

complete with help from a handful of stringent guidelines.

After a destination is chosen, a villa should be chosen by its location (on the beach or further inland: in the mountains or closer to town), its age and condition, the presence and quality of a concierge or service staff (if none is provided). Boomgarden says, many families bring their own staff along), the number and size of bedrooms and bathrooms, and appeal of interior décor.

Focus next on the preference-based qualities, such as air-conditioning versus ceiling fans, deluxe kitchens (for clients who plan to do a lot of cooking or in-villa dining), and the presence of a hot tub or plasma TVs, to name a few.

**Dixie Stewart of Ship & Shore Travel Agency in Macon, GA** often books mountaintop villas for

her clients, and advises agents with a similar specialty to be aware of road conditions for safety purposes. "Washed out roads are not a liability I want," she says.

It's important to know the practical things about the villa, like its surrounding topography, its distance to the nearest food-shopping venue, climate (will a swimming pool or air-conditioning be vital to the clients' comfort?), and nearby restaurants. On the supplier side, Rapp says, it's dire that villa clients get—in terms of location, amenities, service, quality of furnishings and so on—exactly what they were told to expect. Lastly, it's important to find out what is included in the cost of the rental to avoid any unpleasant surprises when it comes to paying the bill.

**Jeffrey Kane, of Jeffrey's World of Travel in Great Neck,**

**ISLAND DESTINATIONS'** Exclusive Villa Collection offers a selection of villas on St. Barthelemy—including Roi Soleil (pictured here), which is located in Lurin on the hills of Gustavia—that are so discretely located, few locals know they exist.



NY, notes that travelers' safety is an important factor. "Be aware of political unrest, anti-American sentiment and labor problems," he says.

Veith says that when shopping for a villa agents must use rental companies that they feel comfortable with and whose products they know and trust. Kane emphasizes the impor-

tance of quality over cost and being particularly wary of booking villas via Internet sites that tout fancy photos and low rates. "If it's too cheap, there's got to be a reason," he says.

Rapp adds that reliable companies know their properties well, can answer clients' questions honestly and accurately, have English-