

# S BLS

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THE CREAM OF THE CROP



# welcome to *paradise*

PRIVATE VILLAS, PERSONAL BUTLERS, AND ELEVATED DINING EXPERIENCES MAKE LAS VENTANAS AL PARAÍSO THE ULTIMATE CABO GETAWAY

BY Alexandra Lee

It's 9 p.m. on a Wednesday, and the evening air is starting to zing with intrigue—evidence that the 20s are roaring still, be it a century later. Down a dim-lit hallway, I push a button on a gold cash register, and slowly the cleverly concealed entrance of a Prohibition-era speakeasy reveals itself. “Policía?” the doorman asks me, a formality of sorts. “No!” I respond, gingerly crossing thresholds to a scene of feather-clad dancers performing daring lifts to the raspy timbre of singer Rosalía de Cuba. Liquor-laden shots are passed around on platters, and what started as an evening of civilized entertainment has transformed into a full-fledged jamboree. Reveling in La Botica's apothecary-themed menu of craft cocktails, lingering here in secrecy until sunrise is a hard-to-pass temptation—yet after a couple hours, better judgment steers me through the Coca-Cola refrigerator exit, past the gourmet carnitas food truck, and back into my pillowy bed. Despite the sultry 1920s *mise en scène* and Prohibition panache, this speakeasy lies a notable distance from the stomping grounds you might expect—La Botica is Los Cabos' most exclusive and elusive nightlife scene.

Though, I'm getting ahead of myself. Tired of California's endless rainy winter, it was about time to escape somewhere sensational—and warm. Somewhere in the regular rotation of well-heeled bon vivants and celebrities seeking hiatus from prying eyes (Kourtney Kardashian a notable guest), though it's not the fanfare of this destination that interests me. It's as simple as

the minimal-effort plane ride to Cabo, where deluges of downpour are traded for sunset horseback rides, and black coffee for carajillos. Las Ventanas al Paraíso, a Rosewood Resort, has a reputation that precedes it, as much a gourmand's delight and sanctum of personal renewal as a honeymoon haven. My very romantic guest of honor happens to be my sister, who's already landed, rightfully one margarita and fish tacos platter deep. “Get here girly!!” she nudges me over text, as if I could make the plane land faster. “You have *got* to see this for yourself.”

My Escalade airport pickup whirrs past an arid forest of skeletal cacti, a telltale sign that we have in fact touched down in Baja, as my driver recounts a dauntless spearfishing tale in a riveting conversation about the region's exceptional seafood. It's not long until the Sea of Cortez's aquamarine waters splash into view, and we pull into a whitewashed cul-de-sac where smiling attendants wave, placing a frothy margarita in my hand as soon as my feet hit the pavement. Past the mariachi-serenaded welcome, the view opens up to a maze of desert-toned balconies and cacti-dotted pathways, whose sand has been perfectly combed into parallel lines. Yes, even the sand here is artwork.

I'm steered down one such pathway, finding myself face-to-face with a looming stained glass door, the liminal entryway to our two-bedroom Signature Villa. It's here that I'm introduced to Eduardo, our Villa Host for the next 72 hours, whose role is comparable to that of



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a personal assistant. “Welcome to Villa 1,” he says with flourish, cutting the ceremonial red ribbon protecting the entrance, and the colossal door swings open to reveal a jaw-dropping view of our private infinity pool. The resort’s twelve villas, second only to the \$35k-per-night Ty Warner mansion, marry a clean Mediterranean aesthetic with vibrant Mexican decor; the master bedroom’s sliding glass “walls” open fully to fuse indoor and outdoor together. “Some people check into the villas and never leave,” says Eduardo, and I can certainly see why. Naturally, the welcome here is a bottle of Clase Azul, and Eduardo sees to it that our shot glasses are properly topped off, along with a platter of three salts and citrus to taste. *Salud*, we cheers. *To our health*.

Once that’s complete, we tour through the villa’s unparalleled host of amenities, from its fully-stocked kitchen, decked-out patio with direct beach access, and massive wellness room (in layman’s terms, the bathroom) to its two suites, each dressed up with monogrammed pillowcases—of course, to match the custom initialed Las Ventanas tote bags waiting for us in the living room. Within every minute detail uncovered, it’s abundantly clear that we’ve stepped foot in one of the world’s finest resorts. Assouline coffee table books stack the shelves from floor to ceiling, and the words “Welcome to Paradise” are carved into the pristine swath of sand out front our villa. I’m becoming more convinced of that very sentiment by the minute; in the first 30 minutes alone, the resort has managed to tick off all the important boxes. Suitcase unpacked for you in color coordinated fashion! Bulgari bath amenities! Tequila mini bar! Fridge stocked with prosciutto! 60-minute welcome massage!

I haven’t eaten all day, but I’m saving room for our inaugural dinner at Alebrije, one of the property’s six eateries (if you count the speakeasy, wine cellar, and ceviche bar)—so instead I rely on a celebratory carajillo, the Mexican espresso martini, to boost my energy levels. As the January sun begins to dwindle, we trade bikinis for eveningwear and prepare for a venture into Oaxacan cuisine. The menu is as imaginative as its namesake, alebrijes being the brightly-colored mythical creatures of Mexican folklore. I spy the Copal, a mezcal concoction with a grasshopper-salt rim, and order it for the novelty—surprisingly subtle, I’m pleased to report, in its earthiness. We stay on trend with the grasshopper-crusted ahi, its delightfully crunchy crust giving way to a smooth, buttery, expertly seared interior. The Carnitas Gorditas pay homage to that savory punch of flavor and comfort so well associated with Mexican food, and we finish with a decadent Tlayuda De La Baja, a staple Oaxacan dish resembling a flatbread, topped with rich lobster, black truffle oil, and a medley of greens. For dessert, a chocolate soufflé with an umami black sesame twist.

Still deep into lobster-elicited dreams, I awaken the next morning to a sharp knock on the door. It’s Eduardo, with breakfast, which I’d forgotten we pre-ordered the night before—I’ll blame it on the grasshopper cocktail. I slip in my contacts and a robe just in time as Eduardo emerges with the largest tray I’ve ever seen, piled high with sliced fruit, coffee, toast, and chorizo eggs. “Do you still want to eat in the pool?” he asks. It’s 8 a.m. My sister and I glance at each other with a shrug. Why not? As he sets up our Maldives-reminiscent floating

feast, I poorly attempt to conceal my enthusiasm, as if this isn’t a bucket list moment. We slide into the pool, half laughing in disbelief—cappuccinos just taste better when you’re submerged in a heated pool, I don’t make the rules. After all, we needed the wake up call—we’ve got important matters to attend to, involving a beach cabana, sunset horseback ride, and a 90-minute massage to mediate the stress of it all.

Our morning trek through the sand culminates at Pericú Cabana, a deluxe pink-and-white Barbie Dreamhouse equipped with its own plunge pool, daybeds, outdoor shower, mini fridge, and, of course, personal butlers available at the touch of a button. They inform us that the deluxe cabanas are intentionally named after Baja’s three major ethnic groups (Pericú, Cochimí and Guaycura), as they simultaneously greet us with two morning essentials: champagne and Evian facial spray. I wade into the plunge pool, clutching a mimosa in one hand and cooling mist in the other, as I peer out over the quintessential “Welcome to Paradise” sand art. Perfectly on cue, a trio of gleaming horses saunters by, donning cowboy-hatted riders, as if to foreshadow my evening’s upcoming adventures.

An impromptu lunch at Sea Grill precedes our journey to the spa, as I’ve developed a desperate hankering for sea bass tacos that demands immediate attention. Convinced that mind-reading is a requirement for the staff, the hosts hand my sister and I each a coconut branded with our name, never with a question as to who is who—a magic trick that has long since baffled me. I later learn from Farid Fajer, Manager of Arbol and Oasis Pool, that indeed it’s a goal amongst the staff to know every guest’s name—proving that, yet again, what would be an astronomical feat at any other destination is just another day in Las Ventanas land.

For adventure-types, there’s ultimate access to all the private yacht charters, snorkeling, surfing, and ATVing that Baja dreams are made of. Personally, as a self-proclaimed flâneur, I’m in search of activities more self-attuned and grounding (literally). Case in point: I’ve booked a 90-minute Signature Massage. We make our way to the solarium for the pre-treatment Holistic Twilight Ceremony, an energy-balancing ritual (called *limpia* by the Mayans) involving fragrant copal smoke and a thrumming sound bath to kickstart an afternoon of revitalization. My masseuse walks me through a medley of essential oils, and for the next 90 minutes, soothing aromas of lavender, basil, and orange entrance the air, accompanied by rhythmic strokes until every last point

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LAS VENTANAS AL PARÁISO ENTRANCE



of tension is relieved. Afterwards, I take a deep breath and sink into the cold plunge pool, in hopes of reaping all the immunity-boosting benefits of the spa before departing. After all, I'm late for a date—with a horse.

After another quick change into our most equestrian-appropriate gear, we assess the scene to find the meeting point for our sunset jaunt on horseback. My eyes trace across the sand, and all of a sudden, there it is: a caballero and his squad of stallions waiting majestically in the distance, framed by the sea as dusk begins to take hold of the sky. It's been a long time since I was last in the saddle, but here it just feels right: these unbelievably patient gentle giants are used to novices like me. As I nudge my mare Luna into a shy trot, a pastiche of brilliant fuschia adorns what had been a gray-blue sky just minutes before. Our ride culminates at the Sunset Bar, quite literally a cluster of furniture sprawled across the sand. The perfect spot for a passion fruit margarita and a view.

Tonight's comparatively casual dinner takes place at Sea Grill, which refines its reputation from a daytime seafood spot to a classy eatery with its elevated evening menu. Admittedly, I'm not always the most adventurous epicure when it comes to sea fare, and this happens to be my first encounter with octopus. The curled tentacle at first appears intimidating, but when sitting atop a bed of luscious squid-ink pappardelle in a saffron-garlic sauce, what's not to like? Burrata and salmorejo, a Spanish gazpacho, with bits of fried prosciutto

and grilled bread are a welcome appetizer, followed by homemade empanadas brimming with cheesy gratification. A bottle of crisp chardonnay from Mexico's Casa Madero, the oldest working winery in the Americas, is the ideal companion to wash it all down. Fireworks suddenly blossom over the sea, leaving me to wonder if this festive display is just an everyday occurrence at Las Ventanas—I wouldn't be surprised. Apparently it's not, and we've just been lucky enough to reap the benefits of a certain couple's engagement or anniversary, as is commonplace here.

A 7 a.m. private yoga class (and the promise of a tantalizing breakfast to follow) is the only incentive to drag myself yet again out of the villa's luxuriously soft sheets. Although it's relatively early and I'm not a morning person, the hour-long yoga class is a gentle reminder to practice gratitude at every opportunity, which I can certainly do as we head back to Alebrije for its Oaxacan brunch. Our feast features an abundance of Mexican pastries, Chile Relleno, and "Cazuela," a sublime skillet including poached eggs, poblano chile, onion, and corn on a bed of salsa roja and queso Oaxaca.

Our final evening of gluttony and glamor begins promptly at 5 o'clock. We meet Farid at the Tequila & Ceviche Bar, where the blind taste test of the century is about to occur. The Tequila Sign Class first walks us through the appropriate methods to sniff and sip the Mexican spirit, before Farid returns with a cluster of mystery flutes, prompting us to divulge our thoughts. "There are

no wrong answers," he remarks calmly, although a few of my guesses certainly evoke inquisitive reactions from the maestro. Luckily, we aren't drinking on an empty stomach, simultaneously served buttery-smooth sushi pairings from the raw bar. After some time, the results are in—my sign is Robust; my sister's, Avid. Farid then promises yet another impossible feat: now that we've discovered our tequila sign, the resort can use that information for every cocktail going forward.

It could be excitement in the air, or the five flutes of tequila each, but we're giddy as Farid leads us towards Arbol, regarded as one of Los Cabos' most coveted reservations. Appropriately named for its many ethereal lantern-laden torote trees, Arbol is where glitterati come to dine off sparkling silverware, their tables inset into pools of water, where waiters tread lightly across stepping stones to deliver their steaming dishes. We're lured into a comprehensive journey through Pan-Asian flavors, curated by Mumbai-born chef Anand Singh, who utilizes four separate kitchens (the wok, raw bar, tandoori, and charcoal oven) to connect a cultural narrative through cuisine. I never thought I'd say I ate the best Indian food of my life in Cabo, but here we are. Bite-sized truffle temari sushi followed by tuna tartare and chicken curry makhani with garlic naan are each standouts in their own right; the wagyu beef tenderloin is so delicate it barely requires chewing.

At one point, Farid reappears to assure us that our cocktails have been crafted with our newly discovered tequilas. Unsurprisingly, the staff here never misses a beat, anticipating every next move with astonishing precision without being too noticeable or overbearing. "Luxury is how you make people feel," Farid remarks, as opposed to having the fanciest facilities (though, they have that too). I couldn't agree more—it's the people that make the place, and here the level of service and personalization is in an echelon of its own.

For our final act, a sparkler-adorned platter of treats graces the table; mango cheesecake, green apple sorbet, hazelnut crunch, and rich chocolate cake are the finale we didn't know we needed. Slowly departing from the sparkling scene, we relish in the freedom of a night still young, the evening air riddled with the mystery and seduction of what's in store.

As a parting gift, Las Ventanas gives guests a blown glass heart, same as the ones that hang on trees around the property. The souvenir is the only relic to prove that what we'd experienced was real, that we hadn't fallen through a dreamlike portal to an otherworldly paradise.

Or had we? I press a button on a gold cash register, and... you know the rest.\*

# WHAT to PACK

LAS VENTANAS AL PARAÍSO  
*Latin-Inspired Luxury*

## 1 CULT GAIA HANSAL GOWN

\$2,698

The roaring 20s are back! Match Rosalia de Cuba's vivacious energy in this equally dramatic flapper-inspired look. Hand-sewn ostrich feathers cascade down the hem of this floor-skimming gown, mimicking the rolling tide of the ocean while locking in your spot as La Botica's best-dressed. [cultgaia.com](http://cultgaia.com)



## 2 MAYGEL CORONEL TRINITARIA SWIMSUIT

\$360

Fleurette accents are the trend of the moment—why not elevate your swimsuit with this delicate detail? Flatter your silhouette in this villa-worthy one piece, finished with an open back and a high-cut leg for maximum elegance. Designer Maygel Coronel, born in Cartagena, Colombia, infuses the free spirit of the Caribbean into her femininity-celebrating designs. [maygelcoronel.com](http://maygelcoronel.com)

## 3 AMANU STYLE 29 SAHARA SANDALS

\$345

An environment-conscious sandal that's custom-made with the highest quality materials? Love at first sight. Amanu's newest style adds glamor to your beach walk with its 24k plated gold bar and cream-embossed croc straps. Each shoe is handcrafted in Amanu's Los Angeles workshop for the perfect fit. Your new favorite sandal—you're welcome. [amanustudio.com](http://amanustudio.com)



## 4 SIMKHA BRIDGET SHELL CLUTCH

\$495

The true bon vivant travels exclusively with accessories that reflect their destination—in this case, an oceanic hand-finished clamshell clutch. Exemplifying designer Jonathan Simkhai's philosophy for elevating the everyday, this clutch pairs perfectly with a casual catch of the day ceviche at Sea Grill, or the divine menu of temari sushi at Arbol. [simkhai.com](http://simkhai.com)



by ALEXANDRA LEE