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Jewish Exponent Feature

After I visited Guadalajara (Mexico's second-largest city and technical capital) and Huatulco (a southern Oaxacan fishing village just finding its sea legs as a tourist destination), Cabo San Lucas initially didn't quite feel like another country to me.

First impressions tend to be strong, and mine was along the highway between Cabo's airport and the Hilton Los Cabos Beach and Golf Resort, dotted with such all-American establishments as Applebee's, Home Depot and McDonald's.

However, to really discover a place, one needs an open mind, a reliable rental car and a travel-savvy companion, like my friend Leyla, to remind you that it's okay to go where the day takes you. Indeed, it's logical to conclude there is something special about the destination, especially as celebrities (including Will and Jada Pinkett Smith, Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz) have designated it as one of their go-to hideaways, and the folks at Resort Condominiums International note that a time-share property in Cabo

has more value than comparable properties in other destination towns, like Cancun.

Indeed, well-to-do Jewish families have also found their place in the sun on this peninsular retreat. My companion and I found evidence of this with the discovery of La Europa (said to carry kosher foods), as well as dining establishments like Lenny's Almost Kosher Deli and Señor Greenberg's at Puerto Paraiso Mall in downtown Cabo. In many respects, the main city of Cabo San Lucas is expat central, and similar to Cancun, except for the fact that the streets are far cleaner, the locals very polite, and the visitors just as likely to be mature couples and families with children as they are fun-loving college kids.

And, if your curiosity or patience can carry you to the other side of Puerto Paraiso, a stunning marina area with trendy outdoor lounges, cafes and shops awaits.

One thing about Cabo I could not deny, with all things considered, is that the beaches and terrain surrounding the shops and restaurants are beautiful, as well as clean and very user-friendly. Unlike Cancun and Puerto Val-

larta, the humidity is significantly lower, thanks to the fact that the desert meets the ocean.

Like other beachfront destinations, local flavor is where you find it, and finding it requires some effort, but is well worth it. Though Cabo San Lucas is regarded as the hub for nightlife, dining and shopping, I found myself particularly charmed by San José Del Cabo, about halfway between the airport and our plush home-away-from-home at the Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort.

After collecting our minimal luggage and securing the rental car, we decided to stop off for a walk around the arty and charming centro, dotted with 19th- and early 20th-century buildings, housing art galleries, boutiques, jewelry haunts and the occasional appearance of Sammy Hagar's famed offspring, Cabo Wabo Tequila.

POP IN FOR A POPSICLE

Needless to say, there was something that brought us back to San José Del Cabo every day — specifically, Paletaria La Michoacana's rather addictive *paletas* (ice-cream and sorbet popsicles made from fresh local fruits and

Photos by Elyse Glickman



MEXICO? Cap it Off at Cabo

flavorings), in addition to excellent local Mexican fare.

Our first meal in Cabo was at Cactus Taco, which offered a fine vegetarian alambre (grilled local vegetables, pineapple and a judicious sprinkling of cheese), which we amped up with a variety of their yummy condiments, including spicy pineapple salsa. Another day, we spontaneously popped into La Posta Antojitos and were richly rewarded.

Taqueria El Fagon, next door, is a meat-eater's place of choice, as well as a favorite of some of the staffers we met during our stay at the Hilton. Another evening, we returned for homemade tamales from a local vendor, washed down with fresh-fruit margaritas from Cocina Salsita.

Also worth noting are the artisan boutiques in San José Del Cabo that take on the personality of their owners. Among our favorites was Los Cabos Amber Gallery and Art Annex, where expat artisan Ron Sanford fashions raw local amber into treasures that have captured the attention of famed fashionista Sarah Jessica Parker.

We were still feeling the pull of wanderlust and a desire to experience still more galleries and shopping, so we followed our rental-car agent's suggestion to visit Todos Santos, a compact seaside village with lovely pocket-sized coffeehouses, the original "Hotel California," and plenty of art galleries and craft shops. Though Todos Santos abounded with beautiful pottery and standard-issue Taxco silver of varying quality, the stand-out jewelry store was APH Galeria, Joyeria y Arte, a real artisan spot featuring exquisite hand-crafted gold charms.



Given that Cabo is a popular Hollywood hangout, there are plenty of ways to live large, and the Hilton Los Cabos Beach and Golf Resort is a lovely place to do that. The amenities — from the well-appointed fitness center to the inviting and well-staffed pool area — operate flawlessly.

The spa, with its calming, modern light-blue decor and water-themed treatment menu, was all you ever wanted a spa to be.

Even the turn-down service is downright appealing, from the towel origami animals to a menu card replacing the traditional chocolate mint with a choice of fruit, locally made coconut candy, Japanese-style peanuts or a mix of all three.

In terms of on-property food opinions, the cornucopia is definitely mixed. The breakfast buffet is a bit costly, but worth it.

Beyond the basic getaway, the property offers many special extras, including a nice kids' club, in addition to wedding-planning services, which are particularly attuned to the dietary needs and tastes of Jewish couples, something that the management recognizes is quite important, given the popularity of shellfish and pork in this part of Mexico. ♦

For more information, go to: www.allaboutcabo.com.

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