

DAY TRIPPER'S GUIDE TO TIJUANA



By Sam Warren

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Day-trippers Guide to Tijuana

You're an idiot if you don't visit TJ. For the price of a trolley ticket you can visit an exotic foreign country. The city has grown from a small border town with a salacious reputation during the Prohibition Era to a modern city. Some people still think that TJ is a sleazy border town full of bars, drug cartels and prostitutes.

But the Tijuana area 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. TJ is a very gringo-friendly and the police are there to make sure you have a safe and pleasant stay.

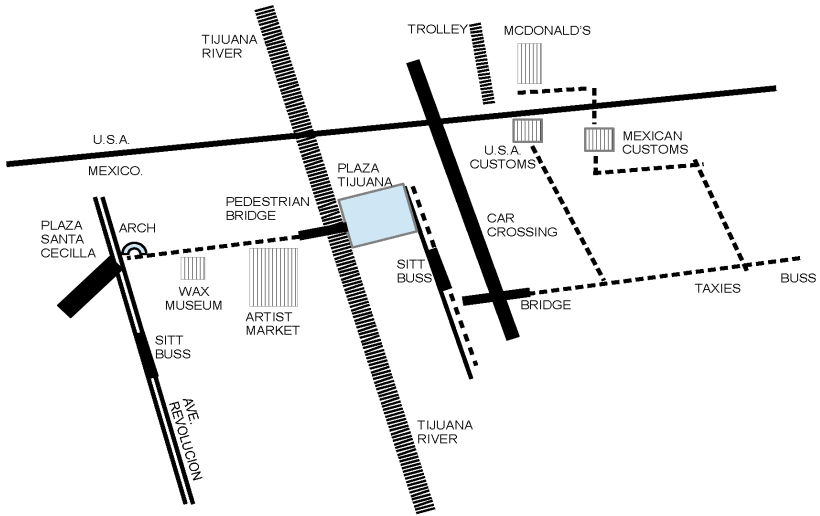
There are some tours by bus that will show your parts of the city. However, they are expensive and they all leave out some of the most interesting places to visit. By following this guide book, you can be your own tour director. Or you could even hire me and get to see the real city.

Rate of Exchange

Due to Mexican inflation, the rate of exchange keeps creeping up and down. As of December 1st, the rate is 18.5 pesos to the dollar. However, everyone except the government takes dollars and the price in dollars usually stays the same. You can exchange your dollars for pesos at the border and at exchange houses everywhere inside.

A quick way to get a close estimate of the exchange is to move the decimal point one step to the left and then divide in half. This will be a little less than the correct amount.

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.

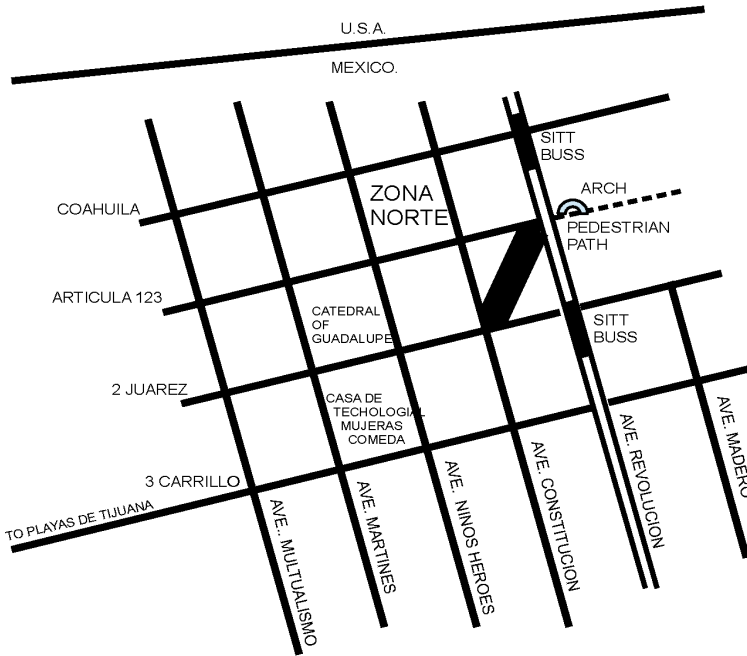
Entering Tijuana

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 \$8 for 8 hours. Just drive to the border and turn left after the Jack-in-the-Box.

To enter TJ, at the end of the trolley line, walk pass McDonald's, turn left, and follow the crowd. When you enter customs, unless you have brown skin, go in the line marked for foreign visitors and apply for a free visa for less than seven days. You will need a passport or passport card to enter back into the U.S.

Follow the crowd and cross the street to the place where all the taxis, vans, and buses, are. To go downtown (*El Centro*) don't pay more than 50 pesos (\$3 or \$4) for a taxi. Or you can catch one of the buses or vans for 10 pesos. 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 have the Uber icon on your cell phone, you can have an Uber driver take your where ever you want for a little less. You even have the option of asking for an English speaking driver.



Walking

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) and 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 across the pedestrian bridge over the TJ river. Or just catch the SITT for 15 pesos.

The Pedestrian Path

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.

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

Ave. Revolución is the main tourist area. I would recommend starting my adventure at the large silver arch. To the left is the Plaza Santa Cecilia.

Plaza Santa Cecilia

A diagonal plaza that cuts between Ave. Revolución and First Street across from the Arch to Third Street and Ave. Constitution. It is a hangout for Mariachi bands and often has live entertainment sponsored by the city, especially on week ends.

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 you who don't go for Mexican food.

Cafe Museu

This seafood restaurant/bar is located near the arch across the street from the Plaza. It's my favorite bar as they have draft beer for 25 pesos and a friendly staff. Say "Hi" to the managers for me, Leo and Louis. Inside is a collection of 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 Caesar 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.

Craft Beer

For a selection of Tijuana craft beer downtown, try the Mamut Brewing Co. on Third Street between Avenue Revolución and Constitución Avenues. If you look on your left you will see a building with a bell tower. Below you will see a passage leading into the brewery.

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.

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,

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

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.

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. It is full of bars, night clubs, restaurants, street food carts, a church, and hotels that rent by the hour. It is a block to the right on Calle Coahuila and is also called the Coahuila.

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

It is located inside the Zona Norte starting between First Street and Calle Coahuila 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.

Tijuana Parks

Day Tripping to Parque Morelas

Are you wanting to take a nearby, inexpensive day trip for your family and you are running out of places to go? Have you been there and done everything? I bet you haven't been to Tijuana's Parque Morelas. I find it bigger, better and more exciting than our own Balboa Park with much more to offer than just a few museums.

It is located about 10 miles east of the San Ysidro border crossing on Blvd. Insurgentes. However, I find it much easier, especially if you have a family or group, to just call and have an Uber driver take you there for about five dollars. Except for Mondays, the park is open from 6 to 8 pm.

Now for all the fun parts. The zoo is nothing to compare with San Diego famous zoo but you will love the lake with all the waterfowl and paddle boat rentals. For something more strenuous there are the water park, pain ball court, and a skateboard park. The traditional style amusement park even has a cable slide between two towers. There are also a number of events you can find by checking with Google. With all the different food stands and carts you won't starve. But sorry, no drinking.

Parque Teniente Guerrero

This beautiful city park has well maintained lawns, shaded walkways, a playground, fountain and a gazebo. It also has a library and many food carts. You will see children playing and old men sitting on park benches reading their newspaper. It is within walking distance on Third Street five blocks from the Ave. Revolución tourist area.

The park was dedicated to Lieutenant Miguel Guerrero, a soldier who died defended Tijuana from an invasion, believe it or not, from San Diego, to try to establish the Republic of Baja California. The Battle of Tijuana was fought on May 8 and 9, 1911, with a force of about 300 invaders from San Diego and other parts of California. Many people from San Diego camped on the nearby hillsides to watch the battle. The occupation lasted only 44 days and was financed by selling post cards to visiting tourist and supplying them with the usual vices.

I bet they didn't teach you that in school.

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.

Tour Guide

I am the author of a number of book including *Having Fun in Tijuana* and *Baja by Night*. (both out of print). My rates for being a personal tour guide are very reasonable and negotiable as I enjoy showing people around. I live in Tijuana so I would have to meet

you at the border. My website is <http://bookwarren.com>; my email is sambookwarren@gmail.com: and my phone number which also rings in Mexico is (616) 635-8657.

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 can be contacted by going to: <http://meetup.com>. Then you can search for those groups. Some of them are TJ Walking Tours, Everything Baja (great group of young singles wanting to do the ritz in TJ), Baja Culuristas, TJ Makes Me Happy, and TJ Food And Beer, Tengo Hambre, and there is even Tijuana Tea for tea fanciers.

The Hungry Hikers are a small group of gringos from San Diego who walk across the border once a month 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. 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.

Soriana Supermarket

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. There is one also on Ave. Revolución.

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.

Cinépolis: 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.

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>.

Plaza Fiesta / Zapato

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 tourist who usually go past it to Rosarito Beach and it is where the locals and ex-pats 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 from 100 to 120 pesos (about 5 to 6 dollars) from the border but you can catch a local bus on Third Street just after Ave. Niños Herós for only 10 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.

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 the 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 get 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.

Miscellaneous

Medical Tourism

May 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. They are building a large hospital to cater to tourist.

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.

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

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

Guadalupe Valley Wine Country

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

