

You can take the Boy OUT OF FIJI

But you can't take Fiji out of the man

We speak with Carl Emberson, Marketing Director for Punta Mita, Mexico on his life growing up in Fiji.

By ANDRIA MITSAKOS

I first met Fijian born Carl Emberson at St Regis Punta Mita, Mexico. I was visiting friends in the coveted destination and he had just become the general manager of the resort. As a country I had lived and worked in for many years, Mexico has always held a special place in my heart – and when you have friends who understand the magic of this incredible country, you gravitate toward them. Carl was one of those people.

It was a Friday night and I had just arrived at the resort for its 'Champagne Ritual', a weekly custom which Carl had created. It was open to hotel guests as well as residents of the private enclave and celebrated the start of the weekend. Carl stood proudly, raised a sword high into the air and with one massive slice, the top of a bottle of Veuve Cliquot flew into oblivion. I was introduced to him shortly after, along with his stunning wife Sabine; and just like that, I knew that regardless of where I wandered, or where Carl and Sabine lived, we'd always be able to share a glass of bubbles and chat about our beloved Mexico.

Many years later, Carl went to work in Riviera Maya on the Caribbean coast of Mexico and I visited him there, but it was just recently we caught up again in his latest post, back in Punta Mita, where I was getting an update on the highly coveted destination where he now serves as Marketing Director.

Home to a variety of residential offerings and estate lots, as well as two Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Courses and various recreational amenities, Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita and The St Regis Resort Punta Mita are known for seductive natural beauty, laid-back vibe and world-class amenities converging to make Mexico's most coveted hideaway for home ownership.

Punta Mita's visionary development has evolved from a carefully conceived, low-density master plan that has become not only an aspirational vacation destination but one of the world's most exclusive, attractive and desirable locations for luxury second-homes and vacation properties in one of the most natural settings.



Carl Emberson (in blue)



Carl with actress Kirsten Dunst



Carl with his family

DINE, one of the largest real estate developers in Mexico, has created a planned community that reflects the luxury and quality that has made Punta Mita such a noted destination.

Emberson now helms the marketing initiatives for this beautiful part of Mexico.

Punta Mita is truly home for him. While at St Regis he started many initiatives that made the destination what it is today, and attributes much of his success to his Fijian roots. We recently chatted a bit more about his childhood in Fiji and how it has influenced his lifetime career in hospitality – an innate quality that has led him to infuse a perfect blend of understated elegance within an oasis of natural habitat.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR FIJIAN BACKGROUND:

I was born some 50 years ago in Suva, son of Dr Felix Emberson, a former Senator in Fiji and Manager of the Fiji Rugby Team on their tour of the United Kingdom in 1970. We were bought up in Lami and Tamavua and went to school at Stella Maris in Suva. Living across the river from a village and with my cousins as our neighbours provided a memorable childhood and a totally Fijian lifestyle. It was all about outdoors – sports, spearfishing, diving, no TV, no shoes only flipflops (Havaianas), weekends on the boat and the possibility of blending completely into both the Fijian and Tongan cultures.

Dad was also born and brought up in Fiji and his role as Manager of the Suva and Fiji Rugby as well as President of the United Club played an important part in my passion for a sport I grew to love – rugby. My grandmother Matilda was from Tonga and a legend in the Pacific as a fun loving, jovial socialite of the region. The connection allowed me to spend a lot of time in the Kingdom of Tonga as a kid – another paradise on Earth. I am eternally grateful to Mum and Dad and Fiji – the way the world should be.

WHAT IS YOUR FONDEST MEMORY OF FIJI?

Spending weekends on the boat at Nukulau Island with my best friend and fellow kaiviti (Fijian) Mark Ragg, with whom I also went to boarding school at St. Ignatius College in Sydney. Touch rugby on the beach, trawling, spearfishing and much more.



Carl with the resort staff



St Regis Punta Mita

DO YOU DRAW ANY PARALLELS FROM FIJI TO MEXICO?

Without a doubt, it's the similarity of the people. While they differ in many ways they share one passion – they are people's people with a natural vocation for friendly service, which in my business, more often than not, separates you from the rest. Having run luxury hotels around the globe, I am in a customer service business, and while you may have all the natural beauty or a marvelous hotel, without the special magic and connection both Fijians and Mexicans can deliver to their guests, they will simply not return.

YOU'VE WORKED IN MEXICO FOR MANY YEARS, WHAT'S THE DRAW?

Yes, I have been in Mexico for more than nine years now between Acapulco, Playa de Carmen and Punta Mita – three wonderful resort destinations each possessing its individual charm. Mexico, without a doubt, is one of the leading global destinations today; rich in culture, gastronomy and natural beauty with pristine beaches peppered with a wide array of luxury resorts - this is my specialty and what has drawn me to Mexico. Being a big foodie and a huge golf aficionado, these two aspects have certainly drawn me to this destination. However, it is the people, especially those I have had the privilege to work with and witness firsthand their warmth and vocation for service that has drawn me to return. I have had many opportunities to explore other parts of the globe workwise, yet I remain passionate to Mexico and more so, Punta Mita.

WE UNDERSTAND THAT YOU LEFT PUNTA MITA AND YOU'RE NOW BACK, PROMOTING THE REGION. TELL US WHY YOU LOVE

PUNTA MITA.

Indeed I accepted an offer in Mayakoba, home of the PGA OHL Classic in Playa de Carmen, where I spent nearly two years, but recently returned back home to Punta Mita. On this journey of mine around the globe, beginning way back in Suva, I have lived and worked in many countries including Fiji, Australia, England, Belgium, Switzerland, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, and have loved every one of them. However, at the end of the day there are few I can call home. Punta Mita has for me that familial feeling of a place where I belong. A destination that has everything one could need – a lovely community, a beautiful natural setting, lifestyle, fantastic golf, great food, plenty of fishing and more. I'd say it almost reflects all the passion points I acquired being raised in Fiji – that love for its people, nature, sports and truly, living the dream.

HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE GROWING UP IN FIJI AFFECTED YOUR WORK AND WHO YOU ARE TODAY?

As a kid I lived in Lamí right across the river from the village with fond memories of playing rugby, soccer or fishing with my cousins and friends from the village. I firmly believe that it was those moments in life that built into me that natural ability to integrate into whatever community I have lived throughout the world with ease - I literally become a local - as I was back in those wonderful days in Lamí village - a kai Viti - speaking the language and singing the songs.

Dad studied in New Zealand with the legendary Dan Costello and, as a young boy, we spent many a weekend at Beachcomber Island. Uncle Dan was an inspiring figure - hospitable like no other, fun and jovial - that true Fiji island hospitality which certainly

rubbed off later on my journey.

I would be remiss not to mention my grandmother Matilda Emberson, another iconic figure in the 70s in Fiji and the Pacific. Her social skills and warm, open personality made her a favorite both amongst princes and paupers. She was a natural and I loved just sitting by her side listening to her stories and watching her smile for hours on hours.

These are but a few of the magic moments of my childhood in Fiji which, without a shadow of a doubt were contagious and consequently became part of my DNA - you can take the boy out of Fiji but you can't take Fiji out of the boy - vinaka vaka Levu Fiji

I recall as a kid spending a lot of time on Beachcomber Island with Uncle Dan Costello & Dad listening to songs by Dan Junior, fishing, swimming across to Treasure Island but most of all I recall how I was marveled by what I call Fiji Island Hospitality – that warm, natural, engaging, fun way of serving guests that all the staff of Beachcomber had as part of their DNA. It marked me in many positive ways as a young man and even today as I maintain that very same approach to my work and life.

Rugby was my number one passion as a kid and I used to be ball boy for the Fiji Team. When I was seven, Fiji was playing the All Blacks in Suva, and I was ball boy on that day one, and Colin Meads I believe accidentally kicked the ball right at me and hit me in the head so hard that I was knocked out and had to be carried off in on a stretcher to a standing ovation! A true story of which I have vague memories but has been told by my Dad and friends over many a Kava bowl!

Most of all, the simplicity of growing up in Fiji in a natural habitat has made me, this Fijian boy, the man he is today.