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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

NOVEMBER 2005

TOP

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CITIES, RESORTS, ISLANDS, HOTELS, CRUISES



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ists who are setting up studios and galleries, and we're helping them, so it's not like the gringos are taking over."

In all, there are upwards of 1,000 *extranjeros*, or foreigners, living here at least part-time, with more arriving every month. Many come from Santa Fe, others from Hollywood. Joan Baez bought property recently. Then there is the base population: about 5,000 mestizo descendants of the long-time ranch and farmworker families.

**P**AULA COLOMBO GREW UP in Harlem, went to UCLA, and then became a magazine model and an interior decorator. By 1988, she says, "I was working in Malibu for spoiled rich people, and I wondered what the hell I was doing." She came to Baja, found Todos Santos, moved here on an impulse with her teenaged daughter, and ended up falling for an Italian painter, Ezio. "I loved that he lived in a little house with a garden of herbs and veggies out back," she recalls. Ezio turned out to be "an incredible eater," she says, so she asked him if he wanted to open a restaurant. Thus was born the Café Santa Fe, which relies upon his family's Northern Italian recipes and which is the town's destination restaurant.

We have dinner there two nights running, fussing over the imported *mozzarella di bufala*, the fresh mahimahi, the wines from northern Baja, the plates of grilled vegetables. Paula has toys for Tabatha to occupy herself with. My daughter-in-law, Numi, thinks the restaurant's better than anything in Santa Fe.

At some point, of course, you wonder if Todos Santos will get too Americanized. Paula believes that the balance will work as long as "nobody comes here and tries to change the place." But their presence alone defines the new Todos Santos: the 15 galleries, the fine dining, all the day-trippers from Cabo. We ask her if she's ever leaving this place. "I wouldn't know where to go," she admits. "And I've looked."

The Hotel California's restaurant is named La Coronela, in honor of the Todos Santos woman who, in 1913, led a gang of local heroes north to fight in the revolution. We eat there one night, tropical fronds pressing in from one side and a Christmas tree twinkling on the other. Numi proposes that we decorate our own tree, but to me it sounds like too much work. She protests, "But you're the Christians!"

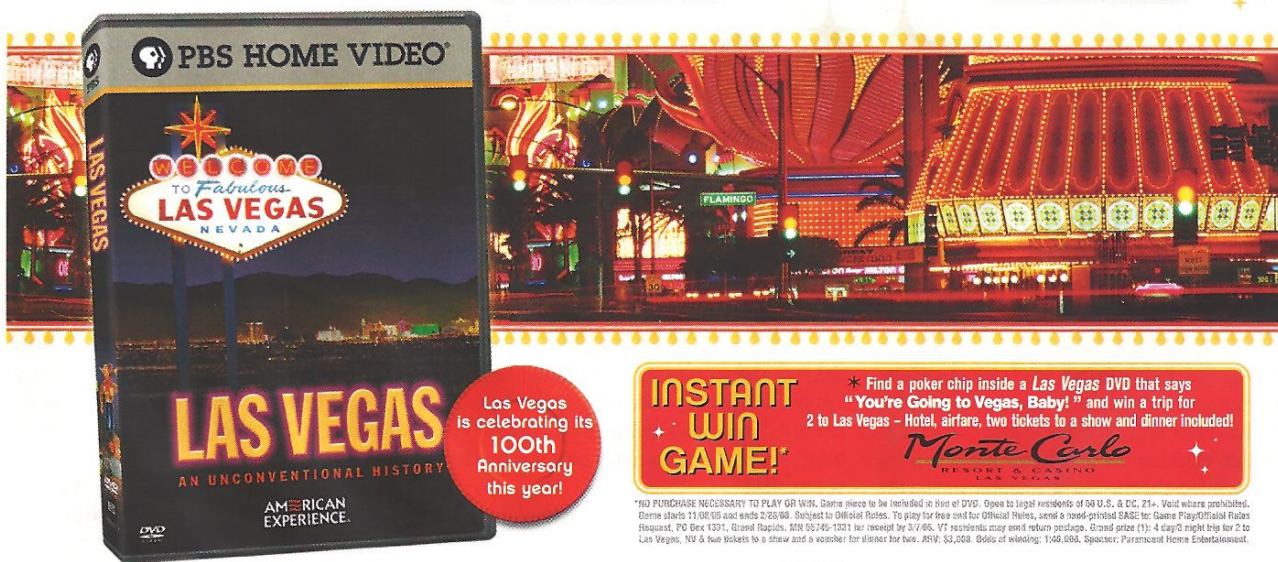
John Stewart sees Todos Santos chang-

ing before his eyes. Real estate prices have doubled in the three years he's been here. "It's the tranquillity that attracts people, but the more of us it attracts, the less tranquillity it has," he laments.

**A**T LAST WE FIND *LA POSADA*. It forms in front of the church at dusk, a dozen Mexican women huddled under shawls and twice as many children. Leading the march are José and María—a boy carrying a shepherd's staff and a girl swathed in baby blue. Bringing up the rear: two white guys, with Tabatha tripping after. The women begin to drone, "*Santa María, madre de Dios . . .*," and we start walking. But a commotion halts us in our tracks. A car with a loudspeaker is coming our way, booming out a political message: "*¡LUIS CÓPPOLA POR GOBERNADOR! VOTA CÓPPOLA!*" Riding on the hood is a man with an oversized head made of felt: a likeness, it seems, of the candidate. The dummy Cópola slides off the hood and hands flyers to the adults and big bags of candy to the kids. There's a moment of uncertainty as ancient tradition collides with the coarser imperatives of democracy.

"*Santa María, madre de Dios . . .*" Now

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