



Kruse Control

WHAT TAKES A STRUCTURAL FABRICATOR FROM THE AUSTRALIAN EAST COAST TO PROVIDING PARADISE PERSONIFIED IN LANGKAWI? RHYDIAN WILLIAMS FINDS OUT

Like many of us starting out Jason Kruse, General Manager of Casa Del Mar in Langkawi, struggled to juggle his personal passions with carving out a career for himself.

However, it was this conflict that brought him into the hotel business. "I originally learned a trade as a structural fabricator and used to race push-bikes, representing Queensland," he says, settling back into his seat in Casa's luxurious surroundings.

"I used to do a lot of road-racing and moved to Brisbane to follow my little dream, riding 600 or 700 kilometres per week while working. My sponsor at the time basically owned a hotel and said: 'Hey, do you want to work in the evening? You can ride all day, you don't have to be up at four o'clock in the morning doing all those long kilometres'. So that's where it all started for me!"

For Jason the contrast between working in Australia and taking the 'expat challenge' means that he has far fewer people to rely on and delegate too. Ultimately, it's all about being hands-on and doing whatever it takes to make the job happen. "You have to be prepared to clean toilets, make beds,

wash dishes, carry plates, check people in, carry bags, clean the beach..."

For some, the world of managing a huge hotel with a massive team might seem preferable, but for Jason there's much more satisfaction in running a boutique establishment like Casa del Mar. "After running big hotels I just wanted to get back to running a small hotel again, getting to know my guests, getting to really know my staff and essentially having a lot of contact.

"For me, the number one priority in running an operation such as Casa del Mar is to make sure you have the right staff around you. Secondly you have to understand your guests, once you get to know them and understand them you can really start to tailor where the resort should be going; for us this is really about small touches, about being homely, personalising guests – we don't believe that every guest should receive exactly the same service.

"It's not a systems based hotel, the staff understand that (for example) if you are Russian, you get a Russian newspaper. There are different things we do for each guest; it's sometimes really basic, sometimes really small like having loose-leaf tea, freshly ground coffee, fresh milk... We don't advertise many of our

five-star touches, we like to continually deliver lots of small surprises and that's what makes the big difference!"

The homely feel that Jason brings to Casa del Mar is clear to see as he wanders through the resort at breakfast with his elegant fashion-designer fiancée Victoria, talking to their guests, getting to know them, arranging excursions and trips. Supported by the wider 'family' including turtle-trio, Hamillton, Kieddel and Gretta, also Shiffon and Domino the cats, this is somewhere where you're more likely to be treated as part of the family rather than just another tourist.

Again it's about going the extra mile. A touch that makes you feel wanted. "Last thing in the afternoon, when you get home, you're not expecting turn-down service, but we will have provided one anyway, with a cocktail and a postcard sitting there. We'll ensure that there's ice ready for you in the room and a candle sitting outside on your balcony, so last thing in the afternoon you can have a drink, sit outdoors with the candle burning and look out over the beautiful sunset."

Jason may never have followed his ambitions to become a professional cyclist – but it's clear that he's still some way ahead of the pack.