

**LEGENDARY HOTELS: BALANCING  
BUSINESS AND BUZZ**

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*“On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair  
Warm smell of colitas, rising up through the air  
Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light  
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim  
I had to stop for the night...”*

For millions of people across the world, and most likely readers of these opening lines of this article, it is impossible not to now hear music starting to play softly within one’s head. Timeless, transposing music, building up to the anthem-like chorus,:

*“Welcome to the Hotel California  
Such a lovely place (Such a lovely place)  
Such a lovely face  
Plenty of room at the Hotel California  
Any time of year (Any time of year)  
You can find it here.”*

Since first written and released by The Eagles in 1977, “Hotel California” has grown to connect generations of rock-era fans across the globe. For over five decades, its haunting lyrics have stirred up vivid images, the unmistakable chords taking listeners back to a time and place in their own memories – where they were when this song was embedded in their personal life stories.

And as powerfully as the music has the ability to transport listeners to a place and time in their lives, it also has the ability to provoke the age-old question that has followed the song’s success: is there really a ‘Hotel California’?

Does it really exist?

And is it actually in Mexico?

Legend has it that there is such a place - a hotel that is found at the end of a long desert highway, tucked away in a tiny town, located alongside an old mission church, making the ringing of the mission bells audible from within the hotel’s old stone walls.

And it is all part of the makings of a now legendary property in Todos Santos.

### **ADDING AWE TO THE EXPERIENCE**

Legendary hotels can be found across the globe – grand hotels rich not just in luxury and hospitality, but in stories, whether true to place or myths of passing times.

Some legendary hotels conjure up images of silver screen stars: New York’s *The Plaza* and *Waldorf Astoria* hotels, *The Ritz* in Paris and London.

Some once, and still, host high profile guests in search of the perfect cooling cocktail to lessen the heat of the tropics, as found at Singapore’s *Raffles Hotel*, home of the signature Singapore Sling.

Others stand tall and elegant as homes of princes and princesses from times long past: India’s magnificent heritage hotels within the *Taj Palace and Resorts* group.

All hold stories, conjure up images and echoes, inspire imagination.

For travellers the world over, these legend-bearing locations bring a destination added appeal. And bring tourists in the doors to see it for themselves. To visit a place and not stop in for a moment, a photograph, a keepsake, would be a lost opportunity to experience and brag- what so many so long to do.

Such is the challenge for a small, boutique hotel in the quaint, artistic Baja, Mexico town of Todos Santos named *Hotel California* <http://hotelcaliforniabaja.com>. First opening its doors in 1950, the once 16 room property has since 2001 been owned by Debbie and (now late) John Stewart, and converted into a funky 11 suite hotel also housing a restaurant, bar and gift shop. Today, over 300 tourists come by daily to see, and have a photo taken in, 'Hotel California', even though both the owners and The Eagles state there is no connection at all between the hotel and the legendary song.

Many tourist still to this day argue that the similarities between the hotels' location and surroundings, and the song's lyrics, are simply too much to take as coincidence.

Whatever the case, the hotel has become an icon, attracting endless streams of tourists.

The attention and drop-in visitation is a complement to the hotel, and powerful form of marketing, no question about it.

But what about the hotel guests that actually booked into the hotel, investing their time and money in hopes of experiencing a quiet, peaceful, restful stay?

Buzz is important, but so too is protecting the business. This requires being ever-aware of the importance of protecting the peace and privacy of the guest experience.

As stated by hotel owner and front desk overseer, Debbie Stewart:

*"We are very happy that the legend of the Eagle's song brings people here every day. But it is not what we are selling. Once people arrive here and take their picture in front of the hotel, they realize that we have something very special to offer, away from the hustle and bustle of Los Cabos. Our guests that have come to stay with us appreciate the quietude and intimacy of our hotel and the fact that they can hide away. It is sometimes difficult to manage that with the day-trippers that come and want to just look around but once they understand what we are giving our guests, they also want to return and stay with us."*

### WORKING WITH THE WONDER

Legendary status, while posing its own unique set of challenges, can also create the opportunity to be part of the solution. Being a magnet for tourists can in fact allow the property the chance to identify and direct the magnetic forces pulling travellers in.

In the case of *Hotel California*, embracing the fact that whether fact or fiction, the hotel will attract music-loving tourists enchanted by the possibility of the hotel being 'the real thing', the property has taken an active role in local tourism industry development – working with the strength of the magnet to ensure that tourism to the hotel, and town is working for all stakeholders.

Stewart explains:

*"We are the only local hotel, outside of Los Cabos, in the Los Cabos Hotel Association, and we are a part of their marketing committee that develops the marketing campaign of Los Cabos and surrounding areas. We are very committed to promoting our area which attracted 150,000+ people in 2013 and continues to grow."*

Stewart continues:

*"With our commitment to the area, we enjoy the full support of the Secretary of Tourism and financial support from them in the promotion of Todos Santos. I see the Hotel California continuing to grow as an icon. Still, our growth will always be in keeping with the feeling of small town Mexico."*

Ultimately, staying true to the legend and the hotel means ensuring that the property, and its guest experience, maintains its personal, private, intimate, Mexican coastal nature.



## **COMPASS – Insights into Tourism Branding**

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Like all tourism attractions, protecting reason for being and reason for appeal are vital to authenticity, brand personality, experience delivery and long-term success.

However many signature tune humming tourists may pass through the doors of Hotel California, the hotel will always stay true to its roots and to its guest promise – a small, sun-soaked, seaside boutique hotel nestled in a richly tactile, artsy, Baja town...where guests feel they can check in any time they like, knowing they will be missed when they leave.

**- ENDS -**