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ESCAPE TO REGENERATIVE LUXURY TRAVEL

Xala, a new development in Mexico's Costalegre, takes regeneration to another level



PHOTOS COURTESY OF XALA

Xala, a sustainable luxury development on the coast of Jalisco, Mexico, is surrounded by two internationally protected estuaries. It sits along five miles of coastline, also protected as part of a turtle sanctuary.

by Kelly Bryant

You may see the acronym ESG (environmental, social and governance) thrown around a lot in real estate circles, placing a significant focus on the ecological impact of new developments. There's a delicate balance of good intentions and financial viability surrounding these projects. But for Ricardo Santa Cruz, CEO and one of the founding partners of the Xala Project, the desire to plan and execute sustainable communities goes much further than checking off a few compliance boxes.

The Xala Project truly embodies this commitment. Located along the western coast of Jalisco, a state in Mexico, the highly anticipated community is set to be a stunner. Aside from a hotel component to meet the needs of visitors, Xala will feature four different types of real estate opportunities. These include 75 rancho lots, with six acres of land and 197 linear feet of beachfront, plus 14 cove lots across three acres and 131 linear feet of beachfront, all of which are currently on sale. Additionally, there will be a not-yet-announced branded residence program with Xala's hotel operator. And its recently launched casita residences have already sold out.

However the destination is what Santa Cruz refers to as an "environmentally sensitive area." It's surrounded by two estuaries with international protections and has five miles of protected coastline with a turtle sanctuary. Some might have backed away from developing such fiercely guarded land, but for Santa Cruz, it's become a passion project — though not one without its challenges.

"While master planning the development, we wanted to not only ensure these ecosystems would not be affected, but also take it a step further and improve the environmental quality of the natural resources," he explains. "These resources were deteriorating and under strain due to many years of poor agricultural and farming practices."

For Santa Cruz and his development partners, this meant taking a holistic approach. They needed to assemble many different experts across a variety of fields: land planning, estuary restoration, turtle management and regenerative farming, to name a few. All while creating a low-density project still financially sound for investors. Thanks to a successful track record in both development and hotel management, including the One&Only Mandarin in Riviera Nayarit, Santa Cruz and his team have been able to do just that.

MAINTAINING BIODIVERSITY

Stefanie Brendl, the founder and executive director of Shark Allies, a U.S.-based nonprofit dedicated to protecting sharks and rays, is a partner in the development of Xala. Her two decades of experience with sustainability projects have been integral to the community's biodiversity and reef conservation goals.

Brendl has helped develop a "ridge-to-reef" plan that focuses on the protection and restoration of nature, not just on the property but in the surrounding areas as well. With the first projects now underway, she notes the importance of involving both regional experts and the local community to get a feel for best practices. For the next phase, the community will continue its involvement. "This will require a combination of solutions to bring back water flows and water quality," Brendl says. "For the reefs, we are discussing the establishment of small fish refuges or marine-protected areas that will help with the recovery of biodiversity and eventually improve artisanal fishing."

But her work with Xala doesn't stop at the planning stages. Brendl hopes all of this attention to detail will provide future visitors with a unique opportunity to appreciate marine conservation.

"The estuaries and turtle sanctuary will play an important part in showing people how the land and ocean are interconnected," she says. "We cannot have healthy systems without protecting biodiversity. They will see it and experience it. Through guides, visitors will understand the best that nature has to offer at Xala. Guided bird watching, plus scuba and snorkeling excursions with experts, will be available to give guests a first-hand experience."

Getting up close and personal with nature is expected to be a big draw for travelers, however Santa Cruz makes it clear this is not your typical vacation destination.

"Our unique difference when marketing Xala is that it is not a resort, it is a community leading the way in regenerative development and what's possible for the future," he says. "Our travelers want luxury, but in an organic way."

KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY

Xala really doubled down on social impact with the Xala With Heart Foundation. Its mission is to improve the quality of life in two neighboring communities — José María Morelos and Higuera Blanca — through three pillars: personal growth and sports, education and culture, and economic resilience.

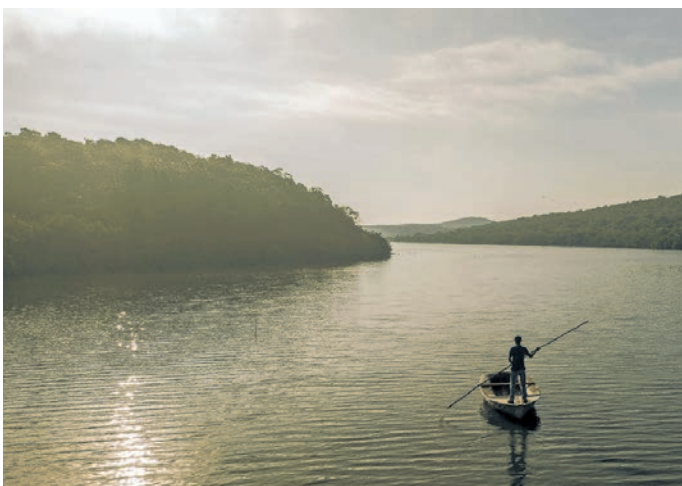
Continued on M7



The turtle sanctuary at Xala has existed for more than 25 years. The development team recently enhanced its facilities, providing new housing for both the staff and the turtles.



Xala is a low-density project, designed to restore and protect the land while creating a unique community welcoming new homebuyers and travelers. Each step of the development process is thoughtful and intentional.



Exploration awaits at Xala, where guests will be invited to immerse themselves in the nature, culture and heart of a truly unique community. This might mean kayaking through an estuary or hiking along 25 miles of trails.



There are 440 acres of organic mangos here, featuring two different varieties of the fruit: Ataulfo and Kent.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF XALA

Xala is committed to regenerative practices that honor the land and community, so experiences here are particularly unique. You won't find a golf course, but rather a preserved and protected landscape.

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The first program, Descúbrete (Discover Yourself), enrolled 130 teenagers, including young men and women from the community, and offers classes to encourage personal growth. Focuses include ambitions, overcoming obstacles and setting aside limiting beliefs. Next month, the foundation will launch its first economic resilience program in partnership with a Mexico-based business university. The intention is to support local entrepreneurs who want to reach luxury industry standards with additional education.

Cecilia Paredes, director of the Xala With Heart Foundation, is excited about what's to come for the foundation, and the difference they can make in the area.

"Our first step is to actively listen to the dreams, needs, pains and talents of the community," Paredes says. "Based on that, we propose programs that include co-participation, creating a sense of joint-responsibility that fosters and strengthens the programs we implement. This is a key part of the social empowerment support we provide, helping communities gradually become creators of their own destinies."

The dichotomy between providing a luxury travel experience and local support is apparent. But between community outreach and a united concern for preserving the area's beauty, the two aren't as far apart as you might think.

"José María Morelos and Higuera Blanca are characterized by their vibrant Jalisco traditions, making them highly appealing destinations," Paredes says. "These communities offer a wide range of distinctive local events, encompassing both religious and cultural celebrations. Furthermore, the recent influx of Xala's long-term and socially conscious luxury industry vision has sparked renewed energy in the community."

This is one of the many reasons it's important to Xala's partners that the project is positioned as a community rather than a resort. He wants visitors to feel immersed in the culture, which might mean touring an organic mango plantation by the locals who run it. Or maybe it's seeing how salt miners mine the organic salt produced in one of the estuaries. But it isn't all work and no play.

"Perhaps they want to play soccer with some of the locals on our soccer field or join them on the skatepark or pump track," Santa Cruz says. "They can kayak in the estuary and learn where the fish hang out from the local fishermen, or simply canoe or paddle board surrounded by migratory birds."

Essentially, everything being put in place is intentional, with the hope to establish fluidity between locals, visitors and new Xala homeowners.

RESTORATION FROM THE GROUND UP

There would be no Xala without the very land it sits on, and agricultural manager Edgar Mendoza and organic farm coordinator Antonio Monjaras have their work cut out for them, recovering and restoring vegetation in areas that have deteriorated over time. With the community's Reforestation Restoration program, the goal is to preserve the connectivity of ecosystems, including jungles, forests, wetlands and dunes.

"This program allows us to reclaim degraded patches of low-lying deciduous forest, while also providing soil protection, climate regulation and water harvesting," Mendoza says.

In theory, these efforts should help regenerate 590 acres, which represents 21% of Xala's total land.

One conservation strategy is keeping the natural habitats in their original place, without moving anything in place of development.

"We prioritize the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems in the region," Monjaras says. "Additionally,

we have adopted land preparation practices that promote soil moisture, ensuring optimal conditions for the endemic mango trees in our plantations and preventing them from drying out."

Everything is done to benefit the soil's flora and fauna, which means they refrain from mechanical tillage in the Xala orchard. Synthetic chemicals are avoided to reduce both water and soil contamination, while also preserving the insect population.

Perhaps most impressive are the 440 acres of organic mango fields, which produce both Ataulfo and Kent varieties. Sure, some of that acreage could have been used for additional bells and whistles to attract visitors, but that's not what this community is about.

"Unlike most of the large Mexican Pacific resorts that build huge golf courses, Xala remained firm to its philosophy, seeking to maintain the practices of the area," Mendoza says, "giving back to the community and the land through regenerative practices and opportunities to connect with nature. So Xala decided to cultivate mango fields, a sustainable practice that uses less water than a golf course and generates jobs in neighboring communities while restoring the land."

As the fully realized vision for Xala gets closer to fruition, Santa Cruz hopes it will become a platform for other international developments. He welcomes the opportunity to share what they have learned about implementing regenerative development while still being profitable.

"We want to share with others what we got right, how to avoid the mistakes we made along the way and help each other to constantly improve," he says. "Xala is a new way of conscious development and we welcome anyone who wants to either come learn from us or share their knowledge and experience with us."



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MARC ANGELES

Listed exclusively by Branden and Rayni Williams at The Beverly Hills Estates, this property enjoys 20 acres of land and sweeping views of Los Angeles.



COURTESY OF SOTHEBY'S ISRAEL

The Jaffa Penthouse, which appropriately sits atop the Jaffa Hotel in Tel Aviv, was just one of the highly sought-after properties discussed at UPFRONTS.

FIRST LOOK AT HOT PROPERTIES

Invitation-only event puts a new spin on marketing luxury listings

by Kelly Bryant

Alexander Ali, CEO and founder of The SOCIETY Group, represents pedigree properties globally as well as a growing number of luxury real estate agents and, as such, is privy to some of the most hotly anticipated listings before they hit the market. In a different time, lavish properties would simply generate their own buzz with traditional real estate marketing tools. But these are no ordinary times. And for his clients, Ali is constantly drumming up innovative new ways to market exclusive enclaves.

Enter UPFRONTS, presented by The SOCIETY Group in partnership with *The Wall Street Journal*. It's a real estate spin on the entertainment industry's long-standing upfronts presentations, designed to announce new television network slates as an enticement for advertisers. They're glossy, high-energy and exciting first looks at new and returning series.

Ali's inaugural take on the concept for real estate, held at The London in West Hollywood, California, on May 8, is a similar play to build excitement around never-before-seen listings and developments. But here the invites are much more limited, with only 100 hand-picked industry professionals in attendance.

"If there's one thing real estate likes to do, it's to pre-buzz projects, now more than ever," Ali says. "You're seeing the rise of labeled living in new developments, and those projects all need to sell 50% before they even break ground. We work with a lot of the developers, agents and moguls behind them."

To create an intimate, for-your-eyes-only environment, no outside photography or video was allowed.

"The people in the room want to know they're seeing it first," Ali says. "That's how properties are sold in this day and age. The people in the know get the best listings. That's what we're creating."

IN THE MOMENT

Luxury listings require a tailored approach to hit just the right buyer. For Tomer Fridman, co-founder and managing principal of TFG International at Compass Beverly Hills, that could mean focusing on international reach or large-scale exposure at broker events. It could also be as simple as a conversation with an architect to truly understand the inspiration behind a home.

Fridman is working with The Rosewood Residences Beverly Hills, a development he says has been years in the making. It's set to be the most exclusive luxury-branded set of residences in Los Angeles, featuring just 17 homes. He chose UPFRONTS to debut exclusive information related to the project.

"These opportunities are irreplaceable," Fridman says. "Having the chance to share exclusive information to the top of our industry and connect with the publicists in our area is a blessing. It's very effective exposure for our listings. We received two substantial leads and appointments from agents who attended UPFRONTS already."

Other UPFRONTS presentations included yet-to-be-completed mega mansions with renderings and videos of what's ahead, as well as international properties, like a \$65 million penthouse in Tel Aviv that was debuted on stage by Fridman and his business partner, Isidora Fridman, who owns Sotheby's Israel.

WORKING SMARTER

"Today's buyer is more global, and living in more cities," Fridman says. "So it's important to connect markets and promote your property in a different way. In this market shortage, it's become very commonplace for many branded residences, listings and even mega mansions to sell before they hit the market. So how do you generate excitement, and who do you need in the room? That's where UPFRONTS comes in."

Pomp and circumstance get attention, but Branden Williams, president and co-founder of The Beverly Hills Estates, understands it has to be accompanied by a dose of reality in this market.

"I've always believed honesty is the best marketing



GETTY IMAGES/THE SOCIETY GROUP

Alexander Ali, CEO and founder of The SOCIETY Group, speaks to the exclusive audience at the company's first-ever UPFRONTS presentation.

tool," Williams says. "Tell people where the market really is, not just what they want to hear. It's important to be realistic with your sellers. If they don't feel your value is the right value, don't waste your time because everybody will be disappointed and the property won't sell."

Despite continued success, he still works the phones, networks and makes staying connected a priority.

"I just get out there and work even harder and smarter," Williams says. "I like to undervalue properties and not over-price anything — and I only take on what I know I can sell."

Recently he listed the home of an award-winning Canadian rapper with an asking price of \$88 million. It sits on over 20 acres in Beverly Hills. Williams is excited to see who the next buyer will be, noting the land alone is worth over \$70 million. Bringing awareness to an estate like this one is key to getting the right buyer through the door.

"Bringing realtors and developers from all around the globe together is my favorite thing, and that's what I took from SOCIETY's UPFRONTS event with *The Wall Street Journal*," Williams says. "Previewing luxury properties is more important now because they're selling off market. That's where real estate is going."

Kelly Bryant is a freelance writer in Los Angeles specializing in real estate and lifestyle topics.

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Rayni Williams, Branden Williams, Jason Somers



Alexander Ali, Isidora Fridman, Tomer Fridman



Paula Nosrati, Ramtin Nosrati



Ricardo Santa Cruz

UPFRONTS & PERSONAL

No phones or videos were allowed when real estate's high society gathered at The London Hotel in West Hollywood for the inaugural **UPFRONTS** presented by *The SOCIETY Group's Alexander Ali* in partnership with *The Wall Street Journal*. Synonymous with the entertainment industry, moguls debuted the most-anticipated projects to the closed room. **Branden and Rayni Williams** opened the show with partner **Jason Somers** teasing their next development, *Stanley 2*. **Morgan Ball, Sally Forster Jones** and **Tomer Fridman** premiered the first offerings ever from *The Rosewood Residences Beverly Hills*. Developer **Ardie Tavangarian** dazzled audiences by unveiling *Villa Siena*. **Jay Luchs** gave a first look at Malibu's Cross Creek Ranch. Developer **Ramtin Nosrati** unveiled his \$36M Bel Air mansion, *Allure*. Global projects included *The Jaffa Penthouse* in Tel Aviv for \$65M from Sotheby's Israel owner, **Isidora Fridman**. While Mexico was represented by **Ricardo Santo Cruz**, who brought audience members to tears speaking on his eco-development, *Xala*. Sponsors included Exquisite Surfaces and REAL Messenger, with stage design by ASH Staging.



Morgan Ball, Sally Forster Jones, Tomer Fridman



Raven Kauffman



Rayni Williams



Jay Luchs, Alexander Ali



SOCIETY's Augusto Chabaud, Alexander Ali, Alexis Lopez, Victoria Doyle, Erin Norman



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