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CABO'S CALL ...



The Nicklaus influence

by M. James Ward - photos Courtesy of Los Cabos Tourism Board & John Whittle

Located at the far southern tip of Mexico's Baja California Sur, Cabo San Lucas has been calling visitors to its sun-drenched shores for many years.

Hollywood types, from John Wayne to Bing Crosby, routinely flocked here. Today, it's the likes of Jennifer Aniston, Mary-Kate Olsen and the Kardashians, just to name a few. Close enough to

the States – yet far enough away from prying eyes and probing paparazzi – Cabo's lure has always been its stunning landscape.

Bracketed by the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean within a coastal mountain desert climate, Cabo provides a mesmerising contrast, with nearly 350 days of sunshine.

The most iconic symbol is The Arch at Land's End, where the Sea of Cortez collides with the Pacific Ocean - a must-see landmark when visiting. In the winter season whales migrate via the Pacific and the awesome scene of the annual pilgrimage leaves a lasting memory. World-renowned fishing is also here, for those wishing to land a prized marlin at the end of their fishing reel.

During the go-go period of golf course construction in the 1990's, Cabo's address was among the world's hot spots and international attention accelerated. In 1992, Palmilla opened, the first Jack Nicklaus design in Latin America.

The 18-time Major champion and global reach course designer was able to truly elevate the spotlight with a design that still resonates in a big time fashion today.

The Nicklaus course that got the ball rolling came in May of 1994 at Cabo del Sol. The Ocean Course starts off with nary a clue on what awaits. Like a good book, the qualities emerge slowly and build to a tour de force climax. At the long par-4 5th you tee off high above the fairway, the Sea of Cortez a glistening backdrop. Two par-3's come in succession. Each well-crafted, blending in spectacularly with the coastline and working seamlessly in the overall routing.

The inner half follows the same pattern as the outward nine. You play away from the Sea of Cortez and then head back for the stunning conclusion with such memorably holes as #17 and #18, leaving an indelible mark as you exit the final hole.

The phrase "must play" is often bandied about mindlessly – but it resonates accurately at The Ocean Course. The combination of holes is done superbly and the overall routing touches all parts of the property. While there is housing nearby, it never encroaches to the degree that it becomes obtrusive. Keep in mind, The Ocean is a course that will not tolerate indifferent shots, however it will amply reward those who can properly assess their abilities and execute accordingly.

The Nicklaus portfolio in the Cabo area also includes his effort at El Dorado, a private club abutting the Sea of Cortez. In 2007, Jack created Club Campestre for Questro Golf, located off the



toll road from the airport. The course accentuates playability but does have a few greens that can be severe in spots - most notably the vexing short par-4 5th. There is also his 9-hole effort at Puerto Los Cabos which opened in '08, several miles removed from the main roadway and located at the base of the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains - the gateway between San Jose del Cabo and the refreshing atmosphere of Los Cabos' rugged and unspoiled East Cape coastline. There are plans for both nine-hole layouts - the other is the handiwork of Greg Norman - to be concluded in the near future.

The most recent addition by Nicklaus came in November 2014 when Quivira opened. Located just minutes from the core of Cabo, Quivira is located on the Pacific Ocean side since most courses in the Cabo area are located on the far less windier Sea of Cortez side. There are times at Quivira when no less than a 5-6 club wind is involved.

Situated on 1,850 acres, the Quivira Golf Club is a sprawling design that takes players on an adventurous journey through some of the most

scenic vistas in golf. Players will need to deal with various cart rides between holes - the most notable is a mile in length between the 4th and 5th holes - so the overall rhythm of the round can be interrupted at times.

Among the more photographed holes are the short par-4 5th, which hugs the coastline like paint on a wall. The slightest mishap can mean a quick donation of not just one golf ball, but possible several. Keep in mind, the hole is just over 300 yards! At the par-3 6th you face a downhill approach to another green that slides perilously close to the coastline on the left.

Quivira really shines on the stretch of holes from #7 through #13. The land is especially rolling and the holes work well, calling upon top tier shot-making. The uphill par-4 8th is one of Jack's finest holes, blending power, positioning and accuracy with the approach and putts faced. Be sure to enjoy the refreshment area just to the right of the green.

The combination of holes at the par-5 12th and par-3 13th is especially well done. At the former you face a downhill dog-leg right that begs



Left and above: The spectacular coastline and landscape provide a challenge to golfers of all abilities.

Below: The Quivira steakhouse.

you to go for the big tee shot. Just be sure to marry execution with ambition. The 13th is a delicate short iron - at times much more club will be needed - to a devilish small green that hugs close to the coastline.

The finishing stretch of holes at Quivira provide for a troika of long par-4 holes, each designed differently but all requiring solid play. The closing hole is particularly noteworthy as the green is positioned in front of the Pacific for a powerful conclusion to the round.

More golf is planned for the area and there is

speculation Nicklaus will be leading the way with the second 18 being discussed for Quivira. Unlike so many other destination locations that added far more golf than the market could bear, the golf product has been kept at a stable balancing act.

The Nicklaus influence clearly has made its mark in the Cabo area - one can only wonder what lies ahead for this most sought after destination.



GRADE "A" ARCHITECTURE

Architect: Jack Nicklaus
Quivira Golf Club
Cabo San Lucas,
BCS, Mexico
8th Hole / 399 Yards / Par-4

by M. James Ward



Above: The 'Oasis'.

The reputation of Jack Nicklaus as course designer is clearly stated several times over when coming to the immediate Cabo San Lucas area in Mexico - located at the far southernmost point in Baha California Sur. Over a span of nearly 25 years the Golden Bear has elevated an area best known for Hollywood stars escaping the glare of the paparazzi along with its world class fishing and whale watching into a renown golf destination.

The most recent Nicklaus effort comes with Quivira - located just minutes from the core downtown area of Cabo San Lucas.

The par-72 layout provides for a rather curious routing. The first four holes are contained within a loop before one takes nearly a mile cart ride to reach the top of a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean and featuring two holes hugging the coastline. The short par-4 5th and par-3 6th holes have likely been seen by many golfers given the club's increasing visibility but the real genius of Nicklaus as a designer comes with his stellar effort at the par-4 8th.

The 8th does not abut the Pacific Ocean - it is positioned high above it. When you arrive at the tee you see a hole that goes slightly downhill to an immense landing area. What is often not fully appreciated the first time around is how Nicklaus narrows the landing area at roughly 265 yards from the championship tees. Golfers strong enough to reach this "choke point" need to be full aware that a pulled drive can reach the high grass on the left side.

Even if the rough area is not reached - the approach angle from that side becomes much more daunting. The green set high above the fairway has a frontal bunker partially blocking a portion of the putting surface. Being comfortable about one's club selection is an absolute necessity. Anything hit half-heartedly will not bounce forward as a false front will suck balls back towards the fairway.

The prevailing winter wind is usually into the player's faces. But, even when the 8th plays downwind the task to properly place one's tee shot becomes even more challenging as the choke point previously mentioned becomes more of an obstacle to avoid.

The putting surface is also well prepared - consisting of a number of vexing contours and pitched from back-to-front. Successfully avoiding a quick three-putt means being keenly aware of the varied twists and turns presented.

When standing on the 8th green the view of the property is simply magnificent. You look back at where the hole started and the imagery is indelibly imprinted in your mind. Off to the right of the green is the largest of the four comfort stations providing food and drink - a true oasis.

The Nicklaus team wonderfully blended the natural character of the land - giving elasticity to all handicap types - but never permitting the haplessly executed shot to remotely sniff a reward.