

Frequently Asked Questions About Villa Vacations



a season away

It's your time.

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a season away's

GETTING STARTED

What's the difference between a hotel and a villa or apartment?

In one word: socialization. It is very difficult to socialize with friends or family in a hotel setting. Lobby bars just don't cut it, when you could be having fun in your own living room. Sleeping in late and not having to worry about the breakfast hours at the hotel, or even late night snacks and skinny dips are not a problem in a villa.

Most of our guests tell us they like the freedom a villa offers, the added space, the informality versus a hotel, and not having to pack and unpack every few days as in a typical tour. They also tell us they like immersing themselves in one area, really getting to know it, and feeling more like a local. They complain that with many cruises and tours, they are in an area so briefly that it is like a peck on the cheek versus a longer kiss!

If you have kids, a villa beats the pants off of a hotel for hearing the squeals of laughter as cousins play in the pool (with nobody "shushing" them) or watching them catch lightning bugs at night. And there's something to be said for taking the grandkids fishing or lying on your back with them in the grass counting a zillion stars. And don't get us started on feeding the kids . . . instead of making them dine with you at a fancy restaurant, you can feed them early and send them out to play while the adults enjoy a meal and conversation. Sublime.

If you are planning on traveling together as friends, a villa experience allows having early evening cocktails while watching the sun set over the rolling hills of Tuscany or hearing the night crickets as you dine outside your Provencal villa, only later to retire to the living room to taste wines, play cards, or tell stories.

At the end of the day, whether traveling together as a family or with friends, a villa allows quality time together that is hard to replicate in a hotel experience.



Is renting a villa cheaper than a hotel?

A Season Away's price point – given the "soft" services of a local VillaHost and other amenities - puts us at about the same as a 4 star hotel.

As a rule of thumb, our villas cost of about US \$3,500 per bedroom, per week. So a 3 bedroom home with a pool can cost about \$10,500 in high season per week, depending on service levels, the quality of the apartment and if it is close to the sea or not. So this comes out to about \$500 per bedroom per day, or about the same cost as a nice hotel.

Our inclusive pricing includes the villa rental, VAT taxes, the services of a local VillaHost to enhance the experience, extensive pre-trip planning services, arrival meet-and-greet, a welcome drink and snacks, a first night buffet, a shopping service, our sought-after customized VillaBooks and much more.

Here's the real difference between a hotel and a villa: having your own living room and kitchen, perhaps a fireplace, a separate bedroom, a pool, a yard to let the children play or while away the hours reading a book. **This is entirely different from staying in a hotel room and so should warrant a higher price for the increased space and freedom it offers guests.** The ability to go to local markets to buy the freshest ingredients of the season and then head back to your villa to make a stunning lunch or dinner is better (in our minds, at least) than having to take every meal at a restaurant or trying to cram a few grocery items in a tiny hotel refrigerator.



Are we better off in a hotel than a villa?

This is a great question because you need to be honest with yourself about things like service levels and other factors. We have villas and apartment in our portfolio that range from very nice to super deluxe and from a moderate amount of service to fully staffed properties. If you tell us what you need, we likely can find the suitable property for you.



In some cases, you might be better off in a hotel if you need 24 hour a day room service, but for the most part, we can offer many of the services of a hotel in a private home setting.

The important thing is telling us the types of hotels you stay in regularly and if you expect the same service levels in a villa. As with anything else, good communications as your expectations is the key to a successful stay.

Please explain your VillaHost concept. It sounds interesting.



We are not a villa rental company as much as an experience company that uses villas for our housing. To accomplish creating great memories, we know you have to feel like you are living like a local and not just a tourist peeking into other people's lives. To do this we use local VillaHosts to introduce you to the best the region has to offer.

Most of our VillaHosts are former hotel concierges, and so have great language skills, a can-do attitude and are passionate about where they live.

So they not only are there to meet and greet you, set up the house for arrival and show you how things work in the villa, but they also show you around local villages, help set up wonderful excursions based on your desires, troubleshoot issues, and can be there in an

emergency. So they are your local go-to person in the region.

A hidden benefit of this is it streamlines your holiday so you aren't spending hours trying to find the best local bakery or struggling at making dining reservations. The goal of the VillaHost is to help you find the best the region has to offer: from local markets to things for kids to do, from picking out great local wines to complement your dinner choice to suggesting an out-of-the-way winery.

Many clients don't think they need a VillaHost but then realize a villa vacation will never be the same again without them.

We call the VillaHosts the "secret ingredient" to our success.

How far ahead to we need to book?

The inverse of this is: Before the other guy does.

If you see a property you like and it is available, don't wait. Book it. If you wait and it ends up being rented, then you start the entire process all over again. As a rule of thumb, 9 months to a year ahead is good timing to get what you want (right location, with AC, pool, close to a town, etc.) Booking any closer than this and you take your chances. The reason for the long lead time has less to do with US renters than European ones who tend to take the same vacation weeks each year, gobbling up a good part of the desirable villa supply. Bottom line: act now.

We are 4 couples traveling together, can we get 4 equal bedroom with their own baths?

Possibly, but since most villas are former farm houses, finding renovated properties with equal bedrooms isn't as easy as it looks. This doesn't mean that one couple gets stuck in the maid's quarters or anything, but rather that the bedrooms may not be as uniform as in a hotel. Also, there may be 4 bathrooms in a 4 bedroom home, but they may not all be IN the bedrooms, due to structural issues with the villa itself. In some cases you may need to rent a 5 bedroom villa to get the equity in bedrooms you are looking for. So flexibility is the key.

Can maid service be provided?

Most villas are cleaned mid-week and on Saturdays and additional days can be added in. Usually this cost is about €50 or less per day, so adding in cleaning services is not a "deal breaker" since over the cost of two weeks, and additional 4 days of cleaning will add another €200 to the bill. Larger houses usually have daily cleaning because owners want to make sure the house doesn't get out of control with sloppy guests.

Just so you know, house cleaning is just that: house cleaning. It does not mean doing personal laundry, ironing, babysitting the kids, food shopping or cooking breakfast. If you want other staff to do these chores and duties, we certainly can try to arrange them for you at an added cost.

Why are rentals from Saturday to Saturday?

Three words: church on Sunday. Everyone and their brother takes off on Sunday (including most shops and some restaurants) to go to church and have a family lunch, so finding a cleaner who is willing to work on Sunday is as scary as finding hen's teeth. Since cleaning staff do work on Saturdays, this is the traditional turnover day for villas.

How important is lining up a cook or chef ahead of time?

After choosing the villa, picking the cook or chef is the most important thing to do and you must do it quickly. Good cooks are in big demand, particularly among Europeans, who tend to rent to 2-4 weeks, basically taking the cooks out of circulation. If you want a cook, whether for full or part time, line it up as soon as you pick the villa. Remember, about half the experience in Italy and France is about its great food, so picking the right cook is a key ingredient to a wonderful holiday.



Are there screens on the windows of all your properties?

The answer is no, there aren't screens on all the windows of all the villas in our collection, and where there are villas with window screens, sometimes insects fly in through an open door. If screens are a big priority, tell us and we'll point out the houses with them.

One thing to understand: most villas are hundreds of years old, so the owners can't simply head to a local Home Depot and buy standard window screens. Each must be fitted to odd sized windows

The other thing to consider: the charm of Tuscany or Provence is that it is in the countryside. For better or worse, "country" has some bugs and insects. We feel the occasional insect is a small price to pay for a wonderful, authentic holiday. If you don't like them, make sure you ask us for a property with screens on the windows.

What about air conditioning?

Many villas and apartments do not have air conditioning, or, if they do, it is in the bedrooms. If air conditioning is vital, let us know and we'll recommend homes with AC. Even without air conditioning, understand that most villa walls are 2-3 feet thick and with proper closing of windows and shutters during the day, a villa can be kept cool until nighttime breezes come through.

Is everything safe?

Good question. The crime rates in Italy and France are way, way below that of the US. That said, we urge everyone to take precautions to lock up when you leave a villa, so someone else isn't tempted. Put valuables in a safe. It is SO easy to be lulled into a sense of serenity by the beauty of Provence or Tuscany, for example, that you throw out all common sense and leave everything open. Basically, take the same security precautions as home and you shouldn't have any issues.

We're 2 families with 3 children each, so a total of 10 people. We think 3 or 4 bedrooms is enough since the kids can sleep on the floor. What do you have to offer?

The idea of a beach house cramming as many people into one place is not only an anathema to the French and Italians, but it is also illegal for sanitary and fire code reasons. A house will be rated for the maximum number of occupants, whether young children or adults. It may not seem fair, but it's the rules. If you try to bend the rules, your contract will be invalidated and you could well find yourself out on the street with no recourse. Work with us to find a nice compromise so you have the space you need at a reasonable cost.



Internet and telephone service?

Most all houses offer telephone service, fewer offer internet service. If it is important for you, we can select a property with internet service, usually ADSL, some with Wi-Fi, others with a direct cable connection. We also can arrange cell data "sticks" that are usually good for about 30 days and 50 hours of use for about €50 which can be "topped up" any tobacco shop, so we can usually work it out.

We don't speak the language, will this be an issue?

Not really a problem, since most people speak a "smidgeon" of English or know someone who can. Italians are wonderfully friendly and the "rap" that the French get for pretending not to understand English is ridiculous. The key with the French is to **always, always, always** be the first to say "Bonjour" (Good day) or "Bonsoir" (Good evening) when entering a shop or restaurant. That gesture alone is like putting a key in the lock of cordiality and will pay big dividends. Of course it doesn't hurt to do the same in Italy! (Buongiorno during the day and Buonasera in the evening)ut.

How much do we need to be in contact with you while setting up a villa holiday and what information do you need?

Communication is the key. For us to be successful for you, give us as much information as possible: tell us the ages of kids and adults (if someone a little older is coming, we would like to recommend a villa with a ground floor bedroom, or if you have really little kids, then the pool should be fenced or set away from the villa.) What are your "must haves" and your "sure would be nice" aspects of the trip, how many bedrooms and baths, what do you like and dislike, does anyone have a serious medical condition or allergy, etc. The more information the better. We usually can make a villa recommendation to you with a few contacts. Once you have made a booking, then we will get you on a conference call with our staff and the VillaHost to refine things like chefs, excursions, pre-arrival shopping, the need for special bedding (cots and playpens and such) special dietary issues, etc.



We create unforgettable holidays

by combining exquisite, best-in-class villas and apartments, authentic and personalized excursions, and guidance from our knowledgeable VillaHosts™ to bring a locale alive so you can live like a local.

A Season Away offers extended holidays from one week to several months away, affording you the best gift of all, time:

- Time away...to slow down...gain a sense of place...live like a local
- Time to indulge in your personal passions...with no limits to the imagination
- Time to reconnect with your loved ones

A Season Away presents:

- Handpicked VillaHosts™ with insider access that brings a region alive, offering unique experiences and helping you fulfill your dreams
- Best-in-class villas and apartments
- Thorough pre-trip planning to ensure your goals are met and your “escape” from home is seamless

Specializing in Italy: Tuscany (Chianti, Florence, Lucca, Cortona, Southern Tuscany), Italian Lakes region, Amalfi Coast & Umbria and France: (Provence, Paris, Basque Country, St. Tropez & Burgundy)

A Season Away recommends all clients use a professional travel advisor. Should you have any questions or need the name of a travel consultant in your area, feel free to contact us.

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