The New Cabo: Why the Spring Break Haven Is Drawing a Whole New Crowd
If the notion of a trip to Los Cabos conjures images of an eternal spring break, might we suggest another look? Whether you’re seeking bygone ritz in Cabo San Lucas, Zen in Todos Santos, or bohemian vibes in San José del Cabo, a flurry of new boutique hotels and destination restaurants ensures you’ll never have to throw back shots at El Squid Roe or Cabo Wabo—unless you want to. And now that the effects of last September’s Hurricane Odile have mostly been swept away, there’s never been a better time to take in the tropical desert beauty, vibrant art galleries, and Pacific waves.

Cabo San Lucas

The best-known city in Los Cabos (the collective name given to the region), Cabo San Lucas is still the spot for big-box resorts and large quantities of tequila drinks, but stylish alternatives recall the town’s mid-century jet-set luster. Check in to Thompson Hotels’s new The Cape (“cabo” means “cape” in Spanish) on surf break Monuments Beach, with dramatic views of the town’s signature El Arco rock formation. The ’60s modern-meets-Baja desert decor features hand-painted tile work and architect Javier Sánchez’s life-sized gray whale sculpture made of driftwood. Steps from Cabo’s marina and built into a natural rock formation, the dreamy Resort at Pedregal’s plush rooms, appointed with local handicrafts, all feature private plunge pools looking out on the mighty Pacific—the perfect spot for peeping giant gray, blue, and humpback whales during whale season (December to April) or indulging in the resort’s signature afternoon snack of guacamole and Coronitas.
Creative chefs have been lured by Cabo’s Pacific seafood and fresh produce: Enrique Olvera, known for Pujol in Mexico City and Cosme in New York City, just opened Manta in The Cape hotel, where Baja ingredients find their way into dishes inspired by the cuisine of the Pacific Rim, from Mexico to Peru to Japan.

Yvan Mucharraz, a vet of Per Se and The French Laundry, helms El Farallon at the Resort at Pedregal, where you can choose from the day’s catch—spiny lobster or parrot fish—at tables just above the splash zone of the craggy shore. And it would be a crime to leave Mexico without trying the more traditional fare, so head into town for stone bowls overflowing with grilled avocado, nopalés, steak, and queso fresco at Las Guacamayas and lobster tacos Los Tres Gallos.
Water sports range from the serene (a glass-bottom boat ride past El Arco, sunning sea lions, and perching brown pelicans in the Sea of Cortez) to adrenaline-pumping (flyboarding—sort of a jet-pack-propelled version of water skiing), while those seeking a quieter experience can head for the spas at Las Ventanas for crystal sound therapy under a palapa and nopal detox wraps or Esperanza for a sunbaked stone massage and cucumber-lime facial.
San José del Cabo

Galleries fill the classic adobe homes of San José del Cabo, where weekly art walks (every Thursday night, November to June) offer the chance to scope contemporary works and traditional handicrafts. Saturday’s organic farmers’ market in front of the Jockey Club brings out the splendor of Baja produce. Off the town square, Misión San José del Cabo was rebuilt in 1918 but preserves the 19th-century facade with a mosaic of the martyrdom of the church’s 18th-century founder, Jesuit priest Nicolá Tamaral.

Set in the palm-studded Sierra de la Laguna foothills, the open-air Flora’s Field Kitchen is one of the area’s biggest draws, serving Charlie Trotter’s vet Guillermo Tellez’s fresh salads and wood-fired pizzas, many of the ingredients sourced from the surrounding Flora Farm’s more than 150 acres of ranch, organic farm, and mango orchard. Despite the low-key setting, this spot draws serious star power: Adam Levine married Behati Prinsloo on the grounds, and Jennifer Aniston is said to be a fan. Los Tamarindos is similarly set on a working organic farm and offers farm-to-table Mexican cuisine (pork shank with green mole, Cornish hen with achiote) and cooking classes.

Book one of the 69 rooms in white modernist El Ganzo, which reopens on November 1 with a rooftop infinity pool and fire pit—and a private beach club just a three-minute boat ride away. Visiting artists leave their marks on the walls or record in the on-site studio, while musicians like Damien Rice and Escondido pop by for live sessions. Get lost in the nearby Wirikuta desert botanical garden, with more than 1,500 varieties of cactus, bougainvillea, and botanical plants.
Todos Santos

One of Mexico’s so-called *pueblos mágicos*, towns designated by the government for their historical or cultural significance, the tiny village of Todos Santos draws expat artists and surfers who appreciate the laid-back feel, with a summertime mango festival in the town square and winter music festival curated by R.E.M.’s Peter Buck—last year M. Ward and the Jayhawks performed.

Liz Lambert (behind cool Texas properties Hotel San José in Austin and El Cosmico in Marfa) opens the 32-room beachfront Hotel San Cristobal next May, but in the meantime, try 14-room Moorish courtyard Guaycura Boutique Hotel & Spa, or head just down the beach to Rancho Pescadero.
Spend a lazy afternoon wandering the cacti-lined Spanish colonial streets: At Brilanti, descendants of Ana Brilanti—a pioneering early-20th-century silversmith in the Mexican silver capital of Taxco who once designed a fan-motif Art Deco necklace for First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt—forge bold pieces based on traditional Mexican iconography. Set in an 1850s building, Cafe Santa Fe, run by Italian expats, is locally famous for its Northern Italian classics like wood-fired focaccia.

If you’re serious about catching south-of-the-border waves, pick up a cold-brew coffee at Baja Beans Roasting Company in nearby Pescadero, then head to the beach, one of the best breaks in the area. As the sun goes down, sip a cucumber-basil margarita at Guaycura’s rooftop Sky Lounge while the last of the desert heat melts away.