

[By Matt Helm](#)

So you've rented a villa for your Jamaica vacation. Now what? Well if you've rented a luxury, staffed villa here's what you might expect:

Your driver will meet you at the airport in a comfortable, air-conditioned van. On the drive to your villa, he will indicate points of interest along the road and provide refreshments- if it is a long drive do not hesitate to request a stop. Upon arrival at your villa you will be greeted by your staff; they are your caretakers for the duration of your stay and you should feel completely at ease making reasonable requests of them. Get to know your head-of-house as he or she will be your primary point of contact should you have any questions about the villa and how it operates. Your cook will handle grocery shopping and meal preparation. She will prepurchase your first few meals plus pantry staples, then finish the week's shopping after meeting with you. A typical grocery budget is US\$210 per adult per week (more in some villas) ... less for children. This may vary up or down depending on market prices and menus. If you wish to go to the various markets with your cook, feel free to do so. Otherwise, simply review with her your likes and dislikes and she will handle everything while you stay at the villa and relax. At some of the villa colonies, like Tryall, it is possible for your cook to charge groceries to your account, which you then settle at the end of your stay. At most of the independent villas, unless you've arranged for a mealplan, your cook will request money for shopping; she'll bring you receipts and change.

The day starts while guests are still asleep. The cook quietly places pots of steaming Jamaican coffee and platters of fresh fruit outside your bedroom door or at the breakfast table. Full breakfast is served when all guests are ready. A typical breakfast may include fresh orange juice and several fruits, banana fritters or plantain, eggs, bacon, pancakes or cereal. Light lunches are usual in Jamaica, then for dinner your cook will prepare her own mix of Jamaican specialties ... including delicious homemade soups and desserts, ackee and saltfish, jerk pork or chicken, shrimp or curried goat. Lobster, too, when in season ... she can of course also serve traditional American fare as you request. Warning: Jamaican cooks are excellent and portions are big. Your chambermaid and laundress will care for every detail of your bedroom and bath ... providing a daily supply of fresh linens and flowers and returning your neatly-folded laundry each afternoon before turning down your bed each evening. The gardener will maintain the pool and grounds immaculately each day. Larger villas are staffed by a butler who serves, tends bar and generally facilitates. Available on request are a masseuse, children's nanny and chauffeur. At the conclusion of your stay it is customary to tip for good service. Villa staffs, like most jobs in the service industry, rely on tips as part of their overall compensation.

Recommended gratuities tend to be around 10% of the villa rental in High Season ~ 15% of the villa rental in Low Season (some villas have more specific guidelines). These percentages apply to the entire staff, not to each individual staff member. In each villa, you will find a gratuity guide advising you how tips should be distributed among your staff members based on their seniority- in some cases you can pay the entire amount to the head of house or directly to the property manager for distribution. Once you have experienced the villa lifestyle, it is only natural to be intrigued by the prospect of owning one of these extraordinary properties. Whether it is an existing villa or a home site on which to build the vacation house of your dreams Jamaica's experienced real estate agents will help you find it.

What are the advantages to staying in a villa over a hotel? The only true privacy you get in a hotel is in your bedroom or suite. In a villa everything belongs to you ~ the pool, the sun beds, the terrace, the music, the TV ~ it is your home every minute of the day. You will only see the people you wish to see. Even your staff will become "invisible" if that is what you want, appearing only at those times you ask them to serve you. In a villa you decide everything from what you eat to the time you eat it. And yet, despite having all these major advantages, a villa vacation compares very favorably on price with a hotel.

Certain villas include temporary memberships in private clubs such as Tryall, Round Hill and Wyndham Rose Hall that offer a host of activities including golf, tennis and watersports. Those actually located within a villa colony offer the best-of-both worlds, with the complete privacy of a villa vacation and all the amenities and social opportunities of a fine resort.

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