



15th September 2020

By Email: sharon.belmar@govt.lc

Dr Sharon Belmar-George
Chief Medical Officer
2nd Floor
Sir Stanislaus James Building
Waterfront
Castries
St Lucia

Dear Dr. Belmar-George,

RE: Luxury Villas / Alternative Accommodation

Thank you so much for making your valuable time available to us on Monday and thank you also for so patiently addressing all of our questions and suggestions.

As advised, the SLHTA is working closely with our various sectors and also niche tourism service providers. We are very aware and concerned about the tourism business providers that could not yet re-commence business operations and may be close to financial collapse.

This particular letter centers on our villa members/ informal accommodations.

The SLHTA Villa membership accounts for approximately 646 rooms, mostly at the higher end of the market.

We created a committee for the villas headed by Marella Devaux:
mdevaux@blueskyluxurystlucia.com

To avoid duplication of effort, we would suggest that any meetings for villas/ alternative accommodation include Ms Devaux and also the SLHTA as the issues for the sector are the same.

As we briefly discussed today – Monday -, I would like to suggest that consideration is given to create sub groupings under the informal sector.

It would appear to me that free standing villas or cottages would be easier to integrate immediately than perhaps accommodations linked to someone's home.

In particular, there is a great demand for luxury villas and they would be a very important component in our destination product mix to attract more business and more visitors. Potential travelers have started looking and finalizing their fall travel and the informal sector is missing out because of the uncertainty when they may offer reservations again.

Below are just some of the comments and suggestions I made, taking into account that there may be further delays with Phase 2.

The villa protocols could entail the following (if island protocols remain as they are)

- Villa/accommodation must have 24 hour security
- Villa guests cannot rent a car
- Guests can go on pre-booked coastal excursions and pre booked land taxi excursions with certified drivers but are not allowed to make a stop in between
- Groceries can be ordered and delivered

Opportunities:

- Whilst this model may not be suited for all informal accommodations, it would be a start and bring back income to a percentage of the informal accommodation providers.
- With villa occupancy, come employment of housekeepers, cooks and security personnel.
- The Saint Lucia destination product is restricted currently, and visitors are looking for the informal accommodation grouping as well as luxury villas.
 - By enriching the current available accommodation product we may gain visitors, and therefore also achieve higher airline loading factors
 - More certified drivers could gain income. It would have been my suggestion to find drivers that are willing to accept a weekly fee and make themselves available to villa guests at a reasonable rate rather than charging the usual fares per trip. Perhaps work out a surcharge of the family goes to further away locations.
- Sites and attractions would ramp up with more visitors as would other excursion providers.
- Retail shops could be treated as an excursion and receive visitors on appointment.
- Restaurants would be given an option to open exclusively to international visitors. This could also play in.
- If one can find a beach that is not associated with a beach resort, then a protocol for a supervised beach visit could be developed.
- In regard to mixing international and bubble visitors: With the understanding that each informal accommodation would only cater to one set of clients. The informal accommodation could accept both types of visitors but NOT at the same time. Week 1 could be international, so keep the villa empty for 24 hours max, and then your next visitor could for example be from the bubble.

Ms Devaux had put together questions and comments that have arisen from her grouping which you find below.

Is the opening of the Villa Sector still 5th October? The opening of Villas has now been pushed back twice and we hope for no further delays.

- Are there a list of tours that will be available to guests?
- Will restaurants be open to guests of the villas?
- Will guests be able to go venture out during phase 2?
- What exactly will our guests be able to do during the first two weeks or in general during their stay?

- Will local visitors and friends be able to use the same grounds while the guest cottages are occupied? This is specifically relevant to properties that consists of villas and are on large parcels of land that locals usually visit. We will ensure there is no interaction between guests and locals.
- What is the procedure if there is a suspected case of COVID-19 at a villa. Can someone come to the villa to do the test? Assume all guests at the villa will then need to be quarantined at the villa until the results are received. If the guest's test is positive then will they be required to go to the respiratory clinic and all other guests now tested? What is the estimated cost per day of staying at the respiratory clinic?
- When will there be a more detailed advisory or documentary video for tourists about what to expect when traveling, arriving and vacationing in St Lucia (what happens in any and all eventualities) including the capacity of the islands health system, the hospital experience, and potential associated costs?

- Globally the trend is that vacationers feel safer staying at a Villa where they can have no or minimal service and be among only their own travelling party. When will the CMO and Ministry feel that it is safe to open Villas.
- Villas had been closed now for 6 months and have as such had no revenue for that period of time many still trying to maintain their staff while the moratorium on their loans and insurance payments etc. are due. We urge the CMO and MOT to sit with the stakeholder to see how we can ensure that villas are allowed to open responsibly and safely.
- Due to the price point of the Luxury Villas even with discounts there are only a handful of bookings from Staycation & Caribcations leaving the majority of villas empty and earning no revenue since the end of March.
- We at Blue Sky Luxury have been able to work with the Villa Owners to retain the majority of staff only 5 of over 70 staff are currently on lay off. This will change if we are not able to have international bookings in Oct and the opening date moves again.
- Luxury Villas allows for no/minimal interaction between guests and staff so offers a model that has been globally shown to be more enticing for guests than even hotel stays.
- Luxury Villas are distinctly different from the regular Airbnb accommodation but we are all under the "Alternative Accommodation Sector" and being treated the same. Why?

- Villa Owners are consistently enquiring as to what they will be able to do when they come back to their villa.
 - When will the tracking bands be instated and who will be eligible for them?

 - It will be great to be able to work with the Ministry of Tourism to ensure that they understand the product that they offer with the Luxury Villas and the measures that we are able to put in place to open to international guests from Oct 5th barring any further delays.
 - Can the MOT and MOH offer a Training session for all Housekeeping Staff and Staff who are interacting with Villa guests for all SLHTA Luxury Villas?
 - Can there be a representative at the MOT and MOH that can be the dedicated liaison for the SLHTA Luxury Villa Representatives to assist members with their registration and inspection/certification process?
 - If the opening of the Villas is delayed further what, if any, provisions will be made for the support of Villa Owners regarding the ability to lay staff off or keep staff on layoff, moratoriums from the banks etc.
- Ms Devaux questions end.

Thank you once again Dr Belmar-George for taking the time to study and address the above. As you suggested another meeting on the phone might be best.

Yours sincerely



KAROLIN TROUBETZKOY
President
Saint Lucia Hospitality and Tourism Association

CC: Permanent Secretary of Tourism - Donalyn Vittet
SLTA CEO - Beverly Nicholson-Doty
Lenita Joseph
Marella Devaux – Chairperson SLHTA Luxury Villas Committee