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SEA OF
TRANQUILITY

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THE CITY ON
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HIMALAYAN HARMONY

EXPLORING BHUTAN IN STYLE



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When most people hear the phrase 'all-inclusive', long buffet lines and watered-down drinks typically spring to mind. However, that's all changing thanks to Grand Velas Los Cabos, a lavish new seaside retreat that's changing the all-inclusive game single-handedly. **Nick Walton** checks in to see what all the buzz is about.

It's a winning combination – the mesmerising blue water of the Gulf of California, world-class dining by a series of heavy-hitting chefs, a commitment to the arts, warm, intuitive service, and a design persona that's elegant and luxurious without being ostentatious. It's obvious that Mexico's Grand Velas Los Cabos is a resort that was built to seduce affluent travellers like never before. Opened less than a year ago at a price of US\$150 million, this magnificent all-suite resort, a short drive from Cabo San Lucas's international airport, the fifth property for local brand Velas Resorts, is bringing a touch of finesse to the all-inclusive accommodation segment by infusing levels of quality usually reserved for the likes of Rosewood or Four Seasons.

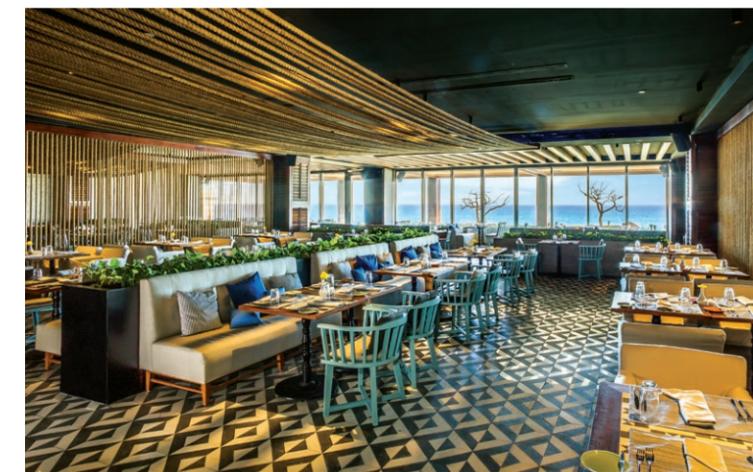


I'll admit I was skeptical at first; I'd been to all-inclusive resorts before, and many claim to be a level above their brethren but when my hotel Escalade drew up to Grand Velas Los Cabos' cavernous lobby, with its breathtaking views of the sea and its army of staff dressed in immaculate white uniforms, I knew I'd arrived somewhere unique.

An oasis on the desert shoreline boasting 304 ocean view suites in a wraparound building designed by architect Ricardo Elias that's reminiscent of the Fontainebleau Miami Beach, Grand Velas Los Cabos' nightly rates start from a very reasonable US\$548 per person, per night twin share. For that, guests enjoy oversized suites complete with complimentary minibars, deep set terraces (some with plunge pools) and king-sized beds so large you'd need to be a sprinter to catch your significant other. The price also includes access to a plethora of intriguing restaurants overseen by executive chef Juan Licerio, including one by two Michelin-starred chef Sidney Schutte; a standing appointment at a Leading Spa of the World; and the choice of not one but three palm-lined pools.

If I ever choose to be a hermit and sequester myself from the world, I'd barricade myself in one of Grand Velas Los Cabos' 100sqm Ambassador Suites, designed by Ernesto Vela. While it's the resort's entry

level room category, it's already leagues above most resorts; huge, airy, well lit, intuitive and indulgent, the space is really made for living in – there's an expansive bathroom with twin vanities, a walk-in shower, a spa tub and L'Occitane amenities. The walls are graced by locally-sourced art inspired by the Baja landscapes, the bed is dressed with luxury linens and goose down pillows; and the daily-restocked minibar features Te Forrte teas, a Nespresso coffee machine, and full-sized bottles of wine and the resort's own artisanal tequila – essentially everything a modern day recluse could ask for. However, if there's anything amiss, round-the-clock butlers are just a call away.



That said I'm a pretty social person so I did eventually emerge, enticed by the crashing ocean, the vibrant gardens that wreath the terraced swimming pools, and the promise of mezcals margaritas. The active will have no shortage of things to keep them inspired and entertained at Grand Velas Los Cabos; you can work up a sweat in the state-of-the-art Technogym Fitness Center, where personal trainers can set you up with a bespoke exercise programme or guide you through a dawn yoga or meditation session; before cooling off at the SE Spa by Grand Velas.

The spa is reason enough to check into the resort. One of Mexico's most luxurious wellness enclaves, the spa is the ideal place to while away the hottest hours of the day. Leave plenty of time to perform the seven-step water journey (if you're travelling with kids, send them packing to the dedicated teens and kid's clubs, they won't want to leave), which includes an ice room, a clay room and an experience pool packed with muscle-melting jets and torrents. If you still haven't shaken off the busy world beyond, make a beeline for one of the glorious treatment suites and treat yourself to the signature Blue Agave massage or the Blue Agave Exfoliation, two of the most popular treatments from a list of innovative wellness rituals conducted by some of the country's leading therapists. The barbershop and salon also do great wedding packages, a popular option for couples looking to tie the knot in paradise.

All that pampering is enough to give you an appetite. Fortunately, some of Baja's best dining is only steps away. Kick off with one of those aforementioned mezcals-laced libations at one of the resort's three bars – the lofty Koi Bar with its al fresco tables overlooking the ocean and list of international and Mexican wines chosen by master sommelier Don Pedro Poncelis Brambila; the beachfront Mezcal & Tequila, the best spot for sunset; or the chic Sky Sports Bar, a popular spot when the game is on. There's also coffee and cake at Amat Café, a hidden nook that's great for lattes and contemplation.

From here you can choose by cuisine or by chef: there's the decadent 8-10 course tasting menus of chef Sidney Schutte at Cocina de Autor, home to 'creative cuisine'; the finest Wagyu beef and local seafood at chef Sergio Lopez's waterfront eatery Velas 10; authentic Mexican fare with a modern twist by chef Roberto Sierra at Frida; French flare and fine Old-World wines with chef Aurélien Legeay at Piaf; the Italian comfort cuisine of chef Antonio La Monica at Lucca; poolside ceviche by chef Dayana Mendoza at Cabrilla; and an international buffet with regular thematic nights and live music at Azul with chef Luis Quiroz. Still think all all-inclusive resorts are born equal?



While it's nice to dress up on those warm Mexican evenings and explore the culinary landscapes on offer at the fine dining joints, I find myself drawn back time and time again to Mendoza's ceviche hot spot. A simple shaded terrace overlooking both pool and sea, the concept is superbly simple – fresh seafood, attentive, friendly service, and a menu that's packed with flavour without being overwhelming. And at the end of the meal there's no bill to pay or forms to sign, just an insistence that I come back for the swordfish. That's a promise I intend to keep. ✈

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Fly: American Airlines, a member of oneworld, offers flights from Hong Kong to Cabo San Lucas via Los Angeles. Business class return from US\$5,000; www.aa.com

Stay: Ambassador Suite from US\$548 per night, all-inclusive. <http://loscabos.grandvelas.com/>