

Latitude 38's
FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE
2024
MEXICO



**By Richard Spindler, Founder of Latitude 38 and Grand Poobah
of 30 Baja Ha-Ha's, with help from Patsy Verhoeven, vet of 17 Ha-Ha's**
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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.*

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FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

The Big Picture

With more than 3,500 miles of coastline, the Pacific Coast of Mexico is one of the longest cruising areas of the world. Its coast is more than four times as long as the rest of Central America and Panama combined. It covers a greater distance than from Florida to South America via the Bahamas and Eastern Caribbean. And it has more coastline than the northern half of the Med.

The Pacific Coast of Mexico is also one of the most desirable cruising destinations in the world. Here are just a few of the reasons why:

Diversity

The cruising grounds of Mexico include everything from the unique desert-by-the-sea environment of the Sea of Cortez, to the never-ending jungle coastline of mainland Mexico, to the offshore islands and those in the Sea of Cortez. North to south, that's a distance of about 1,200 miles in latitude, which explains the wide range of geology and weather.

There is also tremendous variety in the types of cruising available. There are countless remote anchorages that you can have all to yourself, particularly in the Sea of Cortez. But you can also enjoy the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of cities such as Los Cabos, La Paz, Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta, Zihuatanejo, and Acapulco.

And when you get off your boat — as all cruisers should from time to time — it's easy to catch an inexpensive luxury bus to interesting inland destinations such as Guadalajara, Mexico City, Guanajuato, San Miguel de Allende, Oaxaca, and the Copper Canyon.

The Sailing Conditions

The greatest amount of sailing in Mexico is done in light to moderate conditions. Indeed, the most common complaint is not enough wind rather than too much wind.

There are exceptions, of course. Sometimes it can be pretty breezy — 25 knots or more — for a day or so when sailing down the coast of Baja. Fortunately, the wind will almost always be from astern and there are plenty of anchorages in which to take shelter.

It can also be nasty crossing the Sea of Cortez when a Norther is blowing, as you'll be beam to seas that become unusually short and steep. Northers are telegraphed by high pressure in the "Four Corners" of the United States, so nobody should get caught by surprise.

For those heading to Central America, the Gulf of Tehuantepec is notorious for Tehuantepec'ers blowing 50 knots or more, and to more than 100 miles offshore. Even though these are also easy to forecast, most sailors still keep "one foot on the beach" just to be sure.

The "Baja Bash" is an entirely different weather proposition. There is a greater chance of more and longer safe weather windows in November, December, and January than in April or May. August is a good month, too, as it's also warmer.

When it comes to the best and most consistent daysailing in Mexico, we'd nominate Banderas Bay. It's flat water, it's tropical, and it's beautiful. The winds tend to be on the light side from November through about mid-March, then breezy through April and May.

Inexpensive Cruising

Mexico is one of the least expensive places to cruise in the world. It starts with the Temporary Import Permit (TIP) for your boat, which only costs about \$60 for 10 years. Many of the countries in the Caribbean charge you more than \$50 for a week.

The immigration fee, good for up to 180 days, is only about \$40. Like all prices in Mexico, it varies slightly with the exchange rate.

Medical and dental care are also very reasonable, often at a fraction of the cost in the States. In emergencies, Kaiser and others will often reimburse 100% of the bill.

Based on conversations with cruiser/patients who have had everything from heart problems to cancer surgery to giving birth, the care is excellent — and more personal than in the States. But you have to choose the right hospital. If you go to the top hospitals, you'll be stunned at how clean they are and what modern medical equipment they have.

And how about this app? The super-modern American-owned hospital in the poor village of Anclote — Punta Mita



Hiking and climbing can be a big part of cruising in Mexico, particularly in Baja. Don't forget to bring water.

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Cabo can be a madhouse when the fishing fleet returns in the afternoon.

— has an app for emergencies. You push the button on your smart device and it tells them exactly where to pick you up. They also do — for gringos — cosmetic surgery and fertility work.

Warning: There have been some epic hospital ripoffs, extortions actually, to the tune of many tens of thousands of dollars, many of them in Cabo San Lucas. If you need medical care in Cabo, always get a referral from the marina. In fact, no matter where you are, try to get a referral from others first.

Transportation, by both local chicken bus and luxury long-distance bus, offers big bang for the buck. And you rarely have to wait long for a bus.

Food is inexpensive at both markets and in restaurants that don't cater to well-heeled tourists.

As long as you avoid the Drunken Shrimp Tourist Trap and similar restaurants, you'll find countless places with deals. Fellow cruisers will be happy to clue you in. Be careful though, as some restaurants include all the tequila you can drink with \$12 fresh fish dinners. There is a place on the main road in Bucerías that serves more sushi than most people can eat for \$15.

Tacos on the street are a cruiser favorite, and it's common for groups of cruisers to head to favorite spots en masse. The tacos are as delicious as they are inexpensive.

Beer is cheap in Mexico. You can have a couple of store-

bought beers every night for a month for not much more than a single bottle of vodka would run you in French Polynesia.

If you have a favorite hard liquor from the States, bring an ample supply with you. There is a limit, but nobody seems to check.

Budget Busters

There are, however, three budget busters for cruisers:

1) Marinas. These offer lots of comfort and convenience, but don't assume they'll be less expensive than in the States. Some, in fact, are more expensive during the high season. Fortunately, there are free anchorages in the vicinity of most marinas in Mexico. So while some deep-pocket cruisers and/or "commuter cruisers" may keep their boats in marinas most of the time, others might not spend more than a week in a marina the entire season.

2) Tourist bars and restaurants. When you eat with the locals, the food is less expensive — and the experience is usually more fun. This holds true almost everywhere in the world.

3) Paying for others to do your boat work. If you're on a tight budget, you should be prepared to clean your own bottom, maintain the teak, wax the hull, and fix mechanical problems.

That said, boatyard work is often less, and sometimes much less expensive in Mexico than in California. The other good news is that many cruisers are happy to help those who are just discovering the mechanical mysteries of their boats.



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While there is no limit to how much a month you can spend cruising in Mexico, if a couple avoids marinas, they can pretty much cruise like kings and queens on \$2,500 a month. Frugal couples can have a great time on as little as \$1,000 a month. Naturally, it's easier to get by on less money in the Sea of Cortez, where there are fewer places to spend money, than around big cities with lots of attractions, such as Puerto Vallarta.

The Friendly People

We're talking about friendly fellow cruisers and about ultra-friendly and helpful Mexicans. The tropical sun is warm in Mexico, but the people — particularly the poorer people — are warmer.

Yes, drug cartel wars continue to take a terrible toll, but the cartels target each other, not tourists or cruisers. And there are no "pirates" in Mexico. While you don't want to be stupid and flash money anywhere in Mexico, or leave valuables unattended, if you're interested in being mugged or attacked simply because you're a tourist, you'll have better luck if you go to certain parts of the Caribbean or the downtown areas of large cities in the United States.

Many first-timers are surprised to discover the large number of gringos thriving in Mexico without undue concern for their personal safety. There are some 25,000 gringos in the Puerto Vallarta area and something on the order of 750,000 in the entire country.

As for cruisers, nowhere in the world are they more socially and group-oriented than in Mexico. Tenacatita Bay on the Gold Coast has even had a seasonal Cruising Mayor and Cruising First Lady — Robert and Virginia Gleser of the Alameda-based Freeport 41 *Harmony* — for 20 years. Unless you're a hermit, you'll make more friends in Mexico than you had back in the States.

As cruisers continue on to the South Pacific or the Canal and the Caribbean, they often grumble about how cruising was so much more sociable in Mexico.

Mexico Is Close to Home

No matter if you're from British Columbia, Seattle, Portland, the Bay Area, or Southern California, there are plenty of convenient flights "home" from all coastal population centers of

Mexico. These flights are shorter and much less expensive than those you need to get to and from the South Pacific, the Eastern Caribbean, or the Med. And if you pick the right days, the Mexico-based flights are often very inexpensive.

Because of the low cost and convenience of flying to and from Mexico, many sailors can "commuter cruise," meaning they can keep their jobs or maintain businesses up north while still being able to enjoy short- to medium-length visits to their boats in sunny Mexico.

Countless Attractions

It's hard to know where to start on a list of attractions for cruisers in Mexico, but we can start with great board surfing on the coast of Baja and on the mainland. In fact, there are a number of great breaks on the north shore of Punta Mita, where you can enjoy the ultimate surfer/sailor dream — being able to paddle from your boat to a great surf break. There's also fun surf close to your anchored boat at Tenacatita Bay.

The fishing is terrific everywhere in Mexico, with lots of dorado, tuna, and wahoo. Many cruisers summering in the Sea decide what they want for dinner, then grab their spearguns, dive in, and spear it.

There is also whale watching on Banderas Bay, the Sea of Cortez — and in other places — from December to March, although you are not permitted to spear the whales. You can swim with whale sharks, the largest fish in the world, in the Sea of Cortez at almost any time of year. You can't spear them either.

There is excellent hiking, in both desert and jungle environments. We love hiking to the peaks of the islands in the Sea of Cortez, as well as up the jungle rivers to waterfalls on the mainland.

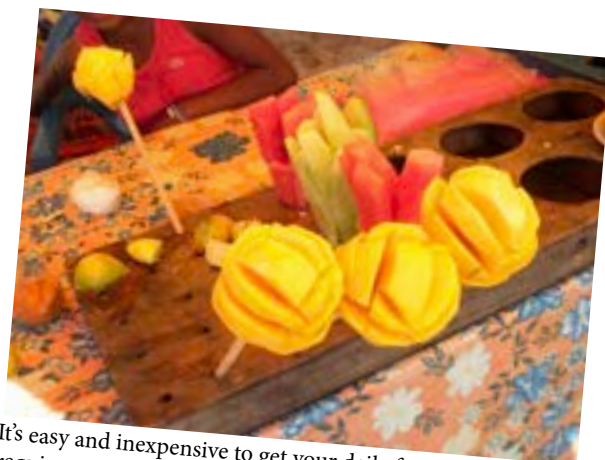
And no matter if you like to play or just listen, the music scene in Mexico is vibrant. This is particularly true in La Cruz. In addition, there is the previously mentioned inland travel — and great tropical sailing.

When To Cruise Mexico

The cruising season in Mexico starts the first week in November, which is at the end of the hurricane season. Where and when the cruising season ends depends on what your



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game plan is and where you end up in Mexico.

Many cruisers are on the “six-and-six” program. They cruise for six months — November 1 to May 1 — then do something else for six months. For the non-cruising six months, some take their boats back north, some stay with family and friends in the States, some RV the West, and the smartest ones, in our opinion, buy a little canal boat for 20k and do the waterways of Europe.

Staying on mainland Mexico from May 1 to November 1 is possible, but we don't recommend it. It gets really humid, and the jungles are green because it rains so much. If you don't have air conditioning, you'd be a masochist to stay on your boat on the mainland during the summer.

Things are a little different in the Sea of Cortez, where the best of the best cruising weather is actually October and November, crossing fingers there are no hurricanes in October. And then again in early summer. By midsummer, it gets hot — really, really hot — in the Sea of Cortez.

The Language

Thanks to the increasing Mexican influence in the States, it's easier to become semi-fluent in “Spanglish” as opposed to French Polynesian French, Caribbean Creole, or even what passes for English in the BVI and other former British colonies.

Your iPhone or similar device makes learning Spanish much easier than ever. By using the right app — we recommend Google Translate — you carry an easy-to-access dictionary at all times. Furthermore, all good translation programs tell you how to properly pronounce words and sentences, and if you want, at slow speeds. And if you point your device's camera at Spanish words, it will, with a little luck, even translate the words instantly.

An effective technique for becoming better at Spanish is to record properly pronounced sentences that you use in everyday life. Then review them each night. It's better than repeating the canned sentences in books or on tapes.

But by far the best way to learn Spanish is to get a Mexican lover.

Unlike the French, Mexicans are very tolerant of foreigners butchering their language.

Minimum Mexican Cruising Boat

If you're a decent sailor, you can cruise just about any decent sailboat to and/or in Mexico.

The normal minimum-size boat is 27 feet. But as Steve and Charlotte Baker, who formerly lived the suburban life in Santa Rosa, can attest, even an outboard-powered Catalina 27 can be all that's needed for nine years of continuous cruising in Mexico. Here's their story:

“Having become dissatisfied with our suburban lives in Santa Rosa, in 2009 we bought *Willful Simplicity*, a 1973 Catalina 27. Many people told us we couldn't enjoy Mexico with our ‘mini-cruiser.’ The only person who encouraged us, and whom we used as a guiding light, was Richard Spindler, who founded both *Latitude 38* magazine and the Baja Ha-Ha. Had we listened to the naysayers rather than Richard, we would have missed out on the nine best years of our lives.

“We started our new life with 135 other boats in the 2009 Baja Ha-Ha, which is the 750-mile cruiser rally Richard runs each year from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas. That Ha-Ha is generally considered to have been the windiest of the 24 Ha-Ha's to date, but we and our Catalina 27 *Willful Simplicity* didn't have any problems.

“We saw many beautiful places and enjoyed countless great anchorages on the way down to Cabo and up into the Sea of Cortez. But the absolute best part of our cruising was meeting the locals, especially the children, and coming to appreciate their natural way of life. We have become better people for what we've learned from the people of Baja.

“For nine years, our homeport was more or less the tiny fishing village of San Evaristo, a popular anchorage about 50 miles north of La Paz by water. Over the years we tried to



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help this village as much as we could, and enjoyed the support of many cruisers in the Sea who donated supplies and equipment to the community.

“Fortunately, our Catalina 27 can carry far more supplies than anyone would imagine. Indeed, it’s so roomy that Charlotte and I were constantly thinking about what junk we wanted to get off the boat. Simplicity is the best!

“Our Catalina 27 has been the perfect Sea of Cortez cruising boat for us and has absolutely been the biggest bang for the buck. Who would have ‘thunk it’ when we sailed under the Golden Gate at 4 a.m. in 2009 and turned left, heading toward an unknown future? We have no regrets about the decision we made and will continue to live our lives in the spirit of ‘willful simplicity,’ although, after nine years, it will now be on land at Evaristo.”

Dirt-Cheap Cruising Boats

Just for fun, in June a couple of years ago we looked around for very inexpensive boats that, if they passed inspection, we’d cruise to Mexico. Here are some examples we found in San Diego alone: Cal 27, \$4,900; Pearson 28, \$8,000; Catalina 27, \$4,000; Cal 29, \$5,000; Catalina 30, \$9,999; Columbia 30, \$8,000; Islander 30, \$7,500; and a Newport 30 with autopilot, depthfinder, navigation aids, radio, fridge/freezer, kayak, roller furling and self-tailing winches, \$10,000. Many of the previously listed boats had a lot of gear, too.

We’re sure that a few of these boats were wrecks that might not be worth accepting even as a gift, and might even be dangerous without new rigging, new thru-hulls, and other expensive upgrades. But we’re also confident that given a little bit of knowledge and a lot of elbow grease, some of them would make fine little cruising boats for Mexico.

Smaller cruising boats remind us of Christian Lauducci, who sailed across the Pacific with his wife and three kids aboard their Sausalito-based Stevens 40 *Shawnigan*. We first met Christian many years ago when he was cruising Mexico on his 26-footer, complete with girlfriend — and six surfboards.

The truth of the matter is that a lack of money is rarely a true obstacle that prevents people from going cruising. It might be more “boat camping” than luxurious cruising if you’re on a short budget, but if you’re young and in search of adventure, it shouldn’t matter to you.

The Basic Requirements of a Boat

As we all know, humans have five basic requirements for life: 1) Oxygen; 2) Fresh water; 3) Food; 4) Shelter, and 5) Sleep.

If you’re fairly new to sailing and owning a sailboat, and not sure what the most important things are, we present the Wanderer’s Basic Boat Requirement Guide:

- 1) Keep water out of the inside of the boat.
- 2) Have some way to steer the boat.
- 3) Have some method of propulsion.
- 4) Have some way to navigate, even if it’s dead reckoning.
- 5) Have some way to anchor.

Everything after these five basic requirements is a detail. Some would be important details for more comfortable cruising, but details nonetheless. Make sure you concentrate on the basics before moving on to the details.

More Typical Cruising Boats

The typical Pacific Coast cruising boat is about 43 feet.

While they range from almost stock to having every imaginable convenience that can be put on a boat, most have quite a few creature comforts.

No Matter What Boat

No matter what kind of boat you take to Mexico, you must 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 20 and some of the crew are seasick.

“A stitch in time saves nine” is for landlubbers. When it comes to boats, a “stitch in time” can save 109 at sea.

Furthermore, specialized marine gear is expensive and often hard to come by in Mexico. So if your gooseneck fails while you’re rounding Cabo Corrientes, you might blow a month or more of your precious cruising season 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 good marine surveyor. It may turn out to be one of the best investments you make.

Cruising Gear, Level One

1) An Engine. Lin and Larry Pardey cruised the world for years with their engineless 24-ft *Seraffyn*. And even folks with much larger cruising boats have — sometimes by necessity — cruised across the South Pacific without an engine. Heck, Steve Schmidt singlehanded his Santa Cruz 70 *Hotel California* throughout the Caribbean for several years without a working diesel. He and the others became more skilled sailors for not having an engine.

Nonetheless, we recommend that your Mexico cruising boat have an engine. And a diesel is way better than an outboard, although the latter is better than nothing.

It can be very slow going in Mexico without an engine, as there can be days in a row with little or no wind. This is particularly hard on boats loaded down with cruising gear and perhaps not having the cleanest bottom.

We remember it took David Addleman six days to sail his Cal 36 *Upsychia* 400 miles from Puerto Vallarta to La Paz. And David, who more recently singlehanded his Santa Cruz 50 X from Malaysia to California — a distance of something like 6,000 miles — is a fine sailor.

And remember, most engines pull double duty by also generating a certain amount of electricity. If you don’t have an engine, you need some other source of electrical power.

2) Working Sails. These need to be in good shape, but shouldn’t get much wear in Mexico. And you’ll almost certainly want a spinnaker or gennaker. Sailing wing-on-wing can be extremely effective when there is a breeze, but when the wind goes light, as it often does in Mexico, there is no really good substitute for a big nylon sail. The garages of coastal California homes are full of used spinnakers and gennakers, many of them in nearly new condition.

3) A Garmin inReach. For only about \$400 the handheld inReach acts like a two-way EPIRB and gives you navigation capability, as well as being a long-distance texting communication device. You can also use it to get basic weather and leave a breadcrumb trail and messages on Facebook for all your family and friends to see. You want to make sure that you link your inReach to an iPad or similar device because



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the actual inReach screen and keyboard are too small for frequent use. Devices such as the Iridium GO! are a little more expensive and offer additional features, including the ability to surf the internet—albeit at dial-up speed—from the middle of the ocean, and get GRIB files. But have at least one such device.

4) Navionics and iNavX Charts. Even though you can navigate with an inReach, we highly recommend you get a more dedicated navigation system, such as Navionics or iNavX charts operating on an iPad or similar device or a chartplotter. If you get the Navionics — all we've ever needed — remember you have to download more detailed parts of charts while you have internet access. If you don't, you'll get no details.

Also remember that many charts of Mexico, particularly older ones, are inaccurate by a mile or more, often showing you on land when you're at sea. Which, while not good, is better than vice versa. Nonetheless, it's important to frequently double- and triple-check your position, using a combination of things such as GPS, radar, the depthsounder, and your eyes.

Some experts insist you should always carry paper charts, too. No matter if we've been in Mexico, the Caribbean, or Europe, we haven't used a paper chart in years. If we were going to the South Pacific, we'd take some paper charts. But for just Mexico or continuing on to Central America, we'd be happy with electronic charts and a guidebook or two. Our rationale is that Mexico is one of the easiest places to navigate, with very few hazards.

Caution: Despite all the incredible navigation aids now available, and Mexico navigation being rather straightforward, people still hit rocks and go aground. Be alert!

5) Cruising Guides. According to our unofficial survey, the most popular cruising guides to Mexico are Shawn Breeding

and Heather Bansmer's *Sea of Cortez: Cruiser's Guidebook* and *Pacific Mexico: A Cruiser's Guidebook*. Followed by the latest edition of Capt. Pat Rain's *Mexico Boating Guide* 2018 edition and *Charlie's Charts for Mexico*, updated in 2015. Naturally, all of these guides have far more detailed information than we can fit in this short guide, and each one brings something a little different to the party. Of particular value in some guides are accurate GPS positions for approaches to harbors and anchorages. So even with inaccurate charts, you shouldn't have a problem.

If you want a real treat in cruising guides to Mexico, we recommend you go to Amazon and hunt down an out-of-print copy of Leland Lewis's *Baja Sea Guide, Volume II*. The guide was published in 1971, so it's ridiculously dated for marinas and such. But Lewis, once a prominent tuna boat skipper, packed a ton of fascinating historical and other information into his oversized volume. Information you won't find anywhere else. We found it even more interesting than John Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez*.

On the subject of printed matter, you might want to get a copy of Peter Benchley's 1972 novel *The Girl of the Sea of Cortez*. It's sort of a female version of *The Old Man and the Sea* and was written two years before Benchley wrote *Jaws*.

6) Two Anchors. One is not enough. Steve Dashew suggests that you know your anchor is big enough when other sailors laugh because it looks so oversized. It's good advice if you want to sleep well at night and don't want to worry during *elephantines* in the Sea of Cortez

You can use mostly rope and a little chain, which is fine in Mexico, where the anchoring is generally easy in usually 20 or fewer feet of water. All chain is much better if you're headed to the South Pacific because you'll be dealing with coral heads and deep water.

How much rode you need depends on the size and type of your boat, rode, and anchor. We'd say 250 feet is the minimum-length rode for a typical 40-ft boat. If you have a boat much over 30 feet or you're much over 30 years of age, you're going to want a windlass. If you're going to be doing a lot of anchoring, you're certainly going to want a power windlass, especially if you have a larger boat.

No matter what kind of anchor and rode you have, make sure one of your electronic devices has an alert system or app to warn you that you're dragging anchor. After all, it's far easier to prevent your boat from going onto the rocks at 3 a.m. than it is getting her off the rocks at 3 a.m.

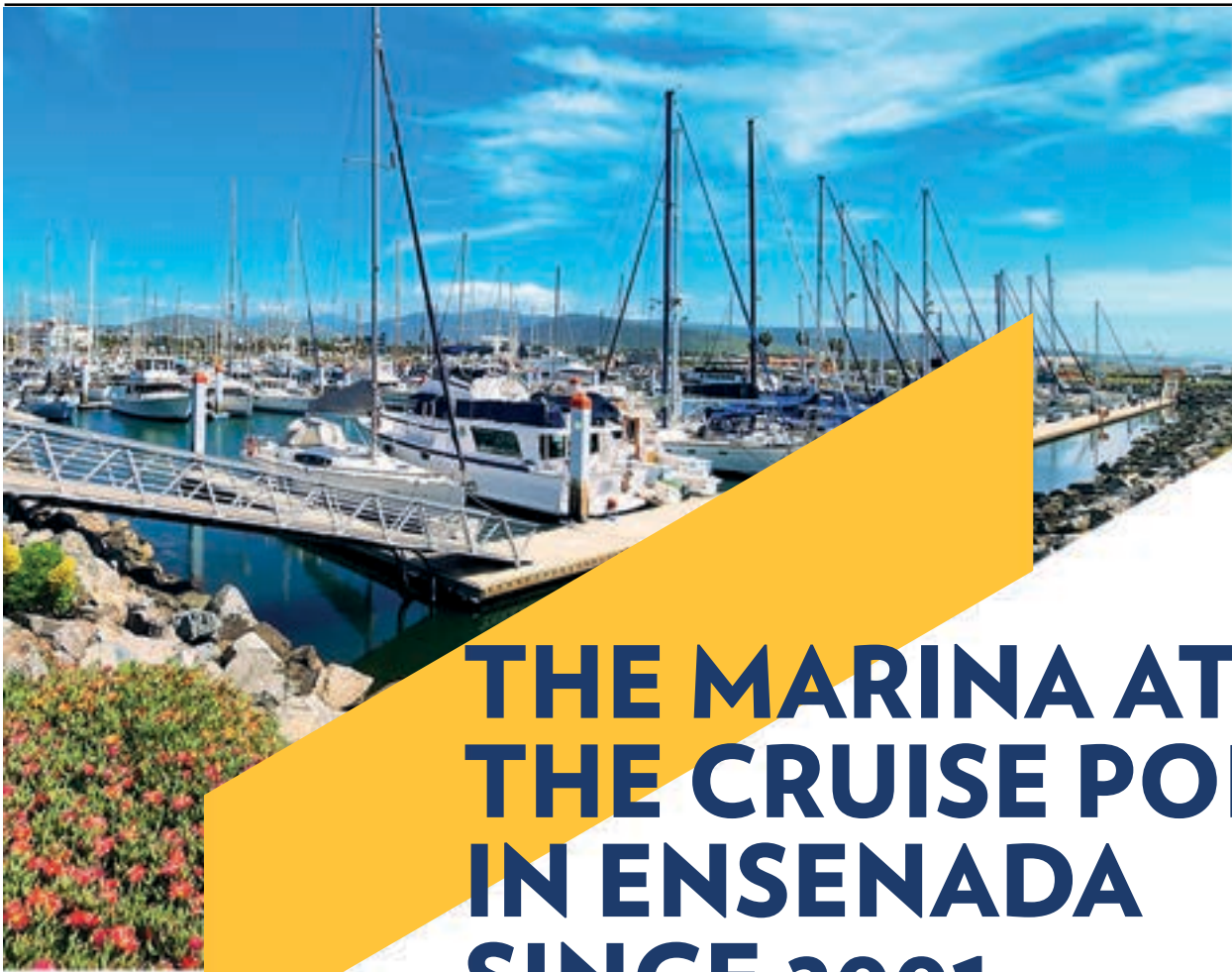
7) A Propane Stove. Forget alcohol and CNG as they aren't available in Mexico, and the former is dangerous. But don't forget to check your propane fittings for leaks. Every 10 years or so a cruising boat in Mexico explodes because of an undetected leak.

8) A Windex on the Masthead. Or at least telltales on the shrouds. Even Bob Dylan recognized the need to know which way the wind was blowing.

Sophisticated electronic wind instruments are great if you have them and they are working. But if your boat doesn't have them, or they aren't working, as on many older boats, we don't think you have to have them. If you need to know the wind direction, look at your Windex or telltales on your shrouds. If you need to know how hard it's blowing, stick your head outside the salon. Or use that iPhone app for wind speed.

9) A Depthsounder. A depthsounder is more than handy as





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it allows boaters to triple-confirm their position, and helps calculate how much chain to put out. A depthsounder is all but essential on boats that are too big to be pushed off hazards.

10) Dinghy. Inflatables are the most popular choice for dinghies: roll-up ones for smaller boats, and hard-bottomed ones for larger boats and cats. There are countless brands. Ever seen one of those weird-looking “Porta-Botes?” Over 100,000 have been sold, and lots of owners rave about them, in part because they fold up flat and are thus particularly easy to store.

If you're on a budget, get a dinghy that rows well so you don't need an outboard. It's good for your heart, too.

11) Shade. Make sure your boat has lots and lots and lots of shade because there is no end to the brilliant tropical sun in Mexico.

Cruising Gear, Level Two

1) Refrigerator/Freezer. Boaters have cruised Mexico with a refrigerator/freezer and without. It's much more pleasant to cruise with them, particularly if you like cold drinks at sunset and not having to shop for perishables every day or two. If you want to cruise with a foodie on your boat, a fridge/freezer is all but mandatory.

The downside of refrigerators/freezers is that they require energy to work, and much more energy in tropical Mexico than the cold air and cold waters of California and the Pacific Northwest. In addition, fridges/freezers, particularly older ones, tend to require maintenance, if not on themselves, then on whatever system provides energy to run them.

Inadequately insulated fridges/freezers, and/or inadequate energy sources to power them, are probably the most common problem for first-time cruisers in Mexico.

If you have an older boat without a fridge/freezer, and some space in that boat, you might consider a highly efficient Engel, or similar self-contained portable unit.

2) A Better Dinghy/Outboard. When cruising and not at sea or in a marina, your dinghy/outboard is your daily ride. So you need to be able to rely on it. A displacement dinghy/outboard extends your range on water much in the same way a bicycle gives you a better range than walking. And a planing dinghy is like having a motorcycle as opposed to walking. It can be a game-changer in the Sea of Cortez, although not quite as important on the mainland.

How to stow your dinghy while underway is a major issue rarely given adequate consideration prior to getting to Mexico. Having to set up and break down your dinghy every couple of days gets old quickly, so make sure you figure out the easiest system possible. Dinghy davits are great if they're already on your boat or can be fitted on your boat. Lots of first-time cruisers get dinghy davits made while in Mexico.

Always lock your dinghy/outboard at night! While thefts are relatively few in Mexico, replacements are very expensive.

3) Watermaker. This is a somewhat controversial big-ticket/installation/maintenance item. When we last polled veteran cruisers in Mexico and the South Pacific about the need for a watermaker, about half said they got along just fine without one, while the other half said it was absolutely essential to their cruising enjoyment. It's the “simple is better” school versus the “I don't want to be camping on a boat” school.

Watermakers are less expensive and more reliable than they

once were, but if you get one, you have to make sure you know how it works and how to replace filters and troubleshoot, that you have enough energy to run it, and that your source of energy is reliable.

4) Chartplotter. While you'll find chartplotters on almost all newer boats, we personally have never been that crazy about them. Our complaint is that we don't like integrated everything because sometimes when one thing goes down, everything goes down.

We bought a big chartplotter because it was the only way to get radar these days: They don't sell stand-alone radars any more. Our B&G chartplotter, once we got everything to work, is capable of doing about 10,000 things. That's about 9,985 more than our boat is set up for and/or we don't care about. If we want to know about the oil pressure on our engine, we'll look at the engine instruments rather than buy a new engine so the sensors can be hooked up to the chartplotter.

The bottom line is that if your boat came with a functioning chartplotter, that's terrific.

5) Radar. If she has a functioning analog radar, or no radar at all, it's not the end of the world. During an interview with the great sailmaker Lowell North a few years ago, he told us he didn't think radar had been necessary at all on his circumnavigation.

Don't get us wrong; radar is great for navigation, for avoiding other vessels, and for tracking the approach of lightning storms.

6) AIS is nice to have too, and to our mind even better than radar to keep from getting hit by some big vessel. But once again, we don't think AIS is necessary or that useful after Cabo, other than for being able to identify other cruising boats around you. After all, except for crossing the Sea of Cortez, most passages after Cabo are daysails, and there just isn't much vessel traffic out there.

7) Power Generation system in addition to your engine. If you're going to have a fridge/freezer, watermaker, honking chartplotter, and SSB radio, and use your computer all the time, and watch a lot of movies, you're going to need a lot of power. Probably more than you think.

High-output alternator(s) on the engine(s) is a good place to start but often isn't enough. If you have enough room for an adequate number of solar panels and enough budget for lithium storage batteries, these are great solutions. But if you don't, there's the ever-popular — except with people anchored near you — Honda 2000i portable genset. But that means you have to carry gas for more than just your outboard.

Built-in diesel gensets are terrific — except for the fact that they are expensive if not already on the boat, and are yet another diesel to maintain. And maintain them you must, lest you be one of those owners who filled his boat's freezers with a season's worth of meat, then had to throw it all away when the genset wouldn't start to run the freezer.

As energy demands are unique to each boat and each cruiser's lifestyle, only you can figure out how much energy you're going to need. Be forewarned: Most first-timers underestimate how much they'll need. And as in all other things on boats, some sort of redundancy is a beautiful thing.

8) SSB or Ham Radio. Communication devices like Starlink and the GO have reduced the cruiser's dependence on SSB and Ham radios. The radios are expensive, it's tricky to get the antenna and ground right, and they use a lot of power



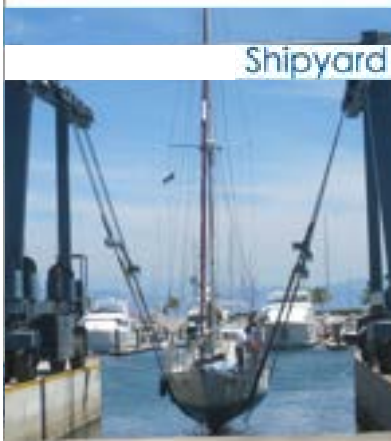
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when transmitting.

But the radios do allow for human-to-human communication with others. True, Garmin inReach and similar devices are terrific, but they don't allow you to participate in group conversations. Regrettably, however, there are fewer and fewer cruising nets.

Given all other forms of communication, we don't consider SSB/Ham to be essential for cruising just Mexico for a season. But if we were continuing across the South Pacific, SSB or Ham might be something we'd want if we could afford it.

9) Air Conditioning. If you're going to spend the summer in Mexico, be it on the mainland or in the Sea of Cortez, air conditioning is all but mandatory. But it uses a lot of juice, so if you're going to be on the hook, you've got to figure out how you're going to power it. If you're going to be in a marina, count on a big bump in your electrical bill.

10) A Dedicated Liferaft. You can cruise Mexico without one, and many have, counting on their dinghy to be the liferaft. The smaller the dinghy, the less wise this becomes. And as you can get new liferafts for less than \$2,000 these days, we'd want at least a 12-ft inflatable "dinghy/liferaft" before we'd go without a dedicated raft.

11) The Golden Rule of Boat Gear. "It's far better to have less gear that you know how to use and maintain than to have lots of gear that you haven't hooked up, don't understand, and aren't going to maintain.

Most cruising boats are full of gear that was purchased years before and was going to be installed "someday."

12) Spare Parts. Downwind Marine in San Diego has an online cruising guide with a list of spare parts and other gear that you might want to have on your cruise.

It's pages long, and if you bought it all, your boat would sink to the bottom, as would your bank account. So just use it as a rough guide.

What most cruisers find after a year is that they've bought twice as much stuff as they needed. Unfortunately, nobody knows what stuff they didn't need until they've been cruising for a year. Before plunking down money for that breadmaker that sounds like something you absolutely need on your cruising boat, figure out where you're going to store it, and if you're really going to use it that often. And remember, they sell breadmakers — and almost everything else sold in the States — in Mexico, too.

It's also much easier to ship boat-specific gear to Mexico than it used to be. So while we carry a spare starter motor and alternators for cruising in Mexico, we'd only do that again if we were continuing on to the South Pacific.

Be aware that there can be problems with shipping boat gear to Mexico. The fact that you have a TIP that you think exempts the gear because yours is a "boat in transit" doesn't mean Mexican officials will agree with you. Over the years tens of thousands of dollars of boat gear have died at customs in Guadalajara. Check with others before shipping stuff down. Usually, the best way to get boat gear to Mexico is to have somebody bring it down on a plane — and hope they get a green light when coming through customs at the airport. If your courier gets a red light, it's likely duty will have to be paid. If you don't have a receipt, agents will Google the price of whatever item is being brought down.

You should also be aware that you can order stuff on Ama-

zon and get it in places such as La Paz in less than a week.

Before checking into Mexico from the USA take all spare parts, supplies, and equipment not yet installed out of their boxes and store them so they look used. Your spare parts and equipment may be mistaken for items you are smuggling into Mexico. If so you will be charged tax on the items.

13) An Iridium Satphone. If you're out at sea and a crew-member falls seriously ill, or if you have a crippling boat problem, it can be invaluable to be able to converse with experts over the phone.

14) Did we leave something off our list? We're sure we did. Our apologies.

Phone and Internet Services

Staying connected via the internet is all but mandatory for most cruisers. From using social media, to working, to getting vital weather information, the internet is a necessity. Good internet can be found in a marina with a wired Ethernet connection — such as Marina de La Paz. This ensures reliability and very fast speeds.

Wi-Fi can be found in countless restaurants, internet cafés, and resorts — just about everywhere. Most marinas, but not all, have decent Wi-Fi included in the slip fee, but it is only available at a central location or some slips, not all slips.

For those anchored out, there are quite a few antenna choices for boosting Wi-Fi signals. The downside of Wi-Fi is the dreaded padlock icon. There were a lot more open Wi-Fi connections just a few years ago, but now most locations require knowing the password.

Cell Phones

A common cruiser option for connecting to the internet is a cell phone, either for accessing the internet through the phone itself or using the device as a hotspot for iPads and computers. There are loads of cell towers along most of coastal Mexico, with two big exceptions north of La Paz in the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Coast of Baja. Cell towers in Mexico seem to have more powerful signals than those in the States. For example, cruisers heading for Puerto Vallarta regularly get good cell service 12 miles out of Cabo San Lucas. And you can usually manage to get SMS text to work even when the cell tower signal is very weak.

You can buy reasonably priced phones with short-term prepaid phone and data plans in Mexico through Telcel, Movistar, and AT&T. If you have an iPhone or other smartphone, make sure you get it unlocked before leaving the States. When you arrive in Mexico, buy a SIM card and phone/data plan for it. Then use it as a hotspot for multiple devices. The phone will have a Mexican phone number, which will work for texting, and may come in handy for voice communication. The best option is to buy a US smartphone that accepts two SIM cards so you can have both plans and two phone numbers on one phone. If you do the Puddle Jump, get a local SIM card when you arrive in French Polynesia and keep using your smartphone as a hotspot for data.

Many cruisers continue to use their current unlimited Mexico/Canada plans with T-Mobile, AT&T, Verizon, and others. But these companies mislead consumers, as they often use the terms "high-speed internet" and "unlimited internet" in the same sentence. This is rubbish! They often do have

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high-speed internet, but after just a little bit of internet use, they throttle you back to a ridiculously slow speed. In addition, these plans are designed for folks who are just traveling to Mexico for a short time, not for people living there. As a result, if you access the internet from Mexico too much, you'll get a dreaded "this line is scheduled for disconnection" text and be referred to the Extreme Roaming Department. Really.

No matter what phone you use to get onto the internet, being on the internet means you can use low-cost phone options such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and Skype. If you're a big talker or like to send video clips, or talk with video, WhatsApp is a good choice.

Starlink, The Game-Changer

Elon Musk's high-speed satellite-based broadband internet is a massive game-changer for cruisers in Mexico — and many other parts of the world. Most of the Sea of Cortez, as well as many marinas even on the mainland, have been dead zones for internet access by cell phone. No more.

The ramifications of Starlink are massive. The fast-growing number of cruisers who want to run businesses or work from their boats now have no geographical limitations. Those who want to keep up with the news or download movies in remote spots now have their solution. Similarly, cruisers can now Facetime their kids and grandkids from many places where it wasn't possible before.

For most Mexico cruisers, the standard Starlink dish with the Mobile Regional option including the ability to toggle on Mobile Priority Data with ocean access and in-motion connectivity seems to be the way to go. If you buy your equipment in the US the cost is \$600, and \$150 per month for the Mobile Regional plan. The offshore mobile priority data fee is \$2 per GB. If you are in Mexico you can buy the equipment for 4,720 pesos (283 USD), plus 1,283 pesos (77 USD) per month, and 42 pesos (2.76 USD) per gig for offshore priority data, depending on the exchange rate at the time. There are limitations, such as not being in a foreign country for over two months, but it does give you the ability to "pause" or turn the system on and off. If your cruising plans will take you past the continent, you can upgrade to the Mobile Global plan for about \$250 USD per month.

The Starlink system and policies have been changing rapidly, so the Poobah recommends joining the "Starlink on Boats" Facebook page. There you'll find constant updates on the plans, and tips on how to best use Starlink.

Skipper Preparation

If you're the skipper, recognize that there are significantly greater challenges to cruising to and 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 accepting and managing the fact that you'll need to be as self-sufficient as possible.

While you won't necessarily be on your own, you should assume that you will be. As such, you need to know how you'll respond to given situations, such as not being able to get your engine to start, not being able to generate electricity, and more serious emergencies such as suddenly finding water up to the floorboards, losing the steering, losing the rudder, or losing the mast. Having advance plans will give you confidence in

dealing with such situations and help you remain calm.

Want a good place to start? Make a diagram indicating the location of all your boat's thru-hulls, as well as how to get to the other areas where water might come in — such as around the cutlass bearing and rudder shaft. And post the diagram for all to see.

Outside Help

There are no official towboat services, such as TowBoatUS or Sea Tow, south of San Diego. While the US Coast Guard won't tow, the Mexican navy has, on occasion, towed boats long distances. You might also get a fishing boat to help, but you'll probably have to pay big bucks.

When it comes to getting tows, other cruisers are usually the best bet. A few years ago, folks on the Lagoon 40 *Muskoka* towed the Solaris 36 catamaran *Striker* the entire 175-mile last leg to Cabo after both of the latter's engines failed. We can also remember a case when a disabled boat in Puerto Escondido needed to get to repairs at 130-mile-distant La Paz. She was towed by another boat. So it happens.

That said, we personally do not consider it an "emergency" if a boat with a non-functioning engine is becalmed 200 miles upwind of the next port. After all, the wind will eventually fill in, and sailors should be able to sail their boats. Unless you're good friends, it's generally considered bad form to ask for a tow in such situations. But as with everything else in the *First-Timer's Guide*, there are differing opinions and differing circumstances

Help From the Coast Guard

If you have a life-threatening emergency, you can call or text Coast Guard Search and Rescue in Alameda at (510) 437-3701. It's smart to post this number near your inReach Iridium satphone, or another two-way device.

In life-and-death cases, the US Coast Guard doesn't hesitate to go south of the border — and much farther — to save lives.

In a more extreme case, one of the crew on a boat was nearly choking on his tongue far into the Pacific on the way to French Polynesia, so the captain put out a distress call. The Coast Guard sent out a C-130, from which a boat and two Coast Guard swimmers were deployed! In the middle of the night! The Coasties got to the stricken crew and took care of the medical business. Coast Guard SAR rocks.

There are also 20 ENSAR — Mexico Search and Rescue bases — on the Pacific Coast of Mexico, from as far north as Ensenada to as far south as Chiapas. Contact the National Coordination Center for Maritime SAR at (800) 627-4621 or email cc2_emga@semar.gob.mx or sarmarina@semar.gob.mx.

In a serious emergency, we would first call the US Coast Guard, and if necessary, have them initiate contact with ENSAR.

Crew

While many sailors have singlehanded to and cruised around Mexico, it's safer — and usually more fun — to have at least one other person along. If sailing shorthanded, you're ever more subject to fatigue. That not only makes the trip less pleasant, but fatigue is a common contributor to making mistakes on boats.

If your boat is large enough, a third or fourth person often makes the trip down Baja more of a pleasure sail than an

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ordeal. That said, some couples are only comfortable with themselves, even on larger boats. To each their own.

The first couple of days at sea are always the hardest, as it takes time for minds and bodies to adjust to the continuous motion and getting into a 24-hour rhythm. So remember to be super-indulgent toward your crew, particularly if they are relatively new to sailing. And ask that they do the same.

If you don't have much offshore experience, we recommend you bring along — if not hire — an experienced mentor for your virgin run from San Diego to Cabo. We had a mentor for our first trip from San Diego to Cabo, and it made the trip more relaxing. In addition, by the time we got to Cabo, we were much more knowledgeable and thus confident in our abilities.

If you are looking for crew check out the Baja Ha-Ha crew list at www.baja-haha.com or the *Latitude 38* Crew List at www.latitude38.com/crew-list/

Crew Familiarization

Before heading south every skipper needs to familiarize the crew with the boat, the boat's systems, basic procedures, and emergency gear. This includes how to start and operate the engine. Nobody whines more than the skipper who falls overboard prior to showing the crew how to start the engine so they can come back and get him.

The skipper and crew should practice shortening sail before taking off, as an overpowered boat is a slow, uncomfortable boat with an uptight crew. Having a boat well reefed in 25 knots of wind can make all the difference between a miserable time at sea and a comfortable and safe one. And having crew continue on the next leg.

You'll probably be anchoring frequently 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 your boat is over 40 feet, it's great to have headphones so the person at the helm and the person at the windlass don't have to shout/scream back and forth. Such headphones are called "marriage savers" for couples, and come in handy when docking, too.

When anchoring, don't just stop and drop the hook. Ease aft and set the hook hard with plenty of rode. Nothing disturbs a good night's sleep as much as having your boat drag and start bouncing on the rocks. Anchor!, Anchor Watch and other apps on electronic devices are excellent for warning you of imminent disaster.

Crew Preparation

If you're thinking about crewing on a boat to or in Mexico and aren't knowledgeable about boats and sailing, make sure you get second opinions on the boat and skipper from other experienced sailors. Better still, invest in a professional trip survey. You are responsible for your life, so you want to know that the boat is properly equipped for going offshore and that the skipper knows what he/she is doing. Skippers of pleasure boats are not required to be licensed, and there are some out there who don't have a very good idea of what they are doing.

It's also critical that the skipper goes over the boat, the gear, the procedures, and emergency equipment with you. One of the most important things to know is how, after making sure the lines in the water aren't near the prop, to start the engine. After all, if the skipper falls overboard and you can't start the engine to get back to him/her, you're likely to be out at sea a lot longer than you anticipated. Maybe forever.

Not having sailing experience is not necessarily an impediment to being good crew. Indeed, a common skipper complaint is that a know-it-all crew tried to change the way the boat was rigged and how everything was done.

If you stay in good spirits, come on watch on time, and are always willing to help, you're well on your way to being excellent crew.

Documents and Paperwork

You'll need the following for your boat:

1) The Original Boat Documentation or State Registration. Modern copiers are so good that we can't tell the original from the copies.

2) Notarized Letter. If the boat is registered under a corporation or LLC, as so many boats are these days, the boat must carry a notarized letter on the company letterhead that states the master is authorized to operate the vessel in Mexico.

Similarly, if the owner is not on the vessel, the master must have a notarized letter from the owner stating that the master has the authority to operate the vessel in Mexico. It's unlikely anyone will ever be asked for such a document, but it's good to get into the habit of having it.

3) Email Customs From San Diego. If your first port of entry will be Cabo or La Paz you need to send an email to customs at facilitacion@anam.gob.mx before your arrival. Send the email from San Diego just before leaving, as there will most likely not be email capabilities down the coast. The email should state your name, boat name, date and departure port, estimated arrival date, arrival port, and the number of people on board.

4) Entry Fee. Once you get to your first port of entry, you'll have to pay the port captain a small Port Entry Fee — it depends on tonnage — for your international arrival. It is less than \$50.

5) Insurance. There are two kinds of insurance for boats in Mexico.

The first is liability insurance, which is mandatory. This covers you in the unlikely event you do some damage with your boat in Mexico, such as run over a *panga* fisherman in the middle of the night, T-bone a shrimper and scratch her topsides, sink and spill diesel on the beach, that kind of thing.

Liability insurance for Mexico is not too expensive and can be purchased from any number of brokers in the States or in Mexico. It's unlikely you'll ever need this insurance, but if you do, you'll be glad to have it. And most marinas won't allow you in without it.

The second type of insurance is the normal hull insurance that most boat owners have on their boats. We're guessing that probably 60% of boats cruising Mexico — and almost all the more valuable ones — have such insurance. Others "self-insure." Some insurance policies do not cover boats in Mexico during what the insurance companies consider to be "hurricane season" — meaning parts or all of the summer and fall. However, you can get a rider on most policies to keep your boat in Mexico during hurricane season. Be aware that insurance claim adjusters may ask for your government issued boater's card or license.

6) A Temporary Import Permit (TIP). All boats over 15 feet need a Temporary Import Permit. The permit allows you to keep your boat in Mexico for 10 years, and you may exit and re-enter the country unlimited times. TIPs are issued either online or in person at a Mexican government bank called



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Banjercito (Ban-hair-see-toe).

You MUST surrender your TIP to *Banjercito* upon leaving Mexico without plans to return or before your TIP expires. It has become increasingly difficult to cancel expired or uncanceled TIPs. For example, at the time of this printing, there is no way to cancel a TIP issued in 2005 or before. These TIPs were issued by Mexican customs (*Aduana*), and there is no procedure in place to cancel them. The boat just cannot legally go to Mexico, period.

Is There a TIP on My Boat?

You can check on the *Banjercito* website at www.tinyurl.com/LookupTIP. Enter your hull number in the first box and leave the second box blank. The website only looks for TIPs issued after 2005 by *Banjercito*. If you suspect there could be an older *Aduana* TIP, a *Banjercito* at a Mexican Consulate will check for you. Not all Mexican Consulates have *Banjercito*; only Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Sacramento, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Dallas, Houston, Austin, Denver and Chicago do. Or call the *Banjercito* across the border from Otay Mesa +52-664-624-5515 and have them check.

If there is an uncanceled or expired TIP on your boat, you cannot get a new one until that one is canceled.

Ways to Get a TIP

1) Get Your TIP Online. Apply for your TIP between 11 and 60 days before the boat enters Mexico. We suggest you do it as soon as possible. If there is a problem, you will have lots of time to get the paperwork together and straighten it out. Follow the instructions on the video *Assistance Completing a Mexican Temporary Import Permit for Boats*, www.tinyurl.com/TIP-Tutorial. Your dinghy and outboard motor must be included in the TIP. When it asks you for your Port of Entry use Ensenada or Pichilingue (La Paz) — it really doesn't matter. You will receive a message saying your application was accepted. This does NOT imply you have a TIP. It only means they have accepted your request for a TIP. The TIP will be emailed to you in a few days — check your SPAM folder. If the website does not email you a TIP within 10 days there is a problem. Contact *Banjercito* to straighten it out or hire it done. The fee you paid will eventually be refunded to you.

2) In Person at a Mexican Consulate. Not all Mexican Consulates have a *Banjercito* only Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Sacramento, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Dallas, Houston, Austin, Denver and Chicago. You could cross the border in Otay Mesa and get your TIP at the *Banjercito* there.

3) In Person at Your First Port of Entry. The port must have a *Banjercito* and not all do. Ensenada does — Cabo does not. If Ensenada is your first port in Mexico, your marina will assist you with your paperwork, including checking into the country and the issuance of your TIP.

4) Hire an Agent. There are lots agents. A couple of our favorites that are bilingual and issue the TIP remotely are Michelle Aguilar at BC Connection info@bcconnection.com, mx +1-619-305-9385 or Yolanda Espinoza at Eco Naviera eco.naviera@gmail.com +52-612-348-8787.

Ways to Cancel an Existing or Expired TIP

1) In Person at Otay Mesa. Take a trip to the *Banjercito* on the Mexican side of the border at Otay Mesa. They will cancel the existing TIP and issue you a new one. Bring your passport,

boat documentation or registration, dinghy documentation and the original TIP if you have it. Bring the model, year, and serial numbers of the engines for the boat and the dinghy. In addition, you will need to provide proof that the boat had left Mexico. This can be in the form of the original Mexican port captain clearance papers or CBP Form 1300 issued by US Customs and Border Protection in San Diego. To obtain the form, go to the San Diego Airport CBP office across from Loading Zone V. Park in the McCain parking lot at 2310 McCain Rd. The office phone is (619) 491-2680, and the hours are 9-5. Be sure to bring your boat documents including registration and/or documentation. Go into the office and ask for a Courtesy Clearance. The person at the desk will help you to fill out CBP Form 1300 and authorize it for you. After hours and on weekends, call Watch Command at (619) 491-2601 and tell them you need assistance with Form 1300. The CBP rules are that you are to leave the country within 48 hours of the issuance of Form 1300, but they are turning a blind eye, so don't blow it.

At the *Banjercito*, you will be asked to complete a list of the equipment on board, anything from radar to a washing machine. You may also need additional documentation, such as a letter from you requesting the old TIP's cancellation and the issuance of a new TIP. You could need the bill of sale from the previous owner, who had the TIP, and the original, uncanceled TIP. Bring anything you have.

2) By Mail. The cancellation may be done by mail by sending the above documents via registered mail to a *Banjercito* at a Mexican Consulate or any port of entry. This method is not recommended, as the system has no process for checking the status of the request.

3) Hire it Done. We recommend Yolanda Espinoza at Eco Naviera eco.naviera@gmail.com +52-612-348-8787 or Michelle Aguilar at BC Connection info@bcconnection.com, mx +1-619-305-9385. You may need to provide them with the above-mentioned Form 1300 from the CBP in San Diego.

If you are going to stop in Ensenada, Fito Espinoza, the dockmaster at Marina Coral will help you release an existing TIP but you better be certain there is no *Aduana* TIP on your boat before you arrive in Ensenada, or he will send you and your boat back to the USA.

Paperwork for Owners and Crew

1) A Passport. Everyone going to Mexico on a boat must have a current passport.

2) Notarized Letter for those under 18. If one of the crew is under age 18, he/she must also have a notarized letter for travel if not accompanied by both parents.

3) Immigration As of September 2022, when you arrive in Mexico by boat, you do not get a paper visa (known as an FMM) — instead, your passport is stamped and dated as proof of entry. This permits up to 180 days as a tourist in Mexico and cannot be renewed. Keep in mind this changes a longtime policy. Some ports may not have gotten the word and may require additional paperwork.

Everybody needs to pay an entry fee for immigration of 687 pesos or about \$38. The fee is paid either at the bank or to an agent at your first port of entry. If arriving by boat to a Mexican port you may not pay this fee online. The payment receipt will not be accepted by immigration.

It doesn't matter where your first port is, the crew doesn't



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have to stay on the boat while the captain checks in and gets the passports stamped. Even if it's a weekend. Mexican officials are generally very accommodating — unless they catch you trying to put one over on them.

If you have a problem, our experience is that the best thing to do is tell the officials up front that you have a problem. Most Mexican officials like to solve “problems.”

4) Fishing Licenses. If you carry fishing gear on your boat — technically even if there are just fishing hooks in your liferaft — every person aboard must have a valid fishing license. It doesn't matter if only one or two people fish; everyone has to have a license.

Fishing licenses cost about \$18/day or \$62/year for one person. In light of this, if you only have fish hooks in your liferaft, we wouldn't worry about it. In more than 30 trips to Mexico, we've never been asked for fishing licenses.

By the way, you do not need a license to fish from shore. However, you do need a license to spearfish. Note that you are not allowed to spearfish with scuba tanks or air-powered spearguns.

While you are still in the US, fishing licenses may be obtained from any of the big sportfishing places at America's Cup Harbor in San Diego. You can also get them online at www.tinyurl.com/BajaFishingLicense

5) Boater's Card or License Mexican law states that everyone operating a boat in Mexico must have an operator's license or boater's card. This requirement has been in Mexican law for years but has not been enforced until recently and is not enforced in all ports. But it's not difficult to get one so be prepared and get your card.

Let's Review Because It Can Be Confusing:

You need the following before sailing to Mexico:

1. **TIP** unless getting in Ensenada
2. **Documentation or Registration**
3. **Passports** for everyone
4. **Liability Insurance**
5. **Boater's Card or License**
6. **Email Customs** (if first port is La Paz or Cabo)
7. **Notarized Letter** (if Appl)
8. **Letter of Authorization** (if Appl)
9. **Fishing Licenses** (if Appl)

Who Does the Paperwork?

If you are on the Baja Ha-Ha, you will have the unique opportunity to check into Mexico at Bahia Santa Maria. The vessel paperwork is all done in advance via email. Immigration officials arrive from San Carlos in Mag Bay to the Bahia Santa Maria anchorage by fishing boat to stamp everyone's passports. The amazing process is made possible by our friends at Mag Bay Outfitters.

If your port of entry is Ensenada, the staff of either Cruiseport Marina, Baja Naval or Marina Coral will help you with your TIP and your entry paperwork.

If your port of entry is Cabo San Lucas, do the TIP before you go, and then you can easily do the check-in yourself. It involves some walking and can take a couple of hours, but lots of cruisers do it.

You can also use a ship's agent in Cabo. We recommend Barreda Agency: operations@caboportagent.com. They will

also go to the marina in San Jose del Cabo to check you in. If you or your crew only have limited time in Cabo, we recommend using Barreda Agency's services. If you have more time than money, you might want to take care of the paperwork yourself.

A Point of Confusion

Over the years Mexico has justifiably been unhappy about private American boats that come south to fish in their bountiful waters without ever checking into Mexico, and thus without anybody paying for a boat permit or tourist visas. As a result, there are different rules for boats — almost all fishing boats — that go into Mexican waters but never go to port.

The procedures are outlined on page 4 of the excellent brochure *Visiting Mexico by Private Boat*, www.tinyurl.com/BoatingMexico.

Specifically, those boats need to get a permit online, and each member of the crew has to, individually, get an FMM online. They also have to email their crew list to the nearest port captain's office in advance.

But as we said, this only applies to a special class of boats: those “cruising in territorial waters of Mexico for any length of time without going ashore, such as those visiting the Coronado Islands, going on fishing ventures, etc.” This almost certainly will not apply to you, so don't get confused. And don't worry about having to email a crew list to the port captain.

What About a Zarpe?

When you leave most countries, you are given a *zarpe*, which is an exit document to show officials at your next port of entry that you properly checked out of your last country. Technically, Mexico requires a *zarpe* from boats coming down from the States. In reality, we've only heard of a couple of boats that have been asked for them. In times when Mexican officials have requested them, they've never insisted on them.

If you ask the Coast Guard, they will tell you that you don't need a *zarpe* for Mexico. And as we said, we've never needed one. The rules are different for vessels not registered in the United States. You have to get exit papers.

Radio Licenses

Your vessel must have an FCC license to operate a SSB or Ham radio. If you are a Ham radio operator there are different levels of examinations allowing levels of bandwidth use. For general requirements and procedures for obtaining a Ham license see www.arrl.org and www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/amateur-radio-service.

Reciprocal Ham radio licensing in Mexico is currently amid some confusion. At this time, there are no procedures in place for US licensees (or those from other nations) to obtain a valid license in Mexico or to operate under a reciprocal agreement. Stations are using their US call signs on the Ham nets with no problems from local authorities.

You do not need a reciprocal license to operate a SSB.

Once You're in Mexico

Checking Into and Out of Ports.

Navigating from one Mexican port to another is yet another case where different port captains have different requirements. Ask around for the local policy. Procedures vary wildly,

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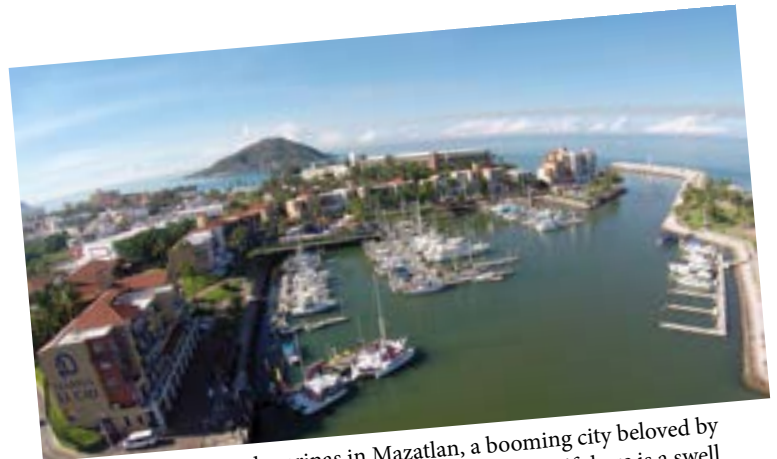
Paddle from your boat to the waves? Punta Mita has the most spots, but you can do it at BSM, Tenacatita, and other places, too.



Most sailing in Mexico is in light air. So spinnakers and gennakers can save lots of money on diesel, which isn't cheap like it used to be.



There's nothing to taking a dinghy in and out of the surf. Nothing at all. Unless, of course, you get caught in a breaking wave. Did you know that the small props on outboards are also used to grind meat for sausage?



El Cid is one of several marinas in Mazatlan, a booming city beloved by many of the liveaboards. But be careful at the entrance if there is a swell running.



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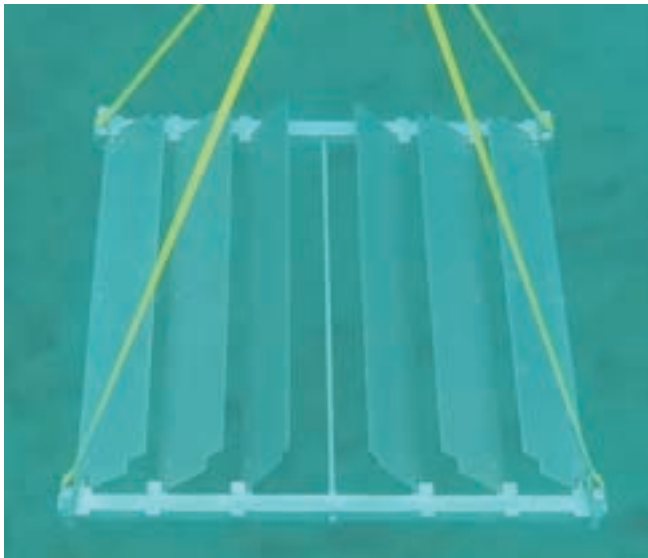
WORKS ON ANY BOAT, power or sail. Hang from a pole or right off the rail.



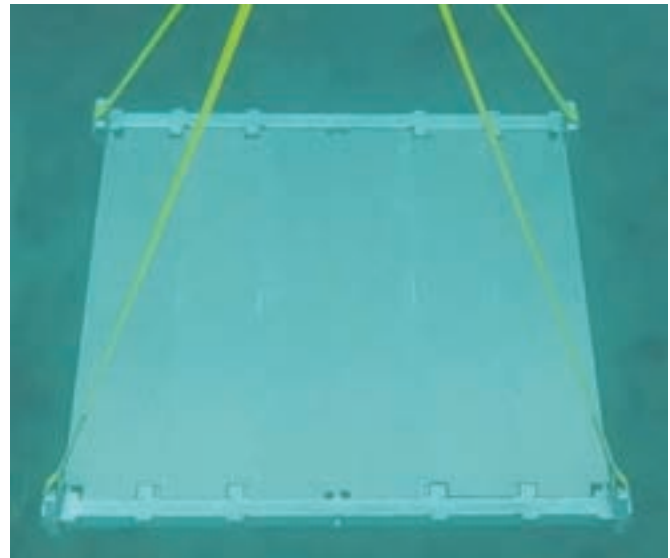
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including emails to the port captain, or the requirement of a boater's card or other proof of competency, and some port captains insist on a document issued by your last Mexican port.

We have heard of instances involving days of delay to complete the paperwork, and in some instances exorbitant fees. In La Cruz, you must physically go to the port captain with your papers. If you stay in a marina in La Paz, the marina will notify the port captain. If you anchor out in La Paz, you hail the port captain on the VHF, answer a few simple questions, and you are good to go.

Do what the local port captain requires or it can lead to problems, delays, and/or fines.

Clearing Out of Mexico

International clearance must be done at a port of entry, not just any port captain's office. The process for clearing out of Mexico is as follows:

- 1) Complete the crew list for your *zarpe*.
- 2) Have immigration stamp your crew list.
- 3) Go to the port captain's office to pay the vessel's clearing-out fees, and have the crew list stamped with the authorization for leaving Mexico.
- 4) Go to a *Banjercito* and cancel your Temporary Import Permit if there is a possibility that you may not return to Mexico before it expires.

In the "old days" lots of skippers wouldn't bother to clear out of Mexico, or planned on checking out at Ensenada but then just blew by because the weather was good. This is a big no-no and can cause *muchas* problems for you or anybody else who takes your boat to Mexico again. Mexican officials have computers and scan passports, so they know if you cleared out of the country or if you're in the country legally. Be smart; be legal.

Before attempting to get an international clearance, we'd ask other cruisers whether the port captain is a stickler for obscure rules and regulations. Apparently, boats and crews are technically supposed to get health certificates before clearing out of the country. In addition to being a waste of time, it makes little sense for Mexico to ask for one when a vessel is leaving as opposed to arriving. To our knowledge, this rule has only been enforced in La Paz. A few years ago this was a complicated and expensive process, but more recently it's said to be "quick and free."

In general, boats headed back to California will clear out at either Cabo San Lucas or Ensenada.

What happens if you arrive in French Polynesia without having gotten a *zarpe* from Mexico? You have to sail 3,000 miles upwind back to Mexico to get one. Just kidding. Actually, we're not sure what happens. Just get the *zarpe*.

Dress to Impress

To a much greater degree than in the United States, Mexican officials and others will treat you according to how well you dress and behave. If you dress as if you're an important person, you'll usually be treated as such. 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. So don't expect too much respect in return. And as they say, you

only get one chance to make a good first impression.

If you're a woman who prefers to wear a minimum of clothing, it's not a problem in tourist areas or in most marinas. But if you visit official offices or venture off into "real" Mexico, you likely won't be treated the way you expect. 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 out. If you go naked on the beach, know that "Mexican eyes" are everywhere.

Cruising Itineraries

Depending on how long you are going to stay in Mexico, we recommend one of two basic itineraries.

Itinerary One

If you'll be doing the Puddle Jump the following spring, we strongly suggest that you head up the Sea of Cortez as soon as you can. This should give you three to four weeks of the best weather in the Sea of Cortez.

If you can ultimately make it 250 miles north to Puerto Escondido in the Sea, you will have gotten an excellent taste of what is unique and so special about the Sea of Cortez.

If you don't have as much time, or like to take things slower, you can get almost as big a taste of the Sea by going just 175 miles north to Isla San Francisco. Most of your stops will be at the fabulous uninhabited offshore islands, which have great anchorages that offer excellent protection in the case of an early-season Norther. Pets, by the way, are strictly prohibited from going ashore at these islands/national parks.

And don't forget La Paz, one of the most popular cruiser destinations in Mexico. But be wary of the allure of La Paz, as countless cruisers have dropped their hook in La Paz and weren't able to escape for years.

"Northers," which are two to three days of strong winds from the north, are the bane of cruising in the Sea of Cortez, as they bring cold air and cooler water temperatures. The number of Northers during any given winter can vary tremendously.

Some years they seem to come almost one after another. Other years there are hardly any at all.

Neil Shroyer of Marina de La Paz once told us, "La Paz is warm about 50% of the time in the winter. But you don't know which 50% of the days, weeks, months or entire winter seasons will be warm, and which won't."

Recent winters have been some of the more pleasant ones, with few Northers and mild temperatures. But some winters can be wicked. Remember the Fastnet Storm of 1989 that killed 15 participants in the Fastnet Race? Some of the sailors who had done that race also did a November race from Long Beach to La Paz. They said that conditions in the Sea of Cortez — where the swell can be unusually short and steep — were even worse than in the deadly Fastnet. But Northers that strong are rare, and Northers are forecast well in advance.

Most years Northers don't start until mid-December and are over mid-February.

Since most people cruise the tropics for warm air and water, we suggest that those following Itinerary One head to the mainland, meaning Mazatlán, Isla Isabela, San Blas, and Banderas Bay (Puerto Vallarta) by the mid-December. Banderas Bay — meaning Punta Mita, La Cruz, Yelapa, and the three marinas in the bay — is a major cruiser center in December

The logo features a stylized blue and orange wave or sail shape to the left of the text.

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with lots of great activities, such as the Banderas Bay Blast, which is a three-day mini-Ha-Ha on the flat waters of the bay. It's also when the humpbacks arrive.

After the start of the new year, we suggest working your way down the Gold Coast, where Chamela, Tenacatita Bay, and Barra de Navidad will be among the highlights.

The big decision for those who will Puddle Jump after only three to five months in Mexico is whether to continue 200 miles south to Z-town. This is a great place and home to the Zihua SailFest cruiser charity, which has raised almost \$1 million for local schools and other projects.

The dilemma for Puddle Jumpers is that SailFest is at the end of February, which is when most Puddle Jump folks are gathering and "seminaring" 300 miles north in Banderas Bay for March departures to the South Pacific. Boats can and do leave Z-town for the South Pacific, but it makes for a longer crossing with more light air the first week or so.

Itinerary Two

If you're going to stay in Mexico for at least a year — which always includes a group of folks who think they're going to Puddle Jump their first year, but realize they either haven't gotten their fill of Mexico or aren't quite ready to go across — Itinerary Two is what we recommend.

In this case, and particularly if there has been an early Norther or two, we suggest that after arrival in Cabo you blow off the Sea of Cortez and head across to Mazatlán, San Blas, and Banderas Bay. While it's twice as far to Banderas Bay as it is up to La Paz, the sail to Banderas Bay is off the wind, and there's a decent chance you'll get there in less time than it would take to sail up to La Paz. And having sailed 1,000 miles downwind, sailing upwind again, as you'll have to do

to get La Paz, will come as an unpleasant shock.

So we suggest that you enjoy the mainland, with a special emphasis on Banderas Bay for the month of December. Since you've got plenty of time, we suggest you then leisurely make your way down the Gold Coast, and not miss Zihua SailFest. Come the middle of February, we'd slowly start heading back north, revisiting the places you liked best on the way down. Returning to Puerto Vallarta in time for the ever-popular Banderas Bay Regatta. Cruisers racing their houses in superb conditions never gets old.

The big question is when to head across to the Sea. Most everyone goes too early — at least if they are looking to enjoy swimming in the Sea. The reality is that the Sea of Cortez water stays warm surprisingly late in the year — at least to the end of November — but doesn't warm again till surprisingly late in the year — like May or even early June. The air temperature might be in the high 80s and 90s, but the water will still be cold.

May, June, and July are great months in the Sea of Cortez. After that, you have to be prepared for the Big Heat, and the increased possibility of tropical storms and hurricanes. You may want to leave your boat in a marina or on the hard and go elsewhere.

The good news is that if you leave your boat somewhere in the Sea, she will be in a perfect position to enjoy the Sea of Cortez at its finest, which is in October and November.

Other Itineraries

Our suggested itineraries are just the roughest of guidelines. Lots of cruising vets will no doubt have other ideas. And every cruiser's schedule is subject to all kinds of complicating factors. The good news is that it's hard to go wrong when cruising Mexico, as long as you don't try to do the mainland in the summer.





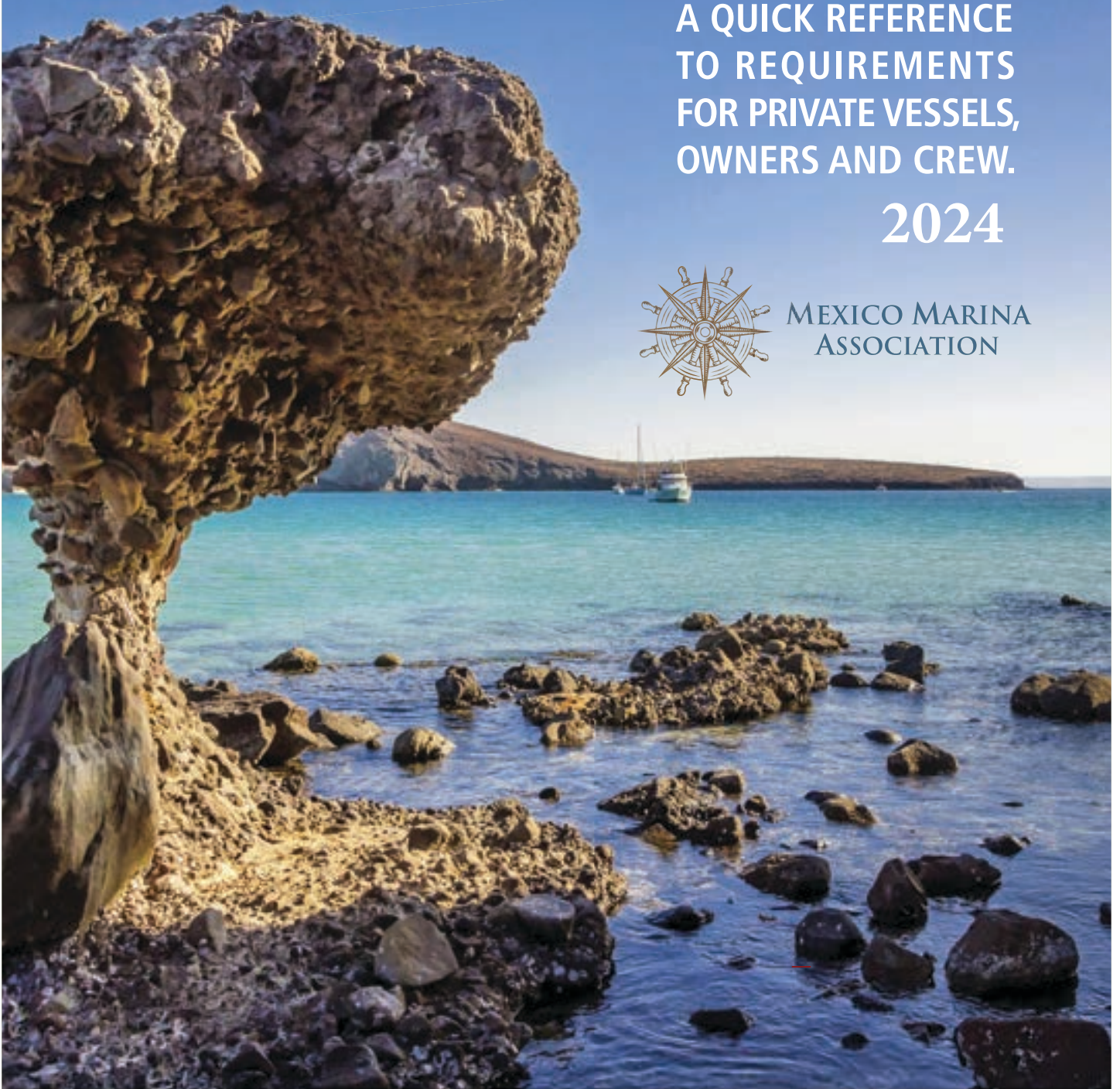
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Tropical Storms and Hurricanes

The “official” hurricane season in the Eastern Pacific, which includes Mexico, is from the middle of May until the end of November. Not that hurricanes live by a schedule, as there have been hurricanes in Mexico as early as mid-May and as late as the end of December. But only a very few, and usually far to the south, down by the border with Guatemala.

Mariners view hurricane season a more nuanced way, as most tropical storms and hurricanes occur in August, September and October. And most of these storms parallel the coast a couple of hundred miles offshore and then head in the general direction of Hawaii. The biggest threat to marine interests in Mexico is in September and October, when some hurricanes tend to curve back toward land rather than head farther out to sea, and thus pose threats to Cabo, La Paz, and the rest of the Sea of Cortez.

Despite the high hurricane threat in mid-October, that's when they hold the multimillion-dollar Bisbee Fishing Tournament out of Cabo.

By the beginning of November, the threat of tropical storms and hurricanes drops to close to nil.

The nice thing about most Mexican hurricanes is that they start far to the south, often down by the border with Guatemala. Thus everyone usually has several days' warning, and those in the Sea as much as a week.

Tropical storms and hurricanes need a certain set of conditions to come together, so professional weather routers can often tell you whether conditions are present for the possible formation of tropical storms. www.eebmike.com has the most extensive tropical storm coverage and forecasting that we're aware of.

Relatively Safe Places During Hurricane Season

Barra de Navidad, which took a near hit from Patricia, the strongest — and also the most compact — hurricane to ever hit the Western Hemisphere. Not only did boats in Grand Marina do well, so did the ones at anchor in the lagoon.

Banderas Bay/Puerto Vallarta, perhaps because it's guarded by mountains to 8,000 feet, has never been hit by a major hurricane.

In October 2002, Category 5 Hurricane Zenn, made landfall about 60 miles to the north at San Blas, destroying 95% of the buildings. Banderas Bay did get some huge waves, particularly along the Vallarta Malecón, where some cars were tossed around by the surf. But there was no damage to boats in the marinas.

In 2023, tropical storm Lidia quickly turned into Hurricane Lidia, and came ashore just south of Puerto Vallarta as a Category 4 storm. The storm caused little damage to marinas but brought lots of rain.

We consider the marinas on Banderas Bay to be safe except for a direct hit, and they haven't had a direct hit yet. Summer lightning has been a greater cause for concern on Banderas Bay than hurricanes.

Mazatlán has only been hit by two bad hurricanes over the last 70 years. A hurricane known only as “Mazatlán” hit in 1943 and claimed 100 lives. Walt Disney was reportedly there to experience it. The hurricane struck with no advance warning. Olivia hit in October 1943 with only Category 3 winds, but killed 30 people, 20 of them on shrimp boats,

and left 7,000 homeless. Primitive weather forecasting was a major cause. We consider Mazatlán, where most of the marinas are a long way up a channel, to be safe in all but a direct hit.

Cabo, La Paz, Puerto Escondido, and San Carlos/ Guaymas. All of these locations have been hit by powerful September and October hurricanes, sometimes with severe damage. The other thing to remember is that flash flooding in these Sea of Cortez locations can be as destructive and deadly as the hurricane-force winds.

The marina at Cabo has withstood 100-knot winds at least twice with little damage. But in September 2014 Odile hit with 120 knots, and caused extensive damage in Cabo, including knocking out several sections of marina docks.

Odile continued north to La Paz, where marina interests also suffered a lot of damage from storms in the 1990s. The hurricane claimed the lives of three cruisers on their anchored-out boats. Other boats were sunk in the anchorage.

The effect of tropical storms and hurricanes on La Paz is directly related to which way the wind is blowing. If the winds only blow offshore, the damage tends to be limited. If a storm blows onshore, as happened in the 1990s, the damage can be severe.

Odile would continue on to damage boats in Puerto Escondido and across in San Carlos, two other places where a lot of boats were lost in the 1990s.

Odile started far to the south of Acapulco, so boat owners in the Sea had plenty of time to flee to the north. The problem is that there are so many tropical storm false alarms that you could be fleeing to the north several times a season, and for nothing.



Etiquette requires getting the sand off your feet before you come aboard.



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FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

We consider boats in all of these locations to be reasonably safe if they are in marinas or strapped down on the hard, as the Sea usually gets hit by a tropical storm only every two years. And not all tropical storms strike where boats are.

Boats left on the hook or on moorings, particularly if they are left unattended, are much less safe during hurricane season. A big problem is other boats, particularly unattended boats, breaking loose and starting the “bowling ball” effect, with other boats being the “pins.” In such cases, no amount of preparation on your part can protect your boat.

Some boat owners hire other mariners to watch over their anchored-out boats during hurricane season, and to bring them into a marina if a storm approaches. Be aware that not everyone hired to watch over boats for absent owners does what they promise to do. If you leave a boat in Mexico for the off-season and hire someone to watch over her or do work on her, make sure somebody else checks on them.

If you want your boat to be as safe as possible from hurricanes and tropical storms in the Sea of Cortez, we'd recommend the Don Juan anchorage in the Bahia de los Angeles area. It's so far north that we can't remember the last time it got hit. But you need to be on your boat.

Take note that boats that summer in the Sea of Cortez are also subject to *elephantas*, which are short but violent storms that seemingly come out of nowhere in the middle of the night. Sometimes they have been strong enough to drive a number of anchored boats ashore. A somewhat similar phenomenon is the *chubasco*, which sometimes hits the tropical Pacific Coast of Mexico from May to October.

FAQS

Q: Are there pirates in Mexico?

A: No. In the last 40 years we know of only two cases of cruising boats — the catamarans *Capricorn Cat* and *Moontide* — being boarded by Mexicans with guns. Both incidents happened at the Bufadero anchorage south of Manzanillo. In both cases, the thieves made away with a little bit of money and did no harm.

Q: Should I bring guns to Mexico?

A: Only if you plan on buying large quantities of drugs from members of cartels. And in that case, you'll want a full complement of assault weapons. We've never brought guns to Mexico, and have never felt the need for them. Oh yeah, they're illegal.

Q: Is dinghy and outboard theft a problem?

A: From time to time it is. Outboard theft had been quite rare in the Sea of Cortez until about May 2018, when about five outboards were stolen in one week from Guaymas. And a few years ago, outboards were being stolen from boats anchored at Stone Island just to the south of the Old Harbor at Mazatlán. They were even being taken from dinghies hauled out of the water on anchored boats. And San Blas had some outboards stolen a couple of years ago.

Always either lock your outboard/dinghy to your boat or lift it out of the water at night.

Q: How much food do I need to bring to Mexico?

A: Only specialty items. Many first-time cruisers overload their boats with canned foods and other staples, apparently not realizing there is plenty of food in Mexico. Carrying lots



The calm waters of Turtle Bay, with room for 1,000 anchored boats, are a welcome refuge.

of canned goods takes up lots of space and makes the boat heavy and slow, and oftentimes the cans just end up rusting in some boat corner for years.

There are big-box stores such as Costco, Sam's Club and Walmart in all Mexican cities — Cabo, La Paz, Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo, Zihua. And some of them, like the new La Comer in Bucerias near La Cruz, are right up there with Whole Foods in style and substance.

You do not want to fill a huge freezer with meat bought in the States because it might be confiscated by agriculture inspectors when you arrive in Cabo. Besides, you can buy great cuts of meat in Mexico.

Most medium and large cities have traditional *mercados*. These are a lot of fun, although the skinned cow and pig heads in the display cases result in some cruisers converting to vegetarianism. Mazatlán has a fine *mercado*.

Mexico is now inundated with OXXO stores, which are similar to 7/11s. They only sell four items: sugar, fat, beer, and tobacco. Entering them is not good for your health.

There are plenty of *tiendas* and *bodegas* on the outskirts of cities and in smaller villages, although naturally, these don't always have that great a selection. Ask what day of the week the fresh veggies come in.

Q: Should I bring lots of my favorite wines?

A: Wine tends not to age well on boats, so we wouldn't bring that much. Besides, you can find many of your favorites at the big-box stores.

Similarly, you can find almost all your favorite brands of hard liquor at the big-boxes.

Q: What is the best way to get money in Mexico?

A: Get pesos from ATM machines— preferably at banks or Costcos, because they tend to be safer — and that's how



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FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO



Marina Puerto de la Navidad (Barra) has become an extremely popular cruiser marina in recent years. But there is also a great free anchorage in the lagoon a short distance away"

you'll get the best exchange rate.

Never exchange dollars for pesos at a *cambio*, as the exchange rate is terrible and the fees are expensive.

Never get dollars from an ATM; you never want to pay for anything in dollars because you'll get a terrible exchange rate. Always pay using pesos when paying in cash, because once again, you'll get totally screwed — we've seen as much as 30% — in the exchange rate if you use dollars.

Q: What about using credit cards?

A: Using credit cards is fine under two conditions:

1) Make sure your credit card doesn't assess "foreign transaction fees," which often run close to 5%.

2) Periodically check your account to make sure your credit card number hasn't been stolen and used fraudulently. Credit card theft is rampant in Mexico.

Q: What's that buzzing sound?

A: Quite possibly Africanized bees, which can be everything from an annoyance to a serious health hazard. Bees are commonly attracted to standing water on boats in the Sea of Cortez in the summer.

If anyone on your boat is allergic to bee stings, carry an EpiPen. And you might want to pick up a beekeeper suit, which runs about \$60 from Amazon.

Q: Why are marina rates so high in Mexico?

A: First, almost all were built relatively recently, so there are land and construction costs that have to be recaptured. Second, there's only a five- to six-month season in Mexico, as opposed to California, where marinas have a 12-month season. Marina rates in Mexico drop significantly during the summer.

Q: Is the water safe to drink?

A: Some brave souls drink tap water. Bottled water is available everywhere and not expensive if you buy it in five-gallon containers.

Some folks use special solutions to wash their lettuce, spinach and other fruits and veggies.

Q: How do I make sure I don't get turista?

A: There is no sure way to prevent it. You either get it or

you don't. As awful as you might feel, you'll be better in a few days. If not, or if you become severely dehydrated, see a doctor.

Q: Where are the best places to have family and friends visit for an adventure?

A: If they are sailors, they should enjoy crossing the Sea of Cortez, from La Paz or Cabo to Mazatlán or Banderas Bay. If they are lesser sailors or non-sailors, daysailing on the flat waters of Banderas Bay is excellent. If they are interested in unusual natural beauty, a short cruise from La Paz to the nearby islands of Espiritu Santo and Caleta Partida for a few overnights would fit the bill.

Q: When is the worst time to have family and friends join us?

A: During the summer and *Semana Santa*, which is the Mexican Easter vacation. The latter is a complete mob scene on the coast and on the beaches.

The best times are late fall and late spring in the Sea of Cortez and winter on the mainland. The farther south you go on the mainland, the hotter it gets. Zihua and Acapulco are always cooking!

Q: What kind of clothing should I bring?

A: If you'll be spending the winter in the Sea, you'll need both warm- and cold-weather clothes. If you head over to the mainland, you'll very rarely want anything more than shorts and light shirts. Long-sleeve shirts may seem like a bad idea in such a hot climate, but you want to keep the sun off your arms. Long-sleeve linen shirts are great.

Most first-timers find they bring way more clothing than they need or want. But if you're doing a Baja Bash before August, you'll want to make sure you have a good cold-weather outfit, because, after the tropics, it's freezing along that coast.

Q: What about laundry?

A: Doing laundry is usually one of the biggest annoyances when cruising. Fortunately, you can find good and inexpensive laundry services in most Mexican towns.

Q: Can I get good work done on my diesel in Mexico?

A: Yes, but you must be careful. Unfortunately, lots of cruisers with a set of tools and an empty cruising kitty fancy

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themselves expert diesel mechanics and they aren't. There are, however, some good cruiser mechanics and Mexican mechanics. Get referrals before making any commitments.

Q: What other kinds of good work can I get done?

A: Mexicans excel at repairing electric motors, and are very good at stainless, canvas, and cushions. We should say, many Mexicans are. Once again, always get references.

And remember, *mañana* doesn't mean "tomorrow," it means "not now." Just as in the States, many service providers don't deliver when they say they will. We can't tell you how many Baja Bashes and Puddle Jumps we've heard of being delayed by weeks — if not months — because jobs weren't completed when promised. While making a deposit is customary, never pay for an entire job in advance.

Q: What about getting my boat washed and waxed?

A: Mexicans tend to do a great job of cleaning. But compare quotes and get references. Mexicans are good at keeping bottoms cleaned, but make sure your boat isn't given a "donut."

Q: Should you use a Baja filter when taking on diesel?

A: We take our fuel straight, treat it, and haven't had any problems.

Q: When anchoring in an uncrowded anchorage, should I anchor close to or just in front of an already anchored boat?

A: No, you should not. And if you're going to play loud music or run a Honda portable genset, anchor as far away from others as possible.

Q: What is "API"?

A: In 1997, the administration of most ports in Mexico was turned over to a state-owned company referred to as "API" (app-ee). API is responsible for maintaining lights and channel buoys in harbors. Boats anchored in ports such as Cabo San Lucas, La Paz, and Puerto Escondido must pay the API anchoring fee, and at some the port entry fee as well. If you are in a marina they will usually take care of the API fees. Check with your marina regarding your responsibility.

Q: What is the single most helpful device while cruising Mexico?

A: An iPhone. To list just some of the reasons, it's good for making calls via regular phone service as well as WhatsApp, Skype and others. It's good for texting and for surfing the internet. It has great alarms to warn if you're dragging anchor. It's your always-with-you camera/video recorder and playback machine. It's excellent for navigation when paired with Navionics charts. It's your book and music library, and when matched with Bluetooth speakers, the basis of your sound system. If you have modern instruments, they can connect with your phone via Bluetooth, allowing you to monitor the weather and many of your boat functions from your berth. There's more. Just don't drop the iPhone overboard.

Author's note:

I hope you find this First-Timer's Guide to Mexico to be helpful. I'm particularly interested if you have any corrections, disagree with any of my opinions, or have additional information you think should be shared.

Contact me at richard@latitude38.com.

*Richard Spindler,
aka The Wanderer and The Grand Poobah*



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If you want to sail and are looking for a captain, or are a captain looking for crew, enter your information in the Latitude 38 crew page to get connected. www.latitude38.com/crew-list

Contact Info for Major Mexican Marinas



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

NORTHERN COASTAL BAJA

Puerto Salina La Marina — Tijuana
 slips: shallow draft
 harbormaster: Paul Hernandez
 paul@marinapuertosalina.com
 +52(646) 155-4188
 +52(646) 155-4106
 info@marinapuertosalina.com
 VHF:channel 16

Marina Coral — Ensenada
 slips: 353 - 30' to 109', end ties to 100'
 harbormaster: Fito Espinoza
 fito.espinoza@hotelcoral.com
 +52 (646) 175-0050
 from USA: (866) 302-0066
 marina@hotelcoral.com
 www.hotelcoral.com
 VHF:channel 71

Baja Naval Marina — Ensenada
 slips: 50 from 33' to 80'
 harbormaster: Victor Manuel Cantu Aguilar
 +52 (646) 174-0020
 marina@bajanaval.com
 www.bajanaval.com
 VHF:channel 77 & 16

Contact Info for Major Mexican Marinas

Ensenada Cruiseport Village — Ensenada

Slips: 191 – 36' to 68', end ties from 83'-135',
a 510' mega yacht area.
+52 (646) 173-41-41
from USA (877)-219-5822
info@hutchisonportsecv.com
www.marina.hutchisonportsecv.com

SOUTHERN COSTAL BAJA

Marina Cabo San Lucas — Cabo San Lucas

slips: 380 up to 365'
manager:Jesus Esquitel
+52 (624) 173-9140
CSL@igymarinas.com
igymarinas.com
VHF:channel 88A

Marina del Rey — Cabo San Lucas

slips: 80 to 130'
harbormaster: Arturo Serrano Torres
+52 (624) 143-6522 ex25
from USA(619) 259-6902
arturo@marinadelreycabo.com
www.marinadelreycabo.com
VHF:channel 06 & 16

Marina Puerto Los Cabos — San Jose del Cabo

slips: 200 - from 30' to 260'
manager:Anibal de Iturbide
+52 (624) 105-6028
+52 (624) 105-6181
adeiturbide@puertoloscabos.com
www.puertoloscabos.com
VHF:channel 22A

LA PAZ

Marina Costa Baja — La Paz

slips: 250 - from 30' to 220'
dockmaster....Gabriel Ley
+52 (612) 121-6225
from USA..... (888) 866-9394
gley@marinacostabaja.com
www.marinacostabaja.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Palmira — La Paz

slips: 193 - from 25' to 145'
manager:Eduardo Medina
eduardo.medina@marinapalmira.com.mx
+52 (612) 121-6159
reservation@marinapalmira.com.mx
www.marinapalmira.com.mx
VHF:channel 16

Marina Cortez — La Paz

slips: 50 - from 40' to 300'
manager:Guadalupe Morales Sanchez
+52 (612) 123-4101
+52 (612)157-0013
dockmaster@marinacortez.com
www.marinacortez.com

Marina de La Paz — La Paz

slips: 110 - from 30' to 200'
harbormaster: Neil Shroyer
+52 (612) 122-1646
info@marinadelapaz.com
www.marinadelapaz.com
VHF:channel 16

SEA OF CORTEZ

Marina Puerto Escondido — Loreto

100 slips up to 200', dry storage, moorings
harbormaster: Javier Fuerte
+52 (613) 133-0189
harbormaster@marinapuertoesccondido.com
www.marinapuertoesccondido.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Fonatur Santa Rosalia — Santa Rosalia

slips: 20 – up to 50', 1 longer end tie
+52 (615) 152-1769
+52 (615) 152-1768
mmabarca@fonatur.gob.mx
customerservice@fonatur.gob.mx
www.marinasonatur.com/SantaRosaliaat.aspx
VHF:channel 16

Safe Marina — Puerto Penasco

harbormaster: Miguel Acevedo
+52 (638) 383-1145
+52 (638) 386-5868
miguelacevedo71@live.com.mx
VHF:channel 88A

Cabrales Boatyard — Puerto Penasco

slips: dry storage up to 95'
manager:Salvador Cabrales Irineo
+52 (638) 112-0204
scabrales@cabralescorp.com
www.cabralesboatyard.com

Marina Real — San Carlos

slips: up to 55'
manager:Isabel Escobar
+52 (622) 227-0011
marinareal@prodigy.net.mx
VHF:channel 16

Marina San Carlos — San Carlos

slips: 336 - 16' to 110', dry storage
manager:Silvia I. Ramos
+52 (622) 226-1061
from USA(520) 407-6774
info@marinasancarlos.com
www.marinasantcarlos.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Guaymas — Guaymas

slips: dry storage including cats
manager:gabriel@marinaguaymas.com
+52 (622) 221-7200
+52 (622) 118-6701
info@marinaguaymas.com
www.marinaguaymas.com

Marina Fonatur Guaymas — Guaymas

slips: 15, one longer end tie
+52 (622) 224-3000
jrcastro@fonatur.gob.mx
customerservice@fonatur.gob.mx
www.marinasonatur.com/GuaymasAt.aspx
VHF:channel 16

Marina Palmira — Topolobampo

Slips: 40 - up to 150 ft
+52 (688) 862-1544
contacto_topolobampo@marinapalmira.com.mx
www.marinapalmiratopolobampo.com

Marina y Club de Yates Isla Cortes — Altata

slips: 90 - 30' to 120', dry storage to 35'
harbormaster: Cristian Lares
cristianlares1982@gmail.com
comercialmcortes@gmail.com
+52 (667) 324-0446
www.marinaislacortes.mx
VHF:channel 16

MAZATLAN & SAN BLAS

Marina El Cid — Mazatlan

slips: 120 - from 25' to 120'
director: Geronimo Cevallos
+52 (669) 916-3468
from USA(855) 513-4080
marinaelcidmazatlan@elcid.com.mx
www.elcidmarinas.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Fonatur Mazatlan — Mazatlan

slips: 20 - up to 110'
manager:Gabriel
+52 (669) 913-3730
ghinojosa@fonatur.gob.mx
customerservice@fonatur.gob.mx
www.marinasonatur.com/mazatlanat.aspx
VHF:channel 67

Contact Info for Major Mexican Marinas

Marina Mazatlan — Mazatlan
slips: 339 - from 30' to 125'
harbormaster: Saul Alberto Lopez
+52 (669) 916-7799
+52 (669) 669-2936
atecmarinamazatlan@gmail.com
www.marina-mazatlan.com
VHF:channel 16 or 72

Isla Mazatlan Marina — Mazatlan
slips: 27
+52 (669) 913-3388
from USA(866) 357-5679
slips@islamazatlan.com.mx
www.islamazatlan.com.mx

Marina Fonatur San Blas — San Blas
slips: 20 - up to 110'
+52 (323) 285-0033
rmgomez@fonatur.gob.mx
customerservice@fonatur.gob.mx
www.marinafonatur.com/SanBlasAt.aspx
VHF:channel 16 & 74

BANDERAS BAY

Marina Riviera Nayarit — La Cruz
slips: 340 - from 31' to 400'
harbormaster: Rafael Alcántara Luarte
+52 (329) 295-5526
cell +52 (322) 205-7467
harbormaster@marinarivieranayarit.com
www.marinarivieranayarit.com
VHF:channel 16

Paradise Village Marina — Nuevo Vallarta
slips: 200 - from 26 to 240'
harbormaster: Dick Markie
dmarkie@paradisevillagegroup.com
+52 (322) 226-6728
marina@paradisevillagegroup.com
paradisevillagegroup.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Nuevo Vallarta — Nuevo Vallarta
slips: 64 - from 22' to 130'
harbormaster: Juan Sebastian Estrada
+52 (322) 297-7000
juan@marinanuevovallarta.com
www.marinanuevovallarta.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Pueblo Nautico — Nuevo Vallarta
slips: 10 - up to 80'
harbormaster: Jesus Alejandro Velasco
+52 (322) 297-4553
+52 (322) 297-1069
info@marinapueblonautico.com
www.marinapueblonautico.com

Marina Vallarta — Puerto Vallarta
slips: 351 - from 25' to 160'
harbormaster: Pablo Fernandez
phone+52 (322) 221-0275
+52 (322) 221-0722
admin3@marina-vallarta.com.mx
www.marina-vallarta.com.mx
VHF:channels 18 & 16

Opequimar Centro Marino — Puerto Vallarta
slips: 25, dry storage
manager:Carlos Verjan
+52 (322) 221-1800
+52 (322) 221-1978
info@opequimar.com
www.opequimar.com
VHF:channel 68

SOUTHERN MAINLAND

Marina Puerto Navidad — Barra de Navidad
slips: 207 - 31' to 150', 6 end ties
harbormaster: Secundino Alvarez
+52 (314) 337-9014
harbormaster@islaresort.com.mx
dockmaster@islaresort.com.mx
www.islanavidad.com.mx

Marina Las Hadas — Manzanillo
slips: 70 - stern-to med mooring style
harbormaster: Adrián Evidarte Ramos
+52 (314) 331-0101
from USA(888) 559-4329
hadas.marina@brisas.com.mx
www.lasbrisascollection.com

Marina Ixtapa — Ixtapa
slips: 583 - from 15' to 200'
manager:Elsa Zuniga
ezuniga@marina-ixtapa.com
+52 (755) 553-2180
+52 (755) 553-0222
+52 (755) 553-2012
contacto@marina-ixtapa.com
ixtapa@jarestate.com
www.marina-ixtapa.com
VHF:channel 16

Club de Yates Acapulco — Acapulco
slips: 300 - from 30' to 180'
harbormaster: Enrique Calderon
+52 (744) 482-3859
+52 (744) 434-1999
ggeneral@clubdeyatesdeacapulco.com
www.clubdeyatesdeacapulco.com
VHF:channel 16

La Marina Acapulco — Acapulco
slips: 269 - from 30' to 240'
manager:Luis Ramire
+52 (744) 483-6143
+52 (744) 843-7744
+52 (744) 131-3007
marinaacapulco@jarestate.com
www.lamarinaacapulco.com
VHF:Channel 16

Marina Performance — Acapulco
slips: 16 to 120', 18 med style
manager:Alejandro Arnold Hudson
+52(744) 480-2334
pensionacapulco@jarestate.com
acapulco@jarestate.com
www.jarestate.com
VHF:channel 16

Marina Chahue — Huatulco
slips: 82 - 27' to 60', 2 to 100'
manager:Ezequiel Gutierrez
+52 (958) 587-2652
egutierrez@fonatur.gob.mx
marinachahueserv@fonatur.gob.mx
marinachahue@hotmail.com
tomzap.com/marinachahue.html

Marina Chiapas — Puerto Chiapas
slips: 70 to 150', dry storage
+52 (962) 620-4038
+52 (961) 111-8291
harbormaster: Guillermo Garcia Stivalet
memogarcia@marinachiapas.com.mx
marinachiapas@hotmail.com
www.marina-chiapas.com
VHF:channel 16

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: patsy@baja-haha.com

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