

## Life on Vacation

A weekly look at the second-home market

# Loreto Bay and La Paz, Mexico

# Sleepy-resort feel with laid-back prices

By Larry Olmsted  
Special for USA TODAY

Mention "second home" and "Baja Peninsula" and many people think of Los Cabos, Mexico's most upscale resort. But the newest hotbed of residential development south of the border is a few hours north of Cabo, stretching from La Paz to Loreto.

La Paz (The Peace) is the capital of Baja Sur, one of two Mexican states that make up the 800-mile peninsula. With about 200,000 people, it is also the largest. The main attractions are beaches, desert and water sports, but the small city also boasts an impressive *malecón*, a waterfront promenade with shops, restaurants and hotels. Long popular with tourists for its combination of urban amenities and sleepy-fishing-town feel, La Paz is suddenly popular for its price: Homes are far less expensive in La Paz than in pricey Los Cabos, 130 miles south.

Two hours north of La Paz, Loreto is undergoing more aggressive development around a pristine bay that houses the 800-square-mile Bay of Loreto National Marine Park, a U.N. World Heritage Site. The area had been identified by FONATUR, the Mexican government's tourism investment arm, as a site with potential, and infrastructure was built to encourage development.

"The government has poured \$200 million into an airport, roads, sewage, everything developers need," says Mark Codioli, sales associate for the new JW Marriott Residences complex here and a longtime Baja real estate agent.

Codioli, who is from San Francisco, became entranced with Baja Sur years ago and recently bought in Loreto. "If you were familiar with Cabo 30 years ago, when it was a sleepy getaway for Hollywood stars and fishermen, and you wished you had bought

then, that's what this area is now. Prices are about half of comparables in Los Cabos."

Not everyone agrees. "Loreto is not the next Cabo," says Jim Spano, president of the Loreto Visitors Bureau. A master plan regulating building height, zoning and density will keep it from being overbuilt like Cabo, he says. "Think of Loreto as the 'Eco Cabo.'"



### Best for

Eco-tourists, fishermen, sea kayakers.

### Claim to fame

A historic Spanish mission town, Loreto was capital of the Californias in 1697.

### Don't miss

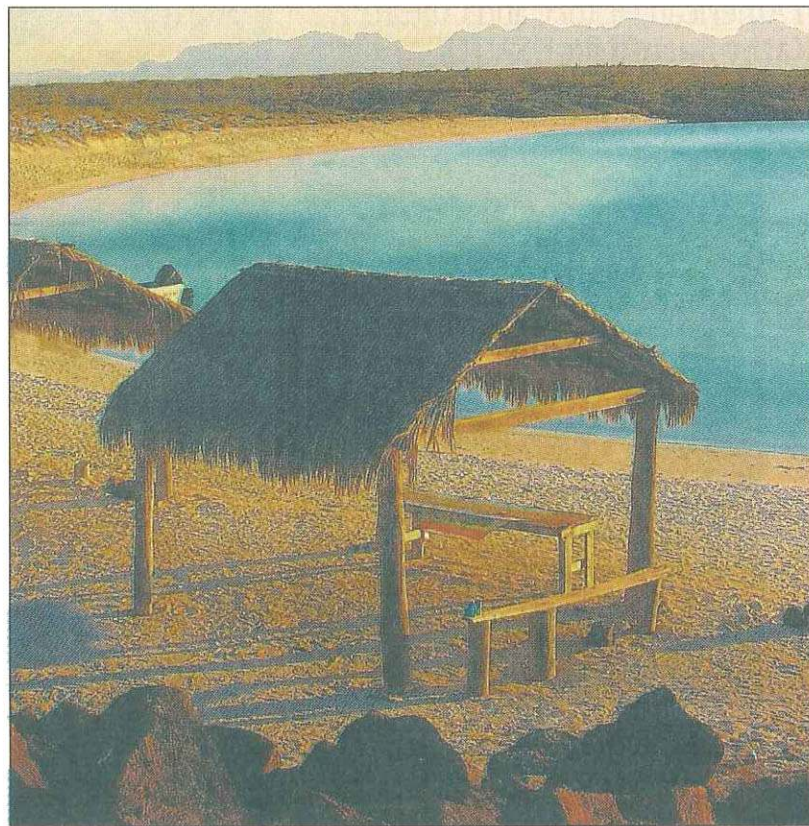
Scuba and snorkeling in the marine preserve with 800 species, many of them endangered.

### Getting there

The La Paz Airport just outside town has flights to Los Angeles and many to Mexico City. Loreto's smaller new airport serves Los Angeles.

### Tourism information

vivalapaz.com, loreto.com



Loreto Visitors Bureau

Perfect for a siesta: In Loreto, new development is balanced against pristine surroundings.

## A look at three La Paz and Loreto neighborhoods

- ▶ **La Paz:** On a waterfront peninsula, Paraiso del Mar has the region's top golf course, an Arthur Hills design, plus homes and condos from \$200,000 to more than \$1 million; nearly 4,000 units are planned (paradisofthesea.com). Many buyers consider downtown enclaves near the beach and shops, where bargains abound. Condos near the water begin at less than \$100,000, two-bedroom homes with pools are in the \$200,000s, and luxury homes with four-plus bedrooms run \$500,000 to \$1 million.
- ▶ **Nopolo:** Second-home construction is booming in this small beach resort town 7 miles south of historic downtown Loreto, including a JW Marriott Residences planned for late 2010. "People hear Marriott and think hotel or timeshare, but this is just whole ownership condos with a resort feel and hotel services," Codioli says. The project has a spa, marina and private beach, and condos with two to four bedrooms will have waterfront views and outdoor living areas. Large condos begin at about \$750,000. (liveloreto.com)
- ▶ **Loreto Bay:** One of the largest residential projects here with 6,000 planned homes, Loreto Bay uses a "new urbanism" design, with homes clustered into several villages strung along 3 miles of beach and linked by paths for bikes, walkers and golf carts. It has a golf course and hotel as well. Loreto Bay currently offers furnished two-bedroom casitas with extensive outdoor living areas for \$365,000 with larger models under development. (loreto bay.com)



JW Marriott Residences, Loreto

**On the market:** This condo in the JW Marriott Residences in Loreto (under construction) will have a sea view.

**High price** **\$1,178,000**

- ▶ **Bedrooms:** 3
- ▶ **Bathrooms:** 3
- ▶ **Size:** 2,251 square feet + 557 square-foot terrace
- ▶ **Features:** Telescoping glass walls open to terrace, marble flooring, oversized soaking tubs, deluxe kitchen with granite counters, Wolf and SubZero appliances. Common areas include spa, fitness center, yoga lawn, lazy river pool, family play center, private beach, hot tubs.



Paraiso Del Mar

**On the market:** This new Spanish-style house in the Paraiso del Mar community in La Paz has a detached one-bedroom guest casita.

**Midrange price** **\$353,848**

- ▶ **Bedrooms:** 3
- ▶ **Bathrooms:** 3
- ▶ **Size:** 1,768 square feet
- ▶ **Features:** Stucco exterior, tile roof, ceramic tile floors. Main house, guest house and two-car garage surround private courtyard with fireplace, fountain and grill. Main house has great room, laundry room and enclosed porch.