



The Secret to Happiness

BAZ DREISINGER GETS THE INSIDE STORY ON AN A-LISTER'S ANGUILLA.

Pity the travel writer assigned a story about Anguilla. I learned this during my second day on the blissful Eastern Caribbean island, after two glasses of rum punch left me hitching a ride with a friendly Texas couple who called themselves regular visitors there. Hearing that I had come to investigate the allure of their favorite vacation spot, they brought the car to a screeching halt and nearly deposited me by the side of the road.

"We're not telling you a thing, lady!" they shrieked. "We don't want those tourists taking over our little island!"

Over the course of my trip, I heard similar sentiments from nearly every other tourist I befriended. Rather, didn't befriend: Telling folks I was planning to publicize their best-kept secret made me as popular as a bad rash.

But if Anguilla regulars are intent on staying mum about their luxurious locale, they better enlist Hollywood headliners in the crusade. From **Robert DeNiro** and **Liam Neeson** to **Denzel Washington** and **Kevin Kline**, A-listers have lately sung Anguilla's praises. **Janet Jackson** included songs about the island on her latest CD. **Kate Winslet** married **Sam Mendes** at a private villa there. **Kevin Bacon** even showed up at a recent Anguilla Tourist Board event in New York City, pledging devotion to the flat, scrubby 16-mile island known simply as "The Rock." According to one travel website's message board, it's getting out of hand, this Anguilla celebrity free-for-all.

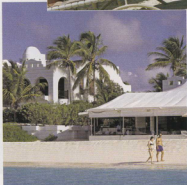
Anguilla, I learned, is hot. I mean this literally: The island, a British territory eight miles north of St. Martin, has a mean temperature of 80 degrees, minimal humidity and scarce rainfall. And also figuratively: Anguilla has garnered hype as a pretentiously unpretentious place for bigwigs and boldface names to unwind, a more mellow and reserved version of St. Bart's—sans paparazzi (they're unwelcome) and nude beaches (they're illegal). According to the Anguillian woman sitting next to me on the American Eagle mini-plane carrying us from Puerto Rico to Anguilla's Wallblake Airport—too small to accommodate full-size airplanes—Anguilla is feted for what it doesn't have. No McDonald's, traffic lights or kitschy all-inclusives (not even a hotel featuring more than 100 rooms). No lush green mountains—just rocks, cacti and a constant cool breeze, as if an enormous fan has been permanently affixed above. No colossal cruise ships or tacky casinos. And, prior to the early '80s, no island-wide electricity or paved roads. Anguilla is to St. Martin what, say, Boise is to New York City.

It didn't take me long to discover what Anguilla does have. During the short ride from the airport to **Villa Coyaba**, the private rental villa where I spent my first night, my taxi driver informed me that Anguilla is home to 12 miles of powdery beach—33 of them, to be exact. He snubbed his nose at the slew of commercial cruise liners clogging up St. Martin's shores, then recalled the time he personally instructed a young man to stop peddling wares on a nearby beach ("we don't bother our visitors here—we leave them alone to relax," he sniffed). He summed up Anguilla's tourism philosophy in terms of quality over quantity: "We'd rather have 100 tourists spending \$1,000 each than 1,000 tourists spending \$100."

It's easy to spend \$1,000 on Anguilla. The island might look humble, but it's home to the sort of fine dining you would find in Paris, not to mention dazzling hotels and villas with weekly rates that can hit the \$50,000 mark. Generally speaking, there are two ways to experience Anguilla: at a hotel or in a private villa. I did both. At **Villa Coyaba**, I was greeted by its owner, Mrs. Romney, an American who moved to Anguilla 15 years ago and never looked back. As she took me from one stunningly appointed room to the next—the villa has six



From top:
Sky Villa at
Temerous
Villas.
Some R&R
at the Cap
Juluca
Hotel.
Strolling
the beach
at the Cap
Juluca.



bedrooms, a gym, round-the-clock staffing and a secluded beach—she indulged my lust for name-dropping: **Mariah Carey** recently spent five weeks at Villa Coyaba; over Christmas the villa housed a high-profile record producer whose guests included **Jay-Z** and **Beyoncé**.

I settled in, took a swim, walked along the rocky shore and later found myself doing something I hadn't had time to do in years: taking a bath, all the while ogling the striking view of St. Martin that graced almost every window in my villa. That night I enjoyed dinner and live music (more like karaoke, actually, but surprisingly good karaoke) at **Mango's**, an upscale seaside eatery in nearby Barnes Bay (in truth, everything on Anguilla is "nearby"). I shared a drink with its owner, ex-New Jerseyan Dave Schnittlich, who casually mentioned his good friend "Bobby"—**DeNiro**, that is—is a Mango's regular. Lost in the wine, the music and the sea breeze, I stayed out far later than planned.

The next day I toured The Valley: a cluster of government offices, shops and historic buildings that is Anguilla's capital city. Then I set off for Scilly Cay, a private island open only during lunch hours and accessible thanks to Julius, who tows visitors there on a small boat. Stand at the dock, wave, and Julius appears; when you're ready to return, wave again and Julius will deposit you on the mainland. Scilly Cay is an oasis-within-an-oasis, a getaway from your island getaway. Eudoxie Wallace—known to locals as "Gorgeous"—owns the outdoor restaurant there: a casual, conch-lined haven where you can swim, eat (chicken, lobster or crayfish), drink (yet more rum punch), or sit back under tiki huts and enjoy Gorgeous' skillful flirtations (note to husbands: guard your wives!). I liked Scilly Cay so much that I returned two days later to take in the Happy Hits Band, a weekly Sunday shindig for locals and tourists alike.

Checking in at my new lodging—**Cap Juluca**, on southwest Maundays Bay—my expectations were high. The hotel has topped many a prestigious "best-of" lists; getting a room there involved string pulling and a mid-stay room change (which didn't feel so bad when I learned that Kevin Bacon had done the same, on his first of many stays there). The idyllic hotel—not a hotel or resort, really, but a true lodging experience, probably the most spectacular one I've ever enjoyed—is a slice of Santorini deposited on a Caribbean isle: gleaming white Moorish arches and spiral staircases poised on a near-mile of ocean so blue, it might as well be injected with turquoise dye.

Basketball star **Alonzo Mourning** was married at Cap Juluca, and celebrity guests are such a commonplace occurrence that manager Eustace Guishard speaks of them with a been-there-done-that flick of the wrist. Ask and he'll tell you—without mentioning names, of course—about a certain famous female whose bodyguards cordoned off the fitness room every morning, only to be reminded that other guests had equal rights to the facilities. But Mr. Guishard, a native Anguillian, would much rather light up a cigar, pour you a glass of Anguilla's own Pyrat Rum, and discuss his island's rich Amerindian heritage. Cap Juluca, he told me, is named



From top:
Sea Villa at
Temenos
Villas.
Chefs at
work at
Mallouhan
Hotel. A
beach
stocked
with fun at
Cap Juluca
Hotel.

