



**ANI VILLAS ANGUILLA**  
At resorts such as Ani Villas, guests are pampered with bespoke experiences



**ANI VILLAS THAILAND**  
Ani Villas has resorts in Sri Lanka and Thailand in Asia, and Anguilla and the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean



**MAHU WHENUA**  
At the top end, guests can pay NZ\$15,000 (\$\$14,600) per night for 12 guests on a 55,000 hectare high-country sheep station, Mahu Whenua

Booking an entire resort for the clan to spend quality time together takes family gathering up a few luxury notches

BY RAHITA ELIAS

# Happy togetherring

**W**HEN it comes to group holidays, what is good enough for Justin Bieber (The Biebs) is certainly good enough for the very rich. For the totally luxurious and exclusive, not to mention over-the-top, family gathering, the rich do not just have family holidays. They go togetherring.

This involves more than simply jetting off together and booking into a luxurious hotel or resort, which they have to share with (shudder) strangers. Instead, the clan books an entire resort to spend quality time with one another away from the hoi polloi.

Ira Bloom, chief executive officer (CEO) of Ani Villas, explains the growing popularity of togetherring: "It's one of the great new trends in travel. Also, it's something people have wanted for a long time; they just haven't known the private resort option existed. People want to travel. They want to be with family and friends. They like the amenities of a resort but want to have their own space."

"With a private resort, you can have it all. You can do almost as much at a traditional resort, of course. But when you have the whole place to yourselves, the experience is more personalised, deeper, richer and more memorable."

Ani Villas has resorts in Sri Lanka and Thailand in Asia, and Anguilla and the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. As these resorts accept only group bookings, you are assured that only you and your family have the entire resort along with all the luxurious amenities and

facilities found in top-end hotels.

Alexandra Stewart, founder and CEO, Antipodean Luxury Travel, observes: "Togetherring provides an opportunity for families or groups to spend quality time and connect in a place that is exclusive to them. It's often the parents or grandparents who are paying the bill to bring all the family together, or it's a special occasion that warrants investment in exclusivity and time. Guests enjoy that their trip is completely personalised, luxurious, and not something that can be easily replicated."

Singapore-based Antipodean provides one-off curated experiences and concierge service for its clientele.

Ms Stewart adds: "Togetherring is mainly multi-generational families, but we also see younger couples travelling with parents, two families with children, and groups of friends coming together for a special occasion. There's no typical profile, it's more about the experience that the group wants to share together, and how we can personalise their trip for them."

Antipodean, she explains, ensures that each property fits the profile of the family.

"For example, if the group is made up of lots of young children then we find full-serviced villas are a better fit. We also get requests for the master suites to be slightly removed to give the older couple their own space."

Among the popular places for togetherring adult groups include the Owner's Cottage at Matakauri Lodge or The Penthouse at Eichardt's.

Ms Stewart adds: "We also know that Justin Bieber recently stayed at The Hills Lodge after his Auckland

concert with friends – this allowed him to have complete privacy, with infinity pool, tennis court, world-class golf course and fully stocked bar."

Nico Heath, co-founder and director, Lightfoot Travel, says that togetherring groups can hire a private island for the ultimate in privacy. "Luckily for us in Singapore, Asia has plenty. The benefit of a private island, of course, is that they can completely take it over and do exactly as they please, when they please. Often activities are included, and there are a lot of them on offer. While the kids are learning to surf, the parents could be treating themselves to a spa treatment."

## Varied clientele

For Ani Villas, its togetherring clientele is quite varied.

Ms Bloom says: "The guests at Ani Villas, for sure, include families and individuals with the highest of net worth, but it's a bit of a wider spread than you'd expect. As far as the type of groups we get, it really has been a wide mix – be it a 20-plus reunion of grandparents, kids and grandkids to celebrate a milestone anniversary, eight couples getting away for someone's 50th birthday, or a group of executives and their wives on a corporate retreat."

At resorts such as Ani Villas, guests are pampered with bespoke experiences that take into account anything from their dietary restrictions to their whims and fancies, and the outright bizarre.

Ms Bloom says: "We customise and personalise every single stay. We just did a fully kosher experience for our guests for this past Passover in Anguilla where one of our



employees had to fly to Miami to source the right foods and make sure it was respecting the strictest guidelines of our guests. We also had a request for a fun-filled week for children where the kids had one villa all to themselves, and all the parents were staying in the other villa. Our staff organised games and activities for them while the adults relaxed, had spa treatments, and lounged by their private pool."

Antipodean, too, has received specific requests from its togetherring clientele.

Ms Stewart says: "The strangest request was for a specific temperature to be set throughout the whole villa for the duration of their stay. Also, smoking is not allowed in most properties in New Zealand, so one client requested a temporary structure built away from the house so they

**QUALITY TIME**  
(Above left) Mahu Whenua; (centre) The Hills Lodge. Ms Stewart says: "Togetherring provides an opportunity for families or groups to spend quality time and connect in a place that is exclusive to them."

had somewhere to smoke in comfort."

The cost of togetherring varies quite widely, depending on just what you want.

At the top end, Ms Stewart says, guests can pay NZ\$15,000 (\$\$14,600) per night for 12 guests on a 55,000 hectare high-country sheep station, Mahu Whenua. The Hills Lodge, where The Biebs partied, starts from NZ\$28,000 and goes up to NZ\$32,000 per night during the peak season.

Ms Bloom of Ani Villas says that while booking an entire resort may seem extravagant, it could cost no more than holidaying in a five-star hotel.

Ms Bloom says: "The rates in the end are comparable to renting multiple rooms at a top-level resort, but when you consider that all the food, drinks and a wide range of other services are included, there is truly some great value. When filling up one of our resorts, the breakdown of costs per room becomes very reasonable in comparison to a five-star resort."

"Rates start at around US\$4,000 per night for a group of eight – and run up to around US\$18,000 per night for a group of 30 over the festive season. With the resort to yourself, a full staff and all the inclusions, mostly everything you need for a terrific escape with a group is covered. Outside excursions, special decorations and activities would be at extra costs – and can only add to a great experience." ■