

speaking representatives on site or nearby to assist and won't try to steal clients' business from agents if they decide to book a subsequent villa vacation.

Personally visiting as many villas as possible is also key. "It's much easier to sell a product when you've seen it first-hand," Veith says. "Go and explore what activities are available in the area in which the client would like to stay."

Despite the stark contrasts from hotels that villas provide, villa guests do appreciate small hotel-like touches—often arranged personally by their travel advisors—during their stay.

"Make sure the lights are on around the home and that there's music playing when the clients arrive," advises Boomgarden. "I have flower arrangements placed around the home to create a warm, welcoming feeling similar to what a hotel might provide."

Kane personalizes his clients' villa vacations by providing grocery lists (or having the refrigerator and pantry stocked with the clients' preferred groceries ahead of time) and detailed maps with directions to markets, restaurants and other points of interest. Veith sends menus to her clients so that they can pre-select their meals, and Stewart pre-arranges sightseeing tours and cooking classes, as well as car, limo and van transportation when wanted, for her VIP clients. Boomgarden supplies pre-paid calling cards.

In addition, these agents—whose percentages of business from villa bookings range from 10% to 15%—typically offer extra services, from booking airline tickets and tours to making rental car and dinner reservations, for which they can charge separate fees or earn commission, another factor Veith advises agents to look for when searching for a villa.

"Villa rentals are becoming a much larger portion of the business, as family- and generational group-travel are growing tremendously," Kane says.

"Check out even the most reputed of places and companies," Boomgarden says. "Hotel guests can avoid disappointment when there's nothing to do off site, because of what the hotel itself has to offer. That's not the case with villas, so it's best to get it right from the start." ■