

## **Anguilla feature**

**By Jeff Louderback**

Posted on the side of a rocky passage leading to the Cinnamon Reef Resort, a sign promises drivers that what they'll find at the end is worth every bump in the road.

Tucked away in Little Harbour, protected from the Caribbean Sea by the reef for which it is named, this serene hideaway reflects the island it calls home. Like Anguilla (pronounced Ang-GWIL-LA), a flat, sparsely vegetated island nestled in the British West Indies, Cinnamon Reef is peaceful, relaxed and modestly elegant.

When Miami University graduates Richard and Carol Hauser broke ground on Cinnamon Reef in the late 1970s, there were no resorts on the mostly undeveloped island. Posh resorts and cosmopolitan restaurants have sprouted on Anguilla's shores since the Hausers fulfilled their vision in 1983. Yet none has duplicated Cinnamon Reef's unpretentious luxury.

Mr. Hauser, who founded and operated a prosperous trucking company during the 1950s in his native New York, had taken his family on annual Caribbean trips, but didn't know about Anguilla until he found it on a map. When the Hausers investigated the island, they found a quiet paradise with little crime, undisturbed scenery -- and no cities.

Even today, this northernmost Leeward island of about 11,000 residents is not large enough to support a city. Sixteen miles long and three miles wide, Anguilla is dotted with villages. The capital, the Valley, is a crossroads town with a handful of banks, groceries and restaurants.

Even the arrival of lavish palaces like the Cuisinart Resort & Spa and Cap Juluca hasn't changed the slow pace and friendly demeanor of Anguilla and its citizens. Crime is still infrequent. Beaches are favored by fashion photographers for their powder-white soft sand and transparent water illuminated by a kaleidoscope of blues. Natives remain patient with tourists, who are frequently confused navigating the island's unmarked roads.

Bougainvillea everywhere

Cinnamon Reef reflects the island's relaxed pace. Scattered about 10 acres lush with flowering bougainvillea are 22 villas. Fourteen of the whitewashed Mediterranean-style villas are detached. Each offers views of the harbor and the Caribbean.

The villas and beach suites have terra cotta flooring, sunken living room, raised sleeping area, dressing room and bath with sunken shower. Hammocks dangle from the ceilings on the spacious patios. Anguilla's largest freshwater pool and two Deco-Turf tennis courts are part of the complex.

Wearing khaki shorts and an untucked Oxford-cloth shirt, Mr. Hauser watches snorkelers, paddle boaters and Sunfish sailors test Little Harbour's crystal waters. First-timers at windsurfing, sailing, kayaking and snorkeling can relax, knowing the currents won't carry them out to sea.

"Little Harbour is like our private lagoon," Mr. Hauser said. "Even when we're at full capacity, you feel like you have the water and the beach to yourself."

Even if the menu at Cinnamon Reef's Palm Court Restaurant were lacking, the view of the Caribbean and the islands of St. Maarten - St. Martin and St. Barts in the distance from the open-air terrace would be enough to lure you to the table. Nevertheless, the restaurant boasts world-class cuisine for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The Palm Court is so revered that the Anguillan government chose it as the place for Britain's Prince Philip to dine during a recent visit.

The poached eggs for breakfast, Little Harbour snapper hero sandwich for lunch and grilled Anguillan rock grouper for dinner were my favorites.

#### Beach-side restaurants

Though Cinnamon Reef's beach is a welcome place to relax or swim, take some time to explore more of Anguilla. At some beaches, like Road Bay in Sandy Ground and mile-long Shoal Bay, restaurants and bars share the scene. Tiny Scilly Cay, accessible by a short water taxi ride from Island Harbour, is a favorite snorkeling destination, but the oasis is most known for a thatch-hut, open-air eatery that serves steaks, seafood and fruity spirits.

What separates Anguilla from most Caribbean islands is the bounty of secluded beaches where the only footprints in the sand are those you leave behind. Discovering a private paradise here is simple, though finding some remote havens -- like Captain's Bay and Windward Point on the east side -- requires long drives down roads with gaping holes and jagged rocks. Your rewards -- absorbing the sensations of gentle breezes, silky sand, turquoise water and tropical bird symphonies in solitude -- make the journey worthwhile.

Mead's Bay, with a long strand ideal for long walks and a lagoon where children often frolic, is more easily located, yet uncrowded.

Perhaps the island's best kept secret, Little Bay, is the most stunning beach for snorkeling and picnicking, and it's likely the most challenging to reach. After a short hike along a treacherous trail, adventure-seekers can hoist themselves down a rope draped from a cliff overlooking the bay.

Capt. Calvin Rogers offers an easier option: a five-minute ride from Crocus Bay via his boat service.

Like secluded beaches, offshore reefs are plentiful. Scuba divers flock to Stoney Bay Marine Park, the island's museum under the waves near Junk's Hole Bay. The El Buen Consejo, a Spanish merchant ship, sank here in 1772. Canons, anchors and bronze devotional medals from the Roman Catholic friars aboard the vessel remain embedded in the coral.

#### Personable artist

Though shopping is not the draw in Anguilla, there are souvenir shops in the Valley and art studios scattered about the island, like Savannah's in the Old Valley and Devonish Art Gallery on the west end. A friendly sculptor and potter from Barbados, Courtney Devonish opened Anguilla's first gallery in 1988 and stocks it with his wood, stone and clay pieces, along with works of Caribbean and international artists.

Mr. Devonish's beaming smile, and stories of trips to the unfamiliar frigid terrain of his wife's native Philadelphia, are alone worth the visit.

While the smile of Courtney Devonish portrays the warmth Anguillans are known for, Terrence "Tap" Webster exemplifies the islanders' selfless approach to life. Returning from a rough road that led to a secluded beach, my rental car developed a flat tire, and the trunk did not have a jack. Graciously, Mr. Webster pulled his van to the roadside, grabbed his jack, changed the tire and shared his opinion on everything from Major League Baseball to reggae music.

When handed a \$20 bill for his kindness, the lead singer of a local reggae band called High Tension refused.

"I do it for the love," he said.

#### Character-rich commerce

Venturing through the villages that dot Anguilla is the best way to taste the island's culture. Colorful and well-kept gingerbread cottages line the roads. Children play the nation's favorite pastime -- cricket -- in sandlots and parks. Stone churches with open-air windows are crowded every Sunday by devout islanders whose priorities are God and family. Family-operated markets, like Brooks' General Store in Island Harbour on the eastern tip, sell groceries and homemade chicken noodle soup in character-rich one-room buildings.

Near the beach in Island Harbour, Eaton "Smitty" Smith will pump your gas and fix your tires at his service station. Smitty's cozy, three-table restaurant and bar across the narrow street is an Anguillan institution -- at least Smitty thinks so.

The sharply dressed, well-traveled host will pour you a glass of rum punch, prepare a crayfish dinner and talk about his life and times, which include an appearance in the pages of GQ.

In Sandy Ground on the west end, islanders and tourists alike frequent the Pump House, where reggae and steel pan bands perform weekly. Once used as a pump house when salt-making was king on Anguilla, the bar and eatery now serve as a mini-museum, displaying photos and relics from the bygone salt-making days. Sandy Ground is bordered by an expansive salt pond, one of the stops on historian Sir Emile Gumbs' walking tour of the village.

Anguilla's past is kept alive at the restored 18th-century plantation called Wallblake, but its greatest history lesson is told at the Heritage Collection.

In a small museum attached to his home near East End Village, author and newspaper columnist Colville Petty showcases artifacts from Anguilla's first known residents, the Arawak Indians, as well as Spanish shipwreck relics and tools from the island's once prosperous boat building, salt making and fishing industries.

The professorial Mr. Petty is especially passionate about his room of photographs, newspaper clippings and memorabilia from the Anguilla Revolution. Being controlled by Great Britain and linked with St. Kitts and Nevis since the 19th century, Anguillans were outraged when the three islands were made an associated state by the British in 1967. Anguilla wanted independence -- not from Great Britain, but from St. Kitts and Nevis.

Anguillans stormed the 13-man force of St. Kitts police officers, disarming them and sending them on a plane back to St. Kitts. Two years later, England invaded Anguilla, expecting a skirmish. Instead, soldiers were greeted with British flag-waving islanders who welcomed their presence.

After more than a decade of negotiations, Anguilla was granted British Dependent Territory status in 1980.

#### Day trip to St. Martin

A worthy day trip from Anguilla is the half-Dutch, half-French island of St. Maarten - St. Martin. Mornings and afternoons, ferries embark from Anguilla's Blowing Point to Marigot, (French) St. Martin, where artwork, crafts, clothing and jewelry are sold at the town square's open-air market. The Dutch side of the island, where cruise ships stop over, offers glitzy casinos and lively night clubs.

Finding a secluded spot where the water is a kaleidoscope of blues and the lone footprints on the white powdery sand are the ones you leave behind is simple.

Little Bay is one of Anguilla's top snorkeling spots. The secluded cove, which also has a beach for picnicking and sunning, is overlooked by jutting cliffs.

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