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Retro comedy 'Baja' offers a vacation for the mind

By NOEL MURRAY

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Arienne Mandi, from left, Chris Brochu and Jake Thomas in the movie "Baja." (Prankster Entertainment)



Since the days of Frankie and Annette, low-budget filmmakers have understood that the dopest stories sell, so long as the location's sunny and the characters sincere. Writer-director Tony Vidal's youth comedy "Baja" isn't that funny, but it does have a genially retro vibe and a breezy beach atmosphere.

"Baja" has former "Lizzie Maguire" child star Jake Thomas playing Bryan, a strait-laced youngster who improbably agrees to let his chaotic friend Todd (Chris Brochu) and two of their old high-school pals, Lisa (Arienne Mandi) and Jessica (Michelle DeShon), join him on a trip to Mexico's Cabo San Lucas to drop off his parents' RV.

As soon as the kids cross the border, Todd gets roped into a local crook's smuggling scheme. Meanwhile, Bryan picks up a prostitute, Carmen (Zoe Corraface), who offers her worldly experience to the gringos, for a price.

Vidal juggles multiple sitcom-level subplots, which resolve in the most preposterous way imaginable. There are stories involving absentee dads, shady surf bums, dead pop stars and a failing resort hotel. The jokes and situations are broad, relying heavily on stereotypes.



Still, the scenery's pleasant and the actors are mostly likable. If "Baja" had been made in the '60s, it would have some kitsch appeal. It's easy watching, for anyone who needs a little mind-vacation. Everyone else should consider burying it in a hole for the next 50 years.

‘Baja’

Rating: PG-13, for sexual content, thematic material and language

Running time: 1 hour, 46 minutes

Playing: AMC Citywalk Stadium 19, Universal City; AMC Marina Pacifica 12, Long Beach; Laemmle Music Hall, Beverly Hills

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