

# MEXICO

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## A DESTINATION SPECIALIST COURSE

### Table of Contents and Sample Chapter



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Produced in partnership  
with the Mexico Tourism Board



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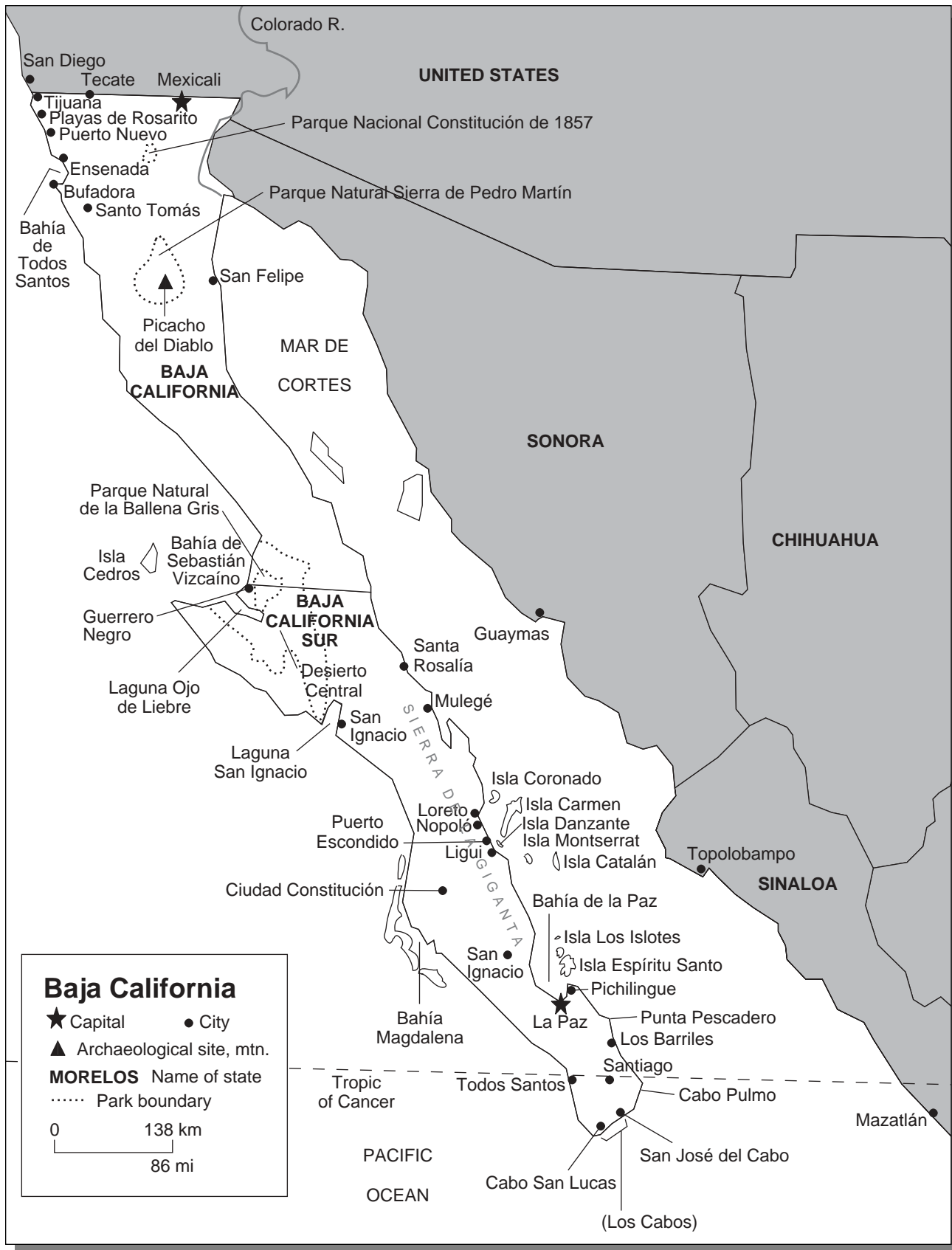
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## **Study Guide**

## **Job Aid**



CHAPTER  
1

# Baja California

Mexico's **Baja California Peninsula** is a world-class destination for golfing, sportfishing, and whale watching. Baja (*BAH hah*) does not have the colonial architecture, indigenous peoples, distinctive regional cuisine, and unique handicrafts found in other areas of Mexico. But the isolation, geography, beaches, and bountiful sea life of the region provide rich and varied choices for sports enthusiasts, ecotourists, and vacationers who just want to relax.

The cities of **Tijuana**, **Ensenada**, and **Cabo San Lucas** are nightlife meccas with pulsing music beginning at sunset and ending in the wee hours of the morning. Tijuana, so near the U.S. border, offers an opportunity for day-trippers to sample shopping, and it provides an introduction to Mexican culture, despite the strong U.S. influence. Ensenada is one of Mexico's largest cruise ship ports and is the hub of the country's major wine-producing region. Artist-owned galleries are attractions in the small town of **Todos Santos**, which is close to the tip of the peninsula on the Pacific Ocean side, and upscale resorts can be found at Cabo San Lucas at the very end.

**La Paz** has been described as having the most Mexican atmosphere of all of Baja's major cities, and the town of **San Ignacio** is one base for excursions to see the wonderful and mysterious pre-Conquest cave paintings that depict hunters and their prey.

The **Mar de Cortés (Sea of Cortez)** separates the 820-mile-long Baja Peninsula (the world's longest peninsula) from mainland Mexico. Ranging from 13 to 120 miles across, the peninsula is made up of the two states of **Baja (Lower) California** and **Baja California Sur (South)**, which begins at the 28th parallel. At its southernmost tip at **Finisterra (Land's End)** can be found the eroded rock arch known as **El Arco (The Arch)**, which rises from the water to mark the place where the Pacific Ocean and the Mar de Cortés are said to meet.

The landscape is primarily desert, reflecting the few inches of rainfall received each year. Baja's spine runs along the same San Andreas fault known for seismic movements in the U.S. state of California. In Baja California, the backbone is marked by the mountain ranges of the Sierra

## FAST FACTS

**Top Attractions:** Whale watching, golf (Los Cabos), sportfishing, ecotourism (Mar de Cortés), wine country (near Ensenada)

**Airports:** Aeropuerto Internacional de General Manuel Márquez de León (La Paz); Aeropuerto Internacional de Loreto; Aeropuerto Internacional Los Cabos (6.5 miles north of San José del Cabo); Aeropuerto Internacional Abelardo L. Rodríguez (Tijuana)

**How to Get There:** Scheduled and charter flights to Los Cabos; local air service between major cities and towns. Ten days suggested to drive entire peninsula on the Transpeninsular MEX Hwy. 1. Ferries from Guaymas, Topolobampo, and Mazatlán on mainland access Santa Rosalía and La Paz on Baja's east side. Some cruise lines stop in Ensenada; both sides of the peninsula have ports for recreational boaters.

**Tourist Card:** Clients going farther south in Mexico than Ensenada or San Felipe (on the Mar de Cortés) or planning to be in Mexico for more than 72 hours must carry a tourist card.



Desert and mountains in Baja California Sur

de Juarez and the Sierra San Pedro Mártir with its highest peak, the 10,154-foot Picacho del Diablo. In Baja California Sur, the Sierra de la Giganta range begins at the border and travels south toward the coast.

Offshore islands, particularly in the Mar de Cortés, host large populations of birds and sea lions. Lagoons and bays on the Pacific side of the central Baja Peninsula—such as the **Laguna Ojo de Liebre**, also called Scammon’s Lagoon; the **Laguna San Ignacio**; and the **Bahía Magdalena**—are whale-watching and calving sites during winter

months. Surfing is also enjoyed at various beaches.

Clients who are outdoor enthusiasts will find plenty of opportunities to satisfy their desires on the Baja Peninsula.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The **Baja Peninsula’s cardón** is one of the world’s largest cacti, some of which grow to 50 feet and weigh 50,000 pounds. The shallow roots take advantage of the occasional rainfall. Its nutritious fruits support birds as well as long-nosed bats, which pollinate white *cardón* flowers from March through June. The flesh is used to heal wounds, and the dried skeleton of a dead *cardón* is used locally to make fences and fish spears.

## Local Transportation

When time is limited, clients can fly to a main Baja California Sur destination, such as Los Cabos or La Paz, and make the area a base for exploration. Local air carriers offer passenger service and tours.

Before the development of Los Cabos and other areas, Baja was known as one of the longest ultimate driving trips in the world with mainly rough dirt roads and long stretches of desert terrain. Today, the entire 1,060-mile length of Transpeninsular Highway, MEX Hwy. 1, also called “Carretera 1” or “Primera” is paved. (Thirteen miles south of La Paz, clients can divert to MEX Hwy. 19, a straighter route to Los Cabos via Todos Santos.) Clients who drive should check on insurance requirements and have visas in order before leaving the United States; regulations for both can change.

Buses are available between main points, such as Los Cabos, La Paz, Tijuana, or Ensenada. Local buses in Baja tend to be crowded, with unpredictable schedules.

Ferry service across the Mar de Cortés from mainland Mexico arrives at the ports of Santa Rosalía and La Paz in Baja California Sur. The trip from

Guaymas in the state of Sonora to Santa Rosalía takes 8 hours; from Topolobampo (port for Los Mochis) in the state of Sinaloa to La Paz, 9 hours; and from Mazatlán in the state of Sinaloa to La Paz, 17 hours. Car ferry bookings should be made far in advance, as should bookings of any berths or suites (*especial, turista, cabina*) except for the least-expensive *salón* class.

Boaters have a number of ports available to them down both sides of the peninsula and should have all documentation ready in advance of visiting the port's immigration authorities or harbormaster.

A government-sponsored project, the Escalera Náutica del Mar de Cortés (meaning the “nautical ladder”), has been allocated \$1.9 billion to build a series of marinas, airports, roads, hotels, and golf courses along the Baja Peninsula and mainland Mexico. Its stated purpose is to open the Mar de Cortés to American boaters by providing 24 marinas no more than an average 100 nautical miles apart along the peninsula. However, critics opposed to the project have questioned its impact on the local ecology and real estate values. They also maintain that drug trafficking would be made easier. While work has begun on a marina at Santa Rosalía, an environmental study is underway on the impact of the project as a whole.

## Tijuana

Tijuana (*tee HWAH nah*), 18 miles south of San Diego, California, is Mexico's ultimate day-trip destination, with close to 40 million people crossing the border each year. TJ, as it is sometimes called, gives visitors the opportunity to quickly sample Mexican music and entertainment, shop for souvenirs, see a bullfight, and soak up some local color.

Mexico's fourth-largest city, with a population of nearly 2 million, has suffered somewhat from an “anything goes” party image that developed when Prohibition (1920 to 1933) prevented the legal sale of alcohol in the United States and Americans made the trip south for Tijuana's open bars and legal gambling. In later decades, drug cartels based in Tijuana also damaged the city's reputation. Though the crime rate remains significant, in recent years Tijuana has cleaned up sections of town frequented by visitors. In addition, Tijuana is prospering as a boomtown of maquiladoras.

Tijuana's main street is **Avenida Revolución**, often called **La Revo**. Here is Tijuana's **Zona Centro**, between Calle 1 or Primavera (1st Street) and Calle 8 or Octava (8th Street) with nightclubs, bars, restaurants, shopping, and

### DID YOU KNOW?

Baja's desert is the **Sonora Desert**, the most biologically diverse of the four North American deserts (Mojave, Sonora, Chihuahua, and Great Basin). It covers the southern two-thirds of the Baja Peninsula, stretches beyond the eastern coastline of the Mar de Cortés, and extends north into southern Arizona. Unique to the area is the spiny, gray boojum tree. It grows up to 30 feet tall and ends abruptly in a tuft shaped like a carrot top at its tips.

### NOTE

In this chapter, cities and towns are described in geographical order, north to south, rather than alphabetically.

cultural offerings. There is not much feel of Mexico, but the partying and duty-free shopping are enough to keep most tourists here during their entire Tijuana visit. There are also several locales for wagering on horse racing and sport events.



*Sombreros for sale in Tijuana*

Shopping is Tijuana's second major activity after its nightlife and club scene. Vendors are everywhere the tourists are, and roving street vendors can be persistent. Goods, clothing, and handicrafts from all over Mexico are for sale, from glassware to ceramic pots, place mats, furniture, Talavera ceramic ware from Puebla, trinkets, and masks. Bargaining is expected in the handicraft markets. The Mercado de Artesanía (Crafts Market) is under the footbridge entry to the La Revo area. The Bazar de México and Plaza Santa Cecilia offer other handicraft-buying opportunities. The municipal market, Mercado

Hidalgo, is a fine place for clients to see local produce and to buy souvenirs, including piñatas. Other shopping attractions include numerous pharmacies where some prescription drugs are sold over the counter and cost less than in the United States.

Other areas of Tijuana include the Zona Río, southeast of the tourist area; the downtown area to the southwest; and the Playas (Beaches) de Tijuana along the Pacific Ocean, six miles west of downtown.

### DID YOU KNOW?

A **Department of Tourist Assistance** can be found in **Tijuana** at Avenida Revolución and Calle 1.

### Local Transportation

The self-proclaimed "Most Visited Border City in the World" has easy access from the United States. Clients can drive themselves (with the advance documentation required by officials on both sides of the border), take a bus, or take a daylong bus tour to Tijuana. An inexpensive trolley runs every 15 minutes from dawn to midnight from downtown San Diego, California, to the border crossing at San Ysidro, California. Clients can take the trolley into Tijuana. Another option is to park in the United States and take a taxi. Or they can walk the Andador (Pedestrian Walkway) from the border to the heart of the tourist area (Calle 1) in about 20 minutes. The

International Airport is about five miles east of Tijuana, close to a second international border crossing at Otay Mesa.

Once in Tijuana, there are local buses, car rental agencies, and longer-distance buses to other cities in the northern part of Baja California.

## Around Tijuana: Attractions

- **Bullfighting**—Two bullrings, El Toreo de Tijuana, southeast of the Zona Centro, and the Plaza de Toros Monumental, known as the Bull Ring by the Sea (oceanside at Playas de Tijuana), schedule weekend bullfights from May through October.
- **Cava de Vinos L. A. Cetto**—A wine-barrel facade marks the entrance to the tasting room of this Ensenada-area winery a few blocks south of the main section of La Revo. Tours also can be arranged here.
- **Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT)**—Tijuana’s cultural center is southeast of La Revo, near the Río Tijuana, in the Zona Río. Across from a huge sculpture of a pair of scissors stands another landmark, a five-story-tall bronze dome. Known as La Bola (The Ball), the dome holds the center’s Omnimax theater and planetarium. CECUT has a full schedule of exhibitions, plays, and concerts, including performances by its resident Baja California symphony orchestra. Art galleries, video and classic film screenings, a bookstore, and restaurant complete the cultural offerings.
- **Frontón Palacio Jai Alai**—Vaguely Moorish architecture and a statue of a jai alai player holding the wicker *cesta* (basket) used to catch the *pelota* (ball) make this jai alai pelota court a landmark. Jai alai, the fastest game in the world, used to be played here; clients should ask if play has been reinstated.
- **Golf**—Golfers can book public tee times at the 18-hole Club Campestre de Tijuana near the old Agua Caliente Racetrack.
- **Mundo Divertido (Fun World)**—Clients with children will enjoy this park with miniature golf, a roller coaster, batting cages, and other attractions southeast of the Zona Centro.
- **Museo de Cera (Wax Museum)**—This attraction is at the north end of the La Revo area, with 80 figures, including Mahatma Gandhi, Marilyn Monroe, and Mexican hero, Emiliano Zapata.

### DID YOU KNOW?

As a camp in the 1940s, **Rancho La Puerta**, 35 miles southeast of San Diego, California, east of Tijuana, and a few miles south of the international border, pioneered health, fitness, and the **spa** concept. Today, it is one of the world’s more luxurious spas, with weeklong programs conducted within 3,000 acres of lush gardens, with mountain views and Mexican folk art.

- **Museo de las Californias**—This museum of Baja California tells Tijuana’s local history with Spanish- and English-captioned exhibits on the region. A sailing ship, cave paintings, and missions have been replicated.

## Playas de Rosarito (Rosarito Beach)

For beach lovers, spring break participants, and southern Californians looking for a weekend getaway, there is Playas de Rosarito with its five miles of sand that stretch along the Pacific Ocean. With plenty of hotels, condominiums, and recreational vehicle parks, the beach is about 18 miles south of the San Ysidro, California, border crossing via a coastal route (MEX Hwy. 1) or a toll road (MEX Hwy. 1-D). The Rosarito Beach Hotel and Spa has welcomed visitors and movie stars to the northern part of Baja California since it opened in 1926.

Surfing is good along this stretch of coast. Other water sports include swimming, sailing, boogie boarding, and fishing. Biking, horseback riding on the beach, jogging, and competitive beachside volleyball tournaments are popular land-based activities. The 18-hole Real del Mar Golf Club is at the Marriott Real del Mar Residence Inn six miles north of Playas de Rosarito.

Souvenirs, crafts, home furnishings, furniture, and clothing from around Mexico are for sale from beach vendors or from the many shops in Rosarito beachfront communities.

### Around Playas de Rosarito: Attractions

- **Foxploration**—Fox Studios Baja, where *Titanic* and part of *Pearl Harbor* were filmed, operates the Foxploration movie theme park, which is three miles south of Playas de Rosarito. Titanic Expo is a guided tour through 19,000 square feet of props and furniture used for the original set. Cinemágico has interactive animatronics, sound effects, and optical illusions; other areas cover movie makeup, props, and wardrobe.
- **Museo de Historia Wa Kumatay**—The Rosarito-area history and handicraft museum is next to the Rosarito Beach Hotel and Spa.

### Outside Playas de Rosarito: Attractions

- **Puerto Nuevo**—About 10 miles south of Playas de Rosarito is Puerto Nuevo, which is famous as a lobster-fishing village. Southern Californians and local Baja Californian residents alike head to Puerto

#### DID YOU KNOW?

April to September is the season for **fresh local lobster** in **Puerto Nuevo**.

Nuevo to consume more than 1 million lobsters each year in more than 100 area restaurants. In addition, many of the local restaurants, hotels, and bars have nightly entertainment offering Latin music such as *cumbia*.

## Ensenada

Drive along the coastline from Playas de Rosarito past dramatic cliffs, mountainous areas, and thundering ocean surf to arrive in Ensenada (*ehn seh NAH dah*). This onetime fishing village is one of Mexico's largest ports, and it accommodates cruise ships at a modern terminal facility near downtown.

In the center of Mexico's major wine-producing area, Ensenada attracts many visitors with its internationally renowned sporting activities, food and wine, and cultural events. Situated on the Bahía de Todos Santos about 70 miles south of the international border, the city is Baja's third largest with a population of 370,000. In addition to its port facilities, it is home to a commercial fishing fleet, canneries, and Baja California's oldest cantina.

**Bulevar Costero**, also known as Bulevar Cárdenas, is the main street closest to the waterfront. **Avenida López Mateos**, also called Calle 1 or Primera, roughly parallels Bulevar Costero and is where clients will find much of the trendy shopping, dining, and nightlife. Mexico's second-largest flag, which flies next to the harbor in the Plaza Cívica, serves as a landmark.

Soaking up the atmosphere of a commercial and cruise ship port with plenty of activities suits many visitors, whether clients are in town for the day, a weekend, or longer. Ensenada also can be a base for touring area vineyards and missions or for visiting Laguna Hanson, a lake surrounded by pine forest in the mountains of Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857, which is 22 miles east of the city.

Active clients will find plenty to occupy their time, including mountain biking, horseback riding, tennis, swimming, diving, surfing,



© Mexico Tourism Board

Vineyard in Baja California

sailing, kayaking, and sportfishing. Whale watching occurs January through March. Golfers may want to try the Robert von Hagge–designed course at the Bajamar Resort. The course is considered Mexico’s version of the famous California Pebble Beach course. Golf also is available at the Baja Country Club Ensenada course.

April is an eventful month in Ensenada with the Newport–Ensenada International Yacht Race and the Rosarito–Ensenada 50-Mile Fun Ride. The largest international yachting regatta begins in Newport Beach, California, and ends two days later in Ensenada. The Fun Ride attracts more than 10,000 bicyclists both in April and again in September.

Farther afield, a number of ecotourism ranches can be found along MEX Hwy. 3 from Ensenada to San Felipe on the Mar de Cortés. Lodging ranges from tent camping to cabins. Horseback riding, mountain biking, and some fishing are available.

## Local Transportation

Taxis serve Ensenada, and fares should be determined in advance. There are a number of car rental agencies and local buses. *Calandrias* (horse-drawn carriages) depart for downtown tours from the Plaza Cívica.

## Around Ensenada: Attractions

- **Bodegas de Santo Tomás**—This winery at the north end of downtown Ensenada is Mexico’s oldest (1888), with grapes first planted by Dominican friars in 1791 in the nearby Valle de Santo Tomás. There is a charge for the winery tour and tasting; bottled wine is sold, and the restaurant, La Embotelladora Vieja, offers fine dining.
- **Bufadora**—This blowhole, whose name means “buffalo snort,” spouts from 35 to 100 feet in the air. It is a 23-mile drive south of Ensenada around the Bahía de Todos Santos. A three-tier observation area on the Punta Banda cliffs permits visitors to watch the marine geyser or to be drenched for the thrill. A botanical garden and visitor center are part of the complex.
- **Colinas de Chapultepec (Chapultepec Hills)**—This natural formation, northwest of Ensenada Harbor, offers excellent views of the city and waterfront.
- **Esquina de Bodegas**—In a former winery building, the “wine cellars’ corner” has a large selection of Baja wines, a glass and ceramic gallery, and a café.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The **Bufadora** is one of only a few natural ocean blowholes in the world; others occur in Hawaii, Tahiti, and Tonga. Wave and tidal action trap air in a cave, which then is forced out of a surface hole by building pressure. The tide level and force of the surf create different heights in the water spout.

- **Galería de Pérez Meillón**—Located in the Central Artesanal de Ensenada (Ensenada Handicrafts Center), this gallery offers crafts made by local indigenous people and by the potters of Mata Ortiz (see chapter on Copper Canyon and the Mar de Cortés under Casas Grandes and Paquimé).
- **Hussong’s Cantina**—Generations of party-goers of all ages have crossed the border to drink margaritas and tequila at Hussong’s Cantina, which can be found north of the harbor and southwest of the Colinas de Chapultepec. Hussong’s is Baja California’s oldest cantina, established in 1892. Mariachis play at top volume, and a long bar and saloon-style swinging doors contribute to the atmosphere. Clark Gable and Carole Lombard were among the movie stars who visited from Hollywood, and mobster Al Capone was another 1930s guest.
- **Mercado de Pescados (Fish Market)**—The fish market of this working commercial fishing port provides a good preview of what will be on dinner menus at area restaurants. The combined indoor-outdoor market is at the northeast end of Ensenada harbor.
- **Museo de Ciencias de Ensenada (Ensenada Science Museum)**—The Pacific Ocean and its endangered species are the emphasis of this science museum a mile northeast of the harbor. The museum also has a harborside center for guided, bilingual whale-watching tours in winter.
- **Museo del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH)**—Mexico’s National Anthropology and History Institute has its regional headquarters and a museum in Ensenada’s oldest structure, built in 1886. Baja California’s mission history is featured.
- **Riviera del Pacífico**—This Prohibition-era gambling casino and hotel was owned and managed by world champion boxer Jack Dempsey. The Centro Social, Cívico, y Cultural de Ensenada now uses the Moorish-style building for conventions, art exhibits, film showings, and other cultural events. Clients can view a large mural of the Californias, tour the restored building, and have a drink in the Andaluz Gardens Bar patio area, where stars such as Bing Crosby and Rita Hayworth used to be seen.

## Beyond Ensenada: Attractions

- **Valles de Guadalupe and Santo Tomás**—The Valleys of Guadalupe (about 50 miles northeast of Ensenada) and Santo Tomás (about 30 miles south of Ensenada) produce close to 90 percent of Mexico’s wine,

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Baja wines** conform to the Mexican Wine Classification system, which has three designations:

- *Varietales*, considered the best quality, are made from only one grape variety.
- *Combinadas* blend several grape varieties.
- *De Origen* are wines from vines planted in a distinct area or region.

including still wine, sparkling wine, port, sherry, and brandy. Baja wine makers compare their climate to that of the Bordeaux region of France or to northern California—cool foggy nights and early mornings, sunny days, and mild winters.

Many Ensenada-based tour operators conduct wine country tours that may include some of the region's best-known wineries: Casa Pedro Domecq, Chateau Camou, L. A. Cetto, Mogor Bagán, and Monte Xanic. Las Bodegas de Santo Tomás has tours and tastings with retail sales in Ensenada. Cavas Valmar also has a tasting room with tours by appointment in Ensenada. Some wineries provide tours only to groups.

The **Museo Comunitario del Valle de Guadalupe**, in a Russian-style house, tells the story of the wine-making valley and of the Molokans, non-Orthodox Russian peasants who were granted permission to resettle and to worship in the Valle de Guadalupe by the Mexican Government in 1905. The Molokans repaired wine-making equipment left from previous ventures and prospered in the valley.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Alaskan **gray whales** swim 6,000 miles each year, from the Bering Sea (Alaska) to central Baja California's lagoons and bays, to mate, breed, and produce calves between January and March. This endangered species can grow to 46 feet in length.

## Reserva de la Biosfera el Vizcaíno

One of Baja California's major attractions is watching Alaskan gray and, occasionally, humpback whales migrate from December to April. No one can predict exactly when or how many whales will move into the central Baja bays and inlets where they breed or calve, but the sheer size of each animal and the movement of a pod (group) of whales is awesome.

The whale breeding and calving grounds are protected in sanctuaries along the Pacific Ocean side of Baja California. The 9,650-square-mile Reserva de la Biosfera el Vizcaíno stretches from Isla Cedros, west of the Bahía de Sebastián Vizcaíno and the Laguna Ojo de Liebre, to the Laguna San Ignacio. The reserve also includes ancient cave paintings found in the Sierra de San Francisco mountains and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993.

Many whale-watching options are available whether on a fly-in/fly-out excursion, a small cruise ship, a guided tour from a nearby town, or by individual travel in sea kayaks. The tours generate \$40 million dollars annually.

## Around the Reserva de la Biosfera el Vizcaíno: Attractions

- **Bahía Magdalena (Magdalena Bay)**—South of Baja California’s Desierto Central (Central Desert) is the Bahía Magdalena, another spot where whales congregate in winter, southwest of Ciudad Constitución. Clients can get *panga* (private fishing skiff) tours locally leaving from Puerto Adolfo López Mateos or take guided tours from Loreto, La Paz, or Los Cabos.

For all tours, prices increase the farther clients are from the sanctuary they have chosen to visit.

- **Laguna Ojo de Liebre (Hare’s Eye Lagoon)**—This sheltered area, also called Scammon’s Lagoon, inside the Bahía de Sebastián Vizcaíno is encircled by the Parque Natural de la Ballena Gris (Gray Whale Natural Park). It is west of the town of Guerrero Negro, near the boundary between Baja California and Baja California Sur.
- **Laguna San Ignacio**—The town of San Ignacio, 90 miles southeast of Laguna Ojo de Liebre, is the tour staging area for visits to Laguna San Ignacio, which is farther west. Whales give birth here sheltered from the wave action of the Pacific Ocean.
- **Sierra de San Francisco**—This mountain range is the site of ancient cave paintings that date from pre-Conquest times. Executed in red and black, the paintings depict hunters, puma, bighorn sheep, deer, and other creatures. Clients can access the caves on guided tours from the town of San Ignacio, about 30 miles to the south. Tour operators farther from San Ignacio can also arrange tours.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**Guerrero Negro**, at the 28th parallel boundary between the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur, produces one-third of the world’s salt.



Laguna San Ignacio

## Loreto

**Loreto** (*loh REH toh*), Baja’s oldest settlement, is on the Mar de Cortés at the southeastern end of the peninsula’s Desierto Central and is flanked on the west by the Sierra de la Giganta mountain range. While some of its

## DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1970s, **Loreto** was identified by the Mexican government agency FONATUR as an excellent place for a large resort, such as the one developed at Los Cabos, but construction of hotels and infrastructure was never completed.

colonial buildings remain after being badly damaged in the 1800s by a hurricane and earthquake, its main attraction today is as an ecotourism center. Many activities, including sportfishing and bird- and wildlife watching, are centered around Loreto's offshore islands in the Parque Marítimo Nacional Bahía de Loreto (Loreto Bay National Marine Park).

The onetime capital of Baja California today offers beaches, one golf course, and recreation such as kayaking, diving, and windsurfing. Good beaches, including Nopoló, Juncalito, and Ligui, are along the coast south of Loreto. Campo de Loreto, an 18-hole golf course near Nopoló, is known for a challenging 14th hole. The nine-court John McEnroe Loreto Tennis Center, with a stadium, was developed by Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo (FONATUR), a Mexican government agency, in the same area.

Sportfishing operators are easy to find in Loreto; experienced clients can also hire the services of a *panga* and its *panguero* (*panga* operator). Whale-watching tours often use Loreto as a point of departure.

## Local Transportation

Several car rental agencies and local taxis provide in-town transportation; long-distance buses run north and south on the Transpeninsular Highway, MEX Hwy. 1. The international airport is four miles southwest of the city.



Misión Nuestra Señora de Loreto

## Around Loreto: Attractions

- **Misión Nuestra Señora de Loreto**—Baja California's original mission, founded in 1696, has been restored after several earthquakes. The mission and museum next door are three blocks west of the *malecón* (waterfront walkway). A sign above the entrance door reads, "Cabeza y Madre de Las Misiones de Baja y Alta California" ("Head and Mother of Lower and Upper California Missions"), in tribute to its importance. The legend of the mission tells of founder Padre Salvatierra's mule lurching, and throwing the image of the Virgen de Loreto it carried to the ground. That fateful plunge indicated to Salvatierra where the mission should be established.

- **Misión San Javier**—Clients can drive a high-clearance vehicle over rough roads the 20 miles southwest to this well-preserved mission church in the Sierra de la Giganta. The dark-rock mission is Baja California's second oldest (after Loreto), with stained-glass windows, an ornate altar from Mexico City, and a bell tower with views high above a valley. A guided tour, however, is recommended when navigating the mountains and canyons and proceeding on to see the Sierra de San Francisco cave paintings.
- **Museo de las Misiones**—Nationally run, the missions museum, next to Misión Nuestra Señora de Loreto church, documents early Baja settlement and the local Cochima, Cucapa, Kikawa, and Kumiai indigenous peoples who lived in this central Baja area before the Spanish arrived.
- **Parque Marítimo Nacional Bahía de Loreto (Loreto Bay National Marine Park)**—Established in 1996, this park protects 800 square miles of shoreline (mangroves, coastal dunes, and dry scrub); beaches; and the waters of the Mar de Cortés. The park also protects offshore *islas* (islands), including Carmen, Coronado, Danzante, and Montserrat, from overfishing, pollution, and too much visitation. Sportfishing is permitted, but commercial net fishing is not allowed. Some plants and animals are found only in this area, and the park is a hammerhead shark breeding ground.

Major activities include sea kayaking, snorkeling, hiking, swimming, and sportfishing for sailfish, dorado, yellowtail, and wahoo. Dolphins are common, and blue whales may be spotted occasionally. Scuba divers look for sea lions, whale sharks, dolphins, manta rays, and blue whales.

**Isla Coronado**, northeast of Loreto, hosts a sea lion colony. The large island due south of Loreto, **Isla Carmen**, is privately owned and is known for coves, beautiful beaches, and a species of rattlesnake without a rattle. Prior permission is required to land on the island. The tiny, narrow island of **Isla Danzante (The Dancer)**, is a favorite of scuba divers with its coves and rocky cliffs.

## La Paz

La Paz (*lah PAHS*), whose name means peace, has a reputation as the most Mexican of Baja's major cities with lots of color and ambiance. It is the capital of Baja California Sur and the commercial center of the surrounding area. La Paz is known for sunset watching, its three-mile-long

*malecón*, its proximity to Isla Espíritu Santo's California sea lion colony, and superb scenery.

The lively city of 150,000, once a small but important pearl-producing area, is sheltered at the southern end of Bahía de La Paz. The Pichilingue (*pee chee LEEN geh*) Peninsula forms the east side of the bay. The town of Pichilingue, about 14 miles due north of La Paz, serves as the main ferry port for connections to Mexico's mainland. Isla Espíritu Santo is north of the peninsula.

During whale-watching season, January through March, tour operators run 12-hour round trips from La Paz to the calving area around Bahía Magdalena. Scuba diving—wreck diving, swimming with sea lions, reef and cave diving—is best June through September. Sea kayaking has become one of the lower Baja Peninsula's best ways to see the Mar de Cortés, its flora and fauna, islands, and desert shore at close range. World-class sportfishing attracts enthusiasts who want a chance to land a few of the 800 species of fish in area waters.

Most of La Paz's 10 major beaches are north, a short walk west from the main road that leads to the town of Pichilingue. Beachcombing for shells and semiprecious gems, sunbathing, renting a paddleboat, snorkeling, swimming, and dining at a beachside *taquería* (taco stand) are some beach activities.

## Local Transportation

Rental cars are an option and may be convenient if planning day excursions to Los Barriles for windsurfing or Todos Santos for art gallery browsing. Taxis are widely available; clients can take collective buses from the airport, but only taxis go to the airport 11 miles southwest of La Paz. Local buses run from downtown La Paz 14 miles along the Carretera Pichilingue (MEX Hwy. 11) to the port of Pichilingue for ferries to the mainland Mexico ports of Mazatlán and Topolobampo (the port for Los Mochis) in the state of Sinaloa.

## Around La Paz: Attractions

- **Biblioteca de las Californias (Library of the Californias)**—Two blocks northwest of the cathedral, the library is one of two places in La Paz to see replicas of Baja cave paintings. It also has many of the historic documents created during more than 400 years of Baja Peninsula history.
- **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de La Paz**—This cathedral was built on the site of the Jesuits' original mission.

- **Island Cruises**—Tour operators offer day cruises to see the rugged rocks and sea lion colonies on Isla Espíritu Santo and Isla Los Islotes. Snorkeling from the tour boat close to the sheer walls of the islands is possible, depending on time of day and wind. Clients will see birds and dolphins leaping along the way, and most tour operators stop for lunch and swimming at a remote beach. A number of companies have several day-to-weeklong tours with camping and kayaking. Small ship cruising is another way for visitors to experience the rich sea and bird life of the Mar de Cortés.
- **Mercado Central (Central Market)**—The Mercado Central (at Revolución de 1910 and Degollado four blocks east of the *malecón*) and the streets surrounding it are filled with lively commerce and numerous piñata shops. Most La Paz shops and stalls close for midday siesta. A few blocks north of the central market is a pottery factory, with demonstrations and sales. Handicrafts and Mexican-style clothing are found in more upscale shops across from the *malecón* and a few blocks east.
- **Museo Regional de Antropología e Historia**—Indigenous village replicas, reproduction Baja cave paintings, and other artifacts from local settlements are displayed in this anthropology and history museum seven blocks west of the *malecón*.
- **Playas (Beaches)**—La Paz is a mecca of beaches, an attractive palm-lined malecón, hundreds of shops not far from small restaurants near the water, and eco- and adventure tours for snorkeling, diving, kayaking, and fishing. It is ideal for those looking for outdoor experiences with comfortable accommodations or pampered island visits.
- **El Teatro de la Ciudad (City Theater)**—This theater is a venue for ballet, music concerts such as symphony, and theater presentations.

## Beyond La Paz: Attractions

- **East Cape**—The last cape on the southeast side of the Mar de Cortés, situated about 70 miles south of La Paz, is marketed as the East Cape. It includes most of the beaches from Punta Pescadero, north of Los Barriles, to Cabo Pulmo. **Los Barriles** (*lohs bah RHE lays*) is considered Baja California Sur's windsurfing capital. The winds blow from September through March and are strongest in January. Farther south on the Transpeninsular Highway (MEX Hwy. 1) and east along the coast, is **Cabo Pulmo**. Here clients can enjoy either snorkeling or diving to view the only living coral reef on the Mar de Cortés.

## Todos Santos

Expatriates and artists have brought new life to this onetime mission village and sugarcane-processing center. Todos Santos (*TOH dohs SAHN tohs*), a few miles from the Pacific on the Tropic of Cancer, is known for its galleries full of paintings and graceful sculptures. Wooden doors, pastel-painted buildings laced with flowering bougainvillea plants, and good restaurants give the town of less than 4,000 the reputation of a Taos or Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the making.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The **Café Santa Fe** has a reputation far beyond Mexico for fine north Italian dining featuring seafood and pasta. The restaurant helped put **Todos Santos** on the map. It draws many diners to the former mission village for the day, to bask in the good-food-and-arts atmosphere.

Artists, architects, builders, organic farmers, surfers, seasonal visitors, and local fishermen coexist in this small town on the western side of the Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra de la Laguna. Todos Santos is 25 miles southwest of La Paz and 25 miles north of Cabo San Lucas along MEX Hwy. 19.

The ruins of brick sugar mills, left from the 1700s, can still be seen around town. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), Mexico's National Anthropology and History Institute, designated the part of town near the central plaza as a national historic district, preserving a number of one- and two-story brick buildings with courtyards.

Strolling around this small, quiet town, browsing the art galleries, shopping, and dining are major activities. The local expatriate population organizes tai chi and yoga classes, among other things to do, which are listed in the local English-language brochure "El Calendario de Todos Santos."

Strong waves and currents favor only experienced surfers, not swimmers, at beaches south of Todos Santos. Playa Punta Lobos, a few miles south of town, is where the fishermen's cooperatives haul up their catches on the beach for sorting and weighing in the afternoon.

### Around Todos Santos: Attractions

- **Art Galleries**—Todos Santos is noted for the number of artists who have their own galleries to display their work. Clients will find painters and sculptors with noted reputations and prices sometimes equivalent to those in the United States. The advantage in Todos Santos is that the artist may be present to discuss the artwork. One venue that shows multiple artists is the Galería de Todos Santos, whose owners encourage the local arts scene.
- **Centro Cultural Todosanteño**—The cultural center is a bustling place with 1930s murals showing the social struggles of peasants and workers.

## Outside Todos Santos: Attractions

- **Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra de la Laguna**—A lot of Baja Peninsula activities are water-oriented, but this biosphere reserve has mountain hiking, where unlikely types of plants grow side by side. Any of several towns 20 to 30 miles north of San José del Cabo on the Transpeninsular Highway, including Santiago, can serve as a base. Campsites are available for hikers going up into the mountains from the foothill communities. One popular, but arduous, eight-hour hike goes to La Laguna, the large meadow that was once a lake, for which the mountain range is named. Another hike through Cañón San Dionisio requires climbing over boulders to see cacti, pines, palms, oaks, and aspens growing together.

## Los Cabos

Los Cabos (The Capes) actually refers to several destinations in one at the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula—the capes of Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo and the 20-mile-long Corredor, the highway that connects the two resort areas. In the mid 1980s, Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo (FONATUR), the Mexican government agency charged with beach resort design, settled upon this site for development as the western equivalent of Cancún on the Mar Caribe.



El Arco at Cabo San Lucas

The bustle of Cabo San Lucas, known for its marina, sportfishing, and parties, contrasts with the pastel-colored, small-town ambiance of San José del Cabo, with its boutiques, art galleries, and tree-shaded restaurants. Ten beaches, some of the most luxurious resorts in Mexico, and several of the country's best golf courses are found along the Corredor. Cabo Real and Cabo del Sol are major developments with hotels, restaurants, private homes, and golf courses.

Los Cabos activities include diving, swimming, snorkeling, kayaking, surfing, windsurfing, parasailing, horseback riding, bicycling, bird-watching, and whale watching. There are also boat trips, sunset cruises, nature walks, and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) tours.

## DID YOU KNOW?

As elsewhere in Mexico, the night starts hopping after 10 P.M.—if even that early—on the **Cabo San Lucas club scene**. Several of the bars and clubs are world-renowned, including the pink-lighted El Squid Roe with its mock weddings amid much hilarity and noise. Musician Sammy Hagar owns Cabo Wabo, and the Giggling Marlin is known for the sign that tourists love to pose with—an upside-down fisherman.

**Cabo San Lucas** surrounds its own harbor and marina. Finisterra (Land's End) is at the tip of the Bahía San Lucas, a few yards beyond the arch-shaped rock known as El Arco (The Arch), a point that is considered the spot where the Pacific Ocean and the Mar de Cortés meet.

Most government business for Los Cabos is conducted in **San José del Cabo**, a city of 25,000. The buildings are painted in pastel hues of yellow, orange, blue, green, and pink. Most restaurants, boutiques, art galleries, and high-quality handicraft shops are along the Bulevar Mijares.

### Local Transportation

Taxis provide much of the transportation along the Corredor and from the airport, eight miles north of San José del Cabo, although local buses also travel along the Corredor. Another option from the airport is to take a *colectivo* (shared van). Because of the distances and quite expensive taxicab fares, clients may want to rent a car to get around and discover Los Cabos, or take day trips to explore towns such as Todos Santos. Guided tours are an economical alternative for visitors wanting to see a variety of widespread attractions.

### Around Cabo San Lucas: Attractions

- **El Arco Glass-Bottom Boat Tour**—Glass-bottom boats leave from the marina for a short ride around El Arco (The Arch) and other rocks where pelicans and sea lions bask in the sun. Many boat operators will drop clients close enough to wade to Playa del Amor (Lover's Beach) with a different boat picking up passengers later for the return trip. Playa del Amor is a strand of sand just inside the bay enjoyed by picnickers, beachcombers, sunbathers, and swimmers. The Pacific Ocean-side beach, with dangerous tides, is known as Playa del Divorcio (Divorce Beach).
- **ATV Tours**—All-terrain vehicles can take clients to the 1890 Cabo Falso lighthouse, on a ride over sand dunes, and to see a sea turtle nesting area from a distance. Another ATV tour visits Candelaria, a village 25 miles north of town, and rides along a canyon and near turtle nesting areas on the return trip.
- **Diving**—Jacques Cousteau discovered and told the world about unique underwater sandfalls 90 feet down along a Bahía San Lucas canyon, a prime attraction for diving excursions. Los Cabos is known for its variety of fish and underwater caves, walls, and seamounts. Other favorite diving spots include Playa Santa María on the Corredor; Gorda Banks Seamount, eight miles from shore; and the East Cape.

- **Glassworks**—There are two glassblowing factories with retail sales rooms where the public can watch the artisans. Workers make art glass as well as the famous cobalt blue-rimmed drinking glasses sold throughout Mexico. Workers are freshest—and coolest—in the morning before the day’s heat adds to that of the kiln.
- **Snorkeling**—Snorkeling from or near Corredor beaches is a popular activity, and it is sometimes combined with diving on boat trips.
- **Sportfishing**—Los Cabos, the “Marlin Capital of the World,” is one of the world’s most notable sportfishing destinations. Blue, black, and striped marlin are taken in waters near here. Fish can weigh 1,000 pounds each. Boats range from top-of-the-line, flybridge-style cruisers to modest skiffs, and they can be chartered from the Cabo San Lucas Marina. World-class fishing dictates prices to match, and clients should match their prior experience and current expectations with captain, boat, and equipment.

Year-round warm-water temperatures and an underwater canyon that expels minerals is ideal for a wide variety of fish, including sailfish, dorado, yellowfin tuna, sierra, Pacific red snapper, and roosterfish. Captains closely observe fishing limits and encourage catch and release.

- **Sunset cruises**—Boats, sailing ships, and catamarans depart from the Plaza Las Glorias Hotel dock inside the marina for cruises along the coast all during the day, but sunset cruises are the most popular.

## Around San José del Cabo: Attractions

- **Estero de San José (Saint Joseph Estuary)**—East of San José del Cabo, this estuary is located next to El Presidente Inter-Continental Hotel, which helped restore the wetland when an expansion of its property was approved. It is loveliest at dawn as birds wake and flutter their wings and the sky turns successive shades of pink. A path along one side of the estuary where the Río San José meets the Mar de Cortés provides access to this safe haven for egrets, great blue herons, ducks, raptors—and mosquitoes.
- **Iglesia San José (San José Church)**—This graceful, yellow-painted church rises where local Pericú Indians killed a missionary who preached that clothing and monogamy were necessary. A tile mural of the bloody event is above the main church door. Across the street is Plaza Mijares, a shady place for enjoying a park bench and watching local residents.

## Pronunciation Guide

Baja	<i>BAH hah</i>
Los Barriles	<i>loh bah RHE lays</i>
Ensenada	<i>ehn seh NAH dah</i>
Loreto	<i>loh REH toh</i>
La Paz	<i>lah PAHS</i>
Pichilingue	<i>pee chee LEEN geh</i>
Tijuana	<i>tee HWAH nah</i>
Todos Santos	<i>TOH dohs SAHN tohs</i>