

CUISINE NOIR

Breaking Down Baja: Where To Eat, Stay and Play South of the Border



Pictured: Sailing in Cabo San Lucas | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal



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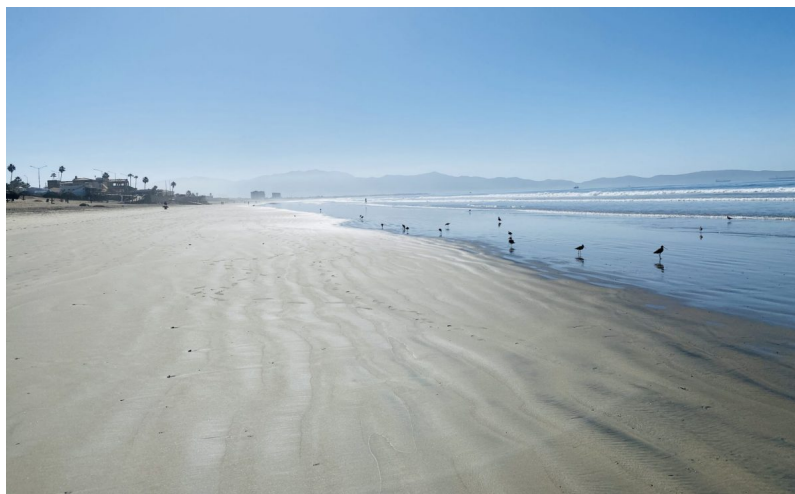
Baja California is a state in Mexico located south of the California border. With the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico on either side, Baja has dramatic landscapes that span across mountains, sandy beaches, deserts and valleys. The Baja peninsula is one of the longest in the world, stretching over 700 miles from north to south.

While the peninsula has much to discover, the two main regions worth traveling to are Baja California (north Baja) and Baja California Sur (south Baja).

Road Trip Through North Baja

The best way to start your exploration of north Baja is by flying into San Diego International airport. From here, you can either rent a car (less than a 30-minute drive), or take a taxi to San Ysidro to cross the pedestrian bridge. Alternately, you can fly into the large city of Tijuana and start your road trip here. Make sure to check your car rental insurance policy as some companies do not provide coverage in Mexico.

Continue your drive along the Pacific Coast on Highway 1, stopping at the towns of Rosarito Beach and Puerto Nuevo for fresh lobsters, margaritas and tamarind candies.



Pictured: Beach in Ensenada | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal

Make your way to Ensenada, a charming port town with expansive beaches, surfing spots, boutique restaurants and shopping.

If you have a car, you can drive further south to see rocky cliffs and one of the world's largest blowholes, La Bufadora.

Ensenada is also known as the gateway to Mexico's wine country and hosts a series of concerts, tastings and events during Fiestas de la Vendimia (Wine Harvest Festival).

Mexico's Wine Valley

Valle de Guadalupe is often compared to California's Napa Valley. Here you can find over 120 wineries, trendy Baja Med cuisine, and an assortment of eco-friendly hotels located along Ruta del Vino (wine route). The community

was first founded by Dominican missions in 1834, and now over 80% of Mexico's wine is produced in the valley.



Pictured: Valle de Guadalupe | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal

The region's Mediterranean-like climate is ideal for growing red grape varieties such as nebbiolo, merlot, cabernet sauvignon, grenache and syrah. Since the winemakers are not regulated, they have room to innovate and create new blends using the season's fresh harvest, rather than importing grapes.

While most of the vineyards and wine producers in the valley are boutique, there are also a few large commercial brands. Unique designs, open-air tasting rooms and local art displays make a few wineries worth the visit. Check out Vena Cava's nautical themed wine bar and food truck, olive and lemon groves at Casa Magoni, a cool cave cellar at Encuentro, and nature-themed art installations at Bruma. Wine tasting rooms tend to get crowded on the weekends as visitors from the U.S. and Mexico get away for the weekend.



Pictured: Encuentro Guadalupe winery | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal

In the valley, stay at Encuentro Guadalupe, a 24-room boutique hotel and winery with individual cabins on a wildlife reserve that appear to blend into the vast dry mountainous landscape. Each of the eco lofts has large windows and private terraces, so you can privately enjoy a sea breeze over neighboring vineyards, scenic sunset and star-studded night skies. Though the food and wine at Encuentro are notable, some of the best restaurants and wineries are located only minutes away.

Wellness in Tecate

On the border of San Diego and Tecate lies Rancho La Puerta, a destination spa resort that has been inspiring wellness for 80 years. Here you can stay in a Spanish-style casita surrounded by 4,000 acres of beautifully manicured gardens and the sacred Kuuchamaa Mountain.



Pictured: Rancho La Puerta | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal

All-inclusive rates give you access to over 50 fitness classes each day, healthy and delicious farm-to-table meals, as well as presentations by wellness coaches. You can also experience some natural spa treatments and holistic therapies unique to The Rancho La Puerta. Plan to stay for at least a week if you want to avail the full experience.

Sun and Beach in South Baja

Southern Baja is a popular destination known for its year-round warm weather, warm, turquoise blue waters and white sand beaches. Los Cabos International Airport is well connected to cities across the U.S. Once you

arrive, you can head to either of the two main cities located only a few minutes away—Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo.

Cabo San Lucas

Cabo San Lucas is a haven for those who like to swim, kayak, fish, snorkel, sail or just relax at the beach. Most resorts and timeshares are located in the southern tip of Baja California Sur near Cabo San Lucas.



Pictured: The Thompson Hotel in Cabo San Lucas | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal

The luxurious The Cape – A Thompson Hotel overlooks the Sea of Cortez and granite formations called El Arco. Local architects and artists partnered to design the hotel that blends in with the surroundings and maintains a vibrant 1960s Baja-meets-Southern California vibe. Start your day with a swim in the infinity pool, walk along the secluded beach and dine at Manta, an Asian-Peruvian-Mexican fusion restaurant.

The marina at Cabo San Lucas is dotted with bars, restaurants and shopping. This is also a meeting point for most tours, including snorkel and sightseeing sails. A must is to cruise along Land's End with a local operator, Pez Gato. They offer smaller group excursions so you can have a safe and leisure experience watching the colorful marine life in the shallow waters at Santa Maria Bay.

San Jose del Cabo

The neighboring city of San Jose del Cabo is more historic. Colorful buildings located along cobblestone streets offer the authenticity of an old Spanish town. Here you are less likely to be bothered by peddlers as local families

stroll through the main square across the Parroquia San José (a mission church).



Pictured: Main square at San Jose Del Cabo at night | Photo credit: Sucheta Rawal

There are lots of art galleries, boutique shops, bars and cafés within walking distance. But the main reason to come to San Jose del Cabo is for the food. Unlike San Lucas, there are more Mexican mom and pop restaurants here specializing in tacos, seafood, margaritas and churros.

To discover some of the best architectural and culinary secrets of the area, take a guided walking food tour with Juan More Taco, a locally-owned and operated tour company.

Baja California is one of the safest places in Mexico. No matter which part you choose to explore first, you will find that the people are friendly and welcoming, taking pride in their land and culture.