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Santa Rosalía



Santa Rosalia, Baja California Sur Overview

"Copper-bearing deposits, in blue-green globules called *boleos*, were discovered near here in 1868, and in 1885 a French mining company calling itself **El Boleo** acquired mineral rights to the area for 99 years. To help build over 600 km (375 miles) of mine tunnels, a large copper smelting foundry (imported by ship from Europe), a pier, and a 30-km (18 mile) mine railway, the French brought in Yaqui indians from Sonora; fresh water was piped in from the Santa Aqueda oasis, 16 km (10 miles) west. Two thousand Chinese and Japanese laborers, told they would be able to plant rice, also came to work at **El Boleo**. When they found that rice wouldn't grow in Baja, almost all of them left; many ended up in Sinaloa across the Cortez.

After smelting, the copper ore was shipped to Tacoma, Washington, for refining. Instead of returning empty, copper-transport ships brought lumber from the Pacific Northwest to Santa Rosalía, and, as the town grew, the French filled the arroyo and mesas on either side with wooden buildings to house workers, company officials, and Mexican soldiers. During **EL Boleo's** heyday in the 1940's, a sooty cloud issued constantly from the foundry's smokestack, hanging over the town. Eventually, the ore began to run out, and in 1954 the French company sold its mining facilities back to the Mexican government. Copper ore from the Mexican mainland is smelted in Santa Rosalía on occasion, but the mines closed in 1985.

Without the mines in operation, Santa Rosalía (pop. 10,200) is probably a far more pleasant place to live than ever before. Today it serves a government, transportation, and market center for central Baja. It is also an important tourist crossroads for visitors making the ferry trip to the mainland or stocking up on supplies for further peninsular exploration.

The Mahatma Gandhi Public Library in Parque Morelos, at the east end of town near the harbor, features an exhibit of historic photos from Santa Rosalía's mining days. "



Iglesia Santa Barbara de Santa Rosalía

Santa Rosalia's Famous metal church, designed by Alexandre Gustave

Eiffel (builder of the Eiffel Tower) It was constructed from prefabricated galvanized iron in 1897. The building was originally destined for an African country where resistance to termites was required.

From: **THE BAJA HANDBOOK** by *Joe Cummings*



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