

Baja | Film Threat

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by Bobby LePire

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There is something to be said for the familiar. The reason you re-read that book, re-watch a movie millions of times, or revisit your favorite episodes of a show is because you know the laughs will leave you howling or when the drama will make you cry and those emotional highs comfort you like a cozy blanket. That is not to discount originality, of course, but retelling a familiar story well is better than an original tale told poorly. One doesn't need to know the specific details of the new comedic road trip movie **Baja** before watching it in order for that snugly warmth to pervade every frame.

Bryan (Jake Thomas) and his best friend Todd (Chris Brochu), along with school chums Jessica (Michelle DeShon) and Lisa (Arienne Mandi) head on a Mexican holiday in an RV, owned by Bryan's parents. Todd, whose trust fund is almost depleted, convinces them to make a stop at a nightclub owned by Jorge (Andres Londono) so Todd can illegally move some product for a quick buck. After a night of heavy drinking, Bryan wakes up next to escort Carmen (Zoe Corraface), and they discover the loot has been stolen out of the RV. In order to evade Jorge's henchmen, they lay low in the deteriorating resort La Parelle, which Carmen discovers she owns. Will the friends survive this trip? Can Carmen fix the resort before the bank forecloses on it? Have Bryan and Carmen finally found true love?



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Writer-director Tony Vidal doesn't have a particularly strong visual aesthetic. But he does bring a good-natured, laid-back atmosphere to the happenings, so it does feel like you are spending time with close friends. That intimate vibe is harder to pull off than one might realize, and that Vidal pulls it off so well with his second picture is a testament to his directing prowess. He also keeps the comedic timing in perfect check, with no joke overstaying its welcome.

The writing plays an equally important part in developing that comfy sensibility. At the outset, the friends seem like clichés such as the smart girl in love with the bad boy, the bad boy who just thinks of himself, the rule-oriented kid that can't talk to girls and so on. As ***Baja*** progresses, each character reveals hidden layers to themselves, and they all become relatively well defined. The strong characterizations offset the standard plot. Where the story goes and how it gets there are all telegraphed from the first few scenes, with just one twist in the third act that shows true creativity. Therefore, the writing does take a bit of a hit for that.



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If the cast did not have such strong chemistry, the movie would flounder. But Jake Thomas, Chris Brochu, Michelle DeShon, Arienne Mandi, and Zoe Corraface are all great together. Individually each of them is fine and likable, but their group dynamic as friends feels so genuine and true that you are rooting for all of them. Change out just one cast member, and you'd throw the engagement into disarray.

Baja doesn't have the most original plot nor an overarching style. But the characters are really likable, the actors' chemistry is off the charts, and the cordial ambiance invites the viewer to lay back and have a good time.



Baja (2018) Directed by Tony Vidal. Written by Tony Vidal. Starring Jake Thomas, Chris Brochu, Michelle DeShon, Arienne Mandi, Zoe Corraface, Andres Londono, Jason Spisak.

Grade B