

Destinations in Paradise

Redefining Post-Pandemic Private Villa Rental Service Standards

BY MERILEE KERN



Photos Courtesy of Destinations in Paradise

It would be an understatement to say that the recent pandemic is ushering in a seismic shift for the travel trade, which suffered a collective gut punch as COVID-19 unrelentingly raged across the globe. New health and safety protocols, crisis management plans and other operational touchpoints are being overhauled to help those in — and dependent upon — the travel industry better pivot and adapt to the unforeseen. For travelers, priorities and sensibilities have also evolved on multiple fronts.

In fact, a “Covid Travel Outlook 2021” travel sentiment survey by Indagare found that travelers “feel more comfortable renting a home or private villa for added privacy” and that “more than half of those surveyed said that they are 54% more likely to rent a home than they were prior to coronavirus, preferring to ‘stay at homes, not hotels,’ for added security and peace of mind.”

Destinations in Paradise is a boutique agency offering a suite of five-star private villas in four locales: The Big Island and Kauai, Hawaii as well as Los Cabos, Mexico and Mendocino, California. Having personally experienced this company’s brand of haute hospitality on the Big Island, I connected with the founders, David Cohen and Howard Appel, for some clarity on how they’ve apparently adapted so well in the post-pandemic era.

What sets Destinations in Paradise apart from other luxury home and private villa purveyors in the

various regions where you operate?

Cohen: It’s essentially our caliber of white-glove service, which is highly personalized and with the very best amenities that can be provided. The company was started because we wanted to have some fun, as Howard and I had been retired a while. We wanted to give people, especially those desiring privacy and security, the kind of high-caliber experience that we would expect. When someone arrives at one of our homes, they’re greeted and welcomed with enthusiasm, and everything to elevate the experience is there. This includes the best linens, a house full of flowers and arrival gifts. Plus, any special requests are accommodated. Even when guests depart, we give them a thank-you gift for having booked a stay with us. Overall, it’s a very personalized experience. It’s akin to having a member of the family come and stay. The difference is that it’s a five-star experience at every touch point.

Appel: We, ourselves, like to travel in luxury and, as we started acquiring the properties, we realized that this is a great opportunity to offer to other people the same kind of treatment we enjoy. It’s the way we all would love to be treated. And we think we offer it differently and more special than others. The business sort of just fell into place as bookings escalated and we started to acquire additional properties.

In the luxury travel space personal touches are key. How do you go above-and-beyond for your high-end luxury travelers?

Cohen: Here’s one interesting example about the Mexican

Casa Bellamar in Cabo, Mexico



property, for example: It’s two acres of the most gorgeous landscaping that you’ve ever seen. Even though it’s in the middle of a desert, we are desalinating seawater using solar power, so the yards and the landscaping and the flowers are all very lush, but still desert-type plants. The interesting thing is that Howard and I have worked together for close to 40 years and, until we actually got into this business, I had no idea that he had this artistic flair. The landscaping at all of the houses is beyond spectacular.

Appel: It’s important to note that these homes are indoor-outdoor homes. We want to make sure we carry the luxury on both sides. If you search our home in Cabo on Google Earth, you can easily spot it because it’s the only significant patch of green anywhere along the east scape. This kind of lush, natural beauty is just one of the many ways that we cater to our guests relative to the luxurious aspects both inside and outside of the homes.

How have the recent health concerns impacted your business?

Appel: We took COVID-19 very seriously from the beginning and, yes, 2020 was a hard year for us. We lost almost all of our business, but we used that down time as an opportunity to continue to enhance the homes. Even now, when guests come to one of our properties, they’re greeted in a manner that best assures their health and safety. We have our house managers maintain their distance and use masks, of course. But, during the guests’ stay, we also make sure we work around their calendars to not intrude on their stay there. We take it very seriously. And, in fact, when a guest leaves, we have a minimum 48 hours between guests so we can properly clean and sanitize the home for the next guest.

Many people often associate private villa experiences more with leisure travel versus business. But Destinations in Paradise properties are also utilized in business, so tell us about some of your corporate benefits.

Cohen: Even though the houses are focused on providing a safe, comfortable environment for families and extended small events, we do also host small, medium and large-scale corporate events at the houses. Whether it’s a two-person law firm figuring out how they’re going to

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run their businesses remotely, to a large distillery that wants to try and get their name out for a new product for, say, tequila in Mexico, our homes are an apt venue. Of course, we host weddings, and social media is prompting bookings from people like rappers who want a place to chill out and rethink what their next shows or postings are going to be. And we’ve hosted philanthropic events like releasing baby turtles in the beaches of Mexico to address species endangerment. Howard has also had some dealings with movie studios that are interested in hosting corporate get-togethers and business strategy meetings. And, in at least two instances that I can recall, they’ve considered using the homes as part of a movie production. I should also mention that each of the homes has the ability to cater for large and small groups.

If we bring chefs in, that event never ever needs to leave the property. The house in Mexico, for instance, has two kitchens that are fully capable of catering to as many people as the property can accommodate, which is substantial, but each of the homes has the ability to cater internally and not rely on outside services.

Appel: All the homes offer businesses a unique opportunity to host different types of meetings and events, from the very large as in Mexico, to even Mendocino for smaller gatherings. They’re all unique and offer the privacy, security and comfort that private villa venues offer — all, of course, with our discerning five-star touch.

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Mendocino

