



Kickin' Back IN CABO

The East Cape is more chill and a reminder of Cabo before it became a tourist destination

BY ADAM SCHUPAK



Big mistake. Those were the words of the men's locker room attendant at the spa at the Four Seasons Costa Palmas, a luxury resort and private residential community on the East Cape of the Baja Peninsula, when I told him that it was my first visit to the Oasis Spa and my last day at the resort.

I had visited the desert destination of Cabo, known for its margarita-inspired siestas, lively nightlife and a 20-mile tourist corridor of lavish resorts, scenic golf courses and blond beaches, more than a handful of times over the last decade. Not many tourists drive north after landing at Los Cabos International Airport but that's where my wife and I discovered a budding Cabo alternative that is more chill, private and peaceful. Surfers have been making the pilgrimage to the East Cape, which is blessed with waves to die for from late March through the end of November, for decades. Imagine Cabo before it exploded into a haven for golfers and not just fishermen — that's what Costa Palmas on the edge of the Sea of Cortez looks like today.



We arrived at the open-air lobby to the Four Seasons Resort, the flagship property at the 1,500-acre community, and were welcomed with a cocktail. The location is remote for now but it won't remain that way for long; once people discover it, they fall head over heels in love with it. Set on two miles of pristine beachfront and comprised of low-slung buildings that offer views of the Sea of Cortez and the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains, this 141-room resort exudes a sense of contemporary, eco-friendly luxury.

The only thing our trip lacked was enough time – to fully explore and enjoy all the amenities at our disposal – because we had a young child to get home to. So, we did our best to sample as much of the good life as we could.



Let's start with the golf course, an 18-hole Robert Trent Jones II design bearing the same name as the resort and that is the rare walker-friendly public access layout in Cabo. Costa Palmas has been sculpted into the natural setting, with three distinct environments, like three movements of a symphony to hear Jones tell it. Golfers first head toward the sea and into the expansive sand dunes, then they turn inland and cross the barrancas – watch out for the Tarantula bunker at No. 9 – and finally they move up into the highlands, with the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains in the distance, and return along the marina and the clubhouse near the sea. Short on time? Each six holes can be played in its own loop.

“You can play six holes or 12 holes in any order you want,” Jones said. “You can even start in the middle if you wish.”

There are multiple tees to cater to different skill levels and a sprawling, 30,000 square-foot putting green where Jones hopes children will get their first taste of the game before graduating to the short course. It's a low-key setting where tee times weren't necessary, with music playing on the range and a new one for me – a hammock – if you decide to take a siesta in between bags of balls.

You will not go hungry at Costa Palmas and the good eats extend to the golf course. Bouchie's, the open-air café and sundry shop located at the Costa Palmas practice range, makes a mean pre-round breakfast burrito and Jones raves about the ice-cream milkshakes there. But don't overindulge because Lucha Libre, a patio-style snack shack located between the 7th and 8th holes, and also between 13 and 14, with Mexican wrestling murals and a swing set, awaits. Cabo's comfort stations have jumped the shark and this eatery serves fresh guacamole, made-to-order street tacos, with the chef's secret ingredient – adobada sauce – wood-oven pizzas and includes a well-stocked bar. We weren't the first and won't be the last to let a group play through.



We enjoyed fresh flavors of Mexico in a relaxed poolside setting at Casa de Brasa when we first arrived and dinner at Estiatorio Milos, a renowned purveyor of Greek cuisine that has made Cabo its latest seafood outpost. Dishes are meant to be enjoyed family style, encouraging sharing and conversation around the table. My wife and I weren't a big enough party nor had quite the appetite at the time to order a whole fish but it was fun to look at the options staring back at us on ice. The simple presentation of grilled vegetables is designed to preserve the subtle distinct flavors of the local produce and we gobbled down the largest clams either of us had ever seen. We both agreed our favorite meal had to be at Delphine, Michelin-star Chef Ludo Lefebvre's beach club in Costa Palmas, where the French Riviera comes to Baja California along with the fresh seaside flavors of the Cote d'Azur.



It was also unique to take a water taxi to the Marina Village, Baja's first luxury marina, for dinner at Mozza, the offspring of Pizzeria Mozza and Osteria Mozza in Los Angeles. The pizza and pasta were superb. Discreetly tucked away in the Marina Village, not far from Mozza's seaside dining pavilion is Chiki, a nightclub that is a modern spin on Mexico's old world cantinas, inspired by artist Frida Kahlo's color-soaked La Casa Azul in Mexico City and reimagined as a magnet for Costa Palmas' cultured crowd. It's built around a central courtyard and garden in the spirit of traditional Mexican homes like Kahlo's and serving up bespoke cocktails stirred and shaken behind the bar, from the El Rey (a stately tippie featuring home-aged tequila with pink peppercorn) to the Diablito (which lives up to its fiery name with mezcal, baked pineapple and spicy chamoy).



All that eating and drinking means you better burn some calories. In addition to walking the golf course with a very able caddie by our side, my wife and I tooled around the property on the bicycles conveniently provided outside the door of our room, swam among the seven pools, including ones geared for families and for adults only. We tried a couple – the fitness center includes a lap pool that I visited daily – and even were granted access to the Costa Palmas Beach Club, lounging beachside at this private retreat for property owners, which gave us a taste of how the 1% live. We also took a fitness class, played tennis and hit the beach.



And what a beach it is at Costa Palmas! All that white sand along the Sea of Cortez, where the calm, gold-flecked waters are perfect for swimming – unlike at some of the other Cabo resorts – and water sports galore. My wife schooled me on the stand-up paddleboard. I ended up bouncing around the water trampoline which was more my speed and then we rented some snorkels and didn't have to go far to swim alongside an aquarium worth of fish. We never did fit in a ride on the resort's Hobie catamaran, which may have been our first mistake. Definitely on the list for next time. But eventually we hit the Oasis Spa on our last day and my first cold water plunge got the senses going. There's also complimentary access to a sauna, a steam room and hydrotherapy whirlpool to recharge the body after a massage. There was no mistaking how the spa cemented for me this undeniable feeling that I had really gone off the grid, if only for several days. And in reflection, that's what I loved best about Four Seasons Costa Palmas: it's the antidote to the over-populated, tourist trap that much of Cabo has become and serves as a tranquil time capsule that calls to mind how Cabo used to be. Next time, I'm going to the spa on the first day, not the last.