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How to avoid budget busting on Anguilla

By **Bonnie Desimone**
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

I knew the drill. An ever-punctual rooster outside my window would cut loose with a brain-curdling cry at about 4 in the morning. I put a pillow over my head, and, sinking back into sleep, I imagined this same rooster, its internal GPS activated the second I set foot on Anguilla, ruthlessly tracking me down as it had on all my previous visits.

I was an old Anguilla hand, but this time on a new and interesting mission: how to live well on \$250 a day on a Caribbean island that promotes itself as an elite retreat. And I did it, too, with \$1.75 left over.

The key? Chickens have the run of the place, but so do people. Anguilla's staggeringly beautiful beaches are public land, open to all no matter what high-price resort looms nearby.

I felt like a reverse infiltrator. That's apt, since the highlight of Anguilla's modern history was its largely nonviolent reverse revolution in the late 1960s, when islanders successfully staved off Britain's attempts to loosen economic and administrative ties. The island remains a British dependency.

I won't account for every penny I spent, I'll just hit the highlights.

I had reserved a single room at Lloyd's Guest House for \$78 a night, including tax and a hot, cooked-to-order breakfast. Perched atop breezy Crocus Hill, and managed by David

Lloyd, whose parents opened the bed-and-breakfast 45 years ago, Lloyd's serves business travelers and savvy tourists. My fellow guests included an artist, two marine biologists and an itinerant financier.

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 in the room but no phone. (Lloyd makes his office phone and Internet connection available to guests.)

My first night, I walked down the short, steep and very dark hill (take 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.

A compact rental car awaited me outside the hotel. Lloyd booked it through Andy Connors' 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 because of repaving on the main drag, I stopped to ask two women for directions and was

somewhat startled when they opened the door and climbed in. We all got to our destinations.

I had an hour-plus 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 site of the very upscale Cap Juluca resort.

I assembled lunch en route at Wee-Gee's bakery and MacDonna's, a take-out place. I parked in Cap Juluca's public lot, spread my towel beneath a sea grape tree, ate, read, took a dip and gazed back at the resort's white Moorish-style villas and perfect palm trees.

Next on my agenda was a hike to Shoal Bay West, one beach over. I walked over on a nonscenic inland path along a pond, emerging on another gorgeous strip of sand occupied by the chic Altamer and Covecastles resorts, the Blue Waters Beach Apartments and a pink mansion once owned by the actor Chuck Norris.

After rambling the length of the beach and back, I took a break at the dreamy little open-air Trattoria Tramonto, whose sensory pleasures include colorful tile-and-wood decor, opera wafting from the speakers and freshly grated nutmeg on the exotic drinks. I ordered a cooling lime daiquiri (\$8 with tip) and discussed celebrity sightings with the bartender, who reported that Robert De Niro had stopped in recently.

After cleaning up, I headed for the Devonish Art Gallery at West End to attend a reception for an exhibit of antique maps. Over complimentary wine and

If you go

ANGUILLA

It is the most northern of the Leeward Islands in the British West Indies.

For more information: www.anguilla-vacation.com
Anguilla Tourist Board (800) 553-4938

Lloyd's Guest House (<http://lloydsguesthouse.com>) 264-497-2351





Ah, the good life. That's what you get on the British West Indies island of Anguilla, but you don't necessarily have to pay for it. The beaches are all free. *Chris Ramirez / The New York Times*

hors d'oeuvres, I chatted with the gallery's owners, Courtney and Carrolle Devonish, and bought one of Devonish's woodcarvings, a "touch form" (\$20) meant to be cupped in the palm for stress reduction.

Dinner had to be inexpensive after my profligacy, so I headed for the English Rose, a tavern in Anguilla's central business district. 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. A nightcap at Roy's (\$4), and I was ready for bed.

After Sunday breakfast, I drove 20 minutes to Shoal Bay East. It's a one-stop-shopping beach with lots of commercial activity, but it still never seems crowded.

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.

When a glass-bottomed boat pulled up near the beach, I waded into the water and hailed Ju-

nior Fleming, who has worked Shoal Bay East for years. He proposed an hourlong one-on-one snorkeling outing for \$40 (less per person depending on the size of the group), then motored to an outlying reef.

The current was strong, so Junior literally took my hand and towed me around, pointing out huge schools of blue tang, the odd, long-nosed trumpet fish, 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 a soda (\$8).

Wanting to dine somewhere with tablecloths without busting my budget, I headed to Tasty's in South Hill. I ordered lobster-and-corn bisque and seafood salad, and washed it down with a half-bottle of French rose (\$46 with tip). I still had money to burn, so I made my now-ritual stop at Roy's before retiring.

On Monday morning, I

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PAUL HORN / Union-Tribune

squeezed in visits to several art 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).

As I savored the meal and my lush surroundings, three plump hens stutter-stepped across the patio. A rooster called from afar. Two women sitting next to me started, and one giggled nervously. "At least they keep the floor clean," she said.

We budget travelers don't hog the poultry. The chickens, like all the best sights on Anguilla, are for everyone.

Bonnie DeSimone's story was distributed by the New York Times News Service.