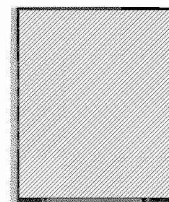


4 ways to *MEXICO*

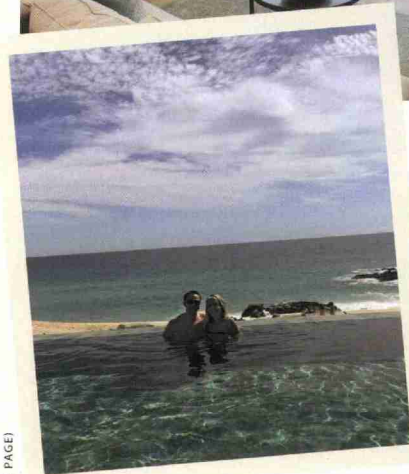
DESIGN | HISTORY | FOOD | ART

COME JOIN US as editor **Wendy Generes** brings us to Los Cabos for a look at designer resorts, rooftop bars, subterranean spas, organic farmers markets and a working farm; managing editor **Eva Ditler** escorts us on a wacky historical jaunt through Guanajuato—the birthplace of Mexico's independence; writer **Kristin Díaz de Sandi** guides us on a tour to one-of-a-kind vineyards in Valle de Guadalupe's wine region; and photographer **Stacy Keck** takes us on a picturesque journey to Oaxaca's gardens, monasteries, ruins and a private mezcal tasting.





lifestyle design destination



A Tale of Two Cities

A long weekend in Los Cabos BY WENDY MANWARREN GENERES



Clockwise from top left: The Hayloft homes, which are for sale at Flora Farms, combine sustainable, high-end design and views. • Art transcends the interior walls at the Patricia Mendoza Art Gallery. • An aerial view of The Cape. • Scott and I relax in the adults-only pool at our hotel. Facing page: Dawn at Grand Velas Los Cabos features contrasting stripes and sculptural furnishings.

LOS CABOS was never on the top of my must-do vacations list. In fact, it wasn't even on the list. I always considered it a spring-break party town, the kind that used to be featured on MTV *Spring Break*—week-long programming that showed hordes of young, tan partygoers, performances from '90s bands like TLC and a bash that appeared to be a dangerous diversion from real life.

But that all changed last year as I followed the Instagram feeds of so many friends capturing the designer-done hotels, food from world-renowned chefs, and gorgeous shops and galleries they were experiencing in Cabo, the Mexican resort town nestled on the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula.

So, when Scott and I decided to take a four-day trip to celebrate six years of marriage last November, we thought Cabo would provide everything we wanted—culture, design, fun and lots of relaxation.

Before I bring you to all the places we went, the food and drink we consumed and the gems we found, you should know that Cabo encompasses a 20-mile tourist corridor of over-the-top-luxury hotels, spas, golf courses and blond beaches bookended by the 18th-century town of San José del Cabo to the east and night-life driven Cabo San Lucas to the west. You should give yourself plenty of time to explore all of it. Honestly, four days gave us just a glimpse of the Old World charm, incredible design, desert terrain and seaside vistas.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Because we booked a room at the all-inclusive **Grand Velas Los Cabos**, the resort arranged for **Blue Dreams**, a private transfer company, to pick us up at the airport in a clean, air-conditioned suburban with cold bottles of water and chilled facecloths waiting. It was a comfortable 30-minute ride to the hotel, where we took in breathtaking ocean views, magnificently steep mountains, remote towns, and several modern-day conveniences such as the city's Walmart (I know).

FLORA FARMS (TOP LEFT); DIEGO CAMPIA (MIDDLE); NICK HALL (BOTTOM RIGHT); VELAS RESORTS (FACING PAGE)

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Clockwise from left: Tucked behind the striped walls that jut out in the Grand Velas lobby are a clothing and gift boutique and a coffee bar. • Each suite has a large terrace and view of the sea. • Frida's herringbone-pattern walls in teal make me want to work the bold color into my kitchen. • Velas 10 serves fresh seafood and more.



If you're staying at a resort that doesn't provide complimentary car service from the airport, Blue Dreams could cost anywhere from \$70-\$120 for two, depending on where you're staying. Another option is to schedule a semi-private van (there are a handful of reputable companies from which to choose) that you typically share with another couple or group for less.

SUITE DREAMS

If you read my "Phoenix Rising" article in the March issue, you know that I don't like to stay and eat in the same place, which is, by definition, the all-inclusive resort—paying one fee to include the accommodations, food and drink, tips and taxes and some specific activities for the entire trip. In this case, although I had never gone the all-inclusive route, Scott and I decided to give it a whirl because the idea of planting and forcing ourselves to really relax and let someone else take care of everything else was appealing.



Upon arrival at Grand Velas, we were greeted in the lobby with hyssop (a plant in the mint family) lemonade and a five-minute head and neck massage before meeting our personal concierge (the hotel prides itself on a staff-to-guest ratio of 3:1), who takes care of any requests and unobtrusively checks in on us during our stay.

Then we check out the 307-room resort, starting with the open-air entry with sculptural seating and out to the back to see the unique three-story half-moon shape of the hotel that affords every room—including ours—a Sea of Cortez view.

We meander past the kids' club facilities, which include a playground and beach-entry pool and remark that we should have brought the kids—not really, this vacation is all about us!

We travel down the steps, past the property's three infinity pools out to the golden sand of Playa El Tule just in front of the resort. It's a stunning stretch of beach but rather rocky and rough, and the lifeguard who stands at the top of steps so he can see the hotel pool and the sea tells us, "El mar is peligroso; no puede nadar!" which translates to "the sea is dangerous; you can't swim." Though it's disappointing, the

VELAS RESORTS

pools look inviting, especially the infinity pool closest to the beach that has a no-kids-allowed policy...perfect for quiet reading and soaking. Maybe tomorrow.

CABO SAN LUCAS

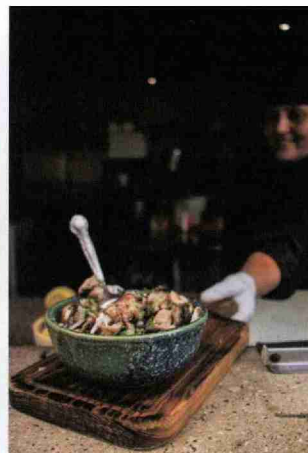
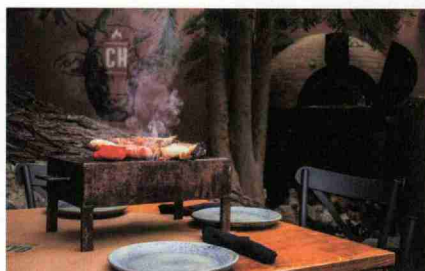
I'm ready to go and explore more of Los Cabos, starting with the rowdier Cabo San Lucas. We get a taxi from the resort for \$40 for the 15-minute drive west.

We roll into Cabo just before 5 p.m. looking for a place to park ourselves for a drink and to take in sunset (which will occur in the next 30 minutes). My cousin, who had just been to Cabo to celebrate her 10th wedding anniversary the week before, recommended **The Cape**, a Thompson Hotel, with a gloriously unobstructed view of The Arch, the natural granite formation that's become the photographic symbol for Cabo. As I walk into the lobby, which feels like a contemporary take on 1960s Southern California with a Baja vibe, I wish this was one of those hotels where *everything* is for sale (it's not), but I want the midcentury-modern chairs, the edgy light fixture and all the driftwood sculptures, which I'm told were created by local artisans from pieces found after Hurricane Odile decimated the town five years ago.

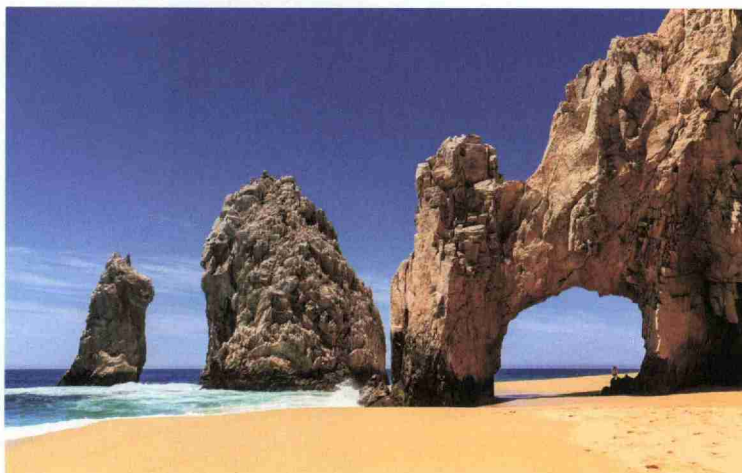
I pull my jaw up from the ground and hurry to the sixth-floor lounge and garden (it opens daily at 5 p.m.) to score a prime vantage point to see the setting sun. It's Cabo's only rooftop bar, and The Cape, the signature drink with herbal-infused mezcal, pineapple, grapefruit, fresh lime juice and Angostura bitters, goes down way too easily in paradise. We leave after one drink because we're starving, but we only want a nibble since we have a reservation at **Cocina de Autor**, the restaurant at our resort headed by two-Michelin-star chef Sidney Schutte.

We learn from the couple sitting next to us at the bar that Uber exists in Cabo, so we get one to take us to **Chamuyo**, an Argentinian steakhouse lauded for its beef ribs.

We sit at the bar in the rustic courtyard with wine-bottle lights, lots of exposed brick and wrought iron, and butcher paper tablecloths. The bartender recommends the humita empanadas stuffed with corn, red



Clockwise from top left: Cabo's only rooftop bar is at The Cape. • The mollejas at Chamuyo comes on a wooden board. • The Arch rock formation marks the place where the Sea of Cortez meets the Pacific Ocean. • A tabletop grill cooks the steaks, sausages and vegetables at Chamuyo.



peppers and onion, but how do you come to a steakhouse and not order meat? Both the vegetarian and carnivorous options were delicious, but Scott and I agreed that we have to come back to try the ribs, which looked *amazing*. (Note: Make reservations. We were there the weekend before Thanksgiving, and nothing in Los Cabos was crowded, but holidays and school breaks become a different story.)

ENJOYING ALL THE PERKS

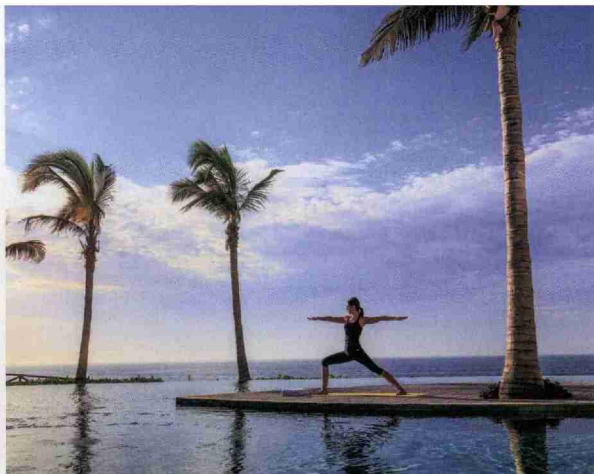
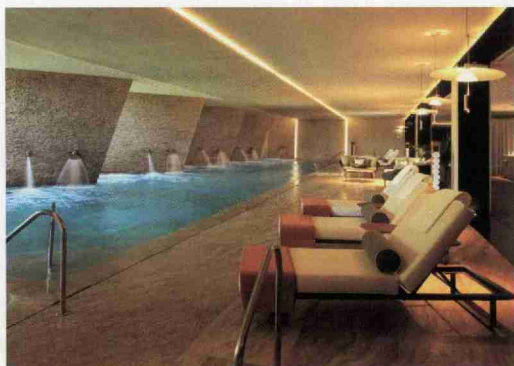
Another Uber, which cost less than \$9, takes us back to the resort to dress (collared

shirts and trousers are required for men; dresses, skirts or "evening trousers" for ladies) for dinner at Cocina de Autor, where we experience a 10-course tasting menu. I have no idea what we ate, but everything was incredible—and included! If you're not a guest, the meal (without wine) runs about \$165 per person. My opinion? Worth every penny!

I spend the following morning at the resort's subterranean **SE Spa**. I booked a facial but was talked into coming early (90 minutes) in my swimsuit to experience the hydrotherapy journey. It's actually included

NICK HALL (TOP LEFT); MARCELO ROMBY (TOP RIGHT AND MIDDLE LEFT)

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Clockwise from left: A spa valet at SE Spa leads you through the underground sanctuary that begins with a pool of jets meant to work different parts of your body. • You must try the seafront yoga. • This infinity pool has a swim-up bar. • Kids can play and splash in this supervised area just for them while you relax.



with any 50-minute treatment, but you can purchase it à la carte for \$70 as well. I get a verbal rundown of how I should wade through the room-temperature pool and where to stop. You basically stand in front of each stone wall that appears to rise from the water, push a button and take whatever comes your way—waterfalls, wall-mounted jets and bubble beds—all meant to work your shoulders, back, glutes and legs. I couldn't wait for some of the jets that felt like a beating to end; other, gentler streams of water beckoned me to push the button again to get what felt like quick finger taps to dance across my back one more time.

From there, I took the recommendations of the attendant: five minutes in the hot tub (heaven), a quick plunge in the cold pool (yikes!), eight minutes in the eucalyptus-scented steam room, six minutes in the ice room, seven minutes in the dry sauna and a fast aromatherapy shower—all accompanied by *agua fresca*, dried fruit and nuts, fresh-fruit popsicles and cookies to enhance each



experience. Then I reclined on a heated chaise in my plush robe with a warm neck pillow and cucumbers on my eyes while I waited for my facial to begin.

SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

That afternoon, Scott and I took another expensive cab ride. (Note: It's very hard to get an Uber in the tourist corridor where we stayed. I'm pretty sure the hotels have relationships with certain cab companies and so will only call you one of those when you ask to go somewhere.) This time we headed east to **San José del Cabo**. I

requested that he drop us off the beaten path, where we might find the true Mexican artisans as opposed to the tourist shops slinging the exact same things—T-shirts, woven bags and loads of tchotchkes with "Cabo" written on them.

We ended up exactly where we didn't want to be in the center of every tourist shop, but we were hellbent to find authenticity and so we ventured on foot to explore this charming town.

We found ourselves just off Calle Centenario behind the arts district at the weekly **San José Organic Market**, the

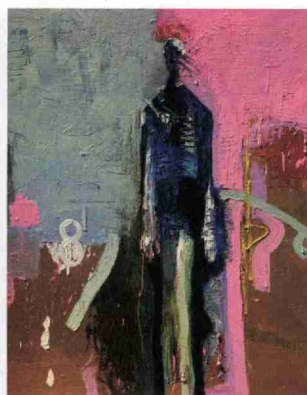
VELAS RESORTS

largest organic farmers market in Los Cabos. For reference, it opens at 9 a.m. and closes at 3 p.m. every Saturday from early November through May. We buy a coffee and walk the market—past the growers selling beautiful squash, eggplant, tomatoes and radishes; vendors making quesadillas and peddling tamales and homemade ice cream; performers singing, juggling and dancing on stilts; and artisans showing their paintings, jewelry and more. We buy a hand-carved and painted wooden nativity set and a bright-colored, embroidered felt heart with a tassel. We collect nativity sets and ornaments when we travel, and though the heart isn't technically an ornament, it captures the hues and culture we're experiencing here perfectly.

From here, we stroll the **San José del Cabo Gallery District**, the enclave of narrow, color-filled, cobblestoned back streets that surround the Plaza Mijares, the main town square. We wander in to the **Patricia Mendoza Art Gallery**, known for contemporary art from top Mexican artists. There, we're told we must also pop into the **Frank Arnold Gallery**, where we find the artist's current abstract oil paintings in this space that is, we learn, the front of his gallery and home, too.

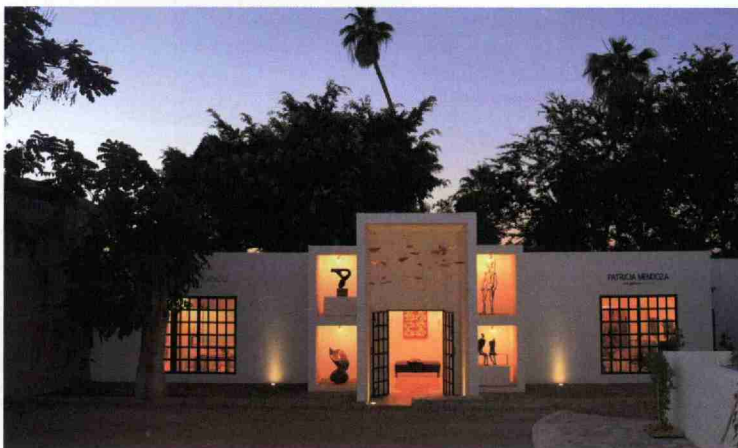
The time to hit this eclectic neighborhood is Thursday night from November through June when most of the galleries stay open until 9 p.m. during the popular **Art Walk**, where you can see new exhibits, sometimes meet artists, sip wine and take in the entertainment—from folkloric dancers to musicians—free.

Before catching an Uber back to the hotel to make our reservation at the property's **Piaf**, the French restaurant with a design reminiscent of Paris in the 1940s, we take some time to see the **Misión de San José del Cabo**. It's the Catholic church in the center of town. Inside, near the altar, visitors write their petitions for divine intervention and also their expressions of thanks on ribbons they tie to a designated rack near Saint Charbel Mahklouf, the saint who supposedly works miracles. I write one of each and tie them in place.



Above: Frank Arnold's "Blue Man" is one of the artist's abstract figurative paintings.

Left: The Misión de San José del Cabo hosts 30 baptisms and eight weddings a month. In fact, there were people setting up for a wedding during our visit.



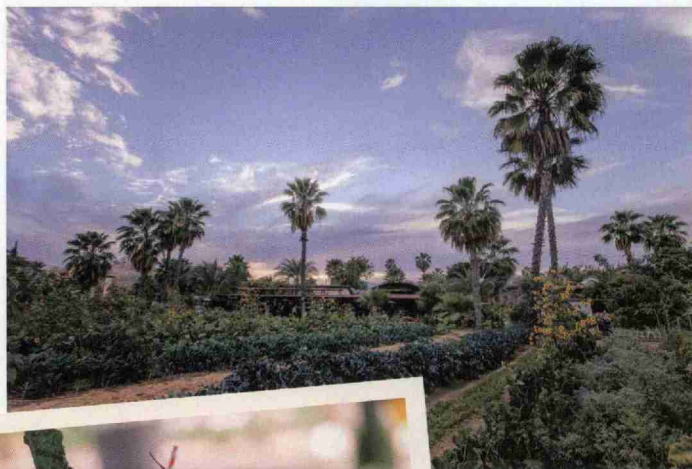
Above: The Patricia Mendoza Art Gallery is one of many that stays open late on Thursday evenings from November to June for the weekly Art Walk.



Left: A local artist works while he sells his paintings at the San José Organic Market.

HCP MEDIA (TOP LEFT); DIEGO CAMPIA (MIDDLE); DISSONANCE PHOTOGRAPHY (BOTTOM)

lifestyle **design destination**



Clockwise from top left: Flora Farms is the working organic farm in San José del Cabo with a restaurant, shops, a spa and more. • The Culinary Cottages are hand-built, straw-bale homes on the property for the culinary-inclined. • Flora's Field Kitchen is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. • Ingredients come from the fields around the restaurant and the larger farm a few miles away. • Try one of the fruit- or vegetable-infused craft cocktails.

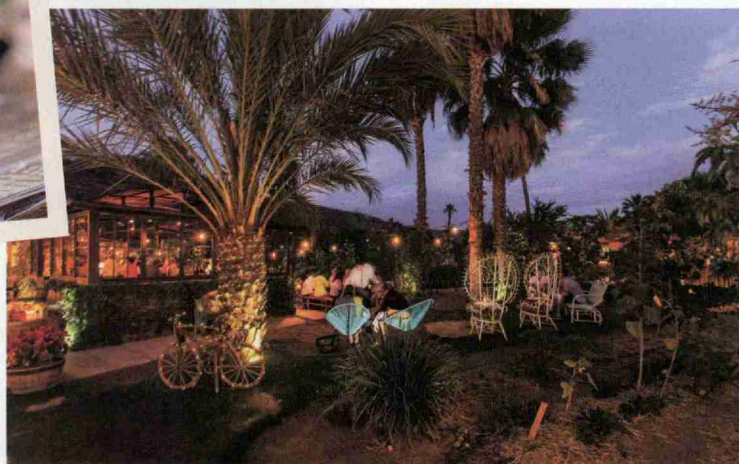


A DAY ON THE FARM

The next morning, we take a \$65 cab ride to **Flora Farms**. The road to get there is unpaved, bumpy and riddled with potholes. It feels like you're driving to the middle of nowhere, and you are, but the destination is magical.

This 10-acre organic working farm nestled in the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains in San José del Cabo is more like a compound with a bar; restaurant; boutique concept shops; cooking, painting and yoga classes; a market where they sell their produce; a spa; and privately-owned designer "culinary cottages," which are also available for rent.

We have a reservation—a must!—for brunch at **Flora's Field Kitchen**. I suggest you arrive an hour early and enjoy a drink at the bar. Scott and I each had the signature Farmarita made with carrot, lime and orange juices, simple syrup, Cointreau, tequila and a pinch of red pepper flakes. The Bloody Mary with a salad of kale, celery,



green beans, cilantro, radishes, peppers, tomatoes, beets and a rice cake spilling out of the glass looked incredibly appetizing as well. Everything on the menu is either grown on the property or at the larger farm a few miles away. The menu changes according to what's available but usually includes eggs, pizza, salads and freshly caught fish. It does not, however, include any beef dishes since beef's not sustainable in a region lacking water. We order the vegetable frittata with gruyère and the lemon ricotta pancakes—both are delicious.

With full bellies, we embark on the 30-minute field tour (which also requires a reservation) to get a better feel for the lay of the land and hear about the husband-and-



FLORA FARMS

THE DETAILS



GRAND VELAS LOS CABOS

Mexico 1 km 17, Tourist Corridor, 23405
Cabo San Lucas, (+52) 624-104-9800, loscabos.grandvelas.com

BLUE DREAMS

(+52) 998-180-3700, bluedreams.com.mx

THE CAPE

Mexico, 1 km 5, Misiones del Cabo, 23455
Cabo San Lucas, (+52) 624-163-0000,
thompsonhotels.com

CHAMUYO

Ave. del Pesacador, El Medano Ejidal,
23453 Cabo San Lucas, (+52) 624-143-4900,
chamuyorestaurant.com

SAN JOSÉ ORGANIC MARKET

sanjomo.com

SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

GALLERY DISTRICT

artcabo.com

PATRICIA MENDOZA ART GALLERY

Alvaro Obregon Mijares, Centro, 23400
San José del Cabo, (+52) 624-105-2270,
patriciamendozagallery.com

FRANK ARNOLD GALLERY

1137 Calle Comonfort, 23400 San José del
Cabo, (+52) 559-301-1148, frankarnoldart.com

MISIÓN DE SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

Miguel Hidalgo S/N, Gallery District, Centro,
23400 San José del Cabo, (+52) 624-142-0064

FLORA FARMS

Carretera Transpeninsular San José del Cabo
Km 30, Las Ánimas Bajas, 23407 San José del
Cabo, (+52) 624-142-1000, flora-farms.com

WIRIKUTA

East Cape Road, San José del Cabo,
(+52) 624-131-3131, thewirikuta.com



Above and top left: Register in advance for one of the cooking classes offered at Flora Farms. There are several. At this one, guests learn to make roasted vegetable tacos and homemade tortillas from scratch.

Left: Musicians perform at the Wirikuta Show at the botanical garden. It's San José del Cabo's only night show and opens again beginning in October.

wife owners from California who've been farming this land for nearly 20 years.

After spending several hours shopping and walking around Flora Farms, we have our driver summoned (that's how they do it out here since it's not on any main drag). We had passed **Wirikuta**, Los Cabos' botanical garden, on the way out to Flora Farms, so I convince our driver to stop there on the way back. In the booklet at the hotel, I read that there are thousands of must-see plants. There are lots of succulents, cacti and dry-climate perennials, a labyrinth of bougainvillea and stone "pyramids" topped with palapas. At night, there's a circus-like dinner

show that takes over the garden, but that's not in our plans. After a lap around the garden, we head back to the resort to enjoy the pools and dinner at **Frida**, the authentic Mexican restaurant on site, with walls of teal herringbone tile I covet for the base of my kitchen island.

We spent our final morning relishing the pools, the free food and booze, and the last moments of quiet before getting the hotel-arranged SUV to the airport and flying back to our little ones, who gave us the sweetest screaming-with-excitement homecoming before asking what we brought them. ♦