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Quivira Might Be Mexico's Pebble Beach, With 18 More Holes Of Great Golf On The Way



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I write on sports business, with a focus on golf & golf destinations. [FULL BIO](#) ▾

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The 5th green at the Jack Nicklaus-designed Quivira in Los Cabos, Mexico. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado never found the mythical city of Quivira and its immense riches when he set off from Mexico in 1539. The golf world has found Coronado simply wasn't looking in the right spot.

On the sunny tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula sits stunning Los Cabos, which is home to an abundance of world-class beaches, resorts, vacation homes and golf courses. Among the best of the bunch are the [Pueblo Bonito Oceanfront Resorts and Spas](#), the community of Quivira and the breathtaking Jack Nicklaus-designed course of the same name. The setting for [Quivira Golf Club](#) is absolutely breathtaking, with Pacific Ocean views from every hole, a handful of which are perched on sheer granite cliffs.



An aerial view of the par-4 fifth hole, a risk-reward dogleg left to a green perched above the Pacific Ocean. (Photo credit: Quivira Golf Club)

Fresh off the plane from the U.S., I'd been on property at The Towers at Pacifica at Pueblo Bonita for only a few hours before overhearing a guest insist the views along the cliffs at Quivira were even better than those at one of golf's true jewels: [Pebble Beach Golf Links](#) on California's Monterey Peninsula. It was a bold claim, perhaps one some might say bordered on heresy in golf circles. If anything, it made me even more anxious to experience an acclaimed course I'd only seen in pictures.

The stunning visuals at Quivira start even before the round, with a clubhouse that sits right on the beach, less than a sand wedge from the Pacific Ocean.



The clubhouse at Quivira sits right on the beach, with a drive through the sand to get to the first tee. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

From there, it's a rollicking ride -- and this course most definitely is not walker friendly -- through desert, dunes and arroyos, and along steep cliffs and endless stretches of empty beach. There's a reason the pace of play at Quivira is set at 5 hours. There's a half-hour allowance for photos and another 30 minutes is tacked on for rest stops at the course's three scenic comfort stations. (because who can say no to fresh burritos, adult beverages and spectacular vistas?)

The mile-long climb from the fourth green to the cliff-top comfort station behind the fifth green is like few you'll find in golf. Once the ascent is complete, you're rewarded with views from a rest stop that sits 275 feet above the beach, with the clubhouse and the resort below. As whales spout and breach in the blue waters that extend to the horizon, it becomes clear that 10 minutes isn't enough time -- even with the cliff-side fifth tee box beckoning for what is the most memorable of the course's signature holes.



The comfort station between the 4th green and 5th tee at Quivira sits about 275 feet above the beach and resort below. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

"Golf is going to be a little different than back home," Antonio Reynante, Quivira's director of golf, explains to me over lunch back at the clubhouse. "Here you're on vacation and people are really enjoying the course. The comfort stations are a perfect excuse to spend a little more time. Even though they are bad for pace of play, in the end it's part of the experience that's quite unique."

Quivira is among six Nicklaus signature courses in the Los Cabos area and just one of the luxurious experiences at Pueblo Bonito, which features the adults-only [Towers at Pacifica](#) next to its bigger family-friendly resort next door. I indulged in a 90-minute golf-centric spa treatment that was perfect for relieving tight muscles after my flight from the East Coast, ate like a king and relaxed by the pools. I watched fellow guests catching fish in the surf and being shown how to prepare it on the beach. I visited the 1,850-acre community's modern and magnificent vacation homes and condominiums.



An overhead view of Pueblo Bonito resort and the Towers at Pacifica. (Photo credit: Pueblo Bonito)

I started one day with yoga in the sand at sunrise, indulged in Huevos rancheros on a quiet deck overlooking the crashing surf, went on an epic whale-watching trip from Cabo San Lucas with [Cabo Adventures](#), played 18 holes at Quivira, took in a few drinks poolside, did a Mescal tasting atop a roof on one of the highest points on property, had a delicious dinner on the beach and capped it all off at a massive fire pit dug into the sand (benches and all). My main focus, though, was the golf -- the 18 great holes that Jack has designed, with 18 more in the planning stages.

After the first four holes weave through the sand and scrub around the clubhouse, Quivira climbs atop the cliffs for a three-hole stretch that guests won't forget. The fifth hole -- a potentially driveable par-4 -- has been a polarizing one in the two years since the course opened to rave reviews (named development of the year by Golf Inc. and best new international course by Golf Magazine). About three-quarters of the green is in view from the tee box and is similarly perched on the granite cliffs, about 275 feet above the ocean. It's an intimidating visual, leaving golfers the option of going for the green or playing a blind tee shot, with a much shorter club, toward an aiming pole to the right.



The fifth green peeks out on the side of the cliff to the left, beckoning players on this risk-reward par-4. The safe play is a short iron toward the fairway on the right. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

I took two tee shots the first time I played No. 5: hitting to the right from the impressively-situated back tee and then *going for it* from the blue tee that's listed as 288 yards on the scorecard, but amounts to about a 250-yard carry with the slight elevation change and a prevailing wind usually at the players' backs. My "safe" tee shot apparently ran through the fairway (which dives violently to the left toward the green) and was never seen again. My risk-reward drive from the blue tee found the front bunker and I made par. After the round, I consulted Reynante about proper strategy for the fifth hole.

"If you can make the ball fly 250 from the blue tees, go for the green," he counseled. "Our local rule is a drop zone that's set up about 120 yards from the green, no matter where your balls lands. If it's lost or unplayable, on cliffs, dunes, in native grass areas, it's a drop with a one-stroke penalty. If you make the green, you're putting for eagle. If you're in the ocean, you are facing a third shot 120 yards from the pin.

"If you make it, you're going to love that hole, trust me," Reynante added. "If you don't have the distance, go for the aiming pole on the right-hand side. But I tell people to have fun and go for it. It's such a special hole."



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The green at Quivira's par-4 fifth hole. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

The second time I played the fifth, the wind was slightly in our faces, but I still opted for the hero shot. I struck one pure and triumphantly found the left side of the green -- 30 feet from eagle and only about 10 feet from a sheer drop to the beach below. After walking away with a tap-in birdie, count me among those who love the unique fifth hole.



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The par-3 sixth hole at Quivira also demands photo opportunities. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

The par-3 sixth also sits along the coastline, backed by rugged bunkers behind, a drop-off and crashing waves to the left, an old lighthouse in the distance and a steep hillside to the right. Our group found said hill is ideal for bouncing balls off of onto the green. The par-4 seventh, just beyond the lighthouse, plays to yet another green with bountiful ocean views.

The confounding Z-shaped par-5 12th or tiny but terrifying par-3 13th surrounded by rocky spires could be signature holes just about anywhere else. At Quivira, they're among a group of photogenic holes that extend the expected pace of play, in welcoming fashion. The endless, empty beach next to the 12th green is not only a great backdrop, it's visually reminiscent of the setting for the dramatic final scene in "Planet of the Apes."



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The green at the 12th hole, a downhill Z-shaped par-5 that weaves its way down to the beach. (Photo credit: Erik Matuszewski)

The routing at Quivira could be changing, however. A new 18-hole course -- also by Nicklaus -- is in the planning stages and construction will likely begin in the next two years. The plan is for one of the courses to be private (possibly on a rotating basis) and only open to property owners in the community. Parts of the existing course would be worked in with the new 18 to create a more cohesive routing.

A new clubhouse will be built, probably behind the current 16th tee box, which sits at the highest elevation on the course -- approximately 350 feet. The current clubhouse, with its prime beachfront location, will become the resort's beach club. About the only problem with this stretch of beach is that its too dangerous for swimming given the strong surf and currents. But seeing whales come up for air less than 100 yards offshore can make up for that. The views from the golf course will too.

Are they as good as Pebble Beach? Come see for yourself.