

# entree

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# Pacific Coast Contrast

The new *Imanta* and the legendary *Costa Careyes* bring luxury and relaxation to Mexico's west coast in two singular, unforgettable styles

BY ALISON MILLER

**IMANTA RESORT PUNTA DE MITA** There's a little mystery that comes with the twists and turns leading to Imanta. The unpaved dirt drive through the deeply wooded jungle carefully conceals what lies on the other side. As we cross natural springs, chase the sun darting through the palm tree canopy, and smell the ocean air,



heavy with humidity that fogs my sunglasses, the car rolls to a stop. In the clearing, an open-air lobby and a towering tree strung with lanterns frame a view that's well worth the drive—the expanse of Pacific Ocean meeting the jungle and, connecting the two, a cluster of stone villas rising from the cliffside. This must be what the Spanish mean by *imanta*—a magnetic attraction.

Nestled on 250 acres of rainforest in Punta de Mita on the high-style Riviera Nayarit peninsula just 45 minutes from Puerto Vallarta, the year-old Imanta is breathing fresh life into Mexico's west coast. The intimate resort made up of five casas and two casonas—each featuring floor-to-ceiling



glass doors, sunken tubs, Mexican-stone floors, and Huichol embroidered textiles—inspires a Zen-like feeling of serenity. Private terraces and plunge pools give way to unobstructed views of the half-mile stretch of pristine private beach.

I've arrived during crab mating season, so the scuttle of red and yellow crabs becomes familiar as they head, like I am, to the shore. On the beach, guests stretch across daybed cabanas and, as if by magic, a member of the staff appears with fresh coconut water or Imanta's signature cucumber margarita with a spiced red rim. I tie on a pareo and head for the beachside palapa Catch of the Day for a lunch of locally caught fish and the chef's addictive chunky guacamole.

In the resort's more refined dining room, Tukipa, the chef faithfully emerges from the kitchen with a single question: "What would you like to eat?" I place my palate in his capable hands—spicy chilaquiles with fried eggs at breakfast and a ceviche starter and seafood risotto for dinner. This is the low-key luxury that has come to define the hideaway.

If you were to ask guests their favorite spot, they'd point in the direction of the Observatorio. The rooftop bar and lookout is the perfect spot to drink in the stretch of sea, sky, and mountain, as well as another spicy margarita. The inescapable and irresistible backdrop is confirmation that the only thing wild about Mexico's west is its lush greenery and intense sunsets. As the sun splashes pink and orange across the horizon, I sense that the magnetic grip will one day bring me back to this Pacific paradise.

**COSTA CAREYES** The effortlessly chic foil to Imanta's contemporary cool, this gated community of mostly private residences in Jalisco, Mexico, is a certified camp where the well-heeled unwind.

Founded in the 1960s by financier and artist Gian Franco Brignone, the family-owned destination has welcomed rock stars and movie stars, as well as the Brignone brood. You can set your watch by

**Above: The seven-villa Imanta Resort overlooks a half-mile stretch of pristine private beach. Above left: Chilled hibiscus tea is the preferred refresher at Costa Careyes.**



*“Defined by its Mexico-meets-Mediterranean style, the expansive enclave of Careyes is dotted with sherbet-colored castles, villas, casitas, and bungalows, each with its own character.”*

Gian Franco’s lunchtime at Playa Rosa, a beachside watering hole known for its carpaccio and the hip, bring-your-own-board surf set.

Defined by its Mexico-meets-Mediterranean style, the expansive enclave of Careyes is dotted with sherbet-colored castles, villas, casitas, and bungalows, each with its own character. Stepping out of the car after a scenic 2½-hour drive from Vallarta (as the locals call it), I’m welcomed by the cobblestoned walk and sky-blue hue of the Nido de Amor villa. Maneuvering the impressive staircase is tricky: Safety dictates that I focus on the winding path that leads from the hilltop entrance to the palapa-covered living room to the infinity

pool perched over a bougainvillea-covered mountain, but the ocean view demands my attention too.

The architecture and the undulating acres upon acres of Careyes are best seen by boat tour. Crossing the manicured lawn blanketed with sunbathers on bamboo mats, my driver and I make a running start into the boat. Zipping along the coast, we see private villas, the colorful clutch of casitas, and the resort’s three film-ready castles with such amenities as screening rooms and wraparound infinity pools.

Just as fascinating as the scenery is the community’s carefree attitude—minus the glitz. Frequenters such as Heidi Klum and Courteney Cox (on vacation during my visit) turn heads but don’t cause a stir. Here, more importance is placed on the stylishness of your tunic than on your social status. The scene consists of private parties in the villas, cocktail hour at sunset, and the cultural hub of Careyes: Plaza de Los Caballeros del Sol, a lively square with an outdoor cinema, art gallery, and restaurant.

Despite the differences between Imanta and Costa Careyes, the resorts share a standard of high style and a strong sense of place that’s at once magnetic and effortlessly cool. ✱

*Imanta: 877/370-5427, [www.imantaresorts.com](http://www.imantaresorts.com). Costa Careyes: 011-52-315-3510-320, [www.careyes.com](http://www.careyes.com). To arrange a trip, contact InCircle Access at 888/570-6756.*



**Above, clockwise from left: The cliff-hugging oceanfront Nido de Amor (Love Nest) villa at Costa Careyes. The sunny yellow, six-bedroom Sol de Oriente castle at Costa Careyes. The master suite terrace overlooking the pool at Imanta’s Casona Jaguar.**