

# NO REGRETS

I was 24 years old in 1983, and had signed on as crew on a Piver Vic-tress trimaran that was bound for Eng-land from San Diego. That year's El Niño made for a rough passage south. The elderly owner had a heart condi-tion, became very seasick, and nearly died. When we reached Cabo San Lu-cas, he flew to a hospital in the USA. While he recovered, my fellow crew and I hung out boat-sitting. When the owner finally returned, he decided to sell the boat. Our epic voyage was over.

However, those weeks in Cabo changed my life. I fell in love with cruis-ing. Hanging on the hook of what was then just a fishing town and not the tourist mecca it's become, we swam and snorkeled, drank beer and ate lobster on the beach, played music, laid the nets and watched the night sky and met cruisers — real cruisers, including one salty couple who just completed a circumnavigation. I remember raft listening to their stories in the salon of their Tayana and marveling at all the little improvements they'd made that had turned their boat into a true cruis-ing home. But mostly, I remember them saying that of all the places they'd vis-ited around the world, the Sea of Cortez was one of their favorites. Though my sailing trip on the Piver was at an end, I knew I'd be back someday.

I did return — on my own trimaran — with the '99 Baja Ha-Ha, and spent a good portion of two years in Mexico. I was back again in 2005, before heading

further south a year and a half later.

And last year, my wife Alene and I returned to Mexico after a 13-year Pa-cific circuit via Polynesia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Alaska. This time, however, we didn't plan to linger. We hauled the boat and visited a few fa-vorite spots, but spent most of our time preparing to return to the South Pacific.

## Mexico U-Turn

On May 5, after three weeks of spectacular diving with giant mantas, sharks, dolphins, and whales in the Re-villagigedo Islands, we left Isla Socorro bound for the Marquesas. *Migration*, my Cross 46 tri, was heavily loaded with food and booze; we were well aware how costly provisioning can be in French Polynesia. The sailing was perfect: sun-ny skies, gentle breeze, calm seas. Af-ter a few hours I turned to Alene and mentioned how sad I was that we prob-ably would never dive the Revillagige-dos again; by the time we get back to Mexico, I might be too old.

There ensued an hour-long discus-sion. We made pro and con lists. Flipped a coin. Finally, with Socorro only twen-ty miles astern, we spun the wheel and headed north. We decided to stay in Mexico, spend the summer in the Sea of Cortez, and then dive the Revillagigedos again next year. At the time it seemed a crazy and rash decision, but with each day that's passed, we've been overjoyed with our about-face.

Returning to Mexico also made clear

*'Migration' anchored off the Sierra de la Giganta mountain range in eastern Baja California.*



how many boats were gone; moving on to either the South Pacific or Central America. Many of these boats had only arrived a few months earlier. We'd had long discussions with their crews sing-ing the praises of a summer in the Sea, yet it seemed other lands sang louder.

As I write this, *Migration* is making her way slowly northward along the east coast of the Baja peninsula. The standard summer protocol is to hang around Bahia de Los Angeles where Puerto Don Juan offers excellent pro-tection from the few hurricanes that curve northward. Each day we marvel at the awesomeness of the Sea and are enthralled by the unique beauty of this part of the world. Instead of empha-sizing that point with the oft-quoted words of Cousteau or Steinbeck, I'll relate a few of our experiences during these past weeks: swimming with 60 dol-phins in 30 feet of crystal-clear water over sparkling-white sand; sleeping on deck under a billion stars with a gentle breeze, no mosquitoes, and no other boats; snorkeling through a fever of hundreds of mobula rays; enjoying de-licious raw *chocolata* clams purchased from local divers while enjoying views of

# WHY YOU SHOULD LINGER IN MEXICO



Every boat has its own time and budget constraints, but why do so many short-change Mexico? Perhaps being so close — like California's Channel Islands — we don't give proper respect to these truly exotic locales. Once you leave Mexico, it's hard to get back: a bash up from the Canal, a long upwind beat against the trades, or a loop through the harsh North Pacific. Why rush away so soon? Mainland Mexico offers excellent cruising with fine sailing, white sand beaches and palm trees; however, those can be found in many parts of the world. Here are a few places whose delights are unique only to Mexico.

## The Sea of Cortez

We mean the whole Sea. Not just the islands around La Paz, although sailing (not motoring) up the west side of Espiritu Santo where the colorful cliffs plunge into bays of turquoise water is a sight you will never forget. And a stop at Isla San Francisco is also well worthwhile for viewing the hundreds of garden eels in the south end of the east anchorage. The Loreto area, however, is where the Sea really begins to shine; not just because the ever-changing light on the mountains of the Sierra de la Giganta offers inspiration every day. It's probably the easiest area to cruise;

**The Revillagigedos are a relatively small archipelago off the tip of Baja California. But up close, their unique beauty — such as San Benedicto (inset) — is massive.**

**Spread: Bruce Balan dives of his Cross 46 trimaran 'Migration' off San Benedicto Island in the Revillagigedos. Inset: Bruce and Alene enjoying the good life south of the border.**

the majestic Sierra de la Giganta; diving into a school of a thousand juvenile barracuda forming and reforming into fantastic shapes; snorkeling alongside a 30-foot whale shark.

These are all experiences we have had nowhere else but in the Sea of Cortez. That's after 60,000 sea miles and 26 countries. The Gulf of California is a rare place: it offers so many astounding and unique experiences in an area with fairly benign weather (yes, there are northers and occasional summer hurricanes), no fear of piracy, few mosquitoes (however, there are bees and sometimes no-see-ums), and scores of beautiful anchorages with clear, flat sand bottoms making for some of the easiest anchoring ever.

Another of Mexico's crown jewels is just a two-day sail south of the Sea: Isla Isabela. Here you can hike right into a BBC documentary to watch blue-footed boobies perform mating dances. You'll duck beneath tree branches weighed down with magnificent frigates guarding their chicks. There are lounging iguanas around every corner

and humpbacks breaching outside the anchorage. Yet every year, boat after boat passes by "The Galapagos of Mexico" on their way to . . . someplace better?



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"Get in the water. It's what you do in Mexico!" wrote the authors. What's underneath the waters in Mexico is often as impressive as what's above.

no La Paz *corumuel* or severe *elefante* winds and dozens of glorious anchorages and islands lie within a few miles of each other.

To really get to know the Sea, spend a summer in it. Though Bahia de Los Angeles is a good ways north, it is worth the trip for its strikingly beautiful mountains and islands, excellent anchorages, sheltered hurricane hole, fantastic fishing, and whale sharks!

## Isla Isabela and the Revillagigedos


Many people avoid Isabela because they've heard rumors of difficult anchoring. We've anchored there seven times with no problems and have yet to meet anyone who had real trouble in the east anchorage – which is one of the coolest anchorages in the world because of Las Monas rocks and the whales that frequent the area.

If you are a diver, you must visit the Revillagigedos! They are far out to sea, the anchoring is challenging, and your boat will be covered with volcanic dust. But ask anyone who has been there and they will tell you it is worth it a thousand times over. Giant mantas, dolphins, sharks, whales; some of the best diving in the world in the largest marine protected area of North America. A permit is required.

## Que Rico!


Once you leave, we guarantee you'll be missing Mexican cuisine. It is some of the finest in the world and far more interesting than much of what you'll find in Central America or the South Pacific.

In Loreto, buy *almejas chocolateas*, the delicious local clams, from the *parqueiros* harvesting them right in front of town. Eat the entire clam raw with a squeeze of lime and a splash of *salsa picante*. In La Paz, sample fish tacos at street stands recommended by locals.

Order a *papa rellena* at Super Burro. Whatever you do, don't leave without savoring a *piñon* (pine nut) *paleta*  *Fuente*. Or just go for it and try every one of the dozens of flavors they offer.

## Enjoy Cruising

Once you've made it to Mexico, you'll probably have to fix a few things that broke on the way down. But don't forget to enjoy yourself by getting out of the marina and exploring. It's easy to get stuck in project mode, particularly since prices for marine services are often less than in the US. You can sit in a marina anywhere; that's not why you sailed a thousand miles.

After you cast off the dock lines, spend time alone. The cruiser community is wonderful, especially in Mexico,  but in addition to potlucks and beach parties, take some time for yourself.

Sleep on deck when the weather allows. Count shooting stars and satellites. Life slows down and you'll discover a new appreciation for life aboard.

To help slow down, sail whenever possible, even if it means making only 12 miles in a six-hour sail. If the sails stay full, the boat is moving, and you get in before dark, you'll enjoy your voyage and feel a part of the world instead of just a boat motoring through it (you'll also be more likely to see wildlife). Make a resolution to sail even a small part of every passage to remind yourself of the delights of a sailboat.

Though there are excellent cruising guides for Mexico, try using satellite images to find anchorages that aren't listed. You can identify promising sandy areas as well as dangerous rocky terrain. There's genuine satisfaction in finding your own way.

*Your classic cactus-y desert-y Baja California landscape.*



# WHY YOU SHOULD LINGER IN MEXICO

Once you get to your anchorage, get in the water — it's what you do in Mexico! Especially in the Sea in the summer. You'll cool off, get exercise, and it's the only way to see the incredible life below the surface. If there are dolphins or rays in the anchorage, jump in! They may move on, but they may not. And don't forget to become a star-person by swimming at night in bioluminescence.

Despite what some Americans may think, everyone here is not clamoring to get over a wall into the USA. That's evident as you watch content families stroll the malecon each evening. Mexico has a rich and varied cultural history of music, dance, literature, and food. Mexicans are fun, generous, and surprisingly, incredibly welcoming to Americans. Learn Spanish and get to know your hosts.

The South Pacific is a magical place and *Migration* will be sailing that way next spring. But we'll be heading there with no regrets, having given Mexico the attention she deserves. At least until she calls us back again.

— bruce balan and alene d. rice

## A Few Tips to Make Your Extended Stay in Mexico **Muy Bueno**

- Watch the weather daily. Though mobile coverage has expanded, there are areas with no signal. Have a non-cellular way of receiving weather, be it SSB or satellite.
- If you have SSB, participate in the nets and tune in to the nightly summertime Chubasco Report.
- When you have internet access, visit [eebmike.com](http://eebmike.com) for an excellent weather summary.
- Plan your destination based on the weather — not the calendar. For example, don't head to Isla Isabela when a strong blow is forecast.
- Stay close to a hurricane hole in the summer.
- Create adequate shade and ventilation; you won't survive a summer without it.
- Avoid using air conditioning on your boat. You will not acclimatize to the normal conditions and will be forced to run a generator which destroys your tranquility and annoys your neighbors.
- Have mosquito and/or no-see-um screens for all hatches and ports available when necessary.
- In the Sea, don't allow bees to discover fresh water on your boat. If they do, will come in droves and make your life miserable. Smoldering coffee grounds sometimes helps keep them away.



*Migration and her crew have been sailing the Pacific full-time since 2005. They'll be heading to the South Pacific again in 2020... unless they change their minds again. — [migrations.brucebalan.com](http://migrations.brucebalan.com)*