



Destination Guide: Cabo San Lucas



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AAA Destination Guide: Cabo San Lucas includes trip-planning information covering AAA recommended attractions and restaurants, exclusive member discounts, maps and more.

Before the 1970s, Cabo San Lucas was a quiet, isolated community known mostly to sport fishermen, and San José del Cabo, to the northeast, was a sleepy, provincial village. In the 1970s, however, FONATUR (Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo), Mexico's agency for tourism promotion, selected the locale as its next development project. The choice was a natural: Cabo San Lucas' setting at "Land's End," the very southern tip of Baja California, is where the Pacific Ocean meets the Gulf of California, and San José del Cabo, though modern in every respect, retains its 18th-century small-town appeal.

The towns are now collectively called "Los Cabos," and the 30-kilometer (20-mile) four-lane divided highway that connects the two resort areas is popularly known as "the Corridor." However, though united by a common moniker, each has a distinct persona.

Cabo San Lucas, the more populous of the two, still draws anglers eager to land a record catch. But it also caters to golfers ready to tee off at a championship course and those with a penchant for partying into the wee hours. Very much a playground, Cabo San Lucas is also the more "Americanized" of the duo, especially the area near the marina where malls and familiar fast-food chains are numerous.

On the Corridor, luxurious waterfront resort hotels are secluded from the view of passersby, and side roads lead to quiet azure beaches perfect for snorkeling or just lazing in the sun. San José, the quiet sibling of boisterous Cabo San Lucas, has quaint streets full of art galleries and

high-end gift shops, and a square anchored by a cathedral and a gingerbread gazebo

Essentials

Catch a water taxi and ride to Land's End, the southernmost tip of the Baja Peninsula, for a close-up view of El Arco (the arch), the iconic image of Cabo San Lucas, and Playa del Amor (Lover's Beach), the romantically named spit of sand adjacent to the arch.

Charter a deep-sea fishing boat and find out for yourself why Cabo San Lucas claims to be the Marlin Capital of the World.

Do you know the way to San José? Just head up the Corridor to [San José del Cabo](#) and spend some quality time shopping in the galleries, boutiques, jewelry shops and stores featuring items hand-crafted by regional artisans. (The corridor is the 30-kilometer (20-mile) four-lane divided highway that connects Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo.)



Reserve a tee time at one of the Corridor's championship-caliber golf courses designed by Jack Nicklaus, Robert Trent Jones, Tom Weiskopf and Roy Dye.

Slather on plenty of sunscreen, grab a hat and a pair of sunglasses and flip-flop your way to the beach or pool for a day of sun worshiping.

Indulge in a day of pampering at one of Los Cabos' plush spas where massages and body wraps help rejuvenate and nourish both body and spirit.

Venture beyond burritos and sample other Mexican fare, from simple fish tacos made from today's catch at [The Office on the Beach](#) to exquisite presentations creatively crafted using locally grown organic products at [French Riviera Restaurant & Club 96](#).

Dive right in. Snorkelers agree that the waters around Cabo, especially those around Land's End, are great for up-close inspection of colorful tropical underwater creatures.

Sip a margarita or cerveza at one of Cabo San Lucas' legendary hangouts—Cabo Wabo, El Squid Roe or the Giggling Marlin—or while watching a glorious tropical sunset at a beachfront palapa or hotel lounge.

Sail away on a sunset catamaran cruise and watch the twinkling lights of Cabo flicker on as evening overtakes the peninsula; your hotel concierge can make suggestions and reservations.

Restaurants

Whether you're looking for haute cuisine or just a juicy burger, you can find it in Los Cabos. In addition to traditional Mexican fare, Mediterranean, Italian, American, Asian and international-inspired dishes are featured at restaurants in Cabo San Lucas, along the Corridor and in [San José del Cabo](#).



Just a short walk off the marina in downtown Cabo San Lucas (down the street from the Giggling Marlin), [O Mole Mio](#) is worth a visit as much for the decor as for the food.

Guadalajaran artist Ernesto Cruz designed the wildly creative interior, a blend of wood, stone and wrought iron featuring custom-

made tables and chairs and a very cool staircase that winds up to the second level. As the name says, the house specialty is the various mole sauces, served over chicken. Another good choice is tuna accompanied by a zippy mango-papaya salsa. Even if you don't eat here, stop in for a

drink; the margaritas deliver, and the bartenders are convivial and quite entertaining.

You know you're in for a fine, authentic Italian meal when you see the waiters at [Romeo y Julieta Ristorante](#) in their Italian flag-colored red, green and white aprons. This Cabo San Lucas restaurant features appetizers such as antipasto and prosciutto and melon as well as an extensive salad bar. Caesar salad made tableside is a popular request. Entrées include Chicken Parmesana; Chicken Cacciatore; Scampi Provenzale with Cannelloni; Medagliones Funghi (veal medallions); gnocchi; lasagna; and pizzas from a wood-fired oven. Top off your meal with a piece of homemade cake or the delicious flan. The attentive staff provides prompt service.

When you enter [Mi Casa](#) in Cabo San Lucas, you feel as if you've stepped into a Mexican village. Seating is on different levels, with some areas partially covered and others open to the sun. The bold colors used in the décor are reminiscent of a bright, festive piñata. Many dishes feature meats and seafood that have been marinated in achiote, a Mexican chile paste. A variety of regional delicacies, all made from scratch, include chicken with a rich mole sauce, sopa de frijoles (black bean soup), jumbo shrimp and a poblano pepper stuffed with the sautéed meat of your choice. Warm tortillas are made on the spot.

[La Golondrina](#) claims to be in the oldest building in Cabo San Lucas, an old trading post dating to 1896. Formerly known as The Trailer Park, the restaurant's long-standing family recipes and sauces feature fresh lobster, filet mignon, ribs, shrimp and fresh fish as well as home-style Mexican dishes, pastas and combination platters. The waiters stand at the entrance to welcome you in.

At [The Office on the Beach](#) you can dine outdoors with your feet comfortably resting in the sand. This casual atmosphere is the perfect spot in which to unwind and have a margarita while watching the waves and beachgoers enjoying a swim or hopping on a boat to Land's End. Traditional Mexican fare, such as jumbo shrimp, butterfly-cut and grilled with a generous amount of blackened garlic, is the Cabo San Lucas

restaurant's specialty. A lively Mexican fiesta with traditional folk dances, piñatas and audience participation is celebrated once a week. If you haven't finished shopping, check out the wares vendors offer on the beach; you might just find a bargain souvenir.

Another marina area eatery in Cabo San Lucas is Galeon Italian Restaurant, where the antipasto selections are first-class, as are entrees such as veal medallions with marsala and mushrooms; another veal dish, Scaloppina al Limone; filet mignon with anchovies and black olives; and a generous portion of shrimp in garlic, tomatoes, wine and herbs.

Although there are restaurants along the Corridor between Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo where casual fare is the order of the day, the highway also is well-known for elegant fine-dining establishments, many of which can be found in the posh hotels that stretch of road is famous for.

The amount of memorabilia, fishing and marine items, license plates and business cards that cover the walls at Latitude 22+ Roadhouse can seem overwhelming at first, but this casual restaurant and bar is generally packed with regulars ready to chow down on affordable fare such as Philly cheesesteak, burgers with every conceivable type of filling, chicken fried steak, prime rib, tacos and enchiladas. Locals enjoy the unpretentious atmosphere and consider this a place to hang out after a busy day of fishing or a fun watering hole to quench your thirst and satisfy the munchies. Like the restaurant itself, the service is carefree and informal.

Both the indoor and outdoor seating at Sunset da Mona Lisa provide breathtaking views of Land's End and the bay of Cabo San Lucas. This Italian restaurant on the ocean's edge offers the freshest seafood and finest local ingredients. Tuna, scallops and calamari are favorite starters, and focaccia is baked nightly in a wood-fired oven. Service is accommodating and professional.

Gleaming crystal and crisp white table linens set the stage for the cuisine prepared by chef/owner Jacques Chretien at French Riviera Restaurant &

Club 96. The restaurant's design includes panoramic views of the Gulf of California and the arch at Land's End, and its open kitchen allows guests to watch the chef and his staff create exquisite French- and Mediterranean-inspired dishes. Only the finest local seafood and organically grown produce are used for the à la carte selections and the three tasting menus. Breads and decadent desserts come from the restaurant's own bakery. An extensive wine list and attentive service promise an impressive meal.

The Restaurant, the main dining room at Las Ventanas al Paraiso, is as refined and elegant as the lodging itself. Guests may choose to dine outdoors on a covered patio or indoors; regardless, every table has a view of both the hotel's stunning pool and the blue-green Gulf of California. The cuisine is described as Baja-Mediterranean and leans toward seafood, though lamb and steak dishes also make an appearance on the ever-changing menu. As might be expected, the wine selection is exemplary and service outstanding.

The intimate fine dining experience at Canto del Mar Restaurant in the Marquis Los Cabos Beach, Golf, Spa & Casitas Resort begins in a private dining room as the waiter explains each course. A candelabra, lace tablecloth and cloth napkins set a tone of elegance. Prix fixe dinners, which include recommendations from the chef designed to suit each guest's palate, culminate with a freshly brewed cup of coffee or after dinner drink.

Quaint San José del Cabo retains much of its 18th-century colonial character, and many of its restaurants, almost all near the town square, are fashionable establishments that cover a full range of culinary choices.

Tequila Restaurante is a perfect spot for intimate dinners and special occasions. Its open and semi-private garden areas are decorated with twinkling lights hanging from trees. A blend of Mediterranean, Asian and Mexican influences enhances each entrée, including seafood, beef and poultry selections. The Tequila Shrimp is excellent. The Agave Lounge, in a bow to the establishment's name, offers an amazing array of tequila brands, and the restaurant's staff is pleasant and accommodating.

The upscale ambience of [Morgan's Restaurant & Cellar](#) is evocative of a traditional Mexican setting, complete with an open interior patio. Aromas of juicy choice steaks, prime rib, beef tenderloin and fresh fish from the open kitchen whet your appetite, and the personable staff provide professional service and set the tone for a memorable dining experience.

You have a choice of where to dine at [Morgan's Encore](#)—the main floor dining room or open-air seating on the second floor where a fireplace provides a cozy touch. Although the restaurant features fresh fish, lamb shanks and pork tenderloin, the most popular item is their homemade spaghetti and meatballs. For dessert try the creamy lime cheesecake. The personable servers make sure your dining experience is relaxing and pleasant.

The sidewalk seating area at [Tropicana Bar & Grill](#) is the perfect place for watching people stroll through San José del Cabo's quaint town plaza. High ceilings and colorful murals add to the casual ambience of the restaurant, where breakfast is a popular time of the day. Mexican dishes are a favorite, and the tortillas come hot and fresh from the open-air kitchen. Other popular items include seafood, such as red snapper and ahi tuna, or you can choose your entree from the lobster tank. A lounge provides live entertainment on weekends.

Diners at [El Chilar](#) can always expect something new on the menu, as the chef changes the selections on a monthly basis. One constant, though, is the presence of a variety of chilies in his creative Mexican presentations. Scallops are a popular entrée, as are two of the chef's most imaginative dishes, shrimp in roasted garlic and salmon napoleon with pico de gallo. An extensive wine list complements the menu choices. As a personal touch, the chef visits each table to ensure his customers' dining experiences are positive.

Located near the gallery district in a 150-year-old colonial home, [Baan Thai](#) prepares an array of Pan-Asian cuisine featuring Indonesian and Thai elements. The show kitchen is open to two dining areas, one being a bit more private. Recommended dishes include Vietnamese summer rolls, seafood dumplings, spicy chicken with fresh herbs, vegetables

wrapped in rice paper, Thai coconut chicken and braised lamb shank; the portions of most are large enough to share. The staff is very friendly and laid-back.

Recreation

Biking, swimming, backpacking, fishing, hiking—whatever your interest, make sure you experience these recreational highlights, as chosen by AAA editors.



Los Cabos' tropical environment and the year-round warm waters of the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean guarantee you'll have plenty of recreational options to choose from. Fan favorites such as fishing, golfing, diving and surfing—activities that made this area a vacation magnet—are

perennially popular, but this ocean playground also reaches out to those who like to try something new. How about parasailing, ziplining or heading off into the backcountry on an ATV? You've definitely come to the right place.

Without a doubt fishing lures many anglers to Cabo San Lucas. How could anyone serious about sportfishing not love a place that calls itself the Marlin Capital of the World—a place where landing a 100-pound catch is commonplace? Deep-sea fishing can be enjoyed all year, though the prized marlins generally run from July through December. Other fish typically found in offshore waters include wahoo, tuna, sailfish, yellowtail and dorado, though the type of fish caught varies with the season.

To reel in these fish, you'll need to charter a boat. *Pangas*, small motor-powered skiffs used by local fishermen, are the most reasonably priced and can generally accommodate two or three fishermen, or you can go more upscale and reserve a cruiser or yacht with a capacity for up to eight. Regardless, splitting the cost of the rental helps lower the overall price. Charters can last from 5 hours to a whole day and typically head to

the bountiful Gordo Banks, offshore from San José del Cabo, or into the Pacific Ocean.

Pangas can be found at the marina in Cabo San Lucas or just north of San José del Cabo by the new Puerto los Cabos development. For larger boats, stick to the Cabo San Lucas marina. It's a good idea to confirm what's included up front; bait, tackle, food, drinks and cleaning are some of the items that might be wrapped into the rental fee. And if you do land a record catch, have a picture taken as documentation, since catch-and-release is the common practice and this will truly be "the one that got away."

For landlubbers, golf is the sport of choice in Los Cabos. Challenging championship-quality courses, many designed by such well-known names as Jack Nicklaus and Roy Dye, appear as winding ribbons of green in Cabo's dry, desert landscape. Most of Los Cabos' public courses are along the Corridor—the 20-mile stretch of road connecting Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo—and all offer scenic desert, ocean and/or mountain views.

Links open to the public are the three nine-hole courses at Palmilla Golf Club, 18 holes at Cabo Real, the 18-hole Cabo del Sol Ocean Course, the 18-hole Cabo del Sol Desert Course, and 18 holes at the Raven Golf Club. In addition, San José del Cabo has the nine-hole Mayan Palace Golf Course. Greens fees can be quite high, especially in season (usually mid-October to mid-June), though rates are somewhat cheaper in the afternoon. Several new courses under construction are part of exclusive planned communities and will be open only to residents and members.

At the tip of the Baja peninsula, with the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Gulf of California (also known as the Sea of Cortez) on the other, Los Cabos was practically destined to be a diver's paradise. Three major ocean currents meet here, bringing with them a tremendous assortment of marine life.

You don't have to travel far to find snorkeling and scuba diving heaven. Land's End, where the ocean and gulf merge, is one of the most

accessible (and popular) locations. You can sign up for a reasonably priced tour to snorkeling sites near El Arco, or just take a 15-minute water taxi ride from the Cabo San Lucas marina or Playa el Médano to Lover's Beach, which is near the arch. As it makes its way across the bay, your boat will skim by interesting rock formations and colonies of seals and pelicans snoozing on their own patches of rocky real estate. Once there, be sure and stay on the gulf side of El Arco since the currents and undertow on the ocean side (humorously referred to as Divorce Beach) are not conducive to any type of water activity. As you snorkel, you're likely to spot schools of such brightly colored creatures as angel, trigger and parrot fish. And, if you're not on a tour, don't forget to arrange a time for the water taxi to pick you up for the return trip to Cabo.

Dive operations provide excursions to popular scuba sites, including several near Land's End. Sea fans cling to Pelican Rock, which is also a favorite of schools of colorful goatfish and angelfish. Near Pelican Rock are some of the Sandfalls, which resemble waterfalls but are actually sand. Several types of gorgonias as well as a large Sandfall can be found



near Neptune's Finger, a rock formation protruding from the water. At The Point (the actual "land's end"), divers may find themselves among gamefish, turtles, whale sharks and mantas.

Two other snorkeling and scuba spots to consider, both along the Corridor, are Playa Chileno and Playa Santa Maria. Playa Chileno, popular with locals, has clear, blue water, palm trees and a coral reef where sea turtles, sea urchins and starfish hang out. Family-friendly Santa Maria, just south in a horseshoe-shaped cove, is a marine sanctuary with plenty of colorful tropical fish. The best time to come to either beach is in the morning before the tour buses arrive.

The primo site for diving and snorkeling, though, is about a 2-hour drive north from Cabo San Lucas. Cabo Pulmo National Marine Sanctuary, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the only living coral reef on North

America's west coast. The village of Cabo Pulmo has few amenities, but it's what's underwater here that counts. The best time to come is June through July.

Surfers long ago discovered the potential of the area, and year-round warm water and almost continual sunshine still draw surfing fanatics to several beaches along the Corridor. The most popular is Playa Costa Azul, just south of San José del Cabo, which consists of three surfing sites. Locals say the best surf can be found at Zipper's, though crowded conditions are common there. Playa Acapulquito, colloquially known as "Old Man's" or "Gringos," is great for beginners, while The Rock is for the more advanced surfer. Huge waves can be found about an hour's drive along the Pacific coast on Mex. 19 just before Todos Santos at Playa los Cerritos and at El Pescadero.

Beaches in the Los Cabos area are stunning and dramatic, often rimmed by craggy rock formations. The sand is pristine and the water a beautiful turquoise. Unfortunately, strong waves and undertows on the Pacific Ocean side as well as at many beaches along the Gulf of California make swimming exceedingly dangerous. This, plus the lack of lifeguards, means these scenic beaches should be enjoyed for walks, picnicking, sunbathing, taking photographs or playing volleyball, but not for swimming.

There are, however, many other beaches where the water's fine for swimming. The main (and most popular) beach in Cabo San Lucas is the 3.2-kilometer-long (2-mile-long) Playa el Médano. Not only can you swim here, you can also rent jet-skis, go parasailing, people watch or dine or have a drink at one of the outdoor restaurants along the beach.

You can take a water taxi from Playa el Médano to another popular beach, Playa del Amor (Lover's Beach) at *Finisterra* (Land's End). This southernmost tip of the Baja Peninsula creates an interesting phenomenon: You can actually walk from Lover's Beach on the Gulf of California, where the water is calm and swimming is permissible, across the sand to Divorce Beach on the Pacific Side, where breaking waves and rough water make swimming unsafe.

Some of the same qualities that make playas Chileno and Santa Maria great for snorkeling and scuba diving also endear the beaches to swimmers. The calm, clear water at Playa Chileno and the crescent-shaped Playa Santa Maria, both reached from turn-offs from the Corridor, draw locals as well as visitors in search of some time in the sun. In fact, many good beaches can be found by impromptu turn-offs from the Corridor. Sand or dirt roads lead to quiet, secluded expanses of shore free of crowds and the vendors common at many of the more visited beaches.

Gliding along the Gulf of California sea kayaking provides views of the resort area from a water-based perspective; Land's End and the peaceful San José estuary near San José del Cabo are two good, but very different, locations to try. The estuary is also a good spot for bird-watching. Exploring the beauty of the Baja area while horseback riding might take you along a sandy beach or on a desert trail ride to arroyos and canyons where you can see vegetation and animals native to this arid region. Your hotel can provide a list of companies and outfitters offering kayak rentals and tours and horseback riding excursions.

There are also more non-traditional recreation options in Los Cabos. If you'd prefer views of Cabo from above, try parasailing. Floating above the sparkling waters off Cabo San Lucas provides a bird's-eye view of the peninsula. For a real adrenaline rush, get into a harness and try ziplining across a desert canyon, or go offroading through the dusty, rugged outback on an ATV or in a Hummer. Outfitters and guides are available throughout Los Cabos to ensure you enjoy your choice of outdoor activity.

Outdoor Recreation

Two pursuits define the outdoor life at Los Cabos: sport fishing and golf. The waters of the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean are home to some 850 species of fish. The gulf in particular has a rich and varied marine population, including whale sharks, manta rays, schooling hammerhead sharks, stingrays, moray eels and sea turtles.

Of the two dozen or so game species widely caught in Baja waters, striped marlin run year-round. The season for the majestic blue marlin is June through mid-November. Others commonly hooked include amberjack, black marlin, bonito, black sea bass, corbina, dorado (mahi mahi), roosterfish, sailfish, snapper, wahoo, yellowfin tuna and yellowtail.

During the season it is advisable to book fishing trips well in advance; some participants reserve boats as much as a year in advance for the Bisbee's Black and Blue Marlin Jackpot Tournament and the Los Cabos Offshore Tournament, both held the second half of October. These are among the world's richest marlin fishing tournaments, with base entry fees of several thousand dollars.

A catch-and-release policy is strongly emphasized; anglers experience the thrill of battle, but after their catch is reeled in it is tagged and set free, helping to preserve billfish species and ensure the continuation of the sport.

Most of the larger resort hotels have their own sport-fishing fleets, making it easy to plan an excursion if you're a guest. The Fiesta Americana Grand Los Cabos, the Solmar Suites Resort and the One & Only Palmilla have fleets with boats anchored at the Cabo San Lucas marina.

If you prefer to make your own arrangements, several fleet operators operate from the marina's docks on the south side of the harbor. *Pangas* (small, outboard motor-powered skiffs) holding two or three people can be rented by the hour, including equipment and a fishing license (required). ABY Charters is at the marina's main dock, next to the Flea Market (Mercado de Artesanías); phone (624) 143-0831 or (866) 751-3505 (from the United States).

More expensive sport-fishing cruisers normally rent for parties of four to six people so expenses can be shared; the cost usually includes tackle, bait, licenses, lunch and a captain and mate, but not taxes or tips. Rates range from \$700 to more than \$1,000 per day, depending on the size of the boat. Trips depart around 7 a.m. and return by 2 or 3 in the afternoon.

Most boats either head east to the fertile fishing grounds of the Gordo Banks or around Los Arcos toward the open Pacific.

Several water sports centers provide a full range of rental equipment as well as organized snorkeling and scuba trips. Cabo Acuadeportes specializes in scuba and snorkeling excursions to Chileno Bay. They also conduct single-tank boat dives with an English-speaking guide to nearby sites daily at 9, 11 and 2:30. Bringing your own dive gear is recommended, although rental equipment is available. The center is located at the Hacienda Beach Hotel, on Cabo San Lucas Bay at the southern end of Medano Beach; phone (624) 143-0117.

Amigos del Mar, on Boulevard Marina across from the sport-fishing docks, offers guided natural history, scuba and snorkeling tours. These excursions venture to such prime spots as the Socorro Islands, about 200 miles southwest of Cabo San Lucas, inhabited by 400-pound tuna and exotic species of reef fish; Land's End, home to octopus, tropicals and sea lions; and Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, site of a living coral reef that offers experienced divers some of the clearest water and richest marine life in the world.

Most trips are aboard a 22-foot canopied skiff that accommodates four people plus a divemaster. For additional information and reservations phone (624) 143-0505, or (513) 898-0547 (from the United States).

Gray whales complete their long-distance migration from the Bering Sea to the warm Pacific waters of the mid- and lower Baja coastline each year from January through March. They can sometimes be spotted from the beaches and rocky overlooks along the Mex. 1 Corridor and the rocks around Land's End.

The adventure tour company Aereo Calafia offers flights to Magdalena Bay, the southernmost gray whale calving area, which is about 200 miles up the Pacific coast. *Panga* boats take passengers into the coastal lagoons for an up-close look at these fascinating creatures. There is an Aereo Calafia office downtown inside the Hotel Tesoro; phone (624) 143-4302, or (818) 206-3255 (from the United States).

As popular as sport fishing—if not more so—is golf. Not so long ago, golf meant one nine-hole course, the Mayan Palace Golf Course (formerly Campo de Golf) in San José del Cabo. A process that allows reclaimed water to be used for irrigation purposes makes it possible to maintain manicured greens and fairways in the midst of arid conditions.

Today world-class courses are scattered along the Corridor between the two Cabos—with more on the drawing board—all laid out against the stunning natural backdrop of desert terrain. Some—like Querencia, an exclusive residential community with an 18-hole course designed by Tom Fazio—are open to members only. Golfing in Los Cabos also is a very expensive pastime; greens fees for 18 holes average more than \$200 (somewhat less in the low season), cart and bottled water included.

The signature hole at the Nicklaus-designed Palmilla Golf Club, at the One & Only Palmilla resort, is the par-4 fifth. The tee shot must carry over a cactus-filled canyon, which also wraps around in front of the green. The desert vegetation, Gulf of California vistas and view from the mountaintop clubhouse are all breathtaking, and the play is a strategic challenge. This is a semiprivate club, and eventually will be open to guests only. For information phone the resort at (624) 144-5250.

The Golden Bear also designed the highly regarded and recently renovated Ocean Course at the Cabo del Sol resort development. The final three holes offer dramatic waterfront scenery as well as an assortment of hazards in the form of cactus, rock cliffs and treacherous bunkers. Instead of negotiating long fairways, players tee off over deep ravines to landing pads and then chip to the green. Even the short par 3 holes are formidable.

The Tom Weiskopf-designed Desert Course features an inland layout that nevertheless provides a view of the gulf from every hole. For information about either course phone the resort at (624) 145-8200, or (213) 891-6385 or (877) 703-4394 (from the United States).

The Cabo Real Golf Course, at Corridor Km marker 19.5, was designed by Robert Trent Jones. It winds its way among beautiful homes and the

exclusive Las Ventanas al Paraiso resort. Average players can handle the layout, which doesn't mean play is easy. The palm-flanked 14th-hole fairway sweeps down to the beach, while the 15th tee, right at the surf, offers the most spectacular view of the course. Reservations can be made by phoning (800) 543-2044 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (877) 795-8727 (from the United States).

The Nicklaus-designed course at the Eldorado Golf Club, next to the Westin Regina Golf & Beach Resort at the northeast end of the Cabo Real development, has six holes right along the beach. The layout winds from seaside to rocky canyons and back, with the green at the par-5 16th hole framed by the gulf's cobalt-blue waters. For reservations, phone (624) 144-5450 or (877) 795-2727 (from the United States).

The Cabo San Lucas Country Club is just a short distance east of Cabo San Lucas. This is the only course in Los Cabos with a view of the Land's End rocks, which look particularly impressive from the 18th hole. The gently sloping fairways look out on a desert landscape that features giant cardon cacti. The seventh hole, a par 5 double dogleg that wraps around a lake, is a whopping 620 yards. Greens fees are not quite as expensive as they are at the other championship courses. For information phone (624) 143-4653 or (877) 461-3667 (from the United States).

Things to Do

Shopping

A one-stop destination for shopping and entertainment in downtown Cabo is the Puerto Paraiso mall, off Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas between Plaza Bonita Mall and the Marina Fiesta resort. On a par with American malls, Paraiso is a modern, three-level collection of clothing chains (Kenneth Cole, Nautica, Tommy Bahama), boutique-type shops, gift stores, high-end jewelry merchants and restaurants. The center is designed for open-air strolling along attractively landscaped terraces, as well as window shopping in air-conditioned comfort.

On the lower level, American restaurant chains like Johnny Rockets, Harley-Davidson Restaurant & Bar and Ruth's Chris Steakhouse front the marina. For kids there is a bowling alley and video arcade, a 10-screen movie theater complex and a fast-food court. Puerto Paraiso is open daily 7 a.m.-10 p.m.

Plaza Bonita, an open-air shopping center next door to Puerto Paraiso, has a few interesting shops, including the Sergio Bustamente Gallery (near the Hard Rock Cafe). The famed Guadalaajaran artist is known for his whimsical ceramic, wood, bronze and papier-mâché sculptures, which elicit opinions as wildly mixed as his art. Check out the two-level gallery and decide for yourself.

The Souvenir Outlet, across the street from Puerto Paraiso at the corner of Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas and Vicario, occupies a faux lighthouse packed with all manner of souvenir cheese. We're talking fridge magnets, twisted Corona beer bottles, El Arco paperweights, snow globes and other assorted dust collectors. If this is what you're after, the prices here are noticeably lower than at other gift shops around town. You'll also find a well-stocked pharmacy (*farmacia*) inside.

More traditional craft shops are located on or near Lázaro Cárdenas and Boulevard Marina. They offer the usual T-shirts and other touristy trinkets in addition to blankets, folk art, woven goods and black coral jewelry. Open-air flea markets in the downtown area sell ceramics, pottery, silver jewelry, leather goods and hand-carved wooden animal figures. One of the largest flea markets is on the ground level of Plaza del Sol, on Boulevard Marina. Bargaining is expected.

No shopping tour of Cabo is complete without wandering the streets in the vicinity of Plaza Amelia Wilkes, a traditional Mexican square with a gazebo at its center. On the plaza's northwest corner is the Cabo Museum, which has natural history exhibits and is a cool place (both figuratively and literally) to wander around for a few minutes. It's open Tues.-Sun. 10-3 and 6-8 p.m., and admission is free.

Among the countless souvenir shops, clothing boutiques and jewelry stores you'll find a couple of unusual galleries. Worth a visit is the Golden Cactus Gallery/Studio, at the corner of Guerrero and Madero just east of the plaza. This second-floor gallery exhibits works by regional artists and also sells fine art prints and inexpensive posters. Magic of the Moon, in the vicinity of the plaza on Hidalgo (near the corner of Zapata) sells designer women's fashions—casual, colorful outfits with tropical motifs that fit right in at a beachside resort. The vivacious owner, Pepita, will gladly show you around.

Zen Mar, near the corner of Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas and Calle Matamoros, is a combination art gallery and museum with an outstanding variety of ethnic masks from all over Mexico, including Day of the Dead designs. *Ex-votos* have facial writings describing why the mask was made for a particular religious ceremony; *retablos* (small devotional paintings) depict emotions without the use of words. Most of the works are for sale.

Costco, the American warehouse-like discount chain, is on the inland side of the Transpeninsular Highway (the Corridor) at Km 4.5. If you're staying in a condo with a kitchen, it's a good place to load up on staples; don't forget to bring your Costco card from home. In addition, there are well-stocked Mexican grocery stores in town.

Nightlife

Given the surfers and other youthful revelers who flock to Cabo, bars and rock 'n' roll pretty much sum up the casual, lively nightlife. The Cabo Wabo Cantina, on Calle Vicente Guerrero just south of Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas, is owned by rocker Sammy Hagar. Young crowds pack the place for regular live shows by a rock cover band and occasional visits from big-name acts, including Hagar himself; hard rock and dance pop blasts from the sound system on other nights. It's open daily until 4 a.m.

The Giggling Marlin, on Boulevard Marina at Calle Matamoros, blasts classic rock and dance hits, has frequent live music and puts on a saucy audience-participation show. The attraction here is a pulley device that

dangles patrons upside down—rather like a captured fish—to the great amusement of the masses. There’s also a restaurant on the premises that serves good Mexican and seafood dishes. To find it, look for the beer bottle-toting marlin atop the entrance.

Also high on the see-and-be-seen circuit is El Squid Roe, on Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas at Boulevard Marina (across from Plaza Bonita Mall). This three-level nightclub is loud, raucous and invariably packed. Be forewarned: It’s the kind of place where waiters brandishing spray tanks of tequila move through crowds of people dancing on top of tables. An open-air dance floor is on the main level.

The trendiest dance club on the Cabo party scene is Zoo, on Boulevard Marina opposite Plaza Bonita. The decor (African safari chic) and the music (hip-hop, house and electronica) draw a young dressed-to-impress crowd that downs 2-for-1 drink specials and gyrates until dawn.

For a decidedly mellower evening, the Whale Watcher’s Bar in the Hotel Finisterra, off Boulevard Marina heading out toward Land’s End, is an ideal place to watch the sun slowly drop into the Pacific. Mariachis play on Friday evenings. You can watch the big game and wager on the outcome at the Caliente Sports Book on Boulevard Marina (in Plaza Nautica). Clean, well-lit, air conditioned and loaded with TVs, Caliente also offers off-track betting in case you’ve got a hot tip on a horse. There’s a full bar.

Dining

Hotel restaurants in Los Cabos are expensive and, on the whole, predictably good. For more local fare, hit the streets. Cabo is famed for fish tacos, but you’ll also find shrimp, pork, chicken and beef varieties. For the most part, the food at the bars and restaurants lining Medano Beach and the marina *malecón* is very good, but also overpriced. For better *comida* at more digestible prices, try the open-air restaurants in the downtown area, many run by families. These are good places for late night tacos or a hearty morning meal of *huevos rancheros*, eggs and

black beans drenched in tomato salsa, sprinkled with cheese and served with tortillas.

El Pollo de Oro (“The Golden Chicken”), at the corner of Morelos and 20 de Noviembre, specializes in juicy, fall-off-the-bone Sinaloa-style barbecued chicken. Seating is in a large patio courtyard perpetually packed with locals and a sprinkling of tourists. In addition to the must-order *pollo*, the menu is loaded with tempting Mexican dishes—all authentic and affordable.

Torta (sandwich) stands also pop up on downtown street corners after dark. Ham and cheese is a common and tasty variety. Many stands grill hot dogs and whip up tacos as well. Use the same common sense at these places that applies whenever sampling street food in Mexico—if there’s a crowd hovering around a cart and the food looks hot and fresh, it should be fine. Squeezing lots of lime juice over the meat helps kill any lingering bacteria.

Beaches

The beaches of southern Baja are renowned for their beauty as well as their tranquility. The scenery is magnificent: intensely blue water, a



backdrop of mountains and rugged cliffs, stands of huge cacti. It’s still not all that difficult for solitude seekers to find a secluded beach and spend the day picnicking, surfing or snorkeling sans crowds.

You will, however, need a car for beach exploring. With the exception of Medano Beach, private taxi rides to and from the Corridor

beaches are expensive. Public bus transportation is an option and drivers will generally let you disembark at beach turn-offs. However, walking from the highway to the beaches themselves often involves a long trek without any shade (i.e., miserably hot).

Cabo’s most popular sunbathing spot is Medano Beach (Playa El Medano), which curves gracefully along the shore of Cabo San Lucas

Bay just north of town and encompasses the beachfront hotel zone. The water here is usually safe for swimming, the sand is soft, and people-watching from the outdoor bars and restaurants lining the beach is always entertaining.

Cruise ships anchor just off shore. Parasailers soar overhead. Beach vendors trudge through the sand. Catamarans, sea kayaks and *pangas* ply the bay. Rowdy co-eds rent wave runners and other water toys. To reach the beach from Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas, head south on Paseo de Pescador.

Note: During college spring break weeks Medano's raucous beachfront bars are party central.

Land's End, or "Finisterra," is literally that—the tip of the Baja California Peninsula. Both the approach to Cabo San Lucas via Mex. 1 and elevated spots in town offer panoramic views of Baja's final frontier. Some of the beaches in this area, however, are accessible only by boat.

Located just west of Land's End, Lover's Beach (Playa del Amor) may well be the most idyllic, although it's almost always crowded unless you arrive early in the day. A water taxi can be hired either at Medano Beach or the Cabo San Lucas marina to take you to the beach, drop you off and then return at a predetermined time; bring along drinking water and a lunch. Swimming and snorkeling are usually safe along the cove that faces the Gulf of California side, although the water can occasionally get a bit rough.

At Lover's Beach it's also possible to walk coast to coast—literally and in a matter of minutes. From the gulf shore, the sand extends across the cape to another beach facing the Pacific Ocean. Known as Divorce Beach, this stretch's white sand is great for strolling or beachcombing, but crashing waves and strong rip currents make swimming dangerous.

Solmar Beach (Playa Solmar) is a wide stretch of sand running west from the rocks at Land's End. Several large hotels, including the Solmar Suites Resort, the Hotel Finisterra, the Terra Sol Beach Resort and the Playa Grande Resort, front this beach. The powerful Pacific undertow and

currents make swimming here dangerous as well, but the views are spectacular.

Land's End is noted for two dramatic rock formations sculpted by the elements. El Arco, Cabo's signature landmark, is the famous natural rock arch featured on everything from tourist brochures to souvenir shot glasses. The other photogenic formations here are the pinnacles of The Friars (Los Frailes)—chiseled granite formations shaped like hooded monks. Intense blue water surrounds them at Land's End, a point where the Gulf of California mingles with the mighty Pacific.

For close-up views of El Arco you'll need to hit the water. Everything from water taxis and kayak tours to booze cruises and glass-bottom boats make the short trip from either Medano Beach or the Cabo San Lucas marina. Glass-bottom boat tours last an hour, cost about 120 pesos (\$9.25 U.S.) per person and depart from the docks at the far southern end of the marina. You'll find ticket booths along the *malecón*.

At Cabo Falso, a lighthouse once guided ships between the U.S. West Coast and Panama. Old Lighthouse Beach (Playa El Faro Viejo) offers sweeping views of towering sand dunes (*las dunas*). The original lighthouse still stands, and the trip to a hilltop overlook to view the dunes is possible in an all-terrain vehicle, although plans are under way to develop a luxury mega resort at this site.

If you have a car, the Gulf of California coast between Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo, also known as "the Corridor," is sprinkled with surfing areas, hidden beaches and secluded little coves that can be explored. Turn-offs branching off Mex. 1, some no more than dirt paths, lead to these spots. Generally these beaches are not considered safe for swimming (there are no lifeguards, for one thing), but they offer excellent snorkeling and diving opportunities. Heading northeast on Mex. 1 from Cabo San Lucas toward San José del Cabo, here are a few worth visiting.

Shipwreck Beach (Playa Barco Varado) is at Km 11, about 7 miles north of downtown Cabo (access to the beach is via the entrance to the Cabo

del Sol resort development). The beach is named for a Japanese freighter that ran aground in the 1960s; the rusted hulk still remains on the rocks. The wreck provides golfers a spectacular backdrop on the last few holes of the Ocean Course at Cabo del Sol.

Widow's Beach (Playa las Viudas) also is known as Twin Dolphin Beach because of its location near the Hotel Twin Dolphin. Swimming is usually good at this series of scalloped, coarse sand beaches separated by rocky outcroppings. When the surf's up, however, the pounding shore break will surely finish you off. But the wild beauty and splendid isolation of Viudas make it a worthwhile stop at any time, regardless of ocean conditions. The turn-off for the unpaved beach access road (signed "Acceso a la Playa") is just past the Km 12 marker; watch for the "Twin Dolphin" radio tower and bunker on the north side of Mex. 1.

Snorkelers are drawn to Playa Santa Maria, a picturesque horseshoe-shaped bay endowed with colorful underwater scenery. Around mid-day an armada of tour boats arrive at the cove, blasting high-decibel party music and dispensing pods of snorkelers. In other words, it's best to visit in the morning or late afternoon. There are no snack bars, so pack a cooler. Shade is nonexistent, but roving umbrella rental boys will set you up for a few pesos. The signed beach turn-off is on Mex. 1 just past Playa la Viudas. Parking is available in a "guarded" lot near the highway, or farther down the dirt road at the beach itself.

Chileno Bay, about 14 kilometers (9 miles) northeast, is one of the most beautiful areas along the Los Cabos coast, and a prime swimming, snorkeling and scuba destination. A gorgeous bay backed by rocky bluffs and a shady palm grove, Playa Chileno caters to civilized beachgoers with bathrooms, showers and a booth renting snorkel equipment. The Mex. 1 Chileno turn-off is clearly signed "Chileno Bay Playa Público"; a paved road leads down to a free parking lot.

Playa Palmilla, about 27 kilometers (17 miles) northeast, is near the luxurious, long-established One & Only Palmilla resort hotel. A long crescent of sand, Palmilla's dependably calm surf makes it one of the best swimming beaches along the Corridor. If you've brought your mask

and fins, there's decent snorkeling along the rocks toward the point. Thatched *palapa* umbrellas provide welcome shade, and if you're in the mood to fish, the Fisherman's Cooperative in the beach parking lot will gladly arrange a trip. The well-signed turn-off (look for the Palmilla resort signs) is near the Km 27 marker. The paved access road winds through Palmilla's golf course before reaching the beach.

Note: Most of the beaches facing the Gulf of California are safe for swimming; those facing the open Pacific should be appreciated only for the view. Pay attention to any warning signs: Some beaches are prone to riptides and dangerous breakers, or have deep drop-offs close to shore. All beaches in Mexico are the property of the government and consequently are accessible to the public. Parking at or camping on deserted beaches is perfectly legal; it is not legal, however, to leave behind garbage of any kind. Driving on beaches in Mexico also is illegal.

Insider Info

Los Cabos Day-tripping

It's probably safe to say that most visitors come to Los Cabos to bask in the sunshine, do some deep-sea fishing, play a round or two of golf, imbibe a few margaritas, maybe snag a silver souvenir at a fine jewelry store and, in general, just hang out. But a couple of day trips into the countryside will show you a different side of Baja, one that is closer to the "real" Mexico.

Head north from San José del Cabo on Mex. 1 to the port city of La Paz; the trip should take about 3 hours. The narrow, two-lane road winds through a harsh landscape of sand, scrubby brush, an occasional cactus and past a few small towns; the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains can be seen in the western distance. La Paz, the capital of the state of Baja California Sur, is a bustling city of about 200,000 where the emphasis is more on industry than tourism. Several museums and a university add a touch of culture.

The town faces the Bay of La Paz, which flows into the Gulf of California. The wide, winding malecón (waterfront esplanade), the focal point of the town, is accented with benches, statues and palm trees. Small boats bob

peacefully on the intensely blue water of the bay, befitting considering the town's name. Across the street are restaurants, many with expansive windows open to the seaside walkway, gift shops and a number of hotels and bars. In the evening, locals and visitors come for a stroll and to enjoy a spectacular sunset.

In the mid-20th-century La Paz was a much smaller town known mostly by sport fishermen who were drawn by its year-round warm weather and laid-back atmosphere. The town is still a favorite with anglers, scuba divers and snorkelers who appreciate the bountiful waters, climate, affordable accommodations and the friendliness of the people. North of town are quiet beaches interspersed with commercial docks and a port where ferries leave for Mazatlán and Topolobampo on the mainland.

Only about an hour's drive away, but with a totally different vibe from workaday La Paz, is Todos Santos. Approaching the town on two-lane Mex. 19, Todos Santos appears as an oasis amid the parched desert environment; welcoming palm trees stand in stark contrast to the arid surroundings.

This charming city of about 6,000 is well-known as an artists' colony. Restored buildings along the main street and dusty side streets now serve as galleries featuring works by regional artists and shops with quality hand-crafted items and jewelry. Boutique inns, upscale restaurants and a good number of expatriates add to the relaxed, bohemian atmosphere. And, despite a lingering urban legend and the fact that it's "on a dark desert highway," the town's Hotel California is not the one made famous in the 1976 Eagles hit.

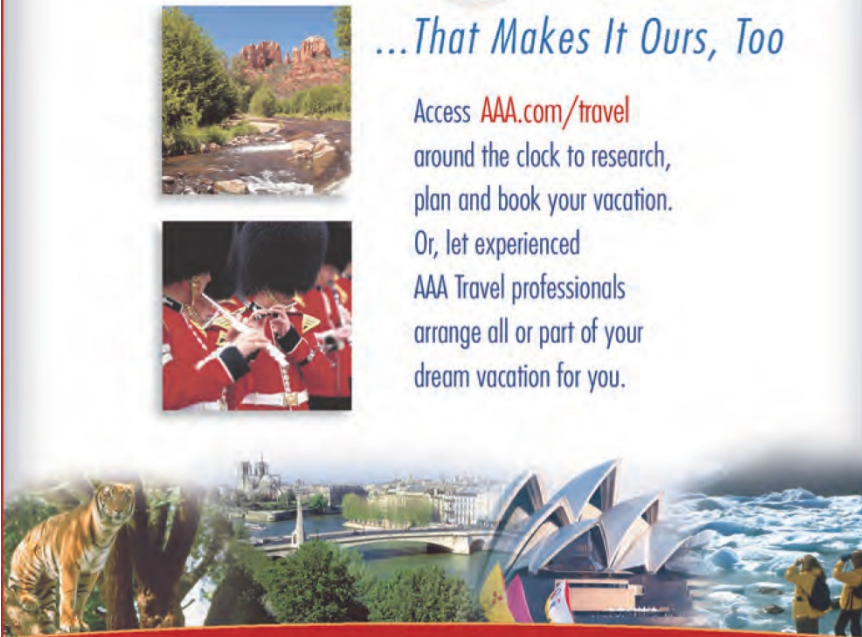
Although not oceanfront, Todos Santos is only about 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) from the pounding waves of the Pacific Ocean. The easiest beaches to get to are those south of town along Mex. 19, many of which are prized by surfers. Wide, wild, mostly deserted and usually accessed by unmarked dirt roads, the closest beaches are not suitable for swimming because of rip currents and rough surf; you can, however, enjoy their rugged beauty on walks or while sunbathing. From Todos Santos, it's only a short hour's drive back to Cabo San Lucas.

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