

# Seven Weeks in Baja: A solo journey

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It was a cold and rainy day in October when Wavelength paddling magazine showed up in my mailbox. On the cover was a picture of Baja. You know the one... aquamarine waters lapping on a white sand beach... a couple thinly-clad kayakers lazing in the sun or snorkeling off shore... red, cactus-studded hills in the distance...

Enchanting. Alluring. Mesmerizing. The kind of picture that doesn't just inspire your dreams, it pervades every cell of your body with the desire to be there. To go there. To go now.

Two weeks later, I was southbound on I-5 chasing that dream, trying to quench the desire for sun and sand and adventure. But to be honest, I was nervous as hell and full of doubts. Would my car make it? Would it get trashed on the road or beat to shit or stolen? Or would I hit a cow and spend a month in some dirt floor jail cell, sick and alone? And what about the kayaking? Would it be safe to go solo? And even if it was safe, would it be fun? Would I be able to meet other kayakers? Would I meet anyone at all? On my first trip to Mexico in 1990, I went weeks without meeting another English speaker. It was a lonely, lonely trip and I didn't want to repeat that experience.

I was so uptight on the drive down, my stomach was clenched in a knot. Sitting in the driver's seat for hours on end became excruciating and by the time I got to LA, I had just about melted down from the stress of my worries. Some vacation! But my mind was made up. I was going to Baja. Damn it! Even if I only lasted a week.

Of course, I tried to find someone to go with me. But who can leave on a two-month trip with two weeks' notice? I posted notes all over the Internet. I called friends. I called acquaintances. I called the friends of acquaintances. Some offered words of encouragement. But many others offered words of caution (if not doom!). No one offered to join me. My journey to Baja was going to have to be solo if it was going to happen at all.

So... how was it? It was better than anything I had dared to dream! The sun and sand and warm, aquamarine waters were waiting for me. As were some of the nicest people I have ever met anywhere in the world. The food was excellent and I ate like a pig; shrimp, scallops, fish, lobster... and even the fast food was superb (tamales, fish tacos, roast chicken.) Highway 1 was in great shape and I only had to negotiate the rough stuff when I got off the beaten path. My little Civic seems no worse for the trip.

As for the kayaking... I had so many incredible, wonderful experiences I could write a book. (And I just might!) The scenery was so spectacular I often paddled around in circles just trying to soak up all the splendor. I took my time. I explored every nook and cranny. Some days were glassy and calm, but many, many more days were crazy with the wind. I took waves over my foredeck and up to my chin on many occasions and I sometimes surfed my fully-loaded boat just for the thrill of it.

I spent many days in absolute solitude, just me and a couple coyotes sharing a fiery red sunset along 22 miles of unbroken beach. I hiked up desolate mountains where all I could hear was the blood rushing through my veins and I snorkeled nude among mazes of rock and coral. I came to love the solitude. To crave it. Just me a pod of 100 dolphins cruising along the cliffs.

But my trip was also incredibly social. I met yaachties who gave me fresh water, not to mention cold beer and sushi, a hot shower, and a chance to hop on the internet via their satellite phone! I met young couples, college kids and retirees, and even a couple of families who were home-schooling their kids for the winter. We shared dinners and campfires and lots of stories. We'd talk under the stars at night or under a shady tree in the afternoon while drinking cervesa. La dolce far niente. The sweetness of doing nothing.

It doesn't cost much to drive to Baja; I think I spent less than \$1000 in seven weeks. But if you're going to do it right, it does take time. You can't rush the experience. You can't will the whales to appear or the wind to stop blowing. But if you're patient and give Baja your time, it will give you back the time of your life. My trip was absolutely unforgettable