

## Cabo Deluxe

### Esperanza treats its guests to the cultivated side of a favorite West Coast getaway

By Kathryn Jessup

If your image of Cabo consists of hoards of college kids doing tequila shots in the tacky bars of Squid Row, you haven't attended master tequilero Alejandro Enriquez's gourmet tequila tasting at Esperanza. If you had, you would have learned that native Mexicans never shoot tequila, they sip it. And you would know that tequila is not a late-night libation but a before dinner drink known as an aperitivo.

The Tequila Journey is just one of the many ways that Esperanza, a sprawling upscale resort that opened four years ago near the southernmost end of Baja California, invites its guests to get beyond the cliché of Cabo and experience the real beauty of its culture.

**The Scene:** Head for one of Esperanza's two pools, one blue tiled and the other enveloping a full bar. The staff, clad in white shirts and colorful Mexican sashes, is plentiful—and available to help with every task imaginable, from dry-cleaning your clothes to stocking your room with pitchers of lemonade and iced tea. You may notice a deep sense of quiet, because one thing you won't see a lot of are children. The hotel doesn't allow any guests under 16 to stay overnight (guests renting condos on the residence side of the property may bring children).

**What's New:** The resort's new small plates restaurant, Tapas, opened this past spring. Light fare, such as scallop and poblano chili ceviche, marinated olives, and thin-sliced Mexican chorizo, arrives on tiered platters that allow easy sharing of dishes while drinking a round of margaritas from the resort's vast selection.

To purify your body after a night of indulgence, slip into the resort's new yoga studio. It's full of sunlight, and the lively instructors—who deliver instructions in English—will lead you through a series of poses at a clip rapid enough to get your heart beating.

**Frills:** Esperanza's beach, which is girded by rocky shoreline, is dotted with private cabanas, essentially a bed on the beach with canvas curtains on all four sides. From these padded perches, you face the dramatic Sea of Cortez. While you may not want to swim in the choppy water, do look out for whales from January through March.

**On the Menu:** While you're reclining on the beach or by the pool, waiters come by to take your order for drinks, such as the powerful torito white rum and tropical fruit cocktail or glasses of locally made Baja wine. Also try cooling yet zippy ensaladas, such

as one made with hunks of chilled watermelon and cucumber with thinly sliced red onion, crisp romaine, roasted peanuts, and a red-chili vanilla-bean vinaigrette. Such creative salads are the work of executive chef Flynt Payne, an American who himself follows a largely vegan diet. Payne's menu includes many local ingredients, such as pumpkin seeds, chipotle chilies, mangoes, and fish. At night, enjoy a romantic dinner on the beach; Esperanza's staff will build a fire in the sand to illuminate your meal and give you ponchos to stay warm beneath the stars.

**Don't Miss:** Esperanza's spa is a paradise within a paradise. The tropical landscaping, steam cave, waterfall, and aguas frescas (chilled fruit drinks) made from indigenous and tropical ingredients, such as bougainvillea and ayate cactus, make for an out-of-the-ordinary spa experience. After you're led to your private treatment room, the massages, body wraps, and facials live up to the spa's impressive atmosphere. The Cuatro Manos, or "four hands" massage, in which two therapists perform in amazing synchrony, is so intense it might temporarily disable you. But fear not: Hammocks and chaise lounges abound.

**For Fun:** Sign up for the Tequila Journey, a civilized tasting in which you learn about tequila's fabrication from the agave plant. You'll experience blanco, reposado, and añejo tequilas, as well as two chasers known as sangritas.

**Hit the Town:** Two towns comprise Los Cabos: Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo. If you can drag yourself away from the resort, head to the more peaceful of the two, San Jose del Cabo, for a day trip or an evening of sophisticated nightlife. The town's galleries, bars, and shops are all within walking distance of each other; pick up a street map from Esperanza's concierge.

This village is centered around a church: Mision Estero de las Palmas de San José del Cabo Añuití. Evidently, Cabo's indigenous people didn't succumb to the Spanish without a fight: Founding father Nicolas Tamaral's violent death at the hands of the natives is depicted in blue, green, and yellow tile at the church's entrance.

Art galleries are a big draw in San Jose del Cabo. Don't miss Galeria de Ida Victoria, a three-floor gallery in a Mexican Colonial building that features work by Mexican artists. The Old Town Gallery sells Mexican-themed pieces, and the selection includes some affordable choices (\$45 to \$100), so it's a good place to pick up a gift. Pez Gordo, a contemporary art gallery, shows some edgier work, such as textured collages, and has a back garden where sculptures sit amid citrus trees, bougainvillea, and hibiscus. The galleries stay open late on Thursday nights. If you're in the market for Mexican cobalt glassware and traditional embroidered clothing, drop into the shops clustered near the church plaza.

At night, bar-restaurants such as Tequila, Morgan's, Morgan's Encore, and Casa Natalia all boast lovely patios for enjoying drinks in the warm night air. La Santa, a hip, new wine bar, holds wine tastings each Wednesday and serves a menu of cheese, charcuterie, and tapas.

**Getting There:** Daily flights to Los Cabos from Oakland and San Francisco cost approximately \$400 round trip.

**Ground Transportation:** Esperanza can provide transport, in the form of a white Escalade and driver, for trips to and from the airport, as well as for trips to San Jose del Cabo. Each ride takes about 30 minutes and costs about \$125. Taxis not affiliated with the resort are also available.

Esperanza, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, (866) 311-2226, [www.esperanzaresort.com](http://www.esperanzaresort.com).

Accommodations range from \$475 per night for casitas to \$2,500 per night for suites. The Tequila Journey takes place at the bar Tuesdays and Saturdays from 5 to 6 p.m. and costs \$50 per person. Spa treatments range from \$73 to \$520.