



Planning Your Trip to Baja



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Now that we've given an overview of the Baja Peninsula, here are some tips for planning your trip to Baja. We'll begin with things you can prepare in advance of your trip. As some areas of the peninsula are fairly remote having your rig and gear in top shape is important.

Note: We included links to useful websites at the bottom of the post for easy reference.



Internet Resources

There are many websites with different types of information about the peninsula. Here are some of our favorites:

Discover Baja Travel Club – has extensive information geared to RVers on their website which is available to all. This includes helpful checklists, information on all the types of permits you might need (fishing, boat, etc).



An important feature of this website is that they post regular updates on road conditions. In addition, they sell vehicle insurance and offer special services for those who become members.

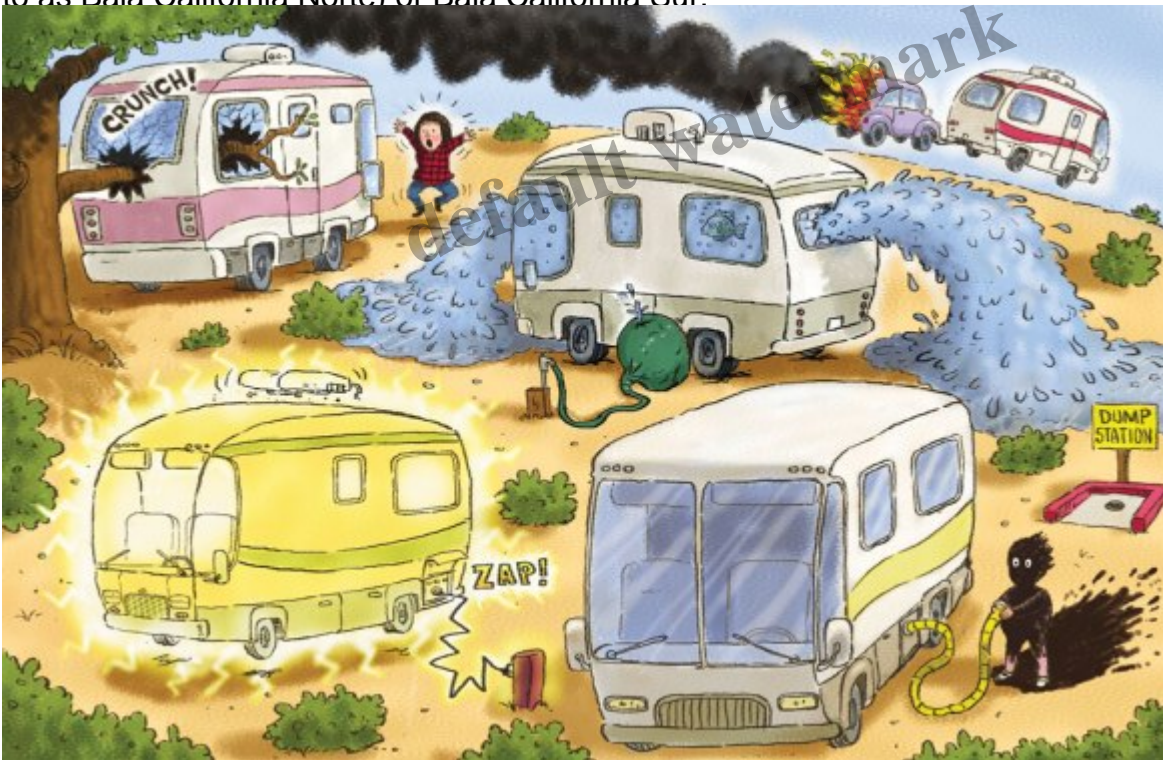
Baja Bound Mexican Insurance – Also has lots of information for travelers driving to Baja in addition to



facegix Visit Mexico – maintained by the Mexico Tourism Board, this

website has good destination information but is geared towards travelers flying into Mexico.

It's organized by state, so you need to search for either Baja California (sometimes mistakenly referred to as Baia California Norte) or Baia California Sur.



and destination

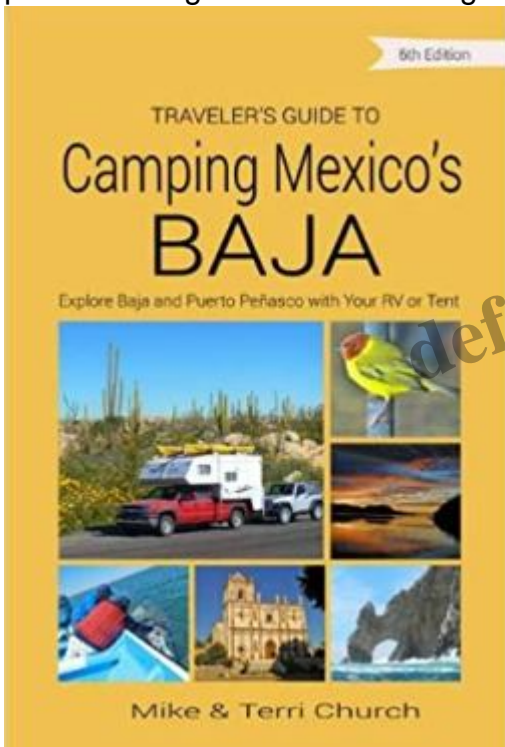
Also be sure to

check your other favorite RV bloggers and google RVing to Baja, as many people have blogged about their travels to the peninsula. We gleaned lots of information from our fellow bloggers and their experiences. They provide some excellent information.



One indispensable resource in our opinion is the book “Traveler’s Guide to

Camping Mexico’s Baja” by Mike and Terri Church. The book describes the various areas of the peninsula in great detail including information on roads, gas stations, sights to see and most accompanied by very detailed little hand drawn maps with all the. Our copy is practically in tatters we used it so much. Don’t go to Baja



This book is occasionally updated and reissued. We got a newly

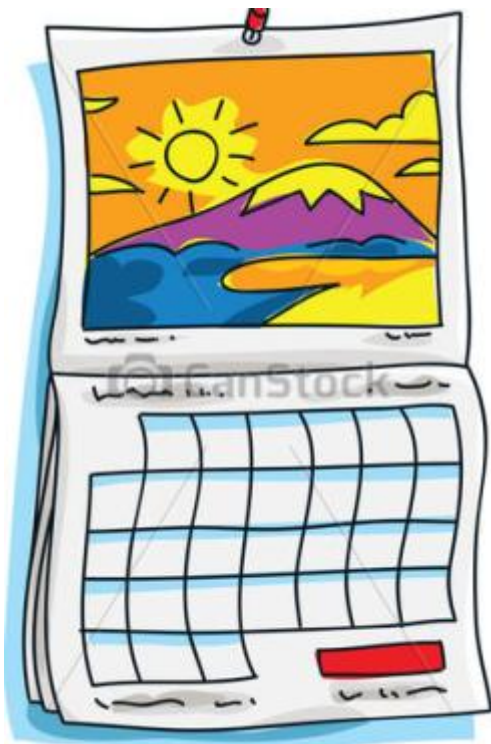
revised edition but it’s important to be aware that no matter what resource you use you should expect things to change. RV parks close down or quality/price/amenities change. Road conditions in particular vary a a lot. Construction takes place in one area one year and another the next. The road that was in great shape a couple of years ago may be terrible this year and the one that was terrible last year may be in great condition this year. Gas stations close down etc.

We also carried copies of Moon and Lonely Planet Guides to Baja.

Our Favorite RV Park Review Website



Another great resource for campground information is Campendium with many reviews on campgrounds and boon docking. We used it to find campgrounds throughout Baja, determine the current condition of campsites (assuming there have been recent reviews) and for more specific details on the campgrounds.



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One other app that we know others have used to find campsites is the iOverlander app.

Deciding When to Go

Most RVers travel to the peninsula in winter when the weather is mild, not too cold nor too hot.

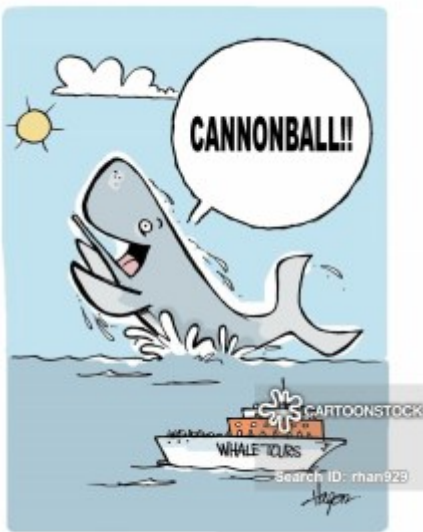
The state of Baja California in the north is popular during summer as well. Summer can be a great time to visit the wine region and the Sierra de San Pedro Mártir National Park in the high mountains.



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And although destinations in the state of Baja California Sur can be quite hot in summer, an issue for RVers as power is often limited or unavailable, activities like big game fishing do bring some visitors to the area.

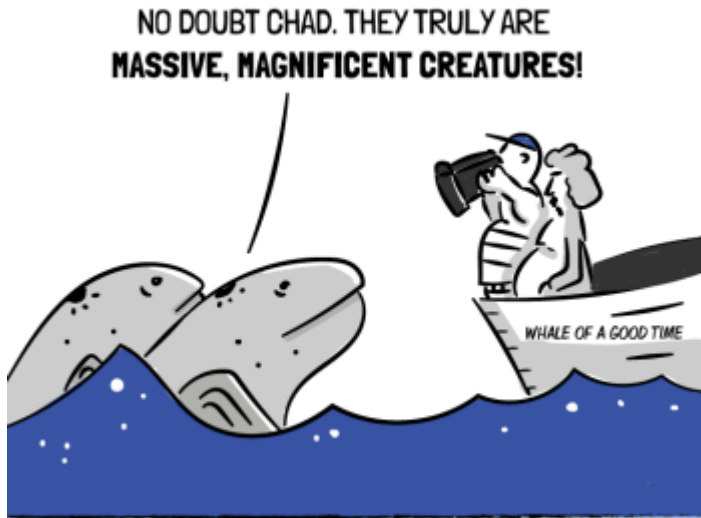




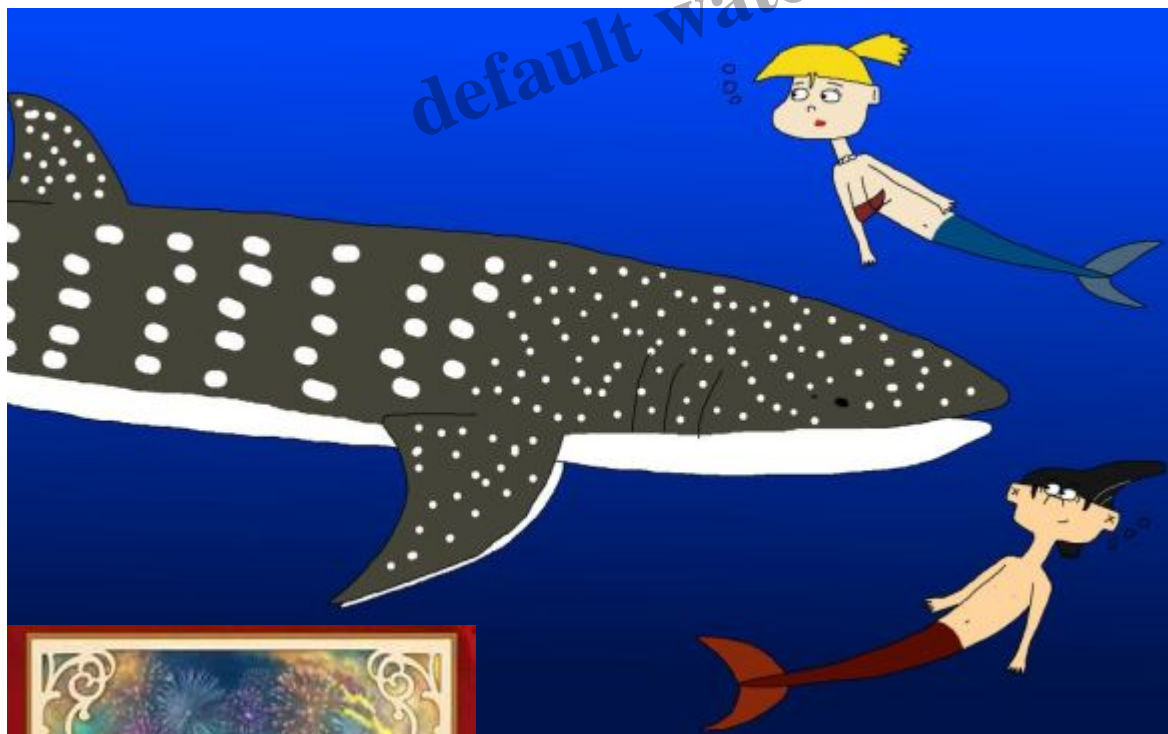
It's also a better time of year for kayaking in the Sea of Cortez as the fierce winds of winter or "nortes" are gone for awhile. We were told that the waters are even more incredibly beautiful, hard to imagine.

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Our decision to begin our travel at the end of January and spend February and March on the Peninsula was related to the specific activities we are interested in. That is prime time for seeing the gray and the blue whales. We also wanted to swim with whale sharks near La Paz.



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Carnaval celebration in La Paz.

On the way down at the start of the trip, we hightailed it to the border from Albuquerque in late January, spending just two overnights on the way. We spent a total of 62 days in the Baja Peninsula, and made a few stops to see friends on the way back for our total of 70 days.



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From Ensenada (69 miles from the border) to La Paz (915 miles!)

there are only small towns. There is the occasional Autozone in places like Guerrero Negro and Mulege, but the point is that you will be traversing a long stretch of REMOTE and beautiful area.



and risk. A simple matter on the road in a US city can specific vehicle parts may not be readily available.

So it's imperative that you start with your vehicles in tip

top shape and that you bring certain spares with you. What to bring depends a bit on how rare your vehicle is. If you have a Ford truck your parts situation will be easier than if you are driving a Mercedes Sprinter (as we discovered). But either way you should bring a few key parts specific to your vehicle so if you need them there is no searching needed.

At minimum **bring a spare fuel filter** (or 2). These are pretty cheap and Baja fuel is notoriously sketchy. An oil filter, a spare of the engine belts for your specific engine, that sort of thing. If you are particular about the kind of oil that goes in your engine bring a supply of that as well.



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Although you only need your U.S. driver's license to drive to

Mexico, you must also purchase Mexican insurance for your vehicle(s). This is a legal requirement for driving in Mexico as U.S. insurance will not cover you. Although there are walk in places near the border where you can buy it this is a significant expense item that you would be wise to have in place before leaving home.

Things work differently in Mexico. If you're involved in an auto accident, you must notify the insurance company immediately and will need to wait until they send an adjuster to the scene to negotiate on compensation agreement with the other party.



We didn't shop around as much as we could have, but shopping around

is recommended. Unfortunately, the only insurance rates available are daily or long term. If you are going for a few days the daily rate might make sense but you'll very quickly reach the crossover point to where the long term rate becomes cheaper.

We bought an annual insurance policy that had some maximum number of days you could be in Mexico during the year and we got it through Discover Baja. It wasn't cheap (we paid ~\$800 or so for the RV plus the car) but it is imperative. Both Discover Baja and Baja Bound have knowledgeable folks who can help you decide on a policy best aligned with your planned trip although as we mentioned before, do shop around.



Many establishments in Baja are cash only,

understandable as connectivity can be limited. So having a cash supply is important at all times.

US dollars are accepted almost everywhere but you will usually pay a slightly higher price as a result. Don't strictly insist on pesos in Mexico after all and it will save you money.



ATMs are usually available in even the smaller towns and are

absolutely the best way to get pesos at the best exchange rate. Far better than any money exchange

storefront.

Before you leave home make sure your ATM card is set up for international withdrawals and that your card is in good condition. Ideally, have more than one card capable of withdrawing funds. Although we usually never use cash advances on our credit cards, we got PINs for one of them just in case our ATM card crapped out.

We also withdrew an “emergency fund” of U.S. dollars before crossing into Mexico that we hid in
... of the FMM. Cost is being ...



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In addition to their U.S. passports, U.S. citizens who are not

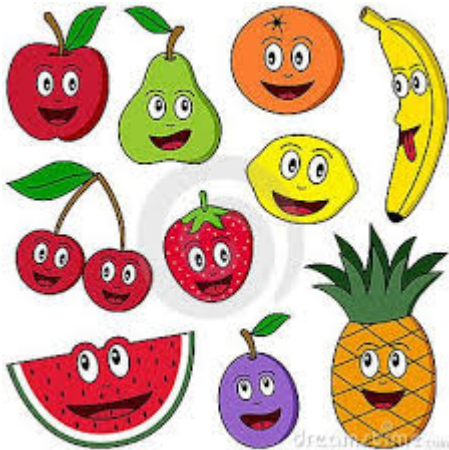
residents of Mexico must obtain a tourist visa or FMM. The FMM is valid for 180 days and when I last checked cost \$533 pesos. Apparently, if you’re driving across the border into certain Mexican states, including Baja California, you can order the FMM online. However, it takes a little while to have it mailed to you and we only realized it at the last minute so we just got ours at the border before
line in advance you will still have to have it stamped when



Since we crossed the border into the small town of Tecate

which has very narrow streets, we read that it's best to spend the night prior to crossing the border in the RV on the U.S. side. The purpose of that is twofold: you can drive to the usually congested border in your van or tow car or truck without the RV in the afternoon/evening, park on the U.S. side and walk across the border to get the FMMs (180-day visas) for Mexico for each person then walk back into the US.

Then you can drive your RV across early the next morning before it's too busy with all paperwork in hand. This was a great tip, because if we had crossed without the form, we would have had to find a spot to leave our vehicles (not easy on narrow streets in an RV with a tow car), and both of us would have had to walk to the office to get our FMMs.



After having crossed the U.S./Canada border multiple times, we've

learned to get rid of all of our fresh meats and produce before doing so. While some things might be allowed we've found it is easier to be able to answer "none" when asked about meats and veggies.

Frozen items, dried goods/seasonings are usually ok, so if you have specific spices etc. you can't live without, you may want to take them with you. Other food items are also prohibited including some pet foods. Make sure any dog/cat food is in original packaging.

There are other restrictions including the amount of alcoholic beverages and It's best to check what is/is not allowed and not take chances. And check again close to the time you will cross the border because what is allowed/not allowed can change. If you have anything you are in doubt about and the border officers ask you about it, it's best to declare it. If they find a prohibited item and you've not



separate drinking water in our RV long before our trip to Mexico. And it's well known that tap water in Mexico is not safe to drink, even the locals don't drink it.

We carried a 5-gallon jug filled with fresh water in our tow vehicle and a combination of 1 and 2-gallon jugs in the RV. Purified water is plentiful and easily available in many places with the possible exception of Bahia de Los Angeles. Water there may be scarce, so fill before you drive there.

Large multi-liter bottles of water are available in grocery stores but there are places that will fill your containers for a very small charge. So bring your favorite containers, it will be much cheaper and better for the environment.

As far as water for the holding tank, we started out with a full tank of US water. Then when we needed to refill the holding tank for showers, dishwashing etc. we poured a tablespoon of Clorox into the end of the hose to sanitize both the hose and our tank. The water wasn't good for drinking nor cooking but fine for brushing our teeth.

Also, since we knew we'd be dry camping a lot, we took packs of Water Wipes, all-natural wipes that friends of ours introduced us to.

Where to cross the border

The easiest way to travel to Baja is to cross the border directly into the Baja California Peninsula from one of several crossing points in California. This has the advantage of avoiding the need for the Temporary Import Permit (TIP) for vehicles, something that is required for crossing the border into the



Based on recommendations from the Church's book, we

crossed the border in the small town of Tecate. It's a small border crossing that is not generally as busy as others (their other recommended town from which to cross the border is Calexico). The road to Tecate on the U.S. side is hilly and windy and the town is pretty remote but the crossing worked well for us.

Not all borders operate on the same hours so we made sure to check Tecate's hours in advance. In addition, since border crossings are influenced by many factors beyond RVers control, we also

is which were short.



border to mainland Mexico, drive down the west coast and take a ferry from either Topolobampo or Mazatlan, both in the state of Sinaloa. The ferry route puts you way south on the peninsula at La Paz and allows you to skip the narrow road in the north if you're only interested in heading south, but you will need a TIP as mentioned above. Or you could head south one way and north the other if you have the time.

That concludes our advance planning tips. Below is a list of useful websites with their links:

- [Discover Baja Travel Club](#) – information geared to people driving to Baja
- [Baja Bound Mexican Insurance](#) – information geared to people driving to Baja
- [Visit Mexico](#) – Official Tourism Guide, click on States in the header
- [Explorando Baja](#) – travel guide for destinations and activities
- [All About Baja](#) – attractions, tips, maps etc.
- [Traveler's Guide to Camping Mexico's Baja](#) – guide to exploring Baja with your RV
- [Campendium](#) – RV Park descriptions and reviews
- [Peso/Dollar Converter](#) – there is also an App – Dollar to Peso
- [Online Tourist Visas \(FMM\)](#) – Note: you must still have them stamped at the border
- [Food, Plant and Animal Allowances](#) -allowed and prohibited imports
- [Border Wait Times](#) – hours of operation and wait times for ports of entry

Next, we will post tips for after crossing the border.

Category

1. Baja
2. Mexico

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