

La Paz Visitor's Guide

Visiting La Paz for the first time is an exciting experience. To ensure you have a successful house hunting trip, we've put together some travel tips.

When To Visit?

That depends on your goals. La Paz and the surrounding area offer a wide variety of experiences, but not all of them are available all year long. Consider your options as follows:

Winter (December-March): This is the busiest season in La Paz. The weather is pleasant and not too hot, and many of the popular tourist attractions (whale watching, swimming with whale sharks) are in full swing. Many hotels and vacation rentals are booked months in advance, so it's best to start planning early if you want to visit at this time. Winter is also prime season for house hunting, so more homes are typically available now. Days are usually sunny and warm, but it can get windy and chilly at night, so be sure to pack layers.

Spring (April-June): This is a great time to visit La Paz, as many of our winter visitors start heading back north in April. The gray whales will have started their journey back north, and the whale shark tours stop running. That means more available rooms at hotels and vacation rentals, and fewer crowds. The weather starts getting warmer now, and the water is warmer too, making it a good time to scuba dive and snorkel.

Summer (July-September): Summers in La Paz are hot, but this is also one of the best times to come for deep sea fishing or diving. By now the water is very warm, and the humidity starts to rise. Late summer and early fall are storm season, so keep an eye on the weather reports if you are traveling during this time. Because of the heat and humidity, many locals leave town to visit family and friends elsewhere, and the inventory of homes for sale can also be a bit thin.

Fall (October-November): By mid-October the rains are usually gone, although there can be a few late storms, and the winter visitors start to arrive again. The desert is often green from the rain, and the water is still warm from summer, so this is a great time to visit. Also, many seasonal visitors wait until after the holidays to come back, so there are more options for hotels or vacation rentals. If you want to see the Baja 1000 race, every second year (even years) the race finishes in La Paz. Check the schedules at <http://score-international.com/>.

Arranging Travel to La Paz

There are many ways to get to La Paz from other cities. Following are a few of the most popular.

Fly into Los Cabos International Airport (SJD): This is the most popular way to come, simply because there are multiple airlines that fly directly into Los Cabos. The Cabo Airport is 2 hours south of La Paz, so you'll need to rent a car or arrange ground transportation from the airport to La Paz.

Fly into La Paz: To fly directly into La Paz, you can connect through Mexico City or Guadalajara from several US cities, or you can fly to San Diego, take the cross border express to the Tijuana airport, and then take a short flight from Tijuana to La Paz on Volaris or Calafia airlines. The connections mean this option takes at least as long as flying into Cabo and driving to La Paz.

Drive down the Baja peninsula: If you are planning to call La Paz home permanently or even seasonally, chances are that you will want to make the drive at least once to bring down some household goods, clothes and maybe even your pets. The Transpeninsu-

lar highway makes the drive relatively easy, as long as you plan ahead. Avoid driving at night as visibility is very low and accidents are common, so plan to be off the road by sunset. From the US/Mexico border, the trip takes 2-3 days, depending on how long you drive each day. Fill up on gas whenever you see a station, as there are long stretches in between towns where gas is available. If you're in a hurry, you can stay in Guerrero Negro overnight and arrive in La Paz the second day. Or, take your time and stop for the night in El Rosario and Santa Rosalia instead. Pet-friendly hotels are available in all three towns, and hotels are inexpensive. Just make sure you call ahead for a reservation, as there are few options for hotels in each town and they can book up in the busy season.

Take a Cruise: You won't see many cruise ships in La Paz, which helps to keep prices low. However, La Paz is becoming a more popular destination, so cruise ships do sometimes anchor here in the Pichilingue marina outside of town. From there, you can take a bus to the downtown bus station on the malecon.

Getting from Los Cabos to La Paz

If you decide to fly into Los Cabos airport, the most popular way to get to La Paz, there are several options for ground transportation to make the 2 hour drive north to La Paz.

Rent a car: The new toll road and 4-lane Highway 1 make it an easy drive from the Los Cabos airport to La Paz. During the first part of the drive you will enjoy gorgeous views of the Pacific Ocean. If you're lucky you may even spot a whale breaching. If the timing is right, stop in Todos Santos, a small town known for its art galleries and shops, for lunch and a bit of shopping. The rental company will quote you a low daily rate for the vehicle, but keep in mind the insurance will run another \$25-\$35/day. You cannot refuse the liability insurance as your US or Canada insurance won't cover it. Both National and Cactus car rental companies quote the entire price up front, and have good reputations. As you enter La Paz, you will go through a military checkpoint. Relax, smile and say hello, they will usually just wave you through.

Eco Baja Tours shuttle (<http://www.ecobajatours.com>): Takes you from the Los Cabos airport to the bus station on the malecon in La Paz. Cost is 545 pesos per person each way. From the bus station, you can take a taxi or Uber ride to your hotel. Be sure to look at the schedules and make sure you leave enough time from the time your flight lands to clear immigration and customs, and get to the shuttle stop by the departure time. This shuttle normally goes the scenic route on the old Highway 1 through Los Barrilles, but they also have one that goes along the Pacific Ocean via Todos Santos.

Aguila Bus (<https://www.autobusesaguila.com>): This is a much larger bus with a restroom and on-board wifi service. The bus leaves from San Jose del Cabo and arrives at the downtown La Paz bus terminal, making multiple stops along the way. The one-way fare is 225-360 pesos and there are multiple buses each day. To take this bus, take a taxi from the Los Cabos airport to the bus stop in San Jose del Cabo.

Costa Nova Shuttle (<https://web.facebook.com/pg/Costanova-tours-and-travel-1229224513814877/services/>): This is a private service, so they will arrange to meet you at the airport and deliver you directly to your final destination. Cost is \$160 US for up to 5 people, so this is a great option if you have several people in your party, if you just want that extra service or if your air travel won't get you to Cabo early enough to take one of the shuttles. The Costa Nova drivers speak English and do a great job of giving you some tips and advice on things to do and see in La Paz during your visit.

Where to stay in La Paz

La Paz is not a tourist destination and there are no all-inclusive resorts (or time share sales!) here, but there are plenty of great options for booking your stay. Whether you prefer a resort style hotel, a boutique inn or a vacation home rental, you can find it here. Following are some of our favorites.

Costa Baja Resort (<https://www.costabajaresort.com>). This is the only real resort style luxury hotel in La Paz, and the most expensive option. The hotel includes several restaurants on site, pools, private beach, spa and an 18 hole golf course. It is not walk-

ing distance to downtown, but there are shuttle, taxi or Uber rides available for the short 10 minute drive into downtown La Paz. Rates start around \$200/night.

Hotel Catedral (<http://hotelcatedrallapaz.mx>). A very nice, modern, European style hotel in the middle of downtown. Walk to the malecon, the farmer's market, restaurants, and more. Rates start at \$75/night for a room but you can upgrade to one of their suites for \$99/night (call to reserve the suites). Includes free breakfast, wi-fi and parking. It can sometimes be noisy late at night on weekends because of the location.

Hyatt Place (<https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/mexico/hyatt-place-la-paz>): New hotel, modern and very clean with a pool on site. Located next to Costa Baja resort and offers very clean modern rooms for a low price. The staff will take you by golf cart to the marina and Costa Baja resort for the restaurants, or get a taxi or Uber ride into town.

La Posada Hotel (<https://laposadahotel.mx>). A boutique, beachfront hotel about midway in between El Centenario and downtown La Paz. Has a pool and a full restaurant on site, and a beautiful view of La Paz Bay. They have recently added a spa with gym and massage services. It's centrally located, so you can easily walk to local restaurants, grocery stores, cinema. It's also an easy 15 minute walk or short bike ride into downtown La Paz.

B&Bs and Home Rentals (www.airbnb.com/mexico or <https://www.vrbo.com/vacation-rentals/mexico>):

This can be a great option if you plan to stay in La Paz for a few weeks or a few months, or if you want to stay in a specific area of town to see what it's like to live there. There are many different options, from condos to beachside bungalows and luxury custom homes. Just make sure you book early during the winter season as many of the rental homes book up months in advance.

Pre-trip Preparations

You've made your travel plans, but as you get closer to your departure date, you'll want to make sure you are prepared so you can optimize your experience.

Passports: Make sure your passports are valid for 6 months after the last day you're here. It's easy to get surprised by this rule unless you travel often. Also, make copies of the photo pages just in case, and/or take digital photos and store them securely online, it will make things much easier in the unfortunate case you lose your passport during your trip.

Get some Mexican pesos. Unlike more popular tourist destinations, US and Canadian cash is not always taken or given as change in La Paz. You can use credit cards to purchase most items here, but there are times when you will need some pesos for the farmers markets and other places that only accept cash. Paying in cash will also get you the best deals when you're negotiating prices. Your bank should be able to get you some pesos at a good exchange rate if you give them some advance notice. You can also exchange money at the airport, but you will get a much lower exchange rate, and they also charge a service fee. There are ATM machines right outside the exit lounge at the Los Cabos airport where you can withdraw pesos from your bank account. The ATMs in town will dispense cash in pesos and the rate is pretty good, but make sure your bank knows you're coming (also good to do with the credit card company) so they don't put a hold on your card while you are here.

Cell Phone Service: If you want to use your cell phones while you're here, call your service provider to make sure it will work in Mexico (not all phones do), and ask them what they charge to add an international plan with data. The service providers usually charge between \$20 to \$30 to add international service for the month, and then you can return to your regular plan when you get back. Note: The Canadian service provider, Rogers, is the exception and apparently charges quite a bit to add the international service, so if you are with Rogers you may want to just use your phone on wifi only while you are here. If you don't add international service to your plan, you will need to turn off roaming and data on your phone when you arrive to avoid excessive charges to your cell phone

bill. Most hotels and restaurants have wifi, so you will be able to use your mobile devices there.

Download a Few Handy Mobile Apps: Following are a few apps you may find useful while you are visiting La Paz and are available in your cell phone provider's mobile app store:

- **Google Maps.** Finding your way around La Paz can be a bit overwhelming when you're here for the first time. Google Maps works very well here and can help you more easily find restaurants, shops, doctor's offices and other destinations.
- **Google Translate.** Unlike more popular tourist destinations, La Paz residents speak predominantly Spanish at most local shops and restaurants. While you can get around without knowing Spanish, knowing even a few words will make your experience much more fun. Google Translate is great at helping you figure out how to say specific words and some basic phrases, and you can save the phrases you use most for easy access. Plus, it's tons of fun when you can get what you want all in Spanish.
- **Uber:** The popular ride share service is now operating here in La Paz, which means you can get around to many places without driving yourself. Uber drivers are available in town and at the marinas and hotels.

Print our La Paz Guides: Check out and download our Things to Do in La Paz, and our La Paz Restaurant Guide so you can start exploring the area and try some of the many options for inexpensive and tasty food in La Paz.

Pack a phone charger cable and car adapter in your carry-on. Part of the drive to La Paz will be out of cell phone range. When that happens your phone boosts the antenna power to try and find a network to use. This means that your phone uses battery life a lot faster when it can't find a network. It's a good idea to always have a cable to plug into the car lighter to keep your phone charged, especially if you're going to use it for directions.

Travel Day

As with any other trip, planning ahead and being organized is the best way to make your trip go smoothly.

Arriving at Cabo airport. Los Cabos is a major tourist destination, with multiple time-share sales outfits operating out of the airport. Unless you specifically want to attend a time share presentation, your best bet is to get outside of the airport as fast as possible. Once you clear immigration, gather your luggage and clear customs, you will exit into two big rooms where someone will try their best to get you to stop and talk to them. They will offer to help get you a shuttle or taxi. If you stop and accept their help, they will take you to a desk where they will use the opportunity to try to get you to agree to go to a presentation. Stopping inside is not necessary. All taxis, shuttles and rental car agency representatives are waiting in the area just outside the airport! Walk confidently through both exit rooms until you are outside. Restrooms are in the second room after you exit customs, on your left before you go outside, as are ATM machines. Once you get outside, look for someone who has the right sign or company shirt for your shuttle or car service, and they will help you from there. Taxis are also out here.

The drive to La Paz. If you will be driving yourself to La Paz, there are several routes you can take. The fastest route is to take the toll road behind the airport, and take that all the way to the end, towards Todos Santos. Cost is around \$3.50 US (70 pesos) each way, and they only take cash. Once you leave the toll road, stay on Highway 19 past Todos Santos and towards La Paz. The highway will merge with MX-1 halfway from Todos Santos to La Paz. **If you are going to use your phone for directions, turn it on BEFORE you get on the highway;** it will stay on even after you lose cell service, but if you try to turn it on when there is no service, it won't be able to connect. You can also drive to La Paz via the old MX-1 highway through the East Cape, Los Barriles, and El Triunfo, but that route tends to take at least 3 hours because it winds through mountain roads and small towns along the way.

Arriving in La Paz: You will pass a police checkpoint when arrive on the outskirts of La Paz. Relax, roll down your window and smile/wave and they will usually just wave you through. Once you pass the checkpoint, it's a good idea to have your directions on. Slow down and watch carefully for directional signs, street lights, and especially other drivers.

Driving in La Paz

Getting around La Paz is not difficult, but like any other city, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Street lights: The street lights here are a bit different from up north. Green is the same, but a flashing green light means prepare to stop, similar to a yellow light in the US or Canada. It's usually ok to keep going through the intersection if it was flashing green when you entered, but if you enter when it is already flashing, you can get a ticket. Going through a yellow or red light will almost certainly get you a ticket. It's also dangerous and could cause an accident. Be warned that the locals can and do regularly go through yellow and red lights, but as visitors it's best to abide by the law to avoid getting stopped.

Stop signs: Stop signs work mostly the same here as the do in the US and Canada, with a few important exceptions. First, instead of yielding to the driver on your right, you need to yield to whoever arrived at the intersection first, regardless of which side they are on. Also, not all streets have stop signs so if you don't see any signs you should treat it as a 4-way stop sign. If your direction of travel has no sign and the other direction does, you may proceed without stopping, but be warned that some locals will try to just blow through the stop sign, so it's a good idea to slow down and look first. Also, if you arrive at a stop sign and there are no other cars or pedestrians to be found, you can usually just proceed after a brief pause...but it's always a good idea to try and make a complete stop anyway to avoid the ticket.

One-way streets. La Paz has many one-way streets, and they can come in handy because they usually have fewer stop signs. The trade-off is that you still need to be aware of where you are and check the directional signs to make sure you don't go the wrong way. If you see metal bumps in the road ahead across

your lane, it means the two-way road ends there and becomes a one-way in the other direction. Don't cross the bumps!

If you are stopped: If you've followed the above rules, chances are you'll get through your visit without getting pulled over by the police. If you do get stopped, stay calm and follow the officer's instructions. If they give you a ticket, they will take your driver's license and you will need to go to the police station to pay your fine before you can get it back. This is legal and the only way to pay a ticket. The officers may wait to go back to the station later in the day, so you may have to wait until the next morning to make sure your license is there. If you pay your fine within 24 hours, you can get a 50% discount on your ticket. Be aware that there are times an officer will offer you the option to "pay now and I won't have to take your license" (also called a bribe or mordida). Our guidance is NOT to do this and insist the officer write you a ticket instead. Often, if you insist on the ticket, they will let you go with a warning. It is illegal to offer the police any cash at the traffic stop, and doing so encourages them to continue the practice. Insist on following the law and you will be fine.

Enjoy Your Visit!

We hope our guides help you enjoy your visit to La Paz. Remember to download our Things to Do in La Paz and our Favorite La Paz Restaurants Guide. You can also visit our blog This Baja Life for articles and ideas on how to enjoy your stay here. We look forward to welcoming you to our beautiful and peaceful city!



Jim & Rebecca MacDonald

MX: 612.167.8976

US: 408.220.5981

jim@bajaliferealty.com

www.bajaliferealty.com