

Anguilla's hotels, food and beaches will bring you to a place you'll never want to leave

Caribbean treasure

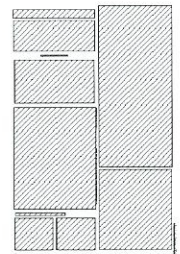
By Drew Limsky | FOR THE CHRONICLE

On tiny Anguilla, there's something about fine cuisine, limited development, dry climate and an obscene number of luscious beaches that creates an alchemy of good will.

For a place with a fairly unprepossessing name — Anguilla (pronounced an-GWILL-a) means “eel” in Italian — this island, only 16 miles long and 3 across, delivers Caribbean nirvana in spades. A giddily friendly local notes that “everyone knows everything about each other on Anguilla,” an observation that would hardly inspire comfort on most Caribbean islands (or anywhere else), but here it somehow does. Given the welcoming atmosphere, it's almost a shame that the island is blessed by so many quality private villas, havens too luxurious to leave.

At Oliver's beachfront restaurant on Long Bay, we were greeted by a hostess of a certain age whose skin was so sun-bronzed that detecting her ethnicity was impossible. She greeted me as if I were her long-lost son. We had already eaten, but Miss B — that's what she called herself — was so charming, we were tempted to stick around for a second dinner.

Anguilla only wants to mother you.



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Cap Juluca: Privacy with a social side

Nowhere is *Anguilla's* bonhomie more evident than at Cap Juluca, a resort of magical Moorish-style accommodations — picture domes, turrets and parapets — splendidly situated on the powdery crescent of Maundays Bay.

A villa within a traditional resort offers the best of everything — privacy, yet all the amenities you could ask for (think complimentary water-skiing) and the possibility of socializing if the mood strikes.

Very quickly, I grew to appreciate the unsolicited hugs from Wilma, the maternal but utterly dignified hostess who holds court over Pimm's, the fine-dining venue. Midmeal, she'll stop by to ask, "How are my children treating you?"

I've been all over the world, but I've never seen anyone work a room like Wilma.

Pimm's also features gala tastings by visiting chefs. A monthly main event, these dinners have a celebratory air, drawing an agreeable mix of resort

guests and glamorous locals — *Anguilla's* high society.

The resort lacks a full-service spa, but not to worry: Therapists swiftly appear to set up their tables in the spacious guest rooms, which have louvered doors of Brazilian walnut and double-arched terraces.

Of course, guests savvy enough to book one of the two- to five-bedroom pool villas wouldn't leave even if the resort had a Golden Door spa. I stayed in Marrakesh (No. 14), where the entrance doors swung open to reveal a pair of pools — one a skinny Jacuzzi, the other for swimming.

Having a deep-tissue massage on a vast terrace, I was tickled by sea breezes. Later, it was the dining room that knocked me out, especially at night when the glass-block tiles in the floor were illuminated.

The impressive staff-to-guest ratio stands at almost 3-to-1, with staff certified by the United Kingdom's Ivor Spencer School of Butlers.

St.Regis Temenos Villas: An architectural sanctuary

In the world of resorts, size matters, inversely. Those with the smallest number of rooms are often off the charts in luxury. But the St. Regis Temenos Villas, a three-villa enclave, puts even the tiniest, toniest places in the Caribbean to shame.

Exclusive is too weak a word to describe this temenos (Greek for sanctuary) next door to Oliver's. The crisply whitewashed Cycladic-style homes are named Sand, Sky and Sea. We holed up in the four-bedroom Sand, which is more than 4,000 square feet. The much-photographed Sea, with five bedrooms and a dramatic, elevated outdoor meditation pavilion, is the largest.

If you've ever doubted that architecture can enhance one's mood, Temenos might cure your skepticism. The design elements are of the feel-good variety — including great rooms with double-height ceilings, circular staircases indoors and out, cushioned poolside nooks, cunningly private terraces and alfresco dining spaces, not to mention the sliver of an infinity pool

that parallels the sea. But perhaps the villas' most distinctive feature is their astoundingly decadent 20-foot-by-25-foot white-marble bathrooms — each bedroom has one — complete with indoor and outdoor showers, Roman baths and mirror-image vanities on opposite sides of the room.

But best of all, Temenos had Jamal, a handsome butler of easy, soft-spoken grace who is also the resort owner's personal butler. We barely saw the chef who whipped up the crab salads and perfectly marinated strip steaks, but Jamal's soothing presence was a constant. He managed to make us feel totally unselfconscious about being served meals wherever we liked: on the pristine, white-sand beach; at any of the three dining tables; or — and this was the standout — in a private, candlelit treehouse. We even toyed with the idea of having dinner in one of the incredible bathrooms.

"Great," said Jamal, clearly jazzed. "You're the first guests to suggest that. Which night?"



Covecastles and Altamer: Iconic, global and beachy

Covecastles and Altamer, the granddaddies of Anguilla's villa scene, were built by famed architect Myron Goldfinger. He and his wife, June, often walk the beach at Shoal Bay West, where the compounds are.

June decorated Altamer's three eclectic, angular houses in different styles — Brazilian, Russian and African. The 14,000-square-foot, eight-bedroom African Sapphire is the star. Its outstanding second-story feature, Goldfinger's seeming "bridge to nowhere," extends over the pool to a circular Jacuzzi.

At Altamer's restaurant, executive chef Maurice Leduc's white gazpacho and Anguillian lobster are worth sampling.

The iconic Covecastles mixes eight semidetached beach houses and six free-standing villas. The imaginative white structures evoke sails with their roofs seemingly brushed back by gale-force winds.

"Every room has a sea view — there are no back bedrooms," Myron notes proudly.

The interiors are wonderfully beachy — rattan club chairs, daybeds with gauzy-white cushions and potted ficus. Of all the places I stayed on the island, my Covecastles villa (No. 5), with its skylights and clear-story windows, was the closest to the ocean.

Once I discovered the hammock on the terra-cotta tile deck, I barely moved from it, filling my eyes with the lapping Caribbean waves 15 steps away. Sandy trails through the sea grape led to fine swimming and coral gardens, perfect for spying parrotfish, although it took me awhile to make the effort.

Information:

St. Regis Temenos Villas: www.starwoodhotels.com/stregis; 264-222-9000, \$35,000-\$75,000/week.

Cap Juluca: www.capjuluca.com; 264-497-6666. \$780-\$5,725/night, high season, \$345-\$2,905/night low season.

Altamer: www.altamer.com; 264-498-4000, \$25,000-\$80,000/week.

Covecastles: www.covecastles.com; 264-497-6801. \$595-\$3,595/night.

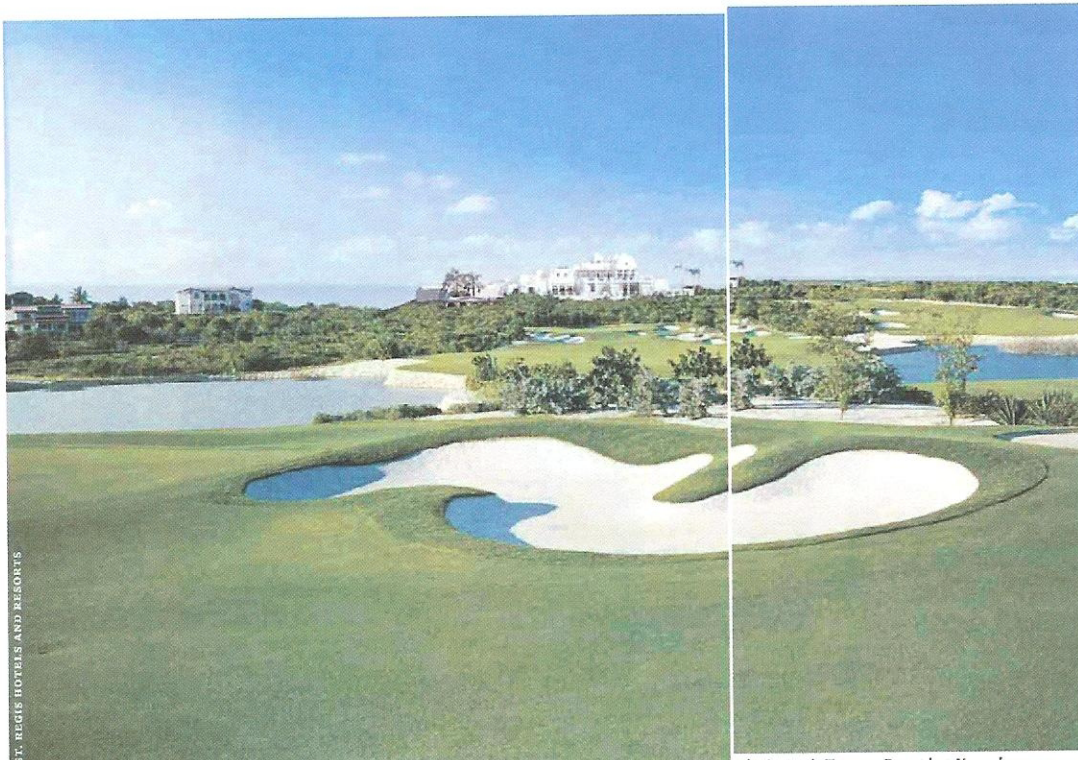




ST. REGIS HOTELS AND RESORTS

SEEING CLEAR TO THERE: A white-washed patio at the St. Regis Temenos Villas offers serenity with a bit of a Greek sensibility. Each of the three villas has private beach access.

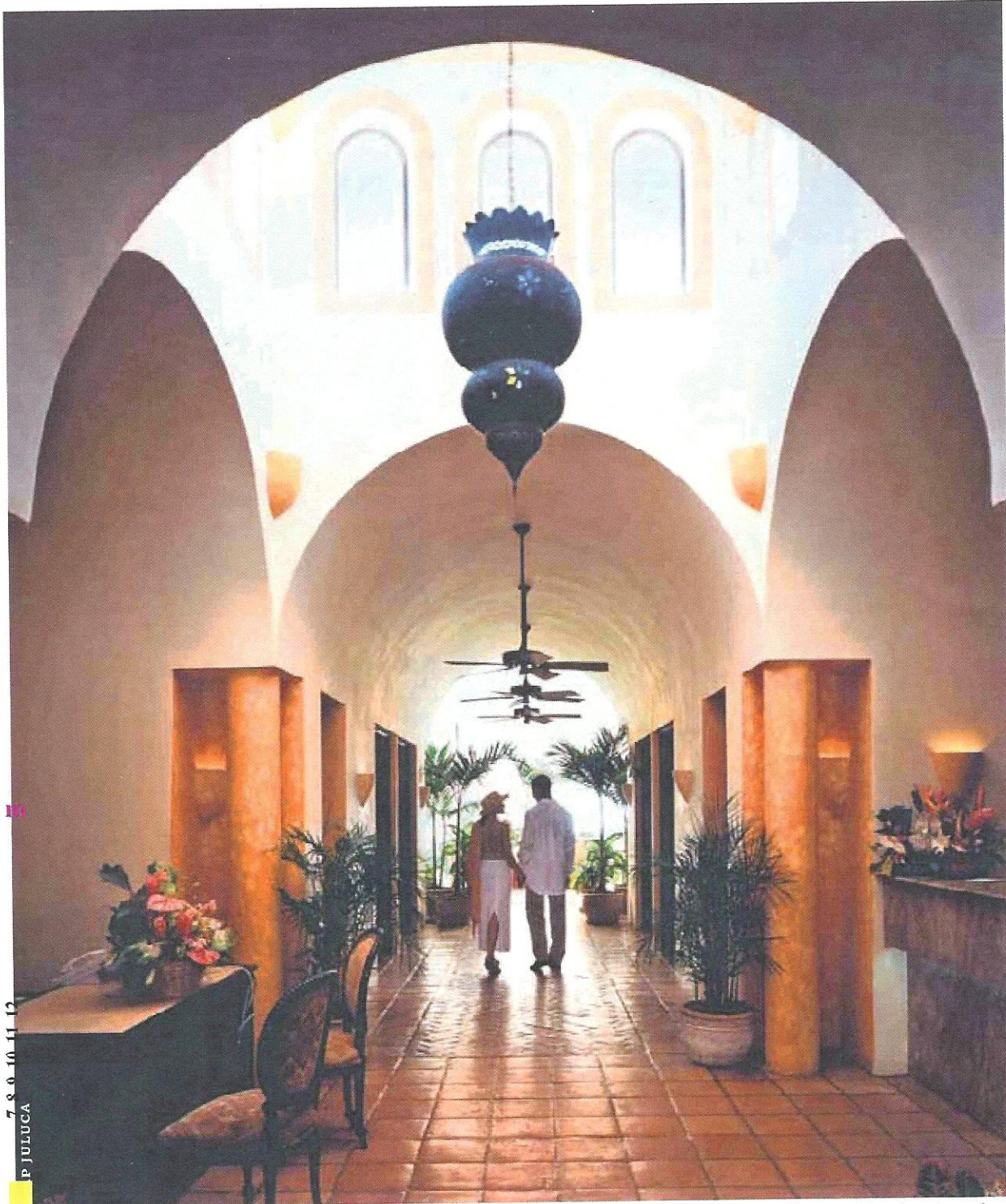




ST. REGIS HOTELS AND RESORTS

AMID THE BLUE. SUPER GREENS: Greg Norman designed the world-class golf course that opened at the St. Regis Temenos Resort last November.





MOOR IS MORE: *Fine dining, social activities and charming Moorish architecture are among the amenities that draw fans to Cap Juluca on Maundays Bay.*





ST. REGIS HOTELS AND RESORTS

SAND, SKY OR SEA: *With high ceilings, indoor-outdoor baths and plentiful poolside nooks, the architecture is as dreamy as the scenery at the St. Regis Temenos Villas.*





THE WATER'S CALL: *Whether you prefer a lively group sail or a meditative kayak ride, the crystalline bays around Anguilla beckon.*

