

The Art of the Perfect Vacation

An Interview with Laura Blair, Founder and CEO of In Villas Veritas

In Villas Veritas was founded in 1997 to develop unique experiences and memories for the most discerning traveller at the most distinctive villas throughout the world. The Company specializes in leisure travel and retreats for multi-generational families, corporations and celebratory groups.

Robert Reiss: Please explain your business model. How has it evolved over the years?

Laura Blair: I fell into my business a bit by accident. I was raised in France, Switzerland and the UK but settled in New York City working as an Interior Design Consultant after graduating from university in the US. I missed Europe and started going back for villa vacations. In turn, friends and family started asking me for recommendations and help in planning their own vacations, first in Europe and then eventually expanding into tropical areas based on client demand. In the early days, we faxed photos of great villas that we had visited and that was the fastest information possible then! The Company grew as top travel agencies with Ultra High Net Worth clients became aware of the quality of service we provided. One of our unique characteristics is that we have personally visited and vetted each property in our collection. Since our founding, we have put together vacations for more than 1,000 clients and, in many cases, worked with them on multiple vacation experiences. We are not high volume as we dedicate ourselves fully to tailoring each and every client villa stay, in every stage of planning, so as to provide a seamless and wonderful experience.

How is your company unique in its market?

What distinguishes In Villas Veritas is the individual attention brought to each client and the complete knowledge of each property in our collection. In the current market where there are now so many companies renting villas that they have not seen, in areas that they know nothing about, we stand with very few in truly knowing our villas and the areas that surround them. We know the villa

owners and their staff. We sample the chefs menus, sleep in the beds and try out all manner of facilities available to clients in each property we stay in. We work directly with each client in creating a holiday tailored to what best suits the group. For those who are not sure of what they would like to do, we are happy to create an itinerary using our decades of experience. We also have a few extraordinary private properties that are not in the public eye at all due to owner preferences for complete privacy. We can market them only directly to vetted clients.

What defines the In Villas Veritas customer experience?

We start by getting to know the client and then using our knowledge and experience to pair the client with a property that suits them perfectly. We then use the services of our carefully vetted local partners and the villa staff to create the perfect holiday. Chauffeurs, tour guides, boat operators, dive instructors, sommeliers, chefs, fitness instructors, massage therapists, tennis pros, etc. are all carefully vetted by a member of our team and years of teamwork and feedback from clients. In addition, we have many multi-generational families travelling together and are able to design activities that are appropriate for each age group.

What are the important trends and challenges in today's travel for CEOs and how does your company respond to them?

We are seeing more interest in off the beaten path destinations, so we are slowly and carefully adding those areas to our collection. This requires spending time in these areas and strenuously vetting the properties, especially in areas that are less accustomed to the demands of VIP clients.

“We don't strive to be bigger; we strive to be better... and for no surprises, except happy ones...”



“A Five-Star villa experience is far more exclusive than that of a Five-Star hotel because all of the services are exclusive to and exclusively designed for only the villa guests.”

A challenge for those looking for a villa is most certainly trying to find a genuine villa rental company in a sea of those purporting to know what they are offering. There is absolutely no way to know a villa unless it has been personally experienced. So many companies offer an automated “tick off the box for interests” type of service. We work directly with each client to create experience best suited to each group.

For those not sure of what they would like to do, we are happy to create an itinerary using our decades of experience. Our clients have extremely busy and active lives. They don't have time to waste in looking, organizing and second guessing vacation plans. We remove that from the equation entirely.

In corporate travel, we are seeing a trend towards large villas and estates being used for corporate retreats and another toward incorporating wellness activities and learning into the experience. Our clients not only want to learn how to cook but want to go to the market and wine tasting with the chef or sommelier. We are also working with companies for villas as incentive awards for the best employees. I think this is partly because the villas are more of a sure thing than they used to be and better value than hotels, even at the high end. Hotels have so many extra costs that the bill ends up blooming to three or four times the initial estimate for accommodations and meals by the time one is finished. When you pay for a villa, most everything is included and easily explained, so final costs are well known and clear up-front, avoiding sticker shock surprises at check out.

Expert Advice Luxury Villas



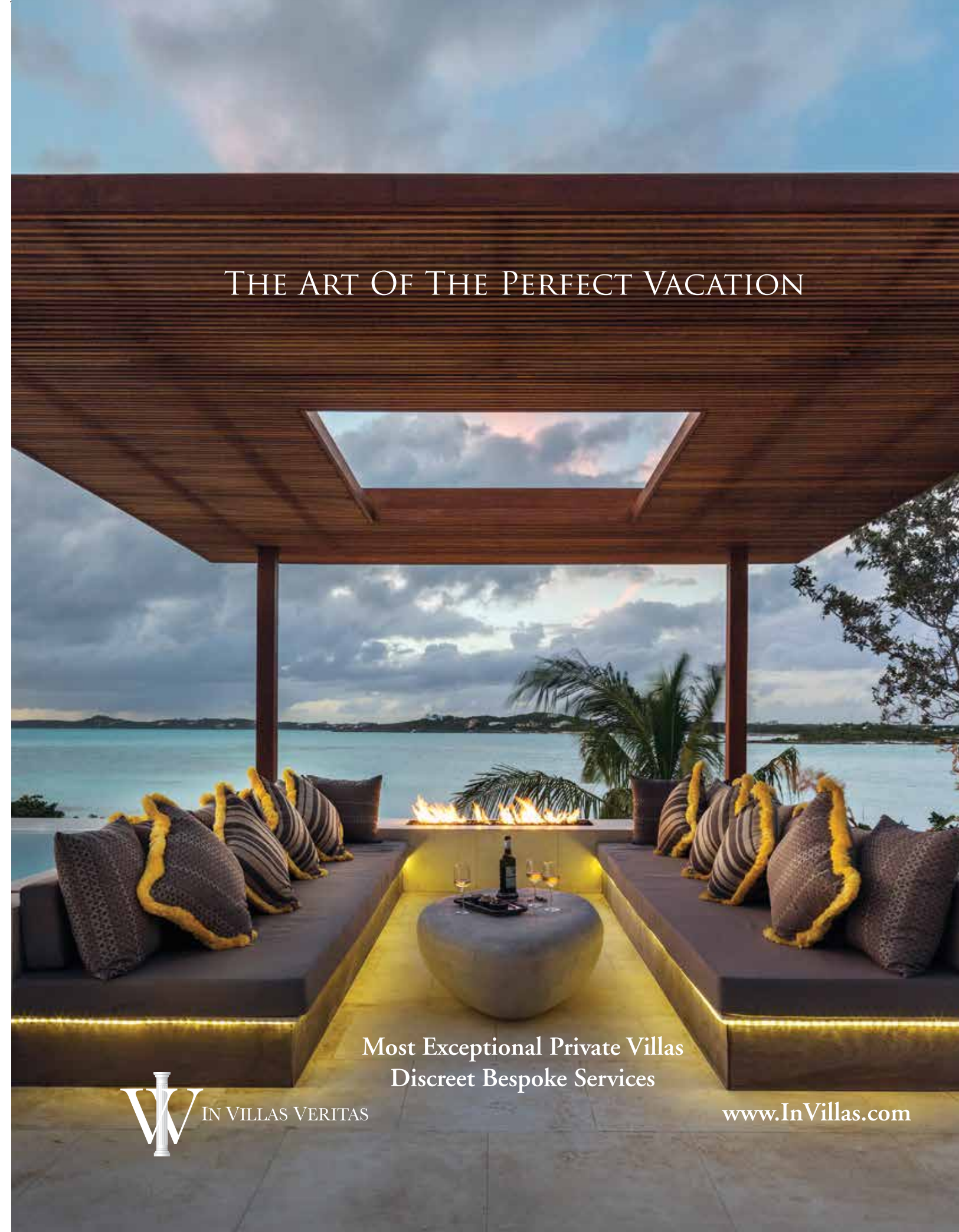
As CEO, how do you spend most of your time being responsible for a large and diverse property portfolio and your customer experiences?

I spend several months a year traveling to the areas that we represent and staying in the properties. To give you an idea, I was just in the Turks and Caicos seeing how they fared post-hurricanes and inspecting and staying in properties and next week I'm off to Aspen, Hawaii and Palm Springs for the same. In April, I will be travelling to Tuscany to visit Sting's estate, among others, including Puglia, the Amalfi coast and Provence. I am also hands on and deal directly with clients while overseeing my experienced and absolutely remarkable staff who go above and beyond at all times providing 7/24/365 service when needed. I also spend time networking with our partners, many of whom are the top private travel agencies or travel concierge companies. We are fortunate to be the preferred villa vendor for some of the most exclusive agents in the US and UK.



Robert Reiss and Laura Blair at Homestead Inn - Thomas Henkelmann.

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