



highway

central baja's

driving

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A map of Baja California Sur, Mexico, colored in shades of orange and yellow. It shows the coastline and major roads. Labels include "Catalina" at the top, "Mulégo" on the coast, "Bahía Concepción" further south, and "Loreto" at the bottom. The map is overlaid on a background of a desert landscape with mountains and a blue sky.

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF ROAD-SIDE MEMORIAL SITES HONORING THE UNFORTUNATE DRIVERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES DRIVING BAJA'S NOTORIOUS HIGHWAY 1. ROADSIDES DROP OFF ANYWHERE FROM A FEW FEET TO A FEW HUNDRED FEET. THE PAVEMENT WILL OFTEN HAVE CHUNKS BROKEN OFF OR WASHED AWAY. THERE ARE NO STREETLIGHTS TO ILLUMINATE YOUR PATH AT NIGHT AND MOST DESERT ANIMALS ARE NOCTURNAL, SEEKING THE HEAT OF THE ROAD FOR WARMTH. EACH VEHICLE HAS ONLY 8 FEET FROM WHICH TO EVADE WANDERING COWS, HAPHAZARD SPEED BUMPS, POTHOLES, ONCOMING 18-WHEELERS AND THE NOMADIC BICYCLIST. AND IF THIS IS NOT ENOUGH TO SLOW YOU DOWN, OFTEN GAS STATIONS ARE BONE DRY — OUT OF FUEL.

SO WHY WOULD ANY SANE PERSON TAKE A ROAD TRIP DOWN BAJA'S HIGHWAY 1? BECAUSE IT IS THE MOST VISUALLY DRAMATIC, EMOTIONALLY STIMULATING AND MENTALLY ENGAGING ROAD TRIP YOU'LL EVER TAKE. ONCE YOU'VE DONE IT, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP—YOU'LL GET ADDICTED. EVERYONE DOES . . .

*(Left)* Approaching Loreto from the south, Highway 1 snakes through the rugged Sierra to Giganta mountains with their jagged cliffs and deep canyons, paving the onset of our road trip through central Baja.





*(Above Left)* A fearless Brahma hesitates, his bold stare suggesting that we are only welcome so long as we keep our distance. *(Above Right)* Jagged Sierras ascend sharply from the sea while rolling hills of desert flora offer picturesque dashboard views. Dating back nearly 12,000 years, Loreto is considered the oldest human settlement on the peninsula of Baja California and remains relatively unchanged since the Jesuit Padres first visit over 300 hundred years ago. Today, Loreto offers a quaint seaside ambience of traditional Mexican values where you can always count on everything *manana*.



I DON'T KNOW WHY I FEEL SO DEEPLY, ONLY THAT I DO. IT WAS MY DESCENT INTO THE PREHISTORIC SIERRA LA GIGANTA MOUNTAINS OF LORETO THAT DETONATED AN EMOTIONAL FIRE WITHIN ME, BURNING TEARS OF REVERENCE THAT STILL ERUPT AT THE SIGHT OF EACH SUCCESSIVE BAJA WONDER. A PTERODACTYL COULD HAVE SWOOPED OVER ME OR THE SEA COULD HAVE

PARTED, AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A GENUINE EXTENSION OF THE MOMENT. IT'S TIMES SUCH AS THIS, THAT I'M THANKFUL I SENSE MY SURROUNDINGS SO PROFOUNDLY. THERE EXISTS A CORNER IN MY HEART THAT WAS UNLOCKED BY THIS PLACE—A CORNER THAT EXPOSED VULNERABILITY SO ORGANIC ALL I COULD DO WAS CRY.



MOVING NORTH, THE DRAMATIC BAJA CONCEPTION DEMANDS THAT YOU **STOP AND SMELL THE SEA**. A LITTLE BIRDIE TOLD ME OF A GREAT PICTURE SPOT, AND SO I HIRED TO A PLACE WHERE **POST-CARDS WERE PROBABLY INVENTED**. EVERYTHING ABOUT BAJA CONCEPTION SEEMS UNTOUCHED. AS I GAZED OUT AT THE SHEEPING BAY, A NAUTICAL SCENE OF **CORTEZ AND HIS MEN** CLAD IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY GARB PLAYED OUT IN MY IMAGINATION. BAJA HAS THIS INCANNY ABILITY TO TAKE YOU BACK IN TIME TO AN ERA WHEN **DISCOVERY AND SURVIVAL** WERE ALL THERE WAS.

I'VE HEARD THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE UNMOVED BY BAJA. FOR THOSE RARE INDIVIDUALS, THE SLEEPY TOWN OF MULÉGE WILL

ANNIHILATE ANY NOTION THAT BAJA IS A DESOLATE, WATERLESS WASTELAND. MOSTLY TANGLED IN PALMS, MANGROVES AND FEATHERED FENCES, THE LUSH VALLEY OF MULÉGE IS A REFRESHING **CONTRAST** TO THE SMOLDERING DESERT LIFE BAJA IS KNOWN FOR. MULÉGE HAS THE PERSONALITY OF A MEDITERRANEAN VILLAGE, REVEALING ITS **CHARM AND FLAIR** WITH QUAINY HOTELS, MULTI-FLOORED ICE-CREAM PARLORS AND ADORABLE BOUTIQUES. FOR THE **ADVENTURE SEEKER**, THERE'S SPORT FISHING, SCUBA DIVING, KATAKING, ADVENTURE TOURS, ECOLOGY TREKS AND EXPLORING THE NEARBY CAVE PAINTINGS. WHATEVER STRIKES YOUR FANCY, ONE THING IS UNDENIABLE — **THE MAGIC OF MULÉGE WILL ENCHANT YOU.**



**(Opposite Top)** The desert brow of Bahia Concepción gives way to glistening waters of indigo and sea foam green, while a quadruplet of curious date palms sunbathes in the Baja sunshine. Flourishing curvaceous semi-circled coves, Bahia Concepción is twenty-six miles long, crowning it as the largest and most fertile bay in Baja. **(Above Top)** The belfry of the Mission of Loreto rises to meet the clear Mex sky. Carrying with him the Virgin of Loreto, Jesuit missionary Juan Marie Salvatierra established the first mission in all of the California at Loreto in 1697. Through his efforts, a powerful religious theocracy was born, beginning a movement that extends into modern day California. **(Left)** The palms of Mulige cuddle the fresh water rivulet that begins as an underground spring, sending seamlessly into the sea beyond.



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"IF YOU NEVER DID, YOU SHOULD. THESE THINGS ARE FUN, AND FUN IS GOOD." AND THROUGH THE PAGES OF A DR. SEUSS PICTURE BOOK WE GO. THE REGION LEADING INTO CATAYINA IS PROBABLY THE MOST VISUALLY PERPLEXING IN ALL OF BAJA, GROSSLY POPULATED WITH THE ODDEST PLANT LIFE I'VE EVER SEEN, THE CARTOON-ESQUE TERRAIN IS HOME TO ENDEMIC PLANTS SUCH AS ELEPHANT TREES, CIRIO AND CAROON. THE WILD VEGETATION FORMS SHAPES AND PAINTS COLORS SO HUMAN-LIKE THAT THE ENTIRE LANDSCAPE SEEMS TO ANTHROPMORPHIZE RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES. WITH ACROBATIC TREES AND BITING CACTUS, CATAYINA IS AN ANIMATOR'S DREAM. LIVELY ROCK GARDENS EMPHASIZE CATAYINA'S BIZARRE SETTING WITH MOUNDS AND VALLEYS OF ROCKS RANGING IN SIZE FROM PEBBLES TO BOULDERS THE SIZE OF BUILDINGS. EXPLORE THE CHILD WITHIN AND HOP FROM ROCK TO ROCK, STOPPING FOR AN OCCASIONAL READ OF LOVE NOTES ETCHED IN STONE.



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(Left) "Nice Stone!" Jenna and a Cirio perform desert headstands. (Above Middle) An elephant tree settles for its close-up. (Above Right) The tip of an Agave bloom might inspire a re-write for Jack and the Beanstalk or at minimum, front as a body double for the Asparagus. (Opposite Page Top) The plant life in Catayina seems to grow straight out of the boulders. (Opposite Page, Middle and Bottom) Welcoming smiles and fruit-spilling produce stands welcome drivers to the roadheads of northern Baja like miniature Gardens of Eden.



IF YOU'RE A FLY-BY-THE-SEAT-OF-YOUR-PANTS KIND OF ROAD TRIPPER — GO BAJA — WHERE THERE ARE SIGHTS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN AND SMILES THAT STRETCH FOR MILES. ROAD TRIPPING JUST GOT COOLER, OR IN THIS CASE — HOTTER! SO FILL THOSE ICE CHESTS, CHECK THE FREDN AND FUEL UP THE CAMPER — IT'S TIME TO GET YOUR BAJA ON!



#### REFERENCE WEBSITES

[WWW.LORETO.COM](http://WWW.LORETO.COM)

[WWW.MULEGE.COM](http://WWW.MULEGE.COM)

[WWW.MULEGE.COM/BAHIA CONCEPCION](http://WWW.MULEGE.COM/BAHIA CONCEPCION)

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[WWW.BAJALIFE.COM/CATAVINA/INDEX.HTML](http://WWW.BAJALIFE.COM/CATAVINA/INDEX.HTML)

