



MAGNETIC IMANTA

By Fred Loewen

Nestled along the mountainous northern coastline of Mexico's Bahia de Banderas, discreetly tucked between Punta de Mita and Sayulita, lies Imanta Resorts' flagship property. True to its namesake ('Imanta' is Spanish for 'magnetic attraction'), this Relais & Chateaux hideaway draws you in and enraptures you. Stunningly situated on a 250-acre private jungle reserve, this family-owned luxury eco-retreat is a collection of 12 individual suites, casas, casonas and a 21st-century version of a Robinson Crusoe-style treehouse each deliberately constructed and thoughtfully appointed with a specific purpose in mind, giving each unit its own unique personality.

Rodrigo Ruiz, Director of Sales, explains that Imanta is much more than meets the eye. It is, instead, the first step towards realizing a greater mission and vision of its owner, Juan Mario Sahagún de la Mora.

LONG BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PROPERTY BEGAN, IT STARTED WITH A VISION. WHAT INSPIRED THE VISION, AND WHAT BROUGHT IT INTO FOCUS?

The dream was to create a special development, very much in balance with nature, respecting all the natural elements and, of course, incorporating our Mexican culture. That vision led to this location - 250 acres of lush jungle, beach and mountains - and to the even more important task of gaining trust among the nearly 400 local land tenants in order to facilitate the progressive purchase of the entire parcel of land and who, in turn, would become key 'partners' in realizing the vision that is Imanta. These are ancestral lands, meaning the grounds, the geography, the natural resources are all to be respected. Imanta intricately weaves these elements into the fabric of this place.



WHEN YOU CONSIDER CURRENT TRENDS IN THE LUXURY HOTEL/ RESORT MARKET, WHY THIS LOCATION AND WHY NOW?

Transforming the land into the infrastructure we have in place today has been a ten-year journey. With inspiration drawn from the Aman properties in Southeast Asia, it became evident that this development, and the manner in which it has been carefully balanced with nature and local cultural influences, would lend itself well to the levels of hospitality and guest experiences befitting today's luxury destinations.



THE BROADER VISION FOR THIS PROPERTY, AND WHICH WE ARE NOW TAKING THE NEXT STEP TOWARDS, INCLUDES A HIGH-END RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT.

This is the right moment in time for Imanta. We are aligned with the market's preference for luxury that is simple; where less is more; where the emphasis is placed on minimalist décor and on the use and respect of local resources and natural materials; where the wildlife that inhabits the land and the water is protected; where generations-old cultural traditions and spiritual rituals are upheld; and where the sustainability of these essentials and of our planet are very much in our consciousness. With deep thought and intention, Imanta has done this – including down to the selections that make up our culinary offerings, drawn from the 100km radius that surrounds us.

WHAT WAS IMPORTANT FROM AN ARCHITECTURAL AND DESIGN PERSPECTIVE, AS YOU WORKED AT INCORPORATING THE UNSPOILED ECOLOGICAL BEAUTY OF A JUNGLE RESERVE AND BALANCING THAT WITH A SOPHISTICATED GUEST EXPERIENCE?

Imanta honors pre-Hispanic architecture through the shapes, the straight cuts, the high buildings. Every unit at Imanta incorporates the features of the ground it has been built on, not only the rocks but also the shapes, which is why each has a different layout but with a similar inner space. A few of our units have bathtubs that were each carved out of five-ton boulders and whose bathrooms were essentially built around where Mother Nature had placed these massive rocks. We've also

positioned, angled and designed our structures to take advantage of natural elements such as the movement of the sun, the varying tones of natural light, and the changing direction of the ocean breezes in order to reduce our carbon footprint while still maximizing comfort and tranquility. The furnishings, finishings and art in the units are all handcrafted by local artisans and are made from natural materials native to these lands. In a similar way, the units have been named after local folklore, wildlife and habitats. So, in a very conscious way, the intent has been to play with nature in the development of Imanta and, in doing so, to not be constricted by standard construction techniques. Perhaps our philosophy is best reflected atop our Observatorio, an homage to the pyramids, with views of the heavens and the four cardinal points and offering a 360-degree panorama of the Pacific Ocean and the lush Sierra de Vallejo jungle. In the end, Imanta has been purposefully designed to balance our environment with the needs of our guests – physically, spiritually, emotionally.





IN WHAT WAYS DOES IMANTA'S PRESENCE HERE CONTRIBUTE TO, PRESERVE AND SUSTAIN, AND PERHAPS EVEN ENHANCE THIS ECOLOGICAL TREASURE?

We preserve it by educating ourselves on what it is that surrounds us – the birds, the animals, the sea life, the trees, the jungle, the mountains, the ocean, the cycles of nature, the Indigenous culture. In educating ourselves we are then able to impart that knowledge of, and respect for, the environment on our guests. Imanta is a living, breathing organism; it



is full of life and it demands care and nurturing and offers the same to our guests in return. In creating Imanta, our challenge has been to imagine what the jungle and the mountain would want... and to use that as our compass.



HOW REFLECTIVE IS THIS FLAGSHIP PROPERTY OF THE BROADER IMANTA RESORTS BRAND EXPERIENCE AND STORY?

The broader vision for this property, and which we are now taking the next step towards, includes a high-end residential development. The first villa has been three years in development and is near completion atop an oceanside cliff. It reflects the type and style of residences that we wish to offer here. So we are at a significant milestone in the evolution of the Imanta brand, and one that

will impact our brand experience and story going forward.

Today, Imanta Resorts – plural – consists of this single flagship property. The intent, of course, is to grow and, to the extent possible, to duplicate what we have created here including its esoteric mysticism. But, for now, our focus is on expanding across our 250 acres and in a way that allows our guests to experience more of what these mountains, beaches, waterfalls, cliffs and ocean have to offer. We know we are doing the right thing.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE IMANTA BRAND AND ITS FUTURE, AND HOW DOES THE ICONIC RELAIS & CHATEAUX BRAND PLAY INTO THAT?

There are merely four Relais & Chateaux affiliations in our country and, of the four, we are the only one that’s on a beach. I think that Relais & Chateaux seeks a place where guests can truly enjoy an inimitable cultural experience and an elevated style and quality of service. I think the essence of, and the story behind, Imanta is precisely what Relais & Chateaux is about. To have the drive to share what we do, and to share those anecdotes and stories with our guests, makes it an enchanting and inviting experience. It will be important, for the future, that we maintain our personality and our essence and that we remain true to ourselves and to our guests as we continue on with this family business. Doing so with the elegance that is synonymous with the Relais & Chateaux level of service is a mountain top we strive for each day. We proudly display the bronze plate with La Fleur de Lys on our wall.



About the author

Fred Loewen is the Chief Operating Officer of an international executive search firm, based in Canada. From his ‘Big Four’ roots in professional services, he has built a 22-year career interviewing senior executives. In this, his first article for ILHA, he brings together his professional passion for leadership & strategy and his personal interest in the luxury hotel sector.