



My Trip: La Ventana BY MICHAEL BEHAR

➔ Ask an agent at the Avis counter in the Los Cabos Airport for driving directions to La Ventana and you'll get a blank stare. La Ventana, a clapboard fishing village in Baja, Mexico, is absent from tourist maps. There's that, and the fact that the conga line from the airport almost always heads south to the mega-resorts of Cabo San Lucas. But La Ventana's budding reputation as a world-class kiteboarding and windsurfing locale — not to mention its epic sport fishing, surfing, scuba diving and mountain biking — has landed this once-sleepy seaside pueblo squarely on the adrenalin-junkie circuit.

The wind gods conspired when they created La Ventana. A three-hour drive north of Cabo, it lies at the edge of the Sonoran Desert —



the third largest in North America — sandwiched between the 6,000-foot granite spires of the Sierra Lagunas and the Gulf of California. The Sonoran is a blast furnace that spawns powerful thermal updrafts. As the hot air rises, cool gulf breezes rush in to fill the void, only to slam headlong into Isla Cerralvo, a precipitous 20-mile-long uninhabited offshore island that funnels the wind directly toward La Ventana. For guaranteed wind, visit between November and April, when winter cold fronts barreling across the lower 48 amplify the thermal affect.

Main Street in La Ventana is hardly more than a sandy footpath. The turnoff from Cabo, which bounces for 40 minutes through a scorched cactus-snarled plateau, remains unpaved. Electricity only arrived five years ago. But flip open a laptop at El Rincón de la Bahía beachfront café — where the perfect midday snack includes an icy Tecate, fresh grilled shrimp and homemade tortilla chips with crème fresh and spicy tuna salsa — and you'll pick up a Wi-Fi signal from one of a half-dozen new resorts now flanking the sapphire-tinged bay.

Joe Cheeks, a 57-year-old retired logger and former Marine from Northern California, opened one of the first properties, Baja Joe's

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(bajajoe.com), with his wife, Angie, in 1997. He intended for it to be a windsurfer's retreat. Then the kiteboarders arrived. In the past two years, fanatics of the world's fastest-growing water sport since surfing have come in droves to La Ventana,

especially beginners. "For new kites, it's the safest place to learn you can find anywhere," says Cheeks. "That's because La Ventana Bay is shaped like a huge catcher's mitt, making it impossible to get blown out to sea."

Baja Joe's seven bungalows (\$80 and up for doubles) are as close to the silky, golden sand as you can get in La Ventana, so there's no schlepping gear — just leave it rigged in Joe's beachside barn and you can practically roll out of bed and onto the water for your morning session. Après kiting, book a hot stone therapy or deep tissue rubdown with Bobbie Gardner,



Kiters enjoy La Ventana's strong, side-on breezes.



of tuna, marlin, sailfish and dorado — talk to Tim Hatler (tim@palapasventana), general manager for Palapas Ventana resort (palapas-ventana.com). Or surf the legendary breaks at Todos Santos, where veteran shaper and owner of Costa Azul Surf Shop (costa-azul.com.mx), Alejandro Olea, has just opened a new store and can set you up with a board and lessons.

Whichever sport tempts you, La Ventana will indulge. But get there soon: It won't be long before the Cabo hoards turn their attention north and descend on this unspoiled Baja gem.

the on-site masseuse. Next door, the upscale Ventana Windsurf Bed and Breakfast (ventana-windsurf.com) rents private cabanas (starting at \$155) and serves gourmet meals (sample the stuffed sea bass and homemade flan). There are free yoga classes on the beach each morning. Plus, it's the only resort with a hot tub.

After a five-minute stroll north of Ventana Windsurf you'll find New Wind Kite School (kiteschool.com). Owners Jim and Corinne Bison came to La Ventana in 1999 and now teach more than 150 students during the five-month winter season.

Beginners get a helmet wired with a two-way radio, enabling coaches to offer pointers from shore as they follow them downwind on ATVs. "You can go for a nine-mile reach and never leave the bay," says Jim Bison. "Then we'll pick you up on the ATV and you can do it again." Bison says most first-timers are up and riding after just three days.

On the rare occasion the wind dies, try a 30-mile single-track mountain bike ride with Hiram Gastelum (katun-tours.com), a local who leads day trips through nearby Copper Canyon. For sport fishing and scuba diving around Cerralvo Island — home to vast schools



An unknown kiter transitions in front of the beach.

PHOTOS: ASHLEY KISSINGER (3); SHAWN ROBBINS (BOTTOM RIGHT)