



DISCOVER
Los Cabos



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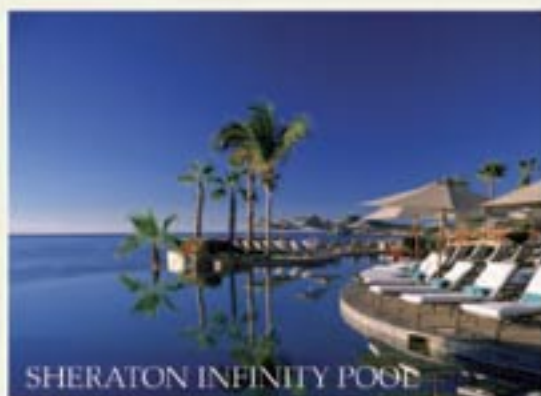
Is this Mexico, or is it Southern California? Visitors to Los Cabos, at the tip of the Baja peninsula 1,000 miles south of San Diego, California and separated from mainland Mexico by the Sea of Cortez, will find an intriguing mix of both worlds. Once a tiny, dilapidated village known primarily for its rowdy spring break crowds and legendary sport fishing tournaments, "Cabo," as the region is casually referred to by visitors, has been transformed in the last ten years into one of the hottest golf destinations in the world. In fact, readers of American Airlines' in-flight magazine, *Celebrated Living*, just rated the Ocean Course at Cabo del Sol number three in their top 20 list of international golf courses. Yet while Cabo's hip new restaurants, five-star hotels and real estate prices are beginning to resemble those of Southern California, somehow the overall vibe remains funky, laid-back Mexico.



PALMILLA MOUNTAIN COURSE

into a final outfling of rock known as Land's End - the southernmost tip of the Baja peninsula. Sheltered by the mainland, which separates the Sea of Cortez from the hurricanes that plague the Gulf of Mexico, Los Cabos boasts near-perfect weather almost year-round.

One reason Cabo is so popular with visitors is that it isn't yet completely commercialized. While Cancun has earned a reputation as the "Las Vegas of Mexico," Cabo still retains its quirky charm. When you arrive at Los Cabos International Airport, you descend from the plane into the hot sun directly onto the runway tarmac, then head for the small, shabby terminal to collect your luggage before clearing customs. During the ride to your hotel, if you ask, the driver will stop in at one of the tiny convenience markets along the dusty road to buy cervezas for the ride. It's worth the stop, especially if your hotel lies at the far end of the 20-mile trip to Cabo San Lucas.



SHERATON INFINITY POOL

ate with a time share agent, you can receive up to 50 percent off of those fees, even on prime morning tee times. Yes, you'll have to sit through a time-share presentation during your stay, but it's not as bad as it sounds. First of all, the presentations can be a good way to preview a hot new resort, so if you're even thinking about attending one, you might as well get the most for your time with a discount at one of the area's top courses. And if you fall in love with Los Cabos and plan to return, as so many do, owning a time share can be a good hedge against escalating hotel rates. But if you'd rather pay full price for your golf than endure a time share pitch, simply tell the agents you're already an owner, and they'll leave you alone.

Escape the crowds at the Westin Resort and Spa

The best place to stay in Los Cabos depends on your goals for your vacation. If you want to avoid the bustling crowds of Cabo San Lucas, and simply com-

BUT CABO IS MUCH MORE THAN A LOCATION ON A MAP. IT IS WHERE THE DESERT RUNS MEETS THE SEA. A PLACE OF STARK CONTRASTS THAT IS AT ONCE DESOLATE AND STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL.

Los Cabos is a municipality located in the Mexican state of Baja California Sur, a peninsula that extends southeast from California, and separates the Pacific Ocean on the Western side from the Sea of Cortez (also known as the Gulf of California), which lies between the peninsula and mainland Mexico. The resort region of Los Cabos, also known as "the Corridor," is a 20-mile stretch of shoreline along the eastern side of the peninsula, book-ended by the colonial city of San Jose del Cabo at the northern end and the town of Cabo San Lucas at the southernmost tip of the peninsula.

But Cabo is much more than a location on a map. It is where the desert runs meets the sea, a place of stark contrasts that is at once desolate and stunningly beautiful. Think Arizona, with an ocean view. Giant saguaro cactus dot the brown sides of the Sierra de Laguna mountains, which tumble down to the sea

That's not to say commercialism isn't alive and well in this desert oasis. In fact, most of what you need to know about Cabo can be summed up in two words: time shares. The "vacation ownership" industry has an overwhelming presence here, and most of the hotels have time share programs that they promote heavily. In fact, the airport is currently undergoing major new construction, not to make room for more rental car or airline counters, but to accommodate all of the time share companies that do business there.

But before you brush by the reps there shouting offers, know this: if you plan to play golf and are willing to give up a few hours of your vacation, these airport counters are the best place to strike a deal. Golf in Los Cabos is expensive, starting around \$100 for off-season twilight fees and rocketing up to \$350 a round during peak season at the most sought-after of the resort courses. If you take the time here to negoti-

bine a few rounds of golf with utter relaxation and luxury, the Westin Resort and Spa, one of the hotels on the north end of the corridor nearest the airport, is a heavenly option. Built into a mountain hillside facing the ocean, the Westin's unique, curved architecture and desert color scheme make it look as if it grew out of the natural landscape. The design pays homage to Los Arcos, the famous natural arch at Land's End, with an arch carved into the front of the hotel that provides your first glimpse of the ocean from the open-air hotel lobby. Seven swimming pools, five restaurants, and a luxurious spa and fitness center round out the full list of amenities. And while there is no golf course on property, it's just a short drive or taxi ride to some of the best golf in Los Cabos, including the Palmilla and Cabo Real golf clubs., and there is a nine-hole putting course situated directly on the beach where you can practice your short stick skills.



CABO DEL SOL DESERT



SHERATON



For the ultimate in relaxation, the Westin provides a luxurious spa facility, called simply The Spa. After a round of golf, book a massage on the beach, and enjoy your treatment in one of the private cabanas, where the crash of waves and the ocean breezes will lull you into utter contentment.

The restaurants at the Westin run from casual pool-side fare to fine dining, all in open air restaurants overlooking the ocean. La Cascada features nightly buffets with a theme - seafood one night, steak the next. The mostly outdoor venue has a casual, relaxed feel where you can sit and enjoy the evening breeze and the view of the ocean through the hotel's main arch. The breakfast buffet includes a dizzying array of Mexican dishes and specialty coffees served in a French press.

For a special evening, head to Arrecifes, where live jazz, flickering candles and a high perch overlooking the sea combine to provide the perfect romantic setting. Chef Francis Drillien and his team deliver creative dishes that fuse Mexican cuisine with Oriental and French influences, such as a seafood appetizer of scallop ceviche, seared tuna and smoked shrimp served in fried wonton tacos. But the real star of this restaurant is the service. Attentive, friendly and professional, the staff quietly anticipate your needs without ever breaking the mood. After dinner, head out to the adjacent On the Rocks bar to lounge on the couches or stargaze through the telescope for a truly memorable end to the evening.

The Westin is also closer to San Jose del Cabo, a quieter, more sedate town than it's rowdy sister at the other end of the corridor. While Cabo San Lucas is the famous party spot, in San Jose, red-tiled roofs, upscale restaurants and abundant shopping attract a quieter crowd.

Design your own course at Palmilla

It seems hard to believe that Cabo was not known for golf until recently. It all started back in 1993, when Palmilla Resort (now the One and Only Palmilla) debuted the first Jack Nicklaus signature design in Latin America. Palmilla's 27 hole layout is the perfect place to start your golfing adventure in Cabo, and it's only five minutes from the Westin. Managed by Troon Golf, the club features three nine-hole courses - the Arroyo, the Mountain and the Ocean courses - each with five sets of tee boxes, so you can mix and match dozens of layouts to create your own perfect eighteen. And don't be fooled by the names into insisting on the Ocean Course, the views are spectacular no matter which combination you choose to play.

For example, from the many elevated tee boxes on the Mountain Course, you can see the ocean sparkling in the distance below. At the crest of the climb to the number one tee box, you'll see the azure waters beckoning off to your right, while the pristine emerald



fairway and a winding desert arroyo await your tee shot below. Don't mistake the arroyos for fairway bunkers, these giant swaths of desert are filled with a heavy, gravelly sand that can be tricky to escape. Take an extra club, place the ball well back in your stance to ensure ball-first contact, and be sure to follow through.

By far the most challenging hole on the Mountain course is number five, a wicked par-4 with a double carry that will have you second guessing your choices right from the start. A yawning ravine divides the first four tee boxes from the narrow fairway, requiring a long 180-200 yard carry off the tee. The fairway runs at a diagonal to the tee boxes, setting up the first choice: do you aim left toward the near, wider end of the fairway and make sure you carry the canyon? If you do, you'll almost certainly have to lay up on your second shot. The tiny target green lies far below, separated from the fairway by the canyon again, and surrounded by desert arroyo and brush. This is a truly a risk-reward hole.

After watching the ocean from your vantage point in the mountains, the Ocean Course brings you back down to sea level. Here the views get up close and personal, as on the course's third hole, where a walk down the fairway ends at a green that is built practically on top of the beach.

Palmilla delivers one of the best golf values in Cabo, where rounds top out around \$350 per person during prime season. A round at Palmilla can be had for almost \$100 less, and the golf is every bit as scenic and challenging as the more expensive layouts. This makes it a good warm up for Cabo's most sought after tee time, Cabo del Sol's Ocean Course.

Find the hidden gem at Cabo del Sol

If you want to be closer to the action in town, but remain close to the golf, head further down the corridor toward Cabo San Lucas and the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar. Slightly more affordable than the Westin, the hotel has a completely different feel, exuding the Old World charm and hospitality of a Mexican hacienda. Stucco walls, wooden beams, and Mexican tile and stone are used throughout the buildings. A stroll through the grounds will also reveal native touches such as an antique tequila press and Mexican glass tile murals. But don't think you'll be roughing it here - an infinity pool looks out over the beach, giving the illusion that you are floating in the sea as you enjoy cocktails brought to you by friendly waiters from the nearby palapa bar. For a perfect sunset dinner, head to de Cortez, and ask for an outdoor table, where only a low stone wall separates you from the waves crashing on the beach.

Surrounding the Sheraton grounds is the famed Cabo del Sol Golf Club, which features two 18-hole tracks, the Ocean Course and the somewhat misnamed Desert Course. As with Palmilla, ocean views are



plentiful on both courses. The Nicklaus-designed Ocean Course is the star and has earned accolades such as Golf Magazine's "Top 100 Courses in the World" and Travel & Leisure Golf's "Best Golf Resort in Mexico and Latin America." As a result, it commands the premium price of \$350 a round in peak season. The prices don't seem to be much of a deterrent on a recent visit, the club had a full tee sheet of golfers lining up to play.

The Ocean Course earns its reputation as the "Pebble Beach of Mexico" with spectacular, scenic holes that run right along the Sea of Cortez. On the par-3 seventh, you'll be hard pressed to hit the green with the distraction of waves crashing on the beach just off to your left. The three finishing holes are truly breathtaking, and Nicklaus himself is reputed to have said they are "the three finest finishing holes in all of golf." The trio starts with the sixteenth, a gentle, downhill dogleg par-4 that turns gracefully to the left towards the beach, where a large, well-bunkered green takes you to the edge of the sea. On the course's signature hole, the par-3 seventeenth, the tee shot requires a carry over a sandy cove to reach a small green perched on a granite rock outcropping. With the ocean swirling in front and to the right of the green, golfers can be forgiven for dawdling here to capture the view with their cameras. You'll feel the salt spray as you walk to the 18th tee, a short but tricky par-4 that stretches out along ocean from tee to green.

Once you've notched your belt with a round at the Ocean Course, be sure to return to play the Tom Weiskopf-designed Desert Course. You'll find a highly engaging layout that's nearly as scenic and highly underrated, as it has been overshadowed by its more famous twin. After playing the Desert Course, you may find yourself telling your friends that you've found the hidden gem of Los Cabos golf. The inland layout delivers 180-degree views of the sea from nearly every hole. The course varies in length from 5,300 to 7,100 yards, with five sets of tees, and river washes, subtle changes in elevation and dramatic bunkering make it a fun test of golf for any level of player.

More golf? Why not!

If you haven't yet had your fill of ocean views, mountainside tee boxes and desert arroyos, head to Cabo Real Golf Club. Home to two Senior Slams, and a host of other prestigious golf tournaments, the 6,988 yard Cabo Real Golf Course designed by Robert Trent Jones II has what is considered the toughest front nine in golf in Los Cabos.

The course takes you first up into the mountains, climbing 460 feet above sea level to the sixth hole before bringing you back down to the ocean below. The 15th tee is directly on the beach, and plays near the surf in front of the hotel properties of Melia Cabo Real and the Las Ventanas al Paraiso.

Finally, if your wallet is starting to feel the pain of \$300 rounds, head to Cabo San Lucas Country Club.

It's the only course situated in the town of Cabo San Lucas, and here you can enjoy a round for under \$200. Yet the Pete Dye design is no layup. At 625 yards, the par-5 seventh hole is the longest golf hole in Mexico, taking you on a double dogleg tour around a lake that will test your every skill.

Take a walk on the wild side in Cabo San Lucas. There is, of course, plenty to do in Cabo other than golf. Sport fishing is still king in this town, which is home to some of the biggest blue marlin in the world, as well as other billfish species such as dorado and wahoo. You'll find no shortage of charters willing to help you land your very own catch. Plan on leaving early, at dawn, and spending at least a half day on the water. Cabo promotes a catch and release program, but if you're determined to take it home, bring a large cooler, the fish often run several hundred pounds. And if you can't wait till you get home to sample your catch, several of the marina restaurants in Cabo San Lucas will even cook it to order for you.

Cabo San Lucas is the place to go for nightlife. Sammy Hagar's famous nightclub, Cabo Wabo, is here, and the rock singer celebrates his birthday there every year in October. The Giggling Marlin, Carols and Charlies and Squid Roe are other popular destinations for serious partiers. But Cabo is also quickly adapting to the increasingly diverse tourist population that visits each year with shops, restaurants and activities designed to appeal to every taste. Taxis are growing expensive, but they're still the best option into town from the corridor hotels. Ask the taxi driver to drop you at the marina, it's a good central point for all that Cabo San Lucas has to offer.

More to do

To relax from all the golf, head to one of the many

beaches. At the southern end of the corridor, in Cabo San Lucas, is Playa Medano, the main swimming beach where watercraft rentals are plentiful. Commandeer a jet ski, go parasailing, or take a water taxi to Lover's Beach, a strip of sand among the rocks at Land's End where you can walk from the Sea of Cortez to the Pacific side of the peninsula in just minutes. If you're feeling more adventurous, you can book a snorkel cruise, scuba dive, take one of the many ATV tours or ride horseback along the beach, courtesy of tour companies such as Baja's Activities. A recent addition to the mix is Cabo Dolphins, where you can swim and play in a pool with a bottlenosed dolphin. No matter where your taste for adventure takes you, Cabo delivers.

About Los Cabos

Transportation: Many airlines offer flights from Texas into Los Cabos International Airport, including American Airlines, America West, Continental Airlines and Mexicana Air.

Weather: Warm and tropical year-round. Hot and humid in the summer. Late summer-early fall (August-October) is the rainy season.

When to go: Depends on your agenda. Sport fishing tournaments are held during the summer and fall months. Whale watching season is December through March, when grey whales migrate south from Alaska. Golf is year-round, but avoid the crowds and the heat, go in early spring or late fall.

For more information: A good web site with live beach cams of Cabo San Lucas is: www.allaboutcabo.com.

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