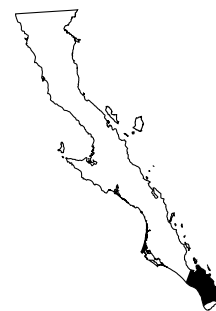


# Southern Baja



Also called the Cape Region, southern Baja is bathed in deliciously tropical weather and possesses some of the peninsula's most enticing attractions. The most obvious is Los Cabos, but because that area is a world in itself, it receives its own chapter (see p217). Strikingly different, the rest of southern Baja remains – for the time being, at least – fairly down to earth. Development is encroaching, especially along the Eastern Cape Rd and around Todos Santos, but most places retain their dusty Baja essence.

La Paz bedazzles its visitors with crimson sunsets and one of the finest *malecones* (waterfronts) in all of Mexico. The city is more quintessentially Mexican than many Baja towns and is a superb base for a myriad of outdoor activities. South of the capital, you'll hit the first fork in the Transpeninsular. The faster México 19 drops below the Tropic of Cancer to hug the Pacific then passes the historic town of Todos Santos before hemming an empty coastline and arriving in Cabo San Lucas.

The slower Transpeninsular heads east, touches the gulf then snakes south through the Sierra de la Laguna. These subtropical highlands of the central cape hold Baja's greatest biodiversity as well as tiny towns that attest to the region's mining history. North of the Tropic of Cancer, the Eastern Cape Rd branches off and rumbles south along a marvelous stretch of coast. It passes the prime windsurfing destination of Los Barriles, the coral reef at Cabo Pulmo and a slew of beautiful beaches before emerging at San Jose del Cabo.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Shack up in a comfy beachside *palapa* (palm-leaf shelter) and live the beach life at rural **El Pescadero** (p215).
- Hire mule and guide and explore the wild **Sierra de la Laguna** (p203), Baja's biodiversity hot spot.
- Watch the crystalline, azure water slide beneath your kayak as you paddle the narrow inlets of **Isla Espíritu Santo** (p200).
- Let **La Paz** (p189) cast its spell on you with sunsets, seafood tacos and its wonderful *malecón* (waterfront promenade).
- Swim with garish tropical fish and dive with manta rays at the coral reef of **Cabo Pulmo** (p207).



■ LA PAZ JANUARY AVERAGE HIGH: 73°F/23°C

■ WATER TEMP OFF CABO PULMO: 68-83°F/20-28°C



# LA PAZ

☎ 612 / pop 196,900

There's something special about La Paz that's difficult to pinpoint: the pinkish light of sundown over the bay, the progressive atmosphere created by its university and cultural center, the crooked sidewalks, its status as a free port, its palpable cultural links to mainland Mexico, the abundance of restaurants and cafés, the eccentric and friendly *paceños* themselves, and a lively street life that has and will seemingly forever refuse to cave in to tourism. Lapped by a deliciously blue sea, the city's *malecón* makes for splendid sunset walks and easy socializing for the families that pour from their homes each night to take in the breeze and the day's gossip.

All of this conspires to keep plenty of return visitors swearing that this is the best city in Baja. To top it all off, La Paz is an excellent base for all sorts of ocean activities. Kayaking, diving, sportfishing, whale-watching and beach bumming can all be done as day trips from town. Best of all, you get to return to La Paz at the end of the day.

## HISTORY

In 1535 Hernán Cortés established Baja's first European settlement on Península Pichilingue, just north of La Paz. However, despite the discovery of pearls in the Gulf of California, it was soon abandoned due to indigenous hostility and food and water shortages.

By the late 16th century, England and Holland were disputing Spain's maritime hegemony, and buccaneers were raiding Spanish ships throughout the world. The treasure-laden galleons that sailed from Manila to Acapulco were especially popular targets, and the pirates often used Bahía de La Paz as a staging area for raids upon the galleons. After the turn of the century, in response to incursions by Northern Europeans, Viceroy Gaspar de Zuñiga y Acevedo of New Spain (Mexico) granted Sebastián Vizcaíno a license to exploit the pearl fisheries of the Cape Region and establish settlements to discourage privateers.

Though Vizcaíno renamed Bahía de la Santa Cruz as Bahía de La Paz (Bay of Peace), he abandoned the idea of a settlement there due to the shortage of supplies and the area's limited agricultural potential.

In 1720 the Jesuits established a mission, but epidemics and indigenous uprisings led to its abandonment 29 years later. La Paz was briefly occupied by US Marines during the Mexican–American War, then attacked by William Walker during his preposterously incompetent attempt to annex Baja California to the USA (see p195).

Mining at nearby El Triunfo, along with pearling and fishing in the gulf, contributed to the city's postindependence growth. Its political status advanced with the grant of statehood to Baja California Sur in 1974, when La Paz was made the state capital.

## ORIENTATION

As the Transpeninsular approaches the city, it runs parallel to Bahía de La Paz and becomes Calzada (or Calle) Abasolo. When Abasolo hits the water, it becomes Paseo Obregón (officially Paseo Alvaro Obregón), running along the *malecón* and on to Península Pichilingue, north of town. If you're continuing to Cabo, entering downtown is unnecessary.

Most of the city's sites are along the *malecón* and within the downtown area bound by Bravo, Héroes de la Independencia and 5 de Mayo. Most of La Paz has a regular grid pattern that makes orientation easy. Plaza Constitución is the city's main plaza, but the *malecón* has become extremely popular for the evening *paseo* (stroll).

## INFORMATION

### Bookstores

**Librería Agora de La Paz** (☎ 122-6204; cnr Altamirano at 5 de Mayo) Carries a great selection of Spanish-language books on Baja and mainland Mexico. Inside Museo Regional de Antropología e Historia.

**Libros Libros Books Books** (☎ 122-1410; Constitución 195) Occasionally stocks English-language magazines and a book or two on Baja in English.

### Emergency Services

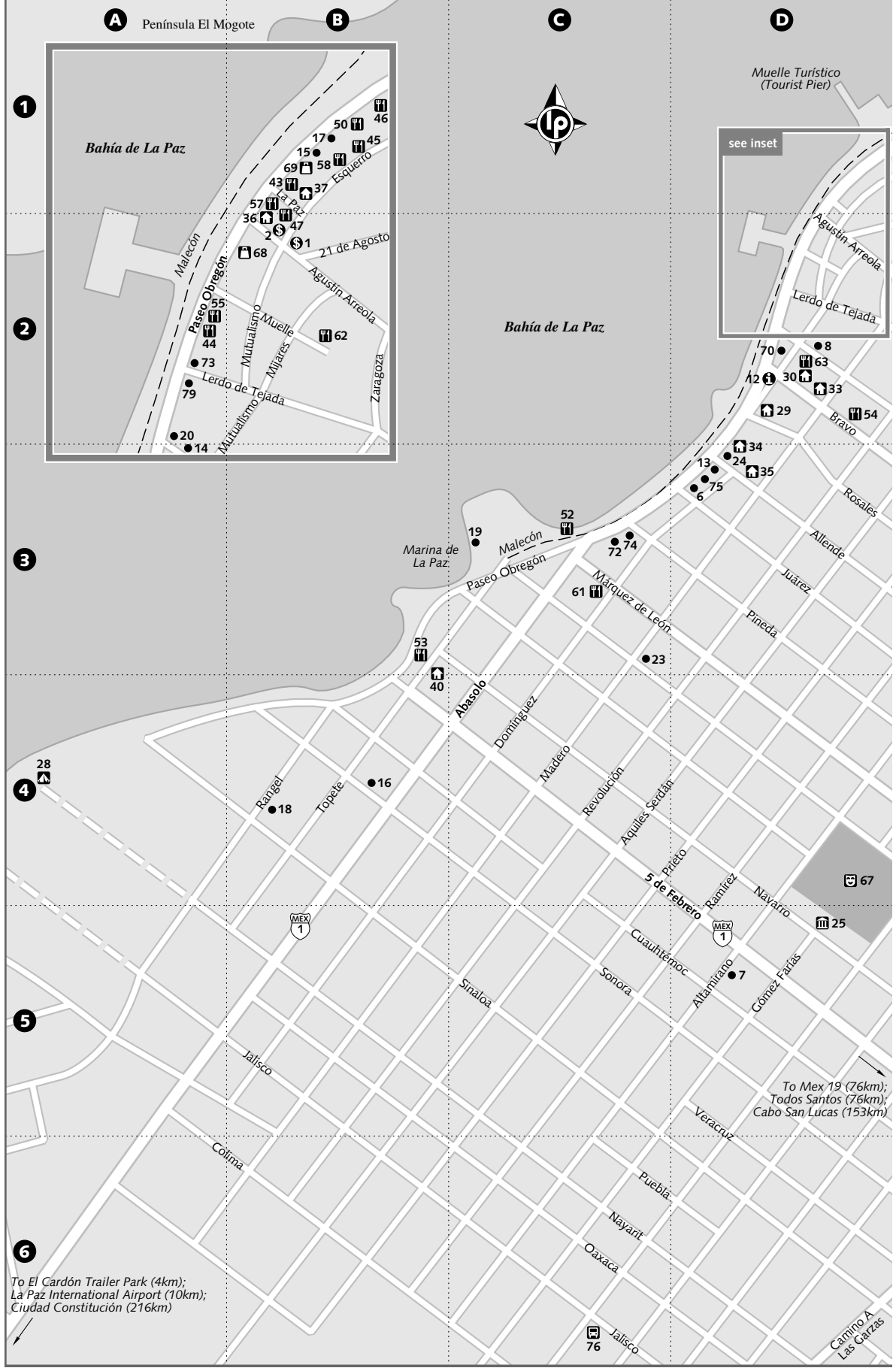
The tourist police office is inside the tourist office.

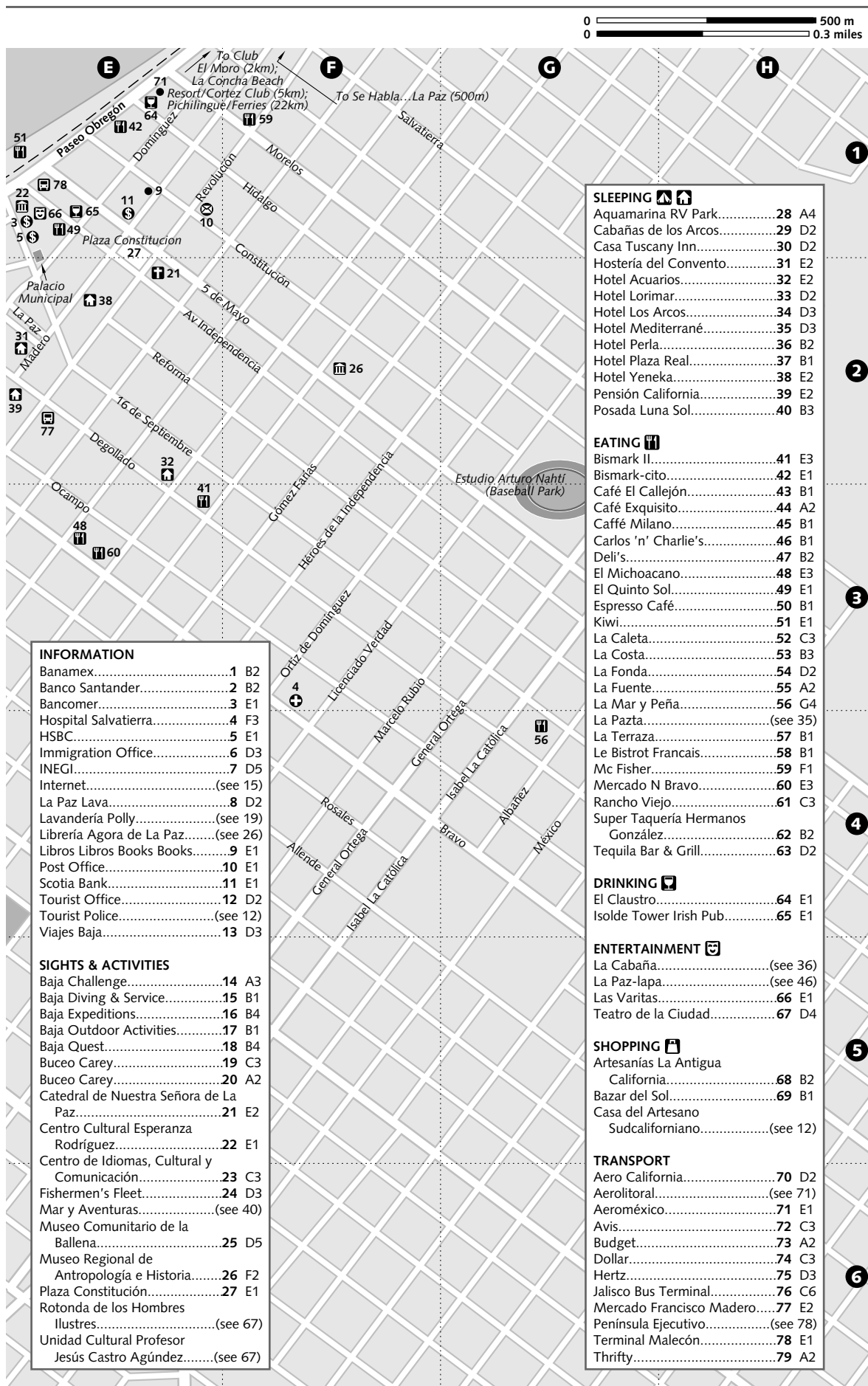
### Immigration

On weekends immigration officials staff the ferry terminal at Pichilingue and the **airport** (☎ 124-6349), but tourist-card extensions are available only at the Paseo Obregón **immigration office** (Servicios Migratorios; ☎ 125-3493; Paseo Obregón 2140, Edificio Milhe; 🕒 9am–6pm Mon–Fri).

# LA PAZ

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SOUTHERN BAJA

### THE DUTCH IN THE PACIFIC

Piracy in the New World was largely an English pursuit, but other northern European countries joined in the pillaging of Spanish booty as well. The sacking of Spain's Manila galleons as they made their way between Acapulco and the Philippines was big business, when successful, and had the additional effect of challenging Spain's wealth and hegemony in the Americas. While the French and especially the Dutch were most active in the Caribbean and along the coast of Brazil, the Dutch also had ambitions in the Pacific.

Since the late-16th-century voyage of Sir Francis Drake, British buccaneers had frequented the Pacific coasts of North and South America, despite the distances between their homes and their convenient, well-watered island bases in the Caribbean. Thomas Cavendish's capture of the *Santa Ana* off Cabo San Lucas in 1587 attracted privateers' interest in New Spain and Baja California; British pirates lay in wait for treasure-laden galleons returning from Manila and sometimes took other major prizes.

The Netherlands, having rebelled against Spanish domination in 1566, was eager to make its mark on the seas. The Dutch became the rivals of the Spaniards in the Caribbean and the Portuguese in Brazil, and they soon rounded the Horn to the Pacific. Though they lurked at Cabo San Lucas in the hopes of emulating Cavendish's windfall, their earliest voyages had limited success. Profit was not the only motive that spurred the Dutch; they were fanatical Protestants who resented the reactionary Catholicism the Spaniards had imposed on them in Europe.

In 1615 the surprisingly genteel occupation of Acapulco by Dutch privateer Joris van Speilbergen induced the Spaniards to build the famous port's landmark castle, the Fuerte de San Diego. For decades, though, the menace of Dutch privateers forced the Spaniards to send patrols from the mainland to the Cape Region. Península Pichilingue, north of La Paz, even takes its name from the Dutch privateers whom the Spaniards called 'Flexelingas,' after their home port of Vlissingen, just north of the modern Belgian border.

### Internet Access

Besides the internet café inside the *malecón* bus terminal, try **Internet** (Paseo Obregón 1665; per hr US\$1; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri), inside Plaza Cerralva.

### Laundry

**La Paz Lava** (Ocampo at Mutualismo; per load US\$6)  
Full service.

**Lavandería Polly** (Marina de La Paz; per load US\$6)  
Full service or DIY.

### Medical Services

**Cruz Roja** (Red Cross; ☎ 122-1111, 122-7828) Call for ambulance.

**Hospital Salvatierra** (☎ 122-1496, 122-1596; Bravo btwn Verdad & Domínguez)

### Money

The following banks all have ATMs; most also change traveler's checks.

**Banamex** (Agustín Arreola at 21 de Agosto)

**Banco Santander** (cnr Agustín Arreola & Esquerro)

**Bancomer** (16 de Septiembre at Esquerro)

**HSBC** (16 de Septiembre near Esquerro)

**Scotia Bank** (cnr 5 de Mayo & Madero)

### Post

**Post office** (cnr Constitución & Revolución)

### Telephone

Telmex/Ladatel pay phones are abundant (remember to avoid the overcharging blue phones, see p263).

### Tourist Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 122-5939; cnr Paseo Obregón & Bravo; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-midnight Sat & Sun)  
Moderately helpful and English is spoken. The tourist police office is also here.

### Travel Agencies

**Viajes Baja** (☎ 122-3660; www.viajesbaja.com; Paseo Obregón 2110 at Allende)

### SIGHTS Malecón

La Paz's newly reconstructed waterfront, with its wide sidewalk, tiny beaches, tourist pier, benches, sculptures by local artists and unimpeded sunset views, has become the city's biggest highlight. At the time of research, the *malecón* stretched 5.5km (3.5 miles), from the Marina de La Paz in the south to Playa Coromuel to the north. The real magic is at sundown, when *paceños* spill out of their homes and take to the *malecón* to stroll, jog, bike, power walk or just hang out and listen

to the live bands that set up on what's easily one of Mexico's finest waterfronts.

### Plaza Constitución

Officially known as Jardín Velasco, La Paz's *zócalo* (main plaza) is the traditional heart of the city. Crowned with an attractive gazebo bandstand, the plaza is the perfect spot to unwind in the shade and people-watch on a hot day. It's at its liveliest in the evening. On the plaza's western side, the **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de La Paz** is the city's cathedral. It only dates from 1861 but mimics the style of California mission architecture. Nothing remains of the city's first cathedral, which was built near the plaza in 1720 under the direction of Jesuit missionaries Jaime Bravo and Juan de Ugarte.

### Museo Regional de Antropología e Historia

Set behind an attractive cactus garden, this first-rate anthropological and historical museum (☎ 122-0162; cnr 5 de Mayo & Altamirano; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-6pm), run by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia (INAH), chronicles the peninsula's past, from prehistory to the Revolution of 1910 and its aftermath.

Exhibits cover pre-Columbian rock art, native peoples, the mission era, various mining booms, the arrival of independence, the Mexican-American War and William Walker's invasion (don't miss the replica of Walker's flag and the bonds used to finance his adventures).

### Unidad Cultural Profesor Jesús Castro Agúndez

The most conspicuous element of the expansive **Unidad Cultural Profesor Jesús Castro Agúndez** (☎ 125-1917), at the southern edge of downtown, is La Paz's sprawling concrete Teatro de La Ciudad (City Theater; see p198). The theater entrance is marked by the **Rotonda de los Hombres Ilustres** (Rotonda of Distinguished Men), a sculptural tribute to figures who fought against filibuster William Walker's invasion of La Paz in 1853 and the French mainland intervention of 1861. On the southwest side of the complex, a pseudo-geodesic dome houses the **Museo Comunitario de la Ballena** (Community Whale Museum; Navarro near Altamirano; admission free; ☎ 1am-1pm), an exhibit of whale art and artifacts.

### Centro Cultural Esperanza Rodríguez

This small **cultural center-cum-art gallery** (☎ 122-9900; [centrocultural@gmail.com](mailto:centrocultural@gmail.com); Independencia 107-B; ☎ 9am-8pm) focuses on women artists from Baja California Sur, though international works are often featured, depending upon the theme (for example, during an International Women's Day exhibit, artists from mainland Mexico and other countries were displayed). If the caretaker isn't in, she's probably next door in the attached internet center.

### ACTIVITIES

When it comes to fun in, on and under the water, La Paz is an excellent base. Many of the city's tour operators offer a variety of trips, from sea kayaking and whale-watching to snorkeling and scuba diving. For beaches near La Paz, see p200.

These are La Paz's main outfitters. Prices are covered under individual activities.

**Baja Diving & Service** (☎ 122-1826; [www.clubcantamar.com](http://www.clubcantamar.com); Paseo Obregón 1665, Local 2) La Paz's best-established dive operator and shop receives gleaming reports and has great staff. It offers courses and dive packages up to two weeks.

**Baja Expeditions** (☎ 125-3828, in the USA 800-843-6967; [www.bajaex.com](http://www.bajaex.com); 585 Sonora at Abasolo) The somewhat legendary Tim Means runs one of the first operators in Baja, where everything is top-notch: outstanding kayaking trips, diving and snorkeling tours, and whale-watching.

Everything from half-day to 10-day kayaking trips offered. **Baja Outdoor Activities** (☎ 125-5636; [www.kayactivities.com](http://www.kayactivities.com); Paseo Obregón) Highly regarded, Baja Outdoor Activities offers three-day whale-watching tours for US\$290 (per person, double occupancy) including two nights' hotel, food and drinks. Eight-day trips cost US\$990. It also offers kayaking trips and rentals.

**Baja Quest** (☎ 123-5320; [www.bajaquest.com](http://www.bajaquest.com); Rangel 10 at Sinaloa) Diving, snorkeling, kayaking and whale-watching trips and all types of packages are available, as are weeklong kayaking and marine ecology clinics.

**Buceo Carey** (☎ 123-2333, 128-4048; [www.carey.com.mx](http://www.carey.com.mx)); Marina de La Paz (cnr Topete & Legaspi); Ocampo (Ocampo near Paseo Obregón) Runs diving, kayaking, fishing, whale-watching, hiking and multiday land trips.

**Cortez Club** (☎ 121-6120, in the USA 800-999-2242; [www.cortezclub.com](http://www.cortezclub.com)) At La Concha Beach Resort (p196), Cortez Club specializes in diving but also rents kayaks, windsurfing equipment, Hobie cats and the like.

**Mar y Aventuras** (☎ 122-7039, in the US 800-355-7140; [www.kayakbaja.com](http://www.kayakbaja.com); Topete 564) This excellent kayaking operator has all types of paddling tours, full kayak and gear rentals, and professional staff. Offers shuttle service for independent travelers.

## Sea Kayaking

La Paz is one of Baja's premier kayaking destinations, luring paddlers from around the world to the azure waters and shallow, finger-like inlets of nearby Isla Espíritu Santo and surrounding islands (see p200). Several of the operators listed earlier offer a variety of tours to the islands, from easy one-day paddles to multiday trips that allow you to camp on the islands by night and explore the spectacular coves by day.

Day trips may be combined with a snorkeling stop at a resident sea lion colony at Los Islotes. Depending on where you go, how much you do and how much time you spend on the water, day trips cost anywhere from US\$65 to US\$95.

You can also do multiday trips with a guide or have one of the operators listed here drop you off and pick you up at a specified time. You can even set up meeting points to have food prepared for you so you can squeeze in max paddling time (and not wear yourself out flipping tortillas).

One-way shuttles to the north end of Isla Espíritu Santo (so you can paddle back down) cost around US\$150 for two people. A week-long kayaking and camping trip (with guides and full food service) costs from US\$850 to US\$1300 per person in a group of 12 to 16. Prices for custom trips vary. Most companies offering kayaking excursions also rent kayaks for US\$25 to US\$50 per day. Nearly everyone speaks English.

## Diving & Snorkeling

Dive sites near La Paz include the **El Bajo Seamount**, likely the most famous site in the Sea of Cortez, thanks to its schools of hammerhead sharks and giant manta rays. It's 12.5km (8 miles) northeast of **Los Islotes**, a group of islets just north of Isla Partida, with various shipwrecks, underwater caves, reefs and sea lion colonies. Los Islotes is also great for snorkeling.

Snorkeling trips to Los Islotes cost about US\$65. Two-tank dive trips cost US\$95 to US\$125, usually depending on whether equipment is included in the price. Always make sure you're clear on what's included; food and drinks usually are.

## Whale-Watching

La Paz ranks lower than the Baja whale-watching destinations of Laguna Ojo de Liebre, Laguna

San Ignacio and Bahía Magdalena, but these gentle giants definitely ply the waters off La Paz, especially from January to April. During these times you have a good chance of sighting gray whales as well as possibly spotting blue, finback, minke, orca and humpback whales. Many of the operators mentioned earlier offer whale-watching trips by boat for US\$110 to US\$125 per person. Some depart from La Paz while others go overland to Bahía Magdalena. The latter by far offers the better whale-watching, but it's a four-hour drive from La Paz.

## Fishing

You can hook game fish all year in the vicinity of La Paz, including bonito, corvina, crevalle, grouper, needlefish, pargo, rock bass, sierra and skipjack. Seasonal species include black and blue marlin (both July to October), dorado (April to December), roosterfish (May to January), sailfish (June to October), snook (December to June, but rare), striped marlin (May to October), yellowfin tuna (July to November, sporadically) and yellowtail (December to May).

The **Jack Vélez Fleet** (☎ 126-7890) is the longest-running sportfishing operator in town. It offers trips on boats ranging from 22ft to 30ft and provides all equipment, licenses and transportation. Rates are US\$180 to US\$240, depending on the boat, for up to four people. Contact the operator by telephone or through Hotel Los Arcos (p196).

**Fishermen's Fleet** (☎ 122-1313; www.fishermensfleet.com; cnr Paseo Obregón & Allende) is very professional, offering both day-trip boat charters and three- to four-night fishing packages (US\$615 and US\$785, respectively) that include lodging. Most major hotels can also arrange fishing trips.

## Mountain Biking

New in town, **Baja Challenge** (☎ 128-6089; www.bajachallenge.com.mx; Paseo Obregón 460 at Ocampo) offers guided mountain-bike rides in the Sierra de la Laguna, Los Birriles, El Triunfo, Cabo and other areas. Day trips run from US\$85 to US\$95 and include transport, guide, lunch, helmets and Specialized Stumpjumpers. The office entrance is on Ocampo.

## COURSES

**Centro de Idiomas, Cultura y Comunicación**

(☎ 125-7554; www.ciclapaz.com; Madero 2460;

🕒 8:30am-1pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Offers



**WILLIAM WALKER, BIG TALKER**

By most opinions, the US made a windfall upon the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican–American War and ceded some 1.36 million sq km (525,000 sq miles) of northern Mexico to the US. Believe it or not, many Americans were still unhappy with the treaty, and some felt that US troops should have stayed on after the war to make Baja part of the new US state of California.

One man even went a step further – and put his plan into action.

William Walker was a quixotic American rabble-rouser. In 1853 he assembled a band of about 50 mercenaries and set sail from San Francisco with the goal of establishing a self-styled ‘Republic of Lower California.’ Touching land at Cabo San Lucas, he continued on to the territorial capital of La Paz where he misrepresented himself and his cohorts as commercial voyagers to gain permission to land. Walker’s forces then arrested the governor, took possession of public buildings and raised the flag of the new republic. He declared himself president, installed ‘cabinet officers’ and, for good measure, also proclaimed annexation of the state of Sonora on the Mexican mainland.

Improvised Mexican resistance failed to dislodge Walker from La Paz, but the threat of a more organized force and the failure of his own reinforcements to arrive drove him back to Cabo San Lucas. Concerned that a Mexican warship was trailing him, Walker abandoned plans to establish a new capital at Bahía Magdalena and headed north to Ensenada. From there he led a heroically foolish attempt to conquer Sonora, ending up defeated not by Mexican troops but by the merciless Sonoran desert. Eventually, he straggled across the US border to hatch the grandiose Central American invasion schemes that led to his death in Honduras in 1860.

introductory, intermediate and advanced Spanish lessons as well as a total-immersion program. The school charges about US\$18 per hour for private lessons and US\$99 to US\$220 for weeklong classes.

**Se Habla... La Paz** (☎ 222-7763; www.sehablalapaz.com; Madero 540) Offers language instruction, cultural programs and homestays. Rates are comparable to those at Centro de Idiomas, Cultura y Comunicación.

**FESTIVALS & EVENTS**

**Carnaval** La Paz’s most colorful celebration is held in mid- to late February before the traditional rigors of Lent. It’s the peninsula’s best, and some even say it’s the best Carnaval celebration in Mexico.

**Fundación de la Ciudad** From May 1 to 7 *paceños* celebrate the city’s founding in 1535.

**Día de la Independencia** The city also comes alive on September 15 and 16 when Mexico celebrates independence from Spain.

**Día de los Muertos** November 2 is another good holiday to be in town for.

**SLEEPING**

La Paz has good accommodation options for all budget levels. Only two hotels are actually located on the waterfront, while the rest are a block or more inland (still only a short walk from the *malecón*) or on the road to Pichilingue.

Rates at budget hotels tend to stay the same year-round, while those at midrange and top-

end places often drop by 10% to 20% during May to September low season. Prices listed here are for the high season.

**Budget**

**El Cardón Trailer Park** (☎ 124-0078; tent US\$4-6, car/RV US\$12/15; 🚐 🚚) At Km 4 on the Transpeninsular, just before town in a partly shaded area distant from the beach, this well-organized park has 90 spaces, each with full hookups, electric lights and a small *palapa*. Facilities include a laundry room, swimming pool, hot showers, clean toilets and an internet café.

**Aquamarina RV Park** (☎ 122-3761; Rangel at Nayarit; site US\$19; 🚐 🚚) Resembling a bayside fortress (thanks to its heavy-duty and slightly intimidating security), Aquamarina is the closest RV park to town. It’s highly regarded, near the water and has full hookups, but the sites are all asphalt.

**Pensión California** (☎ 122-2896; pensioncalifornia@prodigy.net.mx; Degollado 209; s/d US\$15/20) Faded paintings, dusty bric-a-brac and a decades-old turtle carapace adorn the interior courtyard walls of this longtime budget favorite. Rooms are dark, but the blue and yellow concrete walls give them a cheerful feel. Each has a ceiling fan, fluorescent light, adjustable blinds, a shower and a padlock for the door.

**Hostería del Convento** (☎ 122-3508; Madero 85; s/d US\$15/20) Pensión California’s disheveled sister

hotel features the same blue and yellow paint but much less character. Rooms resemble cement cells, but they're fine for the price.

**Hotel Yeneka** (☎ 125-4688; ynkmacias@prodigy.net.mx; Madero 1520; s/d US\$32/36; P 🚰 🚰) Quirky Hotel Yeneka has 20 dark but clean rooms with firm beds (mattresses set over concrete) and a lobby covered in hubcaps, car bumpers, mud-splattered license plates, hats and other trinkets that threaten to spill into the street. Rates include coffee in the morning, an hour of internet and a double shot of tequila upon arrival.

### Midrange

**Hotel Lorimar** (☎ 125-3822; Bravo 110; s/d with air-con US\$34/38, without air-con US\$23/27; 🚰) A disheveled but appealing interior courtyard, bright rooms (provided you get the right one) and a very helpful, English-speaking staff make the Lorimar solid value. The cheaper rooms sell out quickly. Note that some rooms can be dark and unappealing, making them less of a deal.

**Hotel Plaza Real** (☎ 122-9333; cnr La Paz & Esquerro; s & d US\$40, t US\$47) This one's friendly and has an appealing location on the pedestrian Calle La Paz, but its circa 1972 vibe gives it a somewhat cold feel.

**Hotel Acuarios** (☎ 122-9266; Ramírez 1665; s/d US\$58/65; P 🚰 🚰) Wide hallways and a speckled tile floor give the Acuarios an institutional 1960s feel, but the bedrooms are warmed up a bit with an orange wall here and there and vinyl headboards. The 60 rooms are carpeted and comfy, and have TV and telephones. Great period piece.

**Posada Luna Sol** (☎ 123-0559, in the USA 800-355-7140; www.posadalunasol.com; Topete 564; r US\$60-80, ste US\$130; P 🚰 🚰) This fabulous hotel-cum-guest house has enormous, immaculate rooms with colorful Mexican sinks, tile floors and air-con. There's a rooftop terrace with hammocks above and a kitchen (coffee and fridge only) below. It's in a quiet spot and owned by Mar y Aventuras (p193), which is especially convenient if you plan to kayak.

**Cabañas de los Arcos** (☎ 122-2744; www.losarcos.com; Mutualismo near Paseo Obregón; cabañas US\$65-90, d US\$85-110; P 🚰 🚰) Set among lush tropical gardens, this highly regarded establishment boasts *cabaña*-style rooms with fireplaces, tiled floors, thatched roofs, TVs, air-con and minibars. The double rooms and suites are in the nearby Hotel Los Arcos (right).

**Hotel Mediterrané** (☎ 125-1195; www.hotelmed.com; Allende 36; s US\$66-83, d US\$72-83; 🚰) Each spacious (nay, *giant*) room in this gay-friendly hotel is immaculate, comfortable and named after a Greek island. Free internet access, a video library (for your en-suite VCR), bikes and kayaks are all on offer.

**Club El Moro** (☎ 122-4084; www.clubelmoro.com; Carratera Pichilingue Km 2; r US\$73-120; P 🚰 🚰) With a gorgeous pool and landscaping to match, this is one of the nicest places to stay in La Paz, if you don't mind being a bit out of town. The suites are a particularly good deal, offering spacious rooms with kitchenettes and living rooms. It's located on the road to Pichilingue.

**Hotel Perla** (☎ 122-0777; www.hotelperlabaja.com; Paseo Obregón 1570; r US\$83; P 🚰 🚰) One of two lodging options on the *malecón*, this historic hotel (if they came, they stayed here) has a swimming pool, a restaurant, a bar and a laid-back open-air nightclub on the 2nd floor. Some rooms offer bay views (and they're no more expensive), while others overlook the pool; all have air-con, TVs and private bathrooms.

### Top End

**Our pick Casa Tuscany Inn** (☎ 128-8103; www.tuscanybaja.com; Bravo 110-A; r US\$85-115; 🚰) Styled like an Italian villa and decorated with Mexican handicrafts, this small B&B has a lovely, plant-filled patio with shaded tables. Rooms have fridges and get lots of light. There's a video library and an impressive crucifix collection (in the common room). Sweethearts should go for the 'Romeo and Juliet' room.

**Hotel Los Arcos** (Paseo Obregón 498; r US\$95-108, ste US\$115-120) Owned by the same owners of Cabañas de los Arcos, this place has a lovely pool, a sauna, a restaurant and a coffee shop. The hotel is a romantically nostalgic place, with a huge fountain in the middle of the lobby and a professionally attentive staff. It's right on the *malecón* and a great choice if you're looking for something classy. Spring for a room with a balcony facing the ocean.

**La Concha Beach Resort** (☎ 121-6161, 121-6218, in the USA 800-999-2252; www.laconcha.com; r US\$112, ste US\$155-196; P 🚰 🚰) At Km 5 on the road to Pichilingue stands this 107-room beachfront hotel. It's adorned with palm trees, a swimming pool with poolside bar, a fine Mexican restaurant and a water-sports center. Rooms all have balconies overlooking the bay, and rates include two children under 12.

## EATING

La Paz has some of the best tacos on the peninsula, from stand-while-you-eat taco stands to quasi-restaurants that pack 'em in every night. Eat at any *taquería* listed here and you'll forever measure tacos by those of La Paz. When it comes to sit-down restaurants, the city is equally adept at pleasing nearly all tastes, without breaking the bank like restaurants do in Cabo.

### Taquerías

**Super Taquería Hermanos González** (Mutualismo near Arreola; tacos US\$1-1.50; ☎ 8am-5pm) Whether it can maintain the reputation it acquired when it served its famous fish tacos from a street stand remains to be seen, now that it has expanded. Odds are it will. Don't miss it.

**Rancho Viejo** (☎ 128-4647; cnr Domínguez & Márquez de León; tacos US\$1-2; ☎ 24hr) When it comes to meat, there's no competition; the melt-in-your-mouth *tacos de arrachera* (skirt steak tacos) are to die for. Also try the delicious *tacos al pastor* (roisserie pork tacos) and the *gringas* (flour tortillas with meat, salsa and melted cheese). Vegetarians can go for the *papas asadas* (grilled potatoes stuffed with mushrooms, corn, onions and cheese); just tell them to hold the meat.

**our pick Mc Fisher** (Morelos near Revolución; tacos US\$1.20-2.50, mains US\$9-13; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) Oyster, garlic octopus, clam, smoked marlin and sautéed shrimp are just a hint of the astounding array of tacos Mc Fisher whips out. Chase 'em down with a *Michelada* (beer and lemonade over ice in a mug ringed with salt) or a shot of Cazadores tequila. Outdoor tables add to the fun.

**El Michoacano** (cnr Bravo & Prieto; carnitas per person US\$4-7; ☎ 8am-2pm) It's technically not a *taquería*, but you do wrap the *carnitas* (slow-roasted pork) in corn tortillas, so it's close enough. Buy the pork by the kilo, sit at the outdoor tables and chow down. Wednesdays are two-for-one, and it's cheaper if you buy your own tortillas at the *tortillería* next door and take it all to the beach.

### Restaurants

**El Quinto Sol** (☎ 122-1692; cnr Av Independencia & Domínguez; mains US\$3-6; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) Besides its bean specialties, this vegetarian landmark and health-food market offers large breakfast servings of yogurt (plain or with fruit, granola or muesli), *licuados* (fruit shakes), fresh-baked breads and pastries.

**La Fonda** (☎ 125-4700; cnr Bravo & Revolución; mains US\$5-8; ☎ 7am-11pm) The outdoor patio is great, but the real reason to come here is the cheap and excellent *comidas corridas* (set meals) served from 1pm to 7pm.

**Café El Callejón** (☎ 125-4006; Callejón La Paz 51; mains US\$5-8; ☎ 10am-midnight) This touristy place with outdoor tables serves cheap, tasty *antojitos* (snacks or light meals).

**La Pazta** (☎ 125-1195; Allende 36-B; mains US\$5-10) Just south of the *malecón* in the Hotel Mediterrané, La Pazta serves good Italian specials at reasonable prices.

**Tequila Bar & Grill** (☎ 122-5217; cnr Mutualismo & Ocampo; mains US\$6-10) Resembling a ranch house dipped in tar, this small architectural oddity is great spot for *antojitos* and margaritas. Excellent place to kick off the night.

**La Caleta** (☎ 123-0287; Malecón at Pineda; mains US\$6-11) On the waterfront, La Caleta is very popular for its reasonably priced meals and drinks, which you can slurp down to live jazz and mellow sunset tunes.

**La Costa** (☎ 122-8808; cnr Topete & Navarro; mains US\$6-12) Simply put, La Costa serves the best lobster in La Paz. Great fish, too.

**Bismark II** (☎ 122-4854; cnr Degollado & Altamirano; mains US\$7-12); Bismark-cito (☎ 128-9900; Paseo Obregón at Constitución; mains US\$7-12) Long ago, a woman opened a taco stand that later grew into this favorite seafood restaurant with good prices and great fish. The taco stand (tacos US\$1 to US\$6), open from 9am to 5pm, is still a hit and is parked daily in front of Bismark-cito, the family's other restaurant. The lobster tacos sell out by noon, despite their costing US\$6 a pop.

**Carlos 'n' Charlie's** (☎ 122-9290; Paseo Obregón near 16 de Septiembre; mains US\$7-14) Serving tacos, burgers, chicken, pasta and steak to a predominantly Mexican crowd, this branch of the national chain is more noted for drinking than for dining, but the food is definitely reliable.

**La Terraza** (cnr Paseo Obregón & La Paz; mains US\$7-15) Part of Hotel Perla, La Terraza's main draw is its large, open terrace facing the *malecón*, making it a great spot to take in the breeze, the people and the sunset. The food is decent.

**La Mar y Peña** (☎ 122-9949; 16 de Septiembre at Albañez; US\$7-15) Choose from nearly 60 seafood dishes while mariachi bands kick out the tunes at this casual local favorite. It's part of a seafood co-op so the fish is always fresh.

**Le Bistrot Francais** (☎ 125-6080; Esquerro 10; mains US\$7-16) With its interior courtyard adorned

with eclectic art and loads of plants, this French/Italian/Mexican restaurant wins on charm alone. And the food's great too.

**Caffé Milano** (☎ 125-9981; Esquero 15; mains US\$7-17; ☎ 4-11pm Mon-Sat) Slick Italian restaurant; makes for a nice break from the Mexican fare if you've been here a while.

**Kiwi** (Malecón at 16 de Septiembre; mains US\$10-18; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-3am Fri & Sat) Practically *in* the water, Kiwi is likely the best place for a sunset dinner, provided you sit on the terrace and not inside. Seafood, meats and Mexican dishes.

### Cafés & Ice Cream

**La Fuente** (cnr Paseo Obregón & Muelle; ice cream US\$1-2) La Fuente scoops up La Paz's best ice cream; homemade flavors include *elote* (corn), guava and tequila-with-almond. Spot it by the big polka-dot tree out front.

**Espresso Café** (Paseo Obregón 10; drinks & snacks US\$1-4) Frequented more by Mexicans than gringos, this is a popular coffee bar that also serves drinks and light meals.

Both **Deli's** (cnr Callejón La Paz & Mutualismo; drinks & snacks US\$1-4) and **Café Exquisito** (Paseo Obregón near Muelle; drinks US\$1-3) serve good coffee and espresso drinks; Deli's has pastries, good sandwiches and smoothies, too.

### Markets

**Mercado N Bravo** (Bravo near Ramírez; mains US\$2-4) Downtown's indoor seafood and vegetable market has a section of food stalls guaranteeing some of the cheapest eats in town (soups, seafood, stuff like that). You'll enjoy them only if you can handle the smell of fish.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

La Paz lacks the supercharged nightlife of Cabo San Lucas and Tijuana, but there's still plenty to do on weekend nights, and mixing it up with the locals is usually easier than in Cabo. The real fun lies in getting home: La Paz's uneven sidewalks and mismatched steps are virtual minefields for tipsy walkers.

On weekend nights, Paseo Obregón turns into a mile-long traffic jam, while the *malecón* attracts all ages of folks (but particularly students) who wander along and pause to watch the occasional street performance or live band. Most weekend nights *something* happens at the Muelle Turístico. Strolling musicians often play in Plaza Constitución as well.

## Bars

**Isolde Tower Irish Pub** (cnr Av Independencia & Domínguez) Irish pubs draw big crowds in Latin America, and this one's no exception.

**El Claustro** (☎ 122-1609; cnr Paseo Obregón & Hidalgo; ☎ Tue-Sun) This slick new bar-cum-restaurant-cum-dance club offers great views from its upstairs floor and a hip crowd. Right on the *malecón*.

## Clubs & Live Music

**Las Varitas** (☎ 125-2025; Av Independencia 111; admission US\$3-8) The local rock-and-roll scene is fun to check out here; angst-ridden bands rip out loud tunes to a small but often packed house.

**La Paz-lapa** (cnr Paseo Obregón & 16 de Septiembre; cover US\$5; ☎ 10pm-4am Tue, Fri & Sat) Eternally popular La Paz-lapa is downtown's favorite dance club, and Tuesday night is ladies' night (no cover for the gals). It's above Carlos 'n' Charlie's.

**La Cabaña** (Paseo Obregón 1570) In Hotel Perla, this open-air nightclub has a mellow, local vibe and musical leanings toward salsa, merengue and tropical.

## Theater

**Teatro de la Ciudad** (City Theater; ☎ 125-0004) Features performances by musical and theatrical groups, often by performers from mainland Mexico, as well as occasional film series. The giant theater is within the Unidad Cultural Profesor Jesús Castro Agúndez (p193).

## SHOPPING

Peter Gerhard, in his classic *Lower California Guidebook* of the 1960s, tells of a tourist who bought a black pearl in La Paz only to learn that it was an exquisitely burnished ball bearing! Few visitors are so gullible, but local stores have plenty of junk alongside the good stuff. Most are along the waterfront Paseo Obregón.

**Casa del Artesano Sudcaliforniano** (☎ 125-8802; cnr Paseo Obregón & Bravo) Next to the tourist office, this excellent store sells jewelry, handicrafts, paintings, sculptures and clothes made in La Paz and Baja California Sur.

**Artesanías La Antigua California** (☎ 125-5230; Paseo Obregón near Arreola) Features a wide selection of quality crafts from throughout the country.

**Bazar del Sol** (☎ 122-3626; Paseo Obregón 1165) This place is loaded with kitsch.

On weekends during the Christmas season, countless baubles change hands at the

seasonal Mercado Navideño, which turns downtown Madero and Av Independencia into pedestrian malls.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Aeropuerto Internacional General Manuel Márquez de León, in English known as **La Paz International Airport** (☎ 122-1466/67, 122-2959), is just 10km (6.5 miles) southwest of downtown, at the end of a short lateral off the Transpeninsular.

**Aeroméxico** (☎ 122-0091/92/93; Paseo Obregón btwn Hidalgo & Morelos) flies Thursday and Sunday to/from Los Angeles and Tucson, AZ, in the USA; Tijuana in Baja; and several mainland Mexico cities. Its subsidiary, Aerolitoral, at the same address, flies daily to/from Loreto and mainland Mexican cities.

**Aero California** (☎ 125-1023, 123-9800, in the USA 800-237-6225; Paseo Obregón 550) has offices at the airport and downtown. It operates two daily flights between La Paz and Los Angeles, daily flights to Tucson via Hermosillo and one daily nonstop to Tijuana. It also offers many flights to mainland Mexican destinations.

Schedules change regularly.

### Boat

#### FERRY

The terminal for ferries to the mainland towns of Topolobampo and Mazatlán is in Pichilingue, about 22km (14 miles) north of central La Paz. For all sailings, you must arrive at the terminal two hours before departure. All ferries are now run by **Baja Ferries** (☎ 123-1313, 125-7443, in Mexico 800-122-1414; www.bajaferrries.com.mx; cnr Isabel La Católica & Navarro), which has a ticket office in La Paz. Boats depart daily at 3pm to Topolobampo (six hours) and to Mazatlán (18 hours) on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 4pm. High winds sometimes delay winter sailings.

Approximate one-way fares per person are listed here. *Cabinas* (sleepers) have two beds and a private bath. *Turista* class cabins have four beds and no bath. Children must be under 12 to get the lower rate.

Class	To Topolobampo (US\$)	To Mazatlán (US\$)
Salón	67	71
Turista	N/A	94
Cabina	70	108
Child	31	35

Vehicle rates start at US\$92 for a car or pickup to Topolobampo, and US\$185 to Mazatlán. Motorcycles pay US\$53 and US\$120, respectively.

Before shipping your vehicle to mainland Mexico, ferry officials require a tourist permit; for details, see p264.

### PRIVATE YACHT

Between November and March, La Paz is a good place to catch a lift on a private yacht to mainland Mexico. The most frequent trip is La Paz to Puerto Vallarta with fun stops along the way. Allow about one week, with two to three nights at sea. Ask around and check the **Club Cruceros** (www.clubcruceros.org) bulletin board at the **Marina de La Paz** (malecón at Legaspi).

### Bus

La Paz's sparkling new bus terminal, the **Terminal Malecón** (☎ 165-5444; cnr Paseo Obregón & Independencia), is conveniently located on the *malecón*, walking distance from most hotels. Note that if the bus you're taking into La Paz is not signed 'Centro' (and they usually are) you may end up at the **Jalisco bus terminal** (cnr Jalisco & Héroes de la Independencia), which lies about 20 blocks from downtown.

Between **ABC** (☎ 122-3063), **Aguila** (☎ 122-4270) and **Autotransportes de La Paz** (☎ 122-2157), there are three to five departures daily to the following northbound destinations:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)
Ciudad Constitución	17	3
Ensenada	121	23
Guerrero Negro	68	10-12
Loreto	27-30	5
Mexicali	136	24
Mulegé	37	7
Puerto López Mateos	23	4
Puerto San Carlos	22	4
San Ignacio	48	9
San Quintín	98	17
Santa Rosalía	43	8
Tijuana	131	22-24

Southbound ABC/Aguila buses depart La Paz several times daily bound for El Triunfo (US\$4.50, one hour), San Antonio (US\$5, 70 minutes), Buena Vista (US\$6.50, 1½ hours), Miraflores (US\$15, 2½ hours) and San José del Cabo via the Transpeninsular (US\$17, three hours).

Aguila buses take México 19 (the *via corta*, or short route) from La Paz to Todos Santos (US\$8, 1½ hours) and Cabo San Lucas (US\$17, 2½ hours) several times daily.

Autotransportes de La Paz operates buses to Todos Santos (US\$7) and Cabo San Lucas (US\$17) eight times daily between 6:45am and 7:45pm.

**Península Ejecutivo** (☎ 165-5444, ext 129; Terminal Malecón, Paseo Obregón) offers deluxe direct service every two hours to Cabo San Lucas (US\$18, 2½ hours) and San José del Cabo (US\$21, three hours).

## GETTING AROUND

### Bus

The government-regulated **Transporte Terrestre** (☎ 125-3274, 125-6229) minivan service charges US\$23 per person to/from the airport; call for pickup from your hotel. Autotransportes Aguila buses leave the *malecón* bus terminal for Península Pichilingue and the ferry terminal (US\$3, one hour) hourly between 7am and 6pm. Most local buses leave from the front of the **Mercado Francisco Madero** (cnr Degollado & Revolución).

### Car

Car rental rates start at around US\$55 per day, all included. Shop around as prices can vary by up to US\$25. Agencies include:

**Avis** (☎ 122-2651, airport 124-6312; Paseo Obregón 820)

**Budget** (☎ 123-1919, airport 124-6433; www.budgetbaja.com; Paseo Obregón 1775)

**Dollar** (☎ 122-6060; cnr Paseo Obregón & Pineda)

**Hertz** (☎ 122-5300, airport 124-6330; Paseo Obregón btwn Juárez & Allende)

**Thrifty** (☎ 125-9696, airport 124-6365; Paseo Obregón near Bravo)

### Taxi

The minimum fare for a taxi in town is US\$3. Pay no more than this for anywhere within the downtown vicinity. Private taxis to the airport (20 minutes) cost about US\$15; pay too much more and you're getting ripped off.

## AROUND LA PAZ

La Paz makes a great base for exploring the city's nearby beaches and islands. Having your own wheels makes things easier.

### Beaches

Sand-lounging and sun-burning is best done outside the city limits on the small but pleasant beaches north and west of the city. But,

with a state capital right here and loads of development, don't expect the sort of paradisiacal stretches of sand you'll find north along the bay or south along the eastern cape.

The best nearby beaches are on Península Pichilingue, to the north. **Playa Palmira** has the Araiza Inn Palmira, a marina and a few condominium complexes with restaurants and bars, while **Playa Coromuel** and **Playa Caimancito** have restaurants and bars, toilets and shady *palapas*. **Playa Tesoro**, the next beach north, also has a restaurant and some shade.

The road north of **Playa Pichilingue** (which lies about 100m north of the ferry terminal) is paved to the exceptional beaches of **Playa Balandra** and **Playa Tecolote** (where, across the Canal de San Lorenzo, Isla Espíritu Santo looks like a chunk of southern Utah's canyon country floating on the sea). Surprisingly uncrowded, even in ideal winter weather, Playa Tecolote's wide, sandy beach lacks potable water and other amenities, but has a restaurant. **Playa Coyote**, on the gulf side of the peninsula, is more isolated.

Free camping is possible at Playa Coyote and Playa Pichilingue, but don't leave anything unattended. Most hotels can arrange shuttles to the beaches for about US\$8 to US\$10. Aguila buses also run between the *malecón* terminal and Playa Tecolote (US\$3 one way).

## Isla Espíritu Santo & Around

Few things can measure up to the thrill of paddling a kayak across a sand-bottom cove at Isla Espíritu Santo. It's like floating through a 3D watercolor of pinks, browns and aqueous blues, with seabirds and tropical fish thrown in for fun. For sailors, kayakers, divers and snorkelers, it's one of the most exhilarating places in Baja.

Just under 7km (4.5 miles) from the tip of Peninsula Pichilingue, Espíritu Santo is the biggest of several islands that lie immediately outside Bahía de La Paz. From north to south, the three main island groups are: tiny **Los Islotes** (actually three islands), **Isla Partida** and **Isla Espíritu Santo**. On the western side of Espíritu Santo are several smaller islands, including **Isla Ballena**, **Isla Gallo** and **Isla Gallina**.

Los Islotes is famous for its resident colony of friendly sea lions; these frisky animals are known to perform all sorts of underwater acrobatics for divers. The combined

**DETOUR: EL CENTENARIO TO SAN EVARISTO**

West of La Paz, just beyond the village of El Centenario, a paved but potholed bumpy spur off the Transpeninsular leads north along the western shore of Bahía de La Paz to the small phosphate-mining port of **San Juan de la Costa**. It's a beautiful drive out, right along the cliffs of the bay. San Juan has one passable restaurant. North of here, the graded road continues along the eastern escarpment of the Sierra de la Giganta, whose multicolored mountains – especially impressive in the morning sun – resemble a cutaway of Arizona's Grand Canyon. The road ends at **San Evaristo**, a small fish camp opposite Isla San José, on a sparkling inlet of the Gulf of California.

In April and May San Evaristo swarms with boaters and campers who enjoy bountiful fishing for snapper and cochinito. Most of the beaches along the San Juan–San Evaristo route are rocky or gravelly, but determined campers will find a few pleasant, sandy and isolated spots.

snorkel-kayak trips from La Paz often stop here so swimmers can frolic with the sea lions. There is good **hiking** and **camping** on Espíritu Santo and Isla Partida.

One of the best ways to explore the islands is by kayak, and several operators in La Paz (see p194) offer a huge variety of tours. They range from single-day kayaking-and-snorkeling trips to multiday paddles with all food and camping rigmarole taken care of. There is no public transport to the islands, which are mostly uninhabited except for the birds, about 20 species of reptiles and the rare (and endemic) black jackrabbit.

**La Ventana & Ensenada de los Muertos**

These relatively undeveloped seaside villages are the best bet for a truly relaxing beach getaway near La Paz. Southeast of the city (about a 45-minute drive), just before the village of San Juan de los Planes, a paved spur off highway BCS-286 turns north toward La Ventana, on its namesake bay opposite Isla Cerralvo. La Ventana is a splendid spot and is one of the best sites for windsurfing and kite surfing in Baja.

The spacious **La Ventana Campground** (camp-sites US\$6) offers basic services and gets very crowded during the prime windsurfing months (November through March). There are also a couple of unnamed **RV parks** (sites US\$5-10) in town. The pleasant **Baja Joe's** (📍 in La Paz 126-2322; www.bajajoe.com; bunkhouse US\$40, cabaña US\$70, r US\$80-100) offers some stunning rooms on the water. Bikes and kayaks are available to guests, and windsurfing rentals are US\$25 per hour or US\$40 per day (lessons are also available). Rates drop significantly outside windsurfing season.

There are also a few restaurants in town and a market as well.

About 51km (32 miles) southeast of La Paz, BCS-286 turns northeast just beyond San Juan de los Planes, where the paved road surface ends, and continues to Ensenada de los Muertos, on its namesake bay, with plenty of places to camp. The bay is a popular **fishing** area and is one of the main destinations for fishing packages organized in La Paz.

From a junction just southeast of San Juan de los Planes, an unpaved lateral climbs the **Cuesta de los Muertos** (Slope of the Dead) and continues south to Los Barriles. At the time of research, this road was impassible for even the hardest 4WD vehicles, thanks to damage from two hurricanes in 2006; check the latest conditions locally.

**CENTRAL CAPE**

Bucolic mountain towns and the lush peaks of the Sierra de la Laguna define the central cape, a unique region that deserves a slower pace as you wind south toward Los Cabos. While México 19 is faster, the Transpeninsular snakes its way through an undeniably more scenic and more historically important region.

**EL TRIUNFO & SAN ANTONIO**

📞 612 / pop 350

Heading south from La Paz, shortly after passing the junction to Todos Santos, you'll roll into the old mining town of El Triunfo, where a faded yellow-and-red church stands against an often clear blue sky. Turn right off the Transpeninsular into town, head toward the two giant smokestacks, and you'll find an outdoor 'museum' of rusting artifacts left over from El Triunfo's mining days (see p202). This is the site of El Triunfo's **old smelter**.

The round smokestack is built entirely of brick and was designed by – get this – Gustave Eiffel. The fact that it's still standing is impressive enough alone.

Check out the old buildings around town, and don't miss the Museo de Música (see below). A handful of locals make baskets and other crafts by weaving palm fronds. **Artesanías El Mirador**, on the smelter side of the highway, sells these, as do a couple of stalls on the highway.

About 8km (5 miles) east of El Triunfo, San Antonio (population 600) is a modest farming community in a picturesque canyon. The town experienced the same mining boom as nearby El Triunfo, but, like its neighbor, was a ghost town by the end of the 1920s. San Antonio briefly became the capital of the Californias in 1925, after Loreto was obliterated by a hurricane. A year later the capital was moved to La Paz. Today cobbled streets and restored buildings give San Antonio a more prosperous appearance, but, aside from its pretty church, there's less to see here than in El Triunfo. Still, it's worth poking around.

Neither town has anywhere to sleep, but about 14km (8 miles) east of San Antonio, at Km 141, you can camp at **Rancho Verde**

**RV Park** (☎ 126-9103, in the USA 888-516-9462; ranchoverde@mexonline.com; tent/RV US\$7/11), a beautiful 3000-acre ranch set in a lush valley. The **hiking** here is excellent, and an informative natural trail explains the dense vegetation. Camping and RV sites are set among the trees and cacti, and showers and toilets are available.

Both towns have basic grocery stores, but no restaurants.

## SANTIAGO

☎ 624 / pop 2500

Tranquil Santiago, a quiet village with a small central plaza, is set within a countryside offering ample opportunity for hiking and exploring. The village was the site of one of the bloodiest episodes in Baja's history. It was here that indigenous Pericú revolted and murdered the Jesuit Lorenzo Carranco and several other Spaniards before being subdued by Spanish soldiers (and European epidemics). No trace remains of the mission, which closed in 1795, but a lovely little church has been built near the original site. Santiago is also known for its **zoo** (admission by donation; ☎ 8am-6pm), a rather depressing sight. There's a Pemex next to the plaza.

### PIANOS FROM THE PAST

In the old mining town of El Triunfo, at the edge of the Transpeninsular, stands one of Baja's most curious museums: the **Museo de la Música** (admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-6pm). Considering the difficulty of moving a piano, it's a bit odd to encounter a building full of them in the middle of nowhere. Even more surprising is the fact that most of the pianos have been up here since the late 1800s.

The pianos bear witness to an important story in the history of Baja California.

El Triunfo and San Antonio were part of a large cattle ranch under the Jesuits in the early 18th century, but the population quickly swelled after gold and silver were discovered near San Antonio in 1748. At its peak, San Antonio counted a population of over 10,000 and was the largest settlement in the Cape Region. It was mostly home to *mestizo* miners and Yaqui laborers from the state of Sonora. In the early 1860s more gold and silver deposits were found around El Triunfo, and the El Progreso mining company became the largest mining interest on the peninsula.

Along with the thousands of laborers, both towns were also home to a handful of European businessmen and their families. Some of these wealthier denizens couldn't live without their pianos, and so had them shipped from Europe to La Paz. After the long oceanic journey, the instruments were pulled by mule into the sierra, where their owners finally installed them in their homes.

When the mines ran dry in the late 19th century, people began leaving in droves. By the end of the 1920s both towns were virtually abandoned. Along with the old buildings, one of the few signs of San Antonio's and El Triunfo's affluent past are the pianos that were left behind.

Presided over by flamboyant *maestro* Nicolas Carrillo Castro – a professional pianist himself – the museum houses over a dozen pianos. Many date back to the area's mining days, including a 1747 Chickery and a white 1872 Steinway. The 1970 Yamaha Electone is a newer addition – and gives the museum that quirky Baja touch.



Downhill from the plaza, friendly **Hotel Palomar** (☎ 130-2126, 130-2019; palomarsergio66@hotmail.com; s/d US\$25/40) has modest, slightly musty rooms that open onto a leafy courtyard. You can pitch a tent beneath the fruit trees for US\$5. The **restaurant** (mains US\$7-15, set lunch US\$7.50; ☎ 10:30am-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 10:30am-4:30pm Sun), which draws customers from as far as San José del Cabo, is famous for its seafood. It opened in 1966 to serve the wealthy North American hunters who flew in to hunt quail. The English-speaking owner, Sergio Gómez, is an excellent source of information on the nearby Sierra de la Laguna, and guests or restaurant patrons can pick up a very useful free map of the area.

Santiago lies about 10km (6 miles) south of the town of Las Cuevas and 1.6km (1 mile) west of the Transpeninsular.

## AROUND SANTIAGO

There's much to explore around Santiago. To get the lay of the land, head to Hotel Palomar for lunch and hit up the friendly owner for a map and information. You'll be glad.

Just past Santiago's zoo, a dirt road leads about 8km (5 miles) to the village of **Agua Caliente**. Another 4km (2.5 miles) west by dirt road is **El Chorro**, where natural hot-spring water is piped into a concrete reservoir; cleanliness varies. From Agua Caliente another road leads north to more **hot springs** near San Jorge and Santa Rita.

Another road from Santiago leads to **Cañon de la Zorra**, the site of Santiago's most famous attraction: a 30ft **waterfall** plunging into a cool swimming hole formed by a giant bowl of granite. Getting there requires a bit of scouting, but it's worth the effort. From Santiago, turn right onto a dirt road just before reaching the plaza. Take the signed road to San Dionisio, then keep left at the junction and follow the signs to Cañon de la Zorra. Keep right past the old airfield, and right again at the next fork. The road finally dead-ends and the trail begins just past the gate. It's a short but challenging scramble down to falls. Watch out for rattlesnakes after rains.

Just south of Santiago on the Transpeninsular, precisely at latitude 23.5°N, a concrete sphere and sign mark the **Tropic of Cancer**, which also passes through Hawaii, Taiwan, central India, Saudi Arabia and the Sahara Desert. Locals have built an elaborate shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe – and a bar – right next to it.

## SIERRA DE LA LAGUNA

Just south of where the Transpeninsular and México 19 intersect, the precipitous heart of the Cape Region begins. This is one of the most rugged and inaccessible areas of the entire peninsula, with top elevations of around 2100m (7000ft). The Sierra de la Laguna receives more water than any other area in southern Baja, which accounts for its extraordinary biodiversity. In fact, Sierra de la Laguna is *the* most biodiverse region in Baja California.

Below about 800m, the sierra is home to subtropical dry forest, consisting largely of low trees (such as *palo blanco*, mesquite, *palo zorillo*, *mauto* and others) and *matorrales* (scrublands). Above 800m, dry forest gives way to pine-oak forest. Together, these forests support over 220 plant species, more than 190 species of birds and a plethora of reptiles and insects. Because the region was isolated by water from the rest of the peninsula (and the mainland) for so many years, there is a high level of endemism, meaning species found here are found nowhere else in the world.

## Hiking & Trekking

The area's complete wilderness and isolation make for adventurous backpacking, but the terrain is difficult and unpredictable and should be attempted only by experienced hikers. Trails are not marked and are often hard to find. Water sources are not dependable, and weather conditions can change suddenly.

Several foothill villages provide access to the sierra, which is also accessible from Todos Santos (p210) on the range's Pacific slope. Crossing the sierra requires several days; the best time to do it is from November to February after the fall rains have filled the canyons with fresh water. However, days are short at this time of year, and the mercury can drop below freezing at night in January and February.

## CAÑÓN SAN DIONISIO

The northernmost of the east–west routes through the Sierra de la Laguna is the most popular, perhaps because of its unique ecology – cacti, palms, oaks, aspens and pines grow virtually side by side. A route highlight is La Laguna, a flat meadow at 1700m (5600ft) that was once a lake.

Most people start the crossing from the Todos Santos side, where a steep trail climbs into the mountains from near **San Juan del Aseradero** (La Burrera), about 24km (15 miles) east of Todos Santos. From the trailhead, it's about 11km (7 miles) to La Laguna. From here it's another 13km (8 miles) to the eastern trailhead at the town of San Dionisio. The entire crossing can be negotiated in about five to six days. Going the other way, San Dionisio can be reached from Santiago (19km/12 miles) via a dirt road passable for any passenger vehicle driven with caution.

### CAÑÓN SAN BERNARDO

The central route across the sierra is considered a bit easier and is also popular with day hikers. The trailhead is near the village of **Boca de la Sierra**, at the end of a dirt road about 6km (4 miles) west of Miraflores. Miraflores itself is accessible by paved road from the Transpeninsular at Km 71. After about 22.5km (14 miles) the trail comes out at Santo Domingo, from where it's connected to México 19 by a series of signed dirt roads. The entire trip across takes about five days.

### CAÑÓN SAN PABLO

The southernmost route traverses the sierra via Cañón San Pablo and picks up at the town of **El Salto**, about 8km (5 miles) west of Caduaño, terminating at **El Güerigo** after about 17km (10.5 miles). From here dirt roads lead northwest to San Andrés and El Pescadero back to México 19. The turn-off to Caduaño is at about Km 68 on the Transpeninsular. You should schedule about five days to cross the sierra on this route.

### Tours

Those not wanting to go it alone should consider hiring a local guide. Ask around in Santiago or check with Señor Gómez at Hotel Palomar (p203). Pepe Murietta, at Pepe's Outdoor Activity Center (p209) in Cabo Pulmo, and Cuco Moyron, at Rancho Pilar (p216), south of Todos Santos, both offer full guide services; prices vary depending on the number of people, duration etc.

Based partly in Vermont, USA and partly on a small farm outside of Santiago, **Baja Sierra Adventures** ([www.bajasierradventures.com](http://www.bajasierradventures.com)) is a Mexican-American owned operator that offers guided trips into the sierra. Make arrangements online.

## EASTERN CAPE

Still among the less developed coastal areas in the Cape Region, the east cape is where you're most likely to catch a glimpse of the Old Baja magic. It was wealthy American anglers and adventurers who first 'discovered' the area – which stretches from Bahía Las Palmas, about 120km (75 miles) southeast of La Paz, all the way to San José del Cabo – in the 1940s and '50s. Hollywood celebrities such as John Wayne, Bing Crosby and Errol Flynn flew here in their private aircraft, making perilous landings on improvised airstrips. Deep-sea fishing and white-winged-dove hunting were favorite pastimes of this testosterone-driven crowd. The original fly-in resort, the Rancho Buena Vista Hotel (p207), where many of them stayed, is still in operation today.

Fishing in these rich waters continues to be the east cape's main draw. But other outdoor enthusiasts will find plenty to do as well. Remote beaches and clear waters are great for swimming and lounging. There's world-class windsurfing at Los Barriles. Diving off Cabo Pulmo, the only coral reef on the west coast of North America, may yield encounters with huge manta rays and schools of tropical fish.

For the most part, the infrastructure of the east cape is still relatively basic; most roads are unpaved and there are many places without phone connections. In recent years, however, development has encroached upon the area's pristine beauty, especially south of Los Barriles and north of San José del Cabo. Real-estate prices have surged as North Americans snap up beachfront lots for vacation homes, and 'towns' like Buena Vista and Los Barriles, until a few years ago little more than dusty outposts, are growing at a steady clip.

### Getting There & Around

The Transpeninsular brushes the coast just south of Los Barriles, from where a rough dirt road leads north to Punta Pescadero and El Cardonal. At Las Cuevas, near Km 93 on the Transpeninsular, a paved road leads to the coastal village of La Ribera, where the Eastern Cape Rd begins. The cape road leads south to Cabo Pulmo and Bahía Los Frailes and, after about 100km (60 miles), finally culminates at San José del Cabo.

Just before reaching Cabo Pulmo, after about 27km (17 miles), pavement abruptly gives way to a tooth-clattering dirt road. Most 2WD vehicles can usually get through, but it may become impassable after any sort of rain. Always check conditions locally before heading out. Under favorable conditions, smaller RVs should be able to make it through to San José as well.

About 12 miles (19km) south of Los Frailes, at Vinorama, another dirt road called Palo Escopeta Rd heads west and joins back with the Transpeninsular just south of Los Cabos International Airport. This road is usually in a fair state.

There is no public transport along the cape road; ABC and Aguila buses traveling between La Paz and San José del Cabo stop at the entrance to Los Barriles, Buena Vista and anywhere along the Transpeninsular. If you're coming from La Paz, make sure your bus takes the *vía larga* (long route) along México 1 (the Transpeninsular), not México 19.

## LOS BARRILES

☎ 624 / pop 600

As many gringos as Mexicans roam the dirt streets of Baja's windsurfing capital, once nothing but a fish camp frequented by wealthy North American anglers. Houses and time-shares are going up like sails on a windy day, and resident gringos buzz around town on ATVs. If you windsurf, kite surf or fish, you'll surely love it here. If you don't, you might want to save your pesos and blow off toward Cabo Pulmo. November through March is high-wind season.

### Orientation & Information

All tourist services are located along the main drag, 20 de Noviembre. Los Barriles doesn't have a tourist office but everything is easy to find.

Internet access is available at the **Office** (20 de Noviembre; per hr US\$4.50) on the left as you're heading down 20 de Noviembre; you can also make long-distance telephone calls from here. Beside it used to be an **HSBC** (20 de Noviembre) ATM, but it was recently removed and may never be replaced. There's another ATM on the way into town, which regularly runs out of money. In other words, bring cash or use one of the two money exchanges on 20 de Noviembre.

There's a post office (just inland from 20 de Noviembre) and a Cruz Roja (Red Cross) near 20 de Noviembre.

You can have your clothes laundered at the **Washroom** (20 de Noviembre s/n; full service load US\$5; ☎ Mon-Sat).

## Activities

### WINDSURFING

Brisk 'El Norte' winds averaging 20 to 25 knots descend the 1800m (6000ft) *cordillera* (mountain range) toward the midmorning launch site at **Playa Norte**, about 3km (2 miles) north of Los Barriles. The wind picks up around 11am at more southerly locations. The wind direction and curving shoreline, running south and then east into the gulf, make it possible to sail 32km (20 miles) out to sea without losing sight of the shore.

San Francisco Bay Area-based **Vela Windsurf Resorts** (☎ in the USA 831-461-0820, 800-223-5443; www.velawindsurf.com) operates its Baja Highwind Center out of Hotel Playa del Sol (p206) from mid-November to the first week in March. These world-class instructors teach seminars using state-of-the-art equipment. Packages include accommodations at either the Playa del Sol or Hotel Palmas de Cortez, all meals, unlimited use of equipment, daily seminars and a host of outdoor activities. Weeklong trips start around US\$999 per person, double occupancy. Reservations are essential. Note that seminars are best suited for intermediate to advanced sailors. Drop-in lessons cost US\$60 to US\$80 for nonguests.

### MOUNTAIN BIKING

Vela Windsurf built a 40-mile trail network around Los Barriles. Trails are generally paved in thorns, making self-sealing tubes and tire liners essential. Wide tires are a must. A good long-distance trip is the triangular circuit up the Transpeninsular to San Antonio, continuing north through the *arroyo* to San Juan de los Planes and back down the coast to Los Barriles (115km/72 miles). You can also head north from Los Barriles to Bahía de los Muertos – a spectacular ride.

### FISHING

Los Barriles is famous among anglers. To give it a go, contact Martín Verdugos Beach Resort. Rates start at US\$130 for a 22ft *panga* (skiff) and top out at US\$300 for a 28ft supercruiser.

## Sleeping

Los Barriles lacks budget accommodations. Across the *arroyo*, north of town, Buenos Aires RV Park and Playa Norte RV Park have full hookups and tent space

**Martín Verdugo's Beach Resort** (☎ 141-0054; www.verdugosbeachresort.com; 20 de Noviembre; tent/RV US\$11/15, r US\$50-56) This convivial resort accommodates 61 RVs with full hookups and an additional 15 tents. Facilities include hot showers, laundry rooms and spotless bathrooms. It also offers large, nicely decorated beachfront motel rooms.

**Los Barriles Hotel** (☎ 141-0024; www.losbarriles.com; s/d US\$53/65; 📞 📺 🚿) Huge rooms and an inviting swimming pool make this 20-room hotel one of the better deals in town. It's a two-story motel-type structure, but very well done. The rooms are giant, each with solid-wood table and chairs and carved-wood headboards.

**Hotel Playa del Sol** (☎ 141-0212, in the USA 877-777-8862; www.vanwormerresorts.com; 20 de Noviembre; r US\$144-156; 📞 📺 🚿) The little (but older) brother of Hotel Palmas de Cortez is a weathered but comfortable old hotel with 26 clean rooms and an inviting beachfront swimming pool. It's well worth dropping extra money on an ocean-view room: the cement patio with a plastic table may not seem like much, but it is, and the breeze is delicious.

**Hotel Palmas de Cortez** (☎ 141-0050, in the USA 877-777-8862; www.vanwormerresorts.com; s US\$183-220, d US\$232-268, condo US\$450; 📞 📺 🚿) A traditional favorite among anglers, the luxurious Palmas de Cortez is a beautiful hotel with 31 rooms, 15 suites and 10 condominiums, all of them with ocean views. Nice touches include an aviary with parrots and *cabaña* suites with private hammocks. The swimming pool, which blends in visual perfection with the ocean, is one of the best on the cape. Rates include all meals.

## Eating

**Taquería Los Barriles** (Blue Tarp Taquería; tacos US\$1-2; ☎ 8am-3pm Wed-Mon) Outstanding *taquería* on the road into town.

**El Barrilito** (Av Palmas s/n; mains US\$6-11; ☎ 10am-10pm) Wrap your lips around a roll or two at this colorful *palapa*-cum-sushi restaurant, which is also popular for its cooked versions of seafood.

**Otra Vez** (☎ 141-0249; 20 de Noviembre; mains US\$9-15; ☎ from 5pm Mon-Sat) This indoor eatery has an ambitious menu featuring Thai, Mexican and

pasta dishes, as well as low-fat and vegetarian choices. Best of all, all main courses include a jaunt to the salad bar (get your broccoli and greens fix here!). The salad bar alone costs US\$7.95. Lots of good seafood, too.

**Campestre Triny** (☎ 141-0289; 20 de Noviembre & Callejón Don Pepe; mains US\$9-15; ☎ noon-10pm) Now this is what dining in Mexico is all about: sitting beneath the trees at rickety, colorfully set tables and stuffing yourself on delicious seafood in what amounts to the owner's backyard.

**Tío Pablo** (☎ 141-0330; mains US\$9-18) Known for its gut-busting portions, the ever-popular Tío Pablo is just off 20 de Noviembre. Most people come for the pizza and burgers, but it's famous for the 28oz (840g) 'beltbuster steak.' There's also an all-you-can-eat salad bar and several vegetarian options.

## NORTH OF LOS BARRILES

☎ 612

North of Los Barriles, a mostly graded but rough road hugs the coast to Punta Pescadero and El Cardonal, and eventually crosses the very difficult Cuesta de los Muertos en route to San Juan de los Planes and La Paz. Conditions get worse north of El Cardonal. Cuesta de los Muertos was nearly impassable at the time of research; inquire locally. A new paved road also leads north from Los Barriles to Punta Pescadero and El Cardonal. While most beaches north of Los Barriles are rocky or gravelly, some are suitable for free camping.

About 13km (8 miles) north of Los Barriles, you'll reach remote **Hotel Punta Pescadero** (☎ 141-0101, in the USA 800-426-2252; www.punta-pescadero.com; d with/without meals US\$272/150), a consummate get-away resort with 21 lovely rooms opening onto a gorgeous stretch of beach. It's popular with anglers. Sportfishing trips per boat cost US\$110 on a *panga*, US\$250 on a super-*panga* and US\$400 to US\$450 on a cruiser. There's a full dive shop and ATV rentals.

Another 10km (6 miles) north is the Canadian-run **El Cardonal Hide-A-Way** (☎ 141-0040, in the USA & Canada 514-467-4700; www.elcardonal.net; r night/week US\$72/482), which offers beachfront suites with two double beds and full kitchenettes. Tents and small campers are charged US\$10, while RVs pay US\$12 for full hookups. It's right on the beach. Children stay free, and the restaurant is open all day. Activities include diving and snorkeling, horseback riding, kayaking and fishing (all fee-based).

## BUENA VISTA

☎ 624 / pop 300

Buena Vista grew up around the east cape's first fly-in fishing resort, the Rancho Buena Vista Hotel, once frequented by Hollywood hotshots. Today it suffers the same luxury housing development as nearby Los Barriles, but still offers plenty of fun in the sun for divers, mountain bikers and, of course, anglers. The resorts here are small and offer a far more intimate experience than the big resorts of Los Cabos – you just have to put up with lots of fish tales.

### Activities

The hotels listed under Sleeping & Eating (below) all maintain their own **sportfishing** fleets.

**Hikers** will be rewarded with fine bay views from the top of Flat Top Mountain, reached via an easy 30- to 45-minute trail. Ask for directions at Rancho Leonero (below). Less ambitious folk can walk, drive or bike up to the Flag Monument for equally impressive views. Look for the turnoff off the Transpeninsular at around Km 105.5.

North American-owned **Vista Sea Sport** (☎ 141-0031; www.vistaseasport.com) offers diving tours to Cabo Pulmo (US\$110), Los Frailes (US\$110), Punta Pescadero (US\$100), Isla Cerralvo (US\$120) and the Gorda Banks (US\$140), as well as snorkeling tours (US\$35 to US\$65) in the Los Barriles area. It also offers PADI Discover and certification courses.

**Mountain bikers** can take the Pemex Ridge Trail from behind the Pemex station at Km 109, which runs through a cactus forest and offers great bay views.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Rancho Buena Vista Hotel** (☎ 141-0177, in the USA 800-258-8200; www.ranchobuenavista.com; s/d US\$109/195; 🍷)

This historic hotel remains the sentimental favorite of anglers and their families, although the Hollywood glamour has decidedly worn off. Still, it's a great place.

**Hotel Buena Vista Beach Resort** (☎ 141-0033, in the USA 800-752-3555; www.hotelbuenavista.com; s/d US\$110/170, ste s/d US\$146/207; 🍷) Located 800m (0.5 mile) south of Rancho Buena Vista Hotel, this comfortable lodging has a pretty garden setting, a hot mineral spa, swim-up pool bar and an extensive menu of activities.

**Rancho Leonero** (☎ 145-3636, in the USA 800-646-2252; www.rancholeonero.com; s US\$120-220, d US\$150-250;

🍷) For a special treat, ensconce yourself at this isolated resort set on a spectacular beachfront reached by taking a turnoff at Km 103.5. Manly fishermen mix with gregarious families, and stories of marlins that got away (or not) fly fast and furiously at the bar each night. Spotless, spacious rooms have thatched roofs, stone walls, tiled floors and some of the best showers on the east cape.

There are a few taco stands around the Pemex station, and the resorts have excellent restaurants.

## LA RIBERA & AROUND

☎ 624

From Rancho Leonero, the dirt road continues south to tiny La Ribera, a dusty sand-street town with surprisingly legible street signs, an incongruously large stadium and several small **markets**. It's also accessible via a paved lateral from Las Cuevas, about 13km (8 miles) south of Buena Vista on the Transpeninsular.

The trailer park that used to be here closed, but you can camp for free on the beach south of town. La Ribera is the last point for supplies southbound on the Eastern Cape Rd, so stock up here if you're headed to Cabo Pulmo or beyond.

About 6km (4 miles) south of La Ribera, via a signed dirt road between Km 19 and Km 20 on the Transpeninsular, is the isolated **Hotel Punta Colorada** (☎ 141-0050, in the USA 877-777-8862; www.vanwormerresorts.com; s US\$122-183, d US\$158-220, cabaña US\$146), another anglers' favorite. It's a marvelously secluded spot, and some visitors arrive in their own planes. Day rates for fishing trips range from US\$250 to US\$660, depending on the boat.

## CABO PULMO

☎ 624 / pop 111

Cabo Pulmo is home to the only coral reef on the west coast of North America, and many consider it the most extraordinary site on the entire cape. The village itself consists of a few modest hotels and restaurants, dive centers, sand roads and a handful of salt-crusted characters from Mexico and abroad who support themselves through tourism in order to live on the edge of this unique underwater paradise. Hell, it's pretty close to paradise *above* the water too – and undoubtedly a great place to chill out and dive or snorkel until you're as salty and sunburnt as the rest of 'em.

The village of Cabo Pulmo is entirely solar-powered and has no other services than those mentioned earlier. In 2006 the town was hit harder than almost anywhere on the cape by Hurricane John. One resident reportedly clocked wind-speeds of 336km/h (210mph). Trees were destroyed, roofs blew off and a small section of the reef was damaged. But everything is up and running.

### Activities

Diving and snorkeling are the real highlights here. Green turtles nest at Playa Las Barracas, about 15 minutes north of Cabo Pulmo, in August and September.

### DIVING

Optimal conditions for diving and snorkeling are in June and July, when glassy waters allow for visibility up to 100ft. It's lower in May, August and September, but the greater amount of plankton attracts more and different marine life, including many pelagics (fish from the open sea) and manta rays. From December to March, heavy winds often make diving impossible.

There are 14 dive sites in the national park, of which **El Bajo** has the highest concentration of fish, including the gigantic and rare whale shark and ore fish. **El Cantil** is the largest reef and has good coral, plus bat rays, hammer-head sharks and manta rays. **El Vencedor**, a tuna boat sunk in 1981, is a good place to spot baby eels and sea cucumbers; it was even featured in a Jacques Cousteau video. **El Islote** (Rock Island) has the best sea fans, plus frog fish, sea horses and big groupers. To the south, **Los Frailes** is a submarine canyon whose walls are home to manta rays and turtles. Water depths range from 25ft to 100ft. There's also a sea lion colony in Bahía Los Frailes.

### SNORKELING

There's snorkeling right off the beach in Cabo Pulmo, but it's well worth taking a snorkeling tour which gets you by boat to the best sections of the reef, where snorkeling is superb. One of the best sites is **Playa La Sirenita** (Mermaid Beach), about a 10-minute boat ride away. The best site that doesn't require a boat is the exquisite beach of **Playa Arbolito**, which also offers great beachcombing and basic free

### ALL TOGETHER NOW

Strap on a mask and snorkel and plunge beneath the water off Cabo Pulmo and you'll encounter a world of kaleidoscopic marine life. Cabo Pulmo owes its underwater diversity to its coral reef, one of only four living reefs in North America.

Corals are animals, tiny carnivorous polyps with minute tentacles, a stomach and a central calcium-carbonate core or 'skeleton'. Despite their diminutive size, they have created the world's largest living structures, Australia's Great Barrier Reef being their grandest work of all. Coral polyps are only a few millimeters in diameter, so when you look at a coral head, what you see is the conglomeration of thousands of polyps. The sea anemone-like creatures build upon generation after generation of their dead polyp predecessors and, given the right conditions, slowly build up a reef beneath them. The Pulmo reef is an estimated 25,000 years old.

With their astonishing array of crevices, caverns and caves, coral reefs harbor some of the world's greatest biodiversity. The Pulmo reef, composed of two living coral species, lies on the cusp of tropical and temperate waters and harbors over 230 species of tropical fish. The reef consists of seven fingers jutting into the sea right from the shoreline. Most corals are dependent upon sunlight for life and are found in shallow waters. The Sea of Cortez' clear water conditions allow the corals here to survive down to depths of 70ft. While divers will surely see the widest array of life, snorkelers can explore the reef immediately offshore.

The reef and 71 sq km (27 sq miles) of ocean surrounding it constitute the **Parque Marino Nacional Cabo Pulmo**, a legally protected area since 1995. The marine park is bounded by Playa Las Barracas in the north and Bahía Los Frailes in the south. The reef system is very fragile and especially susceptible to pollution. Planned on-shore resort and housing developments pose the biggest threats, as does petrochemical pollution from two-stroke outboard motors. No fishing is allowed within the park.

If you'd like to get involved with conservationist projects within the park, contact **Amigos Para La Conservación de Cabo Pulmo** (ACCP; [www.pulmoamigos.org](http://www.pulmoamigos.org)).

camping. If you're driving from Cabo Pulmo, look for the first road toward the beach about 3 miles south of town.

### HIKING & CLIMBING

Rock climbers will find challenging sea-view routes on the nearby granite (there is also some basalt and other volcanic rock). For hikers, the Vista Trail is a two-hour loop around Pulmo Mountain.

### Tours

Dive tours run from US\$65 to US\$75 for a two-tank boat dive. A beginner's PADI Resort Course will set you back about US\$100, while an Open Water Certification course costs about US\$400. Both Cabo Pulmo Dive Center and Cabo Pulmo Divers offer tank-fills and rent scuba equipment (US\$5 to US\$15 per item). Snorkeling equipment rental costs US\$15 for everything. Snorkeling tours run US\$35 to US\$70, depending on the length of the trip. They're well worth the money.

Run by Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, the Cabo Pulmo Dive Center offers two-hour snorkel tours and a host of dive tours. It also rents kayaks and will pick you up in Los Frailes if you want to kayak up there. If you're staying at a hotel in Cabo, your concierge can set you up with the dive center or you can call the resort's San José del Cabo number directly.

Affable and English-speaking José Luis Murietta, better known as Pepe, runs a full-service PADI dive shop at his **Pepe's Outdoor Activity Center** (☎ 141-0001; www.cabopulmo.com.mx). Along with all types of scuba-diving tours, he offers snorkeling tours, full-day hikes to hot springs near Santiago, excursions by horseback or kayak (about US\$45 per person) and surfing trips to nearby Punta Perfecta. When it comes to activities, there's little Pepe doesn't do.

**Cabo Pulmo Divers** (Mario's; ☎ 105-2141, 130-0235; www.cabopulmodivers.com), near *taquería* La Palapa, just off the beach, is another local dive and snorkeling operator who seems just as highly regarded. Fishing trips are also offered.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort** (☎ 141-0244, in San José del Cabo 624-141-0726, in the USA 562-366-0398; www.cabopulmo.com; r from US\$49) Cabo Pulmo's most formal accommodations are US/Mexican-owned Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort with spic-and-span hotel-style rooms rather than stereotypical 'resort' type luxury. Larger rooms cost US\$79.

Small bungalows cost around US\$60, and *casitas* (cottages) sleeping up to four people cost US\$99. The beach house, for up to six people, rents for US\$175. All but the hotel rooms have kitchens. Here, you'll also find Coral Reef (breakfast US\$4 to US\$12), open Wednesday to Monday, which serves good breakfasts, lunches and dinner.

**Pepe's Outdoor Activity Center** (palapas US\$55-65) Pepe has *palapas* for rent, and if he's full, he can usually figure out *something* for you.

**Nancy's** (☎ in the USA 617-524-4440; fax 617-524-4430, in La Ribera 624-130-0203; amykhy@aol.com; mains US\$13-16; ☎ 8am-10pm Thu-Tue) For gourmet quality and possibly the best food and wine anywhere on the Cape, go to Nancy's, where you'll have an unforgettable outdoor dining experience. All the recipes are Nancy's creations, including delicacies such as scallop *ceviche*, lobster salad over greens with avocado and tomato, shrimp *guajillo* (a type of chili sauce) and scallops caramelized in butter and garlic. Vegetarians will love the vegetable enchiladas. The bread is homemade and the margaritas (blammo!) are knockouts. Nancy also rents three *casitas* (US\$40 to US\$50), rustic little houses with equally rustic tables, thatched roofs, basic patios and wonderfully comfortable beds (adorned with 300-thread-count sheets). They're extremely simple, but they're a wonderful place to chill out, if you don't mind being close to the elements. And to hone your cooking skills, take advantage of Nancy's cooking classes (US\$20 per person).

**El Caballero** (mains US\$4-8) This place has a large menu with straightforward Mexican fare.

**Restaurant-Bar La Palapa** (mains US\$6-11) It started out as a taco stand on the beach and now it's a full-blown restaurant, serving its ever-sublime tacos (US\$6 to US\$7 for three), plus enchiladas and other Mexican dishes. It's just off the beach.

Cabo Pulmo's first eatery was Tito's and – when it's open – you can dine on a patio deck made from a local shipwreck.

## BAHÍA LOS FRAILES TO SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

About 8km (5 miles) south of Cabo Pulmo, Bahía Los Frailes is a beautiful crescent-shaped bay with free beach camping on its northern end. **Hotel Bahía Los Frailes** (www.losfrailes.com) was a serene luxury hideaway until Hurricane John closed it down in 2006. If it reopens (check the website), you're in for a treat if you stay.

South of Los Frailes, the road gets rougher, but it's regularly graded and passable for most vehicles all the way to San José del Cabo. It's a spectacular drive, hugging the cliffs above the ocean or dropping to the shore as it meanders south. Plans are underway to completely pave this road, in large part to accommodate the new part-time residents in their vacation homes. About 13km (8 miles) south of Los Frailes, the road reaches **Rancho Boca del Tule** and, after another 5.5km (3.5 miles), **Rancho Boca La Vinorama**, where some extravagant housing development has already occurred.

A short distance south, a graded dirt road heads west to the village of **Palo Escopeta**, hitting the Transpeninsular just north of the Los Cabos International Airport after about 35km (22 miles). This is an alternate route to San José and used to offer a smoother and faster ride compared to the rest of the coastal road. These days, except after storms, they're about the same.

For additional information about the stretch of the Eastern Cape Rd as it approaches San José del Cabo, see p229.

## WESTERN CAPE

With the scrub- and cactus-covered flanks of the Sierra de la Laguna to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west, México 19 traverses a beautiful coastline caught in the throws of change. Its main town is the handsome gringo enclave of Todos Santos, but the beach town and farming community of El Pescadero is growing fast as folks from the US snatch up coastal properties. Hotels and housing developments are on the verge of springing up near Playa Los Cerritos, but much of the coast remains untouched. Local Mexicans are friendly and seem to work well with the many longtime resident gringos. For those seeking a low-key, surf-filled, beach vacation, it's still a great alternative to pricier, crazier Los Cabos.

### TODOS SANTOS

☎ 612 / pop 4000

Todos Santos is a mixed bag. Its plethora of excellent down-home restaurants, its historic buildings and boutique hotels, and its unhurried small-town atmosphere make for easy relaxation. Wide beaches and good surf are

only a short drive away, and the lack – at least for now – of giant hotels means getting to the beaches is still an adventure. All of this, however, along with a magnetic art scene, has drawn hordes of gringos, a fact which, depending upon your outlook, either detracts from or adds to the atmosphere. Tour buses pull in daily from Cabo, and vacationers pour into the street to browse boutique craft shops and mumble among themselves in the many art galleries that have come to define the town. But, no matter how you slice it, there's still plenty of off-beat characters (old-guard gringos and Mexicans alike), stray dogs (though even these are on the decline), cackling roosters and bumpy roads through the cacti to create a sense of place that's still definitively Baja. You just have to look a little harder.

### History

Founded in 1724 as a Jesuit *visita* (outstation) dependent on La Paz, Misión Santa Rosa de Todos Los Santos became a full-fledged mission a decade later, but a two-year Pericú rebellion nearly destroyed it. When the La Paz mission was abandoned in 1749, Todos Santos' became Misión Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Todos Santos. Epidemics killed indigenous people who were relocated here from San Luis Gonzaga and La Pasión, and Todos Santos then limped along until its abandonment in 1840.

In the late 19th century, the former colonial village became a prosperous cane-milling town with four red-brick *trapiches* (mills) producing the dark sugar known as *panocha*. The first mill was shipped from San Francisco to Cabo San Lucas and then overland to Todos Santos. The depleted aquifers eliminated most of the thirsty sugar industry, though mills still operate in nearby El Pescadero and San Jacinto. In these areas, a contingency of independent farmers (some from the USA) have instituted organic and multicropping methods to grow fruits and vegetables with less and often no reliance on chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

In recent years, Todos Santos has seen a major influx of North American expatriates, including artists for whom Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, have grown too large and impersonal. In 1985 the completion of the paved Southern Cape Hwy (México 19) through Todos Santos created a straighter



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and quicker western alternative to Cabo San Lucas than the serpentine Transpeninsular, improving access to beaches south of town. Nevertheless, Todos Santos proper retains its charm.

Despite its small size, Todos Santos has produced many notable historical figures. Among them are General Manuel Márquez de León (who fought against the French intervention of 1861 and later, less heroically, led a Sinaloa rebellion against Porfirio Díaz), Colonel Clodomiro Cota Márquez (also active against the French intervention), General Agustín Olachea Avilés and General Melitón Albañez (notable participants in the Mexican Revolution), and Dionisia Villarino Espinoza (a heroine of the Revolution).

### Orientation

Like many Mexican towns, Todos Santos, 76km (47 miles) south of La Paz, has a fairly regular grid plan, but local residents rely more on landmarks than street names for directions (though street names do exist). The town sits on a plateau, about 3.2km (2 miles) from the ocean. Downtown services

are mostly concentrated on and around Juárez, northeast of Morelos.

### Information

Pick up a copy of *El Calendario de Todos Santos*, a free English-language monthly publication that will tune you into everything in and around Todos Santos. There's no tourist office.

**Banorte** (cnr Juárez & Obregón) Changes foreign currencies and has an ATM.

**Banorte ATM** (Juárez near Márquez de León) Doesn't always work.

**Café Brown** (Av Hidalgo near Colegio Militar) Internet café with sporadic hours.

**Centro de Salud** (☎ 145-0095; cnr Juárez & Degollado) For medical or emergency services.

**El Tecolote Libros** (☎ 145-0295; cnr Juárez & Av Hidalgo) English-language bookstore with a solid selection of Baja-related books. Good place to seek information.

**Los Adobes** (Av Hidalgo near Colegio Militar) Restaurant with three computers (and margaritas).

**Police station** (Legaspi near Av Hidalgo)

**Post office** (Colegio Militar near Márquez de León)

**Todos Santos Internet Cafe** (cnr Juárez & Topete; per hr US\$2.50) Inside Milagro Real Estate.

## Sights

A visit to Todos Santos is hardly complete without a wander through its many art galleries. See Shopping (p214) for more information.

Murals at the **Centro Cultural Todosanteño** (Juárez near Topete), Todos Santos' former schoolhouse and current cultural center, date from 1933; their nationalist and revolutionary motifs depict missionaries and indigenous people, the Spanish conquistadors, Emiliano Zapata, cooperativism, rural laborers, industry and athletics ('vigor in mind and muscle').

Scattered around Todos Santos are the remains of former mills, including **Molino El Progreso** (Rangel at Progreso) and **Molino de los Santana** (Juárez btwn Zaragoza & Degollado), opposite the clinic. Molino Cerro Verde and Molino Jesús Amador are on the northern outskirts of town.

## BEACHES

Despite the fact that Todos Santos isn't on the beach, there are several **beaches** a short drive from town. The most accessible are those south of town off Hwy México 19 (see Around Todos Santos, p215). Beaches to the north of town are a bit trickier to get to, but can be accessed by heading northwest on Topete and making the inevitable wrong turns before you finally wind your way along the dirt-and-sand roads to the ocean. Once you hit the ocean, a sandy road runs along the beach up to **Playa La Pastora**.

Although there's not much beach at **Punta Lobos**, the fishing activity makes for an interesting visit. *Pangueros* (skiff operators) sell their catches in the late afternoon, offering a cheaper and often better selection than local markets. There's also good surfing here. Punta Lobos lies about 2.5km (1.5 miles) south of Todos Santos, and is accessible via either a signed road off of México 19 or from town by heading southwest on Pedrajo.

## Activities

There's good **surf** at Punta Lobos and a solid reef break at El Pescadero (p215). The most famous surf spot around here (probably because it's consistent and is a good beach break for beginners) is Playa Los Cerritos (p215), where you can rent boards and take surf lessons. Playa La Pastora has some of the biggest waves on the cape.

To buy boards or gear head to **Costa Azul Surf Shop** (Juárez near Av Hidalgo); its brochure has a map showing local breaks.

## Courses

If you wish to study Spanish in style, Todos Santos Inn offers weeklong instruction packages that include lodging for about US\$1000 per person. Courses in aikido, aerobics, tai chi, yoga and other practices are offered around town; pick up a copy of *El Calendario de Todos Santos* to find out what's happening where.

## Festivals & Events

Todos Santos' annual **Festival de Artes** (art festival) lasts two days in February (dates vary). In late February, Todos Santos holds a tour of local historic homes. The **Fiesta de Todos Santos**, which celebrates the town's patron saint, La Virgen de Pilar, is held on October 12.

## Sleeping

Todos Santos has a small but excellent selection of hotels.

**El Litro RV Park** (tent/RV US\$7/13) Located southwest of the baseball park, this place offers spacious camping sites and RV sites with hookups. The toilets are spotless and there are three bathrooms, two with showers.

**Hotel Miramar** (☎ 145-0341; cnr Verduzco & Pedrajo; s/d US\$15/20; (P) 🚽) Southwest of the town center, the Miramar has only limited ocean views from the 2nd-floor balconies, but that's still more ocean view than anything else in town. It's clean and reasonably priced, if basic.

**Motel Guluarte** (☎ 145-0006; cnr Juárez & Morelos; r US\$30; 🚽 🚿) Motel Guluarte offers good-value rooms. It recently filled its parking lot with a new block of units, the building of which was still in progress at the time of research. The old rooms are totally adequate, with TVs and mismatched furniture, metal doors and old minifridges.

**Hotel Santa Rosa** (☎ 145-0394; www.hotelsantarosa.com.mx; Olachea at Villarino; r US\$62; 🚽) Set in a modestly inviting garden on the south side of town, this pleasant (and quiet) hotel has eight giant rooms, each with a living room and kitchenette. The hotel lacks air-con but has fans (sometimes two in each room) and an excellent swimming pool.

**Hacienda Todos Los Santos** (☎ 145-0547; www.mexonline.com/haciendatodoslossantos.htm; Juárez; guest-houses US\$118-170; (P) 🚽 🚿 🚿) Three guesthouses and four master suites (the latter currently in the works) sit on a 12-acre parcel bursting with trees and plants on the edge of downtown. It's divinely relaxing and the swimming pool, where you can fall asleep to the sound of palm

fronds whispering in the wind, is sublime. Most of the *casitas* have full kitchens.

**Todos Santos Inn** (☎ 145-0040; www.todossantosinn.com; Legaspi 33; r US\$125-225; ♿ ♿) Fashioned from a restored 19th-century brick building, US-owned Todos Santos Inn has only eight intimate rooms, each with a four-poster bed and a divinely luxurious atmosphere. A tiny swimming pool sits within a verdant tropical courtyard, adding to the hotel's irresistibility. One of the cape's finest.

**Hotel California** (☎ 145-0525; www.hotelcalifornia.com; Juárez at Morelos; r US\$125-250; ♿) The recently reopened Hotel California is a stunning creation of its Canadian owners, who completely remodeled the place, giving it a very artsy edge. The rooms are all decorated with paintings by local artists and the attached restaurant and tequila bar are excellent. The hotel has long held the mythical status ('mythical' being the key word here) of being the lodging that inspired the Eagles' hit *Hotel California*. Whether you believe it or not, there's no denying the hotel is a masterpiece of boutique hostelry. Look for its brand of tequila, too.

## Eating

Despite its small size, Todos Santos has an astounding number of good restaurants.

## BUDGET

**Paletería La Paloma** (Colegio Militar near Av Hidalgo; pop-sicles US\$1) Pop in for a sublime fruit popsicle, made on the premises with natural fruit juices. Yum!

**Pilar's Fish Tacos** (cnr Zaragoza & Colegio Militar; tacos US\$1-2) The somewhat legendary Pilar's was closed on our last pass, but ask around to see if she reopened. Seems people in town are demanding she does.

**Barajas Tacos** (cnr Degollado & Cuauhtémoc; tacos US\$1-3; ☎ Wed-Mon) This excellent *palapa*-roofed *taquería* serves delicious fish tacos, *carnitas*, and *papas asadas* (stuffed grilled potatoes).

**Tacos Chilako** (Juárez near Hidalgo; tacos US\$1.40) It might be just another stand, but the location and outdoor seating make it just the ticket for an evening taco. *Carne asada* (grilled beef), *tortas* (sandwiches) and burritos.

**Miguel's** (cnr Degollado & Rangel; breakfast US\$3-8, lunch & dinner US\$6-12; ☎ Mon-Sat) Locally loved for its hearty plates of Mexican food, shrimp, fresh soups, tasty tacos and delicious breakfasts, Miguel's is a modest *palapa*-style restaurant that never fails its faithful customers.

## MIDRANGE

**Shut Up Frank's** (Degollado near Rangel; mains US\$4-9) Get your north-of-the-border fix at this restaurant and sports bar where the menu – painted in blue on the walls outside – includes burgers, ribs, steak, pancakes and big egg breakfasts.

**Mariscos Mi Costa** (cnr Colegio Militar & Ocampo; mains US\$5-9) This little family-style place serves 11 varieties of outstanding seafood cocktails, plus a delicious *sopa de mariscos* (seafood soup) and huge plates of tacos.

**Caffé Todos Santos** (☎ 145-0300; Centenario 33; mains US\$5-10) The espresso drinks here will make caffeine junkies bug-eyed. Also: savory pastries, big breakfasts, enticing fruit salads and outstanding deli-style sandwiches.

**Las Fuentes** (☎ 145-0257; cnr Degollado & Colegio Militar; mains US\$6-11) Las Fuentes serves excellent Mexican dishes (the chicken with *mole* sauce is exceptional) and seafood specialties in a shady patio among colorful bougainvilleas and three refreshing fountains. Shrimp plates exceed the average prices, topping out around US\$20.

**Tequila's Sunrise** (☎ 145-0193; Juárez s/n; mains US\$8-15; ☎ 8am-10pm) If you can handle the Eagles barrage (you're almost guaranteed to hear *Hotel California* at least twice while you're here), pop into the restaurant that *claims* to be the original restaurant that was in Hotel California. Whether you buy it or not, it's a fun place, and every inch of just about everything in the place is covered in permanent marker, business cards and dollar bills. The menu features everything from surf-and-turf platters to garlic shrimp, salads and good ol' Mexican food.

**La Coronela** (Juárez at Morelos; mains US\$6-20) Part of Hotel California, La Coronela serves big breakfasts, including French toast, eggs Benedict with smoked marlin, and homemade muffins, cinnamon rolls and banana bread. For lunch and dinner, choose anything from gorgonzola pizza to tapas to gourmet seafood.

**El Zaguán** (☎ 145-0017; Juárez btwn Topete & Hidalgo; mains US\$9-11; ☎ noon-9pm Mon-Sat) This small restaurant shows big imagination with mouth-watering dishes like filleted fish in peanut sauce with rice and organic salad, octopus soup, tuna marinated in sesame oil with papaya salsa, and shrimp sautéed in basil oil. Everything is organic, the atmosphere is romantic at night, prices are great, and the flavors exquisite.

### DOWN A DARK DESERT HIGHWAY

It's impossible to visit Todos Santos without hearing about the Hotel California, a little hotel with a big reputation for inspiring the Eagles hit *Hotel California*. Of course, this isn't the only Hotel California in the world, nor is it the only Hotel California that claims to be the muse. But all day long, tourists arrive from Cabo San Lucas and pose for photos in front of the recently refurbished hotel.

No one really knows how the rumor got started. The hotel, a modest two-story building with an arched facade on Av Juárez, opened in the early 1950s, almost directly behind the town cathedral. Some say a local real-estate agent began telling people in the 1980s that it was *the* Hotel California in order to drum up business. Supposedly, the hotel's previous owner loved to recount the story that Eagles front man Don Henley, who cowrote the song, shacked up here in the 1970s and composed the lyrics behind closed doors.

The lyrics of the song, which tell of a dark desert highway and mission bells, make great fodder for the story (though pink champagne – on ice no less – would have been the last thing you'd find in southern Baja back then). Throughout the 1980s, the hotel was a cheap backpacker-style place that further kindled romantic images of Henley scribbling away beneath the warm smell of *colitas*. And then there's the *Hotel California* album cover, with the photograph of a Spanish bell tower behind palm trees (which is actually the Beverly Hills Hotel).

John Henley has flatly denied ever visiting the hotel. We contacted Larry Solters, longtime spokesman for the Eagles, and he confirmed that the entire rumor is 'totally unfounded and untrue.' The song is generally accepted to be an allegorical depiction of the cocaine-dusted Los Angeles in the 1970s.

Hotel California closed its doors in 1998, was sold to its current owner and reopened in 2003 under the same name. The current owner makes no claims to the hotel's past, but uses the phrase 'legendary' to market the reincarnation of the hotel and its eponymous brand of premium tequila. Indeed, the legend *has* grown over the years. There's even a bar across the street, Tequila's Sunrise, that claims to be the original bar that used to be inside the hotel, only now it's across the street. If that makes any sense...

### TOP END

**Los Adobes** (☎ 145-0203; Av Hidalgo near Colegio Militar; mains US\$12-16) For some seriously good *alta cocina* (haute cuisine) try this upscale but casual restaurant. Dishes include *mole poblano* (a chili sauce flavored with chocolate and spices), Cornish game hen in 'Jamaica sauce' and several mouth-watering seafood dishes.

**Café Santa Fe** (☎ 145-0340; cnr Centenario & Márquez de León; mains US\$15-20) In a class all by itself, Café Santa Fe entices patrons from as far away as La Paz and Cabo San Lucas. The grub here is Italian and prices are high, but service is excellent, and it's well worth a splurge. Reservations recommended during holiday periods.

### Drinking & Entertainment

**Todos Santos Inn Wine Bar** (Legaspi 33; ☎ 5-9pm) The winebar in the Todos Santos Inn is a good place to kick off the evening tasting wines from Baja California. If you'd rather taste premium tequilas, try the tequila bar inside Hotel California (p213). For something a little more civilized head over to Shut Up Frank's (p213)

and join the expat sport fanatics shouting at the big-screen TV.

**Club de los Leones** (Juárez btwn Morelos & Zaragoza) This club features live *norteña* (Mexican country-style music) and *banda* (brass-band with vocals) on weekends.

**Teatro Cine General Manuel Márquez de León** (☎ 145-0122; cnr Legaspi & Márquez de León) This restored theater, on the northern side of the plaza, hosts occasional live concerts and other performances.

**Estadio Jesús Rosas Izquierdo** (cnr Rangel & Villarino) For live sports, enthusiastic amateur baseball teams from Todos Santos and other nearby communities play several nights weekly (plus weekend daytime games) at this stadium.

### Shopping

As an artists' colony, Todos Santos has a plethora of art galleries and loads of boutique stores. It's a small place, and the joy of shopping lies in wandering the streets and seeing what you turn up. Pick up a copy of *El Calendario*, which has a map showing most of the galleries in town.

**Stewart Gallery** (Obregón btwn Legaspi & Centenario) The man who essentially kicked off the Todos Santos art scene is Charles Stewart, and his gallery is a good place to start.

**Galería de Todos Santos** (cnr Topete & Legaspi) This is another one not to miss.

**Curios Tony** (Juárez near Zaragoza) This place makes for a great browse, stocking everything from ceramics and jewelry to glassware and textiles, all from Baja and mainland Mexico.

### Getting There & Away

Buses stop outside the **Transportes Aguilas ticket office** (☎ 120-9448; Colegio Militar near Morelos). From 7:30am to 9pm, they go hourly to Cabo San Lucas (US\$8, 1¼ hours), San José del Cabo (US\$9, two hours) and La Paz (US\$8, 1¼ hours). A 6pm bus goes to Tijuana (US\$110, 24 hours), stopping at all major towns en route.

### AROUND TODOS SANTOS

☎ 612

From the Sierra de la Laguna (see p203) to the many beaches that lie hidden at the end of a network of dirt roads, there's plenty to explore around Todos Santos. Having a car isn't imperative, but you're definitely limited without one. The areas around Playa San Pedrito, Playa Los Cerrito, El Pescadero and north of Todos Santos are all slated for development and are changing rapidly – generally, unless roads are gated, you can drive down them and look for the beach without getting hassled.

### El Pescadero & Around

In the last two decades, El Pescadero has gone from a wee fishing village to being the center of Baja's organic farming movement to, most recently, a hot spot for development. Lots that went for US\$30,000 in 2003 were selling for between US\$150,000 and US\$300,000 in 2006. Most of the town (and there ain't much) lies on the inland side of México 19. Between the highway and the coast, a network of roads runs through farmland that's rapidly giving way to houses before hitting a beautiful beach (about 3km/2 miles from the highway) with great **surfing**. The break is at the northern end of the beach, near the rocks.

**Pescadero Surf Camp** (☎ 134-0480; www.pescadero-surf.com; palapa per person US\$10, walapa US\$25-35, cabaña s/d/t US\$40/45/50; (P)) sits above the highway on the south end of town and has several clean, basic, but totally comfortable open-air *palapas*.

Some are for tents, and have sand floors and even an electrical outlet, while others have cement floors, partial walls and thatched roofs (they call them 'walapas'). The highlight is the pool, which has a wee swim-up bar (not always tended). Boogie boards and surfboards rent for US\$8 and US\$15, respectively. Surf lessons cost US\$45 per hour.

If you want to stay closer to the beach, there are two places that rent small but comfortable *casitas* a short walk from the sand. **Casa Simpática** (casasimpatica@yahoo.com; casita US\$65) is open year-round and run by a friendly, longtime Baja surfer/traveler. Nearby, the slightly more upscale **Sierra de la Costa** (www.todossantos.cc/sierradelacosta.html; r US\$77-93) is open from November 1 to the last week in April and has a three-night minimum policy. Both make for an excellent beach getaway.

A couple of places along the sandy track that parallels the beach rent rooms.

On the inland side of the highway, the **Sand Bar** (☎ 130-3209; Transpeninsular Km 63; mains US\$4-10; ☎ 3pm-midnight) serves New York steak, filet mignon, chili-stuffed potatoes and, on Wednesdays, all you can eat pizza for US\$6.50. On Tuesday and Saturday nights it hosts live music.

Further south on México 19, across from a botanical garden, a 4km (2.5-mile) dirt road leads to **Playa San Pedrito**, a sandy crescent beach with surfable breaks.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you're heading south from Todos Santos, you'll cross a wide *arroyo* before hitting the town of El Pescadero. Several sandy tracks in the *arroyo* lead to the beach. The best way to the beach, however, is via the road just after the southernmost of the three *topes* (speed bumps) in El Pescadero. If you're driving south from Todos Santos and you pass El Pescadero's Pemex station, you've gone too far.

### Los Cerritos

In a northern swell, the 7km-long crescent-shaped beach at **Playa Los Cerritos** has a good right break (a left picks up in the summer months), but it has become more crowded in recent years. There is also good fishing from the rocky headland to the north. Los Cerritos Surf Shop, at the north end of the beach, rents long and short surfboards (US\$15 per day) and boogie boards (US\$10 per day). The owner repairs boards and will set up surf lessons.

### TENDING TO THE TURTLES

Playa Los Cerritos is an important nesting ground for *laud* (leatherback) and *golfina* (olive ridley) sea turtles, the largest and smallest of the world's sea turtle species. Each year the turtles swim ashore and lay their eggs in the sand, and the hatchlings later crawl back out to sea. While you shouldn't drive on many beaches in Baja, it's particularly important keep any and all vehicles off of this one.

Run by a friendly woman from El Pescadero, the **Grupo Ecológico y Tortuguero de Pescadero** is a sea turtle rescue program that collects and hatches turtle eggs and releases the hatchlings back into the ocean. If you're interested in volunteering or making a donation, contact **Griselda Sotelo Amaya** (☎ 612-108-4483; lorgisal@hotmail.com) in El Pescadero.

Above the beach, **Los Cerritos RV Park** (camp-sites free) offers outhouses only. There is some shade, and you can rent beach umbrellas for about US\$5. Ejido El Pescadero keeps the area weed-free, and if there's someone there, they might charge US\$5 to park inside the fence.

Los Cerritos is signed near Km 65. There are two roads, both of which lead to the beach. Several newly graded roads, sliced straight through the cacti and elephant trees, were being cut in at the time of research, making way for hotels that will soon go in. A new bar and restaurant, the out-of-place Los Cerritos Nightclub, has recently opened on the beach.

### Rancho Pilar & Around

At Km 74, near a giant (and blank) billboard, a dirt road heads seaward; after about 273m (300 yards), the left fork leads to **Rancho Pilar** ([www.ranchopilar.com](http://www.ranchopilar.com)), owned by artists Pilar and Cuco Moyron. Cuco custom-makes traditional Baja-style huaraches, cutting the sole out of an old tire and tying up the leather straps while you wait. As he says, 'they're

guaranteed for 3000 miles,' which is up 1000 miles since our last edition! Pilar makes and sells 'beach jewelry' and woven palm-frond hats to adorn your other appendages.

Cuco also offers one-day and multiday hikes into the Sierra de la Laguna (p203); prices are very reasonable and depend on the number of people in your group and whether you need horses, mules and food or other services. Ask about beach camping, which Cuco will probably be offering by the time this book hits the shelves.

At an unmarked turnoff at about Km 83, **Playa Las Cabrillas** features a long but steep sandy beach unsuitable for surfing. However, there are many good rustic campsites just off the highway.

At Km 97, a dirt road (actually more like a sand trail – suitable only for 4WD) leads 1km (0.5 miles) west among mangroves to **Playa Migriño** and Estero Migriño, a good bird-watching site that also has a right break during the winter months. Cow patties and insects are both abundant, so watch your step and bring bug repellent.

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