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Northern Baja: Tijuana, Rosarito Beach & Ensenada

Northern Baja California is not only Mexico's most infamous border crossing, it's also the land that claims to be the birthplace of the original Caesar salad and the margarita. Who could resist that? As you travel south along the Pacific coastline, the towns of Tijuana, Rosarito Beach, and Ensenada together make one of the most important introductions to Mexico. The trip combines the boisterous, the beachy, and the beautiful of Baja.

Long notorious as a party-hard, 10-block border town, Tijuana has cleaned up its act a bit on its way to becoming a full-scale city. A growing number of sports and cultural attractions now augment the legendary shopping experience and wild nightlife. Rosarito Beach remains a more tranquil resort town, despite recently spending time in Hollywood's spotlight; the decidedly laid-back atmosphere makes it easy to enjoy miles of beachfront. Continue south past stellar surf breaks, golf courses, and fish-taco stands, and Ensenada emerges, a favored port of call and a lovely town with plenty of appeal for active travelers.

EXPLORING NORTHERN BAJA

If you have a car, it's easy to venture into Baja Norte from Southern California for a few days' getaway. Since 1991, American car-rental companies have allowed customers to drive their cars into Baja. Whether you drive your own car or a rented one, you'll need Mexican auto insurance in addition to your own; it's available at the border in San Ysidro or through the car-rental companies (see "Getting Around" in chapter 1).

It takes relatively little time to cross the international border in Tijuana, but be prepared for a delay of an hour or more on your return to the United States through San Diego—with increased

A Suggested Itinerary

Begin your trip in Tijuana with an afternoon or overnight stay that includes watching some fast-paced jai alai (see “Outdoor Activities & Spectator Sports,” in section 1, “Tijuana: Bawdy Border Town,” for in-depth information), then head down the coast to the seaside town of Rosarito Beach, and then on to Puerto Nuevo and Ensenada.

security measures for entering the U.S., this is an especially diligent point of entry. If you take local buses down the Baja coast (which is possible), the delays come en route rather than at the border.

1 Tijuana: Bawdy Border Town

26km (16 miles) S of San Diego

In northern Baja California, the first point of entry from the West Coast of the U.S. is infamous Tijuana, a town that continues to delude travelers into thinking that a visit there means they've been to Mexico. An important border town, Tijuana is renowned for its hustling, carnival-like atmosphere and easily accessible decadence.

But Tijuana is increasingly an important city in Mexico; the population has swelled to nearly two million, making it the second-largest city on the Pacific coast of North America (after Los Angeles). Despite obvious signs of widespread poverty, the town claims one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, thanks to the rise in *maquiladoras*, the foreign-owned manufacturing operations that continue to proliferate under NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). High-rise office buildings testify to increased prosperity, as does the rise of a white-collar middle class that shops at modern shopping centers away from the tourist zone. And there's tourism from elsewhere in northern Mexico; the availability of imported goods and the lure of a big-city experience draw visitors.

Tijuana's “sin city” image is gradually morphing into that of a shopper's mecca and a nocturnal playground. Vineyards associated with the growing wine industry are nearby, and an increasing number of cultural offerings are joining the traditional sporting attractions of greyhound racing, jai alai, and bullfights. Tijuana first earned notoriety during the U.S. Prohibition, when scores of visitors found the time and the inclination to come here, to the site of the world's

Tijuana



- Cafe La Especial **1**
- Caliente Racetrack **9**
- El Toreo Bullring **6**
- Hotel Lucerna **8**
- Frontón Palacio (Jai Alai Palace) **3**
- L.A. Cetto Winery **4**
- Mundo Divertido **7**
- Pueblo Amigo **2**
- Tijuana Cultural Center **5**

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largest saloon bar, The Whale. Around the same time, the Hotel Casino de Aguacaliente—the first resort of its kind in Mexico—attracted Hollywood stars and other celebrities with its casino, greyhound racing, and hot-springs spa.

Like many large cities in developing nations, Tijuana is a mixture of new and old, rich and poor, modern and traditional. You are less likely to find the Mexico you may be expecting—charming town squares and churches, abundant bougainvillea, and women in colorful embroidered skirts and blouses—and more likely to find an urban culture, a profusion of U.S.-inspired goods and services, and relentless hawkers playing to the thousands of tourists who come for a taste of Mexico.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE & DEPARTING

A visit to Tijuana requires little in the way of formalities—no passport or tourist card is required of people who stay less than 72 hours in the border zone. If you plan to stay longer, you must have a tourist card, available free of charge from the border crossing station, or from any immigration office.

BY PLANE **AeroCalifornia** (☎ 800/237-6225 in the U.S., or 664/684-2100) has nonstop or direct flights from Los Angeles; **Aeromexico** (☎ 800/237-6639 in the U.S., 664/683-2700, or 664/638-8444; www.aeromexico.com) has connecting flights from Houston, New York, Culiacán, Hermosillo, Guadalajara, La Paz, and Mexico City. **Mexicana** (☎ 800/531-7921 in the U.S., 664/634-6566, www.mexicana.com) has direct or connecting flights from Guadalajara, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Cancún.

BY CAR If you plan to visit only Tijuana and are arriving from Southern California, you should consider leaving your car behind, because the traffic can be challenging. One alternative is to walk across the border; you can either park your car in one of the safe, long-term parking lots on the San Diego side for about \$8 a day, or take the San Diego Trolley to the border. Once you're in Tijuana, it's easier to get around by taxi than to take on the local drivers. Cab fares from the border to downtown Tijuana run about \$5. You can also charter a taxi to Rosarito for about \$20 (one-way) or to Ensenada for \$100 (one-way).

To reach Tijuana from the U.S., take I-5 south to the Mexican border at San Ysidro. The drive from downtown San Diego takes about half an hour.

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Many car-rental companies in San Diego allow customers to drive their cars into Baja California, at least as far as Ensenada. Cars from **Avis** (☎ **800/331-1212** or 619/688-5000) and **Southwest** (☎ **619/497-4800**) may be driven as far as the 28th parallel and Guerrero Negro, the dividing line that separates Baja into two states, North and South. **Bob Baker Ford** (☎ **619/297-5001**, ext. 9) allows its cars to be driven the entire 1,000-mile stretch of the Baja Peninsula.

Keep in mind that if you drive in, you'll need Mexican auto insurance in addition to your own. You can get it in San Ysidro, just north of the border at the San Ysidro exit; from your car-rental agency in San Diego; or from a AAA office if you're a member.

From the south, take Highway 1 (Carretera Transpeninsular) north to Tijuana. It's a long and sometimes difficult drive.

BY TROLLEY From downtown San Diego, you also have the option of taking the bright-red trolley headed for San Ysidro and getting off at the last stop (it's nicknamed the Tijuana Trolley for good reason). From here, just follow the signs to walk across the border. It's simple, quick, and inexpensive; the one-way trolley fare is \$2. The last trolley leaving for San Ysidro departs downtown around midnight; the last returning trolley from San Ysidro is at 1am. On Saturday, the trolley runs 24 hours.

BY BUS **Five Star Tours**, in San Diego at the intersection of Broadway and Kettner (☎ **619/232-5049**; fax 619/575-3075), offers specialized trips across the border. For \$50 for the first person and \$5 per extra person, the company will take you across the border, recommend shops and restaurants, or take you to the Cultural Center, then pick you up to return to San Diego at a pre-established time. You must make reservations 24 hours in advance.

Also from San Diego, **Gray Line Tours** (☎ **619/238-4777**) offers a tour to Tijuana for \$20. It's not a regularly scheduled tour, so call ahead to check departure dates and times. **Contact Tours** (☎ **619/477-8687**) also offers a tour to Tijuana for \$28.

ORIENTATION

ARRIVING Upon arrival at the airport, buy a ticket inside the building for a taxi, which can be shared by up to five passengers. It costs about \$9 to and from anywhere in the city. Public buses to downtown Tijuana, marked CENTRO, are also available and cost 45¢ per passenger. The airport is about 8km (5 miles) east of the city.

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The major car-rental agencies all have counters at the airport, open during flight arrivals: **Avis** (☎ 800/331-1212 from the U.S., or 664/683-2310); **Budget** (☎ 800/527-0700 from the U.S., or 664/683-2905); **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131 from the U.S., or 664/683-2080); and **National** (☎ 800/328-4567 from the U.S., or 664/683-8115). Advance reservations are not always necessary, but they are recommended. You can usually get a better rate if you make your reservation in the U.S.

If you've come to Tijuana on the San Diego Trolley or if you leave a car on the U.S. side of the border, you will walk through the border crossing. The first structure you'll see on your left is a Visitor Information Center, open daily from 9am to 7pm; ask for a copy of the *Baja Visitor* magazine and the *Baja Times*. From here, you can easily walk into the center of town or take a taxi.

Tijuana taxicabs are easy to find, available at most of the visitor hot spots. It's customary to agree upon the rate before stepping into the cab, whether you're going just a few blocks or hiring a cab for the afternoon. One-way rides within the city cost between \$4 and \$8, and tipping is optional. Some cabs are "local" taxis, frequently stopping to take on or let off other passengers during your ride; they are less expensive than private cabs.

VISITOR INFORMATION Prior to your visit, you can write for information, brochures, and maps from the Tijuana Convention & Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 434523, San Diego, CA 92143-4523. You can also get a preview of events, restaurants, and more online at www.seetijuana.com. Once in Tijuana, pick up visitor information at the **Tijuana Tourism Board**, Paseo de los Héroes 9365, Zona Río (☎ 888/775-2417 toll-free in the U.S., or 664/686-1345; www.seetijuana.com). You can also try the **Mexican Tourism Office** (☎ 664/688-0555; open Mon–Fri from 8am–5pm, Sat and Sun from 10am–2pm), or the **National Chamber of Commerce** (☎ 664/685-8472; open Mon–Fri 9am–2pm and 4–7pm). Both have offices at the corner of Avenida Revolución and Calle 1, and are extremely helpful with maps and orientation, local events of interest, and accommodations; in addition, the tourism office provides legal assistance for visitors who encounter problems while in Tijuana.

The following countries have **consulate offices** in Tijuana: the **United States** (☎ 664/622-7400), **Canada** (☎ 664/684-0461), and the **United Kingdom** (☎ 664/681-7323 or 664/686-5320).



FAST FACTS: Tijuana

Area Code The local telephone area code is **664**.

Banks Banks exchange currency during business hours, generally Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 6pm and Saturday from 9am to 2pm. Major banks with ATMs and *casas de cambio* (money-exchange houses) are easy to find in all the heavily trafficked areas discussed in this book. The currency of Mexico is the peso, but you can easily visit Tijuana (or Rosarito and Ensenada, for that matter) without changing money because dollars are accepted virtually everywhere.

Climate & Weather Tijuana's climate is similar to Southern California's. Don't expect sweltering heat just because you're south of the border, and remember that the Pacific waters won't be much warmer than off San Diego. The first beaches you'll find are about 24km (15 miles) south of Tijuana.

Pharmacy Sanborn's (☎ **664/688-1462**), the 24-hour mega-store with a pharmacy, has several locations in Tijuana; one is at the corner of Avenida Revolución and Calle 8. Numerous discount pharmacies are along Avenida Constitución and Avenida Revolución; one to try is **Farmacias Roma** (☎ **664/688-0426**, home delivery 664/681-8522).

Post Office The main *correo*, at Calle 11 at Avenida Negrete (☎ **664/627-2699**), is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 7pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

Taxes & Tipping A value-added tax of 10%, called **IVA** (*Impuesto al Valor Agregado*), is added to most bills, including those in restaurants. This does not represent the tip; the bill will read "IVA incluido," but you should add about 15% for the tip if the service warrants.

EXPLORING TIJUANA

One of the first major tourist attractions below the border is also one of the strangest—the **Museo de Cera** (Wax Museum), Calle 1 no. 8281, at the corner of Madero (☎ **664/688-2478**). Featured statues include the eclectic mix of Whoopi Goldberg, Laurel and Hardy, and Bill Clinton, arranged in an exhibit otherwise dominated by figures from Mexican history. If you aren't spooked by the not-so-lifelike figures of Aztec warriors, brown-robed friars, Spanish

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princes, and 20th-century military leaders (all posed in period dioramas), step into the Chamber of Horrors, where wax werewolves and sinister sadists lurk in the shadows. When the museum is mostly empty, which is most of the time, the dramatically lit Chamber of Horrors can be a little creepy. This side-street freak show is open daily from 10am to 8pm, and admission is \$1.50.

For many visitors, Tijuana's "main event" is the bustling **Avenida Revolución**, the street whose reputation precedes it. Beginning in the 1920s, American college students, servicemen, and hedonistic tourists discovered this street as a bawdy center for illicit fun. Some of the original attraction has fallen by the wayside: Gambling was outlawed in the 1930s, back-alley cockfights are also illegal, and the same civic improvements that repaved Revolución to provide trees, benches, and wider sidewalks also vanquished the girlie shows whose barkers once accosted passersby. Drinking and shopping are the main order of business these days; while revelers from across the border knock back tequila shooters and dangle precariously at the upstairs railings of glaring bars, bargain hunters peruse the never-ending array of goods (and not-so-goods) for sale. You'll find the action between calles 1 and 9; the information centers (mentioned earlier) are at the north end, and the landmark jai alai palace anchors the southern portion. To help make sense of all those tchotchkes, see "Shopping," below.

Visitors can be easily seduced—then quickly repulsed—by tourist-trap areas like Avenida Revolución, but it's important to remember that there's more to Tijuana than American tourism. If you're looking to see a different side of Tijuana, the best place to start is the **Centro Cultural Tijuana**, Paseo de los Héroes at Mina (☎ 664/687-9600; www.cecut.gob.mx [a Spanish-only website]). You'll easily spot the ultramodern Tijuana Cultural Center complex, designed by irrepressible modern architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez. Its centerpiece is that gigantic sand-colored dome housing an OMNIMAX theater, which screens different 45-minute films (subjects range from science to space travel). The center houses the **Museum of Mexican Identities'** permanent collection of artifacts from pre-Hispanic times through the modern political era, plus a gallery for visiting exhibits, which have included everything from the works of artist Diego Rivera to a well-curated yet disturbing exhibit chronicling torture and human rights violations through the ages. Music, theater, and dance performances take place in the center's concert hall and courtyard, and there's also a cafe and an excellent museum bookshop. Call to check the concert schedule during your visit. The center also holds

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the new Museum of the Californias. The center is open daily from 9am to 8:30pm. Admission to the museum's permanent exhibits is free; there's a \$2 charge for the special-event gallery, and tickets for OMNIMAX films are \$4 for adults and \$2.50 for children.

Don't be discouraged if the Cultural Center sounds like a field trip for school children; it's a must-see, if only to drag you away from tourist kitsch and into the more sophisticated Zona Río (river area). While there, stop to admire the wide, European-style Paseo de los Héroes. The boulevard's intersections are gigantic traffic circles (*glorietas*), at the center of which stand statuesque monuments to leaders ranging from Aztec Emperor Cuauhtémoc to Abraham Lincoln. Navigating the congested glorietas will require your undivided attention, however, so it's best to pull over to admire the monuments.

In the Zona Río you'll find some classier shopping and a colorful local marketplace, plus the ultimate kid destination, **Mundo Divertido**, Paseo de los Héroes at Calle José María Velasco (☎ 664/634-3213 and 664/634-3214). Literally translated, it means "fun world," and one parent described it as the Mexican equivalent of "a Chuck E. Cheese's restaurant built inside a Malibu Grand Prix." You get the idea—noisy and frenetic, it's the kind of place kids dream about. Let them choose from miniature golf, batting cages, a roller coaster, a kid-sized train, a video game parlor, and go-carts. There's a food court with tacos and hamburgers; if you're in luck, the picnic area will be festooned with streamers and piñatas for some fortunate child's birthday party. The park is open weekdays from noon to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am until 8:30pm. Admission is free, and several booths inside sell tickets for the various rides.

The fertile valleys of Northern Baja produce most of Mexico's finest wines and export many high-quality vintages to Europe; most are not available in the U.S. For an introduction to Mexican wines, stop into **Cava de Vinos L.A. Cetto** (L.A. Cetto Winery), Av. Cañón Johnson 2108, at Avenida Constitución Sur (☎ 664/685-3031). Shaped like a wine barrel, this building's striking facade is made from old oak aging barrels in an inspired bit of recycling. In the entrance stand a couple of wine presses (ca. 1928) that Don Angel Cetto used back in the early days of production. His family still runs the winery, which opened the impressive visitor center in 1993. L.A. Cetto bottles both red and white wines, some of them award winners, including petite sirah, nebbiolo, and cabernet sauvignon. Most bottles cost about \$5; the special reserves are a little more than \$10. The company also produces tequila, brandy, and

olive oil, all for sale here. Admission is \$2.50 for a tour and generous tasting (for those 18 and older only; those under 18 are admitted free with an adult but cannot taste the wines), \$3 with souvenir wine glass. Open Monday through Friday from 9:30am to 6:30pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 5:30pm. Tours run Monday through Friday 10am to 2pm and 4 to 5:30pm, and Saturday 10am to 2pm.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & SPECTATOR SPORTS

BULLFIGHTING While some insist this spectacle promotes a cruel disregard for animal rights, others esteem it as a richly symbolic drama involving the courage Ernest Hemingway called “grace under pressure.” Whatever your opinion, bullfighting has a prominent place in Mexican heritage and is even considered an essential element of the culture. The skill and bravery of matadors is closely linked with cultural ideals regarding machismo, and some of the world’s best perform at Tijuana’s two stadiums. The season runs from May through September, with events held Sunday at 4:30pm. Ticket prices range from \$17 to \$40 (the premium seats are on the shaded side of the arena), and can be purchased at the bullring or in advance from San Diego’s **Five Star Tours** (☎ 619/232-5049). **El Toreo** (☎ 664/686-1510) is 3.2km (2 miles) east of downtown on Bulevar Agua Caliente at Avenida Diego Rivera. **Plaza de Toros Monumental**, or Bullring-by-the-Sea (☎ 664/680-1808), is 10km (6 miles) west of downtown on Highway 1-D (before the first toll

Moments **First Crush: The Annual Harvest Festival**

If you enjoyed a visit to L.A. Cetto, Tijuana’s winery (or Ensenada’s Bodegas de Santo Tomás, discussed later in this chapter), then you might want to come back for the Harvest Festival, held each year in late August or early September. Set amongst the endless vineyards of the fertile Guadalupe Valley, the day’s events include the traditional blessing of the grapes, wine tastings, live music and dancing, riding exhibitions, and a country-style Mexican meal. L.A. Cetto offers a group excursion from Tijuana (about an hour’s drive); San Diego’s Baja California Tours (☎ 619/454-7166) also organizes a day-long trip from San Diego.

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station); it perches at the edge of both the ocean and the California border. You can take a taxi easily to El Toreo—fares are negotiable, and around \$10 one-way should be fair. You can also negotiate a fare to Bullring-by-the-Sea, but fares are unpredictable.

DOG RACING There's satellite wagering on U.S. horse races at the majestic **Caliente Racetrack**, off Bulevar Agua Caliente, 4.8km (3 miles) east of downtown, but these days only greyhounds actually kick up dust at the track. Races are held daily at 7:45pm, with Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2pm. General admission is free, but bettors in the know congregate in the comfortable Turf Club; admission there is \$10, refundable with a wagering voucher. For more information, call ☎ **664/685-7833**, or 619/231-1910 in San Diego. For other racing information, call ☎ **800-PICK-BAJA**.

GOLF Once the favorite of golfing celebrities and socialites (and a very young Arnold Palmer) who stayed at the now-defunct Agua Caliente Resort, the **Tijuana Country Club**, Bulevar Agua Caliente at Avenida Gustavo Salinas (☎ **664/681-7855**), is near the Caliente Racetrack and behind the Grand Hotel Tijuana; it's about a 10-minute drive from downtown. The course is well maintained and frequented mostly by business travelers staying at nearby hotels, many of which offer golf packages (see Grand Hotel Tijuana in "Where to Stay," below). Weekend greens fees are \$40 a person, and optional cart rental is \$20 per cart; club rental is \$20, with caddies an additional \$20 plus tip. Ask for seasonal specials. Stop by the pro shop for balls, tees, and a limited number of other accessories; the clubhouse also has two restaurants, complete with cocktail lounges.

JAI ALAI A lightning-paced ballgame played on a slick indoor court, jai alai (pronounced *high-ah-lye*) is an ancient Basque tradition incorporating elements of tennis, hockey, and basketball. You can't miss the **Frontón Palacio**, Avenida Revolución at Calle 7 (☎ **664/685-3687**, 664/688-0125, or 619/231-1910 in San Diego); it's a huge, box-like arena in the center of town, painted with giant red letters spelling JAI ALAI. Games are held Monday through Saturday at 8pm, with matinee events Monday and Friday at noon. General admission is \$2, and there are betting windows inside the arena.

SHOPPING

Tijuana's biggest attraction is shopping—ask any of the 44 million people who cross the border each year to do it. They come to take advantage of reasonable prices on a variety of merchandise: terra-cotta

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and colorfully glazed pottery, woven blankets and serapes, embroidered dresses and sequined sombreros, onyx chess sets, beaded necklaces and bracelets, silver jewelry, leather bags and huarache sandals, rain sticks (bamboo branches filled with pebbles that simulate the patter of raindrops), hammered-tin picture frames, thick drinking glasses, novelty swizzle sticks, Cuban cigars, and Mexican liquors like Kahlúa and tequila. You're permitted to bring \$800 worth of purchases back across the border (sorry, no Cuban cigars allowed), including 1 liter of alcohol per person.

When most people think of Tijuana, they picture **Avenida Revolución**, which appears to exist solely for the extraction of dollars from American visitors. Dedicated shoppers quickly discover that most of the curios spilling out onto the sidewalk look alike, despite the determined seller's assurances that their wares are the best in town. Browse for comparison's sake, but for the best souvenir shopping, duck into one of the many *pasajes*, or passageway arcades, where you'll find items of a slightly better quality and merchants willing to bargain. Some of the most enjoyable *pasajes* are on the east side of the street between calles 2 and 5; they also provide a pleasant respite from the quickly irritating tumult of Avenida Revolución.

An alternative is to visit **Sanborn's**, Avenida Revolución between calles 8 and 9 (☎ 664/688-1462), a branch of the Mexico City department store long favored by American travelers. It sells an array of regional folk art and souvenirs, books about Mexico in both Spanish and English, and candies and fresh sweet treats from the bakery—and you can have breakfast in the sunny cafe.

One of the few places in Tijuana to find better-quality crafts from a variety of Mexican states is **Tolán**, Avenida Revolución between calles 7 and 8 (☎ 664/688-3637). In addition to the obligatory selection of standard Avenida Revolución souvenirs, you'll find blue glassware from Guadalajara, glazed pottery from Tlaquepaque, crafts from the Oaxaca countryside, and distinctive tilework from Puebla. Prices at Tolán are fixed, so you shouldn't try to bargain the way you can in some of the smaller shops and informal stands. If a marketplace atmosphere and spirited bargaining are what you're looking for, head instead to **Mercado de Artesanías** (crafts market), Calle 2 and Avenida Negrete, where vendors of pottery, clayware, clothing, and other crafts fill an entire city block.

Shopping malls are as common in Tijuana as in any big American city; you shouldn't expect to find typical souvenirs there, but shopping alongside residents and other intrepid visitors is often

Tips Where to Park in Tijuana

Plaza Río Tijuana has ample free parking and is just across the street from the Cultural Center, where private lots charge \$5 to \$8 to park.

more fun than feeling like a sitting-duck tourist. One of the biggest, and most convenient, is **Plaza Río Tijuana**, Paseo de los Héroes at Avenida Independencia (☎ **664/684-0402**), an outdoor plaza anchored by several department stores and featuring dozens of specialty shops and casual restaurants. Other shopping malls are listed at www.seetijuana.com/tijuanasite/shopping_centers.htm.

On the other side of Paseo de los Héroes from Plaza Río Tijuana is **Plaza del Zapato**, a two-story indoor mall filled with only shoe (*zapato*) stores. Though most are made with quality leather rather than synthetics, inferior workmanship ensures they'll likely last only a season or two. But with prices as low as \$30, why not indulge? For a taste of everyday Mexico, visit **Mercado Hidalgo**, 1 block west at avenidas Sánchez Taboada and Independencia, a busy indoor-outdoor marketplace where vendors display fresh flowers and produce, sacks of dried beans and chiles by the kilo, and a few souvenir crafts (including some excellent piñatas). Morning is the best time to visit the market, and you'll be more comfortable paying with pesos, since most sellers are accustomed to a local crowd.

WHERE TO STAY

When calculating room rates, always remember that hotel rates in Tijuana are subject to a 12% tax.

Grand Hotel Tijuana ✨ Popular with business travelers and visiting celebrities, and for society events, the hotel has the best-maintained public and guest rooms in Tijuana, which helps make up for what it lacks in regional warmth. You can see the hotel's 32-story mirrored twin towers from all of the surrounding city. Modern and sleek in design, it opened in 1982—at the height of Tijuana's prosperity—under the name Fiesta Americana, a name locals (and many cab drivers) still use. Rooms have spectacular views of the city from the top floors. The Vegas-like lobby gives way to several ballrooms and an airy atrium that serves elegant international cuisine at dinner and weekend brunch. Next to the atrium is a casual Mexican restaurant, beyond which the Vegas resemblance resumes with an indoor shopping arcade.

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The hotel offers a golf package for \$82 per person—it includes one night's lodging with a welcome cocktail and a round of 18 holes (including cart) at the adjacent Tijuana Country Club.

Agua Caliente 4500, Tijuana (P.O. Box BC, Chula Vista, CA 92012). ☎ **800/GRANDTIJ** in the U.S., or 664/681-7000 in Tijuana. Fax 664/681-7016. www.grandhoteltij.com.mx. 422 units. \$151 double; \$196–\$213 suite. AE, MC, V. Free underground parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; lobby bar; heated pool; sauna; concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry and dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, dataport, minibar, iron, safe-deposit boxes.

Hotel Lucerna ★ Once the most chic hotel in Tijuana, Lucerna now feels slightly worn, but the place still has personality. The flavor is Mexican colonial—wrought-iron railings and chandeliers, rough-hewn heavy wood furniture, brocade wallpaper, and traditional tiles. The hotel is in the Zona Río, away from the noise and congestion of downtown, so a quiet night's sleep is easily attainable. All the rooms in this five-story hotel have balconies or patios but are otherwise unremarkable. Sunday brunch is served outdoors by the swimming pool; there's also a coffee shop that provides room service. The staff is friendly and attentive.

Av. Paseo de los Héroes 10902, Zona Río, Tijuana. ☎ **800/582-3762** in the U.S., or 664/634-2000; www.hotel-lucerna.com.mx. 167 units. \$85 double; \$88 suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; swimming pool; tour desk; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

EXPENSIVE

Cien Años ★★ MEXICAN An elegant and gracious Zona Río restaurant offering artfully blended Mexican flavors (tamarind, poblano chile, mango) in stylish presentations. Try chile rellenos stuffed with shrimp in lobster sauce, delicate *calabaza* (squash-blossom) soup, or huitlacoche (corn mushroom) tamales. The most adventurous diners can sample garlicky ant eggs or buttery *guisanos* (cactus worms). If you're interested in true haute cuisine, the buzz around Tijuana is all about this place.

Calle José María Velasco 1407. ☎ **664/634-3039** or 664/634-7262. Main courses \$12–\$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 1pm–midnight.

La Costa ★ MEXICAN-STYLE SEAFOOD Fish gets top billing here, starting with hearty seafood soup. There are combination platters of half a grilled lobster, stuffed shrimp, and baked shrimp; fish filet stuffed with seafood and cheese; and several abalone dishes.

Calle 7 no. 8131 (just off Av. Revolución), Zona Centro. ☎ **664/685-8494**. Main courses \$8–\$20. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight.

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MODERATE

Hard Rock Cafe AMERICAN/MEXICAN Had an overload of Mexican culture? Looking for a place with all the familiar comforts of home? Then head for the Tijuana branch of this ubiquitous watering hole, which promises nothing exotic; it serves the standard Hard Rock chain menu, which admittedly features an outstanding hamburger, in the regulation Hard Rock setting (dark, clubby, walls filled with rock 'n' roll memorabilia). While the restaurant's street presence is more subdued than most Hard Rock locations, you'll still spot the trademark Caddie emerging from above the door. Prices are in line with what you'd see in the U.S.—and therefore no bargain in competitive Tijuana.

520 Av. Revolución (near Calle 1), Zona Centro. ☎ 664/685-0206. Menu items \$5–\$10. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am.

INEXPENSIVE

Cafe La Especial MEXICAN Tucked away in a shopping pasaje at the bottom of some stairs (turn in at the taco stand of the same name), this restaurant is a well-known shopper's refuge and purveyor of home-style Mexican cooking at reasonable (though not dirt-cheap) prices. The gruff, efficient waitstaff carry out platter after platter of *carne asada* (grilled marinated beef) served with fresh tortillas, beans, and rice—it's La Especial's most popular item. Traditional dishes like tacos, enchiladas, and burritos round out the menu, augmented by frosty cold Mexican beers.

Av. Revolución 718 (between calles 3 and 4), Zona Centro. ☎ 664/685-6654. Menu items \$4–\$12. MC, V. Daily 9am–10pm.

Carnitas Uruapán ★★ MEXICAN *Carnitas*—marinated pork roasted on a spit till falling-apart tender, then served in chunks with tortillas, salsa, cilantro, guacamole, and onions—are a beloved dish in Mexico and the main attraction at Carnitas Uruapán. It serves the meat by the kilo (or portion thereof) at long, communal wooden tables to a crowd of mostly locals. A half-kilo of carnitas is plenty for two people and costs around \$12, including beans and that impressive array of condiments. It's a casual feast without compare, but vegetarians need not apply. The original is a little hard to find, but this branch is in the fashionable Zona Rfo. A third location, which specializes in seafood as well, is on Paseo de los Héroes at Avenida Rodríguez (no phone).

Blv. Díaz Ordáz 12650 (across from Plaza Patria), La Mesa. ☎ 664/681-6181. Menu items \$2.50–\$8. No credit cards. Daily 8am–5am.

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La Fonda de Roberto ★★ MEXICAN Although its location may seem out-of-the-way on the map, this modest restaurant's regular appearances on San Diego "Best Of" lists attest to its continued appeal. A short drive (or taxi ride) from downtown Tijuana, La Fonda's colorful dining room opens onto the courtyard of a kitschy 1960s motel, complete with retro kidney-shaped swimming pool. The festive atmosphere is perfect for enjoying a variety of regional Mexican dishes, including decent chicken mole and generous portions of *milanesa* (beef, chicken, or pork pounded paper thin, then breaded and fried). A house specialty is *queso fundido*, deep-fried cheese with chiles and mushrooms, served with a basket of freshly made corn tortillas.

In the La Sierra Motel, 2800 Blv. Cuauhtémoc Sur Oeste (Av. 16 de Septiembre, on the old road to Ensenada). ☎ 664/686-4687. Most dishes \$5–\$11. MC, V. Tues–Thurs 10am–10pm.

TIJUANA AFTER DARK

Avenida Revolución is the center of the city's nightlife; many compare it with Bourbon Street in New Orleans during Mardi Gras—except here it's a regular occurrence, not a once-a-year blowout. Tijuana has several lively discos; perhaps the most popular is **Baby Rock**, 1482 Diego Rivera, Zona Río (☎ 664/634-2404), a cousin to Acapulco's lively Baby O, which features everything from Latin rock to rap. It's near the Guadalajara Grill restaurant.

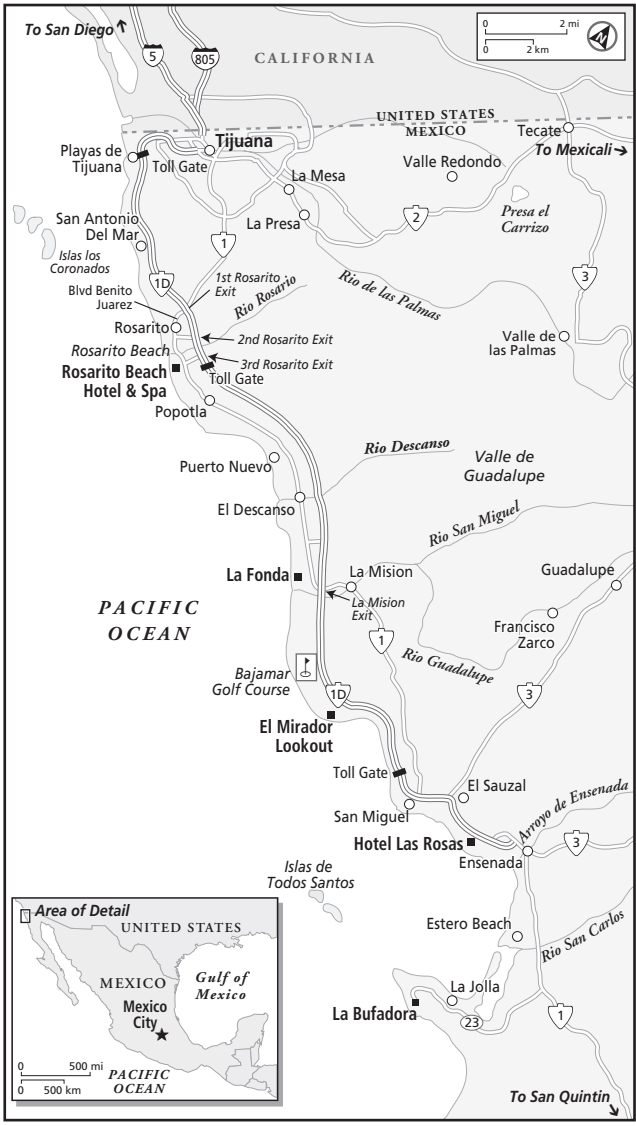
Also popular in Tijuana are sports bars, featuring wagering on events from all over the United States as well as races from Tijuana's Caliente track. The most popular of these bars cluster in the **Pueblo Amigo** and **Vía Oriente** areas and around **Paseo Tijuana** in the Zona Río, a new center designed to resemble a colonial Mexican village. Even if you don't bet on the horses, you can soak up the atmosphere. Two of the town's hottest discos, **Rodeo de Media Noche** (☎ 664/682-4967) and **Señor Frogs** (☎ 664/682-4962), are in Pueblo Amigo, as is **La Tablita de Tony** (☎ 664/682-8111), an Argentinian restaurant. Pueblo Amigo is less than 3.2km (2 miles) from the border, a short taxi ride or—during daylight hours—a pleasant walk.

2 Rosarito Beach & Beyond: Baja's First Beach Resorts

55km (34 miles) S of San Diego; 29km (18 miles) S of Tijuana

Just a 20-minute drive south of Tijuana and a complete departure in ambience, Rosarito Beach is a tranquil, friendly beach town. It also

The Upper Baja Peninsula



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gained early renown during the U.S. Prohibition, when the elegant Rosarito Beach Hotel catered to Hollywood stars. This classic structure still welcomes numerous guests, despite the fact that its opulence has lost some luster. Hollywood has likewise played a major part in Rosarito's recent renaissance—it was the location for the soundstage and filming of the Academy Award-winning *Titanic*. The Titanic Museum at **Foxploration** here continues to draw fans of the film (see “En Route from Rosarito to Ensenada,” below).

Two roads run between Tijuana and Ensenada (the largest and third-largest cities in Baja)—the scenic, coast-hugging toll road (marked CUOTA, or I-D), and the free but slower-going public road (marked LIBRE, or 1). We strongly recommend starting out on the toll road, but use the free road along Rosarito Beach if you'd like to easily pull on and off the road to shop or look at the view. The beaches between Tijuana and Rosarito are also known for excellent surf breaks.

VISITOR INFORMATION The best source of information is **Baja California Tourism Information** (☎ 800/522-1516 in California, Arizona, or Nevada; 800/225-2786 in the rest of the U.S. and Canada; or 619/298-4105 in San Diego). This office provides advice and makes hotel reservations throughout Baja California. You can also contact the local **Secretaria de Turismo**, Km 28 Carretera Libre Tijuana–Ensenada Local 13B (☎ 661/612-0200; rosarito@turismobc.gob.mx). The office is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 3pm.

EXPLORING ROSARITO BEACH

Once a tiny resort town that remained a secret despite its proximity to Tijuana, Rosarito Beach saw an explosion of development in the prosperous '80s; now it's settled down into its own spirited personality. Why does its popularity persist? Location is one reason—it's the first beach resort town south of the border, and party-minded tourists aren't always too discriminating. This should give you an idea of the crowd to expect on holiday weekends and during school breaks.

Reputation is another draw: For years the **Rosarito Beach Hotel & Spa** (see “Where to Stay,” below), built around 1927, was the preferred hideaway of celebrities and other fashionable Angelenos. Movie star Rita Hayworth and her husband Prince Aly Khan vacationed here; Paulette Goddard and Burgess Meredith were married at the resort. Although the hotel's entry still features the gallant inscription POR ESTA PUERTA PASAN LAS MUJERES MAS HERMOSAS DEL MUNDO (“Through this doorway pass the most beautiful women in

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the world”), today’s vacationing starlets are more often found at resorts on Baja’s southern tip. While the glimmer (as well as the glamour) has worn off, the Rosarito Beach Hotel is still the most interesting place in town, and nostalgia buffs will want to stop in for a look at some expert tile- and woodwork, as well as the panoramic murals throughout the lobby. Check out the colorful Aztec images in the main dining room, the magnificently tiled restrooms, and the glassed-in bar overlooking the sparkling pool and beach, or peek into the original owner’s mansion on the property (now home to a spa and gourmet restaurant).

Rosarito Beach has caught the attention of Hollywood for years; most recently, the megahit *Titanic* was filmed here in a state-of-the-art production facility. *Titanic*’s allure is fading fast, however, and the former set was remodeled into an interactive museum with broader appeal.

If it’s not too crowded, Rosarito is a good place to while away a few hours. Swim or horseback ride at the beach, then dine on fish tacos or tamales from any one of a number of family-run stands along Bulevar Benito Juárez, the town’s main (and only) drag. You can have a drink at the local branch of Ensenada’s enormously popular Papas & Beer (see “Rosarito Beach After Dark,” below), or shop for souvenirs along the Old Ensenada Highway just south of town.

SHOPPING

The dozen or so blocks north of the Rosarito Beach Hotel abound with the stores typical in Mexican border towns; curio shops, cigar and *licores* (liquor) stores, and *farmacias* (where drugs like Viagra, Retin-A, Prozac, Rogaine, and many more are available at low cost and without a prescription). Rosarito has also become a center for carved furnishings—plentiful downtown along Bulevar Benito Juárez—and pottery, best purchased at stands along the old highway, south of town. A reliable but more expensive furniture shop is **Casa la Carreta**, Km 29.5 on the old road south of Rosarito (☎ 661/612-0502; www.casalacarreta.net), where you can see plentiful examples of the best workmanship—chests, tables, chairs, headboards, cabinets, and cradles.

WHERE TO STAY

Rosarito Beach Hotel & Spa ⚡⚡ *Value* Although this once-glamorous resort has been holding steady since its heyday, the vestiges of vacationing movie stars, a casino, and 1930s elegance have been

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all but eclipsed by the glaring nighttime neon and party-mania that currently define the former retreat. Despite the resort's changed personality, unique features of artistic construction and lavish decoration remain, setting it apart from the rest. Located along a wide stretch of a family-friendly beach, the hotel draws a mixed crowd. The stately on-site home of the original owners has been transformed into the full-service Casa Playa Spa, where massages and other treatments are only slightly less costly than in the U.S.

You'll pay more for an ocean view, and more for the newer, air-conditioned rooms in the tower; the older rooms in the poolside building may have only ceiling fans, but they prevail in the character department, with hand-painted trim and original tile.

Blv. Benito Juárez, Zona Centro, Rosarito, B.C. Mexico (P.O. Box 430145, San Diego, CA 92143). ☎ 800/343-8582 or 1-866/ROSARITO U.S., or 661/612-0144. Fax 661/612-1125. www.rosaritohtl.com. 280 units. \$59–\$129 double Sept–June; \$89–\$139 double July–Aug and U.S. holidays. 2 children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Packages available. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; 2 swimming pools; racquetball and tennis courts; kids' playground; room service. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

While in Rosarito, you may want to try Chabert's or the more casual Azteca Restaurant, both in the Rosarito Beach Hotel. Outside the hotel, a branch of **Puerto Nuevo's Ortega's** (☎ 661/612-0022) on the main drag is the place for lobster; early risers out for a stroll can enjoy fresh, steaming-hot tamales, a traditional Mexican breakfast treat sold from sidewalk carts for around 50¢ each.

El Nido 🌟🌟 MEXICAN/STEAKS One of the first eateries in Rosarito, El Nido remains popular with visitors unimpressed by the flashier, neon-lit joints that pop up to please the college-age set. The setting is Western frontier, complete with rustic candles and rusting wagon wheels; sit outside in the enclosed patio, or opt for the dark, cozy interior warmed by a large fireplace and open grill. The mesquite fire is constantly stoked to prepare the grilled steaks and seafood that are El Nido's specialty; the menu also includes free-range (and super-fresh) quail and venison from the owner's ranch in the nearby wine country. Meals are reasonably priced and generous, including hearty bean soup, American-style green salad, baked potatoes, and all the fresh tortillas and zesty salsa you can eat.

Blv. Juárez 67. ☎ 661/612-1430. Main courses \$5.50–\$20. No credit cards. Daily 8am–midnight.

ROSARITO BEACH AFTER DARK

Because the legal drinking age in Baja is 18, the under-21 crowd from Southern California tends to flock across the border on Friday and Saturday nights. The most popular spot in town is **Papas & Beer** (☎ 661/612-0444), part of the Rosarito Beach Hotel. It's a relaxed come-as-you-are-type club on the beach, just a block north of the hotel. Even for those young in spirit only, it's great fun, with open-air tables and a bar surrounding a sand volleyball court. Or choose from several other adjacent clubs, each offering booming music, spirited dancing, and all-night-long energy. Cover charges vary depending on the season, the crowd, and the mood of the staff. The **Salon Mexican** (☎ 661/612-0144), in the Rosarito Beach Hotel, attracts a slightly more mature crowd, with live music on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights.

EN ROUTE FROM ROSARITO TO ENSENADA

A few miles south of Rosarito proper lies the seaside production site of the 1997 megablockbuster *Titanic*. A 240m-long (800-ft.) *Titanic* replica was constructed for filming, and many local citizens served as extras in the movie. Although the gargantuan ship was sunk and destroyed during filming, soundstages still contain partial sets (like a first-class hallway) and numerous props, including lifeboats, furnishings, and crates from dockside scenes. Fox Studio's **Foxploration** (☎ 661/614-0110) interactive museum covers several acres and can hold up to 3,000 visitors, with exhibits that showcase the art of making movies. Hands-on exhibits demonstrate everything from optical illusions to computer generation of special effects. Props and scenery from various Fox Studio movie sets are on view throughout, but the star attraction is the Titanic Expo, with a wealth of memorabilia and props from the movie. The steady flow of curious visitors prompted the opening of Foxploration. It's open Thursday to Monday from 10am to 6pm (daily around holidays and during busy seasons). Admission is \$12 for adults, \$9 for children 3 to 11.

Leaving Rosarito, drive south on the toll highway or the local-access old road that parallels it. In addition to the curious juxtaposition of ramshackle villages and luxurious vacation homes, you'll pass a variety of restaurants and resorts—this stretch of coastline has now surpassed Rosarito in drawing the discriminating visitor. Many places are so Americanized you feel as though you never left home, so our favorites are the funkier, more colorfully Mexican places, like Calafia restaurant, Puerto Nuevo lobster village, and La Fonda

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resort (see “Where to Stay” and “Where to Dine,” below). After La Fonda, be sure to get back on the toll road, because the old road veers inland and you don’t want to miss what’s coming next.

Development falls off somewhat for the next 24km (15 miles), but the coastline’s natural beauty picks up. You’ll see green meadows running down to meet white-sand beaches and wild sand dunes, as you skirt rocky cliffs reminiscent of the coast at Big Sur. The ideal place to take it all in is El Mirador lookout, about 18km (11 miles) south of La Fonda. Feel the drama build as you climb up the stairs and gasp at the breathtaking view, which sweeps from the deep-blue open sea past steep cliffs and down the curved coastline to Salsipuedes Point, around which lies Ensenada. If vertigo doesn’t trouble you, look straight down from El Mirador’s railing, and you’ll see piles of automobiles lying where they were driven off before El Mirador was built. Whether the promontory was a popular suicide spot or merely a junkyard with an enticing twist is best left to urban legend-makers; it nevertheless reinforces your sense of a different culture—nowhere in image-conscious California would that twisted pile of metal be left on the rocks.

A few miles farther south on the toll road, you’ll come to a sign for SALSIPUEDES BAY (the name means “leave if you can”). The dramatic scenery along the drive ends here, so you can take the exit if you want to turn around and head north again. If you plan to do some camping, head down the near-mile-long, rutted road to Salsipuedes Campground, set under olive trees on a cliff. Each campsite has a fire ring and costs \$5 a day (day use is also \$5). There’s a natural rock tub with hot-spring water at the campground, and some basic cottages that rent for \$30 a day. There is no easy access to the beach, known for its good surfing, from the campground.


Ensenada, with its shops, restaurants, and winery, is another 24km (15 miles) away.

NEARBY GOLF


Bajamar (☎ 800/225-2418 in the U.S., or 646/155-0152), 32km (20 miles) north of Ensenada, is a self-contained resort with 27 truly spectacular holes of golf. It’s the place to go if you want to feel just like you’re in the United States. Conceived as a planned community with vacation home/s and a country club, Bajamar suffered when the bottom dropped out of ’80s speculation, leaving a lot of unbuilt house pads on cul-de-sacs behind the grandiose guardhouse. The main attraction is now the golf club and sister hotel, which play host

to high-level retreats, conventions, and Asian tourists attracted by great golf deals. Featuring oceanfront Scottish-style links reminiscent of the courses on the Monterey Peninsula, Bajamar lets you combine any two of its three nine-hole courses. Public greens fees for 18 holes (including mandatory cart) are \$75 Sunday through Thursday, and \$85 Friday or Saturday. Hotel guests pay \$5 less, but the **Hacienda Bajamar** offers a bevy of golf packages (see “Where to Stay,” below). Services include a pro shop, putting and chipping greens, a driving range, and an elegant bar and restaurant.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Hacienda Bajamar  Situated 32km (20 miles) north of Ensenada, Hacienda Bajamar is tucked away in the Bajamar golf resort and community. Popular with business conventions and family gatherings, Bajamar is as Americanized as it gets, and so is this hotel, near the clubhouse. The hotel is built like an early Spanish mission, with an interior outdoor plaza and garden surrounded by long arcades shading guest-room doorways. The 27 holes of golf are the main draw—the long road from the highway is lined with signs for phases of the surrounding vacation-home development that never really got off the ground. Rooms and suites are very spacious and comfortable, with vaguely colonial furnishings and luxurious bathrooms. A variety of golf packages are available, including pricing for couples with only one golfer. For greens fees, see “Nearby Golf,” above.

Hwy. 1-D, Km 77.5 (mailing address: 416 W. San Ysidro Blv., Suite #L-732, San Ysidro, CA 92173). © 800/225-2418 U.S., or 646/155-0152; www.golfbajamar.com. 80 units. \$84–\$112 double; \$184–\$208 suite. Children under 12 stay free in parent’s room. Golf packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; heated swimming pool; tennis courts; spa; concierge; tour desk; business center; room service; laundry and dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Hotel Las Rocas  This polished hotel is run by an American, for Americans, and it shows. English is spoken fluently everywhere, and there are only as many signs in Spanish as you’d expect to see in Los Angeles. Built in Mediterranean style, with gleaming white stucco, cobalt-blue accents, and brightly painted tiles everywhere, Las Rocas has a lovely setting perched above the sea. There’s no beach below the rocky edge, but the hotel’s oceanfront swimming pool and secluded whirlpool lagoons more than make up for it. The thatched-roof *palapa* in the poolside garden serves tropical drinks and snacks, and swaying palms rustle throughout the property. Like most Baja resorts, Las Rocas is oriented toward the sea, so all rooms

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have an oceanfront private terrace. The rooms and suites are very nicely furnished in Mexican colonial style, and bathrooms are well equipped and beautifully tiled. The restaurant makes outstanding guacamole, which you can order by the bowl for chip-dipping at the indoor or poolside bar. **Tip:** Try to stay in the main building, and don't rule out a suite—even the \$115 junior suite is spacious and includes a romantic fireplace and minikitchen.

Km 38.5 Free Road (P.O. Box 189003 HLR, Coronado, CA 92178-9003). © **888/LAS-ROCAS** in the U.S., or 646/612-2140. www.lasrocas.com. 72 units. Low season \$83–\$117 double, \$128–\$223 suite; high season \$97–\$133 double, \$150–\$313 suite. Senior discounts and packages available. AE, MC, V. Take the second Rosarito exit off the toll road, then drive 10km (6 miles) south, or follow the free road south from Rosarito; Las Rocas will be on the right. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool with Jacuzzi; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV.

La Fonda ★ *Value* Just as American-style Las Rocas has its staunch devotees, plenty of folks are loyal to La Fonda's rustic rooms, which don't have minibars, state-of-the-art TVs, or phones. What they do have is an adventuresome appeal unlike any other northern Baja coast resort, a place for people who truly want to get away from it all. Relaxation and romance are the key words at this small hotel and restaurant, which opened in the '50s and hasn't changed a whole lot since. Perched cliffside above a wide, sandy beach, all of La Fonda's rooms have wide-open views of the breaking surf below. Although there are some newer motel-style rooms,

Fun Fact **The Bartender Who Launched a Thousand Hangovers**

The hotel and restaurant Rancho La Gloria claims to be the birthplace of the margarita. Here's the deal: Carlos "Danny" Herrera says he invented the drink in 1948 for movie starlet Marjorie King, who allegedly fared badly if she drank any type of alcohol other than tequila. But she didn't want to appear unladylike by downing straight tequila—so Danny added fresh lime juice and Cointreau to soften the taste for Margarita, as she was known south of the border. The libation quickly gained popularity with fellow hotel guests and Hollywood friends Phil Harris and Alice Faye. Soon the concoction was being mixed up at La Plaza, a hotel in La Jolla, California, before making its way to Los Angeles and eventual beverage superstardom.

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the older apartments with fireplaces (some with kitchenettes) have more charm. To reach them, guests use narrow winding staircases, much like the pathway down to the sand. The best rooms are numbers 18 to 22, closest to the sand and isolated from the main building; ask for one of these when you reserve. During particularly cold months, unheated La Fonda can get chilly—an important consideration. At the very least, be sure you're in a room with a fireplace.

Ensenada is a scenic 45-minute drive south, and Puerto Nuevo a mere 13km (8 miles) up the road—if you decide you need to leave this hideaway at all.

Hwy. 1-D, Km 59, La Misión exit. (Mailing address: P.O. Box 430268, San Ysidro, CA 92143.) No phone. 22 units. \$55 standard; \$75 deluxe (with fireplace and/or full kitchen). No credit cards. Write for reservations; allow 2 weeks for response. **Amenities:** Restaurant/bar (see "Where to Dine," below). *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

A bit less than 5km (3 miles) south of Rosarito Beach, elaborate stucco portals beckon drivers to **Calafia** (☎ 661/612-1581), a restaurant and trailer park that isn't visible from the highway. We don't recommend the dismal accommodations, but Calafia's restaurant is worth a stop, if only to admire the impressive setting above the crashing surf. Your meal is served at tables on terraces, balconies, and ledges wedged into the rocks all the way down to the bottom, where an outdoor dance floor and wrecked Spanish galleon sit on the beach. At night, when the outdoor landings are softly lit, and the mariachis' gentle strumming complements the sound of crashing waves, romance is definitely in the air. The menu is standard Mexican fare with the addition of some Americanized dishes like fajitas, but it's all prepared well and served with fresh, warm tortillas and good, strong margaritas. Calafia serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily. Another excellent choice for sunset cocktails is the Moroccan-style **Hotel Cafe Americana**, Carretera Libre a Ensenada, Km 51 (☎ 661/612-0070 or 661/612-0490), a private home turned inn and restaurant with whimsical white minarets. The bar offers a superb selection of premium tequilas, for sipping by the fire or on a dramatic oceanfront terrace.

A trip down the coast just wouldn't be complete without stopping at **Puerto Nuevo**, a tiny fishing town with nearly 30 restaurants—all serving exactly the same thing! Some 40 years ago the fishermen's wives here started serving local lobsters from the kitchens of their simple shacks; many eventually added small dining rooms to their

Tips Surfing, Northern Baja Style

From California and beyond, surfers come to the northern Baja coastline for perpetual right-breaking waves, cheap digs and eats, and *Endless Summer*-type camaraderie.

Undoubtedly, the most famous surf spot in all of Mexico is Killers, at Todos Santos Island. This was the location of the winning wave in the 1997–98 K2 Challenge (a world-wide contest to ride the largest wave each winter—and be photographed doing it). Killers is a very makeable wave for confident, competent surfers. To get there you need a boat. You can get a lift from the local *panga* (skiff) fleet, for about \$100 for the day. That's pretty much the going rate, and the tightly knit Ensenada *pangueros* aren't eager to undercut each other. It's about 16km (10 miles) out to the island; there you'll anchor and paddle into the lineup. You must bring everything you'll need—food, drink, sunscreen, and so on.

Other less radical and easier-to-reach spots include Popotla, just south of Rosarito, where you'll walk to the beach through the Popotla trailer park. Calafia, also just a mile or two south of Rosarito, has a reeling right point that can get extremely heavy. San Miguel is the point break just south of the final tollbooth on the highway into Ensenada. It's an excellent wave but generally crowded.

If you're a surfer looking to get your bearings or a spectator wanting to get your feet wet, stop by Inner Reef (Km 34½; no phone). Opened in 1998 by a friendly Southern California ex-pat named Roger, this tiny shack offers all the essentials: wax, leashes, patch kits, surfboard sales and rentals, even expert repairs at bargain prices. Roger is there from noon until sunset every day in summer, and from Wednesday to Sunday in winter.

homes or built proper restaurants. The result is a lobster lover's paradise, where a feast of lobster, beans, rice, salsa, limes, and fresh tortillas costs around \$10. Puerto Nuevo is 19km (12 miles) south of Rosarito on the Old Ensenada Highway (parallel to the toll Hwy. 1)—just drive through the arched entryway, park, and stroll the town's three or four blocks for a restaurant that suits your fancy.

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Some have names, and some don't; **Ortega's** is one of the originals, and has expanded to five locations within the village. There's also **La Casa de la Langosta** ("House of Lobster"), which even opened a branch in Rosarito Beach. But regulars prefer the smaller, family-run spots, where mismatched dinette sets and chipped plates underscore the earnest service and personally prepared dinners.

About 16km (10 miles) farther south, roughly halfway between Rosarito and Ensenada, is the **La Fonda** hotel and restaurant (no phone; see "Where to Stay," above). Plenty of San Diegans make the drive Sunday mornings for La Fonda's outstanding buffet brunch, an orgy of meats, traditional Mexican stews, *chilaquiles* (a saucy egg-and-tortilla scramble), fresh fruits, and pastries. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are always accompanied by a basket of Baja's best flour tortillas (try rolling them with some butter and jam at breakfast). The best seating is under thatched umbrellas on La Fonda's tiled terrace overlooking the breaking surf; live music keeps the adjacent bar jumping on Friday and Saturday nights (strolling mariachis entertain the rest of the time). House specialties include banana pancakes, pork chops with salsa verde, succulent glazed ribs, and a variety of seafood; plan to walk off your heavy meal along the sandy beach below, accessible by a stone stairway. Relaxing ambience coupled with exceptionally good food and service make La Fonda a must-see along the coast. Sunday brunch is around \$12 a person; main courses otherwise are \$4 to \$15. Open daily from around 9am to 10pm; Sunday's buffet brunch is from 10am to 3:30pm.

3 Ensenada: Port of Call ★

135km (84 miles) S of San Diego; 110km (68 miles) S of Tijuana

Ensenada is an attractive, classic town on a lovely bay, surrounded by sheltering mountains. About 40 minutes from Rosarito, it's the kind of place that loves a celebration. Almost any time you choose to visit, the city is festive—be it for a bicycle race or a seafood festival.

One of Mexico's principal ports of call, Ensenada welcomes half a million visitors a year, attracted to its beaches, excellent sportfishing, nearby wineries, and surrounding natural attractions.

GETTING THERE After passing through the final tollbooth, Highway 1-D curves sharply toward downtown Ensenada. Watch out for brutal metal speed bumps slowing traffic into town—they're far less forgiving on the average chassis than those in the U.S.!

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Tourist and Convention Bureau booth** (☎ 646/178-2411) is at the western entrance to town, where the waterfront-hugging Bulevar Lázaro Cárdenas—also known as Bulevar Costero—curves away to the right. The booth is open daily from 9am till dusk and can provide a downtown map, directions to major nearby sites, and information on special events throughout the city. As in most of the commonly visited areas of Baja, one or more employees speak English fluently. Eight blocks south you'll find the **State Secretary of Tourism**, Blv. Lázaro Cárdenas 1477, Government Building (☎ 646/172-3022; fax 646/172-3081), which is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm, Saturday from 10am to 3pm, and Sunday from 10am to 2pm. Both offices have extended hours on U.S. holidays. Taxis park along López Mateos.

EXPLORING ENSENADA

Ensenada is technically a “border town,” but part of its appeal is its multilayered vitality, born out of being concerned with much more than tourism. The bustling port consumes the entire waterfront—beach access is north or south of town—and the Pacific fishing trade and agriculture in the fertile valleys surrounding the city dominate the economy. Try not to leave Ensenada without getting a taste of its true personality; for example, stop by the indoor-outdoor fish market at the northernmost corner of the harbor. Each day, from early morning to midday, merchants and housewives gather to assess the day's catch—tuna, marlin, snapper, plus many other varieties of fish and piles of shrimp from the morning's haul.

Outside the market is the perfect place to sample the culinary craze of Baja California, the Baja fish taco. Several stands prepare this local treat; strips of freshly caught fish are battered and deep fried, then wrapped in corn tortillas and topped with shredded cabbage, cilantro, salsa, and various other condiments. They're delicious, cheap, and filling, and it's easy to see why surf bums and collegiate vacationers consider them a Baja staple.

Elsewhere in town, visit the **Bodegas de Santo Tomás Winery**, Av. Miramar 666 at Calle 7 (☎ 646/178-2509; www.santotomas.com.mx). While most visitors to Mexico are quite content quaffing endless quantities of cheap *cerveza* (beer), even part-time oenophiles should pay a visit to this historic winery—the oldest in Mexico, and the largest in all of Baja. It uses old-fashioned methods of processing grapes grown in the lush Santo Tomás Valley, first cultivated by Dominican monks in 1791. A 45-minute tour introduces you to

low-tech processing machinery, hand-hammered wood casks, and cool, damp stone aging rooms; it culminates in an invitation to sample several Santo Tomás vintages, including an international-medal-winning cabernet and delightfully crisp sparkling blanc de blanc. The wood-paneled, church-like tasting room is adorned with paintings of mischievous altar boys being scolded by stern friars for pilfering wine or ruining precious grapes. Anyone used to the pretentious, assembly-line ambience of trendier wine regions will relish the friendly welcome and informative tour presented here. Tours in English start Monday through Saturday at 10am, 11am, 12pm, 1pm, and 3pm. Admission is \$6, including a tasting of three low-priced wines; \$10 more gets you a souvenir wineglass and a tasting of 12 high-priced wines. Wines for sale cost \$6.50 to \$20 a bottle. **Note:** Most of the winery's product is exported for the European market.

Be sure to poke around Santo Tomás a bit after your tour concludes. The little modern machinery installed here freed up a cavernous space now used for monthly jazz concerts, and a former aging room has been transformed into La Embottelladora Vieja ("the old aging room") restaurant (see "Where to Dine," below). Across the street stands La Esquina de Bodegas ("the corner wine cellar"), former aging rooms for Santo Tomás. The industrial-style building now functions as a gallery showcasing local art, with a skylit bookstore on the second level and a small cafe (punctuated by giant copper distillation vats) in the rear.

Ensenada's primary cultural center is the **Centro Cívico, Social y Cultura**, Bulevar Lázaro Cárdenas at Avenida Club Rotario. The impressive Mediterranean building was formerly Riviera del Pacífico, a glamorous 1930s bayfront casino and resort frequented by Hollywood's elite. Tiles in the lobby commemorate "Visitantes Distinguidos 1930–1940," including Marion Davies, William Randolph Hearst, Lana Turner, Myrna Loy, and Jack Dempsey. Now used by the Rotary Club as offices and for cultural and social events, the main building is open to the public. Elegant hallways and ballrooms evoke bygone elegance, and every wall and alcove glows with original murals depicting Mexico's colorful history. Lush formal gardens span the front of the building, and there's a small art gallery on one side. Through the lobby, facing an inner courtyard, is Bar Andaluz, which is open to the public sporadically. It's an intimate, dark-wood place where you can just imagine someone like Papa Hemingway holding cocktail-hour court beneath that colorful toreador mural.

A NEARBY ATTRACTION South of the city, a 45-minute drive along the rural Punta Banda peninsula, is one of Ensenada's major attractions: **La Bufadora**, a natural sea spout in the rocks. With each incoming wave, water is forced upward through the rock, creating a geyser whose loud grunt gave the phenomenon its name (*la bufadora* means "buffalo snort"). Local fishermen who ply these waters have a much more lyrical explanation for this roaring blowhole. According to local legend, a mother gray whale and her calf were just beginning their migration from the safety of Baja's San Ignacio lagoon to Alaska. As they rounded Punta Banda, the curious calf squeezed into a sea cave, only to be trapped. The groan that this 70-foot high blowhole makes every time it erupts is the sound of the stranded calf still crying for his mother, and the tremendous spray is his spout.

From downtown Ensenada, take Avenida Reforma south (Hwy. 1) to Highway 23 west. It's a long, meandering drive through a semi-swamplike area untouched by development; look for grazing animals, bait shops, and fishermen's shacks along the way. La Bufadora is at the end of the road, and once parked (\$1 per car in crude dirt lots), you must walk downhill to the viewing platform, at the end of a 540m (1,800 ft.) pathway lined with souvenir stands. In addition to running a gauntlet of determined vendors featuring the usual wares, visitors can avail themselves of inexpensive snacks at the sole restaurant located there, including tasty fish tacos. Visitation is enormous, but long-standing plans to pave the dirt parking lots and build permanent restaurants and shops have yet to become a reality.

SPORTS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

FISHING Ensenada, which bills itself as "the yellowtail capital of the world," draws sportfishermen eager to venture out from the beautiful Bahía de Todos Santos (Bay of All Saints) in search of the Pacific's albacore, halibut, marlin, rockfish, and sea bass. A wooden boardwalk parallel to Bulevar Lázaro Cárdenas (Costero) near the northern entrance to town provides access to the sportfishing piers and their many charter-boat operators. Open-party boats leave early, often by 7am, and charge around \$35 per person, plus an additional fee (around \$5) for the mandatory fishing license. Nonfishing passengers must, by law, also be licensed. Those disinclined to comparison shop the boats can make advance arrangements with San Diego-based **Baja California Tours** (☎ 619/454-7166). In addition to daily fishing excursions, it offers 1- to 3-night packages including hotel, fishing, some meals, and transportation from San Diego.

HIKING Ensenada is the gateway city to the **Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857**. Located on the spine of the Sierra de Juárez, the park was once a heavily used mining area. Most of the mines are now defunct. In contrast to the dry and sometimes desolate surroundings of much of the northern peninsula, the 5,000-hectare (12,350-acre) preserve averages about 1,200m (4,000 ft.) in altitude and is covered in places with pine forests. The most idiosyncratic thing, however, is the sight of a good-sized lake in an alpine setting. The park has no developed trails other than a 10km (6-mile) one that circumnavigates the lake, Laguna Hanson, but there are endless opportunities for blazing your own. To get there, take Mexico Highway 3 south from Ensenada and exit at the graded dirt access road at Km 55. The park entrance road is gravel and generally well maintained, but can be really rough after a rainy year. It's 35km (22 miles) to the park entrance. If the entrance is staffed, you'll be asked for a modest entrance fee.

The **Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir** is to Baja California what Yosemite is to Alta California. Almost 81,000 hectares (200,000 acres) of the highest mountains on the peninsula have been preserved. The highest, Picacho del Diablo (Devil's Peak), rises to 3,046m (10,154 ft.). Views from the summit encompass both oceans and an immense stretch of land. Best of all, it's virtually unvisited, something that sets it apart from the normal national park experience in Los Estados Unidos.

Farther south on Highway 1 from Ensenada, you'll come to a signed turnoff for the park at Km 140, soon after you pass the little town of Colonet. The sign also says OBSERVATORIO. Fill up with gas in Colonet—there is no more until you exit this way again—and reset your trip odometer at the turnoff. In between, it's entirely possible to put on a gas-guzzling 242km (150 miles) of rugged driving. It's 76km (47 miles) to the park entrance.

You'll find a high alpine realm of flower-speckled meadows, soaring granite peaks, and year-round creeks. Official trails are few and far between, but anyone who's good with a map and compass or even just good at wandering off and finding his or her way back can have a great time hiking. Cow trails (yes, cows in a national park) are numerous. Four year-round creeks drain the park and make great destinations. Picacho del Diablo is a difficult but rewarding overnight hike and long scramble. Always remember that you're in one of the most rugged and remote places in all of Baja, and it's quite likely that if you get lost or hurt, nobody will come looking for you.

SEA KAYAKING The rocky coastline of Punta la Banda is a favorite first trip for beginning ocean kayakers. There are several secluded beaches, sea caves, and terrific scenery. Many kayakers use La Bufadora as a launching point to head out to the Todos Santos Islands. It's about 11km (7 miles) from La Bufadora to the southern and larger of the two islands. The first 4.8km (3 miles) follow a rocky coast to the tip of Punta la Banda. From here it's time to size up the wind, the waves, and the fog. If the coast is clear, take a compass heading and begin the 6km (4-mile) open-water crossing. Bring water and camping gear to spend a night on the pristine island. **Dale's La Bufadora Dive Shop** (☎ 646/154-2045) has kayak rentals and is open weekends or by prior reservation. **Southwest Sea Kayaks** (☎ 619/222-3616) in San Diego leads weekend trips to the island several times a year.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING La Bufadora is a great dive spot with thick kelp and wonderful sea life. Get underwater and zoom through lovely kelp beds and rugged rock formations covered in strawberry anemones and gypsy shawl nudibranchs. You may also spot spiny lobsters and numerous large fish. It's possible to swim right over to the blowhole, but use extreme caution in this area—you don't want to end up like that mythical whale calf. **Dale's La Bufadora Dive Shop** (☎ 646/154-2045) is on shore at the best entry point. The staff will set you up with fills and advice.

Several dive shops in Ensenada, including **Almar**, 149 Av. Macheros (☎ 646/178-3013), and **Baja Dive Expeditions**, at the Baja Beach and Tennis Club (☎ 646/173-0220), will arrange boat dives to the Todos Santos islands, which sit at the outer edge of Todos Santos Bay. The diving here is similar to the diving at Catalina or the other California Channel Islands—lots of fish, big kelp, urchins, and jagged underwater rock formations. The visibility varies widely, depending on the swell.

SHOPPING

Ensenada's equivalent of Tijuana's Avenida Revolución is crowded Avenida López Mateos, which runs roughly parallel to Bulevar Lázaro Cárdenas (Costero); the highest concentration of shops and restaurants is between avenidas Ruiz and Castillo. Beggars fill the street. Sellers are less likely to bargain than those in Tijuana—they're used to gullible cruise-ship buyers. Compared to Tijuana, there is more authentic Mexican art- and craftwork in Ensenada, pieces imported from rural states and villages where different skills are traditionally

practiced. Though from the outside it looks dusty and unlit, **Curiosidades La Joya**, Ave. López Mateos 725 (☎ 646/178-3191), is a treasure trove of stained-glass lamps, hangings, and other handcrafted curios. Piles of intricately designed glass lampshades lie side-by-side with colorful tiles and wrought-iron birdcages, the shop's other specialty. The shopkeepers here are stubborn about bargaining, perhaps because they know the value of their unusual wares.

You'll see colorfully painted glazed pottery wherever you go in northern Baja. It ranges in quality, from sloppy pieces quickly painted with a limited palette to intricately designed, painstakingly painted works evocative of Tuscan urns and pitchers. The best prices are at the abundant roadside stands lining the old road south of Rosarito, but if you're willing to pay extra for quality, head to **Artesanías Colibrí**, 855 Av. López Mateos (☎ 646/178-1312). Here you can learn about the origins of this Talavera style—how invading Moors set up terra-cotta factories in the Spanish city of Talavera, and subsequent migration brought the art to the Mexican state of Puebla.

WHERE TO STAY

Estero Beach Resort ⚡ About 10km (6 miles) south of downtown Ensenada, this sprawling complex of rooms, cottages, and mobile-home hookups is popular with families and active vacationers. The bay and protected lagoon at the edge of the lushly planted property are perfect for swimming and launching sailboards; there's also tennis, horseback riding, volleyball, and a game room with Ping-Pong and billiards. The guest rooms are a little worn, but no one expects fancy at Estero Beach. The beachfront restaurant serves a casual mix of seafood, Mexican fare, hamburgers, fried chicken, and omelets. Some suites and 5 of the 15 cottages have kitchenettes, and some can easily accommodate a whole family.

Estero Beach. (Mailing address: Apdo. Postal 86, Ensenada, BC, Mexico.) ☎ 646/176-6225. www.hotelesterobeach.com. 94 units. \$95–\$156 double; cottage \$75–\$120 double; \$448 presidential suite. From Ensenada, take Hwy. 1 south; turn right at ESTERO BEACH sign. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tennis court; game room. *In room:* TV.

Hotel Las Rosas ⚡⚡ One of the most modern hotels in the area, Hotel Las Rosas still falls short of most definitions of luxurious, yet the pink oceanfront hotel 3.2km (2 miles) outside Ensenada is the favorite of many Baja aficionados. It offers most of the comforts of an upscale American hotel—which doesn't leave room for much Mexican personality. The atrium lobby is awash in pale pink and

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seafoam green, a color scheme that pervades throughout—including the guest rooms, sparsely furnished with quasitropical furniture. Some rooms have fireplaces and/or in-room whirlpools, and all have balconies overlooking the pool and ocean. One of the resort's main photo-ops is the swimming pool that overlooks the Pacific and features a vanishing edge that appears to merge with the ocean beyond. If you're looking to maintain the highest comfort level possible, this would be your hotel of choice.

Hwy. 1, 3.2km (2 miles) north of Ensenada. (Mailing address: Apdo. Postal 316, Ensenada, BC, Mexico.) ☎ **646/174-4310**. 48 units. \$126–\$190 double. Children under 12 \$16; extra adult \$22. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cocktail lounge; swimming pool; tennis and racquetball courts; basic workout room; cliff-top hot tub; tour desk; room service; massage; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV.

San Nicolás Resort Hotel Most rooms at this modern motor inn face the courtyard or have balconies overlooking the swimming pool—and the place is surprisingly quiet for being right on the main drag. The hotel also has a disco and a branch of Caliente Sports Book, where you can gamble on games and races throughout the U.S.

Av. López Mateos and Guadalupe, Ensenada. (Mailing address: P.O. Box 437060, San Ysidro, CA 92073-7060.) ☎ **646/176-1901**. Fax 646/176-4930. www.sannicolas.com.mx. 147 units. \$99–\$134 double; \$146–\$291 suite. Extra person \$10. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cocktail lounge; swimming pool. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Villa Fontana Days Inn This motel is notable for its out-of-place architecture—who'd expect a peak-roofed, gabled, New England-style structure in a land dominated by red-tiled roofs? This bargain-priced motel is otherwise unremarkable; well located and cleanly run by the Days Inn chain, it has a small pool and enclosed parking. Most of the 65 rooms have showers, rather than tubs, in the bathrooms. Ask for a room at the back, away from street noise.

Av. López Mateos 1050, Ensenada. ☎ **800/4-BAJA-04** U.S., or 646/178-3434. www.villafontana.com.mx. 65 units. Summer \$60 double; \$115 suite. Rates are higher on holidays, lower midweek and in winter. Rates include continental breakfast. Internet discounts available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Pool. *In room:* A/C, TV.

WHERE TO DINE

El Charro MEXICAN You'll recognize El Charro by its front windows: Whole chickens rotate slowly on the rotisserie in one, while a woman makes tortillas in the other. This little place has been here since 1956 and looks it, with charred walls and a ceiling made of split logs. The simple fare consists of such dishes as half a roasted chicken with fries and tortillas, or *carne asada* (grilled marinated beef) with soup, guacamole, and tortillas. Giant piñatas hang from

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the walls above the concrete floor. Kids are welcome; they'll think they're on a picnic. Wine and beer are served, and beer is cheaper than soda.

Av. López Mateos 475 (between Ruiz and Gastellum). ☎ 646/178-3881. Menu items \$5–\$12; lobster \$20. No credit cards. Daily 11am–2am.

El Rey Sol ★★ FRENCH/MEXICAN Opened by French expatriates in 1947, the family-run El Rey Sol has long been considered Ensenada's finest eatery. Decked out like the French flag, this red, white, and blue building is a beacon on busy López Mateos. Wrought-iron chandeliers and heavy oak farm tables add to the country French ambience, but the menu's prices and sophistication belie the casual decor. House specialties include seafood puff pastry; baby clams steamed in butter, white wine, and cilantro; chicken in brandy and chipotle chile cream sauce; tender grilled steaks; and homemade French desserts. Portions are generous, however, and always feature fresh vegetables from the nearby family farm. Every table receives a complimentary platter of appetizers at dinnertime; lunch is a hearty three-course meal.

Av. López Mateos 1000 (at Blancarte). ☎ 646/178-1733. Reservations recommended for weekends. Main courses \$9–\$19. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–10:30pm.

La Embottelladora Vieja ★★★ *finds* FRENCH/MEXICAN If you're planning to splurge on one fine meal in Ensenada (or all of northern Baja, for that matter), this is the place. Hidden on an industrial side street and attached to the Bodegas de Santo Tomás winery, it looks more like a chapel than the elegant restaurant it is. Sophisticated diners will feel right at home in the stylish setting, a former winery aging room now resplendent with red oak furniture (constructed from old wine casks), high brick walls, and crystal goblets and candlesticks on linen tablecloths. The wine list is exemplary, featuring bottles from Santo Tomás and other Baja vintners, and the "Baja French" menu features dishes carefully crafted to include or complement wine. Look for appetizers like abalone ceviche or cream of garlic soup, followed by grilled swordfish in cilantro sauce, filet mignon in port wine–Gorgonzola sauce, or quail with tart sauvignon blanc sauce.

Av. Miramar 666 (at Calle 7). ☎ 646/174-0807. Reservations recommended for weekends. Main courses \$8–\$20. AE, MC, V. Lunch and dinner; call for seasonal hours.

ENSENADA AFTER DARK

No discussion of Ensenada would be complete without mentioning **Hussong's Cantina**, Av. Ruiz 113, near Avenida López Mateos



Valle de Guadalupe: Mexico's Wine Country

Beyond the lure of Tijuana and tequila, an exploration of Mexico's wine country, in the northern Baja peninsula, makes for an offbeat and intriguing side trip to the area.

A 29km (18-mile) drive northeast of Ensenada along Highway 3 will bring you to the Valle de Guadalupe (Guadalupe Valley), the heart of Mexico's small but blossoming wine industry. Although most connoisseurs tend to be dismissive of Mexico's wine efforts, in recent years the production and quality have made quantum leaps, and several Mexican vintages have earned international acclaim.

Spanish missionaries first introduced wine to Baja California in 1701, when a Jesuit priest, Father Juan de Ugarte, planted the peninsula's first grape vines. In 1791, the first vineyards were established in these fertile valleys at Mision Santo Thomas.

The Valle de Guadalupe is in the "world wine strip," a zone of lands with the climate and porous soil that result in ideal conditions for grape growing—similar to those found in northern California, France, Spain, and Italy. Northern Baja's dry, hot summers and cool, humid winters, added to a stream of cool breezes, make the conditions in Guadalupe Valley especially conducive for vineyards, similar to what you would find in the Mediterranean.

(© 646/178-3210); just like the line from *Casablanca*, "everyone goes to Rick's," everyone's been going to Hussong's since the bar opened in 1892. Nothing much has changed in the last century—the place still sports Wild West-style swinging saloon doors, a long bar to slide beers along, and strolling mariachis bellowing to rise above the din of revelers. There's definitely a minimalist appeal to Hussong's, which looks as if it sprang from a south-of-the-border episode of *GunsMoke*. Beer and tequilas at astonishingly low prices are the main order of business. Be aware that hygiene and privacy are a low priority in the restrooms.

While the crowd (a pleasant mix of tourists and locals) at Hussong's can really whoop it up, they're amateurs compared to those

In 1905, the Mexican government granted political asylum to 100 families from Russia, who arrived in Guadalupe Valley to cultivate grapes. These were the pioneers of grape cultivation in the area, and many of the present-day residents are descendents of those Russian families. The Museo Comunitario del Valle de Guadalupe, on Francisco Zarco (no phone), has displays and artifacts from this curious time of cultural conversion.

The best time to visit the Valle de Guadalupe is in late August, during Las Fiestas de la Vendimia (Harvest Festivals). Various vineyards schedule a multitude of activities, including tastings, classical music concerts, and Masses celebrating the harvest. If you plan to dine or spend the night, **Adobe Guadalupe** (☎ 649/631-3098 in the U.S., or 646/155-2094; www.adobeguadalupe.com), one of the few places to stay in Guadalupe Valley, is both an inn and a boutique winery. The double rate of \$125 includes breakfast; the four-course dinner goes for \$50 per person (\$35 without wine).

Winery tours are available at the **Casa Pedro Domecq**, **Chateau Camou**, and **Monte Xanic** vineyards, all located in Guadalupe Valley.

who frequent **Papas & Beer**, Avenida Ruiz near Avenida López Mateos (☎ 646/178-4231), across the street. A tiny entrance leads to the upstairs bar and disco, where the music is loud and the hip young crowd is definitely here to party. Happy patrons hang out of the second-story windows calling out to their friends, and stopping occasionally to eat *papas* (french fries) accompanied by local beers. Papas & Beer has quite a reputation with the Southern California college crowd, and has opened a branch in Rosarito Beach (see “Rosarito Beach After Dark,” earlier in this chapter). You’ve probably noticed bumper stickers for these two quintessentially Baja watering holes, but they don’t just give them away. In fact, each bar has several souvenir shops along Avenida Ruiz.