

Baja in the Backyard

Let Tracy's travels inspire you at home

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

Traveling is fantastic, and sometimes it's fun to stay home and recreate memorable experiences from those travels. Music, food, and decorations are terrific mediums for reinventing those moments. Over the last year, I have been to three incredible and unique places in Baja California Sur: Posada de las Flores in Loreto; Esperanza, Auberge Resorts Collection; and Garza Blanca Resort & Spa Los Cabos. The latter two reside near Cabo San Lucas. Follow me on a journey to relive my trip highlights and then, reflect them in your own backyard!

Esperanza, Auberge Resorts Collection

Everything at Esperanza is exceptional, but my favorite moments involved the food. Esperanza is perched above Cabo's Punta Ballena's stunning coastline and boasts one of the most resplendent alfresco dining spots in Baja, California, Cocina Del Mar restaurant. My daughter Brittney accompanied me on this trip. Our dinner table sat on the headland's farthest point above the crashing waves. The night was still, and the soft lights of the restaurant were enough to cast a glow on the white water spraying up the sides of the rocky cliffs below.

We began the evening with a delicious Del-margarita made with lemon, grapefruit 1800 anejo tequila, Grand Marnier, and volcanic salt. The staff brought sourdough bread cooked in a cup that resembled a popover, and a tasty, sweet eggplant butter accompanied the dish.

Our next course was Torre de Mariscos, an assortment of raw gifts from the sea. The platter included Kumiai oysters, chocolate clams, poached blue shrimp, and other offerings alongside several delicious sauces. Everything was fresh and tasted vaguely of the sea, and the presentation was dramatic (pictured, above).

Time with Chef Palacios

My favorite experience was our private event with the resort's Executive Chef Alexis Palacios. He walked us down to the beach to teach us about the different marine life in the local tide pools. While climbing around, we found crabs, snails, and small fish. Chef Palacios told us that sometimes he finds octopus and larger fish. After poking around for a while, we returned to



the restaurant where we discovered a gorgeous spread of beautifully ripe fruits and vegetables. Chocolate clams, blue shrimp, and fresh tuna were also ready for preparation. The staff handed us aprons, and we stood at stations across from the chef and began our cooking class.

Chef Palacios showed us how to cure raw onion in lemon juice and water. This technique removes some of the onion's acidity and crunch. We added serrano chili to bump up the flavor. We also made a unique and incredibly delicious guacamole with avocado, cucumber with no seeds, lemon juice, chopped tomatillo, olive oil, salt, and pepper. We also made a fruity pico de gallo with the cured onion, serrano chili, especially ripe cherry tomatoes, chunks of fresh mango and pineapple, olive oil, and fresh cilantro. Lastly, we prepared a mignonette for the raw oysters and a black lemon paste for the tuna and shrimp. It was a thrilling learning experience with the chef.

Garza Blanca Resort & Spa Los Cabos

The luxurious Garza Blanca Resort & Spa Los Cabos, located between Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo in Mexico, features an eclectic array of expansive suites and residences, decadent cuisine, numerous activities, eight exclusive swimming pools, special spa indulgences, and a hydrotherapy circuit. The spa, yoga, and tequila



tasting were the moments I treasure the most. Brittney was with me for this trip too.

One morning we attended a yoga class under the resort's signature orange tree. At our afternoon tequila tasting/cooking class we sampled two 100 percent blue agave tequilas,

one blanco and one reposado.

The Spa experience

Spa Imagine at Garza highlights stunning ocean views from the ninth floor. After a few minutes in the sauna, we hit the hydrotherapy circuit, one of the most comprehensive in Los Cabos. Personal chaperones guide clients through timed stays in the vitality pool, cold plunge pool, and high-

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pressure shower. Hydrotherapy is an immersive experience that helps calm the mind and relax muscles, the perfect preparation for a soothing massage.

After we changed into our robes, the technician dried our swimsuits while we settled in the lounge room and looked out over the Sea of Cortez. We both opted for a deep tissue massage. Our attendants gently placed cucumber slices and a cold, wet washcloth over our eyes. Later, we moved to a massage room with two tables. We sat in chairs and put our feet into bowls while they poured warm water over our toes and gave our feet a gentle scrub. After towel drying our feet, they left the room, and we got onto the tables.

The masseuses were very skilled. They knew exactly where to apply pressure and how to pull the stubborn knots out from our sore muscles. After excellent massages, we returned to the lounge to enjoy mint chlorophyll water, chamomile tea with honey, and delicious shortbread cookies and nuts.

includes rugged desert terrain, deep canyons, and the occasional welcoming oasis.

A Day on the Bel Gato

The Bel Gato is a gorgeous catamaran with a professional and personable crew. I stepped on board and wanted for nothing the rest of the day. The staff instinctively knew what each passenger needed or wanted before being asked and quickly learned each guest's cocktail preference profile. They kept the libations coming at a well-balanced pace.

The water in the Sea of Cortez is deep blue with stunning shades of teal. I loved jumping off the side of the catamaran to swim and snorkel. Other guests went for a paddle on the kayak, and everyone took turns on the zodiac.

We saw only one other boat on the water that day, but three different pods of dolphins joined us. Playfully swimming and jumping in front of and alongside the catamaran, these fantastic mammals were a highlight of the day.



Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines. She is in her seventh year as CRR's "Out & About" columnist. She lives in Longview, Wash.



By Tracy Beard

PROVISIONS ALONG THE TRAIL

Bring BAJA to YOUR Backyard!

Recreating specific Baja experiences is easy: play some lively Mexican music, decorate the yard with bright colors and authentic pottery, put together a few fun cold and hot water features, and consider hiring a masseuse or purchasing items to do your own spa day. Whip up one of my tequila cocktails, cook some delicious Mexican cuisine, and, voilà, you are in Baja. Here are a few recipes to get you started.



Put the meat in a large pot, cover with water. Add 1 1/2 tablespoons oregano, 1 1/2 tablespoons bay leaves, and 1 1/2 tablespoons marjoram. Add the whole onion cut in half and half a head of peeled garlic.

Boil for two hours until the meat is almost cooked and soft, add salt to taste, and boil over low heat for another half hour; add more warm water if needed. It's best to have lots of broth.

In another pot, add the pozole corn kernels, cover with the cup of milk, the remaining herbs, half an onion, and a quarter of a head of garlic. Boil until the grains burst. Strain the corn and reserve the water.

Put clean chiles in a pot and cover with water. Add half the onion and the rest of the garlic. Once boiling, lower heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Turn off the heat and soak chiles for 10 more minutes.

Next put the chiles in the blender and add the toasted sesame seeds and the vinegar with a bit of cooking water. Blend until you have a delicate and creamy texture. In another pot, add a little oil and fry this chili sauce; season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

Remove the onion pieces from the meat stock pot. Add the strained corn, and the chili sauce. Boil for 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Serve the broth on a plate with some pieces of meat and corn and accompany with the condiments. Eat the pozole with tostada pieces or corn tortilla chips and sour cream.



Elote (Mexican street corn)

- 4 ears of fresh corn – remove husk and corn silks, rinse with cold water
- 4 Tbl mayonnaise
- 1-2 tsp chili powder (I like chipotle chili powder)
- Salt to taste
- 4 oz. cotija cheese

Wash and pat dry the corn. Place cobs on the grill, frequently turning to char. Place charred corn into glass dish. Brush each cob with mayonnaise. Sprinkle with salt and chili powder. Crumble cotija over all the corn cobs. Cook for three minutes in the microwave and serve.



Green Iguana

- 2 oz. silver tequila
- 1 1/2 oz. Midori
- 1/2 oz. fresh lime juice
- 1/2 oz. Cointreau
- Sugar

Rub two martini glass rims with a lime wedge. Dip the glasses in sugar. Place all remaining ingredients into a cocktail shaker and fill with ice. Shake for 30 seconds. Pour the cocktail evenly into the two glasses and serve.

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