Baja Safety Tips

Baja California is a 3rd world country.Â Up until about the year 2004, thereÂ had been few uproars on the Peninsula.Â There are always common issues such as theft, vandalism, and drug running in Baja; however, being aware and taking specific precautions will help you travel safer in Baja.

1.Â Avoid sticking out like a soar thumb (we obviously don't blend in well on motos, but keep this in mind when spending the day in a city):Â Don't flaunt money, expensive gadgets, or draw attention to money.Â Blend in as best you can and keep a low profile.

2.Â Hide your money in different places while keeping enough money handy for use.Â Some good hiding places are:Â in the sole of your boot, somewhere on your bike like stashed in whatever you have strapped to your fender (sleeping bag, tool bag, or spare tube bag) or duct tape a pocket to the inside of your air filter box.Â Some dirt bike pants have small inside pockets at the waist (good spot).Â

3.Â Do not ride or drive any highways at night, particularly the section on Hwy 1 from Tijuana to Ensenada.Â This is where the vast majority of issues reside.Â I avoid that stretch day or night myself and rather enjoy the route down to San Felipe anyway.Â

4.Â Do not pick up hitch hikers.

5.Â No hot-shots.Â You want to avoid the 'Police' as best as possible.Â Don't speed, no wheelies (unless you are away from towns/cities), obey all street signs, and make complete stops with both feet on the ground.Â Your behavior in populated areas keep you out of trouble.

6.Â Exchanging Money:Â Everyone is negotiable in Baja.Â Negotiate for a better rate at exchange booths/houses, but not in a bank.Â Sometimes you can get the best rates from Pemex station attendants!Â Make sure you have a calculator and know the going 'bank' rate before negotiating with these guys; some of them are very smooth and quick to rip you off and other times you'll get a killer deal.

7.Â Gas Stations:Â Some gas station attendants have poor math skills to their benefit, so pay attention.

8.Â Riding:Â Baja is the mecca of off-road.Â It is everyone's dream to ride the wide open Baja and it has been made feasible through tour guides and the Baja GPS Guidebooks.Â These few riding tips will help you enjoy a safe self-guided off-road tour:

Â A.Â NEVER ride over 70% (this is not a race - it's a joy ride with safety first)

Â B.Â Always ride prepared for head-on traffic

Â C.Â Use hand signals to indicate how many riders are behind you (to on-coming traffic, horsemen, andÂ

Â Â Â Â Â Â populous)

Â D.Â Be aware of animals (cows are faster than you think and horses spook easily)

Â E.Â Stick together!Â Always know where the person is behind you.Â Stop at each intersection until the rider

Â Â Â Â Â Â behind you signals to go (this works like an accordion-file).Â

Â F.Â Never skimp on water or gas in Baja.Â If there is gas, top off.

Â G.Â If someone informs you of a private property issue (this may be brand new), respect thier requests.Â If

Â Â Â Â Â Â you respect them, they respect you.Â Â You can make requests too.Â

Â H.Â Smile at the people, befriend the culture, fit into the moment, and enjoyÂ this amazing country!

9.Â Baja 1000 SCORE Nov. 20-23, 2008:Â Beware of race times for the Baja 1000, 250, and 500.Â Theft increases during the month around the races, expecially the Baja 1000.Â If you are not racing, it is highly advisable to stay off the race course and avoid the Tijuana through Manedero (south of Ensenada) areas completely, especially during contigency, race start, and race finishing.Â It is safer to plan joy-rides in Baja any time up to pre-running (Nov. 1st for the 1000) and a week after the race has finished (Nov. 30 for the 1000).Â Â If you plan your trip during this time, make sure you print and take the course map for reference so that you do not get on course in reverse direction of the race course flow!Â I strongly advise planning your routes away from the course (this year it is in the north only).Â Click HERE for information on the Baja 1000 Score Race 2008 & get educated prior to planning your trip.Â Remember, the highest risk times are pre-running through post-running these races.Â Be smart.

10. Always open and CLOSE all ranch gates, even if they are difficult to maneuver.Â These fences and gates are thereÂ typically to retain cattle and other ranch animals.Â Leaving a gate open can cost a rancher a full day's work rounding up cattle due to our actions.Â It is our purpose not to impose problems for locals, but to help keep the peace or befriend this amazing culture.Â Please close all gates behind you!