

# **I Stayed at a Luxury Villa That Costs Over \$20,000 a Night. Take a Look Inside – and Learn Its Secrets for Surpassing High Expectations.**

When you round the final bend in the road and see Villa Avellana, a 10-bedroom residence located on Costa Rica's Peninsula Papagayo, it's as if the house is growing out of Guanacaste's north Pacific landscape itself. Designed by Sarco Architects, the property sits in a gated neighborhood within a gated community and boasts more than 33,000 square feet of indoor-outdoor living space and three acres of black-sand beachfront. It also comes with a 42-foot yacht and 20-person staff.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana

As one might expect, the all-inclusive, full-buyout property, which officially opened to guests in August 2023, comes with a premium, season-dependent price tag. Nightly rates with a five-night stay requirement are \$22,000 from May 1 to November 18 and \$32,000 from November 19 to April 30, with the exception of the “festive season.” The latter spans from November 20 to November 27, then December 20 to January 4, and costs \$40,000 a night with a minimum stay of seven nights.

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It's typical for multiple generations of a family to stay

together at Villa Avellana, general manager Thomas Freitag tells *Entrepreneur*. Groups of friends have also taken up residence; the villa has even hosted a wedding too.

Naturally, people spending more than \$100,000 on a vacation might have some high expectations, including the desire for a range of amenities and activities suitable for all ages, interests and abilities.

Villa Avellana delivers on that, and then some: world-class meals crafted by a private chef; spa services and yoga classes in the treehouse retreat; swimming and spear fishing in the warm, calm Prieta Bay; golf, nature tours, ziplining and mountain biking across the peninsula; and service projects through partnerships with local nonprofits – just to name a few.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. The treehouse retreat.

The villa's proximity to the Four Seasons Resort, Andaz Resort and the Clubhouse at Prieta Beach is also a draw, as guests can take advantage of day passes allowing access to additional restaurants, amenities and services.

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My husband and I had the opportunity to experience Villa Avellana as part of a small press group in November. We were supposed to be there for three nights, but a seasonally uncharacteristic tropical storm and subsequent airport closure doubled the length of our stay (spoiler alert: it wasn't a bad place to be stuck).

Although the heavy rains prevented us from enjoying some of the weather-dependent activities on the agenda, like a surf lesson and boat ride, we still had a wonderful time, which is a testament to Villa Avellana's extensive amenities and incredible staff.

Image Credit: Amanda Breen. View from Villa Avellana's beach.

Any business that strives to exceed customer expectations can learn a lot from Villa Avellana's approach.

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Read on for an inside look at the property and how its team goes the extra mile to make guests feel at home and like

anything is possible.

## **Business lesson No. 1: Don't skimp on the details – strive to surprise and delight**

Upon arrival at Villa Avellana, guests are greeted by name, offered a hand towel and met with the subtle but serene scent of doTERRA essential oils wafting down the halls and from the bedrooms.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. Ocean view king room with en suite bathroom and private balcony.

My husband and I stayed in one of the ocean view king rooms.

Like all of the rooms at the villa, ours featured an en suite bathroom and private balcony. The house, which sleeps up to 18 adults and five children, has three ocean view king rooms, two ocean view double queen rooms, four garden view king rooms and one ocean view bunk room for the kids. Villa Avellana provides guests with daily housekeeping and a laundry service.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. Ocean view king room with en suite bathroom and private balcony.

In the evenings, after a day of activity or lounging poolside with a spicy mezcal margarita, guests come back to a relaxation-promoting amenity. Some of ours included an incense kit complete with sage, palo santo, selenite stone and a bird-carved lighter; healing golden mud from Rincón de la Vieja Volcano for a face mask; and a selection of tea infusions.

Learning guests' names before they step foot on the property and leaving amenities in their rooms every evening might seem like minor details, but they add up to a major impact: a series of surprise-and-delight moments that can mean the difference between a great experience and an unforgettable one.

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All businesses would do well to remember that the little things matter a lot. **Surprise-and-delight factors don't have to cost a lot of time or money, but even minimal investments in them often come back in spades.**

## **Business lesson No. 2: Be extremely prepared – but flexible**

At Villa Avellana, meals cater to everyone's dietary restrictions and preferences, thanks to the detailed questionnaire that guests fill out before arrival.

Costa Rican coffee was prepared in a traditional pour-over coffee maker called a Vandola, and fresh-squeezed juices, pastries, toast and fruit were available in the kitchen each morning. Breakfast chef Michelle Brenes also offered daily specials like chilaquiles or French toast. Head chef David Moya's lunch and dinner creations featured global classics with inventive twists and fresh local ingredients.

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"Everything is on your time" was a common refrain during our stay at the villa. Meals were ideated and penciled into the schedule, but the staff was happy to deliver breakfast to the rooms of non-early risers and consult our group to confirm when a lunch or dinner seating made sense within the rest of the day's plans.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. Dinner served outside.

The ability to plan carefully but pivot with intention was also on full display when the storm curtailed several of our scheduled activities.

With surfing and boating off the agenda, lead concierge Sergio Jaén helped organize a couple of spontaneous activities in the living area, which still felt deliberate and meaningful. We enjoyed a presentation by The Chocolate Master, Henrik Bodholdt, who discussed cacao farming and helped us make our own chocolate bars. We also heard from the director of Creciendo Juntos, Elsa Bonilla, who shared more about the nonprofit organization that supports elementary and high schools in the communities surrounding Peninsula Papagayo.

## **Related: 3 Things Luxury Hotels Can Teach About Exceptional Customer Service**

Businesses, take note: **Unforeseen circumstances are an opportunity to showcase your preparation skills – and prove that nothing will stop you from giving clients a five-star experience.**

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. The living area, featuring the interior dining space and kitchen.

## **Business lesson No. 3: Hire great people with a talent for building**

# rapport

Villa Avellana's bar, pool and outdoor dining and living areas create another oasis on the property. Despite the storm, mild temperatures in the 70s allowed us to enjoy the covered outdoor space for much of our visit – and in good company.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. The bar, pool and outdoor dining and living areas.

My husband and I enjoyed chatting with food and beverage manager Jose Murllio about Miami Vice cocktails and Costa Rica's soccer team. Bartender Tatiana Juarez generously invited my husband behind the bar to teach him how to make her daiquiri with aged rum and a guaro sour. From Aneth Alvarez, I learned about Costa Rican coffee and the process of preparing

it in the Vandola – she was even kind enough to give us some beans to take home.

Freitag is an excellent host with a skill for building rapport and establishing trust; he has a knack for making people feel like all of the details are accounted for, even when unexpected challenges arise, and with the storm, there were plenty of them. From showing us around Peninsula Papagayo in less-than-ideal weather to helping us navigate flight and hotel options amid numerous cancellations, Freitag was always ready to make the best of any situation.

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These are just a few of many examples of how Villa Avellana's staff cultivates a truly rare guest experience.

Businesses should never lose sight of how important it is to assemble a team with a talent for communication and relationship-building. **Hire the right people, and you'll give your clients an experience they can't find elsewhere.**

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. Lap pool and jacuzzi.

## **Business lesson No. 4: Listen for what's not being said – then go above and beyond**

Villa Avellana strives to provide the vacation experience of a lifetime. It's a lofty goal that not only requires the exceptional readiness, flexibility, attention to detail and rapport mentioned above but also the ability to really hear what people want and then execute it flawlessly.

Meeting expectations, even inordinately high ones, can be fairly straightforward when people know what they want and

don't hesitate to verbalize it. Of course, even if someone is transparent about their wishes, it's difficult to exceed expectations if the person is, well, expecting them to be fulfilled.

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Freitag says that part of the job is to listen for what people want but don't necessarily ask for outright. For example, if a guest casually mentions to another how cool it would be to see a whale, that's a chance to make the magic happen – take them out on the boat and spot a whale.

During our stay, when someone in the group mentioned how convenient it would be to have some of the homemade chocolate chip cookies that were in the kitchen downstairs closer to the bedrooms upstairs, a plate of those cookies appeared on the table in the media room. Later, when people expressed interest in watching *The Apprentice*, a copy of the film was placed in the media room.

The lesson here is a simple but critical one: **Businesses that listen to their clients so closely that they hear what's not being said can surpass even the highest expectations.**

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The Liberia airport was still closed when the rain let up, so our group drove to San Jose, where we spent the night before catching our flight the next morning.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Villa Avellana. An exterior view from the beach.

It was hard to say goodbye to Villa Avellana, not only because the property is exquisite but also because its staff created such a convivial atmosphere: It's a place where guests can trust that all is taken care of – and relax enough to have a vacation they'll remember forever.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/living/inside-my-stay-at-a-22k-a-night-villa-top-business-lessons/485256>