

# TRAVEL

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## Sunny Delight

Pack your bags! Anguilla's more affordable off-season is finally here

By Michelle Megna



# Caribbean dream

## Now's the time to plan an escape to Anguilla

Last winter, the tiny West Indian island of Anguilla gave Saint-Tropez and St. Barth's some serious competition for hottest celebrity playground. Jennifer Aniston took teary-eyed walks with Brad Pitt at Captain's Bay and hung out with Courteney Cox. Jay-Z and Beyoncé snuggled on the shores of

Shoal's Bay West. Nelly and Ashanti were spotted splashing in the waves on a local beach. Denzel Washington celebrated his 51st birthday there.

But despite the recent red-carpet scene, you don't have to be a star to be in this show. This week marks the beginning of Anguilla's off-season, which means cheaper room rates and the chance to have the island's incredible white sand beaches all to yourself.

Anguilla, a coral island 11 miles north of St. Maarten and 150 miles east of Puerto Rico, impresses even the saltiest Caribbean travelers. Unlike other islands, it still offers an unspoiled surfside experience.

The island is small and rather rural (16 miles long, 3 miles wide, 12,000 people and one traffic light), so it's safe and easy to explore. There are

no resort compounds locked behind gates. You won't see cruise ships, commercial centers, casinos or cajoling panhandlers. You will see 33 beaches with white sand and crystal-clear water ranging from light green to royal blue. All the beaches are public and close-knit, which means you can spend the morning snorkeling in a deserted cove, then drive 15 minutes to a long ribbon of coastline where you can drink Carib beer and eat barbecue, then catch a glowing sunset on a rocky reef 10 more minutes away.

Locals say the island's home-grown hospitality is rooted in its history. Colonial rulers left them to fend for themselves because the scrubby, dry inland could not support profitable sugarcane or cotton crops. This,

they say, imbued the native population with a fierce streak of self-reliance and community spirit.

Renting a car is the best way to get around Anguilla. Most hotels offer rental services or you can call Island Car Rental (264-497-2723). The cost is \$40 a day, and \$20 for a temporary Anguilla license issued on the spot. (Anguilla is a British West Indies territory, so U.S. dollars are accepted and everyone speaks English.) Driving is on the left, but since there is no traffic, it's not difficult to maneuver. Along the way, you'll see modest squat, pastel homes and half-finished concrete houses a short distance from luxurious seaside resorts. Watch out for goats; they outnumber road signs by a large margin.

### Where to stay

Anguilla has everything from ultra-luxurious resorts starting at about \$30,000 a week to charming beachside villas that cost \$150 a night. Even the cheapest lodgings are a shell's throw from fabulous reefs and shoals. Shoal's Bay East on the Atlantic side of the island is one of the most popular beaches and is considered one of the most picturesque in the world. Beach

Hotel and Villas (1-800-274-4893; [www.rendezvousbay.com](http://www.rendezvousbay.com)), the oldest hotel on the island, built in 1962. The \$195 one-bedroom villas have fully equipped kitchens and balconies overlooking a 2-mile stretch of beach good for kayaking and leisurely strolls. Go for a sunset walk, and you may see reggae maven Bankie Banx, who runs a laid-back bar, the Dune Preserve. Of course, there is no shortage of luxury digs in Anguilla, including Cap Jaluca and Saint Peter's Desert & Spa, though sunbrikt mall

**EASY LIVING** With Anguilla's off-season rates, a vacation like Courteney Cox Arquette & J

cheap barbecue dinners, live bands and  
Shoal's Bay beach is the spot for snorkeling and noshing. It stretches for 2 miles, powdery it won't rinse off unless you rub hands. Uncle Ernie's BBQ is recommended. On the other side of the island is Meads

