

Casa Velas: The Luxury Boutique AI Has Arrived!



In case you haven't noticed, the "All Inclusive" hotel landscape has changed dramatically over the last ten years. With a reputation for catering to people who prefer quantity over quality, the term "all-inclusive" unfortunately evokes images of wilted lettuce, crowded buffet tables, watered-down cocktails, and pools crowded with sun-burned tourists screaming "Bingo!"

Suffice to say, New Jetsetters have never been big fans of the concept. With average room counts anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000, the sheer size of All Inclusive hotels can be intimidating. The corresponding number of

restaurants and bars attempting to cater to every ethnic food group makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve any kind of high quality experience or satisfactory level of service. Recent years have seen All Inclusive's (hereinafter referred to as AI's) raise the bar by catering to the "niche market". Children in tow? The "Family Friendly" AI is there for you. Romance in mind? "Adults Only" have a king size bed and a Jacuzzi tub for you. Even the very scary (to us, anyway) "Clothing Optional" naturalists can find a place to bare their tidbits at an AI. When we heard about the "Luxury Four Diamond All Inclusive", though, we decided to take a second look. Last month we visited Casa Velas, a small, boutique AI property. A member of the Mexican Grand Velas family of Resorts, this little gem is located beside a sexy little golf course in the Marina Vallarta development north of bustling Puerto Vallarta. This is a hotel you can call intimate in comparison with traditional AI's, a refreshing feature in itself. While there are aspects of the 5-star high end features that need to be polished, Casa Velas is well on it's way to finding their own niche in the luxury market.



We were warmly welcomed to Casa Velas by Chief Concierge Denisse Ortiz and General Manager Manuel Oviedo. As smiling staff greet you with a warm "welcome home", they place their hand over their heart, an unexpectedly endearing gesture. A delicious cocktail and cool, scented cloths were brought over to refresh us as we filled in our paperwork on the comfortable lounge in the lobby. We felt ourselves relax. It is said that first impressions are usually correct, and our immediate impression was very good. We were in for a more personal and intimate experience than we would ever have expected from an all-inclusive. We liked that.

With only 80 suites, Casa Velas certainly qualifies as a "Boutique All Inclusive". We were pleased to find many distinguishing features that set it apart from others. Suites range from the spacious "Master Suite" all the way up to a Presidential Suite, some featuring private plunge pools. All suites are decorated with warm, traditional Mexican colours and artwork.



While there is only one restaurant in the main complex, it is a good one. Yes, "quality" over "quantity"! We would rather have one excellent restaurant than six bad restaurants! While guests do have access to other Velas restaurants off-site, "Emiliano" serves a great full breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is a pleasure to sit on the large outdoor patio overlooking the glimmering pool, surrounded by tropical vegetation. If you are lucky, you'll spot one of the resorts resident iguanas enjoying the sunshine amongst the foliage of the huge trees. Moving slowly and methodically, these enormous prehistoric-looking reptiles are fascinating to see and photograph.



Lunch is very enjoyable with a very good selection of surf, turf and vegetarian options. My prawn cocktail was beautifully presented in a martini glass, the huge, meaty prawns delicious. Emiliano, however, really shines at dinner. With a choice of indoor or outdoor seating, this is a wonderful spot to enjoy an excellent dinner. Candles flicker romantically on white tablecloths, and friendly waitstaff create the perfect atmosphere to enjoy either a relaxing casual meal or a night of romance. The included wine list isn't bad either. We found the presentation of the food to be excellent – we almost didn't want to eat our gorgeous desert, it was so beautifully displayed.

Casa Velas isn't on the beach but they've got that covered, with a private off-site beach club. Only a 5 minute drive from the lobby by hotel shuttle (free), it's simple to pop over for an afternoon at the beach. You will also find a second restaurant here; the "Ocean Club" Restaurant. Overlooking a pretty infinity pool and large Jacuzzi, this is the place to enjoy a traditional Mexican white-sand beach view and killer sunsets.



If golf's your game there's more good news. Casa Velas secures preferred tee times for all guests and has a resident Golf Pro on site for all your golf needs. They've got a spa, and of course 24 hour room service, but if we had to sum up what truly made the difference at Casa Velas (and what always makes the difference with the better properties) it is the staff, their connection with their guests and their desire to make your vacation special. Case (or "Casa") in point: during dinner on the patio one evening, the Maître D approached us, as he did every evening, to make sure we were happy and enjoying ourselves. We explained that we were going to be moving on the next day. He seemed genuinely sad to see us leave and asked if he could do anything for us. As we contemplated a response, he proposed a special dinner, complete with lobster and wine, to be set up at a private table just for us. He honestly wanted us to have a special memory to take with us when we left.

The last day went by quickly with Denisse giving us a personal tour of the property. The elegant spa looked very appealing, and our stroll around the beautiful grounds was accompanied by some of the beautiful resident peacocks. We took a look at the property gardens, where herbs and spices are grown for use in the restaurant. With many of today's socially responsible travellers focussing on the slow-food movement and sustainable agriculture, this "garden to table" approach at an all-inclusive is an added bonus that many guests of Casa Velas truly appreciate.

Our stay was too short but we left Casa Velas feeling very special. We look forward to accepting their invitation to return soon.

Source: <http://www.newjetsetters.com/casa-velas-the-luxury-boutique-ai-has-arrived/>