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Carried away to the Caribbean

There's an island getaway seemingly custom-tailored for nearly every wish or whim — so take your pick from these 10.

By MICHELLE HIGGINS
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Boasting more than 30 major islands, from the lush wilderness of Dominica to the desertylike terrain of Curacao, the Caribbean can be almost all things to all people.

A back-to-nature hiking experience? A five-star resort where the staff-to-guest ratio is 2-1? A place where there's no TV or cell phone service and where dinner is no more elaborate than the catch of the day? All that and more are possible.

But choosing the right Caribbean vacation is not as simple as blocking out the dates and finding the best airfares. You can end up with the trip of a lifetime or a vacation from hell.

That's where this guide comes in: a 10-point primer on some of the best island getaways, geared to the kind of vacation you might want to take this winter.

A reminder: Americans are now required to carry a passport for air travel within the Western Hemisphere, including the Bahamas, Bermuda and the Caribbean (except for the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico).

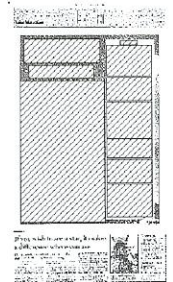
Over the past several years, local chefs who trained under foreign chefs at the high-end resorts on this northernmost of the Leeward Islands in the Lesser Antilles have been opening their own restaurants and adding new twists to traditional dishes.

Among the best known is Dale Carty, who worked at Malliouhana before opening a high-end restaurant called Tasty's in 1999.

Carty's interpretations of traditional Anguillan cuisine include Stewed Chicken Grandmas Style and Steamed Fish 'n' Fungi with Provisions, which Carty said uses a polentalike cornmeal and "food from the earth" such as sweet potatoes and pumpkins.

In 2004, Gwendolyn Smith, a native Anguillan, was made executive chef at KoalKeel, a restaurant in a building constructed in the 1700s as part of a sugar and cotton plantation. On her menu: Island Pea Soup made with pigeon peas and local sweet potato, and Rock Oven Chicken, which is slow-roasted in a 200-year-old oven.

Another native, Vernon Hughes, who began his career as a dishwasher at Anguilla's Cinnamon Reef resort, has opened his



own restaurant, E's Oven, on the site of his mother's old stone oven. His cousin and mentor, George Reid, is the executive chef at Cap Juluca.

Where to stay: Cap Juluca, on the southwest coast, has a beautiful beach, Moorish-style villas and three restaurants. Rates start at \$825 a night through mid-April (888-858-5822, www.capjuluca.com). CuisinArt Resort & Spá grows its own vegetables on a hydroponic farm. Rooms start at \$685 a night in season (800-943-3210, www.cuisinartresort.com). Carimar Beach Club at the water's edge on Mead's Bay has rooms for \$365 in season (800-235-8667, www.carimar.com).

Thanks in part to a breed of salt-tolerant turf grass known as paspalum, golf courses have been springing up on many islands in recent years.

For many avid golfers, however, the island of choice remains Jamaica, which has 12 golf courses and a range of difficulty to suit every level of player.

Most courses are in and around resort centers, making it easy to play a round at one course in the morning and hit a different set of links in the afternoon. Montego Bay, a resort city on the north coast, has three notable courses: Half Moon Golf Club, a Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed course; White Witch, owned by the Ritz-Carlton; and Cinnamon Hill, at the Rose Hall Resort & Country Club. Each is within a 10-minute drive of the others.

Where to stay: At the Ritz-Carlton Golf & Spa Resort, Montego Bay, ocean-view rooms begin at \$459 a night through March; (800-241-3333, www.ritzcarlton.com). Rose Hall Resort & Country Club has rooms from \$149 a night; (866-831-1313, www.rosehallresort.com).

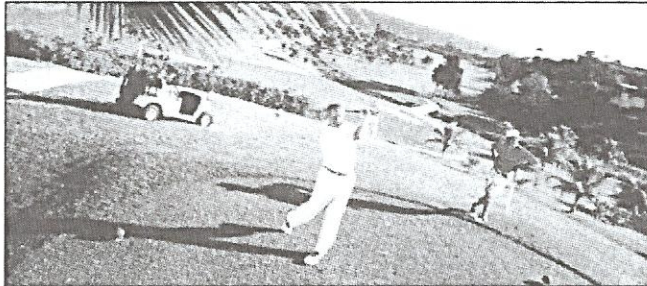
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For foodies: Anguilla



WWW.CAPJULUCA.COM

For golfers: Jamaica



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