







# SUN, SURF, SIPS AND SWINGS

CABO SAN LUCAS HAS BEEN A HIVE OF GOLF DEVELOPMENT IN RECENT YEARS,  
BUT DON'T BE SURPRISED IF YOU GET DISTRACTED

BY JAY BLASI, CABO SAN LUCAS, MEXICO

**T**he golf scene at the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula in Mexico is unlike any other in North America. The area is home to 16 courses designed by the likes of Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Greg Norman, Tom Fazio and Robert Trent Jones Jr. – all built within the last 25 years. But it's not all about the golf.

First-time visitors will experience sensory overload from the turquoise water of the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Cortez, the dramatic rock formations along the water's edge, the white sand beaches and giant dune systems. Just above that coastline is a desert landscape highlighted by arroyos and saguaro cacti, and from there climb mountains that reach as high as 6,500 feet in elevation.

Simply put, there is beauty in every direction. But it's not all about that beauty, either.

There's a vibe to Cabo, an invitation to relax, to enjoy oneself, that takes the sum of its parts – golf, coast, mountains, views – to deliver something even greater as a whole.

Want to party? Check. Want to relax at the beach between rounds? Check. Want to go all-in with a second home at a resort-style community that offers all the trimmings? »

*Pictured: Quivira*





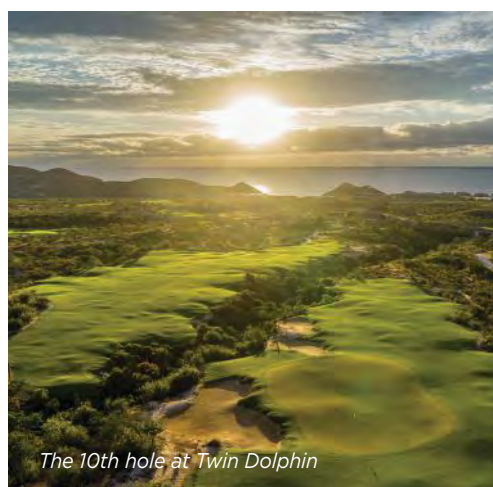
*The 11th hole at Twin Dolphin*

Check. Cabo offers all that and more.

That vibe starts before visitors leave the airport. After the frenzy of customs, claiming bags and avoiding the dozens of timeshare hawkers, you step outside and are bathed in sunshine and offered a drink. Even before you grab a taxi or climb into a shuttle, there is a curbside bar filled with happy tourists – apparently the fun can't wait in Cabo.

The drive from the airport to the hotel areas is about 30-45 minutes. Most guests will stay at a large hotel or resort in one of three areas; the Corridor, the Marina District or the Pacific side of the peninsula.

The Corridor is a 15-mile stretch between San Jose Del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas filled with mega-hotels, each with



*The 10th hole at Twin Dolphin*

hundreds of rooms, pools, restaurants and activities. Many are set up as all-inclusive, and some guests never venture outside their resort.

The Marina District is where the town of Cabo San Lucas meets the beach. There are shops and restaurants nestled up to fishing boats and yachts at the marina. Tourists can sign up for whale

watching, sport fishing, a ride on a glass-bottom boat, a sunset cruise and more at the Marina. A few blocks inland are the nightclubs and bars that give Cabo its reputation as a spring break-bachelor party hot spot. A walk from the Marina up the beach takes you past bars and restaurants in the sand, alongside large condos and hotels, and gives you the best view of Land's End, the iconic rock formation that dives into the sea at the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula.

Around Land's End is the Pacific side, another dramatic meeting of land and sea where numerous hotels, resorts and developments have popped up in the past 20 years. The Pacific side is a little more quiet and offers amazing sunsets,





and it is home to some of the newer golf courses in Cabo.

The golf experience in Cabo is resort golf through and through. Arrival at a course usually includes a cocktail, everyone takes carts, there is often music on the range and many courses are arranged as roughly six-hole stretches between comfort stations where golfers indulge on cocktails and local-fare appetizers. Shorts and flip flops might be seen alongside an Airstream kitchen serving tacos and a VW Bus offering margaritas. The vibe is frequently much more beach club with a golf course added on.

Cabo's roots are a fishing village, but golf crashed the party in the 1980s. »

## A SAMPLE OF CABO'S NEW COURSES

New courses and big renovations in the past few years around Cabo have produced what is likely the biggest golf boom outside Vietnam. In October a group of 28 Golfweek's Best course raters spent a week checking out several layouts and found positive takeaways at each.

COURTESY OF RANCHO SAN LUCAS/  
BRIAN G. OAR

*Rancho San Lucas*



### Rancho San Lucas

**DESIGNER:** Greg Norman

**OPENED:** 2020

**AFFILIATED WITH:** Rancho San Lucas resort community

**2021 GOLFWEEK'S BEST RANKING:** Tied for No. 12 among courses in Mexico, Caribbean, Atlantic and Central America

**THE DETAILS:** A very playable layout on what was likely the best site of the four new courses we played. Each nine features a few desert, dune and beachfront holes. The par-3 17th to an island green with a waterfall behind, just a few hundred yards from the Pacific Ocean, was a head-scratcher.

**THE RATERS SAY:** "A fun place to just sit and enjoy the views." – Mark Hildahl, New Hampshire

COURTESY OF TWIN DOLPHIN/  
EVAN SCHILLER

*Twin Dolphin*



### Twin Dolphin

**DESIGNERS:** Fred Couples and Todd Eckenrode

**YEAR OPENED:** 2018

**AFFILIATED WITH:** Montage Las Cabos

**2021 GOLFWEEK'S BEST RANKING:** No. 15 among courses in Mexico, Caribbean, Atlantic and Central America

**THE DETAILS:** A more traditional desert course set a mile or two above the sea. Wide corridors and engaging green complexes make the course one to be enjoyed on a day-to-day basis.

**THE RATERS SAY:** "Terrific green complexes that offer all kinds of options." – Ed Oden, North Carolina

COURTESY OF QUIVIRA/  
BRIAN G. OAR

*Quivira*



### Quivira

**DESIGNER:** Jack Nicklaus

**YEAR OPENED:** 2014

**AFFILIATED WITH:** Pueblo Bonito Resorts

**2021 GOLFWEEK'S BEST RANKING:** No. 25 among courses in Mexico, Caribbean, Atlantic and Central America

**THE DETAILS:** A wild journey along the Pacific with holes in a few different zones on the property. The 2-mile cart ride from No. 4 to No. 5 was broken up by a comfort station built into a cliff overlooking the ocean.

**THE RATERS SAY:** "Several of the most visually spectacular holes in golf." – Todd Jones, Ohio

COURTESY OF COSTA PALMAS/  
EVAN SCHILLER

*Costa Palmas*



### Costa Palmas

**DESIGNER:** Robert Trent Jones Jr.

**OPENED:** 2019

**AFFILIATED WITH:** Four Seasons

**2021 GOLFWEEK'S BEST RANKING:** Tied for No. 39 among courses in Mexico, Caribbean, Atlantic and Central America

**THE DETAILS:** A low-lying layout with three distinct environments; dunes, forest and marina. The course offers wide fairways, dramatic bunkering and rolling green contours throughout. The large driving range can be converted into a six-hole short course for early-morning or late-afternoon fun.

**THE RATERS SAY:** "Exceptional variety of strategic shots." – Kristy Medo, Wisconsin



## Perfect pit stops

Perhaps as memorable as the golf is the comfort station experience in Cabo. Many of the courses offer small snack shacks with a full bar and prepared food, and it seems each property aims to outdo its neighbors. Some of the more memorable comfort stations we experienced were:



**Cliffhouse at Quivira:** Set before the fifth tee a few hundred feet above the Pacific and built into a cliff, guests are offered a margarita and fish tacos with a million-dollar view.

**Red Door 5 at Twin Dolphin:** After the fifth hole, golfers can settle into a gracious outdoor room with tables, a firepit and tv, or they can belly up to a bar where the left wall is filled with sweets and the right wall is filled with booze. For early players, breakfast is served: Pastries, fresh fruit, chorizo breakfast taquitos, pancakes, mimosas, Bloody Mary's and fresh mango yogurt can make you forget about golf.



**Lucha Libre at Costa Palmas:** Golfers finishing either No. 7 or 13 can sample a little outdoor bar that feels like a spot you might find along the beach where you choose to hang out. Upon arrival, we were greeted with a mango-scented cold towel and a full Pizza Al Pastor fresh out of the custom brick oven. Margaritas with fresh lime juice and mini popsicles of local flavored ice creams also were on offer.

The game exploded in the area in the '90s with the addition of Cabo Del Sol designed by Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf, El Dorado by Nicklaus, Palmilla by Nicklaus, Cabo Real by Jones Jr. and Querencia by Fazio.

In the past decade more courses were built: Diamante Dunes by Davis Love III, El Cardonal at Diamante by Woods, Quivira by Nicklaus, Twin Dolphin by Fred Couples and Todd Eckenrode, and most recently Rancho San Lucas by Norman, which opened in early 2020.

In addition to all these fresh courses near Cabo, Costa Palmas by Jones Jr. opened in 2019 at the East Cape roughly 90 minutes away but equidistant from Los Cabos International Airport.

And finally, Cabo Del Sol has changed its Ocean Course to a private layout now called Cove Club, for which Nicklaus redesigned multiple holes and renovated the greens and bunkers. And in the spirit of nothing standing still for long in Cabo, Weiskopf's Desert Course at Cabo Del Sol is slated to be redesigned by the team of Dana Fry and Jason Straka.

All told, golf in Cabo is unique. The golf purists and architectural aficionados may see Cabo as a missed opportunity. Great land with sandy soils and a

dramatic coastline has been the scene for many of the game's best modern courses. Mike Keiser – founder of Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in western Oregon, as well as several other top golf-focused destinations – has developed a formula of a resort where golf gets the best land and the lodging is set away from the water, and that model has worked extremely well in tougher spots.

But Cabo's climate is much better than Bandon's, and it's easier to get to. Despite proven examples of focusing on golf in other locales, to date every development in Cabo has been real estate or resort first and golf second, with much of the best land distrusted accordingly. That also may explain why all the courses in Cabo have been designed by big-name celebrity architects as opposed to the smaller, hands-on shops that produced many of the top layouts of our time.

Will the model change in the future? Only time will tell. For now, Cabo is an ideal spot for a couples getaway or an all-purpose trip with your most fun travel buddies.

This is not Pine Valley or Seminole. This is Cabo. Untuck your shirt, grab a margarita, crank up the tunes, forget about your score and enjoy. **Gwk**



*Pictured: Costa Palmas*