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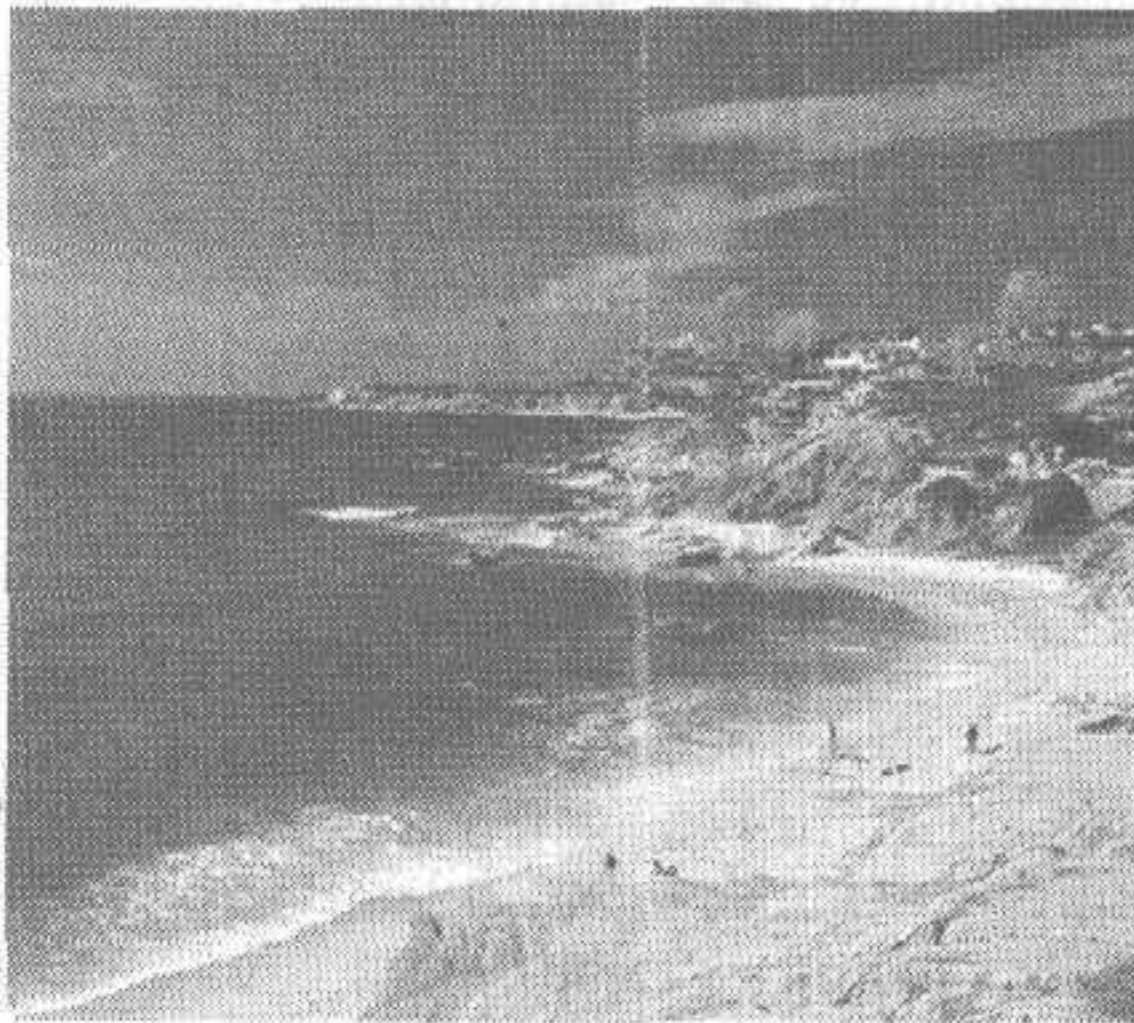
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**Off the Beaten Track**

*San José del Cabo*

Reporter **Stephanie Kang** on where to eat, shop and see whales in and around this Mexican town on the southern tip of Baja California.

■ **Where to get fresh air:** San José del Cabo offers gourmet restaurants, boutique hotels and all the natural beauty of nearby Cabo San Lucas—without the reveling spring-break students. Take an early-morning walk along the city's miles of shimmering beaches. For more adventurous visitors, outfitters like Baja Wild offer trips to nearby Cabo Pulmo, where you can sea kayak and then snorkel to within a whisker's length of a sea-lion colony. Divers can take advantage of Cabo Pulmo's vibrant reef, the northernmost living reef in North America (Baja Wild, Tel. 011-52-624-142-5300, [bajawild.com](http://bajawild.com)). From February to May, migrating whales round the tip of the Baja Peninsula. While many commercial whale-watching trips require a short van ride to Cabo San Lucas, impromptu expeditions can be arranged in



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*San José del Cabo has miles of shimmering beaches.*

San José de Cabo in small skiffs called *pangas* that get closer to the action.

■ **Where to stay:** Skip the cookie-cutter beach resorts and stay in the picturesque center of town. Casa Natalia is a 16-room boutique hotel, run by European émigrés, that boasts a chic courtyard filled with palm trees and fountains. Each room has its own private terrace (Boulevard Mijares N. 4, Tel. 011-52-624-142-5100, [www.casanatalia.com](http://www.casanatalia.com)).

■ **Where to eat:** Casa Natalia's restaurant, Mi Cocina, serves up high-end "Euro-Mexican" cuisine. Just a few doors down on Plaza Mijares, the city's central square, Damiana offers more-traditional Mexican dishes. Sip a margarita in the restaurant's leafy patio while a three-piece mariachi band plays everything from Mexican folk tunes to "La Bamba" (Boulevard Mijares N. 8, Tel. 011-52-624-142-0499, [damiana.com.mx](http://damiana.com.mx)). Some of the best Mexican food can be found at hole-in-the-wall establishments just west of the plaza. At Taquería El Fogón on Avenida Doblado, you can wolf down a plateful of *tacos al pastor*—pork tacos—for around \$3 (Manuel Doblado Ave. s/n Col. Centro., Tel. 011-52-624-132-8485).

■ **Where to shop:** San José de Cabo's central district is filled with small shops selling hand-worked leather and silver along with local gemstones. Los Cabos Amber Gallery (Álvaro Obregón N. 18B, Tel. 011-52-624-105-2332) has an array of original amber jewelry, while the soaring Galeria de Ida Victoria (1128 Vicente Guerrero, Tel. 011-52-624-142-5772) nearby displays an impressive collection of original paintings.