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*Hit the beach with celebrities, without
paying their prices, from your*

Villa in Anguilla



Photo by Cheryl Blackerby

The dazzling white stand at the posh Cap Juluca has attracted guests such as Liam Neeson and Natasha Richardson, but you don't have to stay there to enjoy its beach.

On a strip of sun-spashed limestone in the Caribbean, Paradise found

By SHERRY MARKER
New York Times News Service

THE VALLEY, Anguilla — It is 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, setting out with a towel and beach bag, it is 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 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 dozen small inns and many rentable villas where accommodations are \$80 to \$200 a day in the peak winter

months. Now, as the off-season is underway, the bargains are even better. In one, 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. Rooms at both have kitchens, a plus for cost-sensitive travelers.

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. Calm 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. It's just a 15-minute ferry ride from Marigot, St. Martin, and adjacent St. Maarten, which attracts major airlines. The language is English (with a distinctive Anguillian lilt), and the U.S. 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 1980s, Anguilla began marketing itself at the top end of the rapidly expanding Caribbean tourism market.

By the 1990s, 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 six 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.

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.

At Uncle Ernie's in Shoal Bay, where the ribs are succulent and the cole slaw is tasty, there were no celebrities in sight one Sunday afternoon. But the cheerful patrons, taking a break from the beach, did not seem to miss



Trying to decide which is the most inviting beach of the 33 on Anguilla is a challenging and enviable enterprise.

If you go

Getting there: Ferry service from St. Martin lands at the small village of Blowing Point.

Money: American currency is accepted everywhere on Anguilla, and all prices below are in U.S. dollars. Prices generally do not include a 10 percent government tax or a 10 percent service charge that are usually added. Many, but not all, hotels lower their prices in the off-season.

Where to stay: Anguilla's premier resorts also have off-season specials, cutting hundreds of dollars off their rates. A double room at Cap Juluca (Maundays Bay, 264-497-6666; www.capjuluca.com) that goes for \$780 a day in high season, is \$420 May 1 to Nov. 11. A five-day, four-night package for two drops to \$2,615 from \$4,825.

Syd-Ans Apartments (Sandy Ground, 264-

497-3180; www.inns.ai/sydans, overlooking a 93-acre salt pond, has 14 rooms and suites for \$65 to \$95 a day from mid-April to November and \$75 to \$125 in high season.

Sea View Apartments (Sandy Ground; 264-497-3397; www.inns.ai/seaview, has a one-bedroom unit for \$60 year-round and a two-bedroom for \$110 (\$100 in summer). Ping's Villas (North Hill, 264-497-2928) has two-bedroom, two-bathroom units for \$110 – \$60 from May to November. Harbor Lights (264-497-4435; www.harborlightsanguilla.com) has doubles with kitchens from \$60 to \$100; \$80 to \$130 from about mid-December to May. Lloyd's Guest House (The Valley, 264-497-2351; lloyds.ai) has nine doubles for \$85 a day year-round.