

ML MAINLINE

THE ART + CULTURE + LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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proves green is
the new black

THE FOOD ISSUE

50 BEST MEALS
ON THE MAIN LINE

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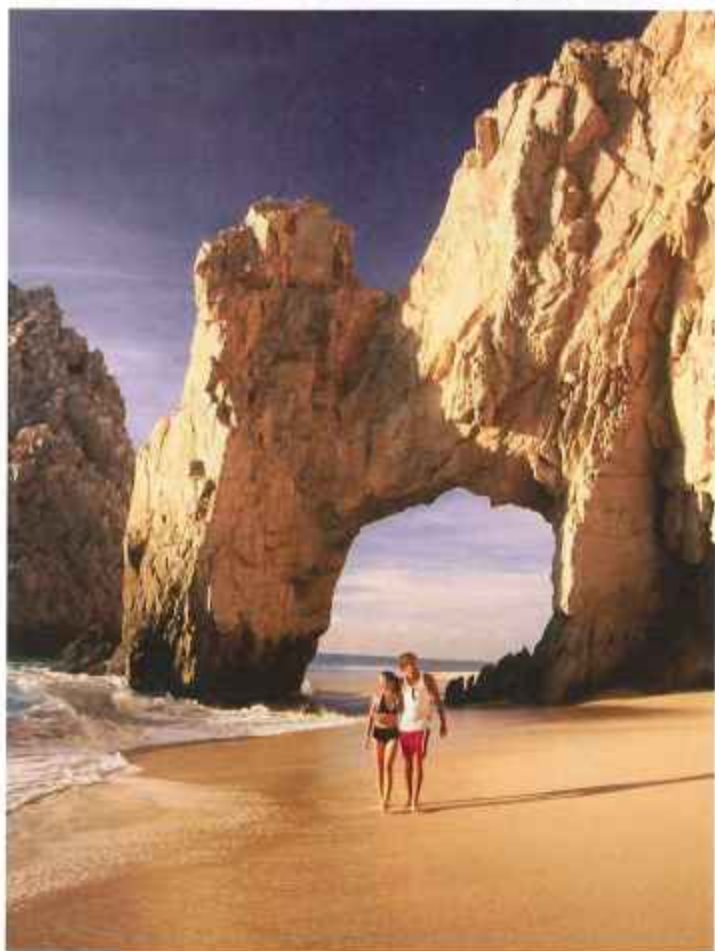
Get it while it's hot

Why Cabo just might be the next St. Bart's



Get it while it's hot

Skip the islands this year and journey to the tip of the Baja Peninsula, to the Mexican paradise of Los Cabos



A few decades ago, Cabo San Lucas was little more than a sleepy fishing village known for some of the best sport fishing in the world. But since then, the world has discovered this paradise wedged on a shimmering strip of sand and rocks between ocean and desert at the tip of the Baja Peninsula. Uber-luxury resorts have sprung up in Los Cabos (the capes)—especially along “the Corridor,” the 20-mile ribbon of shoreline that links the “fiesta” town of San Lucas with the other Căbo, San Jose del Cabo, a “siesta” town overlooking the Sea of Cortés. The past five years have seen an almost Dubai-like building frenzy of infinity edge pools, manicured golf courses, raucous nightclubs, gourmet restaurants and oceanfront spas—creating a playground for Hollywood glitterati and snowbirds alike.

Yet it's no wonder that famous scene of Armageddon in the original *Planet of the Apes*, where Charlton Heston curses humanity under the shadow of the buried Statue of Liberty, was filmed on a beach just minutes from the heart of downtown Cabo San Lucas. Because even in this boomtown it's still possible

to find utter isolation—along with peace, tranquility and relaxation.

When we touched down at Los Cabos recently, we discovered the advantage to the rush of development: complete and total luxury. We checked in at the Marquis Los Cabos, a sprawling adobe-colored palace of ocean-view suites and casitas entered via a sweeping open-air archway overlooking the ocean. Thanks to the troubled U.S. economy and loads of last-minute cancellations, we had the complex of curving infinity-edge pools nearly to ourselves. Our morning alarm clock was the sunrise over crashing ocean waves—and we woke each morning to find a breakfast of hot coffee, fresh bread and fruit tucked into a cubby by the door.

Los Cabos has no dearth of luxe accommodations, but what makes this place truly unique might be the wildlife. The beaches along the corridor are all but unswimmable thanks to fierce undertow. That leaves water so unspoiled that, from January to March, you can sit on your hotel balcony and watch the gray whales—who come here each year to mate—splash around just offshore. Game fish are in season year-round here: in January, it's sea bass, black marlin and yellowfin tuna. And at Land's End, the tip of the curving peninsula that hugs Cabo San Lucas' natural harbor, a noisy colony of sea lions bask on the sea-smoothed rocks, unbothered by the hoards of pelicans swooping around the natural stone arch that has become Los Cabos' iconic landmark.

There's plenty to do here as well. Take a kayak (past towering cruise ships and rowdy booze cruises) from Cabo San Lucas to the secluded Lovers' Beach, accessible only by boat.

FIELD GUIDE: LOS CABOS

LOGISTICS

WHEN TO GO: High season lasts November through May. Stay away during cruelly hot summers and September hurricanes.

GETTING THERE: There are no direct commercial flights from Philadelphia to Los Cabos; expect at least seven hours of travel time including a stopover when flying commercially. The Los Cabos International Airport is open to private jets.

TRANSPORT: Rental cars are the most affordable option, as resorts are often secluded and spread across a 20-mile stretch between towns. Avis, National, Alamo and others all have offices at the airport and in town. Or hire a driver and guide from a luxury firm like TransCabo (transcabo.com) or Terramar (terramardestinations.com).

STAY

MARQUIS LOS CABOS: The six-year-old resort on the Corridor offers luxurious ocean-view suites with hydromassage tubs, Bulgari toiletries, balconies and some private pools, plus an extensive spa, fitness center, activities and gourmet dining on site. (From \$495, marquisloscabos.com.)

ESPERANZA: Luxe palapa-like casitas and suites are adorned with work by top Mexican artists at this up-market paradise with its top-rated spa and open-air massage rooms on the beach. Some rooms have plunge pools or infinity edge hot tubs; all have ocean views and lavish amenities. (From \$675, esperanzaresort.com.)

ONE&ONLY PALMILLA: This storied property, once a private haven for the son of a Mexican president, is among the region's finest, with one of Los Cabos' only swimmable beaches and rooms that include 24-hour butler service and ocean-view terraces with plush daybeds and telescopes for whale-watching. (From \$500, oneandonlyresorts.com.)

LAS VENTANAS AL PARAISO: This exclusive Mediterranean-style getaway offers perks like a “director of romance services,” outdoor cooking classes in an aromatic herb garden, and rooms with in-suite adobe fireplaces or private rooftop hot tubs. (From \$725, lasventanas.com.)

DINE

MI COCINA: Within the Casa Natalia hotel, a charming, palm-shaded courtyard just off San Jose's historic square hosts an elegant restaurant run by Chef Loic Tenoux, who serves up innovative Mexican-Continental fusion fare. (casanatalia.com).

ESPERANZA: Don't miss the dramatic cliff-side dining, the tastings of more than 100 types of tequila or the standout ceviche at The Restaurant, where the menu showcases fresh local fish and seafood. (esperanzaresort.com).

TEQUILA: One of the oldest fine dining restaurants in San Jose, Tequila features organic produce from the owner's farm, plus fresh seafood and Mexican-global fusion fare. There's also a wine cellar and a cigar room. (tequilarestaurant.com).

LEISURE

GOLF: Don't miss the Cabo del Sol development's 36 holes: the renowned Jack Nicklaus Ocean course (termed Mexico's Pebble Beach), as well as Tom Weiskopf's more affordable Desert course (cabodelsol.com). Nicklaus also designed the 27 holes at Palmilla Golf Club, the acclaimed facility affiliated with One&Only (palmillagc.com). And at Cabo Real, there's the Robert Trent Jones II 18-hole course (caboreal.com).

SHOPPING: The only shopping mall is Puerto Paraiso in Cabo San Lucas. For silly souvenirs like Mexican wrestlers' masks, check out the flea market on the pier in San Lucas; then settle into serious shopping at the stores around the main square in San Jose, where you can find hand-crafted silver jewelry, artisan ceramics, soft woven blankets and more. A budding gallery row offers impressive works by local artists; stop by Casa Dahlia Gallery and Tea Garden at Morelos and Zaragoza streets for organic tea and coffee in a charming setting. And outside the tourist quarter, there's an authentic market area at Castro and Coronado streets, for spices, clothing and other souvenirs.

ADVENTURE: Kayak across San Lucas' harbor to Lovers' Beach for snorkeling, sea lion watching and the best view of the arch, or take an ATV trip into the desert for rappelling with Baja Wild (bajawild.com). And word is, Susan Sarandon loved the Marquis Los Cabos' Fox Canyon trip, with hiking, swimming and your own Hummer for off-roading. You can also swim with Pacific bottlenose dolphins at Cabo Dolphins in San Lucas, (cabodolphins.com). Or take a small Aereo Calafia plane to Bahia Magdalena, where you can watch gray whales up close from January through March, (aerocalafia.com).

FISHING: Trophy fish, especially black marlin, are abundant here almost any time of year, as are fishing vessels for hire. Two of the biggest and best-known fleets are Pisce Sportfishing (piscsportfishing.com) and Picante Bluewater Sportfishing (picantesportfishing.com) both out of San Lucas, starting around \$400 for day sails for up to four people.

NIGHTLIFE: San Lucas is known for rowdy nightlife, from the spring break-type crowds that drink and dance until dawn at El Squid Roe (elsquidroe.com), to the somewhat calmer, more mature group that crowds Sammy Hagar's Cabo Wabo Cantina, where the former Van Halen singer shows up to play several times a year (cabowabocantina.com). Visit the swanky open air Passions nightclub at the Melia resort (we ran into rapper Lil Jon there on a recent weekend) where the occasional go-go dancers start the party (solmelia.com). There are also low-key live concerts held outdoors in San Jose's town square on many Friday and Saturday nights.



From top to bottom: The lobby at Marquis Los Cabos; a view of Esperanza resort, and Cabo San Lucas' resident sea lions.

There, you can snorkel among the schools of fish that crowd the reefs or walk across the peninsula to what's been dubbed Divorce Beach, thanks to rough, treacherous waters. Get behind the wheel of a rugged all-terrain vehicle for a wild ride through the desert. Book a tee time at Cabo del Sol's Jack Nicklaus-designed ocean course, deemed the best in Mexico. Or sign up for a treatment at luxurious spas that abound along the resort corridor.

Or, make like great travelers like Hemingway and Steinbeck, who traveled to Los Cabos in quieter times: Sit back with a cold Pacifico beer, soak in the sun and wait for the marlin to bite. ■

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