



*Cape of
Good Fun*

*Relaxation &
recreation in Cabo*

By Kara Williams



BRIAN FLORKY / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

▶ ¿Dónde está el cowboy statue on a bench?” I ask a grinning shopkeeper, not stopping for a second as I jog along the sidewalk in downtown Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Without skipping a beat, the amused local points straight ahead, “Allí.” He appears accustomed to energetic visitors asking in broken Spanish for directions to this popular photo op.

In fact, it’s more than just a photo op. Every Wednesday morning, teams of tourists run through town, along the marina, into restaurants and to off-the-beaten-path sights as they compete in the weekly A-Maze-In Cabo Race, a fun (and funny!) activity that my husband and I enjoyed on our visit to the area earlier this year. It’s a combination scavenger hunt/obstacle race/local tour, and it’s both exhilarating and enlightening.

After all, much as we enjoy lounging by the pool or on the beach with a good book and cold beer on our travels to Mexico, there is more to Cabo than delicious relaxation. We like to earn our leisure time, too, by doing something active each day. Typically that’s hiking or kayaking, but we figured this clever local activity, a very scaled-down version of television’s *The Amazing Race*, would accomplish several goals simultaneously: We’d get a cardio workout hustling to various locations as we quickly answer clues in an effort to be the first team to cross the finish line, plus we’d get an overview of a locale new to us.

We signed up for the race on our second day in Cabo, and since

we’d explored a bit the day before, we had some inkling where things are in town and along the restaurant-lined marina. Plus, each team is equipped with a map, as well as bottled water, a set of rules, a pen, an emergency phone, and pesos for the public transportation we’d mysteriously need at some point in the race. Still, our little bit of area knowledge didn’t really help us get a jump start on the other 15 teams lined up at The Giggling Bean Cafe, since we stumbled over solving our first brain teaser—darned math!—that would lead us to our next challenge and clue.

While my husband and I were “in it to win it,” thus running instead of walking from one clue to the next, it was hard to take the race too seriously, especially when activities along the way included tossing beanbags in buckets, eating crunchy bugs (fried crickets, an exotic Mexican delicacy) a la *Fear Factor*, and drinking frozen concoctions such as virgin strawberry daiquiris as quickly as possible in the “brain

Lover’s Beach is one of the most popular day-trip destinations for visitors to Cabo San Lucas—and the nearby arch that marks the end of the cape is an icon of Baja California.





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Jumping into the water from the boat,
we dashed up to the beach.

Jumping into the water from the boat, we dashed up on shore to fall on the beach, flinging golden sand in the air (and in our hair) to find the laminated card.

Some teams weren't feeling competitive at all; one in particular stopped for a beer every time a clue brought them to a bar (at least three times, including the famous Cabo Wabo Cantina); others wore bright feather boas and sombreros as they jogged through town and into a small local museum, a (much-welcomed) air conditioned building.

So how did we do in this competition that tested athletic prowess, puzzle-solving skills, adventuresome mettle and directional savvy? I was pleased with our valiant tied-for-third-place finish; we completed the course in a little over 90 minutes. However, I must note that the winners included family teams with children as young as 7 years old! Truly, this adventure is for all ages and physical

freeze" challenge. Good-natured fellow racers—with silly team names like "Twisted Sisters" and "Oldies but Goodies"—helped keep the atmosphere light and entertaining.

Team camaraderie was further enhanced when we all had to belt old Journey lyrics ("Don't Stop Believin' ") simultaneously and then when we compared notes on our experiences as we shared a water taxi to one of Cabo's pristine beaches, where another clue awaited.

The A-Maze-In Cabo Race is great fun and introduces participants to many sights in Cabo San Lucas.



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abilities. Friendly organizers encouraged us along the way, we felt safe the entire time, and the chips, beers and margaritas included in the price (\$79 per person) and offered at the finish were appreciated.

Cabo is a perfect destination to combine both adventurous and more relaxing pursuits, such as an excursion we took the day after our race.

HURRICANE UPDATE: OPEN FOR BUSINESS

After Hurricane Odile reached Baja in September, Cabo's residents, store owners, hotel employees and tourism professionals rallied to get the region's primary business, travel, back up and running quickly. Today, the vast majority of hotels in Cabo San Lucas and along the coast nearby are fully operational, as are most stores, golf courses, tour operators and fishing charters. The airport is welcoming regularly scheduled flights as high season in Cabo gets underway.

Virtually every major lodging property in the area will be open by the holidays, with more than 90 percent of hotel rooms available. Alaska Airlines has resumed full service, too—so it's business as usual in one of Mexico's most popular resort areas.

Lover's Beach is a popular spot to while away an afternoon in Cabo. The small, remote swimming beach on Land's End is typically reached via water taxi from the marina or busy Medano Beach on Cabo San Lucas Bay. After cooling off in the bay's gentle and clear water, munching on our picnic lunch, and celebrating our journey with the cold beers we'd packed, we opted to pay one of the ever-present water-taxi drivers to take us past El Arco ("the Arch"), to see Cabo's landmark rock formation and the sea lions that make their home nearby.

Still more active adventures in Cabo include ziplining, mountain biking, desert hiking, swimming with whale sharks (September to April), scuba diving, snorkeling, stand-up paddling,

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Jeeping and kayaking. Glass-bottom boat tours, whale-watching cruises (December to April) and sunset sails are more leisurely ways to enjoy the water; make sure to book one that takes you past El Arco at Land's End. Area public golf courses include the challenging 18 holes at Cabo San Lucas Country Club. And there are umpteen ways to book a fishing charter in Cabo; simply strolling through the marina will yield offers from boat owners and outfitters.

One reason my husband and I stay active on vacation is because we like to eat well. The fine dining scene in Cabo has grown considerably over the past few years, and it is now one of the capitals of Pacific seafood cuisine. Aside



With the ocean just below, and the food so utterly fresh, the entire experience was memorable.

from the sheer enjoyment of it, our hike made fresh lobster dipped in butter, handmade pork tamales, and guacamole made tableside taste a lot better since I felt like I fully deserved the indulgence.

For our big splurge in Cabo, we booked a table for two at El Farallón, a fine-dining restaurant at the upscale oceanfront resort Capella Pedregal (scheduled to reopen in mid-January). Here, tables are perched beside the cliff, with powerful Pacific waves crashing into the rocks below, creating a dramatic setting.

The menu began with tasty flatbread and homemade pretzels, followed by seafood soup and a trio of appetizers to share (ours were crispy shrimp, fish ceviche, and seaweed salad). Then it was time for the "fun" course: Dinner guests visit the "fish expert," who details the entree offerings for the evening based on what had been caught by local fishermen that morning. We opted for Ensenada flounder and La Paz amber-

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jack, but California spiny lobster, chocolate clams, local shrimp, parrotfish and “snapper” were also on the menu. Each item was laid out in front of us on ice, so we could see exactly what we would be eating. Prices were handwritten on a chalkboard next to a hanging scale (\$37 for the amberjack) as if we were visiting a fish market.

While the full moon rose over the Pacific, we savored every bite of our fish entrees—seared and sautéed and served with three different sauces, including a savory-sweet pesto with pumpkin seeds, and quinoa and grilled local asparagus. We capped our meal with hot doughnut holes dipped in strawberry compote and lemon curd. With the ocean just below, and the food so utterly fresh, the entire experience—from choosing our fish to the remarkable and romantic atmosphere—was memorable.

And regional Mexican specialties are not the only option in Cabo. Restaurante Romeo & Julieta lends Italian flair to local specialties, with tuna, local shrimp, and of course Caesar salad, invented in Baja generations ago. At Puerto San Lucas, steaks, lamb and chicken supplement local seafood specialties such as tuna and Pacific lobster.

In Mexico lunch is just as important as dinner, so The Office at Medano Beach is always bustling—expect a modest wait for one of the tables festooned in bright green, yellow and pink tablecloths. With toes in the sand, seated next to a woman making fresh tortillas on the griddle, and under plenty of umbrella shade, we feasted on fish tacos, jumbo shrimp with garlic and homemade flan.

Looks like more hiking, kayaking and running around Cabo are in order—and we’ll happily embrace it all. ▲

Kara Williams is based in Colorado.

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