

HAVING FUN IN TIJUANA

A Day Tripper's Guide



By Sam Warren

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Having Fun In Tijuana, A Day-trippers Guide

You're an idiot if you don't visit TJ. For the price of a trolley ticket you can visit an exotic foreign country. Some people still think that TJ is a sleazy border town full of bars, drug cartels and prostitutes. But Tijuana is bigger than San Diego and a modern major Mexican city full of factories and industry. The days of the drug cartels are long gone and TJ is safer than most U.S. Cities.

There are some tours by bus that will show your parts of the city. However, they all leave out the most interesting places to visit. By following this guide book, you can be your own tour director. Or you could even hire me and get to see the real city.

Rate of Exchange

Due to Mexican inflation, the rate of exchange keeps creeping up. At the time of writing this booklet, the rate is 20 pesos to the dollar. However, everyone except the government takes dollars and the price in dollars stays the same. You can exchange your dollars for pesos at the border and at exchange houses everywhere inside.

I would recommend paying for everything in dollars as it makes it easier to know how much you are spending and how much to tip. A rule of thumb is that if a shop has an open front you are expected to haggle over the price. You don't tip taxis but restaurants and bars are the same as in the U.S.

Entering Tijuana

If you are driving, first you have to stash your car somewhere. Parking in the Trolley parking lot is free or you can drive to the end of the line and park for \$7 for 8 hours. You will need a passport or passport card to enter and leave.

To enter TJ, at the end of the trolley line, go pass McDonald's, turn left, and follow the crowd. When you enter customs, go in the line marked for foreign visitors and apply for a free visa for less than seven days. Follow the crowd to the place where all the taxis are. To go downtown (*El Centro*) don't pay more than \$3 or \$4 (*60 or 70 pesos*) for a taxi.

If you go to the left, you can get a bus or van ride for only 13 pesos (about 60 cents) and the driver gives change. If you are ever in doubt or confused, people are very friendly and glad to help you. Just tell them your want to go to *El Centro*.

If you go to the right, you can walk downtown in about 30 minutes. Cross the bridge on the left (that is marked to go to the US) to cross over all the cars waiting in line. Cross to the other side and continue right. Turn left after the new SITT bus station and before the Zoom pharmacy then follow the crowd to the pedestrian bridge over the TJ river.

Public Transportation

You can bargain with taxis and there is no tipping.

The city has a new modern bus service named SITT. It even has free WiFi service. On your smart phone connect on "MyWiFi505." At this time the service goes one way on a route counter clockwise around the city that takes less than two hours round trip. You catch it by going to the right across the bridge and into a narrow glass building. You have to have the exact change in pesos which at this time is 14 pesos. Remember – you can always ask for help and many people in TJ speak English.

The first stop of SITT is on Ave. Revolución across from the red light district and the second stop is also on Ave. Revolución in the tourist district. I would recommend doubling back and start my ad-

venture at the large silver arch. To the right are the Wax Museum (*Muse de Cera*) and Artist Market (*Mercardo de Artesanias*). To the left is the Plaza Santa Cecilia.

The Pedestrian Path

Artist Market

Merardo Artisainas. When you get to the other side, on the left you will see the Marcardo Artesians (Artist Market) which covers the whole block. It is a mall of small shops and artists workshops with a large selection of items including, cement garden art, ceramics, leather, stained glass, tin work, wrought iron, clothing, dinner wear, and all kinds of mostly declarative stuff. It also has a pharmacy and a small restaurant. You can even get custom made products and many shops are wholesale. Don't take the asking price and be sure and bargain.

Wax Museum

Museu de Cera: As you walk down, on the left your will find the wax museum has a number of wax copies of famous people from around the world on display.

Plaza Santa Cecilia

A diagonal plaza that cuts between Ave. Revolución and First Street Near Arch to Third Street and Ave. Constitution. It is a hang out for Mariachi bands and often has live entertainment sponsored by the city,. There are bars and restaurant on the sides and souvenir stands in the middle. The second floor of a number of the bars cater to gays. At the end of the plaza is a McDonald's for those of your who don't go for Mexican food.

Cafe Museu

This seafood restaurant/bar is located neat the arch across the street from the Plaza. It's my favorite bar as they have draft beer for a dollar and a friendly staff. Say "Hi" to to the managers for me, Leo

and Louis. Inside is a collection and antiques and photos of Old Tijuana.

Avenue Revolución

This is the main tourist drag for the city with many shops and restaurants. Check out the Hotel Cesar, the home for the famous Caesars Salad. This is where it got its start in the 1920s when Caesar Cardini, an Italian immigrant, ran out of ingredients and improvised the now famous salad.

There are a number of bars, restaurants, fast food, shops, super market, coffeehouses, dentists, casino, drug stores, etc. and in the evening there is a lively night life. You will find downtown Tijuana a lot livelier than most American cities.

Caliente Casino

The Caliente Casino is at the corner of 8th Street. Now you don't have to go to Las Vegas to gamble. In addition to having slots, they have sports booking. There is another casino in the Plaza Amigo.

Cathedral of the Virgin of Guadalupe

The oldest and largest Catholic Church in Tijuana, it is located on a plaza at the corner of Second Street and Ninós Herós.

Municipal Market

Next to the Cathedral, this building houses a number of traditional Mexican restaurants and flower shops. This is where the Mexicans eat. I especially love the fish tacos.

Plaza Techological, Plaza Mujeres, and the Zona Comeda

This two story building that covers most of the block between Third and Fourth Street and Ave. Ninós Herós and Calle Martinez.

The Plaza of Technology has a number of small shops that will especially appeal to the nerd in you. There are shops that sell and

repair smart phones, computers and other forms of high tech. The entrance is on Ninós Herós but connects with all the other plazas.

The Plaza of Women caters to all kinds of services that appeal to women to include beauty shops, manicures, pedicures, jewelry, etc. The main entrance to this part is on Third Street.

The Food Zone is similar to a food court in one of our shopping malls. There is all kinds of food stalls to assuage your appetite. The entrance is on Fourth Street, however, all the parts interconnect.

Zona Norte

At the end of the Plaza Santa Cecilia, turn right for a block and you will be at the beginning of Tijuana's Red Lights District that is full of bars, night clubs, restaurants, street food carts, a church, and hotels that rent by the hour. Don't worry, The crime rate in TJ is less than half of San Diego's. They also have special police in the area to watch out for tourists. You will find the sex workers standing along the side of the sidewalks and inside the clubs. The ones inside the clubs are more expensive.

Flea Market

Located inside the Zona Norte starting on First Street and continuing on past Calle Martinez and covers an area more than a block square. It is open every day, but on weekends, it expands to more than four times the size. You will find almost anything you can imagine to include clothes, food, electronics, hardware, furniture, barbers shops, etc. This is where most Mexicans do their shopping.

Street Food

Food, food, food. Food everywhere. Mexicans love to eat and love to eat out. That's why they are even more overweight than Americans. There are restaurant and taco carts everywhere. I especially love their hot dogs and hamburgers.

Walking Tour Groups

If you feel more comfortable with groups there are a few groups in

san

diego who like to do walking tours.

Meet-Up ??????????????

The Hungry Hikers are a small group of gringos from San Diego who walk across the border and visit some of the finer restaurants in the city. However, if walking isn't for you, you can take a taxi. To get on their invitation list, email pfisher@hungryhiker-tj.com.

Restaurants

For reviews of some of the restaurants reviewed by the Hungry Hikers, go to: <http://hungryhiker-tj.com/HHGSrch.html>

Plaza Rio Shopping Center

Located not far in the Zona Rio, The easiest way to get there is to get on the SITT bus on Ave. Revolución. To get back downtown just catch a regular bus, van or taxi.

Comercial Mexicana

This is a large box store similar to Wall Mart. They sell almost anything you can imagine. You might find it interesting to see what products are sold in Mexican stores and for how much.

Movie Theaters

There are two Cinépolis movie theaters with a lot of first rate American movies with Spanish subtitles. The prices are much lower than in the US.

Ciinépolis

The regular price is only \$2 but the 4DX movies are \$8. 4DX has motion chairs and environmental effects such as wind, bubbles, and scent work in perfect synchronicity with the action on screen.

Cinépolis VIP

This is a luxurious theater with recliner chairs where you can order food and drink to be served to you. The price is only about \$7.

PHOTO

Cultural Center (CEUT)

Art Exhibits

The art and photo exhibits are changed on a regular basis and you will find them very interesting.

IMAX Movie Theater

For information on the IMAX theater go to: [http://www.cecut.gob-mx/imax.php](http://www.cecut.gob.mx/imax.php).

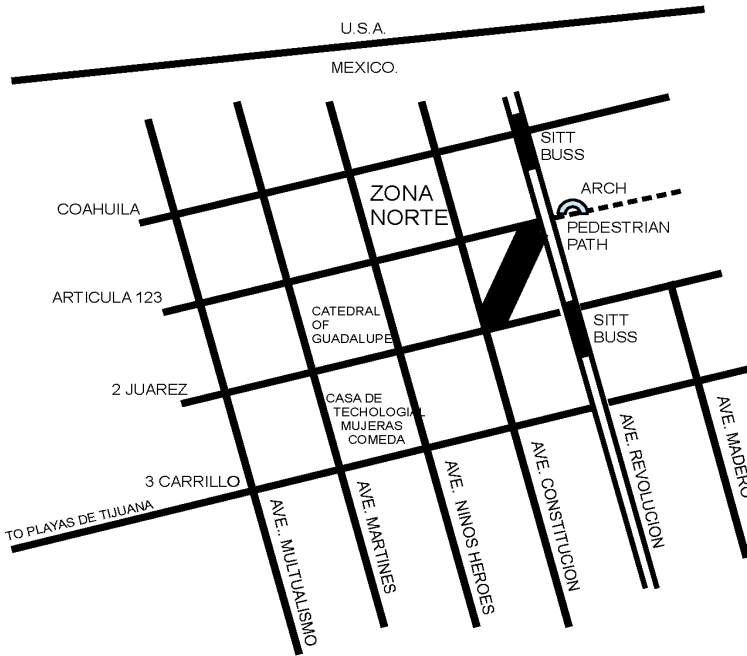
PHOTO

Plaza Fiesta

Located across the street from the Plaza Rio Shopping Center, this is the place for serious beer drinkers. You will find over 15 different craft beers in the bars in this area. They open at one in the afternoon and go until three in the morning.

Real Charo Supplies

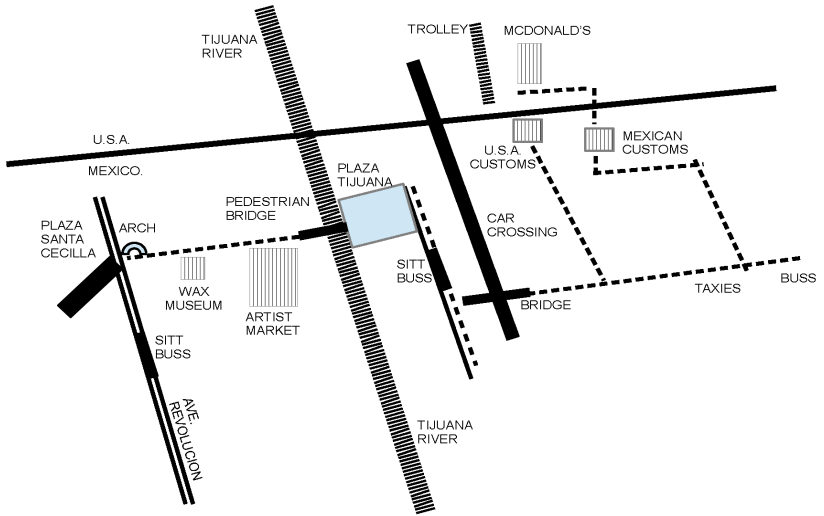
Located in the Plaza de Zapato, a large building on the far left, is a store that specializes in Mexican charo and rodeo clothes and items. They sell everything from horse saddles and bull fighting costumes to silver buckles. I doubt if you could ever find a store like this in the US.



This is a strange location for this the of business as the rest of the building is full of stalls that sell women clothes and services. It is left over from when the building first specialized in shoes and leather goods in the '80s.

Miguel Hidalgo Market

Located behind the Plaza Fiesta and on the right side is this huge farmers market. Trucks deliver farm produce from all over Mexico. In addition, there are restaurants and shops that sell household items. You will find a tour of this market very interesting. Instead of small cans, spices are sold by the scoop full.



Playas de Tijuana

Tijuana's beach is a real treat. It is not visited much by tourists who usually go past it to Rosarito Beach and is where the locals and expats who live in the area visit. I like it much better than either Rosarito Beach or any beach in San Diego. It has a beautiful boardwalk with food stalls, coffeehouses, a bar, etc. along it. On weekends the city sponsors free entertainment. Playas de Tijuana isn't just a beach but a beach community with homes, condos, shopping malls and many fine restaurants.

How to Get There

A taxi will cost you about ?????? but you can catch a local bus on Third Street just after Ave. Niños Herós for only 12 pesos (about 60 cents) Look on the front window of the ratty looking bus where a hand painted sign should say Playas #1 or Playas #2. Playas #2 will take you to the shopping district with a mall and other shops. However, it is a medium walk from there to the beach. Playas #1 will take you to the Bullfighting Ring where you get off, turn right, and walk a couple of blocks to the beach.

Or you can take a ruta van for 15 pesos (about 75 cents. They are just a few feet further up from the buses.



The road paralleling the beach has many inexpensive restaurants and an inexpensive motel. If you continue down the steps you will get the stage and boardwalk on the beach. If you go to the right, you will run into the border fence. If you go to the left, you will find food stands, coffeehouses with internet and a bar.

To return, go back the way you came and cross the street where you can catch the same bus or van back downtown or you catch a taxi.

Miscellaneous

Medical Tourism

Many people come to TJ for the low cost medical services which includes dental, cosmetic surgery, cancer treatment, and many other things. Some are as good as in the U.S. While others are not. You can find lots of information about this on the internet.

If you are driving, there is a special lane to cross back to San Ysidro if you get a permit from a Mexican doctor or dentist.

Buying Prescription and non Prescription Medications

According to the U.S. Customs, to bring back prescription drugs into the U.S. you must have a prescription written by a physician licensed in the United States, have it in its original packaging and carry no more than a three-month supply AND you must declare them. If you are caught trying to bring in drugs without the above requirements you can be stopped, have your goods confiscated and may be arrested.

The pharmacist in Mexico is required to keep the original prescription, but you should make sure you don't leave the store with a copy for yourself. Also, if you're in doubt about the classification of your medication, if it's a controlled substance, the pharmacist will have the official pharmaceutical book with that information.

Many drugs that require a prescription in the U.S. can be bought over the counter in Mexico, such as antibiotics, anti-depressants, birth control pills and heart medications. Technically these drugs do require a prescription but the law is routinely ignored.

Car Repairs

Want to save money on car repairs including repainting and new upholstery? As you drive across the border one will derive through a collection of garages and paint shops where you have have work done on your car at a fraction of what you will pay in the US.

There are also places to get motorcycles, bicycles, musical instruments, etc. fixed

Nearby Places to Visit

Rosarito Beach

Driving past Playas de Tijuana on the toll road, one will reach this nearby beach city. It is very popular with ex-pats, tourist and students on spring break. To get there ?????

Puerto Nuevo

Continuing along the toll road, this small town is full of restaurants that sell seafood especially rock lobster. It got its start from a roadside stand that sold lobsters caught by the Ortega family and grew to a collection of restaurants all own by the same family. Now it even has resort hotels. Great place to visit if you love lobsters.

Tecate

Tecate is a nice little town about 40 miles east of Tijuana. It can also be reached from San Diego has a nice park and the main attraction is the Tecate Brewery.

Ensenada

Abut 90 miles south of TJ on a toll road, it is a port town with cruse ships visiting. Ensenada is a more sophisticated tourist area than Tijuana, specializes in seafood, and the scenic bus route there only costs like \$23 round trip.

Guadalupe Valley Wine Country

The Guadalupe Valley runs between Tecate and Ensenada and is a beautiful drive. Thee are many wineries that will let you tour and sample their wines. Just Google for information on tours.

Return Across the Border

Returning back to the U.S. Can be a real pain depending on when you cross. It depends on the weather, holidays and some times there just is no reason. What ever you do, don't cross early in the morning as that is when people who live in TJ are crossing to go to work.

There is a lot of construction going on now and there is a new crossing However I still prefer tho old one as the new one is a bit out of the way and you have to take a long walk or pay for a shuttle to get back to the trolley. Don't forget that the last trolley leaves around one in the morning.

You can go to the crossing by either taking a taxi or bus. The taxi shouldn't cost more than \$5 and you can catch a bus on Niños Herós at Third Street.

BACK COVER