

## JALCOMULCO Veracruz, Mexico

Rising from the tropical Gulf Coast to the snow-covered flanks of Pico Orizaba, the Mexican state of Veracruz is full of whitewater. From the spring-fed Class II-III Actopan, which bursts from a mossy limestone cliff and winds playfully through the mango plantations, to the 400-foot-per-mile creeks tumbling out of the mountains, Veracruz has something for every boater. Jalcomulco is the sleepy center of it all.

Despite its status as a local tourist hub—during the rainy season, busloads of well-to-do tourists arrive daily from Mexico City to raft the Antigua's Class IV Pescados with international guides who tell river lies in multiple tongues—Jalcomulco retains a friendly small-town feel. There's no ATM, just one corner store, and many of the people live as they have for generations, harvesting sugar cane and trapping langostino—the giant crawfish the town is justly famous for. The Antigua is full of small woven-straw traps, tended by men wearing shorts and machetes who swim Class III ferries with nonchalance.

Take a room for about \$100 a month, or bask in the comparative luxury of a hotel for \$20 a night. Or try renting a cabana at an outfitter's camp. Run rivers with the safety kayakers by day and hold long, barely intelligible conversations deep into the night with other boating burnouts. There's no sense going to bed early—the cumbia, a kind of Latin American folk-rap invariably played at top volume—starts at dark and rarely subsides before midnight. —jm

### JALCOMULCO BETA

**Local Outfitter:** Selva Azul; Calleva

**Eats:** Langostino at Nacha's restaurant overlooking the river

**Drinks:** Veracruz style: a fifth of rum, two liters of Coca Cola, and a table-full of friends

**Room:** Hotel La Villa, downtown

**Tent:** Pay an outfitter a few bucks to camp in their compound

**Survival Tip:** Ask local boaters the names of upcoming rapids ("Como se llama este rapido?"). If they say it doesn't have a name ("No tiene nombre"), charge the Class III. If it's named Chucky (after the movie doll), let the locals lead.



Downtown Throwdown: Flip-flops make great shuttle rigs in Jalcomulco.

## BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR Mexico

Baja Time is a living force. Just stake out a spot—any spot—and you have 500 miles of world-class sea kayaking to your left and 500 more to your right. Fish tacos are two steps up the beach, and the spouting of whales is a perfect lullaby. You could stay forever, and unless you have a job, a wedding or a funeral compelling you north, you probably will.

Strap your boats on the rig and strike south from San Diego. If your momentum carries you past Bahia de Los Angeles' whales and wildlife, the oasis town of Mulege will hold you like flypaper. Mangroves line the banks of the Santa Rosalia River, and the village's crooked streets, restored Spanish mission and free-range piglets languish in the shade of date palms. The river opens into the sea, with the white sand beaches of Conception Bay beckoning a day's paddle to the south. After a day, a week, or a month exploring the Sea of Cortez, the best bakery on the peninsula awaits downtown, and the ubiquitous Señor Callo holds court nearby, offering bus tickets, tacos and haircuts at bargain prices, and conversation for free.

Baja's oldest city, Loreto, lies a two hour's drive or a week's paddle farther south. McLulu's fish tacos alone are worth the trip, but the nearby Gulf Islands draw sea kayakers from around the world. Known as Mexico's Galapagos for their exotic plant and animal life, the islands were recently designated a marine wildlife sanctuary. Blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigate birds and brown Pelicans crowd the islands. The surrounding waters are home to dolphins, sea lions and fin whales. Take your time—you have plenty of it—and discover the islands' myriad hidden bays, sea caves and abandoned beaches. Eventually you'll have to call the office to say you're taking a few extra weeks to paddle the 150 miles to La Paz, a legendary sea kayak trip tracing the spine of the spectacular Sierra de la Giganta as it plunges to meet the ocean. After all, you're living on Baja Time. —jm

### BAJA BETA

**Local Outfitter:** Baja Expeditions

**Eats:** McLulu's fish tacos in Loreto

**Drinks:** Cold beer and a haircut from Señor Callo in Mulege

**Room:** Plaza de Loreto or the Oasis

**Tent:** The Sea of Cortez boasts 1,000 miles of empty shoreline—pick a spot

**Survival Tip:** The wind will blow. Hard. Maybe it will relent mañana (tomorrow), or perhaps pasado mañana (the day after tomorrow). Bring a good book.