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**By Mark Anders**  
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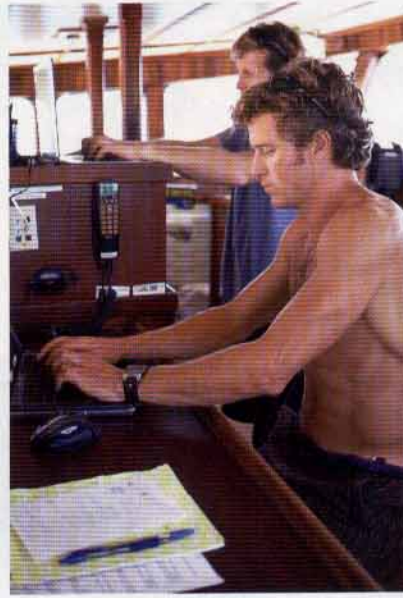
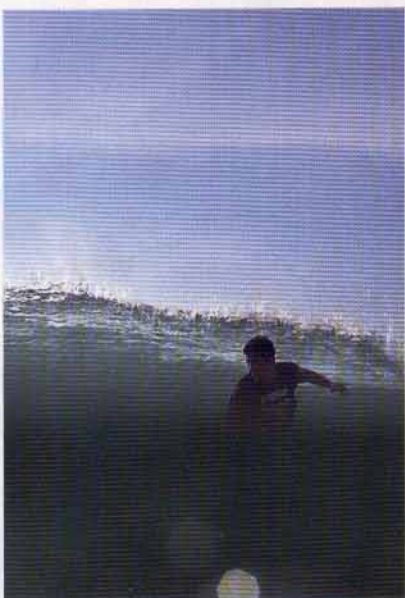
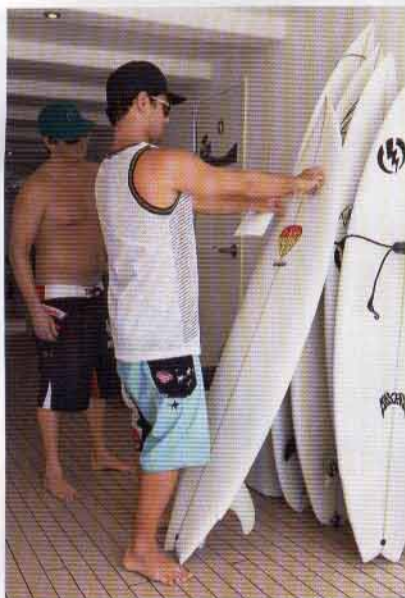
# Miles from Ordinary

Ditching its dirtbag rep,  
Mexico's surfing gets swank onboard  
the *Royal Pelagic*





**WAVE TRAWLING**  
Mike Carter, cofounder of Electric Visual, one of the biggest companies in surfing, on a wave in Mexico; opposite, the *Royal Pelagic*, a crab vessel turned super yacht.



**F**ROM THE WIDE WINDOW OF MY STATEROOM I watched the Pacific in the predawn light, its surface painted a pinkish orange. The sea was calm with an oily smooth sheen. The only sound was the slight inhale and sigh of the swell, and then, faintly, the clatter of an outboard motor drawing closer. Minutes later a long white panga loaded with machete-wielding Mexicans zipped past my berth. This was either an inexplicable local welcoming rite or a very bad start to a day of surfing.

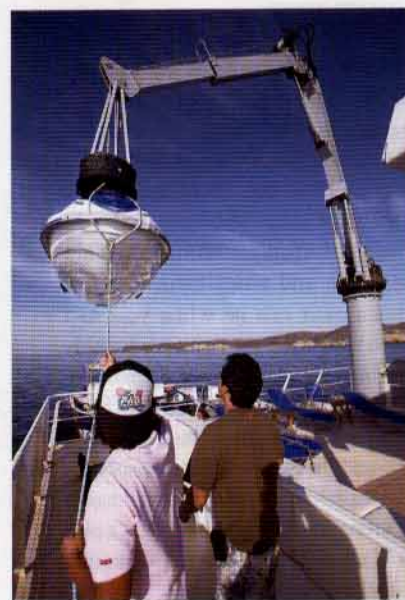
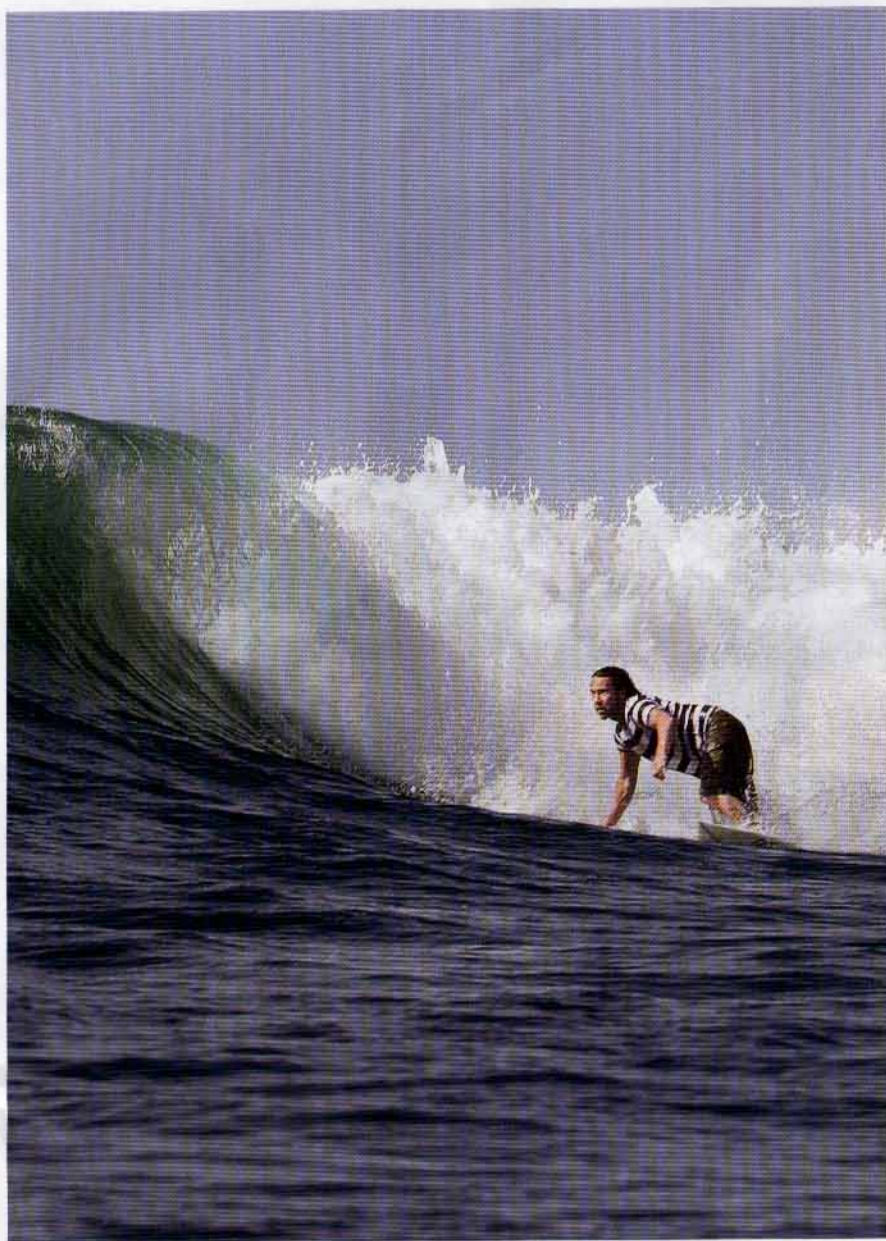
We had motored west overnight from the tiny port of Huatulco, Oaxaca, and headed up mainland Mexico's Pacific coast. It was day one of our six-day surf trip on the *Royal Pelagic*, a 125-foot surf charter christened in Baja in November 2006. Onboard were a few key players from Electric Visual, one of the fastest-growing sunglass brands in the action-sports industry. The ringleader was Bruce Beach, co-founder and co-president of the company. Along for the ride were Mike Carter, global marketing director; John "Monsty" Monson, graphic designer; and Jason Watson, manager of Laguna Surf and Sport.

The four had surfed the Oaxaca coast together a handful of times over the past decade, always in a rental car, scouring the coast's washboard two-tracks for breaks. This time they had traded surf shacks and coolers full of lukewarm Corona for staterooms with A/C and a rooftop bar. The *Royal Pelagic* is, quite simply, the finest oceangoing surf-specific ship on the seas, though she doesn't exactly look it.

Just three years ago this same boat, at the time called the *Aleutian Rover*, was a crabbing vessel. She wintered in the Bering Sea, her huge hull groaning under the onslaught of 40-foot swells and icy, 60-knot winds. Unlike many similar ships, when she was decommissioned in 2004 as part of the U.S. government's buy-back program to relieve pressure on crab fisheries, the *Rover* found new life. "These boats aren't worth anything unless someone like me comes along," says Griff Alker. He and John Musser, both captains, surfers, and owner-operators of

**THE SCENIC CRUISE**

The *Royal Pelagic* affords everything a crew of surfers could desire: a fleet of surfboards, Jet Skis, five-star cuisine, and access to remote breaks.



Solana Beach, California-based Pelagic Surf Charters (858-350-1049; royalpelagic.com), snatched up the \$2 million boat for just \$300,000. After 15 months and more than \$2 million in renovations, they transformed the former fishing boat into a luxury surf yacht, complete with two skiffs, two Jet Skis, a fleet of ten longboards, six staterooms, a movie theater with a 70-inch plasma TV, a Keegerator, and an après-surf Jacuzzi. On the horizon, however, the *Royal Pelagic* still cuts the silhouette of a commercial crabber.

That's precisely what had brought the panga of angry locals swinging alongside our stern. Soon a drab-gray military-looking vessel docked at the ship's swim step, as well. A handful of soldiers in fatigues, several armed with automatic weapons, boarded the *Royal Pelagic* and huddled with Captain Musser. Recently some purse-seine vessels, notorious for using 1,200-foot-long nets to scoop up schools of tuna, had been decimating local fisheries. At least one fisherman had allegedly been murdered in a recent scuffle. This morning, some of these enraged locals had mistaken the *Royal Pelagic* for a purse-seine fishing boat and called in the Mexican navy.

After extended explanations and negotiations, the *federales* finally

**A \$2 MILLION RENOVATION TURNED THE FISHING BOAT INTO A LUXURY SURF YACHT, COMPLETE WITH TWO SKIFFS, TWO JET SKIS, A MOVIE THEATER, AND A JACUZZI.**

motored away. Time to surf—at last. We grabbed our boards and pushed off in one of the 21-foot skiffs.

“Those guys had their M16s locked and loaded,” says Beach. “I always get a little knot in my stomach when I see that.”

“We have weapons too,” Carter jokes. “Boats, boards, Jet Skis—we’ve got it all.”

THAT FIRST MORNING, THE WAVES WERE A little blown out, so conversation turned to past trips. The guys go surfing together every year in places as distant as Indonesia and the Gold Coast of Australia. Recalling past adventures has a soothing logic: If the surf's crappy today, why not reminisce about better trips? It's also like subconscious voodoo, as if talking about good waves might conjure up a great set or two.

As we waited, Bruce—his friends call him Bird—recalled the

time a few years back when the group had surfed Mexico's La Jolla, farther north in Jalisco. The waves had been great, and groups of local children had gathered to watch. After a few days of hanging with the kids, the Electric boys decided to organize a surf contest. One morning, they dragged coolers and umbrellas down to the beach and lent out their boards for the kids to try out. Bird and company judged the proceedings, eventually handing out prizes (sunglasses, caps, and even a surfboard) to everyone involved. The memory got the crew laughing—and nearly overshadowed this day's average waves.

Back on deck, after a full afternoon of surfing, the stories flowed as freely as the beer. There's a certain camaraderie on a guys-only surf trip. No women onboard—except for those on the pages of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue someone brought along to torture us. With the families at home and work turned off (as much as it can be when you surf with your colleagues), men inevitably fall back into college routines, namely, drinking heavily and goofing off. On a well-stocked boat like the *Royal Pelagic*, the first part's easy: In six days the team soaked up seven half kegs of Corona, two bottles of merlot, a pint of Jack Daniel's, a pair of tequila bottles, and a magnum of Dom Pérignon. It was all fuel for the good-natured taunting and sarcasm.

As soon as the alcohol commenced, so did the *Love Boat* references. "At noon on the lido deck, we'll have nude water ballet with the Canadians," says Carter in his best Captain Merrill Stubing impression, referring to a pair of young women we'd seen sunning on the beach. "Hula-hooping will commence at 3 A.M."

In spite of the Jeff Spicoli personas, the guys are hardly blithe about the business. Whenever Bird's BlackBerry pulled in even a sliver of a cell signal, he would stop whatever he was doing, rush up onto the ship's wheelhouse for maximum bars, and check in at the office or fire off a few e-mails. Under the direction of Bird, Carter, and fellow Electric cofounder Kip Arnette, Electric Visual has grown from a dream funded by their personal savings to one of the most powerful eyewear brands in the surf, skate, and snow worlds. Founded in 2000 after each of the partners quit industry giant Arnette (started by Kip's father), Electric has seen steady growth, including several years in the triple digits. And in 2006 the company won the prestigious title of Breakthrough Brand of the Year from the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association. The night after they won, Bird, Carter, and the rest of the Electric team stormed the bar at the Tropicana Inn in



**IF THE SURF'S CRAPPY TODAY, WHY NOT REMINISCE ABOUT BETTER TRIPS? IT'S LIKE SUBCONSCIOUS VOODOO, AS IF TALKING ABOUT GOOD WAVES MIGHT CONJURE A GREAT SET OR TWO.**

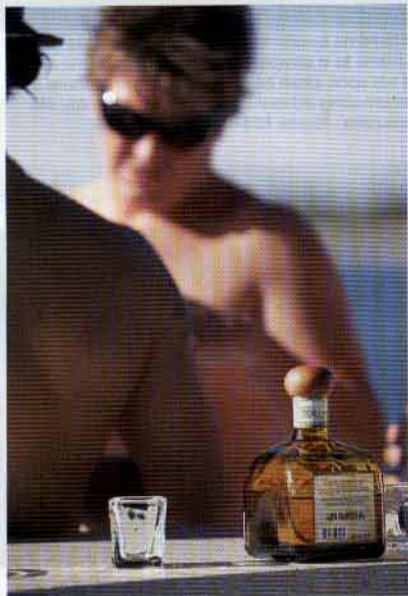
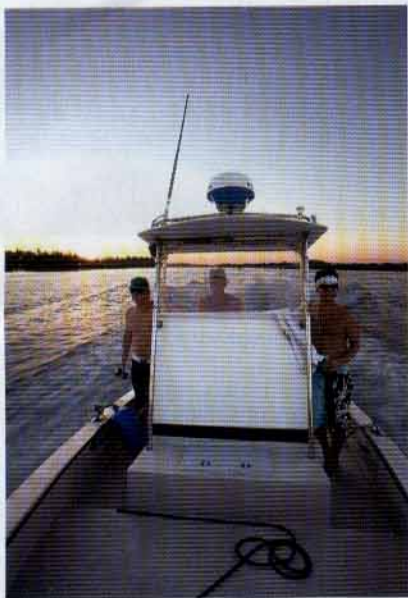
San José del Cabo, Mexico, not far from where the SIMA banquet was held.

"I ordered huge fishbowl Cadillac margaritas for everyone, each with three shots of La Familia," Bird says proudly. "The bartender looked at me like I was crazy."

"I was sure someone was going to end up in the bar's lobster tank doing the full Jacques Cousteau," adds Monsty.

Conversation moved on, but the comment must have triggered some uncontrollable urge in Monsty's memory bank. Minutes later the ship's hydraulic crane groaned to life. A powerful knuckle crane, it was designed to manhandle 800-pound crab pots. But with Captain Musser at the controls, the crane was now hoisting Monsty, barefoot and wearing nothing but a pair of surf trunks and a black fedora, over the sea.

"Higher!" yelled Bird. "Get it up there, Musser!"



Before the crane stopped, Monsty was at least 50 feet off the water. Then with a quick sidestep he was airborne, one hand holding the hat on his head, the other protecting his huevos. The huge splash had the crew roaring. And almost as soon as I turned around, a soaking Monsty was back at the bar, sipping another Corona.

**WE SURFED ALL WEEK, AND THE WAVES GOT BETTER THE FARTHER EAST** we moved. By day five we'd reached Punto Dos Casas, a break in the zone the Electric crew had been hoping to surf the whole trip. With its setup of eight point breaks perfectly situated to rope in big south swells, this section of coast promised reeling barrels.

Though it's not as well known as the North Shore or even Western Oz, mainland Mexico is home to plenty of great surf. Oaxaca itself has 317 miles of coastline and a wide-open and consistent window

**TEQUILA SUNSET**

Though the ship has fishing gear for those so inclined, on a guys-only surf charter you're likely to be doing one of two things: surfing or shots.

that pulls in south swells. It's home to Puerto Escondido, a.k.a. the Mexican Pipeline, and countless world-class point-break setups. There are also hundreds of little-known breaks, like Punto Dos Casas, that are just as good—but completely deserted.

We anchored a mile off the coast and ferried in on the skiff. As soon as we were shuttled out to the break, a set of three head-high waves ground down the point. The swell was building, and with each set the waves exploded against the point, morphed into overhead walls, and then steam-rolled perfectly for at least a hundred yards. As the skiff slowed, everyone was already piling into the water.

For the next 48 hours we played hard in the waves. Though our arms were noodles, Bird and the boys insisted the crew wake us before dawn on our final day so we could squeeze in a quick session before our noon flights. As planned, we scored a few hours of powerful surf, pounded breakfast tacos, and grabbed some Coronas for the trip back to Huatulco.

At the airport we were exhausted. A week in the sun had baked Bird and Carter the deep reddish brown of iron-heavy soil, and everyone was staring off in a contented daze. It's good form to end a surf trip hard. It's like taking that one last plate from the buffet even though you could probably do without. We had gorged ourselves, and everyone looked stuffed.

At the check-in desk, we were stunned. Though someone had thought he remembered a noon flight, no one had actually checked the itineraries. It was 10 A.M., and our flights weren't scheduled to leave until three in the afternoon.

Monsty and Bird dragged our overstuffed board bags into a pile, and Carter ordered up five more Coronas as we settled into a tiny table at the airport bar. I looked around, and the expressions ranged from stunned to bemused. The beers were cold, and the bartender, with her long black hair and deep hazel eyes, was cute. But she wouldn't be enough to keep this crew entertained for five more hours.

"Come on," Monsty said, articulating the thought that had been silently vibrating in the air. "There's time for another session."

He *had* to be kidding. It would be a pain to unpack our boards and gear—we had wrapped everything in bubble wrap, duct tape, and board bags for the flight. Getting a taxi with all that kit wouldn't be easy, either, and we would definitely risk missing our planes. But with five hours to kill and great waves just 30 miles up the road, there was still some adventure to be squeezed out of this trip.

Bird finished his beer in a gulp and began dragging his board bag through the airport exit, toward the Mexican surf. ☺