

## Baja Trip 2: Securing the Land Base

Flying into the international airport in Baja California Sur near San Jose del Cabo, we could see that the land below remained dry – it appeared that the wet season hadn't arrived yet. With daily highs hovering around 100 F, and low humidity on the ground, it was evident that this was so. The rains normally arrive during the period between July and October, however we'd heard that the area around La Ribera had only received 2 inches over the past 2 years. The airport provides a majestic view of the Sierra La Laguna mountain range to the north, with peaks of over 6,000 ft – this is a striking feature of the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula.



Upon arrival, we drove the 45 minutes to La Rivera to meet with Snr. Agundez, representing the landowner who is his father-in-law. We wanted to ensure that he was aware of our visit and ready to meet to ensure a smooth land sale process. We found him at his home, evidently busy with numerous visiting relatives. We agreed to meet the next day and returned to San Jose Del Cabo, and found a hotel in the middle of the old part of town. It was our first visit and we were impressed with the old town focused on the Town Square, church and pleasant streets and buildings that emanate from this core.

The next morning we met with our lawyer, Marycarmen Valencia. We reviewed our needs in relation to the land contract and identified outstanding questions that were still to be answered before proceeding on the Exclusive purchase agreement. Our meeting was conducted amicably with the seller. He was able to provide relevant land title documents. These detailed the actual surface area of the property (5.85 ha) and the boundary neighbors (all 5 of whom are members of the extended family). He also clarified water rights associated with the land – water is drawn from the arroyo at Agua Caliente and flows by gravity via a small concrete irrigation canal to a number of water users who are members of the Ehido. Water is run on a schedule of 10 days to each branch of users. Volume available depends on season, as the source is surface water running from the mountains. Water to the property is fed by gravity to a holding tank from which it can then be dispersed.

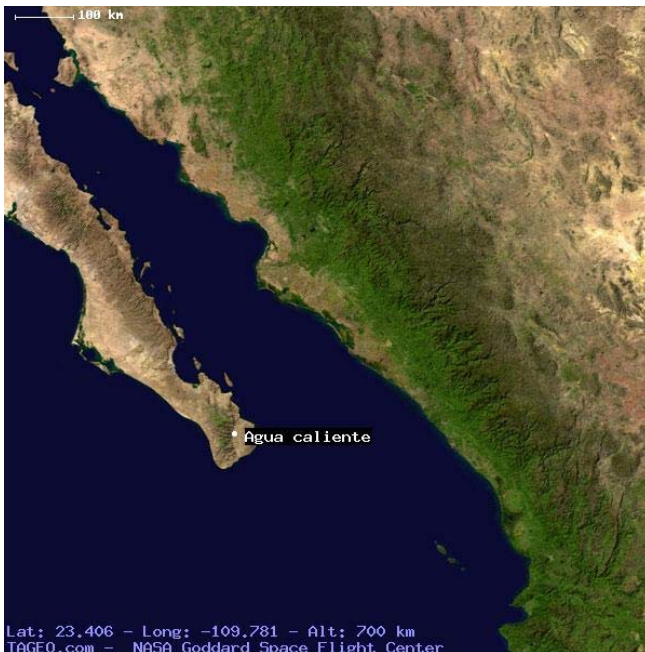
The payment schedule was agreed in two steps; a 10% payment (\$7,500) to secure the Exclusive purchase agreement, followed by a final payment of \$67,500 due on November 25 to secure the final transfer of title. Snr Agundez agreed to show us the land the following day (Saturday) so that we could better understand the irrigation set up, spend some additional time on the land, and eat some of the fresh mangos now ripe in the mango orchard.

Marycarmen confirmed that we'd need a Mexican entity in order to enter into a legally binding agreement. We determined to establish a Mexican non-profit with which to buy the land. The name of this entity is Baja Bio Sana (Baja Healthy Life), with the following Purpose:

1. Recognizing the need for environmental solutions related to water supply, waste disposal and other environmental impacts due to economic growth and development of Baja California Sur, Baja Bio Sana's primary purpose is to create a living example of strategic solutions to these challenges through permaculture techniques and to offer training in the local community.
2. To design and establish a training center utilizing permaculture strategies for appropriate land design, water management and purification, construction techniques, organic food production, and natural healing.
3. To share these techniques through outreach into the local community of Agua Caliente and Santiago.

4. To organize seminars and workshops for interested governmental entities, investors and developers to enhance sustainable economic development.
5. To provide a facility that invites the collaboration of the most universally recognized practitioners of natural solutions.
6. To allow for the contribution of donations to support the above.

We were advised to avoid making the purpose of the NGO too broad, as that slows the process of receiving tax deductibility status (which normally takes 1 year). It is important to note, however that a key aspect of the vision for the NGO is work with natural techniques that support healing and balance of the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical body. The fuller vision and project description is currently being developed and will be available soon.



On Saturday we were able to pay a brief visit to Buena Fortuna run by Kitzia and Gabriel Howearth. They have provided invaluable advice on various aspects of this venture and identified the land that we're now in the process of buying. Their 10 acre Botanic Garden supports 3,700 species of plants. The site is designed using a combination of Kinship gardening and permaculture techniques and represents irrefutable proof of the potential abundance of this area. We were blessed with a bag of freshly frozen lychee fruits.

Driving up to the mountains towards the land, through the oasis town of Santiago, you have an impression of amazing productivity and increased reverence for the role of water in life. The town is one of several true oasis in the Baja Peninsula and you can observe a combination of crops and fruits growing

including mango, papaya, banana, sugarcane, dates and grapes. The hot springs of Agua Caliente are a further 6 miles or so up the valley, just within the borders of the La Laguna Biosphere Reserve. The land lies 1 mile south of Agua Caliente.



View from the land towards Sierra La Laguna Biosphere Reserve, with Mango trees in the foreground

We spent a good few hours on the land with Snr. Agundez. Having looked in more detail at the irrigation system, we then collected mangos from the two varieties still in fruit (locally known as 'Manila' and 'Cairns'). The 'Cairns' looks like the famous Australian 'Bowen' Mango from what I can tell. We walked the property boundary and noted the following interesting features on the land.

- A seasonal stream- bed running along the southern boundary. This could be tapped to direct water into an on-site swale system during rain events, significantly increasing water directed into the site and subsoil water storage.
- A stony escarpment about 20 feet high running along the western boundary. This marks an old floodplain, now a secondary floodplain to the river. It catches the afternoon valley winds that are typical and generated by the mountain uplift of warming coastal air. This may represent a natural feature along which to place living structures on the site.

The land has wonderful views north and west to the mountains and river valley, and we have received a basic aerial photomap from the local cadastral (land mapping) office, with a detailed contour map on order from them.

The next days were spent in preparing the non-profit entity paperwork, and watching progress of tropical storm Emilia. Prior to its arrival, I enjoyed a couple of mornings of bodysurfing on the main beach at San Jose del Cabo. The town has an unusual feature of a permanent coastal wetland lagoon fed by the mountains. This supports rich bird and fishwife – and forms a good surfing break when it breaks the sand bank to flow into the ocean. In the meantime, there are a series of good shore breaks, which operate during the summer months – peak surfing time for the 'Costa Azul' as the cost between San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas is known.



### Zippers Beach - Costa Azul

The lagoon is now threatened by coastal development and eutrophication – clearly something that can be one of the focal points for positive engagement in the region as we get established. As Emilia made her presence felt, the seas became wilder, and the clouds gathered. Monday and Tuesday combined to dump approximately 11 inches of water on San Jose del Cabo – quite an event as the town has only received several inches of rain over the past couple of years. Being arid tropics, this region faces water as the limiting resource. It's wise use is critical, and the spawning of tourist driven golf course developments (of which there are 7 now, and growing) flies directly in the face of sane resource management.

Our sense from meeting and talking with many warm, intelligent and engaged people during this trip is that the focus of Baja Bio Sana is appropriate and needed in the region at this time. It can back up and support the good work

already being done by those such as Kitzia and Gabriel Howearth, as well as providing additional energy and resources to take on new projects and initiatives. The region is blessed with an abundance of wealth in the form of natural resources and unique biology, as well as a healthy dry climate with abundant sunshine, good water and a host of available nature-based outdoor activities: - scuba diving, snorkeling, sailing, surfing, windsurfing, hiking, mtn. Biking, whale watching, bird watching etc.



Agua Caliente - looking up the Arroyo

Proximity to the US and Mexico's stability has led to a recent rapid development process along the coast. This has, and will continue to challenge local planning and zoning efforts, stress limiting natural resources and threaten some areas with inappropriate development. On the other hand, the size of these investments represent cause enough for those same people to want to protect them and good design can offer better environmental and economic and social performance. Many of those that come to the area do so out of a love and appreciation for what it represents, so there is a great opportunity to be positively engaged in finding solutions along with sufficient financial resources to back those same solutions.

A more detailed planning document is in process, we wanted initially to share the core news and impressions from our trip, as it has helped to confirm and clarify the path that this project can take.

Best regards,

Baja Bio Sana Team