An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in Baja California Sur, Mexico. The town is built on a hillside overlooking a large, curved bay. The water is a deep blue, and the bay is filled with numerous sailboats of various sizes. The sky is clear and blue. The text 'Latitude 38's' is written in a cursive font at the top, and 'FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE' is written in a large, bold, serif font below it.

*Latitude 38's*  
**FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE**

2021  
**MEXICO**

**By Richard Spindler, Founder of Latitude 38 and Grand Poobah  
of 27 Baja Ha-Ha's, with help from Patsy Verhoeven, vet of 14 Ha-Ha's**  
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# Latitude 38's FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE TO MEXICO



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. See map on **PAGE 48**.

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. Northerners 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 \$50 for 10 years. Many of the countries in the Caribbean charge you more than \$50 for a week.

Your FMM (tourist visa), good for 180 days, is only about \$30. 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 — has an app for emergencies. You push the button on



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# FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

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 rip-offs, 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, both by local chicken bus or 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 Bucerias 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

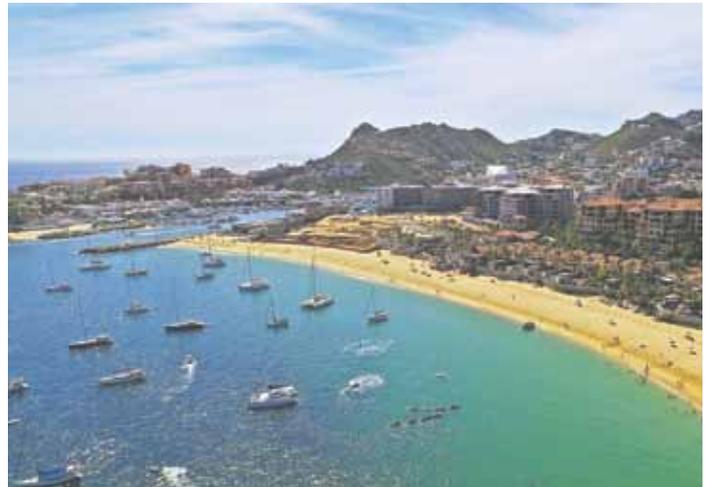
3) *Paying for others to do your boat work.* If you're on a tight budget, you should be prepared to clean your own bottom, maintain the teak, wax the hull, and fix mechanical problems.

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.

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



With more than 3,500 miles of coastline, the Pacific Coast of Mexico is one of the longest cruising areas of the world.

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 19 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



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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 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



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*Andrew Linney, [www.nokaoi2.info](http://www.nokaoi2.info)*

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MARINA RIVIERA NAYARIT  
AT LA CRUZ

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# FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING 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 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 about 20 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 42 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. Especially if there is a woman aboard.

## 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

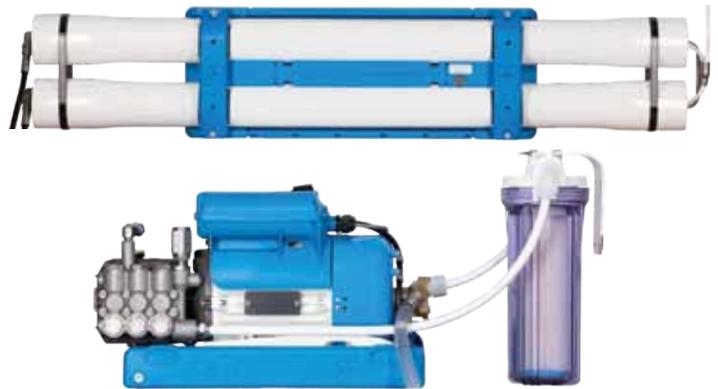




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across the South Pacific without an engine. Heck, Steve Schmidt singlehanded his Santa Cruz 70 *Hotel California* throughout the Caribbean for several years without a working diesel. He and the others became more skilled sailors for not having an engine.

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 \$350 the handheld inReach gives you EPIRB and navigation capability, as well as being a two-way, 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 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 closely by the latest edition of *Charlie's Charts for Mexico* by Holly Scott. Another contender is Capt. Pat Rain's *Mexico Boating Guide*, which was updated in 2018. 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' *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 *elephantes* 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, such as the Drag Queen or Anchor 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.

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# FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

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 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 woman 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. As such, 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 anymore. 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



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## Principal Cruiser Nets Used by Mexico Cruisers

**(Please Note: Some times and frequencies may have changed. Also, there may be additional nets for which we have no info here.)**

The entire country of Mexico observes daylight saving time, which means you will be in the same time zone (Pacific) as San Diego until you reach Bahia Tortuga. From there until you reach a line between La Cruz and Puerto Vallarta, you will be the same as the Mountain Time Zone, and from there south to Z-town you will be in the Central Time Zone.

Below are listed the current times of the nets, given in UTC (ZULU) time. It's up to you to figure out what time zone you're in to get local time. Note also, that use of cruiser nets has changed substantially due to wide proliferation of HF email.



Time / UTC	Freq / kHz	Net Name & Type
1430 Z daily	3.968 LSB	Sonrisa Net (Ham)
1530 Z daily	7192 LSB	Chubasco Net: (Ham) Monitors for emergency traffic at 1530.
1600 Z daily	7233.5 LSB	Baja California Maritime Service Net (Ham): Forecasts San Diego to Puerto Vallarta, including Sea of Cortez. Wkdays
0200 Z daily	8.122	Southbound Net (Marine)
0200 Z daily	6516	Bluewater Net (Marine)
0230 Z daily	4051 - 4060	North Sea of Cortez Net (Marine)
0430 Z daily	4030 - 4024	Papagayo Net (Marine)
1400 Z daily	6227 - 6224	Amigo Net (Marine)
1600 Z daily	8104	Westbound Net (Marine)
1430-1500 Z daily	4A, 6A, 8A, 12A, 16A	CanMex (Marine) Helps boats down the Coast and to HI. Changes Freq every 5 minutes. to extend range. Nov 1-Apr 15

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## FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE

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 storage batteries — and you're likely to underestimate how many you'll need — that is a great solution. But if you don't have room, 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.** There is a lot of good and some bad with SSB radio. The bad is that they are expensive, especially if you're going to include a Pactor modem for SailMail/Winlink, and sometimes it's tricky to get the antenna and ground right. On the other hand, they allow for voice — i.e., human — communication with others. True, Garmin inReach and similar devices are terrific, but they don't allow you to participate in group conversations, such as the various cruising nets.

Given all the 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 on across the South Pacific, SSB/Ham would be something we'd want if we could possibly afford it. But remember, you use a lot of power when you transmit.

**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 they use 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.

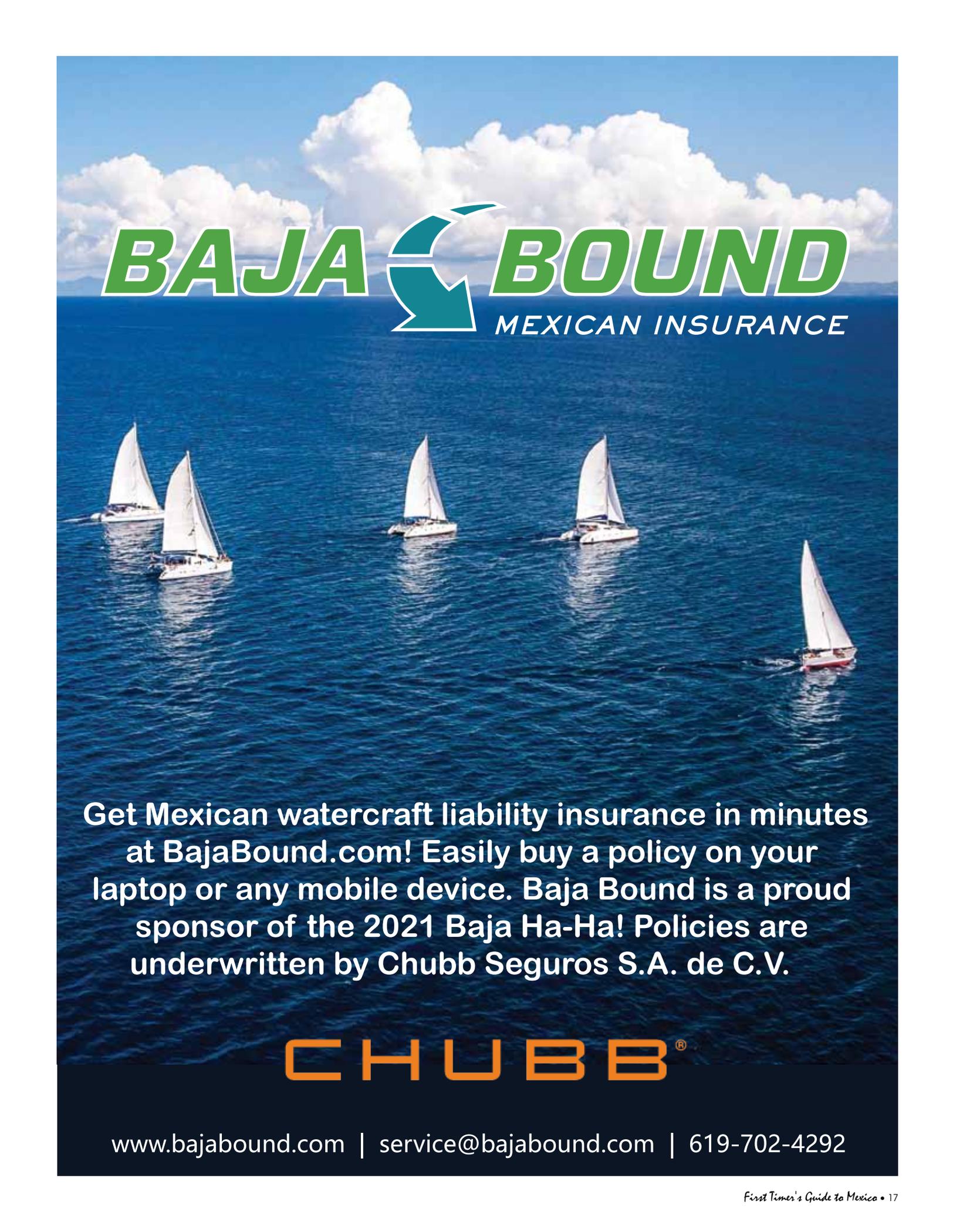
**10) A Dedicated Liferaft.** You can cruise Mexico without one, and many have, counting on their dinghy to be the liferaft. The smaller the dinghy, the less wise this becomes. And as you can get new liferafts for less than \$2,000 these days, we'd want at least a 12-ft inflatable 'dinghy/liferaft' before 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 a free list of spare parts and other gear that you might want to have on your cruise. It's many 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



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

**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 and cell phone is all but mandatory for most cruisers.

From using social media, to working, to getting vital weather information, the internet is a necessity. The best internet for cruisers in Mexico 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 is the next best, and it can be found in countless restaurants, internet cafés, 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 options for boosting Wi-Fi signals. Among the more popular options are the C. Crane Super USB Wi-Fi Antenna, Bitstorm Bad Boy Xtreme, and the Wave Wi-Fi Rogue Wave. Each one offers different setups, features, and ranges. 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.

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, north of La Paz in the Sea of Cortez being a big exception. 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 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.

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 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.

Many cruisers keep their US cell phones and plans and also buy a Mexican phone with a plan. 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.

No matter what phone you use to get on 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.

There are other phone and internet options out there; the quality of service is up to your individual budget.

## 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 BoatUS or Tow Boat, south of San Diego. While the US Coast Guard

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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 & 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 & Rescue bases — on the Pacific Coast of Mexico, from as far north as Ensenada to as far south as Chiapas. The satellite and telephone numbers of each can be found in *Visiting Mexico by Private Boat*, [www.baja-haha.com/Alumni/2021/2021VisitingMexico.pdf](http://www.baja-haha.com/Alumni/2021/2021VisitingMexico.pdf), a guide for private vessels entering Mexico. Be aware that the immigration information given on page 3 is for vessels with crew NOT GOING ASHORE in Mexico.

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 even 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 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 of 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](http://www.baja-haha.com) or the *Latitude 38* Crew List at [www.latitude38.com/crew-list/](http://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 women 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. Drag Queen, Anchor, or 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.

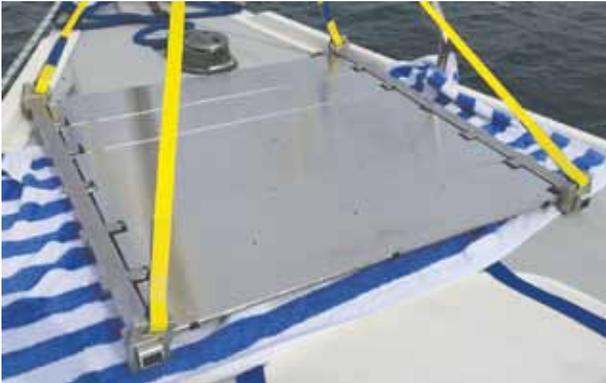
It's also critical that the skipper goes over the boat, the gear, the procedures, and emergency equipment with you. One of the most important things to know is how, after making sure the lines in the water aren't near the prop, to start the engine. After all, if the skipper falls overboard and you can't 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.

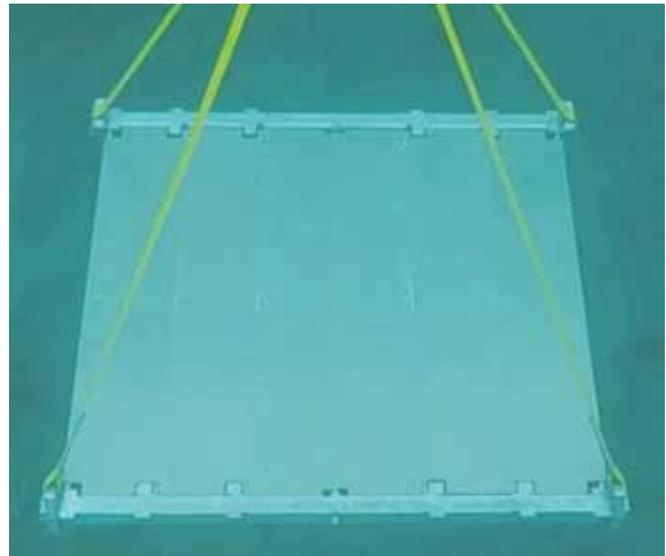
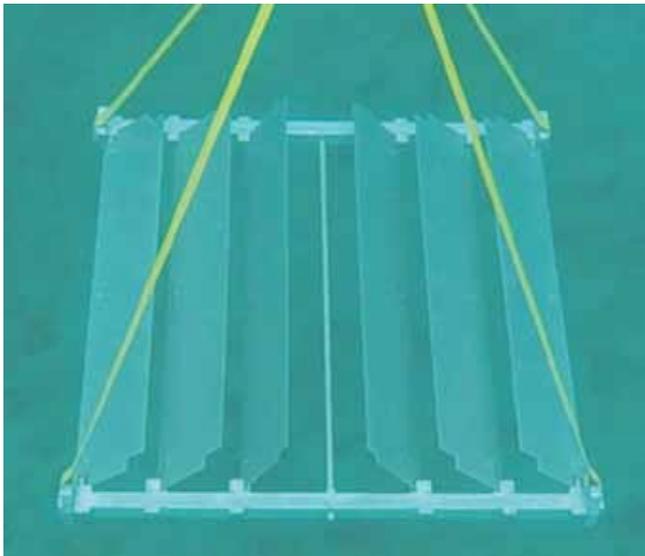
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*The slow up-roll takes the boat out of the wave cycle, so the hull "cancels" the next wave.*

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## 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) A Temporary Import Permit (TIP).** All vessels over 15 feet in length must have a Temporary Import Permit (TIP). Depending on the exchange rate, a TIP runs about \$50 or \$60 and is good for 10 years. This is easily the greatest bargain in the world of cruising, as many places — such as the Caribbean or Panama — will charge you \$50 or much more for a single week. A one-day permit for cruising the Seine River on a canal boat costs \$66! A boat's TIP is good for as many times as you want to go into and out of Mexico. Your boat's TIP must always be on the boat.

The TIP will be required by customs within 72 hours of your arrival in Cabo. You cannot get a TIP in Cabo because there is no Banjercito — which is a military bank — in Cabo. Although while your boat is in Cabo, you could take the bus to La Paz — \$17 and about 2.5 hours on a luxury bus — and

get one there. Actually, the Banjercito is at the port at Pichilingue, which is an expensive taxi ride outside La Paz proper. Or a \$3 bus ride.

First, try to get your TIP online. This must be done between 11 and 60 days prior to entering Mexico. Follow the instructions on the video "Assistance Completing a Mexican Temporary Import Permit for Boats," [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogatmW3lg\\_M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogatmW3lg_M), provided by Marina de La Paz. The TIP will be emailed to you in a few days after filling out the form. If the website does not email you a TIP there is most likely an old TIP registered to your boat that was never canceled. The fee you paid will eventually be refunded to you and this issue will require a trip to the Banjercito on the Mexican side of the border at Otay Mesa or San Ysidro. It's about 40 minutes from San Diego by car to either one. The Banjercito clerks have done lots of TIPs and can answer all your questions and get the problem straightened out or point you in the right direction. Be sure to bring all the documents mentioned in the above video (passport, documentation or registration, dinghy documentation and model, year, serial numbers for boat and dinghy engines). It should take about an hour and you will get your TIP right then and there.

You can also get TIPs in person at one of several Mexican consulates, including Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino, Denver, Dallas, and a few other places. But not San Francisco or San Diego. Or you can get one in Ensenada.

Completely frustrated or have no time to deal with the TIP? Berrera Agency [paperwork@caboportagent.com](mailto:paperwork@caboportagent.com) in Cabo San Lucas will do it for you. Email them at least a couple of weeks before leaving San Diego. The fee is \$200 and includes the cost of the TIP. If there is an uncanceled TIP registered to your boat, they will clear that up too — for another \$100.

**4) Send the Emails From San Diego.** If your first port of entry will be Cabo or La Paz you need to send an email to customs ([aduana.lapaz@sat.gob.mx](mailto:aduana.lapaz@sat.gob.mx)) and one to the Health Department ([egallo@coeprisbcs.gob.mx](mailto:egallo@coeprisbcs.gob.mx)) before your arrival. Send these emails from San Diego just before leaving, as there will most likely not be email capabilities down the coast. Each email should state your name, boat name, date and departure port, estimated arrival date, arrival port, and the number of people on board.

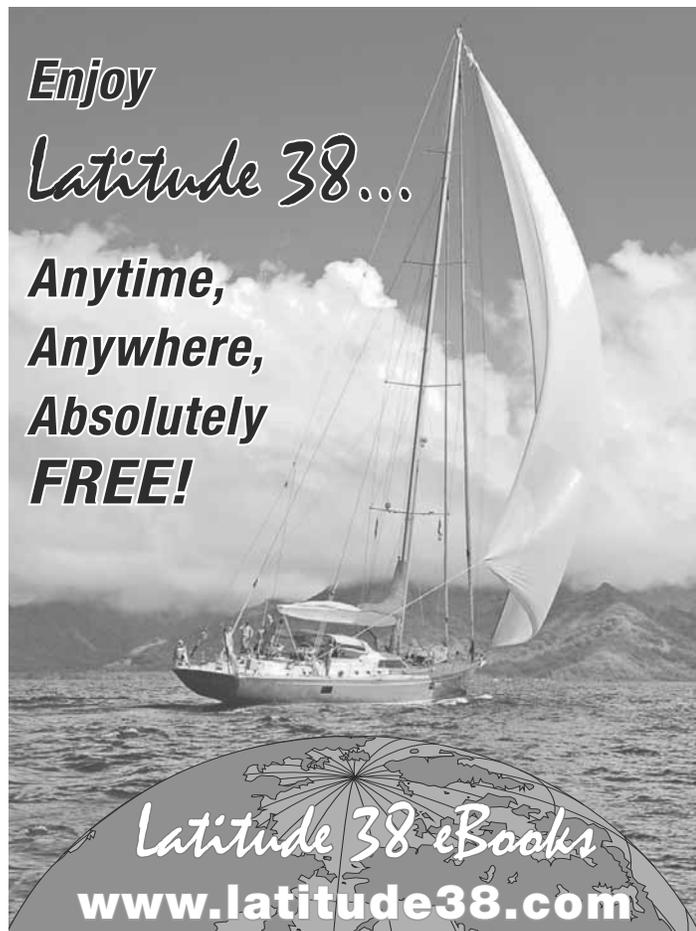
Completely frustrated or have no time to deal with the TIP? Berrera Agency ([paperwork@caboportagent.com](mailto:paperwork@caboportagent.com)) in Cabo San Lucas will do it for you. Email them at least a couple of weeks before leaving San Diego. The fee is \$200 and includes the cost of the TIP. If there is an uncanceled TIP registered to your boat, they will clear that up too — for another \$100.

**5) 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.

**6) 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.



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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.

## 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) An FMM.** When a boat gets to the first port of entry — for Ha-Ha boats this is usually Cabo — everybody needs to get an FMM from immigration. This is a 180-day tourist visa that costs 575 pesos or about \$30. You can get FMMs online before you cross into Mexican waters, but we strongly recommend that you don't. The website is confusing and if the skipper signs up and pays for FMMs for the entire crew, everybody on the boat has to leave Mexico from the same place at the same time. If you insist on getting FMMs online, have each member of the crew do it separately. Once you pay online you will receive a receipt for payment. You will need to present the receipt to immigration to get the FMM either in person or through an agent. The best place to get your FMM is at immigration at either Ensenada or Cabo.

It doesn't matter if you're in Ensenada or Cabo, the crew doesn't have to stay on the boat while the captain checks in and gets the FMMs. Even if it's a weekend. Mexican officials are generally very accommodating — unless they catch you trying to pull one over on them.

If you have a problem, our experience is that the best thing to do is tell the officials upfront 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 even 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 \$12/day or \$40/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.sportfishingbcs.gob.mx/](http://www.sportfishingbcs.gob.mx/)

## Let's Review Because It Can Be Confusing:

You need the following before sailing to Mexico:

- 1) Temporary Import Permit (TIP) unless Ensenada is your first port of entry.
- 2) Boat documentation or registration.
- 3) Passports for everyone.

- 4) Notarized letter of permission for those under 18 by the absent parent (if applicable).
- 5) Letter of authorization from either a corporate entity or owner of the boat (if applicable).
- 6) Fishing licenses (if applicable).
- 7) Liability insurance.
- 8) Emails to customs and the Health Department (unless port of entry is Ensenada).

## Who Does the Paperwork?

If your port of entry is Ensenada, the staff of either Marina Coral or Cruiseport Marina will, for a reasonable fee, help you out with your TIP and your entry paperwork. But if you can find someplace to anchor out — you can no longer anchor in the harbor — you can do it yourself.

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 Berrera Agency ([paperwork@caboportagent.com](mailto:paperwork@caboportagent.com)), who sets up shop next to the fuel dock each year. Their discounted Ha-Ha rate is \$100 for the 2021 Baja Ha-Ha. If you or your crew only have limited time in Cabo, we recommend using Berrera 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 3 of the excellent brochure *Visiting Mexico by Private Boat* [www.baja-haha.com/Alumni/2021/2021VisitingMexico.pdf](http://www.baja-haha.com/Alumni/2021/2021VisitingMexico.pdf)

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 want to be a Dudley Do-Right and get a *zarpe* from the US, you need to get Customs and Border Patrol Form 1300 from [www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2020-Apr/CBP%20Form%201300.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2020-Apr/CBP%20Form%201300.pdf). Fill it out, then take it to an international airport and have it stamped by Customs.



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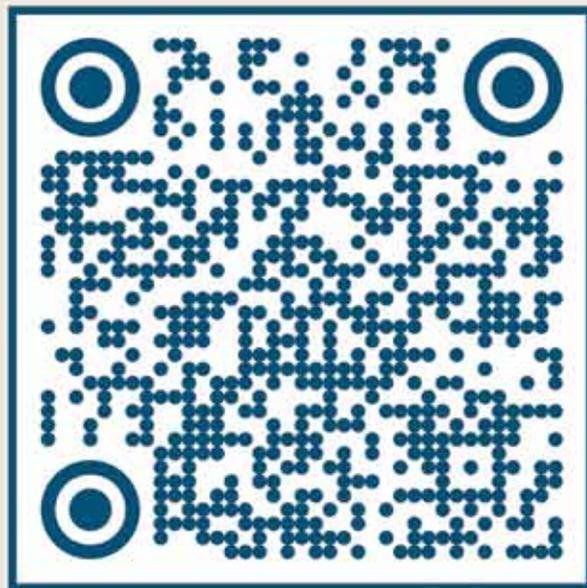


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There is just one slight problem. Form 1300 is for commercial vessels only, and you probably don't have a commercial vessel. So Customs may or may not be willing to sign it.

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](http://www.arrl.org) and [www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/amateur-radio-service](http://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.

If you are navigating from one Mexican port to another, all that is required is that you inform the port captain, or in some cases the harbormaster of the marina you've been staying in.

In Cabo, for example, you just need to get on VHF 16 and report that you are leaving. You probably won't get a response. If you stayed in a marina in La Paz, the marina will notify the port captain. If you were anchored out, hail the port captain on 16 and he'll have you switch to 14. After a few simple questions, you'll be free to go.

Domestic clearing procedure is yet another case where different port captains have different requirements. Ask around for the local policy. Do what they ask or it can lead to problems.

### 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, at which point everyone surrenders their FMM tourist visa.
- 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.

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 clear-

ing 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 it's like 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.



'Secret' anchorages in the Sea of Cortez are spectacular in the late spring and fall. And many of them are less than 30 miles from La Paz. But sorry, no internet — except at the south end of Espiritu Santo.



There are lots of crocs along the coast of mainland Mexico. But no worries, as they prefer seafood and cats and dogs to humans for their evening meals.



Cosmopolitan Cabo San Lucas is a shock after the pristine Baja coast.



Most Mexican officials do everything they can to help you out. But following the simple rules and dressing to impress helps.



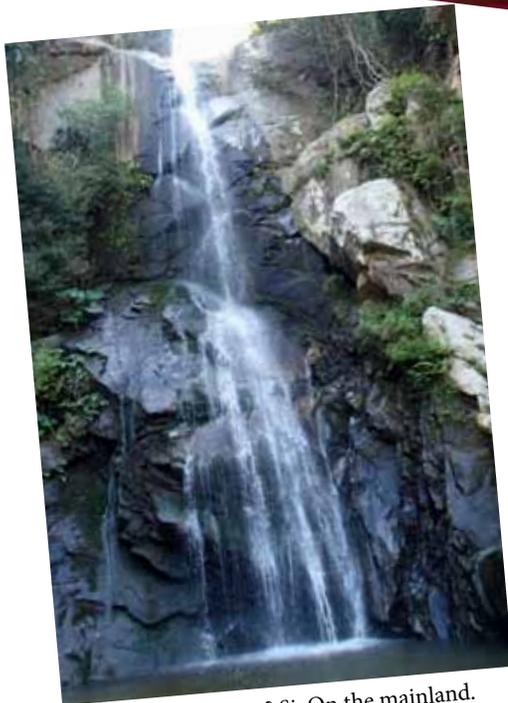
Most sailing in Mexico is in light air. So spinnakers and gennakers can save lots of money on diesel, which isn't cheap like it used to be.



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?



The entrance to the marinas at the north end of Mazatlan is narrow, so be careful if a swell is running. But once inside, Marina El Cid, and the marinas further up the canal, offer excellent protection.



Waterfalls in Mexico? Si. On the mainland.



Baseball anyone? The tiny, dusty village of Turtle Bay has one of the best baseball facilities in Mexico. This is home to the famous Cruisers versus Kids game.



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# FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

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 early December and are over by March.

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 beginning of December. Banderas Bay — meaning Punta Mita, La Cruz, Yelapa, and the three marinas in the bay — is a major cruiser center in December 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 beginning 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 were 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 faster than if you 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 — and maybe Guitar Fest, which follows shortly afterward.

Come the middle of February, we’d slowly start heading back north, revisiting the places you liked best on the way down.

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.

## **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. Passage Weather uses models that seem to predict worst-case scenarios.

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](http://www.eebmike.com) has the most extensive tropical storm coverage and forecasting that we’re aware of.

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Despite the threat of hurricanes, it's not hard to get insurance coverage for your boat in Mexico during hurricane season. That's because historically there hasn't been that much damage to boats.

## 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 tropical storm, let alone a hurricane. The closest was in October 2002, when Category 5 hurricane Zenn, the second-strongest to ever hit Mexico, 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. 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 have 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 ways 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.

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 Bahía 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 *elephant*s, 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

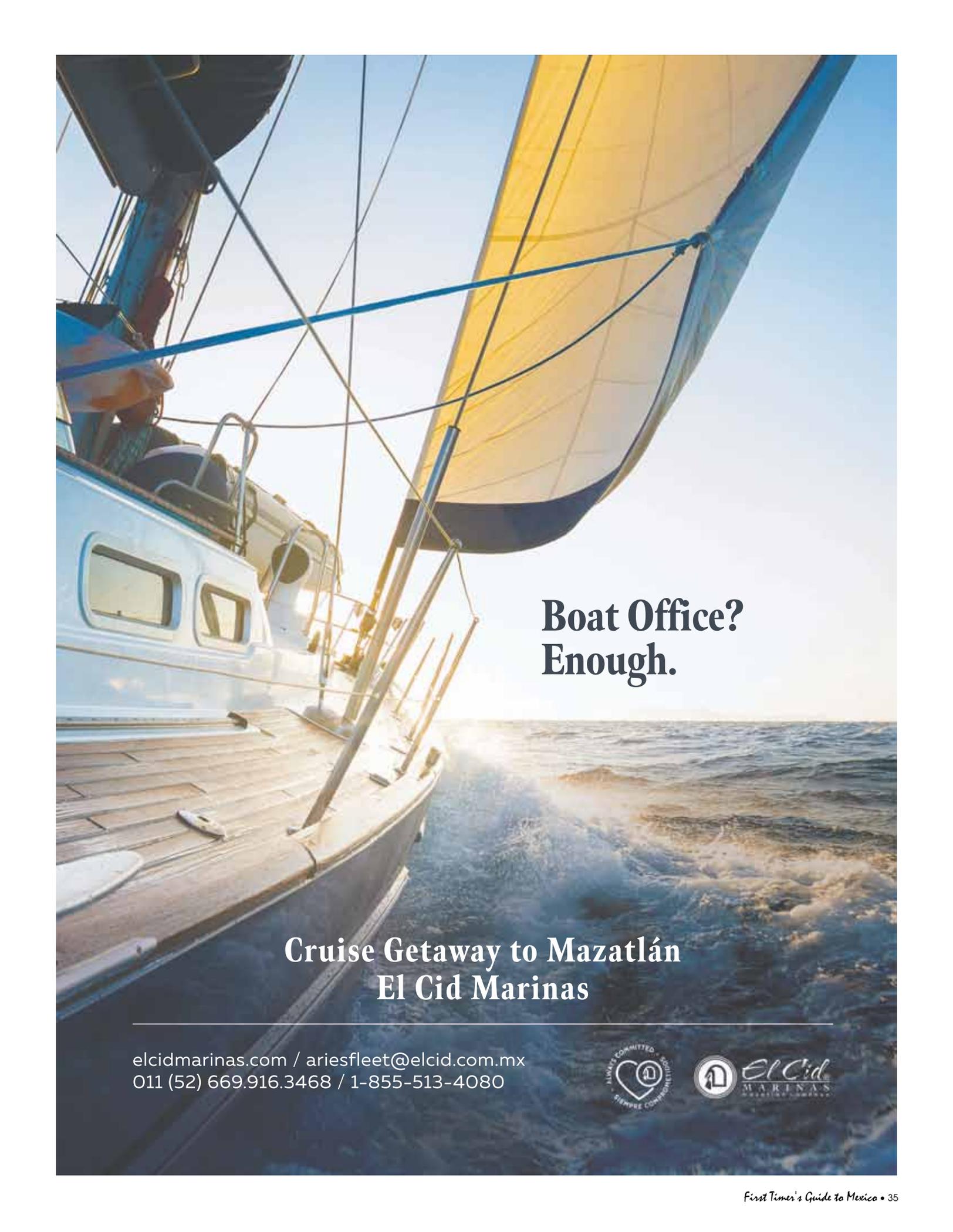
### Q: Are there pirates in Mexico?

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.





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# FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

## **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 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 you'll get the best exchange rate. Depending on your bank and the particular machine, you can get between 5,000 and 8,000 pesos — \$275 and \$450 respectively — a crack.

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 5-6 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.

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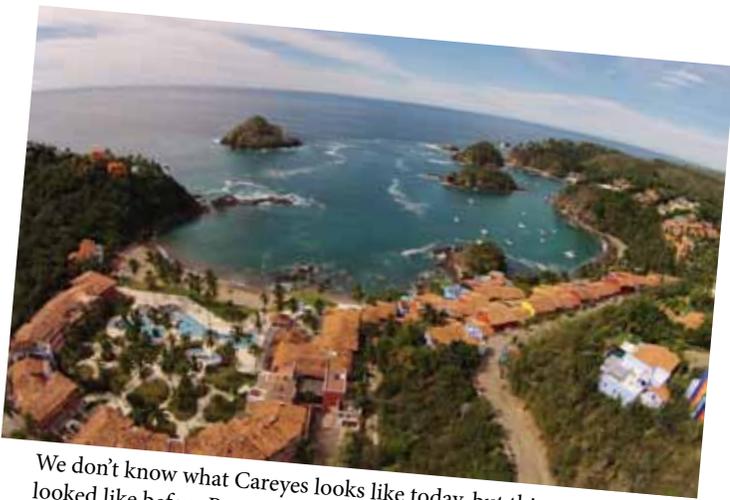
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SCAN ME



We don't know what Careyes looks like today, but this was what it looked like before Patricia hit.



You don't need to bring food to Mexico. They have enough.



The Banderas Bay Blast, in December, and the Banderas Bay Regatta, in March, are the two big cruiser, fun racing events in the Vallarta area.



Spectacular Bahia Santa Maria is surreal when the Ha-Ha fleet is in.



Looking for dry storage over the summer? This is less than half of what Marina Seca stores each year in the San Carlos area.



Cruising on a budget? There are plenty of places to anchor in Mexico. This is San Carlos.

There are plenty of serene scenes in Mexico.



The Banderas Bay Blast doesn't raise as much money as Sailfest, but it still feeds a lot of hungry schoolkids — and is a lot of fun.



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If you love warm water in the winter, you must go to the mainland. The farther south, the warmer it gets.



Zihua and La Paz have the most fantastic sunsets. Z-town for the reds and oranges, La Paz for the pinks, purples, and other unusual colors.



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.



Marina Real on the mainland side of the Sea of Cortez, offers great shelter.



Manuel gives his seal of approval to this cruiser properly checking in at Paradise Marina in Nuevo Vallarta.



A good dinghy and outboard will vastly expand your cruising range. But a good system to offload and reload them from/to your boat is essential. And don't forget locks!



The Grand Marina at Barra Navidad has been a snug harbor in hurricanes, and Barra is great on New Year's.



There are plenty of fish in the sea in Mexico. both along the mainland and up in the Sea of Cortez. You do need a license to fish.





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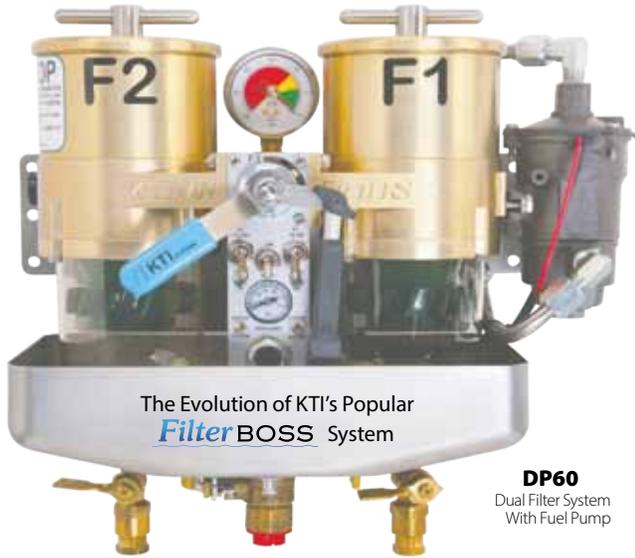
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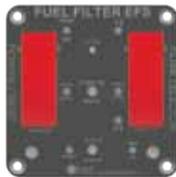
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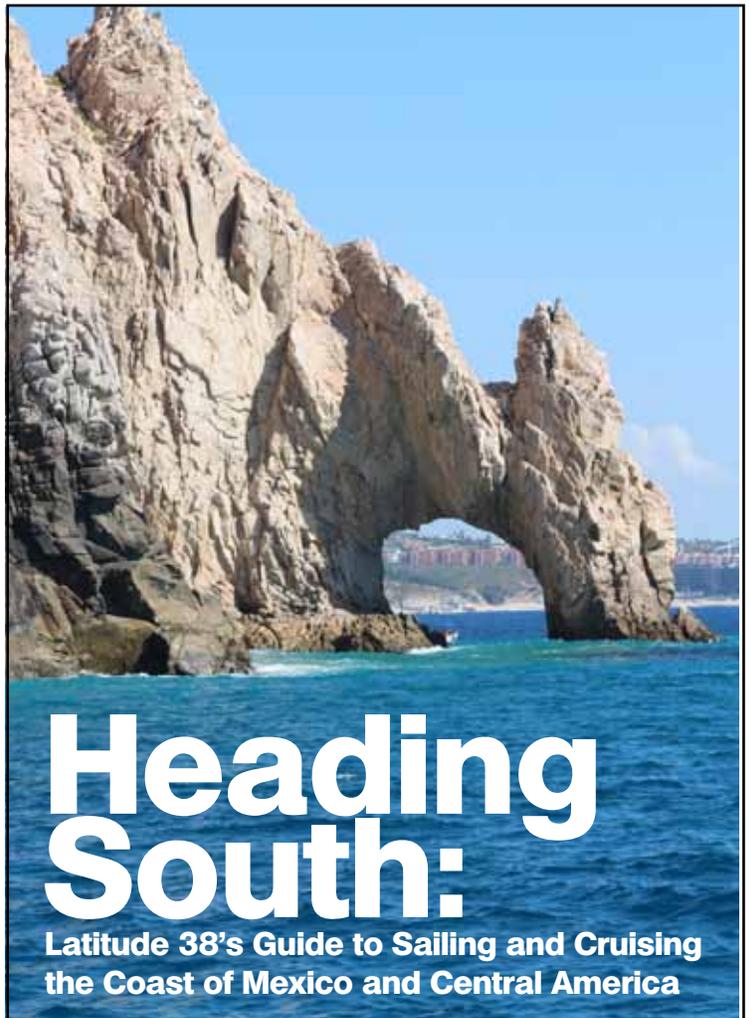
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# FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE TO CRUISING MEXICO

**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 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 said they would. 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](mailto:richard@latitude38.com).*

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



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## 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  
 www.marinapuertosalina.com  
 VHF:channel 16

**Marina Coral** — Ensenada  
 slips: 353 - 30' to 109', end ties to 100'  
 harbormaster: Fito Espinoza  
 +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'  
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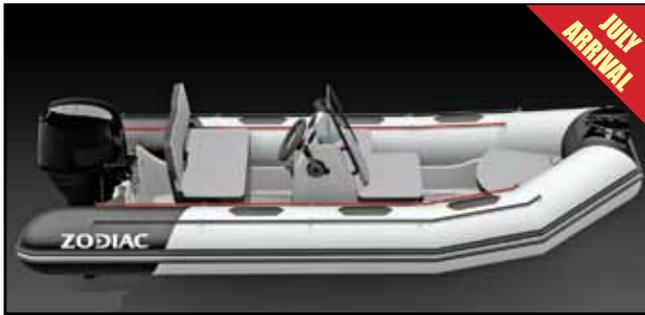
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## Contact Info for Major Mexican Marinas

### **Cruiseport Village Marina** — Ensenada

slips: 189 - 36' to 68', end ties 135'  
harbormaster: Michelle Aguilar  
+52 (646) 219-5822  
from USA.....(877) 219-5822  
reservations@hutchisonportsecv.com  
www.hutchisonportsecv.com  
VHF:channel 12

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### **SOUTHERN COSTAL BAJA**

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### **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

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### **LA PAZ**

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### **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

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### **SEA OF CORTEZ**

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### **Marina Puerto Escondido** — Loreto

100 slips up to 200', dry storage, moorings  
harbormaster: Javier Fuerte  
+52 (613) 133-0189  
harbormaster@marinapuertoescandido.com  
www.marinapuertoescandido.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  
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  
jrcaastro@fonatur.gob.mx  
customerservice@fonatur.gob.mx  
www.marinasonatur.com  
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  
comercialmorcortes@gmail.com  
+52 (667) 324-0446  
www.marinaislacortes.mx  
VHF:channel 16

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### **MAZATLAN & SAN BLAS**

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### **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

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## 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](http://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.marinasfonatur.com/SanBlasAt.aspx  
VHF:channel 16 & 74

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### BANDERAS BAY

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**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  
paradisevillagemarina.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

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### SOUTHERN MAINLAND

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**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  
marinachahuereserv@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@baha-haha.com*





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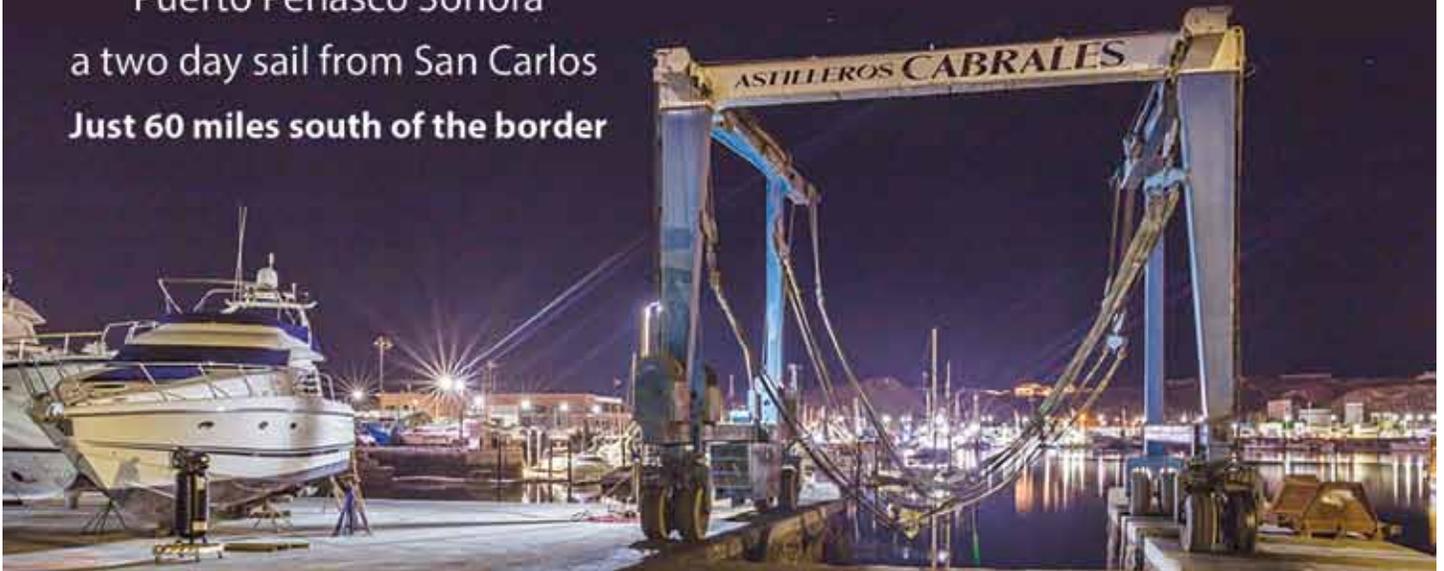
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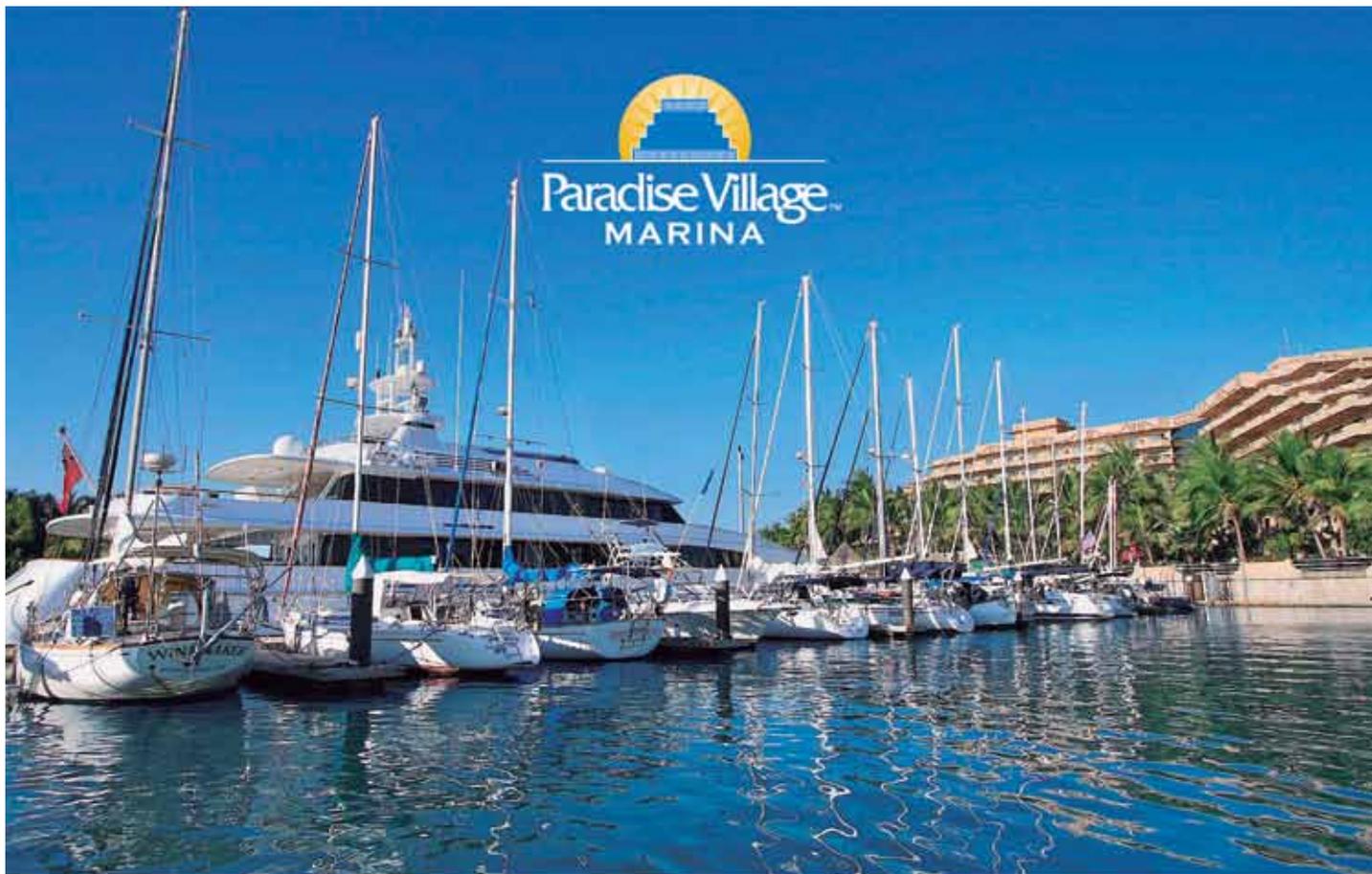
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