



ANGUILLA'S

ALLURE

Surrounded by cliffs, Little Bay is among the most dramatic coves on the island. **OPPOSITE:** Miles of pristine sand beaches, like the one at Barnes Bay, are Anguilla's biggest treasures.

To be honest, the first time I traveled to ANGUILLA, twenty- two years ago, I didn't see it becoming the luxury capital of the Caribbean. The northernmost

of the Leeward Islands, in the eastern Caribbean, Anguilla does not have the dramatic volcanic peaks of neighboring St. Martin or the superchic vibe of St. Bart's. Its plant life is scrubby—and under constant siege by goats—and its countryside is spotted with concrete-block houses in various stages of construction, reflecting the thrifty Anguillian habit of building only as far as the money on hand will stretch. So why does this island, measuring a mere thirty-five square miles, today boast three of the world's premier resorts: Malliouhana, Cap Juluca and CuisinArt? And why are two more top-end properties, the St. Regis Temenos Anguilla and the Viceroy, under construction there right now? And how does it rate a handful of supervillas that cater to a guest's every whim—for about \$40,000 a week?

Looking back, I can see that the answer to those questions was already apparent on my initial visit, when the island was nowhere on the travel radar. Some friends and I had decided that we wanted a quiet Caribbean getaway, and I had heard that Anguilla might be what we were looking for. We rented a villa sight unseen. Driving in from the airport, we thought we'd made a serious mistake. But a trip to the beach at Shoal Bay, on the northern coast—recommended by the villa's caretaker—quickly changed our minds. The water looked like the palette of an artist experimenting with variations of blue: far out, the sea was a deep royal; closer to shore, it flowed from electric to turquoise to aquamarine. The sand was powdery and shaded by palm trees. We had discovered Anguilla's treasure: its thirty-three fantastic beaches, large and small, stretching for a glorious twelve miles.

Adding to the island's wealth were the Anguillians themselves. Everywhere we went, people asked how we liked it there and if we were having a good time. We became very friendly with a woman named Amy, a baker who still makes the most delicious banana cream pie I've ever had. We also got to know the woman who ran the little liquor store. When she saw us coming, she would pull a bottle of Mount Gay off a shelf (which, I belatedly realize, indicates that it was she who got to know us, not the other way around). We felt that we belonged.

The attributes that charmed us during that first visit are drawing high-end developers to the island today. "Anguilla has a track record of sustaining luxury properties," says Paul Kanovos, the CEO of Flag Luxury, which is building the St. Regis Temenos Anguilla. "The Anguillians are welcoming people. They know how

to provide five-star service. And no other island has as many spectacular beaches. It was easy to decide to invest there."

What amazes me is that after all these years, Anguilla remains essentially the same. Beyond its luxurious villas and resorts, the island is free of worldly diversions. It has no discos, no casinos, no duty-free shopping. Even more revealing of Anguilla's smart resistance to the downsides of island tourism is the absence of big cruise liners (they're not allowed to anchor here) and large jets, which the airport cannot accommodate. Noisy Jet Skis are banned from the otherwise extensive menu of water sports: kayaking, snorkeling, sailing and scuba diving.

There are other activities as well, but it's pretty much up to you to fill your day. In the evening, dining choices range from barbecue on the beach to creative French-Caribbean. The resorts offer some entertainment, and a couple of spots on the water can be counted on for good music—Johnno's, at Sandy Ground, being the longest running. Or you can just gaze up at the night sky, where you'll see more stars than you may ever have before.

If you look around, you may also spot stars of the entertainment variety. But this is not a see-and-be-seen island. Privacy is respected, and it is easy to maintain. The resorts offer spacious accommodations that can be worlds unto themselves, and the rental luxury villas ensure seclusion.

On my most recent trip to Anguilla, I realized that there remained beaches I hadn't yet visited (and that's still true, although I got out every day to explore). It's an activity I recommend highly. No matter how much you love your own room or villa, with its pool and familiar stretch of sand, you should grab a map of the island and select a new beach to visit. Snorkel, pick up some shells, read a book, take a walk with a friend. Succumb to the place's irresistible atmosphere.

There is informed speculation that one of the ancient caves on the island contains the legendary Fountain of Youth, which Ponce de León sought in vain. Whether the rumor is true or not, a visit to Anguilla will rejuvenate you as no other place can. That's why I've been there fourteen times—and counting. *Telephone and fax numbers, except where indicated otherwise, should be preceded by 264 when dialed from the United States.*

