

## The Best of Los Cabos & Baja

It was May of my senior year in college when I found out I was going to Los Cabos for the first time. A publisher in my hometown dreamed up a magazine called *Cabo Living* and hired me—with my stockpile of youthful ambition—to be the editor. All I really knew about Cabo was that Debbie Hunt, the dating-service-crazed redhead in Cameron Crowe’s movie, *Singles* (1992), buys a plane ticket to Cabo, meets an enticing divorcé when she lands, he likes her earrings, they fall in love, and she plans to move there with him if she can get a job at the local TV station. (Aside: There is no local TV station in Cabo, Cameron Crowe.)

I had nothing in common with Debbie Hunt—I was a suburban-bred Kansan barely out of school and she was a grunge-era Seattleite making her way in the world—but I suddenly considered her a kindred spirit. I had reached near Hollywood status because I was going to Cabo, this glamorous and mysterious beachy paradise someone was paying me to explore.

My friend, India, calls Los Cabos “a real cooker,” by which she means all experiences here are amplified. India’s theory—as I interpret it—is that because Los Cabos is surrounded by water on three sides, desert moonscape all around, and mountains to the north, energy in general has nowhere to diffuse, so it swirls around Baja’s tip, making things happen with extra gusto. Couples fall in love, couples separate, old friends reunite, careers take off, careers tank, people evolve, deep friendships take root, healing occurs, and Debbie Hunt meets her sugar daddy, all in the blink of an eye.

Having begun my own career, experienced moments I still can’t believe, and met my beau for life (not to mention a few soul sisters) in Los Cabos, I think India may be right. Above all, its breathtaking landscape, luxurious resorts, delectable restaurants, opulent real estate, and ceaseless adventure make Los Cabos a real cooker.

The funny thing about Baja, though, is that everyone believes his or her area is the peninsula’s seat of, well, everything. In my travels, I’ve heard countless declarations from “best sunset” to “best marlin fishing” and “best surf break” to “best taco” in La Paz, San Felipe, Ensenada, Loreto, and more. And you could drink for weeks if you tried downing every “best margarita in Baja.” Like a true Land’s Endophile, for a short time, I believed Los Cabos represented the best of Baja, mostly for its magical “cooker” aspect, and because I felt that no other place could hold all the promise and paradox so ubiquitous at Baja’s tip.

A little exploring early on proved me—and everyone else who swears his peninsular plot is the best ever—completely wrong. No matter where I go in Baja, I meet people with their own unique “cooker” stories, elaborate and unexpected tales of how they ended up here, how they realized their life’s dream, how they fell in love, how they overcame unbelievable obstacles. Baja—from top to bottom—is brimming with the stuff of legends: horticulturist turned flamenco guitarist, near-death cancer patient turned vibrant survivor, high school dropout turned real estate mogul, former drug

trafficker turned yogi, off-road racer turned businessman, ski filmmaker turned land developer, pregnant teenager turned CEO, Olympic coach turned surf junkie, covert government agent turned fisherman, and more.

Beyond all the beautiful things to do and see in Baja—and there are many, as you'll find if you read on—the most important thing to do in Baja is be. Travel itineraries and the suggestions I provide in this book are useful, but please be open to the subtle currents of life, and if you feel the sudden urge to turn right instead of left, walk instead of drive, say “gracias” instead of “thank you,” do it. When you vacation in a “real cooker” like Baja, even the subtlest currents may be leading you to the stuff of legends. I think Debbie Hunt would vouch for that.

## 1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **Harvest Festival in the Valle de Guadalupe:** Mexico's wine country comes alive in true fiesta style each year, late August to early September, during this annual wine festival. The celebrations combine wine tastings with parties, concerts, blessings of the grapes, and other events. See p. 156.
- **Exploring Baja's Missions:** From the late 17th through the 19th centuries, Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican friars founded a succession of missions in Baja California. The missions were part of the many institutions that the Spanish crown used to colonize the territories of “Nuevo España.” Explore one or several along the “Camino Real Misionero.” See p. 125.
- **Arts Festival in Todos Santos:** Although Todos Santos is filled with a creative, artistic ambience at any time of year, it reaches a peak each February during the annual Arts Festival. Held since the early 1990s, the festival continues to grow in popularity and content. See p. 95.
- **Feria de San José:** Those nostalgic for the traveling carnivals of old will find just the sensory overload they've been missing in the litigious U.S. For 1 full week at the end of March, the carnival comes to downtown San José del Cabo in celebration of San José Day. With it come endless booths of spicy food and full-service bars, rickety rides, housewares hawkers, shooting and dart games you're never supposed to win, live *banda* music, a Palenque tent with organized cockfights, and even a house of mirrors. It's my favorite week of the year. See p. 61.
- **Exploration!** When the 1997 movie *Titanic* was filmed here, at a seaside soundstage created for the production of the movie, Hollywood turned its attention to Rosarito Beach for even more moviemaking. The original production facility has been turned into an interactive museum and entertainment center that brings into focus the art of moviemaking and special effects, especially those made along Baja's coastline. See p. 163.
- **Bullfights in Tijuana:** No matter what your opinion of bullfighting may be, the pastime is an undeniable part of the sporting culture of Mexico, drawing from its Spanish heritage. Considered among the best venues for watching this sport in North America, Tijuana's dual bullrings feature top matadors in their contests against bulls. The season runs from May to September. See p. 157.
- **Cave Paintings of Central Baja:** Primitive rock paintings on the walls of caves in central Baja are the only examples of this type of art on the North American continent. Their origin remains a mystery, and

researchers say they could date back as far as 10,000 years, created during the Prehistoric Age. Regardless of who created them, or when they were created, the colorful, mystical murals are impressive. The journey to reach them is also an adventure in itself. See “Baja’s Cave Paintings: An Exploration of the Mysterious” on p. 126.

- **Carnaval in La Paz:** The best Carnival (or Mardi Gras) party in Baja takes place in La Paz, where round-the-clock revelries take place just prior to Lent. The oceanfront *malecón* is the site of most of the festivities as this generally tranquil town swings into party mode. See p. 101.

## 2 The Best Beach Vacations

- **Los Cabos Corridor:** Dramatic rock formations and crashing waves mix with wide stretches of soft sand and rolling surf breaks here. This stretch of coast is also home to some of Mexico’s most luxurious resorts, verdant golf greens, and crowd-free surf breaks. Start at Playa Palmilla in San José del Cabo and work your way down to the famed Playa de Amor at Land’s End in Cabo San Lucas. Some beaches here are more suitable for contemplation than for swimming, which isn’t all bad. See chapter 4.
- **Los Barriles:** The gentle, sleepy-town feel of this blossoming East-Cape fishing village is just the start of why this place is magical. Sweeping beaches, accommodations that feel luxurious despite friendly price tags, a thriving expat artist community, a handful of truly delectable eateries, and all the fish in the sea make Los Barriles a must for the beach-bound vacationer. See p. 94.
- **La Paz:** If you want time to stop in its tracks, this town—the capital city of Baja Sur—offers slow-paced beach life at its best. Most accommodations are modest, inexpensive inns, with a

few unique, well-appointed places tossed in. Follow the scent of ocean-going adventure in the air or just follow the breeze to myriad sandy beaches. In La Paz, no one expects anything of you, allowing you to pave your own way to underwater vistas and offshore islands or shallow snorkels and comfy beach chairs. See chapter 5.

- **Loreto:** Once the center of the Jesuit mission movement in Baja, Loreto is both a town of historical interest as well as a naturalist’s dream. Offshore islands provide abundant opportunities for kayaking, snorkeling, diving, and exploring, and the beaches to the south of town are downright dreamy. If you tire of the big blue, there are plenty of inland explorations nearby as well. See chapter 6.
- **Rosarito to Ensenada:** Northern Baja’s beach towns may be primarily known for attracting a rowdy party crowd on weekends, but regardless of whether you’re here for the revelry, you’ll also find this stretch of coast ideal for great surfing and dramatic diving. See chapter 7.

## 3 The Best Museums

- **Museo Histórico Comunitario:** It’s a little-known fact that this region—now known as Mexico’s wine

country—was originally settled by Russian immigrants who were granted political asylum by Mexico in

the early 1900s. A tribute to these pioneers of grape cultivation in the area, this small but intriguing museum tells the story of this curious time. An adjacent restaurant serves traditional Russian food. See p. 178.

- **Museo de las Misiones, Loreto:** The missionaries who came to Baja in the 17th through 19th centuries did more than work on converting the local populations to Christianity. This museum features a complete collection of historical and anthropological exhibits pertaining to the Baja peninsula, and includes the zoological studies and scientific writings of the friars. It also documents the contribution of these missions to the demise of indigenous cultures. See p. 125.
- **Museo de Antropología (Anthropology Museum), La Paz:** If you can't make it to see the actual cave paintings of central Baja, this museum has large, although faded, photographs of them along with a number of exhibits on various topics concerning the geology and history of Baja California. See p. 108.
- **Serpentarium, La Paz:** Reptiles are the star of this mostly open-air natural museum that offers plenty of opportunities to get up close and personal with the snakes, iguanas, lizards, crocodiles, and other reptilians of

Baja. Children seem especially happy to explore here. See p. 110.

- **Museo Regional de Historia, Mulegé:** It's not so much this museum that fascinates me; it's more about the fact that it was once a state penitentiary that allowed its inmates to leave during the day—on the condition they return at dusk! For some reason, escape attempts were rare in this honor-system prison. The museum details the operation of this unique entity and the town of Mulegé. See p. 139.
- **Museo de Cera, Tijuana:** Many of the 90 figures in this wax museum are creepy, but it's hard not to be fascinated by the eclectic mix of personalities memorialized in wax that range from Aztec warriors and Dominican friars to Bill Clinton and Whoopi Goldberg. Don't miss the Chamber of Horrors. See p. 153.
- **Museo de las Identidades Mexicanas (Museum of Mexican Identities), Tijuana:** Located inside the Centro Cultural Tijuana, this permanent collection of artifacts from pre-Hispanic through modern times displays the gamut of Mexican historical and cultural influences, leaving visitors with a better understanding of this complex society. See p. 154.

## 4 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Whale-Watching in Magdalena Bay:** Few sights are as awe inspiring as watching whales in their natural habitat, and few places in the world can offer as complete an experience as Mexico's Baja peninsula, especially in Magdalena Bay in the El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve. The various protected bays and lagoons in this area on the Pacific coast are the preferred winter waters for migrating gray whales as they journey south to mate

and give birth to their calves. See chapter 6.

- **Surfing the Baja Coastline:** Northern Baja has the perfect combination of perpetual right-breaking waves and cheap places to stay, not to mention the legendary Killers Break at Todos Santos Island, while Southern Baja guarantees premium waves and worry-free beach camping year round. See chapters 4 and 7.

- **Kayaking the Islands off Loreto:** The offshore islands and inlets surrounding Loreto are a kayaker's paradise, and numerous outfitters are equipped to take you on day trips or overnight kayak excursions. Especially popular is exploring Isla del Carmen, a mostly inaccessible and private island just offshore. See chapter 6.
- **Freediving and Spearfishing off La Paz:** Gliding beneath the water on a deep breath alone—without a heavy scuba tank or bubbles—is as liberating as it gets. And, if regular fishing bores you, a deep breath is the first step to your hand-picked catch. Test your spear-gun shot underwater against the sea's pelagic predators. Tour companies offer freediving and spear-fishing instruction; and in the reefs, seamounts, and blue water surrounding La Paz, you never know what may swim by. See chapter 5.
- **Golf in Los Cabos:** Los Cabos has evolved as one of the world's top golf destinations. It currently has seven courses open to challenge golfers and several more under construction. The destination master plan calls for a total of 207 holes of play. In addition to the championship design, quality, and exquisite desert-and-sea scenery of these courses, Cabo offers very reliable weather. The ample and intriguing variety of courses challenges golfers of all levels. See chapter 4.
- **Exploring the Caves in Central Baja:** The goal of a trip to these caves is to see the mysterious cave paintings that potentially date back to the Prehistoric Age, but, in itself, the journey to the caves in Central Baja is a fascinating adventure. Depending on your destination, treks can be mildly challenging to difficult. These treks will take you through the canyons, crossing streams, and up challenging climbs. In many protected areas, access is allowed only with an authorized guide. The caves are in the San Francisco de la Sierra and Santa Martha mountains in Central Baja. See chapter 6.
- **Sportfishing in Los Cabos:** You're as likely to reel in the big one here as anywhere in the world, where bringing in a 45-kilogram (100-lb.) marlin is considered routine. The Sea of Cortez has an abundance of fighting fish, and easy access to the Pacific provides opportunities for stellar sportfishing in all seasons. Among your likely catches are sailfish, wahoo, tuna, and the famed marlin, in black, blue, and striped varieties. See chapter 4.
- **Hiking the National Parks of Northern Baja:** In northern Baja, several national parks provide ample opportunities for hiking, camping, climbing, and other explorations. Among the most notable is the **Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857**, a 5,000-hectare (12,350-acre) preserve, at an altitude that averages 1,200m (3,936 ft.), and, contrary to what you may expect in Mexico, has a large lake in an alpine setting. In the **Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir**, you'll find the Picacho del Diablo (Devil's Peak), a mountain with a summit at 3,095m (10,152 ft.) from which you can see both oceans and an immense stretch of land. See chapter 7.

## 5 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

- **Rancho La Puerta:** In 1940, well before resort spas were the rage—or even an acceptable form of vacationing—Rancho La Puerta opened its doors. It was called a “health camp” then, and today it is

considered a pioneer of the modern spa and fitness movement. In the more than 50 years it's been in operation, it has consistently been at the cutting edge of promoting health and wellness. It emphasizes a mind/body/spirit philosophy in one of the most relaxing and pristine settings you can imagine. For those looking to get away from it all in search of your best self, this is the place. See p. 162.

- **Cabo Pulmo:** It's only a 37km (60-mile) drive from the Los Cabos airport to Cabo Pulmo, yet if the mounded Sierra de La Laguna peaks weren't a dead giveaway for Baja, you could be in the South Pacific. Swaying in the shade of a *palapa*-roofed bungalow fronting the Sea of Cortez, you won't care where you are—you just won't want to leave. The coral reef itself is a sight to behold, but the real attraction is the flourishing sea life in this protected marine park. The underwater world is ideal for washing away earthly cares, and extensive hiking/mountain-biking trails loop through the mountains, for those who prefer the peace of the desert. See chapter 4.
- **Camping near Loreto:** The beautiful succession of tranquil coves and beaches bordering Loreto makes for a few great places to set up camp. Once settled you can kayak the coast, explore the desert, hike a hill, or just hold court on the sand. See chapter 6.
- **Punta Colorada, East Cape:** Baja's East Cape is close enough to the bustle of Los Cabos that you can drift as far away as you want while being close enough to do lunch or dinner in San José. Punta Colorada is a classically stark Baja escape steeped in a culture of fishing, hiking, bird watching, beach combing, and, more than anything, just being. See chapter 4.
- **Valle de Guadalupe:** Mexico's wine country bears little resemblance to the tourism-oriented wineries of Northern California. Here you'll find plenty of peace and quiet in the midst of acres of vineyards. A couple of small inns welcome visitors who want to stop and smell the grapes—or vintages produced here. And, its eclectic history makes exploring the area a treat. See chapter 7.
- **El Santuario:** This resort's location, 40km (25 miles) south of Loreto on pristine Ensenada Blanca Bay, makes it far away from most everything, but you won't miss a thing. Nestled in rolling sand dunes, six small *palapa*-topped casitas are located throughout the property, allowing for privacy in the stillness of this sustainable ecoretreat. All meals—mostly vegetarian—and a host of activities are included in the rate. Therapy sessions based on the mind-body connection also are available with one of the owners, a renowned psychotherapist from California. See p. 129.
- **Posada La Poza:** On its own, a visit to Todos Santos feels worlds away—especially from the crowds of Los Cabos—but nestled beside a quiet lagoon that borders the Pacific is Posada La Poza. This gracious boutique retreat, awash in desert colors, birdsong, and meticulous detail, will take you even farther into your own reverie. See chapter 4.

## 6 The Best Shopping

**Some tips on bargaining:** Although haggling over prices in markets is expected and part of the fun, don't try to browbeat the vendor or bad-mouth the goods.

Vendors won't bargain with people they consider disrespectful unless they are desperate to make a sale, and in the resort areas of Baja, unless it's an open-air

market, the prices in stores are fixed, so bargaining is not an option. Nevertheless, it never hurts to ask. For best results, be insistent but friendly.

- **Carved Furniture in Rosarito:** Rosarito Beach's Bulevar Benito Juárez has become known for its selection of shops featuring ornately carved wooden furniture. Comparing the offerings has become easy, with so many options in one central location. See p. 164.
- **Art in Todos Santos:** Whether it's oil on canvas, pottery, or weavings, you'll find very high-quality original works of art in this cultural community. The annual Arts Festival, held every February, brings an even greater selection of works to choose from. See p. 94.
- **Homemade candy in San Bartolo:** The unassuming stand at the curve in Highway 1, between La Paz and Los Cabos, is home to mind-blowing macaroons made of *cajeta* (caramel made from goat's milk) and rough-hewn coconut thick and fresh from the grove in the valley below. Buy it by the truckload, if you can. Fresh fig jam and *cajeta* caramels are other worthy reasons to stop. See p. 100.
- **Ibarra's Pottery, La Paz:** Not only can you shop for hand-painted tiles, tableware, and decorative pottery here, but you can also watch it being

made. Each piece offered for sale in this popular shop is individually made. See p. 111.

- **San José's boutiques:** As San José del Cabo becomes increasingly gentrified, so does its shopping experience. In southern Baja, the best boutiques and shops offering clothing, jewelry, and decorative items for the home are found within the lovely colonial buildings in this tree-lined town. See p. 63.
- **Avenida Revolución in Tijuana:** This rowdy drive is shopping central for the entire Baja peninsula. The most popular items offered here are electronics, traditional Mexican souvenirs, T-shirts, and prescription medicines (sans prescription). See p. 158.
- **Mercado de Artesanías, Tijuana:** For a more authentic and spirited marketplace atmosphere to pick up your colorful sombrero or serape, head to this collection of more than 200 stalls in Tijuana, where bargaining is both accepted and expected. You'll also find pottery, clothing, and crafts from throughout Mexico. See p. 158.
- **Duty-Free in Cabo San Lucas:** Fine jewelry, watches, perfumes, and cosmetics are offered at duty-free prices in Cabo's UltraFemme store, the largest duty-free shop in Mexico. See p. 85.

## 7 The Hottest Nightlife

Although, as expected, Cabo San Lucas is home to much of Baja's nightlife, that resort city isn't the only place to have a good time after dark. Along the northern Pacific coast, beachside dance floors with live bands and extended happy hours in seaside bars dominate the nightlife. Here are some of my favorite hot spots:

- **Nikki Beach, Los Cabos:** The global haven of the hip has recently arrived

in Cabo San Lucas, on the beachfront of the new ME Cabo resort on Médano Beach. Lounge on oversize beds draped in white, day or night, while sipping colorful cocktails and watching the beautiful people groove to music spun by the world's hottest DJs. See p. 91.

- **Tijuana's Avenida Revolución:** This street ranks among the world's most

famous—or infamous—for nighttime carousing. “La Revo,” as it’s commonly known, is probably the single most-common introduction tourists have to Mexico, though it offers only a glimmer of the country’s wealth of attractions. No matter the night, you’re likely to find a party atmosphere here on par with the best of a Mardi Gras celebration in full swing. Bring plenty of aspirin for the next morning—as overindulgence is the norm. See chapter 7.

- **Locals bars in Loreto:** In Loreto, “nightlife” starts well before sundown. A couple draft beers at Del Borracho, which closes at sunset, will jumpstart the afternoon. Then, roll

into Augie’s Bar & Bait Shop around 4pm, take a seat at the bar, and wait for the rowdy barrage of friendly expats to join you for half-priced drinks till 7pm. Chances are, you’ll make a few friends and end up coming back for more the next day. See chapter 6.

- **Beach Bars of Rosarito and Ensenada:** It doesn’t have to be spring break in Rosarito or Ensenada to find a similar let-loose party atmosphere here. The favored spot is Papas & Beer, which has a location in both of these beach towns. And both regularly draw a young and spirited crowd for endless-summer-style fun. See chapter 7.

## 8 The Most Luxurious Hotels

- **Las Ventanas al Paraíso** (Los Cabos Corridor; ☎ 888/525-0483 in the U.S., or 624/144-0300; www.lasventanas.com): Understated luxury by the sea, Las Ventanas perfectly melds desert landscapes and sophisticated pampering in this elegant, yet intimate, resort. Special extras such as telescopes, fireplaces, private pools, and rooftop terraces, make each suite a slice of heaven. Their seaside infinity pool is one of my favorite places in the world, helped, in no small part, by the exceptional service offered by the resort’s pool butlers. See p. 70.
- **Esperanza** (Los Cabos Corridor; ☎ 866/331-2226 in the U.S., or 624/145-6400; www.esperanzaresort.com): A creation of the famed Auberge Resorts group, this dramatically designed resort, set on a bluff overlooking two small coves, feels more like a collection of villas than a hotel. Hallmarks are its exceptional spa,

award-winning restaurant, yoga studio, and impeccable service. See p. 70.

- **Posada de las Flores** (Loreto; ☎ 877/245-2860 in the U.S., or 613/135-1162; www.posadadelasflores.com): The best of old-world style and modern luxury meet in this historic building on Loreto’s main square. A rooftop pool, lavish linens, and detailed service are matched by location, charm, and ambience. See p. 129.
- **Casa Natalie** (Ensenada; ☎ 888/562-8254 in the U.S., or 646/174-7373; www.casanatalie.com): Stillness and comfort are the marks of this modern boutique resort, which opened a little more than a year ago. Neutral colors contrast the blue of the ocean, cozy nooks await peace seekers, the rooms are some of the best in Baja, and an overall atmosphere of unpretentious luxury ensures a divine experience. See p. 172.

## 9 The Best Budget Inns

- **Cabo Inn** (Cabo San Lucas; ☎ 619/819-2727 in the U.S., or 624/143-0819; www.caboinnhotel.com): This former bordello is the best budget inn in the area. Rooms are small but extra clean and invitingly decorated, amenities are generous, and the owner/managers are friendly and helpful. Ideally located, close to town and near the marina, the inn caters to sportfishers. See p. 87.
- **Hotel Mediterraneo** (La Paz; ☎ 612/125-1195; www.hotelmed.com): Mixing Mexican with Mediterranean decor details, the result here is a stylish, economical inn. The location near the *malecón* means you're close to everything. The on-site Trattoria La Pazta restaurant is one of La Paz's best. See p. 112.
- **La Damiana Inn** (Loreto; ☎ 613/135-0356; www.ladamianainn.com): This charming inn, crafted from a century-old family home, is a cozy, well-appointed hideaway perfect for couples, families, and solo travelers alike. The friendly service can't be topped. See p. 130.
- **Hotel Hacienda Mulegé** (Mulegé; ☎ 615/153-0021): Right in the heart of Mulegé, this former 18th-century hacienda is a comfortable and value-priced place to stay, complete with a small shaded pool and popular bar. See p. 140.

## 10 The Best Unique Inns

- **Casa Natalia** (San José del Cabo; ☎ 888/277-3814 in the U.S., or 624/142-5100; www.casanatalia.com): This renovated historic home, now a masterfully crafted inn, is an oasis of palms, waterfalls, and flowers set against the desert landscape. Each room and suite is an artful combination of modern architecture and traditional Mexican touches. The restaurant is the hottest in town. See p. 64.
- **Hotel California** (Todos Santos; ☎ 612/145-0525 or 612/145-0522): After undergoing a complete renovation in 2003, the Hotel California has emerged as the hippest place to stay in the area. Jewel-tone rooms and a profusion of candles and eclectic accents make this a study in creative style. Although you can check out anytime you like, chances are you won't want to after being lured in by the inviting pool area and the popular La Coronela Restaurant and Bar. See p. 96.
- **La Villa del Valle** (Valle de Guadalupe; ☎ 649/183-9249; www.lavilladelvalle.com): The six rooms of this charming inn, flanked by lavender fields, make for casual respite in the middle of Ensenada wine country. Plus, a garden teeming with chef-ready produce and fresh herbs ensures every meal is the freshest in the valley. See p. 180.
- **Punta Chivato** (north of Mulegé at Punta Chivato; ☎ 615/153-0188; www.posadadelasflores.com): Enjoy the 3 hectares (7½ acres) of desert landscape and tranquil, private beach that come with a stay in the large and beautifully decorated suites and guest rooms here. Meals are included, as are a host of light activities. There's even a private airstrip to make it more accessible. See p. 139.

## 11 The Best Dining Experiences

In this section, best doesn't necessarily mean most luxurious. Although some of the restaurants listed here are fancy affairs, others are simple places to get fine, authentic Mexican cuisine.

- **Las Guacamayas** (San José del Cabo; ☎ 624/172-6162): Nothing is more Mexican than tacos, and the tacos at Las Guacamayas reign supreme. Take your pick from pastor, *huitlacoche*, squash blossoms, and more. Whatever you order, this hole-in-the-wall will rock your world. See p. 68.
- **Laja** (Valle de Guadalupe; ☎ 646/155-2556): This lovely adobe-and-stone gourmet restaurant has become a reason in and of itself to visit Mexico's wine country. A daily fixed menu of four to eight courses is prepared, regularly drawing a crowd and winning mounting accolades. See p. 180.
- **Café Santa Fe** (Todos Santos; ☎ 612/145-0300): Excellent northern Italian cuisine prepared in the exhibition kitchen of this gracious cafe has been a driving factor in drawing people to Todos Santos over the past decade. Enjoying lunch here in the flower-filled courtyard is a particularly wonderful way to pass an afternoon. See p. 97.
- **Mi Cocina** (San José del Cabo; ☎ 624/142-5100; [www.casanatalia.com/dining.cfm](http://www.casanatalia.com/dining.cfm)): It could be the creative menu, the captivating garden setting, or even the hibiscus-infused martinis, but whatever the reason, Mi Cocina, at Casa Natalia, is one of the best dining experiences in Los Cabos. See p. 67.
- **The Mulegé Pig Roast** (Mulegé): Regardless of where you stay in Mulegé, if it's Saturday, you won't want to miss the pig roast at the Hotel Serenidad. As they say here, it's more than a pig, it's a party; and it's the must-do tourist activity in town, one in which the pig is roasted Polynesian style, in a palm-lined open pit, for hours while guests enjoy libations. See p. 140.
- **El Boleo** (Santa Rosalía; ☎ 615/152-0310): Throughout Mexico, bakeries offer a small version of the French baguette known as *bolios*, and it's not far fetched to wonder if the name derives from this bakery, in Santa Rosalía. This bakery has been operating since the late 1800s when the French Compañía de Boleo obtained a 99-year lease from the Mexican government to operate the area's copper mines in exchange for creating employment opportunities. Of course, the French executives running the operation needed their bread, which continues to be addictive to this day. While the bolíos are good, the sweet breads, namely the pitahaya, are out of this world. See p. 142.
- **Cien Años** (Tijuana; ☎ 664/633-3900): One of the finest gourmet Mexican restaurants in Baja, Cien Años will intrigue even the most adventurous of diners, with regional specialties that may include garlicky ant eggs or buttery *guisanos* (cactus worms). See p. 161.
- **Don Emiliano** (San José del Cabo; ☎ 624/142-0266): Farm-fresh ingredients laced with Mexican tradition are Don Emiliano's masterpieces. Modern takes on classic favorites, such as *chile en nogada* with a sherried cream sauce and lemon atole with candied pumpkin, emerge from the kitchen in radiant glory. There's always a special menu tailored to the season, and the regular menu combines the likes of locally made cheeses with roasted tomatillos and dried

hibiscus flowers with beef tenderloin. This is by far Los Cabos's best sampling of *alta cocina* Mexicana. See p. 67.

- **Lobster in Puerto Nuevo** (Puerto Nuevo): It seems almost every restaurant or simple shack serving food in this tiny seaside town has locally

caught lobster on the menu—and there's good reason why. It's fresh, and it's delicious. The Puerto Nuevo way of serving it is grilled and accompanied with fresh tortillas, salsa, limes, beans, and rice, and the price is just over \$10, making it well worth a stop in this town. See p. 50.