

BON APPETIT

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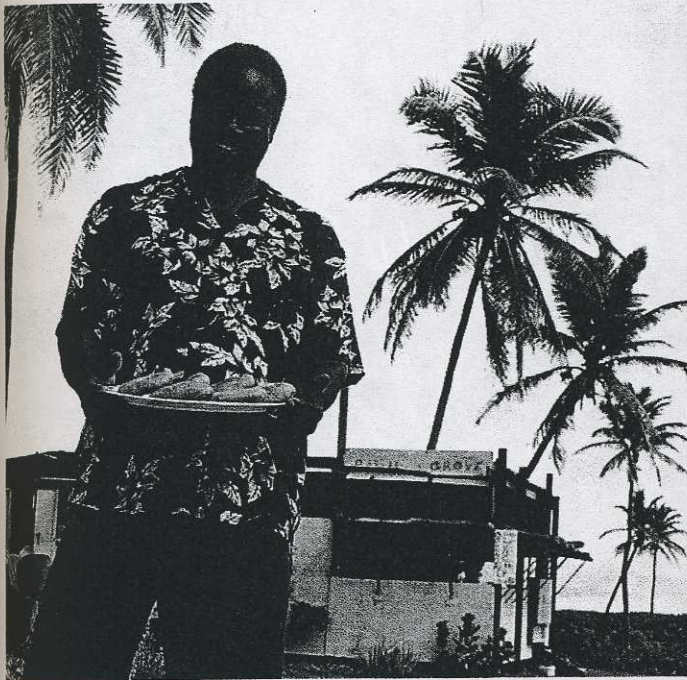
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Traveling with Taste

Life's a Beach Shack

The true flavor of **Anguilla** is served up at any number of the island's cafés, rib joints, cozy inns, and top-tier resorts. **Julie Powell** digs in, samples everything from marlin steak to hot pepper sorbet—and a few Carib beers—and finds it all here very, very chill.

The Palm Grove's Nat Richardson (below) is the man to see for a batch of johnnycakes. Proprietor—and reggae star—Bankie Banx (right) shakes things up at The Dune Preserve.



So, a funny thing happened on the way to Anguilla. I lost our boarding passes in the ladies' room of the San Juan airport. And got, well, a little hysterical. My husband, bless him, let me empty the contents of my purse into his lap, endured the muttered obscenities, and followed me faithfully as I dashed sweatily up and down moving sidewalks. Eventually, we ran up to the ticketing counter, red-faced and panicky.

"How are you?" asked the woman on the other side of the counter, beaming.

"Um, well, not so good, actually, I've—"

"How has your day been, Mrs. Powell? What did you eat today?" And then, with a flourish, she revealed them: our boarding passes. "These things are gold—don't lose them."

I could have kissed her.

I never answered her question about the eating, though what would I have said? "Oh, a mediocre fusion brunch in Brooklyn and some pretzels on the plane"? If only she had asked a week later. Then I could have told a much better story, about crayfish and singing dogs and tapas under Moorish arches.

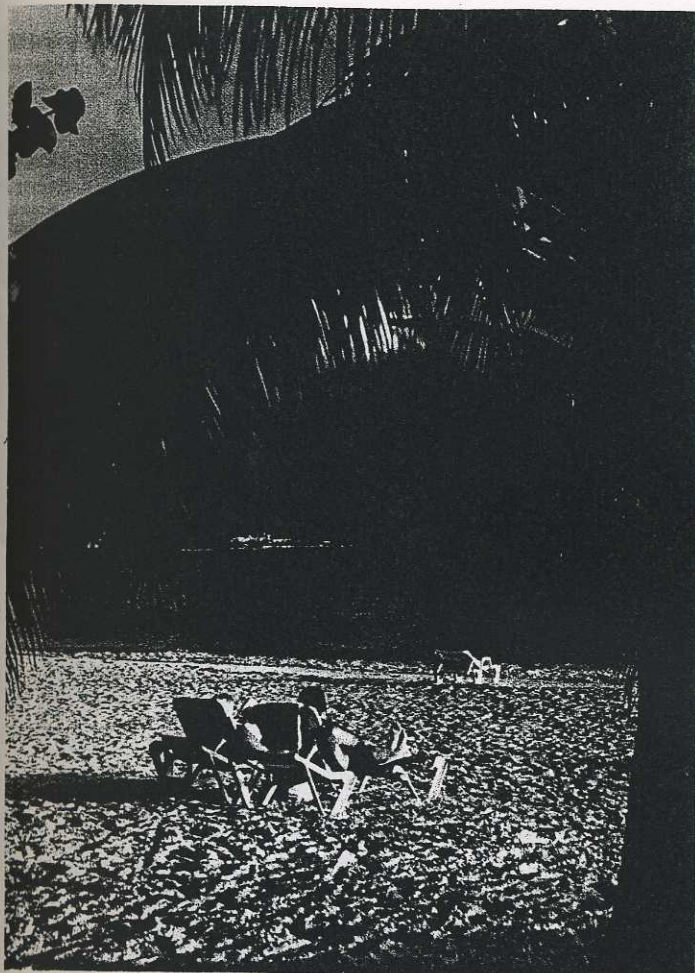
Other Caribbean destinations boast candy-colored delights—neon-lit nightclubs and mile-long cruise ships and bubblegum-colored Daiquiris. Anguilla's are quieter gifts. Beyond its flawless, and often nearly unpopulated, white sand beaches, the island has no particular claim to beauty; it is low and dry and blanketed in dusty scrub, home to thousands of scruffy goats. There is no charming colonial architecture because Anguilla was never much

of a colony. Its thin soil and arid climate held few charms for sugar plantation owners or British bureaucrats. So the many fine restaurants and resorts cling like barnacles to Anguilla's scalloped, pearlescent edges. Here you can feast like a king and live like a movie star, provided you can withstand the sticker shock.

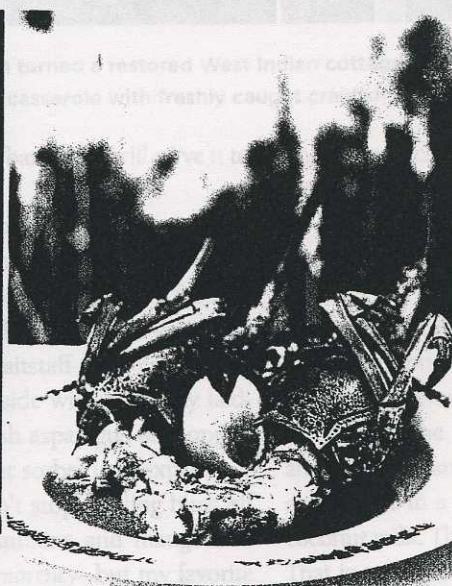
But to find the true soul of Anguilla's appeal you have to leave these grander edifices behind. You have to look under the overgrown palm groves and wander up the beach to small, isolated coves. In a simple shack, on a Styrofoam plate heaped with ribs or fish, you will discover Anguilla's greatest talent—its generous spirit.

You can find these beach shacks nearly anywhere on the island, from busy Shoal Bay East, widely considered one of the Caribbean's most beautiful strands, to Junk's Hole Bay, a spot so remote that venturing there in your rented Toyota Corolla is risky business, but where, when and if you arrive, you can reward your foolhardiness with a glass of homemade ginger beer and a quick snorkel before sampling Nat Richardson's grilled crayfish and johnnycakes at the Palm Grove Bar & Grill. (Nat will even provide the flippers.) Tracking in sand is de rigeur at these joints (good thing, too), and though a couple of shelves behind the bar are lined with pretty decent bottles of booze, a dry Martini is, how shall I say, Not Quite the Thing. Stick with a Carib beer.

Every Anguillan beach shack is a great beach shack, but The Dune Preserve is the idiosyncratic ne plus ultra of the genus. Opened in 1993 by hometown boy turned ►



The next best thing to your own beach? A spot on the sand at the Anguilla Great House (above). Lobster in paradise at the Malliouhana Hotel restaurant, carved tableside and served simply.



international reggae star Bankie Banx, The Dune looks like what Peter Pan and his Lost Boys would come up with if they decided to open a bar—tiers of open-air platforms above the palm trees, perched high enough above the white sands of Rendezvous Bay to make the most of the breeze.

While I petted the friendly mutts who had free range of the place and my husband took out his camera to stalk a cat and her kittens, Randy, Banx's webmaster and sometime bartender, mixed us up a couple of Dune Shines—the unusually spicy and potent house renditions of Anguilla's ubiquitous rum punch. When I asked Randy what was in them, he and the young honeymooning couple sitting at the bar said in unison, "It's Bankie's secret!"

The Dune is not the place to come for a quick bite. Beach shacks never are. Come instead to slowly sip Dune Shines and gaze across the channel at the peaks of bustling St. Martin. Come to hear a dog named Dash with a black spot over one eye yodel along with the proprietor's songs playing on the stereo. Come to eat simple, delicious fare, cooked and served by a reggae superstar.

"I'm not a great cook," insisted Banx, a handsome, lean man with grizzled dreadlocks, as we dug into our plates of cumin-marinated marlin steak and exquisitely crispy baby back ribs. "I cook what I like, that's all. You like the salad? That dressing's been around since we opened. Ground coriander. I use whole seeds when I can, but those can be hard to get."

The pair of honeymooners seemed to have made The Dune their home base. They were here until all hours the night before, returned for lunch, and before leaving for an afternoon sailing expedition they shook hands with Banx, who had retired to the barside couch for an afternoon smoke, and assured him they'd be back that evening. "It's a great atmosphere," the blonde bride whispered, as if asking me not to spread a secret. "Very chill."

I couldn't have said it better myself.

"Mosey" is the recommended speed around here. We'd have been convicted of half a dozen counts of aggravated goat-slaughter if we hadn't learned to drive at a leisurely dawdle, and when we attempted a hearty hike over the coral outcroppings lining the shore between our hotel and secluded Cove Bay, we learned what those cloven hooves are good for. After such an endeavor it's best not to move at all, except to the bar, say, for another glass of coconut water. That's the signature drink of the Anguilla Great House Beach Resort, and ▶ page 91

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