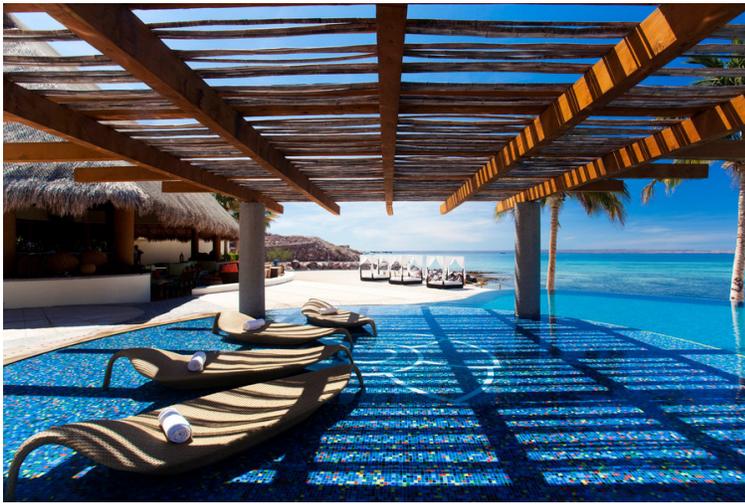


DEPARTURES

How to Vacation Like a Billionaire in Mexico

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Departures

Departures! I'll be honest: I had never heard of La Paz, Mexico, when I booked my trip to Puerto Cortés, a resort located about two hours from the ever-bustling beach destination of Los Cabos. But upon hearing about an opportunity to swim alongside whale sharks in the cerulean blue waters of the storied Sea of Cortez, La Paz was immediately on my radar. The cherry on top? Ahead of my trip, I didn't even realize that the resort where I'd be staying, Puerto Cortés (formerly Costa Baja), would be just as phenomenal of an experience as swimming with giant fish and sea lions off the coast of sunny Mexico.



Courtesy of Puerto Cortés

Located in the Baja California Sur region of Mexico's west coast, La Paz is a decidedly unfussy city. Drive through it, and you'll catch glimpses of towering cacti, rugged mountains, and the sparkling sea beyond the highway. And because of the low-key atmosphere, it may come as a surprise that billionaires (like Bill Gates, for one) come here to escape the public eye and hunker down. But enter Puerto Cortés, the only resort of its kind in the area, and you'll discover a veritable paradise largely untouched by the tourism that abounds in much of coastal Mexico. By day, the La Paz area is hot and dry, perfect for long

afternoons on the boat and by the beach (the resort's head concierge, Karla, will be happy to help book a tour). By night, the town is just bustling enough to feel lively and warm, but still intimate. Between the cacti back-lit by the setting sun, and the lights that sparkle through the canyons in the evening, the destination is truly magical



Courtesy of Puerto Cortés

What struck me most, aside from the views, the smoldering sunsets, and the fresh seafood, was a striking collective respect for the environment and local sea life. Locals are aware of the rarity that is the Sea of Cortez (it was once referred to as the Aquarium of the World by Jacques Cousteau) and the surrounding area, and thus there is a sense that those who live here want to preserve this special coastline. Below, we've rounded up why you should plan a trip to Baja California Sur, and more specifically, Puerto Cortés.

Stay in your own sprawling apartment



Courtesy of Puerta Cortés

Sure, hotel rooms are nice. But if you're coming all the way to this western peninsula, we recommend opting for an apartment, rather than a room. Puerta Cortés is conveniently divided into a hotel, private villas, and the Vista Mar residences, which can be purchased as real estate, or used for long-term vacations. The nice thing about Vista Mar is that guests get ample privacy, including a residence-only infinity pool, gardens, and a beautiful common area with sweeping views of the Sea of Cortez. Bonus points go to

the hotel for providing guests with their very own golf cart to use on the expansive property.

Swim with local sea life and learn about the precious ecosystem



Tammy616/Getty Images.

Four words: swim with whale sharks. And no, they're actually *not* whales. nor are they big toothy sharks; they're really big, beautiful fish—and known for being the gentle giants of the sea (and the largest fish species on earth). In addition to whale sharks, you may be lucky enough to swim alongside playful dolphins and sea lions, as well as dozens of colorful fish that live among the coral found in the Sea of Cortez. After all, the body of water is home to over 6,000 species. Our tour guide, Miguel, was a passionate marine biologist

and extremely knowledgeable about the local ecosystem and sealife. He explained to us that the La Paz area enforces strict boating rules in order to help protect the whale sharks. Pro tip: book a tour that includes a stop at one of the exclusive beaches, like Balandra (Miguel took us here and packed freshly-made *ceviche*, which was, unsurprisingly, to-die-for).

Feast on fresh seafood and Mexican cuisine



Courtesy Ellie Nan Storck

Sushi, *ceviche*, fish tacos, enchiladas with fresh *mole* sauce, and so much more can be found at restaurants on-site at Puerta Cortés. You'll have no shortage of options at the four restaurants, all of which source seafood right from the water that you dine in front of. But if you do choose to wander into La Paz, don't miss out on Sorstis, where the Caesar salad is a must (they make it for you fresh at the table).

Get a massage on the beach



Courtesy of Puerta Cortés

Imagine the warm breeze rustling soft curtains as you breathe in fresh salty air on the beach—while getting a full-body, hot stone massage. Whether you choose to have your treatment on the beach (which we highly recommend) or head indoors to the luxe spa, you won't want to miss out on the resort's expansive spa menu.

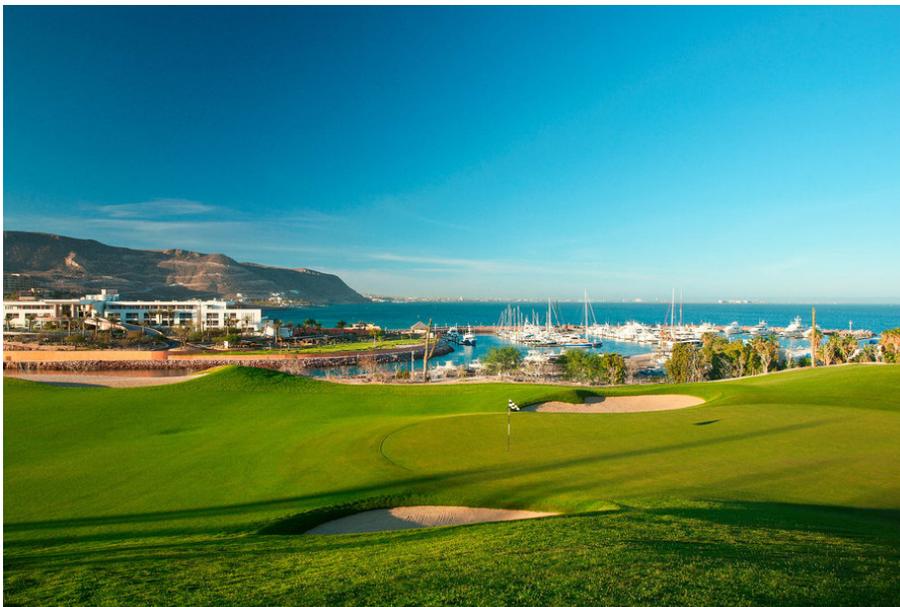
Watch the sunset over the sea from a mountaintop bar



Courtesy of Puerta Cortés

The recently renovated Sunset Lounge is arguably the selling point of the entire resort. Drive yourself up to the top of the mountain overlooking the property, and you'll wind past huge cacti and the lush golf course. At the top sits a stately building which leads out to the aptly-named Sunset Lounge, a whitewashed, open-air bar perched high above the sea below. Pro tip: don't miss a piña colada while you watch the sun go down.

Play 19 holes above the sea



Aidan Bradley/Courtesy of Puerta Cortés

Many come to Puerta Cortés just to play a round of golf at the stunning 19 hole course, El Cortés. You won't want to miss the cutting edge architecture at the resting point at hole 19. Head to the Sunset Lounge for a beer after you play. Go yachting like Bill and Melinda Gates



Courtesy of Puerta Cortés

Big-name billionaires are known for docking their mega-yachts in the Puerta Cortés marina, namely Bill Gates and Steven Spielberg. The Gates apparently love to play tennis on the property when they're not out exploring the waterfront. The resort's marina, which is home to 70 slips where yachts over 250 feet can be docked, is conveniently located next to a handful of restaurants and the property's private club. Consider this marina the luxury gateway to the Sea of Cortez.