

A taste of Mexico

ESPERANZA RESORT CAPTURES THE RIOTOUS FLAVORS OF LOS CABOS

BY BROOKE CHESHER
PHOTOS COURTESY OF ESPERANZA RESORT



View of a casita at the Hotel at Esperanza in Los Cabos, Baja California.

Baja lime. It's one of Cabo San Lucas' signature scents, and it infuses everything at Esperanza Resort, from chef Sergio Howland's *cocina del sol* to the cool towels with which the valet greets guests when he drives them from the airport, along the bluffs overlooking the Sea of Cortez and through the private gates to a casita at the Hotel at Esperanza. As the valet bypasses the front desk and whisks guests away to their rooms, that lime scent may grow faint as others — traces of bougainvillea, papaya, mango, avocado, aloe, and coconut carried in on a salty wind — start to surface.

At Esperanza, guests find the exotic essences of native fruits, vegetables and desert plants in custom-blended *aguas frescas*. The same rejuvenating scents lift from their skin after a full day of treatments in one of the Spa at Esperanza's 14 treatment rooms, all of which are surrounded by fragrant private gardens with outdoor showers shaded by *latilla* canopies.

These indigenous aromas are only one part of a mindfully choreographed symphony designed to give guests an authentic sense of place. Most all-inclusive Mexico resorts are designed to keep guests inside its walls and locals at bay. Yet the flavors and foliage of Los Cabos and the Baja Peninsula filter into every corner of this 17-acre property.

Locals call Los Cabos the place where the desert meets the ocean. Esperanza tucks beautifully, luxuriously into this dry, dusty seascape. At the 57-suite oasis — where every room faces the ocean, private plunge pools coolly beckon and windows slide fluidly into walls — the resort and landscape literally melt together.



Each of the 57 suites at Esperanza faces the ocean.

Here, the resort's Master Tequilero Alejandro Enriquez introduces visitors to more than 100 varieties of tequilas, the local wines of Baja, and the orange and red chile-infused sangrita recipes of western Mexico. And when he's not crafting snapper bouillabaisse, vanilla-braised veal and sautéed lobster at El Restaurante (one of four dining rooms on-site), Chef Howland offers private cooking classes for groups of two and three. With Howland, guests don't just watch. They prepare ceviches and hone their knife skills.

On Thursday nights at Esperanza, Cabo Sun Lucas' downtown street vendors surge in for Mexicanismo, an outdoor, ocean-side festival filled with Mariachi music, fireworks and tables laden with mole, salsas and foods from Mexico's unique regions. On Wednesday nights it's Carnivalismo, with Mexican barbecue, salsa dancing and live music.

If or when a guest decides he would rather engage with the people of Los Cabos outside the walls of the Esperanza, all he has to do is ask. Since the staff-to-guest ratio is incredibly high, General Manager Severino Gomez and his crew can arrange anything from scuba diving to private art excursions to world-class golf and fishing outings.

"One of the great things about Cabo and the Esperanza is that you get out of it what you want to," Esperanza Media Representative Kurstin Faraone says. "You can come here to simply decompress, cleanse and explore the walking trails and the exceptional yoga classes. If you're an arts enthusiast, the Esperanza can guide you to galleries both on the

property and off as well as arrange private tours, introduce you to the top curators and schedule you for art classes."

Personalized service drives the petite village-like resort. Well, personalized service, vibrantly fresh and authentic regional cuisine and stunningly designed rooms filled with botanical spa products, fresh Frette linens and, always, the briny, exotic scents of coastal Mexico — the place where desert and ocean collide.

STAYING AT ESPERANZA

Esperanza features 57 casitas ranging in space from 925 to 4,700 square feet. Each casita faces the sea and all have pocket doors that disappear into the walls, merging inside with out. Rates start at \$475 per night. Although typically considered a couture couples' retreat, the property also boasts 60 luxury villas (most of which are residences) for active families.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL

Esperanza offers four restaurants, stunning galleries that feature traditional Oaxacan pottery and contemporary painting and sculpture from Mexico's most celebrated artists, infinity pools and poolside bars (poolside service includes complimentary hand and foot massages and refreshing aloe cubes), world-class gym and yoga classes, walking trails and much more.

Even with all these amenities, visitors to Mexico may find themselves hungry to explore the world outside the resort. Avoid the hordes of tourists flocking to Cabo San Lucas and instead visit the town of **San Jose del Cabo**.

Founded in 1730 by a Jesuit priest, the mesa town is probably the least crowded, most authentic village in Baja California. It boasts colonial 18th-century architecture, narrow streets and some of the best taquerias — and the best fish tacos — in coastal Mexico. San Jose also has **lasanta**, one of the area's most exquisite wine bars. Housed in a quarried stone building, its cellar holds more than 135 different wines. The bar also has fantastic charcuterie and proper stemware. Never underestimate the power of a great wine glass.

The club and cantina-craving crowds, however, will find the famous nightspots of Cabo San Lucas to be the winning bet. However, there is grown-up fun to be had. **Mi Casa** is the perfect place to sip aged tequila and discover regional Mexican seafood at an 80-year-old bar in the town's oldest adobe building. At the hotel One&Only Palmilla, Michelin-starred Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten has opened **Market**, which features upscale Eur-Asian cuisine with a Mexican twist. Palmilla's recently opened sushi bar, **Suviche**, overlooks the Sea of Cortez and offers exquisitely cut sushi, high-end sake and an array of green teas. Sushi seems to be popular in coastal Cabo San Lucas, and **Nick-San** is another local favorite. The open restaurant seats 100 and features unique adaptations such as lobster curry.

SWING TIME

Cabo long has been the marlin capital of the world, but over the last decade, the desert peninsula also has garnered a reputation as the hottest golf spot in North America. Cabo San Lucas claims six championship golf courses, and most are as beautiful as they are challenging. The **Jack Nicklaus Ocean Course at Cabo del Sol** follows 1 1/2 miles of oceanfront along the Sea of Cortez. With its sand traps, arroyos, rocky outcroppings and complex layout, it's considered one of the most difficult courses in the region. Golfers looking to play the toughest front nine of their lives won't want to miss the **Robert Trent Jones II-designed golf course at Cabo Real**. They may even spot breaching whales from the tee box. Then there's the course that started it all, the first **Jack Nicklaus-designed course at One&Only Palmilla Golf Club**. With 27 holes divided into the Ocean Nine, the Mountain Nine and the Arroyo Nine, it's one of the most stunning par-72 courses on the peninsula. Staff members at Esperanza Resort will arrange tee times and transportation for their guests. ■

Everything a guest could need for dining, drinking, lodging and entertainment is located on the Esperanza Resort property. Unlike most all-inclusives, however, many of these added luxuries are not included in the room price. For more information about the resort, visit www.esperanzasort.com or call (866) 311-2226.

Top: A suite with a private plunge pool overlooking the ocean. Middle: One of four on-site dining areas. Bottom: A view of Arroyo Nine of the Jack Nicklaus-designed course at One&Only Palmilla Golf Club.

