



## LA PAZ, CITY OF PEACE, GOES BOOM!!

by J. Michael Sullivan

### “Boom!”

No, that's not the sound of the wedding party fireworks sounding over the now demolished Hacienda Beach Resort, site of a new condo and hotel development.

“Boom” describes what's happening right now in La Paz. Just look around. Condo towers are going up and new marinas are being installed. The highway to Todos Santos is being enlarged and improved. The malecon now extends out toward Pichilingue and the hillsides are covered with surveyed lots and new homes. New houses are going up all over our neighborhood.

Workers from the mainland, attracted by the boom times, are arriving in increasingly larger numbers. You are more and more likely to hear a Mexico City or other mainland accent and not the accent of a Paceno. You may know this accent: a singing pronunciation and “swallowing”

of the s's.

*The Wall Street Journal* recently published an article on living in La Paz. *House Hunters International*, a television program on the Home and Garden channel has already aired one show from La Paz and they have another one in the works. A production company is filming here for a presentation on, yes, Cosmopolitan TV and a reporter affiliated with a major U.S. newspaper interviewed us for an article on the daily life of retirees living in the Yucatan and in La Paz. Major airlines have added flights from the U.S. over the past year. What do they know that maybe we don't? And is this good or is it bad?

My partner and I had long planned to retire to Mexico and had done a great deal of research. We loved the desert after living, respectively, in Phoenix and Las Vegas for many years. The desert is open, clear and, yes, even spiritual.

So, why not the southern Baja,

where the desert meets the sea? Loreto? Too few services. Cabo? Too much of a tourist town for our taste. Todos Santos? Beautiful, but more for surfing than swimming and, again, too small. La Paz looked just right, with good hospitals, an accessible airport, stores and services. This was the Goldilocks decision.

Our adventure started a year ago last May when we spent a week in La Paz. After only three days of watching the famous purple sunsets from the malecon surrounded by loving, playful families and practically drawn to tears at the gentle beauty of the place, we made our decision; La Paz, here we come!

We sensed the beginning of the boom after checking out real estate prices and talking to local expats. So, our two year plan became the two month plan. It was now or probably never; prices were rising. We put a down payment on a villa, returned to the states and sold our home in Las Vegas.

We have lived in La Paz for over one year now. Would we move here again? Absolutely. “Nosotros amamos La Paz.” We love La Paz. Why? There are lots of reasons.

There are the obvious and usual suspects. You'll see them in the tourist brochures. There are magnificent, pristine beaches with gentle currents just minutes from town. If you like to fish, the waters are teeming with them. A boat tour on a *panga* out to the island sanctuary of Espiritu Santo and the adjacent islands makes for pure wonder. There's a real downtown that is active, vibrant, and very walkable, with an historic center, and the malecon is world-class.

And developers obviously find La Paz attractive. You can't swing a dead cat without hitting a work site for a new project. Could it be because of the relatively cheap land prices compared to Cabo? Can this be the last, undeveloped, substantial outpost left in Baja California Sur? Why the increased access with the rising number of plane flights? Maybe it's the baby boomers with money who crave the warm sun?

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timism. The local government and citizens have pushed back against rampant development several times. Just recently the mayor and an organization of citizens have blocked the development planned for the Balandra area; a state park and a world-class jewel of a beach. Ecologically-minded citizens also pushed for the preservation of the mangrove areas on El Magote, even as the east end of this peninsula is undergoing development. And even in this development, the plan is to use "gray water" for the golf course.

Read the local newspapers and you'll see that the state government is spending increasingly large amounts on the development of the infrastructure. The government has also set up task forces to address the issues of affordable housing and of the training of local workers to meet the needs of the boom.

Estimates vary, but let's assume there are 300,000 residents in La Paz. This number helps to insure a certain inertia that will inoculate the area from wide-spread "gringoization." La Paz is a real Mexican city, not a tourist haven and we think this will continue to be true.

We've talked to many buyers of properties here. While some are "investors" and happy to see the appreciation of their holdings, even more say that all they want is a wonderful place to vacation and a place where they can retire eventually in ease and comfort. Many buyers do not plan to "flip" their property but rather to relax, enjoy and maybe even to settle here.

La Paz is still the city of peace, even with the boom and we just love it. The good part is the rich lifestyle, the bad part is that you can't stop progress. And since you can't stop it, you might as well enjoy the ride.