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## BAJA BEST BETS

### ► WHERE TO STAY ON YOUR NEXT (OR FIRST) BAJA GETAWAY.

LOOKING FOR AN EASY AND fabulous getaway just south of the border? Baja is brimming with options to make you feel right at home.

A 75-minute drive southeast of central San Diego and five minutes across the Mexican border in Tecate, Baja, California, **Rancho La Puerta** is a respite for those who are stressed out, out of shape and/or seeking inspiration. Founded by legendary health activist Deborah Szekely in 1940, it's the world's first "eco resort" and is regularly honored among the top wellness retreats in existence.

The 3,000-acre property—which spans a rolling valley at the base of the Laguna Mountains and its famed, 3,885-foot Mount Kuchumaa peak—is laced with tranquil gardens, meandering pathways, pools, gardens, sculptures, water features and plenty of quiet spots for meditation and reflection. Guests can roam among a 6-acre organic farm where between 60 and 80 different types of produce are growing at any given time, as well as take cooking classes at world-class culinary center La Cocina Que Canta. The grounds also

← Adobe Guadalupe Vineyards & Inn  
in the Valle de Guadalupe in Baja

encompass hiking trails, two full-service spas, a state-of-the-art fitness center, a tennis school and nearly a dozen boutique studios tailored to specific activities—from weight training, cardio, dancing and yoga, to jewelry designing, painting, drawing and sculpting.

Accommodations range from studio cottages to two-bedroom casitas at the Ranch, and only about 150 guests are allowed at any given time. Many opt for the standard one-week program, with three- and four-day packages also available.

If just a quick visit is in the cards for you, the Ranch offers a “Saturday at the Ranch” day-visit experience. The popular program has been retooled to embody a comprehensive wellness experience that includes the following: complimentary round-trip transportation from San Diego; a tour of Rancho La Puerta’s grounds and facilities; a cooking demonstration and interactive tasting at La Cocina Que Canta; your choice of select fitness classes; Mediterranean-style lunch at the Ranch; a nature hike through part of the resort’s

nature preserve; a 50-minute massage at the spa; and free time to explore. Day trips cost \$300 per person and go from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. each Saturday. [rancholapuerta.com](http://rancholapuerta.com)

For a more intimate and private retreat, the brand-new **Finca La Divina** at the southern end of the Valle de Guadalupe is a three-bedroom B&B that feels like a cozy, yet spacious, family home—because it once was one. The latest endeavor by Chef Javier Plascencia, the overhauled property boasts gorgeously appointed, contemporary digs with a familiar rustic charm that channels the region’s quaint (yet growing) wine country. Each sumptuous, uniquely decorated bedroom is accented by vibrant artwork, and all surround a generous great room and common area—complete with a full kitchen, bar and fireplace. Outside, relax in one of several lounging areas featuring shaded porticos and a full grilling station, or take a dip in the pool or hot tub. Your stay also includes a full breakfast; for lunch or dinner, we suggest dining nearby at Plascencia’s country-style kitchen, Finca Altozano—

# Fiddler on the Roof



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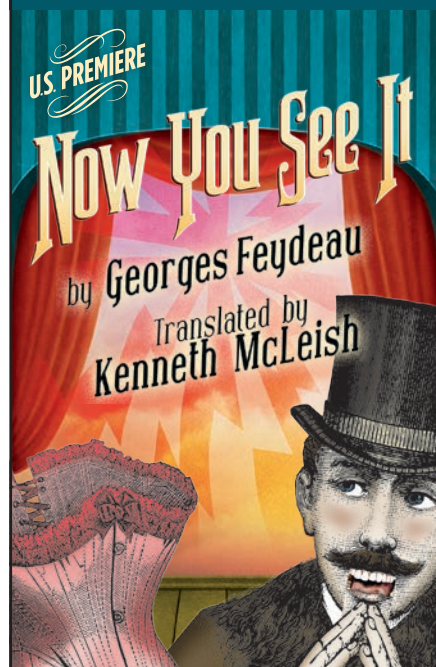
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Emeralds from Jewels  
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known for its sprawling indoor/outdoor seating, stunning Valle views and Baja-Med cuisine highlighted by wood-fire-grilled meats. Eight new villas at Finca La Divina are planned for later this year. [fincaladivina.com](http://fincaladivina.com)

Another charming option in the Valle is **Adobe Guadalupe Vineyards & Inn**, located outside the town of Francisco Zarco. It's one of the first B&Bs in the area, outfitted with six secluded guest rooms. The elegant, hacienda-style inn also houses its winery and cellar room, surrounded by 60 acres of vineyards that produce cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, malbec, syrah, nebbiolo, viognier, tempranillo and grenache wines. The grounds also include a seasonal alfresco restaurant and a romantic dining room with a cozy fireplace; plus a pool, Jacuzzi, meditation garden, serene fountain courtyard, brick archways and stables offering horseback riding. Most come here to relax and enjoy the wines; this means the guest rooms are simple and lack televisions and Wi-Fi (although both are available in the library). Not to worry, eye candy and stimulation abound with the gorgeous Valle views just outside. [adobeguadalupe.com](http://adobeguadalupe.com)

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↑ A guest room at Finca La Divina

Also just outside Francisco Zarco, in the El Provenir area, sits **Hotel Boutique Valle de Guadalupe**—a 21-room, family-run property with exquisitely landscaped grounds, a wine cave for local tastings, large pool, Jacuzzi, organic garden and a stable with horses, goats, sheep and peacocks. There's also the mountain-view Fuego restaurant and bar, which offers covered outdoor seating overlooking the vineyards. On the menu: spicy lamb tacos, tuna tostadas and Brussels sprouts with garlic jelly. An array of activities can be enjoyed on site and nearby, including cycling, billiards and table tennis. The property also offers hot-air balloon rides, helicopter tours and guided-horseback-riding trips. [hoteldelvalledeguadalupe.com](http://hoteldelvalledeguadalupe.com)

Speaking of vineyards, wine aficionados will love the many other wineries located in the Valle de Guadalupe. This northern end of the Baja peninsula is being hailed as “the new Napa,” with more than 50 wineries—and more opening every year. The region, which produces 90 percent of all of the wine that comes from Mexico, is a quiet landscape of boulder-covered hills and green valleys. Its cooler, damper winters and dry, hot summers, combined with porous soil and cooling sea breezes, are ideal for grape growing. Each year for a few weeks in August, the Valle de Guadalupe celebrates the wine harvest festival, or the *Fiestas de la Vendimia*. Wineries and restaurants hold galas, dinners and parties celebrating the harvest and local food and wine. Newer must-visit wineries include Finca La Carrodilla, which makes biodynamic wines; the family-run Vinas de Garza; small producers such as Monte Xanic, known for its sauvignon blanc; and the ultra-mod Paralelo, showcasing 250 acres of barbera, cabernet sauvignon, petite syrah, merlot, sauvignon blanc and zinfandel wines. For more info, visit [bajabound.com](http://bajabound.com) and click on “Baja Wine Country.”

—Sarah Daoust

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