

THE LUXURY TRAVEL CLUB FROM TRAVEL WEEKLY

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OUT OF THE SHADOWS

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as its luxury offering shines*



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MEXICO

SUR-FIRE WINNER

DUBBED THE 'A-LIST GATEWAY', MEXICO'S LOS CABOS HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH HIGH-END LIVING. AMIE KEELEY VISITS BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR



Outstanding beaches, once-in-a-lifetime wildlife experiences and a string of five-star properties dotted along a glistening coastline – Baja California Sur ticks a lot of boxes.

While the Riviera Maya on Mexico's Caribbean coastline attracts most British visitors, with its all-inclusive resorts and direct charter and scheduled flights from the UK, the southern pocket of this western state, directly south of California, is somewhat more exclusive.

Home to the 'A-list gateway' of Los Cabos, it is favoured by Hollywood stars and millionaires. Its proximity to California makes it the go-to vacation destination for the rich and famous living a short flight north of the border. Unsurprisingly, there are plenty of luxury hotels and private villas to choose from along the resort corridor that runs between the municipality's two towns, Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo.

The most recent addition, Grand Velas Los Cabos, has raised the stakes with its 'beyond all-inclusive' offering that includes a two-Michelin-starred restaurant; huge, modern ocean-facing rooms; and the world's most-ostentatious taco, priced at \$25,000 (*hotel review, page 82*).

The hotel is located a few miles from the party town of Cabo San Lucas, with its raucous club scene and abundance of souvenir shops.

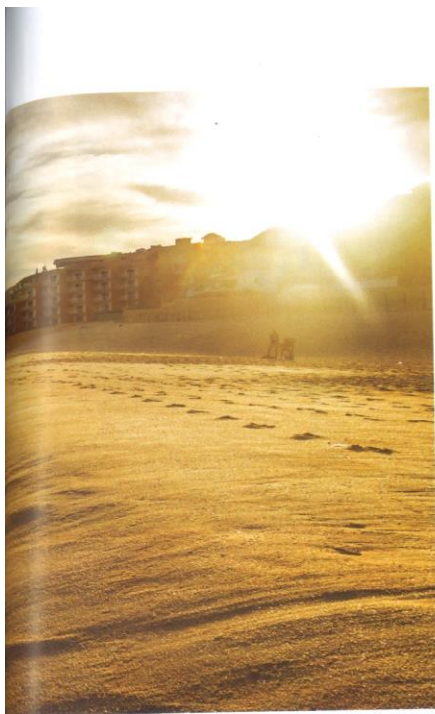
While the town centre veers towards



the tacky side, it is a good platform from which to experience the plethora of sea and land-based activities on offer. Top of the list is the El Arco (Arch of Cabo San Lucas). Formed by erosion, the natural rock formation has come to symbolise the area, standing where the Gulf of California meets the Pacific Ocean. It is inaccessible by land, but visitors wanting a photo can reach the rock by water taxi from the marina.

The marina is also where you will find Cabo Adventures, which offers the widest range of excursions. Name it and they do it, from shark encounters and outback camel safaris to zip-lining and sailing. Fancy being propelled 45 feet in the air? Well now you can do that too. It's called flyboarding and involves the rider jumping out of the water and using an

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aquatic jetpack to hover in the air.

But Cabo Adventures' newest activity – an electric-bike tour – is the best, and not too strenuous, way to explore the landscape. Riders are taken through the Baja desert, surrounded by cacti at every turn, up and down hills that offer sweeping views of the ocean. They then cycle along the untouched sandy beach, from where whales can be seen at certain times of the year, before ending up at a secluded beachfront restaurant to make margaritas and tuck into delicious quesadillas.

Any of the tours can be tweaked for a private group. Staff can also tailor-make your client's chosen activity, from a champagne brunch on a privately chartered catamaran to private-jet tours.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Although they are only a 20-minute drive from each other, and share the same coastline, Cabo San Lucas and San Jose Del Cabo are worlds apart.

San Jose is more laid-back and far more traditional, with its colonial buildings, narrow streets, art galleries and boutique hotels around the beautiful Plaza Mijares.

Visitors are also spoilt for choice when it comes to dining and drinking. A recent addition to the gastronomic scene is La Revolución Comedor de Baja California. The design is modern – think high ceilings and exposed brickwork – but not out of keeping with its surroundings. The diverse menu features seafood dishes such as ceviche and oysters, and smoked meats, not to mention a 'creative cocktails' list.

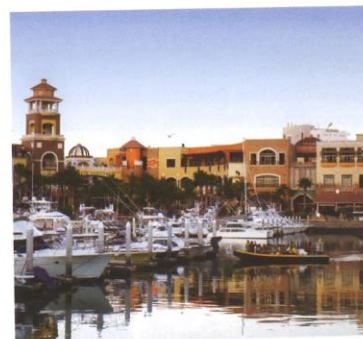
If you can tear yourself away from this corner of paradise, there is a lot worth exploring in the region.

Not to be missed is Isla Espíritu Santo, a private island with a white-sand beach surrounded by the turquoise waters of the Sea of Cortez. A Unesco World Heritage Site, the island is an hour's boat ride from the state's capital, La Paz.

Cortez Club runs a boat excursion



ABOVE LEFT AND BELOW: Cabo San Lucas
LEFT: Grand Velas Los Cabos





ABOVE: El Arco of Cabo San Lucas
LEFT: Sea lions

to the area and to the nearby La Lobera sea lion colony, where you can swim alongside these sociable mammals and their pups. They also run diving courses and whale-watching excursions, recently counting *Batman Begins* star Christian Bale among its clientele.

The whole Baja peninsula is a whale-watching hotspot – and it's a must-do activity while you are here. Every winter, gray whales end their migration from the Arctic at Baja's Pacific lagoons. Excursions run daily from the end of December to the beginning of March, and the giant creatures are so friendly that you will often get close enough to touch.

About halfway between La Paz and Cabo San Lucas is Todos Santos, a charming town renowned for its colourful colonial architecture, at the foothills of the Sierra

de la Laguna mountains. Founded in 1724 as a mission, it is one of 36 'magical towns' in Mexico, designated as such for their beauty and heritage. Its laid-back vibe makes it popular with artists and surfers venturing down from the US.

One of Todos Santos's most popular spots is Hotel California, no doubt helped by rumours that it was the inspiration for the Eagles song. Sadly, they are not true, but the myth lives on, and visitors flock to stay in one of the hotel's 11 uniquely designed rooms with private terraces, or to dine in its La Coronela restaurant, which serves delicious, and generous, Mexican classics and punchy cocktails.

This area of Mexico isn't the most accessible, but it's definitely worth the trip for those who enjoy basking in an area not too often visited by Brits. ●

GETTING THERE

There are no direct flights to Los Cabos from the UK. Visitors have to take a connecting flight from Mexico City to Los Cabos or La Paz. AeroMexico has added a sixth weekly flight from Heathrow for the summer, and offers easy onward connections to both towns. The airline's new Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners boast an impressive 'Clase Premier' (business class) with large touchscreens, lie-flat ergonomic seats and a bar.

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PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; LATIN AMERICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION/RICARDO ESPINOSA