

# VIRTUOSO

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Family Travel

# EVERYBODY'S PLAYGROUND

IN LOS CABOS, IT'S EASY TO FIND ALL-AGES FUN.

BY AMY CASSELL PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIS GARCÍA



Los Tres Gallos, a favorite for classic Mexican in (opposite) downtown San José del Cabo.



**M**Y FIRST TRIP to Los Cabos was about 13 years ago. Fresh off a breakup, I leaned heavily into the tequila, pairing late nights in Cabo San Lucas with 12 PM wake-ups and afternoon massages. One day, I paddled a sea kayak near El Arco, the region's famous three-story rock formation. I scaled one of the surrounding rocks (safely and with a guide, to be clear) and leaped into the inky-blue water. I was invincible. The desert air and sunshine – and OK, probably the booze-fueled nights – were healing me. I was ready to enter my *Eat, Pray, Love* era. *Should I move here?*

Spoiler alert: I did not settle down in Los Cabos. But recently, I did finally make it back – this time with my husband and 4-year-old daughter in tow. I knew how well the vacation capital caters to adults, but I was ready to see why it plays so well with the swim-floaties crowd too.

Hugging the southern tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula and flanked by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Sea of Cortés to the east, Los Cabos is actually a municipality that comprises several destinations, including its two anchors: Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo. The towns are separated by a 20-mile string of beachfront resorts that cosset guests with infinity-edge pools, fine-dining restaurants, golf courses, beachfront cabanas, and spa hydrotherapy circuits.

I'm sure many travelers who come to Los Cabos barely leave their resorts' confines – a valid vacation style, if you ask me – but beyond the tourist corridor, there are innumerable ways to break free from the beach lounge: off-roading and hikes to waterfalls in the Sierra de la Laguna, sportfishing, whale-watching (between December and April), snorkeling excursions, sunset sailings, and day trips – to Cabo Pulmo, a UNESCO-protected marine park, and *pueblos mágicos* (magical towns) such as Todos Santos.

“Los Cabos’ resorts really cater to children with exceptional kids’ clubs and programming,” says La Jolla,

Chileno Beach and Flora Farms' monumental Bloody Mary.



California-based Virtuoso travel advisor Leah Kirgis. “The Sea of Cortés – nicknamed the ‘World’s Aquarium’ by Jacques Cousteau – is such a great place for snorkeling and whale-watching. It’s one of my favorites.”

Our game plan fell somewhere in the middle of “Do nothing” and “Do everything”: We’d get out and explore, but in snack-size spurts that would keep our trip on the restorative side. Plus, our resort, the all-inclusive, 307-room Grand Velas Los Cabos, had a powerful hold on each of us, with kids’ club mermaid parties at the pool, unlimited ceviche and ice cream for lunch, and our ocean-front ninth-floor balcony, where we spotted at least a handful of humpback whales in the distance. (Pro tip: Scan the horizon for their spouts.)

OUR FIRST OUTING WAS San José del Cabo and its Thursday Night Art Walk, a weekly affair between November and June where the narrow labyrinth of streets behind Plaza Mijares closes to cars and the town’s shops and art galleries stay open until 9 PM. We let Eleanor – armed with a watermelon *paleta* (popsicle) from Paletería La Tropical – lead the way, as we stopped into Enrique Bascón to admire the artist’s large-scale, neon-hued paintings; Azul Consciente for some easy-to-pack, eco-friendly candles and chocolate; Los Tres Gallos for a margarita break; and Zoko to covet a few handmade leather purses. (Eleanor picked out her own brightly colored straw bag at a souvenir shop a few stores down.)

The town’s main plaza brimmed with local artists selling everything from Mexican fire-opal jewelry to ponchos for dogs, and vendors hawked tamales, *elote*, and pan-fried gorditas stuffed with Nutella. If Cabo San Lucas is where the party’s at, San José del Cabo is the lower-key sister that wakes up without a hangover. Its slower pace and smaller footprint felt more family friendly – the *paletas* for sale around every corner helped too.

Just north of San José and into the Sierra Madre foothills is Flora Farms,

a Los Cabos institution since 2010. Travelers come to the 25-acre organic estate for cooking classes, spa treatments, and meals at the adorable open-air Flora's Field Kitchen. On a trip for breakfast, our tiny Uber crept over the dirt roads leading to the farm. My husband and I enjoyed buttery-soft scrambled eggs and potatoes, poached-egg-topped *sopes*, and a Bloody Mary that can only be described as borderline obnoxious – a six-inch-long chicharron is one of its nearly dozen accoutrements.

While we feasted, Eleanor nibbled on her bagel, too distracted by the playground she saw on our stroll in to fully focus on sustenance. The estate knows how to keep fidgety children happy: Guests can walk through the on-site farm, which grows 100 varieties of fruits and veggies annually; there's a gaggle of resident geese to observe; and kids can feed the turtles in the pond – before or after a round or two on the swing set.

All other diversions aside, we were here for the beach, and the one at Grand Velas is a beauty. But like many of the area's waterfront stretches, it isn't swimmable, thanks to rocky sea floors and rough currents. So on our final day, we headed a few minutes south to Chileno Beach, a crescent-shaped cove that's popular for snorkeling. We joined other travelers and local families picnicking in the sand and watched groups of snorkelers bob in the water near the shore.

At one point, Eleanor and I stood knee-deep in the water, jumping over the waves as they broke – they were bigger than average, thanks to the handful of catamarans and party boats that were navigating into the bay to anchor a few hundred yards out. Bright-blue butterflyfish slipped past our feet, and bass thumped from one of the boats nearby. Some of its revelers jumped into the sea for a swim. Eleanor waved and shouted, “Woo! I love this place!” She was completely unfazed by the water toppling her over. Turns out, Los Cabos has a way of making both of us feel invincible.



## Los Cabos Landing Pads

Every one of the 307 rooms at the all-inclusive **Grand Velas Los Cabos** faces the Sea of Cortés; their extra-large, bougainvillea-draped balconies are decked out with daybeds, and some also have private plunge pools. Dinner options at the resort's eight restaurants range from steak and seafood at Velas 10 to elevated Mexican at Frida, and a lively kids' club keeps little ones happy with pool games, face-painting sessions, and movie nights under the stars. *Doubles from \$886, including all meals, a hydrotherapy session for two, and a \$50 spa credit per person per night.*

The vibe is decidedly more serene (and grown-up) at the new 79-room, adults-only **Grand Velas Boutique Hotel**, which opened in January just down the beach from its big sister. Butler-serviced guest rooms cloaked in white and blush palettes come with private Jacuzzis on the balconies and Dyson hairdryers in the bathrooms, and a small spa just off the showstopper of a pool features treatments inspired by the movements of the region's wildlife. *Doubles from \$653, including all meals and drinks and a \$100 hotel credit.*

The 122-room **Montage Los Cabos** fronts one of Los Cabos' few swimmable beaches, on Santa Maria Bay. Minimalist guest rooms frame ocean views, and there's a kids' club and three restaurants, including a casual, Thai-inspired food-truck space and an oceanfront sushi bar. *Doubles from \$1,458, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

The Tortuguitas Kids Club at Cabo San Lucas' **Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal** offers Spanish lessons, scavenger hunts, friendly sandcastle-building competitions, and plenty of other opportunities for young guests. Meanwhile, parents lounge by the pool or grab a quiet lunch at one of the 112-room resort's four on-site restaurants. *Doubles from \$1,600, including breakfast daily and a \$150 hotel credit.* ♡