SPECIAL
TERI HATCHER’S
DESPERATE SECRET
BY LESLIE BENNETTS p. 185

“THIS IS SOMETHING I’VE
TRIED TO HIDE MY WHOLE LIFE.
I haven’t tried to kill myself, but I’ve certainly thought about it.”

ALSO!
DIRTY LOBBYIST
JACK ABRAMOFF TALKS
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THE HONEYMOON-CRUISE MYSTERY
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PLUS!
MICHAEL WOLFF ON
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LAURA BUSH,
AND DOMINICK DUNNE’S
DIARY

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DOWN MEXICO WAY
(1) "El Arco". (2) Boho chic at Hotel California. (3) Lounging at Las Ventanas. (4) Easy living at the Hotel California. (5) Palmilla Chapel. (6) All rooms at Palmilla have a sea view. (7) Palms and ferns add a lush touch at Palmilla.
BAJA IS A NEW RIVIERA: FIFTY PER CENT OF THE GUESTS AT THE SWISH RESORT OF LAS VENTANAS AL PARAISO ARRIVE BY PRIVATE JET FROM NEW YORK AND LOS ANGELES.

are moving in. Organic farms? The markets at Todos Santos and Mirefiores are fabulous. And then there’s Esperanza – Auberge Resorts’ seaside sister to Auberge du Soleil in Napa Valley: arty, relaxed, very linen. Alan Fuerstman, the big hotel-industry noise, with his Montage Hotel & Resort at Laguna Beach, is thinking of coming on the only beach at Baja where you can actually swim (Baja’s big disadvantage, which no one tells you, is that the sea is mostly unswimmable, except by whales).

So in Baja you can do resort life, but you can also do local life – that funny old idea of being in a foreign place. The restaurants are joyously cool; you eat seafood at La Panga Antigua, pastries at the French Riviera Bakery, drink chilled Monte Xanic – better than most New World wines – and wake in the morning to see a pelican fly-past, skimming over the sea.

THE BEST OF BAJA

**BEST WAY TO GO** UK reservations. Elegant Resorts (Call 01244 897222, or go to elegantresorts.co.uk.)

**BEST PLACES TO STAY** With five staff per guest and a sheet menu – “Would madam like 100-per-cent Egyptian spun-cotton, Jacquard sateen or pure linen?” - One&Only Palmilla is $110 million-worth of grand glam. All rooms and suites face the sea – you can look out but no one looks in, which is why it’s such a big hit with the rich and famous (palmillaresort.com). UK reservations: Elegant Resorts (Call 01244 897222, or go to elegantresorts.co.uk.) Las Ventanas al Paraiso is über-chic, all jewel-coloured Mexican fabrics and lovely white-washed rooms – five with plunge pools on the balconies (lasventanas.com). UK reservations: Seasons in Style (Call 01244 202000, or go to seasonsinstyle.co.uk.) Casa Natalia is an adorable boutique hotel enthusiastically owned and run by Nathalie Tenoux. Each of the 16 rooms is different, wacky, and the beating heart of the hotel is the courtyard, with 39 palm trees, waterfalls, a bar and restaurant (Nathalie’s husband Loic is chef). (For reservations, call 00 52 624 142 5100, or go to casanatalia.com.) Overlooking beach, cliffs, waves, sunset, Esperanza is not only sheer, full-on drama, it’s fun and laid-back. The bedrooms and balconies are slightly small, but hey, you’re there to be cool (esperanzaresort.com). UK reservations: Carrier (Call 0161 491 7600, or go to carrier.co.uk.)

**BEST CAFES AND BARS** At Todos Santos, have lunch at Café Santa Fe. For drinks and cigars, go to the bar at the Hotel California (hotelcaliforniaabaja.com).

**BEST RESTAURANTS** In San José del Cabo, Morgan’s offers everything from tapas to tortillas in a great atmosphere. (For reservations, call 00 52 624 142 3625.) La Panga Antigua serves fish and modern Mexican in a charming colonial courtyard. (For reservations, call 00 52 624 142 4041.) Stroll to the French Riviera Restaurant & Bakery for Mediterranean and Mexican – and divine pastries. (For reservations, call 00 52 624 142 3356.)

**BEST READS** Moon Handbooks Baja by Joe Cummings (Avalon Travel) for an up-to-date guide with useful contacts, maps and day-trip suggestions. The Log from the Sea of Cortez by John Steinbeck (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics) is the author’s compelling study of the lives of marine invertebrates, gleaned from his trip along the Californian coast with biologist Ed Ricketts.

**BEST INSIDER INFO** Do take a trip down to the Sea of Cortez, where you can go whale-watching, anytime between December and April. Don’t wear sandals in the desert – if a cactus doesn’t get you, the rattlesnakes will.