

upscale in mexico

GRAND VELAS' LUXURY-INCLUSIVE PROPERTIES TARGET UPMARKET CLIENTS

In January, the all-inclusive Grand Velas All Suites & Spa Resort debuted on Mexico's Riviera Maya. The 495 suites range from 1,184 to 3,767 square feet, but that's not all that's grand about this resort, which spans 86 acres. There's a 76,640-square-foot spa with 40 treatment rooms and suites, 91,457 square feet of indoor and outdoor flexible meeting space, 11 food and beverage options, 24-hour in-suite dining, butler/concierge services, waterfront plunge pools, indoor whirlpools, children's programs and a fitness center.

Yet despite the newness of the resort, the luxury-inclusive concept behind it has been in operation since 2002 at sister resort Grand Velas Vallarta, in Nuevo Vallarta.

"Grand Velas Vallarta has been so successful since it opened that the owner, Eduardo Vela, decided to take the same concept to the Riviera Maya, near Playa del Carmen," says Margarita Guitron, director of sales and marketing.

A second, larger resort on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula was a natural next step, given how popular the Vallarta property—a member of Leading Hotels of the World—is among upmarket travelers.

Only six years old, Grand Velas Vallarta completed an expansion in 2006 that included the addition of a 106-suite wing; a French restaurant, Piaf; and Selva del Mar, a poolside snack bar. The resort has 267 suites, configured as one-, two- and three-bedroom units, all of which measure more than 1,000 square feet and offer a private balcony with ocean views. Each is designed in muted tones of chocolate brown or soft beige, with touches of color and teak furniture creating a sense of the tropics.

Such amenities as flat-screen televisions with a DVD/CD player, down pillows and comforters, an MP3 player and high-speed, wireless Internet service make the experience all the more comfortable, whether guests are in a Parlor Suite, the 4,000-square-foot Presidential Suite or any of the six classes in between.

The selection of suite options means that the resort welcomes a variety of travelers from the U.S. According to Guitron, 60 percent of the resort's guests are from the U.S. in high season, which is primarily winter. Guests typically range from their late 30s to their late 50s, and they have substantial household incomes. The resort also has a strong reputation for destination weddings and honeymoons.

The summer months bring mainly families to the resort, and throughout the entire year, Grand Velas Vallarta hosts incentive groups and golfers.

"Our most popular packages are the ones that include golf and spa," says Guitron. "This really helps give



OCEANVIEW SUITES ARE COMMON AT THE GRAND VELAS VALLARTA.

added value to families, where the father will typically go play golf during the day while the kids go to our children's club, which is a supervised activities program, and the mother goes to our spa."

The spa, with its 20 treatment rooms, more than 80 therapies, a hydrotherapy area, a fitness center and a beauty salon, is one of the main attractions. Guests can choose from a menu of 11 Collections, or styles of spa service, such as the Wellness Collection, which boasts such treatments as the Love My Back Massage, or the Huichol Collection, which offers such indigenous treatments as the Prehispanic Massage Tukipa.

The indulgence continues with a multicourse menu of spa cuisine that is as inspired and flavorful as any of the dishes served in the resort's four dining venues, including a buffet-style restaurant. The other three restaurants are not merely providing à la carte options to the all-inclusive guests. Guitron points out that locals, too, enjoy the fine dining at the Mexican restaurant Frida, the Italian-Mediterranean flavors of Lucca and the French fare at Piaf.

"It's not easy to find the quality of cuisine that's served in our restaurants," says Guitron. "Many of our guests who are here on business return with their families or spouses because they want their loved ones to experience the property, too, and one of the main reasons they give for [returning] is the quality and selection of food." ☺

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