

The Borderland

INTERMINGLING FLAVORS UNDER GLORIOUS LIGHT

To live along the Baja California-U.S. border is to be part of a shared history — Old West towns transformed into modern cities mixed with extreme climates and disparate cultures. You can feel this sensation in Mexico's Chinese restaurants where sweet and sour Asian flavors intermingle with spicy Mexican aromas. We borderlanders have adopted the fashions and customs of the globalized world without losing our own rich culture. We live in modern cities yet endure severe desert conditions in a land that demands a strong character and a defiant disposition. Just by traveling along the Mexicali-Tijuana highway and looking up at the Ramonero mountains you feel the light-headedness of the saguaro. The same rocks that the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti called "a fantastic mountain landscape of nothing but stone" with "bright sun flames" chase over. In some ways we Baja California borderlanders are the ultimate gold-seekers, nomads who in this region, discovered a destiny under transcendent light. — Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, author, *Mexicali*

Map Key

- Archaeological site
- Festival
- Mission or church
- Museum
- Natural or scenic area
- Other point of interest
- Urban area
- Protected Areas
- Biosphere reserve
- National park
- Other protected area



Peninsula of Baja California

ON THE PENINSULA, THE DREAM IS REAL

Forget about calling this 800-mile-long peninsula Baja or "Lower" California. This was California, named that way on maps long before the first mission bells pealed over San Diego. The early explorers may have put this peninsula on the map, but they failed miserably in their search for treasure. Thank goodness they didn't make much of an impact on the land, most of which looks now as it did when Cortez abandoned the peninsula: stark, defiantly beautiful, intimidating. Yet the spines and barbs are just an evolutionary defense protecting its gentler side. Walking in an arroyo after my first Baja summer thunderstorm—hummingbirds probing ocotillo flowers, fat mesquite pods dangling on the branch—I realized that this peninsula was a sleeping beauty, needing only the kiss of water to awaken. The Californios have always known this, and have managed a centuries-old balance of limited resources that could serve as a lesson to us all. You might see some vacation developments threatening this balance, places tilting more towards fantasy than reality. But remember, this peninsula is the original California, and its California Dream isn't make-believe. It's defined by the distinctive places you'll find on this map, judged by the people who actually live here as being the peninsula's most authentic treasures. Visiting them enriches your journey, and sustains their future. They and their visitors agree with John Steinbeck: "A dream hangs over the whole region."

—Charlie Kolander, travel author



An Endless Summer

DISCOVERING THE PENINSULA'S DIVERSITY

Giant winter swells slant down the peninsula's west coast, cutting into waves sought by the world's best surfers. While 50 miles away, kayakers glide on hazy seas. That's the diversity of this narrow peninsula offers: you can encounter a placid Caribbean-like beach on one side, Hawaii's North Shore on the other, and tackle the Sierras in between—all in one day. And if you're prepared for a multi-sport adventure, the weather will never shut you down. Pedro Cole, bodysurfer, La Paz: "Some of the best waves come up from the south, driven by severe summer storms. Surf breaks that lie dormant—where you never see waves—suddenly turn into some of the most incredible breaks you'll ever ride. Where are the best spots? You gotta be kidding. You have to find these places yourself." Trish Angell, sea operator, Loreto: "In March 1978, we paddled out in the channel across to Isla Dandante in the moonlight surrounded by whale blows to begin a month-long paddling down the coast to La Paz. It was a magical night. Three years later, I'm still here."



National Geographic and the people of the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur present this *Geotourism Map* to the peninsula of Baja California.



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Desert Visions

ARTISTS WORK IN A TRANSCENDENT LANDSCAPE

Whether it's folkloric art along the border or the government-sponsored Casas de Cultura found in the distant towns, you'll feel the vital artistic pulse of the peninsula. Resident artists—Mexican and international—are interpreting sea and desert in startling new ways, a vibrancy that fills the galleries in Todos Santos and elsewhere. Inspired by their surroundings, artists increasingly work to conserve them. Michael Cope, owner, *Galería de Todos Santos*: "This is an oasis in the desert—the clarity of light, the water, even the way crows walk across the road—everything a painter needs is in Todos Santos. We work with the town to preserve this regional character. Seeing how popular we've become, the town realizes what's at stake: we now have building codes to keep it historical. And the art community has initiated school art programs." Miguel Angel De la Cueva, photographer, La Paz: "While climbing the Sierra de la Giganta years ago, I was awestruck by its grandeur and felt the need to share its force and beauty. If my photographs can make a person feel this same passion, then perhaps they will help to protect these places. This has become my work."



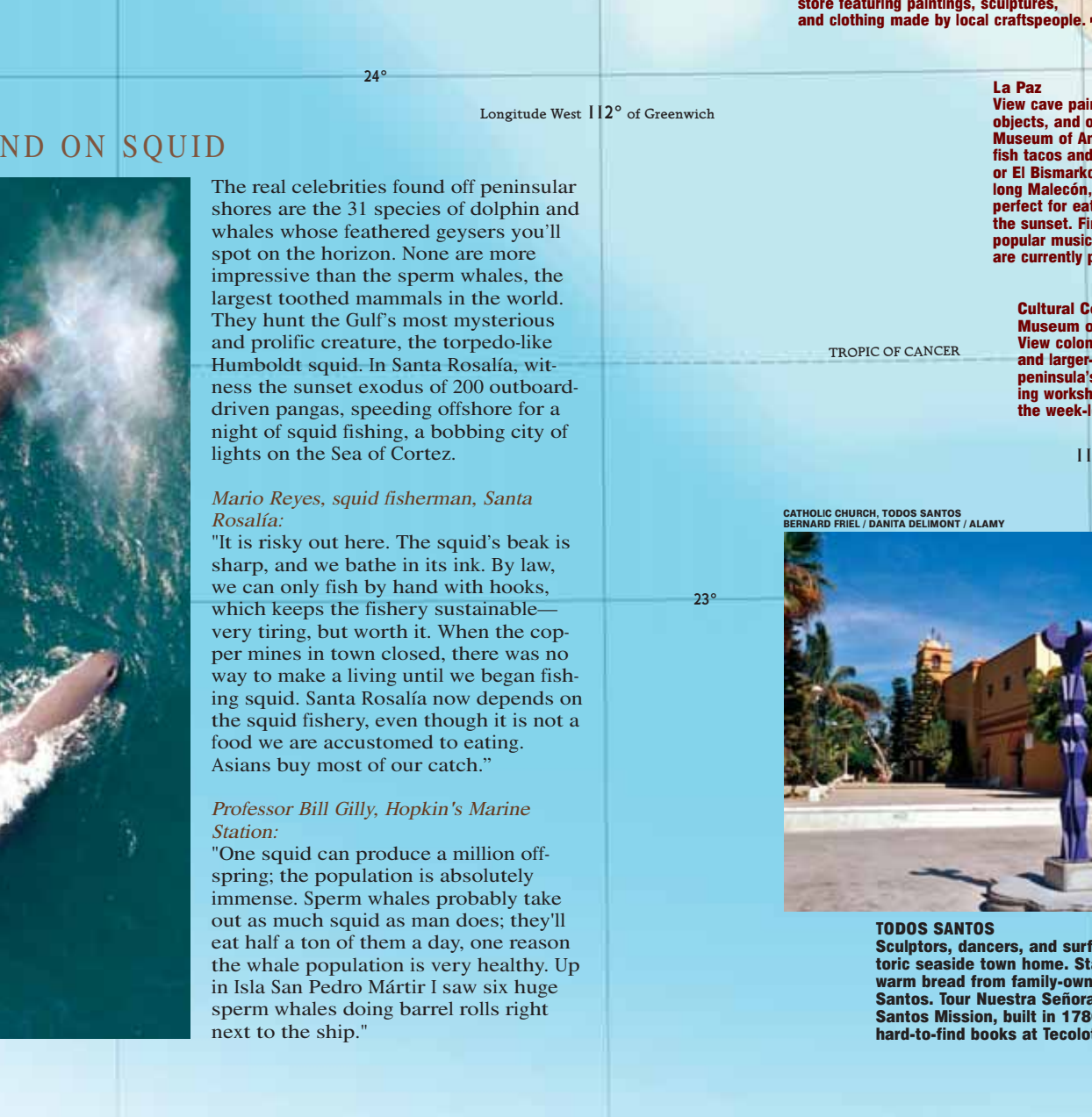
FESTIVALS & EVENTS

- Music, Food, Heritage & Nature**
Todos Santos Art Festival: Todos Santos, Baja California Sur (end of January or early February) Exhibits and performances in local and regional artists' studios, theaters, and restaurants, workshops, and conferences. www.todosantosartfestival.com
- Gay Whale Festival** Magdalena Bay, Baja California Sur (end of February) Celebrates the beginning of the whale-watching season with music and entertainment. Local food, horse racing, and fireworks. www.whalefestival.com
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- La Paz Foundation Festival** La Paz, Baja California Sur (first week in May) Exhibits and concerts celebrate the founding of La Paz on May 3, 1525. www.lapazfoundation.com
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Sustaining Seas

WHALES AND MAN DEPEND ON SQUID

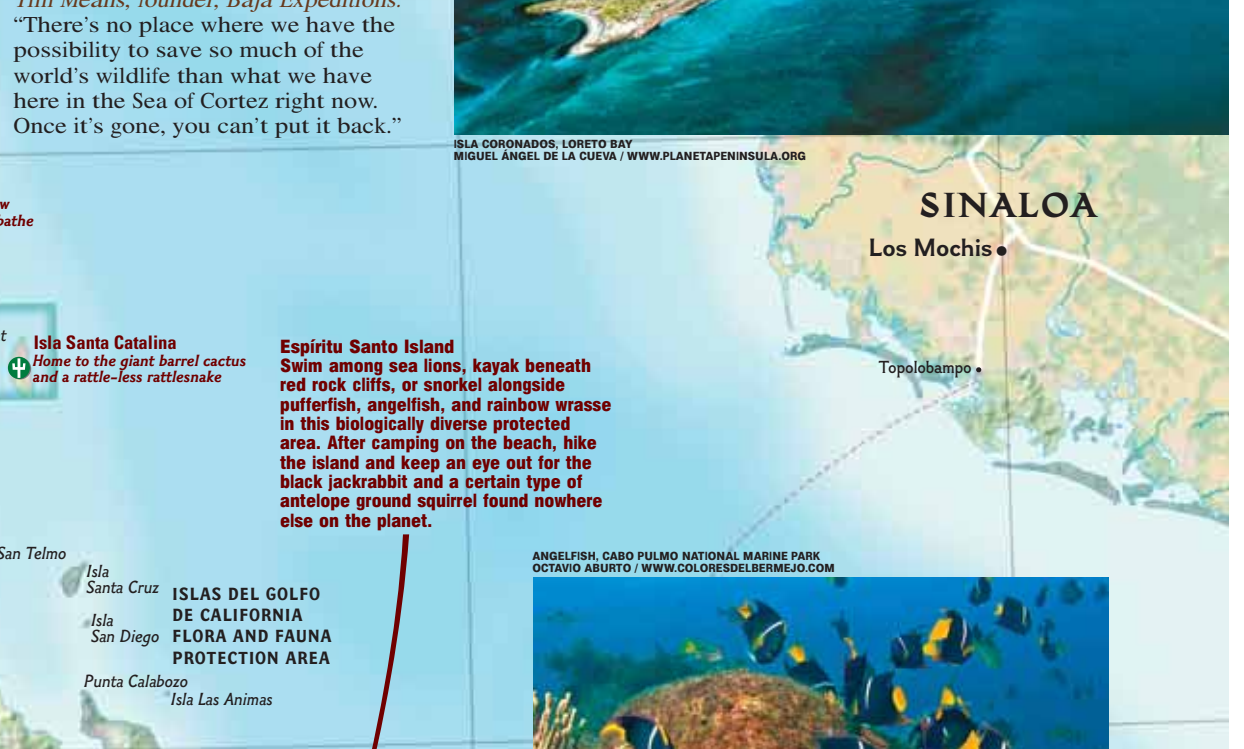
The real celebrities found off peninsular shores are the 31 species of dolphin and whales whose feathered powers you'll spot on the horizon. None are more impressive than the sperm whales, the largest toothed mammals in the world. They hunt the Gulf's most mysterious and prolific creature, the topknot-like Humboldt squid. In Santa Rosalita, witness the sunset chases of 200 onboard-driven pangas, speeding offshore for a night of squid fishing, a bobbing city of lights on the Sea of Cortez. Mario Reyes, squid fisherman, Santa Rosalita: "It is risky out here. The squid's beak is sharp, and we bathe in its ink. By law, we can only fish by hand with hooks, which keeps the fishery sustainable—very tiring, but worth it. When the copper mines in town closed, there was no way to make a living until we began fishing squid. Santa Rosalita now depends on the squid fishery, even though it is not a food we are accustomed to eating. Asians buy most of our catch."



Mexico's Galápagos

AN EVOLUTIONARY TREASURE

When the San Andrés Fault drove the peninsula from the North American mainland a few million years back, not only did it create the world's "Swanagee" rift, it left behind some tectonic orphans: over 200 of them. (A few newer volcanic islands have added to their number.) These islands, powered by nutrient-rich seas, raced down the evolutionary highway, becoming home to the largest number of endemic species in North America: checkwallows, rattlesnakes, jackrabbits, spinkers, scorpions, squirrels, lizards, snakes, and insects. This astounding diversity prompted UNESCO to recognize the Gulf's islands as a World Heritage Site. And it's why a network of national parks—the Loreto, San Lorenzo, and Espíritu Santo marine parks, the Bahía de los Angeles and Upper Gulf Spheres—have been created to protect these islands.



Tim Means, founder, *Baja Expeditions*: "There's no place where we have the possibility to save so much of the world's wildlife than what we have here in the Sea of Cortez right now. Once it's gone, you can't put it back."

