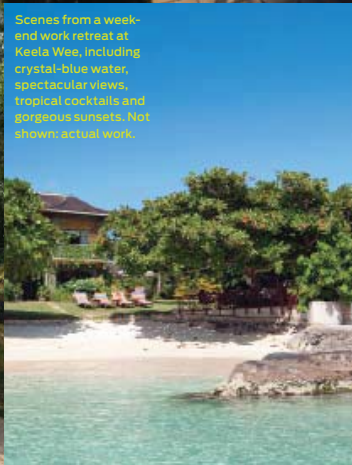




Keela Wee // Discovery Bay, Jamaica

THE BUSINESS OF PLAY

Monday through Friday we sit in meetings, send e-mails with *URGENT* in the subject lines and maybe pair up for a hasty lunch. Friday evenings we might even gather for a beer or two before heading our separate ways. But could we — the entire staff of *Caribbean Travel + Life* — survive a long-weekend Jamaican getaway together? Vacations, after all, are supposed to be *from work*, not *with work*. Calling it a “retreat” and throwing it at the lovely waterfront villa



Scenes from a week-end work retreat at Keela Wee, including crystal-blue water, spectacular views, tropical cocktails and gorgeous sunsets. Not shown: actual work.

5 GREAT WAYS TO SAVE

Take note of these tips, and live large without spending big.

1. Time It Right Travel during the low season — May through mid-December — when airfares and villa rates are as much as 40 percent lower. Stretch your dollar even further by avoiding weekend travel.

2. Choose Wisely In general, airfares to destinations with direct flights from the United States will be cheaper than those that require connections. And in destinations where villas are usually rented with staff (Jamaica, Barbados or St. Lucia, for example), you'll enjoy the luxury of round-the-clock attention at no out-of-pocket expense.

3. Go Big It's all about economies of scale: the more people in your party, the lower the per-person tab. A larger home is almost always more economical, and traveling with a group means your entertainment's built in.

4. Watch the Web It's not uncommon for villa companies to offer free nights or a complimentary car rental or to throw in provisions for your first night. Monitor their websites for deals, and don't be afraid to ask for a little something extra.

5. Live Like a Local Eat in most days and save. At the supermarket, choose homegrown produce and less-expensive domestic brands. Stock your bar with local spirits, or bring duty-free liquor with you. If you do eat out, find the inexpensive places locals eat. And don't forget to bring your own sunscreen and insect repellent; there are hefty markups on imported toiletries too.

Keela Wee in Discovery Bay might make things a little easier. We had some high-level brainstorming to get done without everyday office distractions, and there seemed no better place for us to convene than in the islands themselves. The salt air and the rum would loosen our minds and our tongues, respectively. Which, frankly, could go either way.

Keela Wee is the best office you could imagine: a two-story butter-yellow villa of 6,500 square feet, with plenty of intimate nooks inside and out — perfect spots for people to gather or get away from each other. Each of the six bedrooms is unique and elegant, but the two sea-view upstairs rooms are, no surprise, the most covetable, with luxurious king-size beds and *Romeo and Juliet*-style balconies draped romantically in flowering Pandora vines that attract some very territorial hummingbirds.

We took our meals in the large dining room, which was open to the sea breeze on three sides. Eager to get us into the island swing, our

Jamaican-bred senior editor encouraged us to try ackee and saltfish for breakfast. Afterward, we held conferences on the round wooden deck, sheltered by a leafy almond tree, and as we worked, Keela Wee's attentive staff of six made sure our stomachs were never empty and our drinks were never warm. No sooner would we set down a Red Stripe — half-full or not — than butler Tony would whisk it away and replace it with another, full and ice-cold.

During breaks in our schedule, we took some time to enjoy the lush property. There were kayaks and snorkeling gear for exploring the bay, staff-arranged massages, a swimming pool, a tennis court and loungers set in sunny spots on the wide lawn. From our petite private beach, we snorkeled past other villas and along the ironshore coast, spotting blue tangs and sergeants major darting between the rocks and a queen conch lolling on the sandy bottom. The house is close enough to Ocho Rios for an easy road trip, so a

contingent of us stole away for a morning at Dunn's River Falls, and lunches of local jerk pork and chicken and Jamaican patties were easily arranged. Dinnertime was a similarly casual, unobtrusive affair; we ate outdoors by the water, the only light coming from candles on the tables and lanterns hanging in the almond trees.

The villa gave our group plenty of privacy, as well as the chance to spend time together. A friendly staff made the experience effortless, and the villa's intimate quarters and incredible setting encouraged us to approach our work in ways not possible in cubicles. There were no *Real World* antics; no one got voted off the island. We came, we worked and we played. And now that we've had a taste of how sweet villa life can be, the verdict's unanimous: We'll be needing another staff villa retreat next year.

— BECKY STRAUSS

Keela Wee villa, from \$10,950 per week in low season (\$11,950 high). 301-229-4300; jamaicavillas.com