

→ ECO-TOURIST

BY JEFF STEPHENS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PLAYA VIVA, ZIHUATANEJO, MEXICO



**P**ARENTS WITH FOND CHILDHOOD RECOLLECTIONS of outdoor experiences often are driven to give their children similar experiences and create new memories. Located on the west coast of Mexico, Playa Viva is a new sustainable resort and residence that is emblematic of the drive to recreate natural experiences. If building green is about doing less damage and building sustainably means doing net-zero damage, Playa Viva takes it one step further with a regenerative approach, aimed to improve the health of living systems.

Situated on 200 acres (81 hectares), Playa Viva is 30 minutes south of the Zihuatanejo/Ixtapa International Airport near the town of Juluchuca. It is nestled between the drama of the Sierra Madre mountains and the sparkling waters of the Pacific Ocean. The landscape, once a coastal forest cleared for now-abandoned coconut palm plantations, slowly is regenerating thanks in part to the hard work of Playa Viva's resident permaculturalist, who is committed to restoring 80 percent of the land to coastal forest and wetlands. Despite historic disturbances, the site remains vital for nesting marine turtles.

Each year, thousands of green turtles and tens of endangered leatherback turtles come to the shores of Playa Viva to lay their eggs. The Playa Viva Turtle Sanctuary was founded to protect turtles from predators and poachers and is staffed by an all-volunteer team from the local community. They have named the sanctuary La Tortuga Feliz—The Happy Turtle—and receive support from Playa Viva.

Playa Viva offers co-ownership opportunities in individual suites or casitas of one, two or three bedrooms with a bathroom and porches. Casitas are built on raised platforms connected to living palm trees. The architecture and site design with common eating areas encourage community. The project uses

## PLAYA VIVA

Zihuatanejo, Mexico  
(866) 482-8922  
[www.playaviva.com](http://www.playaviva.com)



photovoltaic and solar-thermal panels, as well as natural building products. New woods are harvested from local palm-tree groves and sustainably managed forests. In the spirit of eco-effectiveness, remnant egg shells from the turtle sanctuary are crushed and mixed with local materials to create plaster for the walls.

The Playa Viva project is headed by husband and wife team David Leventhal and Sandra Kahn, developers of Casa Viva Troncones, a popular bed and breakfast located 30 minutes north of Zihuatanejo/Ixtapa. They also founded Rainforest2Reef, a preserve in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula that protects more than 350,000 acres (141,640 hectares) of jaguar habitat.

At the time of the Aztecs, the name for Juluchuca was Xolochiuhyan and its icon was the head of an old man with white hair. The literal translation for Xolochiuhyan is "the place to grow wrinkles." Playa Viva may well be the place where memories are born and families grow old together. 🌱

➤ JEFF STEPHENS is principal of Oakland, Calif.-based Planet Relations, a public-relations consultancy for Earth-minded businesses. He can be reached at [jeff@planetrelations.com](mailto:jeff@planetrelations.com) or (510) 663-4462.