

# CABO'S REINVENTION

The premier tourist destination in Mexico has seen a regeneration with luxury properties and new culinary powerhouses.

By Ashley Burnett

Los Cabos' new restaurants and luxury resorts offer even more ways to enjoy the picturesque locale.



**L**os Cabos allows for many choices: the option of soaking in the old-school atmosphere of San José del Cabo versus the luxe feel of Cabo San Lucas; traversing the stark desert landscapes dotted with cacti or taking a dip in the sparkling Pacific Ocean. And during the ride from the airport to my hotel, the cab driver pointed out as much

when he asked which route I wanted to take: the one that wended its way past the sea, or the one that went through the desert sands?

After picking the desert route, we were off to our destination in Cabo.

Cabo San Lucas, which has always been a hot spot for spring breakers and luxury-oriented travelers alike, is back after the devastation of

Hurricane Odile in 2014 and better than ever, with properties such as The Resort at Pedregal rebuilding to offer new, high-end accommodations. And the area further lures visitors with refined menus and events centered solely around food and drink—and the subsequent gathering of chefs and sommeliers from all over the world in the seaside town.

While the specter of spring break may linger—as evidenced by the expansive Señor Frog's restaurant and famed party spot at the harbor—it's clear that Cabo is reinventing itself, growing in terms of its appeal to visitors' discerning palates as well as the number of properties from which they may choose to stay. And, just as one can opt to drive by the sea or via the sand, the area

promises more and more choices that allow your getaway to unfold just as you want it to.

#### WHAT'S COOKING IN CABO

One thing that hasn't changed in Cabo is the preferred restaurants of locals and travelers in the know. There are plenty of standbys that visitors in Cabo still flock to, including The Office, which

boasts a singular dining experience right on the sand, and Nick-San, which blends Mexican ingredients seamlessly with traditional Japanese fare. There's also Edith's, which offers steak and seafood prepared with locally sourced ingredients. Mi Casa, another beloved eatery, has been offering traditional Mexican bites for more than 20 years, while cigar aficionados from around the

## FRESH FLORA

Visiting Flora Farm, located in the foothills of the Sierra de Laguna mountain range, is a Los Cabos must.

Nearly everyone I spoke to during my time in Los Cabos mentioned or recommended Flora Farm, a 10-acre organic farm in neighboring San José del Cabo (about a 45-minute drive from downtown Cabo San Lucas). The farm is at the very edge of Cabo's culinary scene and it's not uncommon to have a waitlist of more than a few months to schedule a dinner.

While you can take a tour of the farm itself, it's the Field Kitchen that's the real draw. The menu is full of plates concocted with ingredients straight from the farm's fields, with Flora's bakers, chefs and stewards starting preparations right when the sun begins to rise each day. This farm-fresh approach extends to the Farm Bar, which infuses drinks with fruits and veggies. In addition to the bar and restaurant, Flora Farm also boasts its own grocery store and cottages, which are available for rent. Overall, the farm has become a chic, world-renowned destination for foodies, chefs and celebrities alike, and has even hosted its share of star-studded events, including the marriage of singer Adam Levine to model Behati Prinsloo. (flora-farms.com)



Flora Farm's fresh cocktails



El Arco, the famous arch rock formation in Cabo San Lucas, adds to the stunning setting.

world still flock to J&J Habanos, which features Cuban cigars, premium tequila and Cuban rum, and is famous for its Big Papa mojitos.

In Cabo San Lucas proper, it's the region's hotels and resorts that are working to make the culinary scene more dynamic. The Resort at Pedregal, for instance, has El Farallon, a gorgeous, cliffside eatery overlooking the ocean. The menu features dishes that utilize the local fishermen's fresh catches, and so it changes daily. Served on the side are family-style offerings like charred tomato with arugula pesto, marinated grilled asparagus and a sun-dried tomato risotto cake. The property also boasts Don Manuel's, where Executive Chef Gustavo Pinet creates a unique menu—you guessed it—every day, using only the freshest ingredients. Expect dishes like roasted sea bass with corn-and-vanilla pudding, hamachi crudo, bluefin tuna tartare and garbanzo gnocchi with butter-poached lobster. Even the resort's duo of beachside bars—the Crudo Beach Bar and Beach Club—offer a litany of delicious small bites and beverages.

Other properties that are catering to foodies with their cuisine include The Cape, a Thompson Hotel, with its signature restaurant Manta, which boasts contemporary Mexican fare with stunning vistas of the famous Monuments surf beach and El Arco. Expect dishes like Veracruz-style ceviche, beef tartare tostada and chocolata clams with black garlic aguachile. Seared restaurant at the One&Only Palmilla resort, meanwhile, offers guests 15 different cuts of quality beef, as well as local spiny lobsters, whole red snappers and a

comprehensive wine list.

Other notable stops include Los Tres Gallos in downtown Cabo and Sunset MonaLisa, which features a menu full of gourmet Italian food served with a view of the Bay of Cabo San Lucas and Land's End. For a more laid-back experience, try the rooftop of Sunset MonaLisa or enjoy a wood-fired pizza and tapas at Sunset Point, a wine and pizza lounge.

## PERFECTION AT PEDREGAL

The perfect headquarters for a food-centered experience in Los Cabos, The Resort at Pedregal serves as an epicenter of sorts for Cabo's rapidly evolving culinary scene. It's played host to several food- and wine-related events, including 2016's The Art of Taste, an exclusive festival in which a diverse range of acclaimed chefs and sommeliers are flown in to give educational seminars, teach cooking skills and techniques and, of course, prepare some of the best food you've ever tasted. Last year's event featured luminaries like Dakota Weiss, a former "Top Chef" contestant best known for the dishes she serves up at Los Angeles' Estrella, as well as Sonya Coté of the renowned eatery Hillside Pharmacy in Austin, Texas. This gathering of noteworthy chefs was just another undeniable signal of Cabo's growing prominence in the culinary world.

The resort hosted plenty of food-focused events this year as well, including a special Romance Week for Valentine's Day featuring epicurean events spotlighting chefs such as Coté, as well as a huge celebration for Memorial Day, including oyster and artisan beer tastings. Culinary events for

BOTTOM: COURTESY OF FLORA FARM



Clockwise from top left: The Resort at Pedregal's El Farallon eatery, poolside bar, luxury accommodations and swimming pool

Christmas and New Year's Eve are also upcoming.

And, in between meals, The Resort at Pedregal is an ideal locale both to digest and relax. It's probably one of the most stunning resorts I've ever seen. With a view of the water, where the Pacific Ocean meets the Sea of Cortez, the resort feels like a true getaway and respite from the real world. At Pedregal, your only worries are about what masterfully made cocktail you should order by the infinity pool (insider tip: be sure to try one of the fresh fruit smoothies) and what time you want your daily complimentary chips and guacamole plate delivered to your room (for me, it was promptly at 3 p.m., right before my late afternoon siesta).

And what rooms they are. Mine featured a combined view of the resort unfolding out before me and the dazzling ocean, both of which I could see from the small infinity plunge pool on my balcony—a welcome and luxurious amenity that capped off every food-filled day with a relaxing and cooling dip. Inside, the suite boasted a

fireplace, a rainfall shower and a tub stocked with honey-scented bath products.

If you can pull yourself away from your luxurious suite—and believe me, it will be difficult—the rest of the resort is yours to explore. You might, for example, book a treatment at Luna y Mar Spa. One of the most gorgeous spots located within the resort—and there's plenty of competition—the spa is an oasis of relaxation. Beautifully silent with dim lighting, the spa boasts its own hidden pool and waterfall within its complex, as well as a swirling whirlpool, ice room and sauna. Relax before or after your treatment in the many serene areas within the complex where you can spread out on large cushions and draw the curtains before or after your treatment.

The spa revolves around the theme of the moon and sea, with six specific treatments created to reflect the lunar phases and boasting ocean-inspired ingredients like seaweed and algae. I received a full-body massage in one of the separate

massage rooms, which are surrounded by the spa's private pool and full of the sounds made from its cascading waterfall. If entering the resort feels like a disconnect from the real world, the spa offers that experience tenfold—as you listen to the sound of the waterfall and receive your treatment (other options include facials and other massages), you'll feel unplugged from any real-world stress.

In addition to the spa and its myriad treatments, the resort also features a fitness center with the latest machines and a full class listing. Check out the outdoor yoga class—which takes place on the beach—or one of the cardio classes for the perfect complement to your culinary adventures.

At the end of the day, no matter what choices you've made—spending time by the infinity pool, at the beachside bar making new friends as you sip the bartenders' unique concoctions, or noshing on traditional Mexican fare or more modern bites—in Cabo, the choice is always yours. **LBM**

—Steve Zepezauer also contributed to this article