

# GRAND VELAS RIVIERA NAYARIT

By Linda Bauer, author of "Recipes from Historic America"

Photos by Steve Bauer, author of "Chameleon"

Just a two hour plane ride from Houston Intercontinental Airport to Puerto Vallarta on United Airlines transports the traveler into a superb new airport with easy access to gather the luggage and a short ride to Grand Velas Riviera Nayarit Resort. Thus begins a majestic trip to paradise amid the Sierra Madre mountains on one side and nestled on the Bay of Banderas on the other. A truly amazing staff greets guests, beginning an absolutely wonderful luxurious vacation. The amazing open-air reception area fascinates guests with its high thatched roof, glistening floors and impressive koi ponds, reminding one of the very best of Bali or Hawaii.

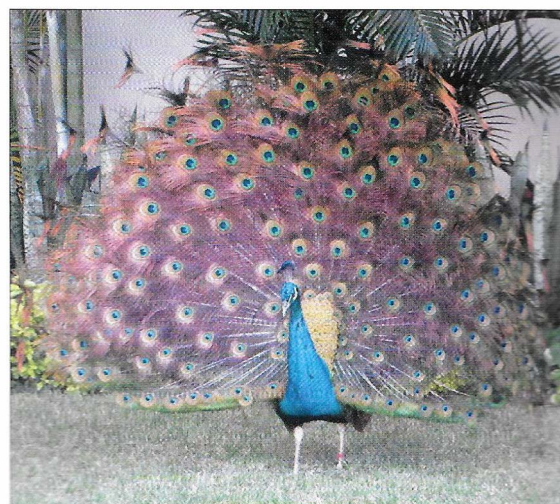
Twenty-five years ago, a dream was born to form a unique resort experience incorporating all-inclusive amenities with Mexican warm hospitality. Five such resorts were created using four fundamental iconic traditions: world-class award winning dining, privileged locations, amazing spas and suites that are totally spacious, with personalized service and amenities. The Vela brothers have made that dream a true reality and have certainly exceeded all my expectations.

Velas Resorts has won many awards. The Grand Velas Riviera Nayarit with 267 suites, each one thousand square feet or more, boasts Mexican art, beautiful wood and fine furnishings as well as conference and wedding venues. A honeymoon at Grand Velas would be carefree and most romantic.

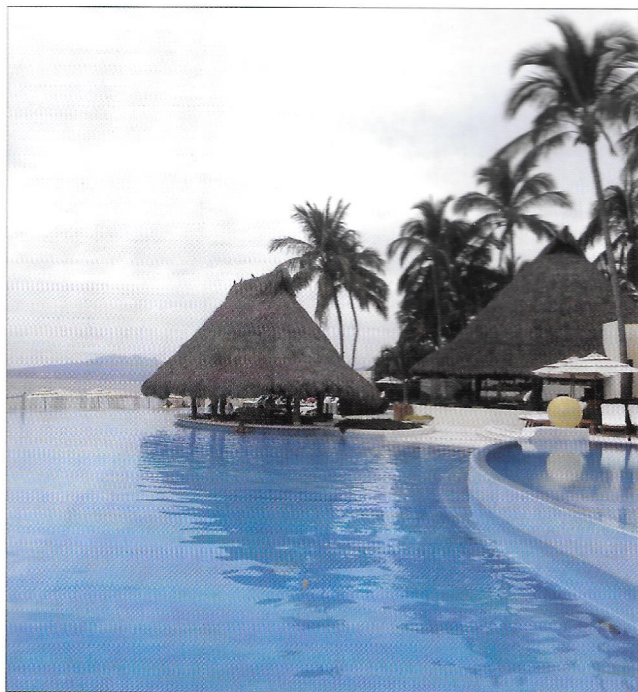
Three restaurants on the property with Four Diamond Awards in an all-inclusive are quite an accomplishment. The creative dining concept allows guests to enjoy every type of cuisine from Mexican, French, Italian or Asian all in lovely settings with astoundingly beautiful atmospheres, service, and selection of menus and libations. Executive Chef Guillaume Morance has a professional, trained style and a very fine personality not often seen in his colleagues. He truly enjoys mingling with guests as well as checking on the service and quality of his extraordinary restaurants.

For three nights, he collaborated with the Michelin Star Executive Chef of L'Atelier in Vegas and winner of Chopped! on the Food Network, and Executive Chef of the Waldorf in Beverly Hills, Steve Benjamin. The menu was created to pay homage to the late "Chef of the Century," Joel Robuchon and France. The veal, beef cheeks and avocado souffle were superb. I hope that this event also becomes an annual tribute to France. Many locals and those staying at other resorts attended, since if you make reservations, even though it is an all-inclusive, one may dine on the premises according to an a la carte plan. I am willing to guess that they will soon become guests of this amazing resort. I understand why so many of the guests I met have been coming for over a decade.

The Grand Velas also offers specialty options for the true gourmet such as an outdoor brunch featuring a fresh catch of the day brought in by the fisherman and cooked for the guests. Choices included mahi







mahi, parrot fish, shrimp or the many stations featuring mouthwatering fresh guacamole, paella, or oysters. Ice cream with tequila, pina colada, and other treats from a local shop served by the lovely owner was a key attraction. The General Manager, Pilar, was thrilled with the response of guests and plans to make this an annual event featuring the music, tastes and delightful setting. The staff also agreed that the brunch was a great success for all who attended.

Sen Lin, the resort's new Asian restaurant, was a treat, with an excellent Pad Thai and green papaya salad demonstrated in a cooking class and served for lunch to happy guests. The resort offers in-suite gourmet dining at any time as well as Azul, the outdoor restaurant with buffets or ala carte menus and poolside dining. A swim up bar is a great way to spend the sunny days.

After dinner, enjoy the huge patio, sip a libation, listen to a musician playing tunes, go to Koi Bar to watch the big screen television and view sports events, or ask the DJ to play your favorite songs. A special treat is offered in the form of a hands-on drink-making class by a wonderful bartender and once again the theme of Mexico is emphasized and enjoyed to the utmost.

The suites are stocked with drinks, artisanal Mezcal, tasty treats and L'Occitane products every day as well as jetted tubs and rain showers. My personal favorite was the double bed lounge on the immense balcony, where one night I watched the circus performance down below with acrobats, jugglers and music beneath the starry sky.

The SE Spa comprises a spacious reception area, fine treatments featuring Mexican healing traditions, lavish treatment areas and rooms, and some of the best staff in the world. I enjoyed the hydrotherapy ritual in the jacuzzi, two temperature lagoon and herbal sauna as well as an eighty minute Grand Cora Massage which was so great that I booked a



foot massage each day and topped that off with the Diamond Ritual Facial and Diamond Manicure and Pedicure. I have been working on a spa book, and visited the best in the world, so I was delighted to see that they use and sell the Natura Bisse, the best line. They also have two story wellness spa suites with a jacuzzi overlooking the bay, and many different wellness options. Their Presidential Suite is an outstanding and exceptional option for those of discernment.

The three tiered infinity pools have won awards, and are heated, as well as huge adult-only jacuzzis near the beach. The baby concierge allows parents to arrive without worrying about dragging along strollers and other necessities as all are provided for them, making for a true family vacation. Kids Club and Teen Clubs offer amazing facilities for every age and those under four are complimentary, so activities are enjoyed by every age. A unique aspect is Guillermo, a hawk, that comes with a great handler once a week to rid the property of nuisance birds, much to the delight of guests.

Each morning, a walk on the beach helped me to enjoy not only working up an appetite for the great cuisine, but to meet others. One day I saw dolphins, whales and the best treat was to see newborn turtles scurrying to the sea. I think that the two resident peacocks are the luckiest birds on earth, and bring much delight to the guests. Grand Velas Riviera Nayarit provides the best of everything for anyone of any age. It does seem to be a guilty pleasure worth repeating.