

JULY 2, 2012

TravelAgent

UNITING BUYERS AND SELLERS THROUGH MULTIMEDIA INTELLIGENCE

www.travelagentcentral.com

RIVER CRUISE ROUNDTABLE

Experts examine the appeal and
potential of this growing product

SEE PAGE 20




INSIDE:

Virgin Gorda Villas
Family-Friendly Mexico
Walking Around Frankfurt
Update on Manila

ON THE WEB

Keep up with the latest developments in the popular river cruising market. Search "river" at www.travelagentcentral.com



Villa Aquamare's spacious living rooms have balconies that overlook the ocean.

Virgin Gorda Villas

Aquamare presents three luxurious, 8,000-square-foot oceanfront retreats.

IT'S NOT every day that we can make a claim like this, but our **Travel Agent** team recently returned from what may have been one of the best villas we will ever experience, **Villa Aquamare** (www.villaaquamare.com) in the British Virgin Islands. This resort is made up of three perfectly designed, 8,000-square-foot villas, all within a stone's throw from one of the most beautiful beaches in Virgin Gorda and all spaced out enough to ensure privacy.

Each five-bedroom villa is perched at a different elevation and surrounded by landscaping for even more privacy, yet angled to maximize views of the stunning Sir Francis Drake Channel. A separate Concierge House is located on the property to provide attentive guest services at every turn. Clients have the rare option of renting more than one villa, or even all three, to accommodate large gatherings of up to 36 people in one private enclave.

The villas all have comfortable and spacious areas and ample balconies with spectacular ocean views. But a distinguishing feature of the Aquamare experience is found in each of the spa suites: open, yet completely sheltered marble bath areas with separate large, outdoor shower rooms.

This reporter, who usually takes this kind of stuff for granted, didn't want to leave the private swimming pool on the bottom floor, couldn't get enough in the outdoor rain showers—which are available in each of the three master suites and the studio (the other room is a double)—and frankly just didn't want to leave the villa.

The full-time housekeeping service may require clients to sacrifice a little privacy in exchange for a meticulously clean villa. The housekeepers could be in their open-air living room at anytime from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. so advise them to make sure they're not doing

anything they wouldn't want their mother to see because they may have a surprise visitor. Having said that, they'll get over that small inconvenience when they come down from their bedroom to see the evidence of the previous night's festivities already discarded before breakfast is served.

Private, in-villa dinners, lunches and breakfasts are also offered where one can get either a gourmet meal or some down-home cooking. For dinner, we chose some comfort food cooked by our incredibly friendly chef, Mimi, who made an incredibly delicious sweet potato and leek soup. Clients also have the option of getting a butler, who will come to the villa for eight-hour shifts and take care of their every need.

Aquamare's private Beach Park, with its man-made, white-sand beach, is the ideal setting for destination weddings and small meetings. (Most beaches are

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

...one family
reunion, a villa
in Tuscany,
one safari,
25 flights,
52 emails
and one
system error.

now how about some
customers who really
appreciate all that you do?

When you accept American
Express® Cards, you attract loyal
Cardmembers who are likely to
be more affluent, travel more
frequently and book more travel
than non-Cardmembers¹.

visit www.americanexpress.com/merchant to learn
how accepting the
American Express Card
can help grow your travel
business.

1. Brookfield Research, March 2012



American Express®
Cardmembers report
spending an average
of \$2,442 with travel
agents in one year¹.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

not private in the Caribbean; that's why there was a "public" beach and then another man-made one just for villa guests.) There was help-yourself kayaking, snorkeling, a cabana and the clearest, calmest water you can imagine.

Villa Aquamare has an onsite concierge named Gino, a very charismatic Peruvian native who knows the island inside out. Gino can assist clients in just about everything from coordinating boat excursions along the Sir Francis Drake Channel to a champagne sunset cruise, or availing just about any in-villa services.

Two things we highly recommend for your clients to do here: booking groceries before their arrival and a private dinner in their villa for at least one or two nights. Before we and our four guests arrived at the villa, we ordered roughly \$700 worth of groceries from burgers and hot dogs to beer, wine and liquor. (Note: There is a 25 percent service charge for the groceries pickup.) It turned out to be far more than we needed for the four-day stay. We recommend getting simply what you need for the first day or two and then playing the others days by ear. Agents should also recommend renting a car if clients would like to skip the aforementioned service charge and pick up some groceries on their own or if they want to see one of the Caribbean greatest attractions, The Baths, which is about a 40-minute drive from Villa Aquamare.

We also highly recommend private boat transfers—or at least book one for the way back. The public ferries, however, are actually pretty convenient and cost about \$20 each. Make sure your clients have cash for the ride. Note: The ferries only run about every two hours, so planning it around your return flight can result in getting to the airport way earlier than you really need to.

Target Clientele

Book Villa Aquamare for couples getaways, friends getaways and multigenerational travel. Although we were told that one of Villa Aquamare's first guests was actor Harrison Ford and

that musicians, such as rapper Ludacris, have also stayed at the property, agents should not limit their focus to only affluent clients, as the villa can actually be a lot more affordable than you might think at first. When we went in May, for example, we were told the costs were roughly \$20,000 for the week. And each villa sleeps up to 12 people, so if you have multigenerational families or smaller groups of couples, the costs per person can be lowered substantially. Also, there are always some pretty good deals going on involving Villa Aquamare so keep your eyes open.

There is no way around having to rely on affluent clients if you're looking to book this property for the holidays, however, costs for Christmas and New Year's Eve stays can balloon to as high as \$50,000 to \$70,000 a week, we were told.

A Few More Words of Advice

Agents should note that there is a \$20 tax to leave the country; it is not included in the price of the air ticket. Most major credit cards are accepted (American Express is not).

Clients should also be advised to use as much bug repellent as possible. Paradise doesn't come without a catch or two and in this case it's in the form of some pretty determined mosquitoes.

Who to Reach Out to

Agents looking to book Villa Aquamare should contact Tracey Harlowe (tracey@harlowegroup.com, 954-345-4078), travel industry sales representative with The Harlowe Group, a boutique representation company. They can also reach out to Lizzie Paz (lizzie@villaaquamare.com, 787-725-2552), hospitality and reservations manager for Villa Aquamare, to ask questions or to make reservations.

—JOE PIKE

ON TRAVELAGENTCENTRAL.COM

TAKE A LOOK at some other fine resort options in the BVI. Visit www.travelagentcentral.com, search "Biras Creek."