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Driving Vacation & ATV Adventures: Cabo San Lucas to Buena Vista - Baja California

Driving Vacation & ATV Adventures: Cabo San Lucas to Buena Vista - Baja California



With summer a fond memory and colder weather approaching, now is a good time to think about a trip to warmer climes.

Although the usual suspects of Hawaii, Florida or Puerto Rico, are on many people's lists, many are letting fear get in the way of exploring Mexico.

David Latt traveled south of the border to go beyond the corona and the Jose Cuervo to discover the adventurous side of Baja.

Mexico's well-publicized difficulties with crime have caused many travelers to steer clear of the border cities. Tragically, it was those regions that were once the perfect places to experience the melding of two great cultures and peoples.

Luckily there are safe places to visit in Mexico far from the border. A recent trip to the southernmost tip of Baja California revealed the experiential adventures that await in Mexico.

In Cabo San Lucas, most visitors divide their time between relaxing and partying, the ratio of one to the other depending on personal proclivities. Even for me, a normal visit to Cabo for me would center around a poolside piña colada followed by a visit to the spa. Of course, I enjoyed both upon arrival, but the real goal on this trip was to experience Baja from a more adventurous perspective.

Seafaring Adventures

Interestingly, while all the resorts publicize their beach fronts with photographs of clear, blue water and large, sandy expanses, swimming is not advised. The tidal undercurrent and surf are quite dangerous, which makes finding other active experiences all the more worthwhile.

Cabo San Lucas commands a view of the Sea of Cortez (also known as the Gulf of California) where cruise ships stop during the day. With an iconic rock outcropping and happily basking sea lions adjacent to Lovers' Beach, visitors enjoy the water in the busy marina or by taking glass-bottomed skiffs or day-tripping boats to secluded areas like Santa Maria Bay or Chileno Beach.

Tour companies like [Terramar Destinations](#) offer a smorgasbord of activities, from snorkeling in the protected waters of Santa Maria Bay (warning: expect about a four-hour trip on a catamaran) to kayaking in the crystal-clear waters where you may battle high winds and a challenging surf.

Other high-energy activities in the area include jet skiing, parasailing and kitesurfing. Meanwhile, more laid-back types can opt for whale watching, swimming with dolphins, take a "booze cruise," or simply sail around the harbor for a sunset dinner cruise complete with ice-cold margaritas.

High-Octane Landlubbers

For the adventurous traveler who wants more than just creature comforts, there are opportunities in Cabo to test one's skill battling with nature and good sense. For most visitors, that includes taking a safari into the expansive desert or off-roading on bone-chattering Baja Buggies.



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Our job? To test-drive Mitsubishi's 2011 Outlander Family and Outlander Sport from Cabo San Lucas to Buena Vista.

There are other parts of Mexico where driving a car is risky, but Highway 1, which stretches northeast from the southern tip of Cabo San Lucas to the area above the

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fishing village of Los Barriles, feels completely safe, although it's important to keep an eye out for the occasional cow ambling across the highway. I am still not a fan of driving at night in Mexico (what's Spanish for DUI?) so stick to daytime driving. But the well-paved highway is a convenient way to explore the area.

Starting in Cabo San Lucas, we drove an hour and a half north to Buena Vista on the coast. I only vaguely understood the car's features like plastic polymer components in the fenders and a brake energy rejuvenation system, but they did translate into a car that had plenty of power, good handling (although a bit loose in turning), a quiet interior, and comfortable seats. We agreed that the Outlander Family was a pleasant way to do the drive and take in the passing scenery.

For most of the year, the vast expanse of plant life on the southern-most tip of Baja suffers horribly under cloudless skies and an unrelenting sun. The dull, leafless plants are almost indistinguishable from the brown earth.

And then, in the fall, an amazing thing happens.

Unlike the [Mayan Riviera](#), which receives upwards of 5 feet of rain through out the year, the arid, southern tip of the Baja peninsula averages a mere 6 inches. And when it rains it pours. That 6 inches comes all at once when hurricanes cut across the peninsula at the end of summer.



What we saw as we sped north on Highway 1 was the result of that extreme weather. A lush expanse of green covered the hills to the horizon. We took the greenery for granted, but locals pointed out that just a few weeks before, the landscape had been brown and forlorn.

But the real highlight of my land-based adventure activities was an ATV ride at the rustic [Hotel Buena Vista](#).

As a child I had an unfortunate experience on a motorcycle with a stuck accelerator that scarred my psyche and forearm. While an ATV has four wheels and could be considered "safer," those four wheels do not necessarily provide additional control.



Controlling the ATV took some getting used to, but, with the ocean on our right as we headed north on the gravelly beach, it seemed the experience would be worth the risk. Our guide apparently thought the beach wasn't adventuresome enough because he quickly changed course and took us up a rocky hillside.

The road was barely a "road," so the ATV had to be steered with considerable care, dodging holes and large rocks.

With my face hammered by dust and gravel, struggling to stay on the miserable excuse for a road, the vibrations of the engine violently rolling my body, I released all the pent up emotion of the moment by screaming for no one's benefit but my own, "Ohmygod, I hate this!"

The tricky part on this twisty-turning dirt trail was steering the corners. One misjudged turn could send my ATV tumbling down the cliff onto the pristine beach and crystal-clear water below.

After what seemed like hours, our guide pulled over to the side of a promontory so we could enjoy the view of the coastline. I dismounted my ATV, happy to enjoy a non-vibrating moment only to be embraced by one of our group who smiled broadly as he said, "Tell me that wasn't the most fun ever!"

We spent another hour on our ATVs, traveling further up the coast and then back to the beach.

We watched two surfers propelled by "kites" that at times lifted them off their boards, suspending them midair in what appeared to be a magical sleight of hand.

We saw a school of a dozen dolphins following the coastline as they searched for food.



We passed campers who were homesteading a beautiful stretch of beach.

We stopped for water at a small resort of no more than a dozen cabanas with a fresh water swimming pool perched only a few feet above the surf pounding against jagged rocks. Well worth the trip ...

By David Latt for PeterGreenberg.com. Visit David on the Web at MenWhoLiketoCook.com. Check back for the next installment of David Latt's Mexican adventures as he day trips to the laid-back town of San Jose del Cabo, and reports on his foodie findings in Baja.

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