

Manmade lagoons poised to proliferate in Austin area; This company's at helm for latest amenity craze

10 projects being considered in Central Texas



Crystal Lagoons U.S. Corp. has dozens of manmade lagoon projects planned across Texas. This photo shows a developed lagoon called Lago Mar near Houston.

By [Kathryn Hardison](#) – Staff Writer, Austin Business Journal
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Four acres of teal blue water and white sandy beaches planned in Leander may be the first of several lagoon developments slated for the Austin area.

Miami-based Crystal Lagoons U.S. Corp., which creates the technology for the manmade lagoons that are popping up around the world, has recognized Texas as a priority market for several years now, and executives recently said they're targeting the Austin area as people continue to pour into the region. [Ivan Manzur](#), senior vice president of sales for Crystal Lagoons, said that translates into more opportunities for local developers and could have a major impact on tourism.

By publication time, Manzur said 10 lagoon projects were in different stages of negotiations, planning or development across the region. He declined to disclose where the projects are being considered and what development teams were involved.

Central Texas' first Crystal Lagoon has been the talk of the town in Leander since [city officials announced a public-private partnership last year](#). Developer Leander Springs LLC — which is controlled by Austin-based iLand Development Group — aims to create a \$1.1 billion mixed-use project at the southwest corner of FM 2243 and the 183A toll road that would also include up to 1,600 multifamily units, a hotel and more than 1 million square feet of commercial space across nearly 80 acres. Developers [cleared the final zoning hurdle in February](#), and work is expected to start on the lagoon in the second half of this year.



A rendering of the four-acre lagoon planned for Leander Springs.

The first Crystal Lagoon in Texas was [completed in 2018 in Balmoral](#), a community northeast of Houston, by developer Land Tejas. The same company last year completed its second lagoon called Lago Mar in Texas City — between Houston and Galveston — and it clocked in at a whopping 12 acres. Manzur said the Lago Mar lagoon has generated daily revenue of more than \$50,000 through ticket purchases during the pandemic, averaging 1,200 people daily.

Manzur said there are many factors that impact Crystal Lagoon licensing costs and declined to give an estimate. Another company executive [told Houston Business Journal in 2018](#) that construction costs for a lagoon were roughly between \$600,000-\$800,000 per acre.

The lagoons are designed to use sustainable technology, Manzur said. A lagoon uses fewer chemicals than a swimming pool and 30-times less water than a golf course, he said. The lagoon needs to only be filled once, and it captures rainwater to compensate for natural evaporation.

Founded in 2010, Crystal Lagoons U.S. Corp has more than 150 employees worldwide, Manzur said. The company has offices in the United States, the Netherlands, Chile and the United Arab Emirates. According to its website, the company's intellectual property was valued at more than \$4.1 billion.



Ivan Manzur, SVP of sales for Crystal Lagoons U.S. Corp.
CRYSTAL LAGOONS US CORP.

Austin Business Journal spoke with Manzur about the company's business model and its focus on the Lone Star State. His answers have been edited for length and clarity.

How does the Crystal Lagoons business model work?

We don't build the lagoons, we license our technology to real estate developers and we receive a percentage of the sales.

We have two different approaches: real estate and public access lagoons. For the real estate projects, those are a main amenity in a development that only offers private access. In the case of the public access lagoons, we have a lot of hybrid developments. So sometimes there's a private portion next to 600 apartment units, and on the other side of the lagoon is a beach area that is available for public access. The company is really growing because of this public access concept.

We also have our new Hot Reef technology that is implemented with a removable dome, which allows guests to be able to enjoy the lagoon outside the peak season as well as during rainy or cloudy summer days.

We meet with all the developers that are interested in having some exclusivity in different territories, and we start negotiating the number of projects that will be developed in an area. They propose a number and we need to see if it's compatible with our projection.

Which lagoon model is most popular?

Over 90% of our projects are being planned behind our public access lagoons concept. A great majority are master-planned communities that set a specific part of beach areas for public access. There are multiple different interests for setting a PAL project, such as retail stores, shopping malls, amusement parks, golf courses, casinos and many others.

Crystal Lagoons U.S. Corp. has said Texas is a "star" state for the company. Can you explain why Crystal Lagoons is targeting Texas, and specifically Austin?

Texas is, without a doubt, one of the most attractive states for Crystal Lagoons. It has to do with the population, with the size and the idea that we could bring the beach life to Texans. We have over 70 projects in different stages in Texas. Of course, there are many, many locations around the U.S. which we are exploring these partnerships. Texas, Florida and California are the main states in which we're putting more focus and priority, but now with this Hot Reef technology, we're going to be able to explore some states in which the weather is not very good, for example all the parts of the northern United States.

We are currently working on 10 total projects in different states of development in Austin and its suburbs, being one of the most important cities where we want to bring our Crystal Lagoons concept. Many of those projects are still in the negotiation stage — and you know what happens in negotiations: some of them continue, some of them don't. But I think we will have at least five projects in the Austin suburbs.

What opportunities are there for businesses in Central Texas?

For the local real estate developers, there is still a huge opportunity to have an exclusivity [agreement] with Crystal Lagoons in some of the territories in Texas. In four or five months, that might be different.

And then, of course, there are opportunities for the construction work and the hospitality and retail that goes into those projects. The lagoon concept also raises awareness to the area where a lagoon is built. More tourists and people wanting to experience this tropical lifestyle are drawn to the surroundings and local businesses. Because of this, we have seen an increase in jobs for the tourism, food and services businesses in the surrounding areas.

What are the metrics you look at when deciding where you are willing to put your projects?

Population, density, disposable incomes, what states or cities are nearby, how much is spent in tourism or entertainment — we have a lot of factors. We also consider the weather conditions, though with the Hot Reef technology, it has given us a very interesting opportunity to explore states up north.

How many Crystal Lagoons projects are there worldwide?

There are probably 50 or 60 projects that are now in operation. In less than 10 years, we now have 600 projects [in various stages] in over 60 countries. We have projects in Indonesia, Thailand, Mexico, the U.S., Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Dubai — we have projects on every continent. Of course, those 600 projects are in different stages... some of them are in operation, some are under construction, etc.

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<https://www.bizjournals.com/austin/news/2021/04/06/crystal-lagoons-slated-for-austin-region.html>