



CURE FOR THE SUMMERTIME BLUES

A CIRCUIT OF THE UPPER SEA OF CORTEZ KEEPS SUMMER EXCITING.

Now is the time for Mexico boaters to make plans — and reservations — for safe summer quarters, because some dry storage yards and marinas in the upper Sea of Cortez are starting to fill up. With that in mind, we have a suggested itinerary that allows you to circulate among six different hurricane holes for safety and still take advantage of “all clear” periods to move north or explore the many other pristine cruising grounds that weren’t mentioned as winter cruising grounds (see Mexico Report, May). Each has services for yachts.

TOPOLOBAMPO

The first stop on this circuit is Topolobampo, which is about 100 miles north of La Paz and 244 miles northwest of Mazatlan. From the Topo sea buoy (about 25 degrees 30 minutes north, 109 degrees 12 minutes west),

call the port captain on VHF Channel 16 to request permission to enter the commercial harbor, and he’ll give you directions in English to the secondary channel hidden behind fingers of land. At 8.5 miles in from the sea buoy, the sheltered slips, fuel dock and boatyard

of Marina Palmira Topolobampo welcome guests with boats to 80 feet. This marina has been hurricane safe since it opened in 2009.

Provisioning for fresh produce is excellent at Los Mochis farmer’s market. To prevent cabin fever, take the dinghy (or hire a panga guide) to fish and bird-watch around the vast Bahía Ohuira.

But the coolest three- to five-day adventure here is the fabled Copper Canyon train excursion. For best viewing, book first-class seats on starboard going up and to port coming down. Spend a night or two at Creel or Devisadero where the chilly elevation requires jackets to hike pine trails, visit a Tarahumara village or ride the sky tram across the Sierra Madre gorge.

During a weather window, cross 135 miles west-northwest from Topo to Baja’s Puerto Escondido, passing the south ends of Catalina, Monserrat and Danzante islands.

PUERTO ESCONDIDO

A near-perfect enclosure by hills and land bridges prevents the brunt of storm winds and seas from entering



this tranquil 2-mile bay. It's nestled in the foot of the Sierra La Giganta's sheer 900-foot facade, so storms that may cross Baja from the Pacific are pushed aloft here, unable to reform until farther out into the Sea of Cortez.

Puerto Escondido has a 25-slip Fonatur marina that also operates 100 rental moorings, a 100-foot fuel dock and a paved boatyard with secure dry storage. Near the marina office are two restaurants, a small chandler and Hidden Port Yacht Club, which hosts Loreto Fest each spring. For boats under 40 feet, a smaller marina has rented no-frills side-ties inside the concrete canals of a stalled residential development.

Loreto, 15 miles north, has good provisioning, a lovely mission and an international airport.

When it's clear to move, simply coast 80 miles north on Baja, visiting any of 40 anchorages, the second-best cruising grounds in Mexico. From either Bahia Concepcion or Santa Rosalia (fuel dock), you cross 80 miles northeast to the mainland.

GUAYMAS

Guaymas Harbor has 360-degree shelter from hurricane winds and seas. Fonatur's marina lies in the harbor's northwest corner with its own fuel dock, a paved boatyard and nice amenities. Several dry storage and repair yards line the harbor's south end. Guaymas has good provisioning, air conditioned movies and a big shrimp fleet.

SAN CARLOS

San Carlos is a resort port only 16 miles farther, past 10 interesting anchorages. Summering over was really perfected by the Grossman family, which owns Marina San Carlos. It has 360 slips in an enclosed bay, plus the largest dry storage and repair yards in Mexico. Marina Seca Transport trucks yachts to and from the U.S., a popular

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service for yachts 50 feet or less. Nearby Marina Real is almost as well sheltered, just smaller.

Fishing and scuba diving are the main summer activities from both Guaymas and San Carlos. The other pastime is sampling new appetizers at more than 50 gringo-friendly restaurants. Moving north again, if the weather report is good for a week or more, you can anchor in a different pristine cove every night along the 50-mile Found Coast, ending at Punta Los Corralitos (28 degrees 20 minutes north, 111 degrees 28 minutes west).

Crossing from Los Corralitos on Sonora to Puerto Don Juan on Baja requires a 75-mile jump northwest, passing Isla San Pedro Martir, to make landfall at Bahia San Francisquito (28 degrees 27 minutes north, 112 degrees 51 minutes west),

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The docks at Marina Palmira Topolobampo are a great starting point for a summer circuit of the upper Sea of Cortez.

a large south-wind anchorage. Then it's 43 miles of coasting up Baja past a dozen more anchorages to reach the Bahía de Los Angeles (L.A. Bay) area.

PUERTO DON JUAN

Hardly a port, this remote bay has no roads or develop-

ment, just year-round 360-degree shelter and room for 35 or 40 boats to swing in comfort. Potlucks sprout on the pristine beach, and sailboats can be careened in a side bay called the Bath Tub. Provisions and fuel come from L.A. Bay, a 7-mile commute that includes lunch at Guillermo's near the landing.

"Don Juaners" have 20 getaway island anchorages within 12 miles to keep from getting bored. Weather is the main topic on the morning VHF 22 net, so everyone knows if a hurricane is creeping up the Sea of Cortez — fairly rare.

PUERTO PENASCO

One-hundred forty-five miles north from Don Juan, Puerto Peñasco in the state of Sonora is the northernmost harbor in the Sea of Cortez. It has three marinas, two fuel docks, two boatyards and good provisioning. Many gringos retire here, and a daily bus goes to the U.S. border at Sonoyta. The main drawback? Tidal ranges are significant, so pay attention as you approach land and shallows, especially during full and dark moons.

Punta Cholla Sportfishing Club 5 miles west of Peñasco welcomes guests to weekly potlucks, fishing derbies and other activities.

As late season hurricanes peter out, it's time to migrate slowly back down to the lower half of the Sea of Cortez and eventually back down the mainland. 🍷