



# Northwest Mexico

A battle of blues characterizes northwest Mexico, a diverse region notable for the striking lucidity of the azure Sea of Cortez waters and the crystal-clear cobalt skies of the Sierra Madre. In between is a region of deep canyons, dusty deserts and colonial villages with cobblestone streets.

Most visitors to this dusty delight are bound for one of two surreal landscapes: the Barranca del Cobre – spectacular gorges and mountain cliffs that comprise a system of canyons that surpasses the Grand Canyon in mass, depth and accessibility – and the thrilling railway that runs through it; or the postcard-perfect beaches of the Sea of Cortez, so easily accessed from the southwestern US that many towns here – Puerto Peñasco and San Carlos among them – are beginning to offer more vacation condos and burger joints than beach shacks and burritos.

While these folks lend a conspicuously American feel to many communities, there is no shortage of indigenous wonders. The area around Bahía de Kino is known for its alive-and-well Seri culture, while the Barranca del Cobre thrives with the vibrantly clad cave-dwelling Rarámuri, who offset the warm earth tones of the canyons with kaleidoscopic bursts of color in the chasms.

The area has a couple of major cities, including laid-back Hermosillo, plus charming villages like Álamos and El Fuerte. And you're never too far from the 12,950-sq-km Desierto Sonorense, an ecological treasure of biological riches. No matter where you go, keep your eyes on the horizon: the entire northwest erupts with dreamlike vistas, whether it be the glow of a desert sunset or the penetrating cerulean skies across the dramatic Barranca del Cobre.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Lose yourself for a few days in the mellow village of **Bahía de Kino** (p327)
- Lazily walk off a belly full of Doña Lola's incredible enchiladas *suizas* through the sleepy colonial streets of **Álamos** (p333)
- Suck in the brisk canyon air between cars as you ride the **Ferrocarril Chihuahua Pacífico** (p341) through the spectacular Barranca del Cobre
- Manage your adrenaline on the breathtaking descents to the wonderful canyon-bottom towns of **Urique** (p347) and **Batopilas** (p354)
- Cool off in the spray at the bottom of the mighty **Cascada de Basaseachi** (p354), Mexico's highest full-time waterfall



## History

The lands that stretch south from Nogales have served as a gateway to Mexico since the first explorers passed this way some 30,000 years ago. The Pima – direct descendants of those early visitors – established an elaborate system of irrigation that transformed the desert into agricultural lands. The region's colonial history dates from 1687, when the Italian Jesuit missionary Father Eusebio Francisco Kino began establishing missions and making inroads with the indigenous peoples, ultimately tying their destinies to the rest of Nueva España.

In the 19th century, the coastal waters of the Sea of Cortez (Golfo de California) were witness to many naval battles, with most of the action centered on the port jewel of Guaymas, as various world powers challenged Mexico's fledgling independence and coveted its mineral wealth. Between Guaymas and Ciudad Obregón is the ancestral home of the fiercely independent Yaqui tribe, which aggressively resisted the forces of colonialism up until its last rebellion in 1901. The nomadic Seris of the central Sonoran coastal and desert lands fought a losing battle for their way of life, though their population is now steadily increasing.

In recent years, the northwest region of Mexico has seen an influx of tourism, causing an economic boom and raising eyebrows with environmentalists and culture conservationists who worry that Fonatur (Mexico's gung-ho, pro-development tourism agency) could turn much of this region into another Cancún. It is forging ahead with the construction of condos, a new scenic coastal highway and a network of fancy marinas (see Guaymas, p329) that would link Puerto Peñasco with waterfront towns to the north and south, drastically changing the serene nature of the coastline and disturbing estuaries and diverse marine life.

## Climate

In the Desierto Sonorense the summers are extremely hot and the winters are benign. Spring and autumn are similar to the seasons that precede them. The best time to visit the Copper Canyon region is after the summer rains, in late September and October, when the rivers are swift and the flowers abundant. Spring is pleasant throughout the canyons.

## Parks & Reserves

In Northern Sonora, the Reserva de la Biosfera El Pinacate y Gran Desierto de Altar (see

boxed text, p324) stretches its volcanic landscape across a 714,556-hectare area full of moon-like craters and massive dunes.

Off the coast of Bahía de Kino, Mexico's largest island, Isla del Tiburón (p328) is a Seri-controlled migratory bird refuge and nature-lovers paradise.

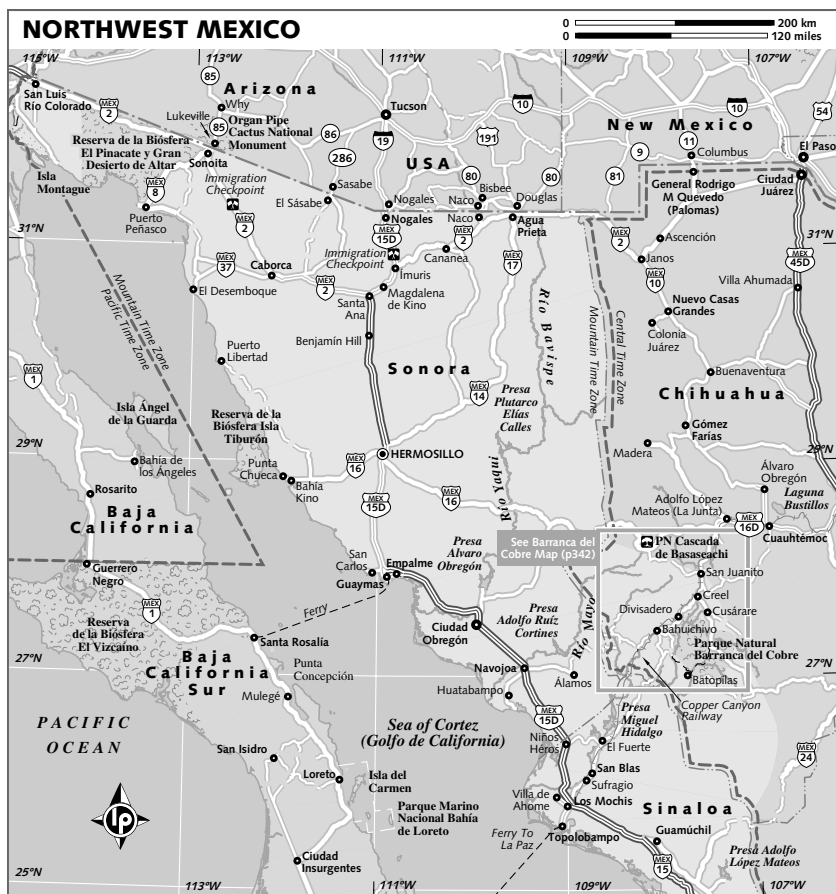
The wonderful Parque Nacional Cascada de Basaseachi (p354) is home to Mexico's majestic Basaseachi waterfall, the country's highest full-time falls.

## Getting There & Around

Hwy 15, Mexico's principal northern Pacific coast highway, begins at the border town of Nogales, Sonora, about 1½ hours (108km) south of Tucson. This is one of the most convenient border crossings between western Mexico and the US. From Nogales, Hwy 15/15D heads south through the Desierto Sonorense for about four hours (260km) to Hermosillo and then cuts over to the coast at Guaymas. From Guaymas the highway parallels the beautiful Pacific coast for about 1000km, finally turning inland at Tepic (see p446) and heading on to Guadalajara and Mexico City. There are regular tollbooths along Hwy 15 (including two between Nogales and Hermosillo that charge around M\$78 in total).

The **Lukeville–Sonoyta crossing** (🚗 6am–midnight), 357km west of Nogales opposite Lukeville, Arizona, immediately south of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, is the quickest and easiest in the region (though it's only convenient if you're heading west to Puerto Peñasco). There are also crossings at **San Luis Río Colorado** (🚗 24hr) west of Sonoyta and 42km southwest of Yuma, Arizona; **Naco** (🚗 24hr), 90km east of Nogales, opposite Naco, Arizona; and **Agua Prieta** (🚗 24hr), 130km east of Nogales opposite Douglas, Arizona.

See p986 for information on permits for bringing a vehicle into Mexico, but note that the state of Sonora operates the no-permit, no-cost **Only Sonora** program for drivers who do not go south of Hwy 2 between Agua Prieta and Imuris, or east of Hwy 15/15D anywhere as far south as Empalme, at Km 98 on Hwy 15 east of Guaymas. If you are taking a vehicle beyond these boundaries, you must stop at a vehicle permit station at Empalme, or at Cananea on Hwy 2, and obtain either an Only Sonora vehicle permit, costing the peso equivalent of US\$25.30, allowing you to drive in the rest of Sonora state (for example to



Álamos, or an all-Mexico permit (US\$29.70) if you want to go beyond Sonora state.

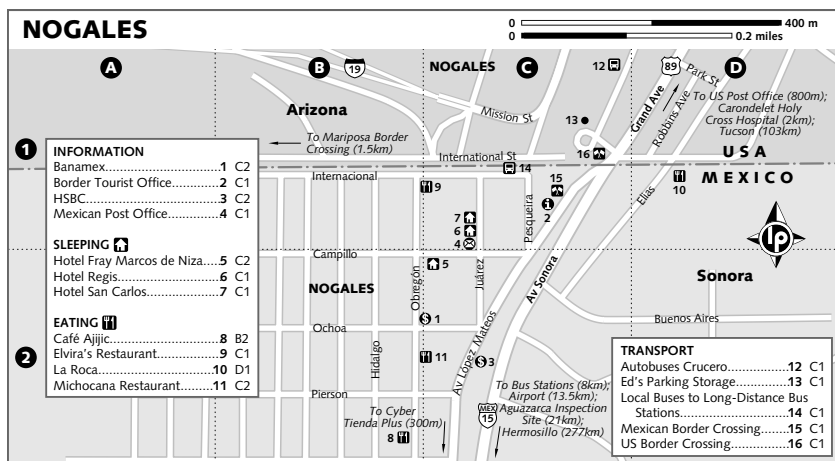
Vehicle and passenger ferries link Guaymas with Santa Rosalía (Baja California) three times a week, and Topolobampo (near Los Mochis) with La Paz (Baja California) daily.

Nogales, Hermosillo and Los Mochis are the primary hubs for bus travel. Buses of all classes ply the cities and towns along Hwy 15 with great frequency, making it possible to travel from northwest Mexico to destinations throughout the mainland or to the US with ease. Many travelers begin their journey through the Copper Canyon at Los Mochis, traveling northeast by train on the Ferrocarril Chihuahua Pacífico. Others do the trip in reverse, beginning in Chihuahua.

The major airports for the region are at Hermosillo, which has several flights to and from the US, and Los Mochis, which serves several mainland destinations.

## SONORA

Chock-full of pristine beaches, sleepy colonial villages, colorful indigenous peoples and surreal desert landscapes, Sonora, Mexico's second-largest state (bordering Chihuahua is first) borders the US to the north but shows remarkable cultural diversity within its 180,000 sq km. The state is like a piñata full of the country's best offerings, on its way to being pummeled into tourism oblivion.



## NOGALES

☎ 631 / pop 189,760 / elevation 1170m

Like its border-city cousins Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo, Nogales is a major transit point between the US and Mexico; as a result, it's a zoo of money-exchange houses, pharmacies, cheesy curio shops and low-rent bars catering mostly to gringos on weekend binges – the kind of place where trouble finds you. 'You looking for something that's hard to find?' is basically a greeting here. It suits fine as a day trip, but if you're looking to go further afield in Sonora, there's no real reason to linger here.

### Orientation

The commercial section of Nogales is only a few blocks wide, being hemmed in by hills. The main commercial street is Obregón, two blocks west of the border crossing, which eventually runs south into Mexico's Hwy 15.

### Information

Almost everything you'll need is within walking distance of the border crossing.

**Border tourist office** (☎ 312-06-66; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) Beside the border customs office.

**Banamex** (cnr Obregón & Ochoa; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Has an ATM.

**Carondelet Holy Cross Hospital** (☎ 520-285-3000; 1171 W Target Range Rd, Nogales, Arizona) On the US side of the border, this small regional hospital offers emergency and walk-in care.

**Cyber Tienda Plus** (López Mateos 291; internet access per hr M\$12; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat)

**HSBC** (López Mateos 171; ☎ 9am-4pm) Has an ATM.

**Mexican post office** (cnr Juárez & Campillo; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri)

**US post office** (300 N Morley Ave; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Three blocks north of the border crossing in Nogales, Arizona.

### Sleeping

Although staying in Nogales voluntarily would be an unusual choice, if you've traveled a long way via the US, there's a bed here for all budgets.

**Hotel San Carlos** (☎ 312-15-57; Juárez 22; s/d M\$357/429; (P) ☎) One block from the border, this clean and basic option is by far the best value for your money. The 2nd-floor rooms have nicer bedsprads.

**Hotel Regis** (☎ 312-51-81; Juárez 34; s/d M\$407/438; ☎) Located just next door, it's a colorful alternative to the San Carlos – check those multi-hued bedsprads and highlighter-green walls. There's a historic saloon attached as well.

**Hotel Fray Marcos de Niza** (☎ 312-16-51; Campillo 91; s/d M\$560/622; (P) ☎) The nicest digs in town, though a bit dark. The chilly hallways offer a welcomed respite from the heat.

### Eating

**Michocana Restaurant** (☎ 311-25-89; Obregón 123; mains M\$12-60; ☎ 7am-7pm) A great little find serving *comida corrida* (set meals), fresh juices and killer *chilaquiles verdes* (fried tortillas with cheese and green salsa) for breakfast.

**Café Ajjic** (☎ 312-50-74; Obregón 182; mains M\$35-135; ☎ 8am-midnight Sun-Wed, 8am-3am Thu-Sat) Serves

an extensive Mexican menu to day-tripping gringos on a colorful outdoor patio with a lovely fountain. Ignore the constant barrage of hawkers and mariachi.

**Elvira's Restaurant** (☎ 312-47-73; Obregón 1; mains M\$87-220; ☎ 11am-10pm) Mexican folk art meets 2001: *A Space Odyssey* at this longstanding institution serving excellent Mexican classics (nine types of *mole*) with a free shot of tequila.

**La Roca** (☎ 312-07-60; Elias 91; mains M\$137-330; ☎ 11am-midnight) The upscale La Roca serves a diverse menu of Sonoran and regional Mexican in a low-light romantic setting under colonial archways and cavernous stone walls.

## Getting There & Away

If you are heading further south into Mexico, pick up a Mexican tourist permit at the immigration office in the large modern building at the border crossing. The tourist permit is also available at the vehicle checkpoint 21km south of the border. If you're driving your own vehicle (buses don't stop there), it is more convenient to get it at this checkpoint at the same time as your vehicle permit (see p987). Both offices are open 24 hours a day.

## AIR

The Nogales International Airport is located 13.5km southeast of the city center but it closed due to lack of funds in 2007. The nearest working airport is in Tucson, Arizona, about 100km (1½ hours) north.

## BUS

From Nogales' **main bus station** (Hwy 15), 8km south of the city center, **Elite** (☎ 313-16-03) travels to Guadalajara (M\$1043, 25 hours), Mexico City (M\$1440, 32 hours), Chihuahua (M\$590, 12 hours) and Hermosillo (M\$140, three hours). **Autobuses Crucero** (☎ 319-42-65) buses also leave from the main bus station, stopping at the station on the Arizona side and going to Tucson (M\$143, two hours), Phoenix (M\$341, four hours), Las Vegas (M\$902, 12 hours) and Los Angeles (M\$847, 13 hours). From Nogales, Arizona, **Autobuses Crucero** (☎ in the US 520-287-5628; www.crucero-usa.com; 35 N Terrace Ave), a block from the border crossing, has frequent buses to Tucson (US\$9, one hour), Phoenix (US\$26, 3½ hours) and Hermosillo (US\$19, four hours).

**Transportes y Autobuses del Pacífico** (TAP; ☎ 319-41-54; www.tap.com.mx) has shiny new offices three

blocks north of the bus station. From there, 1st-class air-conditioned buses head south along Hwy 15 to Guadalajara (M\$1045, 28 hours) and on to Mexico City (M\$1440, 35 hours). Other destinations include Guaymas (M\$210, 5½ hours), Tijuana (M\$455, 25 hours) and Los Mochis (M\$400, 13 hours).

**Transportes Baldomero Corral** (☎ 313-28-80) serves the major cities along Hwy 15, with a 1st-class bus departing from its station two blocks north of the main station every two hours from 7:30am; stops include Hermosillo (M\$167, 3½ hours) and Álamos (M\$362, nine hours). Next door, **Tufesa** (☎ 313-38-62; www.tufesa.com.mx) operates hourly 1st-class buses that go south as far as Culiacán (M\$588), as well as north to Phoenix (M\$330) and Los Angeles (M\$653).

To get to the main bus station from the border crossing (8km away), you can take a taxi or hop onto one of the frequent local buses marked 'Central Camionera,' from a corner of Av López Mateos, just a couple of blocks from the border (M\$4).

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Approaching Nogales, Arizona, from Tucson, the left lanes go to central Nogales. The right lanes, which go to the **Mariposa border crossing** (☎ 6am-midnight) outside the city, are the quickest way to enter Mexico, though only the Deconcini crossing is open 24/7. As you approach Nogales, you'll see plenty of signs for Mexican auto insurance, which you'll need if you're bringing a vehicle into Mexico.

Temporary vehicle-import procedures for those who are driving beyond Sonora state into the rest of Mexico are dealt with at the Aguazarcas inspection site at the 21km point on the highway south of Nogales. See p318 for information on the simplified Only Sonora program for drivers who are not going beyond Sonora state limits.

Day-trippers should note that several attended lots near the border crossing offer parking on the US side for US\$8 per day. **Ed's Parking Storage** (☎ in the US 520-287-2025; cnr N Terrace & W Crawford; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm Sun) is the most secure (it's located behind McDonald's).

With more than 11,000 vehicles crossing into the US at Nogales each day, getting through the border quickly when heading north requires luck, or perhaps some foresight. The **US Department of Homeland Security** (<http://apps.cbp.gov/bwt>) posts estimated wait times online.

**DETOUR: ASADERO LEO'S**

As you breach the hill around Km 210 along Hwy 15 an hour and a half out of Nogales, the smoke rising from the grill can be seen a good 200m away. *Carne asada!* **Asadero Leo's** (Carretera Internacional No 189, Ímuris), nothing but a streetside stall and a few seats indoors, looks like it is going up in flames. Do yourself a favor and pull over immediately. First comes the most colorful, fragrant tray of fresh condiments you've ever seen: guacamole, three types of salsa, pickled carrots, radishes, onions, limes, *pico de gallo* (finely chopped sals) and cucumbers. This is followed by as many *carne asada* (marinated grilled beef) tacos you can get down for M\$12 each. Unforgettable.

**PUERTO PEÑASCO**

☎ 638 / pop 44,875 / elevation 48m

On the northeast coast of the Sea of Cortez (Golfo de California), this town has for years been a popular destination for the beach-craving residents of Arizona's desert cities. But Rocky Point, as the US visitors call it, is not the quaint little seaside town it used to be. It has become a gringo free-for-all and is now home to so many non-natives that it has basically become the seaside retirement community Arizona never had. Its main stretch of waterfront, Sandy Beach (also known as Sandy Point), is home to a dozen massive condo-hotel resorts, which offer luxury rooms with views, sports bars, expensive restaurants and not a hint of Mexican culture. Fans like to call it 'the new Cancún'; haters might opt for Puerto Condo.

Over US\$300 million was pumped into this area in 2007 alone, with another US\$1.2 billion on its way. As a result, Peñasco is Mexico's fastest-growing town, with a leg up on similar resort cities like Acapulco, Cancún and Puerto Vallarta due to its accessibility by car from the US. When the new international airport opens in 2009, all hell should break loose.

**Orientation**

Just an hour south of the Arizona border (from the no-fuss Lukeville–Sonoyta crossing), Puerto Peñasco sits at the end of Mexico's Hwy 8. After driving through the general downtown and residential blocks, you'll reach the Old Port district to the west and, west of

that, the resort-filled stretch of Sandy Beach. Las Conchas and CEDO are to the east.

**Information**

Santander, Bancomer, Banamex and Banorte, all on Blvd Juárez, have ATMs.

**CEDO** (Freemont Blvd; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) This nature center (below) has a small gift shop with some good books about the region in both English and Spanish.

**Max's Café** (La Marina Center; ☎ 8am–10pm) Free internet on one computer.

**Post office** (1285 Av Chiapas; ☎ 8am–2pm Mon–Fri, 8am–3pm Sat, 8am–11am Sun)

**Rocky Point Convention & Visitors Bureau** (☎ 388-04-44, in the US 877-843-3717; [www.cometorockypoint.com](http://www.cometorockypoint.com); Blvd Juárez & Calle 11) In the Circle K parking lot.

**Santa Fe Clinic** (☎ 383-24-47; Av Morua; ☎ 24hr)

**Sights & Activities**

**The Acuario Cet-Mar** (☎ 382-00-10; Av Freeman, Las Conchas; admission M\$30; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri) is an aquarium a little worse for wear, but it's worth a peek in to check out the varieties of green sea turtles and the very friendly sea lion, Arthur.

Just down the road, **CEDO** (Intercultural Center for the Study of Desert & Oceans; ☎ 382-01-13; [www.cedointercultural.org](http://www.cedointercultural.org); Freemont Blvd, Las Conchas; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sat) is a wonderful source of information about the fascinating desert-meets-the-sea ecosystem of Rocky Point. It has a museum, library, whale-skeleton exhibit, history displays and free natural-history talks (in English) on Tuesday at 2pm and Saturday at 4pm. The place also offers guided tours of the local ecosystems if you arrange in advance (check website for availability), from a two-hour **Tidepool Tour** (adult/child M\$165/110) to a six-hour **Kayak Caper** (M\$935, adults only).

**Festivals & Events**

**Spring Break** March is probably a good time to stay away, as this is when the town is overtaken by margarita-chugging college students from the US.

**Bathtub Races** This odd event has expats racing down the street in bathtubs-on-wheels in October.

**Rocky Point Rally** In early November, 10,000 Harley-Davidsons descend on the town.

**Sleeping**

While the most visible of accommodations these days are the new resorts – just stand at the edge of the Old Port and look toward Sandy Beach for the big picture – there are



some great down-to-earth options too (though it's slim pickings for those on tight budgets).

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Posada La Roca Hotel** (☎ 383-31-99; Av Primero de Junio 2; s/d M\$440/490;

### RESERVA DE LA BIOSFERA EL PINACATE Y GRAN DESIERTO DE ALTAR

Northwest of Rocky Point is the **Reserva de la Biosfera El Pinacate y Gran Desierto de Altar** (Pinacate Biosphere Reserve; ☎ 638-384-90-07; admission M\$40; 🕒 8am-5pm), containing extinct volcanic craters, a large lava flow, vast sand dunes and other surreal landscapes. To get there for a hiking adventure, head 45km northeast (in a high-clearance, 4WD vehicle only) on Hwy 8 and register at the sand-toned ranger station at Km 52. From there, you'll really be on your own, as there's no food, water or fuel.

### Getting There & Around

Driving south from Arizona, cross at the **Lukeville–Sonoyta border crossing** (🕒 6am-midnight) and follow Hwy 8 to Puerto Peñasco. Though a new international airport is scheduled to open sometime in 2009, the only two commercial flights currently arriving are **Aeroméxico Connect** (✈ in the US 800-237-6639; www.aeromexico.com) from Hermosillo and Los Angeles on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. **Kona Shuttle** (✈ in the US 602-956-5696; www.konashuttle.com) offers shuttle-van service from Tucson and Phoenix for US\$180 round trip (discounts for groups). You can travel by bus to Puerto Peñasco from Hermosillo via **Albatros** (✈ 662-213-82-40) for about M\$180. Also, **ABC** (www.abc.com.mx) makes bus trips throughout the day to all major stops in Baja California from M\$350. Take the 6am *ejecutivo* to Tijuana for any semblance of comfort, though.

Once you're in town, it's best to have a car, as there is no usable public transportation and the town is spread out over a wide area. Taxis are cheap and plentiful, though, with most cross-town rides costing no more than M\$55.

### HERMOSILLO

☎ 662 / pop 641,741 / elevation 238m

Many travelers simply do a fly-by through Hermosillo, a prosperous agricultural center and the capital of Sonora, without so much as rolling down the window (it's too hot out there). That's a shame. It's actually a well-maintained, modern city with a provincial feel that isn't a bad spot to kill a day, get a haircut and nosh on some tasty cuisine.

Don't loiter too long, though – it's a place where commerce and government rule and

the heat gets unbearable most afternoons (it's nicknamed 'Sun City' for a reason). But if you're driving through this region, chances are you'll spend at least a night here to break the trip and restock on some serious civilization.

Many of the streets in Hermosillo, founded in 1700 by Juan Bautista Escalante, have names that acknowledge the city's debt to the native revolutionary heroes, including General Álvaro Obregón.

### Orientation

Hwy 15 enters Hermosillo from the northeast and becomes Blvd Francisco Eusebio Kino, a wide street lined with orange and laurel trees. Blvd Kino (much of which is known as the Zona Hotelera, or Hotel Zone) continues west through the city, curves southwest and becomes Rodríguez, then Rosales as it passes through the city center, then Vildosola before becoming Hwy 15 again south of the city.

### Information

**Centro Médico Del Noroeste** (☎ 217-45-21; Colosio 23 Ote; 🕒 24hr) Medical services.

**Librerías de Cristal** (☎ 213-71-97; Serdán 178; 🕒 9am-7:45pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5:45pm Sun) Wide selection of books in Spanish.

**Post office** (cnr Blvd Rosales & Serdán; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

**State of Sonora tourist office** (☎ 289-58-00, in the US 800-476-6672; www.gotosonora.com; Edificio Sonora Norte, 3rd fl, Comonfort & Paseo del Río; 🕒 8am-9pm Mon-Fri) Grab an excellent map of Hermosillo and Sonora.

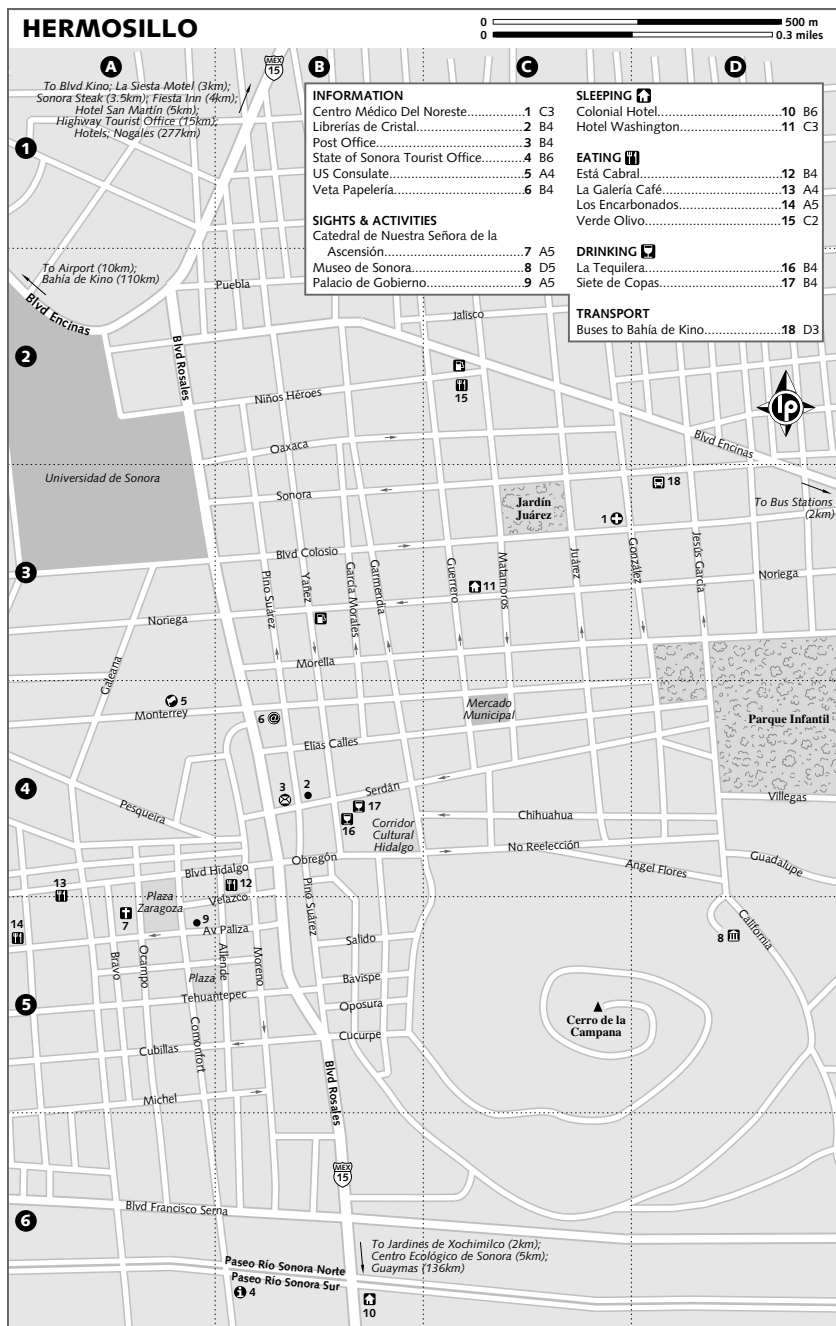
**Tourist emergency assistance** (☎ 800-903-92-00)  
**Veta Papelería** (☎ 212-79-87; Monterrey 86; per hr M\$15; 🕒 7am-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sun) Internet access.

### Sights

#### PLAZA ZARAGOZA

Not to be confused with the grittier Jardín Juárez, this **plaza** (btwn Blvd Hidalgo & Av Paliza) is shaded by beautiful orange trees, drawing government workers on lunch breaks and creating a peaceful place to hang. Its majestic **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción**, also called the Catedral Metropolitana, was constructed between 1877 and 1908 in a mix of neoclassical and baroque styles. The **Palacio de Gobierno** (☎ 213-11-70; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat), completed in 1906, is on the east side of the plaza, and features an airy, neo-Moorish courtyard with colorful, dramatic murals depicting the history of Sonora. At night, the





plaza comes alive when vendors hawking Sonoran *tamales* and tasty variations of corn swarm in. A city of over half a million suddenly feels like a small town.

### CERRO DE LA CAMPANA

This 'Hill of the Bell' is the most prominent landmark in the area and an easy point of reference night or day. It's named for the legend that striking certain rocks on the hill creates a bell sound. The panoramic view from the top is worth the drive up – though it's a shame about the numerous telecommunication towers.

### MUSEO DE SONORA

Hugging the east side of the Cerro de la Campana, this **museum** (☎ 217-27-14; Jesús García s/n; admission M\$34, free Sun & holidays; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) is worth a stroll for its location in a stone-walled, 100-year-old former jail – a museum itself – with interesting exhibits on the history of Sonora housed in former cells.

### CENTRO ECOLÓGICO DE SONORA

This **zoo and botanical garden** (☎ 250-67-68; admission M\$30; 🕒 8am-5pm) is about 5km south of central Hermosillo. Like a massive park, it features plants and animals of the Desierto Sonorense, as well as an **observatory** (admission M\$30) with telescope viewing sessions. To get there by public transit, watch for the 'Luis Orcí' bus at the west side of Jardín Juárez, which departs about every 15 minutes. Ask the driver when to get off, as it's not clearly marked.

### Sleeping

Most of Hermosillo's better hotels are in the Zona Hotelera, a convenient 15 minutes from the city center, though budget travelers will need to stick to places downtown.

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Hotel Washington** (☎ 213-11-83; Noriega 68; s/d M\$200/220; 📶) Cute colonial Mexican tiles and interesting art line the lobby walls here, along with a free coffee stand and vending machines. The rooms are opium-den musty, but it's a steal at this price. It's on a very busy shopping street about a 15-minute walk from Plaza Zaragoza.

**Hotel San Martín** (☎ 289-05-50, in the US 877-225-2987; www.hotelsanmartin.net; Blvd Kino 498; s/d M\$480/530; 📶 🚰 🚿 🛁 🛏) A complete renovation in 2007 gave this motel a leg up in the hotel zone. There's a great new pool with a Jacuzzi

and slide, a 24-hour restaurant, large TVs and nicely sized rooms with wi-fi and minibars.

**La Siesta Motel** (☎ 289-19-50; Blvd Kino; r M\$550, ste M\$700-1000; 📶 🚰 🚿 🛁 🛏) Another motel-style option in the hotel zone, popular with Mexican tourists, who enjoy the extra-large rooms and refrigerators. Cleanliness isn't next to godliness here, but it's otherwise comfortable.

### TOP END

**Colonial Hotel** (☎ 259-00-00; www.hotelescolonial.com; Vado del Río 9; r/ste M\$1169/1593; 📶 🚰 🚿 🛁 🛏) The most stylish *motel* you've ever seen, full of modern art and sleek design touches on lush grounds on the road to Guaymas, south of the center. Rates include breakfast.

**Fiesta Inn** (☎ 289-22-00; www.fiestainn.com; Blvd Kino 375; r M\$1989-2147; 📶 🚰 🚿 🛁 🛏) A high-end business hotel in tip-top shape with a lovely central courtyard and fantastic canvas Mexican folk art on the walls. All double rooms come with a large living room, giving guests a suite for the price of a double.

### Eating & Drinking

**Los Encarbonadas** (☎ 212-74-74; cnr Av Paliza & Londres; mains M\$15-60; 🕒 5pm-midnight) This excellent *asadero* bar serves up Sonora's specialty, *carne asada*, alongside a mouth-watering salsa and condiment cart that flows between tables. The 'order' serves two easily and the *frijoles* might just be Mexico's best. Highly recommended.

**La Galeria Café** (☎ 212-15-16; Blvd Hidalgo 54A; mains M\$35-65, desserts M\$22-33; 🕒 noon-midnight Sun-Fri) A Bohemian hangout steeped in the local art scene. It's a great spot for cappuccinos, bagels and live tunes (on Saturday night).

**Verde Olivo** (☎ 213-28-81; Niños Héroes 75D; mains M\$25-55, buffet M\$127; 🕒 7:30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun; 🍷) If you have tired of quesadillas and tacos, do not pass go. Do collect M\$200. Go straight to Verde Olivo. This gem in the middle of beef country offers excellent grain veggie burgers, fresh juices and smoothies, and PETA-friendly versions of Mexican classics.

**Está Cabral** (☎ 213-74-74; Velazco 11; mains M\$45-60; 🕒 7pm-1am) This large, open-air café occupies the interior of a once-regal building and features Cuban *Nueva Trova* folk music nightly, attracting a fun and eclectic crowd.

**Sonora Steak** (☎ 210-03-13; Blvd Kino 914; mains M\$65-187; 🕒 noon-1am) Inside this stately colonial home in the hotel zone, Sonora's famed steaks – 28-day aged rib eyes – are weighed tableside (M\$60 per 100g), cooked to perfect

tion and served with flour tortillas, grilled onions and jalapeños.

**Siete de Copas/La Tequilera** (☎ 217-17-71; Serdán 171; ☎ 6pm-2am Wed-Sat) This bar complex features Siete de Copas, a large, somewhat rowdy modern cantina (imagine a contemporary version of the one in Robert Rodriguez' *From Dusk Till Dawn*); and La Tequilera, a two-story bar with dueling live music on the open-air roof upstairs and indoors in the bar down below. Both attract the city's young and hip.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The recently renovated airport, about 10km from central Hermosillo on the road to Bahía de Kino, is served by Aerobus, Aero California, Aeroméxico, America West, Aviacsa, Avolar, Azteca, Volaris and Mexicana. Daily direct flights, all with connections to other centers, go to cities including Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Obregón, Guadalajara, La Paz, Los Angeles, Los Mochis, Mexicali, Mexico City, Monterrey, Phoenix, Tijuana and Tucson.

### BUS

From the **main bus terminal** (☎ 213-44-55; Blvd Encinas), 2km southeast of the city center, 1st-class service is offered by Autobuses Crucero, Elite, Estrella Blanca (EB), Transportes del Pacífico (TP), Transportes y Autobuses del Pacífico (TAP), Transportes Norte de Sonora (TNS) and others. More companies have separate terminals nearby – Transportes Baldomero Corral (TBC) and Albratros is next door. Across the street is Tufesa, about a block west of Blvd Encinas is Estrellas del Pacífico (EP), and TAP has larger offices a few more blocks down. Services to many destinations depart around the clock:

Destination	Fare	Duration
Guaymas	M\$60	2hr
Guadalajara	M\$848	24hr
Los Angeles	M\$996	16hr
Mexico City	M\$1295	30hr
Monterrey	M\$900	26hr
Nogales	M\$140	4hr
Phoenix	M\$443	8hr
Puerto Peñasco	M\$180	6hr

Second-class buses to Bahía de Kino (M\$55, two hours) depart from the AMH and TCH bus terminal in central Hermosillo, on Sonora

between González and Jesús García, 1½ blocks east of Jardín Juárez. They leave hourly from 5:30am to 11:30am and 3:30pm to 6:30pm.

## Getting Around

Local buses operate from 5:30am to 10pm daily (M\$5). To get to the main bus terminal, take any 'Central,' 'Central Camionera' or 'Ruta 1' bus from Juárez on the east side of Jardín Juárez. A taxi to the airport costs about M\$11. Taxis from the main bus station cost M\$50 and M\$60 for Plaza Zaragoza and the Zona Hotelera, respectively. Count on M\$150 from the airport to either.

## BAHÍA DE KINO

☎ 740 / pop 5000

Bahía de Kino is the kind of Mexican paradise you see in the movies, but rarely stumble upon in real life. There is a true end-of-the-road feel to the place; it's the most laid-back waterfront town in this region and one that encourages packing it all in and living out your days soaking in the sun and sipping on Sols.

The town was named for Father Eusebio Kino, a Jesuit missionary who established a small mission here for the indigenous Seri people in the late 17th century. It's 110km west of Hermosillo, is flanked by some 10km of beautiful and peaceful Sea of Cortez coastline and, unlike Puerto Peñasco, it hasn't suffered a massive overdose on condominiums at the hands of overzealous developers.

Kino is divided into old and new parts: Kino Viejo, the old quarter, is a dusty, run-down fishing village. Though the town hops with schoolkids and shrimpers during the day, it turns sleepy at dusk and most businesses are closed by 8pm. Kino Nuevo, further west, is where you'll most likely spend most of your time. It's also where you'll find the 'snowbirds' (retired Americans who head south for the winter, when their northern residences turn chilly) who live along this single beachfront road in either spiffy holiday homes or hulking RVs. The main beach is a soft, lengthy, *palapa*-lined piece of paradise and is safe for swimming. High season is November to March; at other times, you may find yourself blissfully alone in any one of the hotels or campgrounds. Go ahead, lose yourself.

## Orientation

Route 16 runs west to both parts of town. To get to Viejo, turn left at the Pemex station and

you'll be heading directly toward the Sea of Cortez, and will be within the small grid that makes up the old portion of town. Bypass the Pemex and keep heading north to venture into Nuevo. You'll soon be able to see the sea from this main road, and will eventually come to the strip of hotels and restaurants.

## Information

**Centro de Salud Rural** (☎ 242-02-97; cnr Blvd Eusebio Kino & Tampico, Kino Viejo) Limited medical services but it beats dying.

**Cruz Roja** (Red Cross; ☎ 060, 242-00-32) Ambulance and ATM services.

**New Space Café** (cnr Yavarosa & Topolobampo, Kino Viejo; per hr M\$10; ☎ 8:30am-10:30pm) Internet access.

**Pemex gas station** (cnr Carretera a Kino Viejo & Blvd Eusebio, Kino Viejo) ATM services. There are no banks or exchange services in Bahía de Kino.

**Post Office** (cnr Blvd Eusebio & Salina Cruz)

**Tourism office** (cnr Mar de Cortés & Santa Catarina, Kino Nuevo; ☎ 9am-5pm Thu-Tue) This new office is eager to help and has a decent map of the town. It's attached to the bus station.

## Sights & Activities

**Museo de los Seris** (admission M\$6; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri), about halfway along the beachfront road in Kino Nuevo, is a tiny spot that features illuminating exhibits (with all-Spanish texts) about the Seri (see boxed text, opposite). Unfortunately, it was closed indefinitely for remodeling at the time of research.

**Punta Chueca** is a small village 25km north of Bahía de Kino. It's actually more like a living museum, as it's where most members of the area's Seri tribe live. You'll need a sturdy 4WD with high clearance to make the journey along the dirt road; once you arrive, be prepared to be pounced upon by several Seri women who will want to sell you hand-crafted jewelry, baskets or ironwood carvings. If you're interested in making the boat trip out to **Isla del Tiburón**, a peaceful, uninhabited ecological preserve owned by the Seri tribe through presidential decree, look for Alfredo López, Ernesto Molina or David Morales, all of whom are guides who live in Punta Chueca and can facilitate permits or provide tours (folks at Prescott College's **Kino Bay Center for Cultural and Ecological Studies** can point you in the right direction).

## Sleeping

**our pick** **La Playa RV & Hotel** (☎ 242-02-73; www.la-playarvhotel.com; Blvd Mar de Cortés 101, Kino Nuevo; trailer

sites/r M\$220/1200; ♿ ♿ ♿) This whitewashed beachfront paradise is hands down the best in town – it feels a bit like you're in the Greek Islands. Rooms all boast postcard-perfect sea views and feature stone floors, firm beds, mini kitchen areas with sinks and fridges, large marble bathrooms and private front decks with individual *palapas*. Note: there's a two-night minimum on summer weekends.

**Hotel Posada del Mar** (☎ 242-01-55; www.hotelposada-delmar.com; cnr Blvd Mar de Cortés & Creta; s/d M\$440/520, ste M\$600-840; ♿ ♿ ♿) Directly across the street from the beach, this hotel has lovely, shady grounds. The rooms aren't in the best shape but the exposed brick is nice. If you're pinching pesos, ask for a 2nd-floor room for champagne views on a Chevy budget.

**Hotel Hacienda** (☎ 195-23-90; cnr Blvd Guaymas & Manzanillo, Kino Viejo; r/ste M\$600/1200; ♿ ☒ ♿) If you prefer the grittier vibe in Kino Viejo, this newcomer is a real gem: a beautiful Mexican hacienda decked out in rust-orange with all rooms surrounding a charming courtyard and pool.

**Las Toninas Condominiums** (☎ 242-08-92; cnr Blvd Mar de Cortés & Singapur, Kino Nuevo; condos M\$850; ♿ ☒ ♿ ♿) These family-friendly rentable condominiums feature full kitchen and sofa beds in the living room, but you'll have to endure the *Brady Bunch*-era decor and facilities.

## Eating

**La Palapa del Pescador** (☎ 242-0210; Blvd Mar de Cortés & Wellington; mains M\$40-300; ☎ 9am-10pm) Whole fried fish or stuffed lobster and various seafood dishes are calling at this seaside joint with an outdoor, *palapa*-covered patio and a jukebox with a mind of its own. It's also popular for a few *cervezas* at night.

**Restaurant Dorita** (☎ 252-03-49; cnr Blvd Kino & Salina Cruz, Kino Viejo; mains M\$45-60; ☎ 7am-8pm Tue-Sun) Dorita and her daughter turned their front room into a restaurant 20 years ago and have been kicking out the best breakfast in either town since. *Omelette ranchero* is all you need to know.

**Jorge's Restaurant** (☎ 242-00-49; cnr Blvd Mar de Cortés & Alecantres; mains M\$45-140; ☎ 8am-10pm) Located on the beach at the end of Kino Nuevo, this spot draws in crowds for its excellent shrimp and fish dishes. It's especially good for shrimping in Kino's spectacular sunsets.

**El Pargo Rojo** (☎ 242-02-05; Blvd Mar de Cortés 1426; mains M\$50-295; ☎ 7am-10pm) Never mind the

## THE SERIS

The Seris, or *Com caac* as they call themselves, are the least numerous indigenous people in Sonora – by the 1930s their population had decreased to 300 due to hunger and the introduction of foreign disease. But they are hardy, and have existed in the same region for more than 500 years. Traditionally a nomadic people living by hunting, gathering and fishing – not agriculture, despite the attempts of Christian missionaries to turn them into farmers over the centuries – the Seris roamed along the Sea of Cortez, from roughly El Desemboque in the north to Bahía de Kino in the south, and inland to Hermosillo. Today, an estimated 900 or so are left.

The Seris are one of the few indigenous peoples who do not work for outsiders, preferring to live by fishing, hunting and making handicrafts such as their ubiquitous ironwood carvings (known as *palofierro*) of animals, humans and other figures. These are fading fast, though, as numerous impostors, especially around Hermosillo and Bahía de Kino, are passing themselves off as Seri (some are Oaxacan) and trying to make a quick buck off the ironwood-carving trade. Additionally, since the late 1970s the increased demand for ironwood carvings and charcoal from US markets have devastated local populations of ironwood trees. The end result has been irreparable to the Seri economy and they have moved on to stone as the craft of choice (though you rarely see that either) as well as ecotourism and desert bighorn sheep hunting to make ends meet.

They are no longer strictly nomadic, but still often move from place to place in groups; sometimes you can see numbers camped at Bahía de Kino, or traveling up and down the coast. Most, though, live in villages north of Bahía de Kino, including Punta Chueca (opposite) and the more traditional El Desemboque. It is also important to note there is no substitute for visiting Punta Chueca if you are looking for authentic carvings, necklaces or baskets (hawkers in front of El Pargo Rojo and Jorge's in Kino Nuevo and the post office in Hermosillo are *not* Seri).

poorly translated English menu at this festive seafooder, this is the place to enjoy delicious fish dishes and hearty Mexican breakfasts in the midst of Kino Nuevo. The *camarones rellenos* are a real treat.

## Getting There & Away

Costa Espresso buses to Hermosillo leave from the new bus depot in Kino Nuevo (attached to the tourism office) roughly every hour from 5am to 7:45pm.

If you're driving, you can make the trip from Hermosillo to Bahía de Kino in a little over an hour. From central Hermosillo, head northwest out of town on Blvd Encinas and just drive until you see the deep-blue Sea of Cortez.

## GUAYMAS

☎ 622 / pop 134,153

There's nothing cute about Guaymas, Sonora's main port. Stopping here for any extended length of time had better be due to catastrophic vehicle breakdown or massive coronary. That said, many travelers will transit through here on their way to more interesting destinations to the south, so to make the best of it, you'll need to embrace the town's inextricable link to the sea. It won't

be easy to forget as you stroll the edge of the harbor, watching fishing boats return with the seasonal *camarones gigantes* (massive shrimp), available October to February, that Guaymas is famous for.

This city, founded in 1769 by Spaniards at the site of Yaqui and Guaymenas indigenous villages, later saw its bay become the locus of military campaigns by would-be invaders ranging from the US navy to French pirates.

Today Guaymas is a bustling port and naval-supply center. Currently, the marina is undergoing a multi-year, M\$5.7 million transformation that, if it winds up looking anything like the projection photos, will look more Miami than Mexico. Travelers looking for charm will opt to stay in the resort town of San Carlos, 22km northwest.

## Orientation

Hwy 15 becomes Blvd García López as it passes along the northern edge of Guaymas. Central Guaymas and the port area are along Av Serdán, the town's main drag, running parallel to and just south of García López; everything you'll need is on or near Av Serdán. García López and Serdán intersect a few blocks west of the Guaymas map's extents.





is a cool and comfortable option, especially if you nab one of the 10 suites with kitchenette and living area – for the same price as a double!

**Armida Hotel** (☎ 224-30-35; www.hotelarmida.com.mx; Carretera Internacional Salida Norte; r M\$570-980; (P) (♿) (♿)) Though it's aged, this option on the northern edge of town has cheery lobby furniture, refrigerators, satellite TV, balconies or terraces, and bathtubs. There's also a café and a popular steak house.

## Eating

For goodness' sake, at least eat well while you're here.

**Las 1000 Tortas** (Av Serdán btwn Calles 17 & 18; tortas M\$20-75; ☎ 8am-11pm) A good snack shop serving *tortas* and hamburgers.

**Sky Café** (Calle 25, Edificio Guaymense; desserts M\$25; ☎ 7am-10:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10:30pm Sat & Sun) Great spot just off the cathedral for cappuccinos and sweet deserts.

**SE Pizzas** (Av Serdán near Calle 20; buffet from M\$35; ☎ noon-10pm) This all-you-can-eat pizza and salad buffet packs in a vibrant local crowd.

**Restaurant Los Barcos** (☎ 222-76-50; cnr Malecón & Calle 21; mains M\$78-135; ☎ noon-10pm) This airy, *palapa*-roofed restaurant is the spot to try the town's famous fat shrimp.

**El Oeste Steak House** (☎ 225-28-00; Hotel Armida; mains M\$190-235; ☎ noon-11pm) This popular steakhouse wins the Innovation In Taxidermy Design award, serving raved-about grilled Sonoran steaks in a saloon-like room decked out in stuffed game.

Like most Mexican towns, Guaymas supports a **Mercado Municipal**, which has stalls where you can sit down to eat cheaply. Popular morning stalls include El Rinconito for *machaca* (rehydrated, spiced beef) and El Vaporcito for *tacos al vapor* (steamed beef) and *birria* (spicy meat stew). Both are in the southwest corner. It's a block south of Av Serdán, on Av Rodríguez between Calles 19 and 20, and opens around 6am.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The airport is about 10km northwest of Guaymas on the highway to San Carlos. **US Airways** (☎ 221-22-66) flies direct from Phoenix once daily all months except September, when it cuts back to Thursday to Sunday. **Aereo Calafia** (☎ 222-55-96) flies to Baja destinations La Paz, Loreto and Los Cabos. **Aéreo Servicio**

### BEST SONORAN CARNE ASADA

- **Tacos El Grillo** (p323)
- **Asadero Leo's** (boxed text, p322)
- **Los Encarbonadas** (p326)

**Guerrero** (☎ 221-28-00) heads to Santa Rosalía in Baja. **Aeroméxico** (☎ 222-66-02; Av Serdán 236) has an office in town.

### BOAT

Overnight ferries connect Guaymas with Santa Rosalía, Baja California. The passenger/auto ferry *Santa Rosalía*, operated by Operadora Rotuaria del Noroeste, departs at 8pm on Monday, Thursday and Saturday, and arrives around 6am, though strong winter winds may cause delays.

The ticket office is at the **ferry terminal** (☎ 222-02-04; www.ferrysantarosalia.com; Av Serdán; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) at the east end of town. Vehicle reservations are accepted by telephone a week in advance. Passenger tickets are sold at the ferry office on the morning of departure, or a few days before. Make reservations at least three days in advance and, even if you have reservations, arrive early at the ticket office. Passenger fares are M\$550 for seats and M\$750 for cabins. Advance reservations are recommended. See p296 for vehicle fares.

### BUS

Guaymas has four small bus stations on Calle 14, about two blocks south of Av Serdán (a ramshackle area, to say the least).

**Albatros** (cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Goes to Puerto Peñasco three times a day (9:15am, 5:15pm and 10:15pm).

**Autobuses Crucero** (Estrellas del Pacífico office, cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Hourly departures all day and night to locations both north and south.

**Autobuses Los Mayitos** (Calle 14, btwn Aves 10 & 12) Hourly departures north to Hermosillo and Nogales and south to Navojoa.

**Estrellas del Pacífico** (cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Goes to Guadalajara and Tijuana hourly.

**Transportes Baldomero Corral** (cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Leaves hourly for Hermosillo, seven times daily for Nogales from 1am, eight daily for Ciudad Obregón from 10:45am and 11 daily for Navojoa from 2:45am. Most notable is its one daily bus (3:45pm) direct to Álamos.

**Transportes Chihuahueses** (Estrellas del Pacífico office, cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Goes to Ciudad Juárez once a day (3:30pm, 12 hours).

**Transportes del Pacífico** (cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Also sells tickets for Crucero, Transportes Norte de Sonora and Chihuahuese.

**Transportes Norte de Sonora** (Estrellas del Pacífico office, cnr Calle 14 & Av 12) Hourly departures to Tijuana and Mexico City.

**Transportes y Autobuses del Pacífico** (García López) Hourly departures all day and night to locations both north and south.

**Tufesa** (García López) Heads every few hours to Hermosillo, Nogales, Ciudad Obregón and Navojoa, and once per day to Los Mochis.

Most companies have far-ranging northbound and southbound routes to destinations including the following:

Destination	Fare	Duration
Álamos	M\$245	4hr
Guadalajara	M\$835	20hr
Hermosillo	M\$84	1¾hr
Los Mochis	M\$215	5hr
Mexico City	M\$780	30hr
Tijuana	M\$560	15hr

## Getting Around

To get to the airport, catch a bus from Av Serdán heading to Itson or San José, or take a taxi (around M\$80). Local buses run along Av Serdán frequently between 6am and 9pm (M\$5). Several eastbound buses stop at the ferry terminal; ask for the *transbordador* (ferry).

## SAN CARLOS

☎ 622 / pop 4500

Located about 22km northwest of Guaymas, San Carlos has a beautiful desert-and-bay landscape that is presided over by some fairly dramatic mountains – most notably the majestic twin peaks of Cerro Tetakawi – that glow an impressive red-earthed hue as the sun descends upon them towards the end of the day. For a moment, it doesn't even seem like Mexico.

From October to April, the town is overtaken by a massive influx of *norteamericanos*, but at other times you'll find it a quiet, beautiful spot that's a respite from the hot, surrounding desert cities. The town isn't especially known for its beaches, with the exception of Playa Algodones (scenes from the 1970 film *Catch 22* were shot here, hence its nickname, Playa Catch 22), though it does offer a wealth of outdoor activities.

## Orientation

San Carlos is based around two marinas: Marina San Carlos, in the heart of town, and the newer Marina Real at Algodones in the northernmost section. Most motels and eateries lie along the strip of Blvd Beltrones, while the larger resorts are toward Algodones.

## Information

**Banamex** (Blvd Manlio Beltrones) Both US dollars and pesos are accepted everywhere. This Banamex, next to the Pemex station on Beltrones, has two ATMs.

**Gary's Internet Connection** (☎ 226-00-49; www.garysdiveshop.com; Blvd Manlio Beltrones Km 10; per hr M\$30; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Located at Gary's Dive Shop.

**Guaymas San Carlos Convention & Visitor's Bureau** (☎ 226-0202; Blvd Manlio Beltrones Km 9; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Helpful maps and reservation assistance.

**Post Office** (Blvd Manlio Beltrones near Calle H; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri)

## Activities

San Carlos offers a wealth of beach-related and adventure activities, with sport fishing topping the list.

**Catch 22** (☎ 226-21-62; www.catch22mexicofishing.com; Marinaterra 1; ☎ 7am-4pm Tue-Sat) The spot for fishing excursions.

**El Mar Diving Center** (☎ 226-04-04; www.elmar.com; 263 Creston; ☎ 7am-6pm) Diving, hiking, kayaking and snorkeling.

**Gary's Dive Shop** (☎ 226-00-49; www.garysdiveshop.com; Blvd Manlio Beltrones Km 10) Diving and fishing.

**Ocean Sports** (☎ 226-06-96; www.desertdivers.com; Edificio Marina San Carlos; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 7am-7pm Fri & Sat, 7am-5pm Sun) Sunset cruises, jet-ski rental, whale watching and horseback riding.

## Sleeping

**Departamentos Adlai** (☎ 226-07-70; Calle H; s/d M\$450/500; ☎ ☎ ☎) This small hotel in the residential neighborhood of Las Ranchitas is great value: large, comfortable rooms around an extra-large Jacuzzi. It's popular with hipsters from Ciudad Obregón. To get there, turn right at the first Extra convenience store coming into town and walk 1km; it's the aqua-green building on the left.

**Motel Creston** (☎ 226-00-20; www.hotelcreston.com.mx; Blvd Manlio Beltrones Km 10; r M\$550; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A good budget option, this somewhat indifferent motor lodge has retro charm and large rooms. The lukewarm showers are an interesting height.



## History

In 1540 this was the campsite of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, future governor of Nueva Galicia (the colonial name for much of western Mexico), during his wars against the indigenous Mayo and Yaqui (the Yaqui resisted all invaders until 1928). If he had known about the vast amounts of gold and silver that prospectors later found, he would have stayed.

In 1683, silver was discovered at Promontorios, near Álamos, and the Europa mine was opened. Other mines soon followed and Álamos became a boom town of more than 30,000, one of Mexico's principal 18th-century mining centers. Mansions, haciendas, a cathedral, tanneries, metalworks, blacksmiths' shops and later a mint were all built. El Camino Real (The King's Hwy), a well-trodden Spanish mule trail through the foothills, connected Álamos with Culiacán and El Fuerte to the south.

After Mexican independence, Álamos became the capital of the newly formed province of Occidente, a vast area including all of the present states of Sonora and Sinaloa. Don José María Almada, owner of the richest silver mine in Álamos, was appointed as governor.

During the turmoil of the 19th century, and up to the Mexican Revolution, Álamos was attacked repeatedly, both by rebels seeking its vast silver wealth and by the fiercely independent Yaqui. The years of the revolution took a great toll on the town. By the 1920s, most of the population had left and many of the once-beautiful haciendas had fallen into disrepair. Álamos became practically a ghost town.

In 1948 Álamos was reawakened by the arrival of William Levant Alcorn, a Pennsylvania dairy farmer who bought the Almada mansion on Plaza de Armas and restored it as the Hotel Los Portales. Alcorn brought publicity to the town and made a fortune selling Álamos real estate. A number of *norteamericanos* crossed the border, bought crumbling old mansions for good prices and set about the task of lovingly restoring them to their former glory. Many of these people still live in Álamos today.

Today, the copper and silver trade has picked up again (two new mines have opened) and mining is once again big business in the area.

## Orientation

The paved road from Navojoa enters Álamos from the west and leads to the green, shady

Plaza Alameda, with the market at its east end. The town's other main square, the more uppity Plaza de Armas, is two blocks south of the market. The Arroyo La Aduana (Customs House Stream, which is usually dry) runs along the town's northern edge; the Arroyo Agua Escondida (Hidden Waters Stream, also usually dry) runs along the southern edge. Both converge at the east end of town with the Arroyo La Barranca (Ravine Stream), which runs, dryly, from the northwest.

## Information

**Álamos Books and Maps** (Juárez 8; ☎ 9am-6pm) The best bookshop (and high-end handicraft spot) in town.

**Banorte** (Madero 37; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) ATM and money exchange.

**Comps-E** (Serdán 4; per hr M\$10; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat & Sun) Internet access.

**Hospital General de Álamos** (☎ 428-02-25; Madero btwn Ramón Ortiz & Cocoteros; ☎ 24hr)

**Post office** (Palacio de Gobierno, Juárez; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

**Tourist office** (☎ 428-04-50; Victoria 3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) Lots of information about destinations all over Sonora, but oddly short on Álamos info.

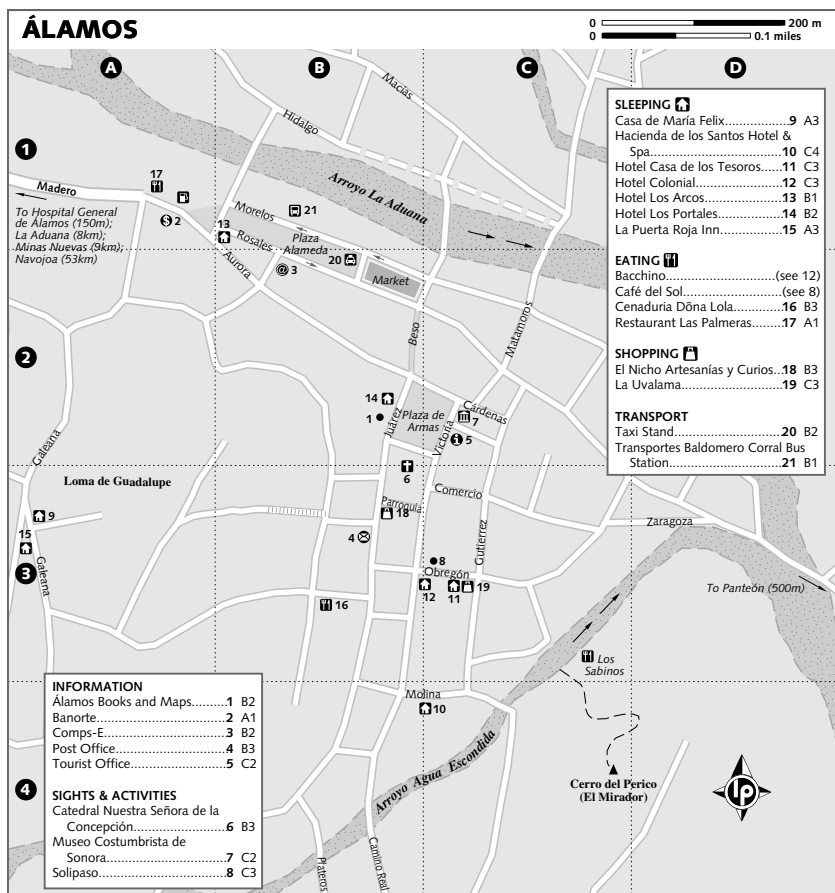
## Sights

### CATEDRAL NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN

Known simply as 'the cathedral,' this **church** (Church of the Immaculate Conception; Plaza de Armas; ☎ daily services 8am & 6pm) is the tallest building in Álamos. It was built between 1786 and 1804, as a copy of a Tucson, Arizona church known as the 'White Dove of the Desert.' Inside, the altar rail, lamps, censers and candelabra were fashioned from silver, but were all ordered to be melted down in 1866 by General Ángel Martínez after he booted out French imperialist troops from Álamos. Subterranean passages (seven or so, it's believed) between the church and several of the mansions – probably built as escape routes for the safety of the rich families in times of attack – were blocked off in the 1950s.

### MUSEO COSTUMBRISTA DE SONORA

This well-done **museum** (☎ 428-00-53; Plaza de Armas; admission M\$10; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Sun), on the east side of the Plaza de Armas, has extensive exhibits (all in Spanish) on the history and traditions of the people of Sonora. Special attention is paid to the influence of mining on Álamos, and the fleeting prosperity it created.



## EL MIRADOR

This lookout, atop a hill on the southeast edge of town, affords a sweeping view of Álamos and its mountainous surroundings, and is a popular hangout spot at sunset. To get there, take the walking trail that ascends from the Arroyo Agua Escondida next to the now-closed Los Sabinos restaurant. Alternatively, you can walk or drive up the steep, paved road that ascends from its southern approach.

## THE PANTEÓN

This deliciously ancient **cemetery** (Álamos Cemetery; cr Las Delicias & Posada; ☎ 6am-6pm) is a fascinating jumble of above-ground tombs, elaborate headstones made of pastel-hued crosses and angel statues, and tall palm trees. It began

receiving the dead of wealthy families in 1751, when the practice of burying them inside the church was abolished.

## Tours

**Tours of Distinction** (☎ 428-13-68) Lifelong local Emiliano Grajeda offers a variety of walking tours: a History Walk, a Ghosts and Legends Tour and a House and Garden Tour of the most impressive haciendas in town. Tours last two to three hours and cost M\$110 per person. He has also added a tour to the nearby former silver-mining town of La Aduana that includes a homemade tortilla-and-cheese lunch at a local home.

**Solipaso** (☎ 428-04-66; www.solipaso.com; Obregón 3; day trips M\$100-250) An excellent resource for nature lovers, this ecotour company offers nature excursions, including trips on the Río Mayo and Sea of Cortez, and to La Aduana,

all by prior arrangement. Its Californian expat owners also lead bird-watching, hiking and historical tours from October through May, and operate Café del Sol (right).

## Festivals & Events

**Ortiz Tirado Music & Art Festival** Held in late January, this 10-day festival of orchestra, choir and dance performances attracts thousands of Mexican visitors each year.

## Sleeping

Out of all the towns in northwest Mexico, Álamos has the most unique and attractive accommodations, most of which inhabit restored colonial mansions and have rooms encircling flower-filled courtyards, though budget offerings are scarce.

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Hotel Los Portales** (☎ 428-02-11; Juárez 6; r M\$300-600) The restored mansion of the Almada family is a tad decrepit and said to be haunted. Still, it's right in the center of town and could be a necessary choice for brave souls on a tight budget. The attached bar, La Corregidora, is the town's most atmospheric and interesting.

**Hotel Los Arcos** (☎ 428-15-28; Madero & Rosales 2; r M\$450, condos M\$800-1146; ☎ ☎) This new, Mexican-owned property sits in a lovely spot above Super Tito's supermarket on Plaza Alameda and has a gorgeous 2nd-floor arched walkway that overlooks the square. The M\$450 budget rooms here are the best value in town.

**Casa de María Felix** (☎ 428-09-29; www.casademariafelix.com; Galeana 41; r M\$550-650; ☎ ☎ ☎) A smidgeon less sophisticated but similarly appointed to La Puerta Roja, this lush and homey property, also a museum, is full of curios, fireplaces, antiques and plenty of dogs and cats.

**Hotel Casa de los Tesoros** (☎ 428-00-10; www.tesoros-hotel.com; Obregón 10; r M\$700-1100; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Formerly an 18th-century convent, this mellow hotel has a breezy, orange tree-shaded courtyard and beautiful archways (though quarters are dim compared to the property at large). The popular cantina here purportedly has the best chips and salsa in town (they are damn good).

**La Puerta Roja Inn** (☎ 428-01-41; www.lapuertaroja.com; Galeana 46; r incl breakfast M\$990; ☎ ☎) This gorgeous, 150-year-old home combines a Mexican junkyard-chic vibe with eclectic art and furnishings, and has a cheery garden and courtyard.

## TOP END

**Hotel Colonial** (☎ 428-13-71; www.alamoshotelcolonial.com; Obregón 8; r M\$1458-1985; ☎ ☎) A former silver mansion meticulously restored by Cajun firecracker Janet Anderson, whose cozy dream inn features 10 uniquely decorated rooms with stone floors and bathrooms to die for, all opening up onto a pleasant courtyard.

**Hacienda de los Santos Hotel & Spa** (☎ 428-02-17; www.haciendadelossantos.com; Molina 8; r M\$2940-2970, ste M\$3190-15,400; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) One of the most beautiful properties in all of North America, this sprawling estate features five restored colonial homes connected by a sequence of tunnels, archways and bridges. Its furnishings are the result of 43 years of international antique collecting by the owners and the spectacular property features 63 fireplaces, four pools, three restaurants and a tequila collection 520-strong.

## Eating & Drinking

Álamos has become a bit of a gourmet's hub. From the cheap and tasty food carts that dot the edge of Plaza Alameda (save snack room for Rigoberto's scrumptious chili mangos across from the bus station) to Casa La Aduana (opposite), 10 minutes out of town, Álamos has found its foodie focus. Keep in mind that in low season, many restaurants shut on Monday and dramatically cut back on their opening hours. The following reflects high-season hours.

**our pick Cenaduría Doña Lola** (☎ 428-11-09; Volantín s/n; mains M\$30-45; ☎ 6am-10pm) Stunning homemade Mexican dishes at startling prices, this family-run, locals' secret is worth the trip to Álamos alone (the enchiladas *suizas* are the best in the world). If you hear folks refer to Koky's, they mean here.

**Restaurant Las Palmeras** (☎ 428-00-65; Madero 48; mains M\$35-120; ☎ 6am-10pm Mon-Thu, 6am-2pm Fri-Sun) In a new location just northwest of Plaza Alameda, this town classic still churns out the same excellent *chiles rellenos* (stuffed chilies with cheese or chicken) and memorable homemade tortillas.

**Café del Sol** (☎ 428-04-66; Obregón 3; meals M\$50-70; ☎ 7:30am-6pm Tue-Sat) An airy colonial café ideal for espresso and innovative Nuevo Mexican bites like crepes with *chipotle* cider cream sauce.

**Bacchino** (☎ 428-13-71; Hotel Colonial; pizzas M\$90-120, mains M\$70-140; ☎ 11:30am-2:30pm & 5:30-10:30pm; ☎) This recently opened Italian restaurant



with a Louisiana soul (shrimp remoulade, anyone?) churns out wood-fired brick oven pizzas and favorites like six-cheese lasagna in a colorful atmosphere inside Hotel Colonial. There's live romantic Mexican guitar on Wednesday and Saturday nights.

**La Puerta Roja Inn** (☎ 428-01-41; www.lapuertarojainn.com; Galeana 46; dinner tasting menu M\$200-275; ☞ Wed only) Every Wednesday, guests and nonguests alike are welcome to partake in owner Teri Arnold's delicious meals, made with local produce, fish and fowl (courtesy of her hunter husband). Signature dishes like chocolate-rubbed pork ribs are a major hit with local expats.

## Shopping

**El Nicho Artesanías y Curios** (Juárez 15; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Occupying a former silk factory behind the cathedral is this fascinating shop, brimming with antiques, curios, folk art and Mexican handicrafts.

**La Uvalama** (☎ 428-01-80; cnr Obregón & Gutiérrez; ☞ 8am-6pm) It's sparse but the kiln-fired clay pottery is worth taking home. They also do pottery classes in high season (M\$40 per person for two hours) and you walk with your own custom-designed pottery.

## Getting There & Away

Access to Álamos is via Hwy 13 from Navojoa, 194km from Guaymas. Second-class buses to Álamos depart from Navojoa's **Transportes Baldomero Corral (TBC) station** (cnr Guerrero & No Reección) sporadically hourly or half-hourly (there are 21 per day) between 6am and 10pm (M\$20, one hour). TBC also has 1st-class service for longer trips, including 15 daily buses north to Hermosillo (M\$137, five hours), plus several to Tucson (M\$465, 11 hours) and Phoenix (M\$595, 13 hours).

In Álamos the TBC bus station is on the north side of Plaza Alameda. Buses depart for Navojoa (M\$20, one hour) every half-hour from 5:30am to 12:30pm, and then hourly from 1:15pm to 2:15pm, then half-hourly again from 3pm to 6:30pm. A bus to Phoenix (M\$549, 12 hours) departs nightly at 9:15pm.

The closest commercial airport is in Ciudad Obregón, about 90 minutes away.

## LA ADUANA

There are several small historic villages near Álamos that make interesting day excursions,

but La Aduana, the mine that once made Álamos rich, is a must, and is often included on guided-tour itineraries. It's a tiny little town with a small main plaza and a rustic feel.

The real star of the place is **Casa La Aduana Restaurant & Hotel** (☎ 647-404-34-73; www.casalaadua.com; r with breakfast & dinner for two M\$1250; ☞ closed May-mid-Jun). It has basic rooms on the plaza, but the big draw is its lauded restaurant (prix fixe dinner M\$180 to M\$320), where Italian- and French-trained owner/chef Sam Beardsley turns out lovingly prepared New Sonoran cuisine like shrimp rolled in tomato garlic chili marmalade. The dirt road leading here was being paved during research, so that should make access a little more comfortable.

There is also a budding ecotourism movement happening in La Aduana, led by the **Proyecto Ecoturístico La Aduana** (☎ 110-44-79), a woman's cooperative that will take you rappelling down a 35m mine shaft for M\$150. There are also over 350 species of birds in the area and spectacular hiking.

If you don't have your own vehicle, a cab from Álamos will cost M\$150 to M\$200.

## NORTHERN SINALOA

With the exception of the lovely El Fuerte (p344), Northern Sinaloa doesn't boast colonial streets or a wealth of activities, though most travelers wind up here for one very compelling reason: it is the western gateway to one of Mexico's most stunning natural attractions, the dramatic Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon). Southern Sinaloa, including Mazatlán, is covered in the Central Pacific Coast chapter.

## LOS MOCHIS

☎ 668 / pop 231,980

A surprisingly brisk balance of modern urban buzz and small-town friendly energy greets travelers to Los Mochis, 488km south of Hermosillo. Though many travelers now opt to begin or end their Copper Canyon rail journey in more picturesque El Fuerte, rail enthusiasts carry on or begin here in Los Mochis, the western terminus for the scenic railway.

## Orientation

The main street through the city, running southwest from Hwy 15D directly into the

center of town, changes names from Calz López Mateos to Leyva as it enters the center. Coming from the ferry terminal at Topolobampo, you will enter the city center on Blvd Castro, another major artery. Some blocks in the center are split by smaller streets (not shown on the Los Mochis map) running parallel to the main streets, and very few streets in the center are two-way.

## Information

**Centro Médico** (☎ 812-08-34; Blvd Castro 130)

**Online Café Internet** (Obregón; per hr M\$12; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat)

**Post office** (Ordoñez btwn Zaragoza & Prieto; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 816-20-15; cnr Cuauhtémoc & Al-lende) There are plans to move to a new location well out of the town center.

## Sights & Activities

The whitewashed **Parroquia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús** (cnr Obregón & Mina), a small church with a graceful tower, stands sentinel near the lovely **Plazuela 27 de Septiembre**, a pleasant, quiet and shady plaza with a classic gazebo, one of the best in northwest Mexico. There is a small museum, the **Museo Regional del Valle del Fuerte** (cnr Blvd Rosales & Obregón; admission M\$10, free Sun; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat), which has somewhat static exhibits (Spanish language only) on the history and culture of northwest Mexico, with more interesting rotating exhibits by local and international artists. The **Mercado Independencia** (Av Independencia), between Degollado and Zapata, is an energetic marketplace dealing mostly in meat and vegetables, but the outside shops along Av Independencia do offer some choice cowboy wear.

## Sleeping

Los Mochis has a good mix of accommodations for all budgets, and if you're heading to the Copper Canyon they can be invaluable for information and logistics.

## BUDGET

**Hotel Beltran** (☎ 812-06-88; cnr Hidalgo & Zaragoza; s/d M\$275/320; ☎) You won't send postcards home from here or anything, but budget travelers will find it much more comfortable than other similarly priced options.

**Hotel Fénix** (☎ 812-26-23; Flores 365 Sur; s/d M\$275/326; ☎) Like two hotels in one: the 16 recently renovated rooms are great value for

those on a budget; old rooms for the same price are a bit of a ripoff (though some do have improved bathrooms).

**Hotel Montecarlo** (☎ 812-18-18; Flores 322 Sur; s/d M\$290/350; ☎ ☎) A cheerful blue colonial building with rickety rooms around a sunny enclosed courtyard, this place certainly evokes a bygone era. It's worth the M\$40 splurge for an upgraded double, but don't expect miracles. It has a lot that allows long-term parking (if you're Copper Canyon bound), but the Fénix is a better deal if that's irrelevant to you.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Corintios Hotel** (☎ 818-22-24; www.hotelcorintios.com; Obregón 580 Pte; s/d M\$684/774, ste M\$855-1100; ☎ ☎) With its airy courtyard and cozy rooms with marble-tiled bathtubs, the centrally-located Corintios, though deteriorating ('70s minibars, broken coffeemakers), is still a good-value midrange option. The staff members are friendly and guests can park their car here long-term for free (others pay M\$80 per day).

**Hotel Santa Anita** (☎ 818-70-46; www.santaanita.hotel.com; cnr Leyva & Hidalgo; s/d M\$978/1133; ☎ ☎) This is the first link in the Balderrama chain, which owns six hotels in the Copper Canyon region. Two of the four floors have been questionably renovated (pea-colored walls? No). The attached travel agency can handle all things Copper Canyon and guests who use their services may leave their car here as well (others pay M\$50 per day).

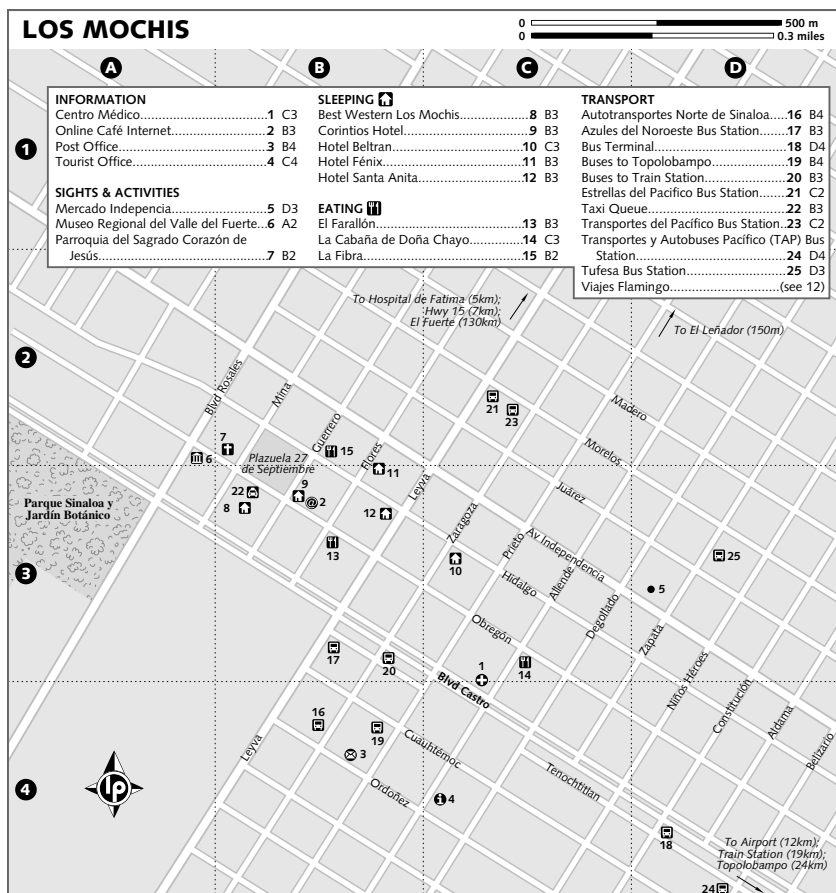
**Best Western Los Mochis** (☎ 816-30-30; www.bestwestern.com; Obregón 691 Pte; r M\$1045; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Though the rooms aren't as high-tech and fancy as the lobby and elevators, this all-amenity chain hotel is the newest, most tastefully decorated and comfortable of all hotels in Mochis. Lower floors are nonsmoking.

## Eating & Drinking

You won't go hungry in Los Mochis – its pleasant mix of classic joints and gourmet options allow for a nice gorging before heading into the starved-for-choice canyon.

**La Fibra** (☎ 812-5674; Hidalgo 540 Pte; sandwiches M\$12-17; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Sat; ☎) It's cramped, but the soy burgers and *tortas*, whole wheat quesadillas and array of fresh juices in the middle of cattle country is a welcome change.

**La Cabaña de Doña Chayo** (☎ 818-54-98; Obregón 99 Pte; mains M\$18-32; ☎ 9am-1am) Fabulous quesadil-



las and tacos with *carne asada* and *machaca* (spiced shredded dried beef) arrive here in piping-hot, handmade-to-order corn and flour tortillas. A classic.

**El Leñador** (☎ 812-66-00; Prieto 301 Nte; burgers M\$33-38, steaks M\$92-169; ☎ noon-11pm) Middle-class Mochis descends on this excellent burger and steak restaurant (try the Mexicana burger!), oddly popular with both families and the young and beautiful. Chips are served with three fantastic salsas.

**El Farallón** (☎ 812-12-73; cnr Flores & Obregón; mains M\$110-130; ☎ 9am-midnight) The upscale atmosphere evokes too much cruise-ship clubhouse, but there's excellent *ceviche*, sushi and endless preparations of shrimp and fish (the *chiletépin* sauce packs a fiery wallop).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The Los Mochis airport is about 14km south of the city off the road to Topolobampo. Daily direct flights (all with connections to other cities) are offered by **Aeroméxico/Aeroméxico Connect** (☎ 812-01-40) to Mexico City, Hermosillo and Guadalajara. **Aero California** (☎ 800-080-90-90) flies to Guadalajara, La Paz, Mexico City and Tijuana. **Alma** (☎ 817-47-67; www.alma.com.mx) flies daily to La Paz, Guadalajara, Tijuana and Puerto Vallarta.

### BOAT

Ferries go from Topolobampo, 24km southwest of Los Mochis, to La Paz, Baja California Sur; they leave at 11pm daily. Tickets are sold

by **Baja Ferries** ([www.bajaferreries.com.mx](http://www.bajaferreries.com.mx)) at the ferry terminal in Topolobampo (right). In Los Mochis, **Viajes Flamingo** (☎ 812-818-16-13; [www.mexicocoppercanyon.com](http://www.mexicocoppercanyon.com); Hotel Santa Anita, cnr Leyva & Hidalgo) sells tickets up to a month in advance. Buses head to Topolobampo consistently throughout the day (M\$20).

## BUS

In what was surely a bid to win you over with convenience, Los Mochis' numerous bus stations are spread all over town. Elite, Futura and Transportes Chihuahuenses (all 1st-class) share a large **bus terminal** (☎ 812-57-49; cnr Blvd Castro & Constitución) several blocks east of the center. Other 1st-class bus lines have their own terminals, such as **Transportes Norte de Sonora** (☎ 812-17-57; Moreles) and **Transportes del Pacífico** (☎ 812-03-47), who share a small station on Morelos between Zaragoza and Leyva, and **Estrellas del Pacífico** (☎ 818-96-14) next door. These all serve more or less the same major regional destinations. **Tufesa** (☎ 818-22-22; [www.tufesa.com.mx](http://www.tufesa.com.mx)), on Zapata between Juárez and Merlos, goes north to Nogales and south to Culiacán on a limited schedule as well as once daily to Los Angeles (12:20pm, 24 hours). **TAP** (☎ 817-59-07; [www.tap.com.mx](http://www.tap.com.mx); cnr Blvd Castro & Belizario) is next to the main bus terminal and heads to Mexico City, Guadalajara and Mazatlán among others. **Autotransportes Norte de Sinaloa** (☎ 818-03-57; [www.nortedesinaloa.com.mx](http://www.nortedesinaloa.com.mx)), at Zaragoza and Ordoñez, has 2nd-class buses to Culiacán and Mazatlán. **Azules del Noroeste** (☎ 812-34-94) goes to El Fuerte and the airport five times a day from a small station on Callejón Juan Escutia.

Destinations served include the following (fares given are 1st-class):

Destination	Fare	Duration
El Fuerte	M\$55	2hr
Guadalajara	M\$545	12hr
Guaymas	M\$180	5hr
Hermosillo	M\$250	7hr
Los Angeles	M\$1215	24hr
Mazatlán	M\$275	6hr
Nogales	M\$400	12hr
Topolobampo	M\$13	45min

## TRAIN

For much more about the train journey between Los Mochis and Chihuahua, see opposite.

The train station is 8km east of the center on Serrano. The ticket window is open from 5am to 7am daily for the morning's departures toward the Copper Canyon and Chihuahua. Tickets are also sold inside the **office** (☎ 824-11-51; ☎ 9am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12:30pm Sat, 8-10am Sun).

You can buy *primera express* (1st-class) tickets up to one week in advance of travel. Tickets for *clase económica* (economy-class) trains are sold an hour before the train departs, or the day before. You can also purchase tickets for the same price in *primera express* (if you pay cash) and for an 8% fee in *clase económica* one day in advance through Hotel Santa Anita's in-house travel agency, **Viajes Flamingo** (☎ 818-16-13; [www.mexicocoppercanyon.com](http://www.mexicocoppercanyon.com); cnr Leyva & Hidalgo).

The *primera express* train leaves Los Mochis at 6am, and the *clase económica* at 7am. See the boxed text, p343) for fares and schedules.

## Getting Around

Nearly everything of interest to travelers in Los Mochis is within walking distance of the city center. Taxis queue up on Obregón, right in front of the Best Western. A taxi to the airport costs approximately M\$140.




'Estación' (or 'Ruta 72') buses to the train station (M\$4.50, 20 minutes) depart every 30 minutes between 5am and 8pm from Blvd Castro, between Zaragoza and Prieta. You can take the bus to the station for the *clase económica* train, which departs at 7am, but for the 6am *primera express* departure it's probably safer to fork out M\$50 for a taxi.

## TOPOLOBAMPO

☎ 668

The second-largest natural deepwater port in the world, 24km southwest of Los Mochis, enjoyed a fleeting glimpse of pop-culture cool when it was the set for a popular Mexican *telenovela* (it was surely picked for its ridiculously awesome name). Unfortunately, there is nothing else terribly awesome about Topolobampo, though it was once the terminus for the Copper Canyon railway train. Now that the train goes no further than Los Mochis, the main importer of visitors here is the ferry that goes between the mainland and La Paz, in Baja.

For lodging, the only game in town is the **Hotel Marina** (☎ 862-01-00; Albert K Owen 33 Pte;

r M\$350;   ), an aged inn though the pool and restaurant are nice enough if you're in from La Paz at 9pm. It's easy to find; just follow the signs to the town center.

To make the five-hour excursion over to Baja, you can buy same-day tickets from **Baja Ferries** (☎ 862-10-03; www.bajaferrries.com; Terminal de Transbordadores; ☎ 9am-10:30pm). Passenger fares are M\$750 in *salón*; cabins for up to four people cost M\$760 extra. Passenger ferries leave at 11:30pm daily, arriving in La Paz at 5am. Returning ferries leave La Paz at 3pm, arriving in Topolobampo at 9pm the same night. See p306 for vehicle fares.

## BARRANCA DEL COBRE

Of all the things to see and do in northwest Mexico, none compare in awe and wonder to the dramatic Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon). It's a series of more than 20 spectacular canyons that altogether comprise a region that's four times larger than the Grand Canyon in Arizona, and in several parts it's much deeper. Imagine for a moment if a jagged key the size of the Florida panhandle was scraped across a car the size of North Carolina – the resulting damage would be akin to Copper Canyon's stunning chasms.

The best part about the region is that you can travel right up, over and through some of the steepest areas on the Ferrocarril Chihuahua Pacífico (Chihuahua-Pacific Railway, also known as the Copper Canyon Railway), which takes passengers on a scenic journey over 655km of impressively laid rails. The train, which travels between Los Mochis at its western terminus and Chihuahua in the Midwest, is the most popular way to see the canyons. For more, see p343.

The name Copper Canyon, which was misleadingly named by the Spanish (they mistook the greenish-glow of lichen for copper as they traipsed through the area), refers specifically to the stunning Barranca de Urique – which, at an altitude of only 500m (but 1879m deep), is the canyon's deepest point.

The Barranca de Urique has a subtropical climate, while the peaks high above are 2300m above sea level, and are home to conifers and evergreens. The entire region is also home to one of Mexico's largest groups of indigenous people, the Rarámuri (see the boxed text, p346).

Though many people simply ride the train all the way through and then stop overnight before returning, this is an injustice: the best way to truly experience the Barranca del Cobre region is to make a few stops along the way. Creel (p349), approximately eight hours from Los Mochis, is where most people (especially backpackers) choose to break the journey, as it's near plenty of good spots for exploring, and is a town full of traveler amenities. Overnight stays are also possible at Cerocahui, Urique, Posada Barrancas and Divisadero, each allowing you 24 hours before the train passes by again – time enough to get a closer look and explore the canyons.

Many travelers prefer to visit the area in spring or autumn, when the temperatures are not too hot at the bottom of the canyon (as in summer), or too cold at the top (as in winter). A particularly good time to come is late September and October (after the summer rains), when the vegetation is still green. Things dry up from February to June, but you can still glimpse some wildflowers.

## FERROCARRIL CHIHUAHUA PACÍFICO

One of the world's most scenic rail journeys, the Ferrocarril Chihuahua Pacífico (Copper Canyon Railway) is also a considerable feat of engineering: it has 37 bridges and 86 tunnels along its 653km of railway line, and connects the mountainous, arid interior of northern Mexico with a town just 24km shy of the Pacific coast. The line, which was opened in 1961 after many decades of building, is now the major link between Chihuahua and the coast, and is used heavily not only by passengers but also for freight. The beauty of the landscape it traverses – sweeping mountain vistas, sheer canyon walls, sparkling lakes and fields of flowers, most of it free of humans and development of any kind – has made it one of Mexico's prime tourist excursions.

The Ferrocarril Chihuahua Pacífico (CHEPE, pronounced *che-pe*) operates two trains: the 1st-class *primera express*, which costs twice as much but makes fewer stops and has a restaurant and bar; and the cheaper and slower *clase económica*, which has a snack bar. Cars on both trains have air-conditioning and heating. The *clase económica* is certainly nice enough for most tourists, so the issue comes down to time – it takes at least 14 hours to make the one-way trip on the *primera*



express, and at least two hours longer on the *clase económica*, which stops frequently along the way.

If you're heading toward Los Mochis from Chihuahua, consider taking the *primera expres*, as the *clase económica* runs later and is often behind schedule anyway, and passes much of the best scenery (between Creel and El Fuerte) after dark, especially in winter when the sun sets earlier. Heading in the other direction, you should be able to see the best views on either train, unless the *clase económica* is excessively delayed.

The majority of the good views are on the right side of the carriage heading inland (east), while the left side is best for trips going to the coast (west); if you've got an advance ticket

that's not on the side you were hoping for, just ask the conductor to switch you. Wherever your seat, it's fun to congregate in the vestibules between cars, where the windows open and you can take unobstructed photos and feel the fresh mountain air whoosh past your face.

Between Los Mochis and El Fuerte, the train passes through flat, gray farmland. Shortly after, it begins to climb through fog-shrouded hills speckled with dark pillars of cacti. It passes over the long Río Fuerte bridge and through the first of 87 tunnels about three hours after leaving Los Mochis. Along the way, the train cuts through small canyons (snaking through three ascending loops known as La Pera at Témoris, for its shape like a pear) and hugs the sides of dramatic cliffs as it climbs higher



and higher through the mountains of the Sierra Tarahumara until the highlight: when the train stops at Divisadero, where you get your first and only glimpse of the actual Barranca del Cobre. The train circles back over itself in a complete loop inside the canyon again at El Lazo before steaming into Creel and Chihuahua.

## Tickets

*Primera express* tickets can be purchased up to one week in advance, while tickets for

*clase económica* trains can only be purchased one day in advance. Tickets don't usually require advance purchase, but you definitely shouldn't just walk up during *Semana Santa*, July or August, or at Christmas.

For a same-day *primera express* ticket, it's prudent to go to the ticket office by 5am, if you're at **Los Mochis station** (☎ 668-824-11-51; 📄 ticket window 5-7am & 9am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 5-7am & 10am-12:30pm Sat, 5-7am & 8-10am Sun) or **Chihuahua station** (☎ 614-439-72-12; 📄 ticket window 5-7am &

## RAILWAY SCHEDULE – FERROCARRIL CHIHUAHUA PACÍFICO

Both the *primera express* and *clase económica* trains run every day. Trains tend to run late, and the times given below comprise just a rough guideline. You will hear people talk about 'normal' times as if they are official due to years of experience with the train. This is worth a listen. Though the train *can* run on time, it has also been known to show up two hours earlier or later than times shown here, so it's best to check with your hotel, at the train stations or with train conductors for the latest schedules. Also, if you are leaving Chihuahua on the *primera express* with hopes of making it to the Baja ferry from Topolobampo that same day, don't count on it. It almost never works out. The *clase económica* train, which is much slower, often arrives at the end of the line around 1:30am. There is no time change between Los Mochis and Chihuahua.

### EASTBOUND – LOS MOCHIS TO CHIHUAHUA

Primera Express Train 75		Clase Económica Train No 75		
Station	Arrives	Fare from Los Mochis	Arrives	Fare from Los Mochis
Los Mochis	6am (departs Los Mochis)	–	7am (departs Los Mochis)	–
El Fuerte	8:30am	M\$267	10:15am	M\$133
Témoris	11:26am	M\$475	1:55pm	M\$238
Bahuichivo	12:27pm	M\$562	3:10pm	M\$281
San Rafael	1:20pm	M\$633	4:25pm	M\$317
Posada Barrancas	1:40pm	M\$655	4:50pm	M\$328
Divisadero	1:45pm	M\$664	4:55pm	M\$332
Creel	3:24pm	M\$793	6pm	M\$397
Cuauhtémoc	6:23pm	M\$1155	10:35pm	M\$578
Chihuahua	8:45pm	M\$1451	1:30am	M\$726

### WESTBOUND – CHIHUAHUA TO LOS MOCHIS

Primera Express Train 74		Clase Económica Train No 76		
Station	Arrives	Fare from Chihuahua	Arrives	Fare from Chihuahua
Chihuahua	6am (departs Chihuahua)	–	7am (departs Chihuahua)	–
Cuauhtémoc	8:15am	M\$295	9:55am	M\$148
Creel	11:15am	M\$660	1:20pm	M\$330
Divisadero	12:34pm	M\$789	3:25pm	M\$399
Posada Barrancas	1pm	M\$820	3:30pm	M\$399
San Rafael	1:18pm	M\$875	4:45pm	M\$410
Bahuichivo	2:17pm	M\$891	5:10pm	M\$446
Témoris	3:15pm	M\$978	6:25pm	M\$489
El Fuerte	6:10pm	M\$1271	10:23pm	M\$636
Los Mochis	8:50pm	M\$1451	1:30am	M\$726

10am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 5-7am & 9am-12:30pm Sat, 5-7am Sun). Note that advanced sales to the general public are only available in Los Mochis, Creel (*primera express* only, from 11am) and Chihuahua. If you board anywhere else, you have to purchase tickets on the train with cash only, and you do run the risk that they might be sold out by then. Alternatively, any of the many **Balderrama Hotels** (☎ 668-712-16-23, www.mexicoscoppercanyon.com) assist their clients in making reservations for the same cost as the station if you pay cash.

## EL FUERTE

☎ 698 / pop 11,920 / elevation 180m

It's not as charming or wealthy as Álamos, but El Fuerte, a sleepy and picturesque little town surrounded by one of Latin America's last standing dry tropical forests, isn't a victim of an expat occupation either. Noted for its colonial ambience, its Spanish architecture and, mostly, for being a good starting or ending point for a trip on the Copper Canyon Railway, El Fuerte has a stuck-in-time feel that probably won't last too much longer.

Founded in 1564 by the Spanish Francisco de Ibarra, El Fuerte – named for its 17th-century fort that Spaniards built to protect settlers from various natives – was an important Spanish settlement throughout the colonial period. For more than three centuries it was a major farming and commercial center, and a trading post on El Camino Real, the Spanish mule trail between Guadalajara and Álamos. In 1824 El Fuerte became the capital of the state of Sinaloa, and remained so for several years.

El Fuerte is usually swarming with bus tours, but independent travelers are starting to find their way here as well. There's not a lot to do in town, but as more indie-minded operators begin to open shop here, the wealth of offerings in the surrounding countryside should begin to see more visitors.

## Information

**3Amigos Too** (☎ 893-50-28; www.amigos3.com; Rosales 104; ☎ 9am-7pm) All of your Copper Canyon needs can be handled by the newly opened El Fuerte offices of this highly regarded Creel operator. They also offer river and hiking tours around El Fuerte and rent kayaks, 4WDs, scooters and bicycles for self-guided tours in the area.

**Amigo Trails** (☎ 456-00-36; www.amigotrails.com; Rosales 104) The new travel agency, located inside 3Amigos Too and in Creel, books accommodations along

the way, and plans on eventually booking train tickets. It is the only inbound agency within the canyon boundaries. Inquire here about its new boutique hotel as well.

**Bancomer** (cnr Constitución & Juárez; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri) If you're starting your train journey here, load up on cash. There are no banks between here and Creel and the ATM in Creel is often picky.

**Hospital Rural IMSS Solidaridad** (☎ 893-07-70; Rebeca Serna s/n)

**Police** (☎ 893-03-07)

**Post Office** (Calle 5 de Mayo s/n; ☎ 8am-4pm) Inside the Palacio Municipal.

**Uri@s Ciber Café** (☎ 893-06-15; Juárez 103; per hr M\$10; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) Internet access close to the 3Amigos office.

## Sights and Activities

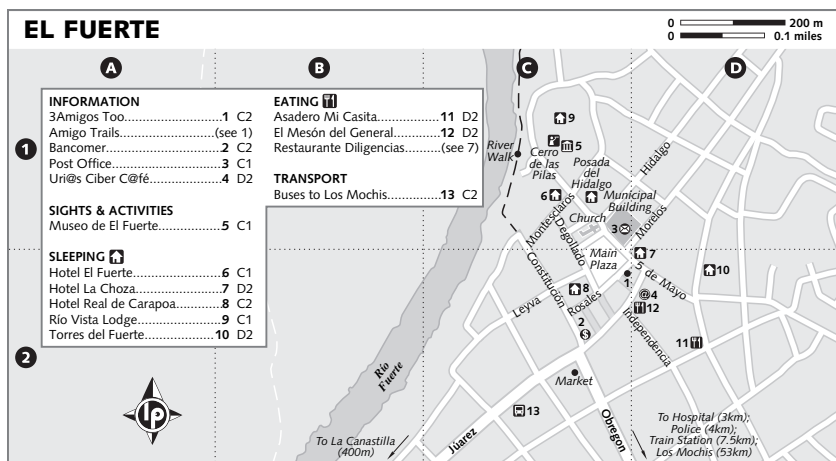
The Palacio Municipal, plaza and church are El Fuerte's most notable features (the Hotel Posada del Hidalgo, though historic, is very underwhelming). You can visit the **Museo de El Fuerte** (☎ 893-15-01; admission M\$5; ☎ 9am-8pm), a replica of the original fort, at the top of the town's small *mirador* – called Cerro de las Pilas. This is an excellent vantage point of the town, its surrounding area and the wide Río Fuerte. It's an especially dramatic view at sunset.

## Sleeping

El Fuerte as a destination was all but created by packaged group tours, so many hotels are often booked solid. It's best to reserve here on the early side. Most spots will agree to keep an eye on your car – which can be safely parked on the street near the inn – while you're off on the rails.

**Hotel Real de Carapoa** (☎ 893-17-96; Paseo de la Juventude 102; s/d M\$400/450; ☎) A newer, cheaper offering right off the main square. Unfortunately, the sizable rooms here – all with king-size bed – aren't as colorful as the common area, but they are a good value when all's said and done. There's free coffee as well.

**Rio Vista Lodge** (☎ 893-04-13; Junto Al Museo Mirador; r M\$500; ☎ ☎ ☎) This rustic hotel at the top of the *mirador* does indeed boast lovely views of the river, especially from its peaceful, high-altitude backyard. The owner, an avid birder, has built it room by room from the ground up. Three new rooms offer excellent river views and slate floors and bathrooms. The whole place is a little rural treasure, full of quirky touches like Revolution Winchester rifles and birdfeeders.



**Hotel La Chozo** (☎ 893-12-74; [www.hotellachozo.com](http://www.hotellachozo.com); Calle 5 de Mayo 101; r M\$575-690; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) A good midrange option not lacking in style: brick domed ceilings (on the top floors), colorful tile work, moody lighting, brightly sponge-painted walls, cool stone floors and colorful Mexican sinks. The excellent onsite restaurant and private parking lot are also pluses.

**Hotel El Fuerte** (☎ 893-02-26; Montesclaros 37; r M\$750-900; ☑) The El Fuerte looks like a drunk mariachi swallowed a piñata and threw up all over the place: The clichéd design here is a little over the top. Still, rooms in this 17th-century mansion do have some charm and are set around large, flowering courtyards.

**our pick Torres del Fuerte** (☎ 893-19-74; [www.hotelesstorres.com](http://www.hotelesstorres.com); Robles 102; r M\$1000-1500; P ☒ ☑ ☒) Francisco Torres has turned his family's 400-year-old hacienda into a beautiful boutique hotel. A gorgeous ménage-à-trois of colonial relic, rustic elegance and contemporary art characterizes this new property, from the rescued antique doors to the excavated original columns to the recycled bricks and beams. All 25 rooms are uniquely themed, many with beautiful slate bathrooms and exposed adobe and brick walls. The bar and restaurant are housed within an old foreman's house and ancient Jesuit-built chapel. For the same price, it would be unthinkable not to stay here over Posada del Hidalgo.

## Eating

There is a wealth of freshwater on the outskirts of El Fuerte, which produces local specialties

you should definitely not leave town without sampling: *cauques* (sweetwater lobster) and *lobina* (black bass).

**Asadero Mi Casita** (cnr Robles & Zaragoza; mains M\$10-55; ☒ 6pm-1am Wed-Mon) This joint is popular for the house specialty, *papa asada*: grilled beef, loads of gooey cheese, potatoes and butter that you wrap up in tortillas. Legendary!

**El Mesón del General** (☎ 893-02-60; Juárez 202; mains M\$55-198; ☒ 8am-11pm) The most traditional of El Fuerte's options, this institution serves up several styles of octopus (*polpo*) and offers the best deal on *lobina* and *cauque*: a M\$150 combo plate.

**La Canastilla** (☎ 893-18-64; Juárez 510; mains M\$58-185; ☒ 9am-9pm) The town's main restaurants serve more or less the same dishes, but the food at this riverside spot trumps them all. The stuffed shrimp (*camerones rellenos*) and flambéed black bass (*flameado*) are both rich and exquisite.

**Restaurant Diligencias** (☎ 893-12-74; Hotel La Chozo, Calle 5 de Mayo 101; mains M\$78-178; ☒ 7am-11pm) Another great spot for *lobina* (try it breaded *zarandeado*-style) and scrumptious *cauques* – expensive but worth it. The breakfast *chilaquiles* are also wonderful.

## Getting There & Around

The roads in and out of El Fuerte have seen their share of roadwork in recent years, so if you're driving, the approach from all directions is paved and safe with the exception of the small road from Álamos – you still need a 4WD from there.

## THE RARÁMURI

At least 50,000 indigenous Rarámuri (do not refer to them as the Tarahumara; it is considered politically incorrect) live in the Sierra Tarahumara's numerous canyons, including the Barranca del Cobre. You will see them – mostly women, dressed in colorful skirts and blouses, peddling beautiful hand-woven baskets and carrying infants on their backs – as you travel deeper into this region. The women are known for their bright apparel, while most men wear Western jeans and shirts (except in more remote areas, where you'll still see men in loincloths); both men and women wear sandals hewn from tire-tread and strips of leather.

'Rarámuri' means 'those who run fast' – an appropriate name for a people who are most famous for running long distances swiftly, sometimes up to 20 hours at a time. Traditionally, the Rarámuri hunted by chasing down and exhausting deer, then driving the animals over cliffs to be impaled on wooden sticks strategically placed at the bottom of the canyon. Today, they run grueling footraces of at least 160km through rough canyons, all the while kicking a small wooden ball ahead of them. Their famous runners have also competed in marathons and ultra distance races in the US and throughout the world.

Another tradition is that of the *tesquinada*, a raucous social gathering in which Rarámuris consume copious amounts of *tesquino*, a potent alcoholic beverage made from fermented corn.

Though many are determined to remain isolated within this formidable topography, and do manage to retain many traditions (such as residing in cave dwellings), it will be clear the very first time you see a bargain-happy tourist trying to save M\$10 on a basket that the Rarámuri way of life is under serious threat. Between the rapid loss of their language and severe degradation of their environment – by logging, mining, drug cultivation and tourist-based development – the line between the Rarámuri and other Mexicans becomes thinner every day. Because of that, their overwhelming poverty (more than 40% have no income) becomes more and more of an issue. Poor health is also problematic; there are high rates of infant mortality and teenage pregnancy among Rarámuris (it is not uncommon for girls to be taken out of school and married by the age of 14), with some of the only relief coming from Catholic missionaries.

If you want to help, you can purchase Rarámuri wares at Artesanías Misión (p352) in Creel, which donates proceeds to help provide free health care for the Rarámuri; and you can make good use of their ecotourism options outside Creel at Complejo Ecoturístico Areko (p353). Though donating Western clothes is inappropriate, you can donate 10m of brightly colored cloth so they may continue to make their own garments according to tradition. 3Amigos in Creel (see p350) regularly accepts donations both for the Rarámuri and down-on-their-luck Mexicans as well.

Buses to Los Mochis (M\$55, two hours) depart every half-hour between 5am and 7pm from the corner of Juárez and 16 de Septiembre.

The train station is a few kilometers east of town. The departure time for the eastbound *primera express* is 8:30am, though it never arrives before 9am, with the *clase económica* trailing about an hour and a half to two hours behind. You can take a taxi to the station for about M\$100.

## CEROCAHUI

☎ 635 / pop 1550 / elevation 1600m

Cerocahui is a hub for local travelers and a place where tourists rarely disembark, but those that do are greeted with a tiny pueblo in the middle of a verdant and picturesque valley. Access to Cerocahui is from

Bahuichivo station, two stops after El Fuerte and one stop past Témoris. Here and in and around Urique is where you'll get your first glimpse of the Rarámuri (see the boxed text, above), as many live in this area, though they don't come out in droves hawking their beautiful wares until San Rafael.

The town's pretty yellow-domed church, **San Francisco Javier de Cerocahui**, was founded in 1680 by the Jesuit Padre Juan María de Salvatierra. Today, Cerocahui is an *ejido* (communal landholding) dedicated to forestry. It boasts a few good lodging options, a boarding school for Rarámuri girls, a peaceful atmosphere and, best of all, proximity to the surrounding countryside – excellent for bird-watching (over 225 species of birds have been spotted here), hiking and horseback riding.

Any of the hotels here can arrange trips into the canyon, and can pick you up at the train station for the 40-minute, 16km drive into town.

## Sleeping & Eating

Cerocahui has a handful of choices for all budgets.

**Hotel Paraíso del Oso** (☎ in Chihuahua 614-421-33-72, in the US 800-844-3107; [www.mexicohorse.com](http://www.mexicohorse.com); campsite/dm M\$50/100, s/d incl meals & transfers M\$1210/1870; 📞 📧 📺) Paraíso del Oso occupies a peaceful and picturesque spot just north of Cerocahui village. The down-to-earth vibe here is one that emphasizes ecotourism, bird-watching and equestrian tours. Vegetarian meals are available, as are riverside campsites and five dorm beds. The management can also arrange horseback-riding tours (there are 20 horses on the property) and hiking trips throughout the surrounding area.

**Hotel Plaza** (☎ 456-52-56; s/d M\$200/300) Offers tidy and colorful budget rooms on the main plaza with TV and wood-burning stove.

**Cabañas San Isidro** (☎ 456-52-57; [www.coppercanyonamigos.com](http://www.coppercanyonamigos.com); s/d incl all meals & transfers M\$900/1300) Perched in the surrounding hillsides 8km from town, this newer, family-run lodge offers charming pine cabins on a rustic working ranch. Rooms have wood-burning stoves, pine furniture, bottle-built stained-glass windows, mural-painted walls and cozy Rarámuri throws. The food is unsophisticated but tasty.

**Hotel Misión** (☎ in Los Mochis 668-818-70-46; [www.hotelmision.com](http://www.hotelmision.com); s/d incl all meals & transfers M\$1963.50/2572.50; 📞 📧) The oldest and best-known hotel in Cerocahui and yet another link in the underwhelming Balderrama chain of Barranca del Cobre hotels, this former hacienda has rustic rooms complete with wood-burning stoves, a bar, a restaurant, gardens and a pool table. Ten new rooms overlook the small vineyard.

## Getting There & Away

All the hotels except the Hotel Plaza will pick you up at the Bahuichivo train station, and you can always catch a ride with one of the other hotels' buses, or pick up a lift by thumb. The daily 'school' bus from Bahuichivo to Urique may drop you off in Cerocahui for M\$30 if it's not too full.

## URIQUE

☎ 635 / pop 1500 / elevation 550m

This starry-skied village, at the bottom of the impressive Barranca de Urique, is also accessed from the Bahuichivo train stop, and is a good base for all kinds of canyon hikes lasting anywhere from one to several days. The three- to four-day hike between Batopilas and Urique is a popular trek. If you organize it on your own, the going rate with a guide is M\$1000 per person. For more comfort you may contact **EcoTravel Mexico** (☎ in Chihuahua 614-179-03-92; [www.ecotravel-mexico.com](http://www.ecotravel-mexico.com); hikes per person from M\$1320), which organizes the trip with guides certified with the National Outdoor Leadership School and Leave No Trace.

A mini school bus heads down to Urique from Bahuichivo train station once a day after the last train passes the station (around 4pm, though an earlier bus may be sent if enough people disembark on the *primera express* train). The jarring ride (M\$115, three hours) makes a breathtaking 1050m descent on loose gravel and dirt into the Barranca de Urique, the deepest of the canyons. Sit on the right side for all the bare-knuckle views. It departs for the return trip at around 8am (it runs up and down the main street – just flag it down). Alternatively, you may be able to arrange transportation with your hotel in Urique. Hotels in Cerocahui can also arrange for guided trips down into this deep canyon town. Keep in mind, Urique is rural – more Tecates are passed around here than educations – and marijuana fuels the local economy (you thought Rarámuri baskets bought those brand-new Ford trucks?), so be extra wary about town.

Urique has only a few accommodations. **Entre Amigos** ([www.amongamigos.com](http://www.amongamigos.com); camp/dm M\$50/75, r M\$250) is a great option for independent backpackers. Just outside town, it's more peaceful, and the American-run spot has nice stone cabins, dorm rooms, camping sites and a big communal kitchen. Watch out for scorpions! **Hotel Barrancas de Urique** (☎ 456-60-76; Principal 201; r M\$250-300; 📞) is definitely the nicest and cleanest spot, on the main road at the edge of the river. Bear in mind, though, the rowdy cantina below can seriously stint your shuteye.

**Hotel Estrella del Río** (☎ 456-60-03; r M\$400; 📞) offers rooms (some with air-con) with commanding views of the Río Urique and surrounding mountains. Inquire at **Restaurant Plaza** (📞 6am-9pm), across from the plaza,

which, incidentally, is the only good and clean spot to eat (the specialty, *aguachile*, is a soupy shrimp cocktail full of onions and tomatoes and spiced up with *chiletepin* peppers, served in a *molcajete*).

## POSADA BARRANCAS

☎ 635 / pop 350 / elevation 2220m

About 5km southwest of Divisadero, Posada Barrancas station is next to Areponápuchi, the only village on the train line that is right on the rim of the canyon. Often referred to as Arepo, this village – made up of just a couple of dozen houses, a tiny church and a handful of inns – is where it all comes together for the first time: spectacular views of the canyon dangle precariously under the patios of a few hotels here, making it a don't-miss stopover. Arepo is also a good base for going into the canyon by foot, car or on horseback. Most of the hotels will organize any kind of canyon trip you would like, be it a hike to the rim or a horseback ride down into the deep village Wakajípare, below. If you want to set off on your own, take the trail down to the left of the entrance to Hotel Mirador. Plan on four hours down, six back up (though the Rarámuri do it in three) and carry plenty of food and water as well as layered clothing.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Cabañas Díaz** (☎ 578-30-08; large r with 8 bunks M\$100, 1-3-person cabaña with shared/private bathroom M\$250/400, 3-5-person cabaña with private bathroom M\$600; (P)) The Díaz family's guest lodge is known for its hospitality, delicious meals (M\$70) and tranquil atmosphere. Its various cabins and rooms are basic and cozy, with fireplaces and firm beds, and the family can help arrange custom trips. If no one from here comes to meet the train, just walk down the main road into the village until you see the sign on the right (about 10 minutes).

**Cabañas Arepo Barrancas** (☎ 578-30-46; s/d incl breakfast M\$300/400; (P)) This is the best budget option – tiled floors, comfy beds – though it's a bit further from the canyon rim. Get one of the six new cabañas here and you've robbed them at these prices. Look for María Dolores at the station – she works the middle food stall – or walk through town five minutes past the sign for Cabañas Díaz. It's on the left. Meals here cost M\$35 to M\$45.

**Hotel Mansión Rarámuri** (☎ 800-777-46-68, in Chihuahua 614-415-47-21; incl meals & transfers s M\$1210-

1600, d M\$1716-2300; (P) (♿) (♿) Dubbed 'El Castillo' because it looks like a medieval stone castle, this quirky resort has a variety of cozy, rustic cabins, but the true gems are 17 new rooms on the rim of the canyon with plush beds and wood-beam ceilings. They are more comfortable than the Mirador and boast more or less the same view for M\$685 less.

**Hotel Posada Mirador** (☎ in Los Mochis 668-812-16-13, in the US 888-528-8401; www.mexicocoppercanyon.com/mirador; s/d incl meals & transfers M\$1985/2985; (P)) One night here costs more than the entire rail journey in 1st class and it's often over-run with tour groups, but this, the only jewel in the Balderrama chain's monopoly, boasts spectacular views from each room's private balcony. Communal meals aren't Michelin-worthy but suffice. Since the main attraction here is drinking in the view, the 6pm to 7pm nightly Happy Hour ain't too shabby, either.

## Getting There & Away

See the railway schedule on p343 for information on getting to Posada Barrancas by train. Buses between San Rafael and Creel will drop you off in Areponápuchi at the highway entrance (see p353). The bus is much faster and cheaper than the train, but arrange for transportation to the center of town, as there are no taxis.

## DIVISADERO

elevation 2240m

If you don't overnight in Posada Barrancas, then Divisadero, definitely a train stop rather than an actual village, will be your first and only chance to see into the miraculous canyon from the train. Luckily, the train stops for 15 minutes, giving you enough time to jump out, gawk and snap some photos at the viewpoint and hop back on. But be prepared to budget your time more carefully, as the place is also a Rarámuri market and spectacular food court. *Gorditas*, tacos and *chiles rellenos*, cooked up in makeshift oil-drum stoves, are worth the stop alone. Just ask for Lucy González. Her food is like edible art. Gobble it all up quickly – the conductors aren't supposed to allow food back onto the train.

If you decide you want to stay longer than 15 minutes, you can check into the **Hotel Divisadero Barrancas** (☎ in the US 888-232-4219, in Chihuahua 614-415-11-99; s/d incl meals Jun-Aug M\$1100/1600, Sep-May M\$1780/2150), right at the train station, which has 52 beautiful rooms with



wood-beam ceilings and views of the canyon. The restaurant-bar, with a spectacular view, is open to the public (overall, this is the most charming option between Posada Barrancas and Divisadero). Get a newer room (numbers 35 to 52) for the best vistas. You can also spend more time here without spending the night if you switch from a *primera express* to *clase económica* train, which is officially three hours behind but often times more like an hour. You will need two separate tickets to do this. Buses also run to Creel six times a day (M\$37, one hour), a shorter and slightly cheaper way than continuing on the train. For information on getting to Divisadero by train, see the railway schedule on p343.

## CREEL

☎ 635 / pop 5340 / elevation 2338m

Creel, surrounded by pine forests and interesting rock formations, is an unexpected surprise. Oddly, its location and log-fueled architecture feel vaguely reminiscent of an alpine village, albeit a very red, white and green one. Filled with the multi-hued Rarámuri, Creel is (at least for now) a perfect little marriage of travelers and tradition and an excellent base for exploring the surrounding area's numerous natural attractions.

It fully established itself as a traveler's hub in the '90s, and now hotels and guesthouses line the main drags, tour-guide companies are aplenty, and backpackers can be seen stalking up and down the streets in search of bargains several times a day after the train comes through. Unlike many of the towns along the railway, Creel has some fun watering holes and great bargain accommodations and several opportunities for shopping – be it for Rarámuri crafts and Mata Ortiz pottery, or to just stock up on a bit of civilization. There isn't a charming plaza or significant historical relic to explore in town, but from here you can venture out into the rest of the Barranca del Cobre, whether it be down into the canyon village of Batopilas or to nearby Lago Arareko.

Its high elevation means Creel can be very cold in winter, even snowy; and it's none too warm at night in autumn, either. In summer, the cool air and pine-tree aroma from the town's surrounding forests are a welcome relief from the heat of the tropical coastal lowlands and the deserts of northern Mexico. Bring a sweater, even if the rest of Mexico is scorching.

## Orientation

Creel is a very small town. Most things you need, including many hotels and restaurants, are on Av López Mateos, the town's main street. This leads south from the town plaza, the site of two churches, the post office, the bank and the Artesanías Misión shop. The train station is one block north of the plaza. Across the tracks are a couple more hotels and restaurants, as well as the bus station.

Av Gran Visión is the highway through town; it heads northeast to Chihuahua and southeast to Guachochi, passing Lago Arareko and Cusárare. There is a paved road that runs southwest from Creel through Divisadero and on to San Rafael. Av López Mateos and Av Gran Visión intersect a couple of kilometers south of the center of town.

## Information

Information about local attractions is available from the tour operators and most accommodations. There is fierce competition for tour business, so be sure to compare prices. You can get laundry service at Casa Margarita (p350) for M\$50 per load – just don't expect it folded. 3Amigos Canyon Expeditions (p350) is a great source for local info.

**Cascada.net** (Av López Mateos 49; per hr M\$20; ☎ 8am-10pm) Internet access.

**Clínica Santa Teresa** (☎ 456-01-05; ☎ 24hr) Behind Casa Margarita.

**CompuCenter** (Av López Mateos 33; per hr M\$20; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) Internet access.

**Divisas La Sierra** (Av López Mateos 59) Changes US dollars and traveler's checks.

**Police station** (☎ 060) On the plaza.

**Post office** (☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) On the plaza.

**Santander** (Av López Mateos 17; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) ATM.

## Sights & Activities

The **Casa de las Artesanías del Estado de Chihuahua y Museo** (☎ 456-00-80; admission M\$10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), overlooking the plaza, is a great spot to delve deeper into Rarámuri culture. There are excellent exhibits with text in English on Rarámuri culture and crafts along with gorgeous woven baskets, traditional clothing, pottery, black-and-white photos and more.

## Tours

Most of Creel's hotels offer tours of the surrounding area, with trips to canyons, rivers,

hot springs, waterfalls and other places. Trips range from a seven-hour tour to the bottom of the Barranca de Urique to an eight-hour excursion to Mennonite settlements in Cuauhtémoc, and overnight excursions to Batopilas, a wonderful canyon village, which descends from an altitude of 2338m at Creel to 495m, via a winding dirt road. This is also prime riding country, and many of Creel's nearby attractions can be enjoyed from horseback; or you can rent a bicycle or scooter and venture out on your own. The whole area is a mountain bike playground and, depending on your skill and fitness level, you could just rent a bike for a few days and take in all the area's attractions without a guide. For those who want just a taste, the most popular mountain biking excursions are to the Valley of the Frogs, Mushrooms and Monks (named for the fat, squashed; thin, big-headed; and tall, slender rock formations that resemble each, respectively), and to the Rarámuri stronghold of Lago Arareko. 3Amigos (below) can give you self-guided maps for the rides.

All tours require a minimum number of people. The easiest place to get a group together is often at Casa Margarita (right); if you're sleeping elsewhere, wander over around 9am. You can also hire your own private guide. Expect to pay around M\$300 per person, per day – and much more if you are doing a bigger trip that requires a vehicle and driver; to Batopilas, for example, a private driver with an SUV will run to around M\$3000 for one night.

**3Amigos Canyon Expeditions** (☎ 456-00-36; www.amigos3.com; Av López Mateos 46) Though they now

offer guided private tours as well, 3Amigos built their excellent reputation on helping you to 'be your own guide in the Copper Canyon!' by selling self-guided tour packages with Nissan trucks, scooters and mountain bikes. Packages range from M\$150 to M\$3000 per day, and sometimes include lunch, maps and travel information. This is a great option for independent souls.

**El Aventurero** (☎ 456-05-57; www.ridemexico.com; Av López Mateos 68; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) Enjoy the surrounding countryside on horseback, with an English-speaking guide who will take you on two- to seven-hour adventures that range from M\$130 to M\$480 per person.

**Tarahumara Tours** (☎ 456-01-21) With an office on the plaza. Offers all the same tours and guide services as the hotels, often at better prices.

**Umarike Expediciones** (www.umarike.com.mx; contact@umarike.com.mx) This internet-based outfitter offers guided mountain-bike adventure trips, rock-climbing and canyoning excursions and instruction. It rents out mountain bikes and camping gear, and offers maps and information for do-it-yourself trips. Week-long bike rental costs M\$825, an eight-day mountain bike trip to Batopilas costs M\$12,650, and a three-day hiking trip within the canyon is M\$4620.

## Sleeping

Creel offers every kind of lodging experience, from dorm-style bunks to nearly five-star resorts. All spots include breakfast unless otherwise noted.

## BUDGET

**Casa Margarita** (☎ 456-00-45; Av López Mateos 11; dm M\$80-100, s/d M\$200/300) Margarita's is a bustling backpacker scene, where everyone gathers

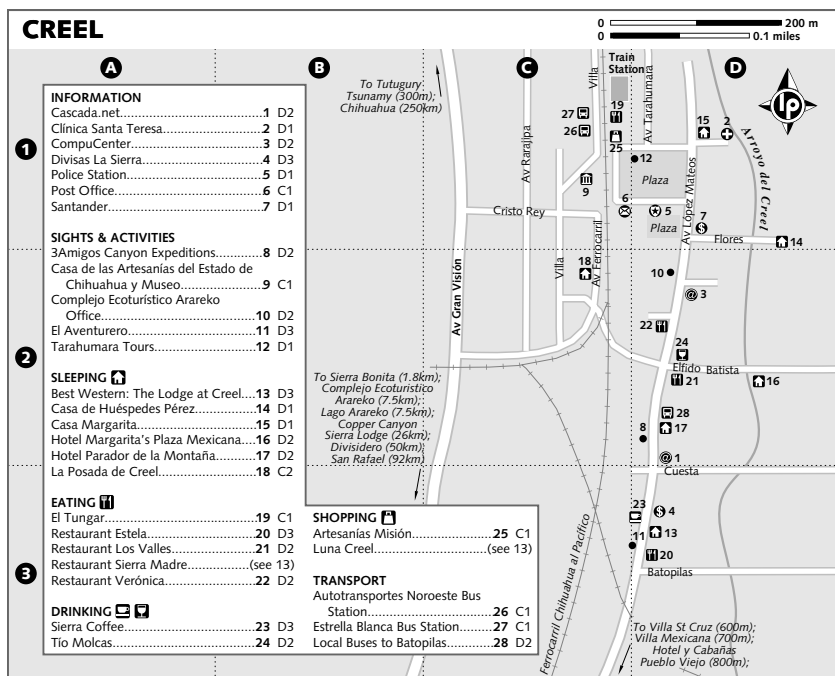
### ALL ABOARD ON THE FERROCARRIL CHIHUAHUA PACÍFICO *Inocencio Reyes Rodríguez*

My favorite part of the train [ride] is El Lazo, because of the work of engineering they did to be able to accomplish it and the vision they had to be able to get through this section of the mines. In order to maintain the required 2.5% rate of ascent, they had to do a loop of 360 degrees inside the canyon.

One of my fondest memories of working on the train was 15 or so years ago, we used to have sleeper cars and observatory cars – we had excellent service back then and it's a special memory for me.

My biggest advice to passengers is to come prepared with their own medicine and prescriptions. If they aren't used to Mexican cuisine, sometimes people get sick and they need their own medicine. It's difficult for us to look after them because we can't give them anything or help them. Not only on the train, but some places in the canyon are very remote and you can't get any medicine.'

*Inocencio Reyes Rodríguez has been a porter on the Ferrocarril Chihuahua Pacífico (p341) for 33 years. He lives in Chihuahua.*



at the table to eat together and swap travel tales, and it's also where you can organize many daily tours (be wary, though: if you don't take a tour, rumor has it you might lose your bed). Rooms are simple but have great water pressure and nice, thick bath towels. Knock off M\$50 per day from the prices above if you don't want meals, though one traveler called the full board the best deal they'd seen in all of Mexico.

**Casa de Huéspedes Pérez** (☎ 456-03-91; Flores 257; dm M\$80, r M\$250) Roomier and more attractive than Margarita's dorms, this Casa has homey one- to six-person log-walled rooms with wood-stove heating as well as private rooms (some on the 2nd floor overlook Creel). Also on the premises is a communal kitchen and Café Luly, which serves your included breakfast and dinner.

**La Posada de Creel** (Av Ferrocarril s/n; r with shared bathroom M\$150, s/d M\$250/400; ☎) Under new management and slowly being spruced up, this veteran is starting to look like a better deal than Margarita's when you consider the food: each of the basic rooms comes with a voucher for breakfast or dinner at Los Valles

or Verónica's – two of the best – and one beer at Tío Molcas, per day.

## MIDRANGE

**Villa Mexicana** (☎ 456-06-65; [www.vmcoppercanyon.com](http://www.vmcoppercanyon.com); Prolongación López Mateos s/n; camp sites per person M\$75, RV sites with full hookups M\$200, 4-person cabins M\$1299, 6-person cabins M\$1750; ☎) This well-equipped campground on the south side of Creel has the coziest log cabins in town, as well as communal kitchen, bathrooms, restaurant, bar, small shop, laundry and tours. It's about a 15-minute walk from the center. Breakfast is extra.

**Hotel Margarita's Plaza Mexicana** (☎ 456-02-45; [www.hoteles-margaritas.com](http://www.hoteles-margaritas.com); Elfido Batista s/n; s/d M\$450/550; ☎) If you've outgrown the hostel scene but still want a laid-back bargain, head for this comfortable hotel, run by the same family that runs the Casa Margarita. Slightly worn rooms are set around a charming courtyard. Prices include meals, but certainly not peace and quiet or hospitable service.

**Villa St Cruz** (☎ 456-02-27; [www.villastacruz.com](http://www.villastacruz.com); r M\$550, cabaña M\$600-1200; ☎) Some of its initial style is wearing thin, but if you don't mind being tucked away on the edge of town, these

family-friendly cabañas are huge and come with full kitchens and dining areas. In low season (September to November and January to May) the M\$550 double goes for M\$150, the best deal in town!

**Hotel y Cabañas Pueblo Viejo** (☎ 456-05-38; www.puebloviejolodge.com; s/d M\$600/700; P) Another option just outside town, this brash spot is set up like an old village backlot – you can sleep in the ‘jail,’ ‘church’ or ‘pharmacy.’ It wins on kitsch, but the service has been occasionally called into question.

**Hotel Parador de la Montaña** (☎ in Chihuahua 614-415-54-08; www.hotelparadorcreel.com; Av López Mateos 44; s/d M\$877/934; P) This alpine-influenced choice is centrally located with comfortable rooms, a decent restaurant and friendly staff (though there’s no accounting for taste with those floral-print bedspreads).

## TOP END

**Sierra Bonita** (☎ 456-06-15; www.sierrabonita.com.mx; Gran Visión s/n; r M\$1006, cabaña M\$3205-3354; P) The furthest place from the center of town but one of the nicest, the Sierra Bonita offers stylish cabañas (save the pink walls) on a dramatic hilltop, a nightclub, bar and restaurant. Rooms 101 to 105 have the best views of town. Breakfast is extra.

**Best Western: The Lodge at Creel** (☎ 456-00-71, in the US 800-528-1234; www.thelodgeatcreel.com; Av López Mateos 61; r from M\$1025; P ☒) The classiest spot in town, designed to look like a hunting lodge, has well-heeled log cabin-style rooms with gas fireplaces and beautiful wood-beam floors, walls and ceilings. There’s also a small fitness center, spa and cozy bar.

## Eating

You’ll find plenty of budget restaurants, all pretty similar to one another, on Av López Mateos in the few blocks south of the plaza.

**El Tungar** (meals M\$30-60; ☎ 8am-5pm) This don’t-miss, next to the tracks just south of the train station, specializes in hangover remedies (hence its nickname, ‘Hospital Para Crudos’) like *menudo* (tripe stew) and *pozole* (hominy stew). Go on – it’s nicer inside than out.

**Restaurant Los Valles** (Av López Mateos 37; mains M\$30-85; ☎ 6:30am-11pm) There are tasty *carne asada*, hamburgers and other Mexican specialties in generous portions at this clean spot on the corner of Batista.

**Restaurant Estela** (☎ 456-01-88; Av López Mateos s/n; mains M\$50; ☎ 7am-6pm) Serves homey *comida*

*corrida* right out of its home kitchen – a good budget option.

**Restaurant Verónica** (☎ 456-06-31; Av López Mateos 33; mains M\$57-110; ☎ 7:30am-10:30pm) The must-try dish at this popular spot for steaks and chicken is *El Norteño*, a cheesy, beefy mess served in a cast-iron skillet that you eat with tortillas. The joint also serves a downright feisty salsa.

**Restaurant Sierra Madre** (Av López Mateos 61; mains M\$68-155) For more upscale dining, try this festive place at the Best Western, with stone walls, exposed wood beams and plenty of taxidermy. It serves a limited dinner menu of steaks, seafood and pasta.

## Drinking

Creel’s status as a traveler’s mecca hasn’t yet produced the nightlife you’d expect – Tío Molcas is still the only tried-and-true watering hole – but you can find travelers drinking here and there elsewhere.

**Sierra Coffee** (☎ 456-07-76; Av López Mateos 60; ☎ 8am-10pm) This humble café serves coffee and espresso that won’t make you angry – a rarity in these parts. There are also homemade cookies, pastries and free wi-fi.

**Tío Molcas** (Av López Mateos 35; ☎ 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, 5pm-2am Fri & Sat) This cozy, wood-heated bar fills up nightly with bedraggled global travelers fresh from the train, itchin’ to swap tall travel tales over Dos Equis and *telenovelas*. It’s good fun.

**Tutugury Tsunami** (cnr Gran Visión & Juárez; ☎ 9pm-2am Thu-Sun) For a serious dose of local color, head to this disco-bar, just slightly out of tourist bounds. To get there, head north from the train station and take the first left on Juárez.

## Shopping

Many shops in Creel sell Rarámuri handicrafts as well as distinctive Mata Ortiz pottery.

**Artesanías Misión** (plaza; ☎ 9:30am-1pm & 3-6pm) All of the store’s earnings go to support the Catholic mission hospital, which provides free medical care for the Rarámuri. Pick up a pair of *huarache* sandals and you’ll blend right in with the indigenous crowd.

**Luna Creel** (Av López Mateos 61; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-9pm) A wonderful café/jewelry shop for handmade artisan silver rings and organic soaps by Anna and Luis Pacheco, who studied anthropology and jewelry making near Paquimé. It’s attached to the Best Western (left).

## Getting There & Around BICYCLE

Several places rent out bicycles, and the surrounding countryside has many places accessible by pedal power.

**3Amigos Canyon Expeditions** (☎ 456-00-36; www.amigos3.com; Av López Mateos 46) Half/full day M\$90/150.

**Casa Margarita** (☎ 456-00-45; Av López Mateos 11) Half/full day M\$90/150.

**Umarike Expediciones** (www.umarike.com.mx; Half/full day M\$120/180. Includes map, helmet and tool kit.

## BUS

Travel between Creel and Chihuahua, as well as between Creel and Divisadero, may be more convenient via bus than train, as the trips are shorter and the schedules more flexible. The Autotransportes Noroeste bus station, across the tracks from the plaza, runs buses to San Rafael (M\$48, 1¼ hours) via Divisadero (M\$37, one hour) at 10:30am, 2:30pm and 6:30pm, and buses to Chihuahua (M\$190, 4½ hours) at 6:45am, 9am, 11:30am, 1pm and 3pm. This is the nicer of the two companies.

The Estrella Blanca bus station, just north of Autotransportes Noroeste, has nine daily buses to Chihuahua (M\$190, 4½ hours), passing through San Juanito (M\$25, 45 minutes), La Junta (M\$90, 2½ hours) and Cuauhtémoc (M\$124, three hours) on the way. Estrella Blanca also has three daily buses to San Rafael (M\$47, 1½ hours) via Divisadero (M\$4, one hour) and Posada Barrancas (Areponápuchi; M\$40, one hour); they depart Creel daily at 10:20am, 2:20pm and 6pm.

The local bus to Batopilas (M\$180, five hours) leaves from outside Artesanías El Towi on López Mateos, two blocks south of the plaza, at 7:30am Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and at 9:30am Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There's now a paved road all the way from Creel to Divisadero and on to San Rafael. From San Rafael, there's a new road connecting Bahuichivo, Cerocahui, Mesa de Arturo, Piedras Verdes, Tubares (there's a new bridge over the Río San Miguel), Choix, and on to El Fuerte. Note that you will need a 4WD between Mesa Arturo and Tubares (about 70km). Or you could go from San Rafael to Álamos via Bahuichivo, Témoris and Chinipas, crossing the Río Chinipas, though this road is very rough and assaults

have been reported on it, so travel at your own risk.

## TRAIN

Creel's train station is half a block from the main plaza. The westbound *primera express* train departs Creel at about 11:15am, and the *clase económica* at about 1:20pm (though it's been known to arrive closer to noon); the eastbound trains depart at about 3:24pm and 6pm. However, times vary greatly and they are usually late. See the schedule on p343 for ticket information.

## AROUND CREEL

The area around Creel is rich in natural wonders, offering everything from waterfalls and hot springs to massive speckled boulders and expansive parklands, all of which are only a day's hike, bike ride or drive from town. Local guides offer a variety of guided tours, or, even better, you can venture out on your own on a rented bicycle, scooter or truck.

## Sights & Activities

Just 2km outside town is the **Valle de los Monjes**, where vertical rock formations inspired its traditional Rarámuri name, Bisabírachi, meaning the 'Valley of the Erect Penises.' It makes a nice full-day trip on horseback, and takes you past some other animatedly named valleys on the way, including **Valle de las Ranas** and **Valle de los Hongos** – 'frogs' and 'mushrooms,' respectively. The photogenic **San Ignacio Mission** is also in this area.

A popular day trip in the area is to the nearby **Complejo Ecoturístico Arareko**, a Rarámuri *ejido*. It is home to about 400 families who live in caves and small homes among the waterfalls, farmlands, deep canyons, dramatic rock formations and a 200-sq-km forest of thick pine trees, 7.5km south of Creel. A lovely greenish lake, **Lago Arareko**, sits on the *ejido* as well, where it beautifully reflects the surrounding pine trees and rock formations. One tip: the **Rekowata Aguas Termales** (Rekowata Hot Springs) on the *ejido* are really just lukewarm and the springs are more or less a swimming pool. The hike down (beautiful) and up (menacing) is very scenic; just don't be expecting a pristine therapeutic hot spring when you reach the bottom.

The 30m-high **Cascada Cúsarare** is a waterfall that's 22km south of Creel, near the Rarámuri village of **Cúsarare** (place of eagles). Also in

Cusárare is the **Loyola Museum** (admission M\$15; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon), dedicated to preserving and displaying its collection of centuries-old paintings that were found wasting away in regional churches and missions.

Even more dramatic than the waterfall in Cusárare is a visit to **Parque Nacional Cascada de Basaseachi**, where you'll find, at 246m, the highest full-time falls in Mexico. Basaseachi is 140km northwest of Creel, and takes a full day to visit, thanks to a bumpy three-hour drive, a one-hour hike to the bottom, two hours to walk back up, and then the return drive. It's a long way to go but if you're up for the challenge, it's worth it. The views of the falls are beautiful from the three viewpoints around its rim, but it's damn near miraculous at the bottom. If you go at midday, the sun creates one stunning rainbow after the other at its base, and you feel close enough to reach out and touch them.

## Sleeping & Eating

Once you get out into Creel's natural surroundings for a day trip, you may decide you'd like to spend the night there. The region has several rustic places to choose from – some with campsites, others with cozy bedrooms. Most will feed you, too.

**Complejo Ecoturístico Areako** (☎ 635-456-01-26; Av López Mateos, Creel) has an office in Creel, where you can reserve a spot at (and arrange for transportation to) one of the *ejido*'s various options. The *ejido* operates two lodges. **Cabañas de Batosárachi** (r M\$100-150) offers three rustic log cabins, which contain either bunk beds or individual rooms, plus hot showers and a communal kitchen, as well as five new individual cabins with small kitchen areas (bring your own camping stove). The more comfortable **Cabaña de Segórachi** (d M\$250), a large cabin on the south shore of Lago Areako, just received a makeover (new carpets, new bathrooms) and includes the use of a rowboat. You can also pitch at tent in either spot, as well as around the lake, for M\$15.

**Copper Canyon Sierra Lodge** (☎ 635-456-00-36, in the US 800-648-8488; www.coppercanyonlodge.com; s/d incl meals M\$800/\$1600) is an atmospheric mountain lodge with comfy rooms with rustic beamed ceilings, kerosene lamps (there's no electricity), carved pine furniture, fluffy white robes, showers with plenty of hot water, and potbelly stoves (two rooms have working fireplaces). Excellent meals are served in a fine old din-

ing room. The rates above include margaritas (yes, that's plural).

## BATOPILAS

☎ 649 / pop 1200 / elevation 495m

If you make it alive down the steep, twisting dirt road to Batopilas, a serene 19th-century silver-mining village 140km south of Creel, you can be satisfied that you have made your way deep into canyon country. The journey is a thrilling ride – from an altitude of 2338m, at Creel, to 495m at Batopilas – with dramatic descents and ascents through several canyons, climates and vegetative zones, ending in a warm little village.

The biggest activity once you arrive at Batopilas is enjoying the stuck-in-time feel of the place. Things shut up early here – last call 10pm on weekends – so don't expect any big nights out. However, there's plenty of history to explore (quirky fact: after Mexico City, Batopilas was the second town in Mexico to receive electricity). One of the most popular excursions is to the **Catedral Perdida** (Lost Cathedral) at Satevó, an elaborate cathedral that was discovered in a remote, uninhabited canyon. It's a long 8km hike along the river, or a 20-minute drive. Any hotel can help arrange day trips; the three- to four-day trek to the canyon town of Urique is also a popular – and spectacular – journey.

Like Urique, Batopilas can be a little rough around the edges. The military recently razed the marijuana crops in the surrounding area, effectively bringing the local economy to a grinding halt. As a result, the town has seen an upsurge in robberies and kidnappings. Foreign tourists aren't usually targeted, but do yourself a favor and be vigilant here.

## Sleeping

**Casa Monse** (☎ 456-90-27; Plaza Principal; r M\$120) Bare-bones backpackers favor the decaying Hotel Batopilas down the plaza, but these economical rooms are cleaner and come with the homespun character of the house, Monse Alcaraz, who will chat your ear off, fix you Rarámuri cuisine and help with local guides and information.

**Hotel Juanita's** (☎ 456-90-43; Plaza Principal; s/d M\$250/400; ☒ ☒) These clean and basic rooms come complete with crucifixes, plus a courtyard overlooking the river, a lovely place to gather in the evening. Juanita says if you don't like Jesus, you can go elsewhere.



**Real de Minas** (☎ 456-90-45; Donato Guerra 1; r M\$526.50; 📍 📞 📺) A little Sierra Madre oasis with eight brightly decorated rooms around a lovely courtyard with a fountain as well as an annex just down the road with six airy and immaculate rooms with orange doors and a peaceful vibe. The low doorknobs, however, were surely designed for Oompa-Loompas and Ewoks.

**La Hacienda Río Batopilas** (☎ in Creel 635-456-02-45; s/d incl meals M\$600/1000) If you don't want to deal with the uncertainty of the sometimes open, sometimes closed Riverside Lodge, this is top digs, a 1760 hacienda run by the same folks who own Casa Margarita in Creel. The sizable rooms feature beautiful exposed cobblestone walls, wood-beam ceilings, stained-glass windows and gorgeous tiled bathrooms and bathtubs. An onsite restaurant serves breakfast and dinner. The downside is that it's a good half-hour walk from town.

### Eating & Drinking

Eating here is an intimate experience, as most 'restaurants' consist of a few tables on the porch or patio of a private home.

**Carolina** (Plaza de la Constitución; mains M\$40-90; 🕒 8am-7:30pm) Good *huevos rancheros* and pancakes for breakfast, and other Mexican specialties throughout the day.

**Doña Mica** (Plaza de la Constitución; meals M\$50-60; 🕒 7:30am-9pm) An excellent spot for home-cooked Mexican meals prepared

on a wonderful antique stove. There is no menu, just a few choices each day with vegetarian possibilities.

**El Puente Colgante** (☎ 456-90-23; mains M\$50-130; 🕒 11am-9pm Sun-Wed, 11am-10pm Fri & Sat) Serves a delicious stuffed trout, seasoned steak and savory pitchers of *micheladas*. Its patio is also a good spot for an early nightcap.

### Getting There & Away

There's just one road in to town, and it's not for the faint of heart. It slithers down the side of the canyon following the outline of a Christmas tree (with a much longer fall to the floor). The cheapest trip is on the 20-seat public bus from Creel, which is usually crowded and takes at least five hours (M\$180, Monday to Saturday). It is not advisable to return to Creel on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday – on these days, the 'bus' is actually a much more cramped seven-seat Chevy Suburban, and the driver crams as many people in as possible (11 and a baby on our occasion). Though it goes all the way to Chihuahua (M\$370, eight hours) on these days, it is extremely uncomfortable and shockingly unsafe. Additionally, passengers to Chihuahua get priority seating over those going to Creel. Both depart from the front of the church at 5am. You can also rent a truck and drive, though it's not recommended as the road is very steep and narrow. Better to join a tour group or hire an experienced driver in Creel.

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