\$10.

A taxi to the Centro Cívico-Comercial or Zona Hotelera from the border averages about M\$50, but agree on the fare first.

## SAN FELIPE

☎ 686 / pop 14,831

Once a fishing community on the Sea of Cortez (Golfo de California), San Felipe, 200km due south of Mexicali, has become a kind of US suburb: quiet and peaceful, but increasingly less Mexican. Its charm lies in its beaches: the long expanses of tide flats make beachcombing fun, and the views are nice, especially on the route north to Mexicali.



**Bancomer** (Av Mar de Cortez 160; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) exchanges traveler's checks and has an ATM. Check email at **La Taza** (☎ 577-05-72; Av Mar de Cortez 238; per hr M\$20; ☎ 7am-10pm).

**Posada del Sol – Baja** (☎ 577-17-27; www.posada.delsolbaja.com; Av Mar de Cortez 238; s/d M\$500/800; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) has small, clean rooms with terra cotta tiles, fridge and microwave. Guests can use the café computers next door for free.

**Costa Azul Hotel** (☎ 577-15-48; cnr Av Mar de Cortez & Ensenada; r M\$770-1100; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a midrange family option – two children can stay for free. It has a cheery pastel blue and white theme and the beach doesn't get any closer. Prices change according to the day of the week and whether there's a holiday.

Good seafood and drinks are on offer at **La Hacienda de la Langosta Roja** (☎ 577-04-83; www.sanfelipelodging.com; Chetumal 125; dinner M\$136-260, lobster M\$420; ☎ 7am-11pm), which is also a hotel. Fishing photos add flair to the large, well-polished bar.

**Doña Chuy** (☎ 577-02-58; cnr Mananillo & Mar Negro; tortas M\$25-35) has great cheap eats, such as *tortas* and *quesadillas*, near the bus station.

Shoppers need go no further than the crammed *malecón* (waterfront boulevard) for deals and steals on fabrics, clothes, hats, trinkets and glassware.

By Hwy 5, San Felipe is 2½ hours from the Mexicali border crossing. At the **bus terminal** (☎ 577-15-16; Av Mar Caribe), **ABC** (www.abc.com.mx) operates to the following destinations:

**Ensenada** (M\$248, four hours, departs 1am and 8am)

**Mexicali** (M\$171, 2½ hours, five daily)

**Tijuana** (M\$362, 5½ hours, four daily)

## AROUND SAN FELIPE

The 85km road from San Felipe to the scenic, quiet village of **Puertecitos** is passable but go slow to avoid potholes. Beyond that, 4WDs can continue all the way to Hwy 1 – a slower but beautiful ride.

## MISIÓN SAN BORJA

This well-restored mission is roughly between El Rosarito and Bahía de los Angeles in pristine, spectacular Boojum-tree and cardón desert. A family descended from the original pre-conquest inhabitants is restoring it by hand and will proudly show you the mission, freshwater spring, a secret tunnel (now walled up, shucks!) and the old Jesuit ruins. Heading west from Bahía de los Angeles, turn left about 21km after leaving the coast.

# SOUTHERN BAJA

Parts of southern Baja look more like pages of a Dr Seuss illustration than real life and no plant exemplifies this more than the funky Boojum tree (Cirio), which looks like a giant inverted carrot with some yellow fluff at the top. You can't help but smile. Cardón cacti, ocotillo, cholla and other desert marvels thrive in areas that sometimes don't see any rain for a decade. Crumbling missions, leafy date palms, coconuts and mangrove swamps are all items to look for as you meander southward.

Remember that mountain time (to the south) is an hour ahead of Pacific time (to the north). Here you also enter the 25,000-sq-km **Reserva de la Biosfera El Vizcaíno**, one of Latin America's largest single protected areas. It sprawls from the Península Vizcaíno across to the Sea of Cortez and includes the major gray-whale calving areas of Laguna San Ignacio and Laguna Ojo de Liebre, and the Sierra de San Francisco with its stunning pre-Hispanic rock art – over 60 sites, many of which can be viewed only by archaeologists.

The vast, desolate, yet starkly beautiful **Desierto de Vizcaíno** is punctuated by the oasis of San Ignacio. Paralleling the gulf, the Sierra de la Giganta divides the region into an eastern subtropical zone and a western zone of elevated plateaus and dry lowlands. Mulegé, Santa Rosalía and Loreto each have slightly different charms.

The southernmost part of the peninsula contains La Paz, small seaside towns and villages, and the popular resorts of San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, aka 'Los Cabos.' After the quiet isolation of the north, Los Cabos will either be a jarring shock or a welcome relief.

## GUERRERO NEGRO

☎ 615 / pop 11,894

After the snazziness of the touristy border towns, unassuming Guerrero Negro – a town that sprang up to service the lone salt factory – is a welcome relief. People actually speak Spanish here and nobody's barking out invitations to titty bars. Though the main tourist draw is the proximity to whales in whale season, there's excellent birding in the shallow marshes, friendly hotels and restaurants, and the salt factory's odd white crystalline plains are quite beautiful. The nearby Laguna Ojo



## CALIFORNIA GRAY WHALES

The migration of gray whales from Siberian and Alaskan waters to the lagoons of Baja is one amazing animal event. In calving grounds such as **Laguna Ojo de Liebre** (Scammon's Lagoon; below), southwest of Guerrero Negro, and Laguna San Ignacio, southwest of San Ignacio, 700kg calves will draw their first breath and begin learning the lessons of the sea from their ever-watchful mothers.

Peak months to see mothers and calves in the lagoons are February to early April, but the official whale-watching season begins December 15 and lasts until April 15. After two to three months in these sheltered waters and nearly doubling their birth weight, the calves with their mothers head back to the open sea to begin the three-month glide home to their rich feeding grounds in the frozen north. The following year, they will return.

If you've got *ballena* (whale) fever, one of these destinations will provide a cure:

- Laguna Ojo de Liebre (Scammon's Lagoon; below)
- Laguna San Ignacio (p295)
- Puerto López Mateos (p301)
- Puerto San Carlos (p302)

de Liebre (known in English as Scammon's Lagoon), which annually becomes the mating and breeding ground of California gray whales, is the prime attraction.

## Orientation & Information

The town comprises two sectors: a strip along Blvd Zapata, west of the Transpeninsular, and an orderly company town further west, run by Exportadora de Sal (ESSA). Nearly all accommodations, restaurants and other services are along Blvd Zapata; places in Guerrero Negro do not have street numbers.

There's a Banamex with an ATM at the far end of the commercial district on Blvd Zapata, just at the start of the company town. Get money here if you'll need it in San Ignacio, as that town has no bank.

**Ciber@migos** (☎ 157-26-51; internet access per hr M\$25; ☎ 10am-9pm), off Zapata, is just a few streets away from Motel Las Ballenas.

Guerrero Negro's main medical facility is the **Clinica Hospital IMSS** (☎ 157-04-33; Blvd Zapata), located where the road curves southwest.

## Whale-Watching

Agencies arrange whale-watching trips on the shallow waters of **Laguna Ojo de Liebre**, where visitors are guaranteed a view of whales in their natural habitat. **Malarrimo Eco Tours** (☎ 157-01-00; www.malarrimo.com; Blvd Zapata), at the beginning of the strip, offers four-hour tours (adult/child M\$450/350). A bit further south *pangueros* (boatmen) from Ejido Benito Juárez take visitors for whale-watching excursions

(adult/child M\$300/250). Baja Outpost (p300) also offers whale-watching tours out of Loreto. If whales aren't around, try bird-watching, cave-painting viewing or touring the salt factory (one to two hours, M\$200 per person). Head to the Old Pier if you're a bird-watcher, as there are 11km of prime territory for ducks, coots, eagles, curlews, terns, herons and other birds.

## Sleeping

The whale-watching season can strain local accommodations; reservations are advisable from January through March.

**Malarrimo Trailer Park** (☎ 157-01-00; www.malarrimo.com; cnr Blvd Zapata & Guerrero; tents M\$140, RV sites M\$140-200; ☎) This park, at the eastern entrance to town, has 45 camp sites with full hookups, plenty of hot water and clean toilets.

**Motel Las Ballenas** (☎ 157-01-16; Victoria Sánchez 10; r M\$250; ☎) Fourteen clean and comfortable rooms with color TV. Not fancy, but they still take the time to twist the towels into the shape of kissing swans.

**Hotel El Morro** (☎ 157-04-14; Blvd Zapata; s/d M\$290/340; ☎) Convenient to the bus station on the north side of Blvd Zapata, this hotel has 34 comfortable, basic rooms.

**Cabañas Malarrimo** (☎ 157-01-00; www.malarrimo.com; cnr Blvd Zapata & Guerrero; d M\$400-450; ☎) Hot, strong showers and a lot more ambience than the other options in town. Same ownership as the Malarrimo Trailer Park. Whale headboards and a general whale theme make it impossible to forget why you've come here.

## Eating

**Cafetería del Motel El Morro** (☎ 157-04-14; Blvd Zapata; dinner mains M\$50-80, lobster M\$200) Adjacent to the Hotel El Morro, this place serves up inexpensive Mexican fare and seafood, including great breakfasts and a near-perfect *chile releneno* (chili stuffed with meat or cheese).

**Los Faroles** (☎ 157-15-10; Blvd Zapata; dinner mains M\$50-80) *Sopes* hit the spot at this friendly café, with Mexican music and white tablecloths.

About 8km south of Guerrero Negro, a good graded road leads 25km west to the **Campo de Ballenas** (Whale-watching Camp) on the edge of the lagoon. Here a M\$50 parking fee includes the right to camp, and the *ejido* (communal landholding) runs a simple restaurant (open in the whale season only).

## Getting There & Away

Guerrero Negro's airport is 2km north of the state border, west of the Transpeninsular.

The Aeroméxico subsidiary **Aeroméxico Connect** (☎ 157-17-45; Blvd Zapata), on the north side of Blvd Zapata, flies Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday to Hermosillo, connecting to mainland Mexican cities.

**Aerocedros** (☎ 157-16-26; Blvd Zapata) flies to Isla Cedros and Ensenada Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The **bus station** (☎ 157-06-11; Blvd Marcello Rubio; ☎ 24hr) is served by **ABC** (www.abc.com.mx) and Autotransportes Águila, one of its subsidiaries. Destinations include the following:

Destination	Fare (Águila/ABC)	Duration
Ensenada	M\$569/614	9hr
La Paz	M\$729/785	12hr
Loreto	M\$392/423	5-6hr
Mulegé	M\$262/285	4hr
Tijuana	M\$671/723	12hr

## SAN IGNACIO

☎ 615 / pop 719

Sleepy San Ignacio seems out of place after the endless Desierto de Vizcaíno – the town's lush, leafy date palms and quiet lake are almost shocking. Lazy mornings, hikes in the mountains along El Camino Real, whale-watching day trips and excursions to the spectacular pre-Hispanic rock-art sites in the Sierra de San Francisco (opposite) make this a great place to stay.

Jesuits located the **Misión San Ignacio de Kadakaamán** here, but Dominicans supervised

construction of the striking church (finished in 1786) that still dominates the cool, laurel-shaded plaza. With lava-block walls nearly 1.2m thick and surrounded by bougainvillea, this is one of Baja's most beautiful churches. A small self-guiding **museum** (☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) offers a glimpse of the area's natural history.

Most services are around the plaza, including public telephones, but there is no bank. International calls can be made from the Hotel La Pinta. Internet access is available at **Fischer Internet** (☎ 154-04-49; per hr M\$25; ☎ 9am-10pm), which can also arrange tours.

## Sleeping & Eating

San Ignacio has excellent accommodations choices tucked away beneath its swaying palms. Many can arrange tours to area attractions.

**our pick Casa Lereé** (☎ 154-01-58; www.murrietawebdesign.com/test/lerree/index.html; Morelos s/n; r with private/shared bathroom M\$750/400) Part guesthouse, part museum, this beautiful old building sits around a verdant garden with all kinds of tropical trees. Rooms are small but very tastefully decorated, there's wi-fi, and the owner is a wealth of information about all aspects of San Ignacio, especially hiking and history.

**Ricardo's Hotel & RV Park** (☎ 154-02-83; d/tr M\$750/1250, RV sites M\$250; P ☎ ☎ ☎) A squeaky-clean hotel offering satellite TV and two queen-sized beds per room. There's a nice restaurant onsite and staff use fresh lime juice in the margaritas. RV sites are spartan but adequate.

**Hotel La Pinta** (☎ 154-03-00; r M\$871; P ☎ ☎ ☎) This service-oriented hotel about 1.6km south of Hwy 1 on the paved road to San Ignacio offers luxurious, spacious rooms with large mirrors. The restaurant serves local beef, good *antojitos* and seafood (M\$120). A beautiful pool and hummingbirds buzzing in the courtyard make this a relaxing escape.

**El Padrino Restaurant & Bar** (Flojos; mains M\$50-130) An unassuming greasy spoon and RV park (camping with/without electricity M\$140/80) with a pool table, TV and friendly staff. Try the fish in *mojo de ajo* (garlic sauce). Everything is good.

**La Misión Kadakaaman** (mains M\$80-120) Dine beneath the shadow of the gorgeous plaza's church on entrées such as fish filet in peanut or cilantro sauce, along with the usual Mexican suspects.

Buy a bag of dates, available everywhere in season, for M\$10 to M\$20 if you want a quick snack or energy for the road.

## Getting There & Away

Buses pick up passengers at the bus station near the San Lino junction outside of town, arriving about every two hours from 5am to 11pm.

## AROUND SAN IGNACIO

### Sierra de San Francisco

The sheer quantity of beautiful petroglyphs in this region is impressive, but the ochre, red, black and white paintings remain shrouded in mystery. Some researchers believe they depict what may be religious rites, hunting rituals or warfare; others suggest they are warnings for neighboring tribes or possibly messages. The fact that some of the sites depict fish and whales indicates that the peoples had contact with oceans despite living far from them. In recognition of its cultural importance, the Sierra de San Francisco has been declared a Unesco World Heritage Site. It is also part of the Reserva de la Biosfera El Vizcaíno.

**Cueva del Ratón**, named for an image of what inhabitants once thought was a rat (or mouse) but is more likely a deer, is the most easily accessible site. Drivers can get there on their own after registering and paying the park entry (M\$34) and guide fee (M\$70) at the **Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia** (INAH; ☎ 154-02-22; ☹ 8am-3pm Mon-Sat) office, adjacent to the Misión San Ignacio on the plaza in San Ignacio, then picking up their guide in the pueblo closest to the ruins. Bringing a camera costs M\$35. Tours start at M\$1300.

The dramatic **Cañón San Pablo** has sites that are better preserved. At **Cueva Pintada**, Cochimí painters and their predecessors decorated 150m of high rock overhangs with vivid red-and-black representations of human figures, bighorn sheep, pumas and deer, as well as with more abstract designs. **Cueva de las Flechas**, across Cañón San Pablo, has similar paintings, but curiously, some of the figures have arrows through them.

The beautiful muleback descent of Cañón San Pablo requires at least two days, preferably three. Excursions to Cañón San Pablo are best done through a tour operator; Kuyimá (see right) can arrange the three-day/six-day trips for M\$4686/10197 per person (four per-

son minimum). Fischer Internet (opposite) is another option.

## Laguna San Ignacio

Along with Laguna Ojo de Liebre and Bahía Magdalena, Laguna San Ignacio is one of the Pacific coast's major winter whale-watching sites, with three-hour excursions costing around M\$440 per person. **Kuyimá** (☎ 154-00-70; www.kuyima.com; Morelos 23), a cooperative based at the east end of the plaza in San Ignacio, can arrange transportation and accommodations. The 65km drive to the camping ground (where cabins are also available) takes about two hours over rough roads.

## SANTA ROSALÍA

☎ 615 / pop 9768

Come here to see cool crumbling buildings in honorable disrepair. Brightly painted clapboard-sided houses, the prefab church, a port and *malecón*, black-sand beaches, lazy pelicans and great views from the surrounding hills are all attractions of Santa Rosalía. For southbound travelers, Santa Rosalía offers the first glimpse of the Sea of Cortez after a long, dry crossing of the Desierto de Vizcaíno.

## Orientation & Information

Central Santa Rosalía is a cluster of densely packed houses, restaurants, inns and stores. Plaza Benito Juárez, four blocks west of the highway, is the town center.

The post office is on Av Constitución at Calle 2. Hotel del Real, on the exit road from town, has long-distance *cabinas* (call centers). Check your email at **Cafe Internet PC Vision** (☎ 152-28-75; cnr 6th & Obregón; per hr M\$20; ☹ 10am-10pm).

## Sights

Built in 1885 by the French to house the offices of the Boleo Company, the **Museo Histórico Minero de Santa Rosalía** (admission M\$20; ☹ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) watches over the town and the rusting copperworks from its perch on the hill near the Hotel Francés, surrounded by cool abandoned locomotives and other machinery.

Designed and erected for Paris' 1889 World's Fair, disassembled and stored in Brussels, intended for West Africa, Gustave Eiffel's (Yes, of Eiffel Tower fame) prefabricated **Iglesia Santa Bárbara** was shipped here when a Boleo Company director signed for its delivery to the town in 1895. Many travelers

agree that the church is interesting more as an example of early prefabricated architecture than for its beauty.

## Sleeping & Eating

Of all the towns in central Baja, Santa Rosalía has perhaps the best variety of well-priced accommodations choices, from the historic to the picturesque.

**Motel San Victor** (☎ 152-01-16; cnr Progreso 36 & Calle 9a; r M\$150; 📶 🚰) Rooms are dark and simple but the quiet, shaded courtyard and off-street parking are nice, and the owner speaks English.

**Hotel del Real** (☎ 152-00-68; Av Montoya 7; r M\$300-350; 📶 🚰) Has a new wing of tidy rooms with two beds and an older and mustier wing. All rooms have cable TV.

**Hotel Francés** (☎ 152-20-52; Cousteau 15; r M\$600; 📶 🚰 🚰) Overlooking the Sea of Cortez and curious rusting hulks of mine machinery, the Hotel Francés is charming and historic. Built in 1886 and originally the dormitory for 'working girls' of a brothel near the mine, the hotel features beautiful rooms with high ceilings, cloth-covered walls and charming stained-wood details. Onsite is a restaurant open Monday to Saturday, for breakfast. Tours cost M\$10.

**Panadería El Boleo** (☎ 152-03-10; Obregón 30; breads M\$8-25) Since 1901, this has been an obligatory stop for the rare find of good French bread in Baja. The pastries are good too. Find it between Calles 3 and 4.

**Restaurant Don Pedro** (Calle 5 No 3; antojitos M\$30-45) This restaurant, just north of Obregón, serves reasonably priced tacos, *antojitos* and a delicious *machaca* (shredded beef).

**Playas Negras** (☎ 152-06-85; breakfast M\$45, dinner mains M\$85-130) South of downtown and with a gorgeous view and a funky map of Baja done in abalone shell, this waterfront restaurant serves sumptuous seafood as well as steak, chicken and pizza.

**El Muelle** (☎ 152-09-31; cnr Constitución & Calle Plaza; mains M\$65-110; ☎ 8am-11pm) The dock theme fits well with seaside Santa Rosalía. Locals come here for everything from egg breakfasts to the popular Red Enchiladas.

For cheap eats or fruit for the road, check out the small **fruit market** (☎ 6am-6pm) on Montoya between Hotel del Real and the highway, or hit one of the many taco stands of high quality along Av Obregón. Most charge M\$8 for a fish taco.

## Getting There & Around

### AIR

**Aéreo Servicio Guerrero** (☎ 615-152-31-81; ☎ 8am-1pm, 3-6pm Mon-Sat) offers flights to Guaymas (M\$870, daily) and Hermosillo (M\$1500, Monday to Saturday) on the Mexican mainland. The ticket office is located in the ferry terminal.

### BOAT

The passenger/auto ferry *Santa Rosalía*, operated by Operadora Rotuaria del Noroeste, sails to Guaymas at 9am Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, arriving at 7am the next morning; the return ferry from Guaymas sails at 8pm Monday, Thursday and Saturday, arriving at 6am. Strong winter winds may cause delays, and the Monday and Tuesday trips are often cancelled due to lack of demand. It's best to check the day before whether the ferry will run. Also note that Sonora doesn't use daylight savings, so at certain times of the year Guaymas will be ahead by one hour.

The ticket office is at the **ferry terminal** (☎ 152-12-46; www.ferrysantarosalia.com; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat), on the highway. Passenger fares are M\$650 in general seating, M\$750 additional for shared cabins (children's tickets are half-price, and there is a general Sunday discount). Advance reservations are recommended. Vehicle rates vary with vehicle length. See the accompanying chart for vehicle fares. The office opens at 7am or 8am on the day of a departure.

Vehicle	Fare
car or pickup up to 5m	M\$2480, plus M\$990 per extra meter
trailer truck up to 15m	M\$9500
motorhome	M\$3500
motorcycle	M\$1350

Before shipping vehicles to the mainland, officials require a vehicle permit (see p987). These can be obtained at **Banjerquito** (www.banjerquito.com.mx), the only bank that processes vehicle permit payments, at its Tijuana, Mexicali or La Paz branches. Alternatively, you can organize one on its Spanish website.

### BUS

At least five buses daily in each direction stop at the **bus terminal** (☎ 152-14-08; ☎ 24hr), which is in the same building as the ferry

### ON A MISSION FROM GOD...

Baja's missions have a dubious history – built by Jesuits and Dominicans intent on bringing salvation, they instead brought death through introduced European diseases. Many missions were abandoned as populations dropped below sustainable levels. Today however, these beautiful buildings, whether in use or out in the middle of nowhere, make for great photos and fun day trips, and they're an undeniable part of Baja's checkered past. You should not need a 4WD to visit any of the ones listed here, though the roads can be impressively bad (or impassable) at times.

**Misión San Francisco Javier de Viggé-Biaundó** (p301) Remote and beautifully preserved; it feels like stepping back in time. The drive there offers awesome vistas and even some cave paintings along the way.

**Misión Santa Rosalía de Mulegé** (below) Extremely photogenic. Don't miss the view from behind looking out over the palm-edged river.

**Misión San Borja** (p292) Out in the middle of nowhere but well worth the drive. Its treasures include a hot spring and a secret tunnel (now walled up). One family, descended from the original pre-conquest inhabitants, is restoring the building rock by rock, by hand.

**Misión Nuestra Señora de Loreto** (p300) The oldest, an impressive monument still in use today.

Resources for further reading include *Las Misiones Antiguas*, by Edward W Vernon, and [www.vivabaja.com/bajamissions](http://www.vivabaja.com/bajamissions); both feature beautiful photos of these interesting ruins.

terminal on the highway just south of the entrance to town. Destinations include the following:

Destination	Fare (ABC/Aguila)	Duration
Ensenada	M\$835/774	12hr
Guerrero Negro	M\$220/204	3hr
La Paz	M\$566/524	8hr
Loreto	M\$202/168	3hr
Mexicali	M\$1097/1041	16hr
Mulegé	M\$63/59	1hr
San Ignacio	M\$75/70	1hr
San José del Cabo	M\$717/679	12hr
Tijuana	M\$944/875	14hr

## MULEGÉ

☎ 615 / pop 3317

The palm- and mangrove-lined Río Mulegé, with its delta, birds, wildlife, snorkeling and diving, makes Mulegé a great stop for the outdoorsy or for those with kids. The ancient mission and town square give the town a quiet charm that's fast disappearing in other parts of Baja. Despite the new eyesore at the entrance to town and the fact that it finally has a bank/ATM, Mulegé still feels like part of yesteryear.

Most services are on or near Jardín Corona, the town plaza. Bancomer and the ATM are on Zaragoza between Martínez and Madero. To get online try **Carlos' Place** (per hr M\$30; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat), across from Los Equipales (p298). Hotel Mulegé (p298) is another option.

## Sights & Activities

Come to the hilltop **Misión Santa Rosalía de Mulegé** (founded in 1705, completed in 1766 and abandoned in 1828) for great photos of the mission and river valley.

The former territorial prison is now the **Museo Mulegé** (Barrio Canenea; donation M\$10; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Sat). Its eclectic holdings include objects from the Mission de Santa Rosalía and prehistoric artifacts.

## DIVING

Mulegé's best diving spots can be found around the Santa Inés Islands (north of town) and just north of Punta Concepción (south of town). **Cortez Explorers** (☎ 153-05-00; [www.cortez-explorers.com](http://www.cortez-explorers.com); Moctezuma 75A; ☎ 8:30am-6pm), under new English ownership, offers all levels of diving instruction from zero to instructor level, squid-diving excursions, snorkeling gear and kayak or bicycle rental. One- or two-tank dives cost M\$990 per person, snorkeling M\$550.

## KAYAKING

The beautiful river, the estuary delta and the southern beaches make Mulegé one of the prime spots for kayaking. Baja Outpost (p300) in Loreto is one of the few places for long-term rentals or for those wanting to follow the coastline south over a few days. **NOLS Mexico** (☎ in the US 800-710-6657, 307-332-5300; [www.nols.edu/courses/locations/mexico/about\\_mexico.shtml](http://www.nols.edu/courses/locations/mexico/about_mexico.shtml)) has sea-kayaking courses out of its sustainable,

eco-friendly facility on Coyote Bay, south of Mulegé.

## Sleeping

**Casa de Huéspedes Manuelita** (☎ 153-01-75; Moctezuma; r M\$250) Rooms are behind a beautiful grape arbor and, while basic, they are clean and have hot showers. The parakeets are a nice touch.

**Hotel Las Casitas** (☎ 153-00-19; www.historicolascasita.com.mx; Madero 50; s/d M\$341/393; P ☎) Beloved Mexican poet Alán Gorosave once inhabited this well-run hotel near Martínez, perhaps inspired by its beautiful courtyard shaded by a well-tended garden of tropical plants. The restaurant serves excellent breakfasts and has an open-fire grill. Drew Barrymore is rumored to have stayed here.

**Hotel Hacienda** (☎ 153-00-21; hotelhacienda\_mulege@hotmail.com; Madero 3; r M\$350; ☎) The oldest hotel in town, the green-and-white atmospheric Hacienda offers rooms with twin beds and a fridge. It even has its own old well that, though unused, still contains water.

**Hotel Mulegé** (☎ 153-04-16; Moctezuma s/n; s/d M\$380/400; P ☎) Mulegé's only business hotel has spotless doubles with carpeted floors, bottled water and cable TV. Internet (M\$25 per hour) in the lobby is another plus.

**Hotel Cuesta Real** (☎ 153-03-21; http://cuestareal.hotel.tripod.com; Transpeninsular Km 132; s/d M\$390/490, RV hookups M\$200; P ☎) This hotel offers large, spotless rooms and easy access to Río Mulegé as it empties into the sea (very convenient for kayakers). The grounds also boast a pleasant restaurant. Take in scenic mangrove swamps and pelicans on the way into town. Internet costs M\$25 per hour.

## Eating & Drinking

The sidewalks are rolled up pretty early in Mulegé, so dine earlier than usual and rest up for that big day tomorrow.

**Restaurante Doney** (☎ 153-00-95; mulegedoney@hotmail.com; Moctezuma s/n; tacos & snacks M\$13-110) There's counter or table seating here, with colorful tablecloths and good *antojitos* and tacos.

**Scott's El Candil** (Zaragoza s/n; mains M\$60-120; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) Nice brick building with open courtyard in the back and arched windows onto Zaragoza for those who want to watch the world (or at least Mulegé's portion of it!) pass by.

**Los Equipales** (☎ 153-03-30; Moctezuma; mains M\$130-220) Just west of Zaragoza, this restau-

rant and bar has gargantuan meals and a breezy balcony seating that's perfect for an afternoon margarita or an evening chat with friends. Shrimp are snapped up as soon as they are served.

## Getting There & Away

Mulegé's **bus terminal** (☎ 7am-11pm) is inconveniently located north of town, at Km 136.5 on the Transpeninsular. ABC/Águila northbound buses to Santa Rosalía (M\$63/59, one hour) stop about every two hours. Southbound buses pass daily to destinations including Loreto (M\$139/129, 2½ hours) and La Paz (M\$503/466, seven hours).

## AROUND MULEGÉ

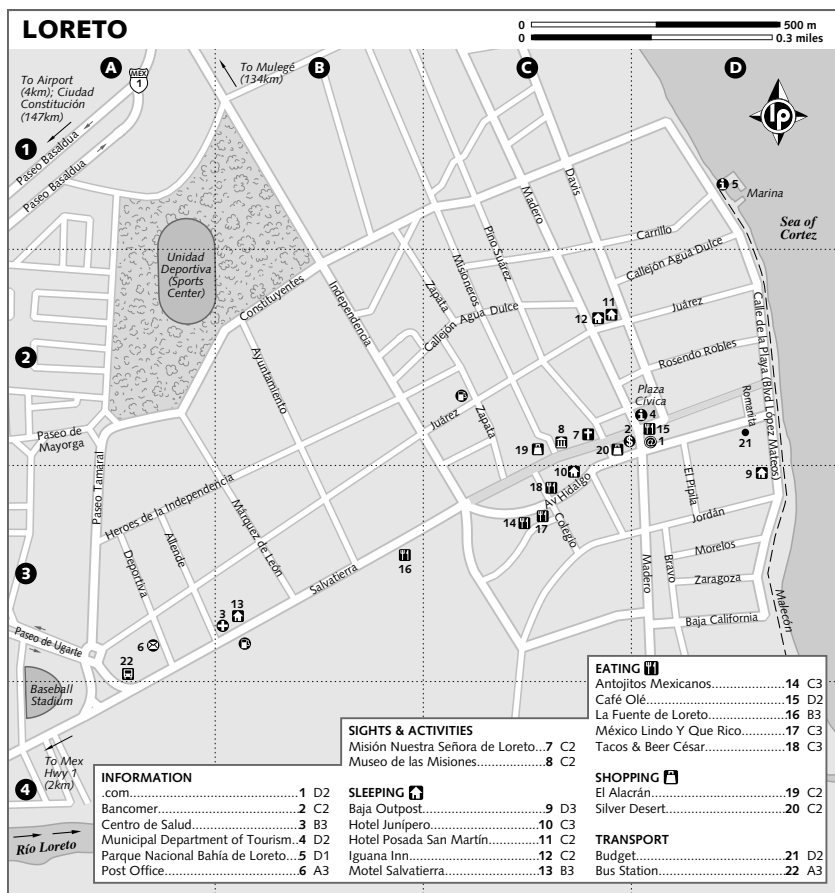
### Cañón La Trinidad

Trinity Canyon is great for bird-watchers, with the chance to see Vermillion Flycatchers, Gila woodpeckers and a host of raptors and buteos. The narrow, sherbet-colored canyon walls and shimmering pools of water are stunning, as are the pre-Hispanic cave paintings. Rendered in shades of ochre and rust, the paintings feature shamans, manta rays, whales and the famous Trinity Deer, leaping gracefully from the walls of the cave as arrows pass harmlessly over its head. Dams and climate change have kept the canyon dry for over a decade. You're not allowed to enter by yourself, but Mulegé native Salvador Castro of **Mulegé Tours** (☎ 615-153-02-32; day excursions per person M\$400) knows just about everything about the site you could want to know – plants, animals, even how to avoid the two nasty beehives that 'guard' the paintings.

## Beaches

As you wind your way south you'll pass some of Baja's most pristine *playas* (beaches). You can string up a hammock, pop the top on something frosty and watch the pelicans dive-bomb the fish. Some beaches have bars, restaurants or *cabañas*. Bahía Concepción, with its pelican colonies, funky rock formations and milky blue-green water, remains a top stop for kayakers, many of whom camp in makeshift RV colonies. **Playa Escondido** (Km 112), **Playa Santispac** (Km 113.5) and **Playa Perla** (Km 91) are just a few of the possible stops along Hwy 1 on the way. Be extremely cautious about weather alerts – the glassy water here and in Loreto can quickly become dangerous in high winds.





## LORETO

☎ 613 / pop 10,283

The Loreto area is considered by anthropologists to be the oldest human settlement on the Baja Peninsula. Indigenous cultures thrived here due to plentiful water and food. In 1697 Jesuit Juan María Salvatierra established the peninsula's first permanent mission at this modest port some 135km south of Mulegé. These days, Loreto has the reputation as Baja's water sports paradise. It's home to the Parque Marino Nacional Bahía de Loreto, with shoreline, ocean and offshore islands protected from pollution and uncontrolled fishing, though massive development of the shoreline is already causing irreparable changes.

## Orientation

Most hotels and services are near the landmark mission church on Salvatierra, while the attractive *malecón* is ideal for evening strolls. The Plaza Cívica is just north of Salvatierra, between Madero and Davis.

## Information

**Bancomer** (cnr Salvatierra & Madero) Has an ATM and changes US cash and traveler's checks Monday to Friday.

**Centro de Salud** (☎ 133-00-39; Salvatierra 68;

☎ 24hr) A local health center.

**.com** (☎ 135-18-46; Madero s/n; per hr M\$20; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) Next to Café Olé and convenient to the town center.

**Municipal Department of Tourism** (☎ 135-04-11; turismoloreto@hotmail.com; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) On

the west side of the Plaza Cívica, has a good selection of brochures and flyers.

**Parque Nacional Bahía de Loreto** (☎ 135-04-77; 🕒 8:30am-2pm Mon-Fri) Pay the M\$21 entrance fee to the park here in the marina. Staff are a good source of information for all water activities in the area.

**Post office** (☎ 135-06-47; Deportiva; 🕒 8am-2:30pm Mon-Fri)

## Sights & Activities

Including the 2065 sq km **Parque Marino Nacional Bahía de Loreto**, Loreto is a world-class destination for all types of outdoor activities; a number of outfitters offer everything from kayaking and diving along the reefs around Isla del Carmen and Coronado to horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking in the Sierra de la Giganta.

Baja Outpost (see right) offers diving, snorkeling, biking and kayaking expeditions in addition to accommodations. Note that its whale-watching tours (M\$2035 per person) run a full seven hours, unlike many others (some are as short as 1½ hours), and the owner can offer both blue and gray whale viewing tours to a variety of locations.

The **Misión Nuestra Señora de Loreto**, dating from 1697, was the first permanent mission in the Californias and the base for the expansion of Jesuit missions up and down the Baja peninsula. Alongside the church, INAH's revamped **Museo de las Misiones** (☎ 135-04-41; cr Salviatierra & Misioneros; admission M\$30; 🕒 9am-1pm & 1:45-6pm Tue-Fri) chronicles the settlement of Baja California.

## Sleeping

Most of Loreto's accommodations choices are on or near the picturesque *malecón*.

### BUDGET

**Hotel Posada San Martín** (☎ 135-11-07; Juárez 4; r M\$200-350; 📶) The best value in town and probably the cleanest M\$200 place in all of Baja, this hotel has large rooms (some with cable TV) and a great location near the plaza.

**Motel Salviatierra** (☎ 135-00-21; Salviatierra 123; s/d/tr/q M\$270/300/350/420) Near the bus station, this bright ochre motel offers clean, basic rooms that are some of Loreto's least expensive.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Hotel Junipero** (☎ 135-01-22; Av Hidalgo; s/d/tr M\$350/400/450; 📶) Overlooking the mission and the town plaza, this family-run hotel has

seen better days but rooms in the back have excellent views of the mission. Golf-ball key rings are out of place, but fun.

**Iguana Inn** (☎ 135-16-27; www.iguanainn.com; Juárez s/n; bungalows M\$550-660; 🕒 Oct-Aug; 📶 📺 📺) Kitchenettes, a video library and clean, comfortable beds make this a great option. Very close to the town center and still within easy walking distance of the *malecón*. A new casita sleeps up to five people for M\$935.

**ourpick Baja Outpost** (☎ 135-11-34; www.bajaoutpost.com; Blvd López Mateos; r incl breakfast M\$760, palapa M\$935; 📶 📺) This posh, tastefully finished B&B offers regular rooms, beautiful *palapas*, great breakfasts made to order and multilingual staff (Leon, the owner, speaks six languages). Located off the busy *malecón*, convenient to the town center and the beach. A testament to Leon's sainthood, or his faith in guestkind, is the well-stocked, honor-system bar. All manner of tours can be done from here as well.

## Eating & Drinking

Loreto has a good selection of restaurants preparing the regional standards: excellent seafood with plenty of lime and cilantro, potent margaritas and fruity *aguas frescas* (ice drinks). Unfortunately, of late mistakes in the bill have become common; don't be afraid to do the arithmetic after the tab arrives.

**Tacos & Beer César** (☎ 135-17-45; cnr Hidalgo & Colegio; mains M\$10-66) Look for the charcoal grill (often in use). Great tacos and other Mexican specialties in a festive outdoor patio. Passing mariachis can be flagged down if you're in the mood for some *música romántica*.

**Antojitos Mexicanos** (Hidalgo s/n; mains M\$12-50; 🕒 closed Wed) This tiny new hole in the wall is family run – get *comida económica* (cheap food) and great shrimp tacos and ceviche, served with pride and a smile. On weekends, try the *birria* – simmered goat meat.

**Café Olé** (☎ 135-04-96; Madero 14; dinner mains M\$24-66) The inexpensive Café Olé has good, basic fare: great Mexican breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Leave a business card in the wicker wall to stake your claim to fame.

**México Lindo Y Que Rico** (☎ 135-11-75; Hidalgo s/n; dinner mains M\$37-120, lobster dishes M\$230; 🕒 closed Mon) The fountain and wrought-iron furniture are nice touches, and the food is great: try the chicken in pipian sauce and follow with creamy flan. Live music adds flair on weekends. There's also a popular Sunday breakfast buffet.

**La Fuente de Loreto** (Salvatierra 88; mains M\$55-140; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Sat) Great *antojitos* and Mexican dishes as well as a variety of Western options. Chicken *chilaquiles* (corn tortillas and spicy chili paste) are fantastic.

## Shopping

The pedestrian mall between Madero and Independencia has many shops selling jewelry and souvenirs.

**El Alacrán** (☎ /fax 135-00-29; Salvatierra 47; ☎ 9:30am-1pm & 2:30-7pm Mon-Sat) is the place to try for varied handicrafts, while **Silver Desert** (☎ 135-06-84; Salvatierra 36; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-8:30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) has Taxco sterling-silver jewelry of good quality.

## Getting There & Away

**Aeropuerto Internacional de Loreto** (☎ 135-04-54) is now served by several international airlines. **Aero California** (☎ 135-05-00) has daily nonstop flights to La Paz, San José del Cabo and Los Angeles. **AeroCalafia** (☎ 135-09-99), also with an office at the airport, flies daily to and from La Paz and Los Angeles.

Loreto's **bus station** (☎ 135-07-67; ☎ 24hr) is near the convergence of Salvatierra, Paseo de Ugarte and Paseo Tamaral. There are services to the following destinations (note there are only two daily to Santa Rosalía).

Destination	Fare	Duration
Guerrero Negro	M\$392	6hr
La Paz	M\$337	5hr
Mexicali	M\$1229	20hr
San José del Cabo	M\$540	8hr
Santa Rosalía	M\$188	3hr
Tijuana	M\$1063	17hr

The car-rental agency **Budget** (☎ 135-10-90; Av Hidalgo) has economy models starting at about M\$550 per day, including appropriate insurance.

## Getting Around

Taxis from the airport, 4km south of Loreto, cost M\$160 if you step outside the door, or M\$100 if you walk to the edge of the airport grounds. Groups are M\$70 per person.

## AROUND LORETO

Whale-watching tours are the biggest tourist draw between Loreto and La Paz, but the wonderful **Misión San Francisco Javier de Viggé-Biaundó** (and the drive to get there!) is well worth a

daytime detour. The windy road passes minor cliff paintings and some beautiful arroyos before arriving at the mission. Be sure to wander in back to see the 300-year-old olive tree with ropelike bark that looks like something out of a Tolkien fantasy. The mission itself is almost unchanged from its look of three centuries ago. Head south on Hwy 1 and look for the sign shortly after you leave Loreto, leading you to the right, up into the mountains. It's about a one-hour drive, usually accessible to any car, though 4WDs are sometimes needed.

## Puerto López Mateos

☎ 613 / pop 2171

Shielded by the offshore barrier of Isla Magdalena, Puerto López Mateos is one of Baja's best whale-watching sites. During the season, the narrow waterway that passes by town becomes a veritable *ballena* cruising strip. Curva del Diablo (The Devil's Bend), 27km south of town, is reported to be the best viewing spot. Three-hour *panga* (skiff) excursions from Puerto López Mateos (M\$650 per hour for up to six people, from 8am to 5pm in season) are easy to arrange.

Free camping (bring water), with pit toilets only, is possible at tidy Playa Boca de la Soledad, which is near Playa El Faro, 1.6km east of town (turn left at the water tower). The only other accommodations in Puerto López Mateos are at the small but serviceable **El Camarón Feliz** (☎ 131-50-32; rM\$300). It also has a nice restaurant, replete with a 'Big Mouth Billy Bass' singing rubber fish on the wall. **Baja Mar** (☎ 131-51-96; mains M\$35-120) offers family-style Mexican dishes.

Puerto López Mateos is 34km west of Ciudad Insurgentes. The bus service to Ciudad Constitución leaves inconveniently at 6:30am and 2:30pm.

## Ciudad Constitución

☎ 613 / pop 37,221

Primarily a farming and industrial city, Ciudad Constitución offers little for tourists other than hotels for whale-watching day trips. Transportation to the port cities of López Mateos and San Carlos is infrequent – it's best to have your own set of wheels. Loreto (p299) or La Paz (p302) have the closest rental agencies.

Ciudad Constitución's lodgings are limited; none of them are fancy and prices rise at the peak of the season.

**Hotel Conchita** (☎ 132-02-66; Olachea 180 at Hidalgo; r M\$270; 🍷) offers basic rooms with yellow bedspreads, TV and privacy glass that blocks any possible view. Watch your step on that uneven staircase.

Rooms at the **Hotel Maribel** (☎ 132-01-55; Guadalupe Victoria 156; s/M\$250-270, d/M\$320-330; 🍷) are spartan, but small balconies brighten them a bit, and there's a convenient restaurant downstairs. More expensive rooms have phones.

Spotless and peach pink all over, **Posadas del Ryal** (☎ 132-48-00; Victoria s/n; r M\$360; 🍷), just off Olachea, has dark rooms with cable TV and a cheery fountain in the courtyard.

At the **bus terminal** (☎ 132-03-76; cnr Zapata & Pino Suárez) you have two daily departures for Puerto López Mateos (M\$64, 12:30pm and 7:30pm) and Puerto San Carlos (M\$52, 11am and 6pm). Other destinations include La Paz (M\$153, frequent) and Tijuana (M\$1203, five daily from 10am to 11pm).

Taxis, just outside the bus station, charge M\$800 for a round-trip ride to Puerto López Mateos and M\$600 for a round trip to Puerto San Carlos.

## Puerto San Carlos

☎ 613 / pop 4716

On Bahía Magdalena, 56km west of Ciudad Constitución, Puerto San Carlos is a deep-water port and fishing town. The *ballenas* arrive in January to calve in the warm lagoon and the town turns its attention to both whales and travelers. From January through March, *pangüeros* take up to six passengers for whale-watching excursions (M\$650 per hour for one to six people).

With several hotels and restaurants to choose from, San Carlos is a good choice for whale-watching adventures. Accommodations can be tougher to find during the high season, but free camping is possible north of town on the public beach (no toilets). The **Motel Las Brisas** (Puerto Madero; s/d M\$150/180; 🍷) has dark, basic rooms that are inexpensive.

The green-trimmed **Hotel Brennan** (☎ 136-02-88; www.hotelbrennan.com.mx; Puerto La Paz; s/d M\$550/650) has smallish but intimate rooms and plentiful patio space. With similar amenities, the **Hotel Alcatraz** (☎ 136-00-17; Puerto Acapulco; s/d M\$450/600; 🍷 🍷) offers 25 rooms with satellite TV, parking and laundry service.

At the Hotel Alcatraz, **Restaurant Bar El Patio** (☎ 136-00-17; buffet M\$120) is the town's best eatery, with – you guessed it – a buffet. Not

to be outdone, **Mariscos Los Arcos** (☎ 136-03-47; Puerto La Paz 170; tacos M\$30, dinner mains M\$45-280) has tremendous shrimp tacos and seafood soup, a full breakfast menu and a small bar.

From a small **house** (☎ 136-04-53) on Calle Puerto Morelos, Autotransportes Águilar runs buses at 7:30am and 1:45pm daily to Ciudad Constitución (M\$52). This is the only public transportation from Puerto San Carlos.

A network of dirt roads also connects Puerto San Carlos with Puerto López Mateos. Drive through the dust and marvel at the majestic monotony of this parched desert – cholla and old-man cactus predominate. To reach **La Florida**, at the marshy coast, you will need a 4WD or risk sinking in the soft, blowing sand. Bring extra water and check the spare tire, just in case.

## LA PAZ

☎ 612 / pop 189,176

Cosmopolitan La Paz is a mix of laid-back, old-world beauty and chi-chi upscale trend. It's surprisingly international – you're as likely to hear French, Portuguese or Italian here as English or Spanish. Its quirky history includes American occupation and even being temporarily declared its own republic. Hernán Cortés established Baja's first European outpost near La Paz, but permanent settlement waited until 1811. Its rich pearl industry disappeared during the revolution of 1910–20.

The beachside *malecón*, unique restaurants and funky stores make it a great place to meander, and you can shop uninterrupted by touts' invitations. The city is a great hub for day trips to Cabo Pulmo (p307) or even Todos Santos (p315).

The port of Pichilingue receives ferries from the mainland ports of Topolobampo and Mazatlán, and the airport is served by several US carriers.

## Orientation

La Paz' grid makes basic orientation easy, but the center's crooked streets and alleys change names almost every block. The city's heart is Jardín Velasco (Plaza Constitución), three blocks southeast of the tourist pier.

## Information

### BOOKSTORES

#### Museo Regional de Antropología e Historia

(☎ 122-01-62; cnr Calle 5 de Mayo & Altamirano;

🕒 9am–6pm) Museum store with good selection of Spanish-language books on Baja California and mainland Mexico.

**EMERGENCY**

**Tourist Police** (☎ 122-59-39, 078; 🕒 8am-10pm)  
Small booth on Obregón.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

**Cafe El Callejón** (☎ 125-40-06; Callejón La Paz 51; per hr M\$15) Also a restaurant, the Callejón has several computers. It has live music and is open late.

**Hotel Perla** (Paseo Obregón 1570) Two machines in the lobby that members of the public are welcome to use.

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

**Viva La Paz** (www.vivalapaz.com) La Paz' official tourism site.

**LAUNDRY**

**La Paz Lava** (☎ 122-31-12; cnr Ocampo & Mutualismo)  
Self-service machines and delivery service to hotels or homes.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Hospital Salvatierra** (☎ 122-14-96; Bravo; 🕒 24hr)  
English-speaking staff.

**MONEY**

Most banks (most with ATMs) and *casas de cambio* are on or around Calle 16 de Septiembre.

**POST**

**Main post office** (cnr Constitución & Revolución; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**State tourist information booth** (☎ 124-01-03; Obregón; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Sat) Brochures and pamphlets are available in English. Some of the staff speak English too.

**Sights**

The **Museo Regional de Antropología e Historia** (☎ 122-01-62; cnr Calle 5 de Mayo & Altamirano; admission free; 🕒 9am-6pm) is a large, well-organized museum chronicling the peninsula's history from prehistory to the revolution of 1910 and its aftermath.

Across from the Jardín Velasco, La Paz' former Casa de Gobierno is now the **Biblioteca de la Historia de las Californias** (cnr Madero & Av Independencia; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri), a history library.

A sprawling concrete edifice, the **Teatro de la Ciudad** is the most conspicuous element of the **Unidad Cultural Profesor Jesús Castro Agúndez** (☎ 125-02-07; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri), a cultural center that takes up most of the area

bounded by Altamirano, Navarro, Héroes de la Independencia and Legaspi. At the periphery of the grounds is the small **Museo Comunitario de la Ballena** (Community Whale Museum; cnr Navarro & Altamirano; admission free; 🕒 9am-1pm Tue-Sat). A few blocks west, the **Santuario de la Virgen de Guadalupe** (☎ 122-15-18; cnr Calle 5 de Febrero & Aquiles Serdán) is La Paz' biggest religious monument. Its 12m-tall altar is impressive.

**Activities**

La Paz makes a great hub for almost any outdoor activity. The nearby island of **Espíritu Santo** is a treasure of shallow azure inlets and sorbet-pink cliffs, and there's even a sea-lion colony. Hiking in the desert, swimming, diving and snorkeling with whale sharks are all possible. Renting a *panga* for trips to look at whale sharks will cost about M\$600 for two hours. Bargain at the beach along the *malecón*. To ensure success you will need to pay for a Cessna spotting plane.

For tours and rentals, try the following:  
**Baja Paradise** (☎ 128-60-97; www.bajaparadiseoutdoors.com; Madero 23) Offers guided camping tours on Espíritu Santo, plus all other activities. Hostel-type accommodations are possible and the owner is a professor in the local university's ecological tourism program who takes care to make the trips as 'green' and low-impact as possible.  
**Carey.com** (☎ 128-40-48; www.carey.com.mx; cnr Topete & Legaspi 3040) A family-run establishment that offers diving and snorkeling day trips to Espíritu Santo, along with other trips and tours.

**Mar y Aventuras** (☎ 122-70-39; www.kayakbaja.com; cnr Calle 5 de Febrero & Topete) Book a kayak expedition or outfit a self-guided trip.

**Courses****Centro de Idiomas, Cultura y Comunicación**

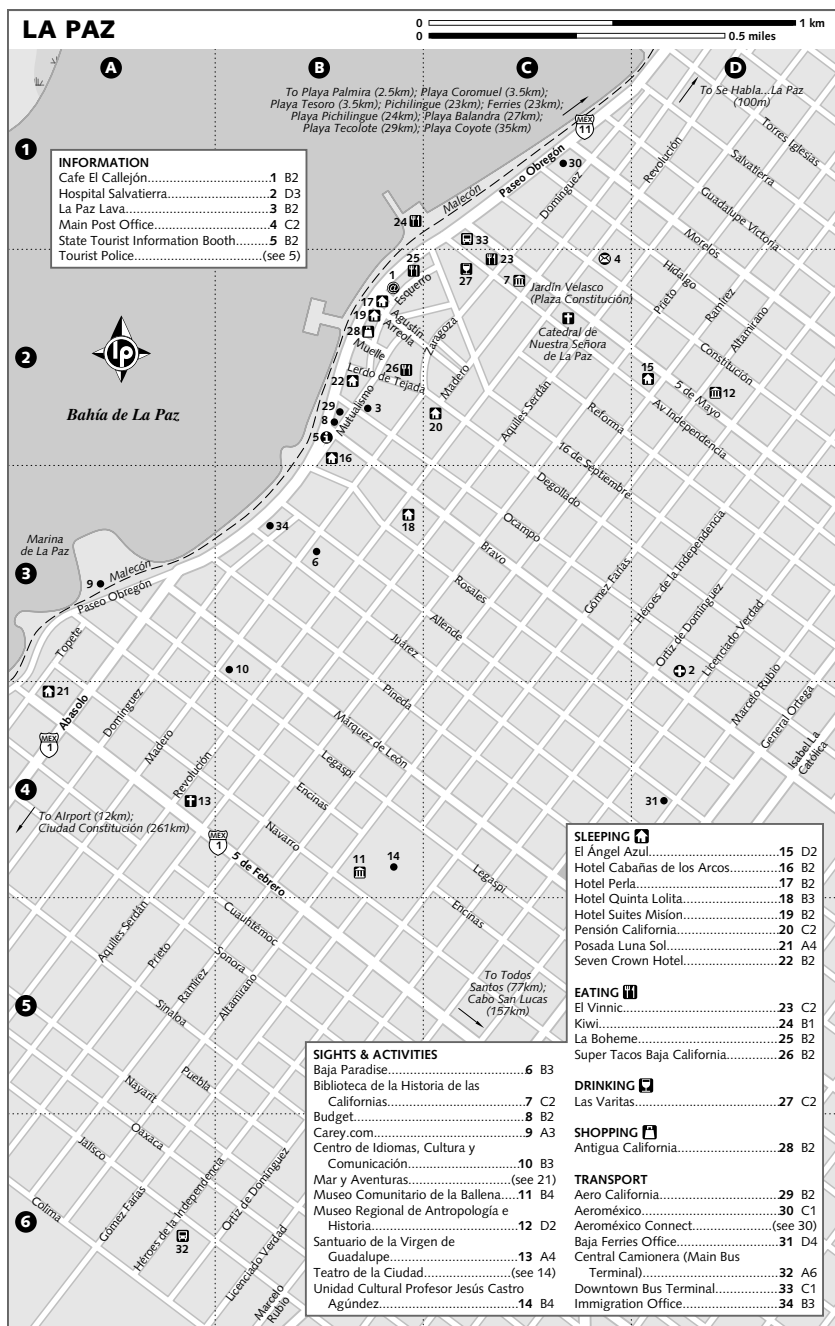
(☎ 125-75-54; www.cicclapaz.com; Madero 2460) Offers intensive Spanish classes and 'Xmas on the beach' classes, and will help coordinate homestay lodging.

**Se Habla... La Paz** (☎ 122-7763; www.sehablalapaz.com; Madero 540) Courses cost M\$2750 per week plus M\$700 registration. All levels of Spanish classes including a medical and legal specialty.

**Festivals & Events**

Festivals and other seasonal events often take place at the Plaza Constitución, between Revolución and Madero at Calle 5 de Mayo.

La Paz' pre-Lent **Carnaval** is among the country's best. In early May, *paseños* (people from La Paz) celebrate the **Fundación de la Ciudad** (Hernán Cortés' 1535 landing).





## Sleeping

Accommodations in La Paz run the gamut from budget digs to big swanky hotels. Midrange accommodations here are varied and of good quality.

### BUDGET

**Pensión California** (☎ 122-28-96; pensioncalifornia@prodigy.net.mx; Degollado 209; s/d M\$170/200) Primary blue and bright yellow, this quirky pension is popular and often full. Cement furniture, icy showers and padlocks give it a meat-locker feel, but the youth hostel-like ambience is fun and the plant-filled courtyard and plastic furniture lend themselves to good conversations.

**Hotel Quinta Lolita** (☎ 125-30-31; Revolución 1501; d M\$300; ☺) Simple, small, clean – a nice alternative if Pensión California is full. Bring a peso or two and join a cutthroat game of Dominos on the front steps.

### MIDRANGE

**Posada Luna Sol** (☎ 120-70-39; cnr Calle 5 de Febrero & Topete; r M\$650; P ☺) Excellent hotel run by the folks at Mar y Aventuras (p303), with well-decorated rooms and an excellent rooftop terrace with bay views.

**Hotel Suites Mision** (☎ 128-77-67; Obregón 220; r M\$750-900) Funky multi-level suites done in 1970s pastels right on the *malecón*. All have kitchenettes.

**Hotel Perla** (☎ 122-07-77; www.hotelperlabajaja.com; Obregón 1570; r incl breakfast M\$926; P ☒ ☺) Supposedly La Paz' first hotel, this standby offers clean rooms and a popular restaurant and nightclub. Some rooms have nice balconies, so ask. Includes late coffee for night owls.

**Hotel Cabañas de los Arcos** (☎ 122-27-44; fax 125-43-13; Obregón 487; d/cabaña M\$967/1209; P ☺) Rooms set around a lush garden have fireplaces, thatched roofs, tiled floors, TV, air-con and minibars. If you feel like splurging, this is not a bad way to go.

### TOP END

**Seven Crown Hotel** (☎ 128-77-88; www.sevencrownhotels.com; Obregón 1710; r/ste M\$1040/1465; P ☺ ☒) Some of the standard rooms here feel like suites – the place is done in sage fabric and faux-marble, and many rooms have balconies. When you're done strolling the *malecón* you can soak away your troubles in the 5th-floor Jacuzzi. Mmm.

**El Ángel Azul** (☎ 125-51-30; cnr Av Independencia & Prieto; d incl breakfast M\$1100-1870; ☺) Possibly

the loveliest of La Paz' lodging options, El Ángel Azul offers elegantly appointed rooms and beautifully landscaped grounds in a historic building.

## Eating

La Paz' restaurant scene has become increasingly sophisticated over the past 10 years and now offers much more than the typical *antojitos* and seafood.

**Super Tacos Baja California** (Hermanos Gonsales; Lerdo de Tejada; tacos M\$15-20) The delicious fish, shrimp and manta ray tacos at this popular stand, between Constitución and Zaragoza, are served with freshly made salsas. As with potato chips, it's hard to eat just one. Also has a stand conveniently located outside the Pensión California.

**El Vinnic** (☎ 122-88-85; cnr Calle 5 de Mayo & Dominguez; set meals M\$40) Offers casual Yucatecan fare that include soup, main and dessert. The *agua de melón* (cantaloupe water) is also fantastic.

**Kiwi** (☎ 123-32-82; dinner mains M\$69-148; ☺ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-3am Sat & Sun) The only restaurant on the ocean side of the *malecón*, between Calle 5 de Mayo and Constitución, Kiwi offers great views you can enjoy while eating decent Mexican and American fare.

**La Boheme** (☎ 125-60-80; Esquerro 10; dinner mains M\$90-340; ☺ 11am-11:30pm) One of the nicest restaurants in La Paz, reasonably priced La Boheme offers friendly service and excellent meals, set in a candlelit courtyard in a historic building. The cream of asparagus soup, simple though it sounds, is exquisite. Whiskey-flavored shrimps are mouth-watering.

## Drinking & Entertainment

The following watering holes are within stumbling distance of the *malecón*, where many travelers have been known to practice their drunken-sailor routine. La Boheme (above) is a good place for unwinding with a glass of red or a hand-crushed mojito.

**Las Varitas** (☎ 125-20-25; Av Independencia 111; cover M\$50) Bring your earplugs and your dancing shoes to this popular club, where live music often plays to a packed house.

## Shopping

Local stores that cater to tourists have plenty of junk and a smattering of good stuff. **Antigua California** (☎ 125-52-30; Obregón 220) features a wide selection of crafts from throughout the country.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The airport, **Manuel Márquez de León** (☎ 124-63-36; Transpeninsular Km 9) is about 9km southwest of the city. It has an **immigration office** (☎ 124-63-49; ☹ 7am-11pm).

**Aeroméxico** (☎ 124-63-66; Obregón) has flights every day but Sunday between La Paz and Los Angeles, and daily flights to Tijuana and mainland Mexican cities. Aeroméxico Connect, at the same address and phone number, flies daily to Loreto and Tucson.

**Aero California** (☎ 125-43-53; Obregón 55; ☹ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) operates daily nonstop flights to Los Angeles and Tijuana and to mainland Mexican destinations, including Los Mochis (for the Copper Canyon Railway), Mazatlán and Mexico City. It also has a branch at the airport.

The airport is also served by Delta, Alaska and Alma airlines.

### BOAT

Ferries to Mazatlán and Topolobampo leave from the ferry terminal at Pichilingue, 23km north of La Paz. **Baja Ferries** (☎ 123-66-00; www.bajaferrys.com; ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) has a small office at the port and an imposing new office in town. Mazatlán ferries depart at 3pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday, arriving the following morning; return ferries leave Mazatlán at 3pm Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Passenger fares are M\$835 (M\$435 for children) in *salón* (numbered seats); cabins with four beds cost M\$250 extra, cabins with two beds and a bath are M\$400 extra. Topolobampo services departs at 3pm daily. The return ferry from Topolobampo to La Paz leaves at 11:30pm daily, arriving in Pichilingue at 5am. Passenger fares are M\$750 in *salón*; cabins for up to four people cost M\$760 extra.

Make sure that you arrive at the pier a full two hours before departure in order to ensure passage. Vehicle rates, which are paid in addition to passenger fares, vary with vehicle length (see the table below).

Route	Vehicle	Fare
La Paz-Mazatlán	car 5m or less	M\$2150
La Paz-Mazatlán	motor home	M\$13100
La Paz-Mazatlán	motorcycle	M\$1600
La Paz-Topolobampo	car 5m or less	M\$1040
La Paz-Topolobampo	motor home	M\$6600
La Paz-Topolobampo	motorcycle	M\$760

Before shipping any vehicle to the mainland, officials require a vehicle permit if you plan to travel further south than Sonora. You can obtain a permit at **Banjercito** (www.banjercito.com.mx; ☹ 9am-1:30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun), at the ferry terminal, or from the bank's website and branches in Mexicali and Tijuana.

There's an **immigration office** (☎ 122-04-29; Obregón; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) near the center.

### BUS

**ABC** (☎ 122-78-98) and **Autotransportes Águila** (☎ 122-78-98) both leave from the **downtown bus terminal** (☎ 122-78-98; cnr Malecón & Av Independencia) along the *malecón*. Buses leave for the following destinations hourly between 5am and 9pm:

Destination	Fare	Duration
Cabo San Lucas	M\$144	3hr
Ciudad Constitución	M\$196-246	2hr
Ensenada	M\$1401/1298	18hr
Guerrero Negro	M\$724-786	11hr
Loreto	M\$337-363	5hr
Mulegé	M\$466-501	6hr
San Ignacio	M\$596-642	9hr
San José del Cabo	M\$170	3hr
Tijuana	M\$1399-1510	22hr
Todos Santos	M\$77	2hr

Autotransportes Águila also operates five daily buses to Playa Tecolote (M\$20, 30 minutes) and six to Playa Pichilingue (M\$20, 20 minutes) between 10am and 5pm.

## Getting Around

The government-regulated minivan service **Transporte Terrestre** (☎ 125-11-56) charges M\$150 per person to or from the airport. Private taxis cost approximately M\$250, but they may be shared.

Car-rental rates start around M\$500 per day. **Budget** (☎ 125-47-47; cnr Obregón & Bravo) is one of several agencies. All have locations both at the airport and along the *malecón*.

## AROUND LA PAZ

### Beaches

On Península Pichilingue, the beaches nearest to La Paz are **Playa Palmira** (with the Hotel Palmira and a marina), **Playa Coromuel** and **Playa Caimancito** (both with restaurant-bars, toilets and *palapas*). **Playa Tesoro**, the next beach north, has a restaurant. Some 100m north of the ferry terminal is **Playa Pichilingue**,

## FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND

'I could have gone to Yucatán, where my ancestors are from,' says 21-year-old Mariana Ledesma, a university student majoring in ecotourism. 'Or here to La Paz. Those are the only two places in all of Mexico where universities offer a degree specifically in ecotourism and environmental protection. I was worried when I arrived, because La Paz seemed so different from Mexico City, but now that I've been here I feel like this is my real home. I went hiking in the Desierto de la Laguna with my boyfriend recently. It was just amazing. The stars were so bright I felt like I could touch them. But it was a little scary too – we lost the trail at one point and then realized that there was a mountain lion very close by. So we returned after only two days. But it was one of my best experiences. For my birthday I'm going to camp in Espíritu Santo with my class. I can't wait.'

with camping, restaurants, bar, toilets and shade. **Playa Balandra** is a beautiful enclosed cove with shallow azure water, great for snorkeling. The surrounding hillsides are soon to be developed, alas. **Playa Tecolote** has plenty of car camping spots and launches leave from here for Espíritu Santo (p303). Often called the 'best' beach, but car break-ins are common, so leave valuables at home.

## LA VENTANA

☎ 612 / pop 183

Come to this unspoiled strip of seaside to watch whale sharks, sea lions, whales, sea turtles and a myriad of fish – without the crowds. Diving is best in the summer when the water visibility reaches 25m or 30m (80ft or 100ft). The same winds that made Los Barriles (below) a windsurfing mecca also blow here.

Quiet, *palapa*-style *cabañas* at **Palapas Ventana** (☎ 114-01-98; www.palapasventana.com; cabañas M\$123-174; 📍 ☒ ☒ ☒ ) include hearty, home-style breakfasts that hit the spot. They outfit for diving, snorkeling, windsurfing, kitesurfing, sportfishing, petroglyph hikes and just about anything else available.

**Rafa's Tacos** (☎ 114-01-82; 🕒 9am-9:30pm Nov-Mar) is a casual roadside taco stand that has plastic chairs and serves up great *antojitos*.

## LOS BARRILES

☎ 624 / pop 1056

South of La Paz, the Transpeninsular brushes the gulf at Los Barriles, where brisk winter westerlies, averaging 20 to 25 knots, make this Baja's windsurfing capital. The lack of breaking waves is what makes the entire coastline so spectacular. From April to August the winds die down, making windsurfing impossible.

Get online at the **Office** (☎ 141-01-42; theoffice@prodigy.net.mx; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) for

a wallet-busting M\$45 per hour. **Vela Windsurf** (www.velawindsurf.com) is one of many beachside places that rent gear and offer lessons.

**Hotel Los Barriles** (☎ 141-00-24; www.losbarrileshotel.com; s/d M\$663/800) is a laid-back place offering clean, comfortable rooms. Prices rise during the Christmas/New Year holiday. It also rents out scuba, snorkeling and windsurfing gear. Get your morning latte fix at **Caleb's Cafe** (☎ 141-03-30; Barriles s/n; mains M\$60-120; 🕒 7am-2pm Tue-Sun). Some travelers say Caleb's gooey, buttery sticky buns are the only thing worth stopping for in Barriles.

**Tio's Tienda** (☎ 141-03-30; Calle 20 de Noviembre; 🕒 7:30am-10pm) has a great collection of Baja-related books and souvenirs.

Fairly good dirt roads follow the coast south to San José del Cabo. Beyond Cabo Pulmo and Bahía Los Frailes, they are sandy but passable for most vehicles, but are impassable for RVs and may be difficult for any vehicles after rainstorms. This road offers awesome glimpses of the coast, Shipwreck Point, and the 'green' desertscape. It too is slated for development, so see it now before the condos, villas and time-shares block the view.

## CABO PULMO

☎ 624 / pop 58

If you're looking for snorkeling or diving without the crowds, slip away from the rowdier southern neighbors and come to Cabo Pulmo, a National Marine Park that's home to the only Pacific coral reef in the Sea of Cortez. You don't need a 4WD to enjoy the drive out here along the spectacular East Cape (from the south) coastal road or through the Sierra de la Laguna (to the north). Unfortunately, much of the surrounding land is slated for development pronto, which will lead to sedimentary erosion that will likely kill or permanently

## BAJA'S BEST UNBEATEN ROUTES

You're on your own with these. Routes have numerous turn offs to ranches or dead ends. Plan on getting lost...and loving it. Bring extra water and check that spare tire (and bring GPS!) in case of an emergency and remember that even if you're in a 4WD, this is not the Baja 1000. Treat these roads, and the people and animals living here, with respect. Times are only basic one-way estimates.

**Playa El Tecolote toward La Ventana** (one hour) Jackrabbits, secluded beaches and awesome snorkeling. It ends up just turning into rock-strewn ravines...you can't go all the way.

**Los Frailes to Las Casitas** (two hours) A 4WD-only road offers canyon vistas and desert wash, chances to spot a silver fox and commune with majestic cardón cacti. Los Frailes is just south of Cabo Pulmo. This and the Los Naranjos route cut an east-west route from one side of the East Cape to the other.

**Los Naranjos to Pescadero** (five hours) High clearance 4WD trail with hair-raising turns, river fording (in season) and views of the Pacific from flower-festooned desertscape. Pescadero is just south of Todos Santos

**San José del Cabo to Cabo Pulmo** (three hours) Sandy coastal track that offers awesome views of the Sea of Cortez the whole way. Bring your surfboard...or just a picnic lunch.

**Puerto López Mateos to La Florida** (three hours) 4WD your way through majestic monotony of cholla and acacia all the way to the estuary. Vultures, rodents and cows.

Non-4WDs may want to try Hwy 3 between San Felipe and Ensenada, the Ruta del Vino (p286) toward Tecate or head toward Punta Abrejos past the Laguna de San Ignacio. The 'boulderscape' of Cataviña is well worth stopping for on the Transpeninsular.

alter the reef. Contact **Pulmo Amigos** ([www.pulmoamigos.org](http://www.pulmoamigos.org)) to help protect this fragile area. *Pronto*...there's little time to waste.

Cabo Pulmo refers to both the park and the tiny village where the following establishments are located.

Snorkel right from the beach at **Los Arbolitos**, or follow the shoreline hiking trail to **Las Sirenitas**, where wind and wave erosion has made the rocks look like melting wax sculptures. Eerie and beautiful, they're accessible by boat as well.

Offshore snorkeling, diving and sea-lion colony trips can be booked through **Pepe's Dive Center** (☎ 9am-5pm, tours leave at 10am; 2 tank dives M\$850, snorkeling M\$150), which also offers internet access.

**Nancy's B&B** (☎ in the US 617-524-4440; cabañas with private/shared bathroom M\$50/40; (P)) is simply furnished, quiet and has great mattresses.

**El Caballero**, when its open, has fantastic Mexican meals at very reasonable prices. Hours vary – it's usually open for lunch and sometimes for dinner.

## RESERVA DE LA BIOSFERA SIERRA DE LA LAGUNA

Hardcore backpackers can strap on their hiking boots, fill their water bottles and head into the uninterrupted wilds of the lush and rugged Sierra de la Laguna biosphere reserve, at the

intersection of the Transpeninsular and Hwy 19. This is not a place for inexperienced hikers, or for anyone unfamiliar with the unique challenges presented by desert trails. **Baja Sierra Adventures** (☎ 612-161-45-01; <http://bajasierradventures.com>), in a tiny ranch called El Chorro, offers day and overnight trips, biking and trekking through this unique region.

## SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

☎ 624 / pop 48,518

San José del Cabo is quiet and peaceful, the 'mild' sister of 'wild' Cabo San Lucas. San José offers quiet shopping, an attractive plaza, a beautiful church and excellent dining opportunities.

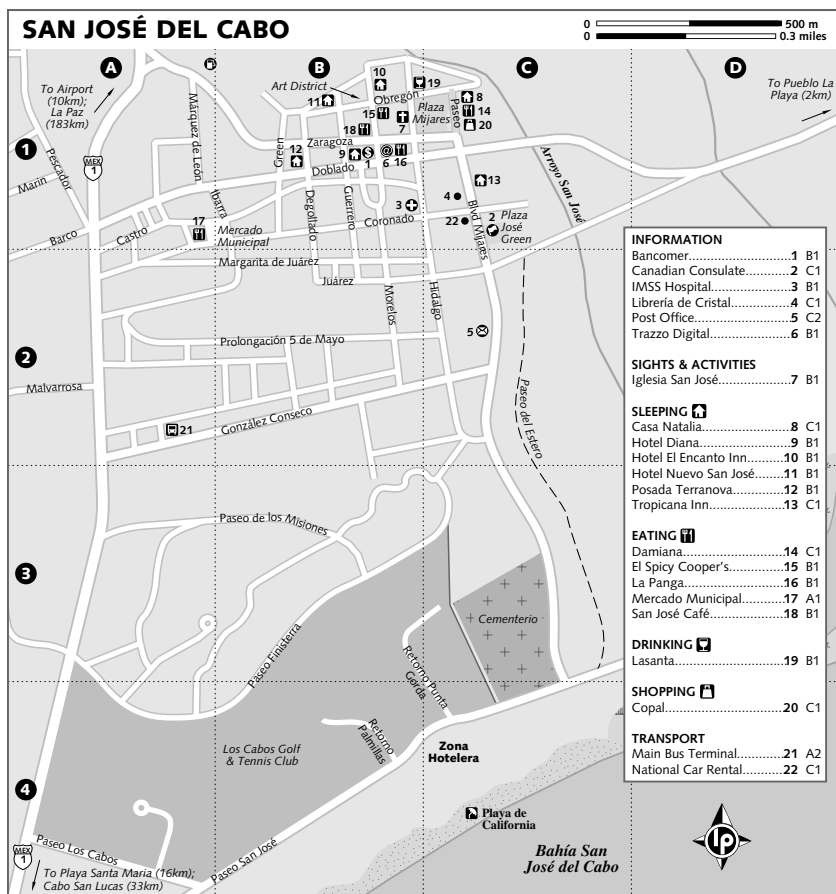
### Orientation

San José del Cabo consists of San José proper, about 1.5km inland, and a Zona Hotelera with large beachfront hotels, condos and eyesores...er, time-shares. Linking the two areas, just south of shady Plaza Mijares, Blvd Mijares is a *gringolandia* of restaurants and souvenir shops.

### Information

Several *casas de cambio* here keep long hours. Banks pay better rates but keep shorter hours.

**Bancomer** (cnr Zaragoza & Morelos) Cashes traveler's checks and has an ATM.



**IMSS Hospital** (☎ non-emergency 142-00-76, emergency 142-01-80; cnr Hidalgo & Coronado)

**Librería de Cristal** (☎ 142-44-33; Blvd Mijares 41) A small bookstore with items in English and Spanish.

**Post office** (Blvd Mijares 1924; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri)

**Secretaría Municipal de Turismo** (☎ 142-29-60 ext 150; Transpeninsular; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Has a stock of brochures and maps on hand.

**Tourist Aid** (☎ 078)

**Trazzo Digital** (☎ 142-03-03; [www.trazzo-digital.com](http://www.trazzo-digital.com); Zaragoza; per hr M\$43; ☎ Mon-Sat) Internet access. Has fast connections and large monitors.

## Sights & Activities

The colonial-style **Iglesia San José**, built on the site of the 1730 Misión San José Del Cabo, faces the spacious Plaza Mijares.

Between raids on Spanish galleons, 18th-century pirates took refuge at the **Arroyo San José**, now a protected wildlife area replenished by a subterranean spring. A riverside **Paseo del Estero** (Marshland Trail) runs parallel to Blvd Mijares all the way to the Zona Hotelera. The best beaches for swimming are along the road to Cabo San Lucas. **Playa Santa María** at Km 13 is one of the nicest beaches in Los Cabos.

The **Fiesta de San José**, on March 19, celebrates the town's patron saint.

## Sleeping

During the peak winter months, it's a good idea to make reservations. Free camping is possible at Pueblo La Playa, east of the center.

**Hotel Nuevo San José** (☎ 142-17-05; cnr Obregón & Guerrero; r M\$220-380; 🍽️) Despite peeling paint and toilets that often lack seats, this joint is often packed. It's as cheap as the Cabos get.

**Hotel Diana** (☎ 142-04-90; Zaragoza 30; d M\$350; 🍽️) Blue swirly tiles, matching bedspreads and windowless rooms are anything but fancy, but they have TV and simple wooden dressers. It's right next to Bancomer.

**Posada Terranova** (☎ 142-05-34; Degollado s/n; d M\$700; 🍽️ 🍷 🍷 🍷) There's art on the walls, it's clean and it has views of the pueblo from some rooms. It also has a good restaurant and kind, English-speaking staff.

**Tropicana Inn** (☎ 142-15-80; www.tropicanaacabo.com; Blvd Mijares 30; d/ste M\$1166/1254; 🍽️ 🍷 🍷) Spacious rooms have satellite TV, fridge and coffee-maker, and the bucolic courtyard has a huge pool and real live parrots. Bring a cracker for Polly. Rates include continental breakfast.

**Hotel El Encanto Inn** (☎ 142-03-88; www.elencantoinn.com; Morelos 133; d/ste M\$1254/1636; 🍽️ 🍷 🍷) Beautiful landscaped gardens, interesting pottery, a fountain and clean, well-decorated rooms. Also rents cars, if you need a set of wheels.

**Casa Natalia** (☎ 146-71-00; www.casanatalia.com; ste from M\$3894; 🍽️ 🍷 🍷 🍷) The posh Natalia opens onto San José's plaza and, in addition to the pool, has shuttles to its beachside club. The walk-in bathrooms are big enough to live in. Prices rise during holidays.

## Eating

**Mercado Municipal** (Ibarra) Between Coronado and Castro, this clean market has numerous stalls offering simple and inexpensive but good, filling meals.

**San José Café** (☎ 142-61-91; cnr Zaragoza & Morelos; breakfast from M\$40; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) A quintessential coffee shop with nice touches – get a bagel and coffee and head to the rooftop terrace for a relaxing meal.

**Damiana** (☎ 142-04-99; www.damiana.com.mx; Plaza Mijares 8; dinner mains M\$190-360) A romantic seafood restaurant in a restored 18th-century house. Abalone in garlic sauce is superb.

**La Panga** (☎ 142-40-41; www.lapanga.com; Zaragoza 20; dinner mains M\$230-465) Dim lighting and a multilevel courtyard make it romantic; however, you pay premium for the ambience, as the food is only so-so.

## Drinking

Head to Cabo San Lucas if you're looking for nightlife. San José del Cabo is almost mousy

in comparison. **Lasanta** (☎ 142-67-67; www.lasanta.com.mx; Obregón 1732) is an upscale bar done in wood, brick and deep red velvet. **El Spicy Cooper's** (☎ 156-87-17) has pool tables and live music Thursday to Friday.

## Shopping

Blvd Mijares is a good place to start. Obregón to Degollado is the self-proclaimed 'Art District' with numerous galleries, studios and stores.

**Copal** (☎ 142-30-70; Plaza Mijares 10), on the east side of Plaza Mijares, has an interesting assortment of crafts, jewelry, rugs and masks.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

All airline offices are at **Los Cabos airport** (☎ 146-50-13), north of San José del Cabo, which serves both San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas.

**Aero California** (☎ 146-52-52) Flies daily to and from Los Angeles and Guadalajara.

**Aeroméxico** (☎ 146-50-97) Flies daily to and from San Diego and to many mainland Mexican destinations, with international connections via Mexico City.

**Alaska Airlines** (☎ 146-51-06) Flies to and from Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco and San Jose, California.

**American** (☎ 146-53-00) Flies daily to Los Angeles and Dallas.

**Continental Airlines** (☎ 146-50-50, in the US 800-900-5000) Flies to and from Houston and, during the high season, Newark.

**Mexicana & Click Mexicana** (☎ 143-53-53) Flies daily to Los Angeles and to mainland destinations such as Mexico City, Guadalajara and Mazatlán.

### BUS

From the main **bus terminal** (☎ 130-73-39; González Conesco), east of the Transpeninsular, buses depart for the following destinations:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Barriles	M\$72	1½hr	frequent
Cabo San Lucas	M\$30	1hr	hourly
La Paz	M\$175	3hr	hourly
La Paz airport	M\$250	3hr	3 daily
Ensenada	M\$1581	22hr	frequent
Tijuana	M\$1574-1690	24hr	frequent

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The usual agencies rent from the airport – rates start at about M\$600 per day, cheaper with an internet reservation. Also try **National Car Rental** (☎ 142-24-24; Blvd Mijares).



## TOP SPOTS FOR FANTASTIC FISH TACOS

Simple, versatile, the humble fish taco is Baja's comfort food. Done right they're magical. These spots are all worth seeking out for a taste of this drool-creating classic:

**Super Tacos Baja California** (La Paz; p305) Loads of salsas and crispy golden batter made this joint a La Paz institution.

**Venado** (Cabo San Lucas; p314) Flaky, moist morsels on corn or flour. Shrimp tacos are just as good.

**Los Arcos** (Playas de Rosarito; p283) Casual family-run place with guacamole, sour cream and *pico de gallo* (fresh chopped salsa).

**Restaurante Doney** (Mulegí; p298) Right by the roadside, tacos here are small, but you can grab a few for the road before catching the next bus. Yum!

**El Caballero** (Cabo Pulmo; p308) These come with a homemade salsa that's picante without being smolderingly hot. Great for snacking after a long, invigorating snorkel.

## Getting Around

Taxi drivers are required by law to display a sanctioned price list. The official, government-run company runs bright yellow taxis and minibuses to the airport for about M\$150. Local buses from the main bus terminal to the airport junction cost less than M\$25, but taking one means a half-hour walk to the air terminal. The toll road costs M\$27.

## LOS CABOS CORRIDOR

Nowhere in Baja is the desert disappearing faster than in the Los Cabos 'Corridor,' the strip of coast between San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas – in its place, cookie-cutter resorts, aquifer-depleting golf courses and all-inclusive hotels line the once-spectacular coastline.

Experienced surfers claim that summer reef and point breaks at **Costa Azul** (aka Zippers) match Hawaii's best. The reefs off **Playa Chileno** are excellent for diving. **Playa Santa Maria**, at Km 13, is one of the nicest for swimming.

## CABO SAN LUCAS

☎ 624 / pop 56,811

Come to Cabo expecting to toss your inhibitions to the wind – everyone else is. Certain clubs round up conga lines so that waiters can pour tequila down dancers' throats, but that notwithstanding, Cabo San Lucas has a curious charm. The beaches are protected by beautiful Land's End, and the activities are endless: jet-skis, banana boats, parasailing, snorkeling, kite sailing, diving and horseback riding can all be done just by walking down to the beach. If you rent a car and get outside the city limits you'll be surrounded by majestic cardón cacti, caracara birds and mystical arroyos that will impress you just as much as that crazy club ('I did *what* last night?!') you partied at the night before.

## Orientation

Northwest of Cárdenas, tourist Cabo has a fairly regular grid; southeast of Cárdenas, Blvd Marina curves along the Harbor Cabo San Lucas toward Land's End (Finisterra), the tip of the peninsula where the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez meet.

## Information

It's an indication of who calls the shots here that Cabo has no government-sanctioned tourist offices. The 'info' booths you'll see are owned by time-shares, condos and hotels. The staff are friendly and can offer maps and info, but their only pay comes from commissions off selling time-share visits: expect an aggressive, sometimes desperate, pitch for you to visit model homes. Be warned – the promised freebies are rarely worth wasting precious vacation time.

Internet cafés with DSL or broadband now abound and many hotels, such as the Siesta Suites, have lobby computers the public can use. Rates are, not surprisingly, cheaper as you go further away from the water. Banks will cash traveler's checks and have ATMs.

**All About Cabo** ([www.allaboutcabo.com](http://www.allaboutcabo.com)) A useful site for visitors.

**American Express** (☎ 143-57-88; Plaza Bonita;

☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

**AmeriMed American Hospital** (☎ 143-96-70; Blvd Cárdenas) Near Paseo de la Marina.

**Bancomer** (cnr Blvd Cárdenas & Paseo San José)

**InternetPuntoCom** (☎ 144-41-90; cnr Leona Vicario & Calle 20 de Noviembre; per hr M\$25)

**Librerías de Cristal** (☎ 143-31-73; Plaza de la Danza, Blvd Marina) Books in English and Spanish.

**Post office** (Blvd Cárdenas; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Near Calle 20 de Noviembre.

**Tourist Assistance** (☎ 078)

## Sights

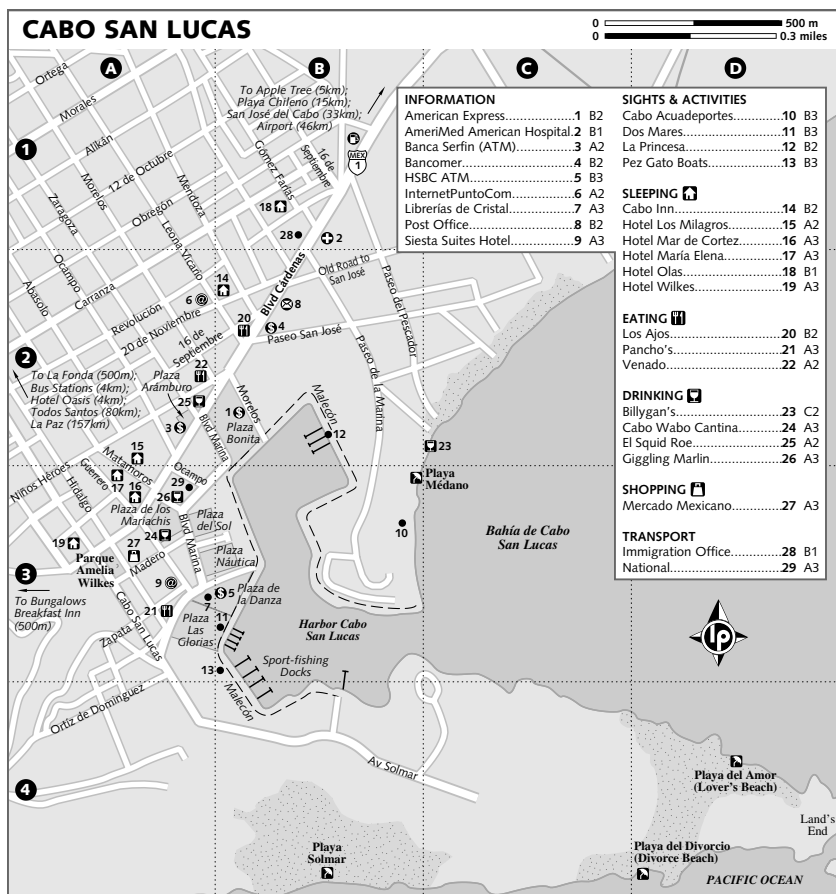
**Land's End** is by far the most impressive attraction Cabo has to offer. Get on a *panga* (M\$10) and head to **El Arco** (the Arch), a jagged natural feature which partially fills with the tide. Pelicans, sea lions, sea, sky – this is what brought people to Cabo in the first place and it's still magical, despite the mammoth cruise ships towering behind it.

For sunbathing and calm waters **Playa Médano**, in front of what once was the Hacienda Beach Resort on the Bahía de Cabo San Lucas, is ideal. **Playa Solmar**, on the Pacific, is pretty but has a reputation for dangerous breakers and rip tides. Nearly unspoiled **Playa del Amor** (Lover's Beach) shouldn't be missed; near Land's End, it is accessible by

boat. Appropriately, **Playa del Divorcio** (Divorce Beach) is nearby, across the point on the Pacific side.

## Activities

The best **diving** areas are Roca Pelicano, the sea-lion colony off Land's End, and the reef off Playa Chileno, at Bahía Chileno east of town. Two-tank dives cost around M\$700 and full-certification courses M\$3750 to M\$4500. **Cabo Acuadeportes** (☎ 143-01-17), at the beach, is the largest water-sports outfitter, but there are numerous alternatives. Surprisingly good **snorkeling** can be done right from Playa del Amor, swimming left, toward the marina. A mask, snorkel and fins should run about M\$150 per day. *Panga* rides cost about M\$120 round trip



**CABO IN...****Two Days**

Take a *panga* to **Playa del Amor** (opposite) and see **El Arco** (opposite) at the same time. Laze for a while or snorkel, then head back for grub or a margarita. Get tipsy on a gorgeous sunset **tour** (below) and then finish the job at **El Squid Roe** (p315). Then choose between quiet shopping at **San José del Cabo** (p308) or something active: surfing at **Los Cerritos** (p316) or diving at **Cabo Pulmo** (p307).

**Four Days**

Four days gives you all of the above. Or you could rent yourself some wheels and do a loop of the Southern Cape. Start heading east, through **San José del Cabo** (p308) and take in the awesome scenery of the East Cape, one of Baja's best unbeaten paths (see boxed text, p308). Stay in **Cabo Pulmo** (p307) for snorkeling and diving, then cruise north for Day 2 to **La Paz** (p302). Hikers will want to see the **Sierra de la Laguna** (p308). Spend Day 3 in the chi-chi galleries and great restaurants of **Todos Santos** (p315) or **surfing** (p315). Head back to Cabo San Lucas on Day 4 and end with a fancy meal at **La Fonda** (p314) or a relaxing sunset **tour** (below).

if you bargain directly with a captain. Tipping M\$10 to M\$30 is appropriate.

**Courses**

**Apple Tree** (☎ 174-28-47; [www.theappletree.com.mx](http://www.theappletree.com.mx)) offers immersion Spanish classes at a variety of levels.

**Tours**

**Dos Mares** (☎ 143-89-71; Plaza Las Glorias) Runs three-hour, glass-bottomed boat tours (M\$100) to Playa del Amor, near Land's End. Departures take place every hour from 9am to 5pm. It also offers snorkeling tours to Santa María (M\$350).

**La Princesa** (☎ 143-76-76; [info@cabosports.com](mailto:info@cabosports.com); dock M-0; tours M\$390) Found behind Hotel Costa Real, this outfit offers sunset booze trips along with other daytime packages.

**Pez Gato I & Pez Gato II** (☎ 143-37-97; [www.pezgatocabo.com](http://www.pezgatocabo.com)) Offers two-hour sunset sailings on catamarans (adult M\$35) and segregates its clientele into 'booze cruises' and 'romantic cruises.' Children are half price and, despite the labels, either should be okay for kids.

**Festivals & Events**

Cabo San Lucas is a popular staging ground for fishing tournaments in October and November. The main events are the **Gold Cup**, **Bisbee's Black & Blue Marlin Jackpot** and the **Cabo Tuna Jackpot**.

**Sammy Hagar's birthday party**, in early October, is a major Cabo event. Invitations (free) are required – try concierges at the bigger hotels or look out for giveaways. Bring your liver and prepare to punish it.

**Día de San Lucas** (October 18) is a local celebration honoring the town's patron saint, with fireworks, food stalls, dancing and partying.

**Sleeping**

Cabo has plenty of accommodations in all price categories – if you start at pricey and end with 'It costs WHAT per night?!' If you want something on a true backpacker budget you'll need to sleep in an unlocked car.

**MIDRANGE**

**Hotel Oasis** (☎ 143-20-98; Carretera a Todos Santos; s/d M\$380/480; ☎ ♿ ♿) Only a stone's throw from the bus station, the shockingly peach Oasis offers clean singles or doubles at rates that are hard to ignore. You can even swim with a killer whale in the oversize pool.

**Hotel María Elena** (☎ 143-32-89; Matamoros s/n btwn Niños Heroes & Cardenas; s/d M\$480/650) Accessed via a narrow staircase above a laundromat, the María Elena has spick-and-span rooms with art on the walls and kitchenettes.

**Hotel Olas** (☎ 143-17-80; cnr Revolución & Gómez Farias; r M\$550; ☎ ♿ ♿) The Olas has clean, simple rooms. The grandfatherly owner has a wealth of information about Baja and speaks some English. Giant clam shells and other maritime items add to the courtyard décor.

**Hotel Wilkes** (☎ 105-07-11; cnr Cabo San Lucas & Calle 5 de Mayo; s/d M\$550/700) The cute and cozy Wilkes has white wrought-iron railings and rooms that are so spacious they feel empty. Verdant potted plants and proximity to Cabo's excesses are additional pluses.

## SURF'S UP

Baja is a prime surfer's paradise with swells coming in off the Pacific that, even on bad days, are challenging and fun. Boards can be rented from surf shops. If you're looking for waves, check out the following:

**San Miguel** (p284) Rocky point break which offers awesome rides when the waves are big. Todos Santos island is another option for the serious.

**Los Cerritos** (p316) Beautiful sand, nice waves, mellow vibe – this is a great beginner beach with powerful Pacific swell... and eagle rays below.

**San Pedrito** (p316) Locals say 'She's a fin stealer' – this is a mid- to expert-level break with barrels that rival Hawaii's. Sea-urchin spines, coral and rocks await those who time things wrong.

**Costa Azul** (p311) Needs southerly swell, but this intermediate break is a whole lot of fun and it's close to either of the Cabos.

For more info on surfing, check out the no-nonsense, brown-and-black covered *Surfer's Guide to Baja* by Mike Parise.

**Hotel Mar de Cortez** (☎ 143-00-32; www.mardecortez.com; cnr Blvd Cárdenas & Guerrero; r M\$610-670, ste M\$790; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This quiet, colonial-style hotel has an outdoor restaurant-bar and a large family-friendly pool area. Rooms are ample, clean and quiet.

**Cabo Inn** (☎ 143-08-19; cnr Calle 20 de Noviembre & Leona Vicario; r M\$649-1320; 🍷) This former brothel retains an aura of sensual languor and has a lush, tropical feel. They've recently added a new, modern Jacuzzi.

**Hotel Los Milagros** (☎ 143-45-66; www.losmilagros.com.mx; Matamoros 116; d M\$880-1400; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The tranquil courtyard and 11 unique rooms provide a perfect escape from Cabo's excesses. A desert garden (complete with resident iguanas), a beautiful deep blue pool, friendly and courteous service and no TVs make this stay unforgettable. The place can also be rented in its entirety for groups, such as weddings or birthday parties.

## TOP END

**our pick Bungalows Breakfast Inn** (☎ 143-50-35; www.cabobungalows.com; cnr Libertad & Herrera; bungalows incl breakfast from US\$153, ste from US\$186; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Extremely attentive service, delicious breakfasts, tastefully furnished rooms, fragrant palm-thatched *palapas*, hammocks and a noncaustic, salt-cleansed swimming pool set this B&B apart. Fresh-fruit smoothies, fruit juices, excellent coffee and warm, welcoming bilingual staff make the Bungalows feel like home. Beautiful handmade soaps are one of the many tiny details that makes this the place to splurge. Note that US dollars are used here.

## Eating

Cabo's culinary scene features a great variety of eateries, from humble taco stands to gourmet restaurants.

**Venado** (☎ 147-69-21; Niños Heroes btwn Zaragoza & Morelos; dinner mains M\$20-80; 🍷; noon-6am) Open all night and packed from 3am until dawn, Venado has delicious fish tacos, fresh salsas and other *antojitos*. If it's slow, the friendly waitresses might drop a coin in the jukebox and invite you to dance.

**Los Ajos** (☎ 143-77-06; Blvd Cárdenas btwn Vicario & Mendoza; breakfasts M\$30-140, buffet M\$90) This casual, clean, family-run place has great breakfasts and an inexpensive lunch and dinner buffet. Look for the large ceramic chef outside the door.

**La Fonda** (☎ 143-69-26; lafonda@solmar.com.mx; cnr Hidalgo & 12 de Octubre; M\$140-230) Superb Mexican cuisine that's worlds away from the typical *antojitos* – try the cream of poblano soup with pumpkin flowers or the *huitlacoche* (corn mushroom) stuffed chicken. The 'Don Julio' margarita vies for the best in Baja.

**Pancho's** (☎ 143-28-91; www.panchos.com; cnr Hidalgo & Zapata; dinner mains M\$190-250, with tequila tasting M\$700) Offers 'all you want to know about tequila' in a festive atmosphere. Aromas from the open grill mix with the mariachi band's tunes. The tequila tasting is like an intensive tequila class, but offers inebriation in place of graduation.

## Drinking

Cabo is a proud party town, and alcoholic revelry is encouraged all day long. The following places are all open well past midnight.

**Gigging Marlin** (☎ 143-11-82; cnr Matamoros & Blvd Marina) Wildly popular bar in the center.

**El Squid Roe** (☎ 143-12-69; cnr Blvd Cárdenas & Zaragoza) Crazy. Just crazy.

**Cabo Wabo Cantina** (☎ 143-11-88; cnr Guerrero & Madero) Much like a college frat party, only everyone's older. And drunker.

**Billygan's** (☎ 143-04-02; Playa Médano) Great for people-watchers and a sunset margarita.

## Shopping

**Mercado Mexicano** (cnr Madero & Hidalgo) Cabo's most comprehensive shopping area is this sprawling market that contains dozens of stalls with crafts from all around the country.

## Getting There & Away

There's an **immigration office** (☎ 143-01-35; cnr Cárdenas & Gómez Farias; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) near the center.

## AIR

The closest airport is Los Cabos (p310), north of San José del Cabo. Airport shuttle vans (M\$150) can drop you off at your hotel. A taxi to or from the airport costs M\$600.

## BUS & CAR

Bus service to and from Cabo is provided by **Águila** (☎ 143-78-80; Hwy 19), located at the Todos Santos crossroad, north of downtown.

Destination	Fare	Duration
La Paz	M\$144	2½-4hr
Loreto	M\$481	8hr
San José del Cabo	M\$30	1hr
Tijuana	M\$1554	24hr
Todos Santos	M\$67	1hr

From a terminal near Águila station, **Autotransportes de La Paz** (cnr Calle 5 de Febrero & Hidalgo) has eight daily La Paz buses (M\$100, 2½ hours).

Numerous car-rental agencies have booths along Blvd Marina and elsewhere in town. **National** (☎ 143-14-14; cnr Blvd Marina & Matamoros) offers rentals starting at M\$60 per day.

## Getting Around

The **airport shuttle bus** (☎ 146-53-93; per person M\$150) leaves every two hours (10am to 4pm) from Plaza Las Glorias. Cab fares within town range from M\$50 to M\$70.

## TODOS SANTOS

☎ 612 / pop 4078

This quiet dusty town, well, ain't what she used to be. Todos Santos has witnessed an invasion

from the north as well-heeled New Mexico artists, organic farmers and even some Hollywood types have snapped up property and put down roots. Locals and tourists alike all say, 'I'm lucky I got to see this place two years ago.' Change is happening that fast, and environmental protection laws mean little when so much money can change hands. The sea turtle and surfing beach Los Cerritos has been slated for development: hotels, houses, condos and bars are already going up and it's unlikely anyone will turn off the lights each spring during egg-laying season.

Todos Santos' newfound prosperity does not reflect its history. Founded in 1723, but nearly destroyed by the Pericú rebellion in 1734, Misión Santa Rosa de Todos los Santos limped along until its abandonment in 1840. In the late 19th century Todos Santos became a prosperous sugar town with several brick *trapiches* (mills), but depleted aquifers have nearly eliminated this thirsty industry.

## Orientation & Information

Todos Santos has a regular grid, but residents rely more on landmarks than street names for directions. The plaza is surrounded by Márquez de León, Legaspi, Av Hidalgo and Centenario.

Todos Santos lacks an official tourist office, but **El Tecolote** (☎ 145-02-95; cnr Juárez & Av Hidalgo), an English-language bookstore, has magazines with town maps and a sketch map of nearby beach areas. Save pesos by going to **Multiservicios Miro** (☎ 145-07-02; cnr Rangel & Márquez de León; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat; per hr M\$25) for internet instead of to the pricey machines inside the real estate offices.

**Banorte** (cnr Juárez & Obregón) Exchanges cash and traveler's checks and has an ATM.

**Post office** (Heróico Colegio Militar) Between Av Hidalgo and Márquez de León.

## Sights & Activities

Scattered around town are several former *trapiches*, including **Molino El Progreso**, the ruin of what was formerly El Molino restaurant, and **Molino de los Santana** on Juárez, opposite the hospital. The restored **Teatro Cine General Manuel Márquez de León** is on Legaspi, facing the plaza.

Housed in a former schoolhouse, the **Centro Cultural** (☎ 145-00-41; Juárez; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun), near Topete, is home to some interesting nationalist and

revolutionary murals dating from 1933. Also on display is an uneven collection of artifacts evoking the history of the region, lots of old photos and a replica ranch house.



Surfers come here for some of the nicest swells in all of Baja. **San Pedrito** offers Hawaii-like tubes (and Hawaii-like sea urchins if you wipe out). Catch that perfect wave as eagle rays glide below you, or just hang out with the mellow crowd on **Los Cerritos** and watch the coral sun plunge into the Pacific. Boards can be rented for M\$150 per day at Pescadero Surf Camp (below), near the beaches. Just down the road from Pescadero Surf Camp is a competition-grade skateboard park.



## Festivals & Events

Todos Santos' two-day **Festival de Artes** (Arts Festival) is held in early February. At other times it's possible to visit local artists in their home studios, and there are galleries galore.

## Sleeping

**Pescadero Surf Camp** (☎ 134-04-80; www.pescadero.surf.com; casitas M\$300-400, camp sites per person M\$100) Friendly and helpful. Pescadero Surf Camp has everything a surfer could need – rentals, lessons, advice, a community kitchen and even a BYOB swim-up bar.

**Motel Guluarte** (☎ 145-00-06; cnr Juárez & Morelos; s/d M\$350/450;  ) This breezy, whitewashed budget option with laundromat has small rooms with refrigerators and a common balcony. No pets, please.

**Hotel Ziranda** (☎ 122-58-06; Pescadero s/n; r M\$400;  ) Kitchenettes here are anything but fancy; however, this place is well located for surfers or beachgoers on a budget. It has a restaurant and internet café as well.

**Todos Santos Inn** (☎ 145-00-40; todosantosinn@yahoo.com; Legaspi 33; d M\$2085-2843, ste M\$4106) This 19th-century building has been converted into a swanky hotel with gorgeous interiors and an excellent restaurant. Rates include a simple breakfast.

**ourpick Posada La Posa** (☎ 145-04-00; www.laposa.com; ste US\$195-480;     ) Boasting 'Mexican hospitality combined with Swiss quality,' this beautiful boutique retreat is right on the Pacific. A saltwater swimming pool, freshwater lagoon, lush garden and superb restaurant with excellent Mexican wines set it apart. A Mexican sweat lodge and Jacuzzi offer alternate ways to let stress slip away. There are no TVs or phones in the rooms, but you will

find a pair of binoculars and even a bird book. Kayak use, bikes and fishing gear are always included. This establishment works with US dollars, though they may accept pesos.


## Eating

Taco stands, along Heróico Colegio Militar between Márquez de León and Degollado, offer cheap eats.

**Caffé Todos Santos** (☎ 145-03-00; Centenario 33; breakfast M\$55-90, dinner mains M\$90-170) Coffee-conscious travelers can consume cappuccinos with savory pastries, mammoth muffins or great main dishes.

**Il Giardino** (☎ 151-98-74; Degollado s/n; mains M\$90-280, pizzas M\$190) Brown paper tablecloths belie the awesome pizzas and sumptuous entrées at this casual Italian eatery. Pears in red wine sauce is a perfect finish to a great meal.

**ourpick Café Santa Fe** (☎ 145-03-40; Centenario 4; dinner mains M\$180-440;  Wed-Mon) The *insalata Mediterranea* (steamed seafood drizzled in lemon juice and oil) will make even seafood haters change their evil ways. The open-air kitchen, designed by the owner himself, allows you to see the food as it's being prepped for your table. Anything on the menu will delight, surprise, tantalize, but if you need suggestions go for the mussels in wine or any one of the various handmade raviolis: lobster, *carne* (meat) or just spinach and ricotta cheese. This is surely one of the best restaurants in Baja and is well worth the splurge.

**El Gusto!** (☎ 145-45-00; Posada La Poza; mains M\$190-340;  Fri-Wed) This beautiful restaurant was recently voted a top place to watch a Pacific sunset – sip a margarita on the terrace or in the beautifully decorated dining area. In season, whales head by as you eat. The extensive wine list is made up of Mexico's finest – selected with care by the owner himself.

## Shopping

There are numerous galleries to wander through, especially around the plaza. Do it yourself on this one. **El Tecolote** (☎ 145-02-95; cnr Juárez & Av Hidalgo) has beautiful postcards, books and souvenirs.

## Getting There & Away

Hourly between 6:30am and 10:30pm, buses head to La Paz (M\$77, two hours) and to Cabo San Lucas (M\$67, one hour) from the **bus stop** (☎ 148-02-89) at Heróico Colegio Militar between Zaragoza and Morelos.



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