

Ah, Capella

Capella Pedregal heats up the luxury hotel scene in Cabo San Lucas

The Pacific Ocean off Cabo San Lucas is too rough for swimming, but Capella makes up for it with private infinity pools in each room, three public pools (one with a swim-up bar, shown here) and stunning views.

Photos courtesy of Capella Hotels and Resorts

By Tiffany Figueiredo

Despite Chicken Little-style news reports about H1N1, violent drug wars and Hurricane Jimena, Mexico's Baja California peninsula is still standing, and its beaches remain one of the warmest places, both in hospitality and climate, for chilly Texans to go come winter. Los Cabos, with its year-round sunshine, pale desert terrain and stunning jagged cliffs all backed by the blue, blue Sea of Cortez and Pacific Ocean, is particularly inviting. And while the old-guard luxury resorts such as Esperanza, Las Ventanas and One&Only Palmilla get all the attention, we think the brand-new Capella Pedregal is poised to steal the limelight.

The Setting

In July, Capella Hotels and Resorts, which has outposts in Austria, Germany, Ixtapa, Telluride and Singapore, quietly opened Capella Pedregal on the southernmost tip of the peninsula in Cabo San Lucas. This relatively new hotel group is helmed by former Ritz-Carlton president Horst Schulze, who managed to keep all of the Ritz-Carlton's attention to detail and service without any of the stodginess that can go along with it. The resort is hidden from the village proper by a mountain. Chihuahuan miners spent three years hand-blasting a tunnel the length of three football fields through the mountain to reach the prime beachfront spot on which the resort sits. Though it takes only minutes to walk from Cabo and its marina to the resort, passing



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through the tunnel with its rock walls, heavy chandeliers and cobblestone pavement gives one the sense of being in a faraway place. The tunnel gives way to a beautiful sun-drenched open-air lobby minimally decorated so as not to take away from the ocean view. Guests are greeted by smiling staffers who offer cold drinks, cooling towels and an easy check-in. Each of the 66 rooms is assigned a personal assistant to handle all requests, be it unpacking suitcases, making dinner reservations or arranging fishing, snorkeling, sailing or golf excursions. Everyone smiles, everyone remembers your name and everyone is well-trained in the art of service. Little hiccups (burned-out light bulbs, missing room service items) are taken care of efficiently and immediately.

The Rooms

In addition to the personal assistants, each room, from the most basic ocean-view digs to the presidential villa, has its own patio and infinity-edge plunge pool. Unlike at some other Mexican resorts, these pools are actually cool and clean. Since the ocean is too rough for swimming, the private pools are a nice respite from the resort's three public ones, pretty and inviting though they are. The rooms also have fireplaces and are minimally chic with dark-wood furnishings, comfortable chairs and soothing cream walls and bedding. Pops of pale-green and yellow textiles and local artwork add interest. The bathrooms have deep, old-fashioned tubs and open rainforest showers. Binoculars for sailboat watching, a mini fridge filled with drinks and an espresso machine are nice touches. If the rooms had iPod players (which they may by the time you read this), they would be near perfect. They are, in a word ... sexy.



Lanterns guide guests from the hotel's tunnel entrance to its open-air lobby.



A suite offers chic furnishings and a spot for alfresco dining.

The Food

Executive chef Marco Bustamante oversees the menu at the resort's pool bar, cliffside outdoor grill (still under construction during our visit) and elegant signature restaurant, Don Manuel. The classically French-trained Bustamante, who has worked at the Russian Tea Room, Ritz-Carlton New Orleans and Thomas Keller's Per Se in New York, takes traditional Mexican cuisine up a notch with upscale reinterpretations of nachos and tacos (think lobster and beef tenderloin) by day and cochinita pibil and seafood stew with fresh-caught fish by night. Most of the produce and meats are obtained locally or in nearby California from organic farms, and the service is attentive but unobtrusive. Just off the Don Manuel entrance is Su Cocina, a small, open kitchen where diners are invited to pull up a stool to the communal table, sip tequila, wine or mojitos and watch the chef prepare small plates such as ahi tuna ceviche, black bean cakes with fava beans and cotija cheese, and duck-filled empanadas. In the mornings, a breakfast spread is laid out here; in the afternoons, Mexican cooking classes are held. It's a nice place to escape the sun, have a snack and meet other guests.

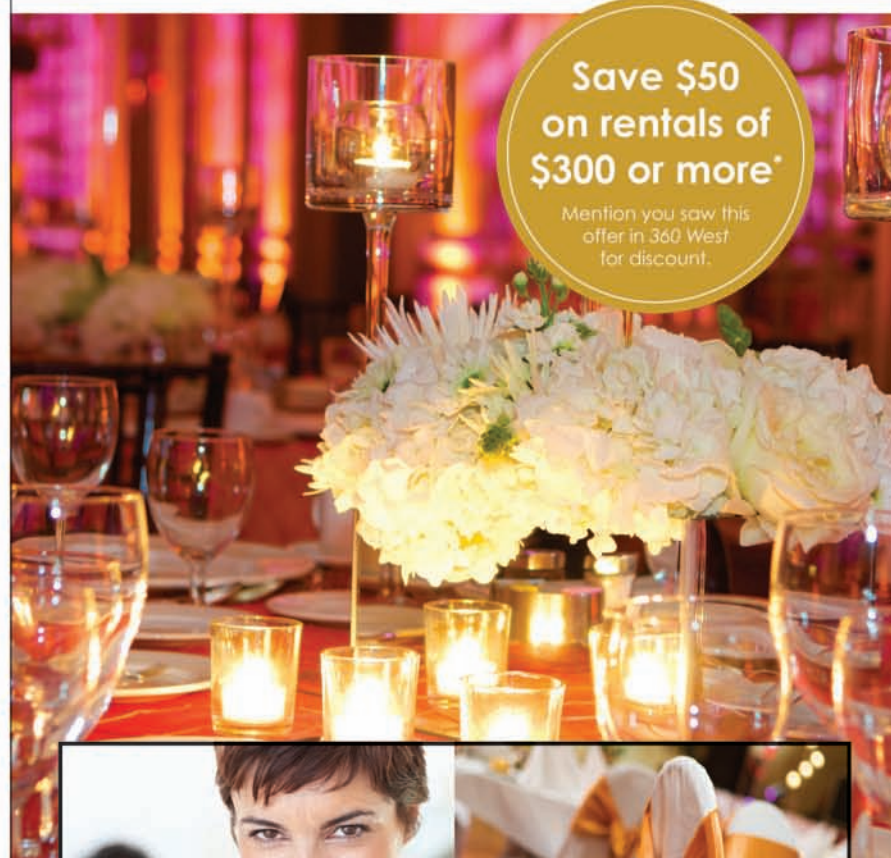
The Spa

Auriga Spa, located in the center of the resort and set off by its own saltwater pool and streaming waterfalls, bases its treatments around the lunar cycle. While that's an interesting concept and moon motifs abound, all you really need to know is that this spa is gorgeous and full of thoughtful touches: a table of small, uplifting treats such as blackberries, nuts and passion fruit; water scented with fresh, organic herbs; clean, fluffy towels everywhere; and private, curtained changing rooms. The staff is courteous, professional and skilled in the art of massage, facials and body work. Don't miss the pre-treatment sauna, steam room and ice grotto, which is the perfect antidote to too much sun and fun. The connecting fitness center is open 24 hours a day and has the latest machines, free weights, an available personal trainer and a high-tech, on-demand video-based instruction program for everything from Pilates to kickboxing. At press time, a gift shop carrying high-end bathing suits, spa wear, local jewelry and art was being built and is scheduled to open this month.

The Details

Capella Pedregal is within walking distance of the town of Cabo San Lucas, which is about 45 minutes from Los Cabos International Airport. During high season (November through May), a basic ocean-view room is \$475 to \$675, although rates are much higher during major holidays. Two- to four-bedroom villas and casitas are available for families and groups. Look for Capella outposts in the Riviera Maya and Ireland this summer. For more information, go to www.capellapedregal.com or www.capellahotels.com.

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