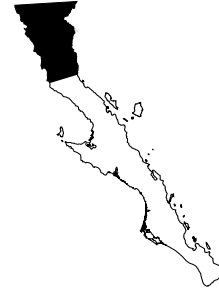


Northern Baja



Northern Baja is a region in flux. It's playing stage to a multifaceted economic drama, featuring everything from the multimillion-dollar drug trade plaguing Tijuana to the *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) along the border, to the real estate bonanza ravaging both sides of the peninsula. Amid this frenzy and the media mayhem surrounding it, vacationers make their way south to frolic in natural treasures. Epic surf riddles the Pacific Coast, fabulous sea kayaking graces both coasts, and two mountainous national parks offer hiking and climbing.

For lovers of urbanity, few cities in the world can match the insanity of Tijuana, where art and culture seem bound by rules only the insane could dream up and only the inquisitive can appreciate. The sun-baked, modern streets of Mexicali turn off most tourists, but there's a fascinating, sophisticated (and, in places, wildly seedy) side to the city well worth exploring. The traditional Mexican town of Tecate and amiable Ensenada offer great urban alternatives for those who like pedestrian-friendly – and visually softer – cities.

In between the urban and the empty are rural treats like the Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico's wine region, where you can taste wines in a setting resembling a Napa Valley of decades past. Immigrants from southern Mexico have given areas like San Quintín an entirely different feel, and you can hear Mixtec and Zapotec languages alongside Spanish on local radio stations. The landscape of northern Baja – geographically and culturally – is incredibly diverse. It just takes a car (or bus fare) and the willingness to pick through the development to appreciate it. And it's well worth it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tap the **Tijuana art scene** (p80) at the independent venues blossoming in Baja's biggest city
- Ditch the crowds, shack up in a seaside bungalow and experience the village life at isolated **La Bocana** and **Puerto Santo Tomás** (p113)
- Soak beneath the desert stars in the thermal baths of **Cañón de Guadalupe** (p136)
- Dowse your taste buds in Mexico's finest wines on a day trip through the **Valle de Guadalupe** (p109), the country's premier wine region
- Camp, hike and take in the boulder-studded lakeside views of Laguna Hanson in **Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857** (p111)



■ TIJUANA JANUARY AVERAGE HIGH: 66°F/19°C

■ WATER TEMP OFF ENSENADA: 55-64°F/13-18°C

TIJUANA

☎ 664 / pop 1,410,700

No one gets out of Tijuana unmoved. Even folks who dash through on their push for the coast experience the heart-pounding adrenaline rush of driving through the city unscathed. And everyone who's been here, no matter how long they stay, has an opinion about the place.

Baja's biggest city (and Mexico's sixth) is a fascinating metropolis, offering a sort of bleak but exciting peek into an unknown future. Migrant workers from throughout Mexico wait to cross into the US or get jobs in the city's Orwellian *maquiladoras*. In dramatic displays of violence, drug cartels gun down cops in broad daylight or kidnap wealthy businessmen for multidigit ransoms. The entertainment strip of La Revo is a visual and aural barrage of neon lights, blaring sound systems, strolling families, shady characters beckoning passersby into darkened strip clubs and day-tripping gringos partying in the bars beneath whistles and screams. With instruments in hand, roaming musicians wander the brothels of the Zona Norte and play to the tourists beneath the city's famous archway. The mayor, they say, keeps a tiger.

The city is also bursting with exquisite restaurants and becoming known for its culinary innovation. Food writers have even put a label on it: Baja Med. The independent arts and music scenes are flourishing in an organic, grass-roots way that seems uniquely Tijuana. Not everyone likes it, but those who do take the good with the bad. And they know that this unique mix is the allure of Tijuana.

HISTORY The Early Years

In colonial times the area of Tijuana fell under the jurisdiction of Misión San Diego, Alta California, until the secularization of the missions in 1832. At the end of the Mexican-American War (1848), the newly relocated international border turned this modest *rancho* (rural settlement) into a port of entry overnight, though it remained a backwater even after the government opened a formal customs depot in 1874.

In 1889 the *rancho* was subdivided and Pueblo Zaragoza (Tijuana's official name until 1929) was created, but the population grew

very slowly to only 242 in 1900 and less than 1000 at the end of WWI. The fledgling city, however, drew upscale tourists from north of the border to facilities like the US-owned Tijuana Hot Springs Hotel and soon became a center for gambling, greyhound racing, boxing matches and cockfights. Bars and bordellos further 'diversified' the local economy.

In 1911 the forces of anarchist leader Ricardo Flores Magón's Partido Liberal (Liberal Party) tried to use Baja California as a territorial foothold during the Mexican Revolution. After holding the town for six weeks, however, the indecisive rebels fled federal reinforcements. Magón was later tried for espionage in the USA and convicted on flimsy evidence.

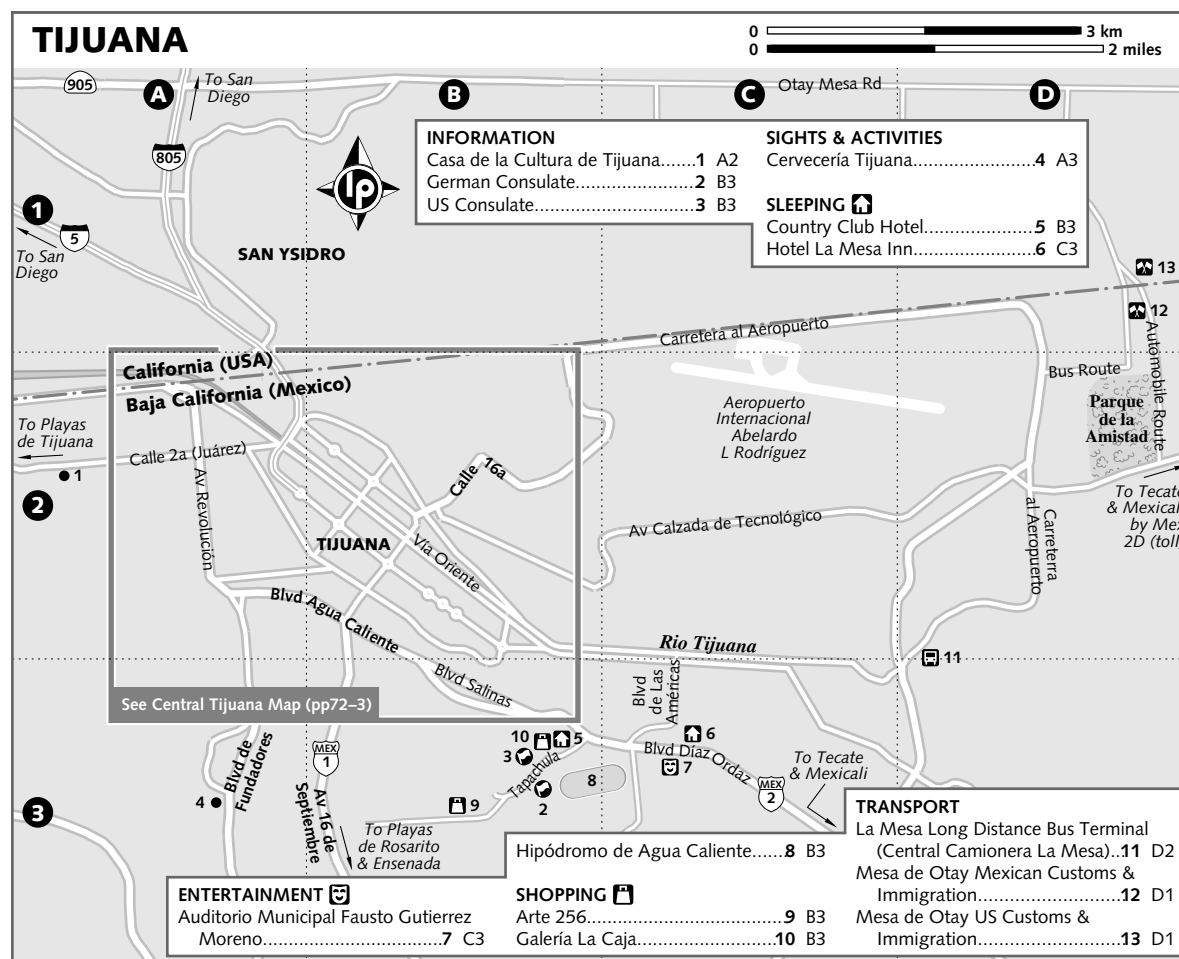
Prohibition & Growth

After 1915, despite restrictive US wartime measures, Tijuana's tourist industry recovered, then positively flourished during US Prohibition, when thirsty Americans flocked to Tijuana for alcohol, gambling and sex. During these years the municipal administration paved streets, improved the water system, built schools and attracted industries like breweries, distilleries and even an aircraft factory.

After Prohibition, President Lázaro Cárdenas outlawed casinos and prostitution, but the big blow to Tijuana's economy came with the Great Depression of the 1930s. Still, as bankrupt US-owned businesses reverted to Mexican control and northern Baja became a customs-free zone, jobless Mexicans returning from the US remained in Tijuana rather than going back to their hometowns, doubling the city's population (to about 16,500) by 1940.

During WWII, with the US Army absorbing nearly all able-bodied American men, the US and Mexican governments established the *bracero* (guest worker) program, allowing Mexican workers north of the border to alleviate serious labor shortages. This program, lasting until 1964, led to major growth in border-area commerce, and by 1960 Tijuana's population had grown tenfold to more than 180,000.

With each succeeding decade, the city's population has more or less doubled. Uncontrolled growth has brought serious social and environmental problems, and municipal administrations find themselves unable to meet demand for adequate housing, potable water and public health services for many parts of the city.



Tijuana Today

Tijuana has never completely overcome its image as a paradise for sinners. During and immediately after WWII, the city experienced probably its seamiest era as the infamous Avenida Revolución (La Revo) attracted US servicemen from nearby San Diego. In recent years, it has cleaned up its act considerably, though the Zona Norte at the northern end of Av Revolución retains some of the style (and substance) of the postwar era.

Most of La Revo, though, now appeals to a younger crowd of US university students and their cohorts, who take advantage of Mexico's permissive drinking laws (the legal drinking age is 18 as opposed to 21 in the US) to party until dawn. Families also feel more comfortable today strolling the city's streets and stores, particularly along La Revo, than they did in former times. In 2006 community groups began pushing for a 2am last-call policy.

Tijuana's biggest struggle today is organized crime. In 2006 the city was plagued by a series of highly publicized crimes including the beheading of three police officers, the murder of a police chief and his brother,

and countless kidnappings. Over 300 people were killed in gang-related murders in 2006 alone, which prompted President Calderón to send 3300 soldiers and federal officers to the city in early 2007. Tourists have been entirely unaffected, but the high-profile killings have severely blemished a reputation the city has been trying to clean up for years.

ORIENTATION

Tijuana parallels the US border for about 19km (12 miles). Downtown Tijuana is a 15-minute walk southwest of the San Ysidro border crossing and features a regular grid pattern of north-south *avenidas* (avenues) and east-west *calles* (streets). Av Revolución, five blocks to the east, is the city's main tourist-oriented artery; the parallel Av Constitución features shops and other businesses catering more to locals.

Most streets in central Tijuana have numbers – for example, Calle 2a (meaning Second St) or Calle 7a (Seventh St) – that are used more frequently than their names (in this case, Juárez or Galeana). This section uses the numbering system but includes the

street name if there is any ambiguity. The map includes both the numbers and the names because people and businesses still use one or the other, or both.

East of downtown, the Zona Río, Tijuana's modern commercial center, flanks the Río Tijuana. Paseo de los Héroes, Via Poniente and Blvd Sánchez Taboada, the principal streets in this part of town, all parallel the river. Northeast of here, on a broad hilltop, is the relatively new sector of Mesa de Otay, home to another border crossing, the airport, *maquiladoras*, residential neighborhoods and shopping areas.

Traffic along Paseo de los Héroes is regulated by several *glorietas* (traffic circles), each anchored by huge monuments. Going west to east (see Map pp72–3), they are the Monumento de la Raza, nicknamed 'Scissors' for its shape; the monument to Cuauhtémoc, the Aztec emperor; the monument to Abraham Lincoln; and the monument to General Ignacio Zaragoza, a war hero during the French invasion of 1862.

Other important *glorietas* are located north of here along Paseo de Tijuana (see Map pp72–3); the monument to Padre Miguel Hidalgo is dedicated to this Mexican independence martyr, while the monument to Diana features this goddess of hunting in Roman mythology.

West of downtown lie both spiffy suburbs and hillside shantytowns, the latter known as *asentamientos irregulares* (literally 'irregular settlements'). Formally, all Tijuana neighborhoods are known as *colonias* (or sometimes as *fraccionamientos*), and addresses are much easier to locate if one knows the name of the *colonia*.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Librería El Día (Map pp72-3; ☎ 684-0908; Blvd Sánchez Taboada 10050, Zona Río) Loads of books on Mexican history and culture, all in Spanish. Good place to pick up independent newspapers.

Libros y Arte (Map pp72-3; www.librosyarte.com.mx; Paseo de los Héroes at Av Independencia) Loads of arts and literature books, plus artsy tomes on Tijuana. Inside Cecut (p74).

Cultural Centers

The *official* heart of Tijuana's cultural pulse is the excellent **Centro Cultural Tijuana (Cecut)** (see p74). In recent years, Tijuana has also

given rise to a unique form of independent cultural center – the *café cultural* – which is the best way for visitors to tap into a much more down-to-earth art scene. For more on these, see the Entertainment section (p80).

Housed in an imposing neoclassical brick building (the former Escuela Alvaro Obregón, built in 1929), the **Casa de la Cultura de Tijuana** (Map p69; ☎ 687-2604; Calle Lisboa 5) presents lectures, art exhibitions, film festivals and concerts. The center is located about 1.6km (1 mile) west of Av Revolución. Take any blue-and-white taxi (marked 'Colonia Altamira') westbound from Calle 3a (Carrillo Puerto) or walk up Calle 4a (Díaz Mirón); instead of the busy street, go up the hillside staircase for fine city views.

Emergency & Medical Services

Central police station (Map pp72-3; ☎ 060; Av Constitución 1616)

Cruz Roja (Red Cross; ☎ 066) Call for ambulance.

Fire station (Map pp72-3; ☎ 068, 066; Av Constitución at Calle 8a/Hidalgo)

Hospital General (Map pp72-3; ☎ 684-0078/79/80, 684-0922; Av Padre Kino)

Tourist assistance number (☎ 078) Call this state government toll-free number if you are the victim of a crime.

Internet Access

Café Internet Blitz (Map pp72-3; Av Constitución near Calle 5a; per hr US\$1.50)

Worldnet (Map pp72-3; Calle 2a 8174; per hr US\$1; ☎ 24hr)

Internet Resources

The following websites – all in English – publish up-to-date information on Tijuana:

Baja Life Online (www.bajalife.com/tijuana) Fairly boring commercial site with comprehensive listings.

Cotuco Official Tourist Guide (www.tijuanaonline.org) Official site of the Tijuana Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Tijuana Tourism Board (www.seetijuana.com) Tijuana's official tourism site features comprehensive information on hotels, restaurant, sightseeing, events and services.

Tijuana.com (www.tijuana.com) Decent commercial site with lots of listings and some reviews.

Media

Tap Tijuana's cultural side by picking up one of these independent newspapers; Librería El Día (left), is the best place to find them.

Arte de Vivir Monthly gay, lesbian, bi and transgendered focused newspaper with cultural information for all open-minded folks.

Bitácora (www.bitacoracultural.com) Highly regarded cultural paper with literature, music and entertainment listings. Free every Wednesday.

Cicuta Highly respected left-leaning paper (US\$1) covering local and national issues.

Tijuana Metro Monthly paper focused on arts, culture and entertainment.

Money

Everyone accepts (even prefers) US dollars. Numerous *casas de cambio* (money exchange houses) will change money and traveler's checks at almost any hour. Banks, though slower and more bureaucratic, offer slightly better rates; most also have ATMs. Beware of *cambios* (currency exchange offices) on the US side, some of which advertise 'no commission' on exchanges of pesos for US dollars but charge up to 8% for converting dollars into pesos. Change money on the Mexican side instead. The ATM inside Caliente (p81) is the only ATM in the center of town that dispenses US dollars.

Post

Post office (Map pp72-3; cnr Av Negrete & Calle 11a/Calles)

Telephone

Tijuana has many Telnor public telephones and long-distance offices.

Tourist Information

Tijuana has tourist offices at the border, downtown and in the Zona Río.

Cotuco head office (Map pp72-3; ☎ 684-0537; www.tijuanaonline.org; Paseo de los Héroes 9365, Ste 201, Zona Río; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Some brochures, fewer answers.

Cotuco tourist information (Map pp72-3; ☎ 683-1405; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Immediately south of the border, near the yellow cabs.

Cotuco tourist information kiosk (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-2210; Av Revolución btwn Calles 3a & 4a; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Thu, 10am-7pm Fri-Sun) Best and most convenient downtown stop for tourist information. Lots of brochures, maps and good advice. English spoken.

Secture (Secretaría de Turismo del Estado; Map pp72-3; ☎ 973-0424/30; 2nd fl, Calle de la Juventud 8800-2523; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) State tourist office; in Plaza Viva Tijuana, on left as entering from USA. Helpful English-speaking staff and brochures.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Ain't no lie: the air quality in Tijuana on any given day will knock a buzzard off a shit wagon. Sleep well away from main traffic thorough-

fares, and be aware that your migraine isn't solely due to last night's extra margarita.

Coyotes and *polleros* (smugglers) and *pollos* (their clients, undocumented border-crossers) congregate along the Río Tijuana west of the San Ysidro border crossing. After dark, avoid this area and also Colonia Libertad, east of the crossing.

The Zona Norte, Tijuana's seedy red-light district west of Av Revolución and north of Calle 1a (Artículo 123), is not recommended for foreigners lacking street savvy, at least after dark. City officials prefer not to dwell on its continued existence, but the area is still of sufficient economic importance such that authorities cannot, or will not, eradicate it. Neon-lit Calle Coahuila is especially notorious for its street prostitution and hard-core clubs.

If you are the victim of a crime, you can call the state government's toll-free **tourist assistance number** (☎ 078), or contact Secture tourist information office.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

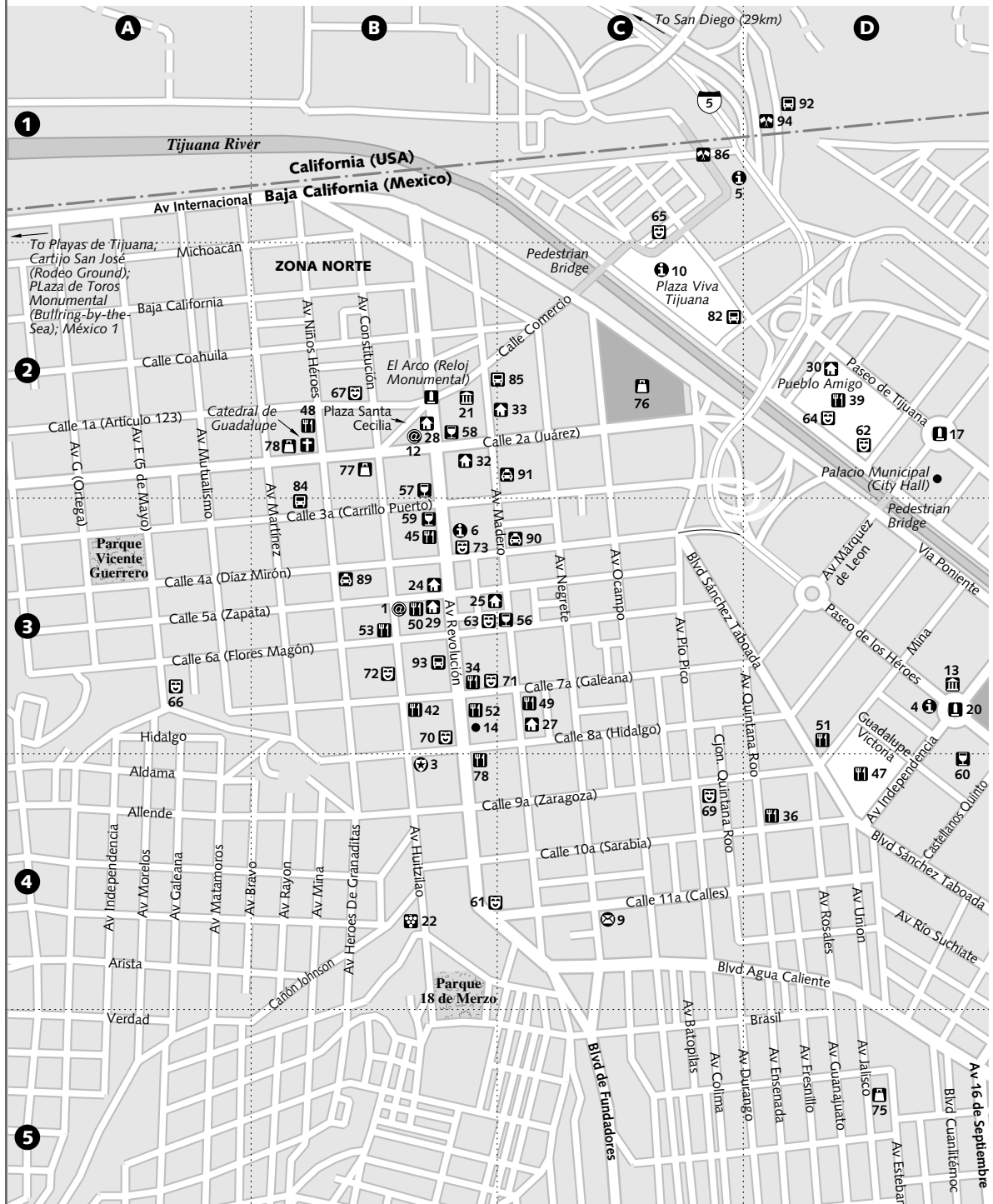
Most sights are in – or within walking distance of – downtown Tijuana. Outside of downtown, the city's broad avenues are oriented for cars rather than pedestrians, but sidewalks make most of the city manageable for those who enjoy exploring afoot, regardless of their surroundings.

La Revo & Around

Virtually every visitor to Tijuana has to experience at least a brief stroll along raucous **Av Revolución**, also known as 'La Revo,' between Calle 1a (Artículo 123) and Calle 8a (Hidalgo). It's a mishmash of nightclubs, bellowing hawkers outside seedy strip bars, brash taxi drivers, tacky souvenir stores, street photographers with zebra-striped burros, discount liquor stores and restaurants. If you're walking north to south but find the sensory assault from high-tech sound systems too overwhelming to return the same way, try the more conventional shopping street of **Av Constitución**, paralleling La Revo one block west. It has a far more local flare.

Oddly baroque in style, the striking **Frontón Palacio Jai Alai** (Map pp72-3; Av Revolución near Calle 7a) is a Tijuana landmark fronting nearly the entire block of Av Revolución between Calle 7a (Galeana) and Calle 8a (Hidalgo). Construction of the building began in 1926, but it wasn't completed until 1947.

CENTRAL TIJUANA



INFORMATION

- Banjerico.....(see 86)
- Café Internet Blitz.....1 B3
- Canadian Consulate.....2 F5
- Central Police Station.....3 B4
- Cotuco Head Office.....4 D3
- Cotuco Tourist Information.....5 C1
- Cotuco Tourist Information Kiosk.....6 B3
- Fire Station.....(see 3)
- Hospital General.....7 F4
- Librería El Día.....8 E4
- Libros y Arte.....(see 13)
- Post Office.....9 C4
- Secure.....10 C2
- UK Consulate.....11 G6
- Worldnet.....12 B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

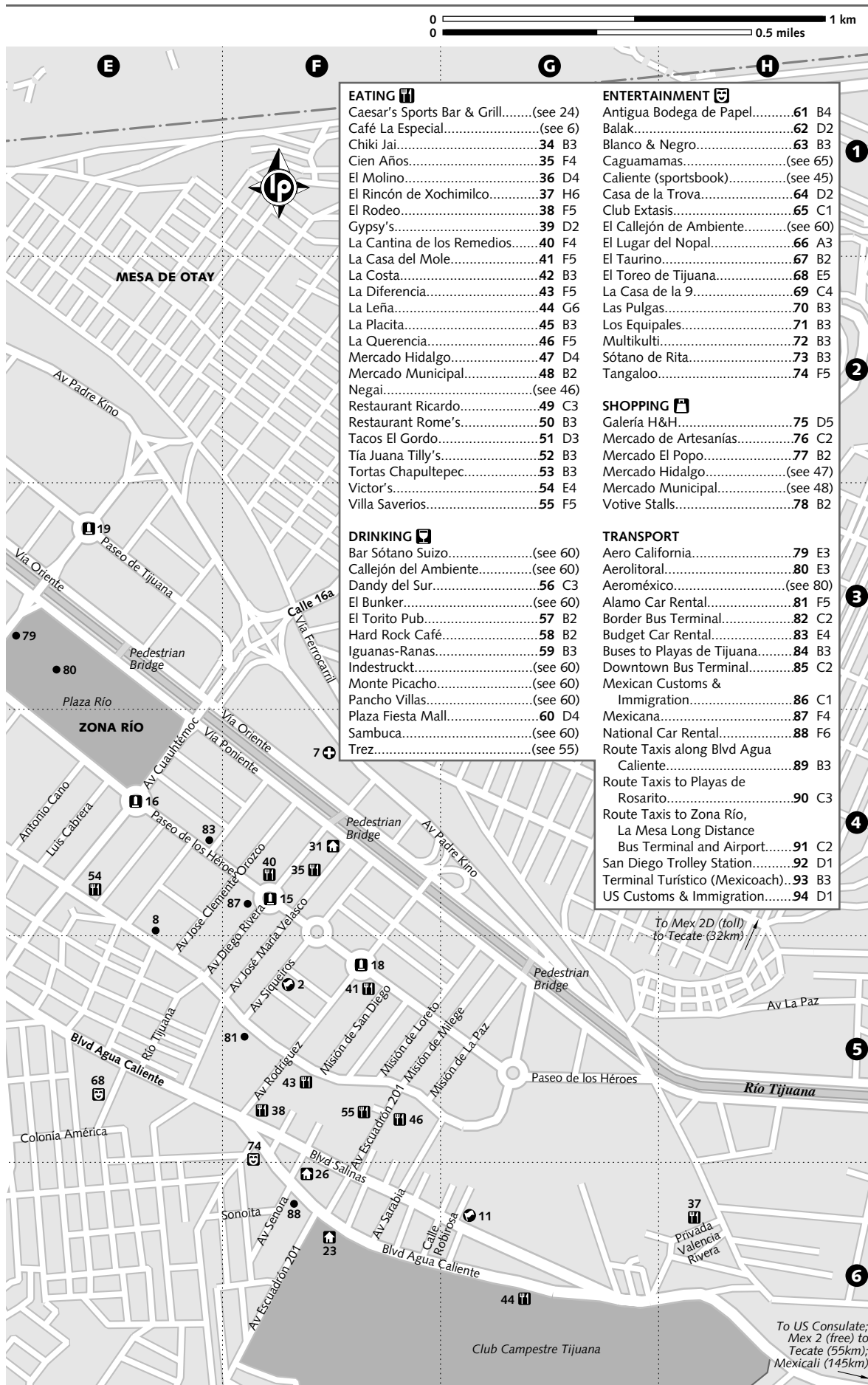
- Centro Cultural Tijuana (Cecut).....13 D3
- Frontón Palacio Jai Alai.....14 B3
- Imax Movie Theater.....(see 13)
- Jardín Caracol.....(see 13)
- Monument to Abraham Lincoln.....15 F4
- Monument to Cuahtémoc.....16 E4
- Monument to Diana (the Huntress).....17 D2
- Monument to General Ignacio Zaragoza.....18 F5
- Monument to Padre Miguel Hidalgo.....19 E3
- Monumento de la Raza.....20 D3
- Museo de Cera (Wax Museum).....21 B2
- Museo de las Californias.....(see 13)

- Vinicola LA Cetto.....22 B4

SLEEPING

- Grand Hotel Tijuana.....23 F6
- Hotel Caesar.....24 B3
- Hotel Catalina.....25 B3
- Hotel El Conquistador.....26 F6
- Hotel La Villa de Zaragoza.....27 C3
- Hotel Lafayette.....(see 6)
- Hotel Nelson.....28 B2
- Hotel París.....29 B3
- Hotel Pueblo Amigo.....30 D2
- Hotel Real del Río.....31 F4
- Hotel Río Rita.....(see 73)
- Hotel St Francis.....32 B2
- Hotel San Nicolas.....33 C2

To Playas de Rosarito (27km); Ensenada (110km)



To US Consulate;
 Mex 2 (free) to
 Tecate (55km);
 Mexicali (145km)

For decades it hosted the fast-moving ball game of jai alai – a sort of a hybrid between squash and tennis, originating in Spain’s Basque Country. Unfortunately, a strike by Mexico City players combined with the game’s obscurity and lack of attendance forced the owner to close down the operation. The building now hosts cultural events including music and theater performances, and you can usually get in to take a look at the courts and lobby area.

Zona Norte

Tijuana’s red-light district, aka the Zona Norte, definitely doesn’t appear in any tourist brochures, and you’ll rarely find a Tijuana denizen who will tell you to see it. But if you’re fond of Bukowski-esque urban experiences, you’ll find the Zona Norte – where prostitutes, drunks and frightening-looking characters from both sides of the border share the sidewalk with neighborhood working-class families and wandering musicians – well worth a stroll. Bars are plenty, and most wreak of spilt liquor, cigarettes and cheap perfume, and double as strip joints. The Zona Norte (Map pp72–3) lies within the blocks west of Av Revolución and north of Calle 1a. Skip it if you dislike depravity.

Centro Cultural Tijuana (Cecut)

This modern **cultural center** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 687-4973, 687-9693; www.cecut.gob.mx; Paseo de los Héroes at Av Independencia) goes a long way toward undermining Tijuana’s reputation as a cultural wasteland and is a facility that would be the pride of any world metropolis. It’s the city’s premier showcase for highbrow events, including concerts, theater, readings, conferences, dance recitals and more. Ticket prices vary but tend to be lower than those north of the border.

The distinctive complex is fronted by a humongous cream-colored sphere locally known as La Bola (the ball) and designed by noted architects Pedro Ramirez Vasquez and Manuel Rosen Morrison. The center houses several art galleries, a well-stocked bookstore and an **imax movie theater** (adult/student US\$4/2, Tue & Wed US\$2) with a 180-degree screen.

The center also houses the **Museo de las Californias** (☎ 687-9641/42; admission US\$2; 🕒 10am–7pm Tue–Sun), which chronicles the history of Baja California from prehistoric times to the present. The exhibit kicks off with replica cave

paintings, then covers important historical milestones, including the earliest Spanish expeditions under Hernán Cortés, the mission period, the Treaty of Hidalgo, the Chinese immigration, the irrigation of the Colorado River delta and the advent of the railroad. Displays in glass cases mix with scale replicas of ships, missions, other objects and fairly realistic dioramas. All explanatory paneling is in English and Spanish, and touch-screen terminals provide additional information. It’s an excellent introduction to the peninsula and should not be missed.

The **Jardín Caracol** (🕒 10am–6pm) is a charming garden whose layout is intended to resemble a snail (hence the name) and often hosts free events and exhibits, many of them geared toward children. In summer the Voladores de Papántla (Totonac indigenous performers) can be seen here.

Vinícola LA Cetto

Mexico’s largest **winery** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-3031; www.cettowine.com; Cañón Johnson 2108) operates a Tijuana branch for tours and tastings just southwest of Av Constitución. Still operated by descendants of Italian immigrants who arrived in Baja in 1926, it produces some 50 million liters annually, about 30% of which is exported. With vineyards in the fertile Valle de Guadalupe (p109) between Tecate and Ensenada, LA Cetto produces a range of tasty red and white varietals, as well as sparkling wines, decent brandy and quality tequila. You can visit the **tasting room** (🕒 10am–2pm & 3:30–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sat) and sample four wines as part of a tour for US\$2 (US\$5 if you want to taste the reserve wines).

Cervecería Tijuana

If you’re a beer-drinker, make a pilgrimage to this **microbrewery** (Tijuana Brewery; Map p69; ☎ 638-8662; Blvd de Fundadores 2951), which opened in early 2000. Owner José González Ibarra’s vision was to make a potent brew in the tradition of pilsner beer, which originated in the Czech Republic. He imported not only all the technology from that country but also a young Czech brew master whose efforts have clearly paid off. Sold under the brand name Tijuana, this is a superior and full-bodied beer that easily measures up to some of Europe’s finest. It is best enjoyed in the atmospheric, timbered brewery pub, about 3.2km (1.5 miles) south of downtown.

Playas de Tijuana

The relatively affluent but still often ramshackle neighborhood of Playas de Tijuana (Map p67) is home to Tijuana's beaches and the city's only beachfront property. Popular with locals, the sand here tends to get crowded, especially during the summer bullfight season (the Plaza de Toros Monumental is located here; see p81). A bus marked 'Playas' runs along Calle 3a (Carrillo Puerto) from downtown and goes westward to the beaches (see Map pp72-3). If you're driving, be sure to stop for tacos at **Tacos Aaron** (Av Pedregal; ☎ 7:30am-2pm), across from the Calimax as you enter Playas from the toll road. The truck whips out some of the best, most imaginative tacos on the entire peninsula.

QUIRKY TIJUANA

Elvis is in da house! Leave any expectations at the door and you might actually enjoy a visit to Tijuana's **Museo de Cera** (Wax Museum; Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-2478; Calle 1a 8281; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 10am-6pm), strategically placed along the walking route to downtown from the border. On view are about 90 waxen figures from Mexican history, world politics and entertainment, plus the obligatory House of Horrors. Controversial displays include Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and Cuba's Fidel Castro, complemented by crowd-pleasers like former Tijuana resident Rita Hayworth, an uncanny Frida Kahlo and a really bad Elvis.

Not sure how to kick off your Friday night? Treat yourself to the spectacle of **Lucha Libre**, where two oversized masked men with names like 'The Mystic One,' 'Blue Panther' and 'Heavy Metal' throw each other about a boxing ring in a theatrical display of free-form wrestling. There's nothing quite like it. Matches begin at 8:30pm every Friday night at the **Auditorio Municipal Fausto Gutierrez Moreno** (Auditorio de Tijuana; Map p69; ☎ 250-9015; Blvd Díaz Ordaz 12421; admission US\$8-35), Tijuana's municipal auditorium. Rates depend on the match.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Every April, Tijuana hosts the **International Dance Festival** at Cecut (opposite) with performances by regional and international troupes.

The **Feria de Tijuana** is the city's annual fair with rides, food, big-name Mexican entertainment and cockfights. It takes place from mid-August to mid-September at the Agua Caliente racetrack.

Food-related festivals include the **Annual Mexican Food Fair**, held around September 10 at the Pueblo Amigo mall, and the **World's Biggest Caesar Salad Festival**, on Av Revolución in late October. The **International Craft Beer Festival** (www.tjbeerfest.com; admission US\$5) is a newcomer to the Tijuana festival scene; 2007 was the third year that breweries from Mexico, the US and Germany gathered at the Agua Caliente racetrack.

The nationwide celebrations of **Día de la Independencia** and **Día de los Muertos** (p258) are particularly colorful in Tijuana.

SLEEPING

Tijuana has a wealth of accommodations in all categories, from downright seedy to luxurious. The cheapest and most convenient for exploring downtown Tijuana are near Av Revolución, while the priciest (and best) are in the Zona Río and along Blvd Agua Caliente.

Budget

Most of Tijuana's cheapest accommodations are in the Zona Norte, but because many places there double as bordellos or safe houses for migrants, none are recommended.

Our pick **Hotel St Francis** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-4903, 685-6462; Calle 2a 8279; r with shared/private bath US\$23/26) When it was built in 1920, the St Francis was visible from the border. It was Tijuana's first two-story hotel. Today, with its fresh coat of paint, creaky floors, big wooden staircase, brightly lit rooms, central location and marvelously old-fashioned feel, it makes for an excellent budget choice. Rooms upstairs have carpet and private bath, while those downstairs have wood floors and shared baths. Unfortunately, there's no parking.

Hotel Lafayette (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-3940; Av Revolución 325; r US\$23-26) Spick-and-span Hotel Lafayette offers plain rooms with TV, phone and bath. It's a safe, reliable budget place, though on our visit the staff was about as friendly as a Tijuana dance club doorman.

Hotel Catalina (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-9748; Calle 5a 2039; r with/without TV US\$30/25) One of the best budget options downtown, this family-run hotel tolerates zero ruffraff, stressing security and cleanliness. Rooms are tiled and tidy, and some have TV. You can even order room service from the cafeteria below. Extra persons (above two) are charged US\$5 each.

Hotel San Nicolas (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-0418; Av Madero 768; r US\$30; Ⓟ) This is the closest acceptable

place to the Zona Norte, with a slightly artsy vibe and Frida Kahlo posters for decoration. Rooms are small but clean and fine if you're just slipping across the border for the night.

Hotel Paris (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-3961, 685-3023; Calle 5a 8181; r US\$25-40; ♿) Friendly if a tad tawdry, Hotel Paris offers a variety of small, modest rooms that, if you choose carefully, make for fair value. Aside from the diminutive size of the rooms, the only real downfall is the saggy beds. The pricier double rooms are bigger and better than the others, and those that have windows get lots of light. Rooms have telephones and color TV, and everything is kept very clean.

Midrange

Hotel Caesar (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-1606; Av Revolución 1079; r US\$33-55) Although recently remodeled into a characterless, modern hotel, the Caesar's straightforward rooms are comfy, especially for being smack in the heart of La Revo. Touches like rust-color walls and wooden headboards add a bit of warmth to the ambience. For trivia buffs: the original restaurant supposedly created the Caesar salad (opposite). Rates go up by US\$5 on weekends.

Hotel Nelson (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-4303; Av Revolución 721; r US\$49-51) Long a favorite for its central location and 92 clean, basic rooms, Hotel Nelson boasts a bar, a restaurant and a location that's stumbling distance from the bawdier bars of the nearby Zona Norte. Rooms on the upper floors were overhauled with incongruous pastel wallpaper, but they're quieter than those below and have telephones and satellite TV. Lower-level rooms have the same layout, but need a fresh coat of paint and new carpet.

Hotel El Conquistador (Map pp72-3; ☎ 681-7955; Blvd Agua Caliente 10750; r from US\$50; ♿) With its nouveau Spanish colonial flare (think clay-tile roof and lots of wrought iron), the Conquistador's outside is a bit out of line with the decor of its rooms (imagine Laura Ashley letting loose on a *Miami Vice* set). That said, all 105 rooms are extremely comfy and have telephone and cable TV. The swimming pool is an added plus.

Hotel La Villa de Zaragoza (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-1832; www.hotellavilla.biz; Av Madero 1120; r US\$49-70; ♿) Probably the best hotel downtown, this two-story, motel-style property is an excellent deal, especially if you're driving (its parking lot is guarded constantly). The staff is very helpful, and the rooms are modern,

immaculate, spacious and comfortable. Even the cheapest rooms have king-size beds. The priciest rooms have giant baths, plush white towels and plenty of room to throw your stuff around. There are fully accessible ground-level rooms for disabled persons.

Hotel Río Rita (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-7777, 685-8484; www.hotelriorita.com; Av Revolución 968; r US\$59-67) This solid hotel, smack in the middle of La Revo, has spotless rooms with cable TV, fans and carpet. Rooms over the strip have balconies but get noisy from the weekend revelry outside.

Hotel La Mesa Inn (Map p69; ☎ 681-6522, in the USA 888-226-1033; www.bajainn.com; Blvd Díaz Ordaz 50; r US\$76; ♿) Tropical gardens and friendly faces behind the reception desk make this modern 120-room property one of the nicest in town. Modern and immaculate rooms have satellite TV, telephones and bottled water. There's plenty of free parking, a lovely swimming pool and a small restaurant.

Top End

Country Club Hotel (Map p69; ☎ 681-7733, in the USA 888-226-1033; www.bajainn.com; Tapachula 1; r US\$75, ste US\$85-100; ♿) Located next to the Agua Caliente racetrack, the modern Country Club Hotel offers spacious suites and rooms overlooking the golf course and the city. All have air-con, cable TV, telephones, private bath and bottled water. Includes a coffee shop/restaurant.

Hotel Real del Río (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-3100, in Mexico 800-025-7325, in the USA 877-517-6479; www.realdelrio.com; José María Velasco 1409-A; r weekday US\$82, ste US\$238; ♿) This elegant, modern hotel is especially convenient for exploring the Zona Río. Service is outstanding, and the rooms are excellent. Bonuses include a Jacuzzi, restaurant and bar. Prices rise about 40% during US holidays.

Hotel Pueblo Amigo (Map pp72-3; ☎ 683-5030, 800-026-6386, in the USA 800-386-6985; www.hotelpuebloamigo.com; Via Oriente 9211; r US\$95-140, ste US\$106-500; ♿) So what if a couple of the upper windows are broken (they're just decorative anyway), the Pueblo Amigo still offers supremely comfortable rooms. Located in the Pueblo Amigo outdoor mall, it's a modern, well-landscaped hotel with all the amenities offered by standard luxury hotels. The mall itself has several excellent restaurants and hip bars that make the hotel especially inviting. Reserve online to obtain the cheaper rates quoted here.

Grand Hotel Tijuana (Map pp72-3; ☎ 681-7000, in the USA 866-472-6385; www.grandhoteltij.com.mx; Blvd Agua Caliente 4500; r US\$123-176, ste US\$212-520; 📶 🚰 🚿 🛏 🚿) Beige walls and quilted bedspreads don't make for cutting-edge hostelry, but they do make for cozy and undeniably comfy rooms. It's the city's most prominent hotel, occupying the landmark 23-floor twin towers of Agua Caliente. Amenities include cable TV, minibars, a heated pool, Jacuzzi, tennis court, two restaurants and a cocktail bar.

EATING

From side-street taco stands and traditional Mexican *antojitos* (Mexican snacks or light meals) to seafood and Mexican haute cuisine, Tijuana is one of the peninsula's most exciting places to eat. Most restaurants on Av Revolución cater to tourists, serving dishes like tacos and enchiladas, while the city's best restaurants are in the Zona Río and along Blvd Agua Caliente.

The current buzzword among Tijuana's culinary crowd is 'Baja Med' (short for Baja Mediterranean), a sort of Mexican version of California cuisine. It's another example of how this city draws from its northerly neighbor as much as from Mexico to concoct results as imaginative as they are delicious.

La Revo & Downtown

Most places along Av Revolución have festive atmospheres and serve decent Mexican food, calibrated to gringo tastes and preceded, of course, by chips, salsa and a bucket of iced Coronas. Those that have stood the test of time are still worth the money. Step one block off Av Revolución and you'll find plenty more candidates worth your attention.

El Molino (Map pp72-3; ☎ 684-9040; Av Quintana Roo at Calle 10a/Sarabia; pastries US\$0.50-2) Pop in for outstanding bakery items. In business since 1928, it makes everything from ordinary *bolillos* (typical Mexican breads) to fanciful wedding cakes.

Mercado Municipal (Map pp72-3; Av Niños Héroes near Calle 2a; mains US\$3-5; 🕒 7am-7pm) For a rather comical culinary experience, pop into the Mercado Municipal and let the women clap, grab and harangue you into their stalls for inexpensive meals like *pozole* (pork and hominy stew), *birria* (stewed goat, beef or lamb), enchiladas, *chile rellenos* (stuffed chilies) and more.

Tortas Chapultepec (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-1412; cnr Av Constitución & Calle 6a/Flores Magón; mains US\$3-5) You can't beat the friendly service, good prices, and delicious *tortas* (sandwiches), burgers and fries at this family-style diner. There are several Mexican dishes, and a long list of egg-type breakfasts on the menu, too.

I CAME, I SAW, I ATE A CAESAR SALAD

Though certainly worthy of kings, the Caesar salad was named not after old Julius, but for the Italian immigrant and restaurateur who invented it in – of all places – Tijuana. Plenty of myth surrounds the origin of the Caesar salad, but the following is the general consensus among food historians.

On the night of July 4, 1924, a small group walked into Caesar Cardini's restaurant (now Caesar's Sports Bar & Grill, p78) at the Hotel Caesar and asked for something light to finish off their night of drinking. Late at night and low on ingredients, Cardini whipped together a salad with what he had: hearts of romaine, garlic-infused olive oil, croutons, parmesan cheese, coddled egg, lemon, Worcestershire sauce and salt. He did not use anchovies. Some stories have it that a similar salad *with* anchovies preceded the Caesar, called the 'aviators salad.' If this salad did exist, it was likely the creation of Cardini's brother, Alex, who named it for American fighter pilots stationed in San Diego, and Caesar adopted the salad.

Whoever invented it, Caesar's creation that night was an immediate hit and, before long, Southern Californians were driving down to Tijuana to sink their teeth into the original. In her cookbook, Julia Child recalls being a young girl and making the trip in the mid-1920s with her parents, who were elated to finally sample the salad.

Caesar Cardini went to Los Angeles after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, and in 1948 he patented his dressing under the name 'Cardini's, The Original Caesar Dressing'. **Victor's** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-3309; Blvd Sánchez Taboada 9848; mains US\$7-15) reputedly serves the best Caesar salad in town, but nearly every restaurant on La Revo does a version of the salad, and many require their waiters to prepare it tableside, just as Cardini did. Aficionados claim it's not a Caesar if it's not prepared tableside. With Tijuana, who needs Rome?

Restaurant Rome's (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-2288; Calle 5a 8157; mains US\$4-8; 🕒 7:30am-11:30pm) For some good ol' family-style cooking, slip into this old-school diner, complete with jukebox and big booths. The US\$4 set lunch (including dessert and drink) is a bargain. Otherwise choose from modest, but well-prepared Mexican plates. Great soups.

Restaurant Ricardo (Map pp72-3; ☎ 681-8655; cnr Av Madero & Calle 7a/Galeana; mains US\$4-8; 🕒 24hr) This former sandwich shop is now a full-fledged diner. It's bright and cheerful, the breakfasts are excellent and the *tortas* are among the best in town. Good soups, too.

Café La Especial (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-6654; Av Revolución btwn Calles 3a & 4a; mains US\$4-9) Hidden away in a small basement shopping arcade on La Revo (next to the Hotel Lafayette), this old-time favorite serves solid Mexican food at reasonable prices.

Caesar's Sports Bar & Grill (Map pp72-3; Av Revolución 1079; mains US\$5-9) We may never know for sure whether the Caesar salad really was invented in 1929 at what is now Caesar's Sports Bar & Grill, but it's definitely fun watching your waiter go through the ritual of preparing one tableside.

La Placita (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-2704; Av Revolución 961; mains US\$4-13; 🕒 Mon-Sat) One of La Revo's best Mexican restaurants, La Placita puts emphasis as much on preparing good food as creating a party. Delicious salsas are served in giant bowls, and the hearty Mexican dishes are fresh and tasty.

Tía Juana Tilly's (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-6024; Av Revolución at Calle 7a; mains US\$5-10) Can't go wrong here; the cantina atmosphere is great at this Tijuana classic next door to the Jai Alai building.

La Costa (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-8494; Calle 7a/Galeana 8131; mains US\$7-11, shrimp US\$18-20) Locals and tourists alike give top marks to this classy, warmly lit seafood restaurant.

Chiki Jai (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-4955; Av Revolución 1388; mains US\$6-15) Thanks to its consistently good Spanish/Basque seafood, the small, friendly Chiki Jai has been packed with patrons since 1947. It's a perfect escape from the street outside.

Zona Río

The Zona Río has many of the best restaurants in town. A cab ride from La Revo – about US\$3 in a Taxi Libre – beats driving.

Mercado Hidalgo (Map pp72-3; cnr Av Independencia & Blvd Sánchez Taboada) For the cheapest restau-

rants in the Zona Río, visit this lively market (see p83).

Tacos El Gordo (Map pp72-3; cnr Blvd Sánchez Taboada & Mina; tacos US\$1-2; 🕒 10am-5am Mon-Thu, 10am-6am Fri-Sun) Near Mercado Hidalgo, tacos El Gordo enjoys cult status among night owls. The quality of the tacos, which are perhaps a tad too authentic for some gringos, is high, and the lines get long in the wee morning hours.

La Casa del Mole (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-6920; Paseo de los Héroes 1501; mains US\$5-10) Head here for Tijuana's best *mole*-based dishes served in a glass-roofed jungle setting. *Mole* is one of several delicious Oaxacan sauces made with chile, chocolate and plenty of spices.

Gypsy's (Map pp72-3; ☎ 683-6006; Pueblo Amigo Mall; mains US\$8-11; 🕒 Tue-Sun) This lively tapas bar has an eclectic décor inspired by Spanish artists Miró, Gaudí and Dalí. Make a meal out of the tapas or dig into more substantial main courses like paella or Spanish-style octopus. Live flamenco music after 10pm on Fridays really gets things going.

La Diferencia (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-3346; www.ladiferencia.com.mx; Blvd Sánchez Taboada 10611-A; mains US\$12-18; 🕒 noon-1:30am) Behind a tuxedo shop, La Diferencia specializes in *alta cocina* (haute cuisine), serving exotic Mexican dishes like crocodile fajitas, *crepes de huitlacoche* (corn fungus crepes) and *ensalada de nopal y chicharron* (cactus paddle and pork crackling salad).

Cien Años (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-3039; www.cien.info; Av José María Velasco 1407; mains US\$12-20) One of Tijuana's temples of *alta cocina*, Cien Años is well worth a splurge. The chefs have dug deep into a box of ancient Mexican recipes, some going back to the Aztecs and Mayans, and have come up with some rather unusual – but by all accounts, delicious – concoctions. It's a formal place, so dress well for dinner. Breakfast and lunch are more casual.

La Cantina de los Remedios (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-3065; Av Diego Rivera 19; complete dinner US\$18-35) This massive hacienda-style place takes classic *mexicanismo* way over the top. It has an energetic vibe and good Mexican favorites and does set menus that will send you home with an overstuffed belly and a dreamy head. It's also a good place for just a drink.

Blvd Agua Caliente

Although Blvd Agua Caliente (and its eastern spin-off, Blvd Salinas) is a bit distant for pedestrians, it has many eateries worth trying.

El Rincón de Xochimilco (Map pp72-3; ☎ 686-2491; Privada Valencia Rivera 157; mains US\$3-7) In a residential area just north of Blvd Agua Caliente, this family eatery serves a range of delicious *antojitos*, including *flautas*, *sopes*, *huaraches* and *gorditas* (all variations on the meat- and cheese-loaded tortilla) prepared Mexico City-style. A huge plate of food, including rice and beans, costs about US\$4.

our pick La Querencia (Map pp72-3; ☎ 972-9935; www.laquerenciatj.com; Escuadrón 201, Local 1 & 2; tacos US\$1.50-2.50, mains US\$12-20; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Thu, 1pm-midnight Fri & Sat, 1-8pm Sun) Considering the astoundingly imaginative menu, fair prices and great atmosphere, La Querencia deserves every bit of its trendiness. You can pop in for a light meal of tuna-fin stew, marinated duck tacos (both under US\$3) or a salmon sandwich and keep to your daily travel budget; or go for broke devouring divinely seasoned octopus (US\$23), sashimi (US\$9.50) or a Mongolian-style New York steak (US\$25). Deer heads and antlers adorn the walls and a colorful fish tank livens up the back bar.

Negai (Map pp72-3; ☎ 971-0000; www.negairestaurant.com; Escuadrón 201 3110-4; rolls US\$9-12, mains US\$10-20; ☎ from 1pm) Tijuana's hippest Japanese restaurant is minimalist to the extreme and very popular for its fusion cuisine, which draws more from Japan than Mexico. Sushi, sashimi, teriyaki dishes and a couple of curries are the primary fare.

El Rodeo (Map pp72-3; ☎ 686-5640; Blvd Salinas 10332; mains US\$9-20) El Rodeo is a fine-beef restaurant with eccentric ranch decor: towering cacti out front, antique gas pumps, Coke machines and a shrine to assassinated PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio inside. The steaks are delicious.

La Leña (Map pp72-3; ☎ 686-4752; Blvd Agua Caliente 11191; mains US\$10-25) Serving some of the city's very best wood-fired Sonoran beef, this long-time favorite is *the* place for steak-lovers.

Villa Saverios (Map pp72-3; ☎ 686-6502; www.villasaverios.com; Escuadrón 201 3151; mains US\$20-28; ☎ from 1pm) Villa Saverios takes the concept of 'Baja Med' to absurd heights. The results? Try beef cheeks stuffed with ancho chilies; mesquite-grilled quail; tuna sashimi; gourmet burritos; sliced raw lobster with a chile vinaigrette; filet mignon carpaccio; or abalone served in its shell and smothered with chipotle cream sauce (gulp). Classical music tinkles over a fairly formal dining room, so dress appropriately.

DRINKING

If you want to down Jell-O shots while waiters blow whistles in your ear and strip-club touts beckon you in with 'free naked ladies!', hang out on La Revo. If you're after something more 'cultured,' more sophisticated and more Tijuana-as-the-locals-do-it, hit the Zona Río or Agua Caliente area. For the dregs, hit the Zona Norte (p74). Few if any bars on La Revo have a cover charge. The bigger clubs of Zona Río and Agua Caliente can charge anywhere from US\$4 to US\$30, depending on the night.

La Revo

our pick Dandy del Sur (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-0052; Calle 6a 2030) For something more down-to-earth than many La Revo watering holes, hit this Tijuana classic. The sort of nostalgic dive that would make Tom Waits proud, Dandy del Sur's been around since 1957, and the combination of *charreada* (Mexican rodeo) photos, vinyl barstools, mixed clientele and eclectic jukebox make it one of the most interesting places downtown.

Along rowdy Av Revolución, picking your party is as easy as walking along and listening to what's pumping out of the sound systems. Classic haunts include the **Hard Rock Café** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-0206; Av Revolución 520), **Iguanas-Ranas** (Av Revolución at Calle 3a) and **El Torito Pub** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-1636; Av Revolución 643).

Zona Río & Blvd Agua Caliente

Trez (Map pp72-3; ☎ 971-0983; Escuadrón 201 at Sánchez Taboada) This ultraswanky minimalist restaurant-bar is worth popping into just to sit on the plush, black bar stools and gaze at the decor and the people.

Plaza Fiesta Mall (Map pp72-3; Independencia at Guadalupe Victoria) What La Revo is to gringos, Plaza Fiesta mall is to locals. The dozen or so bars and restaurants here are great places to knock back a few tequilas and hear the local rock and DJ talent thrash (or spin) it out. It's unique because you can take your pick simply by walking door to door. The bars include Sambuca (a Brazilian-themed place), Monte Picacho (live *rock en español* – Spanish-language rock – Sunday through Thursday, DJs Friday and Saturday), Callejón del Ambiente (great for '80s music and the diverse crowd), Bar Sótano Suizo, El Bunker, Indestructo (for the industrial and garage scene) and Pancho Villas ('tequila, tacos and rock-n-roll!').

Pueblo Amigo, between Paseo de Tijuana and Via Oriente, is another outdoor mall with more fun, local nighttime stomping grounds.

ENTERTAINMENT

From ear-splitting punk shows, live *trova* (folk music) and throbbing dance floors to greyhound races, bullfights and sports betting, there's plenty to do most nights of the week in Tijuana. With heaps of local musicians, plus visiting bands from San Diego and cities throughout Mexico, Tijuana means great live music. And when it comes to nightclubs, well, the Nortec music collective put Tijuana on the international house/techno map in the late 1990s, meaning DJs now turn up from around the world.

Live Music & Art

The *café cultural* (cultural café) is probably the best way to experience Tijuana's independent arts and music scenes. Venues like El Lugar del Nopal, Antigua Bodega de Papel and La Casa de la 9 are art gallery, café, music venue and cultural center all wrapped up into one. They're well worth placing atop your list of things to do in Tijuana.

our pick **El Lugar del Nopal** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-1264; www.lugardelnopal.com; Callejón 5 de Mayo 1328) This sophisticated café-bar-cum-restaurant-cum-cultural center is a fervent supporter of local artists and an enchanting place at that, especially in the garden patio. El Lugar del Nopal is tucked away in a residential area and is a bit hard to find but well worth the effort. It offers music and art classes, and live music Wednesday through Saturday nights. It's also a super place to eat.

La Casa de la 9 (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-0113; www.lacasadelanueva.blogspot.com; Calle 9 8831) In a funky old building surrounded by auto-repair shops, this long-standing art gallery and café hosts visual-art exhibits, live jazz, folk and various forms of Latin American music, book readings and more. It's well worth a peek.

Antigua Bodega de Papel (Map pp72-3; ☎ 633-9174; Calle 11a at Av Revolución) Another great café for hanging out on the edge and tapping the local music and arts scene, this place has a small deli and live Latin jams, *trova* and more.

Sótano de Rita (Río Rita; Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-8400; www.sotano derita.com; Av Revolución 968) With its exceptionally unique (and naughtily inviting) location in a basement beside a strip club, this

alt-culture venue hosts everything from movie nights and art shows to excellent live music, and the occasional 'literary café.'

Multikulti (Map pp72-3; www.myspace.com/multikulti; Av Constitución 1313; admission US\$2-10) One of Tijuana's newest entertainment-cum-cultural venues, Multikulti occupies a burned-out old theater that's been gutted and turned into a sort of urban amphitheater, showcasing music, media and cultural events (in 2006 Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos spoke here). It's well worth catching an event here if you're in town at the right time. Great for punk shows.

Casa de la Trova (Map pp72-3; ☎ 683-4900; Pueblo Amigo; ☎ Tue-Sat) This popular venue in the Pueblo Amigo outdoor mall serves up live *rock en español* (Spanish-language rock) and *trova* starting at 8pm.

Las Pulgas (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-1368; cnr Av Revolución & Calle 8a/Hidalgo; live-music cover US\$8) Pop in the ear-plugs and grab a dance partner – Las Pulgas showcases everything from live and recorded *banda* (brassband with vocals) and *norteña* (country style) music to *cumbia* (dance music originating in Columbia) and merengue.

Nightclubs

For more nightclubs, also see Gay & Lesbian Venues, opposite.

Balak (Map pp72-3; www.balakdisco.com; Pueblo Amigo; ☎ 9pm-late Thu-Sat; admission from US\$12) Masquerading as a giant Mayan temple about 10 minute's walking distance from the border, Balak is Tijuana's biggest, loudest most state-of-the-art disco, featuring international DJs, a multi-million-dollar sound system, wildly festooned performance dancers and an always-packed dance floor. Add about US\$5 to the cover charge to take advantage of the *barra libre* (open bar).

Tangaloo (Map pp72-3; Pueblo Amigo; www.tangaloo.com; Blvd Agua Caliente) One of the biggest discos in town, Tangaloo branches out from the standard techno-house sets with the occasional 1980s mix, and sometimes hosts live music. The place gets packed, and scantily clad stage dancers keep the pitch high.

Blanco & Negro (Map pp72-3; Calle 6a 2020; ☎ Thu-Sat) Not the sort of place the tourist office will send you to, this small working-class *salon social* (social club) kicks out some of Tijuana's very best salsa, *cumbia*, merengue and other Latin grooves. It's a great place to get sweaty with the locals.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

The only city in Baja with any significant gay and lesbian scene (more specifically gay than lesbian) is Tijuana. There are plenty of places to hit downtown, most of which build their evenings around drag-show fun. Locals, as much or more than foreigners, hang out at all these places, giving them a Tijuana vibe that you won't find at La Revo's standard gringo haunts. Also pick up a copy of *Arte de Vivir* for more on what's happening.

Club Extasis (Map pp72-3; ☎ 526-682-8339; Plaza Viva Tijuana; admission free-US\$8; ☑ Thu-Sun) Tijuana's biggest and some say best gay dance club – complete with male strippers and karaoke – is right on the border. It's famous for its male dancers and 'dark room' area where no lights means much more than dancing goes on.

Caguamamas (Map pp72-3; Plaza Viva Tijuana; ☑ Thu-Sun) Thursday is karaoke night, and Friday through Sunday Caguamama's hosts the somewhat legendary Amanda's Show, featuring *trávesti* (transvestite) performers beginning at 11pm. It's next door to Club Extasis, right near the border.

Los Equipales (Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-3006; Calle7a/Galeana 8236 at Av Revolución) Slightly seedy but definitely energetic, Los Equipales has two drag shows from Thursday through Sunday.

El Callejón de Ambiente (Map pp72-3; www.callejon.cjb.net; Plaza Fiesta 8a, Zona Río) Gay, straight, bi and freaky all rip up the dance floor to '80s dance tunes, electronica, synth-pop and more at this club in the Plaza Fiesta Mall (p79). Great mix of people.

El Taurino (Map pp72-3; cnr Av Constitución & Calle 1a) On the flanks of the Zona Norte, El Taurino is the grand-daddy of Tijuana's gay bars with a much more local than foreign clientele.

Sports

Caliente (Map pp72-3; www.caliente.com.mx; Av Revolución 931; ☑ 9am-11pm) Head here for some sports betting and slot machines.

Bullfights

Corridas de toros (bullfights) take place on Sunday afternoons every two or three weeks from the last weekend in April to late September/early October. For schedules and information in English, see www.bullfights.org.

Of the town's two bullrings, the larger, more spectacular venue is the **Plaza de Toros Monumental** (☎ 613-1656, 613-1182, 686-1219; www.plaza-monumental.com; admission US\$12-55), the renowned

bullring by the sea in Playas de Tijuana (p75), only a short distance from the border fence. The other is **El Toreo de Tijuana** (Map pp72-3; Blvd Agua Caliente), between central Tijuana and the Hipódromo de Agua Caliente (racetrack; see below). Spring bullfights take place at El Toreo, which has room for 12,000 spectators. In July or August, *corridas* move to the ring in Playas, which holds up to 25,000 people. This may change, as there has been talk of demolishing the Toreo de Tijuana ring, in which case all *corridas* will take place at Plaza de Toros Monumental.

Tickets are available at the bullrings daily from noon to 6pm and from 10am on the day of the *corrida*. In the USA you can also purchase tickets through **Five Star Tours** (☎ in the USA 619-232-5040, 800-553-8687; www.tjbullfight.com; 1050 Kettner Blvd, San Diego, California) online or at the San Diego office. Prices range from US\$17/20 for general admission on the sunny/shady side, to US\$49/58 for prime seats.

Greyhound Races

Ever since the owner of **Hipódromo de Agua Caliente** (Agua Caliente racetrack; Map p69; ☎ 681-7811 ext 637), Tijuana multimillionaire and mayor Jorge Hank Rhon, refused to give in during a sustained labor dispute several years ago, the thoroughbreds no longer circle this landmark racetrack, and the place has literally gone to the dogs. In fact, it would be more accurate to call it a *galgódromo* (*galgo* means 'greyhound'), because greyhound races with wagering take place at 7:45pm daily and also at 2pm weekends. Just beyond the Club Campestre Tijuana on Blvd Agua Caliente, the Hipódromo de Agua Caliente is open all year; admission is free and parking is cheap.

Rodeos

Charreadas (rodeos) usually take place Sunday afternoons from May to September at one of four venues in the Tijuana area – ask the Secture or Cotuco tourist offices for the latest details. One popular rodeo ground is the Cortijo San José in Playas de Tijuana (p75), just south of Plaza de Toros Monumental.

SHOPPING

People pour into Tijuana from the US for many reasons, but the biggest draw is probably the shopping. Mexican handicrafts, prescription meds, silver jewelry, wrought-iron furniture, auto upholstery, baskets,

DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

It's said that Mexicans arrive on time for only two events – funerals and bullfights. To many others, *corridos de toros* (bullfights) hardly seem to be sport or, for that matter, entertainment, but Mexicans see it as both and more: it's as much a ritualistic dance as a fight.

The *corrida* begins promptly at 4, 4:30 or 5pm on a Sunday. To the sound of music – usually a Spanish *paso doble* – the matador, in his *traje de luces* (suit of lights), and the *toreros* (matador's assistants) give the traditional *paseillo* (salute) to the fight authorities and the crowd. Then the first of the day's bulls (there are usually six in an afternoon) is released from its pen for the first of the ritual's three *suertes* (acts) or *tercios* (thirds).

The cape-waving *toreros* tire the bull by luring him around the ring. After a few minutes two *picadores*, on heavily padded horses, enter and jab *picas* (long lances) into the bull's shoulders. This is usually the most gruesome part of the whole process, as it instantly weakens the bull from the sudden pain and blood loss.

After the *picadores* leave the ring, the *suerte de banderillas* begins, as two *toreros* take turns sticking three pairs of elongated darts (the *banderillas*) into the bull's shoulders without getting impaled on his horns. After that, the *suerte de muleta* is the climax, in which the matador, alone with his red cape, has exactly 16 minutes to kill the bull.

Starting with fancy cape work to tire the animal, the matador then exchanges his large cape for the smaller *muleta* and takes sword in hand, baiting the bull to charge before delivering the fatal *estocada* (thrust) with his sword. The matador must deliver the *estocada* into the neck from a position directly in front of the animal.

If the matador succeeds, and he usually does, the bull eventually collapses and dies. If the applause from the crowd warrants, he will be awarded an *oreja* (ear) or two and sometimes the tail. The dead bull is dragged from the ring to be butchered for sale.

A 'good' bullfight depends not only on the skill and courage of the matador but also on the spirit of the bulls. Animals lacking heart for the fight bring shame on the ranch that bred them. Very occasionally, a bull that has fought outstandingly is *indultado* (spared) – an occasion for great celebration – and will then retire to stud.

Tijuana's two bullfighting arenas (p81) are the most famous in Baja California, but there's also one in Mexicali (p136).

pottery, you name it – it's all cheaper south of the border. But not by much, so shop carefully. Tijuana's Av Revolución is the main tourist-oriented shopping street, and local handicrafts are plentiful. Bargaining is the rule in most stores. Av Constitución, one block west, has shoe stores, flower shops, hardware stores and other places catering primarily to locals.

Tequila, Kahlua and other liquors are popular buys, but you can save a couple of dollars by buying in supermarkets rather than liquor stores. And remember, you can only take one bottle into the US.

Galleries

For such an artistically charged city, Tijuana has very few art galleries – three to be exact (as of mid-2007). There simply isn't a formal art market here as there is in, say, San Diego or San José del Cabo. And art buyers with money

(mostly folks across the border) aren't driving into Tijuana to buy paintings. The following galleries, however, may mark the start of a new trend. And if you're at all interested in Tijuana and Baja California art, you'll want to visit these. All deal in top (but *relatively* affordable) art.

Arte 256 (Map p69; ☎ 621-8654; www.arte256.com; Mérida 256, Fracc Chapultepec) It's well worth the slog to find this fabulous gallery owned and operated by Tijuana native Joly Lacarra. The revolving exhibitions are generally outstanding. To get there, head out Blvd Aguas Calientes, and up Tapachula, past the Hipódromo. After Tapachula veers left, hang a right (at the big black building). This streets merges with Mérida, which you follow up to the gallery. A cab should cost about US\$4.

Galería H&H (Map pp72-3; ☎ 900-6133; www.galeriahh.com; Av Estéban Cantú 2651, Colonia Dávila/Cacho; 📅 Tue-Sun) Opened in 2003 by a husband-wife team

from Cologne, Germany, H&H showcases an outstanding revolving collection of local and national artists.

Galería La Caja (Map p69; ☎ 686-6791; www.lacaja.galeria.com; Tapachula 1-B, Colonia Hipódromo) Located directly across Tapachula from the racetrack, this wee gallery is another great place to check out some of Baja's best-known artists.

Markets

Markets are by far the most interesting places to shop.

Mercado El Popo (Map pp72-3; Calle 2a near Av Constitución) El Popo is the most colorful downtown market, with stacks of fresh cheeses, sweets, wooden spoons, piles of dried chilies, kitchenware, herbs, incense, santería, candles, love soaps, stacks of bundled cinnamon sticks, bee pollen and fruit all pushing you toward sensory overload.

Mercado Hidalgo (Map pp72-3; cnr Av Independencia & Blvd Sánchez Taboada) Join the locals and browse everything from spices, exotic fruits and seasonal Aztec specialties to meat grinders, juicers and toilet plungers. The partially covered stalls open onto a central square, usually filled with delivery trucks.

Mercado Municipal (Map pp72-3; Municipal Market; Av Niños Héroes btwn Calles 1a & 2a) Mostly food stalls, but worth a quick peek.

Mercado de Artesanías (Map pp72-3; Calle 1a & Av Ocampo) Near the border, the artisans' market makes for hours of browsing and bargaining fun.

For Catholic votives, candles, incense, crucifixes and other religious bric-a-brac, browse the **votive stalls** (Map pp72-3; cnr Av Niños Héroes & Calle 2a) adjacent to the Catedral de Guadalupe.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Mexico's fourth-busiest airport, **Aeropuerto Internacional Abelardo L Rodríguez** (Map p69; ☎ 683-2418, 607-8200/01; http://tijuana.aeropuertosgap.com.mx) is in Mesa de Otay, east of downtown. It has become a popular departure and arrival point, and fares to/from other cities in Mexico may be cheaper than in the USA. For more flight information, see the Transportation chapter.

Aeroméxico (Map pp72-3; ☎ 684-8444, at the airport 683-2700, in the USA 800-237-6639; Plaza Río, Paseo de los Héroes, Local A-12-1) and its commuter subsidiary, Aerolitoral, share an office in Plaza Río. Aeroméxico flies to Tucson (Arizona) via the

mainland Mexican city of Hermosillo (Sonora). The airline flies direct to La Paz and to numerous mainland Mexican cities.

Mexicana (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-6566, at the airport 682-4183, in the USA 800-531-7921; Av Diego Rivera 1511) has an office in the Zona Río and offers direct flights to Guadalajara, Zacatecas and Mexico City.

Aero California (Map pp72-3; ☎ 684-2876, at the airport 682-8754, in the USA 800-237-6225; Av Independencia near Via Poniente) also has an office in the Plaza Río and flies daily to La Paz. It also serves many mainland destinations from Mexico City northward.

Bus

Just about every town in Mexico is served from Tijuana, but there is a bewildering number of stations and companies. For more on bus travel in Baja California and beyond, see the Transportation chapter, p268.

BORDER BUS TERMINAL

The **border bus terminal** (Central Camionera de La Linea; Map pp72-3; ☎ 683-5681) is on the southern edge of Plaza Viva Tijuana and is used by ABC, Estrellas del Pacífico and Turi-Mex. ABC leaves every 30 minutes to Ensenada (US\$10, 1½ hours), where there are easy connections to destinations south along the peninsula.

DOWNTOWN BUS TERMINAL

The **downtown bus terminal** (Antigua Central Camionera; Map pp72-3; ☎ 688-0752; Av Madero at Calle 1a) is a short taxi ride or 10-minute walk from the border. It offers services by **ABC** (☎ 621-2424), local buses only, **Greyhound** (☎ 688-1979, in the USA 800-231-2222; www.greyhound.com) and others. Greyhound serves San Diego and Los Angeles. ABC goes to Tecate (US\$4.50, 1½ hours) every 20 minutes and Ensenada (US\$10, 1½ hours) every half hour or so.

LA MESA LONG DISTANCE BUS TERMINAL

Tijuana's **main bus station** (Central Camionera La Mesa; Map p69; ☎ 621-7640; Blvd Lázaro Cárdenas at Río Alamar) for long-distance buses is about 5km (3 miles) southeast of the city center. Companies include **ABC** (☎ 621-2982) and **Elite** (☎ 621-2602). Transportes Norte de Sonora runs buses to Tecate, Mexicali and mainland Mexico.

To reach the station from downtown, take any 'Buena Vista,' 'Centro' or 'Central Camionera' bus (US\$0.65) from Calle 2a (Juárez) east of Av Constitución; these buses also stop at the border bus lot.

For the same price, the quicker and more convenient gold-and-white *taxis de ruta* (route taxis; marked 'Mesa de Otay') stop on Av Madero between Calles 2a (Juárez) and 3a (Carrillo Puerto). A private taxi costs US\$12 to US\$15. ABC serves the following destinations regularly every day. Fares are subject to change often.

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hrs)
El Rosario	29	8
Ensenada	10	1½
La Paz	131	22-24
Loreto	97-103	20
Mexicali	17	2½
Mulegé	81-88	15
San Felipe	36	6
San Quintín	25	5-6
Santa Rosalía	73	11-13
Tecate	4.50	1½

TERMINAL TURÍSTICO (MEXICOACH)

From Friday to Sunday, **Mexicoach** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 685-1470; www.gototijuana.com; Av Revolución at Calle 6a) operates its Rosarito Beach Express (US\$9; 40 minutes) with six departures daily from its terminal on Av Revolución. Buses stop outside the Rosarito Beach Hotel in Playas de Rosarito. There are four daily departures to Ensenada (US\$18, 1¾ hours). It also runs to/from San Ysidro (see opposite).

To/From the USA

Several companies offer services between Los Angeles, San Diego, San Ysidro and Tijuana.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 800-231-2222; www.greyhound.com) runs regular buses from both its **Los Angeles terminal** (☎ 213-629-8401; 1716 E 7th St; US\$23; 3½-5 hrs) and the **San Diego terminal** (☎ 619-239-3266; 120 W Broadway; US\$12; 1hr). Buses stop first at Tijuana's downtown terminal, then continue on to the long-distance bus terminal (same fare), adding about 20 minutes to the journey.

Also from San Diego, bus 929, operated by **Veolia** (☎ 619-427-6438), goes from various stops along Broadway in downtown San Diego to San Ysidro on the US side of the border (US\$2.25, about 90 minutes).

From Tijuana's Terminal Turístico (see above), Mexicoach runs to San Ysidro (US\$5) every 30 minutes between 8am and 9pm.

TROLLEY

The blue line of the **San Diego Trolley** (☎ in the USA 619-233-3004, 800-266-6883; www.sdcommute.com) travels from San Diego's Old Town Transit Center (at 4009 Taylor St) to the San Diego Trolley Station (Map pp72-3) on the US side of the San Ysidro border in about 45 minutes (maximum fare is US\$3). Trolleys depart every 15 minutes or so from about 5am to midnight.

From San Diego International Airport (Lindbergh Field), bus 992 goes directly to the trolley stop at Plaza America in San Diego, across from the Amtrak station, at 15-minute intervals (US\$2.25). If you're making the bus-trolley connection, be sure to request a free transfer.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Taxicabs to the Tijuana airport from downtown or the border will set you back between US\$10 and US\$20, depending on your bargaining skills. You can save a bundle by using public transportation. From the border, you can catch any bus (about US\$0.70) marked 'Aeropuerto' from the bus stop on the southeastern edge of Plaza Viva Tijuana. From downtown or the Zona Río, catch the airport bus or a blue-and-white route taxi on Calle 4a between Av Constitución and Paseo de los Héroes.

Bus

From the border, you can take any bus (US\$0.65) marked 'Centro' to go downtown. The most convenient place to get off is near the corner of Constitución and Calle 3a or near the corner of Madero and Calle 3a (on the other side of Av Revolución). Both stops are one block from Av Revolución.

Car

Rental cars may be cheaper in San Diego, and several of the large companies permit their cars to be taken across the border if you buy supplemental insurance. Companies in Tijuana (which charge about US\$70 for the cheapest vehicle) include:

Alamo (Map pp72-3; ☎ 686-4040, airport 683-8084; Blvd Sánchez Taboada 10401, Zona Río)

Budget (Map pp72-3; ☎ 634-3304, airport 683-2905; Av Paseo de los Héroes 77, Zona Río)

National (Map pp72-3; ☎ 686-2103; Blvd Agua Caliente 10598)

CROSSING THE BORDER

One of the world's busiest border crossings, the San Ysidro–Tijuana port of entry is open 24 hours a day. Whether you're traveling by foot or by car, entering Mexico is usually a cinch.

When crossing into Mexico on foot, take the pedestrian bridge and go through the turnstile into Mexico. Press the 'stoplight' button, which randomly generates a red or green light. Red means stop for an inspection, green means go. To reach Av Revolución, walk through the Plaza Viva Tijuana shopping mall to the pedestrian bridge over the river, cross the street and proceed along Calle Comercio. The entire walk takes about 15 minutes.

For drivers, there are usually no delays coming into Mexico, but returning can be a nightmare, especially at the end of holiday weekends and weekday mornings between about 5am and 9am. Traffic is usually lighter (though the wait is still long) after around 10am. For reports on northbound traffic at the San Ysidro border, call the **border traffic hotline** (☎ in Spanish 700-7000, in the USA 619-690-8999). You can also check the **US Customs Border Wait Times** (<http://apps.cbp.gov/bwt>) for hourly traffic updates.

When driving into Mexico, be sure to arrange vehicle insurance (p270). If you're staying more than 72 hours or traveling south of Ensenada, you must also purchase a tourist card (see p264). To do so, stay to your right as you enter Mexico, and veer right into the small parking lot that you'll see immediately upon crossing the border. The **Mexican Customs & Immigrations office** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 682-4947/48; 🕒 8am-10pm) and **Banjercito** (🕒 8am-10pm), the bank where you pay the fee, are next door to each other and adjacent to the lot (it's all in plain sight). If you need a tourist card outside the office's opening hours, you'll have to go to the office at the pedestrian crossing, which is open 24 hours.

If Tijuana is your only destination, it may be better to leave your car on the northern side of the border and either walk or take a shuttle across. Parking lots include **Border Station Parking** (4570 Camino de la Plaza; per day US\$7); to get there turn right at the last exit off the I-5 before the border. This parking lot also doubles as the northern terminus of the **Mexicoach shuttle** (☎ 685-1470, in the USA 619-428-9517; www.gototijuana.com) connecting to the Terminal Turístico (opposite) on Av Revolución. Buses depart at 15- to 30-minute intervals from 9am to 9pm daily. One-way fares are US\$2.50.

The alternative crossing at Mesa de Otay (Map p69), east of downtown near the airport, is open 24 hours. It takes time to drive to Otay and return to US I-5 after crossing the border, so it's rarely worth the detour to avoid San Ysidro.

Important: by 2008, US citizens entering the USA by land may be required to present a US passport. For updated information consult the Passport section of <http://travel.state.gov>.

Taxi

Tijuana has numerous types of taxis. In general, expect to pay from US\$3 to US\$6 for most city rides. The cheapest of the private taxis are the white ones with 'Taxi Libre' painted in big orange letters on the sides. These taxis have *taxímetros* (taximeters), and the drivers are required to use them; make sure they do to avoid overcharging.

The yellow taxis at the border often try to overcharge; the fare should not be more than US\$5 per car. A ride to La Mesa Long Distance Bus Terminal (Central Camionera) from the border costs about US\$14.

Route taxis are an efficient and inexpensive way to get around town. They are station wagons or minivans that operate along designated routes (which are posted in the front window).

You can board them at their designated route terminus or by flagging them down anywhere along their route. Fares depend on the distance traveled but are usually about US\$0.65 within town. The driver will stop wherever you want to get off.

From the route taxi stop (Map pp72-3) at Av Madero near Calle 3a (Carrillo Puerto), route taxis (marked 'Mesa de Otay') go to the Zona Río, La Mesa Long Distance Bus Terminal (Central Camionera La Mesa) and the airport along Paseo de los Héroes. Red-and-black cabs or red minivans travel along Blvd Agua Caliente to the El Toreo bullring, the country club and the Agua Caliente racetrack. You can pick also them up at the route taxi stop (Map pp72-3) at Calle 4a and Av Niños Héroes in downtown. Yellow-and-blue route

taxis to Playas de Rosarito (US\$1.50, 30 minutes) depart from the taxi stop (Map pp72–3) at Av Madero and Calle 4a (Díaz Mirón).

TIJUANA TO ENSENADA

664

Mex 1D, the toll road to Ensenada, snakes south along a spectacular, rapidly changing coastline. The oceanfront between Tijuana and Ensenada has suffered a gold-rush-like real estate boom and is now the most developed stretch of Baja's Pacific Coast. As developers construct luxury condos and gated communities at breakneck speeds, and erect billboards promising a 'slice of Paradise' (and

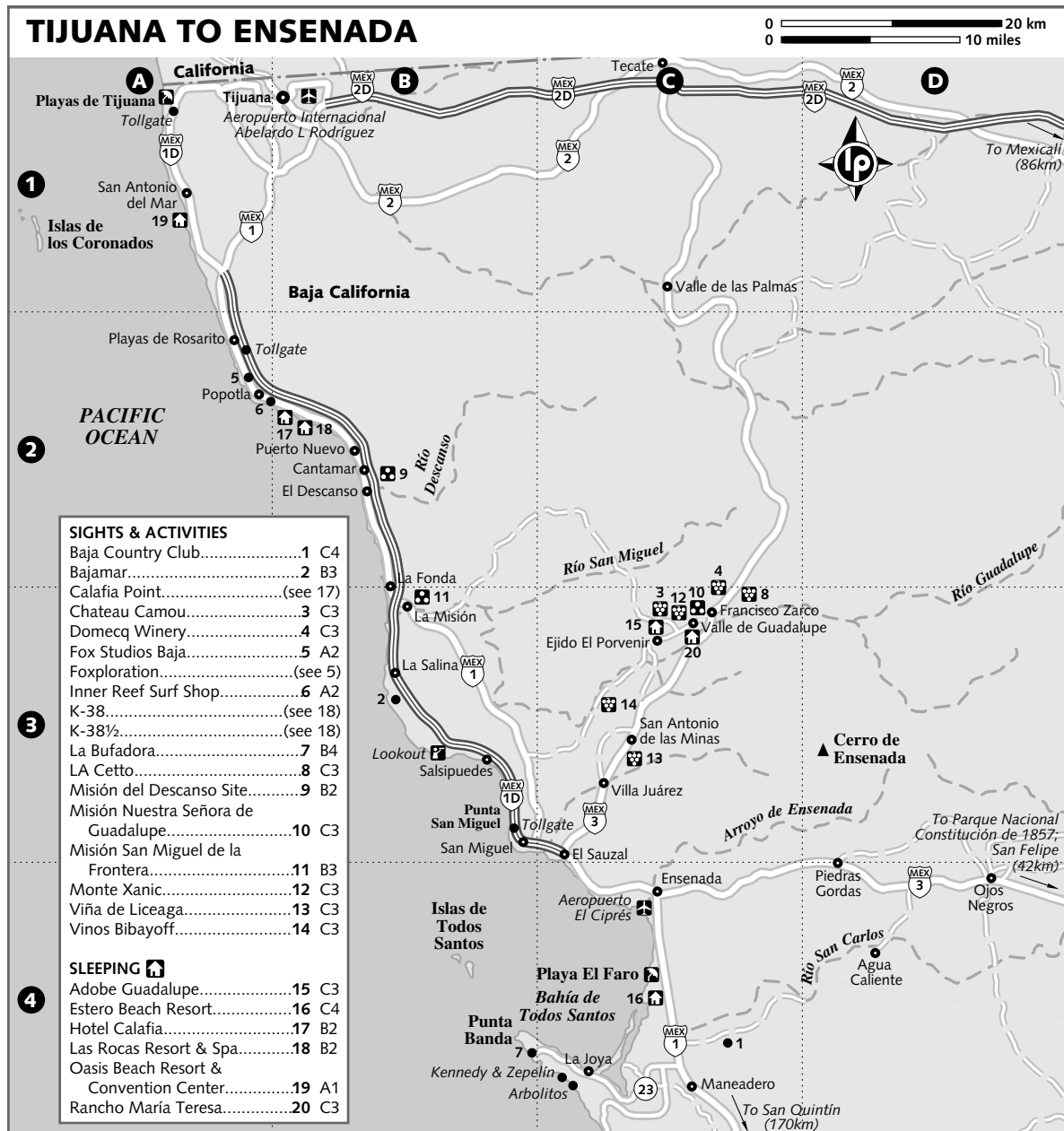
destroying it in the process), beach towns like Popotla, Puerto Nuevo and Cantamar have become almost unrecognizable. There are still some peaceful spots south of Playas de Rosarito (like La Fonda), and the lobster town of Puerto Nuevo is still a fun place to eat, but if you're seeking solitude and unadulterated vistas, you'll have to venture further south.

There are three toll booths between Tijuana and Ensenada along Mex 1D. Each charges US\$2.20 (payable in dollars or pesos).

TIJUANA TO ROSARITO

664

Folks without their own condos will find little reason to stop along this stretch. About 11km (7 miles) offshore you can see the **Islas de los**



MÉXICO 1 VS MÉXICO 1D?

Free road or toll road? That's the question you'll have to ask yourself when driving south from Tijuana to Ensenada.

México 1D, the divided toll road, is faster and more easily accessed, and it offers spectacular coastal views over its entire length. Stay to your right as you cross the border at San Ysidro and follow the (slyly manipulative) 'Ensenada Scenic Rd' signs along Calle Internacional. Paralleling the border fence, the road turns south in Playas de Tijuana, just before plunging into the ocean, and passes through the first of three tollgates.

Two-lane, toll-free México 1 (the Transpeninsular) passes through equally spectacular scenery, but heavier traffic and the drive through Tijuana make it slower. From the Tijuana border crossing, follow the signs to central Tijuana and continue straight (west) along Calle 3a (Carrillo Puerto), turning left (south) at Av Revolución. Follow Av Revolución to the end, where it veers left (east) and becomes Blvd Agua Caliente. Turn right just before the twin towers of the Grand Hotel Tijuana and head south.

Coronados, a popular diving destination for Southern Californians. There is no boat service to the islands, but charter companies such as **Horizon Charters** (p50) offer diving tours.

The first toll booth for México 1D is at Km 9. About 16km (10 miles) south, just before the highway turns inland and the development stops for a while, is the Moorish-architecture-inspired **Oasis Beach Resort & Convention Center** (Map p86; ☎ 631-3250, in the USA 800-818-3133; Mex 1D Km 25; RV midweek US\$49, d US\$67-125), a luxurious beachfront hotel/RV park resort.

PLAYAS DE ROSARITO

☎ 661 / pop 73,305

Since its 'discovery' in the 1990s, Rosarito (as everyone calls it) has transformed from a modest fishing village into a weekend party-town destination with a plethora of restaurants, souvenir shops, hotels and bars. It continues to be the fastest-growing community in Baja California Norte, thanks almost entirely to the real estate boom.

Then there's tourism: from April to October, North Americans pour in by the thousands to hang out on the beach, shoot off fireworks, shop, fish, eat and – in the raucous bars that line southern Blvd Juárez – party until the wee morning hours. Signs posted in every hotel display some variation of 'You break it, you pay for it,' and 'No outside beverages,' which should give you an idea of what goes on here during summer weekends. And we're not just talking about furniture buying which, incidentally, has long been a highlight of visiting Rosarito; the city is known for its handcrafted wood furniture.

Rosarito is at its most appealing around sundown, when locals wander the streets and munch at the taco stands, and the warm light of sunset softens the harsh corners of the mishmash buildings and uneven sidewalks along Blvd Juárez.

Orientation

Rosarito's main artery, Blvd Benito Juárez, is a segment of the Transpeninsular and is lined with services. Rosarito's 'downtown' is located toward the southern end of Blvd Benito Juárez, around the Rosarito Beach Hotel. This is where most of the tourist-oriented places can be found. Rosarito Norte (northern Rosarito) has a more local flair and, besides featuring an entire block of never-completed, apocalyptic cement buildings, it offers colorful taco stands and great shopping (especially for furniture).

Most places do have street addresses, but the numbering system is maddeningly erratic. Whenever possible, this section uses cross streets to help you locate a particular place.

Information

EMERGENCY & MEDICAL SERVICES

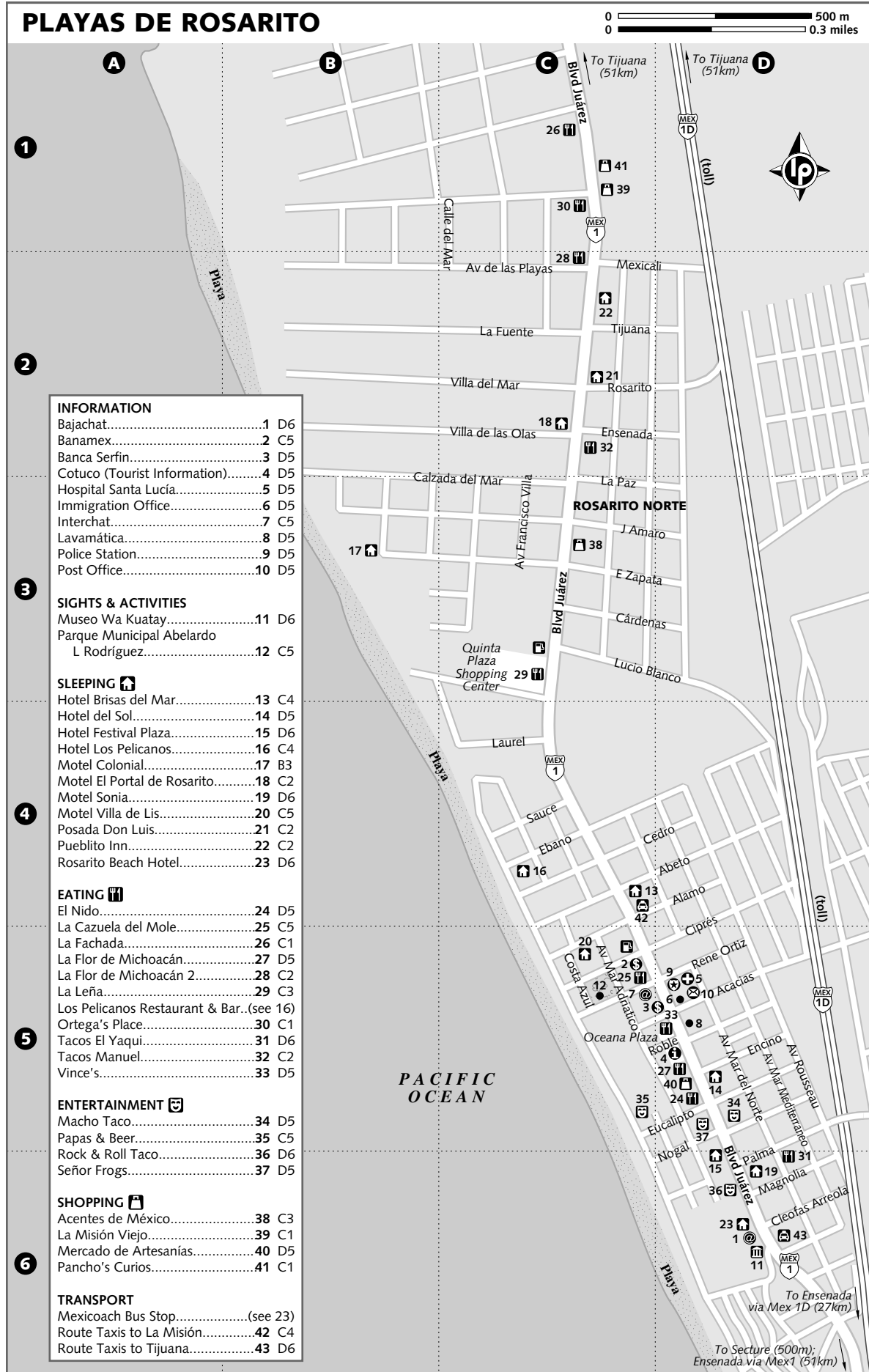
Cruz Roja (Red Cross; ☎ 066, 132 or 612-0414) Call for ambulance.

Hospital Santa Lucía (☎ 612-0440; Av Mar del Norte 557)

Police station (☎ 612-1110/1; Blvd Juárez at Rene Ortiz)

IMMIGRATION

Immigration office (☎ 613-0234; Acacias at Blvd Juárez) Located directly behind the police station.



INTERNET ACCESS**Bajachat** (Blvd Juárez at Cleofas Arreola; per hr US\$1.50)**Interchat** (Rene Ortiz near Blvd Juárez; per hr US\$1)**LAUNDRY****Lavamática** (Blvd Juárez btwn Acacias & Roble; per load US\$5.50; ☎ Fri-Wed)**MONEY**

Nearly all merchants in Playas de Rosarito accept US dollars. **Banamex** (Blvd Juárez at Ciprés) and **Banca Serfin** (Blvd Juárez at Acacias) have ATMs and change money and traveler's checks.

POST**Post office** (Acacias at Av Mar del Norte) Located east of the police station.**TOURIST INFORMATION****Cotuco** (Rosarito Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau; ☎ 612-0396, 612-3078; Blvd Juárez at Roble, Oceana Plaza Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, occasionally Sat).

The most convenient tourist office.

Secture (☎ 612-5222; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) The state-run tourist office is south of downtown at Km 28 on México 1 (Blvd Juárez).**Sights & Activities**

Rosarito's long, wide, unsheltered **beach** can be windy and cool (and rather unappealing) in winter. In summer it's pleasant for **horseback riding** (they're rented along the beach for about US\$7 per hour), but it's hardly the tranquil sandy paradise offered by beaches on the Sea of Cortez or further south along the Pacific.

Museo Wa Kuatay, the name of Rosarito's small historical and anthropological **museum** (☎ 613-0687; Blvd Juárez 18; admission by donation; ☎ 8am-5pm), near the Rosarito Beach Hotel, translates as 'Place of the Waters,' the indigenous Kumiai name for the area. It is lovingly maintained by its caretakers and offers a good introduction to the area from pre-Columbian times to the present. Subjects include the missions, the creation of the *ejidos* (communal land holdings) and the beginnings of tourism. The official opening hours are not always kept.

Parque Municipal Abelardo L Rodríguez, the amphitheater at Rosarito's beachfront plaza, contains the impressive 1987 mural *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Liberty) by Juan Zuñiga Padilla, proof that Mexico's celebrated muralist tradition is still alive and well. Traditional

motifs include the eagle and plumed serpent and Emiliano Zapata and his followers.

Sleeping

Because it's a resort town and so close to the border, Rosarito lacks consistent budget accommodations. Rates vary both seasonally and between weekdays (Monday to Thursday) and weekends (Friday to Sunday). Given this fickle market, prices in the following sections are intended only to give you an idea of what to expect. All hotels require a deposit (usually US\$10) upon checking in.

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Motel El Portal de Rosarito (☎ 612-0050; Blvd Juárez at Vía de las Olas; r midweek US\$27-33, weekends US\$45-50; ☎) The brightly painted El Portal is probably the best choice in this part of town. Rooms are modest but spotless, sinks are given splashes of color with Mexican tiles, and it's very friendly. The only downfall are the often lukewarm showers with cheap showerheads.

Motel Colonial (☎ 612-1575; Calle 1o de Mayo 71; r midweek/weekend US\$30/45, ste US\$60; ☎) Impressive not for its appearance (the place is in dire need of a face-lift) but for the amount of odd furniture that has been crammed into the rooms, the Motel Colonial presents a challenge for anyone prone to claustrophobia. The lower rooms are boxy, dark and musty as a basement in the tropics, while the upstairs rooms stay a little fresher thanks to the balconies. Some rooms have separate dining areas and kitchenettes.

Motel Sonia (☎ 612-1260; Blvd Juárez 781; r midweek/weekend US\$35/40; ☎ ☎) It may be basic but it's central, clean and reliable. Peach walls with green trim liven up the outside of the building, but inside it's as if everything that might possibly get broken during a drunken weekend were removed from the rooms, including fans. Reservations are not accepted.

Posada Don Luis (☎ 612-1166; Blvd Juárez 272; midweek r US\$28-55, weekend r US\$35-65; ☎ ☎ ☎) Posada Don Luis is a huge place featuring an array of rooms varying from cramped and stuffy with plywood walls, to comfortable and spacious with flowered bedspreads and Formica tables. The upstairs rooms – with bamboo headboards, white brick walls, wicker dressers and spotless bathrooms – are great. The priciest ones are perfect for families and open onto the tree-filled patio, pool and parking area.

Hotel del Sol (☎ 612-2552/53/54; Blvd Juárez 32; r midweek/weekend US\$40/50; 📍) Right in downtown Rosarito, Hotel del Sol offers comfy, large, half-tiled, half-carpeted rooms with cable TV, telephones, tables and miniscule bathrooms. The newer rooms are better but more expensive. For the price, it's a good place.

Pueblito Inn (☎ 612-2516, 800-027-5196, in the USA 888-203-8368; www.sdoro.com/pacifico; Blvd Juárez 286; r midweek/weekend US\$45/100; 📍 📺 📶) The 47 modern rooms here are comfortable and have tiled floors, decorative metal bed frames, cable TV and telephones. It's far from special but it's kept clean and the beds are comfy. The pool's practically *in* the parking lot, but that's OK: the glare off the hotel's stark-white stucco walls will have you tan in no time.

Hotel Los Pelicanos (☎ 612-0445; www.pelicanosrosarito.com; Cedro 115; r US\$50-72, ste US\$140) Beachfront Los Pelicanos offers outstanding ocean-facing rooms (US\$72) with loads of light, sliding glass doors and views right over the beach. Rooms have lots of colorful touches like sinks with inlaid Mexican tiles, textile bedspreads and arched entrances to the showers. When deciding on price, keep in mind that the rooms without views are dark. The highly regarded restaurant has a huge balcony over the sand, and the whole place exudes a laid-back feel.

Motel Villa de Lis (☎ 612-2320; Alamo at Costa Azul; r midweek/weekend US\$60/70; 📍) Quiet, clean and characterless, three-story Villa de Lis is popular for its upper rooms with ocean views and balconies. They're fairly spartan, but when you open the sliding balcony door and the bedroom door at the same time, you get a lovely ocean breeze blowing through. All rooms have cable TV. Rates drop by 25% in winter.

Hotel Brisas del Mar (☎ 612-2546/47/48, in the USA 888-871-3605; www.ventanarosahotels.com; Blvd Juárez 22; r US\$70 midweek, US\$112 weekends; 📍 📺 📶) A bit removed from the action, Hotel Brisas del Mar has 71 carpeted, contemporary rooms with peach-colored dressers and bathroom vanities, cable TV, a heated pool and volleyball courts. For such a flashy exterior, the rooms are pretty basic, but they're clean. Considering the price, you're better off at Pelicanos, but check the webpage for off-season specials.

TOP END

Hotel Festival Plaza (☎ 612-2950, in the USA 800-453-8606; www.hotelfestivalplaza.com; Blvd Juárez 1207-1; r US\$86-198; 📍 📺 📶) The appropriately named Festival Plaza is party central, and

any illusions of a quiet night's sleep quickly disappear when you discover that rooms face the outdoor plaza where live concerts take place among several outdoor bars! Billed as 'Baja's entertainment resort,' it's a fun-lovin' place where only the truest of partiers will find themselves at home. Spring break, needless to say, is out of control.

Rosarito Beach Hotel (☎ 612-0144, in the USA 800-343-8582; www.rosaritobeachhotel.com; Blvd Juárez 31; r midweek US\$77-140, weekend US\$132-195, apartments US\$155-218; 📍 📺 📶) Opened in the late 1920s during Prohibition, this beachside hotel quickly became a popular watering hole and gambling haven for Hollywood stars like Orson Welles and Mickey Rooney. Larry Hagman (of *Dallas* fame), Vincent Price and several Mexican presidents have also been guests. Facilities include two pools, a fishing pier, a gym, two restaurants and the Casa Playa Spa, offering a full menu of treatments. All rooms are modern in style.

Eating

Rosarito Norte is inundated with colorful little *taquerías* (taco stands) and seafood-cocktail stands along Blvd Juárez. It's fun to just walk along and stroll into a busy one to see what happens. Restaurants in central Rosarito are geared more toward family dining. Several places listed under Entertainment (opposite) serve food, making them good spots to kick off (or end) the night.

BUDGET

Tacos Manuel (Blvd Juárez near Ensenada; tacos US\$1; ☎ 8am-2am) It doesn't look like much, but streetside Tacos Manuel is a local favorite, serving delicious tacos *de carne asada* (grilled beef), *de cabeza* (head) and *al pastor* (roisserie pork) on handmade tortillas. For a seriously heavy treat, try the *quesadilla de carne asada*.

Tacos El Yaqui (cnr Palma & Av Mar del Norte; tacos US\$1.50-2.10; ☎ 8am-4:30pm, to 9:30pm Fri-Sun, closed Wed) More an outdoor restaurant than a street-style *taquería*, El Yaqui merely demonstrates the myriad forms a *taquería* in Mexico can take. The tacos here, made with deliciously grilled sirloin and served on freshly made flour tortillas, are some of the best in town. Ask them why they're so good, and one cook will yowl like a cat in heat while the other tells you that they're made from *carne de gato* (cat meat). Don't worry.

La Flor de Michoacán (☎ 612-1858; Blvd Juárez 291; full meal US\$7) Beloved Flor de Michoacán serves delicious, authentic *carnitas* (slow-roasted pork). A half-kilo order with tortillas, guacamole, beans, rice and salsa (US\$15) will feed two or three, and you won't need to eat for hours. In central Rosarito, La Flor de Michoacán 2, on Blvd Juárez 306, maintains the same prices but the setting isn't as nice.

MIDRANGE

La Cazuela del Mole (☎ 612-2910; Blvd Juárez 103; mains US\$5-7) Tidy and cute, this local favorite is best for the house dish: *mole* (a rich Oaxacan sauce prepared in several different ways). Try it *poblano* (dark and seasoned with chocolate) or *verde* (green and flavored with pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds). Each main course comes with a scrumptious bowl of chicken soup and a sweet tamale for dessert.

Los Pelicanos Restaurant & Bar (☎ 612-0445; www.pelicanosrosarito.com; Cedro 115; mains US\$7-12) At its namesake hotel (opposite), Los Pelicanos serves juicy steaks and solid Mexican fare. It's not cheap, but its ocean-view deck is a great place to watch the sunset.

Vince's (☎ 612-1253; Blvd Juárez 97-A; mains US\$5-22, average US\$10) Beloved Vince's has quadrupled in size since its original, tiny, fish-market self, but that's because people flock here in hordes to dig their forks into what many consider the town's best seafood.

La Leña (☎ 612-0826; Quinta Plaza shopping center, Blvd Juárez; mains US\$7-16; ☎ 1-9pm) This straightforward and unextraordinary restaurant, tucked into the 2nd floor of an equally unembroidered shopping center, specializes in prime beef.

El Nido (☎ 612-1430; www.elnidorestaurant.com; Blvd Juárez 67; mains \$7-20) One of the best places in Rosarito, El Nido enjoys a spotless reputation for its prime cuts of meat (beef, chicken, rabbit and pork) cooked over a wood-fired grill. Solidly prepared seafood and Mexican dishes and big breakfasts are also available. Great *rancho*-esque atmosphere.

Ortega's Place (☎ 612-1757; Blvd Juárez 200; buffet US\$7-10, mains US\$7-20) Popular with families for its festive atmosphere and decor, Ortega's used to be known for its lobster dinners but its biggest draw now is its all-you-can-eat buffet. It's decent. Skip the overpriced souvenir shop.

La Fachada (☎ 612-1785; Blvd Juárez 317; US\$8-20) Upscale La Fachada gets rave reviews from almost everyone for grilled specialties like steak and lobster.

Entertainment

On weekends, throngs of college students, soldiers and young Mexican-Americans descend upon Rosarito from Southern California for a dose of serious partying. Many of the most raucous haunts are in or near the Hotel Festival Plaza complex. The Rosarito Beach Hotel presents performances by mariachis, singers and gaudy cowboys doing rope tricks on weekends.

From June to October, *charreadas* (Mexican rodeos) often take place on Saturday afternoon. Check with the tourist offices for details.

Rock & Roll Taco (Blvd Juárez at Magnolia) Allegedly a favorite hangout of Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslet during the filming of *Titanic* at nearby Fox Studios Baja, R&R Taco is built on the site of a former rock-and-roll radio station that later became a mortuary – hence the skeletons in the decor. It's a fun place to whoop it up, and if you do feel like eating (mains US\$3 to US\$9), the tacos are cheap and tasty.

Señor Frogs (☎ 612-4375; Blvd Juárez at Nogal; ☎ closed Tue & Wed in winter) This Mexican chain never fails to stir up a good time with its tried and true club-cum-restaurant formula: music, food, drinking, dancing and plenty of whistle blowing.

Papas & Beer (☎ 612-0444) Down by the beach, Papas & Beer whoops revelers into a frenzy with a combination of loud music, beach-front tables, scantily dressed dancers, and the ever-popular mechanical bull. And, of course, plenty of booze.

Macho Taco (☎ 613-0630; www.clubmachotaco.com; Blvd Juárez 60 at Nogal; ☎ 7am-late) Good tacos, cold beer and loud, loud music draw the partiers at all hours. Best for eats during the day and partying at night.

Shopping

Rosarito has a reputation for being the best place in northern Baja for quality rustic furniture, which can be handmade to order for a fraction of what it would cost north of the border. Several businesses are on Blvd Juárez in Rosarito proper, but you'll find the biggest concentration – and lower prices – on the Transpeninsular a few miles south of town.

Mercado de Artesanías (Artisans' Market; Blvd Juárez 306) Located downtown, the 150-stall Mercado de Artesanías offers a huge selection of curios, crafts, jewelry, cigars, guitars and the obligatory obscene T-shirts ('I might be shy, but I'm a great !%@£').

Pancho's Curios (☎ 612-0091; Blvd Juárez 316) Dusty, dark and packed to the brim with Mexican handicrafts, Pancho's is great for really big carved wood products like horse heads or, for that matter, entire horses. Also picture frames, glass votives, metalwork, tiles, vases and furniture.

La Misión Viejo (☎ 612-1576; Blvd Juárez 139) Reasonable prices and a fabulous selection of crafts from all over Mexico make this one of the best shops in town.

Acentes de México (☎ 612-0721; Blvd Juárez 232) This is where you go for the big, beautiful and oh so expensive stuff like magnificent candles, exquisite wood products, leather furniture and more. Even if you don't buy, it's a pleasure to walk through.

Getting There & Around

Mexicoach (www.mexicoach.com) offers a direct bus service (US\$9, 40 minutes) from its Terminal Turístico in downtown Tijuana. It stops in front of the Rosarito Beach Hotel.

ABC buses between Tijuana and Ensenada stop at the tollgate at the southern end of Rosarito but do not enter the town itself. ABC's commuter line, Subur Baja, comes through about every 20 minutes from 6am to 8pm and goes to Tijuana's downtown terminal near the border; the cost is about US\$1.50.

Yellow route taxis leave from a stand near the Rosarito Beach Hotel, connecting Rosarito with Tijuana (US\$1.50, 30 minutes); flag one down anywhere on Blvd Juárez. Route taxis also head south as far as La Misión. Because all taxicabs travel along Blvd Juárez, Rosarito's main commercial drag, they are also a good way to travel from one end of town to the other; simply flag one down. The fare within town is US\$0.85.

POPOTLA

☎ 661

Until 1996 Popotla – situated about 5km (3 miles) south of Rosarito, at Km 33 on the Transpeninsular – was a rustic fishing village. Then Fox Studios Baja moved in. Planned as a temporary facility built for the filming of *Titanic* (1997), the site has evolved into a permanent studio. Its giant water tank has been used for scenes from several other movies, including *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) and *Deep Blue Sea* (1999). In 2000, parts of *Pearl Harbor*, starring Ben Affleck, were filmed here.

Visitors may wander the grounds of **Foxploration** (Map p86; ☎ 614-9000; www.foxploration.com; adult/child US\$12/9), an outdoor movie set-cum-theme park. Its attractions include the Titanic Expo exhibit hall, loaded with sets and props from the movie; a replica of Canal St, New York; an amphitheater; and Cinemágico, where you can witness all sorts of special effects in action.

At Km 35.5 on the Transpeninsular, **Hotel Calafia** (Map p86; ☎ 612-1580/81, in the USA 619-739-4343; www.hotel-calafia.com; r Sun-Thu US\$49-89, Fri & Sat US\$79-129) is a rather curious open-air museum showcasing important moments in Baja history. The hotel itself has an attractive ocean-front setting and package rates that include dinner for two are available. On weekends the restaurant does a famous brunch for US\$13; the best tables are right above the waves.

The nicest hotel along the Tijuana–Ensenada corridor is the Mediterranean-style **Las Rocas Resort & Spa** (Map p86; ☎ 612-2140, in the USA 888-527-7622; www.lasrocas.com; r US\$109-159, ste US\$154-214), at Km 38.5 on the Transpeninsular. Its 34 luxury suites and 40 standard rooms all have private, ocean-view balconies, satellite TV and telephones. Suites are appointed with stylish furniture and have microwaves, coffeemakers and fireplaces. Guests relax by the free-form 'infinity' pool or luxuriate at the first-rate hotel spa. Two restaurants (mains US\$10 to US\$25) serve delicious seafood and Mexican dishes.

Route taxis between Rosarito and Puerto Nuevo (see opposite) drop you in Popotla.

PUERTO NUEVO

☎ 661

Puerto Nuevo means one thing: lobster. The fun of visiting is joining the thousands of people who pour into this bustling fishing town every weekend during lobster season (October through March) to feast on rice, beans, chips, salsa and everyone's favorite crustacean. Puerto Nuevo has been famous for its lobster since the mid-1950s, when women started selling it from their homes to the trickle of folks who passed through. Now, over 35 restaurants sell the tail, even out of lobster season, when it's either frozen (usually at the smaller restaurants) or imported fresh from outside of Baja (which is what the larger restaurants can afford to do).

Unless you're too full of lobster and too high on beer, there's little reason to stay. If

you do stay, you'll find excellent accommodations within steps of Puerto Nuevo at the **Grand Baja Resort** (☎ 614-1488/94, in the USA 877-315-1002; www.grandbaja.com; Transpeninsular Km 44.5; r US\$69-89, ste US\$79-129; P ♻️ 🚰). The modest resort offers spacious, spotless tile-floor rooms with separate sleeping area, living rooms and a sliding door onto a small private patio. Some rooms have ocean views. There's little reason to cough up for the junior suites because the standard rooms are practically identical. The deluxe suites have prettier furniture. The resort has tennis courts and a walkway to the beach. Studios, villas and apartments (all with kitchenettes) are also available.

All the restaurants specialize in lobster, usually cooked in one of two manners: *ranchera* (simmered in salsa) or *frito* (battered and grilled) and served with flour tortillas, limes and all the aforementioned condiments. Restaurants generally have similar prices: US\$18 to US\$22 for a full lobster dinner and US\$10 to US\$14 for a grilled fish dinner. There are loads of other restaurants in town, and you can walk around and pick one that looks busy. We've listed the favorites here.

The Ortega family opened the first lobster restaurant in Puerto Nuevo, and their restaurant, **Ortega's Patio** (☎ 614-0345), at Km 49, is one of the nicest places in town, especially if you get to sit on the outdoor terrace.

Restaurant Puerto Nuevo 1 (☎ 614-1411; cnr Rentería & Arpón; lobster plate US\$22; 🕒 11am-7:30pm Tue-Sun) is on your left after passing through the arch into town. Also called 'Numero Uno', it's supposedly the longest-running lobster house in town and lines still stretch down the street on weekends. Fish filets, shrimp, *carne asada*, guacamole (*lots* of guacamole) and quesadillas are also on the menu. A large serving of lobster (two halves) goes for US\$22.

Next door, the **Restaurant Puerto Nuevo 2** (☎ 614-1454; Arpón near Rentería) is a little more upscale and offers more variety on the menu. A lot of people swear by this place. **Sandra's** (☎ 614-1051), **The Lobster House** (☎ 614-1072), and **La Escondida** (☎ 614-1215) are other local favorites where you can test out the local lobster specials.

Puerto Nuevo is at Km 44 of the Transpeninsular. It's signed from both the toll road and the old highway. Route taxis from Rosarito depart from Blvd Juárez, near the Hotel Festival Plaza, and charge about US\$2.50 for the ride.

CANTAMAR

Near Km 47 on the Transpeninsular this blip of a village has a few small grocery stores, a bakery, a *llantera* (tire shop), taco stands and a Pemex. The spectacular **Cantamar Dunes**, immediately south of town, are regularly subjected to assaults by ATVs and other off-road vehicles. Admission is US\$5 (just to drive out onto the dunes), and there's primitive camping. Midweek in winter there is often no one staffing the entry gate and you can drive onto the dunes for free. Be careful though – the guys you see hanging out with shovels don't dig stuck vehicles from the sand just for kicks.

LA FONDA

☎ 646

Laid-back little La Fonda sits above the best strip of beach between the border and Ensenada. The surf break at the northern end of the beach (known as K58 because it sits at – you guessed it – Km 58) is excellent. Throw several good, midrange hotels, a campground and a couple of decent restaurants into the mix and you have all the makings for a perfect beach getaway only 58km south of the border.

It's well worth spending the extra US\$25 and scoring a bungalow at the lovely **Restaurant & Hotel La Fonda** (☎ 155-0308; Transpeninsular Km 59.5; r US\$100, bungalow US\$125). The bungalows have mission-style decor, beamed ceilings, hardwood floors, white brick walls, fireplaces and balconies with ocean views. Even the stone-floor bathrooms have good views. There's an attached restaurant and spa. The hotel rooms are perfectly fine if you're pinching pesos.

With a giant spray of multicolor bougainvillea out front, the white mission-style **Hotel La Misión** (☎ 155-0333/34; trailer US\$45-56, r US\$57-70, ste US\$88-100) offers spacious doubles with king-size beds, fireplaces and ocean views. Suites are even more spacious and have Jacuzzis and refrigerators. Permanent trailers beside the hotel offer cheaper sleeps. The furniture is a little on the shabby side, but it's a good midrange option. And the location is great. Its restaurant-bar has cheap dinner specials and margaritas, plus live music on weekends.

Sitting on a bare bluff high above the beach, **Campo Alisitos** (per car US\$16.50, RV US\$18) offers basic camping with toilets and cold showers. It's a great spot to pitch a tent and hit the surf,

though it can get pretty packed during weekends and when the surf's up. Check out the long list of rules (including, 'strictly prohibited to carry out acts that alter order and tranquility'). It can be noisy, but the vibe is good.

There are a few modest restaurants in town and several small stores that sell supplies.

La Fonda sits between Km 58 and Km 60 of the Transpeninsular. If you're traveling south on the toll road, take the La Misión exit; if you're traveling north, take the La Fonda exit. The hotels are just off the old highway.

LA MISIÓN

The village of La Misión, on the Transpeninsular's inland turn, is most notable as the site of the Dominican **Misión San Miguel de la Frontera**, also known as San Miguel Encino and San Miguel Arcángel. Founded in 1787 at a site unknown today, the mission moved up the valley of the Río San Miguel when the spring it depended upon dried up. The few remaining ruins are behind the elementary school at Km 65.5, about 1.6km (1 mile) south of the bridge over the Río San Miguel.

At the southern end of town, **Playa Misión** is a long, wide beach with the largest public access and parking between Tijuana and Ensenada, meaning it fills with families on weekends.

SALSIPUEDES

Taking the Salsipuedes turnoff at Km 88 induces the feeling you're about to drive off a cliff. Instead, you drop down a precipitous grade to an old ranch where you can pitch a tent among a grove of olive trees or beneath a broken *palapa* (palm-leaf shelter) overlooking

a small, rocky beach. This is the nearest place to Ensenada to get in some primitive camping. It's like a slice of old Baja in an area facing rapid development – in fact, Salsipuedes is slated for just that, so camp it while you can. On summer weekends it can be a madhouse, but midweek, especially in winter, you'll likely have the place to yourself. The outhouses are pretty beaten up, but the road is passable for most vehicles. Camping costs US\$10 per vehicle. A day visit costs US\$7.

SAN MIGUEL & EL SAUZAL

☎ 646

Surf is San Miguel's claim to fame. Its right point break draws hordes of surfers, especially in the cooler months. The peninsula's first board maker, San Miguel Surfboards (which has a shop in Ensenada), is named after the break. San Miguel itself is a small beach community consisting mostly of US retirees.

As you continue toward Ensenada, you'll know you've reached El Sauzal when you smell the foul odor of fish in the air. Home to a giant seafood cannery, El Sauzal is basically now a suburb of Ensenada with a sandy stretch of beach, a good hostel and a few trailer parks.

In San Miguel, the basic **Ramona Beach Motel & Trailer Park** (☎ 174-6045; RV/r US\$14/20) at Km 104, offers no-frills rooms and has 50 RV sites with full hookups near the beach. Another option near the beach is **San Miguel Village RV Park** (☎ 174-6225; RV US\$10), which offers 100 sites with full hookups, tent camping, hot showers and rustic toilets. The restaurant at the entrance to the RV park serves good seafood.

In El Sauzal, **Hostel Sauzal** (☎ 174-6381; <http://hostelsauzal.tripod.com>; 344 Av L; dm incl breakfast

SURF'S UP

The entire coast south of Rosarito to Ensenada is legendary with the California surf crowd, including **Popotla** (p92), **Calafia Point, K-38, K-38½**, **Cantamar** (p93), **La Fonda** (p93) and **San Miguel** (above), just to name a few of the better-known breaks (see Map p86). If you're heading down for a quick jaunt from California, stick to your right after crossing the border and grab the 'Ensenada Scenic Rd' road (toll-road México 1D), immediately after crossing the border.

A good place to get information is the **Inner Reef Surf Shop** (Map p86; ☎ 661-615-0841; Transpeninsular Km 34.5), about 10km (6 miles) south of Rosarito. The owner, Roger, has been surfing these shores for four decades. He also rents surfboards for US\$2/20 per hour/day. Boogie boards rent for US\$1.50/10 per hour/day and wetsuits cost US\$1.50/10 per hour/day. Roof racks are available for rent as well. There's a three-hour minimum on all hourly rates.

Campgrounds are getting more and more scarce along this stretch as the coast succumbs to development. One of the best spots to camp out is Campo Alisitos (p93) in La Fonda. If you can afford it, Las Rocas Resort & Spa (p92) is very convenient.

US\$15) is one of the few hostels in Baja. It's a delightfully friendly, alcohol-free place with clean bunks in colorful four-person rooms with ocean views. There's plenty of outdoor areas and chairs strewn about and the staff is very informative about what to do in the area. Its proximity to Ensenada makes it a good budget option for that city.

San Miguel is about 11km (7 miles) north of Ensenada and just south of the third toll-gate. To get to El Sauzal from Ensenada, take one of the yellow *micros* (small buses) signed 'El Sauzal' (US\$0.55) from Av Miramar between Av Juárez and Calle 6.

ENSENADA & AROUND

Between Ensenada and all there is to see and do *around* Ensenada (from sea kayaking and scuba diving to beach-walking and wine tasting) you could easily spend a few days shackled up in the area and have loads of fun.

ENSENADA

☎ 646 / pop 413,400

For many, Ensenada conjures up images of Americans descending from cruise ships to gobble up gaudy souvenirs among wild-eyed hordes of booze-crazed weekenders from Southern California. There's an element of truth to the image, but Ensenada has become so much more. A spiffed-up main drag (Av López Mateos) and a refurbished waterfront has generated a palpable civic pride that makes Ensenada one of Baja's most appealing cities to visit. Wander down to the waterfront for sunset (after the cruise passengers are back on the boat) and you'll find yourself mingling with a mix of local and Mexican-American families and a smattering of first-time tourists. The honking sea lions beneath the seawall, the street vendors and roving musicians and the ever-perfect ocean breeze make for a lovely evening. What's more, Ensenada is one of the best places to eat in Baja, famous for everything from fish tacos to French food. The seafood is sublime, and Mexico's premier wine region is only a short drive away.

History

Located on the harbor of Bahía de Todos Santos, Ensenada has sheltered explorers, freighters and fishing boats for more than four centuries. Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo,

searching for the Strait of Anián (the mythical Northwest Passage), entered the bay in September 1542, encountering a small group of indigenous hunter-gatherers.

In 1602 Sebastián Vizcaíno named Ensenada de Todos los Santos after All Saints' Day, November 1. During colonial times the harbor was an occasional refuge for Spanish galleons returning to Acapulco from Manila; the last one sailed through in 1815.

Ensenada's first permanent settlement was established in 1804, but it wasn't until 1869, with the discovery of gold at Real del Castillo, 35km (22 miles) inland, that this sleepy backwater grew up. Because Bahía de Todos Santos was the closest harbor, Ensenada boomed with an influx of miners, merchants and hangers-on. In 1882 the city became the capital of Baja territory. Closure of the mines in the 1880s ended the boom, and in 1915 status of territorial capital was shifted to Mexicali.

After the Revolution, Ensenada, like Tijuana, began to cater to the 'sin' industries of drinking, gambling and sex during US Prohibition. As more visitors came to Ensenada, entrepreneurs built more hotels and restaurants, and the town became a tourist resort and weekend getaway, as it remains today.

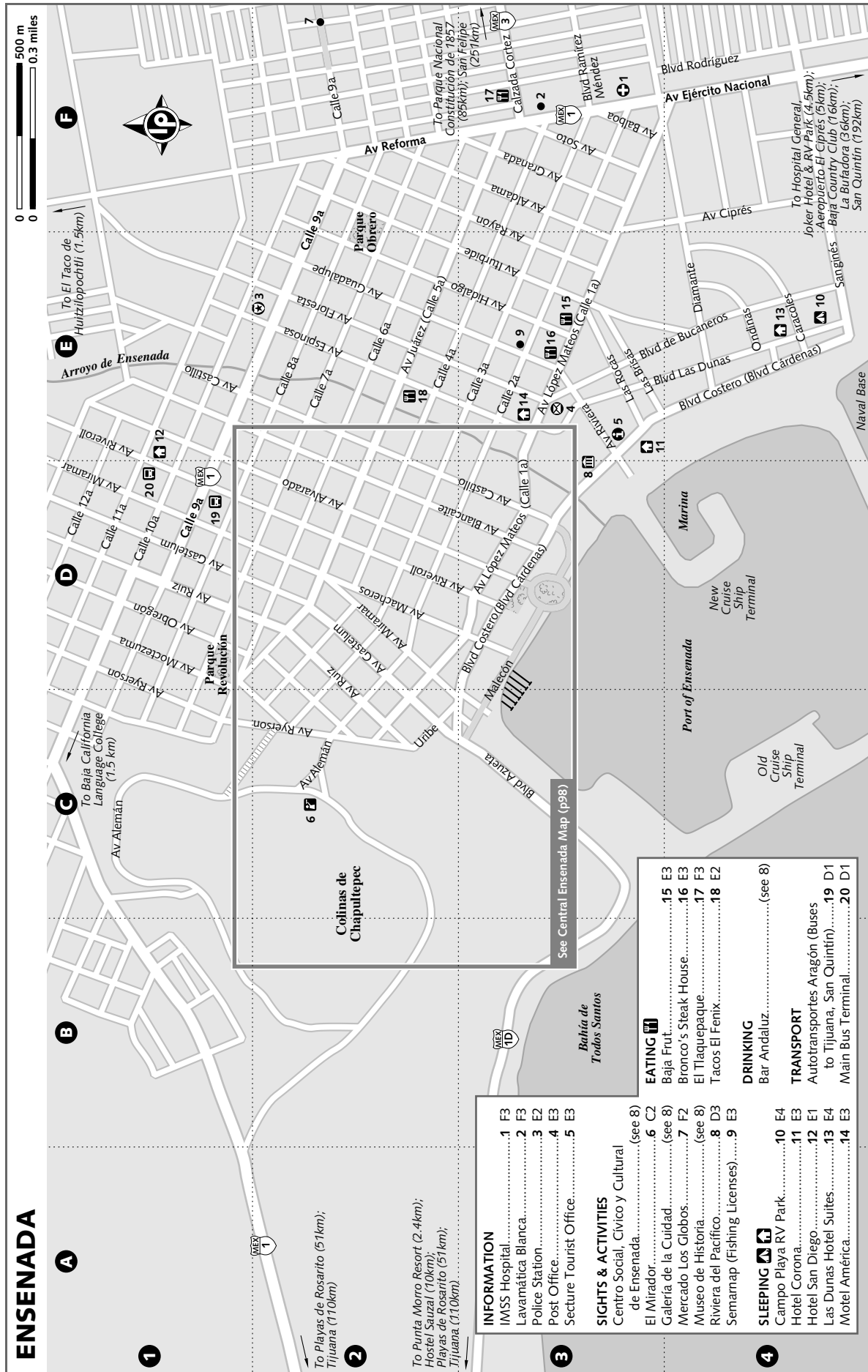
Orientation

Ensenada, 110km (68 miles) south of Tijuana and 192km (119 miles) north of San Quintín, is a major fishing and commercial port on sheltered Bahía de Todos Santos. Most hotels and restaurants line Av López Mateos (also known as Calle 1a), which is one block inland from the waterfront Blvd Costero, also known as Blvd Lázaro Cárdenas.

Five blocks inland, Av Benito Juárez (Calle 5a) has shops and businesses catering to the local population. On the western end of downtown is Ensenada's 'party district,' centered on Av Ruiz.

Just north of town, México 3 heads northwest to Sauzal, then northeast through the wine-growing country of the Valle de Guadalupe to the border at Tecate. From the southern end of Ensenada, México 3 leads east to Ojos Negros, Laguna Hanson in Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 and San Felipe.

Heading southbound, the Transpeninsular (México 1) leads to the military checkpoint at Maneadero, beyond which foreigners must have a tourist card (see p264).



Information**BOOKSTORES**

Libros Libros Books Books (Map p98; ☎ 178-8448; Av López Mateos 690) English-language magazines, newspapers and a few Lonely Planet guidebooks.

EMERGENCY & MEDICAL SERVICES

Cruz Roja (Red Cross; ☎ 066) Call for ambulance.

Hospital General (Map p96; ☎ 176-7800; Transpeninsular, Km 111)

IMSS Hospital (Map p96; ☎ emergency 172-4500; Av Reforma at Blvd Ramírez Méndez)

Police station (Map p96; ☎ 060; Calle 9a at Av Espinosa)

IMMIGRATION

Immigration office (Migraciones; Map p98; ☎ 674-0164; Blvd Azueta 101; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Issues tourist cards required for travel south of Maneadero if you didn't get it at the border. A fine of about US\$5 is charged on top of the US\$18 fee.

INTERNET ACCESS

Compunet (Map p98; Av Riveroll at Calle 2a; per hr US\$1.35)

Equinoxio Café (Map p98; Blvd Cárdenas 267; per hr US\$1.80) Fast computers, espresso drinks, laptop stations, wi-fi access.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Enjoy Ensenada (www.enjoyensenada.com) Ensenada Tourism Board.

Ensenada Gazette (www.ensnadagazette.com) Thorough web-based English-language newspaper about Ensenada and surroundings.

LAUNDRY

Lavamática Blanca (Map p96; cnr Av Reforma & Calzada Cortez) Self-service washers and dryers.

MONEY

Most businesses accept US dollars, but if you are traveling further south pesos are handy to have. Ensenada has plenty of banks that change money and many have ATMs. Banco Santander, Banco Serfin and Bancomer are all on Av Ruiz (Map p98). Banamex (Map p98) is located on Av Ryerson at Calle 3a. **Cambio Yesan** (Map p98; Av Ruiz 201; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) keeps longer hours, but rates may not be as favorable.

POST

Post office (Map p96; cnr Av López Mateos & Av Riviera.

TELEPHONE

Telnor public telephones are widespread in downtown Ensenada. Avoid the extortionate non-Telnor street phones when calling outside of Mexico.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Cotuco (Map p98; ☎ 178-2411; Blvd Costero 540; ☎ 9am-7pm Wed-Thu, 9am-5pm Sat-Tue) Across from the Pemex station, this office has friendly, informed bilingual staff and lots of free maps and brochures.

Secure (Tourist Assistance Office; Map p96; ☎ 172-3022/81; www.enjoyensenada.com; Blvd Costero 1477; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun) Has less information than Cotuco but can help with legal problems.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Viajes Damiana (Map p98; ☎ 174-0170; www.viajesdamiana.com; cnr Calle 2a & Av Obregón) Reputable, full-service travel agency.

Sights**AV LÓPEZ MATEOS**

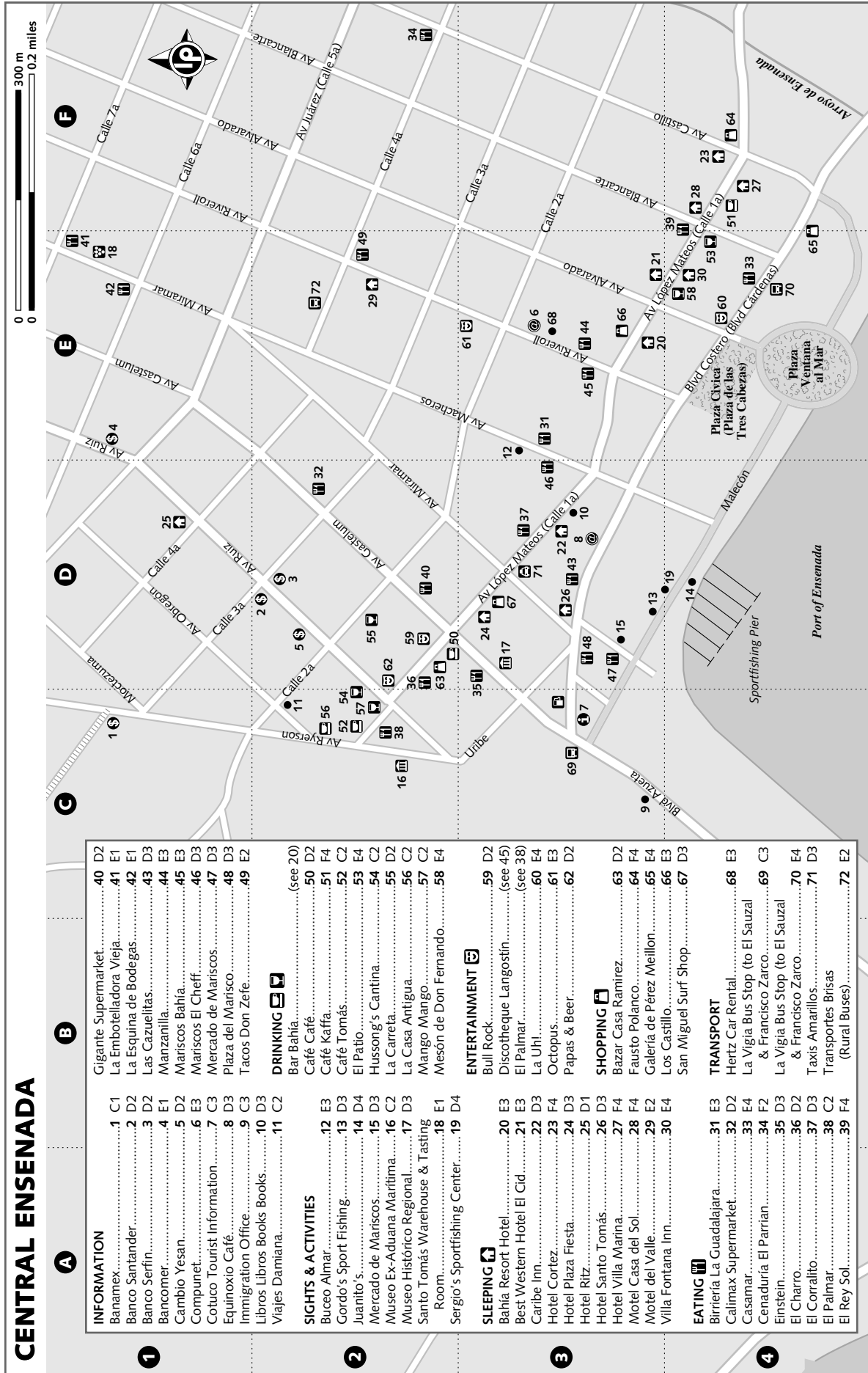
Ensenada has two sides – the local side (off Av López Mateos) and the side that panders to tourists: Av López Mateos. Along this main drag, you'll see everything from window displays featuring fake feces beneath signs reading 'Shit for sale' to the ever-present T-shirts with poetic slogans like 'One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor.' Despite it all (or because of it all), it makes for a fun wander and great shopping for the lover of kitsch. And there are plenty of places to stop for a margarita.

EL MIRADOR

For marvelous views of Ensenada and the Bahía de Todos Santos, climb or drive up to El Mirador (Lookout; Map p96) in Colinas de Chapultepec, the hilly residential neighborhood west of downtown. The lookout is gated off, but no one seems to mind people slipping through the hole in the fence to the right of the gate. To get there from downtown, head up Av Alemán from the western end of Calle 2a. If you're driving, park in the dirt area across the street.

BODEGAS DE SANTO TOMÁS

Founded in 1888 near the vineyards of the Valle de Santo Tomás south of Ensenada, Bodegas de Santo Tomás is one of Baja's premier vintners. Its varietals include pinot noir, chardonnay, cabernet, chenin blanc, barbera,



CENTRAL ENSENADA

A	INFORMATION	1 C1 Banamex.....	2 D2 Banco Santander.....	3 D2 Banco Serfin.....	4 E1 Bancomer.....	5 D2 Cambio Yesan.....	6 E3 Computel.....	7 C3 Cotuco Tourist Information.....	8 D3 Equinoxio Café.....	9 C3 Immigration Office.....	10 D3 Libros Libros Books Books.....	11 C2 Viajes Damiana.....											
B	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	12 E3 Buceo Almar.....	13 D3 Gordo's Sport Fishing.....	14 D4 Juanito's.....	15 D3 Mercado de Mariscos.....	16 C2 Museo Ex-Aduana Marítima.....	17 D3 Museo Histórico Regional.....	18 E1 Santo Tomás Warehouse & Tasting Room.....	19 D4 Sergio's Sportfishing Center.....	20 E3 Bahía Resort Hotel.....	21 E3 Best Western Hotel El Cid.....	22 D3 Caribe Inn.....	23 F4 Hotel Cortez.....	24 D3 Hotel Plaza Fiesta.....	25 D1 Hotel Ritz.....	26 D3 Hotel Santo Tomás.....	27 F4 Hotel Villa Marina.....	28 F4 Motel Casa del Sol.....	29 E2 Motel del Valle.....	30 E4 Villa Fontana Inn.....			
C	EATING	31 E3 Birriería La Guadalupe.....	32 D2 Calimax Supermarket.....	33 E4 Casamar.....	34 F2 Cenaduría El Parrían.....	35 D3 Einstein.....	36 D2 El Charro.....	37 C3 El Corralito.....	38 D2 El Palmar.....	39 F4 El Rey Sol.....	40 D2 Gigante Supermarket.....	41 E1 La Embotelladora Vieja.....	42 E1 La Esquina de Bodegas.....	43 D3 Las Cazuellitas.....	44 E3 Manzanilla.....	45 E3 Mariscos Bahía.....	46 D3 Mariscos El Cheff.....	47 D3 Mercado de Mariscos.....	48 D3 Plaza del Marisco.....	49 E2 Tacos Don Zefe.....			
D	DRINKING	(see 20)	50 D2 Bar Bahía.....	51 F4 Café Kafía.....	52 C2 Café Tomás.....	53 E4 El Patio.....	54 C2 Hussong's Cantina.....	55 D2 La Carreta.....	56 C2 La Casa Antigua.....	57 C2 Mango Mango.....	58 E4 Mesón de Don Fernando.....	59 D2 Bull Rock.....	(see 45)	60 E4 Discotheque Langostín.....	61 E3 El Palmar.....	62 D2 La Uhl.....	63 D2 Octopus.....	64 F4 Papas & Beer.....	65 E4 Bazar Casa Ramirez.....	66 E3 Fausto Polanco.....	67 D3 Galería de Pérez Meillon.....	68 E3 Los Castillo.....	69 C3 San Miguel Surf Shop.....
E	ENTERTAINMENT	69 C3 Bull Rock.....	(see 45)	70 E4 Discotheque Langostín.....	(see 38)	71 E3 La Uhl.....	72 E2 Octopus.....	73 E2 Papas & Beer.....	74 F4 Bazar Casa Ramirez.....	75 E4 Fausto Polanco.....	76 E3 Galería de Pérez Meillon.....	77 D3 Los Castillo.....	78 D3 San Miguel Surf Shop.....	79 C3 Hertz Car Rental.....	80 E3 La Vigía Bus Stop (to El Sauzal & Francisco Zarco.....	81 C3 La Vigía Bus Stop (to El Sauzal & Francisco Zarco.....	82 E4 Taxis Amarillos.....	83 D3 Transportes Brisas (Rural Buses).....	84 E2 72 E2				
F	SHOPPING	81 E3 Birriería La Guadalupe.....	82 D2 Calimax Supermarket.....	83 E4 Casamar.....	84 F2 Cenaduría El Parrían.....	85 D3 Einstein.....	86 D2 El Charro.....	87 C3 El Corralito.....	88 D2 El Palmar.....	89 F4 El Rey Sol.....	90 D2 Gigante Supermarket.....	91 E1 La Embotelladora Vieja.....	92 E1 La Esquina de Bodegas.....	93 D3 Las Cazuellitas.....	94 E3 Manzanilla.....	95 E3 Mariscos Bahía.....	96 D3 Mariscos El Cheff.....	97 D3 Mercado de Mariscos.....	98 D3 Plaza del Marisco.....	99 E2 Tacos Don Zefe.....			

tempranillo and merlot. Up to 150,000 cases are shipped annually throughout Mexico and to Western Europe, Japan and the USA.

The Santo Tomás warehouse and **tasting room** (Map p98; ☎ 178-3333, 178-2509; www.santotomas.com.mx; Av Miramar 666; ☎ 9am-5pm) is located in Ensenada and offers free 30-minute **tours** (☎ 10am, 11am, noon, 1pm & 3pm). Wine tasting costs an additional US\$5 or US\$10. The US\$5 tasting includes three whites and three reds; the US\$10 tasting allows you to sample up to 15 wines, including two *reservas* (reserves), and take home a souvenir glass.

RIVIERA DEL PACÍFICO

An extravagant waterfront complex with Spanish-Moorish architectural touches, the **Riviera del Pacífico** (Map p96; admission free; ☎ grounds 9am-7pm, interior 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) opened in 1930 as the Playa Ensenada Hotel & Casino. The second casino in northern Baja (after the Agua Caliente in Tijuana), this lavish facility was once the haunt of Hollywood figures including ex-Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller ("Tarzan"), Myrna Loy, Lana Turner, Ali Khan and Dolores del Río. Briefly managed by US boxer Jack Dempsey, the facility closed in 1938 when President Lázaro Cárdenas outlawed casino gambling.

Rescued from the wrecking ball in the early 1990s, the building was reborn as the **Centro Social, Cívico y Cultural de Ensenada** (Map p96) and now hosts cultural events, weddings, conventions and meetings.

Open to the public, the Riviera del Pacífico – framed by splendid gardens – is well worth taking some time to explore. The lobby contains an impressive **relief map** of the mission sites scattered throughout Baja and Alta California. Most rooms feature carved and painted ceilings, elaborate tile work, giant wrought-iron chandeliers and creaky parquet floors. The Dining Room and the circular Casino Room are especially impressive, as is the elegant Bar Andaluz (p105), with its arched wooden bar.

The complex also contains the **Museo de Historia** (Map p96; admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-5pm Tue-Sun, Mon from 10am), which traces northern Baja history from the indigenous inhabitants to the mission period. On the building's basement level, the **Galería de la Ciudad** (Map p96; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) features Baja California artists.

MUSEO HISTÓRICO REGIONAL

This modest **museum** (Map p98; ☎ 178-3692; Av Gastelum near Av López Mateos; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) featuring the 'People and Cultures of Meso-America' is housed in an 1886 military barracks that served as the city's jail until as recently as 1986. Exhibits feature tools, ceramics and other archeological finds of the indigenous Cúcapa, Paipai, Kumiai (Kumeyaay) and Kiliwa.

As you're wandering around, check out the cell block, where several of the tiny, windowless concrete cubicles sport some rather accomplished murals by the former inmates. The former dormitory houses rotating art exhibits.

MUSEO EX-ADUANA MARÍTIMA

Built in 1887 by the US-owned International Company of Mexico, the former Marine Customs House is Ensenada's oldest public building. The **Maritime Museum** (Map p98; ☎ 178-2531; Av Ryerson 99 at Uribe; admission free; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) houses rotating exhibitions – from archeological exhibits to contemporary art – with a cultural or historical angle.

MARKETS

Bric-a-brac collectors will find heaven on earth at the **Mercado Los Globos** (Map p96; ☎ 10am-6pm), a sprawling market area spanning eight square blocks on Calle 9a, several blocks east of Av Reforma. Vendors sell everything from old cutlery, dusty plates and broken 1970s radios to fruits, vegetables and a plethora of dried chilies. Weekends are the best time to visit.

Another Ensenada institution is the colorful (and odiferous) **Mercado de Mariscos** (Fish Market; Map p98; Av Miramar at Blvd Costero; ☎ 6:30am-7pm), where you can admire – and purchase – the daily catch. After browsing the piles of abalone steaks, tuna slabs, and mounds of purple octopuses, hit the *taquerías* across the way.

Activities

BEACHES & SURFING

There are no beaches in Ensenada proper, but Estero Beach and Playa El Faro (see p107) are a short drive south and are good for sunbathing. The nearest good surf is San Miguel (see p94). For some well-priced surf gear and – depending on who's in the shop – information, head to the San Miguel Surf Shop (p106).

DAY-TRIPPER

Inject some extra adventure into your jaunt south of the border – Ensenada makes an excellent base for exploring the sea, swill and cultural landscape that make this area so special. Here are a few ideas:

- Hire a cab so you don't have to drive (about US\$60) and head out to the Valle de Guadalupe for an afternoon of wine tasting. Don't miss the museums in Francisco Zarco (p109).
- Drive out to La Bufadora, and sample tamales and olives from the many vendors along the way; it's one of Ensenada's culinary treats (p108).
- Drive out to Dale's La Bufadora Dive Center on Punta Banda and rent kayaks for an exciting ocean paddle (p108).

FISHING

Sportfishing is extremely popular in Ensenada. Catches include albacore, barracuda, bonito, halibut, white sea bass and yellowtail, depending on the season. Most people join an organized fishing trip for about US\$40 per person, plus US\$10 for a Mexican fishing license. Groups traveling together can also charter an entire boat. Rates depend on the vessel, but figure on anywhere between US\$450 and US\$950 for a 12-passenger cruiser or around US\$250 for a four-person *panga* (fiberglass skiff). Prices are always about 20% higher on weekends.

The three main operators are **Gordo's Sport Fishing** (Map p98; ☎ 178-3515; www.gordos.8m.com; Malecón), **Sergio's Sportfishing Center** (Map p98; ☎ 178-2185; www.sergios-sportfishing.com; Malecón) and good ol' **Juanito's** (Map p98; ☎ 174-0953; juancard@prodigy.net.mx; Malecón), all with offices right on the waterfront near the fish market. Trips leave year-round at 6 or 7am and return at 3pm, and a fishing license is usually included in the price.

If you're taking your own boat, fishing licenses are available from **Semarnap** (Map p96; ☎ 176-3837; Calle 2a at Av Guadalupe).

DIVING

The best dive operators are located out on Punta Banda. Aside from Dale's (p108), another operator that has received reader recommendations is **Baja Blue Divers** (☎ 120-3040; www.bajabluedivers.com). They'll pick you up anywhere

in Ensenada and take you back after a lunch of fish tacos. Half-day shore-entry dives cost US\$115 per person. Snorkeling trips cost US\$65. Kayaking, which includes instruction and open-top kayaks, costs US\$65. All trips include transportation and lunch. Gear is also rented for anyone who would like to go independently.

Buceo Almar (Map p98; ☎ 178-3013; Av Macheros 149) rents and sells equipment.

WHALE-WATCHING

Between December and March, California gray whales pass through Bahía de Todos Santos on their way to central Baja's calving sites. In addition to observing whales swimming, breaching and diving, you'll be able to see pelicans, gulls, cormorants and other seabirds skimming the ocean's surface. All three operators listed under Fishing (left) offer four-hour weekend whale-watching trips for about US\$25 per person. Children under 12 pay about US\$20.

GOLF

Two golf courses are within easy reach of Ensenada. About 16km (10 miles) to the south is the 18-hole **Baja Country Club** (Map p86; ☎ 177-5523; www.bajacountryclub.com; green fees incl cart US\$46.75, club rental US\$15; ☎ 7am-7pm). The other course, on the ocean and generally considered better, is at **Bajamar** (Map p86; ☎ 615-0151, in the USA 888-311-6076; www.golfbajamar.com; green fees US\$35-89), about 35km (22 miles) north of town.

Courses

With the exception of La Paz, Ensenada is the best place in Baja California to study Spanish. **Baja California Language College** (Map p96; Colegio de Idiomas de Baja California; ☎ 174-5688, in the USA 619-758-9711, 877-444-2252; www.bajacal.com; Barcelona y Belgrado) offers Spanish immersion programs at its campus in the hills about 1.6km (1 mile) from the coast. One-week programs (30 hours) cost US\$265/519 per group/private; summer rates (June through August) for private instruction go up to US\$559 per week. Twelve-hour weekend courses cost US\$160/229. During summer, the private class goes up to US\$269. Day- and hour-long classes are also available. The school can arrange a stay with a Mexican family, usually for about US\$30 per day, including three meals.

Festivals & Events

More than 70 sporting, tourist and cultural events take place in Ensenada each year; the ones listed below are only a sample. Dates are subject to change, so contact one of the tourist offices or event organizers for specifics.

Carnaval (Carnival or Mardi Gras) February. Ensenada's biggest truly Mexican celebration.

Bicycle Ride Rosarito–Ensenada (www.rosaritoensenada.com) April and September.

Fiesta de los Viñedos en Flor (Flowering Vines Festival; fiestasvendimia@hotmail.com) Early to mid-May. One-day festival at the beginning of the vintners' season. Held at a selected winery, usually in nearby Valle de Guadalupe. Far more intimate than the popular Fiesta de la Vendimia. Tickets go fast.

SCORE Baja 500 Early June. Off-highway race; for details see www.score-international.com.

Fiesta de la Vendimia (Wine Harvest Festival) Early August. Weeklong wine festival kicking off harvest season with cultural events in Valle de Guadalupe and Ensenada. It's a great party, and tickets always sell out. For details and ticket information, email fiestasvendimia@hotmail.com or contact Viajes Damiana (p97).

International Seafood Fair (canirace@prodigy.net.mx; ☎ 174-0448) Mid-September. Seafood-cooking competition judged by chefs from San Diego; for details, call or send an email.

SCORE Baja 1000 (www.score-international.com) Mid-November. Classic off-highway race from Ensenada to Cabo San Lucas.

Sleeping

Most hotels line downtown Ensenada's Av López Mateos, the main tourist strip. The cheapest ones are on the west end of the strip and, to match the neighborhood, are seedier than those to the east. Anywhere on Av López Mateos, request a room away from the street if you hope to get some shut-eye while those outside tear up the night. Reservations are advisable on weekends and in summer. Unless specified, rates listed below are for weekends and may fall midweek.

BUDGET

Campo Playa RV Park (Map p96; ☎ 176-2918; campo_playa_sa@hotmail.com; Blvd Las Dunas 570 at Sanginés; camping per vehicle US\$18, hookups US\$25) At the southern end of downtown, Campo Playa has 90 small campsites with palm trees for shade. Fees include hot showers and full hookups. It's a friendly place, and, while not the most scenic, surprisingly homey for being so close to downtown. Good spot.

Motel América (Map p96; ☎ 176-1333; Av López Mateos 1309; r US\$28, Fri & Sat US\$30; 📍) Just east of the main tourist area, Motel América is an old-school drive-in motel with giant rooms (most with kitchenettes) and friendly owners who live on-site. Noise (both from the street and the propeller-like fans) can be bothersome, but the hotel is undoubtedly one of Ensenada's best budget options.

Caribe Inn (Map p98; ☎ 178-3481; www.caribeinn.com; Av López Mateos 628; r weekdays/weekends US\$30/35; 📍) Bargain beds at the epicenter of Ensenada's nightlife means sharing hallways with seedy characters and liquored up out-of-towners – all having fun of course. And there's no reason you can't too (provided you can channel your inner party animal and dig the unkempt and sometimes noisy atmosphere). The rooms themselves are small, clean and have cable TV.

Hotel San Diego (Map p96; ☎ 178-0493; Av Riveroll 1068; r weekdays/weekends US\$31/41; 📍) This friendly, spotless hotel is perfect if you want something near the bus terminal – it's right across the street.

Hotel Ritz (Map p98; ☎ 174-0501; explotur@telnor.net; Calle 4a 381; r US\$30-45) Shell out for one of the upper rooms with a balcony, and the Ritz will surely satisfy. Opt for a cheaper room, however, and the lack of windows, plus dark carpet and cramped space will likely induce bouts of claustrophobia. It definitely has character and, despite the seemingly odd location, it's secure and very friendly.

Hotel Plaza Fiesta (Map p98; ☎ 178-2715; Av López Mateos 542-A; r midweek/weekends US\$39/56) The Plaza Fiesta is an architectural gem that has sadly been allowed to decay, but it's fine for a night's cheap sleep as long as you don't mind the hourly rate customers. The magic touch is the green wrinkled carpeting resembling worn Astroturf.

Joker Hotel & RV Park (Map p96; ☎ 176-7201, in the USA 800-256-5372; www.hoteljoker.com; Transpeninsular Km 12.5; campsites US\$14, s weekdays/weekend US\$35/48, d US\$45/60, chalet US\$50/75; 📍 📍) The Joker's location on the Transpeninsular, south of downtown, makes for convenient lodging, camping or RV parking if you're just passing through. The shaded RV sites have full hookups and barbeque pits.

MIDRANGE

Motel del Valle (Map p98; ☎ 178-2224; Av Riveroll 367; r midweek/weekends US\$45/59; 📍) The great value, well-kept Motel del Valle has 21 carpeted

rooms with cable TV, and the friendly management keeps a watchful eye over the premises, making sure the communal coffee pot is always full. Lone women travelers might find the walk back to the hotel after dark a bit uncomfortable.

Villa Fontana Inn (Map p98; ☎ 178-3434, in the USA 800-422-5204; www.villafontana.com.mx; Av López Mateos 1050; r midweek US\$46-58, weekends US\$65-76, ste US\$115-134;) The modest yet sparkling clean Villa Fontana is rock-solid value, with spacious, carpeted rooms and a central location. The cheaper rooms open onto the tiny interior parking lot, and the pricier abodes open onto the pool and Jacuzzi area. Staff is courteous, and Mexican pastries and coffee are served in the lobby.

Bahía Resort Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 178-2101/03, in the USA 888-308-9048; www.hotelbahia.com.mx; Av López Mateos 850-A; r midweek US\$59-85, weekends & high season US\$89, ste US\$115-170;) The centrally located Bahía Resort boasts 64 clean, carpeted rooms with balconies, heaters and small refrigerators. The bar here serves up tasty margaritas, and the pool is a hit on hot days. The dark hallways are reminiscent of an urban high school, however, and the rooms are surprisingly standard for the price.

Hotel Villa Marina (Map p98; ☎ /fax 178-3321/51; Av López Mateos at Castillo; s/d midweek US\$55/66, weekends US\$88/99;) This is Ensenada's only high-rise, so if you want a bird's-eye view of the harbor and sea, this is the place. Name a service – bar, pool, room service, disco, laundry, shops – the Villa Marina's got it.

Las Dunas Hotel Suites (Map p96; ☎ 176-2771; Calle Caracoles 169; r US\$65-83;) South of the downtown area, the pleasant Las Dunas offers family suites with bedroom, living room with sofa bed, dining area and full kitchens. The standard rooms are comfortable but don't have kitchens. There's also a pool, Jacuzzi and barbecue area. Golf packages can be arranged with the Baja Country Club (p100) and cost US\$69 per person for one night and a day's golf.

TOP END

Motel Casa del Sol (Map p98; ☎ 178-1570; www.casadelsolemexico.net; Av López Mateos 1001; r midweek US\$56-100, weekends US\$85-140;) The standout feature here is that all the rooms – even the standards – have sitting areas with chairs and a table or a sofa and mission-style furniture. There's a pool, Jacuzzi, coffee shop

and a bar all on-site. The rooms even have hair driers in the bathrooms. One of the best in its price range.

Hotel Santo Tomás (Map p98; ☎ 178-1503; www.bajainn.com; Blvd Costero 609; r midweek/weekends US\$52/100, ste US\$120/140;) A sweeping marble staircase, glass elevator (with splendid views of...the parking lot), sunny hallways and free coffee and newspapers give the comfy Santo Tomás the feel of a business hotel. It's a relaxing place but comparatively pricey for what's on offer.

Best Western Hotel El Cid (Map p98; ☎ 178-2401, in the USA 800-352-4305; www.hotelelcid.com.mx; Av López Mateos 993; r Sep-Jun US\$69-110, Jul, Aug & holidays US\$82-150;) Service is tops at this handsome hotel located smack in the middle of the tourist drag. The restaurant is highly regarded, the rooms are comfortable (despite the polyester bedspreads) and the swimming pool is excellent. Suites have whirlpool bathtubs and comfortable beds backed by giant mirrors. The standard rooms have dry-bars and fridges.

Hotel Cortez (Map p98; ☎ 178-2307; Av López Mateos 1089; r weekdays/weekends US\$87/112, ste US\$128-145;) For those seeking character and comfort, this is the spot. Free coffee, newspaper, bottled water and room service are available, and lounge chairs surround an inviting swimming pool. There's a gym, wireless internet access in the rooms and a computer room for guests. Winter rates drop to US\$52. Reservations highly recommended.

Hotel Corona (Map p96; ☎ 176-0901; www.hotelcorona.com.mx; Blvd Costero 1442; r US\$145;) Facing the harbor near the Riviera del Pacífico, the clay-tile-roofed Hotel Corona has 93 rooms, all with balconies, TVs, heaters and air-con. Get your money's worth by soaking in the Jacuzzi and sauna and working out in the gym. Several readers have recommended this place. Rates drop by about 50% on weekdays during low season.

Punta Morro Resort (☎ 178-3507, in the USA 800-526-6676; www.punta-morro.com; Hwy Tijuana-Ensenada Km 106; r US\$162, ste US\$196-392;) This stylish, quiet and relaxing oceanside resort about 2.4km (1.5 miles) northwest of downtown has beautifully appointed suites with kitchens and terraces with views of the waves. The restaurant is among the best in the area. Rates drop by about 20% from Sunday to Thursday.

Eating

Ensenada has long been known for its food, and dining here is one of the city's highlights. Its eateries run the gamut from corner taco stands and family restaurants – where *antojitos* are prepared in big, open kitchens – to busy seafood restaurants and stylish trendsetters with creative menus. Most of the many restaurants along Av López Mateos are reliable, but for authenticity and better prices, remove yourself from the main drag.

BUDGET

Taquerías

Mercado de Mariscos (Fish Market; Map p98; Av Miramar at Blvd Costero; tacos US\$1-1.50; ☎ 6:30am-7pm) A visit to Ensenada is hardly complete without a visit to the colorful taco and seafood stands adjacent to the fish market. Women coerce passers-by into their stalls, where giant glass goblets of condiments (which you should lather onto fish tacos) make eating a kaleidoscopic experience indeed.

Tacos Don Zefe (Map p98; ☎ 178-3841; cnr Av Riveroll & Calle 4a; tacos US\$1.20, Tue & Thu US\$0.60; ☎ 9am-7pm) Not only does Don Zefe serve what are arguably the best seafood tacos in town, it's also the perfect combination of taco stand and restaurant: outdoor tables, a stainless steel bar mounted between two palm trees and friendly counter service.

Tacos El Fenix (Map p96; cnr Avs Espinoza & Juárez; tacos US\$1-1.50; ☎ 8am-8:30pm) A local institution, El Fenix serves outstanding fish and shrimp tacos to a throng of regulars who harmoniously navigate the condiments bar as cash and tacos change hands at full tilt. Tacos this good at these prices are a steal.

Plaza del Marisco (Map p98; Blvd Costero; tacos US\$0.70-1.50) Some argue this cluster of seafood taco stands along Blvd Costero has more reliable quality than those adjacent to the market itself. We found the difference negligible. Try 'em and see.

Restaurants

Cenaduría El Parrián (Map p98; ☎ 178-1733; cnr Av Castillo & Calle 4a; mains US\$3-4; ☎ noon-midnight Thu-Tue) If you want to eat well on the cheap, blow off the gringo traps along López Mateos and join the locals at El Parrián. The small menu of enchiladas, tacos, *tamales* and *tostadas* is outstanding. Try the *pozole* (a hearty pork and hominy soup) and polish it off with a hot mug of *champurrado* (a chocolate corn drink).

El Tlaquepaque (Map p96; Calzada Cortez 327; mains US\$3-4; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sun) Offering similar fare to El Parrián, this is an excellent family-style eatery concerned more with cooking up good, wholesome food than making money off the cruise-ship casualties.

Einstein (Map p98; Av Gastelum near Av López Mateos; mains US\$3-6) The owner didn't intend his restaurant to become downtown's most popular burger pit, but that's what people kept ordering. So the menu grew to include over a dozen types of burgers. Salads and pastas and a couple of seafood plates (his original idea was natural food) are still on the menu.

Baja Frut (Map p96; ☎ 176-5638; Av López Mateos 1650; mains US\$4-6; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) At this locally loved diner, '*los hotcakes*' come with real syrup, juices are fresh, tea means *two* tea bags, the coffee is bottomless and portions are huge. The *chilaquiles* (a breakfast dish made with fried tortillas and red or green sauce) are outstanding, and the service is tops.

our pick El Taco de Huitzilopochtli (Map p96; ☎ 174-2381; Av de Las Rosas 242, Valle Verde; mains US\$3.50-6; ☎ 8am-6pm Fri-Sun) It's worth planning your visit to Ensenada around this restaurant's opening hours. For 32 years Huitzilopochtli has been serving its mouthwatering *mixiote*, a unique Texcoco-style dish of lamb wrapped in maguey leaves and cooked for 16 hours in mesquite-fired ovens. Other wonderfully unique items include *tlacoyos* (thick, stuffed corn tortillas smothered in green chili sauce), *romeritos* (nopal cactus, potatoes and shrimp in a bowl of chocolaty, spicy *mole*) and *huauzontles* (a stuffed and battered broccoli-like vegetable doused in red sauce). To get there, head north of downtown on Av Reforma, turn right on Ambar, left on Pirules, right on Las Rosas. You may have to ask around once you're in the Valle Verde neighborhood.

Birriería La Guadalajara (Map p98; ☎ 174-0392; Macheros btwn Calle 1a & Calle 2a; mains US\$4-7) *Birria* (stewed goat, beef or lamb) is the specialty here, and you can order it made *de borrego* (lamb), *de res* (beef) or *de chivo* (goat). Big steaming bowls (or tacos, if you wish) will land on your table and keep you energized for hours.

Self-Catering

Supermarkets in the downtown area include **Gigante** (Map p98; Av Gastelum at Calle 2a; ☎ 7am-11pm) and **Calimax** (Map p98; Av Gastelum at Calle 3a; ☎ 7am-11pm).

MIDRANGE

El Corralito (Map p98; ☎ 178-2370; Av López Mateos 627; mains US\$4-7; 🕒 24hr) This place serves mediocre *antojitos* but really shines on weekends, when the nighttime crowd arrives for refueling sessions between bar visits. It's a great spot for a margarita on the strip.

Las Cazuelitas (Map p98; Costero 609-12; mains US\$4-8) Tie-clad waiters serve tasty Mexican food to a mostly middle-class Mexican clientele at this local diner. Great for breakfast.

El Charro (Map p98; ☎ 178-4045; Av López Mateos 454; chicken dishes US\$6-8) This is *the* place for marinated Mexican-style chicken, grilled or roasted over an open flame. Freshly made tortillas, salsa and other condiments accompany all orders.

El Palmar (Map p98; ☎ 788-8788; Av López Mateos 328; mains US\$6-10) Canopied by a giant *palapa*, El Palmar is another casual place to enjoy the day's catch. There's live *banda* (raucous brass-band music with vocals) Friday through Monday to help you digest your food (also, see Live Music, p106).

Mariscos El Cheff (Map p98; ☎ 178-8488; Av Macheros 123; mains US\$6-15; 🕒 11am-7pm Tue-Sun) This eclectic, eight-table mom-and-pop joint is revered for its seafood. Fish nets, dangling abalone shells and red tablecloths complete the scene. Great little place.

Mariscos Bahía (Map p98; ☎ 178-1015; Av Riveroll 109; mains US\$8-12) Since its opening in 1970, Mariscos Bahía has become a venerated classic. The halibut came out overcooked during our last visit, but the *camarones al mojo de ajo* (garlic shrimp; US\$12), the sidewalk terrace and the delicious margaritas made up for it.

TOP END

Casamar (Map p98; ☎ 174-0417; Blvd Costero 987; mains US\$9-20) Casamar's extensive and well-loved menu includes lobster salad, creatively doctored fish filets, a variety of shrimp and scampi dishes, fried frog legs, kabobs, seafood gratin, octopus and loads more. Excellent.

Manzanilla (Map p98; ☎ 175-7073; Av Riveroll 122; mains US\$10-15; 🕒 6pm-midnight Wed-Sun) With a

IN SEARCH OF THE MARGARITA

The margarita has a history as foggy as the morning after a night spent drinking them. From El Paso to Acapulco, plaques and bartenders tell different stories about who, why and where the drink was invented. Although the cocktail's creator is never the same, the stories all share two components: tequila and a picky woman for whom the drink was concocted and named.

Head over to the Riviera del Pacífico and you'll find a plaque outside the Bar Andaluz that tells one version of the margarita. In 1948 Marjorie King Plant, then owner of the hotel, walked into the bar and requested a drink that wouldn't irritate her alcohol 'allergy.' Sr David Negrete, the bartender, concocted a mixture of tequila, lime (and possibly Cointreau) that supposedly did the trick. You can guess what he named it.

True or not, one thing is certain: the margarita is a fabulous drink, and nowhere will you find more places serving better margaritas than Ensenada. In fact, so many places serve margaritas, we decided to undertake a bit of research to help steer you toward the best.

Unlike in the US, almost no bartender here would dream of using margarita mix. Fresh lime is paramount. Most standard margaritas have tequila, lime and Triple Sec, while a Cadillac margarita is usually made with premium tequila and a Grand Marnier or Cointreau float. Margaritas are served blended or on the rocks (our favorite) and with or without a salted rim. We've yet to drink in a bar in Ensenada that doesn't use purified ice. Here's the lowdown:

Bar Andaluz (opposite) A little pricey, but great for an afternoon drink in an historic setting.

Bar Bahía Served in a rocks glass rather than a goblet. We like that (and the US\$4 price tag!). The bar is inside the Bahía Resort Hotel (p102).

El Corralito (above) The house margarita (US\$6) is tart and tasty, and the sidewalk tables are fun.

El Rey Sol (opposite) The Cadillac margarita (US\$6) here is sublime.

Hussong's Cantina (opposite) They look small and innocent but pack a punch. Great value at US\$2.50. Superb atmosphere.

Mesón de Don Fernando (p106) Does monster margaritas in 'bird-bath' goblets; fun, but drink 'em fast or they water down.

HUSSONG'S CANTINA

Spit-and-sawdust **Hussong's Cantina** (Map p98; ☎ 178-3210; Av Ruiz 113; 🕒 10am-1am) is probably the best-known – and some say oldest – watering hole in the Californias. After arriving from Germany in the late 19th century, the Hussong family used their knowledge of traditional German brewing to establish one of Ensenada's first cantinas in 1892. Initially a stagecoach stop frequented by miners and ranchers, it later hosted Hollywood glam queen Marilyn Monroe, rough rider Steve McQueen and a host of other celebs. These days it's the 'mecca of margaritas and mariachis' for a motley crowd of locals (especially midweek), tattooed bikers, college students, honeymooning cruise-ship couples and retirees. And it's never lost its edge. With six-piece bands ripping out *corridos* (Mexican ballads) at full tilt, it's easily one of the best spots to party on the peninsula.

wonderful staff, outstanding regional and Italian-influenced cuisine and an atmosphere you'll melt into, Manzanilla is simply tops. The server will start you off with Baja-grown manzanilla olives and house-baked bread and explain each of the dishes, from fresh local oysters to lamb shank and exquisitely prepared fish. The rib-eye steaks, which come from a select ranch in Sonora (the state famous for its beef) are no less than orgasmic.

El Rey Sol (Map p98) Supposedly Mexico's oldest French restaurant (opened 1947), the award-winning El Rey Sol is elegant but relaxed, despite a guest list that includes several Mexican presidents. Full dinners start around US\$35, and the drinks are excellent.

Bronco's Steak House (Map p96; ☎ 172-4892; Av López Mateos 1525; mains US\$15-25; 🕒 8am-10:30pm) *Vaquero* (cowboy) culture is as alive in the decor here as it is in the hearty and humongous mesquite-grilled steaks that many claim are the best in town. Prices are high, but so is the quality. Great breakfasts.

The Bodegas de Santo Tomás complex (p97), on Av Miramar between Calles 6a and 7a, features two excellent dining establishments. **La Esquina de Bodegas** (Map p98; ☎ 178-7557; Calle 6a at Av Miramar; mains US\$8-12, 7-course meal US\$45; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) is worth a look for its decor alone. It metamorphosed from a former brandy distillery, integrating the ancient drums, vats and pipes into a hip industrial environment. The menu is Mediterranean with Mexican inflections.

The more formal of the two, **La Embotelladora Vieja** (Map p98; ☎ 174-0807; Av Miramar 666; appetizers US\$5-10, mains US\$15-20; 🕒 noon-10pm Mon-Sat) is set in a dimly lit wine cellar with giant, old French barrels looming over an elegant dining room. A full meal will run US\$35 to US\$45. The fare is 'Mexi-terranean.'

Drinking

Seems like ever since Hussong's opened in 1892 (see the boxed text, above), Ensenada has been a great place to drink. Restaurants with outdoor seating along Av López Mateos are prime spots for downing margaritas and cold beer during the day and early evening, while the bars along Av Ruiz are best at night, though they're busy even during the day on weekends.

CAFÉS

La Casa Antigua (Map p98; Av Obregón 110; 🕒 8am-11pm) Occupying one of Ensenada's oldest little houses, this friendly café serves great coffee, croissants, bagels (bagels!), sandwiches and homemade cakes and cookies.

Café Café (Map p98; Av López Mateos 496; 🕒 9am-5pm) Artsy café where most of the owner's paintings are for sale.

Café Kaffa (Map p98; Av López Mateos near Av Blancarte; 🕒 6:30am-10pm) Good espresso drinks and decent snacks.

Café Tomás (Map p98; Av López Mateos at Ryerson; 🕒 7am-midnight) Delicious espresso drinks, but pastries are sometimes stale.

BARS

Bar Andaluz (Map p96; ☎ 177-1730; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) For a change in ambience, visit the cultured Bar Andaluz inside the Riviera del Pacífico (p99), where having a drink is an exercise in nostalgia. You can almost visualize Lana Turner sipping a martini at the polished walnut bar.

El Patio (Map p98; ☎ 178-3866; Av López Mateos 1088) If tequila poppers, whistles and buckets of beer aren't your style, slip into this classy, dimly lit, low-ceiling bar where, for once, you can actually carry on a conversation with your mate (except on Friday and Saturday nights, when there's live music).

La Carreta (Map p98; Calle 2a near Av Gastelum; ☎ Wed-Sun) To brave the local *norteña* (country style) music scene, pop into the *rancho*-esque La Carreta, complete with wagon wheels out front and dancing inside. Thursday is ladies-only night.

Mesón de Don Fernando (Map p98; Av López Mateos 627) Restaurant that's best for a drink at its outside tables.

Mango Mango (Map p98; www.mangomango.com.mx; cnr Avs Ruiz & López Mateos) Festive bar-cum-restaurant with some outdoor seating and loud music.

Entertainment

As with bars, nightclubs concentrate around the intersection of Av López Mateos and Av Ruiz.

NIGHTCLUBS

Papas & Beer (Map p98; ☎ 174-0145; www.papasandbeer.com; Av Ruiz 102; ☎ 10am-3am) Notoriously crazy Papas & Beer caters mostly to rowdy college students, and a small army of bouncers keeps things under control. Roaring music – sometimes live, sometimes spun – means dancing tops conversation.

Discotheque Langostín (Map p98; ☎ 174-0318; Av Riveroll 109; cover charge from US\$3) Above the Mariscos Bahía restaurant, Langostín is where low-key locals take to the dance floor to disco, *banda* and rock, depending on the day.

Octopus (Map p98; Av Riveroll at Calle 2a; cover women/men US\$10/15) A mostly local and youngish (18 to 25) crowd frequents this bumpin' disco weekend nights.

La Uh! (Map p98; cnr Alvarado & Cárdenas; ☎ Fri-Sun) Currently the hottest weekend disco. On Friday nights it hosts a women-only show with bare male dancers on stage.

LIVE MUSIC

El Palmar (Map p98; ☎ 788-8788; Av López Mateos 328; cover charge US\$4) *Banda* may not seem the type of music you want to listen to over a plate of food, but it can put you in the party spirit if you give it a chance. Attracting more locals than tourists, this is a great place to hear good Mexican music (rather than Creedence and The Doors). Music starts at 10pm Friday, Saturday and Monday, and at 4pm on Sunday.

Bull Rock (Map p98; Av López Mateos) This 2nd-floor venue features earsplitting live rock and roll and can be a lot of fun on a good night.

Shopping

Av López Mateos is shoppers' heaven, where you can pick up everything from beer-can hip-holsters and bawdy T-shirts to finer products including woven blankets, textiles, silver jewelry, ceramics, masks, metalwork and countless other colorful Mexican crafts. Also see Markets, p99.

Galería de Pérez Meillon (Map p98; ☎ 175-7848; Blvd Costero 1094, Local 39) In the Centro Artesanal, this gallery sells first-rate indigenous pottery and other crafts from the Paipai, Kumiai and Cucupah peoples, as well as the world-famous Mata Ortiz pottery from mainland Mexico. By far one of Ensenada's best galleries.

Bazar Casa Ramirez (Map p98; ☎ 178-8209; Av López Mateos 496-3) Several readers have recommended this labyrinthine, two-story handicrafts store with items from all over Mexico. Prices are a little steep, but quality is high, and you'll definitely find a colorful selection. It has a large selection of Day of the Dead paraphernalia.

Fausto Polanco (Map p98; ☎ 174-0336; Av López Mateos 1107 at Castillo) A veritable museum of Mexican crafts, this two-story shop stocks some of the finest work in town. The furniture is beautiful, and the decorative arts and home accessories are stunning. There's a particularly good selection of pictures and frames, some great ceramics and some smaller pieces.

Los Castillo (Map p98; ☎ 178-2962; www.loscastillo.com; Av López Mateos 815) Excellent store for silver jewelry.

San Miguel Surf Shop (Map p98; ☎ 178-1007; Av López Mateos 560; ☎ 9am-7pm) Drop in here for surf boards, gear and – depending on who's behind the counter – information on the local surf scene. The owner, Eduardo Echegaray, has been shaping surfboards (long and short) for some 20 years, and his prices are lower than equivalent boards in the USA.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aereo Servicios Guerrero (☎ 120-5793; www.aerোসerviciosguerrero.com.mx; Plaza Las Palmas, Local 122, Colonia Obrera) flies to Isla Cedros (see p158) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for US\$100 each way from the military **Aeropuerto El Ciprés** (Map p86), south of town.

BOAT

Cruise ships arrive almost daily at Ensenada. See the Transportation chapter (p268) for more information.

BUS

Ensenada's **main bus terminal** (Map p96; Av Riveroll 1075 at Calle 11a) is located 10 blocks north of Av López Mateos. **ABC** (☎ 178-6680) is the main peninsular carrier, providing numerous buses to Playas de Rosarito and Tijuana as well as various destinations in the south. **Estrella Blanca** (☎ 178-6770) offers buses to mainland Mexican destinations like Mazatlán and Guadalajara.

From its terminal, two blocks south of the main bus terminal, **Autotransportes Aragón** (Map p96; ☎ 177-0909; Av Riveroll 861) serves Tijuana and San Quintín regularly between 6am and 7pm. Note that Tijuana-bound buses drop Rosarito passengers at the tollgate rather than in Rosarito proper.

There are at least two departures daily to the following destinations and hourly departures to Tijuana. Higher fares are for *ejecutivo* (1st class) service.

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)
La Paz	21	23
Loreto	90	16
Mexicali	26/31	3½-4
Playas de Rosarito	6.50	1
San Felipe	22	4
San Quintín	16	3
Tecate	13	2
Tijuana	10/12.50	1½

Getting Around

Local bus services are provided by La Viga's blue-and-white minibuses and by **Transportes Brisas** (Map p98; ☎ 178-3888; Calle 4a 771 near Av Miramar), whose buses are yellow. Both travel within Ensenada and as far as outlying farming communities like El Sauzal, Francisco Zarco and Maneadero. There's a **La Vigia bus stop** (Map p98; Blvd Azueta at Blvd Costero) on Blvd Azueta and another **La Vigia bus stop** (Map p98; Blvd Costero near Av Blancarte) on Blvd Costero. The destination usually appears on the windshield. Fares vary.

For car rental, head to **Hertz** (Map p98; ☎ 178-2982; Av Riveroll 143-13).

Taxis are available 24 hours a day at several corner stands located along Av López Mateos. The most prominent is **Taxis Amarillos** (Map p98; cnr Miramar & Av López Mateos). Drivers will take you out to the Valle de Guadalupe (see p109) for six hours of wine tasting for about US\$60 for two people.

LOCAL LORE

As one of the world's largest marine geysers, it's no wonder La Bufadora generates stories. Hang around long enough and you might hear tale of the 'whale jail,' an underwater cave beneath the western cliffs of Punta Banda. Whalers told a story of a whale and her calf making their way up the coast from one of the calving lagoons to the south. The calf separated from its mother, swam into the cave and, because it was growing so fast (as young whales tend to do), it became stuck. The air and water expelled through its blowhole can still be seen today.

PLAYA EL FARO & AROUND

☎ 646

The nearest beach to Ensenada where you would actually consider getting in the water (it appears clean enough) is Playa El Faro, a family beach complete with strolling vendors, horses for rent and plenty of people. The water is only warm during the summer. The beach is accessible from Km 14.8 on the Transpeninsular (follow signs for the Estero Beach Resort). There's a huge guarded parking lot (US\$3), public restrooms and, sadly, a caged lion.

Here, you will also find **El Faro Beach Motel & Trailer Park** (☎ 177-4620; elfarobc@yahoo.com; campsites US\$9, RV US\$12-15, r with/without kitchen US\$60/40), which offers eight clean, simple rooms with bath and shower; however, proximity to the beach is its only real attraction. Camping is also available on a sandy lot next to the Playa El Faro, with electricity, water, showers and toilets.

Nearby are the **Corona Beach Trailer Park** (sites US\$10), where sites have water and electrical hookups, and the more elaborate **Rancho Mona Lisa Trailer Park** (site with hookups US\$15-18). Look for the signs.

The sprawling **Estero Beach Resort** (Map p86; ☎ 176-6235; www.hotelesestero.com; RV US\$35-40, r US\$90-160, ste US\$400-500) is a luxurious gringo enclave situated immediately south of Playa El Faro. If you really want to spend US\$10, you can pay for the parking here; alternatively you could just park in the Playa El Faro parking lot and stroll over along the beach. The outdoor restaurant is a good place to grab a bite to eat.

PUNTA BANDA

☎ 646

Punta Banda is a small mountainous peninsula just south of Ensenada famous for what is said to be the world's second-largest marine geyser (aka, a blowhole). It's also a great area for camping, kayaking and diving.

Sights

LA BUFADORA

Simply put, you don't visit Ensenada without making the mandatory pilgrimage out to La Bufadora, a tidal blowhole that blasts water and foam through a V-shaped notch to the delighted 'oohs' and 'ahs' of the often soaking audience standing on the cliffside viewing platform above. Arrive on a day when the sea is rolling heavy and you'll see one hell of a spectacle: it can blast over 80ft high on a big day. With little swell, it's just a belching nook.

As the area's most popular weekend destination, La Bufadora also has endless souvenir stands, food stalls and restaurants along the last stretch of the road leading to the blowhole.

ARBOLITOS, KENNEDY & ZEPELÍN

These remote fish camps on an undeveloped area of Punta Banda offer a surprisingly remote escape from nearby civilization. All three are perched right on the water, have basic campsites and are excellent water entries for kayakers and divers. Arbolitos even has a boat ramp.

To get out here, you'll need a sturdy, high-clearance vehicle. Take the paved road out to La Bufadora as far as the settlement of La Joya. After passing Villarino RV Park, hang a left on the road signed 'Ejido E Cantú.' Follow this road (staying to your right), and you'll hit a fork in the road after a couple of miles; the left fork drops steeply down to Arbolitos, and the right fork drops down to Kennedy and Zepelín. Dive operators take people out at Arbolitos, which is the most scenic of the three.

Activities

Highly regarded **Dale's La Bufadora Dive Center** (☎ 154-2092; www.labufadoradive.com) offers underwater excursions to view sea anemones, sea urchins, sponge colonies, nudibranchs and dozens of fish species. The Canadian operator has three boats and charges US\$30/35 per person for three/four people. Full sets of dive and

snorkeling gear cost US\$35/18, respectively. Tanks are US\$5 to US\$7. Kayaking offshore can be excellent, and Dale's just happens to rents kayaks (US\$20 to US\$45) as well. Dale's is located inside Rancho La Bufadora, which is accessed off a left turn just before entering the Bufadora complex.

Sleeping

Along the road out to La Bufadora, several *ejidos* offer basic camping (pit toilets only). The going rate is US\$5. Some are better than others (a couple have incredible views), so check them out before making a decision.

Rancho La Bufadora (☎ 178-7172; campsites for 2 people US\$5, each additional person US\$1) At Dale's La Bufadora Dive Center (left), this place offers basic camping with ocean-views, outhouses and a few fire rings. Bring your own water.

Punta Banda has two other main campgrounds, both in the settlement of La Joya midway along the road to La Bufadora. Both have clean bathrooms, hot showers and grocery stores.

La Jolla Beach Camp (☎ 154-2005; BCN-23 Km 12.5; campsites US\$11) A behemoth campground offering 500 sites on both sides of the road. It's packed in summer, but during winter you may find yourself sharing the place with only a few other campers. Many sites are right on the beach. No RV hookups. An additional US\$2.50 is charged per person for parties over two.

Villarino RV Park (☎ 154-2045; BCN-23 Km 13; villarv@telnor.net; RV site with/without hookups US\$27.50/22.50) Next door to La Jolla, the 100-space Villarino is smaller, tidier and shadier, but also more regimented and popular with large groups. It has hot showers and picnic benches at each site, but a fence blocks views of the ocean.

Eating

One of the highlights of driving out to La Bufadora is the numerous olive and tamale stands found alongside BCN-23, the road that winds out to the headlands from the Transpeninsular. Jars of olives are piled high on precarious shelves, and tamale vendors sell upwards of a dozen varieties of their delicious corn treats.

Many stalls at La Bufadora serve fish tacos, shrimp cocktails and fresh *churros* (deep-fried dough dipped in sugar and cinnamon). There are also a few seafood restaurants with ocean views.

Los Panchos (☎ 9am-sunset Fri-Wed) Located inside the La Bufadora complex, this longtime favorite serves seafood specialties like octopus in ranchero sauce and 'Siete Mares' (Seven Seas) soup. The latter, loaded with shrimp, octopus, fish, crab and more, is superb.

Celia's (☎ 171-9376; mains US\$3-7) Located just outside the entrance to La Bufadora, Celia's has great views from both its outdoor patio and its inside tables and offers a tasty, inexpensive Sunday breakfast buffet (US\$5, including juice and coffee!).

Los Gordos (mains US\$4-7) Outside the entrance to Rancho La Bufadora, Los Gordos exudes Old Baja ambience with photographs, memorabilia and graffiti filling the dining room. Specialties include a Mexican combo, deep-fried calamari, lobster and shrimp in garlic butter.

Getting There & Away

BCN-23, the paved road to La Bufadora and Punta Banda, leaves the Transpeninsular at the town of Maneadero. Transportes Brisas in Ensenada offers regular bus service as far as Maneadero; from the turnoff to La Bufadora, you can either flag down another bus heading out the peninsula or hitch a ride.

ISLAS DE TODOS SANTOS

Famous for its monstrous waves, this pair of islands roughly 19.2km (12 miles) west of Ensenada attracts surfers from around the world during fall and winter swells. The two main breaks are aptly named 'Killers' and 'Thor's Hammer' and are suitable only for experienced big-wave surfers. **Kayakers** regularly make the 6.4km (4-mile) paddle out to the southern island from the tip of Punta Banda. There is excellent **hiking** on the southern island, and camping is allowed.

While there's no scheduled transportation to the islands, it's possible to hire a *panga* either at the sportfishing piers in Ensenada or, sometimes, in San Miguel (p94).

MÉXICO 3

From Ensenada, México 3 runs northeast to Tecate, passing through the scenic Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico's wine country. A drive (or taxi ride) out to the wineries or to Tecate makes for an excellent day trip from Ensenada. Southeast of Ensenada, the highway passes access roads to Parque Nacional Constitución

de 1857 (Laguna Hanson), El Alamo and Valle de Trinidad before hitting Hwy 5, which leads south to San Felipe and north to Mexicali.

VALLE DE GUADALUPE

☎ 646

Baja California's premier wine-producing region is as rich in history as it is in wine. In 1905 a group of Russian pacifist refugees, Molokans from the area of present-day Turkey, migrated to what is today called Francisco Zarco. Fleeing religious persecution by the Russian Orthodox Church, they first arrived in Los Angeles but found the land undesirable and headed south to the fertile Valle de Guadalupe. At first, the migrants lived in indigenous dwellings known by their Kumiai name of *wa* but soon built adobe houses that the Kumiai later emulated.

Today, only a handful of families of demonstrably Russian descent remain in the area. The Russian cemetery in Francisco Zarco still contains headstones with Cyrillic inscriptions.

Francisco Zarco

Francisco Zarco is the Guadalupe Valley's main population center, located at Km 73, about 32km (20 miles) northeast of Ensenada. The village is the site of the Dominican **Misión Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe**, the last mission built in the Californias. It was founded in 1834 and destroyed in an indigenous uprising only six years later. Despite its brief existence, it was a powerful and important mission, though almost nothing of it remains.

Across from the site of the former mission are the arches of the **former Russian school**, demolished some years ago. The private **Museo Comunitario del Valle de Guadalupe** (☎ 155-2030; donations requested; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) keeps alive the owners' Russian heritage with photographs and artifacts like samovars, a Russian bible and traditional clothing. Antique farming machinery and a Kumiai tribal dwelling decorate the museum grounds.

Part of the house is still inhabited by the family of Franziska San Marín, herself married to a descendant of the early Russian settlers. The owners bake and sell fresh Russian-style breads and cakes on weekends. To reach the museum from Ensenada, turn left off México 3 (about 38km from Ensenada) toward Francisco Zarco; the museum will be on your left as you roll through town.

MEXICO'S WINE COUNTRY

Mexican wine? Who'd a thought? But it's true. Less than an hour's drive from Ensenada, the Valle de Guadalupe is Mexico's premier wine-producing region, with over 15 wineries turning out premium wines in some of the most peaceful countryside in northern Baja. As a wine-tasting destination, Valle de Guadalupe is still young and its wineries are small, meaning you'll often meet the winemakers themselves, and you'll encounter an intimacy in the tasting room that will delight anyone who's used to the Disneyland experience of Napa Valley.

Wine production in Baja California began with the Spanish missionaries, who planted grapes to supply themselves with wine for religious services. Jesuit missionary Father Juan Ugarte is credited with planting Baja's first vineyard at **Mision San Francisco Javier** (p183) around 1701.

Dominican missionaries planted Valle de Guadalupe's first vineyard when they founded a mission near the village of Guadalupe in 1834. After the church was destroyed in 1840 during an indigenous revolt, wine production stagnated until a group of Russian religious refugees, the Molokans, immigrated to the valley in the early 1900s.

The peninsula's first commercial winery – Bodegas de Santo Tomás – was founded in 1888 in the Valle de Santo Tomás, south of Ensenada. Still in operation, its **tasting room** (p97) is in downtown Ensenada. In the 1930s the winery expanded its operations by planting grapes in Valle de Guadalupe.

In 1960 the Cetto family (originally from Italy) began cultivating grapes here, and in 1972 Pedro Domecq built the valley's first commercial winery. Vinos LA Cetto and Vides de Guadalupe Domecq are now two of Valle de Guadalupe's largest wineries.

The tourist offices in Ensenada and Tecate offer a free and excellent **Wine Country brochure**, which lists every winery in the valley and has a very detailed map. Be sure to pick one up before heading out. Pack a lunch for a picnic at one of the wineries or stop at one of the taco stands around Francisco Zarco.

Unless specified, the wineries listed here are open for drop-in tasting.

Chateau Camou (Map p86; ☎ 646-177-2221; www.chateau-camou.com.mx; Francisco Zarco; tour per person US\$5-40; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) This winery offers several varietals and excellent tours. Call in advance if you want the US\$40 'Magnum tour,' which includes a sumptuous lunch.

Domecq (Map p86; ☎ 155-2249/54; México Hwy 3, Km 73.5, Francisco Zarco; tasting US\$2.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1:30pm Sat) This huge winery produces merlot, chardonnay and blanc de blanc. Cabernet sauvignon, tempranillo and barbera are used in blends.

LA Cetto (Map p86; ☎ 646-155-2264; www.lacetto.com; México Hwy 3, Km 73.5, Francisco Zarco; 🕒 10am-5pm) One of the valley's premier wineries, LA Cetto is known for its nebiollo (a red from Italy's Piedmont region), cabernet sauvignon and its reserve chardonnay. It also produces petite sirah, zinfandel, chenin blanc and sauvignon blanc.

Monte Xanic (Map p86; ☎ 646-155-2080; www.montexanic.com; Francisco Zarco; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat; tasting US\$4-8) Modern winery producing Monte Xanic and Calixa label wines. The price of tasting depends on how many and which wines you'd like to sample.

Viña de Liceaga (Map p86; ☎ 646-155-3091, 646-684-0126; www.vinosliceaga.com; México Hwy 3, Km 93; 🕒 11am-5pm Sat & Sun, by appointment Mon-Fri) This small, family-operated winery in San Antonio de las Minas produces merlot, cabernet franc and chenin blanc, and several blends.

Vinos Bibayoff (Map p86; Bodegas Valle de Guadalupe; ☎ 646-176-1008; bibayoff@telnor.net; San Antonio de las Minas; tasting free) Producing only about 1500 cases per year, this small winery is the only one in Valle de Guadalupe whose owners are descendents of the Russian Molokan immigrants. It's well worth a visit. To get there, turn north onto a dirt road from México Hwy 3 at Km 92. Otherwise take the road from Francisco Zarco.

Opposite the Museo Comunitario is the **Museo Histórico Comunitario** (☎ 178-2531; donations requested; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), which tells the story of the local mission and also has an exhibit about the Russian settlers.

Nearby, there are indigenous pictographs on a huge granite boulder known as **Ojá Cuñúrr**, just where the canyon of the Río Guadalupe narrows.

Festivals & Events

Two wine festivals – the **Fiesta de los Viñedos en Flor** (Flowering Vines Festival) in early to mid-May and the **Fiesta de la Vendimia** (Wine Harvest Festival) in August – are well worth attending. Both are held at different wineries each year, and you should purchase advance tickets because both sell out quickly. For more information, see p101.

Sleeping & Eating

Vinos Bibayoff (Map p86; ☎ 646-155-2080; www.montexanic.com; Francisco Zarco) This family-operated winery (see the boxed text, opposite) allows people to camp for US\$10 per vehicle in a wonderful country setting. For US\$30, the owner will prepare an excellent lamb dinner, which includes wine and the camping fee. It's a deal.

Rancho María Teresa (Map p86; ☎ 155-2450; www.ranchomariateresa.com; México 3, Km 82.5; camping per vehicle US\$10, r US\$50, q US\$80; 🚗) At Km 82.5, just south of Francisco Zarco, this popular inn offers large and comfortable but rather generic tile-floor rooms in a hotel-cum-ranch-style setting. There's a swimming pool, Jacuzzi, and cycling and walking trails. Camping is allowed.

Adobe Guadalupe (Map p86; ☎ 155-2094; www.adobeguadalupe.com; Francisco Zarco; r US\$160; 🚗) For a wonderful treat, ensconce yourself at American-owned Adobe Guadalupe, a small award-winning winery with a fabulous six-room B&B. The price includes a delicious breakfast. Horseback rides (US\$50) are offered, there's a Jacuzzi, and you can stroll through the vineyards, taste wine or relax on your own private terrace. Book weekends well ahead.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Ensenada to Tecate will drop passengers on México 3, at the turnoff to Francisco Zarco, from where it's a short walk into town. Taxis from Ensenada (see p107) charge about US\$60 for a day of wine tasting in the valley.

PARQUE NACIONAL CONSTITUCIÓN DE 1857

☎ 646

In the Sierra de Juárez southeast of Ensenada and north of Hwy 3, a striking plateau of ponderosa pines comprises most of **Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857** (per vehicle US\$5). The centerpiece of this a 12,350-acre (5000-hectare) park is the shallow and marshy but pleasant and solitary **Laguna Hanson**, which abounds with migratory birds – ducks, coots, grebes and many others – in fall. It's a lovely place to camp, hike, fish and bird-watch, except during winter when it can be very cold.

On the eastern side of the park at the base of the Sierra de Juárez are several beautiful desert palm canyons, including the beautiful Cañón de Guadalupe (p136). These canyons are only accessible from the eastern side.

Information

Near Laguna Hanson you'll find a visitor center/ranger station where you can pick up information about hiking, climbing, flora and fauna, and pay the admission fee. Southeast of Ensenada, at Km 39 on México 3 toward San Felipe, a paved lateral reaches the village of **Ojos Negros**, whose decent Restaurant Oasis has an English-speaking owner who's happy to provide tourist information. Expect hordes of mosquitoes in late spring.

Activities

HIKING & CLIMBING

A trail skirts Laguna Hanson, but most of the hiking up here is off-trail. The low granite outcrops north and west of Laguna Hanson offer stupendous views but require difficult ascents through dense brush and over and beneath massive rockfalls – watch for ticks and rattlesnakes. The easiest view route is to take the abandoned road northwest from near the ruined cabins and pit toilets to the first dry watercourse, and then follow it toward the peaks. Expect dead ends that are too steep to climb, but follow tunnels through the rockfalls before emerging on a saddle below the two main peaks. This short climb, which should take only about an hour, is nevertheless very tiring.

Technical climbers will find challenging rock-climbing routes up the open granite despite the limited relief – most pitches do not exceed 60m to 90m (200ft to 300ft). The terrain resembles mainland California's Joshua Tree National Park.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Hunting is prohibited, so birders will find the park an exceptional **bird-watching** destination, especially in fall when migratory birds make a pit stop on their way south. **Fishing** on Laguna Hanson, mostly for catfish, bluegill and large-mouth bass, is decent. **Kayaking** is also popular.

Sleeping & Eating

Primitive but well-maintained campsites with pit toilets, barbecue pits and picnic tables are on the western shore of the lake at an approximate elevation of 1200m (4000ft).

Because livestock is plentiful, the water is suitable only for dousing your campfire, so bring your own to drink. Fuel wood is scarce and better left unburnt, but dried cow patties are everywhere.

Getting There & Away

There is no public transportation to the park. From Ojos Negros, a 43km (27-mile) dirt road, passable for almost any passenger car despite its frequent washboard surface, climbs eastward onto the plateau and into the park. Another access road lies about 16km (10 miles) east of Ojos Negros at Km 55.

Approaching from the north, the best route into the park is from the El Cóndor turnoff, west of La Rumorosa at about Km 83 on México 2 (the Tijuana–Tecate–Mexicali highway). This is a rough, approximately 58km (36-mile) drive, manageable only for high-clearance

vehicle. Drivers with low-clearance vehicles should take the Ojos Negros road.

VALLE DE TRINIDAD

☎ 646

From Ojos Negros, México 3 continues south into the verdant Valle de Trinidad before crossing the San Matías pass toward San Felipe. Just south of the junction to the deserted mining town of **El Alamo**, another road leads 8km (5 miles) east of the highway to the village of **Santa Catarina** and the site of the former **Misión Santa Catarina de los Paipais**. The mission was one of two Dominican missions in the peninsula's northern interior. Parts of the adobe walls are the only remaining ruins, on a hill above the present village cemetery.

Santa Catarina itself is a sprawling hodgepodge of wrecked cars and a few adobe houses, trailers and abandoned greenhouses (remnants of a federal government scheme to raise *jojoba*). The Catholic and Pentecostal churches, both emphasizing the term *indígena* (indigenous) in their formal titles, compete for the souls of the remaining Paipai, who still speak their native language as well as Spanish, and continue to collect piñon nuts in the fall.

SOUTH OF ENSENADA

From Ensenada, the Transpeninsular makes its way south, passing the turnoff to Punta Banda and the farming settlement of Maneadero. Any

DETOUR: PUERTO SAN ISIDRO

The fishing villages and good surf west of San Vicente make for a great detour from the Transpeninsular. From near Km 78, take the paved lateral to the beachside **Ejido Eréndira**, a small farming community, reached after about 17km (10.5 miles). Stock up on basic supplies before trippin' up to the isolated fishing cove of Puerto San Isidro, another mile or so north along the coast via a rough dirt road.

For fishing and some serious relaxation, head out to **Castro's Fishing Place** (☎ 646-176-2897; cabins US\$45), where Fernando Castro Ríos rents rustic but fully equipped ocean-facing *cabañas* to paying anglers. Fishing *pangas* (including the boatman) cost US\$175 and can fit up to five people.

About a mile or so past Castro's Fishing Place is **Coyote Cal's** (☎ 646-154-4080, in the USA 888-670-2252; www.coyotecals.com; campsites/RV per person US\$10/10, dm US\$15-18, d US\$40-45, ste US\$60; 📶), the area's only hostel and a good spot to hang for a few days. Dorms sleep four to 10 people and face the ocean. A prime sandy beach is about a quarter-mile north, and there's good surfing everywhere. Prices include a pancake breakfast, and bikes, snorkeling equipment, boogie boards and surfboards are rented.

Backpackers often hitch out here from the Transpeninsular, where buses from Tijuana or other points north make drop-offs.

foreigners traveling south of Maneadero must have a tourist card (see p264). The highway then passes through scenic agricultural land, miles from the ocean, and finally meets the sea again near San Quintín. En route, numerous dirt roads lead west from the Transpeninsular to remote beaches offering off-the-beaten-track camping opportunities.

EJIDO URUAPÁN

☎ 646

Approximately 16km (10 miles) south of Maneadero, near Km 41, Ejido Uruapán sits in the lovely Valle de Uruapán, a fertile valley that produces peppers, tomatoes, olives, strawberries and other fruits and vegetables, mostly for export. A **picnic and camping area** near the Transpeninsular is a good place to stop for lunch (if you're carrying your own), but a more interesting reason to visit is the nearby **hot springs** (admission US\$1; ☎ 7am-9pm), where local *ejido* residents bathe and do their laundry. The baths are just square tiled tubs, hardly built to accommodate the human body, but hot and healthy nonetheless. The whole scene offers a totally rural slice of Mexico, and the women washing their clothes are usually very friendly.

The *ejido* is also a popular quail hunting destination (November to February only) and is home to a sea-urchin processing plant, established with Japanese aid to export sea urchins to Japan, where they're eaten in sushi.

To get to the hot springs, follow the signs from the Transpeninsular.

LA BOCANA & PUERTO SANTO TOMÁS

With their spectacular coastal setting, these isolated fishing villages offer a real middle-of-nowhere experience. Just over 27km (17 miles) west of the Transpeninsular, via a graded dirt road, La Bocana is set on a stunning, wide beach. A dozen well-equipped but simple **cabañas** (☎ in Tijuana 664-684-4079; sergio_bocana@yahoo.com; with/without kitchenette US\$60/40) sit high on a hill overlooking the ocean, offering the perfect escape. Some have kitchens.

There's a small store, but bring most of your own food if you plan to stay. Camping on the beach is free. The beach is separated from La Bocana by the mouth of the Río Santo Tomás, but backtracking leads you to a suspension footbridge over the creek.

Beyond La Bocana, the road gets worse but is passable for most cars if you take it

slowly. After 2 miles, you'll reach the impossibly scenic fish camp of Puerto Santo Tomás, which consists of about two dozen colorful shacks perched on the cliffside over a splendidly grey-blue, kelp-covered bay. Below, fishing *pangas* (fiberglass skiffs) bob on the water and the whole scene makes you feel like you've stumbled into the 19th century.

At the end of the road, a rather incongruous tourist complex offers everything from campsites and basic *cabañas* to fishing trips. There's no beach at Puerto Santo Tomás, however.

SANTO TOMÁS

☎ 646 / pop 400

The Dominican mission village of Santo Tomás (not to be confused with Puerto Santo Tomás, earlier) takes its name from the surrounding Valle de Santo Tomás, one of Baja's key wine-producing areas. The wine industry is a legacy of the Dominicans, who planted thousands of vines and olive trees here in the late 18th century. Founded in 1791 as the last link in the chain connecting Alta and Baja California, **Misión Santo Tomás de Aquino** reached its peak in 1824, when converts may have exceeded 400. Abandoned in 1849, it was the last Dominican mission to maintain a priest. Only a few crumbling ruins remain.

For modern visitors Santo Tomás' key institution is venerable **El Palomar**, a cluster of roadside businesses including a Pemex station, a general store, a restaurant and the small **Motel El Palomar** (☎ 153-8002; r US\$35-45), which offers clean, simple rooms with hot water, TV and heating.

El Palomar's **campground and RV park** (☎ 153-8002; campsites/RV US\$10/16.50) sits among a grove of olive trees. In summer the park's two tennis courts, volleyball court, children's playground, swimming pool, restaurant and 100 barbecue pits attract up to 2000 visitors daily.

Santo Tomás is at Km 51, some 10.5km (6.5 miles) south of Ejido Uruapán.

SAN VICENTE

☎ 646 / pop 3500

The bustling agricultural community of San Vicente lies on its namesake arroyo at Km 90, about 11km (7 miles) south of the Ejido Eréndira junction. Besides a dusty little plaza and the small **Museo Comunitario** (Plaza central; admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat), the only real reason to stop is to see the ruins of **Misión San Vicente Ferrer**, founded in 1780. Substantial

RANCHO MELING

Just over 13km (8 miles) south of Colonet, a signed, paved road leads east to Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir. About 6.5km (4 miles) along this road, you'll pass through the village of **San Telmo**. After 49.5km (31 miles) you'll reach **Rancho Meling** (☎ in the USA 858-454-7166; www.melinggustranch.com; r per person US\$50, children 5-11yr US\$25, under 5 free), a beloved Baja institution also known as Rancho San José. This 10,000-acre (4000-hectare) cattle ranch was established by Norwegian immigrant Salve Meling in the early 1900s and was later run by his daughter, Aida, as a guesthouse until she passed away in 1998.

Aida's children renovated the cozy ranch house and reopened with 12 rustic, spacious and clean rooms. All have private baths with hot showers and a fireplace or pot-bellied stove. Meals cost an extra US\$6 for breakfast, US\$8 for lunch and US\$11 for dinner. Horseback riding and pack trips into Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir are available. Reservations through the San Diego office are a must.

foundations and some walls of the fort and mission lie in a preserved state of arrested decay in a gated park northwest of the town. The site is more notable for its scenic location than for the ruins themselves. To get to the ruins, follow the well-signed dirt road west from the Transpeninsular at about Km 88, just north of town.

If you need to spend the night, there are several hotels located along the highway, including the spotless, peach-colored **Hotel Valentina** (☎ 165-6747; r US\$25-30; Ⓟ). It's on the eastern side of the highway, directly behind **Restaurant Valentina** (mains US\$3-6; 🕒 7am-8pm), which serves delicious home-cooked Mexican fare.

At the far south end of town, **Hotel El Camino** (☎ 665-7611; Transpeninsular; r US\$19; Ⓟ) is a groovy little roadside motel with a big tree in the parking lot and simple but totally acceptable rooms.

SAN ANTONIO DEL MAR

San Antonio del Mar is one of the best beaches for miles, and, except on weekends when Mexican families descend upon the place, feels incredibly desolate. The resident population is a mix of fishermen, their families and American expats. As one resident put it, 'people come out here and they immediately like it or hate it.' Its vastness has that effect on people. The surf fishing and clamming are both excellent.

You can camp on the beach if you can stand the wind, but locals suggest heading north along the sand to the sheltered coves where the wind is noticeably less. Even with 4WD you have the danger of getting stuck, so be careful.

To get here, watch for the road that heads northwest from the Transpeninsular just south of KM 126; if you're traveling south, it's just before the bridge. The bumpy, mostly graded road takes you 11km (7 miles) to San Antonio del Mar. In dry weather it's passable for most vehicles. In wet weather, you'd better have 4WD.

If you're planning on staying a while, supplies can be purchased in the town of **Colonet**, just south of the turnoff to San Antonio del Mar. In Colonet there are stores, eateries, a hotel and a Pemex station.

PARQUE NACIONAL SIERRA SAN PEDRO MÁRTIR

☎ 646

Crowned by the peninsula's highest peak, 3046m (10,154ft) **Picacho del Diablo**, Baja's oldest **national park** (admission per vehicle US\$7) offers excellent hiking and climbing and ample opportunity to have a silent star-blazoned sky all to yourself. The summit of Picacho del Diablo (Devil's Peak), also known as Cerro La Encantada (Enchanted Mountain) or Cerro Providencia, draws climbers from throughout the Californias, though only a handful actually reach the summit because finding the route is so difficult. But anyone seeking the solitude that only total wilderness can offer will be rewarded, especially since off-road vehicles are not allowed in the park.

The park consists of 614 sq km (236 sq miles) of coniferous forests and granitic peaks reaching above 3000m (10,000 ft), plus deep canyons leading down into their steep eastern scarp. Major native tree types include several species of pines, plus incense cedar, Douglas fir and quaking aspen, while the most

conspicuous fauna includes raccoon, fox, coyote and mule deer. The rare desert bighorn sheep inhabits some remote canyon areas.

Unlike Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857, this park has no major bodies of water. Westward-flowing streams like the Río San Rafael, Arroyo Los Pinos and Arroyo San Antonio support the endemic San Pedro Mártir rainbow trout, but wildfowl no longer breed here, as they did a century ago, because of a history of grazing and timber cutting.

Among the typical breeding land birds are the mountain quail, pinyon jay, mountain chickadee, pygmy nuthatch, western bluebird, Cassin's finch, pine siskin, red crossbill and dark-eyed junco.

Information

The ranger station at the park entrance has maps and information.

MAPS

The best map of the area is Centra Publications' *Parque Nacional San Pedro Mártir*, with an area map at a scale of 1:100,000 and details at a scale of 1:31,680.

Determined hikers and climbers should also obtain the latest edition of Walt Peterson's *The Baja Adventure Book*, which includes decent maps and describes several routes up Picacho del Diablo. The Mexican government topographic maps *San Rafael H11B45* and *Santa Cruz H11B55* may be useful too, see p260.

CLIMATE

The Sierra San Pedro Mártir has a temperate climate similar to the mountains of southern mainland California; most precipitation occurs in winter, when the snow depth at higher altitudes can be 1m (3ft) or more, though snow is possible any time from October to May. Thunderstorms are common in summer.

The average annual temperature is around 59°F (16°C), with highs around 68°F (22°C), but winter temperatures can drop well below freezing. At higher elevations, even in summer, changeable weather is a potential hazard. The best time to visit is in spring, when days are getting longer, temperatures are still moderate, the wildflowers are in bloom and there's plenty of water following the snow melt.

Sights & Activities

OBSERVATORIO ASTRONÓMICO NACIONAL

Mexico's **national observatory** (📍 in Ensenada 646-174-4580) features an 84-inch-diameter telescope but may be visited only by prior arrangement, which can be difficult. Even if you don't get inside, you'll enjoy the stupendous views from up here, which extend all across the forest and over to the Pacific, the Sea of Cortez and the Mexican mainland. To get to the observatory, follow the park access road to the end, then walk the final 2km (1.5 miles).

HIKING & CLIMBING

The Sierra San Pedro Mártir is an underappreciated area for hiking, camping and backpacking, in part because access is awkward and it's a little far for weekend trips from mainland California.

Hiking trails are plentiful, though trail maintenance and signage is minimal. Hikers should carry topo maps, a compass (or GPS) along with the usual cold- and wet-weather supplies, canteens and water purification tablets. Below about 1800m (6000ft) or even a bit higher, beware of rattlesnakes.

Near the entrance to the observatory, a short (2km/1.2 mile) trail leads to the El Altar lookout where, on a clear day, you can see both the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez.

About 16km (10 miles) south of the park entrance, trails lead southeast from the

MIKE'S SKY RANCHO

On the northwestern edge of Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir, **Mike's Sky Rancho** (📍 664-681-5514; r per person US\$25) is the beloved haunt of off-roaders, set in a small valley framed by the pine-covered foothills of the Sierra. The ranch offers worn but tidy motel-style rooms with kerosene stove and private bath, plain but hearty meals (extra) and a large swimming pool. The turnoff from México 3 to the ranch is at Km 138, 60km (37 miles) west of the junction with Highway 5. It's 35km (22 miles) from the turnoff to the ranch. The graded dirt road makes it accessible to most passenger vehicles, though it's steep and tricky for ordinary passenger cars at a few points.

Vallecitos area to **Cañón del Diablo** and to **Scout Peak** and **Cerro Botella Azul** (Blue Bottle Peak). From Blue Bottle Peak, a rough scramble is required to get down into Cañón del Diablo, where you'll find **Campo Noche**, a good place to camp before starting the ascent of Pichado del Diablo. The northern end of Cañón del Diablo used to be accessible via an eastern access route into the park, but this has reportedly been closed. The canyon is also accessible via a trail branching east from the observatory road just before the entry gate.

Sleeping

Car camping is possible though sites are minimally maintained and have no services. The opportunity for wilderness camping is what really makes this park special.

Getting There & Away

There is no public transportation to Sierra San Pedro Mártir. Check road conditions locally before heading out.

From the Transpeninsular, south of Km 140, a paved road climbs eastward through San Telmo, past Rancho Meling to the park entrance, about 80km (50 miles) from the highway. The first 70km (42 miles) are paved. After that, the road is graded and passable for most passenger vehicles, and usually even small RVs.

The network of trails at the base of Pichado del Diablo used to be accessible from the eastern edge of the park by way of a graded road from México 3 (the Ensenada–San Felipe highway) and via Rancho Santa Clara. According to local officials, this access route has been closed. One reader reported being turned back by military officers before reaching Rancho Santa Clara.

CAMALÚ & PUNTA SAN JACINTO

Back on the Transpeninsular and about 6.5km (4 miles) north of the town of Camalú, a dirt road heads west to the stunning coastal settlement of Punta San Jacinto. There's no beach here, but the setting is serene and the **surfing** is outstanding. Yellow-and-blue fishing skiffs sit along the shore, and the sounds of squawking seagulls and pebbles in the waves are often all you hear. Known as Freighters or Shipwrecks, the right-hand point break takes its name from the shipwrecked hull of the *Isla del Carmen*, which sits rusting and guarded by birds directly offshore.

There's a fenced-in expat community (which you won't get into), but at the north end of this, you *can* get into the basic **campground** (per vehicle US\$5), which looks directly onto the break. Bring all your own supplies from Camalú.

The road to Punta San Jacinto departs from the Transpeninsular between Km 149 and 150. It's then 4.5 miles (despite what the signs say) to Punta San Jacinto. Camalú has a Pemex station, some stores and a couple of eateries.

COLONIA VICENTE GUERRERO

📍 616

This bustling agricultural town straddling the Transpeninsular merits a stop for two reasons: its mission ruins and its beaches. While the mission is easy enough to find, getting to the beach involves navigating your way through 6.5km (4 miles) of sometimes muddy roads through windblown agricultural fields and, as you near the ocean, narrow sandy tracks. Hiking to the beach from town takes about 45 minutes. The beach is wide, windy and exposed to the elements, and offers good fishing and excellent clamming.

Colonia Vicente Guerrero itself has a post office, some eateries, two banks (both with ATMs), markets and a church. It's quite unextraordinary.

Sights

Founded in 1775 by Manuel García and Miguel Hidalgo at the mouth of the canyon of the Río Santo Domingo, **Misión Santo Domingo de la Frontera** was the second of nine Dominican missions in Baja California. The ruins are the best preserved of any Dominican frontier mission: many of the walls are still standing! Every year in the first week of August at the site of the ruins, the Fiesta de Santo Domingo features horse racing, rodeos, dancing and food stalls. To reach the site, go east on the dirt road on the northern side of the Río Santo Domingo, at the northern entrance to town.

Sleeping & Eating

Colonia Vicente Guerrero has two unattractively situated motels and, at the southwest end of town, two RV parks. The turnoff for both parks is near Km 173 on the western side of the highway, directly north of the Ensenada gas plant.

Mesón de Don Pepe RV Park & Restaurant (☎ 166-4414, 166-2216; Calle del Turismo 102; campsites/RV US\$6.50/10) Don Pepe suffers a bit from highway noise, but the tent sites are on a pleasant grassy area, shaded by large trees. Most sites have barbeque pits, and hot showers are available. The restaurant (mains US\$6 to US\$9, open 6am to 10pm Wednesday to Monday) has that old-time Baja feel and serves reasonably priced seafood and Mexican *antojitos*. Full hookups for RVs.

Posada Don Diego RV Park (☎ 166-2181; posadadondiego@yahoo.com; campsites/RV US\$8/11) A Baja stop since 1970, this RV park offers spacious sites with full hookups, hot showers, a laundry room, a good restaurant (mains US\$4 to US\$8, open 7am to 9pm) and a bar.

Motel Sánchez (☎ 166-2963; Benito Juárez/Transpeninsular 102; d/q US\$19/25) Clay tile roofs, brick planters and a giant pepper tree in the middle of the gravel parking lot make what would otherwise be a bland motel a rather welcoming little spot. In town by the traffic light.

Las Maderas (☎ 166-3104; Benito Juárez/Transpeninsular 215; mains US\$6-19; ☎ 8am-9:30pm) For a whoppin' slab of grilled beef, pop into this steakhouse at the northern end of town (on the west side of the highway), easily spotted for its Wild West ranch decor. Big breakfasts.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is in the center of town on the ocean side of the highway. Nearly all north- and southbound buses stop here.

SAN QUINTÍN

☎ 616 / pop 60,000

The booming agricultural area surrounding the meandering Bahía de San Quintín can be misleading to the first-time visitor, who could be forgiven for wondering what the hell the place is worth stopping for. Those unenamored of fishing, clamming and desolate vistas might spend a few days here and ask the same question. In a nutshell, this is a fishing destination, and the hotels nestled along the shore of the bay are generally full of American anglers who spend days aboard boats and evenings eating (or weaving fish tales about) the day's catch.

San Quintín is most famous for its clams – big, fat, juicy Pismo clams that you can dig up and cook yourself – and its black Brant geese, for which hunters from around the world descend upon San Quintín November to February. If

you're after a beach-type vacation, stay at one of the two hotels on Playa Santa María, where the beach is long and wide, the clamming excellent and the beachcombing fun.

History

Foreign settlers have exploited Bahía San Quintín since colonial times. The area's salt marshes provided salt for nearby Dominican missions and, in the 19th century, for Russian settlements north of San Francisco Bay in the USA.

In the late 19th century San Quintín was the focus of settlement schemes by the English-based Mexican Land & Colonization Company, which introduced English colonists and established a steam-powered flour mill, a customs house, a pier, schoolhouses, fertilizer plants and, after a few years, a cemetery. Only the remains of the Molino Viejo (Old Mill) and the cemetery testify to the English presence. The Muelle Viejo (Old Pier) is no longer visible.

Today, with huge government subsidies flowing in and plastic greenhouses going up faster than homes in San Felipe, the San Quintín area is an agricultural goldmine. It is the world's largest producer of tomatoes. However, fields west of the Transpeninsular are suffering because growers have extracted so much fresh water that brackish seawater has contaminated the aquifers on which they rely.

Recent years have seen an influx of indigenous migrants from impoverished rural Oaxaca (a state in southern Mexico). During peak picking season, up to 60,000 farm workers work the fields. Wages and working conditions are generally horrendous.

Orientation

San Quintín sits on a sheltered harbor 187km (116 miles) south of Ensenada on the Transpeninsular. The name San Quintín commonly refers to an area that includes not only San Quintín proper but also *ejidos* to the south: Lázaro Cárdenas, El Papalote, Los Pinos and Santa María. San Quintín and Lázaro Cárdenas stretch out along the Transpeninsular for over 5km (3 miles). Santa María, another farming area, surrounds Hotel La Pinta San Quintín and Rancho Cielito Lindo.

Because none of the streets (except for the highway) are named, and there are no street addresses whatsoever, it can be difficult to find anything in the San Quintín area. San



Quintín is also very spread out, so it's much better to drive than to rely on public transportation – off the highway, transportation is basically nonexistent.

Kilometer markers start over in Lázaro Cárdenas (Km 0), working their way up from zero as you head south. The turnoff to the Old Mill complex is at Km 1; the turnoff to Hotel La Pinta and Cielito Lindo is at Km 11.

Information

The friendly, informative state-run **Secure tourist office** (☎ 165-3977, 166-2788; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) is in a turquoise building at Km 178, about 4.8km (3 miles) north of San Quintín.

Opposite the plaza in Lázaro Cárdenas, half a block off the highway, HSBC bank has an ATM and cashes traveler's checks. There's another HSBC in San Quintín proper, just past Puente San Quintín on the west side of the road.

The post office is in Lázaro Cárdenas, and you'll find pharmacies, Pemex stations and grocery stores along the Transpeninsular in both Lázaro Cárdenas and San Quintín.

Dangers & Annoyances

The San Quintín area has seen an increasing number of vehicle break-ins and the occasional robbery; especially vulnerable are those camping in remote areas. It's not cause for paranoia, but take precautions. In an emergency, contact **Secure's tourist assistance hotline** (☎ 078 or ☎ 163-3833).

Sights

San Quintín has a few modest cultural landmarks from the period of the early English settlement. The old wheat mill, the **Molino Viejo**, established by the US-based International Company of Mexico in the early 20th century, was turned into a cannery by the Mexican government in 1940 and remained in operation until the 1970s. The mill was originally set up here because the local tides came through the narrow channel with such force that they could easily power the mill-wheel – both ebbing and flowing.

The mill's last manager started a modest hotel on the premises, which has evolved into a comprehensive tourist site. The former cannery is now a restaurant and the center of local nightlife (such as it is). There's also an attractive waterfront area for hanging out.

Activities

Activities in this region tend to center around the **beaches** and the ocean; the best easily accessible beaches are those close to the Hotel La Pinta San Quintín in the Santa María area.

Breaks at the southern end of Cabo San Quintín, southwest of town, are good for **surfing**, but getting there can be difficult without a 4WD vehicle or a boat. About 6 miles offshore, **Isla San Martín** (Map p67) is part of the volcanic cordon that protects the plain from the ocean's erosive power and, after Todos Santos, has the biggest waves in Baja. K&M Offshore Sportfishing (below) takes groups of surfers out to the island. Isla San Martín is also an excellent **kayaking** destination; people usually paddle out and spend at least a night camping on the island.

Most people come to San Quintín to fish. Local **sportfishing** operators are down near the Molino Viejo complex. Daily rates, including guide and *panga*, start around US\$200 per boat for up to three people. Larger super-pangas and cruisers are more expensive. The day starts around 6am or 6:30am, and ends before 3pm, when the wind picks up.

Tiburón's Pangas (☎ 165-2768, 170-0821), **Pedro's Pangas** (☎ 171-1824, in the USA 888-568-2252), **Old Mill Sportfishing** (☎ 165-6034; oldmillsportfishing@hotmail.com) and Don Eddie's Landing (p120) are all based at the Molino Viejo complex. For the very best boats (but higher prices) head to **K&M Offshore Sportfishing** (☎ 949-370-6532, 949-370-6568; capitanm2@yahoo.com.mx; boats US\$300-600), whose captain, Kelly Catian, goes out on a custom-built super-*panga*. All fishing trips leave from the sportfishing pier, and require you to bring your own fishing gear or rent. Pedro's Pangas will usually let you borrow gear if you're going out with them.

Kelly provided the following list, indicating which fish are most common each month in the San Quintín area:

Albacore July to September

Bluefin tuna July to September

Cabrilla Year-round

Corvina Year-round

Dorado July to October

Halibut June to September

Marlin (striped) August to October

Rock cod Year-round

White sea bass March to June, November and December

Yellowfin tuna June

Yellowtail Year-round; best July to September

Sleeping

Lodging choices in the San Quintín area consist of the hotels on the beautiful but beachless Bahía San Quintín (great if you're fishing), the two hotels on the sandy beach and open ocean of Bahía Santa María, and the cheapest but also noisiest motels along the Transpeninsular.

BAHÍA SAN QUINTÍN

Old Mill RV Park (campsites/ RV US\$10/15, r US\$15-30) This spot has tent and RV sites with full hookups and two very basic rooms. Room rates depend on the proprietor's mood; consider anything over US\$15 overpriced.

Old Mill Hotel (☎ 165-6030, in the USA 800-479-7962; r US\$40-45) One of the best around, American-owned Old Mill Hotel sits on the site of the former wheat mill, 5km (3 miles) west of the highway. The motel has a range of attractive rooms, the grounds are pleasant, and the ocean's a shell's-throw away. Make reservations, it fills up fast.

Don Eddie's Landing (☎ 165-6061/62; www.doneddies.com; r US\$45-70, ste US\$100) Just north of the Molino Viejo, Don Eddie's motel and sportfishing center boasts 17 clean, spacious though somewhat worn rooms with tile floors, TVs and ocean-view patios. A restaurant-bar

with sweeping bay windows serves seafood and Mexican fare. Rooms are cheaper if you rent a boat.

BAHÍA SANTA MARÍA

Rancho Cielito Lindo (☎ 159-6158; cielito@telnor.net, www.cielitolindo8m.com; r US\$28-45) South of town, Rancho Cielito Lindo is over 40 years old and was obviously a fabulous place to stay in its day. Vinyl red booths in the restaurant, rooms spread out among an attractive garden, furniture and fixtures straight out of the 1960s – the place has quite a feel. Unfortunately it's slowly deteriorating into a musty, moldy, broken-down remnant of its formerly impressive self. The restaurant is still great, however, and if you can handle the smell of mold, you'll dig the rooms. Best in summer.

Hotel La Pinta San Quintín (☎ 165-9008, in the USA 800-542-3283; www.lapintahotels.com; r US\$84) If you want a place that's right on the beach, Hotel La Pinta San Quintín is your only option. The hotel falls short of the standards of its sister hotels (it sort of resembles a cement plant), but its beachfront location is great for clamming, surf fishing and other beach activities. Balconies face the ocean, and rooms are spacious.

PISMO CLAMS: A BIVALVE BONANZA

One of the largest clam species on the coast of the Californias, Pismo clams are meaty, sweet and delicious in chowder, fried or simply boiled and smothered in butter. Pismo clams are named for the town of Pismo Beach, California, where they were once caught by the thousands. Thanks to overfishing (and the work of hungry sea otters) the Pismo clam fishery north of the border is entirely depleted. But not in San Quintín.

The sandy shores of San Quintín's bays are loaded with these succulent clams, and foolish is he (or she) who leaves without tasting. You can either sample them at restaurants around San Quintín or, if you're the adventurous, self-reliant type, dig and cook them yourself.

Locals generally dig clams by one of two means: by pitchfork or by hand. Either way, low tide is the best time for clamming. The best beach is Playa Santa María, in front of Hotel La Pinta San Quintín. If you're going the pitchfork route, purchase an *horquilla* (pitchfork) and a mesh sack at a hardware store in Lázaro Cárdenas or San Quintín proper. Tie the sack to your waist and head out to the beach. Walk along just below the waterline and feel for clams with your feet. When you find one, use the pitchfork to dig up the clam and toss it into your sack. The mesh allows the sand and water to fall away. You can also throw them straight into a bucket of saltwater (don't use fresh water – it will kill the clams), where they will begin to expel the sand from inside their shells. You should do this anyway, before cooking them. If you're not using a pitchfork, dig the sucker up with your hand. If you have any problems, just ask one of the legion of folks that will surely be out there clamming with you – they're usually more than happy to give pointers.

Yields are limited to 12 clams per person, and no clams under 10cm (4in) may be taken; as a rule of thumb, take nothing smaller than the palm of your hand. Fishing licenses are required (see p52 for information on licenses).

TRANSPENINSULAR

Motel Uruapán (☎ 165-2058; Km 190; r US\$19-23; (P)) Offering 50 pleasant, clean rooms, Motel Uruapán is a solid budget deal. It's pristinely kept, very friendly and smack in the middle of town (so getting to a market or *taquería* won't be a problem).

Hotel Chávez (☎ 165-2005; Km 194; r US\$23-29; (P)) Just before the Puente San Quintín bridge, the easily spotted salmon-color Hotel Chávez is a friendly, comfortable motel-style place. The pricier rooms have satellite TV, heat and fans.

Hotel Real del Cora (☎ 166-8576; Km 193; s/d US\$27/32) A surprising island of charm in gritty San Quintín, this hotel has 25 rooms with telephone and TV, tall ceilings and sparkling baths.

Also recommended:

Motel Cirio (☎ 165-3015; s/d US\$27/30) Turn east off the highway just north of the Maria Celeste Motel.

Maria Celeste Motel (☎ 165-3999; s/d US\$30/33) Spic and span.

SOUTH OF SAN QUINTÍN

About 16km (10 miles) south of San Quintín proper and 1.6km (1 mile) west of the Transpeninsular, **El Pabellón** (campsites US\$5) offers what is likely the best beachside camping in the whole San Quintín area. Though basic, the grounds are immaculately kept, and there's even a large whale skeleton to amuse any car-addled kids you might have dragged along. The best sites are sheltered by trees, others are exposed. It fills up fast. A grocery store is a 20-minute walk away, and clamming and surf fishing are superb.

Another 9km (6 miles) or so further south, **Rancho El Socorrito** (US\$5/vehicle) has primitive beachfront camping just north of Playa El Socorro.

Eating

Palapa de Mariscos El Paraíso (☎ 165-2906) San Quintín's famous clams are sold at numerous stands and restaurants, but for reliable quality plus a casual vibe head here, near Km 192. It has a great menu of *cocteles* (seafood cocktails), fish tacos, *ceviche*, *tostadas*, abalone (in season) and, of course, clams.

Viejo San Quintín (Transpeninsular; mains US\$4-7) This expatriate hangout makes good Mexican combinations, burgers and sandwiches.

Misión Santa Isabel (☎ 165-2309; Transpeninsular; mains US\$4-7) North of the Pemex station, Misión

Santa Isabel offers huge portions and excellent breakfasts.

Restaurant Bar San Quintín (☎ 165-2376; Km 193; mains US\$4-10; ☎ 7:30am-11pm) Alongside Motel Chávez in San Quintín proper, this diner-style restaurant has good breakfasts, filet mignon (about US\$9) and burgers (from US\$4).

Jardines Baja (☎ 165-6060; mains US\$7-11; ☎ Tue-Sun) Accessed via the signed road to the Old Mill Hotel, this family-run restaurant serves delicious seafood, chicken and steak dishes. The interior is a cross between a 1970s log cabin and schoolhouse, but hey, the food's good.

Old Mill Restaurant (☎ 165-6034; mains US\$8-20) This is the area's most expensive restaurant, located in the Molino Viejo complex. You're paying for the atmosphere of an adapted seaside cannery and beautiful views as much as for the food.

Getting There & Away

The long-distance **bus terminal** (☎ 165-3050) is in Ejido Lázaro Cárdenas on the western side of the Transpeninsular. There are regular daily departures to the following destinations:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)
El Rosario	4.50	1
Ensenada	16	3
Guerrero Negro	25	6
La Paz	98	17
Loreto	65	12
Mexicali	36	8
Mulegé	60	10
San Ignacio	40	7½
Santa Rosalía	50	9
Tijuana	25	5½

Getting Around

It's nearly impossible to get around without your own transportation. Along the highway, buses run between Camalú and Ejido El Papalote to the south, roughly every 15 minutes. You can flag them down anywhere en route. Fares range from US\$0.80 to US\$2.

EL ROSARIO

☎ 616 / pop 3500

Seasoned Baja travelers regard El Rosario as the gateway to the untamed stretches of the *real* Baja. Indeed, once you're south of town, the emptiness really kicks in. The town itself is a hodgepodge of buildings nudged up

against a bend in the Transpeninsular, with a Pemex, a baseball diamond, three hotels, mission ruins and one of Baja's most famous restaurants – Mamá Espinosa's.

Historically, El Rosario forms the southern border of the Dominican mission frontier. Known in pre-Spanish times as the indigenous Cochimí *ranchería* (a Spanish word referring to indigenous settlements) of Viñadaco, it was officially founded in 1774 as Misión Nuestra Señora del Rosario Viñadaco. An abundant water supply permitted cultivation of wheat, corn and fruit, including almonds and peaches; missionaries also directed the harvesting of lobster, abalone and clams. After relocating once (when the major spring dried up), the mission closed in 1832 because epidemics had so ravaged the Cochimí population that no laborers remained for the mission fields.

Only limited remains of the **Misión Nuestra Señora del Rosario's** two sites are still standing. The initial mission site is at the end of a short dirt road above the highway, but only the foundation outlines are still visible. Across the Río del Rosario, in the lower half of town (Rosario de Abajo), several standing walls make up the ruins of the later mission.

Information

There's internet access across the Transpeninsular from the baseball field (at KM 58). At the southern end of town, Gallery G/The Trading Post sells AAA Baja maps and, when they're in publication, the excellent *Baja Almanac*.

Sleeping & Eating

Motel Sinahi (☎ 165-8818; campsites/RV US\$10/16, s/d US\$20/25; Transpeninsular Km 56.5) The best things about Motel Sinahi are the kitschy array of furniture and ornately framed prints on the walls. It has a range of rooms and an RV park, and campers may use the shower in the motel office.

Baja Cactus Motel (☎ 165-8850; www.bajacactus.com; Transpeninsular Km 55; r US\$25-30) It's hard to believe rooms this ornate can be found somewhere like El Rosario. Located next door to the Pemex station, this newly revamped mission-style hotel offers luxury rooms with four-poster king-size beds, wooden beamed ceilings, double sinks set in stone and large TVs with satellite TV. The older rooms are boxlike and basic. Whether the price stays this low remains to be seen.

Motel La Cabaña (☎ 165-8615; r US\$35) Part of Mamá Espinosa's, La Cabaña offers clean, comfy rooms that open onto a small parking area. It's perfect for a night's sleep before continuing south.

Mamá Espinosa's (☎ 165-8770; Transpeninsular near Pemex station; mains US\$5-10; ☎ 6am-10pm) With the completion of the Transpeninsular in late 1973, Mamá Espinosa's became a favorite stop for a variety of travelers. In the early days of Baja road races, celebrities Steve McQueen, James Garner and Parnelli Jones were a few of the high-profile customers fond of Doña Anita Espinosa's now famous lobster burritos, which are still on the menu. The restaurant (larger than it once was) is filled with autographed off-road posters, family photos and Mamá Espinosa's paraphernalia. Breakfasts are huge.

Getting There & Away

El Rosario lies about one hour (58km or 36 miles) south of San Quintín. Buses stop at El Rosario's terminal on a schedule similar to that of San Quintín's terminal (see p121).

AROUND EL ROSARIO

At the end of a good but sometimes rough road that leads west 17km (10.5 miles) from El Rosario, the fish camp of **Punta Baja** attracts surfers to a good right-hand point break in winter. It's also a popular sea-kayaking spot. No tourist services are available. From the hill overlooking the camp, the five volcanoes of the San Quintín area are visible to the north.

Some 74km (46 miles) south of El Rosario by a series of decent graded and not-so-decent dirt roads, **Punta San Carlos** is one of the best windsurfing spots on the Pacific side of the peninsula.

THE NORTHERN BORDER

Traveling east from Tijuana along México 2 (or México 2D, the toll road), one passes through a countryside of rocky, scrub-covered hills and ranch land before arriving in Tecate, one of the peninsula's most pleasant towns. East of here, México 2 climbs and descends the treacherous La Rumorosa grade, one of Baja's most frightening roads, before hitting Mexicali, the state capital. Between Tecate and Mexicali lies harsh, boulder-covered

THE POROUS BORDER

Thousands of people live in Tijuana and commute legally to jobs north of the border every day. And thousands pour into Mexico from the US to spend money on everything from prescription drugs and health care to home furnishings and fun. Restaurant and gallery guides in San Diego cover establishments in Tijuana's Zona Río, Mexicans tune US radio stations, and San Diego punk bands play venues south of the border. Language and music, goods and services, Americans and Mexicans – they flow checked and unchecked across the border all day, every day.

This is *la frontera* – the border – and despite a giant fence and tightened US border controls, it remains as porous as ever. Not only does *la frontera* have a culture entirely of its own, but nearly everything that crosses it, especially heading north, is subject to a strict set of politically charged controls. And nothing is more politically charged on both sides of the border than the issue of undocumented immigration into the USA.

In 2005, under the guise of 'homeland security,' the US announced plans to build a new high-security wall along the border. Not surprisingly, Mexicans were outraged. President Vicente Fox called it 'shameful,' and critics pegged it as one more hideous example of political smoke and mirrors during US elections. In October 2006 US President George Bush signed it into law: the Secure Fence Act authorized a 1120km (700-mile) wall and a slew of hi-tech gadgetry, including cameras and sensors, to go along with it.

Of course, this wasn't the first time the US government heightened its border controls, even in the recent past. In 1994 the Clinton administration initiated the costly Operation Gatekeeper, which included a metal fence, a huge contingent of border-patrol agents, and sophisticated equipment such as floodlights, infrared scopes and movement-detecting ground sensors.

Operation Gatekeeper certainly made life harder for potential border crossers, but it did little to seal off the flow of illegal immigrants. It simply redirected them to the deserts to the east, where vast expanses and temperatures soaring to 110°F kill hundreds of crossers every year. Furthermore, measures under both the Clinton and Bush administrations have turned illegal immigration into big business. More and more undocumented immigrants (derogatively called *pollos*, or chickens) are forced to pay for a *coyote* or *pollero* (smuggler) to move them across deserts, through underground tunnels or by boat into the USA. *Coyotes* charge as much as US\$2000 per person, and the increased demand has transformed the previously small-time business into a lucrative cash machine increasingly controlled by crime syndicates operating on both sides of the border.

US–Mexico trade policies have failed to generate the jobs they were supposed to, and unemployment continues to rise throughout Mexico, especially in the south. While the US relies on archaic solutions like walls, and the Mexican government bemoans US immigration policy while doing little to curb poverty in its own country, those who pay the highest price are Mexicans looking for work. And the border stays as porous as ever – the holes just move around.

mountains, palm-filled canyons, the fabulous thermal baths of Cañón de Guadalupe and ample opportunity to get into the wild.

TECATE

☎ 665 / pop 91,021

As one local jokingly proclaimed, 'Tecate is known for three things: bread, tacos and Tecate.' While there's a bit more to Tecate than that, he's right. The town *is* bursting with outstanding *taquerías*, the local *panadería* (bakery) *is* famous, and everyone knows about the beer. This is where Tecate is brewed. The town itself exudes a wonderfully Mexican atmosphere, thanks to its *zócalo* (central plaza), which is filled with trees, cowboys

and strolling musicians who sell songs to the people lounging around the outdoor tables and benches. In short, it's well worth a visit.

History

Tecate's origins derive from an 1831 land grant to a Peruvian named Juan Bandini (who became the mayor of San Diego immediately before the US takeover of Alta California), but the establishment of early businesses and the development of agriculture in the 1880s really put the town on the map. The surrounding countryside yielded both grains and fruit crops such as grapes and olives.

After 1919 the railroad linked Tecate with Tijuana and Arizona (US). Completion of

Information

Banamex (Av Juárez near De la Huerta) Bank with ATM.

Bancomer (cnr Av Juárez & Cárdenas) Bank with ATM.

Cruz Roja (☎ 066, 654-1313; Av Juárez near Calle 15) Local Red Cross.

HSBC (Av Juárez near Calles) Bank with ATM.

Internet Millenium (Av Juárez near Cárdenas; per hr US\$2) Internet service.

Multi-Servicio Cox (Av Juárez near Santana; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Exchanges cash and traveler's checks.

Police station (☎ 654-1177, emergency 060) On México 2, east of downtown.

Post office (cnr Ortiz Rubio & Callejón Madero)

Tourist office (Sector; ☎ 654-1095; Callejón Libertad, Parque Hidalgo; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Usually staffed by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic youngster.

Sights & Activities

The joy of Tecate is hanging out in **Parque Hidalgo** (cnr Av Juárez & Cárdenas), the main plaza, where cowboy-hatted old-timers play checkers on cement tables, children run around with balloons, and mariachi bands stroll bench to bench selling songs of love and death. The park is anchored by a band gazebo and ringed by well-tended gardens and café tables. Unlike in most Mexican cities, Tecate's main church, the **Iglesia Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe** (cnr Cárdenas & Av Hidalgo) is not on the plaza but one block south.

The **Instituto de Cultura de Baja California** (☎ 654-1483; Plaza Hidalgo; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), on the southern side of Parque Hidalgo, has art exhibits, films and other cultural events. It's a source of local pride and well worth a peek. The **Universidad Autónoma's Centro de Extensión** (Ortiz Rubio), just south of the bridge over the Río Tecate, hosts occasional traveling exhibitions of *bajacaliforniano* art.

Tecate's other main landmark, the **Tecate Brewery** (Cervecería Cuauhtémoc-Moctezuma; ☎ 654-1111; visitastecate@ccm.com.mx; Av Hidalgo; ☎ beer garden 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Mar-Sep, 11am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Feb, 10am-2pm Sat year-round) offers tours by reservation only, preferably for at least 10 people. The brewery, Tecate's largest building, produces some of Mexico's best-known beers, including Carta Blanca, XX, Bohemia and the town's namesake, Tecate. The Jardín Cerveza (beer garden) is open to the public, and you should definitely stroll in for your free beer (one per visit). The garden closes to the public for community events, so call ahead if this is your main reason for visiting Tecate.

Behind the brewery, the 1915 **Estación Ferrocarril Tijuana-Tecate** (train station; Vía de Ferrocarril near Carranza) served the San Diego & Arizona Railway that ran along and across the border for more than 60 years (see also p126). It's been refurbished, but the inside is closed to the public.

Festivals & Events

While less extroverted than Tijuana and Ensenada, Tecate holds several festivals that draw locals from throughout the region. Those listed below are in addition to regular Mexican holidays. Double-check with the tourist offices, as event dates sometimes change.

Nacional de Bicicleta de Montaña Late June. National Mountain-Biking Championships.

Feria Tecate en Marcha Mid-July, sometimes in September. Agricultural fair celebrated with parades and rodeos. Takes place in Parque Adolfo López Mateos.

Romería de Verano Early August. Popular local summer festival in Parque Hidalgo, including food stalls, artisanal goods and regional music and dance.

Fundación de Tecate Early October. Two-week celebration of Tecate's anniversary.

Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe December 12. Tecate's Festival of Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the peninsula's most interesting celebrations of this holiday, with groups from all over Baja coming to display their costumes and to dance.

Posadas de Tecate Throughout December. Annual pre-Christmas parades.

Sleeping

Lodging isn't Tecate's strong point. Hotels in the center of town are pretty basic, but heading west on Av Juárez turns up a couple of spiffier places.

BUDGET

Hotel Tecate (☎ 654-1116; Av Hidalgo at Cárdenas; r with/without TV US\$25/18). From the courtyard entrance on Cárdenas, follow the arrows inside and upstairs to this tidy but demure hotel with small, plain rooms. It's basic, but the old-school furniture gives it a slightly appealing touch. The showers are dependably hot. Reservations are not accepted.

Motel Paraíso (☎ 654-1716; Calle Aldrete 83; r with/without TV US\$28/24; ☎ P) Arguably Tecate's best budget option. Paradise, it's not, but rooms are kept clean. The hallways feel a bit prison-like (as do the windowless rooms), but it's a friendly acceptable place.

Rancho Ojai/Tecate KOA (☎ 655-3014; www.tecatekoa.com; camping per person US\$11, RV US\$30, cabins US\$67-105) About 21km (13 miles) east of Tecate, this splendid, deluxe campground and RV park is part of a working ranch, complete with sheep, goats, peacocks and horses. A heated pool, minigolf and nature trail are among the many assets. Guests can rent horses. It's just off México 2, the free road to Tijuana (look for the Rancho Ojai sign).

MIDRANGE

Motel La Hacienda (☎ 654-1250, 654-0953; Av Juárez 861; r US\$37; (P) ♻) Except for its removed location near the outskirts of town, La Hacienda is great: a flower-festooned parking area gives way to clean, carpeted, air-conditioned double rooms with TVs. It's by far the best place to stay in town.

Okakopa Iwa Hotel (☎ 654-1144; okakopa@todito.com; Callejón Madero 141; s/d US\$45/52; (P)) This used to be Tecate's best hotel in the center, but with absolutely no upkeep, carpets are now stained, walls are dirty and the scent of cigarettes and mildew hangs in the air. Some rooms are better than others, so choose carefully and you might be fine.

Motel El Dorado (☎ 654-1333; Eldorado_1971@yahoo.com.mx; Av Juárez 1100; r US\$57, US holidays US\$77; (P) ♻)

This 40-room motel has giant, comfortable, though entirely nondescript rooms with cable TV, telephones and office-style carpeting. It's kept very clean and is walking distance from the plaza.

Eating

Think *taquerías* – Tecate's full of them, and they're all different. Most are open from late morning until late at night. On weekends, a beer and a bowl of chips at the plaza's outdoor tables is mandatory.

BUDGET

Tacos El Güero (Av Juárez near Esteban Cantú; tacos US\$1-2) Several great taco fillings to choose from, including *carne asada*, tripe, head, *birria de res* (a sort of beef stew) and *suadero* (a tender cut of beef from near the breast bone).

Taquería La Guerita (cnr Av Juárez & Santana; tacos US\$1-2.50) Spotless *taquería* serving great *birria de res* tacos in the morning, plus *al pastor*, *carne asada*, *quesadillas*, *tortas* and more.

Mariscos Chemel (☎ 654-4112; Obregón 250; tacos US\$1.50-2) Locals swarm this *taquería* for succulent, inexpensive fish and shrimp tacos.

Taquería Los Amigos (cnr Av Hidalgo & Ortiz Rubio; mains US\$1-3; ☎ Fri-Wed) Join the locals for absolutely superb (and massive) flour *quesadillas*

RAILS ACROSS THE BORDER

About once every month, the **Pacific Southwest Railway Museum** (☎ in the USA 619-478-9937, 619-465-7776; www.sdrm.org; Hwy 94, Campo, CA) in Campo, California runs excursions to Tecate aboard historic trains. This stretch of railroad between Campo and Tecate was part of the Tijuana & Tecate Railway (completed in 1919), itself part of the larger San Diego & Arizona Railway. Together, the routes formed an extensive cross-border rail system linking Mexico and the USA.

Built by Southern Pacific, the San Diego & Arizona Railway began in the San Diego suburb of Lakeside, linked up just south of Chula Vista with a spur from Coronado and entered Mexico at Tijuana. It reentered the USA at Tecate before descending the rugged eastern scarp of the Jacumba Mountains, including the difficult Carrizo Gorge, via a series of switchbacks and tunnels. At El Centro, it joined another route (the Inter-California line), recrossed the border at Mexicali and reentered the USA just beyond Los Algodones.

The San Diego & Arizona Railway continued to operate (carrying freight in its later years) until 1970, when Southern Pacific sold the Tijuana & Tecate segment to the Mexican government. In 1976 Hurricane Kathleen demolished several trestles on the route, ending operations between San Diego and El Centro. In 1997, during the privatization of the Mexican railroad, the segment was bought by the Texas-based Railtex company, which hauls freight along here and through San Diego County under the name San Diego & Imperial Valley Railroad.

Today, short of jumping the boxcars, the historic tourist trains operated by the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum are the only way to ride the rails. The trains chug downhill from 2500ft on their way from Campo, passing three tunnels on the way. Fares are US\$43 (US\$23 for children under 12) and include an optional Tecate Brewery tour. Reservations for the 1¼-hour ride can be made on the museum website.

filled with beans, cheese, excellent guacamole and *carne asada*. The tacos are tasty too. Don't leave Tecate without trying this place.

La Placita (Ortiz Rubio 30; tacos US\$1.50-4) Delicious taco concoctions as well as standard *antojitos* and *tortas*.

Panadería El Mejor (☎ 654-0040; Av Juárez 331; baked goods US\$0.20-1; ☎ 24hr) Locals swear this renowned bakery serves the best bread and pastries in Baja – and they may well be right. It even serves free coffee.

For inexpensive breakfasts try the 24-hour **El Mesón** (cnr Ortiz Rubio & Callejón Madero; mains US\$3-4); attached is the Jardín Santana, a café in a pretty garden. Across the street, **Gorditas Durango** (cnr Ortiz Rubio & Callejón Madero; mains US\$3-4) is good for cheap *antojitos* and outdoor seating.

Self-caterers may find the **Calimax supermarket** (Av Juárez btwn Aldrete & Carranza) useful.

MIDRANGE

El Jardín (Callejón Libertad 274; mains US\$4-6; ☎ 8am-late) Sitting at plastic tables on the plaza while sipping a mug of Tecate, people-watching and listening to the strolling musicians belt out *corridos* (drug ballads) to paying tables is the main attraction here, and that's no small thing. The food's decent.

La Peña de Losa (☎ 655-7648; Callejón Libertad 201; mains US\$4-7) The mix of Mexican and international food is good, but the best bet is the US\$5 *comida corrida* (set lunch), which includes drink, soup, main course and dessert.

La Tradición (☎ 654-8040; Callejón Libertad 200; mains US\$6-10) Likely Tecate's slickest eatery, this family favorite serves delicious Mexican food in an attractive dining room.

Ocean City (☎ 521-3228; cnr Av Juárez & Esteban Cantú; buffet US\$6-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) Good all-you-can-eat Chinese food. Lots of stuff to choose from, and a great way to get down some broccoli if you're up to your neck in beef tacos.

Entertainment

Tecate's nightlife is pretty quiet during the week but warms up on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

Cowboy hats outnumber tables three to one at **Taconazo** (Calle 15 at Av México; cover US\$8-15), where big name *norteña* bands play Mexican country-style music every other Saturday night to a packed house. Chest to chest and legs entwined, couples rip up the dance floor and pay no attention to the occasional gringo who strolls in to join 'em.

Otherwise, join the rock-and-rollers and blow out your eardrums at **Ricky's** (cnr Av Juárez & Aldrete; cover US\$3; ☎ Thu-Sat).

Emiliano's (Callejón Libertad near Calles) keeps a mixed crowd of locals and foreigners dancing and drinking to electronica and pop tunes, while **Bartini's** (Av Juárez near Cárdenas) is a good place to catch live music, usually rock, but sometimes *norteña*.

Shopping

Hand-painted clay tiles and Tecate beer are the town's specialties, but shopping is not as good as in Tijuana or Ensenada. A small **Mercado de Artesanías** (☎ 654-1750; Piedra del Sol at México 3; ☎ weekends only) is just south of Parque Adolfo López Mateos.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Tecate's **bus terminal** (☎ 654-1221; cnr Av Juárez & Rodríguez) is one block east of Parque Hidalgo. ABC buses go to Tijuana's La Mesa Long Distance Bus Station (Central Camionera La Mesa) at least hourly (US\$4.50, 1½ hours) and more frequently to the downtown terminal (US\$4, one hour).

ABC also goes to Mexicali (US\$13, three hours) hourly from 6:30am to 10pm. Ten buses leave daily for Ensenada (US\$13, two hours). To Santa Rosalía, La Paz and Los Cabos, you have to go through Tijuana.

CAR

From Tijuana you can choose between the free México 2 or the toll road México 2D, which starts just east of Mesa de Otoy. The latter is easier to find and faster once you're on it. The downside is the exorbitant fee of US\$6 per vehicle for what amounts to a 32km (20-mile) drive on the actual toll road. From Mexicali follow México 2 all the way west to Tecate.

TO/FROM THE USA

Tecate is a much quieter crossing than Tijuana/San Ysidro. The Customs & Immigration posts on both sides of the border are open 6am to 11pm daily. Saturday is the busiest day; Sunday, surprisingly, is relatively quiet.

AROUND TECATE

☎ 665

Tecate sits in a bowl-shaped valley surrounded by mountains. The most famous of them is **Mt Cuchumá** (1165m/3885ft), which

is sacred to the Kumiai (Kumeyaay) tribe, whose surviving elders and shaman still hold very occasional ceremonies atop the summit. Cuchumá offers numerous opportunities for nature-lovers and recreationists, and it's especially nice in spring when the wildflowers are in bloom. There's also abundant birdlife. At the foot of the mountain is Rancho La Puerta, one of the oldest and most exclusive health spas in North America.

In the hills around Tecate, there are loads of **balnearios** (ranchlike retreats with swimming pools, barbeque pits and, often, lodging). Most are open in summer only, when the only thing sane people can imagine doing is sitting around a pool. The tourist office (p125) provides a long list, often with photos, of many of them.

Rancho La Puerta

If restoring body, mind and soul is your foremost concern (and money isn't), a stay at the exquisite health spa and resort of **Rancho La Puerta** (☎ 654-9155, in the USA 800-443-7565, worldwide 760-744-4222; www.rancholapuerta.com; weekly room & board s US\$3488-4500, d US\$5756-9000; P X ♻️ 🚰) may be what you need. Founded in 1940 by self-improvement gurus Deborah and Edmund Szekely, the lushly landscaped resort snuggles up against the foot of Mt Cuchumá, also known as 'Holy Mountain.' The one-week stay (Saturday to Saturday) is anchored in a low-fat diet and lots of exercise. Days start with a sunrise hike before breakfast, then continue with as many classes as you like. Rates include all food, classes and transportation to and from San Diego International Airport (Lindbergh Field). The *rancho* is on México 2, about 5km (3 miles) west of Tecate.

Hacienda Santa Verónica

Climbing to a high plateau, México 2 passes through a zone of small farms and ranches. **Hacienda Santa Verónica** (☎ in Tijuana 664-681-7428; camping per person US\$10, r US\$50; P 🚰), about 24km (15 miles) southeast of Tecate, can be reached via a lateral off the main highway. The 5000-acre Spanish-colonial-style resort is on a former bull-breeding ranch and offers roomy hotel rooms with fireplaces and patios, and has a large swimming pool, a minimarket, horse, motorcycle and mountain-bike rentals, six tennis courts, volleyball and basketball courts. Visitors seeking peace and quiet should know that the ranch also has an off-road racing track.

Camping fees include access to restrooms, showers, laundry and sports facilities.

La Rumorosa

East of Tecate, for about 64km (40 miles), México 2 passes through an imposing panorama of immense granite boulders to La Rumorosa. Here it descends the precipitous Cantú Grade, with extraordinary views of the shimmering Desierto del Colorado below. Just before La Rumorosa at Km 83, the village of **El Cóndor** gives access to a northern route into the Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857. For details, see p111.

MEXICALI

☎ 686 / pop 855,962

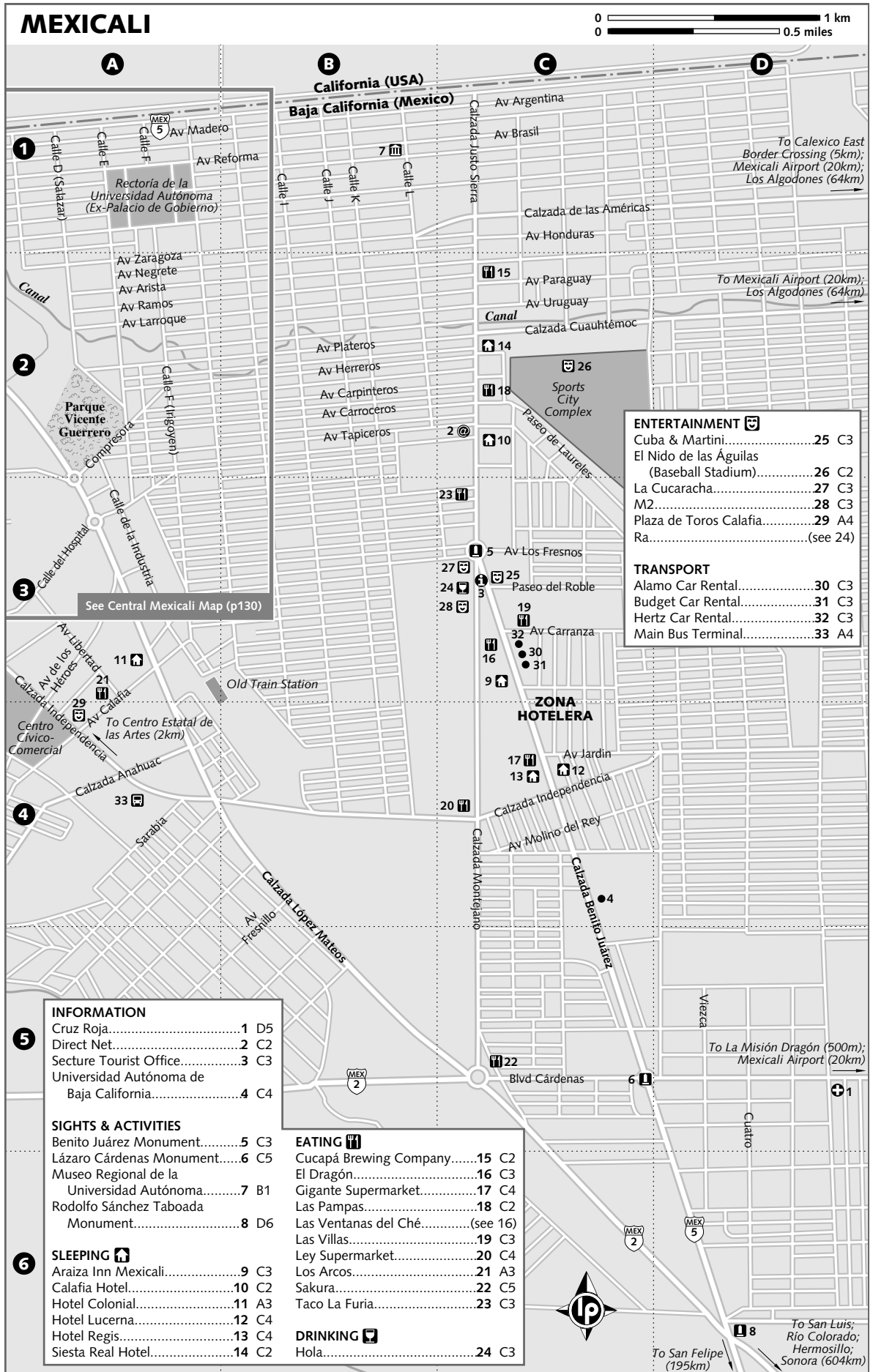
Most foreigners blow through Mexicali on their way south to San Felipe or east to the Mexican mainland, stopping only to refuel, stock up on cheap liquor, shop or hit the strip clubs. But they're missing the hip, cultured, interesting city Mexicali has blossomed into while shedding its stereotypical border-town image.

Admittedly, it isn't an easy city to explore: its streets are wide and its best restaurants, bars and nightclubs (of which there are many) are spread among soccer field-size parking lots in the sprawling areas around the Centro Cívico-Comercial and Zona Hotelera. The city doesn't pander to tourists like San Felipe and Los Cabos, but with determination and a couple nights' stay, you'll find a modern Mexico rivaled in Baja only by Tijuana and La Paz. After a night of dining and dancing, switch gears and hit the historic core of the old town (near the border), where you can take in the seedy bars, crowded shops, decrepit old buildings and bustling street life the Centro Cívico lacks. Then you'll know Mexicali.

History

Long before the arrival of the Spanish, relatively dense populations of sedentary Yumano farmers inhabited the Río Colorado delta. Early Spaniards found both the desert climate and its inhabitants (who resented missionary intrusions) hostile, and never established any sort of stronghold.

Conditions went unchanged until the early 20th century, when entrepreneurs north of the border realized the extraordinary agricultural potential of the delta's deep, river-borne sediments – if only they could be irrigated.



MEXICALI

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles

1 Calle D (Salazar)
Calle E
Calle F
Av Madero
Av Reforma
Rectoría de la Universidad Autónoma (Ex-Palacio de Gobierno)
Av Zaragoza
Av Negrete
Av Arista
Av Ramos
Av Larroque

2 Parque Vicente Guerrero
Calle F (ringoven)
Compresora
Calle de la Industria
Calle del Hospital

3 See Central Mexicali Map (p130)

4 Av Libertad
Av de los Héroes
Calzada Independencia
Centro Cívico-Comercial
To Centro Estatal de las Artes (2km)
Calzada Anahuac
Sarabia
33

5 Cruz Roja
Direct Net
Secure Tourist Office
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California

6 **SLEEPING**

Araiza Inn Mexicali
Calafia Hotel
Hotel Colonial
Hotel Lucerna
Hotel Regis
Siesta Real Hotel

7 **SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Benito Juárez Monument
Lázaro Cárdenas Monument
Museo Regional de la Universidad Autónoma
Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada Monument

B **California (USA)**
Baja California (Mexico)

Calzada Justo Sierra
Av Argentina
Av Brasil
Calle I
Calle J
Calle K
Calle L
7

Av Plateros
Av Herreros
Av Carpinteros
Av Carroceros
Av Tapiceros

8 **EATING**

Cucapá Brewing Company
El Dragón
Gigante Supermarket
Las Pampas
Las Ventanas del Ché
Las Villas
Ley Supermarket
Los Arcos
Sakura
Taco La Furia

9 **DRINKING**

Hola

10 **SLEEPING**

11 **SLEEPING**

12 **SLEEPING**

13 **SLEEPING**

14 **SLEEPING**

15 **EATING**

16 **EATING**

17 **EATING**

18 **EATING**

19 **EATING**

20 **EATING**

21 **EATING**

22 **EATING**

23 **EATING**

24 **DRINKING**

25 **ENTERTAINMENT**

26 **ENTERTAINMENT**

27 **ENTERTAINMENT**

28 **ENTERTAINMENT**

29 **ENTERTAINMENT**

30 **TRANSPORT**

31 **TRANSPORT**

32 **TRANSPORT**

33 **TRANSPORT**

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To Calexico East Border Crossing (5km);
Mexicali Airport (20km);
Los Algodones (64km)

To Mexicali Airport (20km);
Los Algodones (64km)

To La Misión Dragón (500m);
Mexicali Airport (20km)

To San Luis;
Río Colorado;
Hermosillo;
Sonora (604km)

To San Felipe (195km)

ENTERTAINMENT

Cuba & Martini	25	C3
El Nido de las Águilas (Baseball Stadium)	26	C2
La Cucaracha	27	C3
M2	28	C3
Plaza de Toros Calafia	29	A4
Ra	(see 24)	

TRANSPORT

Alamo Car Rental	30	C3
Budget Car Rental	31	C3
Hertz Car Rental	32	C3
Main Bus Terminal	33	A4

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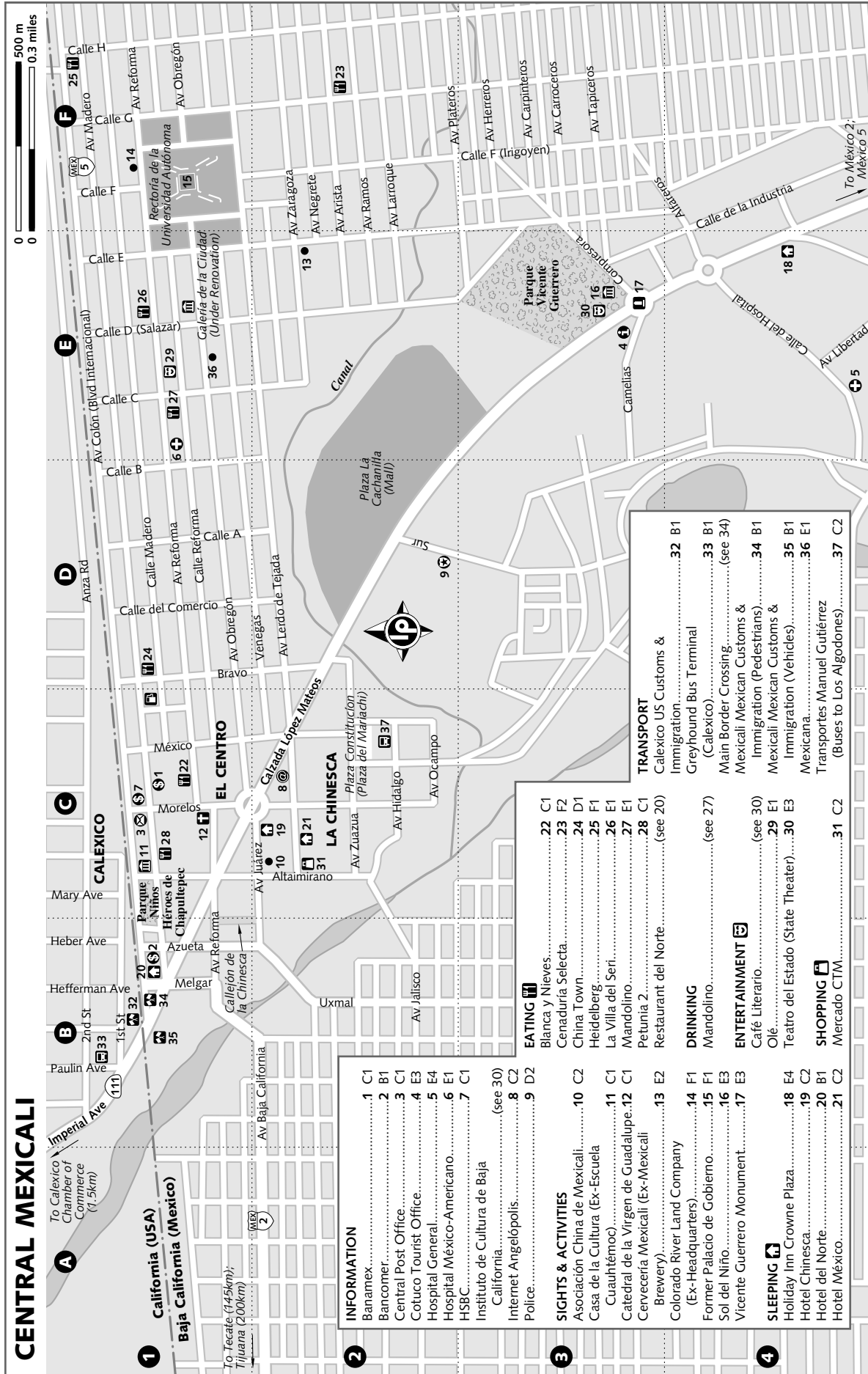
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CENTRAL MEXICALI

0 500 m
0 0.3 miles

1 California (USA)
Baja California (Mexico)

- 1 Banamex.....1 C1
- 2 Bancomer.....2 B1
- 3 Central Post Office.....3 C1
- 4 Cotuco Tourist Office.....4 E3
- 5 Hospital General.....5 E4
- 6 Hospital México-Americano.....6 E1
- 7 HSBC.....7 C1
- 8 Instituto de Cultura de Baja California.....(see 30)
- 9 Internet Angelópolis.....8 C2
- 10 Police.....9 D2

- 2** **INFORMATION**
- Banamex.....1 C1
- Bancomer.....2 B1
- Central Post Office.....3 C1
- Cotuco Tourist Office.....4 E3
- Hospital General.....5 E4
- Hospital México-Americano.....6 E1
- HSBC.....7 C1
- Instituto de Cultura de Baja California.....(see 30)
- Internet Angelópolis.....8 C2
- Police.....9 D2

- 3** **SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- Asociación China de Mexicali.....10 C2
- Casa de la Cultura (Ex-Escuela Cuauhtémoc).....11 C1
- Catedral de la Virgen de Guadalupe.....12 C1
- Cervecería Mexicali (Ex-Mexicali Brewery).....13 E2
- Colorado River Land Company (Ex-Headquarters).....14 F1
- Former Palacio de Gobierno.....15 F1
- Sol del Niño.....16 E3
- Vicente Guerrero Monument.....17 E3

- 4** **SLEEPING**
- Holiday Inn Crownne Plaza.....18 E4
- Hotel Chinesca.....19 C2
- Hotel del Norte.....20 B1
- Hotel México.....21 C2

- EATING**
- Blanca y Nieves.....22 C1
- Cenaduría Selecta.....23 F2
- China Town.....24 D1
- Heidelberg.....25 F1
- La Villa del Seri.....26 E1
- Mandolino.....27 E1
- Petunia 2.....28 C1
- Restaurant del Norte.....(see 20)

- DRINKING**
- Mandolino.....(see 27)

- ENTERTAINMENT**
- Café Literario.....(see 30)
- Olé.....29 E1
- Teatro del Estado (State Theater).....30 E3

- SHOPPING**
- Mercado CTM.....31 C2

- TRANSPORT**
- Calexico US Customs & Immigration.....32 B1
- Greyhound Bus Terminal (Calexico).....33 B1
- Main Border Crossing.....(see 34)
- Mexicali Mexican Customs & Immigration (Pedestrians).....34 B1
- Mexicali Mexican Customs & Immigration (Vehicles).....35 B1
- Transportes Manuel Gutiérrez (Buses to Los Algodones).....37 C2

Charles Rockwood's California Development Company finally did it by convincing Mexican president Porfirio Díaz to allow the company to divert water from the Colorado's main channel into its westward-flowing Alamo channel, in Mexico, and thus into California's fertile desert valley. Rockwood named it the Imperial Valley, the farmers bit, and agriculture soon boomed.

Around this time, the US-based Colorado River Land Company moved into the Mexicali area to develop the Mexican side of the delta just as the California Development Company developed the land to the north. Run by Harry Chandler, then publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, the company engaged in large-scale cotton cultivation and imported Chinese laborers to do the work (see boxed text, p132).

With heavy rains in 1905, disaster struck. Faulty engineering of the river's new route inadvertently diverted the entire flow of the Colorado River into the Imperial Valley. The diversion wiped out Mexicali and turned California's bone-dry Salton Sink into the Salton Sea. Not until early 1907 did massive efforts by the Southern Pacific Railroad succeed in returning the Colorado to its main channel.

In 1937, after the famous 'Asalto a las Tierras' (Assault on the Lands) by laborers in the Mexicali Valley, the government of President Lázaro Cárdenas forced the Colorado River Land Company to sell most of its land to Mexican farmers and *ejidos*. The company's imprint on the cityscape is still apparent – its historic headquarters are now an office building, and the open spaces along the railway line, now giving way to shopping malls, are reminders of the numerous cotton mills that employed many city residents.

Orientation

The area directly south of the border and east of Calzada López Mateos is known as El Centro; this is the oldest part of Mexicali, and it's home to the city's historic buildings, inexpensive restaurants, stores, bars and budget hotels. La Chinesca (Chinatown) is that part of El Centro south of López Mateos between Melgar and Morelos.

Av Francisco Madero heads east through El Centro from Mexican Customs & Immigration and finally hits the north-south artery of Calzada Justo Sierra (which becomes Calzada Benito Juárez). Along this north-south

thoroughfare lie the city's best restaurants and hotels. Mexicali's designated hotel area, the *zona hotelera*, is in the triangle formed by Calzadas Independencia, Montejano and Benito Juárez.

Except for El Centro, Mexicali is mostly car-oriented and therefore not very pedestrian-friendly. Authorities have shifted government services to the Centro Cívico-Comercial (Mexicali's civic center) and discouraged commercial development near the border.

If you're heading south from the USA, follow the broad southeast diagonal Calzada López Mateos, which heads through Mexicali's relatively new industrial and commercial section before dividing into México 5 (to San Felipe, 195km) and México 2 (to Hermosillo, Sonora, 604km).

Information

CULTURAL CENTERS

Centro Estatal de Las Artes (Map p129; ☎ 558-1000; Calzada Río Nuevo near Av Tabasco) Galleries, *exposiciones*, cultural events, dance, music and classes are all part of the schedule at Mexicali's newest cultural center.

Instituto de Cultura de Baja California (Map p130; ☎ 553-5874) Presents film series at the Teatro del Estado (p136) Café Literario on Calzada López Mateos.

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (Map p129; www.uabc.mx; Calzada Benito Juárez) Main university campus with a theater hosting cultural events, theatrical performances and lectures.

EMERGENCY & MEDICAL SERVICES

Cruz Roja (Red Cross; Map p129; ☎ 066, 561-8101; Blvd Cárdenas 1492)

Hospital General (Map p130; ☎ 556-1123; cnr Calle del Hospital & Calzada Independencia)

Hospital México-Americano (Map p130; ☎ 552-2749, 552-2300; Av Reforma 1000) Caters to US visitors.

Police (Map p130; ☎ 060; Sur near Calzada López Mateos)

INTERNET ACCESS

Direct Net (Map p129; Calzada Justo Sierra 820 L-3; per hr US\$2)

Internet Angelópolis (Map p130; Av Lerdo de Tejada near Calzada López Mateos; per hr US\$2)

MONEY

Cambios (currency exchange offices) are especially abundant in the immediate border area. Downtown banks with ATMs include **Bancomer** (Map p130; Azueta near Av Madero), **HSBC** (Map p130; cnr Av Madero & Morelos) and **Banamex** (Map p130;

Madero near Morelos). Many other banks in both Mexicali and Calexico have ATMs.

Travelers passing through Calexico can change money (*cambios* here usually offer slightly better rates than their Mexicali competitors) and buy car insurance along Imperial Ave (Hwy 111), which leads straight to the border.

POST

Central post office (Map p130; cnr Av Madero & Morelos)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Calexico Chamber of Commerce (Map p130; ☎ 760-357-1166; www.calexicochamber.org; 1100 Imperial Ave/Hwy 111; 🕒 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Good source of information on the US side of the border.

Cotuco Tourist Office (Map p130; ☎ 551-9800/01; cnr Calzada López Mateos & Camelias; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Very helpful; 3km (1¾ miles) southeast of the downtown border crossing.

Secture Tourist Office (Map p129; ☎ 566-1116, 566-1277; www.mexicaliturismo.com; Calzada Benito Juárez 1; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Assistance in English; useful city map.

Dangers & Annoyances

La Chinesca neighborhood in central Mexicali, primarily the streets south of Calzada López Mateos between México and Azueta, has Mexicali's highest concentration of bars, strip clubs and prostitution. Those lacking street savvy should avoid the area, especially after dark.

THE STORY OF LA CHINESCA

The last place the folks at Mexicali's tourist offices will send you is on a stroll through La Chinesca, Mexicali's **Chinatown**. Although rich in history, this is the city's dark side – the *zona roja* (red-light district) – where bars, strip clubs, prostitutes, music halls and the characters that follow all abound. It's also Mexicali's most colorful neighborhood, with *santeria* stores, dress shops, music shops, barber shops, hat shops and eerie, dark alleyways that look straight out of a *Bladerunner* scene. The dark **Callejón de la Chinesca** is a covered alleyway full of watch and jewelry shops, worth a wander if only for the atmosphere.

One of Mexico's largest Chinatowns, La Chinesca has its origin in the labor shortages of the early 20th century. The onset of WWI left companies like the Colorado River Land Company (which had begun agricultural operations in the Valle de Mexicali) and other landowners in short supply of cheap labor. Trying to meet the increasing worldwide demand for American agricultural products, these companies looked to immigrants to cultivate the land. The Colorado River Land Company spurred development by leasing parcels of land up to 1000 acres (400 hectares) to individuals who would manage all production of the land. Many lessees were wealthy Chinese from California who imported contract labor from China.

After the war ended in 1918, Mexicans from mainland Mexico flocked to the valley, attracted by the fervor of development. As the area started to experience a surplus of labor, resentment against the hard-working and entrepreneurial Chinese grew quickly, culminating in 1937 when President Lázaro Cárdenas ordered the confiscation of large landholdings, forcing thousands of Chinese off the land and into Mexicali city or back to China.

Meanwhile, in the mid-'20s, Mexicali's economy was booming, thanks in large part to US Prohibition. Americans flooded into town for boozing binges, gambling and sex: most of the action was centered in and around La Chinesca. A huge fire in 1923 revealed a series of tunnels leading to underground bars, brothels and opium dens. At least one tunnel burrowed under the international border to surface in Calexico, undoubtedly for the transportation of contraband to the dry USA. Some say there are still tunnels yet to be found.

Today's Chinese population in Mexicali is around 2000, originating from Canton. It's the largest Chinese population in Mexico. The **Asociación China de Mexicali** (Map p130; ☎ 552-4651; Av Juárez 110; 🕒 9:30-11:50am Mon-Fri) set up in 1918 to unify the Chinese laborers, is still going strong, providing representation, support and advice to the community. It also organizes cultural events, the big one being Chinese New Year. Preservation of the Chinese culture is most apparent in the Chinese language school, which runs Cantonese language classes for children on weekends.

Unfortunately La Chinesca is pretty run-down, but it retains a buzz that leaves the newer parts of town feeling soulless.

Sights

It hardly seems a likely tourist destination, but Mexicali's handful of off-beat sights can easily fill a day.

LA CHINESCA

From its beginnings, Mexicali's Chinatown (see the boxed text, opposite) was a center of commerce and social interaction for the immigrant community, peaking around the 1920s. Today the neighborhood is no longer what it once was, but it's well worth a wander for lovers of urban street scenes. It still contains many Chinese restaurants and other businesses and a smattering of typically Sino-Mexican architecture.

The main streets of La Chinesca are Zuazua, Altamirano and Juárez, all south of Calzada López Mateos, and a stroll along them (preferably by day if you're not street savvy) is very interesting.

MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Permanent displays at the **Museo Regional de la Universidad Autónoma** (Map p129; ☎ 554-1977; cnr Av Reforma & Calle L; admission US\$1; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) cover subjects like geology, paleontology, human evolution, colonial history and photography. Traveling exhibitions include themes such as indigenous textiles from mainland Mexico.

Sol del Niño (Map p130; ☎ 553-8383; Parque Vicente Guerrero; admission US\$3; 🕒 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) is a science and technology museum for children with lots of hands-on exhibits, including working TV and radio stations.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The **Catedral de la Virgen de Guadalupe** (Map p130; cnr Av Reforma & Morelos) is Mexicali's major religious landmark. One block north, on Av Madero between Altamirano and Morelos, the former Escuela Cuauhtémoc is a neoclassical building that now serves as the city's **Casa de la Cultura** (Map p130; ☎ 552-9630; admission free; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, hours vary Sat), which hosts rotating art exhibitions.

Now housing the rectory of the Universidad Autónoma, the grounds of the former 1922 **Palacio de Gobierno** (Government Palace; Map p130) interrupt Av Obregón just east of Calle E. Just north of this imposing building, at the intersection of Av Reforma and Calle F (Irigoyen), the former headquarters of the

Colorado River Land Company (1924; Map p130) is now used for offices, but its attractive fountain and restored balcony murals merit a visit.

Two blocks southwest of the rectory, the former **Cervecería Mexicali** (Mexicali Brewery; Map p130; cnr Av Zaragoza & Calle E) sits vacant but in a good state of preservation despite fire damage in 1986. Opened in 1923 under a German master brewer, it satisfied local demand for half a century and even managed to export some of its production.

MONUMENTS

Mexicali's monuments, which appear on its *glorietas* (traffic circles), are dedicated to past presidents, peasants, the fishermen of San Felipe and various other luminaries. Some notable figures honored in stone and steel are **Benito Juárez** (Map p129), where Calzada Justo Sierra meets Calzada Benito Juárez; **Lázaro Cárdenas** (Map p129), at the intersection of Blvd Cárdenas and Calzada Benito Juárez; **Vicente Guerrero** (Map p130), on Calzada López Mateos; and **Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada** (Map p129), also on Calzada López Mateos.

Festivals & Events

Mexicali hosts a multitude of annual festivals and events, ranging from dog shows and golf tournaments to off-highway races. Most are less gringo-oriented than those in other parts of the peninsula. The more important events include the following:

Baja Prog (www.bajaprog.com) Early March. Progressive rock festival that promoters claim is the world's biggest.

AgroBaja (www.agrobaja.com) Early March. The largest agricultural expo in Mexico and one of biggest in the world now attracts over 40,000 visitors.

Aniversario de Mexicali March 14. Celebration of the city's founding in 1903.

Festejos de Independencia September 16. Celebration of Mexico's Independence Day.

Fiesta del Sol Late September to mid-October. Festival of the Sun commemorating the city's founding; pop-music concerts, art exhibits, theatrical performances and parades.

Paseo Ciclista Mexicali-San Felipe Late October. Mexicali-San Felipe Bicycle Race.

Feria de Muestra Gastronómica Early November. Gastronomic fair featuring a cooking competition among Mexicali chefs.

Sleeping

As in most Baja border towns, adequate budget places are hard to find. If you don't fancy sleeping in a hotel whose reception has

iron bars on the windows, you'll have to pay for it. Ordinary accommodations are better and no more expensive in Calexico, just across the border, where most motels along 4th St charge US\$40 to US\$50.

BUDGET

Most budget hotels are in El Centro/La Chinesca, which is pretty seedy at night.

Hotel México (Map p130; ☎ 554-0669; www.hotelmexicomexicali.com; Av Lerdo de Tejada 478; r US\$27; 📶) Central Mexicali's best bargain may be the family-oriented Hotel México, where three stories of tiny, clean rooms open onto a charmless interior courtyard. The bathrooms are some of the smallest we've come across in all of Baja. Refusing service to hourly clientele, it's the last of a dying breed in the area.

Hotel Chinesca (Map p130; ☎ 552-8522; Av Juárez 134; r US\$29; 📶) This respectable little place has miniscule, windowless rooms with private bathrooms and TV. A smattering of Chinese decorations and sculptures keep it true to its name.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel del Norte (Map p130; ☎ 552-8101, 800-027-3230, in the USA 888-221-8504; www.hoteldelnorte.com.mx; Melgar 205; s/d US\$39/44; 📶) Conveniently close to the border crossing, this landmark art-deco-style hotel has 52 comfortable rooms. Its downstairs restaurant serves moderately priced Mexican dishes, lunch and dinner specials and huge margaritas. It's by far the best hotel in El Centro area.

Hotel Regis (Map p129; ☎ 566-3435; Calzada Benito Juárez 2150; r US\$46; 📶) A little motel on a big street, friendly Hotel Regis is close to good restaurants and nightspots in the Zona Hotelera. Rooms are clean and comfy, and there's a restaurant on-site. For the price and location, it's a good deal.

Siesta Real Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 568-2001, 800-026-5466, in the USA 800-426-5093; www.hotelsiastareal.com; Calzada Justo Sierra 899; r US\$58-99; 📶) The very comfortable Siesta Real offers modern carpeted rooms and secure parking. There's an upscale coffee shop-cum-restaurant next to the lobby, and guests receive 40% off the breakfast buffet. The cheapest rooms are in the back, and are crying for a paint job, but the beds are comfortable, they have cable TV and you still get amenities like shampoo and bath mats.

Hotel Colonial (Map p129; ☎ 556-1312, in the USA 800-582-3762; www.hotelescolonial.com.mx; Calzada López Mateos 1048; r US\$104-122; 📶) This small but

highly regarded hotel offers excellent modern rooms with carpet and little touches like framed prints and handsome light fixtures.

Hotel Lucerna (Map p129; ☎ 564-7000, 800-026-6300, in the USA 800-582-3762; Calzada Benito Juárez 2151; r US\$120-162; 📶) Along with a popular nightclub, a highly regarded Italian restaurant, a piano bar and a palm-lined swimming pool, the deluxe 175-room Lucerna boasts idyllic landscaping of fountains and colonial-style courtyards. AAA members receive significant discounts.

Also recommended:

Calafia Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 568-3311, in the USA 877-727-2492; www.araizahoteles.com; Calzada Justo Sierra 1495; r US\$88-164; 📶) Straightforward but comfortable rooms, with sliding glass doors.

Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza (Map p130; ☎ 557-3600, in the USA 800-227-6963; cnr Calzada López Mateos & Av de los Héroes; r from US\$155; 📶) Deluxe high-rise. Price includes a buffet breakfast.

Araiza Inn Mexicali (Map p129; ☎ 564-1100, in the USA 877-727-2492; www.araizahoteles.com; Calzada Benito Juárez 2220; r US\$151-184; 📶)

Eating

Ask anyone from Mexicali what the city's *comida típica* (typical food) is and they'll tell you in two words: 'Chinese food.' Thanks to its Chinese heritage, the city has more Chinese restaurants than any city in Mexico.

Most budget restaurants are in El Centro and La Chinesca. The finest restaurants, where you can eat extremely well, are in and around the Zona Hotelera.

BUDGET

Taco La Furia (Map p129; Calzada Justo Sierra near Av Los Fresnos; tacos US\$1) For delicious *carne asada* and *al pastor* tacos try this giant *taquería* with outdoor seating. Don't mistake the next door indoor restaurant for this one.

Petunia 2 (Map p130; Av Madero at Altamirano; mains US\$3-4) This tiny juice bar-cum-restaurant serves delicious *liquados* (blended fruit drinks) and cheap Mexican food all day long. Its sidewalk bar makes for an entertaining eat.

Blanca y Nieves (Map p130; ☎ 522-9485; Av Reforma 515; mains US\$3-7) Join the families and old-timers enjoying ice cream and burgers at this air-conditioned ice-cream parlor. For kitsch-value, it can't be beat.

Cenaduría Selecta (Map p130; ☎ 552-4047; Av Arista 1510; mains US\$4-9) This family-run diner is a Mexicali institution specializing in *antojitos* like beef tacos and burritos. Some swear this is

the best Mexican food in town. The set meals (US\$4.50) are a bargain.

For supermarkets, head to **Gigante** (Map p129; Calzada Benito Juárez at Av Jardín) or **Ley** (Map p129; cnr Calzada Montejano & Calzada Independencia).

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Central Mexicali

China Town (Map p130; ☎ 554-0212; Av Madero 701; mains US\$6-9) Plenty of folks in Mexicali say this spotless, modest restaurant serves the best Chinese food in town. A friendly old Chinese-Mexican woman presides over the cash register while attentive waiters whisk out enormous plates of darn good food.

Restaurant del Norte (Map p130; cnr Av Madero & Melgar; mains US\$5-12) Part of the Hotel del Norte, this US-style coffee shop has large and inexpensive, but rather ordinary, specials all day.

Heidelberg (Map p130; ☎ 554-2022; cnr Av Madero & Calle H; mains US\$7-12) Mexicali's lone German restaurant serves hearty Central European-style food, in addition to Mexican specialties, in a very Germanic setting.

La Villa del Seri (Map p130; ☎ 553-2677; cnr Av Reforma & Calle D; mains US\$8-15) Meat-fans will love this place's Sonoran beef. The seafood and *antojitos* are excellent, and portions are huge.

Mandolino (Map p130; ☎ 522-9544; Reforma 1070; mains US\$9-15) Hit this great hideaway for delicious pizza and pasta, and a bar upstairs that doesn't quit until the last punter staggers out the door. Spot the building by the broken Vespa dangling from the roof.

Zona Hotelera & Around

El Dragón (Map p129; ☎ 566-2020; Calzada Benito Juárez 1830; mains US\$6-10) This highly regarded Chinese restaurant serves top-notch food.

La Misión Dragón (Map p129; ☎ 566-4320; Blvd Cárdenas 555; mains US\$6-12) Operated by the owners of El Dragón, this place is set among lovely gardens complete with pagoda and miniature lake, 500m east of Calzada Benito Juárez. Both Dragóns are Mexicali institutions.

Las Villas (Map p129; Av Venustiano Carranza 1199; mains US\$6-12) Great if you can't agree with each other, Las Villas is two restaurants and a bar around one big pretty patio. Villa Vittorio (☎ 553-5503) serves Italian food, Villa Rufinos (☎ 568-1314) serves Mexican, meats and *mariscos* (seafood), and Villa Champs (☎ 568-1314) is the sports bar. Extremely popular.

Cucapá Brewing Company (Map p129; ☎ 568-4205; Calzada Justo Sierra at Av Paraguay; mains US\$7-14; ☎ Mon-

Sat) The ultimate cure for the Mexican light-beer blues, Mexicali's microbrewery serves six excellent brews on tap (four lagers, two ales) and good, hearty bar meals to go with them. No shorts after 6pm.

Sakura (Map p129; ☎ 566-4848; Blvd Cárdenas 200; mains US\$7-15; ☎ Mon-Sat) Intimately lit by lanterns hung over an indoor pool, Sakura serves sushi and other Japanese dishes. Karaoke nights run from Wednesday to Saturday.

Los Arcos (Map p129; ☎ 556-0903; Av Calafia 454; mains US\$7-15) Perhaps Mexicali's most popular seafood restaurant, Los Arcos is near the Plaza de Toros in the Centro Cívico-Comercial.

Las Pampas (Map p129; ☎ 565-6558; Calzada Justo Sierra 1049; mains US\$8-15, buffet men/women US\$16/14) This little yellow house, dwarfed by its parking lot, serves delicious Brazilian food: beef and salads. The buffet is a deal.

Las Ventanas del Ché (Map p129; ☎ 147-4473; Calzada Benito Juárez 1136; mains US\$15-20) Red tablecloths and a steak knife on each napkin make this Argentine steakhouse feel just like they do in the mother country. Along with numerous cuts of beef, there are salads and sandwiches. Chase it all down with a bottle of Mexican wine.

Drinking

If you have a penchant for smoky dive bars and bad company you'll find the bars in La Chinesca right up your alley. If you're worried about getting hit on by drunks or dislike *norteña* and *banda* music, you're best off sticking to the Zona Hotelera bars, such as those listed under Entertainment.

Mandolino (Map p130; ☎ 522-9544; Reforma 1070) Above its namesake Italian restaurant, Mandolino is a great spot to kick off the night. The bar is smaller than others in the Zona Hotelera and it has a welcoming vibe.

Hola (Map p129; Calzada Montejano 1100) Serves international food but is better for its lounge-bar atmosphere at night.

Entertainment

Mexicali has a dynamic nightlife. Most bars and clubs are along Calle Madero and in the area known as '*la cuchilla*' (the knife), named for the pointed shape created by the meeting of Calzadas Benito Juárez and Montejano (formally, it's the Zona Hotelera).

NIGHTCLUBS & LIVE MUSIC

In La Chinesca, Av Zuazua, between Altamirano and López Mateos, and Lerdo de Tejada

between the same streets, are home to some of the neighborhood's biggest bars, where *conjuntos* (bands) play live *banda* and *norteña* music on weekends.

In the Zona Hotelera, there are numerous nightclubs and bars around and especially west of the Benito Juárez monument. They're all walking distance from each other. In this area, **M2** (Map p129; Calzada Montejano) is a large nightclub spinning salsa and other Latin grooves as well as house music, depending on the night. Nearby, **La Cucaracha** (Map p129; Calzada Montejano) has dancing and live local bands. A few doors south, **Ra** (Map p129; Calzada Montejano) is a bigger venue with an odd Egyptian theme.

Across Calzada Benito Juárez, the new **Cuba & Martini** (Map p129; www.cubamartini.com; Paseo del Roble 1) is an ultramodern, ultra-chic bar and nightclub where you can party with Mexicali's upper crust.

Converted from a two-story house into a café-bar, **Olé** (Map p130; Av Reforma 1150) has DJs (inside) and live rock (out back) on Saturday nights. If it's too loud, go upstairs.

THEATER

A variety of theatrical and musical performers appear throughout the year at the state

theater, **Teatro del Estado** (State Theater; Map p130; ☎ 554-6418; Calzada López Mateos at Av Tapiceros), a modern building seating 1100 and equipped with the 'latest acoustical technology.' The Instituto de Cultura de Baja California also presents retrospective film series in the theater's Café Literario (Map p130). The theater is opposite the Cotuco tourist office.

SPORTS

Corridos de toros take place once a month from October to May in the **Plaza de Toros Calafia** (Map p129; ☎ 557-3864; www.bullfights.org; cnr Av Calafia & Calzada Independencia; tickets US\$6-20), next to the Centro Cívico-Comercial. Tickets are available at the gate or online.

Mexicali's professional baseball team, **Las Águilas** (Eagles; www.aguilasdemexicali.com.mx), plays in the Liga Mexicana del Pacífico, which begins its official season in October, shortly after the World Series in the USA. The regular season ends in early January.

Mexicali's baseball stadium, nicknamed **El Nido de las Águilas** (Eagles' Nest; Map p129; ☎ 567-5129; admission US\$3-10), is on Calzada Cuauhtémoc (also known as Av Cuauhtémoc) about 5km (3 miles) east of the border post. Games begin at 7:30pm on weeknights, at 6pm on Saturday and at noon on Sunday.

DETOUR: CAÑÓN DE GUADALUPE

Southwest of Mexicali and descending the eastern scarp of Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857 (p111), palm-studded Cañón de Guadalupe is a delightful hot-springs area superb for hiking, swimming and car camping. Because it's in the rain shadow of the coast range, it's dry and pleasant (except in summer, when it's brutally hot). The best time to visit is from November to late May. In addition to the cold canyon pools and small waterfalls, there are rock-art sites in the vicinity.

The **Guadalupe Canyon Hot Springs & Campground** (☎ in the USA 949-673-2670; www.guadalupe-canyon.com; campsites Mon-Thu US\$50-75, Fri-Sun 2-night minimum US\$90-275) has comfortable camping facilities starting at US\$50 per site midweek, but rising to an average of US\$200 for two nights on weekends. Each site has its own hot tub built into the rocks and fed by a natural spring with water temperatures up to 110°F (43°C). There's a restaurant and a swimming pool to boot. The campground gets crowded on weekends, when the owner requires a two-night minimum stay (three nights during US holiday periods).

To get there, take México 2 about 35km (22 miles) west of Mexicali, where a smooth graded road (signed and passable for most passenger vehicles in dry weather) leads 43km (27 miles) south to a junction that leads another 13km (8 miles) west to Cañón de Guadalupe. For north-bound travelers from San Felipe, the canyon is also accessible by a difficult sandy road (4WD recommended, though not essential) leading northwest from the southern end of Laguna Salada, at the turnoff from México 5 to Ejido José Saldaña No 2. This road is slow, tiresome, sometimes difficult to follow and not really worth doing unless there's no alternative.

If you can't get into this site, there are other, more modest sites up here – with thermal baths – that aren't tied into the online reservation loop. Hence, they're cheaper.

Shopping

Compared to Tijuana, Rosarito and Ensenada, Mexicali's not much of a shopping city, at least for foreigners. Curio stores selling cheap leather goods and kitschy souvenirs are concentrated on Melgar and Av Reforma, a short walk from the border. Buzz over to the small **Mercado CTM** (Map p130; cnr Av Lerdo de Tejada & Altamirano); it's nothing amazing, but the colorful children's dresses, herbalist, hats and other odds and ends make for some interesting browsing.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aeropuerto Internacional General Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada is the official name of the **Mexicali Airport** (Map p129; ☎ 553-5158, 553-4023), which is about 20km (12 miles) east of town via Carreterra Aeropuerto-Algodones. **Mexicana** (Map p130; ☎ 553-5920, at the airport 552-9391; Av Obregón 1170) flies all over Mexico and daily to Guadalajara and Hermosillo.

BUS

Major intercity bus companies have offices at the **main bus terminal** (Map p129; ☎ 557-2420, 557-2450; Calzada Independencia near Calzada López Mateos) and offer service to cities throughout Mexico. Destinations include Mazatlan (US\$74, 24 hours), Guadalajara (US\$100, 36 hours), Hermosillo (US\$36, seven hours) and Mexico City (US\$145, 40 hours).

ABC (☎ 552-6548; www.abc.com.mx) operates exclusively on the peninsula to as far south as La Paz, via Tijuana.

The following fares change regularly.

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)
Ciudad Constitución	125	21
Ensenada	32	3½-4
Guerrero Negro	81	12
La Paz	145	24
Loreto	110	19
Mulegé	105	17
San Felipe	16	2½
San Quintín	36	8
Santa Rosalía	100	16
Tecate	13	2
Tijuana	17	3
Vizcaíno	88	14

Transportes Manuel Gutiérrez (Map p130; ☎ 554-6822/26; Av Hidalgo) runs hourly buses to Los Algodones (only 13km/8 miles from Yuma,

Arizona) from Av Hidalgo between Aldana and Morelos at the southern end of Plaza Constitución (Plaza del Mariachi).

TO/FROM THE USA

Across the border in Calexico, **Greyhound** (Map p130; ☎ in the USA 760-357-1895, 800-229-9424; www.greyhound.com; 121 1st St) is directly opposite the pedestrian border crossing. It has 12 buses daily to Los Angeles. From its **Los Angeles terminal** (☎ in the USA 213-629-8401, 213-629-8536, 800-229-9424; 1716 E 7th St), there are 14 buses daily to Calexico. Fares in both directions are US\$36 and take 5½ to seven hours. There are frequent daily buses between Calexico and other California cities.

Calexico–Mexicali's **main border crossing** (Map p130) located downtown is open 24 hours, but drivers should try to avoid the north-bound afternoon rush hour. The **Calexico East** (Map p129; ☎ 6am-10pm) crossing – in the industrial-park area east of downtown, at the junction of Av República Argentina and Blvd Abelardo L Rodríguez – is another possible option.

Getting Around

Most city bus routes start from Av Reforma just west of Calzada López Mateos, two blocks from the border crossing. Folks on the street are usually happy to tell you which bus to grab. There are few marked bus stops; you just flag the buses down. The 'Justo Sierra' bus goes past the museum and the Secure tourist office. Any bus signed 'Centro Cívico' goes to the Cotuco tourist office and the bullring. The 'Central Camionera' bus goes to the Centro Cívico-Comercial as well as the bus terminal. Local bus fares run from US\$0.50 to US\$0.70.

International car rental agencies with offices in Mexicali include:

Alamo (Map p129; ☎ 568-2020; Calzada Benito Juárez 1004)

Budget (Map p129; ☎ 568-2400/01; Calzada Benito Juárez 1050)

Hertz (Map p129; ☎ 582-5222, 582-5678; Calzada Benito Juárez 1223; airport 552-3494)

A taxi ride from the border to the central bus station or Zona Hotelera will set you back about US\$5. A reliable alternative is to call **Ecotaxi** (☎ 562-6565), which offers slightly cheaper fares. Taxis are the only method of transport to the airport (about US\$16).

AROUND MEXICALI

South of Mexicali, México 5 proceeds through a prosperous farming region en route to the gulf resort of San Felipe, 193km (120 miles) south.

At Km 56 35 miles south of Mexicali, the indigenous village **Cucapá El Mayor** has the **Museo Comunitario** (🕒 10am-5pm), with exhibits on subsistence life and indigenous artifacts; outside are examples of traditional nomadic dwellings. A small store within sells a selection of crafts, including attractive bead necklaces.

Another 37km (23 miles) south, around Km 93, is the edge of the vast, desolate **Laguna Salada** – 1300 sq km (500 sq miles) of salt flats when dry, as is usual. Although these flats were part of the Gulf of California four centuries ago, today they constitute one of Baja's most arid regions. Unusually heavy rains in the mid-1980s, however, swelled the nearby Colorado and Bravo Rivers, turning the landscape into an ephemeral marsh. Southeast of the lake is the Río Colorado delta, a 97km (60-mile) expanse of alluvium.

Cerro El Chinero (Chinese Hill), just east of México 5 and north of the junction with México 3, on the way to San Felipe, memorializes a group of Chinese immigrants who died of thirst in the area.

LOS ALGODONES

📞 658 / pop 12,000

Settled by ranchers from Sonora in the mid-19th century, the border town of Los Algodones, next to Andrade, California, was a stagecoach stop on the route from Yuma (Arizona) to San Diego when the Río Colorado was navigable. Named for the surrounding cotton fields, Los Algodones is about 64km (40 miles) east of Mexicali but only about 13km (8 miles) west of Yuma across the Río Colorado.

Just west of town, the US' largest system of sand dunes, the **Algodones Dunes**, come to an abrupt halt near the Mexican border. The 72km (45-mile) long system of constantly moving sand dunes likely dates to the Pleistocene era.

Nearly deserted in the brutally hot summer, Los Algodones bustles in winter, when more than a million foreigners cross the border. The border is open 6am to 10pm daily, but Mexican authorities will process car permits from 8am to 3pm only. Just south of the border there's a **Cotuco tourist office** (📞 517-7755; cotucocolosalgodones@hotmail.com; Mariano Ma Lee; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri).

There are many *cambios*, but US dollars are accepted widely. Souvenir shops, dentists, autobody shops and restaurants all abound.

There is no public transportation across the border at Los Algodones. From the bus terminal at the corner of Av A and Calle 2, there are daily buses to Mexicali (US\$16, 2½ hours) and Tijuana (US\$36, six hours).

SAN FELIPE & AROUND

South of Mexicali, México 5 traverses vast salt flats and crusty salt marshes before hitting the booming resort town of San Felipe. It continues south to Puertecitos, turns to dirt, leaves the crowds and finally hits the Transpeninsular. The area around and south of San Felipe is desolate country, popular with anglers, off-roaders and the RV crew.

SAN FELIPE

📞 686 / pop 25,000

Beautifully situated between the desert and the Sea of Cortez and backed by stunning white-sand beaches, San Felipe is prime territory for fun in the sun. Until relatively recently it was just a backwater destination for snowbirds from the US. But the Baja land boom has hit San Felipe big time, and gated communities, condos and mammoth residential developments are dramatically transforming this formerly laid-back fishing village. Real estate offices practically outnumber bars, and potential homebuyers bussed in from the US outnumber the party crowd. As the owner of the local bookstore said, 'Just about every other person that walks in here is either ready to sign or has just signed papers on their "deal of a lifetime."' It's still a fun place to hang out for a couple of days, but debatably worth making a serious detour for.

Orientation

San Felipe hugs the shoreline of its namesake bay, a curving inlet of the northern Gulf of California, 193km (120 miles) south of Mexicali. Av Mar de Cortez is the main north-south drag, while Calzada Chetumal leads west to a junction with México 5, the highway north to Mexicali. Downtown along the beach is San Felipe's attractive *malecón* (waterfront promenade).

Information**BOOKSTORES**

San Felipe Title Co (☎ 577-0471; www.blueroadrunner.com/sfbooks; Av Mar de Cortez 101; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) This place has loads of used novels and many new books on Baja, all in English. It's upstairs and next door to Baja Java.

EMERGENCY & MEDICAL SERVICES

Cruz Roja (Red Cross; ☎ 24hr emergency 066, non-emergency 577-1544; cnr Av Mar Bermejo & Puerto Peñasco)

Saint James Infirmary (☎ 577-0117, 577-2976, 577-2965; Av Mar Negro Sur 1285) Best in area; caters to North Americans.

INTERNET ACCESS

Bandidos.com (Av Mar de Cortez near Manzanillo; per hr US\$2)

INTERNET RESOURCES

San Felipe website (www.sanfelipe.com.mx) The expat-operated 'official' site is packed with information.

LAUNDRY

Wash Tub (Av Mar de Cortez 381-3; per load US\$5; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Drop-off service available.

MEDIA

San Felipe Newsletter (www.jetiii.biz/sanfelipe/sfnews) English-language monthly; available free around town.

MONEY

Nearly all merchants accept US dollars.

Bancomer (Av Mar de Cortez near Acapulco) This bank has an ATM.

Curios Mitla (Calzada Chetumal at Av Mar de Cortez) Changes US dollars.

POST

Post office (Av Mar Blanco btwn Calzada Chetumal & Ensenada)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Secture (☎ 577-1155, 577-1865; cnr Av Mar de Cortez & Manzanillo; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) The English-speaking staff at this office are extremely helpful.

Sights & Activities

Most of the fun around San Felipe takes place on or near the water, though you could easily kill a few hours just wandering around town.

CAPILLA DE LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

The local shrine of the Virgen de Guadalupe, Mexico's great national symbol, is a small monument atop a hill north of the *malecón*. The climb to the top offers panoramic views of town and the bay.

CLAMMING

Clamming is popular, particularly when very low tides reveal wide expanses of firm, wet sand. The best beaches for clamming are south of town beyond **Playa El Faro** (Map p67). Small, tasty butter clams can be found around rocks, while the larger, meatier white clams are just beneath the wet sand. Check with locals about minimum acceptable sizes and per-person limits – clammers caught with undersized specimens are subject to hefty fines.

FISHING

Fishing draws many visitors to San Felipe, and Bahía San Felipe has become a parking lot of *pangas*, shrimpers, trawlers and tuna clippers. Fishing licenses are obligatory for any type of fishing, including surf fishing.

Pangas and their owners can be found at the north end of the beach, directly in front of Rosita Patio & Grill, and will take people fishing for about US\$100 for two people, including equipment. Bait usually costs extra and fishing licenses are generally not provided. **Tony Reyes Sport Fishing** (☎ 577-1120; Av Mar Bermejo 130) is another option, and everything is taken care of.

The following list indicates when the various species are most common in the vicinity of San Felipe:

Albacore July to August

Barracuda May to October

Bonfish June to August

Cabrilla Year-round

Corvina July to November

Halibut January to April

Marlin June to September

Rockfish Year-round

Sea bass May

Yellowtail March to November

Festivals & Events

San Felipe hosts many special events, though the hot summer months are usually quiet and event-free. On US holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, San Felipe's population practically doubles. The main street becomes a surge of motorcycles, dune

SAN FELIPE

INFORMATION	
1 Bancomer.....	1 D3
2 Bandidos.com.....	(see 11)
3 Cruz Roja.....	2 D2
4 Curios Mitla.....	3 D3
5 Post Office.....	4 C3
6 Saint James Infirmary.....	5 B4
7 Secture Tourist Office.....	6 C3
The San Felipe Title Co (Bookstore).....(see 22)	
8 The Wash Tub.....	7 C4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
9 Capilla de la Virgen de Guadalupe.....	8 D2
10 Panga.....	9 D2
11 Tony Reyes Sport Fishing.....	10 C3
SLEEPING	
12 Campo San Felipe Trailer Park.....	11 C3
13 Chapala Motel.....	12 C3
14 El Capitán Motel.....	13 C3
15 George's.....	14 C4
16 Hacienda de la Langosta Roja.....	15 C3
17 Hotel Costa Azul.....	16 C3
18 Hotel El Cortéz.....	17 C4
19 Hotel Riviera.....	18 C4
20 Motel El Pescador.....	19 D3
21 Playa de Laura Trailer Park.....	20 C4
22 Posada del Sol.....	21 C3
EATING	
23 Baja Java.....	22 D3
24 BajaMar.....	23 D3
25 Chencho's.....	24 D2
26 Chuy's.....	25 D2
27 El Nido.....	26 C4
28 Fat Boy's.....	(see 34)
29 Food Stands.....	27 C3
30 George's.....	(see 14)
31 La Langosta Roja.....	(see 15)
32 La Vaquita.....	28 D2
33 Petunia's.....	29 D2
34 Restaurant El Capitán.....	(see 13)
35 Rice & Beans.....	30 D3
36 Rosita Patio & Grill.....	31 D2
37 Soporite Comercial.....	32 C3

DRINKING Beachcomber.....33 D3
 Club Bar Miramar.....(see 31)
 Los Mandiles.....34 D3
ENTERTAINMENT Rockodile.....35 D3
SHOPPING The People's Gallery.....36 C4
TRANSPORT Bus Terminal.....37 B4
 Thrifty Car Rental.....38 D2

To RV Parks North of Town; Mexicali (173km)
 To RV Park Mar del Sol (2.5km); RV Parks; Racing Stadium (4.5km); Aeropuerto Internacional San Felipe (13km)

buggies and other ATVs, and noise levels rise significantly.

For this year's exact dates, see the **San Felipe website** (www.sanfelipe.com.mx).

Carnaval San Felipe Early March. Celebrated in San Felipe with a parade of floats and great vigor during the week before Lent.

Tecate-Score San Felipe 250 (www.score-international.com) Early March. Three days of action surrounding the annual off-road race sponsored by the organizers of the Baja 1000.

US Spring Break Mid-March. University students from north of the border flock here to party.

Día de la Marina Nacional June 1. National Navy Day.

La Fiesta Maristaco August. A festival celebrating the fishing industry; San Felipe's chefs gather to make enormous amounts of *ceviche*, a seafood cocktail made –

in this case – with 150 kilos of vegetables and 250 kilos of fish.

Feria del Camarón November. This Shrimp Festival celebration has become a tourist and gastronomic success despite the decreasing shrimp population in the gulf.

Sleeping

Rates in San Felipe, as in other coastal resorts, vary both seasonally and between weekdays and weekends. A budget hotel during the week may well be a midrange place on the weekend or during spring break. During US holidays, prices skyrocket.

BUDGET

There are no real budget hotels in town. There are loads of RV parks north and south of town,

though they're slowly being sold to developers. The quality of sites varies considerably; prices range from US\$7 to US\$28 per night. Most places have drinkable water, electricity and hot showers.

There are two good trailer parks in town, both of which allow camping: **Campo San Felipe Trailer Park** (☎ 577-1012; camposanfelipe@hotmail.com; Av Mar de Cortez near Av Manzanillo; campsites US\$20-25, additional person \$2) and **Playa de Laura Trailer Park** (☎ 577-1128, in Mexicali 554-4712; site on/off beach US\$26/20, additional person US\$4). At each, the rows of beachfront sites are pricier.

About 2.5km (1.5 miles) south of town, **RV Park Mar del Sol** (☎ /fax 577-1088, in the USA 800-336-5454; Av Misión de Loreto 149; campsites/RV US\$12/24; 🚻) has 84 RV sites with full hookups, 30 tent sites, showers, toilets, a small grocery store and a swimming pool.

MIDRANGE

Posada del Sol (☎ 577-1727; www.posadadelosbaja.com; Av Mar de Cortez 238; r US\$40; 📶 🚻) Behind the owners' little supermarket, this small, mini-motel is one of the better deals in town. Doors from the 2nd-floor rooms open onto a shared balcony overlooking the parking lot.

Chapala Motel (☎ 577-1240; Av Mar de Cortez 142; r US\$45; 📶 🚻) Two-story Chapala offers clean, straightforward rooms that open onto a parking lot in traditional motel style. Some have kitchenettes, and the staff is very friendly. It's a good deal for San Felipe.

El Capitán Motel (☎ 577-1303; www.capitanmotel.com; Av Mar de Cortez 298; r Sun-Thu US\$40, Fri & Sat US\$67; 📶 🚻 🚿) The faux sky-blue paint job can bug the eyes out, but this 40-room motel is good value considering the two stories of spotless rooms have air-con and satellite TV.

Motel El Pescador (☎ 577-2991, 577-2648; cnr Calzada Chetumal & Av Mar de Cortez; r US\$45-55; 📶 🚻) This 24-room motel offers some surprisingly spiffy rooms with furnishings resembling castoffs from last year's going-out-of-business furniture sale. They're homey nonetheless. Some rooms open onto the taco restaurant next door, meaning privacy can be slightly compromised. Arrive early if you want a parking spot.

George's (☎ 577-1970; www.georgesatbaja.com; Av Mar de Cortez 336; r US\$62; 📶 🚻) The modern motel-style rooms at George's are big and comfy, if not run of the mill. Sinks are separate from the toilet and shower, and the beds are firm.

Hotel Costa Azul (☎ 577-1548/49; Av Mar de Cortez at Ensenada; r Sun-Wed US\$65, Thu-Sat US\$85; 📶) With 140 rooms, the Costa Azul dwarfs nearly every hotel in town. Amenities include an oddly shaped pool, satellite TV, bar, restaurant and coffee shop. It's popular with spring-breakers and groups on real estate tours. During the week it's fairly relaxing.

TOP END

Hotel Riviera (☎ 577-1185; hriviera@telnor.net; Av de los Cedros near Av Mar Báltico; r Sun-Thu US\$76, Fri & Sat US\$100; 📶 🚻 🚿) Besides its quiet location two blocks off the beach, the main draw here is the grassy courtyard and pool area. Some rooms open to the courtyard, and there are plenty of plastic tables strewn about for outdoor seating. It has a warm sense of nostalgia about it.

Hacienda de la Langosta Roja (Red Lobster; ☎ 557-0483, in the USA 800-967-0005; www.sanfelipelodging.com; Calzada Chetumal 125; r US\$85; 📶 🚻) Despite the fact that the lobby is difficult to find (walk through the restaurant, up the stairs and hang a right), the 'Red Lobster' is one of the slickest hotels downtown. The blue wall in each room livens things up, but it seems a tad overpriced. Still, it's very comfortable.

Hotel El Cortéz (☎ 577-1055; cortezho@telnor.net; Av Mar de Cortez; r US\$80, bungalows US\$100, ste US\$135; 📶 🚻 🚿) Open since 1959, this 110-room beachfront hotel boasts rooms with sea views. A few smaller rooms have beachfront patios, and the pricier bungalows come with kitchens. The standard rooms open onto the beach, but the pricier junior suites do not. It's a great place if you want to be on the ocean.

Eating

As a popular tourist destination, San Felipe has a good selection of restaurants serving the usual *antojitos* as well as outstanding seafood specialties.

BUDGET

Soporte Comercial (Av Mar de Cortez near Calzada Chetumal; pastries US\$0.20-0.50) Pop in for scrumptious Mexican baked goods.

Baja Java (☎ 577-2465; cnr Calzada Chetumal & Av Mar de Cortez; mains US\$3-6; ☎ 7am-4pm) Delicious bagels and bagel sandwiches go down easily with the well-made espresso drinks. Chicken noodle soup, omelets and salads, too.

Chencho's (☎ 577-1058; Puerto Peñasco 233; mains US\$3-7; ☎ Wed-Mon) Since 1967 this little family eatery has been serving wholesome Mexican

dishes at good prices. Breakfasts (French toast, pancakes and all types of egg dishes) are all under US\$5.

Restaurant El Capitán (Av Mar de Cortez 298; mains US\$3-7; ☎ Thu-Tue) In front of its namesake motel, El Capitán gets very busy and serves delicious burritos and cheap breakfasts.

For really cheap eats, check out the cluster of food stands on Av Mar Báltico near Calzada Chetumal. Several small café-cum-restaurants along Av Mar de Cortez, north of Calzada Chetumal, serve cheap Mexican food; **Petunia's** (Av Mar de Cortez 241; mains US\$4-5) is a good one.

MIDRANGE

George's (☎ 577-1057; Av Mar de Cortez 336; mains US\$4-7) This US-style diner-cum-breakfast joint is a favorite among local expats.

Chuy's (☎ 110-9164; Av Mar de Cortez 401; mains US\$6-7; ☎ 6am-9:30pm) Brick walls, plastic tables and family atmosphere complement outstanding seafood at this mom-and-pop eatery. For an affordable seafood lunch or dinner it's hard to beat. The Mexican *antojitos* and breakfasts are great, too.

Rice & Beans (☎ 577-1770; Malecón; mains US\$6-11) Gringos love this place for the balcony over the *malecón* as much as for the food (though that's good too).

BajaMar (Av Mar de Cortez 101; mains US\$5-13) A big patio, maritime decor, a great bar and delicious food make BajaMar one of the best in town. The seafood cocktails and *ceviches* are excellent.

Rosita Patio & Grill (☎ 577-1770; Malecón at Zihuatanejo; mains US\$6-12) Rosita's has a large and varied menu, emphasizing seafood at moderate prices, and good outdoor seating on the *malecón*.

La Vaquita (☎ 110-1438; Av Mar de Cortez near Puerto Peñasco; mains US\$7-12; ☎ Thu-Tue) Big round tables and lots of space make this airy restaurant a fun place for seafood. If fish isn't your style, dig into a T-bone steak. It has a full bar and plans to host live music and karaoke in the near future.

Fat Boy's (☎ 577-4092; cnr Calzada Chetumal & Av Mar de Cortez; pizzas US\$8-15; ☎ Thu-Tue) Inside Los Mandiles bar, Fat Boy's serves pizzas, spaghetti and hot sandwiches. The outdoor tables make for good people-watching.

TOP END

La Langosta Roja (Calzada Chetumal 125; mains US\$12-20; ☎ 7am-11pm) Upscale but relaxed, Langosta Roja is extremely popular for its delicious

seafood, pastas, seafood *cioppino*, and reasonably priced wine list (Baja wines, of course). It's mostly Italian food, and the Caesar salad and chicken parmesan can make a nice break from the Mexican fare. The bar makes a good margarita.

El Nido (☎ 577-1028; Av Mar de Cortez 348; mains US\$8-15; ☎ 2-9pm Thu-Tue) Dim lighting and a old-fashioned *rancho* atmosphere make this San Felipe classic the perfect place for a romantic meal. Choose from various seafood dishes and steaks cooked over mesquite charcoal; the chicken tacos are excellent and the steaks are sublime.

Drinking & Entertainment

Club Bar Miramar (☎ 577-1192; Av Mar de Cortez 315) This smoky bar fills up with leather-skinned expats who sit around watching the pool tables while the party crowd fills up the front room. It's a cool place.

Los Mandiles (cnr Calzada Chetumal & Av Mar de Cortez) Around since long before the real estate offices and spring-breakers, Los Mandiles still makes the perfect spot for an ice-cold beer and a stiff drink for fans of sidewalk tables and old-school bars.

Beachcomber (☎ 577-2122; Malecón near Calzada Chetumal) This combination bar-and-grill makes a good place to settle in for a drink.

Rockodile (www.4rockodile.com; Av Mar de Cortez) The giant, green Rockodile is a bar-cum-disco attracting the party crowd with thumping music and the obligatory whistle blowing.

There are also several clubs on and around the *malecón* and along Av Mar de Cortez, north of Calzada Chetumal.

Shopping

The entire length of Av Mar de Cortez is lined with stores that are packed with souvenirs from around Mexico. For arts and crafts by local and expatriate artists, visit the **People's Gallery** (Av Mar de Cortez 5; ☎ Thu-Tue).

Getting There & Away

Aeropuerto Internacional San Felipe (☎ 577-1368, 577-1858) is 13km (8 miles) south of town via a spur off México 5, but presently there are no commercial flights. **Grey Eagle Aviation** (☎ in the USA 888-280-8802, 760-804-8680; www.greyeaglecharter.com) is a California-based air taxi that flies from Long Beach (US\$225) and San Diego (Brown Field airport; US\$175) on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday.

WITH A FEW MORE DAYS...

Northern Baja is vast and attracts more and more visitors from California every day. Despite that, there are still plenty of off-beat and off-the-beaten-track places and activities worth checking out. For something unique, try one of the following.

- Río Hardy – Southeast of Mexicali via México 5, the Río Hardy area is popular with hunters and anglers but also offers good bird-watching (especially in winter). Various *campos* (camps) offer camping and rustic cabins.
- Ranchos and Spas – There are loads of summer *balnearios* (spas in ranchlike settings) in the countryside around Tecate. Pick up a list at the Tecate tourist office (p125) and join the families for swimming and fun.
- La Rumorosa – From this village atop the treacherous Cantú Grade (p128), check out cave paintings and an old military barracks.
- Palm Canyons – From México 2D, head south on the road to Cañón de Guadalupe (p136) and explore the spectacular boulder-strewn, palm-studded gorges notched into the eastern escarpment of the Sierra de Juárez. There are five in all; Guadalupe and Tajo are the most scenic. Bring a sturdy vehicle, good maps and all your own supplies. Visit November through April, when temperatures are mild.
- Bahía Rosario – From El Rosario (p121), hit the dirt road heading west to this undeveloped ocean playground where you can surf, fish, dive, kayak, beachcomb and camp from Punta Baja in the north to Punta San Antonio in the south.

San Felipe's **bus terminal** (☎ 577-1516; Av Mar Caribe) is 10 to 15 minutes' walk from the *malecón*. There are regular buses to Mexicali (US\$16, 2½ hours), Ensenada (US\$23, four hours) and Tijuana (US\$33, 5½ hours). Buses also depart twice daily to and from Puertecitos (US\$5, two hours).

Rental cars are pricey but available at **Thrifty** (☎ 577-1277; Av Mar de Cortez 75-B), inside the Century 21 office.

PUERTECITOS

Puertecitos is a desolate place dominated by two colors: the brown of the earth and the blue of the sea and sky. Trailers (mostly belonging to American retirees), ramshackle houses, rocks and dirt make up the nonaquatic scenery, while fishing boats and kayaks draw the eye to the sea. It takes a lover of desolation to appreciate the place. In summer and fall, it's quiet, but in winter it's busy.

The paving of México 5 from San Felipe was finally completed in 2006, meaning Puertecitos is probably in for some rapid growth. It's the last bit of civilization before heading down the rough road to Bahía San Luis Gonzaga (p148). There's a Pemex station (rarely open), one public telephone, two small shops and a *llantera* (tire shop). If you're driving north from Gonzaga, refill your tires

here. Puertecitos is 84km (52 miles) south of San Felipe.

Facing the water on Puertecito's small bay, the modest **Campo Turístico Puertecitos** (palapa US\$20, r US\$45) offers *palapas* (for campers) that each have an electrical outlet, picnic bench, barbeque and running water. The hotel rooms are adequate and open onto the sand and water. Both are first come, first served. The complex also includes a boat launch, a restaurant (open November through April only), a landing strip and **thermal baths** that burble up below the high-tide mark on the other side of the point. The baths cost US\$5 per person, and outside peak season you might get them to yourself. They're built into the rocks at water level, so when the tide is high, they cool down enough to enjoy. Gas is also sold here.

NORTH OF PUERTECITOS

Long sandy beaches stretch out to the north of Puertecitos, and beach camps sell soda and beer; some allow you to camp for between US\$10 and US\$15 per vehicle. About 2km north of Puertecitos, Campo Destiny rents *palapas* with tables and grills for US\$15. The swimming here is good. At Km 35.5, you'll pass Chelo's Café and a minimarket, both of which serve food.

SOUTH OF PUERTECITOS

The notoriously rough, rock-strewn road south of Puertecitos traverses some 80km (50 miles) of desolate desert coastline before arriving at the remote Bahía San Luis Gonzaga (p148). Those who undertake the drive – and it's slow going – will be rewarded not only with views aplenty, but by a sense of accomplishment and the memory of driving Baja's last dirt highway.

If you're carrying a kayak, you're golden: several put-ins before Gonzaga offer excellent sea-kayaking opportunities. Beaches are few.

About 4 miles south of Puertecitos, you'll pass **Campo Bahía Cristina** (palapas per vehicle US\$12), which has a small brown-sand beach (it's the same color as the mountains around it), good sturdy *palapas* for camping, and a seasonal **restaurant** (mains US\$4-10; ☑ open Nov-Jun). It's a lot less developed than Puertecitos and makes for a good starting point for the drive south. Each *palapa* has a grill.

About 8km (5 miles) south of Puertecitos, you'll pass **Playa Costilla**, after which the road gets pretty bad. Drivers face two steep *cuestas* (grades) before arriving at the shoreline again. The entire ride is very slow, and, with tires down to 20 psi (as locals insist), and a conservative driver at the wheel, it takes about four hours (without stopping) from Puertecitos to Bahía San Luis Gonzaga. Good clearance is generally more important than 4WD. RVs will have trouble south of Playa Costilla.

Punta Bufeo is 147km (91 miles) south of San Felipe. The mountains meet the water here, making this small resort mostly steep and rocky. There are cabins for rent, a restaurant, dirt landing strip and boat anchorage.

Beyond Punta Bufeo, the road becomes easier but still requires caution as far as Rancho Grande. For more details on this area, see Bahía San Luis Gonzaga (p148) in the Central Baja chapter.

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