

# San Felipe

Formerly a sleepy fishing village, the “Gateway to the Sea of Cortez” has grown into a destination that offers everything from rest and renewal on its pristine beaches to ATV adventures atop its dusty hills. It is also home to unique natural gems including the tallest and oldest cacti in the world at **Valle de Los Gigantes**, a natural preserve where eagles, roadrunners, coyotes and flora dwell. And at the nearly halfway point between San Felipe and Rocky Point in the Sea of Cortez is **Konsag Island**, a massive white rock formation surrounded by the shores of San Felipe. Charter a boat and take a 45-minute trip to watch the seals, sea lions and birds that call Konsag home.

## HIGH SEASON:

Same as Rocky Point: March-May, and October-November.

## LOW SEASON:

August – the water is an unnervingly warm 88 degrees.



## DIGITAL EXTRA!

Meet San Felipe locals and get a peek behind the scenes with Tara Hitchcock and her husband/photo assistant, Kenn Francis, and art director Mirelle Inglefield on their San Felipe adventures at [phoenixmag.com](http://phoenixmag.com).

## Wild San Felipe

Don't be fooled by the tranquility of the surrounding desert, sparkling beaches and gentle gloss of the sea: That's all just to steady the wild pursuits of San Felipe – the nightlife, festivals, rowing and off-road racing competitions that draw visitors to this town of 20,000.

1 **The Baja 250**, a spinoff of the Baja 1000, the **San Felipe 250** and **King of the Baja** ([ultra4racing.com](http://ultra4racing.com), May 16-18) are SF's biggest racing events of the year.

2 **It's not all about** the rough-and-tumble. **La Plazita**, Mar de Cortez 615, San Felipe (“the yellow building across from Bancomerica,” as the locals say) offers local art galleries, clothing boutiques, a beauty salon and fine dining in the heart of downtown.

3 **Owner Michele MacDonald** runs **San Felipe Salt Shop** ([sanfelipesalt.com](http://sanfelipesalt.com)), where you can buy natural spiced salts from the Sea of Cortez. It's so tasty, you might toss your salt and pepper back at home. MacDonald also raised funds to open and now operates a nonprofit breast cancer clinic where education, detection and treatment are available to locals.

## Overnight Option

### Glamping/Resort Road Trip

If you're serious about adventure, check out the five-day **Across Baja** package, which spans the peninsula from the Pacific Ocean to the Sea of Cortez. You'll start out glamping in Valle de Guadalupe on the west coast in a restored, vintage Airstream, hosted by **Glamping at Ruta de Arte y Vino**. Following morning surf lessons, you'll take a tuk-tuk to Baja wine country, with tastings at AlXimia, Vena Cava and Sol de Media Noche wineries. Then, you'll make your way across Baja to **San Felipe Marina Resort** for a private, panoramic beachfront dinner beneath a palapa and relaxation in some of the peninsula's finest accommodations, designed by architect Gonzalo Gomez Palacio. Enjoy a relaxing sunrise on *la playa* and rest up for a horseback ride into the sunset with **Horses in Baja** ([horsesinbaja.com](http://horsesinbaja.com), pictured left), followed up with dinner on the ranch. Finish your five-day Baja walkabout by paddling a kayak around the secluded and serene Gonzaga Bay. \$1,509 per couple. [sanfelipemarina.com](http://sanfelipemarina.com)

PHOTOS BY MIRELLE INGLEFIELD (3); WARDROBE BY RARE SCARF GLAM VINTAGE; COURTESY CORONA



## Must-Visit Restaurants

- BREAKFAST**
- 1 **Restaurante Rosita**  
This eatery serves the best huevos rancheros, (pictured, below) and machaca on the *malecón*. Mar de Cortéz 381, Costero, 21850 San Felipe, Baja
- LUNCH**
- 2 **Tambarillo**  
Third-generation fisherman/chef Alexis B. López García (pictured, left) prepares authentic SF spreads of fresh-caught seafood with regal accompaniments. The photo-worthy scallop ceviche is a favorite. Calle Mar de Cortez, San Felipe, Baja
- DINNER**
- 3 **Rancho Alegre**  
Hit Rancho Alegre for a low-key bite (think: casserole-like shrimp *molcajete*) and copious pours of tequila. 37600 San Felipe – right off the Highway 5, hidden behind Market Otro

## DRINKING TIP

Lime  
Tequila



Grab a deck of cards and try your hand at Mexican poker (a variant of five-card stud) while swigging a **Baja Fog**. PHOENIX photo assistant Kenn Francis instructs: “You get a bottle of Corona and [slowly] pour José Cuervo Gold Tequila and a squeeze of fresh lime on top.” Then chug. Ribbit.



# San Felipe

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## SAN FELIPE WILDLIFE

### Vaquita

The upper Sea of Cortez is the only place in the world to see the endangered "little cow" of the sea, the **vaquita**. Conservationists estimate there are only about 30 alive today due to the use of gillnets for fishing and the porpoise's unusually long gestation period. Spotting one is rare, so grab your binoculars, take a boat ride and buy a lottery ticket if you see one.

### Camping Option

#### More of a beach bum?

Rent a beachside campsite complete with a ramada, barbecue pit and an ATV course just a few minutes from the *malecón* and **Valle de Los Gigantes** (pictured right). \$40/night. [puntaestrella.com](http://puntaestrella.com)



PHOTOS BY MIRELLE INGLEFIELD; TARA HITCHCOCK; COURTESY ADOBE STOCK IMAGES; WARDROBE PROVIDED BY RARE SCARF GLAM VINTAGE

### Photo Op!

## San Felipe Arches

The undeveloped, sweeping landscape is worthy of a photo session alone. There are miles of festively ornate yet dilapidated shells of structures and gritty textures to populate your Instagram feed for days. But these iconic, towering arches as you enter town are obligatory.

### How to Get There



No direct flights from Phoenix, so why not drive? Take the I-10 west to SR-85 south, hopping on the I-8 west in Gila Bend and crossing into California. Just before you hit El Centro, take SR-7 south to the border crossing in Mexicali. Hang your first right and follow Ave. Rep. de Argentina to Calz. Manuel Gomez Morin and head south on Highway 5 all the way to San Felipe. Don't forget your passport.

# Rocky Point

## aka Puerto Peñasco

To be completely, 100 percent honest, *summer is not our favorite season to visit "Arizona's beach."* The Sonoran seaside hamlet cracks triple digits on a routine basis from June to August, and the Sea of Cortez – so shallow and uninsulated on its northern extremity – feels like lukewarm bath water. But May is spectacular, and so is October, when a chill in the weather puts an appealing spin on that bathwater analogy. The one upside of a summer visit: smoking resort deals.

### Mikey's Picks

PHOENIX mag IT wizard Mike Meyer is the biggest Rocky Point aficionado we know – he got married there and visits three to four times a year, so you know his resto recs will be on point.

### Pollo Lucas

Kissed by flame and tasting of citrus, smoke and salt, the grilled chicken at this roadside snack-shack just north of downtown "is the place everyone loves," Meyer says. Find it at 83550 Blvd. Benito Juárez (Highway 8).

### Kaffeehaus

Just down the street from the fish market on Boulevard Benito Juárez García, find this Euro-centric café (tiramisu!) that also offers "awesome chilaquiles and one of the best breakfasts in town." [facebook.com/kaffeehauspuertopenasco](http://facebook.com/kaffeehauspuertopenasco)

### Taqueria El Samy

"It's actually just a taco stand across the street from the Burger King" on Highway 8 coming into town, Meyer says – but he reserves his most passionate Rocky Point ardor for José Perez's 18-year-old taco stand and its chile relleno tacos. "They're right out of the fryer, filled with cheese, and he just slices them open right in front of you and fills them with beans, lettuce and tomato." Perez usually runs out by late morning, so *ándale*. Cerrada La Choya 3731



PHOTOS BY CARRIE EVANS; COURTESY LAS PALOMAS BEACH AND GOLF RESORT

### Group Outing

#### Party Boat

Every evening around dusk, **Del Mar Charters** invites two dozen or so RP visitors aboard its 42-foot catamaran and proceeds to hydrate them vigorously. Fine ocean views and a fun-loving staff ensure those bottomless Cokes and margaritas don't go to waste. (\$30 adults/\$20 children). [delmarcharters.com](http://delmarcharters.com)

### HIGH SEASON:

March-May, October-November

### LOW SEASON:

It's fun over New Year's... but the water will freeze off bits of your anatomy.



### BEST BAR

#### Wrecked at the Reef

No reason to be coy: People love to get soused in Rocky Point. So know that the double entendre stitched into the name of this beachside, hanging-light-strwn palapa west of downtown is wholly well-earned. [facebook.com/wreckedbars/](http://facebook.com/wreckedbars/)

### Overnight Option

#### Cas Palomas Beach and Golf Resort

Our pick for the premier resort in Rocky Point, on the town's tony west side, boasts an **18-hole championship course** designed by Forrest Richardson and Arthur Jack Snyder, and captivating views overlooking the Sea of Cortez. Two-bedroom suites start at \$600/night. [laspalomasresort.net](http://laspalomasresort.net)