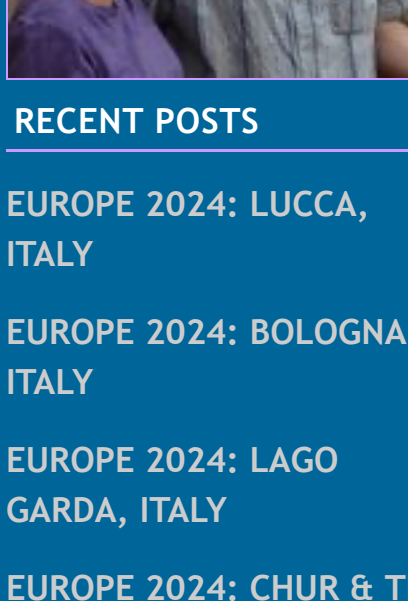




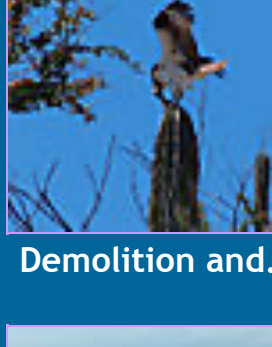
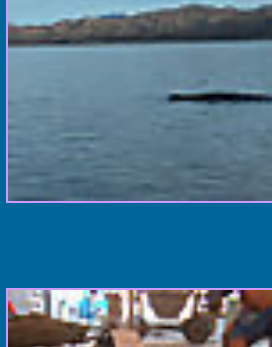
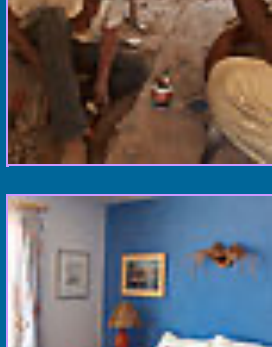
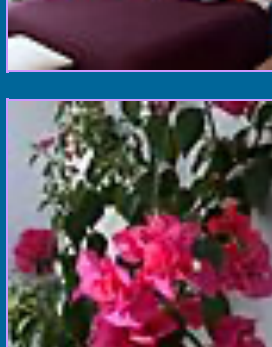
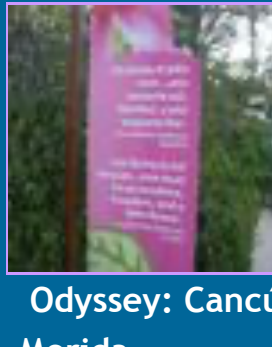

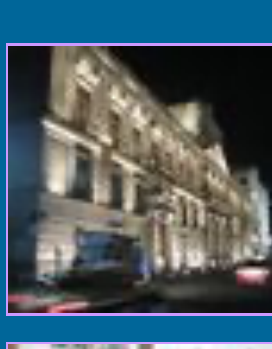
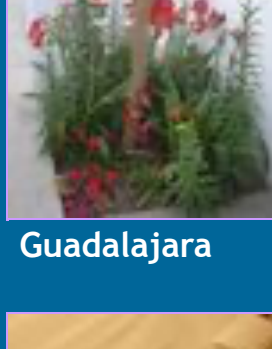
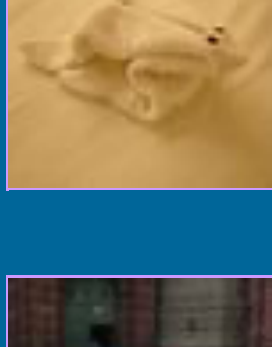
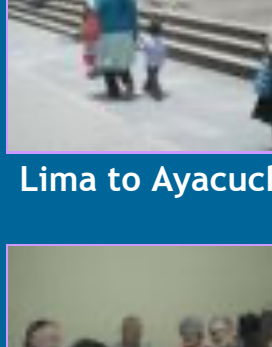


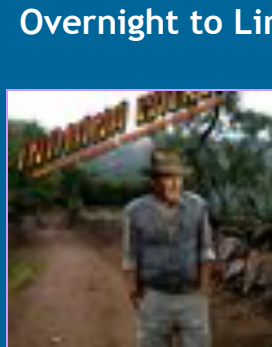


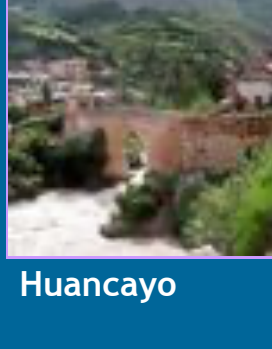
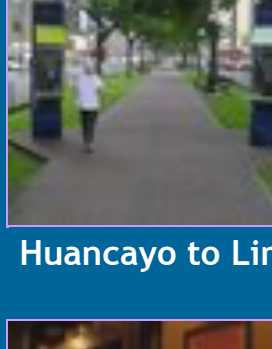
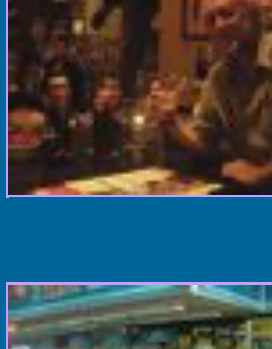
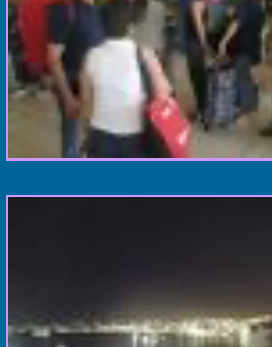
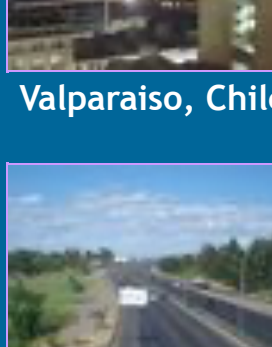
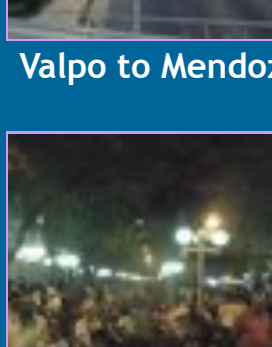
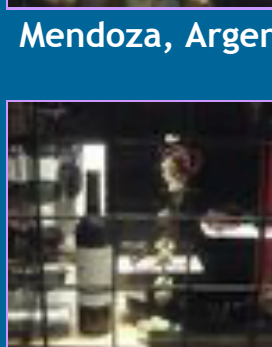
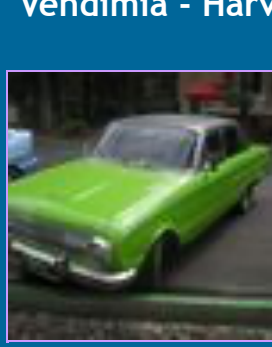




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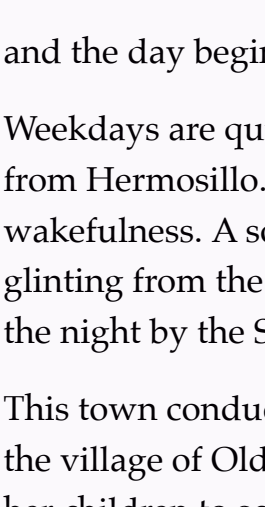
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## 1 entry from July 2005

### July 17, 2005

#### Summer Days in Kino



Summer is a special time on the Sea of Cortez. Each morning the seven mile crescent beach at Bahia de Kino is bathed in hues of pink and orange as the burning sun rises over the Sonoran desert. Nearby Isla Pelicano glows in the dawn. Curtains are pulled aside, and morning light floods over polished floors of saltillo tile, and geraniums in large brightly-painted pots, called macetas. Coffee is brewing in the cocina and the day begins.

Weekdays are quiet here in Bahia de Kino, the small town at the end of the road from Hermosillo. Warm waves quietly lap the shore, nudging the land to wakefulness. A solitary figure walking far down the beach is outlined by sunlight glinting from the water. The beach walker at dawn is first to see the shells left in the night by the Sea as gifts upon the shore.

This town conducts its business just as any small town. Maria, a woman living in the village of Old Kino, rises early to make breakfast for her family, and she walks her children to school. Then she boards the bus to her day job, cleaning and cooking for an Anglo couple living on the beach. Her husband, Juan, finds work as he can, usually related to tending for animals at a local ranch, sometimes in the construction industry. He and two of their older sons are now in Tijuana working on an apartment project. They'll return in three months.

Two blocks away, Luis wheels his old bicycle out to the rutted dirt road in front of his house. From there he begins the five mile ride to his job, watering and tending the plants at a beach home owned by a wealthy family from Hermosillo. He saves the five peso bus fare every day he rides to work, money he and Lupe need to feed their five growing boys. Lupe works as a maid just across town in an office that rents departamentos to weekendng families from Hermosillo. Some gringos also prefer to stay in Old Kino due to the lower cost and the proximity of good cheap places to eat. Lupe lived in southern New Mexico when she was young and she speaks decent English. That skill helped her get an office job.

The families of Maria and Luis each live in tarpaper shacks in the “Invasión Libertad,” an area of vacant desert land “invaded” by peasant squatters. The process is a modern Mexican version of the US Homestead Act where landless families organize to take over an area of unused land for homesites. While technically illegal, it has been codified by the Mexican bureaucracy to relieve the enormous pressure to provide housing for a growing population of working poor. If the invasion is on public lands of little value, the government requires them to improve the property and build homes before granting title. But if it involves private lands, the owner may resist forcefully, or make a deal to sell the land to the government for distribution.

The lots are now divided equally and fenced and each family built its own crude shelter. Water is bucketed in and there's a rudimentary outhouse in the back. A kitchen sink rests on a rickety platform and drains to the dirt street, and power lines lie on the ground to provide light to each home. To a well-off foreigner it may not look like much, but for these hard-working people it's a start.

Winters can be quite cold here, as strong winds sweep south across the desert. And almost every winter one or more of the tarpaper shacks of Old Kino is burned to the ground, sometimes claiming the lives of the entire family inside. In recent years, there has been a joint effort by the Mexican and Anglo communities to replace these shacks with flameproof concrete. The organization, called “Familias Unidas,” runs a low-interest, “micro-credit” program to provide money for materials, and counseling to get the job done in a reasonable time frame.

Today there is a stack of concrete block and a pile of sand standing on each of the lots occupied by the families of Maria and Luis. Each family has constructed several rooms and removed much of the old flamable tarpaper. There are gaping holes where doors and windows will go someday, if there's enough money. But the rooms are livable, after a fashion, and each family is much safer now. Life goes quietly on.

On weekends in Kino, the beach fills with families from Hermosillo and as far away as Nogales and Tucson. The weekend carnival begins as early as Thursday evening, hits its stride on Saturday, and continues into Sunday afternoon, when large numbers of cars start leaving for home. Those who can afford the cost, rent houses on the beach or on nearby streets. Other families pitch tents or colorful plastic shade structures on the beach. Young adults sleep in or beside their cars after long nights of noise and revelry. A local joke goes like this:

“Where did you stay this weekend in Bahia de Kino?”

“At the Hotel ‘Camarena!’”

In English, camarena, or cama de arena, means sandbed. It's a common joke among the middle class, most of whom (like most of us) worked their way out of youthful poverty into good careers and decent jobs.

By midmorning on a typical summer's weekend, the water is filled with people, and the air is filled with the squeals of young children playing in the waves. Every imaginable kind of floating toy can be found in the water and on the beach, and the family dog barks at kids riding the waves just out of reach. The afternoon winds pick up and the warm waves build to challenge the older kids, while young ones frolic in the shallows. Mom watches from her beach chair under the shade structure.

Vendors walk the beach under the hot sun hawking everything from ironwood carvings and jewelry to Oaxacan dresses. A panga (an open fishing boat common to most Mexican beaches) tows a long banana float just offshore, looking for riders. People are parasailing down at the public beach area by Restaurant ‘La Palapa.’ A small plane buzzes the beach no more than thirty feet over the water.

In the evening, the boistrous daily wind drops to a cooling murmur, and the moon casts flecks of silver upon a quiet Sea. Beach fires dot the shore, there's a smell of spicy cooking in the air, and the faint sounds of singing can be heard in the night.

Much of the tranquility returns to Bahia de Kino on Sunday evening, with the last stragglers heading home on Monday morning, concocting their excuses as they drive east back to jobs, classes, and families, in Hermosillo. As they leave, they pass Maria riding to work on the nine o'clock bus, and Luis riding his bike in the morning heat. —PRW



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