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The Secrets of a Dream Villa Vacation

By Bruce Gibson

A villa vacation is a fantastic way of enjoying a relaxing break. But so much can go wrong – some villa owners, unfortunately, fail to tell the whole truth about their properties, and sometimes you find help difficult to come by if something goes wrong.

So how do you find out the reality before you arrive for your vacation? As a villa owner for over 15 years in Spain and also as a villa agent that fully manages villa rentals on the Costa Blanca – as well as personally preferring self catering accommodation – I've seen what can go wrong with a villa vacation from both perspectives.

I also know the best ways to make sure you and your loved ones or friends get your dream vacation. What to look for, and the questions to ask. If you're not happy with the answers, simply go elsewhere. Your vacation is too important to gamble with.

What do the photographs tell you?

Firstly don't get fooled by a single picture – especially if it's tiny and difficult to see – or the lovely descriptive prose which may not resemble reality. All villas can look stunningly beautiful when painted gleaming white, but avoid booking one that does not show sufficient interior pictures. And look closely into each picture – does the bedroom show a headboard, or is it just pillows against the wall? This could indicate lack of preparation by the owner or lack of expenditure on the villa generally.

Clarify if the pictures are current. Was that fantastic view taken from the roof of the building or before some building plot was developed next door? It's not much fun if your sea view is only from the top floor toilet. It does happen.

Ask if you have sun on your terrace. Or will you be in shade from 1pm onwards? Find out about the villa's position and orientation so you know that you do not have to go to the beach in order to catch some rays.

Key questions for private advertisers:

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A private villa owner may oversell his pride and joy. Think about the things that can make a big difference to your vacation. Would you think to ask an owner if the kitchen china is really just inexpensive acrylic or is it a proper unmixed china set? How can you tell if the sofa suite is cheap and not so comfortable or of superior quality? What is the type of linen and towels used, could it be bobbly winceyette sheets for summer use?

Look for an unbiased grading or rating – it'll save you asking awkward or embarrassing questions about your villa vacation. It's best to seek out those who show gradings that indicate the quality grade of kitchen equipment and soft furnishings (including beds and sofas), say, separately.

Ask what service backup do you have if something goes wrong. Ensure that your chosen villa has professional support in case you experience a problem that cannot be rectified quickly. Is for example a knowledgeable local person on hand seven days a week to resolve maintenance issues efficiently?

What happens if the villa becomes unavailable due to the owner taking a double booking (it happens)? Or if there is a problem with the pool, a new building next door, or something not repairable quickly. A private owner may have problems relocating you, while a firm has more options to give you alternative accommodation should something go wrong.

Is privacy important to you? Be aware that many new villas are on very small plots and though are detached, you will be close to your neighbour. So check if the details are specific about this. And, if closeness to shops and supermarkets is important, then do ask.

Private owners may also wish to get a high rate of return on their investment when they rent them out to vacationmakers – or simply believe that their villa just has to be worth more than the market around them. So rates could be unjustifiably higher when compared to similar villas in the same areas.

Key questions for Villa agencies:

When thinking about booking a villa vacation through an agency, be certain who you are dealing with. Ask if the agency has a direct contract with the owner and is not sub-contracted. This ensures that you only liaise with one party, as sub-contracted parties are not in full management control of the villa, resulting possibly in delays of damage deposit repayments.

Check the small print carefully for extra charges. These can include surcharges for credit card use, damage charges even if no damage occurs, and unfair administrative fees charged per person or for simple changes to a booking.

Using a credit card such as Mastercard and Visa (not a charge card such as Amex, Diners Club or Switch or a business card) gives you, providing the payment exceeds £100 (payment amounts and cover may vary from country to country), full consumer credit card protection. So if the villa was fictitious, or the owner or agency was not what it seemed, you can get a full refund from the credit card firm.

Get the information you need

Take a more detailed look at the web site or brochure and look for the detailed information that will help you decide that you can be comfortable with your choice. Look to see if there are clients' comments, how old are they, how many. Always look at the pictures and ask the questions, then you'll have that relaxing villa vacation you've dreamed of.

For more tips and information, see

www.villaspain.co.uk

Bruce Gibson is owner of Villaspain (

<http://www.villaspain.co.uk>

). Villaspain is a long-established,

though modern, friendly local Spanish villa rental agency.

Is Vacation Rental Ownership Your Business Opportunity?

By David Leonhardt

It's a dream I've heard so many people express: "I want to run a bed and breakfast. They are so cute" Or "I want to own a vacation rental property, so I can get a free vacation and make money the rest of the year.

But what is really involved in being a vacation landlord? Is it a business that is right for you. I asked 9 vacation rental owners for their advice to would-be vacation rental owners.

"Can you afford the mortgage if your home is not rented at all?" asks Stewart Granville, owner of an Orlando Florida vacation homes listing site (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net>

). "If interest rates rise

(which they almost certainly will) can you still afford the payments along with the utilities ,taxes, insurance, management fees ,pool cleaning ,lawn maintenance ,running repairs - can you still afford it?"

That is an obvious, but often overlooked, factor. Before rushing into a purchase, make sure that it does not get repossessed if somehow your marketing is fruitless at first. Paul Rowney agrees. Owner of a 4-bedroom Florida Gulf Coast vacation rental (

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<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/181/>

), he says

to be wary of "realtors who promise you'll rent your property for 40 weeks a year." It helps to do your homework. Is there already rental saturation in the area you want to buy in, or are people already lining up for too few vacation homes?

"You can't get too personal with your home if you are using it for renting – you have to think what your client wants," warns Michelle Prince, owner of Secret Key Villa (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/166/>

) in Kissimmee, Florida. That means your ideas of the perfect

bright red–orange kitchen might have to be shelved if your customers have more subdued tastes.

Andrew Piper, owner of a 5 bedroom vacation rental villa (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/332/>

)

advises not to expect that all your friends are a market waiting to rent your vacation home - they are more likely going to hope for a freebie, staying silent if they are too embarrassed to ask. Remember, owning a vacation rental is a business, or else it becomes a very expensive cottage.

Of course, when it comes to décor, you can't please everyone. Sue Evans, owner of an Orlando luxury villa (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/276/>

), does not enjoy "having to read emails from people

saying they don't like your décor or want to stay at your property for peanuts." You need a thick skin to own a vacation rental property.

Christine Creasey, owner of the Florida Golf and Disney Villa (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/65/>

), reminds potential vacation rental owners how time consuming it can be to look after the property, especially if you organize your own rentals. "Make sure you know who is going to manage your home in your absence," she advises. Running a full–fledged bed and breakfast is even more time consuming, requiring much longer hours than an office job, and probably hiring staff to help you manage.

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Neil Thornton, owner of a 4–bedroom executive villa (

<http://lastminutevillas.net/villa/335/>

) in Orlando,

Florida, warns about the grief caused by hurricanes, a common occurrences in the tropical climates where vacation rentals are most popular. "Can you be 5000 miles away, knowing there are guests in your villa, there is a hurricane approaching and all the power lines and telephones are down. What do you do?" asks Dave Gordon, owner of Lindisfarne Villa (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/89/>

).

Perhaps the most obvious advice comes from Lesley and Gerry Heane, owners of Our Dream Villa (

<http://www.lastminutevillas.net/villa/15/>

) south of Walt Disney World: "Always check out the area and

the site of the Villa." It goes without saying, but I have seen too people kick the tires on a car but never try driving it before buying - and I am sure it is the same with vacation rental properties, especially since they are so often so far away.

What all these vacation rental owners are saying boils down to knowing what you are buying, what it could cost you and being prepared before you buy. Every one of them enjoys owning vacation rental property, but many people jump in too soon, only to realize that this is not the place they want to be.

Before you jump in, make sure you really want to own a vacation rental. If you do, I wish you many years of success and pleasure.

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Read more of his travel articles at:

<http://www.TheHappyGuy.com/travel-articles.html>

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Dream Catcher

You Have To Love The Location, Say These Owners Of Orlando Florida Villas

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