

NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK, NY
FRIDAY 1.110.279
APR 22 2005



B BurrellesLuce

470.4068
y.a.

1 XX...n

JOURNEYS

Anguilla On the Cheap

13498A

By SHERRY MARKER

IT'S easy to while away time, especially over rum punches, debating the virtues of Anguilla's beaches. At Maundays Bay the sand sifts through the toes as fine as powder, as white as snow; at Shoal and Rendezvous Bays, it shines iridescent, with a slightly gritty sheen; at Little Bay and Sandy Ground, it turns from basic beige to pink at sunset.

But in practice, setting out with a towel and beach bag, it's hard to say where one beach ends and the next begins. And as Anguilla's beaches blend into one another, its sun worshipers can cross the invisible lines, too. Thanks to local custom, all 33 beaches — even those in front of the exclusive resorts that lure celebrities and A-listers to this 16-mile sliver of limestone and coral — are open to all comers.

Plop down on the dazzling white sand at Cap Juluca, where Liam Neeson and Natasha Richardson are often among the guests, and you can stay all day. (Just don't expect the uniformed attendant to stop by your spot with one of Cap Juluca's fluffy towels.) And while Cap Juluca's real guests are spending as much as \$1,000 a night, you can be paying the same amount for an entire week at a little hotel without a famous name.

Though celebrity visits to Anguilla's fabulous beach resorts are now gossip-column fare, what is less known is that the island has more than a doz-

Continued on Page 2 C1

Continued From First Escapes Page

en small inns and many rentable villas where accommodations are \$80 to \$200 a day in the peak winter months. Now, as the off-season begins, the bargains are even better. Around mid-April, many small inns slice their already reasonable rates for short stays, and they often have dazzling bargains for stays of more than a week. In one small inn, Syd-Ans, rooms that are already well priced at \$75 to \$125 in winter go for \$65 to \$95 in the off-season, which usually lasts until mid-December. In another, Harbor Lights, off-season prices go as low as \$60 for a double room. There also are kitchens, a plus for cost-sensitive travelers.

At any season, the bargain-hunting traveler can find in Anguilla what may be the best of all Caribbean tradeoffs. Give up the amenities of the luxurious, self-contained resorts for a comfortable room in a more modest villa or small inn, and get lower prices, a close-up acquaintance with the hospitable island people — and your pick of the beaches, too.

"I'm pretty particular about my tropical paradises," said Jacqueline Thaw, a New Yorker who has lived in Hawaii. "Anguilla is a real one." Ms. Thaw, a professor at Rutgers, and her husband, Raphael Ben-Yehuda, an artist, spent their honeymoon in Anguilla earlier this year, happy to discover they could stay on the island without paying the high prices they had heard about. They spent \$880 for eight days in the winter season at Ping's Villas in the village of North Hill, with a view all the way out to sea, spending beach time at Sandy Ground. (In May and June, the same suite will cost \$660.) They found the experience "like going to a small town where people greet you like you're in your own home," Ms. Thaw said.

While budget accommodations on Anguilla may not be luxurious or directly on the

beach, they are comfortable, often with balconies providing expansive views and routinely with private bathrooms. On an island three miles wide, nothing is far inland. And paradise retains its credentials in the off-season. With the exception of the late-summer hurricane season, the trade winds and rainfalls diminish in spring and summer. Calmer waters make for wonderful swimming and snorkeling, and cool evening breezes usually allow for sound sleep even in lodgings that have no air-conditioning.

Winter or summer, Americans find the island especially accessible. The northernmost of the Leeward Islands, it is just an hour by plane from San Juan, P.R., making it close enough for a short getaway. The language is English (with a distinctive Anguillian lilt), and the United States dollar is universally accepted, along with the local currency — the Eastern Caribbean dollar. After the runway at Wallblake Airport in The Valley, the Anguillian capital, was extended to 5,440 feet this winter, American Eagle put a larger carrier on its daily San Juan-Anguilla-San Juan turnaround flight.

In the 1980's, Anguilla began marketing itself at the top end of the rapidly expanding Caribbean tourism market. By the 1990's, it had a number of small luxury resorts. Three on the island's west side regularly turn up on lists of the best places to stay in the Caribbean: Cap Juluca, with 72 rooms and suites and 6 private-pool villas; Malliouhana Hotel & Spa, with 55 rooms and suites — some in villas — on a seaside bluff; and Covecastles, 16 futuristic beachside villas designed by the architect Myron Goldfinger. At least a dozen major resorts, including the popular CuisinArt Resort & Spa, have been added in the last few years.

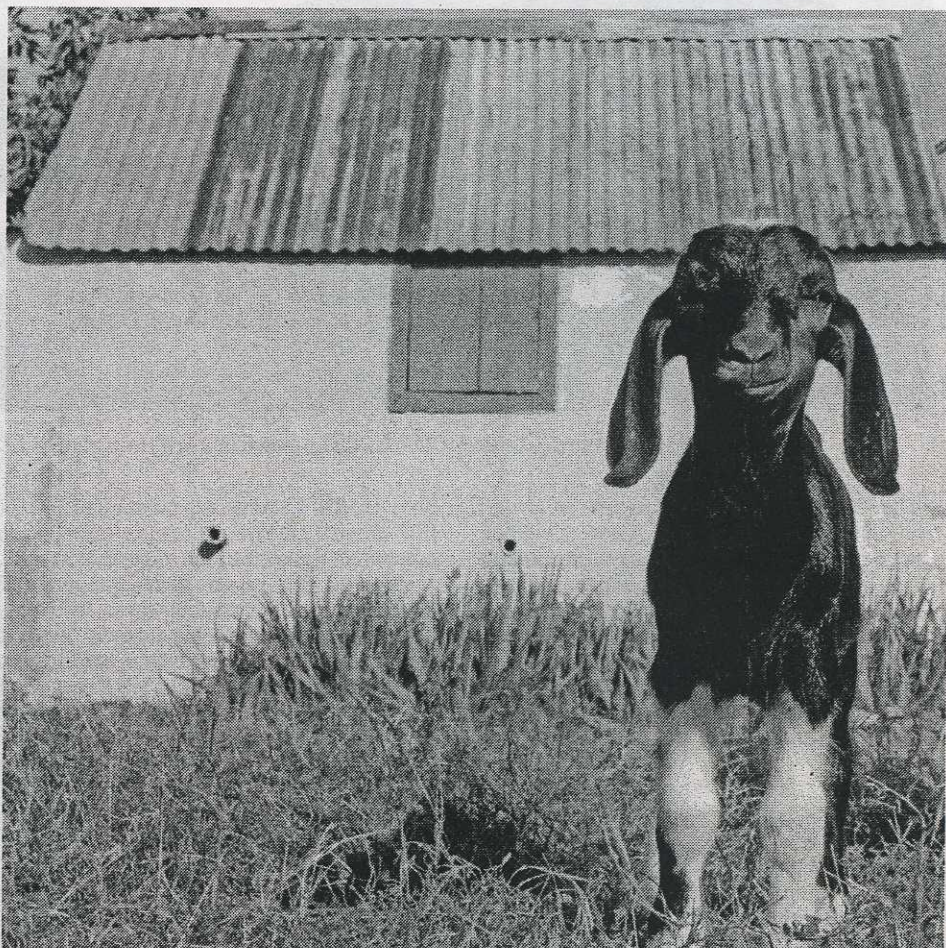
Yet the egalitarianism at the beaches still feels natural. This is a quirky, independent island of 11,000 inhabitants that insisted on breaking off from neighboring St. Kitts in 1967, becoming a separate British overseas

territory. No one has a street address — people just know where to find one another. Sir Emile Gumbs, a former chief minister, as the national leader is called, will give you a guided tour of his neighborhood. Diners at Ripples, a hangout among the British expatriates and just about everyone else, found themselves sitting near Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston the night before they announced their split. (“Couldn’t have looked happier,” the restaurant’s owner, Jacquie Ruan, said, shaking her head in disbelief at the separation announcement the next day.)

THIS sinuous island, which Columbus named Anguilla (Italian for eel), is reliably sunny; it gets only 30 inches of rain a year, and there are as many rainbows (often double rainbows) as downpours. The beaches, protected by offshore reefs, draw swimmers, snorkelers and sunbathers. The island is known for its music, accessible to everyone in the bars where local reggae and jazz bands play. Boat racing, the national sport, is not just for the rich, but a passion that brings everyone together to cheer favorite crews.

Anguilla has more cactuses than palm trees, and almost as many art galleries and resident artists as cactuses. Recent paintings by Lynne Bernbaum, a former Texan, at her gallery in George Hill Landing, depict the island’s red-topped Turk’s-cap barrel cactuses, which she thinks of as living “in little communities, with lots of character” — a description that might also fit the Anguillians themselves.

Half the population lives in The Valley, an agglomeration of government buildings and



Photographs by Richard Patterson for The New York Times

ISLAND LIVESTOCK Small farms where goats are raised still dot inland Anguilla.

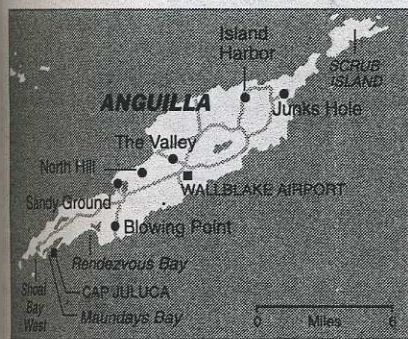
harborside beach bars and restaurants. It's a place that wraps willing visitors in a kind of sunbaked island charm. Dogs bark and motorists crowd. Mandering goats seem to have the right of way.

If you join the evening crowd singing rum

gone patched-roof wood-frame house built by his grandfather in 1804. It is framed by yellow bougainvillea and a tall hedge of scarlet oleander. “Oleanders have three virtues,” Sir Emile explained. “They bloom all year, they are drought resistant, and



PUBLIC ACCESS The beach at Shoal Bay, like all 33 beaches on the Caribbean island of Anguilla, is open to everyone.



The New York Times

mostly low concrete shops, offices and houses. One charming street, Crocus Hill Road, runs steeply uphill through an avenue of mahogany trees. Along the way are a cluster of early-20th-century gingerbread cottages, several old-fashioned bake ovens and gardens edged with pink conch shells. At the top of the hill is Anguilla's first hotel, Lloyd's Guest House, with a pleasantly old-fashioned parlor and double rooms, with breakfast, for \$85 all year.

Other villages are scattered across the island. Many inland hamlets still have farms, with herds of goats and the occasional cow. Fishing boats go out from villages like Island Harbor and Blowing Point.

Sandy Ground, on the north coast, has always been important because of its deep natural harbor, where cargo and fishing boats still put in, along with the sleek yachts and sailboats that anchor near a string of harborside beach bars and restaurants. It's a place that wraps willing visitors in a kind of timeless island charm. Dogs bark and roosters crow. Meandering goats seem to have the right of way.

If you join the evening crowd sipping rum

punch at the beachside outdoor tables at Johnno's, you'll hear a lot of can-you-top-this Anguilla stories, like the one told by an English couple, Jack and Liz Panzetta. At the end of their first visit to Anguilla, Mr. Panzetta left his wallet in the cab on the way to the airport. "I thought it was gone forever," he said. "But when we got back to England, the phone rang." It was the manager of the couple's Anguilla hotel, telling them he had it.

"I told him just to hold onto it," Mr. Panzetta said. "I knew we'd be back." That was in 1986, and the Panzettas have been back every year since, usually staying in the Sea View Apartments in Sandy Ground.

Sandy Ground is also where Sir Emile gives weekly tours. The tour circles the Salt Pond, used in salt processing from the 17th century to the 1980's, and includes a site occupied by Indians. Sir Emile lives in a photogenic pitched-roof wood-frame house built by his grandfather in 1904. It is framed by yellow bougainvillea and a tall hedge of scarlet oleanders. "Oleanders have three virtues," Sir Emile explained. "They bloom all year, they are drought resistant, and

buried victor wearing a sweater. Jack Emile's T-shirt. Attracting sips of Red Stripe beer with licks of a dark chocolate Dove Bar, he murmured reverently, "It just doesn't get any better than this."

