

elite traveler

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The Inspiration Issue

IN THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES,
WE LOOK FORWARD TO FUTURE
TRIPS TO FABULOUS PLACES
WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS



**INSPIRE
SPOTLIGHT**

A BIGGER AND BETTER LOS CABOS

WITH A PLETHORA OF LUXURY HOTELS, MARINE AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES, SENSATIONAL RESTAURANTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN, LOS CABOS IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S HOTTEST DESTINATIONS. IN RECENT YEARS, IT HAS UNDERGONE A TRANSFORMATION THAT HAS ELEVATED IT TO NEW LEVELS OF LUXURY. BECCA HENSLEY EXPLORES ITS EXCITING RENAISSANCE.



The arch of Cabo San Lucas



INSPIRE SPOTLIGHT

Clockwise from top

Los Cabos is home to hundreds of cactus species; local wildlife; lush land meets the desert mountains; the One&Only Palmilla spa



In San José del Cabo's atmospheric main square, Plaza Mijares, the wafting mariachi music foretells a fiesta.

They're playing a childhood favorite, 'La Bamba,' a tune I can't resist. So I follow the upbeat crooning down a cobbled route towards the action. Brightly colored buildings, red rooftops, hand-scrawled signs, chic redos and adobe walls point the way. In the historic Art District, I turn into a bustling street, thronged with well-dressed revelers, most of them slightly sunburned. They come from packed art galleries, stunning boutiques and clever cafes, chatting, clinking wine glasses and nibbling canapes. Many hold purchases — paintings, textiles, hand-painted pottery. That's what happens at Art Walk, one of Mexico's top see-and-be-seen events for art aficionados. People meet the artists, visit their intimate ateliers, drink some wine (vintages from Baja California, of course) and frequently take home something they hadn't planned on buying. Held every Thursday night from November through June, the popular fête has become a Los Cabos classic.

Art wasn't the reason tourists first visited Los Cabos. The pioneer out-of-towners were indigenous hunters and gatherers (the Guaycura, among others), followed by Spanish mariners, priests, pirates, haughty explorers and soldiers, who landed on the southernmost coast of the 800-mile-long Baja California peninsula throughout the centuries. Later,

sportsmen like writer Ernest Hemingway traipsed to sleepy Cabo San Lucas to cast their lines for deep-sea creatures. They were succeeded in spades in the 1950s by Hollywood stars like Bing Crosby, John Wayne and Lucille Ball. These silver-screen celebs visited for a tropical respite after fellow actress, Lucille Bremer, married a developer and opened a festive hotel on the grounds of what is today One&Only Palmilla.

Since then, the resort region has slowly morphed into a destination that attracts global travelers for its largesse of nature, culinary options featuring exceptional organic farms and the bounty of the sea, unique desert landscape, ocean activities and wellness possibilities — from yoga retreats to world-class spas. Having grown exponentially since Hurricane Odile in 2014 (particularly in the last two years), Los Cabos now boasts a mind-boggling stockpile of top-notch hotels. Just last year, Four Seasons Resort Los Cabos at Costa Palmas; Amanvari; Zadún, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve; Nobu Hotel Los Cabos; Viceroy; Grand Velas; Montage; and Solaz, a Luxury Collection Resort — among others — joined the coterie of lodging options.

Los Cabos means 'the capes.' For years the resort region has embodied two towns, radically diverse in mood. Cabo San Lucas, known for its party-hearty vibe, marked by the expected tawdry signs of tourism

— from souvenir shops to spring-break-on-steroids bars, ideal for bachelor parties and midnight revelry — boasts a sexy marina and buzzy spirit. By contrast, San José del Cabo, a historic town home to longtime residents and authentic architecture, has a sleepy, yet stately, art-centric personality. Between them, a 20-mile strip of beach-land known as the corridor holds most hotels, which range from all-inclusive expanses to chichi retreats and distinctive boutique hideaways that sit alongside world-class golf courses, incredible restaurants and a slew of vacation homes.

But it was only recently that the resort area expanded to include new hotels and touristic offerings set further afield. Thoughtfully developed, the new Los Cabos stretches up the Pacific side of the peninsula to Todos Santos, a boho surfer haven designated by the government as a Pueblo Mágico, a classification that celebrates and protects quintessentially characteristic communities. On the other side of the headland, it reaches northward from San José del Cabo to the more rustic, untrammelled East Cape, where Cabo Pulmo National Park reigns (it is a bucket-list destination for scuba divers and snorkelers). "Don't miss the chance to swim with bull sharks here," says Rodrigo Esponda, managing director of the Los Cabos Tourism Board, who enthusiastically notes that this is one place in the world where the sharks are uncharacteristically tranquil. "I try to go every weekend," he adds.

Traditionally, tourists visiting Los Cabos settled into their hotels, relaxed by the pool, did resort activities and only ate at on-site restaurants; each hotel formed its own sanctuary. But part of the destination's recalibration and re-envisioning has resulted in a more fluid resort region — one where guests enjoy various aspects of the resort community as a whole. In particular, there's been a culinary revolution. This new epicurean obsession ensures a stellar dining standard that hovers far above the (sometimes) expected generic, resort-style fare found at retreats in other parts of the world. Every hotel has a signature restaurant; many are headed by celebrity chefs. Healthy choices (aimed to please guests from California, who make up 70% of the clientele) abound, including vegan options, fresh-squeezed juices and gluten-free fare. Regional dishes and Mexican-style seafood preparations, such as ceviche, dominate, usually in casual, shack-style eateries. Cocktails, like an art form, eschew margaritas and tequila shots to embody alchemy, sophistication and finesse. Fine wine, including a variety of Mexican varieties, is de rigueur.

Whether it's watching the sunset, crystal flute in







Clockwise from left
Flora Farms; whale watching
in Los Cabos; Zadún's El
Barrio restaurant; the
exterior of Zadún, a
Ritz-Carlton Reserve

**Guests who seek both
coddling and cultural
immersion head to Zadún**





hand, at Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal's Champagne Terrace, an alfresco bar carved into the cliffs above the sea; eating globally inspired Mexican food at Enrique Olvera's Manta at The Cape, a Thompson Hotel; sampling Nobu's famous rock shrimp tempura or miso black cod at Nobu Los Cabos; or exploring Mexican street food with a snazzy twist at El Barrio, a festive restaurant by chef Rodrigo Torres at Zadún, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, many gourmet experiences in Cabo embrace local culture amid nature's bounty. The latest Cabo trend, dining among verdant organic gardens, takes immersion in the terrain to new heights. One of the first storied vegetable patches to garner acclaim, Flora Farms, came onto the scene more than a decade ago. The large farm, complete with a wood-fired oven, now has a spa, culinary-themed cottages, cooking and art classes, and one of Cabo's most sought-after restaurants. Also worth a visit is Los Tamarindos, which lies on 19 acres of a former sugarcane hacienda. Famous for its crop of 30 types of sweet tomatoes and its farm-to-fork restaurant, it also presents highly touted Mexican and Mediterranean cooking courses. At Acre, where guests sleep in eco-tree houses surrounded by green space, gourmands can partake of garden-to-plate meals, as well as plant-inspired cocktails in the uber-hip bar.

But nothing in Los Cabos can top whale season, from November through April, when the glorious mammals can be spied from the beach or from the deck of a snazzy vessel at sea. On a recent trip, I spotted 20 on a luxurious two-hour cruise with my son. We headed out at dusk, as the sun slowly descended like a fat lemon to the horizon. On our small yacht, we bounced atop waves near the Arch, Los Cabos' iconic rock formation, which looks like a rainbow made from stone. Captivatingly, it framed the churning cobalt water as we sipped our drinks, and the salty breeze cooled our cheeks. Suddenly, we got a surprise: Just a few feet from our boat, a colossal humpback whale breached — majestically, as if greeting or trying to communicate with us. When she landed back in the ocean, she lobtailed — and a wall of water drenched us. We laughed, willing her to do it again. She did, and this time her calf joined the unforgettable show.

Beaches, an art scene, gourmet adventures, a desert prime for ATV off-roading, camel or horseback rides, yoga at dawn, shopping forays to Todos Santos, spa treatments based on indigenous practices, marine wildlife encounters and spectacular hotels deeply in tune with the landscape combine to ensure Los Cabos can promise something for everyone. "It's a magical place," sums up Esponda. That might be an understatement.

HAUTE HOTELS

Montage Los Cabos

This beautiful resort, Montage's first outside of the US, sits on 39 beachfront acres between two rocky promontories, showcasing one of Cabo's most storied crescents of sand, Santa Maria Beach. Chic, modern and low-lying, the organic architecture ensures all guest rooms sport ocean views.

montagehotels.com/loscabos

Four Seasons Resort Los Cabos at Costa Palmas

Nestled into the less-traveled East Cape on the Sea of Cortez, Four Seasons Costa Palmas fuses seamlessly with the desert terrain. It has 141 guest rooms and several residential beachside villas, as well as five restaurants, a superyacht marina, Robert Trent Jones II golf course and two miles of swimmable beach — a rarity in Cabo.

fourseasons.com/loscabos

Solaz Los Cabos, a Luxury Collection Resort

A contemporary masterpiece designed by acclaimed architect Sordo Madaleno, Solaz was built to reflect regional folklore and the landscape. Two Olympic-sized swimming pools, an airy spa, three restaurants and a craft cocktail program rule the day. Book the Three-bedroom Penthouse for eye-popping views.

solaz.com

Zadún, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve

Like the other handful of top-notch Ritz-Carlton Reserve resorts around the world, this one embraces the locale without sacrificing over-the-top standards. For guests who seek both coddling and cultural immersion, Zadún satisfies. Consider the Grand Reserve Villa, which features space for six adults.

ritzcarlton.com/zadun

Grand Velas Los Cabos

This opulent, 304-room, all-inclusive resort has seven stellar restaurants, a beach on the Sea of Cortez, a lively kid's club, lavish fitness facilities, myriad complimentary activities and a state-of-the-art spa. Book the bi-level Wellness Suite, ideal for fitness buffs.

loscabos.grandvelas.com

