

# Hotels & Spas

A Place in the Sun

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# A PLACE IN THE SUN

México's hottest seaside mecca is a hideaway at the edge of the world.

Carol Billups helps you decide where to hang your sombrero.



Bruce Herman

## hotels & spas

It's been a perfect day. I slept in for the first time in months, then strolled the beach followed by a tropical breakfast on my ocean front terrace. I treated myself to the "gentle body glow" at the spa and a dreamy massage under a pavilion on the sand. After lunch I lounged by the pool for the afternoon. As I was leaving, the concierge came to say that our dinner reservations and my husband's tee time for tomorrow were confirmed. Ah, life is so good! (Okay, so I'm actually slaving over a hot computer wishing I could trade my screensaver for sunscreen. But if this fantasy appeals, making it real is only a matter of planning.)

**L**os Cabos is a vacation paradise where the accommodations are as gracious as the hosts, providing every amenity expected by the discriminating traveler. First time visitors are amazed at the variety in Los Cabos—hotel rooms have practically doubled—from 5,731 in 1998 to nearly 10,000 in 2004. From cozy bed and breakfast inns to world class luxury resorts, there is one to match your taste and budget. But with so many options, choosing can be difficult. Los Cabos is a large area with significant differences. To avoid the unpleasant surprise of checking in to a resort inconvenient to your plans, narrow your search to the area best for you.

Think of the two sides of a coin: heads and tails are opposites yet close in proximity. And so it is with Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo. Only 20 miles apart, they couldn't be more different, offering visitors two distinctive faces of México. Cabo San Lucas, or "Cabo," is where the Sea of Cortés meets the Pacific Ocean at Land's End, the tip of the almost 1,000-mile long Baja California peninsula. Home to the area's only marina (another is under construction near San José del Cabo), most fishing charters and cruises depart from here. Unabashedly a party town, Cabo is known for nightlife, water-sports, and a swimming beach fronting a

postcard-perfect bay. A mile inland from the Sea of Cortés, historic San José del Cabo, or “San José,” is a beautiful colonial town founded in 1730 by Jesuit missionaries with delightful courtyard restaurants, boutiques and galleries around a lovely town square. Between the two is the Tourist Corridor, where shore-hugging resort hotels are strung like pearls along the stunning Sea of Cortés. Some surround championship golf courses and hidden jewel-toned bays; many are destination resorts you never have to leave except for brief excursions into either town, and then only if the urge strikes you.

So how can you tell if the hotel you're considering is located in the right area when all the name says is Los Cabos? Simple—check the mileage from the airport. Most travel websites and travel agents can tell you how far the property is from the Los Cabos International Airport. Hotels in or near downtown Cabo are 25 to 28 miles away. Hotels around San José are seven miles away. Corridor hotel distances vary between eight and 25 miles.

Once you've found the right area you must still narrow your search. The variety of accommodations in both towns and through the Corridor is astounding—from lavish resorts to simpler lodgings where a clean comfortable bed and friendly staff are the main attraction.

With seven championship courses, Los Cabos is the golf capital of México. If golf, golf and more golf is on your vacation agenda then you will want a hotel in the Tourist Corridor—some are located on or next door to courses created by Jack Nicklaus, Robert Trent Jones II and other premier designers. If golf is only a small item for you, any hotel will be glad to help arrange tee times and transportation.

In the center of the Corridor at Cabo Real, you'll find the luxurious Hilton Los Cabos, a favorite for corporate groups since opening in 2002, with 375 rooms and suites. Next door, the all-inclusive Meliá Cabo Real's 350 rooms are adjacent to the Robert Trent Jones II course, as is the incomparable Las Ventanas al Paraíso. The intimate Casa del Mar Golf Resort



*The Hacienda Beach Resort's dreamy ocean view pool is surrounded by palms and lush gardens.*

and Dreams Los Cabos, with 150 suites, are just down the beach. The Westin Regina Beach and Golf Resort and the Marquis Los Cabos Resort and Spa are also at Cabo Real, closer to the Jack Nicklaus Eldorado course. Most of these hotels have guaranteed tee times at both courses within Cabo Real. And, all are only minutes away from four other championship courses. Closer to San José, Palmilla's ultra posh One&Only has preferred tee times at the resort's 27-hole Jack Nicklaus course.

The Fiesta Americana Grand and the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar are near Cabo San Lucas in the Cabo del Sol resort development. Both offer luxury accommodations and golfing opportunities at the Cabo del Sol Jack Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf designed-courses, and are only a short ride from other championship venues. Transportation to and from Cabo is available, but it's unlikely you'll want to leave either of these stylish resorts for long. Nearby, at Punta Ballena, the exquisite 50-suite Esperanza is operated by Auberge Resorts.

Los Cabos has over fifty miles of oceanfront and almost every resort property is on a beach, but not all are swimmable. If your dream includes plunging into the ocean frequently, ask if the beach at your chosen hotel is safe for swimming or near one that is. You might be wondering what good is a beach if you can't swim there. Well, if your dream includes a long leisurely stroll on a secluded stretch of sand close to downtown

## hotels & spas



Joseph A. Tyson

*Indulge in a day of pampering at The Grand Baja Resort and Spa's Aztlan Spa.*

Cabo, Pacific Ocean beaches are just the ticket—as long as you stay out of the water. Along the Pacific shore, you'll find Solmar Suites, one of Los Cabos' original resorts. Hotel Finisterra is another of Cabo's first hotels and like the Solmar has undergone expansion and upgrades. Between the two is the Playa Grande Resort. Built in the Mexican hacienda-style, it's growing fast: 68 additional suites (220 in total), a fitness center and spa will be open by the end of 2004. Further north is Pueblo Bonito Sunset Beach on 50 acres of pristine oceanfront. When complete the resort will feature 487 ocean view hillside suites and five pools. Sunset Beach is part of 500-acre Cabo Pacifica, which will include exclusive hotels, residential developments and golf courses.

Want to be near the heart of Cabo with a bay or Land's End view? Then consider swim-safe Médano Beach. Set within a lush palm grove, the Hotel Hacienda Beach Resort has 115 accommodations. Casa Rafael, on the hill above the beach, is a boutique hotel with 10 elegant suites and a renowned restaurant. On the same hill, Bahia Condo Hotel provides fully equipped kitchenettes in all 76 suites. The Marina Sol Condominium Hotel, one block away, offers many services you'd expect to find in the larger resorts such as poolside dining, a Mini-Mart, and a beauty salon. The popular colonial-style beachfront Meliá Cabo San Lucas has 150 suites. Next door are Pueblo Bonito Los Cabos, providing 148 junior and luxury suites, and the elegant, Mediterranean-designed 252-suite Pueblo Bonito Rosé. Further east is Villa del Palmar with 458 suites, all have full kitchens.

At Cabo Real, the Hilton and Meliá Cabo Real hotels front Playa Bledito with a manmade breakwater, good swimming, and watersports rentals. Dreams Los Cabos, Casa del Mar, and Las Ventanas al Paraiso are close by. All are not far from Chileno Bay, the best beach around for safe swimming and excellent

snorkeling and diving. A favorite of celebrities, "unplugged" Twin Dolphin, next to beautiful Santa Maria Bay, shuns in-room TVs and telephones. This is Baja before the boom.

Spas have become an important part of the resort vacation experience and most of the top hotels have spas with services for men and women. At many Los Cabos resorts the spa is an end unto itself with reception, treatment and relaxation areas, boutique and gym separate from the hotel. Although women still represent the majority of spa patrons, a growing number of men are discovering the benefits. If you can't actually stay at one of the spa resorts don't fret: many welcome guests from other hotels. Reservations are almost certainly required if you wish to visit another hotel's spa.

Known worldwide for their exclusive spas, Rosewood Hotels and Resorts' opulent 61-suite Las Ventanas al Paraiso caters to Cabo's most famous, and demanding, visitors. Here, 70% of all guests visit the spa at least once during their stay. The popular



Joseph A. Tyson

*Marina Sol's garden setting is a block away from Médano Beach.*

Ixchel Spa is at the Hilton Los Cabos Beach and Golf Resort, with a new player, the 27,000 square foot spa at the recently opened Marquis Los Cabos now the largest in the area. But not all of our best spas are at Cabo Real. On Médano Beach in Cabo, there's a fine spa at Pueblo Bonito Rosé. Further east, Villa del Palmar boasts a 10,000 square foot spa providing treatments from around the globe. The 171 all-suite Sheraton Hacienda del Mar's 7,000 square foot Cactus Spa and Fitness Center's body treatments use the exclusive Soft Pack system. The Grand Baja Resort and Spa in San José has a Temazcal (a small adobe sweat lodge) along with holistic treatments and full spa services. And, if you think a spa vacation means eating like a rabbit, you might want to investigate the Mandara Spa at the recently opened One&Only at the Palmilla resort near San José. As part of an \$80 million renovation One&Only added a destination spa with 13 cabañas, and a true star-quality restaurant, Charlie Trotter's C, which has garnered praise from *Conde Nast Traveler*, Trotter's hometown *Chicago Tribune*, and others.



Hilton

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## hotels & spas

Heads of state, their entourages, legions of economic delegates, and press from the 21 member nations found Los Cabos the ideal place to do business.



Joseph A. Tyson

Poolside at the Hilton Beach and Golf Resort at Cabo Real in the Tourist Corridor.

Not long ago if you told someone you were going to Los Cabos for a business trip the reply would be a grin and a sly wink. Business trip? Cabo? Yeah, right. But when Los Cabos hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) summit meeting in 2002, our reputation as a business destination was born. Heads

of state, their entourages, legions of economic delegates and press from the 21 member nations found Los Cabos the ideal place to do business. Since then, more and more companies are in on the secret—Los Cabos offers the perfect location for conferences, incentives, and corporate groups. Destination manage-

ment companies in Los Cabos and your hotel representative can arrange for everything from training seminars and awards banquets to group activities and team-building games and events—you have only to ask. For larger groups, you'll want to book at one of the newer full-service hotels such as the Hilton, Fiesta Americana Grand, or the Crowne Plaza, each accommodating groups up to 1,000 in their convention facilities. In Cabo, the marina front 286-room Costa Real Cabo Resort and Spa, formerly Plaza Las Glorias, is undergoing extensive renovations and upgrades.

All-inclusive resorts are newcomers to the Los Cabos hotel scene. If just staying put around the pool is your desire, these resorts just might be the ticket. In San José, the luxurious first phase of the 252-room The Grand Baja Resort and Spa opened in April 2004. Offering an all-inclusive option and three fine restaurants, The Grand Baja has finely furnished one to four bedroom suites, with terraces and full kitchens. Nearby, the affordable 400-room Royal Solaris is next door to the upscale 333-room Crowne Plaza. Near San José's estuary, the Presidente Inter-Continental Los Cabos Resort has 400 rooms, five restaurants, several swimming pools, and recreational activities. All four are on San José's beachfront. Newly all-inclusive Meliá Cabo Real is in the Corridor; with the 600-room RIU Palace Los Cabos east of Villa del Palmar due to open in late 2004.

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If you're looking for more affordable accommodations or intimate cozy lodgings, a boutique hotel, inn or B&B may be the answer. In Cabo, the Bungalows Breakfast Inn offers a homey atmosphere for B&B devotees. The Blarney Castle Inn's nine suites feature a wee bit of Ireland while Casa Pabilto is an intimate hacienda-style hotel. Downtown, the Mar de Cortez is a longtime favorite with anglers. Other options include secluded Los Milagros, Hotel Dos Mares, Casa Bella and the Seven Crown Hotel. Viva Cabo Hotel's luxury studios are a block off the marina.

The Corridor isn't only home to mammoth resorts. Lovely Suites Vistazul and Suites Terrazas de Positano are close to Cabo as are Marbella Suites and Casa Contenta B&B—all offer perfect Land's End views. Marbella Suites en La Playa is near the center of the Corridor on a stunning beach property. In San José del Cabo in the heart of Old Town, you'll find 16 posh rooms at Casa Natalia, this inn is one of the Small



The Playa Grande Resort on Playa Solmar, close to downtown Cabo San Lucas yet in a world of its own.

Luxury Hotels of the World. Nearby, Señor Mañana is a budget inn close to the main square. A few blocks away, the Hotel Posada Terranova's affordable accommodations include a charming courtyard restaurant. And away from downtown, at Suites Las Palmas you'll enjoy panoramic views of San José Bay.

Your vacation should be as unique as you are. No matter what your interests, needs and plans, the hotels of Los Cabos offer the perfect retreat. Whatever your dream vacation includes—providing it's not snow—there's a hotel here ready to make it come true.

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