

# LA CONEXIÓN MEXICANA

## ESCAPEES RV CLUB CHAPTER 8

December 2021

Website: [www.mexicanconnection08.com](http://www.mexicanconnection08.com)

[www.facebook.com/groups/EscapeesMexicanConnection](http://www.facebook.com/groups/EscapeesMexicanConnection)

2022 Wagonmaster email: [ch08wagonmaster@gmail.com](mailto:ch08wagonmaster@gmail.com)



### **Chapter 8 Officers elected February 26, 2020:**

President – Cassandra Dennis, [kassandra@ekdennis.com](mailto:kassandra@ekdennis.com)

Immediate Past President – Ed Dennis, [ed@ekdennis.com](mailto:ed@ekdennis.com)

First Vice President / Wagonmaster – Shari Nova & Gary Hatt, [ch08wagonmaster@gmail.com](mailto:ch08wagonmaster@gmail.com)

Second Vice President - Open

Secretary – Dory Johnson, [dorytx@aol.com](mailto:dorytx@aol.com)

Treasurer – Steve Bufty, [Ch8treasurer@gmail.com](mailto:Ch8treasurer@gmail.com)

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Webmaster – Bill Johnson, [Ch8comms@gmail.com](mailto:Ch8comms@gmail.com)

Historian – Herb Baldwin, [herbsells@gmail.com](mailto:herbsells@gmail.com)

Newsletter Editor – Cece Wroblewski, [cece.wroblewski@gmail.com](mailto:cece.wroblewski@gmail.com)

### **The purpose of Chapter 8 is to:**

- Introduce Escapees Chapter 8 Mexican Connection members to RV travel in Mexico, its scenery, traditions, food, culture and folklore.
- Travel South of the border and give back more than the enriching experiences we gain, through charity donations and business patronization.
- Enable Chapter 8 members to feel comfortable to return to Mexico for future rallies as well as their own road trip adventures.

Refer to the Chapter 8 website for the Chapter Standing Rules and Bylaws.

## 2022 Co-Wagonmasters - Shari Nova & Gary Hatt



Feb. 9, 2022 – Feb. 25, 2022

### Locations:

Potrero County Park, Potrero, California, USA

Zoológico Parque del Niño Jersey,  
Valle de Guadalupe, Baja California, MX



La Jolla Beach Camp  
Punta Banda, Baja California, MX

### It All Starts Here ...

This is where we will be meeting at Potrero Park on February 9th. The pavilion has picnic tables inside with cold, hard, metal seats. Be sure to dress warm and bring a Seat Cushion of some kind or bring your Lawn Chairs for even more comfort.

Also, the road to get here, Hwy 94, is slow, narrow, and curvy, so plan plenty of time to navigate it as in an RV, it will take you much longer than you may think and there is quite a bit of traffic on that road and it goes on for several miles.



Also, cell phone service in this area is spotty, so be sure you know where you are going as calling us for directions may not work.

## And Then Comes the Zoo ...



### Who's New at the Zoo? By Shari Nova



Gary Hatt and I were greeted at the Zoológico Parque Del Niño Jersey this past November by some familiar faces, Arturo Alcantar (left above) and Carlos Laorrabaquio (right above). These gentlemen are zookeepers who have welcomed the Escapee Mexican Connection groups over the past few years. They made us feel right at home! Soon after we arrived, we met with Arturo, Steph Vargas Eaton (left below) and Eric Garcia (right below) to discuss the details of our February 2022 visit. Eric is the new zoo manager and in charge of keeping the zoo running at optimum levels. Before I introduce you to Eric, I'd like to give you a little background on Steph.



Steph lives in Ensenada and has been with the zoo for almost four years. Her main job is that of a zookeeper (the only female in this zoo) working primarily with primates such as the Hamadryas baboon, patas monkeys, squirrel monkeys and the “old lady” (Steph’s words) rhesus macaque. Small parakeets, lovebirds, the nymph cockatoo, bunnies, guinea pigs and other small animals get Steph’s careful attention, too. As if she isn’t busy enough, she has taken on the role of coordinating the Escapee Mexican Connection visit in February 2022 – a big responsibility! She and a few other zookeepers are already working on the behind-the-scenes tour, reptile house visit (with Carlos), introduction to bugs and arachnids (Antonio and his spiders) and a few other activities. When we were here a few years ago, Steph was very shy and hesitant to use her English. Now we see her as poised, confident and passionate about her job. I know you will enjoy meeting her!

### **Introducing Eric Garcia – The Zoo’s Newest Ambassador**

When I was making arrangements to visit the zoo last month, I was a little nervous about contacting someone new. I shouldn’t have been! Eric Garcia made it easy for me by reaching out with his almost-perfect English assuring me that we would have a place to camp and plenty of help to get our work done. Following is a little background on Eric and an update about the zoo:



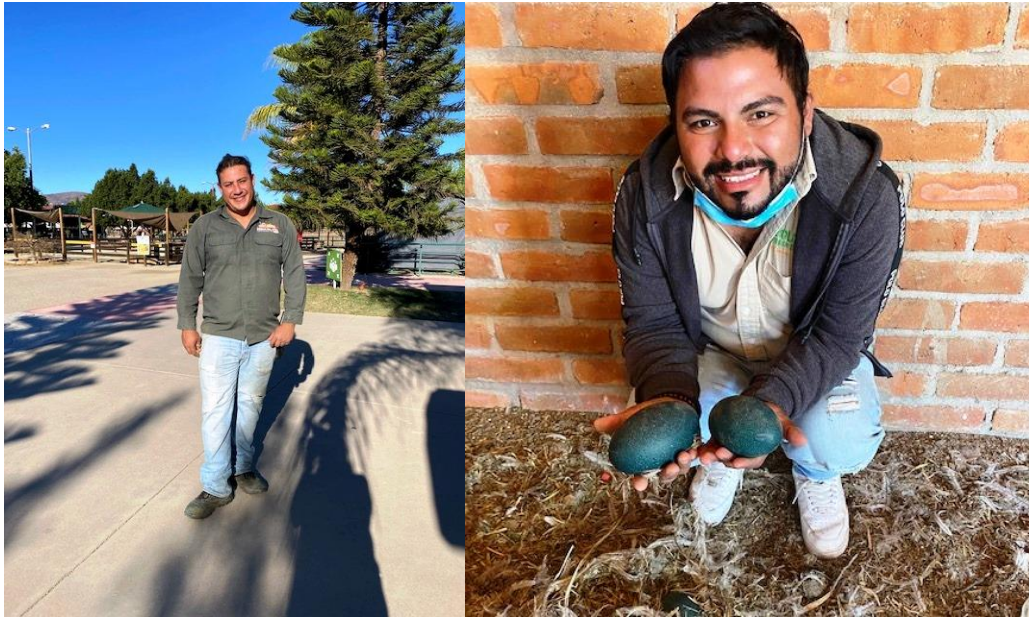
Eric tells us he grew up in Tijuana, and then went to high school in Julian, CA (yes! the apple pie town near San Diego) where he learned to speak English. Later he attended university in Baja studying political science and business administration. He officially started as the Zoo Manager about two months ago, but has been a fan of the zoo for several years. He claims his young daughter and her love of animals is the reason he is at the zoo now. As a three-year-old, she started rescuing animals from the street. They would take them to the Vet for vaccinations and check-ups, and then put them up for adoption. With a strong desire to nurture his daughter's interest in animals, he started bringing her to the zoo (she is now ten years old). He liked this zoo because it was so clean and the animals were well cared for. Soon he started volunteering at the zoo to set a good example for his daughter and give her an opportunity to spend more time learning about the animals. The zoo owners took notice and decided to bring him and his business expertise on full-time in September 2021.

As the zoo manager he is very busy juggling management of the property, water features, playground equipment, concessionaires, and landscaping with the needs of the animals and zookeepers. It's like having two jobs rolled into one, but he doesn't stop there. Eric also owns a restaurant in Ensenada – Miwa Burgers – where he spends most of his weekend evenings.



### How does the zoo operate?

This zoo (I like to think of it as an animal sanctuary) is charged with accepting animals that have been raised in captivity and relinquished to the government through mishandling, drug raids or neighbors' complaints. Since these animals are typically hand-raised by humans, they can't be reintroduced into the wild. Often they are only kept at the zoo until their owners stand trial and the fate of the asset (animal) is determined so they can be permanently placed in other facilities. The authorities bring animals to Zoológico Parque del Niño Jersey because it has a good reputation of cleanliness and care for their animals, thanks to all their dedicated zookeepers and their vet, Carlos Eguibar. The staff at the zoo is eager to take on new animals because they love them like children, even though they realize there is no governmental funding available to help them care for these innocent creatures.



Above left is Carlos Eguibar, the Zoo's vet; on the right is Aldo – keeper of emus, flamingos, lemurs and more.

On the lower left is zookeeper Luis near the jaguar cage and lower right is a group picture from 2020 with Carlos, Antonio, Steph, Perla (the owner's daughter), Mario (Perla's hubby) and Arturo

## How was the zoo affected by COVID?

The zoo is a registered 501c3 non-profit organization. Prior to 2020 they managed to survive on entry fees, concessions and donations...but then COVID hit. In March 2020 the government shut down all non-essential businesses, including the zoo. Steph and a few other key zookeepers decided to move onsite to insure both caretakers and animals stayed healthy. They lived at the zoo full-time from March to December 31, 2020.

Around the first of July, the restrictions eased a little and they were allowed to open at 30% capacity. Even though folks were anxious to get out, they were reluctant to be near other people and many didn't like wearing a mask outdoors, so it was stressful time for the employees. Business was slow until October when they opened up the pumpkin patch and other activities during the holidays. To help supplement the zoo's income the creative crew started posting videos and livestreaming events on Facebook to engage the community and their supporters. Their neighbors responded, some bringing food for the animals, some bringing hay and

others contributing money. **It was difficult to survive during 2020 but the community and dedication of the employees saved the zoo!**

As far as they know, no animals contracted COVID. Yet they, too, were affected by the shutdown as some of the critters appeared to miss having people around. For example, the baboon and monkeys like watching people making funny faces at them. Other animals, like the male jaguar and bears, seemed to enjoy having some peace and quiet. Fortunately, the staff could spend extra time with the animals and help make their beasts and birds a little more comfortable and less lonesome through the enrichment programs.



Moses on the right and his a few of the grounds crew are busy taking care of details before the zoo opens on this Sunday morning.

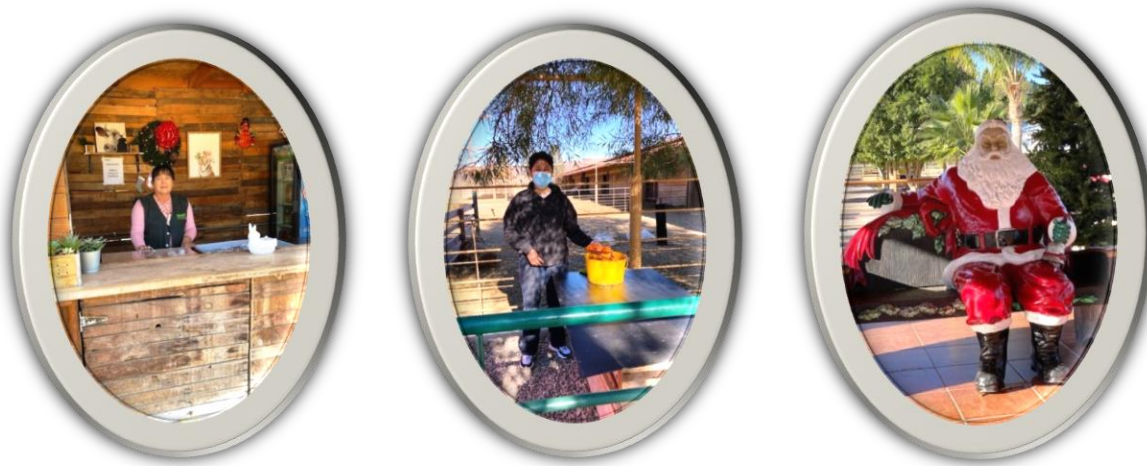
Today the zoo is open at 50% capacity with all the normal COVID precautions in place – masks required (even outside), hand sanitizer stations, temperature checks, traffic patterns with arrows and signage, markers on the floors for separation and Plexiglas partitions on the train. Fifty employees use hand tools, rakes and wheel barrels to keep the grounds clean, the landscaping lush, the engines running and the guests happy. There are also 14 zookeepers who tend the animals and take care of everything from cleaning stalls to nurturing “their” animals. Everyone at the zoo wears many hats and does whatever is necessary to take care of the zoo, the guests and the animals. They say that the animals can tell if their caretaker is upset, so they always try to be in a happy mood, which makes the zoo a fantastic work experience for everyone!

## What’s Next?

With Eric’s guidance, and the creativity and dedication of every employee, the zoo is working hard to get back on good financial ground. They are encouraging elementary and secondary school groups to visit, and are striving to bring more educational programs to visitors and their children. Currently there are two student interns living and learning at the zoo while earning college credits. This is a program the zoo has had for years but hopes to expand in the future. It’s a win-win situation because the student gets to learn animal care, earn college credits, and live onsite while the zoo gains valuable extra hands to help with all the duties required to run a zoo.

The environment at the zoo is ever-changing and growing. Some animals are here for years, some for just a short time. On occasion an animal is moved to another zoo for mating purposes, sometimes babies are born and occasionally animals are transferred to a home with more room. **Arturo, Steph and Eric hinted at some surprises that will be waiting for us when we return. I am excited to go back in February to see my new friends, the critters and to see what the future holds for this incredible animal sanctuary!**





Armeda (above left) minds one of the refreshment stands at the zoo, Citlaly (center) sells carrots to feed to the deer, and Santa is on hand to wish everyone **Happy Holidays!**



We look forward to sharing this unique, magical place with you. Just one word of advice – if you see a bird like this flying around, don't stand under it!



*Gary Hatt and Shari Nova*

## Then we move on to La Jolla Beach Camp ...

### The Community of Punta Banda and the City of Ensenada By Gary Hatt



A typical Pickup in Mexico

Spending the past few weeks in Mexico reminds me of a simpler time, growing up in a small town in New Hampshire. We lived on a farm, raising chickens, ducks, beef cows, tending to our garden, and living the simple life. Everyone knew one another and everyone was friendly and everyone got along very well. Such is the life in Mexico. Like my little town, people here seem to be a bit more laid back.

The community of Punta Banda, where La Jolla Beach Camp is located, is much like the small town I grew up in. There is only one paved road through the community, all of the side roads are undeveloped. This is

mostly farm country, where you see people beside the road catching small buses, mostly to work on the farms or in factories. Many here do not have cars, those that do, have cars that are much simpler, and mostly older than we drive back home.



Road outside La Jolla Beach Camp.

When we travel into Ensenada, the largest city in the area with a population of 341,000, you will find it to be a very friendly city. Shari and I have walked around downtown several times since we have been here, having lunch and lining up activities for our bus tour. When we walk the streets downtown, we are amazed that when you cross the street, cars instinctively stop for you to give you the right-of-way, waving at you with a smile to cross the street.



Downtown Ensenada near Hussong's Cantina



Just another bar with swings instead of bar stools.

They have very few “walk signals” at the intersections here, when the lights turn red on one street, everyone knows it is safe to cross in the other direction. At some intersections, all lights turn red at the same time. In those cases, you are allowed to cross either way and even diagonally.

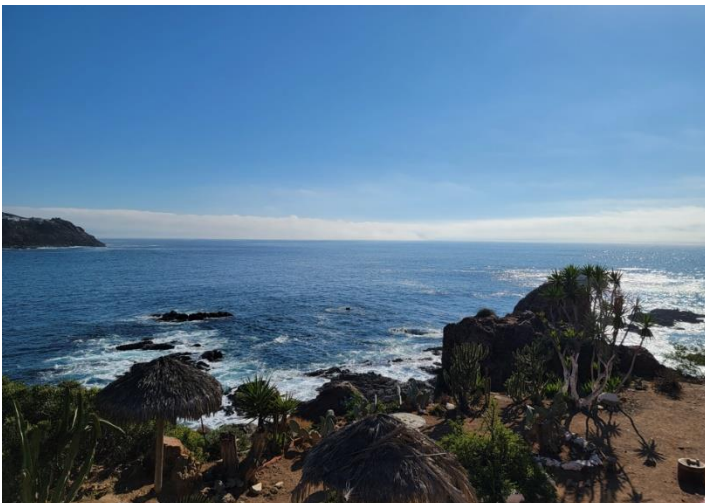
You do not see people staring into their cell phones when crossing the street like you do in the U.S. People here pay attention to where they are going, just like your mother probably taught you when you were growing up. My mother taught me to look both ways before crossing the street. Something seldom seen in the U.S. now.

One night I went to downtown Ensenada alone, after dark, and walked around many of the streets, some very dimly lit. There were a few police officers around, but I saw no crime, nor any disturbances. In SoCal where I have lived for the past few years, you could not go one night without hearing at least gunshot most nights. Here, guns are not allowed. I feel much safer in Mexico. I would not walk in many parts of downtown Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York City after dark, but I feel very comfortable walking around Ensenada as well as San Felipe and Puerto Penasco. I have also walked alone at nights on the streets in Cabo, Puerto Vallarta, and even Mexico City, with a current population of 130 million and have never felt threatened.

Many people have joined the Escapees Mexican Connection for their first trip into Mexico with their RV’s. After traveling with this group, most return on a second adventure to travel to other parts of Mexico. Either at the end of the official caravan or another year. Most people return on their own to travel deeper into Mexico. Once they learn what is required to cross the border in an RV, and how to travel safely in Mexico and how friendly the people are here, they can’t wait to return. Many have even bought RV parking lots, and some have even bought houses to spend winters here. You can buy beach front property here very reasonable compared to in the U.S. and land close to the beach is very reasonable compared to what we see north of the border.

We will have a local real estate person, an expat herself, give a short discussion on buying land in Mexico, at La Jolla Beach Camp for anyone interested. She herself lives in this community. Even if you have no plans to buy land now, you may want to listen to what she says is involved, as maybe later, you may change your mind when you realize how inexpensive it is to live in Mexico upon retirement. Over one million Americans can’t be wrong as they find they enjoy less taxation, more personal freedom, a lower cost of living, a higher quality of life, warmer weather, and a slower pace of life. Once you get here, you will understand why so many Americans chose to retire in Mexico.

The weather near the beach in this area only varies by only a few degrees year-round making it a very comfortable place to live. You can live in this area of Mexico with no air conditioning and very little heat if you wish. You can do the same in places like southern California, but it will cost you many times more. Once you travel with this group to Mexico, you will understand the secret of why so many people decide return here year after year like we do and why so many decide to retire here in one of the many beachfront communities.



The view from the area of La Bufadora.

**You will have a chance to put your hands to work ...**

**Casa Esperanza – The House of Hope**



Every year the Escapees Mexican Connection Wagonmaster chooses a local organization to help. Earlier this year after interviewing a few charities, Phylana Ladd and I (the assistant Wagonmaster at the time) chose Casa Esperanza, a women's shelter and education center, in Maneadero near the La Jolla Beach Camp.



Here's a brief synopsis of this valuable facility.

Gabriel and Gabriela Aguilar will be on hand to greet you. Gabriela (Gabi) has been with this organization for eleven years. She and Gabriel met here, married soon after, and have raised their two children in this loving environment. Her parents live next door and are a great help to this young family.

Gabriela was raised in California, so her English is impeccable and knowledge of this home and organization is thorough. Gabriel provides music and support for all. This isn't just a job for them; it's a way of life!



Currently there are seven moms and twenty children in this facility. Each mom has a room with one or two bunk beds, a small closet, and very few furnishings. These women were accepted to Casa Esperanza through a State-approved process and asked to stay for at least two years - sometimes longer depending on the woman's circumstances.

During her stay each mom is encouraged to get a job. She also receives counselling and health care advice, is supported in getting her GED and learns about money management. Sometimes a young mom needs to learn the most basic and simple skills like cooking, sewing, caring for herself and her children. The residents receive these benefits free of charge with the idea that they will become self-sufficient. As they progress through their development, they are encouraged to start saving money so they can buy a small home of their own before they leave the shelter.

Everyone gets to pitch in and help with the chores around the facility, including kitchen duty, cleaning, yard work, baby sitting and so forth. The common areas are always spotless, the kitchen well-stocked and ready to go and the grounds are kept clean and free of debris.



Gabriela shows Gary the whiteboard hanging in the dining hall where jobs are posted for all the residents.

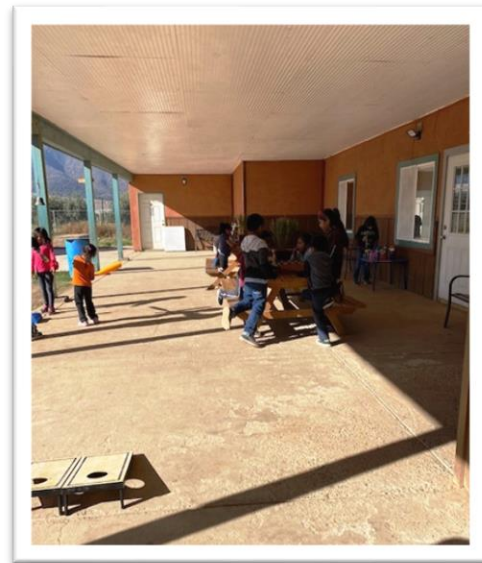
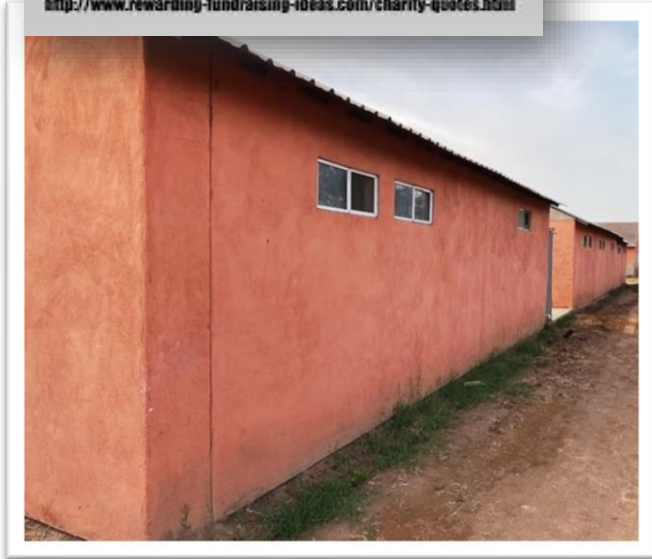
# How can we help?

Saturday, 19 Feb. 2022 will be a very full day. Dress in your old paint clothes, grab breakfast and carpool to the site (maps will be provided for each car). With a full day of work ahead, the day will start at 9:00 a.m. and end around 4:00 pm. Bring water and snacks, but save room for lunch prepared for us by the ladies at Casa Esperanza.

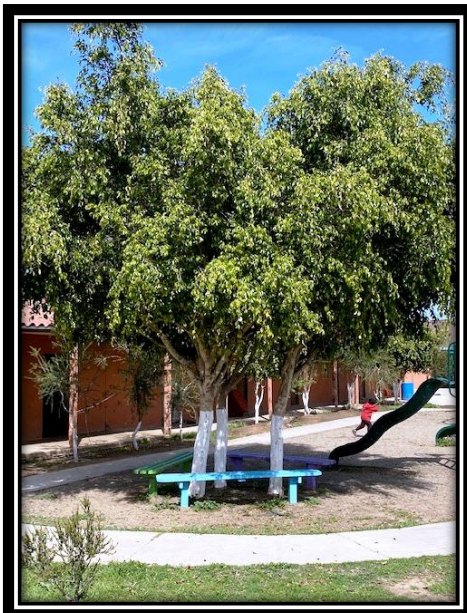
There are several projects we'd like to do, but for now the plan is to paint the exterior walls of most of the buildings.

How beautiful a day can be, when kindness touches it!  
~George Elliston

<http://www.rewarding-fundraising-ideas.com/charity-quotes.html>



There are five buildings to paint, so check in with Gary or Shari to see where you can help.



As I mentioned before, there are a lot of projects we wanted to tackle here at the shelter. **Maybe in the future** we can help build shelving for the library, buy a new refrigerator for the kitchen, repair washing machines, replace toilets in most of the bathrooms; and help make the kindergarten classroom more comfortable by adding an area rug, foam floor coverings and a small vanity with a sink. Fortunately, area churches, a Baja racing team, local hotels, and other organizations help out. Gabi will be the first to tell you how blessed they are, and how much they have grown over the years, thanks to the support of their community.

If you can't join us for the 2022 rally, or are coming on the rally and want to add a little more to your contribution, here is a list of items that can be purchased or brought from home to take to the shelter (Costco, Walmart, Home Depot, are very close):

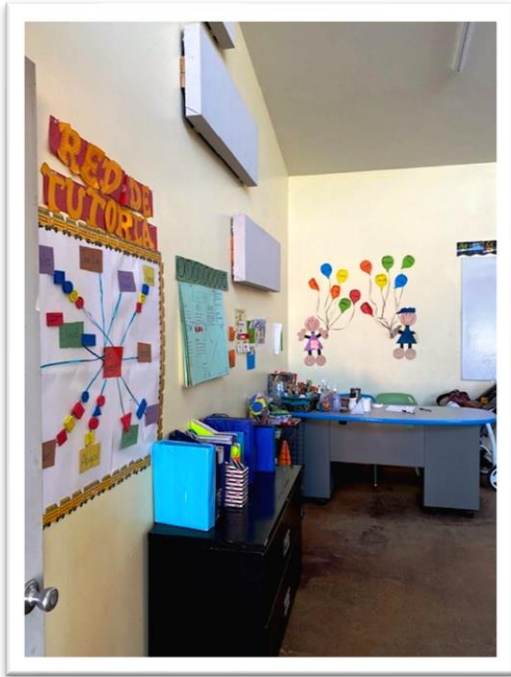
- **Warm Blankets (it gets pretty chilly here at night)**
- Kid's clothing, disposable diapers (sizes 4 & 5)
- Bathroom items: toilet paper, razors, deodorant, soap, lotions, etc.
- Cleaning supplies: powdered laundry soap, Clorox, Pinesol, dish soap, cleaning cloths (like the yellow ones in the picture below), and sponges.



## Helping Now to Help Future Generations

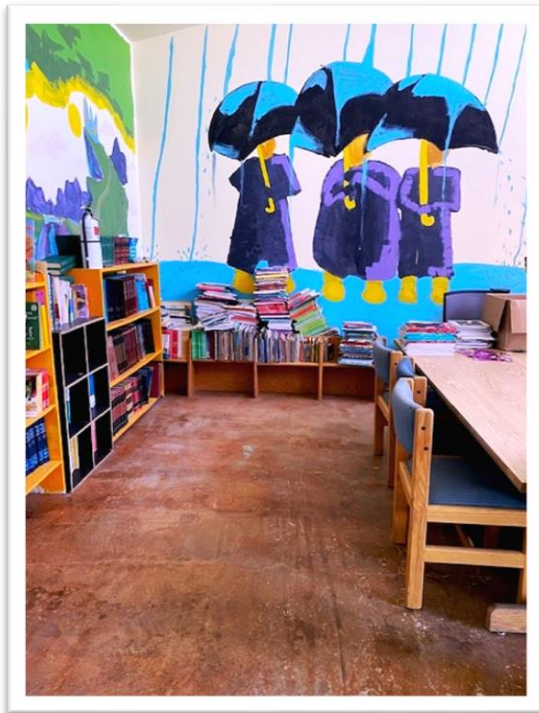


There is a nearly-new school onsite that is currently open to only a few students at a time. The four teachers are always in need of school supplies: **pencil sharpeners**, white board markers and cleaner (Expo), art supplies, paints, brushes (they have enough crayons), foam board for art projects, drawing paper, foam-type construction sheets, **notebooks**, etc.



The classroom on the left is for the first through third graders. Because of COVID restrictions, only two students and a teacher are allowed in a room at a time. Remarkably, they manage to teach 80 students a week, including their own kids and local area children.

The classroom on the right is for the junior high kids. Part of their curriculum is operating a small “tienda” or store, where they sell snack items (on the table in front) while learning how to operate a business. The school provides valuable tools for children to enter the world outside their walls. We even met one of the young teachers who grew up here and has returned to help her unrelated little brothers and sisters grow and prosper.



The school library is growing and changing every time we visit!





Over the past 30+ years, the Escapee Mexican Connection has built a great reputation with the local businesses and communities they visit. Here in Ensenada, we are greeted with warm smiles and a BIENVENIDOS (welcome)! Thanks to your participation in this or other charitable efforts in 2022, we can carry on this rewarding tradition.

We look forward to working with you on this worthwhile project! It will be tiring and fun, but very rewarding!

*Gary Hatt and Shari Nova*

## **Chapter 8 historian Herb Baldwin**

As Chapter 8 Historian (and Membership Chairman) it's always interesting to me to read about what earlier rallies looked like. Over the nearly 40 years of Chapter 8 traveling in Mexico there have been many, many different opportunities offered.

The section below gives us some insight as to the opportunities during the 2012 rally.

"During our 30th anniversary rally to Kino Bay, we traveled with 25 rigs (From Bluebird to VW Eurovan) and 47 campers. Our Caravan consisted of 6 'newbies' who were surrounded by our more experienced travelers.

**During our 17 day rally, we distributed in part: 3 Wheelchairs, 9 Walkers, several canes, about 9 totes full of clothing and a pile of school supplies. Not to forget the 9 soccer balls that made a BIG hit with the young folks.**

**We evaluated several local charities and distributed \$5,000 in cash or we prepaid for services for them. Recipients included: An abused women shelter, a substance abuse facility, a school breakfast program, and a youth sports program.**

During the 17 day rally we had 4 group dinners, a bus trip to Hermosillo, SON, and Happy Hours most afternoons. Several folks availed themselves of kayaking, hiking, 4 Wheeling and other beach related Activities."

# Hear ye! Hear Ye! Calling All



## Members!

Please remember to bring your knick-knacks, gently used items, hobby products, talents (do we have a hairdresser in the house?), artwork, jewelry and anything else you would like to provide for the Auction. No... you can't donate your spouse... but you can contribute a bottle of fine wine, baked goods, RV accessories, tools, and just about anything else you find valuable.

Your donation will be auctioned off at La Jolla Beach Camp Salon on 21 February, 2022 to raise funds for several local charities. Come early, buy often, sip margaritas and help support these worthwhile efforts!

Questions? Contact Shari Nova at [sharinova@gmail.com](mailto:sharinova@gmail.com) or text at (970) 618-1936.

A friendly reminder from the Fall 2011 newsletter ....

**PLEASE REMEMBER ...**

We are all Volunteers in one way or another. And it is the Volunteers that keep a chapter/BOF active, growing, successful and always a lot of fun. If each member just steps up to do a little part, the group can only continue to grow and thrive. We ask each member to volunteer some contribution to the chapter/BOF.....be an officer, chairperson, rally host, helper, greeter, cleaner-upper. We can all contribute something to the chapter/BOF and enjoy the friendships and good times together.

**VOLUNTEERS**

- V aluable is the work you do.
- O utstanding is how you always come through.
- Loyal, sincere and full of cheer,
- U nending are your efforts throughout the year.
- N otable are the contributions you make.
- T rustworthy in every project you take.
- E ager to reach your every goal.
- E ffective in the way you fulfill your role.
- R eady with a smile like a shining star.
- S pecial and wonderful - that's what you are.

SKP Hugs Susie & Denny Or

¡Hola a todos!

Are you getting excited yet??? The 2022 ¡Vamos a Baja! Rally is almost here! A few short weeks from now you will be beginning your journey into Baja! It will be so much fun!

Unfortunately, as you may already know, due to a family situation I needed to resign as the Wagonmaster for the Rally. Thankfully, Shari Nova and Gary Hatt, the elected Assistant Wagonmasters, have stepped up as Co-Wagonmasters. I am most grateful to them both for taking on this challenge, and I know they will put on a wonderful Rally.

I will miss you all, but I feel better knowing that you are in great hands with Shari and Gary.

I wish you a lifetime of memorable experiences as you travel into Baja...it's truly a magical place.

Adios for now. Viajes seguros.

Phylana Ladd  
Former 2022 Wagonmaster

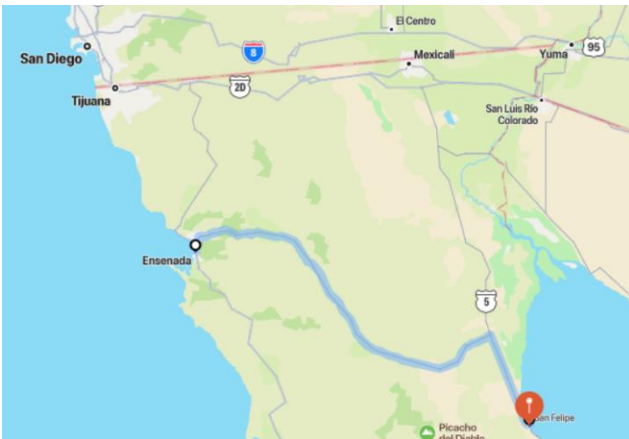
# But Wait ... There's More!

## San Felipe / Puerto Penasco as an Add-on Adventure By Gary Hatt

Picture yourself sitting on the La Jolla beach watching the sun dip behind the nearby hills sipping on a Margarita. The rally ends tomorrow and you feel like you just got started on your Mexican adventure and hate the thought of going back to the U.S. so soon. Happens to everyone who goes on this trip. "What's next?" you ask. How about joining us and heading on over to San Felipe and then to Puerto Penasco?

Very few people turn around and go directly back to the U.S. at the end of the official trip, only those that have previous commitments or have to go to back to work, head back home from here. Everyone else is excited to venture on and see more of what Mexico has to offer.

Here's a sneak preview of what you can expect if you sign up for the San Felipe / Puerto Penasco Add-on trip. BTW, Add-on trips have no daily schedule to adhere to, there are no meetings, and everyone is required to be more relaxed. Daily activities are all on your own, with of course, a little guidance from an unofficial Group Leader who has done this before.



**San Felipe is a little fishing village on the upper western side of the Sea of Cortez.**

We will queue up at La Jolla Beach Camp Friday morning February 25<sup>th</sup> inside the campground, to prepare our departure for San Felipe. We will have a Leader and a Sweep just like we did when we traveled to La Jolla Beach Camp, so no one will be traveling on their own, even though, I have done so myself in Mexico many times. We will travel about 150 miles back up through the city of Ensenada and then turn right and head over the mountain and then through the desert to San Felipe.

The trip will take us about four hours (we don't hurry) with at least two stops along the way to get out and stretch our legs. The road will not be as nice as the road we took down to Ensenada, but by taking our time, it will be relatively easy to navigate. My 1967 40' bus never complains. The roads are similar to many of the roads you have driven on in the U.S. We will be communicating on our CBs as we travel directly to our RV park on the beach in San Felipe and get settled in for a weeklong visit. San Felipe is 153 miles from Ensenada and 118 miles from the U.S. Border



The Malecon in Downtown San Felipe.



San Felipe – A Fishing Town. You can't get fish any fresher than this.

If you were a bit chilly at La Jolla Beach camp, then we have great news for you. San Felipe and Puerto Penasco will average about 10 degrees warmer. Many of the expats that live at La Jolla Beach, spend their winters in San Felipe.

This add-on trip is for those who are curious about smaller, more rural settings but still within an easy day's drive of the U.S. border. We will travel here mainly to relax, eat great food and walk on the beach, and maybe catch up on some reading you picked up at the Book Exchange at La Jolla Beach Camp. You can walk the entire Malecon and downtown area in less than an hour. It is a small town. And yes, we will eat a lot of seafood, chicken, and steak. Which I believe tastes better than you can get in the U.S. as it is mostly free range.

If you want to stay close to the border, then this is the Add-on trip for you. For this entire trip, to San Felipe and on to Puerto Penasco we will never be more than about 125 miles from the U.S. border, making it only about a two-hour drive back to the border at any time. Roads from San Felipe and Puerto Penasco to the U.S. border are at least as good as the road we took to get to Ensenada so it is an easy drive and both borders are easy to cross in an RV.

San Felipe has a population of about 17,000, but increases by about 5,000 people as the Americans and Canadians migrate south for the winter. There is an entire expat community called Eldorado Ranch which consists of 35,000 acres located on the beach seven miles north of town. We will probably visit there on the weekend to attend their Swap Meet. While walking around downtown San Felipe, it is very common to hear Americans speaking at the local restaurants. There are several restaurants, many gift shops, and a couple of nice hotels in the downtown area.

Phylana's Favorite Local Eatery.

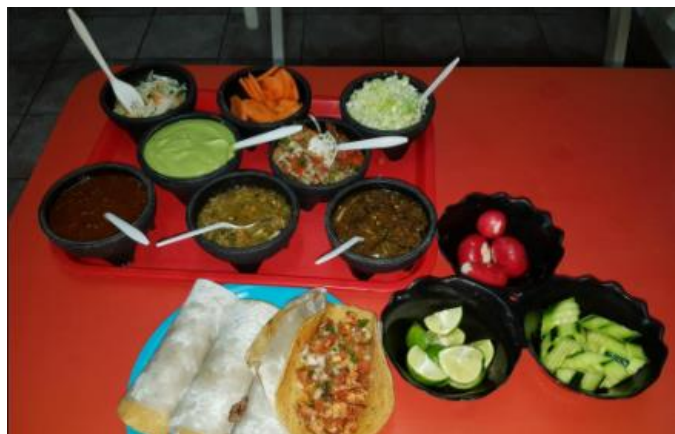
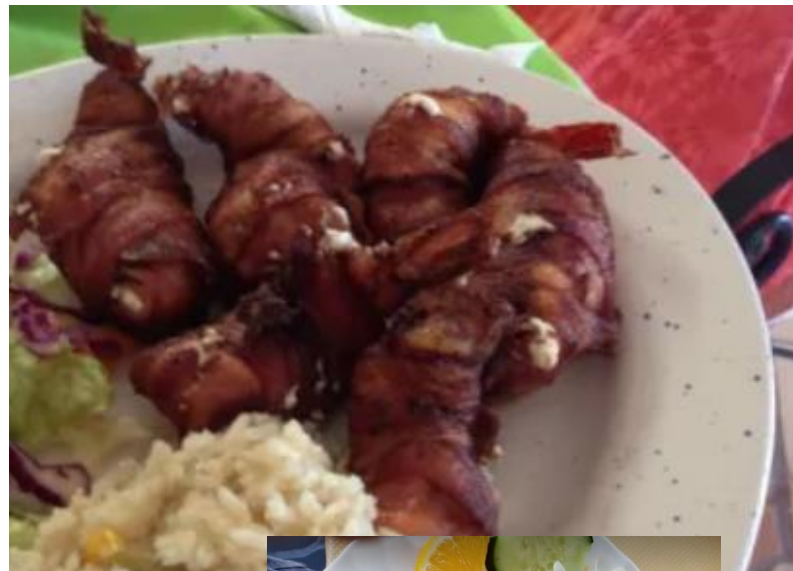


Phylana Ladd is about to dig into this steaming Molcajete (fish stew) from her favorite restaurant in San Felipe.

Bacon Wrapped Shrimp. One of my favorites and the shrimp is basically fat free.



Shrimp Tacos with beans and rice. A favorite lunch in San Felipe.



Add your own toppings and munch on a radish.

Everything here is fresh.

One of my favorites, Garlic Shrimp. Yummy.





Typical Kitchen in a local open-air restaurant. Nothing fancy.



We frequently all meet up for Lunch. Here we are at Pete's Camp, awaiting our sea food and burgers.

The Valley of the Giants is just a few miles south of San Felipe. Here you will see some of the largest and oldest cactus ever. We will still have our orange travel stickers on our cars so people will know we are traveling together.





“Oh Ship Dip” is only a few miles from the Valley of the Giants. It is fun to see how fast you can go and still remain in the seat of your RV.



Puertecitos Sulpher Hot Springs about an hour south of San Felipe.

Our Add-on trips are a little less structured as nothing is officially planned. Each day we may break into small groups to tour the area and some days, maybe just stay in camp and relax. At 5:00 we usually meet at the campsite or someplace in town for dinner to discuss what everyone did during the day and to enjoy an adult beverage.



Tecate, the beverage of choice for many beer drinkers in Mexico.



Happy Hour on the Beach. Discussing our days' events.

**Puerto Penasco a.k.a. Rocky Point is a little fishing village on the upper eastern side of the Sea of Cortez.**

After spending a week in San Felipe, we will head on over to Puerto Penasco for another week of camping on the beach on the opposite side of the Sea of Cortez, before we convoy back to the U.S. As a crow flies, it is only about 50 miles from San Felipe. However, traveling by car or RV, it will take us a bit longer. We will again leave in the morning and travel about 256 miles in about six hours with a few breaks along the way to get out and stretch our legs. If anyone needs to stop along the way for anything, that is what our CBs are for. We will all stop together.



The road is very nice with the exception of a few miles of slightly rough spots through the small towns along the way. If at this time, anyone wants to scoot back to the U.S. we will provide maps to get back across the Mexicali border, which is an easy crossing through Mexicali to get back into Arizona as it is only about 15 miles from our turnoff to Puerto Penasco.

Puerto Penasco, also called Rocky Point, as you will see by the large rocks around the Malecon, is another small fishing village located 62 miles from the U.S. border. The road back to the border through Sonoyta, is in excellent condition, and pretty much a straight shot all the way. This is one of the best roads you will find in Mexico. Crossing the border to get back to the U.S. is one of the simplest and quickest border crossings there is.

Puerto Penasco claims a population of about 62,000, making it a city between the size of Ensenada and San Felipe. This area has been nicknamed “Arizona Beach” as it is the closest ocean beach to cities in Phoenix, Tucson, and Yuma. You will see many Arizona license plates here and many Arizonians leave their RVs parked on the beach year-round, or store them here and have them set up before they arrive and put away back in storage after they leave. Several expats live here and it is said that you can live on \$400/month in a small apartment or in an RV in this small sleepy town, which explains why so many retirees from both the U.S. and Canada love this town.

We will explore the city and the surrounding area, enjoying lunches and dinners in the area. Or if you wish, there are frequently people with shrimp and other fish in coolers that wander through the campgrounds selling their fresh catch of the day that you can cook your own in camp, or freeze and take back home.



Rocky Point Beach. It is not all rocks.



The Malecon area is quite charming with many restaurants and gift shops.



No pressure shopping. Many gifts are “Almost Free”.

We will eat at restaurants like Al Capones, that have great seafood, or we may get Wrecked at the Reef, or even dine in a restaurant on the hill with a view overlooking the entire town.



Al Capones Restaurant. Downtown.



Wrecked at the Reef restaurant. On the outskirts of town.



El Capitan. A restaurant on the hill with a view of the entire city.



Puerto Penasco beach bars are just plain fun.



Typical Fish dinner.



Al Capones Fish Taco.



Fish and Chips. An all-time favorite.

Ceviche – A Healthy Choice and one of my favorite lunches.



If you like fun drinks, you can get them at Rocky Point.



If you are interested in joining us for this particular Add-on excursion to San Felipe and onto Puerto Penasco, we will soon be emailing you the information about the RV parks we will be staying at. To guarantee you secure a place to stay when we arrive in San Felipe and in Puerto Penasco, you will need to contact the RV parks we will be mentioning in each of those cities to make your reservations ASAP. Tell them you are with the Escapees Mexican Connection group when you make your reservations. We will send you all the information you will need to make your reservations in the next couple of weeks.

You can of course, decide at the last minute at La Jolla Beach Camp, which Add-on trip you want to go on, but you may have to camp in a different RV park than the rest of the group in these two cities as capacity at these parks is limited and Americans and Canadians will be flocking down here soon taking up the good spaces. If this happens, we can help you with finding a park in each city and you can join us for lunches and Happy Hour in the evenings if you wish.

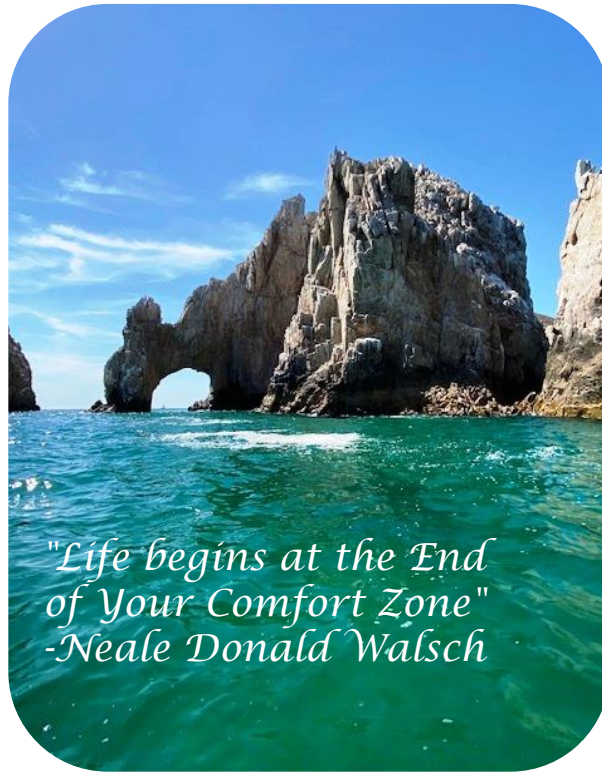
The add-on trips are not associated with Escapees Chapter 8 Mexican Connection in any way, so all camping fees, food, gas and supplies will be your responsibility. We will have more details and costs available soon. But bottom line, you will discover that staying in Mexico is generally less expensive than staying in an RV park in the states.

If you have any questions about this Add-on trip, contact me at [Gary@BusConversionMagazine.com](mailto:Gary@BusConversionMagazine.com)

## Or Maybe You Would Like This ...

### Post Rally Add-On Trips

By Shari Nova



Picture yourself sitting on the La Jolla beach watching the sun dip behind the nearby hills. The rally ends tomorrow and you feel like you just got started on your big adventure. "What's next?" you ask. How about taking one of the three add-on trips? Right now is the best time to start thinking about these bonus adventures and here is a little information to whet your appetite:



#### Let's Go To Guerrero Negro, Mulegé and Beyond!

The ultimate Baja adventures await you when you go to Baja Sur with Paul and Vicki Kinard. These experienced leaders have been to Baja many times and know how to find the best beaches, sea captains, restaurants and fun! In 2020 they were with a Mexican Connection add-on trip that spent nearly a month touring the Pacific Coast near Guerrero Negro, and the magic of the Sea of Cortez near the quaint village of Mulegé (moo-lah-Hay).



February and March are good times to visit Guerrero Negro and Ojo de Liebre Lagoon (formerly known as Scammon's Lagoon) because the protected bay becomes a temporary home to mama gray whales and their babies. The high salt content makes the whale bodies more buoyant and the warm, shallow water creates the perfect nursery for these giants.



This lagoon is within the Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the largest commercial salt-producing plants in the world.







Whale watching is mesmerizing, but actually getting to touch one of these big, lovable animals is very exciting! A tour can cost \$50 or more, depending on the number of people in the boat. You start early and stay out for a good part of the day, so grab your galoshes and warm, waterproof gear, some water and snacks and head out to sea. It is a life-changing experience!

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After you've eaten your fill of seafood, kissed the whales and had enough of Mario's flan, you will head across the peninsula to Mulegé, a tropical oasis at the edge of the desert on the Sea of Cortez.



Mulegé is a robust Mexican village with good restaurants, a bakery, small tiendas filled with colorful clothing and art, places to book fishing and diving tours, and lots of friendly people. You can find an ATM (although it sometimes runs out of money); small grocery stores, and a large, gas station is located on the southern edge of town so you can stock up before you head to camp along Bahía Concepción.

About 12 miles south of Mulegé, along the Bahía Concepción, you will behold some of the most beautiful water and beaches in all of Baja Sur. This bay is roughly 20 miles long and hosts five different RV camping areas and coves. One of Vicki and Paul's favorites is Playa Santispac.



Playa Santispac, on the north end of the Bay, is a very popular campground because the well-packed, sandy access road is short and easy. The camping area is large, well-maintained and secure. It can be quite busy during Semana Santa (Holy Week is April 10-16, 2022), but usually not too crowded during February and March. Two on-site restaurants offer food and beverages. For those who like to grill their own dinners, local vendors will show up on the beach selling shrimp, fish, bakery items, clothing, art, jewelry, fruit and vegetables. Like many places in Baja, you can also get water and propane delivered, or contract with one of the locals for a panga tour of the islands (highly recommended), rent a kayak or get your coach washed and waxed. The local residents are very eager to please and appreciate your patronization.

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One other option is to go with me to **Bahía de Los Angeles**. My friend, Christy Grieff (pictured above), joined Phylana Ladd and me for a few days of kayaking and exploring back in February 2021. Bahía de Los Angeles (Bay of Angels) is one of my favorite spots in Baja. According to Mike and Terri Church, authors of *Traveler's Guide to Camping Mexico's Baja*:

*Bahía de Los Angeles is beautiful; you'll want to see it. The bright blue bay and string of islands offshore are a real spectacle as you approach on the highway.*

*The huge bay is protected by a chain of small islands, and also by Isla Angel de la Guarda, which is 45 miles (75 km) long.*

We will head south either via Hwy 1 to Cataviña, or over to San Felipe and down Hwy 5. Either way you will get to navigate the slender, and often pot-holed, roads of Mexico. We will travel slowly (it will take a few days), carefully and give everyone enough time to explore along the way.



Cataviña has some very unusual rock formations and miles of desert with interesting plants. If we come this way, there is a campground in the middle of this interesting landscape that we can stay at for a day or two.



On the left is one of the beaches, south of San Felipe, that we stayed at on our way to LA Bay. The next day we pulled into Daggett's, one of the small, but comfortable campos near the beach.



This protected cove offers solitude, gentle waters, breathtaking views and small-town hospitality. Make sure your pantry is filled, your propane tank full and your mind is wide open. There are no ATMs in town, and as I remember, the only gas station in town required cash, so make sure you have some bank stashed away.



While we are there, I hope to camp at Campo Archelon for a few days or a week. This small, but unique campground features palapas, rental cabins, spaces for small campers (under 25'), clean restrooms and a fantastic café. Earlier this year it cost about 200 pesos (~\$10) per night.

Campo Archelon was founded by marine biologist Antonio Resendiz, and run as a sea turtle research facility. The research has since stopped, but his son still runs the campo and café.

Ecotourism and nature education are important aspects of this tiny community. We will visit the local museum, hike in the hills and maybe even have a **surprise visitor** show up around the campfire. I confess, I only spent a few days at Bahía de Los Angeles, but look forward to exploring more with you next February!

*Shari Nova* [sharinova@gmail.com](mailto:sharinova@gmail.com)

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**Please Note:** The add-on trips are not associated with Escapees Chapter 8 Mexican Connection in any way, so all camping fees, food, gas and supplies will be your responsibility. We will have more details and costs available as the rally date draws near.

## **Chapter 8 historian Herb Baldwin**

Here's an excerpt from Charlie Boles (2013 Chapter 8 President) newsletter article to the membership in the Spring 2013 newsletter. It really seems to wrap up the feeling after participating in a Chapter 8 rally. If you're still thinking about whether or not the Chapter 8 rally could be for you, hopefully this will help you to make your decision to join us!

"We just arrived back in the USA from San Felipe. Dawn & I now call San Felipe our second home. We were introduced to Chapter 8, seeing it as the cheapest way to go to Mexico. The more I learned about Chapter 8 the more I said, "What a concept". Experienced travelers volunteering to help first time travelers visit Mexico, have fun and offer charity to those needing help due to conditions beyond their control. Our first trip was to Kino Bay Sonora MX. It was so easy and safe. Chapter 8 makes traveling to Mexico for the first time, comfortable, safe and easy. What a nice thing to do, take others to Mexico, show them how wonderful the people of Mexico are, and that most of Mexico is as safe as small town U.S.A. We really liked the whole concept and said we can do that and we did."



**Are you excited NOW!  
Gary & Shari  
are looking forward to  
seeing you at  
Portero Park on Feb 9!!!**