

## To enjoy Anguilla, take a swimsuit and a deep hunger

BY NECEE REGIS

The trip today is about 24 minutes," announced the captain of our eight-passenger shuttle ferry. That was just enough time, I estimated, to be served and finish the rum punch I planned to order as we left port in St. Maarten.

I settled on a seat in the rocking vessel and squinted across the sparkling Caribbean at our destination. The relatively small, flat island of Anguilla appeared as a scrub-covered outcropping on the horizon, an easily overlooked smudge on the surface of the sea.

Anguilla's laid-back, gracious style, its white-sand beaches and dynamic culinary scene are well promoted. But with no dramatic towering volcanic hills, no waterfall-laced rain forest, no major port with glittering amenities — and one tiny airport — I wondered if white sand and fab food were enough to entice people to this off-the-beaten-path location in the Caribbean's Leeward Island chain. In other words, would reality match the hype? That's what I hoped to find out as I arrived at the Blowing Point Ferry Terminal, cleared immigration (in minutes), waited for my luggage (forever), and found a taxi near the ferry kiosks, where scrawny chickens scurried about.

With only one main road and a mere six stoplights, the 10-by-3-mile island isn't difficult to navigate. However, visitors like me, hesitant about left-side-of-the-road driving, may opt for the ease of fixed-rate taxis.

En route to Malliouhana, an Auberge resort perched on a bluff overlooking Meads Bay, I peppered my driver with questions about Anguilla, the main one being, "What is the correct pronunciation?"

"It's An-g-willa, sort of like gorilla. The name comes from its shape. Like an eel," said the driver, who was born and raised on the island.

Like many islands in the Caribbean, Anguilla was colonized in the 17th century by alternating groups of Europeans, primarily from Great Britain and France. After a 1907 revolution to separate itself from the Federation of the West Indies (established in the 1950s with nearby St. Kitts and Nevis), Britain intervened. By December 1980, Anguilla became a British Overseas Territory with some measure of governmental autonomy. The language of the island is English, though most of the population — estimated at 15,000 — speak a melodic Caribbean version.

My driver beeped his car horn and waved at other drivers, and those walking along the road, and it soon became apparent that everyone knew everyone. Since the largest slice of the business pie involves tourism, the majority of the people I met were unfailingly polite and happy to share their opinions of what to see and do on the island, including where to hear traditional soca, calypso, reggae and country music.

I arrived hungry — a good thing, as my visit was planned around experiencing as much of the island's purported tasty offerings as I could schedule in a three-day visit. After check-in and a swim in one of two pools with ocean views, I headed out to dinner.

Before opening Veya, chef Carrie Bogar along with her business partner and husband, Jerry, were looking to escape the gloomy Pennsylvania winters. "We googled, Caribbean restaurants



PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The view from a shuttle boat approaching Sandy Island, off the coast of Anguilla; a visitor lolls under an umbrella there; grilled snapper and creole sauce with corn, rice, peas and carrot salad at Bayside Bar & Grill.



for sale' and packed up the kids and moved," Bogar said.

Located in tropical woodlands, this secluded restaurant has the feel of an exotic treehouse combined with a bohemian lounge. The eclectic menu fuses Caribbean tastes and ingredients with those from other far-flung steamy lands. "I didn't want to be pigeonholed as just a Caribbean chef, so I started thinking about other countries with warm climates such as [the ones in] North Africa, South America and Southeast Asia," Bogar said.

Open since 2007, Veya is no secret. In high season, reservations must be made weeks in advance to sample Bogar's inventive dishes such as grilled jerk-spiced tuna with rum-coffee glaze or grilled local lobster with passion fruit mustard sauce. For light bites, tapas plates and crafted cocktails are offered in the garden lounge. Meze, along with music by local artists, including the soulful reggae beats of Omar Banks. A former celebrated cricketer, Banks is the son of Bankie Banks, a reggae singer known as the "Anguillian Bob Dylan."

It seems silly that I left the island to head to another island for lunch. But, indeed, I did. Sandy Island is one of a number of small, uninhabited off-

shore islands, or cays — all accessible by boat — that are popular with beachcombers, snorkelers and kite surfers. Several of these islands sport casual tiki-style beach shacks that are open for lunch on varying days of the week.

At Sandy Ground in Road Bay, where those arriving by private yacht clear customs and immigration, I caught a shumalecraft named Joy (the others are Happiness and Bliss) along with several young guys clutching beers and snorkeling gear. Frigate birds circled overhead as we cruised toward Sandy Island and in minutes, it seemed, we were jumping into the shallows and wading to shore.

The shaded, open-air restaurant, also known as Sandy Island, specializes in traditional local foods, all prepared on a seaside grill: freshly caught lobster, red snapper, crayfish and mahi-mahi, as well as baby back ribs, barbecued chicken and drunken coconut shrimp. I sat at a picnic table, feet in the white sand, enjoying a margarita mixed at the gaily painted bar while waiting (and waiting) for my meal to arrive. While chatting with guests at nearby tables, I learned that those in the know call ahead to place their orders.

But when on vacation, what's



### If you go

#### WHERE TO STAY

##### Malliouhana

Meads Bay

877-733-3611

[malliouhana.aubergeresorts.com](http://malliouhana.aubergeresorts.com)

The recently refurbished hotel

offers 44 rooms and suites, tennis

courts, two pools, beach access,

open-air restaurant and an

Auberge spa. Expect white

buildings, red-tile roofs and

interiors featuring elegant Moorish

arches and sophisticated, snazzy

booth style. Winter rates from

\$700; offseason from \$425.

##### ColBlue

Valley Road, 1264 The Valley,

Crocus Bay

800-304-4844

[colblueanguilla.com](http://colblueanguilla.com)

Nestled along Crocus Hill, the

highest point on Anguilla (213 feet

above sea level), eight private

villas enjoy stunning ocean views.

Three-to-five-bedroom suites sleep

from six to 12 guests. Seasonal

rates from \$1,200.

#### WHERE TO EAT

##### Veya

North Hill Village, AF-2640, Sandy

Ground

264-498-8392

[veya-ang.com](http://veya-ang.com)

In this hidden locale, chef Carrie

Bogar fuses Caribbean flavors with

cuisines from hot spots around the

world. Also features tapas and live

music in the garden lounge. Meze.

Reservations highly

recommended. Entrees range from

\$32 to \$60.

#### Sandy Island

Sandy Island

264-497-6534

[mysandyisland.com/the-restaurant](http://mysandyisland.com/the-restaurant)

An open-air, lunch-only restaurant

on a tiny, offshore island. Serves

grilled traditional foods such as

freshly caught lobster, red snapper

and baby back ribs. Entrees range

from \$18 to \$65.

#### WHAT TO DO

##### Golf

Rendezvous Bay, The Valley

800-943-3210

[cuisinartresort.com](http://cuisinartresort.com)

The CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa is

home to Greg Norman's signature-

designed championship course.

For guests, it's nine holes for \$170

and 18 holes for \$275. For non-

guests, it's \$200 and \$299.

##### Kitesurfing

The Valley, AF-2640

264-584-1204

[anguillawatersports.com](http://anguillawatersports.com)

Certain beaches on the island are

designated for the sport, and

Anguilla Watersports knows where

to find them. Classes with certified

instructors for all ages and

experience levels. \$175 for a

private lesson and \$150 for a

semiprivate lesson.

#### INFORMATION

[visitanguilla.com](http://visitanguilla.com)

—N.R.

the rush? My succulent lobster with coconut ginger sauce and accompanying rice, beans and salad were worth the wait — in fact, pure bliss, which was the apt name of the shuttle I boarded back to port after post-lunch snorkeling (mask rentals are available) in the crystalline waters around the reef.

My other notable beachside lunch was at Bayside Bar & Grill, a popular spot overlooking boats and swimmers at Crocus Bay. Though tempted to order another lobster, I opted instead for grilled snapper and Creole sauce with corn, rice and peas while others around me, many of them locals, I guessed by their litig accents, enjoyed barbecued chicken and ribs, rustic pizzas, burgers and salads. Before leaving, I peeked inside the grill's elegant sister property, daVida, where the dinner menu is a touch more formal — grilled Angus beef tenderloin, herb-crusted rack of lamb, ginger-teriyaki sea scallops — but the vibe remains island-casual.

After a fruit-and-granola breakfast, some hotel guests headed out to play golf at the island's only course while others planned a day of Auberge spa treatments. I chose a day of lollygagging and swimming at a quiet cove, a short hike down a path from my hotel, where it was easy to imagine I was happily shipwrecked on a deserted island.

I planned a last night splurge at Pimms, a candlelit, open-air restaurant at Cap Juluca, a five-star resort with its own mile-long beach.

It can be awkward eating meals alone, especially at a place that blatantly conjures romance. Maybe it was days spent in the sun and the relaxed island vibe, but the staff at Pimms seemed extra-welcoming, the meal of lobster ravioli and grilled Anguilla crayfish extra divine. I sat at a table near the edge of the sea, where curved blowfish arches framed a view of Maundays Bay and the mountains of St. Maarten, the setting sun smearing pink and violet stains across puffy clouds. Anticipating my trip home in reverse — the taxi to the port, the shuttle boat and one last rum punch before airport security — I sighed and began plotting my next visit.

[travel@washpost.com](mailto:travel@washpost.com)

Regis writes about offbeat and luxury travel, food and oysters at [necce.com](http://necce.com).