

**FAMILY TRAVEL**

# EXTRAORDINARY BEAUTY ON THE BAJA PENINSULA

**MHAIRRI WOODHALL**

Watching my daughter Brooklyn dance across the gleaming white sand of Turtle Beach is mesmerizing. The frothing turquoise waves thrashing the private cove's shoreline drown out the sound of her voice, but I know she's lost in imagination — and the possibilities of where that world takes her are endless. Abandoning my book for the flawless secluded scene in front of our cabana, I float into deep relaxation with a feeling of gratitude.

My husband's 50th birthday, our 11th wedding anniversary and the fortuitous timing of Canada loosening its COVID travel restrictions prompted our recent family vacation to tropical oasis Los Cabos on the sparkling Sea of Cortez. Before this vacation, it had been 20 years since I stepped foot on the Baja Peninsula's soft sand beaches. I was flabbergasted that I could have forgotten the region's extraordinary beauty.

Given the magnitude of the celebratory occasion, we opted out of Cabo San Lucas' all-inclusive scene for a golden jubilee-worthy splurge — you only turn 50 once, right? The One&Only Palmilla in San Jose del Cabo, where we started our vacation, exudes old-world charm.

It first opened in 1956 as an intimate 15-room boutique hideaway owned by the son of the president of Mexico and frequented by dignitaries, presidents, and Hollywood elite, like Lucille Ball and John Wayne. Over time, the resort flour-



San Jose del Cabo is rich in culture and charm. *CURT WOODHALL*

ished into 115 luxurious rooms, eventually reopening under the exclusive One&Only brand after a \$90-million refurbishment in 2004. For the fortunate, staying here is an annual pilgrimage; for the rest, including my family, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience befitting a momentous event.

We heard about the One&Only Palmilla from two sets of friends who raved about their stay. Both couples visited without their children; however, as we discovered, the resort is exceptionally family-friendly. At 10, Brooklyn felt she was too mature for the complimentary Kids Club, even though it welcomes children ages four through 11. She was also too young for the Teen Club (ages 12-16), so we focused on family activities instead. Complimentary non-motorized watersport rentals, including paddleboards, kayaks and snorkel gear, are available at Pelican Beach, one of the few swimmable beaches in Los Cabos. We spent an afternoon



Daughter Brooklyn, 10, surveys the surf at One&Only Palmilla's private Turtle Beach. *CURT WOODHALL*

playing in the waves, searching for seashells and building our obligatory beach vacation sand castles. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our family surf lesson because of a weather system that moved into the area, which was disappointing but unavoidable. On our last trip to Mexico, Brooklyn took an hour tandem surf class through the same company, Tropicsurf Pro, and did incredibly well riding the waves. Given her success, I was ready to conquer my fears, don a wet suit and give it a go in Los Cabos; now, I'll have to shelf that grit and determination until the next opportunity presents itself.

Dining is an experience unto itself at One&Only. Seared, the resort's signature restaurant, was a standout for steak and local seafood, as was the sushi at Suviche. However, taking a Mex-

ican cooking class at Agua was our favourite; for the interactive instruction and delicious fresh ceviche and fish tacos created.

Every vacation, I attempt to battle the extra calorie consumption with exercise and enjoy the most success — well, truthfully, only success — when morning fitness classes are available. One&Only Palmilla offers them daily at 8 a.m. at the spa gym, and I attended daily during our three-night stay. The Barre class was shockingly intense, in a good way, and left me shuffling up and down stairs for the remainder of our vacation. Curt's birthday treat was a gentler spa experience, with a new haircut from the resort's master barber from Italy at Barber & Blade.

After three nights at One&Only Palmilla, we moved to the

Hilton Los Cabos, a beautiful resort on a swimmable beach, for a considerably lower price point. While the rooms were modest, the level of service was outstanding, as were the amenities. We rented a cabana at the sea-view family pool for Curt's birthday, and our butler Fernando went above and beyond, attending to our every need. The Hilton's daily poolside themed-dining experiences were also fantastic, with Brooklyn's favourite being the fresh coconut drinks and Curt's, the seafood paella and sangria lunch. For Curt's birthday dinner, we feasted on fresh seafood and made-from-scratch pasta at the resort's Talavera restaurant. Like the rest of our stay, every morsel surpassed expectation. SEE **FAMILY TRAVEL ON E8**



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A gorgeous sunset at the pool of the luxurious and charming One&Only Palmilla in San Jose del Cabo. **ONE&ONLY**

## Delightful dining scene, enjoyable art walk cap family vacation to Los Cabos

### FAMILY TRAVEL FROM E7

Our Discover AltaMar package is currently available for 20 per cent off and includes a daily buffet breakfast, which was exceptional, a one-day paddle board rental, and round trip airport transportation.

The opportunity to explore San Jose del Cabo's celebrated dining scene heavily influenced our decision to avoid staying all-inclusive. Of the plethora of recommendations we received from friends and family, two were clear winners.

The first, Acre, is part of a boutique resort with tree house suites in a lush natural palm forest. While its restaurant and cocktail bar don't cater to children per se, our foodie daughter was thrilled with the chef's creations, particularly the

cheddar biscuits, grilled octopus and fried brussels sprouts. Picture-perfect Flora Farms, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains, was the other top choice. The 25-acre organic working farm offers events and classes, including plant identification walks, cooking demonstrations, movie nights and free farm tours. In addition to Flora's Field Kitchen, The Farm Bar, Mama's Pizzeria and an ice cream cart serving house-made gelato and sorbet, you'll find multiple artisan shops and a full-service spa.

Touring historic downtown San Jose del Cabo's gallery district for the weekly Thursday art walk is another activity we all thoroughly enjoyed. It was a relaxing evening of whimsy, from the colourful paper banners fluttering above winding cobblestone streets and live music to

the impressive displays of paintings, sculptures, and beautifully intricate hand-painted pottery. Brooklyn was most taken with the handstitched stuffed animals and souvenirs and learning the art of negotiation to reach a price suiting all parties.

The only great regret of our trip was missing Los Cabos' peak whale shark season, which runs from November through April. We considered trying our luck with a late May snorkelling tour but then decided against it, given Brooklyn's age and her potential disappointment if we failed to see any. Not to worry, as Los Cabos is only a quick 4½-hour flight, we'll be back swimming, snorkelling and surfing in the Sea of Cortez before the year's up. Visit [www.arrivalstravel.com](http://www.arrivalstravel.com) to follow Mhairri's family travel adventures.



Hilton Los Cabos features a family pool and beach club. **CURT WOODHALL**

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