

Directory

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ACCOMMODATIONS

Baja California offers a vast array of accommodation options, from Tijuana dives and free beach camping to five-star Cabo resorts. This book categorizes accommodations as either budget (where a typical room for two people costs under US\$35), midrange (US\$36 to US\$85) or top end (above US\$85). Camping is almost always the cheapest way to go. Prices given throughout this book include taxes, which, when charged, are usually 13% (10% value-added tax, plus 3% hotel tax). Top-end hotels (especially resorts) will usually tag on an additional 12% to 15%

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodations reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

in gratuities, bringing the grand total to a whopping 28%.

B&Bs

B&Bs are not a traditional form of Mexican accommodations, which explains why most are run by North Americans. B&Bs are usually small, luxurious, favorably located and characterized by a personal atmosphere. Prices vary widely, ranging from US\$50 to US\$120 a night.

Camping

Most organized campgrounds are actually trailer parks, set up for RVs (camper vans) and trailers (caravans), but many accept tent campers at lower rates. Some are very basic, others quite luxurious. Expect to pay anywhere from US\$4 to US\$15 to pitch a tent, and from US\$15 to US\$20 for two people in an RV with full hookups and facilities. Some restaurants or guesthouses in small beach spots will let you pitch a tent on their land for a few dollars per person.

While all Mexican beaches are public property, the presence of houses and hotels in developed areas can make access difficult. Still, you can camp for free on most beaches, but *never* leave your belongings unattended.

Guesthouses

Casas de huéspedes (guesthouses) are one of Baja's cheapest forms of accommodations. Generally, these consist of basic rooms attached to or built beside someone's home. The bathroom is often shared, and conditions can be very basic, but they often offer a more intimate experience. In small towns and villages, a *casa de huéspedes* may be your only option.

Homestays

Opportunities for homestays are few in Baja, except for those arranged through Spanish schools in La Paz (p194) and Ensenada (p100).

Hostels

There are very few youth hostels and no HI-affiliated hostels in Baja.

Hotels & Motels

Decent hotels start around US\$30, but most towns and all cities have a handful that are cheaper and still tolerable. Don't judge a hotel by its facade: go inside, ask to see a room, sniff around and test the mattress.

In the tourist areas – especially in the northern coastal areas and Los Cabos – seasonal price fluctuations are common, as are differences between weekend and midweek rates. While price differences between single and double occupancy are small or nonexistent, it does matter whether you're staying in a room with one or two double beds.

Room nomenclature can be a bit confusing, especially when you're trying to book a room over the phone. A *sencilla* is a room with one double, queen- or king-size bed meant for one or two people. Both the bed and the room are also called *matrimonial* (you can guess the meaning). If you want a room with two beds you need to ask for a *doble* (double). *Dobles* are for two or four people, yet are priced differently depending on the number of people in the room.

Because most hotels charge the same rate for one or two people, prices quoted throughout this book refer to the room rate (r) for one or two people. If a hotel charges different rates for one versus two guests, we quote the establishment's rates in terms of 'singles' (s) for one person and 'doubles' (d) for two. Nearly all hotels offer triple and quadruple room rates as well. See the inside front cover for a key to more symbols used in this book.

Resorts

Los Cabos is Baja's main resort destination. The area's resorts are almost all chains and offer pampered experiences typical of luxury resorts throughout the world. The cheapest rooms start at around US\$200 low-season, midweek and can climb into the thousands. Along the Eastern Cape (p204) there are

a handful of mom-and-pop-style resorts geared primarily toward anglers, which offer a more down-to-earth experience, even for nonanglers. For more on choosing a resort in Cabo, see p219.

BUSINESS HOURS

Shops are generally open Monday to Saturday from 9am or 10am to 7pm. Siesta (break time), when shops close, is loosely between 2pm and 4pm, although it is not usually observed in big cities or tourist resorts, where businesses tend to be open even on Sunday. Siestas are most common in central Baja. In rural areas, some shops close Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday.

Chain supermarkets, such as Calimax and Gigante, are usually open 7am to 11pm daily. Government offices usually close at 2pm.

Typical restaurant and café hours are 8am to 10pm or midnight. Bars are normally open daily, but each seems to have its own special pattern of hours. Nightclubs open around 9pm but are quiet until well after 10pm.

Banks are normally open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm or 2pm Saturday. In smaller towns they may close earlier or not open on Saturday. *Casas de cambio* (money exchange offices) are usually open from 9am or 10am to 6pm or 7pm daily, longer in Los Cabos. Post offices typically open from 8am or 9am to 4pm, 5pm

PRACTICALITIES

- Mexicans use the metric system for weights and measures.
- Electrical current is 110V, 60Hz; most plugs have two flat prongs, as in the USA and Canada.
- Of the nine main dailies in Baja California, those with the highest circulations are Mexicali's *La Voz de la Frontera* (www.lavozdelafrontera.com.mx), Tijuana's *El Mexicano* (www.el-mexicano.com.mx) and Tijuana's *El Sol de Tijuana* (www.elsoldetijuana.com.mx).
- Of Baja California's numerous radio stations, the majority broadcast from Tijuana, Mexicali and Ensenada. Tijuana's Radio Frontera (102.5 FM) offers the broadest mix of independent programs and music.

or 6pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm Saturday.

In this book we list opening hours for establishments only where they do not fit the above parameters.

CHILDREN

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*, by Cathy Lanigan, offers loads of practical advice on the subject, as well as first-hand stories from many Lonely Planet authors and others who have traveled with children.

Practicalities

Diapers (nappies) are widely available in Baja, but creams, lotions, baby foods or familiar medicines can be impossible to find outside larger cities and tourist towns. Rarely, if ever, will you find a child safety seat in a taxi, but most international car-rental companies can arrange for one. Larger hotels often have a baby-sitting service; in Cabo, nearly every resort does.

Parental consent forms are required for people under 18 traveling with one or no parents; see p264 for more information.

Sights & Activities

It's hard to expound enough on the fun you can have with your kids in Baja. Most of it involves outdoor activities: snorkeling, horse-back riding, shell collecting, playing on the beach, boating, watching wildlife – the list is endless. Imagine the kids' reaction when a gray whale and her calf surface right next to your skiff!

If you're driving down to Cabo, promise them a pirate cruise (p244) in Cabo San Lucas, and wax eloquent on the tropical fish they'll see while snorkeling in the tranquil, shallow waters of Bahía Concepción (p174) or Bahía Santa María (p230). In calm waters such as those at Bahía de Los Ángeles (p150) or around Isla Espíritu Santo (p200), you can rent a double kayak, lather your kid up with sun block, plop them in the front seat and paddle away (with a guide, if you want). Some dive operators listed in this book offer Junior Open Water Diver courses for kids aged 10 to 14.

If you're driving through Mexicali, you could stop at the Sol del Niño (p133), a science and technology museum for children. If you're heading down the Transpeninsular, stop at Foxploration (p92), Baja's version

of Universal Studios. The big resorts of Los Cabos usually offer a myriad of activities to keep the kids busy during the day while you're off scuba diving or fishing.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Baja California is famous for its sunny skies and warm temperatures, but the peninsula actually has a surprising range of climates. As a general rule, temperatures tend to be higher in the south, along the Sea of Cortez coast and at lower elevations. In the tropical Cape Region from La Paz to Cabo San Lucas, the hottest months, May through October, are also the wettest. During this time, tropical storms called *chubascos* occasionally pelt the area. This is also hurricane season, and hurricanes occasionally do hit the southern part of the peninsula. Winter is generally warm and sunny. For tips on the best seasons to travel, see p16.

COURSES

Baja is less popular than mainland Mexico for studying Spanish, but Ensenada (p100) and La Paz (p194) both have good language schools for foreigners.

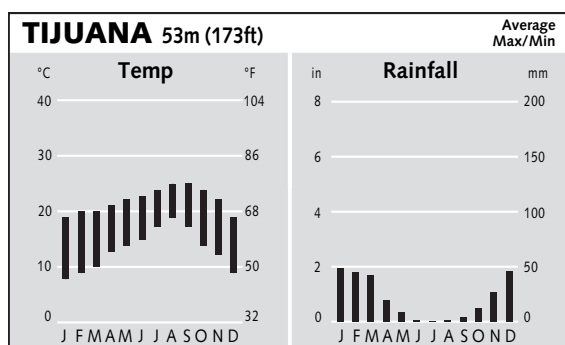
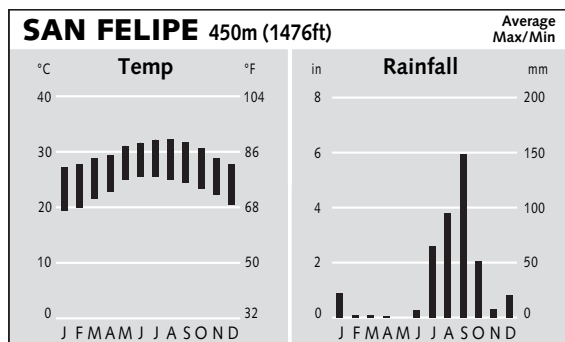
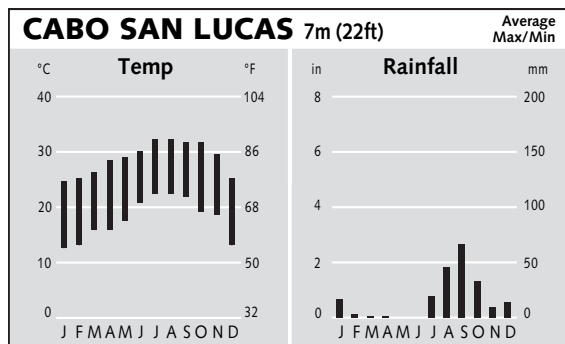
CUSTOMS

Things that visitors may bring into Mexico duty-free include items for personal use, such as clothing; a camera and video camera; up to 12 rolls of film or video/digital cassettes; a cellular phone; a portable computer; a CD or cassette player; five DVDs; 20 music CDs; medicine for personal use (with prescription in the case of psychotropic drugs); 3L of alcohol; 400 cigarettes; and US\$300 worth of other goods (US\$50 if arriving by land).

US residents returning to the USA from Baja may bring in duty-free items valued up to US\$800, for personal use only. You're allowed to bring 1L (33.8 fluid oz) of alcohol into mainland California every 30 days. You may bring in 100 cigars (though not of Cuban origin) and 200 cigarettes duty free.

Fireworks, switchblade knives, products made from endangered species, plants, seeds, soil, pork, poultry and live birds are all prohibited from import into the USA.

US Customs allows fish caught in Mexico to enter the USA as long as it conforms with Mexican bag limits, the species is somehow identifiable and you can produce a Mexican fishing license (see p52).



DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

People new to Baja California generally worry about two things: theft and military checkpoints. If you will be driving around, see p270 for more on both. If you don't have a car, your worries are few. But use common sense: avoid dark streets at night in cities such as Tijuana, Mexicali and Ensenada; don't leave items unattended on the beach; and don't flaunt your (monetary) goods. Generally, only the bigger hotels have *caja fuertes* (safes) for valuables, but rarely will things go missing when they don't.

Tourist police squads patrol most major destinations, keeping things pretty safe. Tijuana and Mexicali, like any big cities, warrant caution after dark. Tijuana is the only city where violent crimes occur frequently, though cases involving tourists are rare.

Many of Baja's Pacific beaches have dangerous offshore rip currents, so learn to

read the water before getting in. Hire sports and aquatic equipment only from reputable sources, such as those listed in this book. Safety standards are generally lower than in countries such as the USA or Australia, and the operator may not carry any accident liability insurance. Several tourists have been injured and even killed in jet ski and diving accidents, and have been subjected to dangerous landings when parasailing.

For more on health issues, including poisonous insects and snakes, see the Health chapter (p274).

Scams

Scamming tourists isn't as common in Baja as in other Latin American countries. Aside from the occasional over-charging taxi driver, the most prevalent scams are those by telephone companies charging extortionate prices through toll-free numbers (for details, see p263).

DISCOUNT CARDS

Student and senior discount cards are of little to no use in Baja. American Automobile Association (AAA) cards can produce discounts at some hotels.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in Baja California

Most foreign consulates are in Tijuana. For a complete list of embassies in Tijuana see www.tijuanaonline.org. The Canadian consulate will assist citizens of Australia and Belize.

Canada Tijuana (Map pp72-3; ☎ 664-684-0461; tijuana@canada.org.mx; Germán Gedovius 10411-101, Zona Río); San José del Cabo (Map pp220-1; ☎ 624-142-4333; loscabos@canada.org.mx; Plaza José Green No 9, Blvd Mijares)

France Tijuana (☎ 664-681-3133; www.francia.org.mx; Calle Fresno 10897 at Av del Bosque, Jardines de Chapultepec); La Paz (☎ 612-128-4151; consulat.lapaz@gmail.com; Fracc La Piedra 23010)

Germany Tijuana (Map p69; ☎ 664-680-1830, 664-680-2512; Cantera 400-305, Edificio Ole, Playas de Tijuana)

UK Tijuana (Map pp72-3; ☎ 664-681-7323, 664-686-5320; www.britishconsulatetijuana.com; Blvd Salinas 1500, Colonia Aviación, La Mesa)

USA Tijuana (Map p69; ☎ 664-622-7400, emergency assistance in San Diego 619-692-2154; <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov>; Av Tapachula 96, Colonia Hipódromo); Cabo San Lucas (Map pp238-9; ☎ 624-143-3566; Blvd Marina No 1, Local No C-4, Plaza Náutica)

Mexican Embassies & Consulates

The first listing for each country is an embassy; subsequent listings are consulates. Updated details can be found at www.sre.gob.mx.

Australia (☎ 02-6273 3963; 14 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-233-8988; www.embamexcan.com; 45 O'Connor St, Suite 1000, ON K1P 1A4); Montreal (☎ 514-288-2502; www.consulmex.qc.ca; 2055 rue Peel, bureau 1000, QC H3A 1V4); Toronto (☎ 416-368-2875; www.consulmex.com; Commerce Court West, 199 Bay St, Suite 4440, ON M5L 1E9); Vancouver (☎ 604-684-3547; www.consulmexvan.com; 710-1177 West Hastings St, BC V6E 2K3)

France Paris (☎ 01-53 70 27 70; www.sre.gob.mx/francia; 9 rue de Longchamp, 75116); consulate in Paris (☎ 01-42 86 56 20; 4 rue Notre Dame des Victoires, 75002)

Germany Berlin (☎ 030-269 3230; www.embamex.de, in German & Spanish; Klingelhofstrasse 3, 10785); Frankfurt am Main (☎ 069-299 8750; Taunusanlage 21, 60325)

Ireland (☎ 01-260 0699; www.sre.gob.mx/irlanda; 43 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Japan (☎ 3-3581 1131; www.sre.gob.mx/japon; 2-15-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, 100-0014)

New Zealand (☎ 04-472 0555; www.sre.gob.mx/nuevazelandia; Level 8, 111 Customhouse Quay, Wellington)

UK (☎ 020-7499 8586; www.sre.gob.mx/reinounido; 16 St Georges St, London, W1S 1FD)

USA Washington, DC (☎ 202-728-1600; www.sre.gob.mx/eua; 1911 Pennsylvania Ave NW, 20006); consulate in Washington, DC (☎ 202-736-1000; consulwas@aol.com; 2827 16th St NW, 20009); San Francisco (☎ 415-354-1732; www.consulmexsf.com; 532 Folsom St, 94105); Los Angeles (☎ 213-351-6800; www.sre.gob.mx/losangeles; 2401 West 6th St, 90057); San Diego (☎ 619-308-9922; <http://portal.sre.gob.mx/sandiego>; 1549 India St, 92101); Calexico (☎ 760-357-4132; www.sre.gob.mx/Calexico; 408 Heber Av, 92231)

BEFORE YOU GO

Official information can make Mexico sound more alarming than it really is, but you might still find advice from your country's foreign affairs department valuable.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 1300 139 281; www.smartraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (☎ 0845-850 2829; www.fco.gov.uk/countryadvice)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 800-267-6788; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca)

US State Department (☎ 888-407-4747; <http://travel.state.gov>)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bajacalifornianos observe all major national and Catholic holidays (see opposite), some of which involve public festivities, processions, music and food. Special festivities and fairs such as Carnival and saints' days usually take place in major towns and cities. See regional entries for information on local events.

January

Día de los Reyes Magos (Three Kings' Day, Epiphany) Mexican children traditionally receive gifts on this day (January 6), rather than at Christmas.

February

Día de la Candelaria (Candlemas) Processions, bullfights and dancing occur in many towns on February 2 to commemorate the presentation of Jesus in the temple, 40 days after his birth.

Carnaval (Carnival) Celebrated in Ensenada (p101), San Felipe (p139) and La Paz (p195), usually the week before Lent (late February to early March), with parades, music, food and fireworks.

March/April

Día del Señor San José (St Joseph's Day) Residents of San José del Cabo (p223) celebrate the festival of St Joseph, the town's patron saint, on March 19 with street dances, horse races, food fairs and fireworks.

Semana Santa (Holy Week) Starting on Palm Sunday (March/April), a week before Easter, this festival is celebrated in every church in Baja. It's also when Mexicans flock to the beaches to paaarty, so be ready.

August

Fiesta de la Vendimia (Wine Harvest Festival) Ensenada and Valle de Guadalupe (p111) kick off the grape-harvest season in early August.

September

Día de Nuestra Señora de Loreto (Our Lady of Loreto) Loreto (p180) celebrates its founding with much vigor on September 8.

Día de la Independencia Commemorates Mexican independence from Spain (1821) from September 15 to 16. The biggest celebrations take place in Tijuana (p75) and La Paz (p195), with fireworks, horse races, folk dances and mariachi bands.

November

Día de Todos los Santos (All Saints' Day) Cemeteries throughout Mexico come alive as families visit graveyards to commune with their dead on the night of November 1.

Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) Festivities continue on November 2, when the souls of the dead are

believed to return to earth. The festivities are especially colorful in Tijuana (p75).

December

Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Festival of Our Lady of Guadalupe) Tecate (p123) hosts one of Baja's most interesting versions of this celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12.

Posadas Children and adults parade with candles from December 16 to 24, reenacting the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem; this celebration is more common in small towns than big cities.

Navidad (Christmas Day) December 25 marks the end of a week of posadas.

FOOD

Some of the lengthier eating sections throughout this book are divided by type of cuisine, neighborhood, or budget sub-headings. The restaurant scene of each town dictates how the establishments are arranged, to make deciding on where to eat easier for you. Within subsections, establishments are always listed in order of budget, with the least expensive listed first. For each restaurant, average prices are given for main courses. 'Mains' means a main dish, as opposed to an entire meal. If it's a *taquería*, average prices of tacos are given.

Three price categories are used in this book: By budget we mean places where you can eat for less than US\$5. Midrange places are those where main courses average US\$6 to US\$15. Establishments fall into our top end category when most main courses cost over US\$15.

For a mouth-watering idea of all the food you can eat while traveling in Baja, see p59.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Though it might appear to be one of the world's more heterosexual countries, Mexico is more broad-minded than visitors might expect. Gays and lesbians tend to keep a low profile, but in general rarely attract open discrimination or violence. Tijuana is the city with the liveliest scene (see p81), although smaller ones exist in Ensenada and Mexicali, though, perhaps surprisingly, not in Los Cabos.

A decent source of information is **Don Pato's Gay Mexico Network** (www.gaymexico.net), sort of the central clearinghouse for information on all things gay throughout Mexico. It has a decent Tijuana section.

HOLIDAYS

The chief Mexican holiday periods are Christmas through New Year's, Semana Santa, and from mid-July to mid-August. Transportation and tourist accommodations are heavily booked at these times. Banks, post offices and government offices throughout Baja are closed on the following national holidays:

Año Nuevo (New Year's Day) January 1.

Día de la Constitución (Constitution Day) February 5.

Día de la Bandera (Day of the National Flag) February 24.

Día de Nacimiento de Benito Juárez (Anniversary of Benito Juárez' birth) March 21.

Semana Santa (Holy Week) March/April. Business closures are usually from Viernes Santo (Good Friday) to Domingo de Resurrección (Easter Sunday).

Día del Trabajo (Labor Day) May 1.

Cinco de Mayo May 5. Anniversary of Mexico's 1862 victory over the French at Puebla, where it is grandly celebrated. It's a normal, business-as-usual day in Baja California.

Día de la Independencia September 16. Commemorates the start of Mexico's war for independence from Spain; the biggest celebrations are in Mexico City, the evening before.

Día de la Raza October 12. Commemorates Columbus' discovery of the New World and the founding of the *mestizo* (mixed-ancestry) Mexican people.

Día de la Revolución (Anniversary of the 1910 Mexican Revolution) November 20.

Día de Navidad (Christmas Day) December 25.

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is advised. For further information on medical insurance see p274; for car insurance, see p270.

Worldwide travel insurance is available at lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you're already on the road.

INTERNET ACCESS

Only the tiniest of Baja villages lacks an internet café. Prices are highest in Los Cabos (up to US\$6 per hour), while prices on the rest of the peninsula average US\$1 to US\$2 per hour. Many B&B or boutique-type hotels offer free internet access. Nearly all top-end hotels either have en-suite wireless internet or computer rooms, where you can go online (for a fee). Most midrange hotels have phone lines in the rooms, but make sure you have a reputable 'global' modem.

One of the best online resources you'll find is Steve Kropla's comprehensive website (www.kropla.com).

Either 'Alt + 64' or 'Alt-Gr + 2' is the command to get the '@' symbol on almost any Spanish-language keyboard.

LEGAL MATTERS

Under Mexican law an accused person is guilty until proven innocent. In all but the most minor car accidents, everyone involved is considered guilty and liable until proven otherwise. Without car insurance, you will be detained until fault has been established.

Drivers found with drugs or weapons on board are likely to have their vehicles confiscated and be jailed while their cases are investigated. Drinking on Mexican streets is illegal. Possession of marijuana or cocaine is also illegal. If arrested, you have the right to notify your embassy or consulate, but consular officials can't get you out of jail.

Bribing a police officer is illegal. Spend a significant amount of time driving in Baja, however, and you'll eventually experience *la mordida* (literally, 'the bite'). This is when a police officer makes it clear you'll need to pay an 'on-the-spot fine' to get out of whatever jam (generally a traffic violation) you've gotten yourself into. Your best bet is to pay the 'fine' and be on your way, unless you want to stick around for up to several days while your offense is dealt with officially. Always treat police officers with complete respect.

The 24-hour, toll-free hotline maintained by **Secture** (☎ 01-800-903-92-00) provides advice on tourist protection laws and where to obtain help. Secture offices are listed under Tourist Information in towns where they exist.

MAPS

The *Baja California Road Map*, published by the Automobile Club of Southern California, an affiliate of AAA, is the best general map of the peninsula. It is available for free to AAA members and sold to everyone else for US\$4.95 at AAA offices and in bookstores. **International Travel Maps & Books** (ITMB; www.itmb.com) has the most recent (2006) map of Baja California at a scale of 1:650,000 (US\$12.95).

The 1997 *Baja Almanac* (US\$24.95), by **Baja Almanac Publishing** (www.baja-almanac.com), contains topographical maps at a scale of 1:100,000 and is indispensable for anyone driving off the beaten track. At the time of research they

were out of print (supposedly more were in production), but you can find them used online and occasionally in Baja.

Essential for hikers and backpackers are the topo maps published by **INEGI** (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática; www.inegi.gob.mx; Tijuana ☎ 664-979-7800 through 7809; Av Vía Rápida Oriente 9306; Mexicali ☎ 686-557-5883; Calzada Independencia 1086; La Paz Map pp190-1; ☎ 612-123-6236; Altamirano 2790) and available for US\$4 to US\$6 each.

All of these maps may be ordered from the US-based companies **Map World** (www.mapworld.com) and **Maplink** (www.maplink.com). In the UK, a good place for Baja-related maps and books is **Stanfords** (www.stanfords.co.uk).

MONEY

Mexico's currency is the peso, which is divided into 100 centavos. Coins come in denominations of five, 10, 20 and 50 centavos and one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 pesos. There are notes of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 pesos.

Both Mexican pesos and US dollars are commonly used in Baja, but US dollars may not be accepted in some small towns and villages. You almost always end up paying slightly less if you pay in pesos.

The dollar (\$) sign refers to pesos in Mexico. The designations N\$ and NP (both for *nuevos pesos*) and MN (*moneda nacional*) all refer to pesos. Prices quoted in US dollars will normally be written as US\$5, \$5 Dlls or 5 USD.

Because the peso's exchange value is unpredictable, prices in this book are given in US\$ equivalents. Refer to the inside back cover for exchange rates and p16 for an idea of what things cost.

ATMs

Automated teller machines (ATMs) are the easiest way to obtain cash pesos in Baja. They are common in nearly all significant towns, but not necessarily in all popular tourist destinations (such as Mulegé and San Ignacio). If a town has a bank, it almost always has an ATM. Cirrus and Plus are the most common networks. Despite the handling fee that may be charged to your account, ATMs offer a better exchange rate than banks and *casa de cambios*.

Cash

Carrying wads of cash anywhere is inherently risky, but you will need it when paying bus and taxi drivers, making small purchases at

convenience stores, eating at all but the fanciest restaurants, leaving tips and so on. In short, don't be without it.

Credit Cards

Major credit cards are accepted by virtually all airlines, car-rental companies and travel agents in Baja, as well as by many hotels, up-scale restaurants and shops in the border zone and cape region. However, outside of these major tourist hubs few businesses will honor your credit cards. MasterCard and Visa are the most widely accepted; American Express is accepted to a lesser extent. Note that Pemex stations will not take credit cards.

Moneychangers

Money can be exchanged at banks, hotels and *casas de cambio*. Exchange rates vary a little from one bank or *casa de cambio* to another. Different rates are also often posted for *efectivo* (cash) and *documento* (traveler's checks). *Cambios* are usually quicker and less bureaucratic than banks. They also have longer hours and may be open on evenings or weekends.

Banks rarely charge commissions, but *cambios* do. Hotels, especially at the top end of the scale, offer poor rates and often charge commissions as well.

Tipping

You should tip 10% to 15% at sit-down restaurants, though generally not at *taquerías*, even if they have tables. Tip bellhops and hotel porters in big hotels as you would throughout the world. Be certain to tip guides, boat captains and crew; tipping US\$20 total per client on an all-day fishing trip is usually sufficient.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks are generally accepted in tourist areas, and most banks will cash them, but the bureaucracy involved can be tiresome. Some banks will not cash more than US\$200 worth of checks at a time. Major-brand checks, denominated in US dollars, are best, and American Express is the most widely accepted.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

In tourist areas, print film is widely available. Most internet cafés have computers with USB connections and CD burners for uploading and backing up your digital pictures.

Mexicans, especially in tourist areas, are normally very gracious about being photographed. No one seems to mind being photographed in the context of an overall scene, but if you want a close-up shot, you should ask first. Refrain from photographing soldiers.

For more tips on travel photography, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography*.

PETS

Under Mexican law, travelers may enter the country with pet dogs or cats, provided they can present the following certificates at the border: a pet health certificate signed by a registered veterinarian and issued not more than 72 hours before the animal enters Mexico, and a pet vaccination certificate showing inoculation against rabies, hepatitis, pip and leptospirosis.

POST

The Servicio Postal Mexicano (the formal name for Mexico's national postal service) sells postage stamps and sends and receives mail at every *oficina de correos* (post office) in Baja.

Receiving Mail

You can receive letters and packages care of a post office if they're addressed as in the following example:

Jane SMITH (last name in capitals)
Lista de Correos
Tijuana Baja California 00000 (post code)
MEXICO

You must present photo ID to claim your mail. There's no charge, though many post offices hold 'Lista' mail for only 10 days before returning it to the sender.

If you think you're going to pick up mail more than 10 days after its arrival, change 'Lista de Correos' in the above address to 'Poste Restante.' Poste Restante may hold mail for up to a month.

Sending Mail

Service is not always dependable, and packages in particular sometimes go missing. Mark all mail conspicuously with the phrase 'Vía Aérea' (air mail). *Certificado* or *registrado* (registered) service helps ensure delivery and costs just US\$2 extra for international mail. An airmail letter from Mexico to the USA

or Canada can take four to 14 days to arrive (even longer to Europe and Australia).

An airmail letter or postcard weighing up to 20g costs US\$0.95 to the USA or Canada, US\$1.20 to Europe and US\$1.35 to the rest of the world; items weighing between 20g and 50g cost US\$1.60, US\$1.85 and US\$2.25, respectively.

SHOPPING

Places like Tijuana, Ensenada and Rosarito offer kitsch galore: multicolored kiddie guitars, wrestling masks, sombreros, leather sandals, seashell knickknacks, obscene T-shirts – you name it, you'll find it. In these towns, and in Los Cabos, you'll also find traditional crafts from mainland Mexico, which can be great value. San José del Cabo is a particularly good place to shop, but prices can be higher than in the border towns.

When you're souvenir shopping anywhere, bargain. It's not uncommon for a vendor to ask US\$60 for a silver ring and part with it for US\$25. In established crafts and artisans stores prices are usually fixed, but it never hurts to ask.

SOLO TRAVELERS

Traveling alone has many perks, but there are drawbacks. The main one is accommodation: nearly all hotels charge the same rate for one or two people, and there are few hostels. Because most folks traveling Baja are drivers from the USA and Canada, it's difficult to hook up with other travelers. Another bummer about traveling alone is having to leave your belongings on the beach when you go for a swim. The only solution is to take to the beach only things (cheap flip-flops, towel and hat) that you don't mind losing. You can always leave your key at the hotel desk.

Traveling alone as a woman implies inherent risks anywhere in the world, and Baja is no exception. See p265 for more information specific to female travelers.

TELEPHONE

Call Offices

Cabinas (sometimes also called *casetas de teléfono*) are call stations, usually found in shops, where you make a call in a booth after an on-the-spot operator connects it for you. There are far fewer *cabinas* in Baja than in the rest of Mexico, but most towns have at least one. They can be more expensive than public

MEXICO COUNTRY CODE

To call a number in Mexico from another country, first dial your international access code, then ☎ 52, then the area code and number.

pay phones, but you don't need a phone card to use them, and they eliminate street noise. Many offer off-peak discounts.

Cell Phones

The most widespread cellular (mobile) phone system in Mexico is **Telcel** (www.telcel.com), which has coverage virtually anywhere with a significant population. You can buy a Telcel cellular phone for under US\$50 (Oxxo convenience stores sell them), including free air time. When you run out of air time, you can purchase pre-paid minutes in denominations starting at US\$10. To dial any mobile telephone from a landline, you must dial ☎ 044 before the area code, giving you a total of 10 digits to punch in. US cell phones work in major population centers throughout Baja, but check those rates before racking up the minutes.

This is a rapidly changing field and you can stay up to date by checking www.kropla.com. For information on GSM (Mexico operates on GSM 1900), including coverage maps, roaming partners and links, see www.gsmworld.com or www.gsmcoverage.co.uk.

Collect Calls

A *llamada por cobrar* (collect call) can cost the receiving party much more than if they call you, so you may prefer to find a phone where you can receive an incoming call, then pay for a quick call to the other party to ask them to call you back.

If you do need to make a collect call, you can do so from pay phones without a card. Call an operator on ☎ 020 for domestic calls or ☎ 090 for international calls.

Mexican international operators can usually speak English. Some telephone *cabinas* and hotels will make collect calls for you, but they usually charge for the service.

Phone Cards

You can use a calling card for calls from Mexico to the USA or Canada by dialing the access number; contact your long-distance carrier for numbers and rates before leaving.

Prefixes, Codes & Costs

When making a direct call, you need to know what *prefijo* (prefix) and *claves* (country or area codes) to include before the number. All telephone numbers have seven digits plus a three-digit area code, which is required when calling from one area code into another. Calling within the same town, you don't need to add an area code to a number.

To call another town in Mexico, add ☎ 01 + area code before the number. To call another country, add ☎ 00 + country code + area code.

When dialing Mexican toll-free numbers (☎ 800 followed by seven digits) always use the ☎ 01 prefix. You can call these numbers from Telmex pay phones without inserting a telephone card.

To get through to Mexican directory information, call ☎ 040.

Local calls cost about US\$0.10 per minute on a Telmex pay phone. Calls from one area code to another within Mexico cost about US\$0.40 per minute. Calls to the USA or Canada cost about US\$0.30 to US\$0.45 per minute; to Europe or South America US\$2 per minute; and to Australasia about US\$2.50.

Public Pay Phones

Public pay phones are nearly everywhere, and most work well. Pay phones are operated by a number of different companies: the most common and reliable are those marked with the name of the country's biggest phone company, Telmex. Telmex pay phones work on *tarjetas telefónicas* or *tarjetas Ladatel* (both the generic way of saying 'phone card'), which come in denominations of 30, 50 or 100 pesos (about US\$3, US\$4.50 and US\$9, respectively). These cards are sold at many kiosks and shops – look for the blue-and-yellow sign reading *De Venta Aquí Ladatel*. Telnor owns the public phones in northern Baja.

Scams

In Baja's tourist areas, you'll notice a variety of other pay phones advertising that they accept credit cards or that you can make easy collect calls to the USA on them. You'll also see stickers with a toll-free number slapped all over Telmex and Telnor pay phones. Avoid using both like dirty Tijuana water! Charges for these operator-assisted calls are exorbitant: rates of US\$7 to US\$28 for the first minute, followed by US\$4 to US\$10 for

each additional minute are not uncommon. The operator may quote you cheaper rates, but you won't know your final tally until it's posted on your next month's credit card bill – by then, it'll be impossible to prove that you were given a different rate.

TIME

The northern state of Baja California runs on Pacific Standard Time (PST), while Baja California Sur runs on Mountain Standard Time (MST), which is one hour ahead of PST. PST is eight hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), while MST is seven hours behind GMT.

In summer, PST moves ahead one hour for Pacific Daylight Time (PDT) and thus becomes the same as MST. Northern Baja is always on the same time as mainland California. Also, see the World Time Zones map.

Bus departure times and opening hours are often given on the 24-hour clock (military time).

TOILETS

Baños públicos (public toilets) exist, but *never* when you need them. Take advantage of toilets in places such as hotels, restaurants, bars and bus stations. Toilet paper is often unavailable, so carry some with you. If there's a basket beside the toilet, put paper, tampons etc in it – most Mexican plumbing cannot handle paper products.

TOURIST INFORMATION

For tourist information before you leave home, contact the **Mexico Tourism Board** (☎ in the USA or Canada 800-449-3942; www.visitmexico.com).

Most of the major tourist towns in Baja California have tourist offices, especially in Baja California (Norte). They can be helpful with maps and brochures, and usually some staff members speak English.

Offices of the Secretaría de Turismo del Estado (Secture) are affiliated with the state governments of either Baja California or Baja California Sur. Most sizable towns also have a tourist office associated with the Comité de Turismo y Convenciones (Cotuco; Committee on Tourism & Conventions).

TOURS

The following companies offer great ways to travel to and around Baja, meet new people and see some of Baja's best attractions. For

more specific activity-based tours, such as kayaking trips, see the Baja Outdoors chapter (p46).

Baja California Tours (☎ 858-454-7166, 800-336-5454; www.bajaspecials.com; 7734 Herschel Av, Ste 0, La Jolla, California) Specializes in short-term guided tours to northern Baja, including Tijuana, Playas de Rosarito, Puerto Nuevo and Ensenada. Also offers themed tours, set around special events such as wine festivals or bicycle races.

Baja Discovery (☎ 619-262-0700, 800-829-2252; www.bajadiscovery.com) Operates out of San Diego and offers several tours around Baja, including popular four- to eight-day walking excursions. Prices average US\$1700. Custom trips are available.

Green Tortoise (☎ 415-956-7500, 800-867-8647; www.greentortoise.com) Based out of San Francisco, Green Tortoise operates its Baja Beach Daze tour from November to April. Sort of a hostel on wheels, Green Tortoise appeals to the young and adventurous who put camaraderie over comfort. Tours may be joined in San Francisco, Los Angeles or San Diego and run either nine or 15 days. Prices range from US\$441 (plus US\$99 for food) to US\$649 (plus US\$151 for food). The 17-day whale-watching excursion costs US\$699 plus US\$151 for food.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Mexico makes few concessions to the disabled, though some hotels and restaurants (mostly toward the top end of the market), and public buildings are starting to provide wheelchair access. Mobility on the street is easiest in the major tourist resorts, where dropped curbs are more common than elsewhere. Public transportation is mainly hopeless.

Mobility International USA (www.miusa.org) advises disabled travelers on mobility issues and runs exchange programs. Another excellent information source for disabled travelers is **Access-able Travel Source** (www.access-able.com). Both **Radar** (www.radar.org.uk) in the UK, and **Acrod** (www.acrod.org.au) in Australia have thoroughly informative websites.

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

Consent Forms for Minors

Every year numerous parents try to run away from the USA or Canada to Mexico with their children to escape legal entanglements with the other parent. To prevent this, minors (people under 18) entering Mexico without one or both of their parents are officially required to show a notarized consent form, signed by the absent parent or parents, giving permission for the young traveler to enter Mexico. A form for this purpose is avail-

able from Mexican consulates. In the case of divorced parents, a custody document may be acceptable instead. If one or both parents are dead, or the traveler has only one legal parent, a notarized statement to that effect may be required.

These rules are aimed primarily at visitors from the USA and Canada but apparently apply to all nationalities.

Passport

Though it's not recommended, US and Canadian citizens can enter Baja without a passport if they have official photo identification, such as a driver's license, plus an original copy of their birth certificate or (for US citizens only) a certificate of naturalization. *But*, controls on returning to the USA are tightening. Beginning in 2007, all US citizens arriving in the USA by air must show a US passport. By 2008, this may extend to passengers arriving in the US by land and sea. In short, get a passport.

Citizens of other countries who are permanent residents in the US have to take their passport and Permanent Resident Alien Cards (green cards). Naturalized Canadian citizens require a valid passport. Citizens from all other countries must have a valid passport and, in some cases, a tourist visa (see Visas, opposite).

Travel Permits & Tourist Fees

The Mexican tourist card – officially the Forma Migratoria para Turista (FMT) – is a document that is stamped by Mexican immigration when you enter Mexico and which you must keep until you leave. It is available at border crossings, international airports and ports. At the US–Mexico border, you won't be given a tourist card automatically but must pick it up at the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM; National Immigration Institute), which has offices at all the border crossings.

The tourist card is not valid until you pay a tourist fee equivalent of 195 pesos (about US\$18). If you're entering by air, the fee is included in your ticket. If you're entering by land, you must pay the fee at a Banjercito bank, which has teller windows at all major border crossings. In Tecate, bank hours are 8am to 4pm daily, and in Mexicali it's open around the clock. For information on crossing the border at Tijuana, see p85.

In Baja you do not need a stamped tourist card if you're entering by land and are staying north of Ensenada or San Felipe for visits of fewer than 72 hours. Everyone must get a stamped tourist card for travel beyond Ensenada or San Felipe.

A section of the card deals with the length of your stay in Mexico. Normally you will be given the maximum 180 days, but double check. The card is good for multiple entries.

If the number of days given on your tourist card is fewer than the 180-day maximum, its validity may be extended one or more times, at no cost, up to the maximum.

To get a tourist card extended, you must apply to the *Servicios Migratorios* (immigration), which has offices in many towns and cities. The procedure is free and usually quick. You'll need your passport, tourist card, photocopies of these documents and – at some offices – evidence of 'sufficient funds.' Most offices will not extend a card until a few days before it is due to expire.

If you lose your card or need more information, contact **Sectur** (☎ 800-903-9200) on their toll-free emergency hotline.

Visas

Citizens of the USA, Canada, EU countries, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Argentina and Chile are among those who do not require visas to enter Mexico as tourists. Nationals of most African, Asian and Eastern European nations require visas. Some nationals will also require a round-trip ticket to enter Mexico. Check well ahead of travel with your local Mexican embassy or consulate.

VOLUNTEERING

Los Medicos Voladores (Flying Doctors; www.flyingdocs.org) is a group of US-based pilots, medical professionals and general volunteers that provides free health care in remote communities in Baja California. It offers extremely unique volunteer opportunities, rates are relatively low (about US\$300 total), and there's usually time for some fun. **Flying Samaritans** (www.flying-samaritans.org) is a similar organization.

With a center in Tijuana, **Casa del Migrante** (www.migrante.com.mx) often needs volunteers to work with immigrants (usually stuck enroute to the USA). Also in Tijuana, the **Casa YMCA Menores Migrantes** (☎ 664-686-1359; www.ymca.org.mx) assists children who attempt to cross the

border and are separated from their families; volunteer opportunities may be available.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Baja is a marvelous destination for women. Whether you're heading down with your girlfriends for a weekend in Cabo or driving down the peninsula with surfboards strapped to the car, there's no reason you shouldn't have a wonderful trip. But there are a few things to consider.

Baja is Mexico, and Mexico is macho. And in a land of machismo, women have to make some concessions to local custom: try not to let it ruin your day when men address your male traveling companion more than you; blow off the inevitable (and generally innocent) catcalls and attempts to chat you up; and, if you're traveling alone, don't be surprised when the first questions strangers put to you are about your marital status, age and children.

Mexican machismo is only half the story, however, and it may feel fairly mundane compared with the amount of North American testosterone injected into this place. Baja California is a very *male* destination: motorcycle riders, off-roaders, fishermen, hunters, surfers and frat boy-types with bags full of fireworks all love Baja. If you're traveling off the beaten track, you could easily stroll into a restaurant or roll into a campground filled entirely with men. While it's rarely dangerous, it can feel a bit strange (especially if you're dubious about large groups of males). That said, couples, families and women from the USA and Canada travel to Baja in great numbers without ever having problems.

You should be fine if you use common sense. Don't put yourself in peril by doing things Mexican women would not do, such as challenging a man's masculinity, drinking alone in a cantina, hitchhiking without a male companion or going alone to isolated places.

Although informal 'dress codes' have become increasingly relaxed, to avoid unwanted come-ons try to avoid wearing clothing that Mexican (and American) men may interpret as provocative. This is especially true if you're going out at night.

Tampons and pads are readily available in large towns throughout Baja, but large towns can be few and far between. So stock up on your favorite brand. Birth control pills are sold in Mexico, but you're better off bringing your own supply.

Transportation

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Immigration officers rarely keep visitors waiting any longer than it takes to flip through their passport and enter the length of stay on their tourist card. Anyone traveling to Baja via the USA (by air, land or sea) should check US visa requirements.

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. For information on tours to Baja, see p263.

AIR

Other than Aeroméxico's new twice-weekly flights between Tokyo-Narita and Tijuana, the only direct international flights to Baja California are from the USA. Most flights originate on the west coast (from Los Angeles in particular), although there are also some

DEPARTURE TAX

A departure tax equivalent to about US\$25 is levied on international flights from Mexico. It's often included in your ticket cost, but if it isn't, you must pay the tax in cash during airport check-in. Ask your travel agent in advance.

from Phoenix, AZ; Tucson, AZ; Dallas-Fort Worth, TX; Chicago, IL; and Denver, CO. All Mexican airlines also operate flights to and from the Mexican mainland.

Airports & Airlines

Most visitors flying to Baja California arrive at the international airports at **Los Cabos** (airport code SJD; ☎ 624-142-2111, 624-146-5013; www.sjdloscabosairport.com) or **Tijuana** (airport code TIJ; ☎ 664-683-2418; <http://tijuana.aerpuertosgap.com.mx>). There are also direct flights from US and Mexican cities to **Mexicali** (airport code MXL; ☎ 686-553-5158, 686-553-4023), **Loreto** (airport code LTO; ☎ 135-0454) and **La Paz** (LAP; ☎ 612-122-1466/67, 122-2959).

Airlines flying to/from Baja California:

Aero California (airline code JR; ☎ in the USA 800-237-6225, in Mexico 800-237-6225; www.aerocalifornia.com) Hub: Tijuana.

Aerolitoral (airline code 5D; ☎ in Mexico 800-800-2376; www.aerolitoral.com.mx) Hub: Monterrey.

Aeroméxico (airline code AM; ☎ in the USA & Canada 800-237-6639, in Mexico 800-021-4010; www.aeromexico.com) Hub: Mexico City.

Alaska Airlines/Horizon Air (airline code AS; ☎ in the USA 800-252-7522, in Mexico 800-252-7522; www.alaskaair.com) Hub: Seattle, WA.

American Airlines (airline code AA; ☎ in the USA 800-433-7300, in Mexico 800-904-6000; www.aa.com) Hub: Dallas, TX.

Continental Airlines (airline code CO; ☎ in the USA 800-523-3273, in Mexico 800-900-5000; www.continental.com) Hub: Houston, TX.

Delta Air Lines (airline code DL; ☎ in the USA 800-241-4141, in Mexico 800-123-4710; www.delta.com) Hub: Atlanta, GA.

Frontier Airlines (airline code FFT; ☎ in the USA 800-432-1359; www.frontierairlines.com) Hub: Denver, CO.

Mexicana (airline code MX; ☎ in the USA 800-531-7921, in Mexico 800-509-8960; www.mexicana.com.mx) Hub: Mexico City.

Northwest Airlines (airline code NW; ☎ in the USA 800-225-2525, in Mexico 800-907-4700; www.nwa.com) Hubs: Detroit, MI; Minneapolis-St Paul, MN; Memphis, TN.

Asia

In 2007 Aeroméxico began direct flights to Tijuana from Tokyo's Narita International Airport. At more than US\$1500 one way, it's a pricey one.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and are aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Australia

The cheapest, most direct routes are generally via a US west coast city (preferably Los Angeles). Some of the cheapest tickets are available through **STA Travel** (☎ 1300-733 035; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au), both of which have dozens of offices in the country. For online bookings, try www.travel.com.au.

Canada

There are no direct flights from Canada to Baja California, but Alaska Airlines has direct flights to Los Cabos from Seattle. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

Continental Europe

Across Europe, many travel agencies have ties with STA Travel, where cheap tickets can be purchased and STA-issued tickets can be altered (usually for a small fee). Otherwise, searching for online ticket fares is a good place to start.

Mainland Mexico

Mexico's two main airlines, Mexicana and Aeroméxico – as well as their subsidiaries and other smaller airlines – connect the airports at Tijuana, Mexicali, Loreto, La Paz and Los Cabos with mainland Mexico.

New Zealand

As with Australia, the best route is usually via Los Angeles, CA. Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800-243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508-782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches throughout the country. For online bookings try www.travel.co.nz.

UK & Ireland

It's usually cheaper to fly to Los Angeles than to Mexico City, though the latter is an option. An excellent place to start your inquiries is **Journey Latin America** (☎ 020-8747 3108; www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk).

Recommended travel agencies in the UK include the following:

Flight Centre (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0871-223 5000; www.ebookers.com)

Quest Travel (☎ 0871-423 0135; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0871-230 0040; www.statravel.co.uk) For travelers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0800-082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA

Fares from the USA fluctuate wildly. Many airlines offer bargain packages – including air, hotel and sometimes meals and a rental car – for short-term visitors to Los Cabos.

The cheapest flights are the direct ones. Alaska Airlines flies direct to Los Cabos from San Francisco; San Jose, CA; Los Angeles; San Diego; Portland, OR; and Seattle, WA. American Airlines flies direct to Los Cabos from Los Angeles and Dallas-Fort Worth, TX. Continental flies direct from Houston, TX; Aeroméxico from Los Angeles; and Mexicana from San Diego. Frontier Airlines operates seasonal flights (either March through October or December through October) to Los Cabos from San Jose, Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles (all in California); Kansas City, KN; and Denver, CO.

To La Paz, Aeroméxico flies direct daily from Los Angeles and Tucson, AZ. To Loreto, Aero California flies direct from Los Angeles three days a week; Aeroméxico flies there direct from San Diego.

The following agencies are recommended for online bookings:

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Lowestfare.com (www.lowestfare.com)

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

STA Travel (www.sta.com) Best for travelers under age 26.

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

LAND**Border Crossings**

There are six official border crossings from the US state of California to Baja. At any crossing, Mexican Customs & Immigration

will issue and stamp tourist cards (see p264). For updated information online, see **US Customs Border Wait Times** (<http://apps.cbp.gov/bwt>).

Andrade–Los Algodones (🚗 6am–10pm) This crossing is about 11km (7 miles) west of Yuma, AZ, via US Interstate 8 and California State Hwy 186.

Calexico–East Mexicali (🚗 6am–10pm) This crossing has relieved some of the pressure from the downtown crossing.

Calexico–Mexicali (🚗 24hr) This congested crossing is about 13km (8 miles) south of El Centro via California State Hwy 111.

Mesa de Otay–Tijuana (🚗 24hr) This crossing offers a far less congested port of entry than San Ysidro; it is east of downtown Tijuana near the airport.

San Ysidro–Tijuana (🚗 24hr) This border crossing, 24km (15 miles) south of downtown San Diego, is one of the world's busiest.

Tecate (🚗 6am–11pm) The Tecate border crossing is about 50km (30 miles) southeast of San Diego via California State Hwys 94 and 188.

Bus & Trolley

For details about bus and trolley travel from US cities to Tijuana, see p84; to Mexicali and beyond, see p137.

Buses run regularly from major centers in Mexico to Mexicali and Tijuana.

Car & Motorcycle

Countless visitors drive their own vehicles into Baja California from the USA. The most important item to carry with you is proof of liability insurance purchased from a Mexican company (see p270). If you're traveling only on the peninsula, you do *not* need the vehicle permit required for mainland Mexico. If you plan to take your car to mainland Mexico, you *will* need a car permit. For more on driving in Baja, see p270.

Train

Amtrak (☎ 800-872-7245; www.amtrak.com) has stations in San Diego (where you can cross to Tijuana) and Calexico (where you can cross to Mexicali). The **Pacific Southwest Railway Museum** (☎ 619-478-9937; www.pswm.org) in Campo, CA, occasionally fires up its historic trains for rides to Tecate (p123).

SEA Mainland Mexico

An alternative to car travel between mainland Mexico and Baja is the ferry service (both passenger and vehicle) across the Sea of Cortez.

Ferries sail between Santa Rosalía and Guaymas four times a week (p170), and between La Paz and Topolobampo (near Los Mochis), and La Paz and Mazatlán daily (p199).

USA

Both **Carnival Cruises** (www.carnival.com) and **Royal Caribbean** (www.royalcaribbean.com) offer two-, three- and four-night luxury cruises from Long Beach, CA, to Ensenada. Seven- and eight-day cruises with Royal Caribbean continue to mainland Mexican ports.

If you know something about boats and sailing, try looking for a crew position on one of the many boats that sail south from Southern California. Marinas at Dana Point, Newport Beach, Belmont Shores and Marina del Rey are all good places to ask.

From October through February, sailboats converge on San Diego to make repairs and purchases, and to change crews. A good way to get your name out to skippers seeking crew is to send a three-by-five card, for posting on the bulletin board, to **Downwind Marine** (☎ 619-224-2733; www.downwindmarine.com; 2804 Canon St, San Diego, CA 92106), a nautical chandler geared toward cruising.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Subsidiaries of Aeroméxico and Mexicana, as well as smaller airlines, have direct flights within Baja California.

From Tijuana, Aero California flies daily to/from La Paz (US\$110 one way, 2½ hours). You can also fly between Loreto and La Paz (US\$65 one way, 45 minutes) on Aerolitoral. The small airline **Aereo Servicio Guerrero** (www.aereoserviciosguerrero.com.mx) flies between Guerrero Negro, Isla Cedros and Ensenada.

For information on flights between Baja and mainland Mexico, see p267.

BICYCLE

Cycling is an increasingly popular way to tour Baja. If you are bringing your own bicycle to Baja California, fill your repair kit with every imaginable spare part.

Cyclists should be in top physical shape, have excellent equipment and be prepared to handle their own repairs. Small towns and villages often have bicycle mechanics, but they may lack parts.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

FLYING & CLIMATE CHANGE

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

CARBON OFFSET SCHEMES

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travelers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

Many cyclists ride the entire length of the peninsula, but such a trip requires a tent, sleeping bag, flashlight (torch), tools, spare tubes and tires, food, several water jugs, a first-aid kit and other supplies.

Road bikes are suitable for paved roads like the Transpeninsular, but potholes are numerous and highway shoulders are very steep and narrow; even though most Mexican drivers are courteous to cyclists, there are likely to be anxious moments when an 18-wheeler blows by at 70mph (112km/h).

On the gravel or dirt roads that crisscross much of the peninsula, a *todo terreno* (mountain bike) is a much better choice, but even then thorns are a major hazard to bicycle tires. Tube sealant, tire liners and patch kits are imperative.

Bicycles can travel by air, but regulations change constantly. For example, at the time of research Mexicana charged US\$75 each way and Continental charged US\$95.

Places to rent bikes in Baja are rare, except in the tourist resorts. Purchasing a quality bike in Baja is difficult and costly.

BOAT

Aside from ferries running across the Sea of Cortez to the mainland, boat travel in Baja is usually recreational. Fishing trips, snorkeling and diving excursions, and sunset cruises

(such as those in Cabo San Lucas, p243) are all boat based.

Many people driving to Baja bring kayaks to paddle around islands in the Sea of Cortez and bays along the peninsular. For more on kayaking, see p48.

BUS

Air-conditioned buses operate daily between towns all along the Baja peninsula. Most have onboard toilets (bring your own toilet paper) and amenities such as videos, drinks and snacks are common on long-distance carriers. Some companies offer *primera clase* (first class) services, which are more comfortable, faster and only slightly more expensive: Norte de Sonora's version is its Elite buses; ABC's first class buses are called ABC Plus. *Ejecutivo* (executive) is another variation on first class.

Traveling from top to bottom of the peninsula takes 24 to 27 hours (with a change in La Paz), as buses stop in almost every town to drop off and pick up passengers. A ticket from Tijuana to Cabo San Lucas costs about US\$130; Tijuana to Loreto will set you back about US\$100, and Tijuana to San Quintín about US\$25.

Baja's main long-distance bus companies are **Autotransportes de Baja California** (ABC; www.abc.com.mx) and, in the south, its subsidiary

Cataviña	1225 / 761					
Ensenada	1596 / 991	369 / 229				
Guerrero Negro	989 / 614	237 / 147	607 / 377			
La Paz	221 / 137	1005 / 624	1373 / 853	766 / 476		
Loreto	573 / 355	652 / 405	1022 / 635	415 / 258	351 / 218	
Tijuana	1711 / 1061	481 / 299	110 / 68	720 / 447	1486 / 923	1135 / 705
	Cabo San Lucas	Cataviña	Ensenada	Guerrero Negro	La Paz	Loreto

Subur Baja (www.abc.com.mx). Norte de Sonora operates principally in the north (and between Baja and the mainland state of Sonora), and **Autotransportes Aguila** (☎ in La Paz 612-122-2157) operates principally in the south.

For fares and details, see the Getting There & Away entries in the respective city sections. If a town is on the Transpeninsular, assume it has bus service to anywhere else on the Transpeninsular (though you may have to transfer if you're going a long way).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Car travel is generally more convenient than bus travel and is often the only way to reach isolated towns, villages, mountains and beaches, but it is more expensive due to fuel prices.

Bringing Your Own Vehicle

Driving across the border into Baja California is about as complex as navigating a fast food drive-thru. You need to stop only if you need a tourist permit (p264). The tough part begins as soon as you cross the border and it's time to start dodging taxis and spotting street signs on your quest for the highway or a hotel. But even that is fairly straightforward if you have a co-pilot plotting your route on the map. Once you're on the Transpeninsular or another highway, it's generally smooth sailing.

The auto-insurance websites listed under Insurance (right) are excellent resources for information on driving in Mexico.

Driver's Licenses

To drive in Baja you need a valid US or Canadian driver's license or an International Driving Permit. Always have your registration papers. If you're from a country other than the USA or Canada, bring your national license as well as your International Driving Permit.

Fuel & Spare Parts

All *gasolina* (gasoline) and diesel fuel in Mexico is sold by the government-owned Pemex (Petróleos Mexicanos) at gas stations all along the Transpeninsular; in some towns and at remote junctions private individuals sell fuel out of drums, usually at a considerable markup. Almost all gas stations accept only cash.

All gasoline is *sin plomo* (unleaded) and comes in both Magna Sin (87 octane), equivalent to US regular unleaded, and Premium (92 octane), equivalent to US super unleaded. *Diesel sin* (diesel fuel) is also widely available and has less sulfur than in years past. If diesel drivers change their oil and filter about every 3500km, they should have no problems.

In central Baja it's a good idea to top up your tank at *every* gas station you pass – the next one might be out of fuel. Carrying at least a 5-gallon (23L) spare can will also keep you out of trouble if you're planning on doing any off-road traveling.

Insurance

Mexican law recognizes only Mexican car insurance, so a US or Canadian policy won't help. Driving in Mexico without Mexican

insurance would be extremely foolish. At the very minimum, you should get liability insurance, which is often all you *can* get for cars older than 1991. We recommend full coverage (collision, liability, road-side assistance, fire, theft, glass, medical and legal). However, to get full coverage on a vehicle, that vehicle must have full coverage at home.

Insurance offices are at and before every Baja border crossing; some are open 24 hours a day. Rates are government controlled and thus fairly standard on both sides of the border. Most major US insurance companies and automobile clubs also can arrange coverage.

Prices depend on the age and make of your vehicle and the length of the insurance policy. For example, full coverage for a car valued at US\$15,000 is about US\$20/25 for liability/full-coverage for one day (additional days cost less). In general, the longer you stay, the cheaper the per-day rate. If you're planning on spending more than 30 days in Baja, a six-month or annual policy will be cheaper. A six-month policy on a US\$15,000 car costs about US\$275 to US\$320 for full coverage. Be sure to call around, as rates can vary greatly.

Following is a list of reliable companies offering Mexican insurance policies. Those with websites sell insurance online, and most sell policies over the phone.

Baja Bound (☎ 619-437-0404, 888-552-2252; www.bajabound.com; 2222 Coronado Ave, Suite H, San Diego, CA 92154)

Club Mex (International Gateway Insurance Brokers; ☎ 619-422-3028, 800-423-2646; www.clubmex.net)

Discover Baja Travel Club (☎ 800-727-2252; www.discoverbaja.com; 3089 Clairemont Dr, San Diego, CA 92117) Offers great insurance rates to members.

Instant Mexico Insurance Services (☎ 619-428-4714, 800-345-4701; www.instant-mex-auto-insur.com; 223 Via de San Ysidro, San Ysidro, CA 92173; 📞 24hr)

Mex-Insur Chula Vista (☎ 619-425-2390; 99 Bonito Rd, Chula Vista, CA 91910); San Ysidro (☎ 619-428-1121; US Interstate 5, Via de San Ysidro exit, San Ysidro, CA 92173)

Oscar Padilla Mexican Insurance Calexico (☎ 760-357-4883; 747 Imperial Av, Calexico, CA 92231); San Ysidro (☎ 800-258-8600, 619-428-4406; www.mexicaninsurance.com; 120 Willow Rd, San Ysidro, CA 92173)

Sanborn's Insurance (☎ 956-686-3601, 800-222-0158; www.sanbornsinsurance.com)

Police & Military Checkpoints

Having four rifle-toting 18-year-olds picking through your glove box is inevitably nerve wracking, but it's part of the Baja road

experience. After a few times it becomes clear that they're only doing their jobs and aren't out to hassle tourists. They're checking vehicles for drugs, weapons and illegal migrants (all largely because of pressure from the USA).

Heading south, the checkpoint soldiers usually just ask you where you're going and wave you on your way (often, you won't even be stopped). It's the northbound Transpeninsular traffic that gets the added pleasure of vehicular search, and you can bet on getting it. Always be cooperative and courteous, and, no matter what, keep a sharp eye on *everything* that's happening.

Rental

Cars can be rented in most of Baja's cities and resorts and at airports.

Renters must have a valid driver's license (US and Canadian licenses are accepted; everyone else should bring an International Driving Permit as well as their national license), passport and major credit card. The minimum age requirement is usually 25.

Always ask exactly what the *seguro* (insurance) covers – sometimes it covers only minimal liability insurance of, say, US\$200, which would put you in big trouble in the case of an accident. Most agencies offer a choice between a per-kilometer deal or *kilometraje libre* (unlimited kilometers). The latter is usually preferable if you intend to do some hard driving.

Auto rental in Mexico is expensive by US or European standards, but worthwhile if you want to visit several places in a short time. The matchbox-size Chevy Pop has replaced the VW Beetle as the cheapest car and will set you back about US\$50 per day in places like Los Cabos. Elsewhere, bank on paying around US\$60 to US\$70 per day, all included.

Sometimes, booking a car from home (especially when buying your plane tickets) will get you a better deal. Following are the major firms operating in Mexico with their Mexico toll-free telephone numbers (when they exist):

Alamo (☎ 800-849-8001; www.alamo.com)

Avis (☎ 800-288-8888; www.avis.com)

Budget (☎ 800-700-1700; www.budgetbaja.com, www.drivebudget.com)

Dollar (www.dollar.com)

Europcar (☎ 800-201-2084; www.europcar.com)

Hertz (☎ 800-654-3030; www.hertz.com)

Thrifty (☎ 800-021-2277; www.thrifty.com)

LA MORDIDA

Officially no policeman is authorized to accept money, and all traffic fines should be paid at the police station or by mail. Historically, however, Mexico has been notorious for *la mordida* (literally 'the bite,' or bribe). The most frequent opportunity for *la mordida* is a traffic violation, such as speeding or running a stop sign. Realists do not expect *la mordida* to disappear from Mexican life any time soon – especially when cops are paid so little – but petty harassment of tourists for minor matters has greatly declined.

If you get pulled over, generally you're expected to pay up on the spot. You can either pay the bribe and get on with your day (undoubtedly the easiest and cheapest option), or you can argue the validity of the citation. Some people simply pretend not to understand, let alone speak, any Spanish in the hopes that the officers become exasperated enough to just let them go. Insisting on going to the police station to pay the fine can also be a deterrent, especially if you've been pulled over for no good reason.

If you are willing to pay the bribe, remember that it is illegal, and the situation should be approached with the utmost tact. One strategy is to tell officers that, if they forgive you, you will be extremely grateful (*'Si me perdona, se lo podría agradecer'*). Perhaps the best approach is to simply ask if it's possible to pay the fine on the spot (*¿Sería posible pagar la multa ahora?*).

Road Conditions

The Transpeninsular is paved top to bottom, with occasional washouts in the southern reaches that are usually passable for all cars. The toll portion (México 1D) of the Transpeninsular between Tijuana and Ensenada is the best-maintained highway in Baja – four lanes wide, smooth and fast, with spectacular coastal views.

In towns and cities, beware of *alto* (stop) signs, potholes and *topes* (speed bumps). Wide one-way streets in Tijuana, for example, are infamous for stop signs placed on one street corner or the other, but not on both. Consequently, drivers in the far-left lane may not see a stop sign on the right corner until they are already in the intersection. Driving slowly and carefully should eliminate the danger of overlooking stop signs.

OFF-HIGHWAY DRIVING

Thousands of miles of rough dirt roads and tracks crisscross Baja's backcountry. Many unpaved roads are graded and are passable even for ordinary passenger vehicles, but others require a 4WD with high clearance. Sharp stones and other hazards can shred even heavy-duty tires, forcing wise drivers to travel at much slower speeds than on paved roads. In such circumstances, Mexican drivers regularly deflate their tires to as little as 20lbs per square inch in order to avoid punctures and smooth out the rough surfaces. This obviously reduces fuel efficiency, but gas is cheaper than a set of new tires.

Make sure your vehicle is in excellent condition; some areas are so isolated that getting stuck can be dangerous. Heat, drought, rain, flash floods and snakes are among the hazards that may bedevil an unprepared driver. Essentials for excursions off paved highways include water, extra fuel, a first-aid kit, flashlight, tools, flares, matches and a disposable lighter, and sleeping bags.

One way to avoid trouble is by checking conditions with the locals before setting out. Roads often deteriorate quickly, especially after rains, and what was an easy, if bumpy, ride last week may have become impassable. If you've already headed out and find conditions questionable, turn back. Some travelers may prefer to form an informal convoy with other vehicles.

Road Hazards

The Transpeninsular presents many tricky turns – so to speak – but it's a wonderful road trip if you keep a few things in mind.

First, most of the highway is only the width of a country road, which provides little margin for error. Potholes can be real axle busters, and animals – including burros and cows – can pop up around any corner. Large debris is also a frequent menace, and many drivers will often signal this problem ahead of you by waving their hands downward, which means you should slow down.

When you approach a large, slow-moving truck from behind, the driver will frequently throw on the left-turn signal, indicating that

it's safe for you to pass. Just remember that you're relying on someone else's judgment; when you accelerate to pass the driver, make sure they're not signaling to turn left!

When you approach towns, always watch for speed bumps. They're bound to be there, and if you hit one at speed you're in for a real – and potentially dangerous – jolt.

Night on the roads of Baja is like the witching hour – sinister and with amplified mayhem. Either don't drive at all or do so like a nun with a load of school children.

Road Rules

Mexicans drive on the right side of the road (except when they're passing you from behind, which will be often). Though few people heed it, the speed limit on the Transpeninsular is 80km/h (50mph). Stop signs in towns mean the same thing that they do around the world but Mexicans seem to follow the 'no cop, no stop' rule, making the foreign driver feel like a fool when coming to a complete stop.

Service

The Mexican tourism ministry, Secture, maintains a network of **Ángeles Verdes** (Green Angels; ☎ 24hr toll-free hotline 800-903-9200; Tijuana ☎ 664-624-3479; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri; La Paz ☎ 612-124-1668; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), bilingual mechanics in green uniforms and green trucks who patrol major stretches of highway during daylight hours looking for motorists in trouble. They make minor repairs, replace small parts, provide fuel and oil, and arrange towing and other assistance by radio if necessary. Service is free; parts, gasoline and oil are provided at cost. Patrols are most prevalent on the northernmost and southernmost stretches of the highway.

Most serious mechanical problems can be fixed efficiently and inexpensively by mechanics in Baja's towns and cities if the parts are available. On the other hand, don't expect miracles if your problems are linked to state-of-the-art computerized systems or other features foreign to Mexican mechanics. Volkswagens (without fuel-injection engines),

Fords and Toyotas are the easiest to have repaired in Baja because they're the most popular makes.

Because Baja's notoriously bad roads take a heavy toll on tires, *llanteras* (tire-repair shops) are ubiquitous, even in many out-of-the-way spots.

HITCHHIKING

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe anywhere. Travelers who decide to hitchhike should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitchhike will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go. People seldom hitch in Baja, but if you're trying to get anywhere off the Transpeninsular (especially in the south), you might decide to thumb it.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Bus

Generally known as *camiones*, local buses are the cheapest way to get around cities and to nearby villages. In Baja California, they exist in Tijuana, Ensenada, San Quintín, Mexicali, La Paz and Los Cabos. They run everywhere, frequently, and are cheap (about US\$0.50 to US\$0.75 within town). Most buses are surprisingly modern, clean and uncrowded.

Taxi

Every large town and city in Baja California has taxi services. Most taxis are private, with government-regulated fares, though haggling over fares is still the rule. Tijuana's *taxis libres* (p85) are one of the few taxi services that use *taxímetros* (taxi meters), and they invariably lead to savings.

Route taxis are an efficient and inexpensive way to get around town. They are station wagons or minivans that operate along designated routes, just like city buses, only slightly more expensive and much faster. You can board them at their designated route terminus or after flagging them down. The driver will stop wherever you want to get off.

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