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BAJA BOOMTOWN

A surge of sojourners are expected in Los Cabos this season, as the Mexican playground welcomes an onslaught of new luxury hotels and residences catering to those with high-end tastes and an appetite for sunshine and siestas.

By Rima Suqi

Los Cabos is booming. Five new hotels—including a Park Hyatt, Nobu and a Solaz—are set to open this year in the posh Mexican resort area at the southernmost tip of the Baja peninsula, a 775-mile-long sliver of land that separates the Pacific Ocean from the Gulf of California. And more are coming—the next few years will bring a 1 Hotel, a The Ritz Carlton Reserve, a Montage, a Four Seasons and a The St. Regis.

What's the appeal? "If you're on the West Coast or in the mountain regions, you can decide on Thursday, 'Hey, let's fly down [to Mexico] on Friday,'" explains Neil Johnson, director of residential real estate for Ohana Real Estate Investors, the company behind the already-open **Maravilla Los Cabos** (maravillaloscabos.com), as well as the **Montage Residences Los Cabos** (montageresidencesloscabos.com) and hotel, scheduled to debut early next year. "It's a short flight, and you're in Mexico where the weather is essentially guaranteed and the service is phenomenal."

About 500 weekly flights arrive into Los Cabos and the airport is currently undergoing a \$48 million expansion, which is slated for completion in two years and will include five new gates, a total refurbishment of the domestic terminal and a brand-new VIP lounge. It's clearly a necessity, as the area—more than ever before—is poised to become one of the top luxury playgrounds in the Americas.

Many existing resorts have been renovated or upgraded in the past three years, thanks to Hurricane Odile, which slammed into the peninsula in September 2014.

Las Ventanas al Paraíso (room rates from \$990 per night, rosewoodhotels.com), a perennial favorite among the boho-chic set, was one of them. In addition to storm-related renovation, the resort recently unveiled the Ty Warner Mansion, a Robert Couturier-designed 28,000-square-foot art-filled villa perched on the most enviable spot on the property. For \$35,000 per night, guests at the two-bedroom villa can luxuriate in over-the-top amenities, including the beachfront infinity pool with a sunken, in-pool living room and swim-up bar; a rooftop terrace with glass-bottom lap pool, whirlpool spa and putting green; as well as the expected private chef, driver on-call and butler. And let's not forget the customizable fireworks display that can be arranged at a moment's notice and controlled by the guest, via remote.

While Las Ventanas is a stalwart, the aforementioned statistics site room for competition. **Grand Velas Los Cabos** (loscabos.grandvelas.com) is one of the newer entries in the market and is removing the stigma around the words "all-inclusive," with rates from \$548 per person, per night. Every room has a private terrace with a view of the ocean, as well as incredibly thoughtful room amenities. There's a staff ratio of 3:1; the resort has five fine-dining restaurants from which guests can choose (including Cocina **CONTINUED...**

From left: Dramatic dining at Chileno Bay Resorts & Residences; the avant-garde Mar Adentro at night.

CHILENO BAY RESIDENCES PHOTO BY PATRICIA LYONS



...CONTINUED de Autor, helmed by the two Michelin-starred chef Sidney Schutte), with 50 included wines and another 200 available at additional cost. The breakfast buffet is beyond. Have a dietary restriction? It's been thought of and addressed before you even ask. Grand Velas is also one of the few resorts that has truly mastered the delicate balancing act of serving guests traveling with kids as well as those without—with an extremely separate kids' pool and splash pad, in addition to kids' and teen clubs that stay open until about 11PM and midnight, respectively, so parents can have a proper date night (nanny services are also available). And let's not forget the spa: There are 35,000 square feet of it, spread across two levels, with the now-expected-from-the-brand Water Journey, a gigantic pool with multiple stations offering different sensory experiences.

Mar Adentro (room rates price upon request, maradentrocabos.com) offers a different sensory experience, namely one for the color and clutter averse. It is a minimalist's paradise, owned and designed by a Miguel Angel Aragonés, an architect who clearly spared no expense in creating the rooms, which were built in a European factory and assembled on-site. Each room, whether in the hotel or the adjacent residences, has at least a partial view of the sea (Mar Adentro translates



to "the sea inside"), and almost everything in the room is white, with lights, shades, sound system and the like, all controlled via tablet.

The pièce de résistance here, from the point of view of someone who didn't experience the property beyond a perfunctory tour (it was still being finalized), is the nestlike structures that demand to be Instagrammed. One houses a restaurant, and the other is a structure to pass through to reach the



Clockwise top: Stunning views from the Ty Warner Mansion at Las Ventanas al Paraíso, a Rosewood Resort; the dramatic lobby at Grand Velas Los Cabos; oceanfront galleria lawn seating at Chilenos Bay Resorts & Residences.

CHILENO BAY RESIDENCES PHOTO BY PATRICIA LYONS



A backyard terrace at Montage Residences Los Cabos

...CONTINUED beach, complete with cleverly disguised showers for rinsing off afterward. The spa is a different experience. Guests enter into a dark cavelike space where light streams through very selective spots, perhaps channeling James Turrell.

Chileno Bay Resorts & Residences (room rates from \$675 per night, chilenobay.aubergeresorts.com) channels a relaxed yet playful lifestyle, to be expected from a property managed by Auberge Resorts Collection (Esperanza, another hotel here, is also in its portfolio). A 450-foot-long, three-tiered pool is strategically positioned in the center of the 60-room hotel property and cascades down to the beach. Oddly, all rooms here are singles with king beds, meaning

families will probably opt to rent one of the 32 three- and four-bedroom beachfront "villas" from the surrounding Chileno Bay Residences. All activity seems to center around the pool, where Coola sunscreen is "on tap" and one might be tempted by the Tacos and Tequila bar. That said, the resort is enviably positioned on one of the only swimmable beaches here and takes full advantage by offering a plethora of activities, including the expected paddleboarding and the more surprising water cycles, which, prior to this, I had only seen at Lake Austin Spa in Texas. The spa here is a little smaller than Lake Austin, but very well-designed, with treatment rooms including a Himalayan salt sauna and a relaxation garden. There's only one signature restaurant here,

but when it's as good as COMAL, who cares? Executive chef Yvan Mucharraz earned his chops at The French Laundry and also L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Paris. I sat at the bar and chatted with him and head mixologist Osvaldo Vasquez about everything from nontraditional Mexican spirits like Sotol and Pox to why I should order the chef's special roasted chicken. Apparently it takes three days to prepare this fabulous fowl, but it only took me 10 minutes to inhale, with one of Vasquez's cocktail recommendations, of course.

After experiencing all the new resorts in Los Cabos, one could be forgiven for having dreams of permanent ownership on this lovely peninsula. Fortunately, there are a mind-boggling array of real estate options. One of the most highly anticipated developments, set to debut next year, is the **Montage Residences Los Cabos** (prices upon request, montageresidencesloscabos.com) on Santa María Bay. Choose from more than 50 two- and three-bedroom open-plan options, designed for optimal indoor-outdoor living, with ample terrace space, fire pits, plunge pools (in ground-floor residences) and practical details like en-suite bathrooms in every bedroom. Added bonus: Residents have access to amenities at the Montage Los Cabos five-star resort, also set to open next year, as well as private residential amenities, plus the opportunity to join the Twin Dolphin Golf Club and play the Fred Couples Signature Golf Course, which features ocean views from every hole. It's perfect for those who want to extend their stay... indefinitely. ■

HOT TREND: FARM-TO-FORK



Two farm-to-table restaurants make dining off-property a must in Los Cabos, even if it can take up to an hour to get there. The good news: They're practically neighbors, on the same unpaved road at the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna mountains, so it's worth making a day of the experience. Start at **Flora Farms** (flora-farms.com), a 25-acre organic working farm with a restaurant set in the middle of the field, where the owners aim to serve what they "make, raise and grow." Plan to come early and take advantage of the brand-new spa, which has two treatment cabins as well as a barber shop/tattoo parlor; nestled among papaya and banana trees. Afterward, have a drink at the Farm Bar (I had the Farmarita, its a take on a margarita) or shop at the Grocery while waiting for your table. If you fall in love, consider renting or buying one of the Culinary Cottages here.

Acre (acrebaja.com) is also situated on 25 acres, located a bit farther down the road, in a lush, dreamy setting amid palm trees. The vibe here is bit more youthful and modern with almost all culinary and design elements sourced locally. Owners Stuart McPherson and Cameron Watt hail from Vancouver, British Columbia, and aimed to create an "extremely creative food and cocktail program, similar to what you might find in a large city." They've succeeded on both counts: my herb-smoked Negroni was delivered in a bell jar; when the top was removed to reveal the drink, aromatic smoke was simultaneously released, to dramatic effect (and the drink was spot-on). The tuna tartare, made from a fish caught earlier that morning by the chefs. It doesn't get much fresher than that.

