



the

Villa Experience

I'm not sure if I fell asleep in the lounge chair by the pool with a rum punch drink in my hand, but by the warming sensation over my body and small amount of drool that was slowly rolling over my chin, there was a good possibility that my relaxed, dream-like state was my venture into a place somewhere between heaven and infinity. But this was no dream; this was my "Villa Experience."

By Cyndi Hansen
National Training Director

A vacation is what you take, when you can't take what you are taking any longer! For many, taking a vacation is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. Knowing what you can offer your clients in terms of a vacation experience to clear their mind and soul is imperative to your credibility as a travel agent. Knowing what your client really wants and needs from their vacation is equally important. A crowded cruise ship or noisy resort may not be for them. In my opinion, if your client is looking to be swept away into a state of total relaxation, a "Villa Experience" is a wonderful option.

I have been a travel agent for about 5 years and until this point, never really appreciated the value of offering the "Villa Experience" to my clients. However, I was fortunate enough to be invited recently to stay at and tour some amazing villas in the Montego Bay region of Jamaica. I'm glad I had the opportunity to see this other mode of vacation relaxation.

I really wasn't sure what to expect during my stay, especially since I am a "die-hard" all-inclusive resort fan. What I didn't realize is that the "Villa Experience" is very comparable to an all-inclusive, but villas offer your clients some indulgences that most all-inclusive resorts don't

offer—like quietness 100% of the day and complete privacy if desired. Knowing this is a high commissionable opportunity for us agents, you are missing the boat if villas are not part of the product line you promote.

On my recent trip to Jamaica, I had the opportunity to personally tour many villas in the vicinity—all of which were beautiful and captured Jamaica's true Caribbean essence. Whether your client's preference is rustic or upscale, 2 bedrooms or 15, there is a villa that will fit his or her needs. Although I will be happy to share pictures or make recommendations of specific villas in Jamaica for you, what I would like to capture in this article is the essence of the "Villa Experience" and explore what it could mean for you and your clients.

While on this recent trip, I stayed at the wonderful Serendipity in Jamaica. Well-situated on the Elegant Corridor in Montego Bay, the Serendipity is newly remodelled with "soothing the spirit" always in mind. The elegant touches throughout every room to the many lounging options outside did not go unnoticed. Nestled on a mountainside, the Serendipity is a charming villa equipped with 6 bedrooms/6 bathrooms with spectacular 180-degree views enhanced

to show off the pristine Half Moon Golf Course and glistening Caribbean Sea. Other features include a huge private pool and plenty of lounge chairs, full spacious living area upstairs and downstairs, a bar, and many dining option locations throughout the villa. Breakfast was served every morning by our private chef to our heart's desire. On the last morning of our trip, she so kindly served "breakfast in bed," which, for those who know how slow I move in the morning, was quite a treat. Did I just say... "private chef?" Absolutely which brings us to the all-inclusive-like features of a villa such as the Serendipity. The villas come equipped with a private chef, a maid, a pool boy (thanks, Levi), security, and a driver. And all of this is included in the price! What's more is every imaginable Caribbean activity is available to you either within walking distance or just a short drive away. So rest assured, if your client likes to mix adventure into their "Villa Experience," it would be only a "stone's throw" away. Personally, I had no desire to ever leave the villa as it came equipped with all the adventure I was seeking! All the more reason to qualify your clients needs and wants to connect them with the vacation experience that's right for them.



This villa's spacious patio overlooks the lush Jamaican landscape, allowing you to relax and enjoy the breathtaking views.

photo by Cyndi Hansen

As travel agents, we sell what everyone wants... relaxation, long naps on the beach, the feeling of the hot sand in our toes, the warm breeze of the Caribbean air, refreshing cocktails at the pool, and the chance to be swept away into another life for a moment. So, know all of your travel choices and make sure you are making recommendations that are best suited for your clients. The "Villa Experience" is a high-commissionable product you can promote and sell to your clients. And lastly...enrich your spirit with your own personal "Villa Experience." There is no better way to get to know your products than to just experience them firsthand.

Keep your clients informed

Staying in a villa is different from staying in a resort or hotel and it is important to know the differences to determine if the "Villa Experience" is right for your client. What I really would love to stress is not to form conclusions or allow your client to form conclusions based on assumptions about what they may think staying in a villa is all about. Below are just some of the benefits I found in staying at a villa over a resort or hotel.

PRIVACY

Most villas will offer exclusivity in accommodations in terms of their privacy and seclusion. Far away from crowds, it's left totally up to you whether or not you want to see and be seen.

FREEDOM

Experience the absolute freedom that only a villa can provide. Imagine the luxury of having breakfast in bed or barefoot in your pajamas, choosing where and when your dinner will be served, or asking a driver to take you to one of the locale's finest restaurants. If you are travelling with children, imagine not having to worry if your kids are running around shouting (as long as they don't disturb you). You can use the expertise of your chef or give them the night off and surprise everyone with your own cooking skills.

ALL SPACES ARE YOURS

There are no "off-limit" areas in a private villa. You can go in the kitchen anytime you like, swim in your pool at 3am watching the stars in your "what-nots" or move your lounge chair to that desired spot to read your book or fall into a deep sleep.

STAFF

With the villa staff taking care of all your needs, your stay will be worry-free. You will be served signature cocktails of your choice by the pool, while the chef prepares the delicious meals that have been mentioned previously. The staff is there for you and...*only you!* And what is even more wonderful, if you're looking for "complete privacy," your staff gives that to you, as well.

REAL FAMILY MOMENTS

What I felt really captured the experience of a villa is the intimate family moments you can enjoy privately. Having drinks on the terrace or by the pool, enjoying the sunset, gazing at the moon through binoculars, playing cribbage under the shade, or just having some good laughs no matter how late it gets, will be the moments of your vacation that you will cherish the most. Plus, if travelling with friends and/or family, staying in a villa allows you to be the "host" for the ones you love.

COST EFFECTIVE

Renting a villa can be extremely cost effective especially if you are travelling with extended family or a small group. Villas are generally priced at about \$5,000 per week for 3-4 bedrooms and about \$6,500 per week for 5-6 bedrooms—and this is sample pricing for a luxury villa! This breaks down to as low as \$541 per person for the entire week or less than \$80 per person per night. You cannot beat this cost advantage for the perks that a villa will offer you or a client. And best yet, villas will offer agents 10-15% commission paid directly to you.†