

### Explore Ashore

**Mountain Mule Trip:** For a 4- to 10-day excursion, visit the lakes and meadows up in the Sierra de la Laguna. Your group and a guide take a van from La Paz or Los Cabos up into the foothills, then a 4-wheel drive to La Reforma, Miraflores or one of several rustic ranchos still in operation high in the rugged mountains. Then you travel by horseback with a pack-mule carrying the gear to the pristine lakes and meadows tucked between Cerro Picacho (Peaked), Cerros Candeleros (Candlesticks) and Cerros Chuparosas (Hummingbirds).

**Scout by Ferry:** Mazatlán or Topolobampo (near Copper Canyon) are only a quick ferry ride away, much faster than bringing your own boat across the Sea of Cortez. To and from both locations, Baja Ferries operates the passenger-only ferry and a separate ferry for cars, boats on trailers, RVs, cargo trucks and passengers. We booked a 2-bunk air-conditioned cabina with private head for the 15-knot overnight voyage to Mazatlán; restaurant and cafeteria on board. Buy passenger ferry tickets at least a week in advance, even earlier for boats on trailers, both from Baja Ferries (800) 884-3107. They work with Native Trails tours in Texas for train excursions into the Copper Canyon.

***Farmers visit all the marinas with truckloads of fresh fruits, veggies, eggs, homemade cheeses and tortillas. Place your order, and they'll bring it next week.***



## *Islas Espiritu Santos*



*The islands are an easy day sail from La Paz.*

## **Islas Espiritu Santos**

Satellite imagery gives us the only accurate view of the spectacular geography of Isla Espiritu Santos and Isla Partida – referred to jointly as Islas Espiritu Santos. We're grateful to SEMARNAT and CONANP rangers and guides who aided our research and filled us in on all the tiny indents, anchorages and history of these islands – so we can share their local knowledge with our fellow yatistas.

N of the San Lorenzo Channel, the 2,000' high, 7.75-mile long island of Espiritu Santo (Holy Spirit) is joined at Partida Cove to the 3.5-mile long 1,099' high Isla Partida (Parted). The tiny Los Islotes lie half a mile N of Partida. Together they form a wonderful 12-mile yatista paradise within 20 miles of La Paz harbor.

We'll look at all 28 coves, anchorages and points of interest on both sides. On the W side, 8 coves have overnight anchoring potential for coastal cruising craft. All are open to W and SW wind, but some have a portion sheltered from S wind. All are delights for smaller boats, multihulls, dinghies, kayaks and divers.

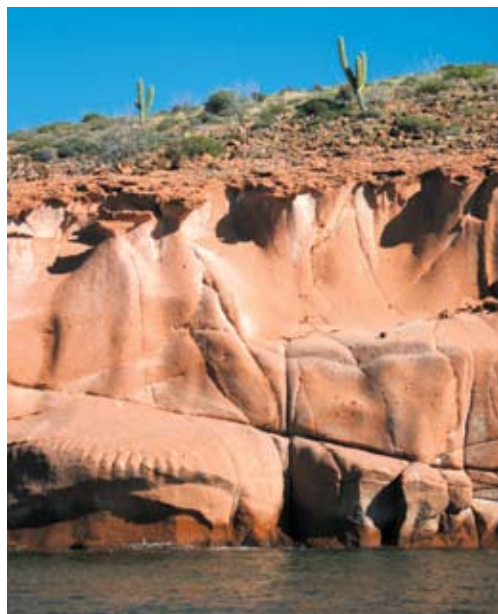
# Mexico Boating Guide



We'll start SE and circumnavigate the islands:

**Playa Ayla** is the open bight at the island's very S end, between low sandy Punta Lupona and a small detached ledge off the larger Punta la Dispensa (Exemption). Multihulls swing over the N shoal and E side, but we found 19' off the W side at our GPS position 24°24.085'N, 110°20.309'W. The shallows SE of Punta Lupona extend about a mile to Suwanee Rock shoals.

**Las Navajas** (Razors) is the tiny beach immediately N of the rounded tip of Punta la Dispensa and below a landmark eroded



*Spectacular geology of the W side coves includes red sandstone sculpted into fantastic shapes.*

lava cone. The pinkish stone is volcanic ash called "estufa." In calm conditions you could anchor a dinghy in the rocks off the beach or swim S from La Dispensa.

**La Dispensa Cove** immediately N of the Las Navajas is shoal at the back but has about 10' of water on a line between Punta la Dispensa and Punta Colorado, the next butte-like point N. The narrow draw NE of the beach is pretty and often green with cactus.

## Bahia San Gabriel

Widest cove (but not largest anchorage) on the islands, the startlingly white beach at the head of San Gabriel Cove runs almost mile in a straight line NW to SE. Behind the berm, a seasonal lagoon meanders NE. A foot trail from the E end of the main beach crosses the island to Playa Bonanza. On each end of the main beach, 2 tiny side lobes have curved beaches, each with a snorkeling reef. Remnants of La Paz's historic pearl farms are preserved in the N lobe.

We've anchored here in 14' at 24°24.86'N, 110°21.02'W. Multihulls can cozy onto the vast turquoise shelf, but anchoring depths of 10' to 15' are out so far they lack sheltered from NW wind.

**El Erizosa** is a V-shaped indent between 2 ridges on the N flank of Punta Prieta, which itself points almost due S. Erizosa means Bristled Sea Urchin.

**El Empachado** (clogged) is the next indent N, and its campsites, trail, beach and snorkeling rocks are ideal for kayakers.

**Ensenada la Gallina** (hen) is the more S of 3 finger coves that cut almost a third of the way across the width of the island. Gallina Cove is N of Punta Gallina and SE of Isla Gallina. Gallina cove has no beach at its head, but it's good for multihulls,

## 8 La Paz & Islas Espiritu Santos



# Mexico Boating Guide



*Aerial shows Partida, Candelerero and Isla Ballena.*

kayaks and snorkelers – not an anchorage for cruising boats.

**Isla Gallina** is the tiniest of the 3 islands off the W side of Espíritu Santo, great for fishing and snorkeling.

**Ensenada el Gallo** (rooster) is next N of Punta Gallina, S of Punta Gallo. Playa Gallo is a tiny white beach and campsite on the NE side of Punta Gallo.

Although Gallo Cove is mostly shoal, a 15' anchoring hole is found just S of the tip of Punta de la Raza, the next dividing finger of land N, where minimal protection from N wind is found.

**Isla Gallo** (just off Punta de la Raza) is larger and closer to shore than is Gallina, but there's passage depth on all sides. You can anchor in fairly deep water close off the higher S side of Isla Gallo, and pangueros placed an eye ashore.

**Ensenada de la Raza** is the N of the 3 finger coves and offers better anchorage, framed by Punta de la Raza to the S and Punta Ballena to the N. Good anchorage is found in 9' to 15' under the lee of Punta Ballena. Above the turquoise shoal head



of La Raza Cove, the highest ground of the island rises to the NE.

**Isla Ballena** (24°28.96'N, 110°23.92'W) is the largest of the 3 islets, distinctly tilted up on its S side. A nav light tower is visible on its SW tip, as are rock off its E side.

In N wind, we found ample protection in the large anchorage area off the SE side of the island in 23' to 28' over sand. In a Corumuel or S, you could anchor in deeper water off the NW tip.

Indents on the N and W sides of Isla Ballena have good snorkeling in calm conditions, and an old military vessel was recently sunk in 65' to attract more fish and for wreck diving. One of the underwater caves has a dry air-pocket cave inside the island – like Jonah in the whale's belly. In the deep rocks NE of Ballena Island, you might catch tasty cabrilla and winter yellowtail.

**Caleta Ballena** is the small squarish cove directly opposite Isla Ballena. (Historically, this was called Puerto Ballena, according to the naturalist guides and local fishermen.) Caleta Ballena has major historic significance and a pretty beach called Playa Ballena where pangas deposit tourists. The straight valley behind it rises gently and almost crosses the island, where its E end is surrounded in 2,000' peaks.

The only place to anchor (marginal) in 15' to 18' of water is almost outside the 2 bladelike headlands, so you may be better off S of Isla Ballena.

**Calaveritas & Manglecito** are 2 tiny deepwater clefts immediately N of Caleta Ballena, and in the N one you'll find a small rock jetty for landing folks from a panga or dinghy, and a trail goes up the draw to a campsite.

*Candelerero Reef (left) offers great snorkeling for novice off the beach and for advanced around the Candlestick in deeper water.*

## 8 La Paz & Islas Espiritu Santos

**Caleta el Candelero** is easy identified by a strikingly layered ridge on its high N wall and by its landmark candlestick rock out in the middle of the cove. A rock reef (primo snorkeling) running NE divides the cove's pretty beaches.

Behind the N beach a trail leads to a well, natural rock amphitheater, dry waterfalls, caves and hanging fig trees pollinated by a bee specie unique to these islands. Another trail over the central ridge connects to the S beach. Kayak groups camp overnight behind both beaches.

In a strong NW blow, we've anchor in 18' to 25' off the N wall where our GPS position was 24°30.451'N, 110°23.334'W. In calm conditions you can anchor S of here down to W of the candlestick. We found 26' in the middle of the S half of this cove, and a 13' spot of clear sand just N of the middle of the reef – which might be useful in a Corumuel.

**El Mezteño** is the slot between Candelero and Partida, useful for its very well sheltered dinghy beach. A trail leads to an overlook of Partida Cove.

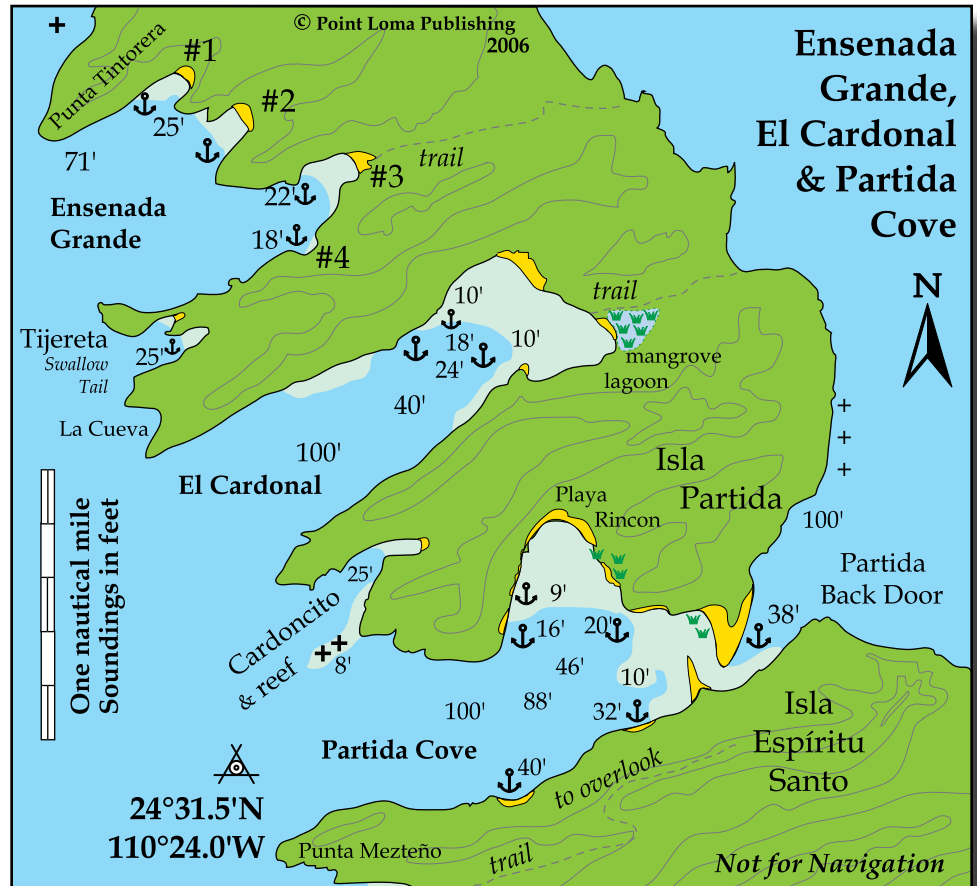
### Partida Cove

connects the islands. Its W opening forms a huge L-shaped cove with good shelter from all directions. A quarter-mile sandbar prevents boats from sailing through, but most dinghies can ford the meandering tidal channel at high tide. (We'll look at Partida Back Door anchorage on the E side below.) Panguero fishing shacks cover the tiny ledge on the port corner of the N lobe and part of the sandbar along with a few park campsites.

Red lava boulders dotted with green cordon circle the white beaches and turquoise shoals - spectacular.

The only time Cruising World magazine had Partida Cove on their cover, it was Pat's photo. Partida's E end and NE lobe form a vast shelf (3' to 6' sand and shell) ideal for multis, but the rest is deeper.

Our favorite large spots in N to NW wind are (a.) S of the N lobe shoal and W of the fish-shack ledge, in anywhere from 9' to 36' of water (our GPS



position 24°31.95'N, 110°22.91'W), or (b.) W of the shoaly sandbar, in 13' to 20' of water. We've also anchored in 2 spots off the S wall; in N wind about 32' W of the sandbar, and in E wind in about 40' of water farther W off a rock shingle.

On N approach or departure, avoid Cardoncito Reef, line of rocks running a quarter mile ESE off the tip between Partida and El Cardoncito. This is a popular scuba spot, so look for divers.

**El Cardoncito** (little cardon cactus) is a great dinghy excursion from adjacent anchorages in calm

*Isla Ballena has caves.*



# Mexico Boating Guide



weather. Steep cliffs shelter the narrow slot (not an anchorage), so the pretty beach is an easy landing. A grove of trees shades some campsites, and a trail leads to an old well (not potable). This beach is a handy rest spot when diving Cardoncito Reef.

**El Cardonal** (cardon grove) cuts deeper E-W across the island than does Partida Cove, and Cardonal (pronounced “kahr-doh-NAHL) is larger if you include its shallow-draft shelf – which consumes the NE third of the cove. All the rest of us can anchor almost anywhere in the middle third of the cove, E of the shelf in 10’ to 36’ over sand. We anchor in 25’ at our GPS position 24°33’N, 110°23.3’W. This still has good N and S shelter.

The beautiful NE beach is in a bowl of hillside similar to Partida’s N lobe, but behind the S beach is a seasonal lagoon with mangroves and trail over to the E side of the island. Some years, mosquitoes are pesky at sunset if the wind’s gone.

**Caleta Tijereta** (swallow-tail frigate bird) is a small 2-headed or swallow-tail cove immediately S of Ensenada Grande. Pangueros pull up onto the tiny



*Gorilla Rock is fun for kids to spot.*

N beach, and one cruising boater reported anchoring the S slot in calm conditions, bow and stern, in 25’ over sand. It looks like a good dinghy excursion from Ensenada Grande.

**Ensenada Grande** or Big Cove is 4 coves in one. 3 obvious anchoring coves fan across the NE end of this bay: #1 small, #2 medium and #3 large from E to W. All 3 are open to the SW.

When anchored in about 20’ of water off #1 and #2, some swell can come around Punta Tintorero to the NW and you can see your neighbors. A picnic palapa on #2 beach is for day use only.

The largest cove #3 is farthest E, has more privacy, better swell shelter, and you can get further in to anchor in 15’ to 38’ over sand. The larger #3 beach is where day tour boats from La Paz bring tourists to hike the maintained trail to the island’s E side. If you want to know if the N wind is still blowing, but don’t want to up anchor and poke your nose out, you might hike across to Playa Mullecitos to see for yourself.

The smallest spot at Ensenada Grande is #4, a rectangular niche out of the S wall of #3, where one boat can swing in 20’ over sand.

**El Embudo** (Funnel) on the NE end of Isla Partida is too tight for ocean-going yachters and subject to N swell. But it’s useful as a dinghy beach and snorkeling spot in calm conditions or a rest stop for kayakers or dinghies going out to Los Islotes.

**Los Islotes** (Islets) lie about half a mile NNW of the N tip of Partida Island. 2 white-washed pinnacles rise 50’ high from depths of at least 75’ – so this is a good place to drift, rather than anchor, while watching the sea lion rookery on the N shelf and the thin reef that connects the islets. Seals cavort with divers, but you must avoid aggressive bulls in mating season. There’s a spectacular grotto at 25’ depth. Only in calm seas can you swim through the arch in the E island to visit both sides.

Los Islotes Light (24°35.85’N, 110°24.18’W) is on the larger, flat-top W islet. There’s deep water all

*Kayakers circumnavigate Isla Espiritu Santo, Isla Partida and out to Los Islotes.*

*Anchoring just outside the shoals.*

around Los Islotes, so don't hesitate to cut between when rounding the N end of Isla Partida.

**El Bajito** (little shallow spot) is a popular scuba site about half a mile SW of Los Islotes. The flat-top pinnacle has a least depth of about 20' down to about 90' at the sand and coral floor. Good fishing, too.

**Marisla Seamount** is about 8.25 miles ENE of Los Islotes. 3 peaks rise from 300' up to between 52' and 82' below the surface, drawing a wealth of beautiful sea creatures – giant manta rays, octopus, dorado. Underwater filmmakers come to Marisla to witness the annual courtship dance of the hammerhead shark – hundreds of them.

**Los Muellecitos** (Little Piers) is a protected beach where sea turtles lay eggs and hatchlings dash to the sea, located about a mile down the less sheltered E side of Isla Partida. We think the name refers to eroded fingers in the sheer cliffs above the beach. Nearby is a scuba dive site with a 75' wall lined with sea fans.

**Partida Back Door** is the E side of Partida Cove, blocked by the sandbar. In fair or moderate NW weather, small boats can find marginal anchorage in about 20' over sand, off the corner where the hill to the NW meets the cobble beach.

**La Salinita** (Little Salt Pan) is 4 miles SE of Partida Back Door. La Salinita is the sheltered N corner of the long indent between the S side of Punta El Pailebote and the N side of Punta Lobos. Pailebote is the prominent (about 600') N-pointing headland. Boats anchor in 35' to 40' of water S of S slope of Pailebote and E of the cobble beach. Laguna La Salinita is the large lagoon behind the berm. We think Pailebote refers to a ship's boiler.

*Going ashore requires park permit.*



**Bonanza Beach** is a mile of blindingly white sand between Punta Lobos and Punta Bonanza. Punta Lobos (24°27.5'N, 110°17.6'W) overlooks a wide reef that spreads a half mile SE from the low point, so take care when approaching from NE. In fair weather, anchorage is possible anywhere off of the beach in 15' to 28' of water. In moderate NW wind, tuck S of the Punta Lobos point and W of its reef in 15' to 25' of water.

However, in a strong blow, the low land doesn't provide good shelter, especially below the draw leading N from the corner anchorage. Bonanza means good sailing weather, as in the friendly nautical salutation "¡Ir en bonanza!" S of Punta Bonanza has no anchorage.

