

## DRIVING MEX 1 – THE BAJA

When I sat down to try to write what I thought may be of interest in planning and preparing to drive the Baja, I remembered a wonderful article I had kept from the past that best-described the road. I was lucky enough to find the 2004 edition of Baja Life, and from it, I am sharing with you 2 paragraphs:

**“There are *hundreds* of roadside memorial sites honoring the *unfortunate drivers* who lost their lives driving Baja’s *notorious* Highway 1. Roadsides *drop off* anywhere from a few feet to a few hundred feet. The pavement will often have chunks broken off or washed away. There are no streetlights to illuminate your path at night and most *desert animals are nocturnal*, seeking the heat of the road for warmth. Each vehicle has only 8 feet from which to evade *wandering cows*, haphazard speed bumps, potholes, oncoming 18-wheelers and the nomadic bicyclist. And if this is not enough to slow you down, *often gas stations are bone dry – out of fuel.*”**

**So why would any *sane person* take a road trip down Baja’s Highway 1? Because it is the most *visually dramatic, emotionally stimulating and mentally engaging* road trip you’ll ever take. Once you’ve done it, *you won’t be able to stop – you’ll get addicted. Everyone does.....*”** by Jenna Cavelle

*And then 3 great paragraphs from the auto association AAA Trip Tik Map:*

**Describing Tijuana to Colonet.....**this route offers a variety of terrain and scenery, including coastal area towns and beaches, sections of agriculture and ranching, as well as mountain and desert terrain. The narrowness of the road and sharp mountain curves between Maneadero and Colonet require extra caution. Night driving on any of the peninsula’s two-lane roads is definitely not recommended;

**From Guerrero Negro to South of Loreto.....**there are steep , winding section with switchbacks approaching the Gulf of California east of San Ignacio and over the Sierra de la Giganta south of Loreto; extra caution recommended. Guerrero Negro, one of the world’s largest salt producing centers, and Loreto, oldest settlement in Baja California, are of interest. Some excellent fishing and camping beaches are within easy reach along Gulf of California;

**From Villa Insurgentes to San Jose del Cabo.....**Villa Insurgentes and Ciudad Constitucion are in a major cotton and alfalfa producing area; slow moving trucks necessitate caution. Villa Insurgentes to La Paz through flat country in the northwest, and a region of bluffs, table mountains and hilly terrain in the southeast. La Paz to San Jose del Cabo through sections of flat country and some hilly/mountain terrain. The road climbs gradually into the Sierra de la Victoria range, passing the villages of El Triunfo and San Antonio before reaching the summit, then descends very steeply into a long inland valley.

Now that you are “pumped” and ready for the wonderful drive ahead, we share with you some important tips and information for your journey.

**Mexican Insurance:** is a must before you cross in to Mexico. Neither USA or Canadian insurance is valid in Mexico. There are companies at the border that sell insurance, information available on the internet, your friends may be able to recommend a company or there is a company listed under services in this directory.

**Watch For:** marked and unmarked topes (speed bumps). They can do a lot of damage to your car if you take them too fast. Traffic tends to have huge variations in speed and you have to pay close attention to this. You need to watch for vehicles entering or leaving the highway – often with no signals.

**Do Not:** drive at night as it is difficult to see the steep shoulders of the road, curves are very sharp in many places, the downhill grades are very steep, and animals do tend to migrate to the warmth of the pavement; some may lie down on the pavement, and you will not see them until you are upon them. The sun sets quickly in the desert, so plan to be off the road early.

**4-Way Flashers:** are often used to signal to drivers that a vehicle is moving very slow. Drivers of large trucks, having better visibility ahead, will often put on their left signal light to inform you that it is clear to pass. This is, of course, a courtesy but you still need to be cautious when passing.

**Extra tips and pointers:**

If you are a member of AAA or CAA, ask for a Trip Tik Map in advance of your trip. It is an excellent map with accurate mileages and good references.

Avoid traveling on *Saturday* afternoons or on holiday weekends.

Plan to cross the border early at Tijuana or Tecate so that you have a good driving day ahead of you.

In planning your trip, and in looking at mileage, realize that the mountainous areas take twice as long to drive as flat land areas. If 100 km normally takes you 1 hour to drive (60 miles); plan that in the mountainous areas it will take you 2 hours. Mexico's road signs are all in kilometers. To convert to miles times the kilometers by .6 ( e.g. 100 x .6 = 60). Cities, towns, and army check points will slow you down considerably.

\*\*\*We always inform our friends of when we plan to cross the border, where we plan to stay, and our planned date of arrival. For good reason, someone should know your plans and how to reach you in the event of an emergency – either yours, or theirs. Cellular phone services tend to be non-existent outside the large city centers.

**Gas:** always keep your fuel tank on the full side for 2 good reasons: it is easier on your fuel pump in hot weather driving; and there are times the next gas station may be out of gas.

From *El Rosario* to *Guerrero Negro* is a very long stretch of highway with no gas stations. Be sure that your vehicle is absolutely full of gas at El Rosario.

Although a little more expensive, most vehicles tend to run better by using Premium gas (rojo/red).

\*\*\*we always carry a jerry can of gas with us, a gallon of water for the radiator, fuel filter, octane boost, fuel stabilizer, and a selection of tools. Be sure to check that your spare tire is in good shape and inflated properly. Good brakes and an operational emergency brake is a must. Even if you cannot do repairs, someone who can, may be able to assist you – or you may be able to offer your help to someone else along the way!

Try to plan curves when you are meeting a large truck. Often they need extra room; and it is best if you can avoid being in the same curve at the same time as a big semi.

The Federal Police are responsible for policing the Highway (black & white vehicles); and may check your speed, etc. There are, however, numerous army checkpoints along the way; and they stop all vehicles and do inspections. Primarily they are searching for weapons and drugs. It is not unusual for them to want to check inside your vehicle. Pay attention during these inspections, do not lose sight of your valuables i.e. purse, passports, etc.

**Good Hotels:** We are certain that there are many good hotels along the way, and that friends can often provide recommendations from their experiences; as is the case with the Ignacio Springs Bed & Breakfast in San Ignacio (card is in the directory under services). We have found that the La Pinta hotels that are located in San Quintin, Catavina, and Loreto have always been very clean, and have very good on-site restaurants. We've also enjoyed staying and dining at the El Morro in Guerrero Negro.