

South of the Border

Crew on yachts in Southern California can sample some Latin American flavor with a quick day trip to Tijuana.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LISA KNAPP

TIJUANA IS MEXICO'S fourth largest city; it's situated next to the world's busiest international border where more than four million cross annually. So the first thing you need to know when going to Tijuana is the less-stress route from the U.S. and back. Park your car at the U.S. border station, a mere \$7, and catch the red "Mexicoach" shuttle in and out of Tijuana for \$8. The automobile traffic crossing the border is phenomenal – there's bound to be a traffic-jam or two – so driving a car and carrying the required Mexican insurance are a real pain.

Tijuana is tacky, but it can mean an interesting day of people-watching and bargain shopping. A note of caution: stick to the main drag, Avenida Revolución (Revolution Avenue), whenever possible. Trouble is easily found on the side streets.

This city appears to have a fetish for donkeys. You'll see striped donkeys galore on Revolution, hooked to colorful carts. A Kodak moment with a real ass can be had for the bargain price of \$5. These zebra donkeys look odd next to the plethora of pharmacies and dentistry offices that proliferate Revolution and the side streets. There are hundreds of bazaars and shops where you can haggle for hidden treasures, unique handcrafted artifacts, fine jewelry, gold, silver, leather, lace, Viagra and Prozac, in no particular order.

There's a reason for all those *farmacias*, which offer Viagra to every red-blooded male who walks by. Many Americans travel south of the border for cosmetic surgery and medical procedures at a fraction of the price paid in the U.S., due to American malpractice insurance rates. California Board-certified physicians practice for peanuts in TJ. It's ordinary to see someone who looks like they've just been released from the hospital with facial trauma on your bus ride back. Just try not to stare.

When thirst kicks in while strolling Revolution, stop in Señor Maguey's for a feast of homemade guacamole and tortilla chips, cold Coronas and margaritas. The bar's entertainment consists of billiards and a jukebox as well as serenading musicians of questionable talent. You can survey all of Revolution's offerings from Maguey's balcony as you plan your next move. Tia Juana Tilly's, Animale and Iguanas-Ranas are nearby haunts offering food, libations and dancing 'til the break of dawn.

Walk down Revolution to Mexico's oldest jai alai palace (a Latin American game similar to handball). The fronton became a concert hall about three years ago and offers top entertainment. A more cerebral pursuit can be found on the sculpture and monument-rich Paseo de los Heroes (Avenue of the Heroes) where you'll find a Mexican history museum at the Tijuana Cultural Center.

There's no telling what you'll see, smell, taste or hear during a four-hour adventure to Tijuana. One thing's for sure: you'll never forget it. ★

IFYOUGO

Immigration: U. S. citizens are required to have a passport or a driver's license and proof of citizenship, i.e. birth certificate. After June 2009, U.S. citizens must provide passports. Non U.S. citizens must have a multiple-entry visa and carry their passport and I-94.

Getting there: If you rent a car, take I-5 or I-805 to the San Ysidro border crossing, park at one of the many commercial lots there and take a Mexicoach, which run continually all day. Another option if traveling from San Diego is to take the San Diego Trolley's blue line to San Ysidro. www.sdmts.com

Money: Mexican pesos are the legal currency but U.S. dollars are widely accepted.



Avenida Revolución



Picture-perfect donkeys



Requisite fare at Señor Maguey's



God of rain



Jai alai fronton