

# Border Crossing

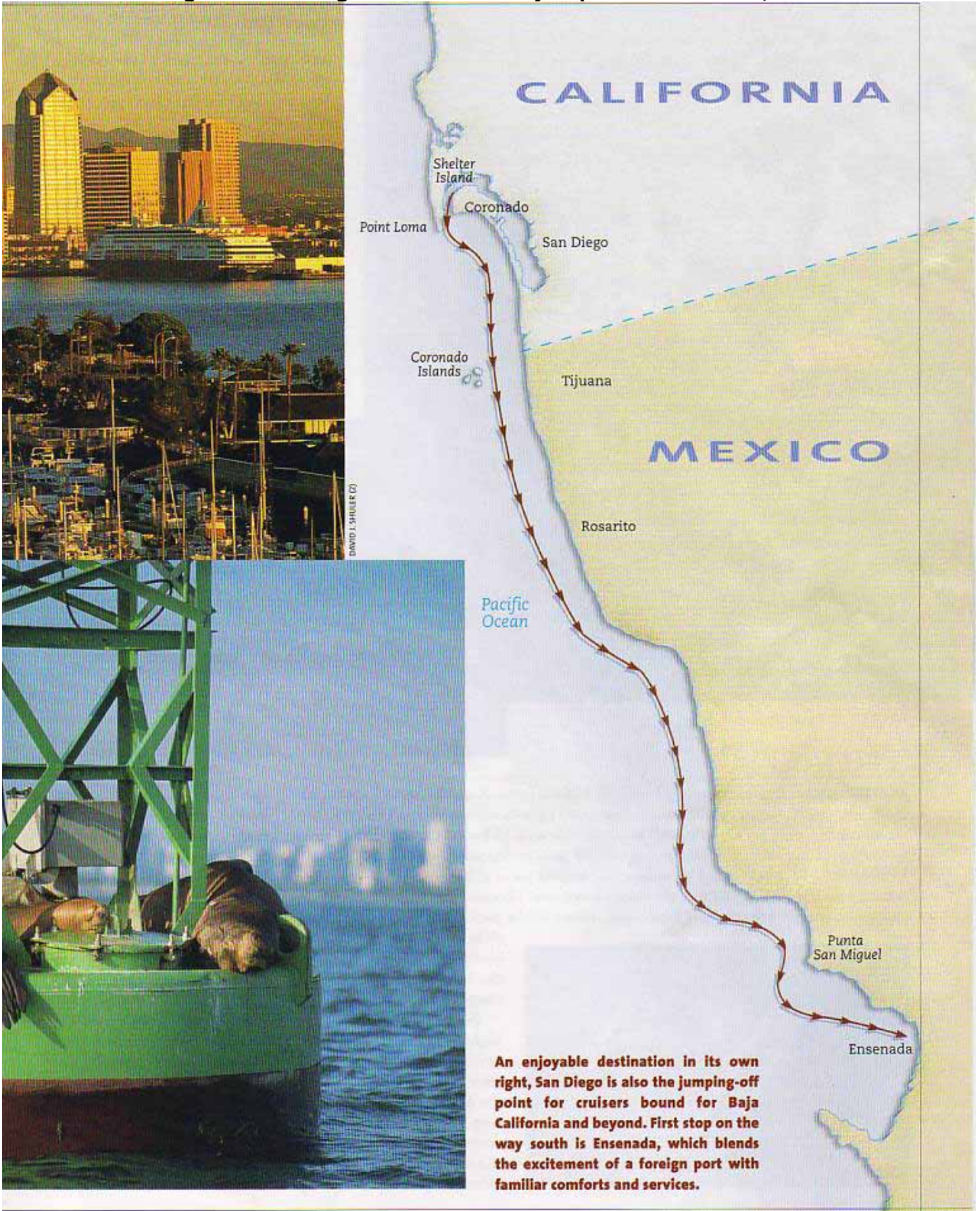
**I**T'S BEEN MORE THAN 30 YEARS SINCE YOU AND YOUR best buddy first went to Ensenada. Back then you were both lance corporals on leave from Camp Pendleton, struggling to keep a rusty Ford pickup with worn kingpins from veering into a ditch along Mex-1.

A lot has changed in the years since you left the service. The hairline has retreated a bit, and the waistline's fighting a holding action, but overall life and business are good. Good enough to reward yourself with a new Kroger 44, which will soon become your seasonal home afloat as you and your wife explore the coastlines of Mexico, Central America and beyond.

**A Weekend Getaway to Ensenada, Gateway to Mexico**

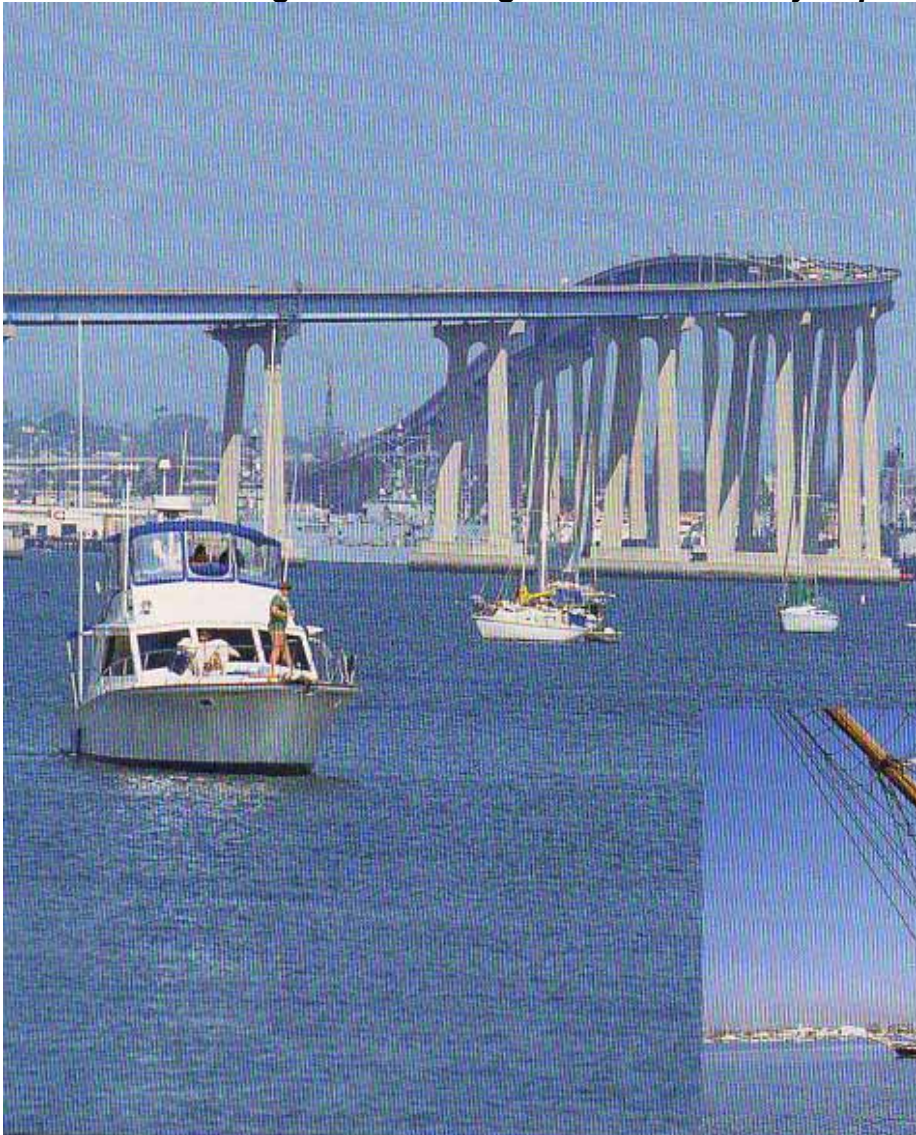
**By Peter Pisciotta**

**Cruising from San Diego to Ensenada – by Capt. Peter Pisciotta, SeaSkills**



**An enjoyable destination in its own right, San Diego is also the jumping-off point for cruisers bound for Baja California and beyond. First stop on the way south is Ensenada, which blends the excitement of a foreign port with familiar comforts and services.**

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Your shakedown cruise will be a bit less ambitious — a three-day out-and-back run to Ensenada with your old buddy from the corps and your first experience entering a foreign port.

Like you, the place has changed. Boating in Ensenada no longer means renting a panga at Juanitos. Now, there are three full-service marinas with everything from cable TV and WiFi Internet access to room-service meals served at your slip. Ashore, the taco stands and open-air stalls selling oversize sombreros and colorful blankets can still be found, but they are often eclipsed by restaurants and air-conditioned duty-free storefronts.

You are not in the States, but you are not far from home.



## THURSDAY

■ **AFTERNOON.** Your yacht awaits at a Shelter Island berth. A quick check of the weather reveals typical August conditions for tomorrow's eight-hour voyage south and Sunday's return trip: 3- to 5-foot westerly swell at 10 seconds with 15 knots of northwesterly afternoon breeze and perfect visibility, so you will not have to depend on inaccurate charts.

■ **EVENING.** Your buddy and his wife arrive, and he jokes at how different the Kroger is from your old Ford. Old times are remembered over libations on the flybridge before walking to Red Sails Restaurant for a casual dinner on the patio overlooking the marina.

A leisurely waterside walk along the seawall watching the last sailboats return caps the evening.

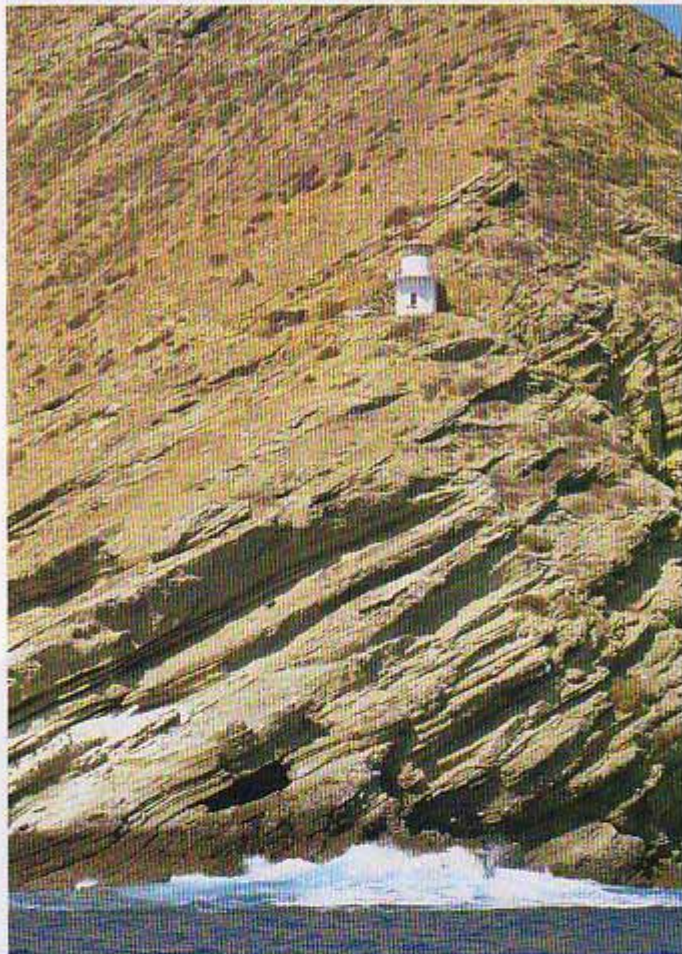
Before turning in for the night, you take a moment to review your paperwork to assure there are photo copies of the following: ship's registration and U.S. Coast Guard documentation showing you as the owner, insurance document, passports for all aboard.



**The cruise begins among the familiar landmarks of the San Diego waterfront (top to bottom): the sleek curves of the Coronado bridge — the longest “box-girder” span in the world — serve as contrast to the timeless lines of the *Star of India*. The oldest active iron-hulled sailing ship in the world, the *Star* now resides at the Maritime Museum of San Diego and is open for tours. Frolicking dolphins are a common sight in local waters.**

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South Island (below) is the largest of Mexico's Coronado Islands, which consist of three main rocks and many smaller islets and boulders (bottom). Old Point Loma Lighthouse (right) guided mariners into San Diego Bay from 1855 to 1891, but its beam was frequently fogged in and its service ended.



DAVID J. SHOULR (1)

## FRIDAY

■ **MORNING.** Up early for a quick bite before casting off lines. Slip past Point Loma by 0800 at 8½ knots, sipping just over 4 gph of diesel. By 0930 you are in Mexican waters and hoisting a courtesy flag on the starboard spreader. To starboard are the Coronado Islands, where *Mutiny on the Bounty* was filmed. Your buddy's wife swears she hears ghostly images of Gold-Rush era pirates rumored to have plied these waters 150 years ago.

You edge to within a mile of shore but watch the depth sounder to stay outside the 10-fathom curve just in case — these are poorly charted waters. Soon, a large modern group of buildings along the shore indicate the Fox Studios movie set where the movie *Titanic* was filmed. Around 1430 you round Punta San Miguel and in the distance is 9-mile-long Bahía Todos Santos (All Saints Bay).



## FRIDAY

■ **AFTERNOON.** Because you called a few days prior to departure, you have a confirmed slip at Cruiseport Village Marina, located inside the harbor between the new cruise-ship terminal and Marina Baja Naval. Juanitos Sportfishing is nearby and looks the same as it did 30 years ago. Yachting in Ensenada has become big business for two reasons: reasonable prices on high-quality labor at local boatyards, and California sales-tax laws that encourage the sheltering yachts outside of the state for 91 days of the first 180 of ownership. Cruiseport Village Marina, the newest marina in the city, has full services, including cable TV, concrete docks and 50 amp 220V on the larger slips.

The first order of business is to clear Mexican customs. Gone are the days of trudging around town finding the port captain, immigration office and an open bank — a process that could easily consume an entire day. The marina manager's office is open seven days a week and takes care of all paperwork for a slight fee, not much more than the cost of a night's berth. The entire process, including securing your slip, takes 10 minutes. You have arrived.

■ **EVENING.** Although there are now many choices of fine restaurants in Ensenada (sushi is especially good since the fish is so fresh), you decide on El Rey Sol restaurant serving French and traditional Mexican dinners for more than 50 years. You try some surprisingly good local wines and learn that over 90 percent of Mexican wines are produced in the hills surrounding Ensenada. Finish the evening with a walk along the *paseo*, a pedestrian walkway hugging the harbor.



PETER PISCOTTA (2)

**Juanito's (above) has been an Ensenada landmark for more than 30 years. Today, in addition to fishing charters, the company offers marina slips and whale-watching tours. Cruise Port Village (below) is part of a relatively new complex that includes a resort, a 200-slip marina and a cruise-ship pier. Last year the sleepy little town entertained almost 500,000 cruise passengers, a new local record.**





## SATURDAY

■ **MORNING.** Sleep late before heading to La Reyna French Pastry Shop for the finest baked goods in the city. On the way back, stop by the fish market to load the freezer with fresh swordfish, albacore and shrimp. Your Spanish is not great, so instead of 10 pounds of each, you get 10 kilos (22 pounds). A good deal turned great.

■ **AFTERNOON.** Off shopping to Avenida Lopez Mateos. The sounds of street mariachis are everywhere as you stroll shops selling silver, leather and pottery goods. U.S. dollars are accepted everywhere, so there's no need to convert to pesos. Grab



fish tacos at an open-air café that seems busy and cooks to order to lessen concern about "Montezuma's revenge." Within an hour you and your buddy manage to "lose" your wives and head to the same place you went 30 years ago: Husongs Cantina, birthplace of the Margarita. There's still sawdust on the floor. Before heading back to the boat, you stop at Gigante grocery store for the best price on local wines.

■ **EVENING.** Dinner is at Bronco's Steak House, an eclectic off-the-beaten track restaurant festooned with tidbits of local memorabilia. The mesquite-grilled steaks are perfect, and some guy named Isaac (you later learn he's the owner) shares stories about Ensenada.



**Top to bottom: Markets are still the mainstay of local life in Ensenada, and visitors shouldn't shy away. It's the only way to have a genuine experience — and everyone is friendly. The fish market is a great place to pick up fresh Pacific seafood for creating your own inexpensive feast. Mariachis can be found playing for tips on the street during the day and performing in fine restaurants at night.**

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DAVID J. SHULER

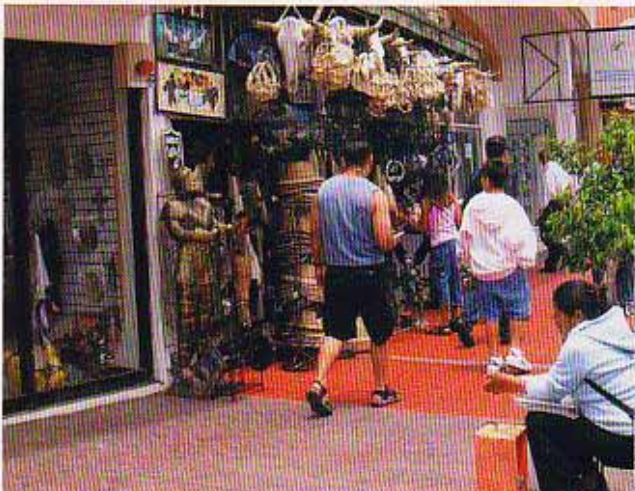
### SUNDAY

■ **MORNING.** You decide to depart early and stop at Marina Coral on the way home to load up on diesel and save 50 cents per gallon. Marina Coral is part of the Hotel Coral complex and has the only fuel dock in Ensenada. It's going to be a warm day, and the pool looks refreshing ... hmmm ...

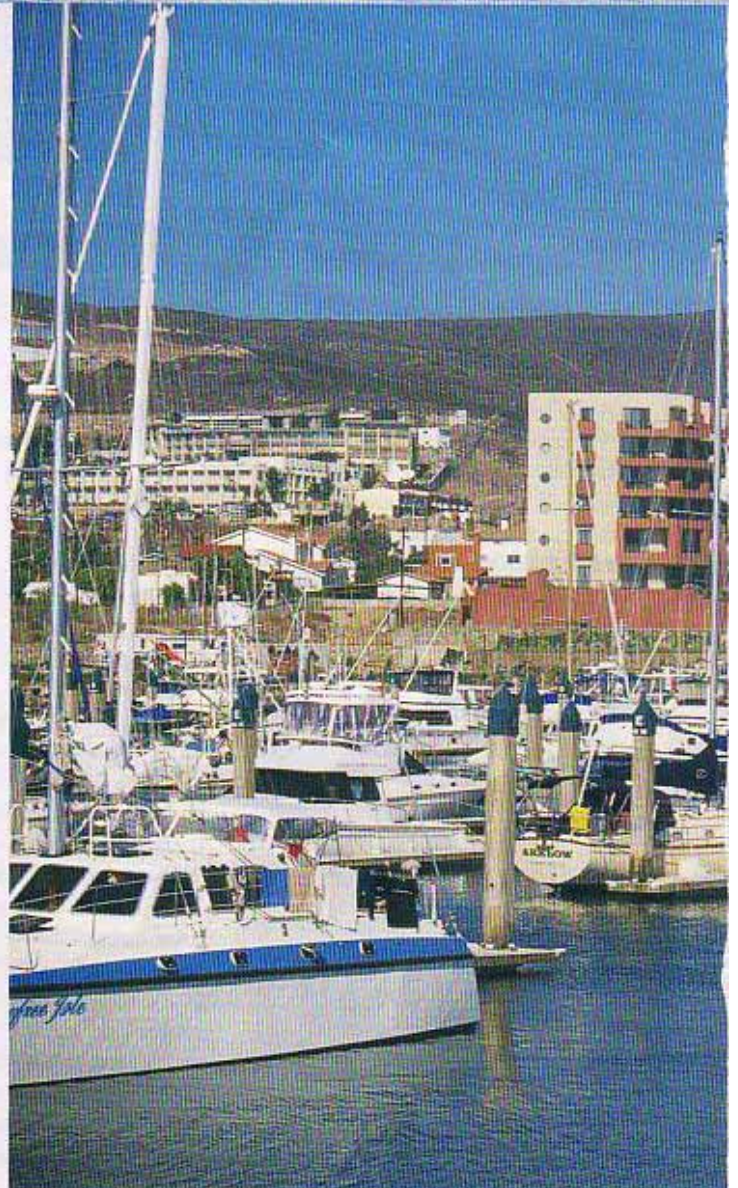
Heading north. Shortly after noon, the northwest wind freshens to over 20 knots and kicks up a short chop. You hug the coast just outside the surf line, a technique delivery captains call "keeping one foot on the beach."

■ **EVENING.** Clearing back into the United States, you dock in front of the police dock on the southwest end of Shelter Island in a yellow space designated "customs quarantine." A free call from the nearby pay phone brings the U.S. Customs in about 10 minutes. Twenty minutes later you are on your way back to your slip just as the sun sets.

Hard to believe you traveled to a foreign country and returned in three short days. You and your buddy vow not to wait another 30 years before returning to Ensenada. ❁

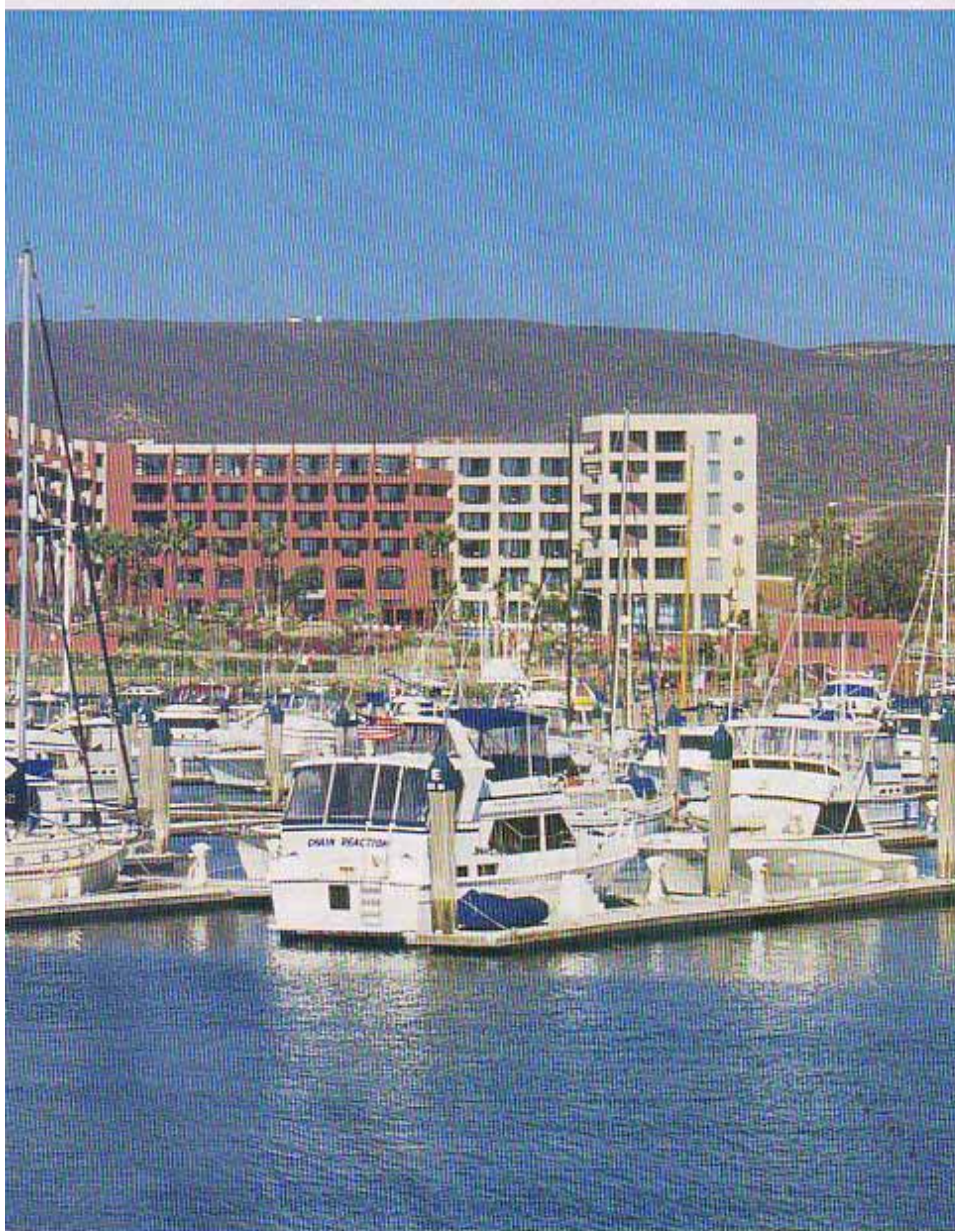


PETER PISCIOTTA



## Cruising from San Diego to Ensenada – by Capt. Peter Pesciotta, SeaSkills

Top left and bottom right: The Marina Coral resort complex includes a well-protected 350-slip marina and a lavish hotel. It's just one of the good changes that has come to this often overlooked village. Below: Weather settles over the Coronados. Bottom left: Souvenirs *hecho en Mexico* are an inexpensive reminder of your trip.



## RESOURCES

### CALL

#### Marina Coral

350 slips  
[www.hotelcoral.com](http://www.hotelcoral.com)  
800-862-9020  
877-233-5839

#### Cruiseport Village Marina

200 slips  
877-219-5822

#### Baja Naval

011-52-646-174-0020  
[www.bajanaval.com](http://www.bajanaval.com)

#### Red Sails Restaurant

2614 Shelter Island Dr.  
San Diego  
619-223-3030

#### El Rey Sol Restaurant

Lopez Mateos and Blancarte, Ensenada  
888-311-6871 ext. 100

#### Broncos Steak House

Avenida Lopez Mateos #1525, Ensenada  
Local phone: 172-4892



#### Hussong's Cantina

Avenida Ruiz #113, Ensenada  
Local phone: 178-3210

### BROWSE

[www.ensenadabaja.com](http://www.ensenadabaja.com)  
[www.ensenada-tourism.com](http://www.ensenada-tourism.com)  
<http://ensenada.baja.com>

### WAYPOINTS

Charts for Ensenada are old and lag behind GPS in accuracy — night and foggy approaches are not advised. Rely on visual navigation and radar, not a chart plotter driving an autopilot (for example, Marina Coral's charted location is actually ¼ mile inland).

### REFERENCE

Punta Morro: 31° 51.3' N 116° 40.3' W  
Marina Coral Approach: 31° 51.5' N 116° 39.7' W  
Ensenada Approach: 31° 50.5' N 116° 37.4' W  
Cruiseport Village: 31° 50.6' N 116° 38.1' W  
Baja Naval: 31° 51.6' N 116° 37.5' W