

# MONTECRISTO

10th  
Anniversary  
Year

Reflecting on a Decade  
Ten Years of MONTECRISTO

Different Strokes  
Ola Volo

Playful Interaction  
Alex Mustonen of Snarkitecture

Connection to the Land  
Kauai's South Shore

In the Details  
Creating Stefano Ricci Silverware

*A Family Legacy*

**Giovanna Gentile  
Ferragamo**

## Amigos y Familia

### Mahekal Beach Resort

TODAY'S FORECAST at Mahekal Beach Resort calls for the following: a blue sky, a high of 30, and a piña colada cradled in my hand as I lie poolside. There is no more magical place to be than right here.

And this place knows a thing or two about magic. For starters, it's in its name; in the local Mayan language, the word "magical" translates to *mahekal*. Visitors from far and wide come to this oasis, nuzzled between Mexico's Riviera Maya jungle and Playa del Carmen's longest stretch of beach, to sink their toes into the white powdery sand and get lost in the endless lush greenery. But right now, right here, I'll keep sipping my cocktail, waiting for a bowl of guacamole to appear.

Mahekal Beach Resort's story began 50 years ago when a local

family built six oceanside bungalow-style *palapas* (traditional Mexican shelters roofed with dried palm leaves) for visiting backpackers to enjoy in the growing city of Playa del Carmen. But unlike its high-rise, all-inclusive neighbours, Mahekal grew to be one-of-a-kind. With a \$16 million re-imagining completed in March 2016, the property has effortlessly become a laidback yet luxe boutique-style resort.

Curated by Mexican architect Hilda Espino in partnership with Texas-based event designer Todd Fiscus, Mahekal boasts a contemporary-bohemian aesthetic. Its refreshing all-white interior is paired with authentic Missoni-esque fabrics and splashes of turquoises and oranges, blending Mexican traditions with design-forward

accents. As for the place where I lay my head at night? The choice is mine: blue or green. If wanting to fall asleep to the sound of rolling waves, waterfront *palapas* offer sights of the Caribbean Sea and the island of Cozumel. Plus, it's a short walk from the casita to Las Olas, the poolside restaurant serving up handmade quesadillas. But if emerald tropical gardens are more the preferred style, treehouse *palapas* provide the chance to be immersed in nature (not to mention, Revive Spa is close if looking for a bit of extra relaxation).

In Mexico, just like in many other parts of the world, coffee is taken seriously. But at Fuego Restaurant y Cantina, one of Mahekal's five bars and restaurants, a cup of joe is lifted to an entirely different level, no matter the time of day. On the

menu for this evening is Mayan Coffee, a traditional drink featuring *xtabentún*, a Mayan liqueur fermented with honey made from the nectar of *xtabentún* flowers and mixed with rum. A sauceboat is dipped gently into flames and when warm, the liqueur is poured in, immediately exploding into a glowing blaze. Guests, enjoying their farm-to-fork meals consisting of Caribbean lobster and beef fillet from the "Tulum-style" wood-burning oven, can't help but to pull out phones to capture the moment. When coffee is finished, I take a glass of Casa Madero 2016 Shiraz down to the restaurant's sandbox, where I enjoy the rest of my vino (from the continent's oldest winery) underneath twinkling lights strung between palm trees, as acoustic tango music plays in the distance.

Beyond the setting and the food, what helps make this resort special is its staff. "We believe in our local people," says Itze Pérez, Mahekal's social media and marketing manager. The property's hidden gem is a woman by the name of Juliana González Juárez. A master of her craft, she is the resident artist at the Artisan *Palapa*, a colourful hut where guests can paint Mayan-style ceramics to take home. My finished piece is placed in a traditional kiln overnight, meaning post-painting I can head straight to Boli's Bar to cheers my artistic endeavour with a handcrafted grapefruit-mezcal cocktail.

Under the warmth of the sun, with toes in the pool, it's crystal-clear to me why travellers come time and time again to feel the magic of this place. The ceramic I decorated is waiting to be picked up, but perhaps it's this moment that paints the most accurate picture of bliss.

—Monika Markovinic

