

Hacienda oasis **CASA DEL MAR** combines traditional Mexican ambiance with modern luxury, making it a first-rate selection.

EXCELLENT CHOICE

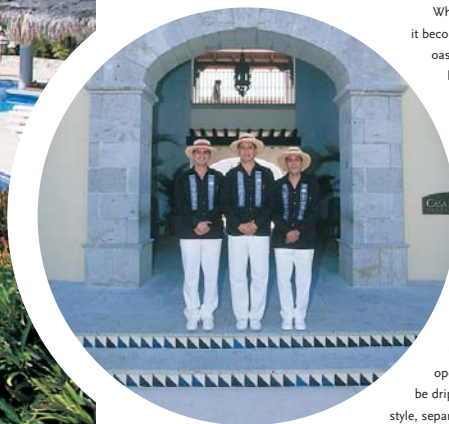
story by *Janna Cavella* • photos by *Erin Cutler*



I WAS LUNCHING WITH MY LADY-FRIENDS at a sidewalk café in Beverly Hills when I observed that our waiter had the same reply after each order was placed. Alexandra ordered steamed mussels – "Excellent choice!" Noelle ordered lobster bisque – "Excellent choice!" Kristin ordered tuna tartar – "Excellent choice!" As a travel writer and part-time socialite living in Los Angeles, I itched for a quick get-a-way that would renew my creativity and make for a fabulous brag worthy of an "Excellent choice!" at my next luncheon.

I longed to unwind in the quiet absence of a vibrating Blackberry, bustling crowds and deafening traffic. I craved sandy white beaches and a plush resort ambiance but didn't fancy an 8-hour flight to Hawaii. Additionally, I fantasized about the romance of seaside dining, the rush of high-end shopping and a pampering full-service spa with options of soft adventure and exhilarating nightlife should the party animal in me seek to venture out.

I decided to take refuge in a nearby haven known as Cabo San Lucas. I 'googled' my preferred destination and found myself clicking www.casadelmarmexico.com. It was here that I un-webbed "Casa Del Mar" Golf Resort and Spa which means, "Home by the Sea" in Spanish. Before I knew it I had booked five days at the resort and was Cabo-bound on a 2 1/2-hour air-jault over the liquid finger known as the Sea of Cortez.



When you're granted entry through the steel gates of Casa Del Mar it becomes obvious that you are entering a sort of secluded beach oasis. As you drive the pathway to the resort, fuchsia-flowered bushes swarming with thirsty butterflies besiege your car and tall palms armed with hungry woodpeckers line the corridor like soldiers. You open your windows and accede to the floral aroma as your car is transformed into a burning potpourri dish on wheels.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by the warm smiles of traditionally clad valet and my eyes fixated on a glorious 19th century style hacienda. There's this nostalgia people experience when entering a beautiful hotel lobby for the first time — a moment that marks the beginning of our vacation escape — a moment that receives us. This familiar quality welcomed me as I entered Casa Del Mar and yet there was something more. I sauntered up the hotel steps into an open-air foyer that was framed by an infinity pool and appeared to be dripping into the ocean beyond. The lobby's structure is palapa-style, separating it from nature only by a roof, columns and marble tiling. This lends a natural, organic quality that instantly soothes and nurtures the spirit, leaving you cleansed of the past and fervent about the future.

The bellman opened the door to my suite and I entered an artfully designed living space with a spectacular terrace view of the Sea of Cortez and her pristine beach. The room was painted

“The SOAP BUBBLES soothed my body
as the CHAMPAGNE calmed my mind”



with marble floors and injected with an en-suite Jacuzzi. I began immediate preparations for a bubble bath and moments later a housekeeper appeared in my doorway with kerosene candle-lamps, a basket of scarlet bougainvillea petals, dark chocolate truffles and a bottle of the bubbly. This was the type of Latin hospitality I soon became accustomed to while relaxing at Casa Del Mar.

The soap bubbles soothed my body and the champagne calmed my mind – seems they were in cahoots and I didn't mind one bit. I'm convinced there was some hypnotic element in the bathwater (or perhaps it was the champagne) as I was soon phoning the spa to schedule a body wrap and facial. And, it must have been part of the greater plan because I was granted an immediate appointment!

I ambled into the spa and sighed with delight when I observed a couple sipping daiquiris in a colossal hot tub. The mood was tranquil – the air still and fragrant. The spa manager Valerie, who closely resembles a Panamanian supermodel, greeted me with enough warmth as to shatter any notion that beautiful women are at times unapproachable. Valerie cheerfully escorted me to the ladies room where my therapist, Claudia, presented me with an embroidered white robe, terrycloth slippers and a locker key. For the next 90 minutes I would be at the therapeutic effects of an Enzymatic Spirulina Sea Mud Wrap and carefree time. I was eager for this particular treatment, as I had been feeling a bit unattractive due to my skin being rough and splotchy from excessive sun exposure during a recent assignment. The treatment began with a relaxing oil



“The MOOD WAS TRANQUIL –
the air STILL AND FRAGRANT”

massage that served as the foundation for a mineral poultice exfoliation. Claudia then painted my body with Spirulina sea mud and sealed me in a warm foil wrap for thirty peaceful minutes. After the treatment I was showering when I noticed that not only was my skin soft and smooth again – but it also glowed like the first tan of summer.



Looking shiny and new, I strolled over to meet my aesthetician, Luz, for a Paraffin Facial that would finish me off. She cleansed my face with toner and patted my face with lavender, ylang ylang and eucalyptus infused lotion. Cotton gauze and paraffin wax were then layered on top of my face to create a mask. The mask hardened in about twenty minutes taking the shape of my face. There's something about the combination of essential oil, paraffin wax and cotton gauze that leaves one feeling restored, not to mention the resulting benefits of nutrient-rich skin hydration and blood circulation.

On the way back to my room I bumped into the couple from the spa hot tub and I accompanied them to the pool bar for a cocktail. We compared the various treatments we received whilst basking in the Baja sunshine and sipping umbrella cocktails. The couple happened to be from Los Angeles and we knew many of the same people, which made for satisfying conversation. Kevin and Bergit returned to their suite as the sun began to set and I closed my day with the final chapter of a delicious romance novel. Casa Del Mar was exactly what I needed and as I checked out on the final day I concluded that I had made a most "Excellent Choice!"



Casa Del Mar Resort & Spa

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SPA SERVICES

» Sueños del Mar

Sueños del Mar boasts a fabulous full-service spa and beauty salon that offers Massage Therapy, Reflexology, Skin Therapy, Body Wraps, Paraffin Wraps, Waxing and Manicure & Pedicure Treatments. Sueños del Mar also provides health and fitness facilities and guests are encouraged to take advantage of the complimentary jacuzzi, sauna, steam room and fully equipped fitness center with Cybex equipment.

TOP RESTAURANTS

» El Tapanco

The wonderfully romantic El Tapanco restaurant offers both an air-conditioned dining room and beautiful terrace dining overlooking the pool. Breakfast guests can enjoy a continental buffet or order a la carte American or Mexican specialties. Dinner, featuring Mexican and International cuisine, is served by candlelight, of course.

» The Beach Club

The charming Beach Club is for the exclusive use of adult guests. It is a beachfront restaurant shaded by palm trees and a bamboo roof, with a tiled kidney-shaped pool and jacuzzi. Mexican snacks and light seafood dishes are served from 11:30 AM to 4:30 PM.

» Pool Bar

The Pool Bar offers Mexican dishes, pasta and seafood served under the poolside palapa. There are two Swim-up Bars, one at The Beach Club and one at the main pool, serving refreshing drinks throughout the day.

» El Maguey Bar

El Maguey is named after the Maguey cactus plant (also named Agave) used to make tequila. Unwind in the comfortable lounge with an open terrace. El Maguey offers a variety of cocktails, as well as choice domestic and international wines.

GOLF

» Cabo Real and El Dorado

Conde Nast Traveler named Casa del Mar one of the "Top 10 Mexican Golf Resorts" for 2003. Guests receive preferred tee times as well as 25% discount on green fees with complimentary round trip transportation to El Dorado and Cabo Real, two championship golf courses that are among the best in Mexico. The Golfer Oasis package combines rounds of golf at both El Dorado and Cabo Real with a sports deep tissue massage, specially priced for one or two golfers (based on double occupancy).