

Mexico: Cabo is tops for golf, glam 🇲🇽

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SAN JOSE DEL CABO, Mexico – This place is hard to peg.

The beauty, a mixture of endless desert and ocean, is unmistakable. The year-round climate is enviable.

But calling it a quiet fishing village, as it was known for generations, or a playground for Hollywood stars and the wealthy, would not suffice. And calling it the hottest golf destination in the world is also not enough, although there are award-winning golf courses, all with spectacular views of the Sea of Cortez. Imagine miniversions of Pebble Beach – the legendary golf links in Carmel, Calif. – in one place. That's Cabos. A visit to this Pacific paradise offers portraits of Los Cabos that are not easily reconciled. That's because Los Cabos is still in search of an identity, a soul. Whether it's Cabo San Lucas' raucous party atmosphere or San Jose del Cabo's laid-back colonial style, don't be fooled: The transformation is under way.

Indeed, when all the hammering stops, this will be one expensive, high-end getaway. In many ways, it already is. You won't see a campaign anytime soon to lure college spring-breakers here, although with California so close and daily flights from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, some inevitably show up.

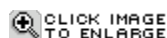
Exclusive hotels and gated residential communities attract the rich and famous, who weave seamlessly amid this wondrous landscape that includes the region between San Jose and Cabo San Lucas. Many properties, some of North America's top resorts, have become a second home for Fortune 500 CEOs and Hollywood and Mexican stars.

The weekend I was there, Mexican singer Luis Miguel's son was baptized at the Palmilla Resort's hillside chapel. John Travolta had just flown in on his private plane for a weekend at his beach pad. And Spanish actress Penélope Cruz was taking in the sun.

Dallas Stars co-general manager Brett Hull married longtime sweetheart Darcie Schollmeyer at Cabos' pricey Esperanza Hotel & Resort in 2006. It was one of many weddings that year, as Cabos has become a destination wedding site.

Nonetheless, pulling at Los Cabos' soul is the old crowd, the surfer dudes who work at the countless time-share developments and the old hippies yearning for yesterday.

At night, Cabo San Lucas' wild party atmosphere still attracts young, rowdy crowds. Plenty of bars still offer 50-cent tequila shots. There's even a \$50-a-night hotel, Cabo Inn, with 19 rooms. Hotel manager Stanley Patenaude, a former Texan, vigorously enforces the single-occupancy rule, not just as a business practice, but also to keep Los Cabos' image clean.



"I'm not opposed to fun, but there are rules to follow," Mr. Patenaude said. "Not everything goes here, like in Cancún."

As Los Cabos cements its identity, it doesn't want to repeat Cancún's mistakes, local authorities and developers say.

"We will not ruin the beaches the way Cancún has," said Juan Murino, a developer responsible for projects including condos overlooking the Sea of



Cortez and a development that includes the largest golf course in Mexico. "Los Cabos is about growth control. That's the key to maintaining the beauty and charm of the place."

Chris Snell is a transplant from Texas via California. He arrived here in the 1990s. He started small and built a real estate empire in which he controls the majority of deals, whether hotels or golf courses. In Los Cabos, he said, you won't find ostentatious tall buildings, as codes are aggressively enforced.

"The caliber of the developers coming out of here is nothing like any other part of Mexico," Mr. Snell said. "There is a push to keep Cabo at a very elite, sophisticated level."

Selling Cabo to the rich isn't difficult. During the summer, Cabo evenings are cool. The desert sun, with some exceptions, is generally bearable. This helps explain the golf



Golfers generally find the sun bearable on the Los Cabos links.

phenomenon.

The tranquil water of the Sea of Cortez makes the beaches invigorating and excellent for diving and snorkeling. Whale-watching in the Pacific Ocean is best from November to February, sometimes even to the first days of March, when the whales pass within a few hundred feet of shore.

Fishing remains world-class and enjoyed year-round. The Los Cabos area is home to the world's largest blue marlin tournament, televised on ESPN. Marine life includes nearly 1,000 species of dolphins, giant manta rays, seals and hammerhead sharks, tourism officials say.

But the rage here is golf. The Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo 20-mile bridge is one huge golf-course- and resort-studded "corridor" amid pristine white sand beaches and craggy coves.

All have beautiful views of the Sea of Cortez and surrounding mountains.

"The beauty of Los Cabos," said Mr. Murino, "is that it offers big opportunities for investors, developers and tourists alike, an opportunity to ... find its soul."