

vibrant baja

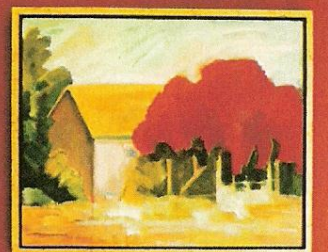
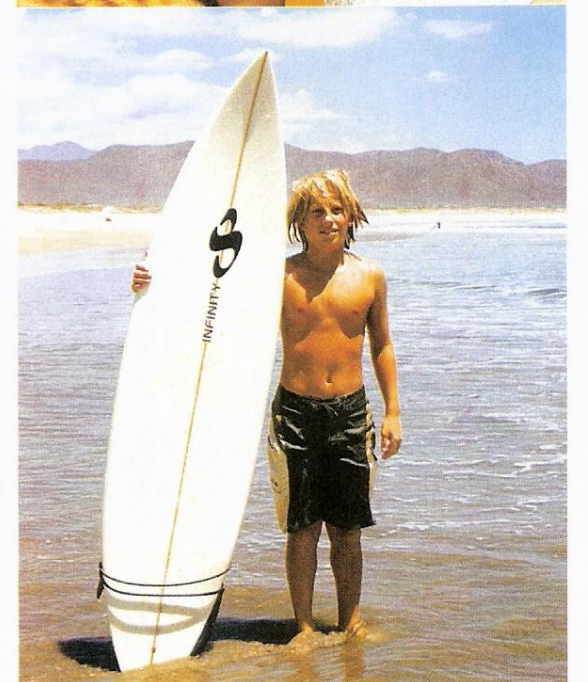
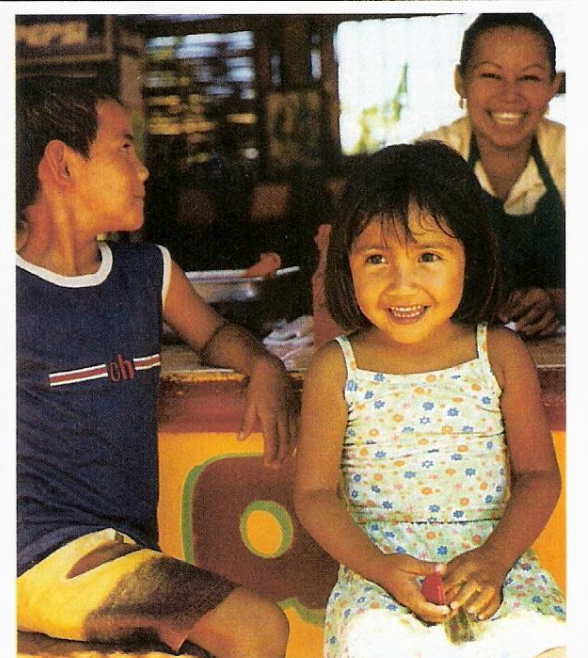
BY SARAH
BRUEGGEMANN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
FRAN GEALER

*Let the vivid colors
and mellow mood of
seaside Todos Santos
stoke your creative spirit.*

Miles of ruddy rock and cacti conceal one of the brightest spots on Baja Peninsula. In the town square of Todos Santos, Mexico, doves carol from the top of a topaz-yellow church. Surrounding Colonial-era structures line up like varying shades in a Crayola 64-pack. "Mexicans love color," says resident Sergio Jáuregui. "Greens, blues, pinks, purples. Flowers come in an amazing variety of colors; why not buildings? Why not have perennial beauty?"

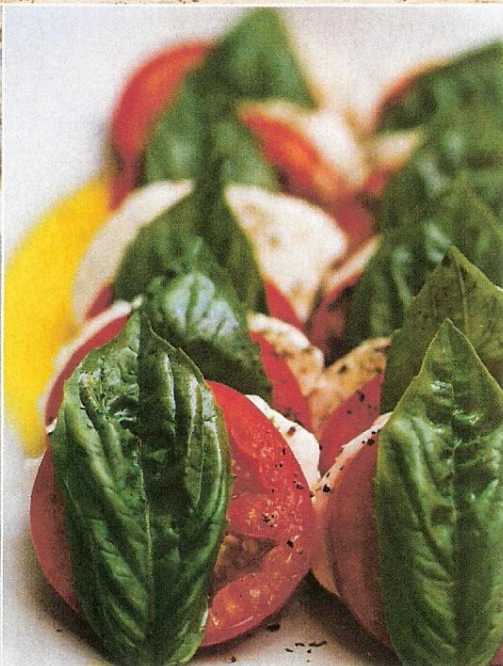
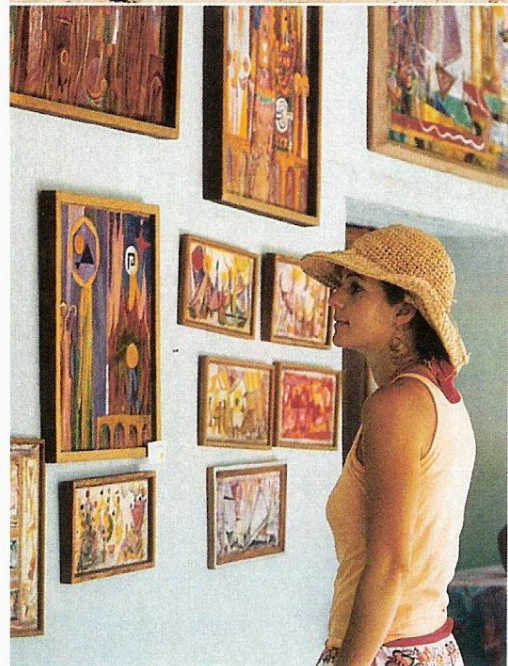
Indeed, this Pacific Coast village flourishes almost year-round as a destination for creative types seeking inspiration and seclusion. The oasis of palms and citrus farmland offers vacationers an alternative to the conga-fueled nightlife of nearby Los Cabos. With more dirt roads than paved ones, the community isn't

In the past few decades, Todos Santos has emerged as an artist's haven, a surfer's mecca, and a foodie's dream. Left: Local inn Posada la Poza typifies the village's hospitality and Latin charm. Top, right: At Barajas Tacos, savor Baja fast food—fried fish stuffed into warm corn tortillas. Middle, right: Surfers love Playa Los Cerritos. The dirt road to the shore is unmarked: Just follow any beat-up Volkswagen with boards lashed to its roof.



"People move to Todos Santos looking for peace. They want to live a different kind of life—to become artists, or create organic orchards."

—Sergio Jáuregui



flashy. Its beauty hides in rainbow-tinted neighborhoods and bougainvillea-filled courtyards.

"One of my friends, a real city boy, came down to visit," recalls expat Bill Sniechowski. "He said, 'No TV, no radio? This is what they're selling as tranquil?' His second day, he wanted to look for property." The town's stillness might distress newcomers used to urban noise. But before long, subtle sounds become distinct. A tiny crab scuttling along the sand. A Mexican folk song wafting out of an open window. "It's a good place to relax internally," says Bill. "You don't have a busy time. Nothing will assault your senses."

Many people, attracted by the solitude, take advantage of the region's unaffected beauty. "Baja is the last frontier of Mexico," says Sergio, who owns Todos Santos Eco Adventures. "Here, you observe nature as it was intended." His cliff-walk tour starts at Punta Lobos, an expansive shore where fishermen tow in their catch each afternoon. From there, travelers climb to breathtaking views of jagged outcroppings and thundering surf. Wild, otherworldly plants stretch their spindly limbs across the bluffs. "It's really magical when the fog rolls in," says Sergio. "Most flora survives here only because of moisture from the sea."

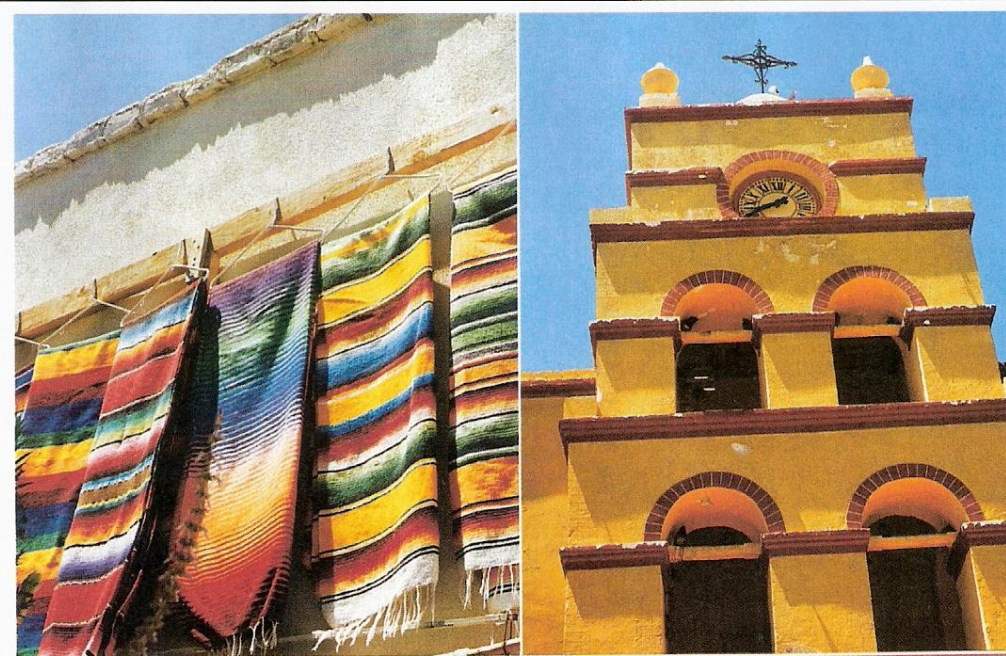
Local lore from Sergio enlivens the trek. He explains how a fig-leaf poultice treats a scorpion bite and how coyotes fish with their tails. Hikers eventually arrive at a shore-front palapa, where driftwood and large, flat stones serve as picnic benches. Following sandwiches of

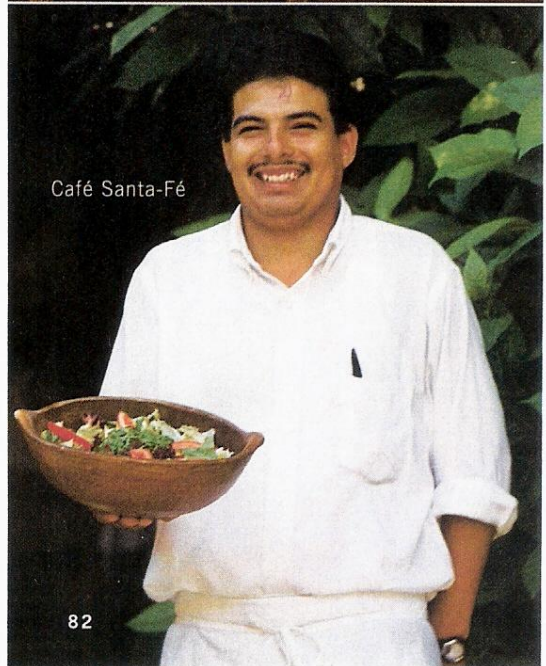
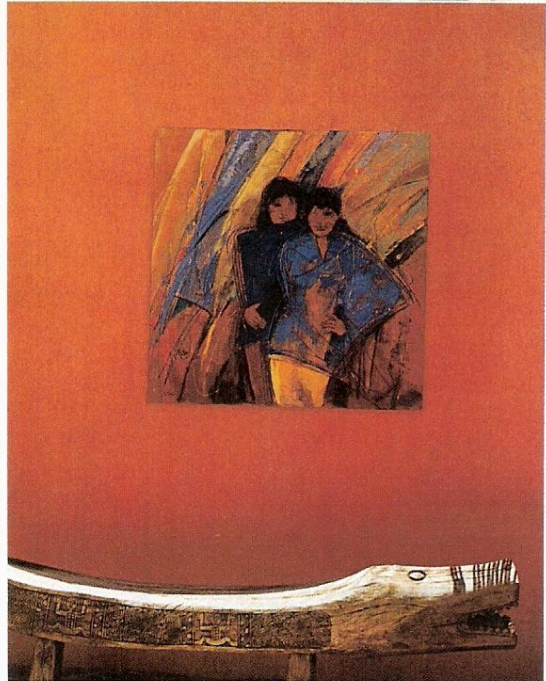
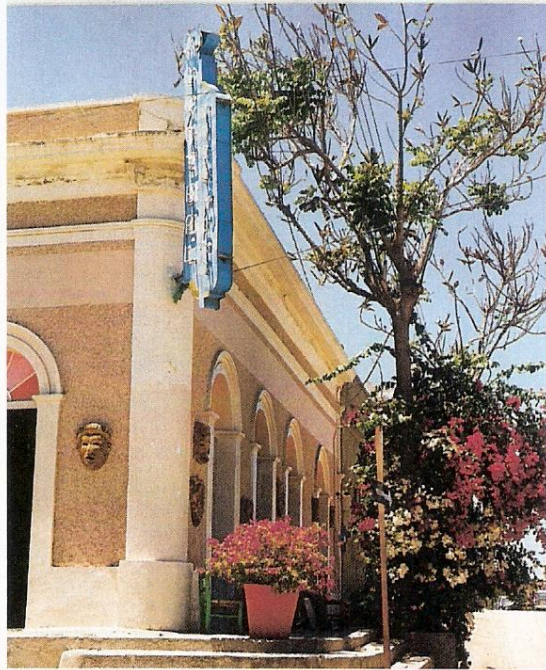
rich pastrami and locally grown avocado, the group lounges on an empty beach. The clean, tawny sand is speckled with mica, leaving traces of glitter on sun-soaked skin.

While the landscape hasn't changed in centuries, the populace lured by it has. After completion of Baja's dusty roller-coaster highway in the 1980s, artist Charles Stewart meandered into Todos Santos and set up a studio. Soon other artists, writers, musicians, surfers, yogis, and massage therapists followed. Now, more than a dozen galleries boast everything from photography and plein air landscapes to stained glass and jewelry. Galería de Todos Santos features drawings and sculptures by skilled area artists. At Gabo Fine Art, new abstract canvases unfurl across tables and on walls. Oils and acrylics of lush landscapes and tropical women premiere at Galería Logan.

Having feasted their eyes on bold artwork, shoppers may want to

This fertile Pacific Coast valley nourishes more than its popular avocados; in countless studios and galleries, artistic ideas take shape. The lack of high-pressure sales tactics makes Todos Santos an appealing spot for souvenir shopping. Brilliant woven blankets (top, left), hammocks, and glazed ceramics on the main thoroughfare beckon passersby. One block away, travelers discover neighborhood architecture inspired by that of southern Spain's Andalucía region. Among the colorful examples is the town's central church, la iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Pilar (top, right). It towers above the humble streetscape.





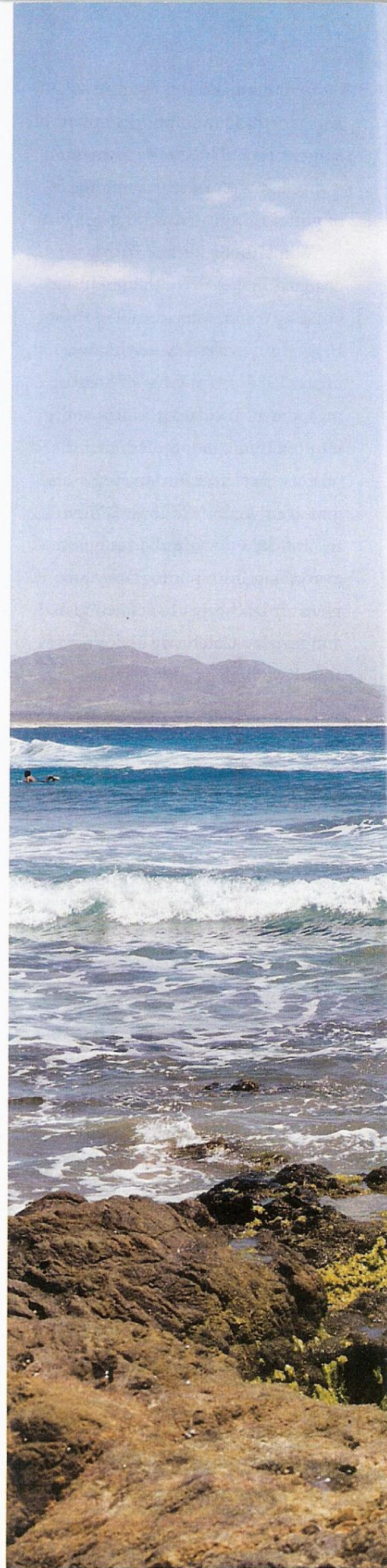
Café Santa-Fé

sample the town's other delicious designs. Whether from an upscale bistro or a thatched street stand, the food here amazes with abundant flavor. Locals claim Miguel's has the best authentic chiles rellenos. And determined Los Cabos tourists have long braved cow-crossed roads for Café Santa-Fé's Northern Italian cuisine. Everyone comes together at Restaurante Santanas, where reggae pounds and tequila flows.

More relaxing garden settings include Los Adobes de Todos Santos, and La Coronela, the restaurant at Hotel California. The long-held rumor that this Hotel California is the one of Eagles fame is false. However, the song's sentiment, "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave," proves true. Over at Playa Los Cerritos, a crew of beach bums plays gin rummy, discarding their cards on a well-worn surfboard. One offers another take on the lyrics: "Incredible friends, waves, mountains," he says. "Why would you want to leave?" 🌴

SIESTA TIME

Among the town's small inns and hotels, Posada la Poza stands out for its fine-dining restaurant, oceanfront swimming pool, and spa services. "We bring together Mexican hospitality and Swiss touches," says owner and artist Libusche Wiesendanger. She and husband Juerg provide guests with friendly, unobtrusive service. Ideal for couples, many of the simply furnished suites boast private outdoor hot tubs overlooking lavish gardens. Winter rates range from \$140 to \$480 U.S.; 011/52/612/145-0400 or lapoza.com.



Reclining against the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna mountains, Todos Santos remains 10 to 15 degrees cooler than steamy Los Cabos. "You go somewhere else to party, you come home here," says expat Bill Sniechowski. Juerg Wiesendanger (top, right) and wife Libusche left Europe for Mexico's peaceful shores. They now operate the boutique hotel Posada la Poza. Bottom, right: The Eagles never stayed at (or sang about) this Hotel California. But that doesn't stop the myth—or keep fans from making a pilgrimage here to buy T-shirts and pose for photos.

