



Los Cabos

A Farm-to-Table Agricultural Oasis

by Irene S. Levine
Photos by Jerome Levine

Farm-fresh Hoja Santa leaves form the foundation for a
pizza-like dish made with local cheese

It is hard to envision large tracts of fertile farmland in Los Cabos, Mexico, an area at the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula, adjacent to craggy shores and sandy beaches of the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Cortez. One may assume the desert terrain is far too dry and dusty to sustain anything but cactus and brush.

The natural landscape is so rough that it is reminiscent of a cowboy movie set. Most of Los Cabos looked like this prior to 1976 when Fonatur, the Mexican agency responsible for sustainable tourism, began to develop the area as a resort destination.

Surprisingly, the mix of sunshine – abundant more than 300 days per year; a growing season, plentiful throughout the lengthy winter; and excellent irrigation systems, compensating for average rainfalls of less than 10 inches per year, create a setting which is agriculturally friendly.

Los Cabos, which is the second most visited resort destination in Mexico, after Cancun, attracts celebrities, “snowbirds,” and business and leisure travelers, as well. Fine dining experiences, although more limited in number, are comparable to those in many major North American cities. The range of culinary options include Baja-style, traditional Mexican, Asian fusion, French, Italian,

seafood, international fare and more.

As food-lovers across the globe are demanding more local, seasonal, sustainable ingredients on restaurant menus, farm-to-table has truly come of age in Los Cabos. Located just minutes from downtown San Jose del Cabo, there are three “off the beaten track,” open-air, farm-based venues serving foods provisioned in the locals’ backyards.

*San Jose del Cabo is one of the two anchoring towns of Los Cabos; the other is Cabo San Lucas. A hotel corridor stretches between them.

Huerto Los Tamarindos

Chef Enrique Silva of Huerta Los Tamarindos might well be considered one of the pioneers of farm-to-table dining in Los Cabos. Trained as an agricultural engineer, he came to Los Cabos almost three decades ago to work in the hospitality industry. Silva’s technical knowledge, coupled with his passion for cooking and farming, enabled him to envision this fallow land as an agri-

cultural oasis. He realized that the alluvial soil is rich in minerals, relatively free of insects, and conducive to organic farming.

About eight years later, he and business partner, Fernando Hernandez, opened Tequila Restaurant. This restaurant has become a mainstay in downtown San Jose del Cabo. Before it became trendy, the partners nurtured relationships with local farmers and fishermen to serve fresh, local fare.

For years, Silva had been eyeing a piece of land once used to raise sugar cane. When the 17-acre property with a brick house dating back to 1868 became available, he purchased it. In 2003, he began to create a restaurant with an outdoor kitchen, cooking school and event space. Then he started cultivating the land to meet stringent standards for organic certification set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Silva named the farm Huerta Los Tamarindos (huerta is a Spanish word used to describe a fertile piece of land).

Before dinner, guests can tour the fields to learn about organic farming while they sip lemongrass iced tea. The menu features

Farmtinis: Wild hibiscus infused cocktails made with ice cold Grey Goose Vodka





Fresh, organic greens at Flora Farm

traditional recipes and cooking techniques that Chef Silva learned in his mother's kitchen, many embellished with an inventive twist. The rustic al fresco tables, which overlook the crops, are set with colorful Mexican pottery ware. Based on what is in season, diners order from a menu on a blackboard outside the kitchen. Sustainable fish like the yellow-tail, used to prepare delicious Fish Veracruz-style, comes from fisherman at a nearby beach called La Playita.

Flora Farm

The setting for Flora Farm is manicured and appealing. It almost feels like a luxury culinary theme park. The ten-acre farm with its sprawling outdoor restaurant is gently tucked beside the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains. It is owned

by Gloria and Patrick Greene of Northern California, who founded the local organic farm market in San Jose del Cabo ten years ago. The ambiance at The Field Kitchen restaurant is a perfect blend of laid-back Baja and sophisticated California.

The architecture, décor and design of the restaurant, as well as the plating of the food, make every moment at Flora Farm seem Instagram-worthy. The organic farm market beside the restaurant could pass for a produce museum. There's also an on-site wine bar; a trendy James Perse Concept Store; an old-fashioned ice cream cart; and a set of curated shops selling arts, crafts and soaps. The layout of the entire site resembles a Mexican pueblito (small village) with the Field Kitchen as its church.

All the cooking ingredients (as well as the fruits, vegetables and herbs used to prepare craft cocktails) are cultivated

on-site; home-baked breads and incredibly delicious pizza comes out of the wood-fired oven. Free-range meats come from the owner's nearby ranch.

The Farm Bar is a lovely place to sip a cocktail, beer from the farm's micro-brewery, or a glass of wine, champagne or fresh garden juice as you wait for a table. Live music adds to the festive atmosphere, which is just as pretty after dark.

Acre

Open since fall 2015, Acre is the newest addition to the Los Cabos farm-to-fork threesome. This 25-acre property is owned and operated by Canadians, Cameron Watt and his business partner, Stuart McPherson. They also own the popular Keefer Bar in Vancouver.

The visually sleek, architecturally-stun-

Chicken liver mousse with tomatillo jam, chicken chicharrón and pickled turnip



ning Acre breaks new ground in Los Cabos. The contemporary structure is hidden in a mango grove surrounded by lush foliage with palm trees and succulents, and five acres of organic crops. After sunset, it is so dark that a valet escorts you with a flashlight from your car in the parking lot to the restaurant's entrance.

The restaurant has a young, urban, Zen-like vibe; ascending the wide steps at the entrance feels akin to entering a temple. The over-sized cocktail bar, busy open-kitchen, and long communal tables encourage friendly conversation. The bar sources small batch wines and spirits from Baja and other parts of Mexico.

Executive chefs, Kevin Luzande and Oscar Torres, have designed an eclectic menu, showcasing global cuisine with a Baja influence that relies upon organic fruits and vegetables from the garden, and local meats and seafood. The tastefully selected furniture, dishware, lighting and accessories are from Baja, the Mexican mainland, and Oaxaca. The owners plan to build twelve tree-houses so guests can relax and rejuvenate in this magical eco-setting. That should be a delightful addition.

If you go

For directions, opening hours and reservations:

[Huerta Los Tamarindos](#)

[Flora Farm](#)

[Acre Baja Restaurant](#)

A few caveats:

The cost of cultivating and serving organic foods is not inexpensive, but worth

the cost.

In the unlikely event that rain is in the forecast, cancel your reservation. All the restaurants are open-air and less than ideal in rainy weather.

If you are driving to one of these farms for the first time, you may want to opt for lunch rather than dinner. Although worth the adventure, they are located on remote, bumpy, unlit dirt roads ridden with gullies. When it rains, the roads become even more difficult to navigate. If you prefer, taxis are available.

House-made ricotta cheese appetizer at Flora Farm



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