

CABO LIVING®

Cabo By HORSEBACK

This Hidden Gem is Worth the Trek!

-by Ardith Stephanson | photos by Karen O'Shaughnessy & Francisco Estrada-



Los Cabos is a jewel in the desert to those who have come to love the area and the many well-known activities that go along with its natural beauty.

Signature excursions include world-renowned fishing; an ever-growing number of top-class golf courses; visits to the many Blue Flag beaches; and an exploding culinary scene. There are other options like kiteboarding and surfing, visiting the famous arch and then on to the nightclubs of Cabo San Lucas, and birdwatching at the estuary or strolling the art walk in San Jose del Cabo.

But there's a hidden gem that may not be top of mind for many visitors. While you might have seen photos of horseback riders on the beach, you likely don't know about the top-of-the-line equestrian center where the desert meets the ocean at the tip of Baja California Sur.

For 30 years, Cuadra San Francisco has served clients in the Los Cabos area,

offering all disciplines with horses: polo, jumping, dressage, horse training, horse boarding, and even equine therapy. You can rent a horse and carriage ride, or a group of dancing horses, for special occasions. But the favorite activity, particularly in high season, is trail riding, where you can enjoy Cuadra San Francisco's private trails led by their experienced guides.

"People would never think they would find something like this in Cabo," says Alejandrina Rangel, who manages Cuadra with her husband, Valente F. Barrena.

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I (ABOVE) | Aerial view of the Cuadra San Francisco complex. |

“They may not expect an equestrian center that is properly set up, that is responsible with the animals, that is responsible with security and safety. It’s a different experience than other activities in Cabo.”

Valente F. Barrena and his father, Francisco J. Barrena, opened Cuadra San Francisco 30 years ago. Valente has carried on the horse training and riding tradition passed down by his grandfather and father, and the daughter of Alejandrina and Valente was riding dressage when we visited Cuadra — one translation of which means “stable” in Spanish.

The Barrena family is originally from Mexico City, and also trained horses and participated in horse shows in California.

Upon moving to Los Cabos, they found a home that has been welcomed by tourists and residents alike. With almost 60 horses in their stables, including several that they board for residents, they are busy throughout the year. For the eight months over the winter, in particular, the trail rides are especially popular.

“In high season, we are busy with clients riding for pleasure,” Valente says. “We have beautiful trails of one hour, two hours or longer. And we have horses for everyone — from beginners to experienced riders, and even for children. We have always been very welcoming with tourists. We really like to be here in Cabo. We really do ride horses all day long.”

Valente is a horse trainer, and together with Alejandrina, they manage this busy operation. They do trail rides in the mornings and again in the afternoons, into sunset.

“We always recommend the desert area,” Valente says. “We do have beach trails, but often there are too many people. We like it inland better. Inland is more wild, and we have a beautiful view on our trails.”

“When visitors come to Cabo, not too many people have the opportunity to be outside in the desert area. They always enjoy their time in this area.”

In fact, the trails are all private, and so are the rides. Cuadra San Francisco’s trail rides can accommodate groups up to 15, but those groups are never mixed. You can go alone, with your family, or with your

friends, and you won’t be combined with anyone else.

As a result, some famous clients have taken advantage of this privacy and tranquility.

“We get many artists and famous people who feel comfortable here,” Alejandrina says. “Nobody will bother them or ask for autographs. It’s exclusive, but people feel really welcomed by us.”

Everyone is welcome at Cuadra San Francisco, situated in the Cabo Real area, at Kilometer 19 on the corridor between San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas. It’s a short drive off the highway but a long way

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(BELOW) | Stables at Cuadra San Francisco. Trail riding through the countryside.





(ABOVE AND BELOW) | *Juanito, the right hand man of Valente, has worked with the family for almost two decades. Beach fun. Trail ride.*

from the hustle and bustle of the growing tourist scene. There's no sign of heavy traffic, crowds, or music, making it a different experience than some other excursions in Los Cabos.

Those who know horses may know of Cuadra San Francisco, but it's not the most talked-about Los Cabos adventure available. That's a good thing.

"We just had a client describe us as a well-kept secret," Alejandrina says. "We don't want to be massive. We like it quiet. We have grown a lot in the last five or six years, but we do try to keep it small."

A short distance on a dirt road and you'll find the stables, riding corrals, and a sitting

area to watch the corral. You'll also find the family's dogs, some roosters, and even a turkey. It's a delight to all the senses. Just walking into the facility, you also get the feeling of a real family atmosphere.

The office area is full of saddles, sombreros, leather riding gear, and walls of photographs. The family has kept their own history intact, and honored the past with their love of equestrian pursuits in Mexico.

"When you go back in history, everything was on horseback," Valente says. "In this generation, that's getting lost. Horses have a

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(ABOVE) | TOP RIGHT: Valente Barrena on the beach with his daughters, Regina and Valentina.

very strong place in history in Mexico, and a very strong place in history in the world.”

Stepping into Cuadra San Francisco is a step into serenity, into being with the animals and along with that, being in the moment. It’s a special Los Cabos destination.

“When you are here, it immediately changes your energy,” Alejandrina says. “It balances you. It brings you to earth.

“When you are riding a horse, you need to be present. If not, you will fall. It’s like a meditation. When you’re riding a horse, you must be here - now - in the present. All your senses are aware when you are on a horse, even the smell!”

That feeling is best summed up in the words of Valente’s father, Francisco, for whom the stables are named. As Valente tells it, he used to say:

“The world looks different from the back of a horse.”

In the case of Cuadra San Francisco, that’s a fine view, indeed.

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