

# EagleRider Tours

## The True Baja & The New Baja – 1,000 Miles of Adventure

Story and Photos: Koz Mraz/EagleRider



Baja carries a certain wild-west mystique; a ridin' hard, with guns-a-blazing vibe as well as a party-hardy, beers-a-poundin appeal. With expatriates from all over the world buying property and relocating here, the main infrastructure is very stable and growing. The New Baja? Between the new toll-roads and the Trans-Peninsula Highway, there's thousands of miles of two-lane blacktop traversing the world's third longest, and one of the most spectacular peninsulas. Baja offers a unique riding experience and EagleRider allows the adventurer to be free from concern or hassle. Everybody wants to motorcycle Baja but for some, doing it solo just doesn't make sense. EagleRider guarantees a care-free Baja adventure.



## Califia – Mythic Land of Woman-Warriors

When the Spaniards arrived in the Baja California area in 1539, they believed they had reached a mythical island of female warriors governed by Queen Califia. Populated only by beautiful Amazonian women wielding golden weapons, California's name was born.

Baja is visually a jagged finger of mountains and desert, ripped from the Mexican mainland along the San Andreas Fault by millions of years of geologic violence. EagleRider, the world's largest motorcycle tourism company, offers three Baja-Experience options: southbound, northbound or a full round-trip. There are so many places you'll want to visit -- a seven-day one-way trip may just not be enough. Hence, EagleRider's 15-day round trip option.

## Cabo Wabo

The northern ride began in Cabo, a notorious party town that offers something for everyone. The EagleRider guides are ex-pats that actually live in Mexico and know Baja inside-and-out. Our kick-off dinner was at Alexander's, right off the Marina. These experienced guides said it was the best restaurant in Cabo and I have no reason to doubt that. Everything was exceptional, and I mean everything that our EagleRider group ordered. From the baked oysters, 4-inch prime rib and lobster to the handmade Caesar's salads, it was all off the charts. Alexander, the owner, has been in his location for over 22 years and sources the best meats and vegetables as well as the best chefs in Baja. Of course, everyone must check out Cabo Wabo, Sammy Hagar's haunt! All-in-all, it's actually easier to pay in dollars here...and do expect to pay U.S. prices, i.e. 5-dollar beers as well as comparable U.S restaurant prices.



It's a short ride on Highway 1 to the monument of the Tropic of Cancer, which is the northerly most latitude on earth where the sun will shine directly overhead.



The northerly ride continued to the quaint little town Los Barriles, (The Barrels), the complete opposite of Cabo St. Lucas. Totally devoid of street vendors or pushy bar folks hawking shots of tequila, Los Barriles is all about relaxing by the pool, cruising the beach on quads while downing ice-cold cervezas. Hotel Palmas Del Cortez must be the right place to stay in Baja Sur because it was here where we chatted with Jerry Penfield, 4-time BAJA 1000 winner. He was staying there with his family ... the true Baja dust was beginning to settle.



Hotel Palmas Del Cortez offers a fantastic breakfast buffet and on premise at The Bay View Restaurant. Breakfast is always included on all EagleRider experiences.

**Hot Tip** – Las Casitas restaurant is just a tiny right turn on the main street, and they could very well boast the best Sushi in Baja. The coconut shrimp and tuna and were completely off the charts.

The next day we pushed 300 miles, the longest riding day of the adventure. La Paz was once the pearling capital of the world yielding the most sought-after and valuable pearls on earth. The very first pearl farm was on La Paz whereby pearling prevailed for over 100 years. It's believed, however, that the Hoover Dam changed the salinity of the sea of Cortez and doomed the area's pearling industry. The giant pearl statue here is a reminder of its glorious past.

The Bay of Balandra at La Paz looks out into the Sea of Cortez and is almost completely circular. As it is surrounded by sand dunes, the sea is even calmer here than in the rest of the gulf.

The brilliant turquoise waters reach just above waist-level throughout much of it, making it possible to cross the considerable distance from one side to the other. This is considered to be one of the most stunning beach areas found anywhere on earth.

## **Soar with Eagles**

Our next overnight destination was Loreto, 280 miles away from Los Barriles. The landscape ranges from sweeping mountain curves, giant saguaro cactus forests to barren shrub-filled plains. This is Highway 1, Mexico's main road...and much like America's Route 66, this barren land is peppered with abandoned gas stations and empty roadside eateries.

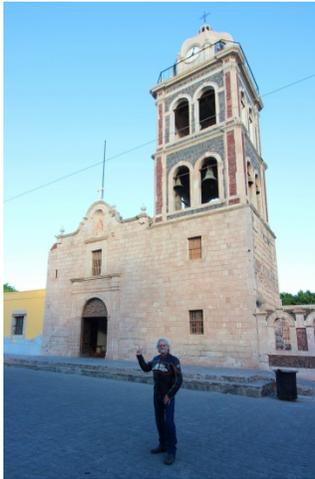
As I settled in for some serious throttle therapy, several large birds with massive six-foot wingspans matched my speed and dropped low, floating along with me as if they wanted to ride with the pack. "How cool," I thought. "I'm soaring with guardian eagles, flying free through the desolate desert." It turned out, however, the large birds following me were actually Mexican turkey vultures hungrily eyeing their meals on wheels.

The roads were smooth with sections of brand-new asphalt. After climbing through the Sierra de la Giganta mountain range which extends along the southeastern Baja California Peninsula, we dropped down from its highest point of elevation at Cerro de la Giganta at 3,858 feet into the bay to Loreto. This was so far, the most breathtaking part of this north-bound ride. Jagged mountains cut against the clear azure sky as we snaked down to the turquoise-blue waters of the Sea of Cortez and the beautiful, seaside town of Loreto.



## Mission of Our Lady Loreto

We stayed at La Mission Hotel overlooking the bay. Dinner was once again amazing! The Los Olivo's passion fruit salad with diced mango, crispy leeks and sweet-and-sour passion fruit vignette got us off to a great start...and our visit just kept getting better.



Visiting the Mission of Our Lady Loreto is a must. Founded in 1697 it's considered the "mother" of all Jesuit missions. It's the very first mission in the chain of 48 missions built from Loreto to Sonoma California between 1697 and 1823. The relics that still remain in this mission include a main Baroque altarpiece and an original sculpture of Our Lady Loreto. Even the wooden doors are original. Some of the world's oldest olive gardens are located behind the church. Loreto reflects the true Baja, yet it offers a commercial airport.

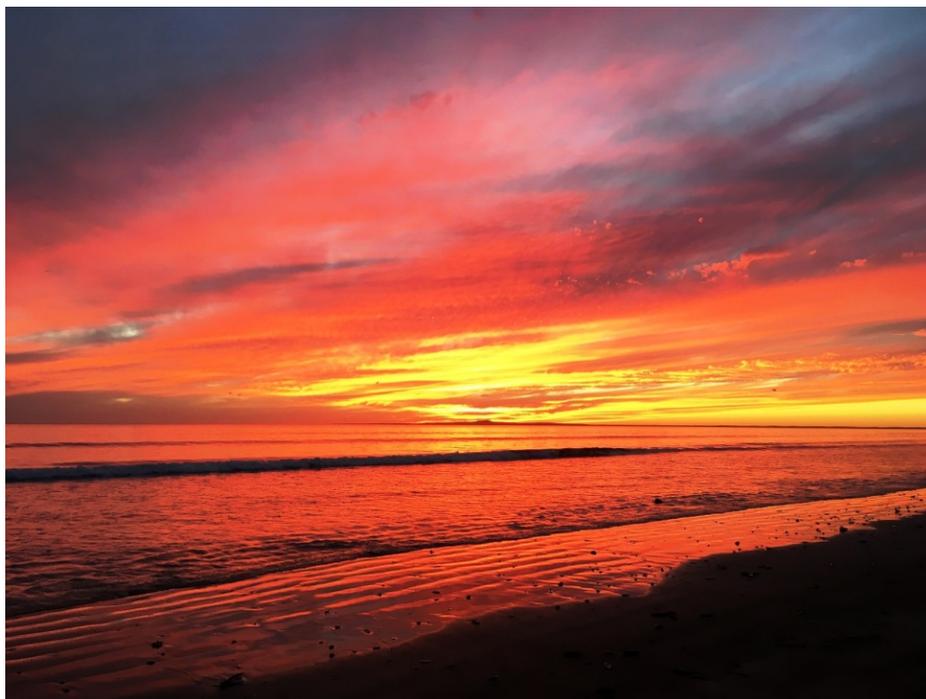
Continuing northbound the next day we stopped in San Ignacio to visit the most northern Spanish mission in the state of Baja, California Sur, known as Mission San Ignacio. It's the 11th mission founded in 1728 and the town square is reminiscent of life in Baja hundreds of years ago.



Winding through Mulegé, we visited this charming, small village that draws many American ex-patriots here to retire in along ocean-paradise for the fraction of the California dollar. At day's end we settled in the town of Guerrero Negro and topped off our ride with a cold Cerveza. Early the next morning, we were off to San Quentin.



This section of the ride was the MOST fun, leaving no doubt that the Sierra de la Giganta mountain range dishes out massive twisties with panoramic vistas. Roller coaster hills and sweeping curves once again dropped us down into some gorgeous seascapes, only this time it's the Pacific Ocean. Settling in at the Mission Santa Maria Hotel in San Quintin, we were graced with one of the most spectacular sunsets I've ever seen, not to mention the groups of dolphins swimming so close to us, we could almost walk out and touch them. Magical! Welcome again to the true Baja.



## San Quintin to Ensenada

Amazingly, the last day of motorcycling Baja turned out to be another superb day of riding. We passed through what seemed to be three eco-systems. The saguaro cactus forests, tucked into valleys like silent guardians, gave way to rolling blankets of richly-scented gold and scarlet flowers far as the eye could see. Then suddenly, the terrain became barren with salt-white sand dunes. This was the roughest patch of road we experienced as we rode battered surfaces pitted with small potholes, all-the-while cows and horses casually grazed along the roadside. Then, as the turns became tighter and the elevation grew higher, the roads became smoother and we were graced with another epic view of the valley below.



Our last night in Ensenada, like Cabo was vey touristy; the new Baja. Between Hussong's Cantina celebrating their 126<sup>th</sup> year of business, and the great Papas-and-Beer, there was no lack of a partying here. Yet, here in the northern part of Baja, is known as the ideal climate for grape-growing.

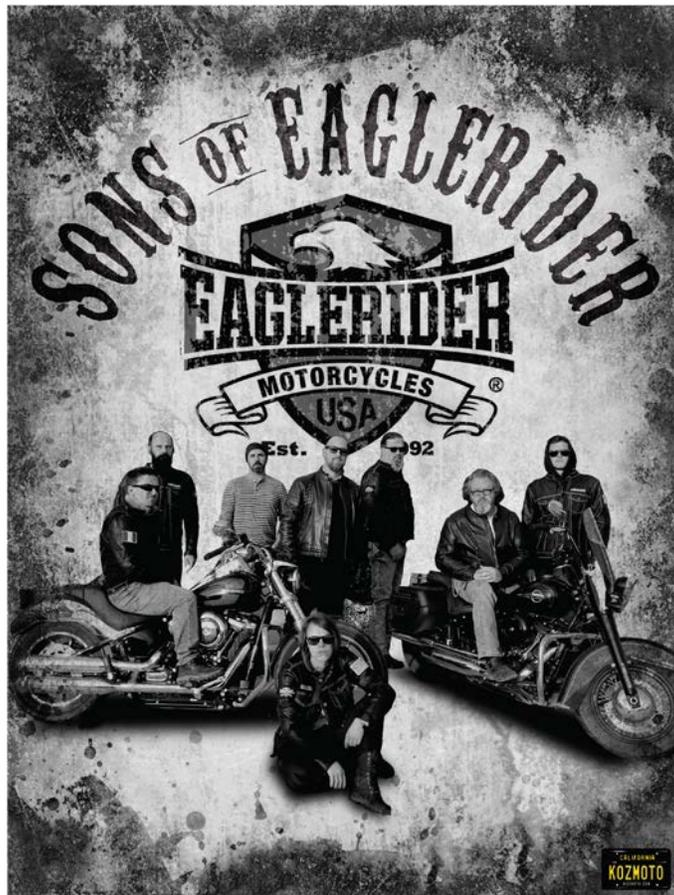
The valleys of Califia, Guadalupe and San Antonio de Las Minas constitute the heart of the Baja California wine country located just 90 minutes south of the border from San Diego. There are well over 100 wineries in and around this valley.



Personally, I enjoyed visiting the missions and smaller towns and villages. Loreto, San Ignacio, Mulege and Toto Santos all have their own personality. The food ranges from five-star dining to street taco stands scraping meat off pig skulls. Overall, I was pleasantly surprised how great the food was everywhere we went. The roads? They range from spankin' brand-new to patches of gravel and sand. Overall, 80 percent of your highway ride will be smooth-sailing with the roughest roads between San Ignacio and Ensenada. Construction is ongoing, so you'll inevitably encounter some small detours. Truckers also have a clever way of signaling riders to pass. Flashing lights means beware, there's oncoming traffic, left turn signals flashing indicates it's OK to pass. If a truck is slowing but not signaling anything, do not pass, they are making a left turn!

Passing through military check points in the remotest parts of Baja was very reassuring, and at no time did anyone feel in any way threatened or in any danger. Everyone, everywhere was warm and friendly to us, and crossing the border was a breeze. Motorcycles easily ride to the front of the line. Riders on everything from adventure bikes to big Harleys are so common, border patrol waves you right through.

I made great friends with the EagleRider staff, some of the best motorcyclist's I've ever ridden with. The group I traveled with was so bad-ass, I christened them the Sons of EagleRider, and Daughter of EagleRider, you need to watch this video. <https://youtu.be/mYmPS220mqA> I probably shouldn't brag about the triple digit speeds and our wild west antics but hey, it's Mexico and here, we were the bad hombres.



I fell in love with motorcycling this beautiful peninsula and the EagleRider tour made the adventure a total blast. If they do build a wall, I may well find myself on the Mexican side. May the true Baja and the new Baja become the Baja you too, visit soon.



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