

Anthony's Beginner Guide to La Ventana

I have been here 6 times for a total length of 45 days. I missed last year in La Ventana, Wow all the development. This will be the last update, the place become more commercial. Baja is desert climate with an occasional hurricane or rain storm. No Human Diseases this year to talk about, like Dengue.

Flying

To save on luggage cost get a airline credit card. I saved \$100 in luggage fees for this trip for a \$50 a year Alaska credit card. I used a kite golf bag and keep it under 50 pounds! The surfboard bag cost \$75. Load it up with the wetsuit and other heavier items. The person at Alaska was impressed how light weight is was at 30 pounds. He was expecting more like 50 pounds, stuffed full of items.

Los Cabo verse La Paz Airport / Immigration

Los Cabo Airport (SJD) is in three terminals. When your flight arrives head right to immigration. I tried the flight from Portland (PDX) to Orange County (SNA) to Cabo (SJD) going down on this trip. I really like the Orange County airport. San Diego Airport is ok and I try to avoid LAX. My arrival time is a little off from the other arriving flights which helps reduce the immigration time. Our flight arrived about 10 minutes early. Score! It is awesome when all the people show up for the flight before takeoff. It took me at 30 minutes to get cleared through. I picked up luggage, standard luggage at carousal with golf bag and surfboard bag at far end. On to the baggage scan area. This time I did not get checked by customs. Love getting the Green Go Light when you push the button. The Red light (stop) will get you checked out. Read the customs rules on your flight and understand how to apply them if you get checked. They will sometimes want to charge you a tax on some of your equipment. Be prepared just in case. You walk into the white room where all the timeshare people are there to greet you. Just keep walking through the opposite door you came. There are no markings in the room. Walk outside to the right for rental car and shuttle vans.

That wonderful little piece of paper you filled out on the plane for immigration is your temporary Visa. On this trip the officers at the airport made it clear to keep that paper with you at all times while traveling. I have not in the past, but it was change in attitude from former trips.

La Paz airport (LAP) is the small terminal. You are typically to the car rental agency within 30 minutes of arriving. I like flying into La Paz, but that is no more. To get to LAP you need to connect through bigger Mexican cities.

There is a Luggage Restriction to Mexico for their bigger cities. There are so many people flying back to home over the Christmas Holiday (Nov 15 - Jan 15) taking goods with them, several airlines now restrict the number of bags and or size of bag. Look at your airline rules before getting you tickets on all flights in the future. SJD Cabo was not a problem from USA.

Be sure your flights have at least 2+ hours connection time when coming back to USA or if you are lucky enough have a direct flight.

TSA-pre and Global Entry

TSA - pre allows you to go through an abbreviated process of security. Leave your shoes on and computer in bag. This is strictly on a random basis! Global Entry is a process where you can go through immigration in an abbreviated manner. Ex: I arrive in Atlanta from Europe, all the passengers' line up for immigration for half hour to hour wait. I go up to the Global Entry Kiosk, input my Global Entry number, scan my finger prints then prints out a sheet with my photo. Time less than 5 minutes for four people! If you are frequent traveler to foreign countries, it is a time saver. Global Entry is the best, \$99 I have spent. One missed flight will pay for it! Global Entry does get me more chances of the TSA-pre. TSA-pre is only on a random basis!

Car Rental

After problems on a rental a few years ago, I was determined to figure the Mexican insurance scam. In talking to several people on rented cars the prices will vary greatly, check out several companies, I have heard of cost down to \$300 for 2 weeks.

1. You have to buy the required Mexican Third Party Liability. Choose the least cost coverage. They will try to sell you more. You need to decline the other insurance!
2. You need to rent your car with a credit card that will have Mexican insurance coverage. Check your credit card coverage!!
3. The credit card should be the primary coverer. If it is secondary coverer the credit card will make you prove you do not have coverage with your insurance at home.
4. Print out the fine print for the credit card coverage. Be sure it is valid to Mexico or where ever you are traveling.
5. There is a time limit that credit card will cover you. If you are going beyond that time limit you would need to run the card again.
5. Rental agencies in Mexico will say that your insurance is not valid. Show them the fine print that it is.
6. Some agencies will say they will not rent you a car unless you get the extra insurance (\$\$\$\$). You should be prepared to go to another agency if they will not budge. Act like you have done this before!
7. Receiving the rental price before you go (on line) is the key. Print your paper work. They hate when you have figured it out before you arrive.
8. If you do buy their insurance, note that there is a high deductible that does not cover as much as you thought.
9. Check for spare tire and jack. Also check to be sure the power points work.
10. The Costco Citi Bank card has excellent foreign automobile insurance coverage.

Phone service - 4G / LTE

I bought a one month \$40 package via ATT that gave me free texting, 200mb for data, and \$1.00 per minute US calling. I used about a 120 mb on this trip. Wi-Fi is available at most places. I use the phone as a GPS. Call or texting a number with a USA phone to a Baja phone number is 011 52 1 612 XXX-XXXX. It took a little experimenting to get the number down. Most cell phone plans can add you on to an international plan reasonable rate.

Maps

You can find many of the maps through online searching. I download load them to my phone for reference. "Got Baja" has a good map of La Ventana. www.gotbaja.mx. It is not on the front page you have to search for it. Also Club Cerralvo has published a directory of services. Well worth getting one.

Shuttles

There is a variety of shuttles to take you from SJD to La Ventana. Subscribe to the Ventana View www.theventanaview.com for the current list of shuttles. The price can range for \$60 US to \$130 US each way. If you use a shuttle having a bike in La Ventana is very helpful. The walk from the south end La Ventana to north end of El Sargento is 4-5 kilometers.

Driving

This is free range area. Cattle, horses, donkey, dogs, etc will be on the road. Do a web search for driving, once you figure the nuances. It is easy to get around. Do not give the police any reason to pull you over! Drive during the day if possible! The roads are paved and road from San Antonio can have a slope failure at any time. Not a problem, keep a lookout. Do not use Goggle Maps for directions it will take on a dirt coastal roadway in Los Barriles. San Antonio can be tricky, go past the Pemex(gas) then less than a half kilometer, you will see signs to Baja Joes and other kiteboard shop signs. Turn there. See goggle map for street system of San Antonio. The highway from LV to La Paz was repaved this last year. Nice!

LV to La Paz Bus

This an old Dodge van(The small school bus is broken) that does two trips back and forth daily. I was only American on the trip. The bus stops about a half mile from the Malecon(water front) at Mercado Bravo. See Got Baja Map It is good to know how to find the bus when going back. The street signing is poor to non-existent. Take a few pics of the area and note the tall building to the south as a reference. Across the street from the bus stop is a market with restaurants, meats and vegetables. It is a great place to shop at the end of your day. The one way cost is a cheap price of 60 pesos(\$3.00) for an hour trip! I got on the van at 7:00 bus on the other side of Playa Central. Come back on the 2:00 bus and dropped me off at Playa Central. A great place to start your day is in one of the Malecon beach front restaurants for breakfast! The van will pick you and drop you off anywhere on the El Sargento - La Ventana Highway. Enjoy, this is an adventure!

Getting around La Paz

La Paz city buses are organized chaos. There is no web site or anything written down, you just have to know it by the locations written on bus and bus numbers. The bus central area is near Mercado Madero, see Got Baja Map. I typically take the Walmart bus to shop that area, then the Centro Bus back to downtown. Ten pesos a ride! The buses will take some interesting routes, enjoy the tour. Do take the time to explore La Paz is a great city and rated one of the safest cities in Latin America. I hope this place will never become a Cabo!!! Be courteous and go with the flow, a few words in Spanish will go a long way. Do not expect English to be spoken. On a non-wind days go to La Paz and stay at one the hotels, enjoy the place.

La Ventana/El Sargento Lodging

La Ventana Lodging is all over the place from camping to expense places. Just look on the internet. No recommendations here, just lots of options.

Money, ATM'S and the Internet.

The last two times I came to La Ventana, I just ordered pesos from my bank in Oregon. I found easy to do on line and the fees reasonable. Check what your fees will be for an ATM visit. In some cases the ATM can cost you more that getting the pesos at home. I have picked up pesos in Los Barriles at Bank of Mexico, there are several ATM's there. Down less that an city block from ATM's is a fair grocery store. There are two ATM's in La Ventana, Los Bandios (Bar) and Club Cerralvo. It is a good time to get pesos at a rate of \$1 to 20 pesos. Most places will accept dollars but you will not be getting the best exchange rate. Get the pesos! There is fiber optical cable all over town, but no one is hooked up to it. I am told the cost is \$300+ a month. The internet will be slow, but in some places it has improved.

Groceries

Los Cabos, Soriana is an ok store. Los Cabos, Soriana is not up the quality and quantity for the stores in La Paz.

Los Brallies has a grocery store about a half mile into town. A little spendy with selection as only fair.

La Paz has several grocery chains, Wal Mart, Mega, Sorianas, etc. Most have good selection and good prices.

Food is cheaper than US.

La Ventana /El Sargento The only thing close to Grocery store is in El Sargento is Oscaritos. Ask most everybody, they know where it is. They have actually doubled the food area compared to 2 years ago! There is a fish / shrimp store just north of the soccer (football) field. First or second street to the east about 1 block. Look for blue building. Incredible shrimp and cheap!

Thursday Farmers market at Playa Central is not very good this year. I am told the one in El Sargento is much better. There is an excellent selection of restaurants in the area, go out and eat. The food is cheap and good! Get it while the Peso is cheap! The local mini-markets have improved greatly do not over look them.

Laundry

I want to take the least amount of clothes. I found a place that will do laundry. It is Lulys store between Kurt -n - Marinas and Baja Joes. Cost is 60-120 pesos (\$3-\$6) per load depending upon size. Awesome for me! You should bring at least one grocery bag with you on the trip. Recyclable bags are hard to find, I bought mine at Walmart in La Paz.

Other things to do.

Yes, you can windsurf. I would recommend Vela Sports. For \$50 US you rent all day right from the beach. It is a great way to try all sorts of equipment.

Snorkel with the whales, do a fishing trip, paddle board, mountain bike etc

Wind Log Dec 4 - 16

I weight 200 lb. I brought a 9, 11 and 14.

I use a 3/2 mm full suit most of the time I have been in La Ventana. If you are a good kiter you can get away with less. The water is warm this year, you can be wearing board shorts and neoprene top most days this December. I recommend helmet with a visor for the sun. I also wear sunglasses while kiting! It is so bright at times you cannot see a kiter coming at you. Bring good sun screen!!

The wind typically starts to blow about 11 am to 1 pm.

Equipment (The old but reliable stuff) is Slingshot T3 14m, 11m, I will be moving on to more modern equipment next year. Also Slingshot Rev 11m to 9 m. Board is a Slingshot 150 Ignition and Slingshot Celeritas surfboard.

Out of 14 days it blew for 11 days for me.

14m - one day

11m - eight days

9m - one day.

One no wind day - went to La Paz for shopping.

Foilboard only - three days. I really want to do this! The ultimate light wind machine.

A great stretch of wind! This was a higher wind vacation than past trips. I heard last year at this time it was much lighter wind.

Kiting Info

Foil boarding has become big here. There are rentals and instruction locally for it. If you are good enough kiter, try it out. Foiling in light winds is amazing. Foiling has completely changed kiting and windsurfing by lowering the wind threshold. There are many schools that teaching kiting here. This is an awesome place to learn. If you have a bad day, the water is warm and you float to the end of the bay.

