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*Latitude 38's*

**FIRST TIMER'S**

**GUIDE TO**

**MEXICO**

**2015**



Welcome to La Paz

# Baja Ha-Ha

Beach Party at La Costa Restaurante

Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup>

4:00 - 7:00 pm.



Mexican Folk Dancing · Live Music · Food & Drinks

**FREE** for first fifty!

(2015 Baja Ha-Ha participants.)

Door prizes and much more!

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# Latitude 38's FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE TO MEXICO



Produced by the *Latitude 38* staff, who remind you to 'keep in touch' during your travels.

We encourage you to email us with reports — and photos! — about interesting places you visit, or letters about issues of interest to other cruisers.

Email: [andy@latitude38.com](mailto:andy@latitude38.com)

*Digital photos can be attached to emails  
(in medium to high resolution).*

Phone: (415) 383-8200, ext. 112

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**[www.latitude38.com](http://www.latitude38.com)    [www.baja-haha.com](http://www.baja-haha.com)    [www.pacificpuddlejump.com](http://www.pacificpuddlejump.com)**

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Acknowledgment: In addition to insights from the *Latitude 38* staff, much of the text in this guide was provided by Emily Fagan. Links to her writing on additional topics can be found at: <http://roadslesstraveled.us>.

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**[www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com)**

Dear Baja Ha-Ha Sailors,

We are very pleased to have this opportunity to support your adventure in Mexico with the 22nd Annual Baja Ha-Ha Rally, and welcome you to the unique Mexico cruising lifestyle.

Renowned as a haven for the world's most discerning cruisers, Mexico's harbors, marinas and attractions have garnered rave reviews from generations of cruisers and Baja Ha-Ha participants.

In the two decades since the first Baja Ha-Ha, marina facilities and shore side services for cruisers have improved dramatically, while the warm waters, steady breezes and friendly nature of the traditional Mexican culture have stayed true to their history.

Additionally, due to our ecologically rich environment, you will see amazing wildlife, clean waters, and will have numerous new and rewarding experiences exploring Mexico's coastline. Of course, we would encourage you to also venture inland, where you will discover even more of Mexico's many rewards and attractions.

These features have made Mexico the destination of choice for cruisers from around the globe, including many repeat Baja Ha-Ha participants. Although there's a big world for cruising sailors to experience, many world travelers tell us there is no better cruising grounds on earth than the waters of Mexico.

On behalf of Mexico Tourism, we hope to welcome you soon, and share with you the magnificence that Mexico has to offer.

My best,

*Jorge Gamboa*

Director

Los Angeles Office of Mexico Tourism

2401 WEST 6TH STREET, 4TH FLOOR, LOS ANGELES, CA 90057 • (213) 739-6336 • (800) 446-3942

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# FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE TO MEXICO

## Preparing to Cruise

**The Boat** — If you're going to sail to Mexico, the size of your boat isn't nearly as important as the quality. Make sure the boat was designed and built, and has been maintained, for open-ocean sailing. While Mexico usually has lighter winds than many sailors prefer, now and then weather conditions can get pretty rough. Hopefully you won't ever find yourself in such conditions, but if you do, you won't want to be trusting your life to a boat designed for lake sailing.

If you own a trailerable boat that wasn't designed for open-ocean sailing, remember that parts of the Sea of Cortez are ideal for trailerboat sailing. Look for the places that have a large number of anchorages close together, which means you'll never have to wander too far from shelter. For those willing to drive farther, Banderas Bay would be another great place for a trailerable boat.

No matter what kind of boat you take to Mexico, check to make sure her basic features, systems, and emergency gear are in good working order. After all, you're better off discovering that the steering cable needs replacement at the dock in California than off Cedros Island at 2 a.m. when it's blowing 30 and everyone is seasick. 'A stitch in time saves nine' is for landlubbers. When it comes to boats, a 'stitch in time' can save 109 at sea. Specialized marine gear is expensive and hard to come by in Mexico. So if your gooseneck fails while you're rounding Cabo Corrientes, you might blow a month of your precious cruising time trying to get it replaced.

If you're unsure how to evaluate the condition of your hull, thru-hulls, steering system and rudder, propulsion system, mast, rigging, sails and other gear, hire a surveyor. It may turn out to be one of the best investments you make.

*(Author Emily Fagan offers additional notes on boat prep tips later in this publication.)*

**Gear** — Despite the fact that many boats heading to Mexico are loaded down with gear, much of it isn't absolutely necessary. To our mind, the following is the minimum:

EPIRB, Coast Guard-required safety gear, liferaft, dinghy (which may be modified to serve as a liferaft), three appropriate-size anchors with appropriate-size rode, compass, two GPSs, VHF radio, working sails, a light-air headsail, some kind of cockpit shading, one set of charts and one cruising guide. Add food and water, and you can enjoy a great minimalist cruise.

While we've cruised Mexico in a boat with only the above gear, if you've got money left, it would also be nice to have an electric windlass, depthsounder, an AIS unit, radar (which is as important for navigation as it is for avoiding ships in the fog), speed and wind instruments, a top-quality dinghy with an outboard powerful enough to make it plane with two passengers, and an SSB radio.

There's nothing like cold beers and lots of fresh water when cruising in the tropics. While both refrigeration and watermakers are great, remember that in addition to their initial cost, they'll also increase demands on your boat's electrical supply and your maintenance time. We think that both

refrigeration and watermakers are worth it, but it's possible to have a great cruise without them.

**Skipper And Crew** — If you're the skipper, you need to be fully aware that there are significantly greater challenges to cruising in Mexico than there are in sailing across San Francisco Bay or on a typical weekend cruise from Marina del Rey to Catalina. The biggest challenge is that you have to be self-sufficient. For all intents and purposes, there is no Coast Guard or US-style tow boat service in the more remote and offshore areas of Mexico. You need to assume that you'll be on your own. You need to be comfortable with night sailing, heavy weather sailing, coastal and offshore navigation,



**Kids love the 80-degree water temps of Cabo San Lucas.**

anchoring, and handling the fatigue that accompanies the first couple of days at sea.

It's also important that you know how to respond to problems. What would you do, for example, if you lost your mast, your rudder, your engine's charging capability, your engine or transmission? Have contingency plans for the basic problems.

If you don't have much offshore experience, you should strongly consider bringing along a seasoned mentor for your virgin run from San Diego to Cabo. We had mentoring for our first two trips to Mexico, and it really prepared us for doing it on our own. Not only do you 'learn the ropes' more easily, but the trip will probably be more relaxing and less stressful. And when you're finally on your own in Cabo, you'll have much greater confidence in your abilities.

Before heading south of the border, the skipper and crew should review all the boat's emergency gear and systems, as well as how to reef the sails and how to start and operate the engine. The last is critical, because it would be a shame if the skipper fell overboard and was lost because he/she didn't bother to teach anyone else how to start the engine. It's also wise to post a diagram indicating the location of all the thru-hull fittings.

The skipper and crew should practice putting in single and double reefs, preferably at night at sea. Crew overboard drills should also be conducted under realistic conditions. You'll be anchoring all the time in Mexico, so the whole crew should be made familiar with all the gear and techniques prior to having to set the hook at midnight in Bahia Santa Maria.

If you're crewing on a boat and the skipper hasn't gone over all the basic and emergency systems and procedures, *insist* that he or she do so.

While many people have singlehanded to Mexico, it's safer — and usually more fun — to have at least one other person along. If your boat is large enough, a third or fourth person often makes the trip down Baja much more of a pleasure cruise. But if there are just two of you making a quick trip from San Diego to Cabo, expect to be wiped out when you arrive at the Cape. After all, the first couple of days at sea are the hardest on even the most experienced sailors, and 12 hours of watches per day will drain anyone.

**Insurance** — There are two types of insurance you need to know about. The first is insurance for your boat in the event that you lose the mast, get blown onto the beach, or get holed by a shrimper. (It's often referred to as "hull insurance.") If your boat is in good condition, you shouldn't have any trouble getting it. If you already have it, there's a good chance your insurer will add a Mexico 'rider' for an additional fee. We would guess that about 50% of the boats cruising Mexico have this kind of insurance.

The second type is Mexican liability insurance, and is now required of all boats visiting Mexican waters. In the unlikely event you do some damage with your boat in Mexico — run over a *panga* fisherman in the middle of the night, T-bone a shrimper and damage the hull, that kind of thing — you'll be glad you have a Mexican liability policy. If not, your boat could be impounded. Proof of liability coverage is also now required by most marinas.

Liability insurance for Mexico is not expensive, and can be purchased in the States from a broker who deals with boat insurance for Mexico. It's the kind of thing you probably won't ever need, but if you do, you'll be really glad you have it.

**Fishing Licenses** — If you carry fishing gear onboard, it's best if every person aboard has a valid fishing license. (Although the law is somewhat ambivalent, some enforcement officers require all on board to have licenses.)

While in the US, fishing licenses may be obtained in person or by mail from: Mexican Department of Fisheries, 2550 Fifth Ave. Suite 15, San Diego, CA 92103. Phone: (619) 233-4324; [www.sport-fishinginmexico.com](http://www.sport-fishinginmexico.com)

They can also be obtained locally from the Baja California and Baja California Sur State Government sites:

[pesca.ebajacalifornia.gob.mx/Pesca](http://pesca.ebajacalifornia.gob.mx/Pesca) and [apps.bcs.gob.mx/finanzas/finaweb/foramar/index.php](http://apps.bcs.gob.mx/finanzas/finaweb/foramar/index.php)

Another very informative site that includes fishing tournaments and events, plus a lot more about fishing in Mexico is: [pescadeportiva.conapesca.sagarpa.gob.mx:82](http://pescadeportiva.conapesca.sagarpa.gob.mx:82) (Once there,

click on "English")

Regardless of where the licenses are purchased, they are valid for use anywhere within territorial Mexican waters.

**Radio Licenses** — In addition to having an FCC ship's station license\* for VHF and SSB radio, Ham operators would do well to obtain a reciprocal Mexican license. You can get one in Tijuana from the Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Transportes (1071 Calle 16, Libertad; phone: 011-52-668-29500), but due to recent incidents of violent crime in that border town, we recommend you wait until you arrive at a Mexican port city. (You will need two copies of your US Ham license along with two copies of your stamped Tourist Card.)

\*To obtain an FCC amateur radio license you will need to complete form FCC 605, which can be downloaded from the Internet ([www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form605/605.pdf](http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form605/605.pdf)). For general requirements and procedures see <http://wireless.fcc.gov/services/amateur/licensing/index.html>. Or call (888) 225-5322.

**Charts and Cruising Guides** — Charts come in many forms: originals, single reproductions, compilations of reproductions, and electronic. The most important thing to remember is that almost all of the charts for Mexico, and many chartlets in older cruising guides, are inaccurate! It sounds worse than it is, but when sailing close to shore in Mexico, your GPS coordinates will often actually have you on the side of a hill or a mile or more inland. To be safe, we always assume at least two miles of error for charts of anyplace in Mexico, and constantly double-check our GPS position with radar and depthsounder. (*You'll find more on this subject in cruiser Emily Fagan's section of this guide.*)

These days, electronic charts seem to be irresistible. But you always want to have some 'hard copy' backup in case you spill a pitcher of sangria on your computer or iPad.

While the cruising guides offer tidbits of historical and cultural information about Mexico, nothing can compare with the informative general tourist guides to Mexico published by Moon Publications and/or Lonely Planet. While a combination of their *Baja Handbook* and *Pacific Mexico Handbook* will do the job, they also offer handbooks for Cabo and Puerto Vallarta. We'd say the first two, at about \$15 each, are 'must buys' to fully appreciate Mexico.

While lots of folks read trashy novels in Mexico, there are three classic books you shouldn't miss: *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* and *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, and Karl Franz's *People's Guide to Mexico*. If you're confused by Mexican culture, Franz's book will explain it in a most entertaining manner.

**Identification, Documents & Licenses** — Don't go to Mexico — or take any crew to Mexico — without these things (details follow):

- 1) Passports for the entire crew.
- 2) FMM Visitor Cards or other immigration document for non-Mexicans.
- 3) Original vessel documentation.
- 4) Original Temporary Import Permit (TIP).
- 5) Proof of liability Insurance. Required by law and marinas.
- 6) Fishing licenses: If you're carrying fishing gear *every* person on board must get a license.
- 7) Original Mexico International Clear-in Document or Crew List.



JOEL SORJUM

**Fishing in Mexican waters can be excellent, but sometimes you get surprises.**

# Get Ready for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Baja Ha-Ha

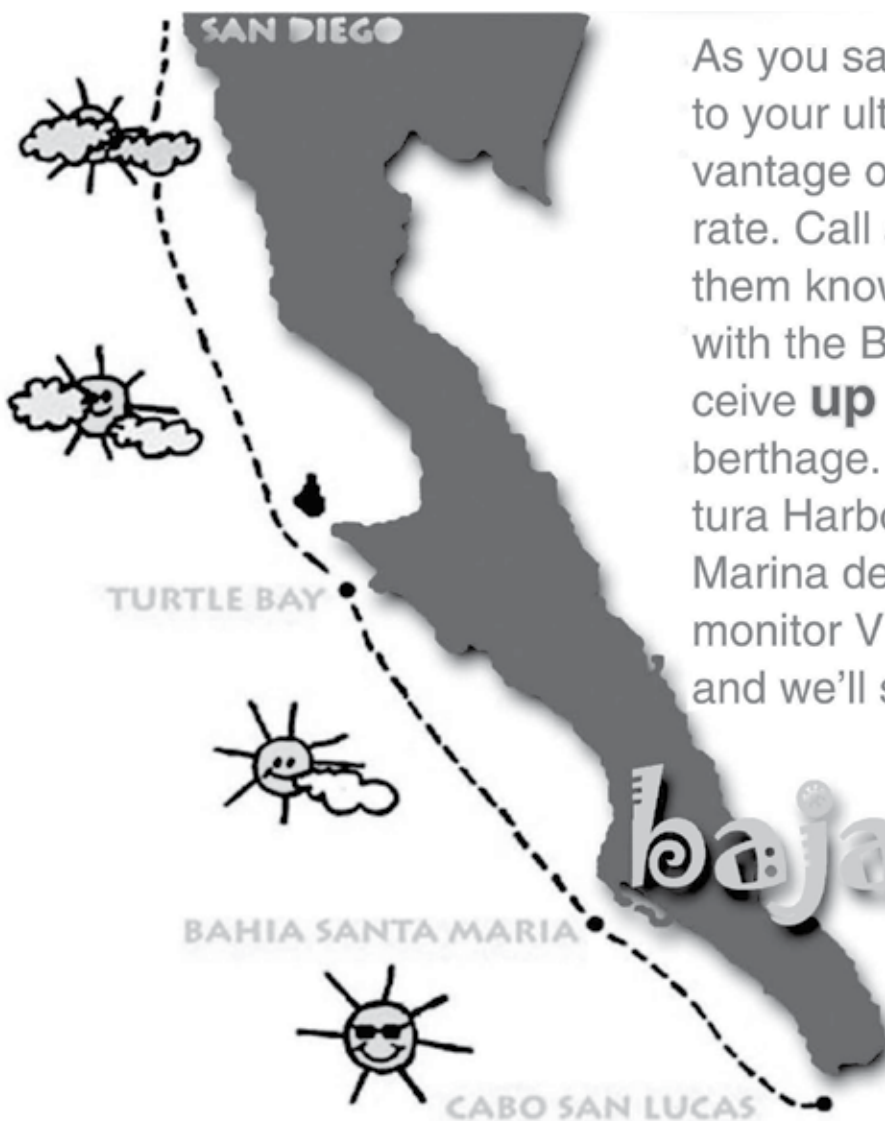
We've created our online **Cruising Headquarters** to point you in the right direction. From outfitting your boat with the best equipment, to tips and videos to help take care of the details, we've got you covered.

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As you sail your way down the coast to your ultimate destination, take advantage of Almar's Baja Ha-Ha guest rate. Call any Almar marina and let them know you are officially registered with the Baja Ha-Ha, and you'll receive **up to 50% off** on your guest berthage. Almar has marinas in Ventura Harbor, Channel Islands Harbor, Marina del Rey and San Diego. We monitor VHF 16. Enjoy the journey and we'll see you soon.

**baja ha-ha**

[www.almar.com](http://www.almar.com)



8) Letter of Authorization if a (non-owner) captain is to be left in charge of the boat.

9) Notarized permission letter for children who are minors if they are not accompanied by both their parents.

• **Passports** — Rules now require foreigners traveling to Mexico, including US citizens, to show a passport to enter Mexico — and to get back into the US.

### **Immigration Requirements Which May Be Processed By You Prior to Arrival in Mexico (By Private Boat)**

**Step One** — Visit the following Internet portal to apply for entry to Mexico and pay the required fees: <https://www.banjercito.com.mx/registroEmbarques/>

Follow the instructions and save the electronic receipt. You will need it when you e-mail the passenger list to INM in the next step. Also print out a copy to keep with you on the boat.

The following information must be provided:

1) Passport number of the person responsible for the vessel

2) Vessel Documentation (State or Federal Documentation).

3) A \$332 Mexican Pesos fee per each visiting foreigner as required by the Federal Fee Act (Ley Federal de Derechos), Article 8, Section I. The fee must be paid using a credit card. The cardholder should be the same person responsible for the boat.

**Step Two** — Download and complete the spreadsheet with the information of the vessel and passengers from: [www.inm.gob.mx/index.php/page/instrucciones\\_para\\_pasajeros/en.html](http://www.inm.gob.mx/index.php/page/instrucciones_para_pasajeros/en.html)

Here you will find the following:

• A Sample Form (spreadsheet) for submission of a list of maritime passengers and crew members — delete the sample information and insert your passenger list. Save it to your computer following the instructions on the web page including how to name the file correctly.

• A guide for filling the Form for the submission of a list of maritime passengers and crew members.

• An e-mail Directory/List of INM Ports addresses for submission of lists of maritime passengers and crew members.

**Step Three** — Email the completed spreadsheet to INM and copy of your receipt (See Step Two above, 3rd bullet on how to find the correct email address)

As an example if you are leaving from Southern California you should send the e-mail to the Ensenada INM Office at: [www.inm.gob.mx](http://www.inm.gob.mx)

**Step Four** — Once the visitors information outlined above is sent to INM, INM will e-mail you back the entry authorization (or denial) to the individuals intending to enter Mexico's territorial waters onboard the given vessel. The document must be kept aboard the vessel at all times along with the receipt of payment.

The authorizing e-mail will also contain INM's permit to

enter as a Visitor Without Permission to Perform Activities for Profit (i.e. work for income/profit).

The length of the stay will be the amount of time requested by the applicant, but shall not exceed 180 days, and cannot be used for multiple entries and departures.

A copy of your information will be sent to the Secretary of the Navy / (SEMAR) and to the Secretary of Communications and Transportation (SCT.)

### **Immigration Requirements By Individuals Upon Arrival in Mexico By Sea**

**Passport/Visa**— All foreigners traveling to Mexico, including U.S. citizens, are now required to carry a valid and current passport to enter Mexico. Non-Mexicans from certain countries may also require a Visa. Contact a Mexican Consul-



*Turtle Bay's beach only gets this much use when the Baja Ha-Ha fleet is in town.*

ate for a list of these countries or: [www.sre.gob.mx/index.php/representaciones/consulados-de-mexico-en-el-exterior](http://www.sre.gob.mx/index.php/representaciones/consulados-de-mexico-en-el-exterior). Children under 18 years of age need a notarized letter for travel if not accompanied by both parents.

When arriving at your first Mexican port of entry you will need to check-in at the local immigration office and show your passport, each crew member will need to fill out an entry permit, now called an FMM and pay \$332.00 Mexican Pesos per person at the bank.

You may also pre-pay the immigration service fee online prior to your departure to Mexico, or before visiting the local immigration office at the first Mexican port. (See previous section "Step One" on how to do this.

#### **FMM — Forma Migratoria Multiple**

Forma Migratoria Multiple loosely translates as "Multiple Immigration Form."

It is simply known as FMM, and is the permit form required to enter Mexico by boat and whether you go ashore or not.

Each person must fill out an FMM form upon arrival.

#### **Vessel Documentation Requirements**

Every vessel entering Mexico must carry ORIGINAL current Vessel Documentation or Registration that proves ownership; this means Federally Documented vessels will need to present a USCG Certificate of Documentation and undocumented vessels will need to have a valid state registration. Foreign-flag vessels from Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, British

Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands, Japan, etc., will require a current Certificate of Registry.

All vessels registered under a Corporation or LLC are required to have an original notarized letter onboard authorizing the Master or Representative to operate the vessel.

### Temporary Import Permits (TIP) for Vessels

All vessels are required to have a Temporary Import Permit (TIP) when in Mexico. The ORIGINAL TIP must be on board the vessel at all times.



#### A sample TIP.

A TIP may be obtained from the following sources:

1) Online prior to your departure for Mexico. Apply between 60 and seven days before you depart at <https://www.banjercito.com.mx/registroVehiculos/>

2) At the first Mexican official port of entry in Mexico, available at any Banjercito CIITEV office at one of the following Mexican ports of entry, as well as border entry ports: Acapulco, Mazatlan, Ensenada, Manzanillo, Guaymas, Puerto Vallarta, La Paz, Salina Cruz, Puerto Juarez, Veracruz, Pichilingue, Tampico, Lazaro Cardenas, Coatzacoalcas

Note: There isn't a Banjercito Office in Cabo San Lucas; therefore it is recommended to use Ensenada, Baja California, as your first Port of Entry if coming into Mexico from the West Coast of the US.

c. You may also acquire the TIP at the following Mexican Consulates:

- In California: Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino
- In Arizona: Phoenix
- In Texas: Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Austin
- In Colorado: Denver
- In Illinois: Chicago
- In New Mexico: Albuquerque

**Important note:** If the vessel does not have a Temporary Import Permit "TIP" on board or fails to exit Mexico prior to its expiration the vessel will be considered to be in Mexican territory illegally and may be subject to fines and/or confiscation by Customs Authorities.

Temporarily imported vessels cannot be sold in Mexico and chartering requires Mexican permits.

### Clearing Into Mexico For the First Time

A vessel must clear-in when entering Mexico at the first official port of entry.

The clear-in process is as follows:

- 1) Complete the Crew List Document
- 2) Go to the immigration office and get the Crew List properly stamped and have FMMs (Forma Migratoria Multiple) issued for all passengers
- 3) Go to the Port Captain's Office with the completed form to pay the Clear-In Fee and have the document duly authorized and stamped. In some ports you may be required to pay a Port Use Fee with the API (Port Administrator).

### Clearing Our of Mexico

A vessel must clear out when leaving Mexico at the last official port of exit.

The process for clearing out of Mexico is as follows:

- 1) Complete the Crew list for exiting Mexico (*Zarpe*).
- 2) Go to the immigration office to get the crew list stamped and surrender the FMM forms.
- 3) Go to the Port Captain's office to pay the Vessel's Check-out fees and have the crew list stamped with the authorization to exit the country of Mexico.

Important note: Do not skip the clear-out process, since the next time you visit Mexico, your information may show that you never left the country and therefore you are considered to be in Mexico illegally.

### Clearing Into and Out of Ports Within Mexico ("cabotage")

If you are navigating from one Mexican port to another, all that you will require is that you inform the Harbor Master or marina of your arrival or departure by means of an "Aviso" (Notification).

Depending on the Harbor Master's office, some may require a written notification, while others allow a verbal one via VHF, Channel 16.

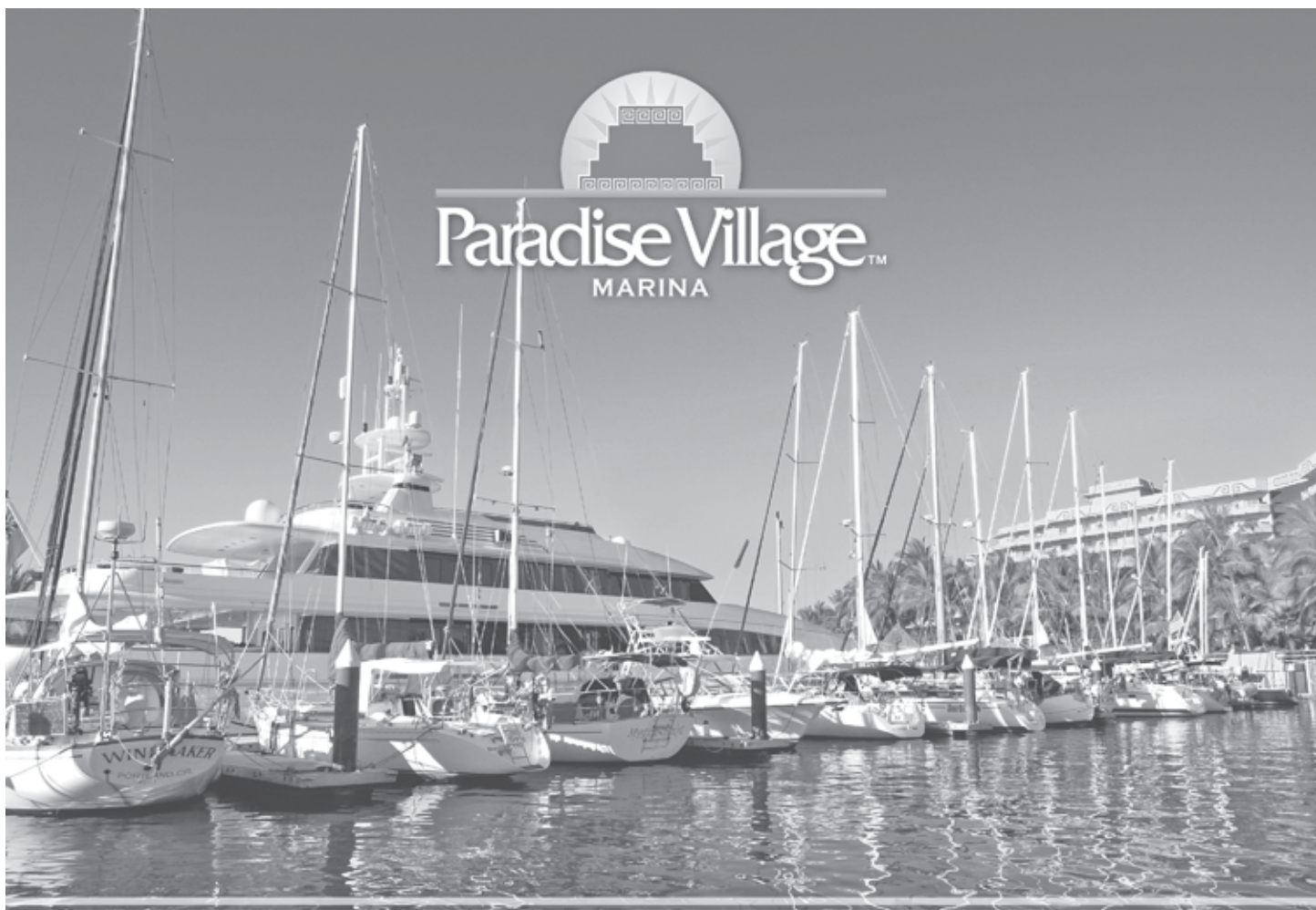


*Caleta Partida is a must-see anchorage in the Sea of Cortez.*

In some ports you must pay a Port Use Fee when arriving and anchoring (if you anchor out). These fees are paid to the API. (The port administration)



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Andrew Linney, [www.nokaoi2.info](http://www.nokaoi2.info)*



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Tel. (329) 295.5526 • Cel (322) 205.7467 • [www.marinarivieranayarit.com](http://www.marinarivieranayarit.com)

## Once You're in Mexico

**Dress To Impress** — To a greater degree than in the United States, officials and business people will treat you according to the way you dress and behave. If you dress as if you're an important person, you'll usually be treated accordingly. But if you dress like a bum, don't be surprised if you don't get as much respect as you'd like. It's not the end of the world if you dress in the 'cruiser's uniform' of shorts, faded T-shirt and flip-flops when you visit the office of a port captain or other official, but it doesn't show much respect.

If you're a woman who enjoys wearing sexy outfits or



**Appearance counts with officials.**

displaying breast augmentation with a skimpy bathing suit, you won't have many problems around tourist areas or resort marinas. But if you visit official offices or venture off into 'real' Mexico, you can expect to be treated with less respect than you might wish. Similarly, although going naked is lots of fun, Mexico isn't the South of France. So only go starkers on your boat when you're anchored way out. If you go naked on the beach, know that 'Mexican eyes' are everywhere.

## Weather Issues

**Water Temperatures** — While there can be spells of cool and cold air temperatures in the Sea of Cortez as early as November, the water temperature normally stays quite warm as late as early December. We once recorded 88° at Isla Partida during Thanksgiving. After that, the water temperature cools rapidly and dramatically, so forget swimming without a wetsuit from La Paz north until March or April.

The bottom line is that the best times to cruise the fabled Sea of Cortez are the spring and fall. Winter is too cool for those who enjoy water sports and are looking for a great tan. Summer is very, very warm in the Sea — in fact, August and September are hot as Hades — but some folks still love it.

South of Mazatlan or Puerto Vallarta, the air and water temperatures are pleasant year round. While some Northers blow down as far south as Mazatlan, they never invade the sheltered waters of Banderas Bay or the Gold Coast. However, if you like serious warmth in the dead of winter, there's nothing like getting as far south as Zihuatanejo. At midnight one memorable New Year's Eve,

we measured both the air and sea temperatures at 80°. The skies almost always seem to be blue in Z-town.

**Nasty Weather** — While the sailing winds in Mexico are normally light and benign during the prime cruising season — between November and June — there are some notable exceptions. The Pacific Coast of Baja is periodically subject to strong winds from the north, northwest and east, as well as 'Pineapple Expresses' from Hawaii.

The Sea of Cortez can also be dangerous from November to March, as Northers howl down from the States on a semi-regular basis. It's not uncommon to have 40 or more knots of wind during a Norther. But the wind isn't as much of a problem as the short and steep seas can be. When there's a Norther blowing, you want to be holed up in a snug anchorage, not crossing the Sea of Cortez. Thank goodness for modern weather forecasting.

The number of Northers during any given winter can vary tremendously. Sometimes they seem to come almost one after another. Other years there are hardly any at all.

**Hurricanes** — The hurricane season in Mexico is generally considered to be from June 1 until October 31. During the last 50 years there have been a handful of Mexican hurricanes in the month of November, only one of which affected cruisers. There was, however, one nasty hurricane in the middle of December — so you never can tell. And there have been several hurricanes in late May.

In the summer hurricane season, most boats on the mainland are tucked tightly into marinas and are therefore quite safe.

While cruising pretty much shuts down on mainland Mexico during the summer months, many folks continue — and love — cruising the Sea of Cortez. The Sea gets visited by a hurricane about every other year, but only rarely do they affect cruising boats. However, storms in the summers of '92, '93 and '14 were very powerful, and caused damage to many boats at La Paz and Puerto Escondido, with a few



**Another perfect day in Mexico? Perhaps, but it's important to keep abreast of local and long-range weather forecasts.**

more in the water at San Carlos. During the 2014 storm, the greatest damage was to boats that were anchored out, not in marinas. So, if your boat is in a marina in Cabo, La Paz, or San Carlos, we think the odds are much in your favor. If

you leave your boat anchored out, all bets are off.

The farther up in the Sea you get, the greater the chance that an approaching hurricane will fizzle out before reaching you.

If you want to be an authority on Mexican hurricanes, go to: <http://weather.unisys.com/hurricane/index.html>. This site has all the data, plus a color-coded chart showing the windspeed and path of every Mexican tropical storm and hurricane since 1949.

In the summertime, the Sea of Cortez is also subject to *chubascos* — brief storms with winds that often blow at close to hurricane force. In the fall of '97, a number of cruising boats were driven ashore at Puerto Escondido by a *chubasco*.

### Staying In Touch

If you're one of those people who likes to stay in touch with your family, friends, and business, there are many ways to communicate back to the States.

**Cell Phones** — If you like to hear voices, some companies now offer relatively economical 'North American Plans' for your cell phone that are good for the US, Mexico, and Canada. Shop around and read the small print. Coverage is surprisingly good in the more populated coastal towns and even some remote areas, although offers of such plans seem to change frequently. Some long-term cruisers opt to buy Mexican cell phones and get a plan with a Mexican provider.

**Satellite Phones** — If you like to hear distant voices while at remote anchorages, a satellite phone is the answer. The Iridium works all over the world, but the sound quality isn't always the best. This year we began testing the new Spot Global phone. It has coverage in most land areas of the world, including Mexico and Central America. But if you might sail to Hawaii or the South Pacific, be advised that there are gaps in its mid-ocean coverage.



PHOEBE WILSON

Dolphins are a common sight both offshore and in the Sea of Cortez.

**Email** — The most popular communication innovation to hit the world of cruising since shouting is email via SSB radio, enabled via either SailMail, Winlink services, or by using a satellite phone as a portal. Every cruiser who uses these systems will tell you that they are a godsend. The SSB-based systems do require a significant investment in setup, in terms of the radio and a Pactor modem, but cruisers consider them a terrific value. They are good not only for staying in touch, but also for ordering parts and making reservations at marinas at which you're about to arrive.

**Wi-Fi** — More and more marinas, and even anchorages, are

getting wired for relatively high-speed Wi-Fi Internet. Some long-term cruisers also opt to buy a mobile Wi-Fi devices and subscribe to a local service.

**Internet Cafes** — You can find these all over Mexico, and they are important if you want to send documents that are too long Winlink and SailMail, or photos. (Winlink and SailMail do not handle graphics, only text.)

**Warning!** One of the great reasons to go cruising is to get away from the overload of information. While trying a 'no money month', why not try an '*incomunicado* month' too?

### Miscellaneous

**Guns** — There are reportedly dozens of Americans in Mexican jails because they brought guns or bullets into Mexico. Given Mexico's history with revolutions, *banditos* and drug cartels, the government shows little mercy on those who violate their strict laws. We've never brought guns or bullets to Mexico, and we never felt as though we needed them.

**Drugs** — Messing around with any amount of illegal drugs in Mexico is foolish and can be very dangerous. While the overwhelming majority of Mexicans are kind and friendly, this doesn't apply to drug dealers and runners.

Even buying a little pot for personal use can be risky, as there is always the possibility you're dealing with the wrong kind of people and/or are being set up. It was reported several years ago that the Mexican legislation passed making it legal to possess very small quantities of certain drugs for personal use. However, when we asked police in several different cities to confirm this, they knew nothing about it. Our advice is never to allow any illegal drugs on your boat.

**Cruiser Code of Conduct** — If there were one, it would be based on the Golden Rule and the Caribbean motto: "Take only photos and leave only footprints."

**Getting Wild And Crazy** — Just about everybody needs to get wild and crazy from time to time. Fortunately, in any large Mexican tourist area there are designated bars where Americans can get drunk and behave like complete idiots. Our post-Ha-Ha favorite has always been Squid Roe in Cabo, where the staff relentlessly encourages everyone to get bombed, do lascivious things with consenting partners, and generally misbehave in a controlled environment. Caution: Do not try this behavior in an authentic Mexican *cantina*. In fact, do yourself a favor and avoid real *cantinas*.

With that intro from the **Latitude 38** staff,  
we'll turn to the advice of  
cruiser **Emily Fagan...**

### Thoughts on Mexican Culture

All it takes is one provisioning run to realize that you're not in Kansas anymore, and it can be quite a culture shock. Mexicans are a wonderful, outgoing, friendly and exuberant people, and their warmth is infectious. But their traditions, ways of doing things, history and ethnicity are very different from what we are used to in the US and Canada.

**Learning Spanish** — One of the best things I did to pre-

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pare for cruising in Mexico was to take some conversational Spanish classes at my local community college. I took three semesters and have found it has not only made it easier to get around and find things, but it has enriched my time in Mexico. I have gradually reached a point where I can listen to the thoughts of these fine people in their own language.

Although three semesters taught me almost all the verb tenses and lots of vocabulary, learning to actually hold a meaningful conversation is still an ongoing process for me. However, the conversation in which the pizza store guy in Loreto explained the Mexican presidential election process to me, the day the canvas lady in San Carlos told me all the ups and downs she has faced as a professional boat service person in a man's industry, and the time the fuel dock guy in Manzanillo told me about the keys to enjoying a long marriage, all stand out as true highlights of this crazy cruising experience. If you won't be starting your cruise for a few years, sign up for a Spanish course today, and keep taking it until the day you leave. By the way, I have met many cruisers trying to learn Spanish from courses on CD like Rosetta Stone. But I haven't met anyone who learned Spanish this way.

### Navigation Issues

Navigation in Mexico with a modern electronic chartplotter and radar overlay is a cinch. All the cruising guides give GPS waypoints for major obstacles and anchorages. Sean Breeding and Heather Bansmer, authors of the popular *Sea of Cortez: A Cruising Guide* and *Pacific Mexico: A Cruising Guide*, include a table at the end of each book that lists the suggested waypoints with logically named labels and descriptions. Entering these waypoints into your chartplotter turns cruising Mexico into an easy paint-by-numbers affair.

As mentioned above, the survey data used to create the chartplotter charts (Navionics and others) is something like a century or more old, and although the contours are usually correct, the data are often offset from the real GPS coordinates by as much as a mile or so.

Whenever we approach an unknown anchorage we turn on the radar to see how accurate the chartplotter is. Fifty percent of the time it is right on. The rest of the time it is usually just offset to one side or the other and it is easy to see where you should go and what to avoid.

Before setting out, we purchased *Pat Rains' Mexico Boating Guide* and *Charlie's Charts of Mexico* by Charles and Margo Wood, as well as the two books by Bansmer/Breeding. All four were useful, and we were glad to have each one on board, as they offer different perspectives. *Charlie's Charts* reflects an earlier age of cruising but is completely up to date. Pat Rains gives down-and-dirty practical advice. Bansmer/Breeding paints a vivid picture of what you will find in each anchorage. We relied on Rains and Wood for the San Diego-to-Cabo passage. We used Rains, Wood and Bansmer/Breeding on the Pacific coast and used Rains and Bansmer/Breeding in the Sea of Cortez.

**Weather Prediction** — We have found the weather in Mexico to be generally benign and the bad weather predictable well in advance.

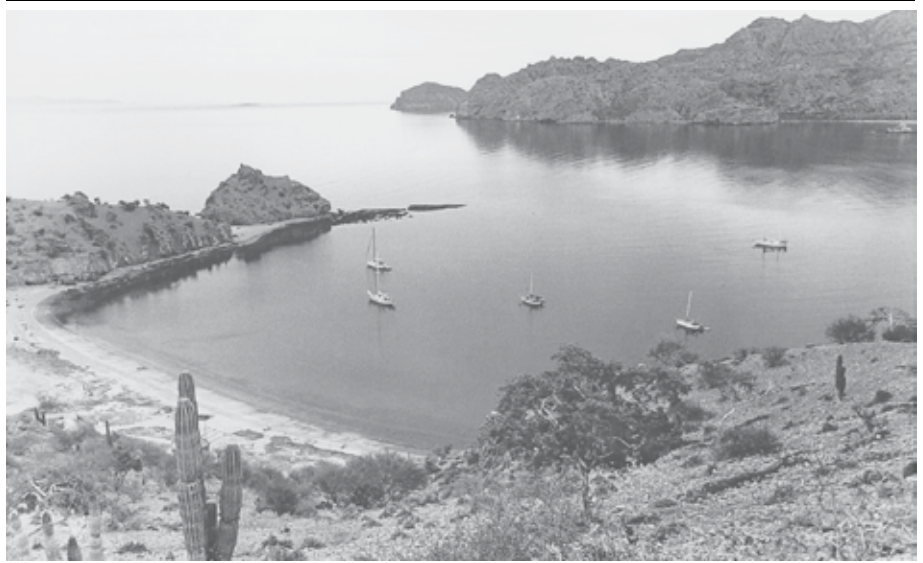
Our preferred method for weather prediction is the In-

ternet. We have had Internet access from the boat at most locations, relying primarily on our USB modem from TelCel (more on acquiring one later in this guide). On the trip south the only place without Internet via TelCel is Cedros Island. Once south, the only place where there is no Internet access (and you really could use it for weather forecasting) is from Isla Espiritu Santo north to just south of Ensenada Blanca (Bahia Candeleros) in the Sea of Cortez, and from north of Isla Coronado farther north to Bahía Concepción, also in the Sea of Cortez. These are both long stretches of excellent cruising grounds, so after a few days at anchor when your downloaded weather data is out of date, it becomes necessary to rely on SSB radio broadcast forecasts from amateur meteorologists (more about that below) or some other method of obtaining weather information. If you can understand rapid-fire Spanish full of wave heights and wind speeds, the port captains periodically broadcast weather forecasts on the VHF radio on channel 12 or 14 (they are announced first on Channel 16 and come mid-morning and mid-afternoon).

The key to all the Internet weather websites is to add 5 knots to the wind speeds and a few feet to the wave heights, especially in the Sea of Cortez where predicted, pleasant sounding 15-knot winds may be 20 with gusts to 25, accompanied with short, steep waves — not fun.

#### **San Diego to Cabo San Lucas Passage Websites:**

- [www.sailflow.com](http://www.sailflow.com) — Gives high resolution graphic images of the Pacific side of Baja that are accurate if you add 5 knots to the wind speed for good measure.
- [www.passageweather.com](http://www.passageweather.com) — There is a page for Baja California that shows the conditions on the Pacific side of the Baja peninsula. The time is given in UTC (Greenwich Mean Time). Rather than worrying about time zones and being exact, I simply subtract 6 hours to try to keep it simple and easy reading these charts, as the forecasts are given for



**Agua Verde, in the Sea of Cortez.**

3, 6, 9 and 12 a.m. and p.m. You really need to study each time-stamped chart carefully to figure out what conditions to expect.

- [www.wunderground.com/blog/Geary/show.html](http://www.wunderground.com/blog/Geary/show.html) — From amateur SSB weather broadcaster Geary (see below), this site gives three-day forecasts for each major anchorage on the Pacific side of the Baja peninsula. The posts are not always up to date.

### **Mainland Mexico Weather Websites:**

- <http://www.passageweather.com> — There is a page for California to Mexico that offers wind and wave forecasts. Subtract 6 hours from UTC to get approximate local time.
- <http://www.passageweather.com/download.htm> — The California-to-Mexico forecasts are available for download if you have a slow Internet connection. These are also useful to download if you are going to lose Internet access in the next few days.
- [www.magicseaweed.com](http://www.magicseaweed.com) — Offers wind and swell forecasts similar to [passageweather.com](http://www.passageweather.com).
- [www.weather.solmatesantiago.com/forecasts.html](http://www.weather.solmatesantiago.com/forecasts.html) — Posted by amateur meteorologist Stan from Manzanillo Bay, there are separate links for each region of Mexico including the Tehuantepec. The posts are not always up to date.
- [groups.yahoo.com/group/southbound\\_group/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/southbound_group/) — This "Southbound\_Group" is resident at [Yahoo.com](http://Yahoo.com), and is an excellent resource for info on cruising between Mexico and Peru.

### **Sea of Cortez Weather Websites:**

- [www.sailflow.com](http://www.sailflow.com) — Gives high resolution graphic images for the Sea of Cortez that are accurate if you add 5 knots to the wind speed for good measure.
- [www.passageweather.com](http://www.passageweather.com) — There is a page for the Baja Peninsula offering wind and wave forecasts
- [www.bajainsider.com/weather/baja-weather108.htm](http://www.bajainsider.com/weather/baja-weather108.htm) — This gives a nice synopsis, including sea temperature (SST tab), and there is a ton of other information about Baja elsewhere on the website.

### **Sea of Cortez — Mainland Crossing Websites:**

The Northern Crossing of the Sea of Cortez is between (approximately) Bahia Concepcion / Punta Chivato / Santa Rosalia on the Baja side and Guaymas and San Carlos on the Mainland side.

- [www.saildocs.com/southerncrossingforecast](http://www.saildocs.com/southerncrossingforecast) — From Stan in Manzanillo Bay, the Southern Crossing forecast. It is not always up to date.
- [www.saildocs.com/northerncrossingforecast](http://www.saildocs.com/northerncrossingforecast) — From Stan in Manzanillo Bay, the Northern Crossing forecast. It is not always up to date.
- [www.wunderground.com/blog/Geary/show.html](http://www.wunderground.com/blog/Geary/show.html) — From amateur SSB weather broadcaster Geary (see below), this site gives 3-day forecasts for the northern and southern crossings including the wind conditions on each side and in the middle. Posts are not always up to date.

**SSB Broadcasts** — There are several amateur weather forecasters who give their predictions on various SSB radio nets. Geary, who is located in Bahía Concepción in the Sea of Cortez, broadcasts on the Sea of Cortez-focused Sonrisa Net. Much has been written about weather guru Don Anderson. Sadly, he passed away in 2012. The volunteer work of these men and others has been extremely generous and they take their self-assigned jobs very seriously.

Geary's three-day forecasts for the passage down the outside of the Baja peninsula (San Diego to Cabo) and the two Sea of Cortez crossings (north and south crossing) are all excellent. However, he does not offer a prediction beyond today for any of the areas inside the Sea of Cortez. He posts the broadcast on the Internet as well. (See above website listings.)

Due to time constraints on the air, forecasters have to generalize a lot, lumping many miles over many hours into a single "15 knots NNW" kind of statement. When I have Internet available, I find it much easier to look at pictures of the Sea of Cortez or of Mainland Mexico showing wind speeds and directions in a graphical form to get an idea of what will be happening in my particular little spot. Especially in the Sea of Cortez where the wind wraps around the towering mountains, changing its direction and intensity with every mile it traverses, a single wind speed and direction forecast can't tell the whole story.

We also like to get a general weather prediction for the air temperature, humidity, sunshine and rain. We use:

- [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

Other websites that can be useful:

- [www.grib.us](http://www.grib.us) — a free downloadable application that allows you to manipulate GRIB files. Windows only.
- [www.buoyweather.com](http://www.buoyweather.com) — a subscription-based marine weather predictor.
- [www.predictwind.com](http://www.predictwind.com) — a subscription-based marine weather predictor
- [www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com) — a general weather forecasting website
- [www.ssec.wisc.edu/data/us\\_comp/us\\_comp.html](http://www.ssec.wisc.edu/data/us_comp/us_comp.html) — Gives a rad\_\_\_ar overview of the most recent conditions
- [www.atmo.arizona.edu/products/wximager/ustr.html](http://www.atmo.arizona.edu/products/wximager/ustr.html) — Gives a radar overview of the most recent conditions

**Tides & Lunar Calendar** — Tides generally run less than 6 feet in most of Pacific Mexico except in the far northern Sea of Cortez, where they can be a lot more (few cruisers venture to that area).

- [www.tide-forecast.com](http://www.tide-forecast.com) — Has a good graphic layout that shows where in the tide sequence you are right now.
- [www.tides4fishing.com/mx](http://www.tides4fishing.com/mx) — An alternative tide forecasting site that includes solar/lunar and other info too.

It is nice to know how much moon you will have on an overnight crossing. This website detects where you are from your IP address and generates a lunar calendar for the month. It also lets you put a red pinpoint on any location in the world and then create a lunar calendar for the month:

- [www.kwathabeng.co.za/travel/moon/full-moon-calendar.html](http://www.kwathabeng.co.za/travel/moon/full-moon-calendar.html)

### **Sailing in Mexico**

The best sailing in Mexico is north of Cabo Corrientes: in the Sea of Cortez, in Banderas Bay (Puerto Vallarta area), and in the "crossing zone" between Cabo San Lucas, La Paz, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta. South of Cabo Corrientes — the Gold Coast (Costa Alegre) and south to Zihuatanejo — has very light wind and it tends to run parallel to the coast, making it either right on the nose or dead astern as you sail between those anchorages.

We have sailed about half of the time that we have been in transit north of Cabo Corrientes and 10% of the time south of there.

This translates to somewhere around 5-10% of all the miles we have covered as the crow flies. In order to sail in Mexico you have to be willing to tack, to sail dead downwind and to sail at 2 or 3 knots. Romping sailboat rides in 15-knot winds on flat seas are not common, but they can be found. One of the best ways to do that kind of sailing is to daysail. Our favorite places for daysailing have been Manzanillo Bay, at the south end of the Costa Alegre (Gold Coast), Loreto Bay

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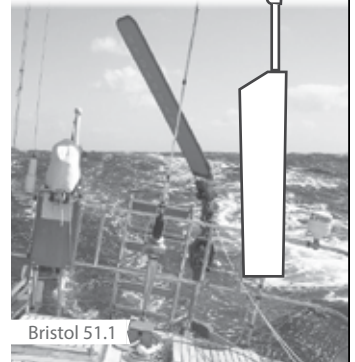
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between Isla Carmen and the Baja peninsula north of La Paz in the Sea of Cortez, Acapulco Bay, and the Bahías de Huatulco. Banderas Bay (Puerto Vallarta) is another good spot. In any of these places you will likely be one of the only boats out daysailing.

Fishermen's "long lines," or nets, crop up in certain places. We have seen one in the Sea of Cortez, five or six in the Isla Isabel / Mazatlan area, one south of the penal colony islands Islas Marias outside Banderas Bay, and one on the Gold Coast south of Cabo Corrientes. They are marked by some kind of buoy at each end, and these end buoys are a few hundred yards or a few miles apart. The two end buoys may have a flag on them and may have a second smaller buoy floating nearby. Reports from people who have sailed into them are that you can cut them fairly easily with a knife.

The VHF radio is an experience unto itself in Mexican waters. The fishermen go crazy on channel 16, especially out at sea late at night. They whoop and holler and whistle at each other. They hold the mic way too close and yell into it in very fast and excited-sounding Spanish. I asked a Bolivian cruiser what the heck they were saying, and he said he couldn't understand them either and that they have their own jargon. Sometimes they hold the mic to their radio speakers and play songs on Channel 16.

Sometimes they make animal sounds and other weird noises. In between, the cruisers hail each other and the freighters and cruise ships hail the port captains, all sounding very formal. I once heard a Mexican voice say in Spanish, "This channel is for serious mariners, not animals." To which the reply was a loud chicken squawk and then silence. Channel 22 is the channel cruisers use to hail each other when not underway, and many busy anchorages host morning nets on Channel 22.

### **Emily's Thoughts on Boat Preparation**

If you are outfitting a boat for cruising, I hope this section offers some food for thought and sparks some ideas. We have found that it is easy to get caught up in a mindset of never-ending boat projects to the point where the projects overshadow the cruising. Starting north of the border with a slew of upgrades, it is really tempting to continue taking on huge boat upgrade projects in Mexico. In addition, things break, and suddenly The Boat turns into a 50-hour-a-week job with no time left for sightseeing and enjoying Mexico itself. Soon frustration sets in. "When does the boat work end and the cruising begin?" one friend asked me in jest, but not really joking. Here are some thoughts I've had about some of the most popular upgrades:

**Solar Power and Watermakers for Marina-based Living** — If you are going to be in Mexico for just a season or two, and you have the budget to spend 50% or more of your time in marinas, you may be best off skipping the watermaker and solar panels. These are two huge, complicated, expensive projects that will only help you when you are anchored out. For a lot of people the time spent anchoring out is just a few weeks in the Sea of Cortez, a few days here and there between La Paz, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta, and a few weeks on the Gold Coast. The \$10-15,000 outlay for a watermaker and solar power/arch setup might be much better spent at the swank resort marinas and on trips inland to Mexico's famous landmarks. Doesn't sitting in a hot tub or visiting the extensive but distant Mayan ruins and dramatic landscapes sound better than overseeing a worker installing

your upgrades, or worse, doing it yourself?

If you stay at a marina for a few weeks and are then in transit for a week or two before settling into the next marina, a Yamaha or Honda 2000 generator will keep the batteries happy on days you don't use your engine, and a large alternator will top them off when you motor between anchorages. If you have good-sized water tanks you can manage with onboard water from the last marina stop.

Some of the happiest cruisers we've met are people who didn't install these expensive items. The water at the marinas is usually (but not always) good.

If in doubt, you can always filter the water at the dock with a 1-micron filter and a carbon filter in series, or you can add a carbon filter at a sink onboard. If you are fussy about drinking water, it is easy to stock up with bottled water in gallon containers, as these are carried in even the tiniest one-room stores.

US camping stores sell collapsible water jugs in 2.5- and 5-gallon sizes. Grab a few of these before you set out and you can increase your onboard water supply without having to store the bottles on deck when they're empty.

### **Solar Power and Watermaker for Living on the Hook**

— On the other hand, if you are going to anchor out most of the time or are planning a longer cruise to places beyond Mexico that don't have so many marinas, solar power and a watermaker are two awesome upgrades. For us it made sense to get the biggest ones we could.

Our DC fridge and freezer eat up about 100-120 amp hours every 24 hours. Our 555 watts of solar panels tied to a 60 amp MPPT charge controller are just barely sufficient in the winter.

On good sunny days we get anywhere from 150 amps in December/January to 230 amps in June/July. We need to run the engine (with its 100-amp alternator) for a few hours every third or fourth day in the wintertime. This works out fine because that is generally about the time we are ready to move on anyway.

We have met a lot of sailors in Mexico who did not install enough solar power before starting out and decided to add more in Mexico. This isn't easy to do. So if you are considering putting solar power on your boat before starting your cruise, get at least 500 watts, and more if possible.

The panels need to be installed so they are not shadowed and they need to be wired in parallel. Ours are aft of the boom, but they often get a little shade when the sun is on the beam or forward of the beam. Lashing the boom off to one side often helps. Unfortunately, on some older panels, if as little as 5% of a solar panel is shaded, it quits working altogether. If the panels are wired in series this knocks out the whole solar panel array. Placing panels near or under radomes, wind generators or the boom will make it very easy for shadows to creep onto one of the panels and severely impair the system. Of course, while sailing they often end up tilted away from the sun as well as being shaded by the sails.

Our engine-drive watermaker is rated to produce 38 gallons per hour, but it actually makes as much as 50 gallons per hour. In our research we discovered that most DC watermakers require running the engine to keep the batteries at a high enough voltage for the watermaker to operate well, so getting an engine-driven unit that produces five times more water made sense to us. It was the same price as the more popular DC watermakers that produce 6-12 gallons per hour.

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## BAJA HA-HA MELTING POT

One look at the Ha-Ha XXII entry roster at [www.baja-haha.com](http://www.baja-haha.com) shows you that boat types in this year's fleet were as varied as ever, and you can bet that the crews who sail them are as colorful as in years past.

In addition to many first-timers, there are plenty of 'repeat offenders' who want to replay some of the fun and great sailing that they experienced the last time around. Some full-time Mexico cruisers even sail all the way back to San Diego each fall just to re-do the rally.

If you're new to the event, let us explain that the Ha-Ha is a 750-mile cruisers' rally from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas, with stops along the way at Turtle Bay and Bahia Santa Maria.

See 'Lectronic Latitude' for updates: [www.latitude38.com](http://www.latitude38.com). In the magazine, look for fleet profiles this summer and a complete recap in December.



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## MEET THE FLEET

Among the important dates to note (on next page) is *Latitude's* annual Mexico-Only Crew List and Ha-Ha Party, September 2. There, hundreds of potential crew mix and mingle with Ha-Ha boat owners who are looking for extra watch-standers.

Get a head start on the process at our constantly updated Crew List at [www.latitude38.com](http://www.latitude38.com). As many Ha-Ha vets will confirm, the best way to prepare for doing the event in your own boat is to crew for someone else first.

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## IMPORTANT DATES

Sept. 2, 4-6 p.m. — Mexico Cruising Seminar, featuring presenters from Mexico marinas. Free! Encinal YC in Alameda.

Sept. 2, 6-9 p.m. — Mexico-Only Crew List Party and Baja Ha-Ha Reunion at Encinal YC in Alameda.

Sept. 15, midnight — Deadline for all entries to be received.

Oct. 17 — Ha-Ha Welcome to San Diego Party, Downwind Marine, 12-4 pm. Ha-Ha entrants only.

Oct. 24 — Pacific Puddle Jump seminar, West Marine, San Diego, 5 pm.

Oct. 25, 11 am — Skipper's meeting, West Marine, San Diego. Skippers only please.

Oct. 25, 1 pm — Ha-Ha Halloween Costume Party and Barbecue, West Marine, San Diego.

Oct. 26, 10 am — San Diego Harbor Ha-Ha Parade.

Oct. 26, 11 am — Start of Leg 1

Oct. 31, 8 am — Start of Leg 2

Nov. 4, 7 am — Start of Leg 3

Nov. 6 — Cabo Beach Party

Nov. 7 — Awards presentation hosted by the Cabo Marina.

Nov. 19, 4-7 pm — La Paz Beach Party. Mexican folk dancing, live music and more.

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### PLEASE NOTE:

Correspondence relating to the event can be emailed to [andy@baja-haha.com](mailto:andy@baja-haha.com). Please don't call *Latitude 38* with questions. The Ha-Ha is a separate operation.

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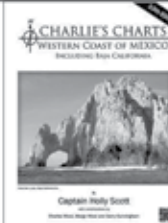
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The salty, grubby marine environment requires lots of fresh water to keep things clean. My husband Mark attaches a hose to the watermaker's sample tube so we can hose down the decks while making water (although the water pressure is light). Snorkeling gear and kayaking gear need rinsing after use, and it is nice to rinse off salty feet and salty bodies after swimming. We also have fresh-water-flush toilets. We use about 20 to 30 gallons of water a day.

**Anchor & Rode** — In Mexico we have been able to anchor in 15 to 25 feet of water almost everywhere, and we put out 120' of chain regardless of the depth because there is usually plenty of swinging room. When a Sea of Cortez Norther or Corumuel or Westerly blows in we let out more chain, often as much as 250'. We thought it was a little crazy when we followed the advice of seasoned cruisers and installed 300' of chain, but we're sure glad we have it now, as we have never dragged. Snorkeling over our 60-lb. Ultra anchor (and Ultra flip swivel) we have seen a case where the boat pulled the chain in a 360-degree circle around the anchor, and the anchor neatly cork-screwed into the sand. The chain's pattern on the sand was very pretty. I wish I'd had an underwater camera to capture it!

### Day-to-Day Life in Mexico

**Money** — There are lots of places to get the current exchange rate between the Mexican peso and US or Canadian



*It's smart to always carry small bills. Twenty pesos = roughly \$2.*

dollar. One site with a historical perspective and current rate is: [www.x-rates.com/d/MXN/USD/graph120.html](http://www.x-rates.com/d/MXN/USD/graph120.html). Although in the past few years the exchange rate has hovered between 11 and 13 pesos to \$1 USD, most people use a 10-to-1 exchange rate in their heads when trying to figure out prices on the fly.

The best place to change money is with your debit card at ATM machines located within bank buildings. By using a bank's ATM machine you have someone to go to if the machine doesn't give you your money. (Three different friends have told me a free-standing Mexican ATM machine shorted them their money or gave them nothing at all, and they had little recourse). You can't exchange money with a bank teller unless you have an account at the bank, and the money changers on the streets don't give great rates.

You will be charged a fee by the bank that changes your money, usually about 19-27 pesos, and unless your bank has a relationship with the Mexican bank, your bank will likely charge a \$2-\$3 fee too. So we prefer to change as much money as possible whenever we do it (6,000 to 8,000 pesos seems typical with most cruisers I've talked to), and the final

exchange rate after the two sets of fees works out to about a few tenths of a peso less than the advertised rate.

The receipts never show the exchange rate you were given, so we find out what rate we got when we look at our bank account online after the fact. HSBC, Bancomer, Banamex, Santander and Scotiabank are in most cities.

Credit card fraud is rampant in Mexico. In one year we had five cases of fraud on three different credit cards. I guess it took us a while to learn our lesson. So (in our opinion) the bottom line is: Avoid using your credit card. Our last fraud was either at an Ensenada marina or at the main TelCel office in Ensenada, so even if you are dealing with an established, above-the-board big business, your card may get compromised. Look up "ATM skimmers" or "credit card skimmers" online to learn more about some of the ways credit card fraud is accomplished, both at US bank ATM machines and abroad.

All that being said, it can still be helpful to have a credit card available for emergencies or for purchases where you trust the merchant. Most credit cards charge a fee for changing the currency from pesos to US dollars. However, Capital One credit cards are terrific for all international travel because they do not charge any kind of a fee for changing money.

You will need lots of smaller bills when you are in smaller towns, i.e. 20-, 50- and 100-peso notes. We have found some places are challenged to make change when you hand them a 200-peso note (worth roughly \$20). Lots of 2-, 5- and 10-peso coins are also handy for tipping. If the ATM machine gives you a wad of 500-peso notes, go inside the bank and get some small ones.

### Food & Provisioning

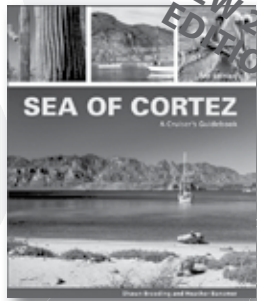
**Warehouse Stores** — There are some warehouse stores on the Mexican coast. Sam's Club is more prevalent in the coastal port towns than Costco. The only coastal Costcos are in Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco. The one in PV is very difficult to get to, especially if you are staying in La Cruz, as there is no bus to it. The cab ride back to La Cruz from that Costco is about 100 pesos (\$7.50). Sam's Club is much more common in coastal Mexico (Manzanillo, Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlan and La Paz) and is relatively easy to reach in every town. Before buying or renewing your club card, check the Mexican locations online, as new Costcos and Sam's Clubs will continue to pop up.

**Supermarkets** — There are lots of big supermarkets in the major cities (Ensenada, La Paz, Loreto, San Carlos, Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo, Zihuatanejo). The Mexican chains are Soriana, Comercial Mexicana (which has a line of mammoth supermarkets called "MEGA") and Ley.

Walmart is in most of those cities too. If you need to do a big provisioning run, take the bus there and a cab back. Most cab rides are around 30 to 50 pesos (\$2.30-\$3.80). Negotiate the fare before you hop in.

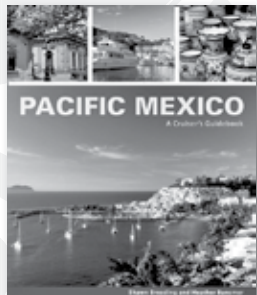
The selection and prices are all over the map, both in the warehouse stores and in the major supermarkets. American packaged products are often more expensive than in the US due to import taxes. Some brands have a big presence in Mexico and some are nonexistent. For instance, Kellogg's cereals are everywhere, some General Mills products are re-branded Nestle, a handful of Quaker cereals can be found and Post cereals don't exist at all. If you have certain products you can't live without, stock up before leaving the US. If you are





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willing to take the time in the bigger cities, you can find just about everything if you check each of the big supermarkets.

Soriana and Comercial Mexicana (Mega) both have club cards for frequent shoppers. It is easy to sign up for a card and you will accumulate points. Every so often it pays off. I've never fully grasped the subtleties of these cards, but a few times we've had a hundred or so pesos deducted from our grocery bill at the checkout counter.

It is customary to tip the bagger a few pesos for bagging your groceries. I have heard rumors that they are not paid by the stores, but I don't know if this is really true. Also, we purchased two big insulated "cold bags" and keep some cold packs in our freezer. This helps keep the refrigerated items cold during the long trek back to the boat.

**Public Markets** — Many bigger towns have a Mercado Publico — a central public market. These usually take up nearly a city block and are enclosed with lots of booths for different vendors. The meat, fish, poultry and produce is brought in from the outlying farms. Prices aren't posted, so it's a great time to practice your Spanish numbers as you ask what different items cost. You bag what you want and pay the person near the booth's register. Often lots of other things are for sale — there might be a hat booth, a straw basket booth, a hardware booth, a broom booth, a DVD booth, etc. For us gringos, it can feel like a very third world experience, but it is also very colorful and exciting.

**Small Grocery Stores** — In smaller towns, villages and on the back streets of the cities you'll find corner "tiendas" or "abarrotes." These are small convenience stores and grocery stores that carry essentials. These little one-room shops usually have a few vegetables (onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and maybe a few others), lots of canned goods, bread, boxed milk, soaps, cold drinks, bottled water, beer and other basics.



**Shopping at local markets can be lots of fun.**

They are often called a "mini-super."

There are US-style convenience store chains as well. Oxxo is the most common convenience store chain. Similar to 7-11 or Circle K, it can be found on many city street corners. The

beer breweries also have chains of convenience stores that sell their beer and other basics. Modelo, Pacifico and Tecate all have convenience stores. For Corona fans: Modelo makes Corona.



**US-style supermarkets are becoming common in larger cities.**

**Dollar Stores** — There are dollar stores in Mexico. The most common are Waldo's ("*Todo a un precio*" — "Everything at one price") and Solo Un Precio. Just like dollar stores in the US, they sell all kinds of cheap goodies.

**Provisioning before leaving the US** — Specialty items, from favorite toiletries to spices, sauces and condiments, may or may not be available in Mexico, so stock up on those before you leave. (See more on this subject at Emily's website: <http://roadslesstraveled.us>)

**Provisioning in Mexico** — Many big city supermarkets have a *gringo* section, and that is often stocked with Kirkland (Costco) brand items, although the prices are more than in the US. Breton crackers, fancy mustards and olives can often be found on these shelves. I've even seen peanut-butter pretzels.

Mexican dairy products are not the same as in the US. For some reason the fresh milk goes sour a lot faster — is it inferior processing, or does the US use more potent chemicals? Who knows? (Again, you'll find much more at Emily's site.)

Fresh fish is often a good choice. The Spanish names are different. Fish we have enjoyed immensely are *cabrilla* (bass) and *sierra* (Spanish mackerel), as well as *dorado* (mahi-mahi).

*Pollo asado* is grilled chicken sold at outdoor stands. This chicken is delicious. Choose a stand that has a crowd of Mexicans around it, and it will be tasty and safe to eat. A whole chicken is usually around 100 pesos (\$7.50) and you can also buy half and quarter chickens. They are often split along the sternum and laid out flat on the grill so they look like roadkill. They are sold with corn tortillas and often with delicious flavored rice. This is a terrific thing to buy prior to a long passage. You can nibble the chicken plain, make chicken salad or sandwiches, turn it into a stir-fry, or wrap it in a tortilla with cheese and heat it up.

Tacos on the street are also a great way to go for cheap eats. A good price is about 8 to 20 pesos per taco (around \$0.60 to \$1.50). Two make a meal and three stuff you. They are served open so you can fill them with toppings and then



*You may meet both locals and cruisers when shopping in 'tiendas'.*

roll them up yourself. Always choose places that are crowded with Mexicans. They know where the good food is.

**Boat Parts** — Because all Mexicans eat there is, of course, an abundance of food to be had, even if it isn't quite what you're used to at home. But not many Mexicans own cruising boats, so finding parts for the boat is a challenge. Even finding simple tools and hardware is a challenge.

The best chandlery we've seen is Lopez Marine in La Paz. It is about the size of West Marine in San Diego. If they don't have it on the shelf they can order it for you from the US. Prices are 10% to 30% higher than in the US. All the other chandleries we visited in Mexico were fishing oriented and had few, if any, sailboat-specific parts. My eyes popped out of my head when I saw a snap shackle at Lopez Marine — it was the first I had seen since West Marine in San Diego six months earlier, and we had been all over the Mexican coast at that point.

The rule in Mexico for buying anything is: if you see and think you might want it someday, buy it, because you won't see it again. That goes for the humongous jar of Skippy peanut-butter and it goes for the gizmo-widget that looks as if it might come in handy in a crisis at sea.

Most hardware stores (*ferreterias*) are small one- or two-room shops that carry a variety of general purpose tools and parts. The selection is often minimal and sometimes a bit weird. They may have 100 screws of one length and pitch, six of another, and none of any others. When you ask for an item they might hand you a dusty, opened box with something similar to what you want inside. You have to rely on your own ingenuity and creativity to make the best out of what you find in these little places. That's what the Mexicans do, and they are extremely good at it.

Some hardware stores have specialties — the nuts-and-bolts-and-screws store, the tool store, etc. Little is available in stainless steel. Home Depot has a few stores in Mexico, and they are much the same as the stores in the US, but they don't

sell things the Mexicans don't buy. Appliances are smaller; the selection of things like faucets is minimal. The major US auto parts stores like Napa Auto Parts are also common in Mexico. Again, patience, lots of walking, and creativity are key. Most store clerks will point you to another store if they don't have what you are looking for. You will get in lots of miles on foot.

In many ways we have had some of our best days getting to know the Mexicans and their culture when we wandered the back streets of different towns looking for a particular part. We might not have found the part, but we had a chance to practice our Spanish and experience a little of life in a culture that is very different from our own.

Major replacement parts can be brought into Mexico, but it is a complicated process that is heavily taxed. Some cities like La Paz have an enterprising person that will drive to the US and carry packages over the border for you for a fee (they avoid the import tax for you by not declaring the part at the border crossing). Otherwise, if the parts are shipped by a commercial shipper they have to go through customs in a major inland city (Mexico City or Guadalajara) and an import duty is imposed. We have not done either of these things, so I won't mislead you any further.

## Wi-Fi Communications

**Telcel Banda Ancha Amigo Alto 3G USB Modem** — For Internet access from the boat we found the TelCel USB modem to be very valuable. It uses the TelCel cell phone towers to operate, and there are cell towers wherever there is a good-sized town. It is a small stick that plugs into the computer's USB port. The first time you plug it in it will download some application software onto your computer. You run that software to make the USB modem connect to a cell tower.

TelCel (pronounced "Tell SELL") is owned by the world's richest man, Carlos Slim, but it is not a particularly easy device to buy or renew. The best way to get one is to go to a main "TelCel — Atención A Clientes" office building. These are huge buildings in major cities (Ensenada, La Paz, Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan, PV, Manzanillo, Ixtapa). Inside (often



*Basic marine products are now available in larger coastal cities.*

upstairs) there is a row of 20 or so clerk windows, like you find at a huge bank or at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Don't bother with any of the small TelCel shops on the street. They are cell phone oriented and don't have what you need.

The big TelCel offices are run something like the Department of Motor Vehicles too: you tell the receptionist what product you are there for and she gives you a number. Then you stand in line for as much as an hour until a window

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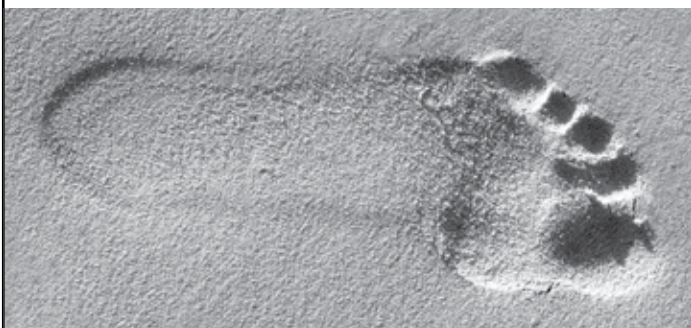
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opens up. Like the check-in process for entering Mexico, this whole process is ever evolving, but I will explain here what we have gone through to purchase and renew our TelCel Banda Ancha. It is just a guideline.

The product you want is the Banda Ancha Amigo Alto 3G. The 3G is pronounced "trays jeega," but the important thing is to get a clerk who speaks English. Once at the clerk's window, it will take a while for the paperwork to be processed. You will then be sent to a line to pay for it.

Your purchase should include both the USB modem and the first month's 500 pesos of upload/download. After you have paid (it might be handled in two transactions) you return to your clerk's window with the receipt and they give you the USB modem stick.

Before leaving the building, take out your laptop, plug in the stick and verify that it works. Look for the word *Idioma* (Language) in the software. It may be in the *Herramientas* (Tools) menu. By clicking *Idioma* you can set the language to English. If you can't get it working, ask for help and stick around until it does. Make a note of the cell phone number that has been assigned to your USB modem.

We got a Huawei modem stick and it works great. Other cruisers like their Huawei stick too. Our first stick was a Nokia and the Macintosh implementation of its software couldn't go through the steps necessary to renew the account at the end of the month. A real headache. The stick lights up blue if it is a 3G connection and green otherwise. Much of the time it is green. The fastest connection I've seen is in La Paz and has a download speed of just under 2.5 Mbps and an upload speed of around 0.15 Mbps. To compare this to your current Internet connection, go to <http://www.speedtest.net> and do the speed test. In most anchorages the download speed is more like 0.5 Mbps and upload is around 0.07 Mbps. Pretty pitiful, but it sure is better than nothing and it teaches you patience, a critical skill for cruising. Sitting in the cockpit, aiming the stick toward the cell tower and even holding the laptop overhead can all make a difference in the speed (I held our laptop overhead off and on for 45 minutes while we left Tenacatita during the March 2011 tsunami so we could get the latest news reports on how the waves were affecting the California coast. We had connectivity — of sorts-

-for six miles out). The cost is 500 pesos (~\$40) per month, and the USB modem stick is a few hundred pesos. You buy 500 pesos of access at a time and you get 3GB of combined uploads and downloads. You can buy more than one packet of 500 pesos, but they are distinct purchases and you should get a separate receipt for each. I found it best to stick to one month's advance payment at a time.

The 3GB of access is enough to send and receive email,



***Beautiful sunny days are the norm in Mexico — often with stunning sunsets. But hurricanes are a legitimate concern during summer months.***

surf the web, watch some YouTube and news videos, and access social media websites. If you spend a lot of time on YouTube or watching news videos or downloading large files you will use it up faster.

You can see your approximate usage in the Statistics tab in the TelCel software. For a more accurate accounting, especially if you access TelCel from more than one computer, you need to set up an account online. To do this go to <http://www.mitelcel.com> and create a NIP (password) to go along with the cell number of your modem. Once you have logged in you can go to "Internet TelCel" and click on "Consulta" see the exact amount you have used so far. On the right hand side bar under "Mi Cuenta" you can go to "Consulta tu Saldo" to see the balance of pesos in your account.

***Baja Ha-Ha cruisers head south from Bahía Santa María.***



Whether or not you use all your 3GB, your account will expire after 30 days at a specific hour, minute and second (given in your online account). The communication between you and TelCel is handled through text messages in the software, and you will be notified when it expires. All the text messages are in Spanish, so a Spanish-English dictionary really helps. Or, you can copy the text from the message into the Google Translator (<http://translate.google.com/>) to get it translated into English.

In order to renew your service, you need to put more money in your account and then inform TelCel to apply it to another month of Amigo 3G access. This is a two-step process. You can put more money in your account any time by going to a chain market — such as Soriana, Comercial Mexicana (MEGA), Chedraui, Walmart, Oxxo — and asking the checkout person to put 500 pesos on your USB modem's cell phone number. Just show them the phone number and ask for 500 pesos to be put on your account.

Once the money is in your account you will get a text message in your TelCel software telling you it has been received. Activate it after the current month has expired, not before. To activate it, open the TelCel application on your computer and go to the TEXT tab (for Text Messages). In the "Send message to:" field put: 5050. In the body of the message write: bat30 You will get a text message reply stating that the service has been restarted. It will also tell you the date and time the service expires. Or do it through your <http://www.mitelcel.com> account. You can also purchase air time with a credit card through [www.mitelcel.com](http://www.mitelcel.com), but when I last tried it was not a secure credit card transaction.

Of course all this will probably change, so this is just an approximation of what to expect. Patience is key, but the reward is Internet access from the boat. A lot of times the speed is not great. Sometimes the servers are down (and if so it will likely take until the next business day for them to be brought up again). However, something is better than nothing, and it's all part of the cultural experience of living in a foreign country.

### The Cost of Cruising in Mexico

Everyone has a different budget, and everyone spends what they have. So it is impossible to say "it costs xyz to cruise in Mexico." However, I'll give a very rough idea of what some of the costs are that we have seen.

For us, keeping a boat in Mexico, living on it and sailing it six months a year, maintaining it, flying back and forth to it, insuring it and storing it when we're not there costs around \$13,000-\$14,000 per year. If we were on it full-time and didn't fly back and forth or store it, our annual cost would be around \$21,000-\$24,000.

Getting our boat ready to cruise - anchor system upgrade, watermaker installation, solar installation, dinghy & outboard, downwind sailing gear, safety gear, interior comfort stuff and small goodies cost about 20% of the purchase price.

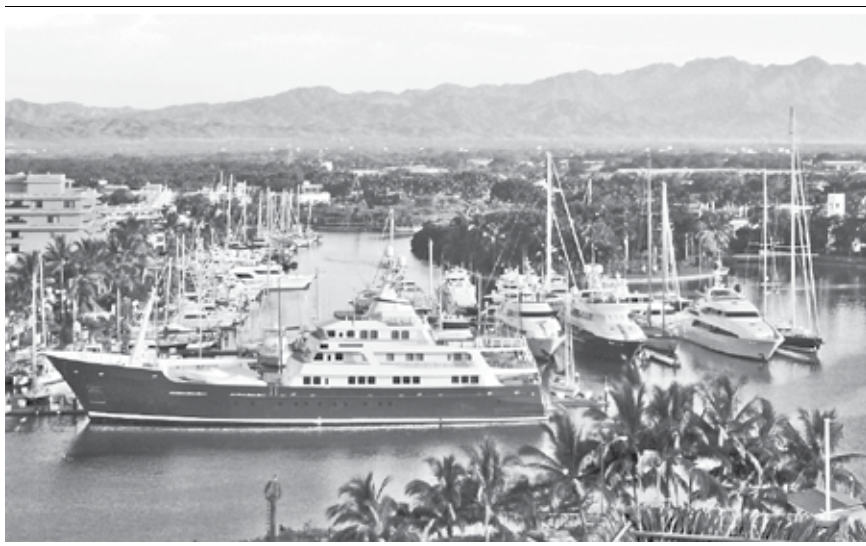
**Food** — On average we found our food bill is about 90% of what it is in the US, slightly higher in the northern parts of Mexico and slightly lower in the southern parts. Beer is typically anywhere from 55 pesos a sixpack (\$4.25) for Pacifico/Modelo to 72 pesos a sixpack (\$5.50) for Bohemia Oscura (a darker more premium beer). Many grocery items are taxed 15%. American branded items seem expensive.

For instance Listerine is 42 pesos (\$3.25) for a 16-oz bottle. Colgate toothpaste is 35 pesos but for the same size tube the Mexican brand called Fresca is 6 pesos. So it is all in how you shop.

**Restaurants** — We don't eat out much, but simple street food is cheap: 100 pesos (\$7.50) can buy each of us a meal and a drink. At the beach *palapa* bars (sitting under an umbrella on a plastic chair in the sand) a beer is typically 12 pesos (\$0.95) in the far south and 25 pesos (\$1.95) farther north. Fine dining in the high end resorts is similar in price to comparable US restaurants.

**Fuel** — Fuel pricing is government-controlled so it can't swing up and down by huge amounts, and there is a tax on it. In addition, marinas charge a service fee for using their docks and that fee can be anywhere from 10% to 20%. So in the end our fuel costs in 2011 have averaged around \$3.10 to \$3.20 per gallon. You can't avoid the dock service fee by showing up with jerry jugs — the fee applies no matter how the fuel is delivered. Still it's not a bad deal, as diesel in Arizona is running around \$3.65 per gallon now at the end of 2011.

We use about half as much fuel per month while cruising as we do while RVing. This may sound surprising, but we drive our truck in the US less than some people might expect and we motor our sailboat in Mexico more than we ever expected. On the boat we burn about 2/3 to 3/4 of a gallon of fuel per hour, and we traveled from San Diego down



**Mexico has some excellent, top-notch marinas, but they're not cheap. Seen here is the Paradise Village Marina near Puerto Vallarta.**

to Zihuatanejo, up to San Carlos, and back down to Puerto Vallarta in a year. Our monthly fuel cost during that time was somewhere around \$250.

**Marinas** — Marina costs are typically \$30-\$60 per night and \$600-\$1,000 per month for a 45-ft slip. Some marinas discount the price slightly after 3 days or a week. Most offer a monthly rate, although both the popular Marina Riviera Nayarit (La Cruz in Banderas Bay) and swank Paradise Village (Nuevo Vallarta in Banderas Bay) charge around \$30 per day in winter no matter how many days you stay (\$0.60 to \$0.65 per foot per day plus tax). Rates drop in the summer. We paid \$565/month for a slip in Marina San Carlos for the summer of 2011. Paradise Village offers a summertime



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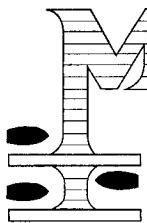


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5-month pre-paid contract rate of \$0.38 per foot per day plus 15% tax. Marinas in Mazatlan had summer rates of \$0.24 per foot (plus tax). The Fonatur/Singlar government-run marinas are less than the private marinas, but they have been raising their prices significantly in 2011. If you wanted to spend half your cruising time in marinas and had a 40-45' monohull, a comfortable budget figure would be around \$400 per month. This would allow for some shorter stays and some month-long stays.

**Boat Services** — Having the bottom cleaned by a diver generally costs about \$1 per foot. Having the boat washed is the same. We got the hull waxed in San Carlos for 700 pesos (\$53). If you use dive tanks to clean the bottom yourself and don't have a compressor, it generally costs about 100 pesos (\$7.50) to have one tank refilled at a dive shop (and you have to lug it there).

**Boat Insurance** — Insurance varies a lot by boat age, sailing experience, where you keep your boat during hurricane season and whether you go south of Acapulco. Keeping our boat in San Carlos during hurricane season, staying north of Acapulco the whole season, and having plenty of sailing experience, insuring our newer boat costs \$1,600 per year.

### What to do During Hurricane Season

Starting in February people begin discussing their summer plans. The marinas in Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlan, La Paz and San Carlos are popular, as is dry storage in La Paz, Loreto and San Carlos/Guymas, and other spots as well. Some marinas offer significant summer discounts, especially when pre-paid. We left our boat in San Carlos in the water for 3 months and were shocked to return and find that everything was just as we left it. A quick boat wash and bottom cleaning and the boat was ready to sail away. Some people who left their boats for six months in dry storage in Loreto and San Carlos reported having to clean a lot of dust off the deck (and some inside).

San Carlos is a popular option for people from Arizona. The bus line Tufesa (this is the link for Bus Schedules) leaves from Guaymas and goes to 27th St. and McDowell in Phoenix. The "Especial" bus trip from San Carlos to Phoenix is \$61 per person and takes 10-11 hours if you take the regular daytime bus. It stops in 4 or 5 towns in Mexico plus the military checkpoint, the border crossing and again in Tucson. The buses are regular Greyhound style buses used for 2-4 hour trips in the US.

The "Ejecutivo" overnight bus is \$81 and takes just 8-9 hours and is a much better option. It stops in two towns in Mexico plus the military checkpoint, border crossing and again in Tucson. The buses are very luxurious. There are only three seats per row, two on one side and one on the other. I found them wide enough to curl up in and try to sleep. Bring layers because the buses can be heavily air-conditioned. Our driver in the US was kind enough to turn off the a/c (we were two of three people on the bus). Our driver in Mexico had an attitude and refused to turn it off (even though the driver's cab is separate and has its own thermostat...). The buses are theoretically equipped with Wi-Fi and electricity. On the US side the driver turned on the electricity so we could run the laptop from its charger cable. On the Mexican side the driver refused to! The Wi-Fi never worked on either side. But it was still a very cool bus ride.

The bus depot in Phoenix is in an unsafe area. If you are there at night stay close to the terminal. Taxi cabs come to

meet the buses.

On Emily's site (<http://roadslesstraveled.us>) you'll find additional insights about living in Mexico including: what clothes to bring, the lowdown on bugs; dinghy and outboard theft and more. And she also discusses in depth a variety of goodies and gadgets to consider bringing along such as a portable SSB radio, a Wi-Fi booster, GMR (walkie-talkie) radios; sun shades, screens and fans; a super siphon hose; and electronic Spanish-English dictionary; LED lighting upgrades; and more.

## A Latitude 38 Addendum:

### Most Common 1st-Timer Mistakes

**Wrongful Anchoring** — The two main causes of faulty anchoring, which lead to anxiety and sleepless nights, are: inadequate equipment and poor technique.

As Einstein noted, everything is relative. So what looks like an enormous anchor and monster rode sitting on a shelf in a chandlery looks like toy stuff when trying to hold a 12-ton boat off a lee shore in a 40-knot blow. Within your cruising budget, there are items you can skimp on, but anchors and rodes should not be among them. Buy big and buy extra. And don't forget the windlass and chafe gear.

The good news about Mexico is that other than at Cabo, where the outer harbor is an uphill sand bottom, and La Paz, where the famous tidal waltz has boats drifting about in all directions, the anchoring conditions are generally very good.

Of course, even the biggest anchor and strongest rode won't do you any good if you don't know how to use them. Throwing the anchor and rode over the side in a bundle while still moving forward is a recipe for disaster. Such a mess will hold in light wind, but as soon as you go to sleep and the breeze comes up, you'll drag right through the fleet.

In most conditions, the proper anchoring technique is to back down at a slow but constant speed, getting the rode to lay out in a straight line. When you get the proper length down, you gradually increase your power in reverse, allowing the anchor to slowly dig in.

**Reefing Madness** — Far too many people sail to Mexico without having a 'clew' about how to properly reef or heave to. Reefing is essential for safety and comfort. And it's useless to practice at the dock, because it's an entirely different experience during a storm at night at sea. If you sail shorthanded, reefing at night is not a bad routine strategy. Sometimes folks heave-to even in light conditions just to catch some rest or a peaceful meal.

**Over-provisioning** — There's not a significant food product you can't find in Cabo, La Paz, Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo or Acapulco. So why cruisers continue to load up with a six-month supply of goods at Costco in San Diego is beyond us. The stuff takes up valuable storage space, overloads the boat, and goes to waste. Besides, there are great *mercados* — and Costcos and Sam's Clubs — all over Mexico.

**Electrical Shortages** — The majority of first-time cruisers greatly underestimate the electrical needs of all the new gear they've had installed. Transmitting on SSB, for example, can really drain a battery. So can refrigerators struggling in tropical heat and watermakers trying to filter the high salin-

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## Principal Cruiser Nets Used by Mexico Cruisers

*(Please Note: Some times and frequencies may have changed. Also, there may be additional nets for which we have no info here.)*

The entire country of Mexico observes daylight saving time, which means you will be in the same time zone (Pacific) as San Diego until you reach Bahia Tortuga. From there until you reach a line between La Cruz and Puerto Vallarta, you will be the same as the Mountain Time Zone, and from there south to Z-town you will be in the Central Time Zone.

Below are listed the current times of the nets, given in UTC (ZULU) time. It's up to you to figure out what time zone you're in to get local time. Note also, that use of cruiser nets has changed substantially due to wide proliferation of HF email.



<u>Time / UTC</u>	<u>Freq / kHz</u>	<u>Net Name</u>
1430 Z daily	..... 3.968 LSB.....	Sonrisa Net (Ham)
1530 Z daily	..... 7192 LSB.....	Chubasco Net: (Ham) Monitors for emergency traffic at 1530.
1600 Z daily	..... 7233.5 LSB.....	Baja California Maritime Service Net (Ham): Forecasts San Diego to Puerto Vallarta, including Sea of Cortez. Weekdays only. Provides backup for AA6TP.
0100 Z daily	..... 8.122.....	Southbound Net (SSB)
0200 Z daily	..... 6516.....	Bluewater Net (SSB)
0230 Z daily	..... 4051 - 4060 ...	North Sea of Cortez Net (SSB)
0430 Z daily	..... 4030 - 4024 ....	Papagayo Net (SSB)
1400 Z daily	..... 6212/6217.....	Amigo Net (SSB)
1600 Z daily	..... 8104 .....	Westbound Net (SSB)

ity water of the Sea of Cortez. The only two solutions are to limit electrical consumption or increase capacity.

**Dinghy Deficit** — When cruising Mexico, your dinghy is not an indulgent toy, but your lifeline with both the shore and greater adventures. For some cruisers, it's their liferaft, too. In our opinion, you need a top-quality dinghy with an outboard powerful enough to plane while carrying the number of people in your crew. That means 6 hp for one, 7 hp for two, and 15 hp for three or four. A good dinghy and outboard combination is expensive, but if you take decent care of it, it should last for five years and still have good resale value. A serviceable second dinghy of some sort is a godsend for boats with larger crews.

Because you'll make so many landings in Mexico, you'll probably want dinghy wheels. You probably won't use the wheels anywhere else, but they're worth it for Mexico alone.

**Health Kick** — While the climate in Mexico is great for drinking, it's even better for the healthy outdoor life and getting yourself into better shape than you've been in years. We all know the formula: Walk a couple of miles a day, swim a mile a day, eat well and drink in moderation. And we all know the results: less weight, lower blood pressure, greater endurance, wilder sex, and better general health.

**Make The Most Of Cruising** — We suggest that everyone about to take off cruising prepare to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the experience. In addition to getting your body into great shape,



*There is nothing like a planing dinghy — but always wear a kill cord.*

and doing the normal things such as sailing, diving, hiking, swimming and exploring, use the free time to expand your mind in other ways. Have mental goals, too.

While in Mexico, interact as much as possible with the locals, for they are wonderful people. One of the biggest surprises is how friendly and helpful most of the civil servants have become.

### Where to After Mexico?

Most cruisers with open-ended timetables spend at least



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2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				

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a year exploring Mexican waters. When they eventually head south along the Central American coast, there's much to see and do. But sooner or later they have to ask themselves the question, "Where to next?" Some continue on to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, but most either hang a left into the Caribbean — it's a 1,200-mile beat to the islands of the Lesser Antilles — or head west toward the South Pacific.

**The Pacific Puddle Jump** — The latter choice requires a 3,000-mile passage to the Marquesas Islands, a voyage we like to call the Pacific Puddle Jump. Because this is one of the longest, and therefore most challenging, crossings in the realm of cruising, *Latitude 38* dedicates a lot of ink to reporting on each year's fleet, and we work with the Tahiti Tourism board to put on special events in the islands for arriving sailors, such as the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous (late June each year).

*Latitude 38* also hosts annual Pacific Puddle Jump send-off parties each winter at both Nuevo Vallarta and Balboa, Panama. Look for date announcements in *Electronic Latitude* postings ([www.latitude38.com](http://www.latitude38.com)) and on the official Pacific Puddle Jump website ([www.pacificpuddlejump.com](http://www.pacificpuddlejump.com)). On the website you'll also find fleet lists, photos, and annual recap articles on the passages of previous fleets.

Online registration for the upcoming Puddle Jump will begin in mid-November.

*The Latitude 38 staff hopes you found this guide to be helpful as you enter the cruising lifestyle. If you find errors within the text, please bring them to our attention: [editorial@latitude38.com](mailto:editorial@latitude38.com)*

# Marina Vallarta

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President

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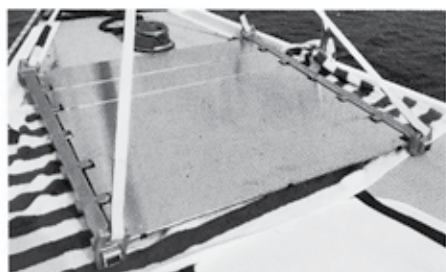
[www.novamarinsurance.com.mx](http://www.novamarinsurance.com.mx)

## REDUCES SIDE-TO-SIDE ROLLING. ESSENTIAL CRUISING EQUIPMENT

ANCHORING, MOORING, DRIFT-FISHING, DIVE BOATS. No more sleepless nights : )

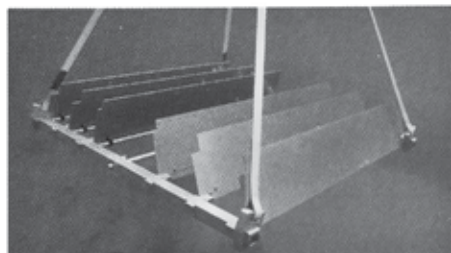


1. Tuck-away Stowable (10x36x4).

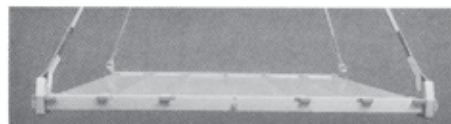


2. From Towel to Water in <2 min.  
No tools, no small parts.

3. Hangs off the side of the boat, from a midship cleat (or pole), about 6' under the surface.



4. On the down-roll, the blades open and the FlopStopper sinks freely.

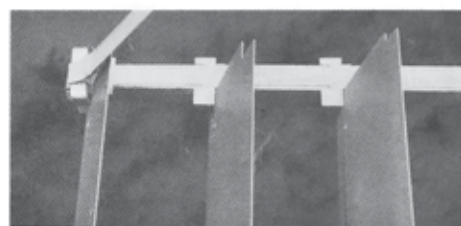


5. On the up-roll, the blades close, creating 8.4 ft<sup>2</sup> of resistance.

- 1) dampens the roll significantly AND
- 2) disrupts the wave/rolling pattern, which
- 3) ends the "harmonic frequency" of the boat roll
- 4) result: slow uproll = next wave "canceled"



Unlike all others, the roll-damping function engages immediately (blades open slightly or fully).



The blades are kept from over-rotating by the blade stops on the channel cap bar + harness.

Makes every anchorage peaceful.

Drinks, Meals, Galley Work = COMFORTABLE

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PATENT PP 62.101,505

by Flat Calm, LLC

### DON'T LEAVE THE MARINA WITHOUT ONE!

Largest Platform \* Fastest Engaging/Most Effective \* Smallest Stow-Size \* Fast and Easy to Assemble and Deploy \* Extremely Durable \* Lowest Cost Per Inch<sup>2</sup> = **SIMPLY THE BEST**



# Contact Info for Major Mexican Marinas



## Approximate Distances in Nautical Miles:

San Diego to Turtle Bay .....	360
Turtle Bay to Bahia Santa Maria .....	240
Bahia Santa Maria to Cabo .....	180
Cabo to Los Frailes .....	45
Cabo to La Paz .....	148
La Paz to Puerto Escondido (Loreto) .....	140
Puerto Escondido (Loreto) to Bahia Concepcion .....	105
Bahia Concepcion to San Carlos .....	80
La Paz to Mazatlan .....	230
Cabo to Mazatlan .....	200
Mazatlan to Puerto Vallarta .....	175
Cabo to Puerto Vallarta .....	295
Puerto Vallarta to Manzanillo .....	175
Manzanillo to Z-town .....	190
Z-town to Acapulco .....	115

**Please Note:** We've done our best to confirm all contact information listed here. Please advise us of errors or omissions.

### BAJA AREA MARINAS

**Ensenada Cruiseport Village Marina** — Ensenada  
 slips .....200, liveboard & guest slips, from 36-68 ft,  
 .....end ties 100-130 ft, mega-yachts up to 360 ft  
 harbormaster.....Jonathan Cervantes  
 phone .....011-52 (646) 178-8801, ext. 3301  
 fax.....011-52 (646) 173-4151  
 email.....reservations@ecpvmarina.com  
 website .....www.ecpvmarina.com  
 VHF.....channels 12 & 16

**Baja Naval Boatyard and Marina** — Ensenada  
 slips .....50, from 33 to 75 ft  
 harbormaster.....Diego Fernandez  
 phone .....011-52 (646) 174-0020  
 boat yd email.....guillermo@bajanaval.com  
 marina email.....marina@bajanaval.com  
 website .....www.bajanaval.com  
 VHF.....channel 77

**Marina Coral** — Ensenada  
 slips .....353, from 30 to 109 ft, end ties: 64 to 100 ft  
 harbormaster.....Arnulfo Espinosa  
 phone .....toll free from US (866) 302-0066,  
 .....01-152 (646) 175-0050  
 fax.....011-52 (646) 175-0058  
 email.....marina@hotelcoral.com  
 website .....www.hotelcoral.com  
 VHF.....channel 71

**Puerto Salina La Marina**, Tijuana, Baja CA, Sur  
 harbormaster.....Arturo Martinez Esquer  
 phone .....1 (866) 365-2562 from the US or  
 .....011-52 (646) 155-4186 to 88  
 email.....info@marinapuertosalina.com  
 website .....www.marinapuertosalina.com

**Marina Cortez** — La Paz  
 slips .....50, from 40' to 303'  
 harbormaster.....J. Eduardo Corona Arballo  
 phone .....011-52 (612) 123-4101  
 .....or 011-52-1 (612) 157-0013  
 fax.....011-52 (612) 125-4212  
 email.....dockmaster@marinacortez.com  
 website .....www.marinacortez.com  
 VHF.....channel 16 & 22

**Marina Palmira** — La Paz  
 slips .....180, from 36 to 150 ft  
 harbormaster.....Enrique Calderon  
 phone .....(877) 217-1513 or 011-52 (612) 121-6159  
 email.....reservations@marinapalmira.com  
 website .....www.marinapalmira.com  
 VHF.....channel 16 & 68

**Marina Costa Baja** — La Paz  
 slips .....250, from 30 to 200 ft; 10 percent overhang  
 manager.....Gabriel Ley  
 phone .....011-52 (612) 121-6225,  
 .....toll free (888) 866 9394, (800) 200-0281  
 fax.....011-52 (612) 121-5764  
 email.....gley@marinacostabaja.com  
 websites .....www.costabaja.com,  
 .....www.marinacostabaja.com

**Marina de La Paz** — La Paz  
 slips .....110, from 30 to 200 ft  
 harbormaster.....Neil Shroyer  
 phone .....011-52 (612) 122-1646  
 fax.....011-52 (612) 125-5900  
 email.....marinadelapaz@prodigy.net.mx  
 website .....www.marinadelapaz.com  
 VHF.....channel 16

**Marina Puerto Escondido** — Loreto  
 slips .....27, from 33 to 75 ft  
 harbormaster.....Isaac Ramos  
 phone .....011-52 (613) 131-8097,  
 .....toll free in México 01-800-800-8008  
 email.....marina@marinapuertoescandido.com  
 website .....www.marinapuertoescandido.com

**Marina Puerto Los Cabos** — San Jose del Cabo  
 slips .....200, from 30-260 ft  
 manager .....Enrique Fernandez del Castillo  
 phone .....011-52 (624) 105-6028  
 .....& 011-52 (624) 105-6181,  
 .....toll free 01 855-578-6222  
 email.....marinainfo@puertoloscabos.com,  
 .....or scollins@puertoloscabos.com  
 website .....www.puertoloscabos.com  
 VHF.....channel 22 A

**Marine Group Boat Works**, San Jose del Cabo (& San Diego)  
 (dry storage facility and boatyard)  
 manager .....Michelle Kiely  
 phone .....(619) 600-5539, 01-52 (624) 105-6500  
 fax.....01-52 (624) 105-6506  
 email.....michelle@marinegroupbw.com  
 website .....www.marinegroupbw.com

**Marina Cabo San Lucas IGY** — Cabo San Lucas  
 slips .....380, up to 365 ft  
 manager .....Darren Carey  
 phone .....011-52 (624) 173-9140  
 .....& 011-52 (624) 143-1252  
 email.....CSL@igymarinas.com  
 website .....www.igymarinas.com/  
 VHF.....channel 88A

**Marinas de Baja** — Cabo San Lucas  
 slips .....25, from 41 to 80 ft  
 harbormaster.....Juan Pablo Montes  
 phone .....011-52 (624) 143-6522,  
 .....011-52 (624) 143-6533  
 email.....info@marinadebaja.com  
 website .....www.grupomarinasdebaja.com

### SAN CARLOS, SONORA AREA MARINAS

**Marina San Carlos & Marina Seca** (dry storage) — San Carlos  
 slips .....338, from 24 to 80 ft  
 harbormaster.....Kirsten Grossman de Zaragoza  
 phone .....011-52 (622) 22-61230,  
 .....011-52 (622) 22-61202  
 email.....info@marinasancarlos.com,  
 .....customerservice@marinasancarlos.com  
 website .....www.marinasantcarlos.com  
 VHF.....channel 16

# Contact Info for Major Mexican Marinas

**Marina Real** — San Carlos  
harbormaster .....Isabel Escobar  
phone .....011-52 (622) 227-0011  
email .....marinareal@prodigy.net.mx  
website .....www.century21marina.com/marina\_real.htm

**Marina Puerto Penasco** — Puerto Penasco  
slips .....20, from 25 to 79 ft  
harbormaster .....Jorge Valdez  
phone .....011-52 (638) 388-6944  
email .....info@marinapuertopenasco.com  
website .....www.marinapuertopenasco.com

## MAZATLAN REGION MARINAS

**Marina Mazatlan** — Mazatlan  
slips .....260, from 30 to 266 ft  
harbormaster .....Jaime Ruiz  
phone .....011-52 (669) 916-7799,  
.....011-52 (669) 669-2936  
fax .....011-52 (669) 669-2937  
email .....atec@marina-mazatlan.com,  
.....atecmarinamazatlan@gmail.com  
website .....www.marina-mazatlan.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**Marina El Cid** — Mazatlan  
slips .....90, from 30 to 120 ft; end ties: 4  
harbormaster .....Gerónimo Cevallos  
phone .....011-52 (669) 916-3468,  
.....US free 1-855-513-4080  
email .....gcevallos@elcid.com  
website .....www.elcidmarinas.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**Marina y Club de Yates Isla Cortes** — Altata  
(120 nm North of Mazatlan)  
slips .....43, up to 80 ft. Dry dock for 20 boats to 35 ft  
harbormaster .....Consuelo Sainz  
phone .....011-52 (672) 854-7157  
email .....Consuelo.sainz@hotmail.com  
website .....www.marinaiislacortes.mx  
VHF .....channel 16

## PUERTO VALLARTA REGION MARINAS

**Marina Riviera Nayarit** — La Cruz de Huanacaxtle  
slips .....340, from 31 to 40 ft  
harbormaster .....Rafael Alcántara Luarte  
phone .....011-52 (329) 295-5526  
email .....harbormaster@marinarivieranayarit.com  
website .....www.marinarivieranayarit.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**Marina Nuevo Vallarta** — Nuevo Vallarta  
slips .....64, from 22 to 130 ft  
harbormaster .....Juan Sebastian Estrada  
phone .....011-52 (322) 297-7000  
email .....juan@marinanuevovallarta.com,  
.....emilio@marinanuevovallarta.com  
website .....www.marinanuevovallarta.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**Marina Pueblo Nautico** — Nuevo Vallarta  
slips .....10, up to 90 ft  
harbormaster .....Javier Velasco  
phone .....011 52 (322) 297-4553  
.....or 011 52 (322) 297-1069  
email .....javelasco@marinapueblonautico.com  
website .....www.marinapueblonautico.com

**Paradise Village Marina** — Nuevo Vallarta  
slips .....200, from 26 to 240 ft  
harbormaster .....Dick Markie  
phone .....011-52 (322) 226-6728  
e-mail .....marina@paradisevillagegroup.com  
website .....www.paradisevillagemarina.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**Marina Vallarta** — Puerto Vallarta  
slips .....351, from 30 to 150 ft  
harbormaster .....Christian Mancebo  
phone .....011-52 (322) 221-0275  
fax .....011-52 (322) 221-0722  
email .....italia@marina-vallarta.com.mx  
website .....www.marina-vallarta.com.mx  
VHF .....channels 18 & 16

**Opequimar Centro Marino** — Puerto Vallarta  
slips .....25  
manager .....Carlos Verjan  
phone .....011-52 (322) 221-1800,  
.....011-52 (322) 221-1978  
email .....info@opequimar.com  
website .....www.opequimar.com  
VHF .....channel 68

## BARRA DE NAVIDAD

**Marina Puerto de la Navidad** — Barra de Navidad  
slips .....207, from 31 to 150 ft End ties: 6  
harbormaster .....Ing Secundino Alvarez  
phone .....011-52 (314) 337-9009  
fax .....011-52 (314) 337-9014  
email .....harbormaster@islaresort.com.mx,  
.....dockmaster@islaresort.com.mx  
website .....www.islanavidad.com.mx

## MANZANILLO

**Marina Las Hadas** — Manzanillo  
slips .....70, med mooring style (stern-to)  
harbormaster .....Adrián Evidarte Ramos  
phone .....011-52 (314) 331-0101  
email .....hadas.marina@brisas.com.mx  
website .....www.lasbrisascollection.com

## IXTAPA / ZIHUATANEJO AREA

**Marina Ixtapa** — Ixtapa  
slips .....583, from 15 to 200 ft  
harbormaster .....Lic. Elsa Zuñiga  
phone .....011-52 (755) 55-3218, (755) 55-30222  
email .....reservations@marina-ixtapa.com,  
.....ezuniga@marina-ixtapa.com  
website .....www.marina-ixtapa.com

## ACAPULCO MARINAS

**Club de Yates Acapulco** — Acapulco  
slips .....350, from 30 to 180 ft  
harbormaster .....Leon Boorenstein  
phone .....011-52 (744) 482-3859  
email .....navegacion@clubdeyatesdeacapulco.com  
website .....www.clubdeyatesacapulco.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**La Marina Acapulco** — Acapulco  
slips .....269, from 30 to 240 ft  
phone .....011-52 74-83-7498  
fax .....011-52 74 83 7505  
email .....marinaacapulco@jarestate.com  
website .....www.lamarinaacapulco.com  
VHF .....channel 16

**Marina Performance** — Acapulco  
slips .....18, Med-mooring-style docking up to 120 ft  
harbormaster .....Alexander Arnold Hudson  
phone .....(01 744) 480-2334  
email .....acapulco@jarestate.com  
website .....www.jarestate.com  
VHF .....channel 16

## HUATULCO, OAXACA

**Marina Chahue** — Huatulco  
slips .....139, from 10 to 170 ft  
phone .....011-52 (958) 587-2652  
email .....egutierrez@fonatur.gob.mx  
website .....www.fonatur.gob.mx

## CHIAPAS

**Marina Puerto Chiapas** — Tapachula  
slips .....70, up to 180 ft  
phone .....011-52 (962) 620-4038  
email .....marinachiapas@hotmail.com  
website .....www.marina-chiapas.com  
VHF .....channel 16

## THE YUCATAN & QUINTANA ROO AREA MARINAS

**Marina Puerto Aventuras** — Puerto Juarez/Riviera Maya  
slips .....125, Med-mooring style docking  
phone .....011-52 (984) 873-5108  
fax .....011-52 (984) 873-5008  
email .....pamarina@puertoaventuras.com.mx  
website .....www.puertoaventuras.com

**Marina Hacienda del Mar** — Cancun  
slips .....80, up to 125 ft  
phone .....011-52 (998) 880-1070  
email .....mperez@marinahaciendadelmar.com  
website .....www.marinahaciendadelmar.com

**Marina Mundo Marino** — Cancun  
slips .....40, from 10 to 65 ft  
phone .....011-52 (998) 849-7257  
fax .....011-52 (998) 849-7259  
email .....mmarino@cancun.com.mx

**Puerto Isla Mujeres** — Isla Mujeres  
slips .....64, up to 80 ft,  
.....and dockage for 10 vessels up to 175 ft  
phone .....011-52 (998) 877-0330;  
.....& 877-1858 / 59 / 60, ext. 211  
email .....marina@puertoislamujeres.com  
website .....www.puertoislamujeres.com

**La Amada Residences & Marina** — Isla Mujeres  
slips .....176 slips / 8 Mega-yacht-sized up to 120 ft  
phone .....from México: 01 (998) 688-0176,  
.....01 (998) 688-0178  
.....from US: 1 (866) 595-9043  
email .....info@laamadamarina.com  
website .....www.igy-laamadamarina.com  
www.laamada.com/marina/

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PLEASE NOTE: We've done our best to make this list as correct and comprehensive as possible. If you find errors or omissions, please let us know by emailing:

**editorial@latitude38.com**

# Latitude 38

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# Vallarta Yacht Club

Vallarta Yacht Club is standing by to welcome Ha-Ha boaters to Banderas Bay, Mexico's premier sailing grounds and center for cruisers. Many Ha-Ha participants have liked Banderas Bay and Puerto Vallarta so much they stayed for years.

## ***Who we are***

We're a 14-year-old, full service yacht club in Nuevo Vallarta, next to Paradise Village Marina. We have reciprocity and recognition with many other yacht clubs.



For local and visiting boaters, we run several regattas. The Vallarta Cup is a four-race series in January. Our signature event is the 24-year-old Banderas Bay Regatta in March. It has both racing and cruising classes. Stick around for it.

If you're going to sail away, we have seminars in the spring on boat maintenance, weather forecasting, provisioning and more. We also have monthly exams for U.S. Ham licences.

We offer all registered Ha-Ha participants two weeks of absolutely free membership. If you're already a member of another yacht club, we offer two months of membership without paying an initiation fee. If you decide to stay around, we have various types of membership. Associate membership is good for a year. Flag membership is good forever. See <http://vallartayachtclub.org/join/membership-information> for details. Try us, you'll like us.

## ***Members get***

- Meals and drinks at low cost at our full service bar and restaurant
- Free Wi-Fi inside the club
- Top notch local entertainment in the club
- Reciprocal privileges at other clubs
- Use of a pool at the club
- Use of a panga
- A great burgee!

