

# Baja Refresh

Skip the big resorts in Cabo and check into one of these low-impact, community-conscious stays instead.

By Casey Hatfield-Chiotti

Colin Ruggiero

Camp Cecil de la Isla

**WITH NEAR PERFECT WEATHER**, miles of virgin beaches and starry skies, it's easy to understand why many are enchanted with the Baja California Sur region around Cabo San Lucas. It's an easy three-hour flight from SFO to the Los Cabos airport, but a world away. In a desert with limited resources, environmental stewardship isn't just a luxury, it's essential if people want to preserve the fragile ecosystem and livelihoods of local communities.

Hoteliers and business owners in towns such as San Jose del Cabo, La Paz and the artsy surfer enclave Todos Santos are meeting the moment, like former Gymboree CEO and Bay Area resident Lisa Harper, who opened the eco-chic Rancho Pescadero ([www.ranchopescadero.com](http://www.ranchopescadero.com)) hotel near Todos in 2009. It was "sustainable" before that was trendy. She hired locals with no experience — many who are now in leadership positions — and gave back to local schools and planted indigenous vegetation. Rancho Pescadero is in the midst of a significant environmentally friendly overhaul and will debut its revamp later this summer. "I want to make sure we're not putting undue pressure on the area. It's the right thing to do," says Harper.

Here are six other places to feel good about visiting, including hotels and restaurants that range from an easy-on-the-earth treehouse escape for animal lovers to a daring design hotel that preserved important architecture.





Las Ventanas al Paraíso

**Acre**

In the San Jose Del Cabo foothills, Acre (from \$355 a night; [www.acrebaja.com](http://www.acrebaja.com)) is an adults-only sanctuary with 12 elegant treehouses tucked between palm trees, mango groves and agave plants. Each accommodation is an open-air haven with a king bed, private terrace and outdoor shower. This is also a working farm: 70 percent of the award-winning hotel restaurant’s ingredients are grown on-site and shine in dishes and cocktails like chocolate clam ceviche with yellow pepper aguachile and the Animas Sour with bourbon, citrus from Acre’s orchard, passion fruit and coconut foam. Adding to the feel-good vibes, Acre is an animal sanctuary. Peacocks wander the property and guests can visit rescued goats, donkeys

and a 25-year-old camel. More than 200 abandoned puppies have been rescued and adopted through the Acre animal rescue program, which you can follow on Instagram @acredogs.

**Paradero Todos Santos**

Sustainability is woven into every aspect of Paradero Todos Santos (from \$550 a night; [www.paraderohotels.com](http://www.paraderohotels.com)) — an indoor/outdoor retreat with 41 suites that opened in 2021. The hotel is in the heart of the La Mesa farming community; all ingredients used in the restaurant are grown in-house or by local family farms. Landscape architects planted 80 endemic species from red sand verbena to Mojave yucca on the grounds, and sand-colored interiors flow into outdoor seating areas; each suite has views of cactus-studded

desert and farmland. Ojo de Agua Spa is inspired by secret watering holes between the Sierra de la Laguna mountains and the Pacific, with hot and cold plunge pools and treatments rooted in ancient Mexican healing traditions. Activities like surfing at Cerritos, guided hiking along the bluffs, farming tutorials and Baja taco tours make this a choice for travelers looking for a cultural retreat rather than a Cabo-type pool scene.

**Las Ventanas al Paraíso, A Rosewood Resort**

While other resorts in Los Cabos have lush tropical environments that require tons of water, Las Ventanas al Paraíso, a Rosewood Resort (from \$1,070 a night; [www.rosewoodhotels.com](http://www.rosewoodhotels.com)) embraced the arid climate when

Courtesy of Las Ventanas al Paraíso

it was built in 1997. Desert gardens with indigenous cactus and succulents dot the property. Over the years, the hotel, owned by billionaire Ty Warner, has doubled down on its sustainability initiatives. Candles are used extensively in the evenings to reduce the use of electrical lights and light pollution, and it provides funding and resources for the community. All proceeds from the current sustainable golf pop-up (golfers can hit biodegradable golf balls that turn into fish food when they plop into the sea) go to the Letty Coppel Foundation, which provides the Los Cabos community with mobile medical care. Immersive experiences like exhibitions by Mexican artists and guided excursions to see curious and friendly gray whales showcase the best of Baja.

**Baja Club Hotel**

Two hours north of Cabo San Lucas and its busy resorts, the seaside city of La Paz has a café-lined boardwalk, or *malecón*, and rich history. Grupo Habita’s year-old Baja Club Hotel (from \$310 a night; [www.bajacclubhotel.com](http://www.bajacclubhotel.com)) incorporates a colonial-era mansion that once belonged to a wealthy pearl harvesting family — La Paz was one of the world’s foremost pearl-fishing centers for centuries. Mexico City–based architect Max von Werz believes demolition should be a last resort. His team recovered original timber beams in the high ceilings and took cues from the original materials for the new four-story L-shaped extension: timber cladding, terrazzo floors and amber-glass details appear throughout. Thirty-two guest rooms feature Mexican-made materials and furnishings. Epic marine-life encounters are La Paz’s main draw — Jacques Cousteau famously referred to the Sea of Cortez as “the world’s aquarium” — and Baja Club Hotel can arrange boat excursions to UNESCO-protected Isla Espiritu Santo just offshore for visitors to enjoy snorkeling with whale sharks in the bay and land adventures like sand surfing. There’s also a Greek restaurant serving sustainable seafood and a rooftop bar.

César Béjar, courtesy of Grupo Habita



Baja Club Hotel



## Todos Santos Eco Adventures

Todos Santos Eco Adventures hosts two low-impact luxury glamping experiences on the Baja Peninsula. Camp Cecil de la Isla (from \$375 per person per night with a two-night minimum; [www.tosea.net](http://www.tosea.net)) is open from October to June on uninhabited Isla Espíritu Santo. Reminiscent of a smaller version of the Galápagos Islands, wildlife viewing is world-class: guests can spot sea lions, blue-footed boobies, manta rays and more. Rates include certified wilderness guides, gourmet meals, a daily happy hour, adventures and equipment. Camp Cecil de la Sierra (from \$225 per person per night with a two-night minimum) in the mountains near Todos Santos is wrapping up its season at the end of April. When it reopens in November, guests can unwind by hiking, picnicking by a waterfall and making tortillas and cheese with a local ranching family.

## Flora Farms, San Jose Del Cabo

Slightly north of San Jose del Cabo, Flora Farms ([www.flora-farms.com](http://www.flora-farms.com)) is one of Baja's most famous culinary destinations. The 25-acre organic working farm grows ingredients for Flora's Field Kitchen, the Farm Bar and Flora Farms Grocery. Visitors can dine on wood-fired pizzas and sip a bright orange heirloom carrot "Farmarita" before finishing it all off with a scoop of homemade mango sorbet. All meats served at Flora's Field Kitchen come from Flora Farms' nearby ranch where animals are humanely raised on hormone-free diets. The property is a farm fantasyland with wide green lawns, lush gardens and whimsical greenhouse-style buildings, and visitors can go on a free farm tour, take art and cooking classes or book an herbal soak at The Farm Spa & Salon. If you don't ever want to leave, Flora Farms' Lofts, Culinary Cottages and Hillside Haylofts (deeded fractional ownership from \$30,000 for a studio) — are available for purchase and make ideal vacation homes for the culinary-inclined. Home owners can pick farm produce whenever they wish and get exclusive access to activities like wine and beer tastings and a private beach club. 🍷

## More Green Things to Come

**Rancho Pescadero** ([www.ranchopescadero.com](http://www.ranchopescadero.com)) will reopen in August as part of Hyatt's boutique Unbound Collection of hotels with 103 luxury guest rooms including oceanfront villas and suites with outdoor showers, plunge pools and private roof decks. Under the leadership of owner Lisa Harper, the hotel, which closed for renovation in 2018, will set the gold standard for regenerative travel in the area and maybe anywhere; any plants too close to construction were uprooted and raised in a nursery and then replanted when it was safe. In addition to a farm and orchard where guests can source everything from eggs for huevos rancheros to ingredients for spa treatments, Harper has put in a bottling plant — so there are no single-use plastics — and is providing sustainable housing, a technical school and child care for employees. "A representative from the environmental consulate got teary-eyed because she said 'you're doing what you said you were going to do,'" says Harper. **Habitas** ([www.ourhabitas.com](http://www.ourhabitas.com)), known for eco-friendly hotels like an off-the-grid property in Namibia, is also opening a resort in Todos Santos this summer. Most of the construction is happening off-site using 3D printing, so there is little environmental impact. Management plans to create a microeconomy by purchasing local food and furnishings and providing job training for residents. A location in Los Cabos is also in the works. Sustainably minded **Chablé Hotels** ([chablehotels.com](http://chablehotels.com)) is opening a property on the Sea of Cortez near La Paz in 2023. Stand-alone villas with green roofs will echo the contours of the landscape. **Aman** ([www.aman.com](http://www.aman.com)) is planning to open Amanvari, a luxurious and isolated eco-hotel in Baja's East Cape in 2024.



Rancho Pescadero