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Baja Lobster Village Becomes Boomtown

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Since the 1950s, Puerto Nuevo has been a favorite destination of San Diegans slipping below the border for some weekend R and R, and the lure has always been the lobsters.

As the demand for local lobster increased, their numbers decreased. Today the once tiny fishing village continues to cope with being northern Baja's boomtown.

The last time I was sent on assignment to Puerto Nuevo was 13 years ago. Back then, the former sleepy, little fishing village had already exploded.

Still nothing could prepare me for what I was about to see on my latest visit. The 10-mile trip from Rosarito Beach to Puerto Nuevo

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now costs \$5 on the toll road, which winds past at least a dozen condo complexes in various stages of development. Each offering "breathtaking pacific views at bargain prices," but few areas in Baja boomed as briskly as Puerto Nuevo.

There are currently 36 restaurants in Puerto Nuevo, all serving up the 'langosta' that were once plentiful in the local waters.

Although it remains quaint, long time visitors can't help notice the difference.

"It used to be just one or two houses... now there's like restaurants and all these stores," one visitor said.

One thing hasn't changed. The first family of New Port has always been the Ortega's. Ortega's number one was opened in 1954, by 88-year-old Juan Ortega, flanked by his two sons Abel and Albert.

When they first opened Ortega's as a restaurant, it cost 80 cents for a large lobster. Eventually, the local waters were fished out. Now the lobsters come from the waters south Ensenada, and sometimes as far away as Cancun.

The Ortega family still owns 5 restaurants in Puerto Nuevo. Ortega's patio offers an ocean view and Puerto Nuevo-style lobster with all the trimmings. First the 1 1/2-pound lobsters are split, then they are boiled. Back in the day, they used to be steamed. Then, they are grilled and served with tortilla soup, rice, beans and hot handmade, melt-in-your-mouth tortillas. All for about \$20.

Puerto Nuevo's atmosphere is still hang loose – it's a place where gringos can full tilt fiesta and families can linger on beautiful Baja day.

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