

Vivo Resorts, an oasis for Ontarians in Mexico

When skiing down a mountainside at 151 km/h, there was only one thing on Cary Mullen's mind: survival.

Speeds like that can lead to two things: death or a World Cup championship. Despite some near-death crashes, those crazy speeds did lead to two World Cup championships for Mullen.



Boat tours of the Laguna de Manialtepec. (PAT BRENNAN /FOR THE TORONTO STAR)

But it was when gliding up mountainsides on chair lifts around the world that Mullen's mind entertained multiple thoughts. As a land developer since age 19, he was always looking out for entrepreneurial opportunities.

Mullen explored mountains all over the world for 10 years as the leader of Canada's National Ski Team. During that time he won two World Cup championships, competed in two Winter Olympic games and set a downhill speed record that still stands on Austria's notorious Kitzbühel ski run.

He was constantly looking for development opportunities, but there was one ingredient missing from all those mountains around the world: a beach. As a land developer, Mullen feels a beach is vital if you're going to have a tranquil, attractive, valuable recreation development.

Mullen has built 130 condo suites and 10 private homes at Vivo Resorts and eventually he'll have built 114 private homes and more than 400 condo suites. Each day of the year the thermometer hovers around 30 C. The three different infinity-style swimming pools overlook the Pacific Ocean, where moderate waves are constantly rolling ashore. One pool is designated for children, another features a swim-up bar.



The crescent-shaped beach overlooked by dining room at Villas Carrizalillo. (PAT BRENNAN /FOR THE TORONTO STAR)

Vivo picks up its visiting guests at the Puerto Escondido Airport 15 kilometres from the resort and four different Canadian airlines fly into Huatulco International Airport, 100 kilometres north up the coast.

One of Vivo's finest assets is handyman Jesús Albert Solva Banos and his intimate knowledge of his hometown, Puerto Escondido. The port city of 45,000 sits 18 kilometres south of Vivo along the Pacific shore.

Jesús conducts van tours of Puerto Escondido for Vivo guests and he's as gentle and genuine as the town itself. The public market is a two-block-long slice of Mexican culture.

Everything you can imagine needing or using in your daily life is on display and for sale at Mercado Benito Juarez. The nice thing is you can stop and talk with the vendors and never feel any pressure to buy. That's not always the case at Mexican markets, particularly for street vendors.

You can wander at your leisure through this large, eclectic market with Jesús as your guide. Plus, he'll show you many of Puerto Escondido's other interesting features — such as Zicatela Beach — one of the world's most challenging beaches for surfing.

The world's best surfers consider Zicatela to be one of the world's 10 best surfing beaches. There are less challenging waves breaking on other Puerto Escondido beaches.

You can look down on one of those milder beaches from one of Puerto Escondido's most charming restaurants. Villas Carrizalillo has 12 boutique hotel rooms and an open-air dining room at the top of a cliff that overlooks a quaint crescent-shaped beach. Jesús is welcomed here by name.



Jesus Albert Solva Banos making soup & tortillas after tour of Lguna de Maniltepec. (PAT BRENNAN/FOR THE TORONTO STAR)

Another reason Mullen picked this site for Vivo Resorts is a unique lagoon 7 kilometres north of the resort. The 16-kilometre-long lagoon is fed by a river coming down off the Sierra Madre del Sur, a southern cousin of the Canadian Rockies.

If you go by day, you'll see a wide variety of birds not found in Canada and wildlife too, plus hundreds of long-legged storks that gather here from throughout North America for two months to have their own babies.

If you go at night, you'll see the natural phenomena of bioluminescence where plankton and micro-organism give off light like a dancing sky full of stars while above you is a real sky with billions of twinkling stars.

Visitors to the lagoon are greeted with a coconut with a straw inserted to drink its milk.

The multicoloured birds at the lagoon won't attack, but they're not fans of Vivo residents. That's because Vivo residents are invited to assist baby sea turtles after they hatch from their nests on the beach in front of the resort to safely reach the open sea and avoid the hungry sea birds hovering above. Mullen says Vivo residents have assisted more than 400,000 baby turtles get a safe start to life.

Mullen says his success on the ski hills and in business comes from following five winning secrets. His book, *How To Win: Achieving Your Goals In Extreme Conditions*, outlines how to apply those five winning secrets. He also explains those five secrets as a popular motivational speaker.



Cary Mullen bought 75 acres on a 21-kilometre-long stretch of vacant beach and built Vivo Resorts, a spectacular gated recreational community. (PAT BRENNAN/FOR THE TORONTO STAR)

When he came down off the mountains, he scoured ocean shorelines around the world looking for a site to develop an attractive recreation community. That's when he stumbled upon Oaxaca, a rural state on the Pacific Ocean in Southern Mexico.

Mullen bought 75 acres on a 21-kilometre-long stretch of vacant beach and built Vivo Resorts, a spectacular gated recreational community.

Mullen is well known in his hometown of Calgary for his skiing and his development and redevelopment projects, and the first buyers of his oceanfront recreational homes were Alberta residents. One was Kevin Lowe, former NHL star and now president of the Edmonton Oilers. Lowe possesses six Stanley Cup rings. His wife, Karen Percy, has two Olympic bronze medals in downhill skiing and was a national team partner with Mullen.

But since Vivo Resorts is now well developed, but still growing, Ontario residents have been Mullen's best customers, either buying or renting recreational homes and midrise condos.

The isolated, naked beach (naked as in there is nothing on the beach for as far as the eye can see) is the biggest attraction at Vivo. And the site has 800 yards on that quiet beach.

Pat Brennan was hosted by Vivo Resorts, which has not reviewed or approved this story.