

PLUS: ANNUAL RULES QUIZ | PEBBLE BEACH'S SALLY DODGE | TRAVEL: MEXICO

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Spring Creek Golf & Country Club **Thriving in the Valley**



Plus:

Meet President Gary Fox
Marion Hollins Gets Her Due
Loustalot Family Affair

MERRY OVER MEXICO

We're gaga for Baja California Sur (and Riviera Nayarit, too)

Choosing which South of the Border destination to highlight this issue was a bit like trying to decide between the filet mignon and the lobster tail for dinner. We ended up going with our version of surf and turf and packed three popular spots and some of the trendiest new courses into our package on golf in Mexico.

For decades, **Cabo San Lucas** has been the magnet of the Mexican state of Baja California Sur, luring pleasure-seekers and adventurers to the peninsula's southernmost tip with its high-end resorts and world-class sportfishing and



surf breaks. But those who seek a smaller, sleepier Baja town have begun heading north to **Loreto**. You can't visit there without trying the local delicacy, almejas chocolates—large, meaty clams with chocolate-hued shells.

Between mountains and the endless Pacific, on a crescent of pristine beach is **Punta Mita**, another former fishing village on a private peninsula at the southernmost point of the Riviera Nayarit, not far from Puerto Vallarta.

All three destinations are an escape to a palm-shaded oasis of warm breezes, oceanfront holes and guaranteed good times.

CABO: Where Life Is Better

by Adam Schupak

The name of the Wi-Fi network and password at the **Grand Solmar Rancho San Lucas** is easy to remember—Life is better at Rancho—but it represented more than just my ticket to surf the internet; it was an entire mindset for my trip to Cabo.

Whether I was basking in the sunshine and sipping the most delicious mango smoothie for breakfast, floating on a raft in the saltwater lagoon or seeing whales breaching in the distance from the golf course, I was constantly reminded that life indeed is better at Rancho.

There's a Mexican saying that tequila is cheaper than therapy. While I abstained from the liquor, nothing eliminated life's worries more than my first stop at one of the two **Rancho San Lucas Golf Club** comfort stations, each stocked with Mexican specialties and ice-cold refresh-

ments. When I ordered a Pacifico beer, the attendant slid not one, but two in front of me on the counter and said, "Señor, you're on vacation. Act like it!"

Don't mind if I do.

Cabo San Lucas, where the Baja desert meets the sun-bathed Sea of Cortez on the southern tip of Baja California Sur, was nothing more than a sleepy fishing village when Jack Nicklaus first visited in 1964.

"You could slip down there with a bathing suit and \$20 in your pocket and seemingly live for a week," Nicklaus says.



"Now, \$20 might not get you out of the airport parking lot!"

Until Nicklaus started building courses here in the 1990s, Cabo had only a nine-hole municipal course. But that would change. The runway where Nicklaus landed during his first visit to Cabo? It's now a fairway at **Palmilla Golf Club**, which opened in 1992 and is one



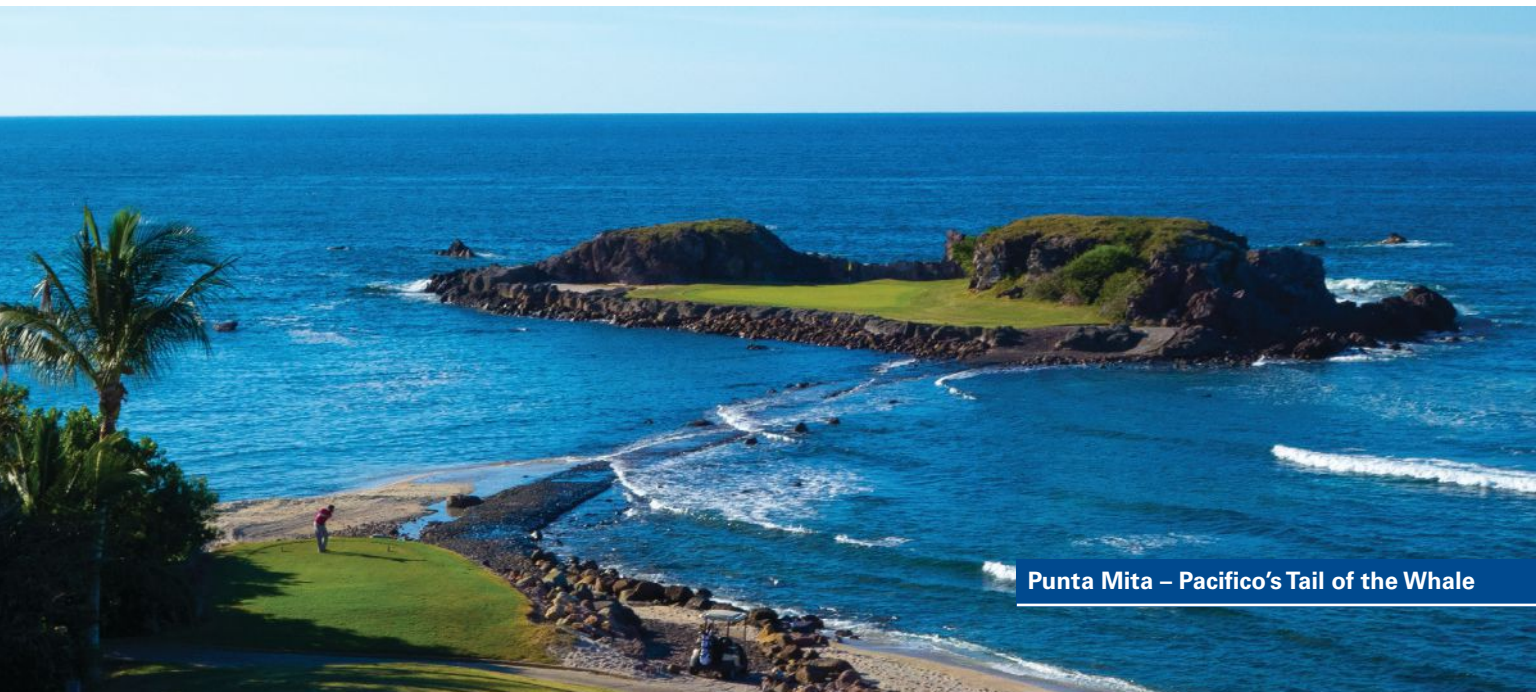
CHANNING BENJAMIN

Cabo – The Rancho San Lucas Golf Club



JOANN DOST

Loreto – TPC Danzante Bay



Punta Mita – Pacifico's Tail of the Whale



TPC Danzante Bay No.3

challenging (you may want to have a guide), offers the reward of gorgeous waterfalls and pools. The Sierra de la Giganta mountain range is one of the few places where it's still possible to see prehistoric sites, including ancient paintings in canyons and caves dating back 7,500 years.

In Loreto, the place to be is the **Villa del Palmar Beach Resort and Spa**, where the series of pools are not to be missed. The resort's numerous dining options will leave you craving more, especially at **Danzante**, known for its seafood

and steak with a touch of Mexican flair.

The resort's showpiece is TPC Danzante Bay, which treks through valleys, arroyos, dunes and foothills. Just a cart ride away from the resort and the only TPC course in Mexico, the layout originally opened in 2016 as 11 holes before Jones added another seven beauties a year later, stretching the par-72 course to 7,237 yards.

"This is a golf course that both avid and casual golfers will want to travel to play, enjoy and experience," says Jones, designer of the NCGA's own Poppy

Ridge in Livermore. "People will want to play the course over and over again because the conditions change with the wind."

Course highlights on the front nine include the uphill par-5 2nd and the knee-knocking par-3 3rd, which features a long carry over a gorge to a putting surface that is larger than it looks from the tee.

After making the turn – don't miss the tacos at the pro shop – players are soon greeted by the scenic par-5 12th and par-3 13th, the original signature hole of the course, nestled in sand dunes that roll down to the beach.

And yet somehow, that hole has been eclipsed by one of the most breathtaking par-3 holes anywhere. The 17th is pure jaw-dropping eye candy, even for non-golfers. (There's a hiking trail nearby for those who aren't playing.) It's hard to follow up that dandy but Danzante's finish is epic – a tee shot at the par 4 over a large rock outcropping and back towards the resort far below in the distance. It's another view to savor.

Surrounded by a continuous panorama of the sea, mountains and adjacent Islands of Loreto, TPC Danzante Bay is an unforgettable experience that will become a treasured deposit in the memory bank. It's all waiting for you at Villa del Palmar at the Islands of Loreto, and it's not too far away. 🌴

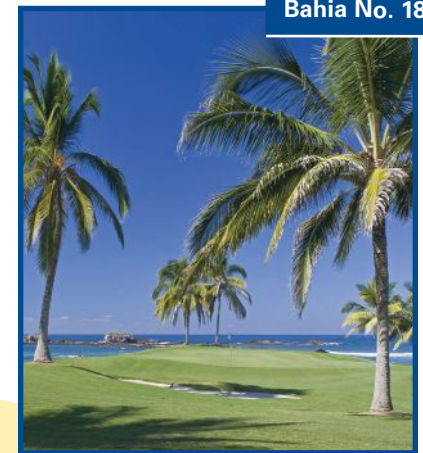
Coco Loco for Punta Mita

by Adam Schupak

Tania Ritchie and her husband, Rob, were sailing around the world when friends of the Canadian couple asked to make a detour to view property in Punta Mita, 30 miles south of the resort city of Puerto Vallarta in the Mexican state of Jalisco. A funny thing happened on their way around the world: The Ritchies ended up being the property buyers, calling off the sailing trip and never looking back.

"We were thinking we'd settle in Paris, maybe," she says. "We had no intention, but we just knew and here we are 13 years later."

A little more than 20 years ago, this southwest point on the Riviera Nayarit was nothing more than an off-the-grid spot for hardcore surfers. No one could



Bahia No. 18

have imagined that two championship golf courses, multimillion-dollar villas and two luxurious resorts, the **Four Seasons** and **St. Regis**, would have

been carved out of this 1,500-acre nature preserve on Banderas Bay.

It didn't take me long to discover why the Ritchies and tourists that enjoy activities such as snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing and fishing tend to fall hard for the intoxicating beauty of Punta Mita. At the Four Seasons Resort, I was welcomed at what the locals call a palapas, a thatched-roof, open-air lounge. From there, I descended to a sparkling infinity pool at the resort's center, with a view that registered at least an 11 on a scale from 1 to 10 for 'wow' factor.

My accommodations were modern and elegant, and I opened up the sliding-glass door to draw in breezes off the electric-blue sea. But this is a place where you want to spend as little time in your room as possible.

I could've taken up permanent residence in the infinity pool, where the bartenders wade into the water to deliver drinks and snacks. I kept seeing sunbathers sipping straws out of coconuts, so I finally asked a middle-aged American tourist the name of this fanciful concoction. "Coco Loco," he said of the mixture of gin, vodka, tequila and lime. "It's kind of like a Long Island Iced Tea, but with tequila. You've got to have one...but only one!"

Having just braved the Thanksgiving holiday in the chilly Midwest, the balmy weather of Punta Mita was good for the soul. The Four Seasons features its version of an old-school weather station: if the rock is wet, it's raining; if the rock is hot, it's sunny; if the rock is cool, it's overcast; and if the rock is under water? Go grab your surfboard.

Set on the northern tip of Banderas Bay, Punta Mita is a spear-shaped peninsula bordered by more than nine miles of white-sugary shoreline. There are five beach clubs to choose from, with most of my off-course time spent at **Kupuri Beach Club**, one of the loveliest corners of the peninsula. There, I dined on Mexican food with an Asian street fare twist. Two other stand-out restaurants are **Sufi**, which combines the flavors of Mexico and the Mediterranean, and **Hector's Kitchen**,



Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita

where I feasted on the most delicious take on red snapper.

At Kupuri, my meal was served under a shaded, beachfront pergola, washed down with a Mitarita, a favorite local cocktail, followed by the inevitable snooze in the sun, lulled by the sound of gentle waves in Litibu Bay. Afterwards I drifted back to the bar, and its poolside swings, and watched the sun descend into the water.

The gated community's signature and most anticipated event of the year is a four-day extravaganza of dining, drinking, golfing, noshing, teeing off and tastings. **The American Express Golf & Gourmet** is a modern-day bacchanalia, with celebrity chefs, mixologists, and sommeliers flown in for a weekend of culinary excellence, and is a bucket-list trip worth taking for golfers and non-golfers.

The golf is top notch, featuring two Jack Nicklaus Signature Designs that rank in the top 10 of *Golfweek's* Best Caribbean Courses. **Pacifico**, dating from 1999, reopened in November after a six-month closure to restore the greens, bunkers and surrounds with TifEagle Bermuda grass. About the only bummer of the trip was that the world's only golf hole with a natural island green, Hole 3B nicknamed "Tail

of the Whale" or Cola de la Ballena, wasn't in play the day I played the course. That's because the rocky cart path to the black-lava island green was submerged by several feet of water from the Sea of Cortez. That's what happens when the tide is up.

Nicklaus calls the 194-yard carry over the Pacific Ocean "probably the best par 3 I've ever designed," and he'll get no argument here. It's the type of hole that makes you want to do cartwheels and brag to your friends when your ball lands safely.

With seven holes directly facing or playing alongside the Pacific Ocean, Pacifico is no one-trick pony. **Bahía**, Nicklaus' second championship course there, has five oceanview holes, and is every bit as good if not better. For those in need of a lesson or two, former French touring pro Jean Van de Velde, who famously blew a seemingly insurmountable lead on the final hole of the 1999 British Open, has taken up permanent residence at the Banderas Bay as resident instructor.

Like the Ritchies, he too has said au revoir to gay Paris and hello to a new philosophy on life best summarized by the chalkboard sign at the Four Seasons lobby bar: All you need is sunsets and margaritas. 🌺