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# Public beaches make Anguilla affordable

BONNIE DESIMONE  
*New York Times*

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ANGUILLA, BRITISH WEST INDIES — My mission was to live well on \$250 a day on a Caribbean island that promotes itself as an elite retreat.

The key? Anguilla's staggeringly beautiful beaches are public land, open to all no matter what high-price resort looms nearby.

It's easier now to do Anguilla on a budget. Luxury accommodations have multiplied, but so have reasonably priced establishments. And it's a challenge to spend money on night life: There's hardly any.

On a Friday afternoon in December, I flew from Philadelphia to the island of St. Martin and took a taxi to the port of Marigot, where ferries leave for Anguilla every 30 or 40 minutes.

From the ferry terminal, I took a cab to Lloyd's Guest House, where I'd reserved a single room, including a hot, cooked-to-order breakfast, for \$78 a night, including tax. The house is perched atop breezy Crocus Hill and is managed by David Lloyd, whose parents opened the bed-and-breakfast 45 years ago.

My spacious, high-ceilinged room had a stone-tile floor, worn but functional furniture and a private bath with a shower and a cold-water sink. There was a television. (Lloyd makes his office phone and Internet connection available to guests.)

Air conditioning can be turned

on for \$10 a night, but a ceiling fan and an open window sufficed.

My first night, I walked down the short, steep and very dark hill (bring a flashlight) to Roy's Place on Crocus Bay, the quintessential beachcomber's joint, for a terrific lobster salad and a couple of beers (\$36), then repaired to the bar to join the island's best ongoing blarney session.

On Saturday morning, breakfast was scrambled eggs, bacon and potatoes. My only quibble with Lloyd's was the mix-it-yourself instant coffee; I drank tea for the weekend.

A compact rental car awaited me. Lloyd booked it through a local agency, which delivered it. The daily rate was \$35, plus a one-time \$20 fee for a temporary driver's license.

Driving on Anguilla is a cross-cultural lesson. Islanders drive on the left, use high beams after sundown and routinely pick up hitchhikers. When I was detoured onto a dusty, cratered secondary road, I stopped to ask two women for directions and was startled when they opened the door and climbed in.

Wanting affluent-looking feet, I had a basic pedicure (\$40) at the Taino Wellness Center in South Hill Village. Then I took my newly painted toenails for a picnic at Maunday's Bay, near the southern tip and the very upscale Cap Juluca resort.

I assembled lunch en route at Wee-Gee's bakery and MacDonna's, a takeout place, stashing a tuna sub, water, banana and a

soda (\$10) in a soft cooler brought from home. I parked in Cap Juluca's public lot, spread my towel beneath a sea grape tree, ate, read, took a dip and gazed at the resort's white Moorish-style villas and palm trees.

I later stopped at the dreamy little open-air Trattoria Tramoto, whose sensory pleasures include colorful tile-and-wood decor, opera wafting from speakers and freshly grated nutmeg on exotic drinks. I ordered a cooling lime daiquiri (\$8 with tip).

I'd never seen Anguilla on horseback, so I arranged for a private ride (\$25, plus \$2 tip) at El Rancho del Blues stable near Blowing Point. The facilities are a tad ramshackle and my Dominican guide spoke little English, but my chestnut rent-a-mare, Natasha, appeared healthy and the tack was in good shape. It wasn't a high-level equestrian experience, but I was content.

I cleaned up in a gas-station bathroom and made my way to the Devonish Art Gallery at West End to attend a reception for an exhibit of antique maps. Over complimentary wine and hors d'oeuvres, I chatted with the gallery's owners, Courtney and Carrolle Devonish, and bought one woodcarving, a "touch form" (\$20) meant to be cupped in the palm for stress reduction.

Dinner had to be inexpensive, so I headed for the English Rose, a tavern in Anguilla's central business district, the Valley. A trencherman's portion of snapper with sweet-tart Creole sauce, rice and native peas, canned mixed veggies and salad, a beer and tip came to \$16.25. Then came a nightcap at Roy's (\$4).

On Sunday morning I drove 20 minutes to Shoal Bay East. At Elodia's, a complex that includes villas and a bar-restaurant, I

rented a chaise longue and umbrella (\$5) and snorkeling gear (\$10) and treated myself to a \$3 coffee. Glass-bottomed boat operator Junior Fleming proposed an hourlong one-on-one snorkeling outing for \$40 and motored us to an outlying reef. After seeing schools of blue tang; the odd, long-nosed trumpet fish; and stands of elkhorn and fan coral, I hauled myself back aboard, wobbly, parched and exhilarated.

I rehydrated with a large bottle of mineral water (\$4) and strolled to Uncle Ernie's timeless beach-food shack for a cheeseburger, coleslaw, fries and soda (\$8). I read, walked and swam until late afternoon, when the reggae band at Elodia's segued into Bob Marley's classic "Stir It Up," triggering a Pavlovian craving for rum. I nursed a frozen pina colada (\$7), dusted with cinnamon and topped with a maraschino cherry, while watching the sunset.

On Monday morning, I squeezed in visits to galleries before going to the CuisinArt resort's Cafe Mediterraneo on Rendezvous Bay for a parting lunch: an entree-size salad of greens and vegetables from the resort's hydroponic garden and a big bottle of bubbly water (\$33.35).

Two-day total: About \$500.