## The last frontier Wild Baja opens to tourists

BAJA CALIFORNIA — The Baja is a 1,000-mile strip of desert surrounded by a magnificent stege of water. The rich have flown their private planes into this Mexican hideaws for years, to watch whales leap out of the Sea of California, to go deep-sea fishing where the Sea of Colifornia, to go deep-sea fishing where the Sea of Cortes meets the Facific Ocean, to hide.

It is also very easy to drown in that magnificent stege of water, especially in the late summer and fail when the storms at sea sea of mountainous waves against the rocky shores and up the sandy beaches of the Baja. I came within seconds of being washed out to sea while standing on a beach at the southern tip of the peninsula last September.

Baja is still a rich fisherman's paradise, but the Mexican government is developing extensive tourist facilities through a federally appointed organization called Fonatur, assigned to coordinate the use of both public and private money for tourist development projects throughout Mexico.

Fonatur was the moving force behind the development of Cancun, where President Reagan met with other heads of state in 1981. It is also the prime mover in Baja, where Mr. Reagan will meet Mexican President Riguel de la Madrid on Sunday.

THE SPANISH conquistadore Hernan Cortes sailed these waters in 1535, and rumors of great wealth drew the Spanish back for a century before Jesuit missionaries settled the desert peninsula in 1653.

There are a few historic remnants of Spanish co-lonization, but the only wealth that most Mexicans in the Bajs ever saw was that of rich, often famous, American fishermen, usually from California. Their favorite piece of paradise was Cabo San Lucas, a tmy fishing village with a few small post lodges on the very southern tip of I and. They would motor out, fishing poles high, past the world-re-power stone arches that grace the sea there, where the Pacific and the gulf waters meet.

It was easy to keep ordinary travelers out. There was no road. Nowadays, you can drive the 1,000 miles from the border to the southermose tip on Mexico Highway I. Smart drivers carry water, and expect 150-mile stretches between gas stations, but they don't worry about getting lost or stranded. The Green Angels, part of the tourist detachment, ride the road daily with fuel and spare parts.

There are good hotels and campgrounds all the way down, and government-sponsored tourist development at both Loreto and San Jose del Cabo, neighbor village to Cabo San Lucas (together they are known as Los Cabos.)

Aeromexico and Mexicana airlines fly regularly into Los Cabos. The Baja is about 50 miles wide at its southern end, so when you follow Highway I south from the airport you drive through desert land that prickles between the dry hills of the gulf side and the black mountains of the Pacific side.

THE LAND MAY look barren to you, but desert vers will tell you that there is a riot of life in



1-of-a-kind traveler Iris Jones

there for those who look closely enough. When one road bears right to Cabo San Lucas another curves uphill through the small town of San Jose del Cabo.

You drive past the whitewashed shape of St. Jo-seph's Cathedral, shops lined with cars on either side of the street and the treed shape of a town square, a sight always familiar in Mexico.

At the square, you turn sharply right down a boulevarded street to the hotel area. Fonatur devel-ops a town like this for tourism by first providing the support systems: roads, good telephone service, health care facilities, and new housing for those displaced by hotels.

Several fine botels line this coast road, brand new and inxurious but small enough to avoid the high-rise look of Miami. You can choose any rate-level from the excellent budget facilities of Nuevo Sol to the deluxe facilities of El Presidente, built and run by the government at the end of the coastal road.

Although San Jose Del Cabo is on the sea, fishing boats go out from Cabos San Lucas, a half-hour drive away. Los Cabos, the capet, splil in dry rocky splendor into the sea there: high, rocky hills, glorious sand beaches and the famous arches that separate the Sea of Cortes from thes parches:

On a single chimney of rock rising out of the sea at the very tip of the Baja, a young sea ilon curis gleaming and alone in the Merziena sun. The area is deserted and beautiful, with only a cluster of Cabo San Lucas botels and the occasional bory shape of a new building to make minor color patches in the wilderness.

The sun blazes bot even in a boat in September. It gleams on the white foam wake foaming against the blue sea and on the sand-fringed rock hills of the Baja as they rise against the sky.

If you tire of all this splender and fishing, you can drive or fly north to the capital city of La Paz or to some of the small but interesting communities of Baja Sur and Baja Nord.

"The Baja Book" by Tom Millar is available for \$9.50 from Baja Trail Publications P.O. Box 6088, Huntington Beach, Calik, 2946. They also will send you information on the Mexico West Travel Club.

Contact the Mexican Government Tourism Office, 233 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 80601.



Baja California is a 1,000-mile strip of desert surrounded by a magnificent slege of water. In the late summer

and fall storms at sea send mountainous waves against the rocky shores and up the sandy Baja beaches.

## Baja's giant waves can prove deadly

Don't plan to swim in the ocean off the southern Baja at this time of year. Tom Miller, guidebook author and ex-pert on Baja California, says that peo-ple abould be warned against swim-ming there in the fall because tropical storms create great crashing waves on the beach, and it is very dangerous. It is calmer in winter, but it still could be dangerous, Stick to the hotel swimming pool.

Last August, a woman who was col-lecting shells close to the water's edge was swept out to sea from the beach in front of the El Presidente Hotel in San Jose def Labo. When I was in the same botel last September, I was foolish enough to walk onto the beach during a storm and nearly met the same fate.

We were all watching and marveling at the huge waves at about 11 p.m. one night. I walked about 20 feet towards the sea, but was still 50 yards away

A woman collecting shells close to the water's edge was swept out to ses.

from where the waves broke. A rogue wave suddenly came higher and higher, prompting us to run for safety, the wave was only inches deep but it knocked me down and pulled me with incredible force.

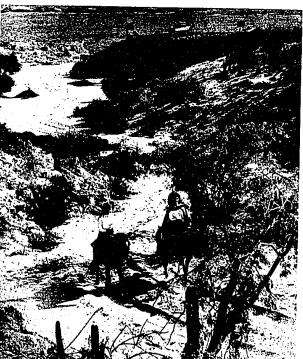
Only my proximity to a low brick wall and the quick action of a hotel em-ployee saved me. My companion broke her cheekbone when the same wave rolled her against a palm tree. When the wave retreated, it pulled a heavy metal table into the sea.

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IRIS SANDERSON JONES

These swimmers are taking in the southern Baja surf from the right vantage point — a nice, safe swimming pool.



The wild, rugged beauty of Baja Cali-fornia can be enjoyed by horseback, but beauty of Baja Catifornia can be enjoyed by horseback, but the Mexican government has taken steps to make the Baja accessible by more conventional transportation too. In the past it was easy to keep ordinary travelers out. There was no road. Nowadays, you can drive the 1,000 miles from the border to the southermost tip on Mexico Highway I. Smart drivers carry water, and expect 150-mile stretches between gas stations, but they don't worry abour getting lost or stranded. The Green Angels, part of the tourist distachment, ride the road daily with fuel and apper ride the road daily with fuel and spare





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