



# Baja Bits & Bytes

NEWS AND UPDATES FROM DISCOVER BAJA TRAVEL CLUB

*JUNE 2012*

## **BAJA BITS & BYTES –SOMETHING NEW**

Discover Baja's *Bits & Bytes* is a new way of communication with members who have expressed concerns about the "timeliness" of items in our quarterly newsletters. Carol Kramer has been addressing these concerns with her Discover Baja Updates emailed to members at least once a month, and we are now experimenting with a monthly, more formal *Bits & Bytes*. Please let us know how you like it. [ask@discoverbaja.com](mailto:ask@discoverbaja.com). ¡Gracias!

## **ROBERT REDFORD MOVIE TO BE SHOT IN ROSARITO**

It's been a while since *Titanic*, *Master & Commander* and *Pearl Harbor* were filmed at the Fox Studio south of Rosarito Beach. There's been a lot of water under the bridge, including the sale of the studio by Fox.

Now, movie producer Zachary Quinto, has chosen the studio, with its huge water tank, for the making of *All is Lost*, a survival film that takes place on the sea, and will star Robert Redford.

Shooting is expected to begin in June and during production, the film should provide a financial boon for Rosarito Beach.

## **HOLIDAYS BRING TOURISTS TO BAJA**

Recent holidays have provided numerous opportunities for American tourists to enjoy the warm hospitality, creative food and unique culture of Baja California. At Discover Baja, we have noticed an increase in the number of members who have been deterred the past few years by drug cartel violence, returning to Baja and feeling comfortable and safe.

Some hotels are reporting their highest occupancy rates in over ten years, confirming the trend that more people are heading south of the border and enjoying it as much, if not more than they ever have.

## ***LONELY PLANET: MEXICO SAFE FOR TRAVEL***

Yes! It's safe to travel in Mexico. We've known it all along, but it's good to hear it from no less an authority than travel book publisher Lonely Planet.

Is Mexico safe for tourists? Lonely Planet travel writer Robert Reid addressed that question recently in an article reprinted by the Huffington Post. In fact, after reviewing the facts, Reid turned the question on its head, asking "Are Americans Safer in Mexico than at Home?"

Check out the report at <http://mexicotoday.org/article/lonely-planet-travel-writer-provides-facts-about-safety-mexico>

## ***HELP SAVE CABO PULMO***

Baja's East Cape's Cabo Pulmo is the only hard coral reef in North America. Conservation efforts in the past seven years, have caused a revitalization in marine life, including an amazing increase in fish biomass of 460%. Now a proposed project--Cabo Cortes--threatens this unique area. Cabo Cortes would develop 9,380 acres with hotels, shops, golf courses and a marina destroying wild life and the pristine beauty of Cabo Pulmo. Greenpeace is working to halt this mega development. Please vote to save Cabo Pulmo. You can also visit [www.cabopulmovivo.org](http://www.cabopulmovivo.org), which is in Spanish and English, and sign the petition.

## ***NEW GUADALUPE VALLEY HOTEL***



Endemico is a spectacular new and very unique addition to the accommodations scene in Baja's beautiful Guadalupe Valley. Staggered among boulders on a secluded hill in the wine-growing region of Baja California, these luxury "cabins" bring guests into direct contact with nature, blending seamlessly with the surrounding landscape. Endemico--Spanish for endemic--meaning native to a specific region or environment, was designed to highlight the isolation of the environment.

Endemico is not cheap—over \$200/night—and each of the 20 luxury units has an unobstructed view of the valley. On the private wooden terraces, guests can sit and sip regional wines while being warmed by a roaring fire. It is opening in July with a beautiful pool area and restaurant. Check out their website: <http://www.tablethotels.com/Hotel-Endemico/Hotels-Baja-Peninsula-Mexico/116596>

## ***MEALS TO SAVOR***

SPLASH, which we've recommended before has just opened a second restaurant--SPLASH too. It is about a mile and a half south of Rosarito Beach on the east side of the free road, before you get to Popotla. It's the same great food and wonderful service without having to travel quite so far south, but without the ocean setting.

Los Pelicanos in Rosarito Beach has replaced their weathered acrylic windows with glass, again providing a gorgeous view of the beach and large, crashing waves. With its made-at-your-table salsa, fabulous steaks, sea food, Mexican dishes and a mini salad bar brought to your table (not to mention the killer margaritas), Los Pelicanos has re-gained its place as a top Rosarito Beach restaurant.

If you are looking for a change from typical Mexican food while in Rosarito, give The Mongolian Grill a try. In addition to their wonderful Mongolian grill dishes, they offer some special pizzas and Korean tacos. Tell Chris and Lee, the friendly owners and operators, that we sent you. It's located a mile south of Rosarito on the free road, in front of the La Jolla del Mar (and Real) towers.

## ***GAS PRICES IN BAJA***

As of 5/29/12 PEMEX prices are lower than the week before: Magna is \$2.86; Premium is \$3.04; Diesel is \$2.90 per US gallon.

## ***PESO EXCHANGE***

As of 6/3/12, the Mexican Peso is exchanging at 14.45 to the US dollar.

## ***ROAD CONDITIONS Puertecitos-Gonzaga Update***

(A recent report from DBTC member, Mike Essary)

From the "round-about" in San Felipe to Puertecitos is about 53 miles - or about a one-hour drive. That road is the same old stuff, with a couple of "Oh s\_\_!" dips in it

From Puertecitos the NEW road extends for 32 miles (kilometer marker 126, which is from somewhere outside of San Felipe). That's paved about 6.7 miles further than they were last year in May when I took the road. Not bad!



The road is great and the view is awesome! HOWEVER, they've made a bunch of new cuts in the hills for the road and there are a LOT of landslides on the paved road. And I'm not talking about little rocks - I had to do some slowing/veering to get around some boulders that were in the road. Guess they're focused on building the new section and not really maintaining the existing road. Unless some of the recent earthquake had something to do with it? Anyway, it's not a problem unless you're going TOO fast and not looking ahead. And if

you're doing that then you SHOULDN'T be driving in Baja.

After the pavement ends, they're working on the road and it is "mostly" graded into Gonzaga Bay. I was able to do 25-35 miles per hour for most of it. And some other *Americanos* passed me, so you could go faster. Total time from kilometer marker 33 (where my friend's house is) to Gonzaga Bay (including the checkpoint just north of Gonzaga) was 1 hour 39 minutes. That's down from 2 hours 15 minutes from last year. Yippee!!!!

The road after Gonzaga is 35.5 miles to Highway 1 at Laguna Chapala - and it's pretty much the same old road. Rocks, washboard, hills, more rocks, dips, more rocks, etc.... Driving reasonably in my van, I did it in 1 hour 40 minutes. I still would NOT recommend it for regular passenger vehicles. High clearance and 4x4 are MUCH better for durability and handling. Not necessary, but you run the risk of breaking SOMETHING and having to wait for help.

## ***DON EDDIE'S – NEW BEGINNINGS AND TOURNAMENT***

Like a Phoenix, rising from the ashes on the Bay of San Quintin, Don Eddie's is coming to life again. All the rooms have been remodeled and the restaurant and bar formally re-opened on Memorial Day. The restaurant has a new, more price-friendly menu while still maintaining its traditional Baja fish tacos.

Don Eddie's will be hosting its 12<sup>th</sup> annual *4<sup>th</sup> of July Fishing Tournament* this July 6 and 7. Entry fee is \$100. For tournament information, email tournament director, Beverly Hawley at [loansbybev@gmail.com](mailto:loansbybev@gmail.com) and for hotel reservations contact Tony Marquez 001-52-664-104-8481 or email [marqueztony@hotmail.com](mailto:marqueztony@hotmail.com)

## ***JUAN DE DIOS—Going Places Judy Goldstein Botello***

Deep in the rugged mountains that form Baja California's spine, there lies a lost world, one whose families still live much as they have lived for more than two centuries. They are the *Californios*, descendents of the soldiers and craftsmen who accompanied the European Padres to that distant peninsula. As the Padres moved north, many of those soldiers and craftsmen remained behind, intermarrying with the native people and working the harsh land bequeathed to them by the Spanish king. Their ranches and villages still dot the Sierras of

Baja California Sur. For many visitors, those villages and ranches are the gateway to Baja's mysterious prehistoric cave paintings; but for the dozens of families who eke out a living from that stony land, they are home.

One such village is Santa Marta, just south and east from San Ignacio, at the end of more than thirty miles of rutted dirt road. We found ourselves there in 2010, as part of a group of volunteer dentists and doctors, an organization called *Los Amigos de los Californios*. Santa Marta is the site of a kind of boarding school, known as *un albuerge*, where the children live, eat, and learn during the week. Most of the students come from the surrounding ranches, but there are few vehicles and fewer roads in those communities; getting to and from school involves hours on foot or on mule back, so once there, the students stay until the weekend. The school's thirty-some children cover pre-school through eighth grade. After the eighth grade, further education requires leaving the village or the family ranch and finding a high school in one of the nearest towns, usually San Ignacio or Santa Rosalia.



After a busy week caring for patients, our group took a day off and headed by mule to Rancho San Antonio, the home of one of the school's star pupils, thirteen-year-old Juan de Dios Lopez. With our local guides, we passed through dazzling scenery: deep multi-colored canyons, bright-blooming cactus and wildflowers, dramatic glimpses of the Sea of Cortez. After riding for about three hours through what seemed to be pure wilderness, we finally came upon Rancho San Antonio: a goat corral, a modest palm-thatched dwelling, a few wooden out-buildings. Alejo Lopez, the ranch's owner, greeted us warmly as we dismounted. Juan de Dios, home from school, gazed shyly at our cavalcade from the corral, his arms around the neck of a young goat. Inside the small home, Alejo's wife was all smiles as she warmed her homemade tortillas on an old metal grate over a wood fire. She had just finished making a round of fresh goat cheese, and we feasted on the best quesadillas I've ever tasted.

Like most local ranches, San Antonio has no electricity. But after our quesadillas, as we were chatting with our hosts, a little voice called gently from a dark corner of the room. Juan de Dios wanted to show us something. There, in the middle of nowhere, in a world that could easily have been from the 1800s, a young boy sat in front of a laptop computer, surfing the Internet. After our astonished exclamations and his shy but proud demonstrations, we learned that Alejo, Juan de Dios's dad, had installed a single solar panel on the south side of the house; that solar panel was connected to an old car battery, and the electricity was sufficient to power a laptop. Far below the mountain on which Rancho San Antonio sits, a transmission tower outside of Santa Rosalia carries signal to the ranch. ("Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't," Juan de Dios told us.) But sometimes is enough. Alejo himself had

only been able to complete six years of school—no more was available in his day—but he is a smart, resourceful man, and he has great hopes for his children.

We returned to the Sierra in March of this year, for Amigos de los Californios' annual clinics. The weekend before we were to drive into Santa Marta, we spent a couple of days in Santa



Rosalia, where we ran into Juan de Dios. He is in high school now, having gone as far as he could go in Santa Marta's *albuerge*. He is living with a family in town whom he met through his church; they are kind to him, but he is homesick for his family. His class in Santa Marta had four students; his class in Santa Rosalia has forty-five. On the ranch, the loudest sound is the "clink-clink" of the bells around the goats' necks; Santa Rosalia vibrates with car horns and hip-hop music blared from radios. And, he told us, he is not adept at talking in public, like the town kids; he still gets tongue-tied when called upon in class.

Nonetheless, he is determined to continue his studies, and one day to attend university, as his older sister has done. Despite his culture shock, he is making good grades. And his dad told us that Juan de Dios has been chosen as president of his class.

When we took our leave of Juan de Dios, he was looking forward eagerly to spending his Spring break with his family on the ranch. We asked how he would get there. Still shy and ill-at-ease with words, Juan de Dios shrugged. Maybe a bus to where the dirt road intersects the highway; maybe then a ride in someone's pickup, if he's lucky; then maybe a borrowed mule or a walk of a few hours . . . He wasn't worried. He was going home.

*Judy Goldstein Botello and her husband Victor are long-time members of Discover Baja. A retired pediatrician with a passion for Mexico, she is author of the travel memoir "The Other Side: Journeys in Baja California".*

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