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# CARIBBEAN

TRAVEL & LIFE

FEBRUARY 2005

3

VACATIONS  
ONE ISLAND  
BARBADOS

DOMINICA'S  
GREEN  
SCENE

BEACH  
LOVER'S  
ANGUILLA

MEGA-YACHT  
GALLEY  
TALES

COZUMEL  
ON \$81  
A DAY

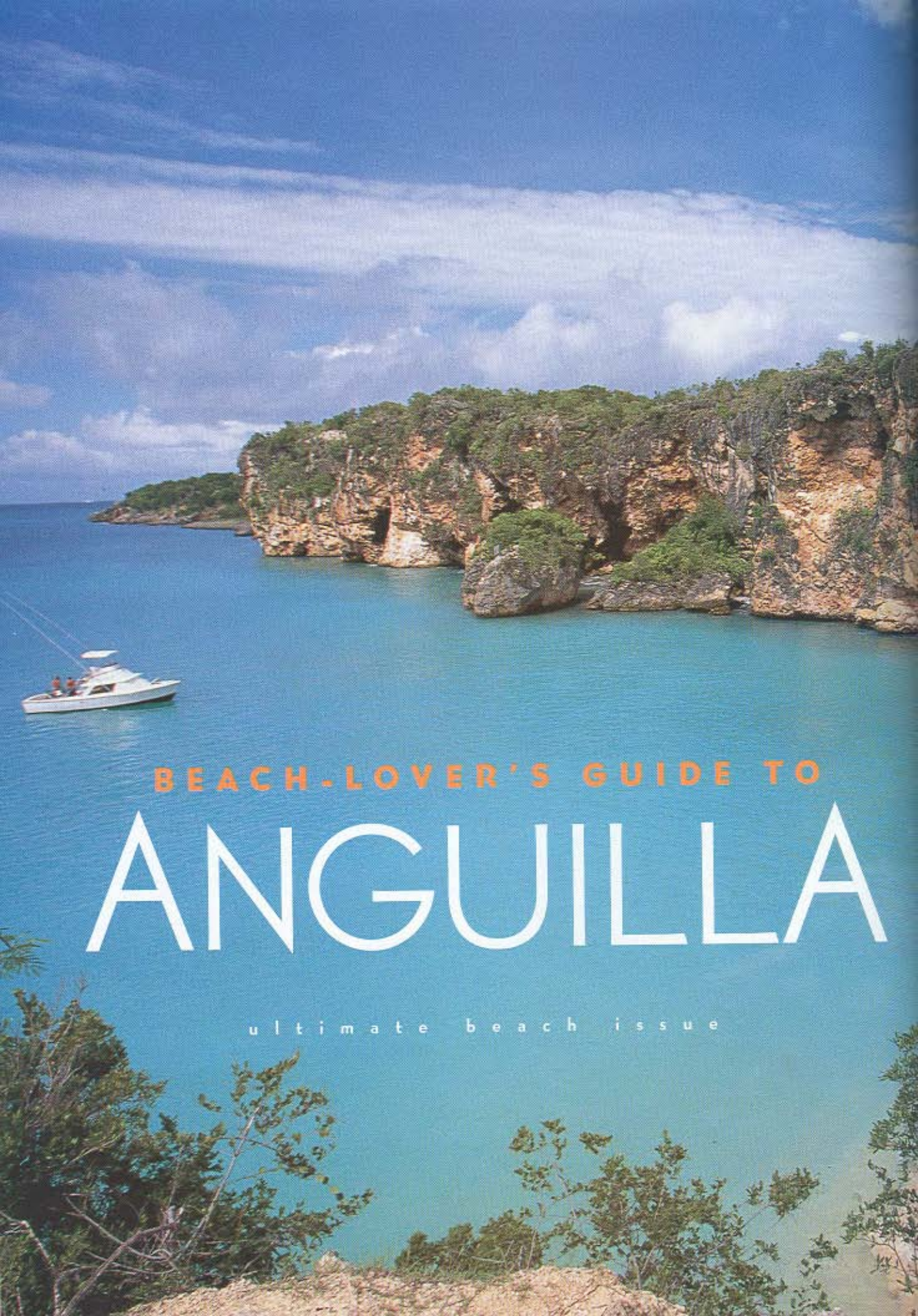
## ULTIMATE BEACHES

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BEACH-LOVER'S GUIDE TO

# ANGUILLA

ultimate beach issue

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB FRIEL



Little Bay

**A**nguilla is the quintessential beach destination for *CT&L* readers — as well as its editors. We're not big fans of blaring boomboxes, buzzing waterbikes and naked volleyball. We want a soft beach to walk and lie on, clear water to swim and snorkel in and an authentic beach bar with icy rum drinks and fish sandwiches for lunch, grilled lobster for dinner. And when we're done for the day, we want to walk a few steps to a comfortable resort. • Anguilla more than fits the bill. The water, filled with Crayola-colored tropical fish, is often so transparent it's like floating in air. The resorts range from clean, simple and on the sand to some of the world's best. As for the restaurants, you'd have to be a shark to get fresher seafood. And the beaches? Merely the finest collection you'll find on any single island in the Caribbean.



## BEACH BY BEACH

### SHOAL BAY EAST

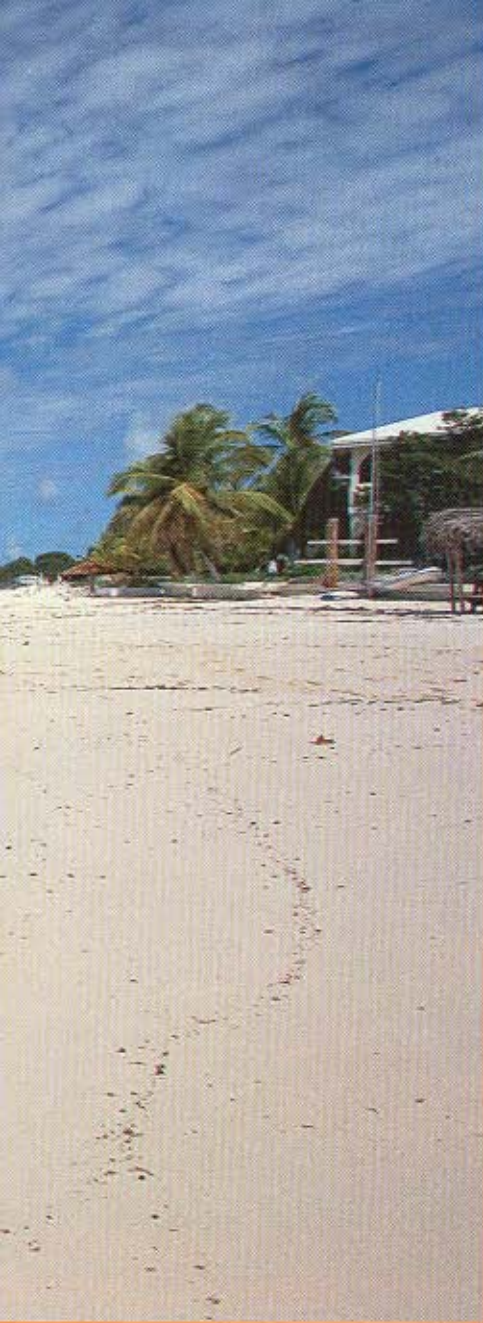
Anguilla's most famous beach, Shoal Bay East, has it all: a wide swath of creamy soft sand over a mile long; the island's most extensive buffet of beach bars and restaurants; a comfortable collection of small beach resorts; and an offshore reef that attracts colorful tropicals along with snorkelers, divers and glass-bottom boaters. It's also the only beach that, during high season, draws enough barefoot traffic to keep it interesting for devoted people-watchers.

The main road into Shoal Bay East dead-ends at Uncle Ernie's beach bar and barbecue, epicenter of all the action. In the shade between beach shacks, local entrepreneurs play dominos when they're not helping visitors arrange lounge chairs, umbrellas, snorkel trips, etc. Pick one place to plant your towel and then spend the day walking a few steps into the blue water and then a few the other way for fresh drinks. Or you can see it like a sea turtle, crawling from one beach bar to the next, maybe stopping to hook

up with a water-sports operator for an offshore snorkeling excursion.

Day-trippers from St. Martin descend on the beach most afternoons, but anytime you're feeling cramped, simply walk east or west to find plenty of sandy space. Sundays are the biggest beach days, when most of the bars serve up live music.

**Where to Stay:** Madeariman Beach Club (\$175 to \$225\*; 264-498-3833; [www.madeariman.com](http://www.madeariman.com)) tucks four suites and one studio into a garden just steps from



## CT&L BEACH REPORT

■ **Barefoot Factor:** Anguilla's beaches are mainly composed of sugar-fine coral sand. Colors range from Shoal Bay West's foraminifera-tinted pink to Upper Shoal Bay's bleach-white mix of halimeda flakes and coral, with most beaches a light shade of gold.

■ **Access:** All beaches are open to the public. Chairs and umbrellas in front of resorts are for guest use only; at Shoal Bay East, they are available for rent.

■ **Getting Around:** If you don't want to rent a car, pick a resort on Shoal Bay East, Upper Shoal Bay or Mead's Bay, where you'll get a great beach and a choice of beach bars and restaurants. A car, though, will give you access to all the beaches. Definitely pick up a copy of the *Road Map & Guide*. There are very few road signs, and there are more dirt roads than paved ones; but it's impossible to get too lost, and with this good map, you can use dead reckoning to get where you're going.

■ **Undress Code:** Nude sunbathing is illegal. Even on beaches adjacent to the most exclusive resorts staff will remind visitors

to stay strategically clad. Tan-line terminators can either stick to private villas or chance it along secluded stretches of Savannah Bay, Windward Point Bay, Mimi's Bay or Captain's Bay.

■ **Best Snorkeling Beaches:** Upper Shoal Bay, Shoal Bay East, Savannah Bay and Little Bay.

■ **Best Beach Sunsets:** Mead's Bay, Barnes Bay, Limestone Bay.

■ **Best People-Watching:** Shoal Bay East. Maunday's Bay for celebrities.

■ **Best Beachy Day Trips:** Boat trips for snorkeling and lunch at Prickly Pear Island and for the lobster lunch at Scilly Cay.

■ **Best Beach Bars:** Gwen's Reggae Grill, Upper Shoal Bay; Dune Preserve, Rendezvous Bay.

■ **Best Beach Parties:** Moonplash at Dune Preserve (April 1-4); Summer Festival (August 1-10)

the beach. Only palms stand between the beach and Shoal Bay Villas' (\$270 to \$360; 264-497-2051; [www.sbvillas.ai](http://www.sbvillas.ai)) studios, apartments and suite.

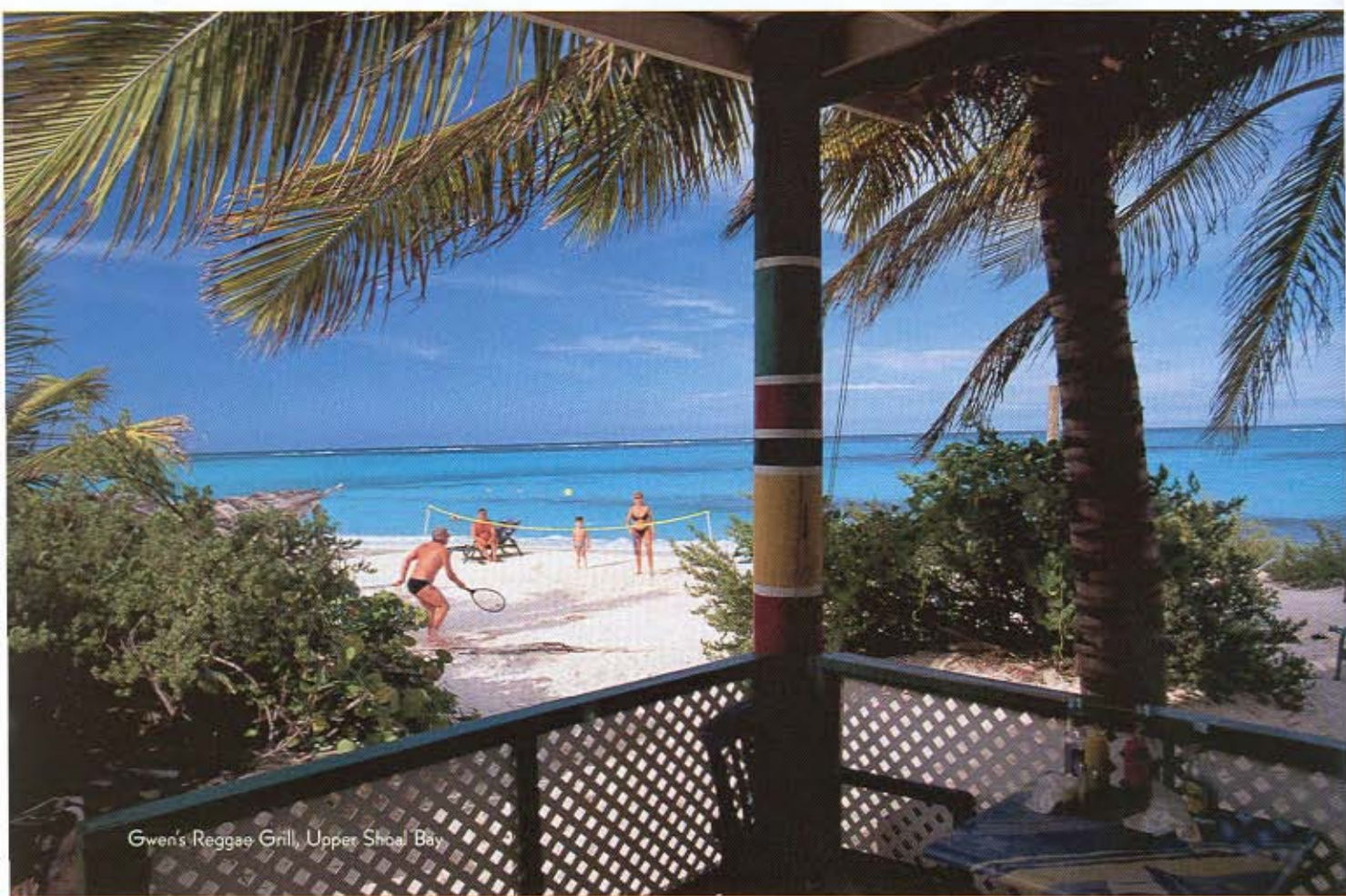
**Where to Play:** Uncle Ernie's (\$\$\*\*; 264-497-3907) classic spot serves up everything from burgers to lobster; Elodias Beach Bar & Grill (\$\$; 264-497-3363) is great for West Indian beach barbecue.



\* All prices for winter season 2004-2005.

\*\* Average main course; each \$=\$10.

## AT UPPER SHOAL BAY YOU'LL WADE THROUGH THE WHITEST



Gwen's Reggae Grill, Upper Shoal Bay

**Hot Stuff:** Just to confuse first-timers, there are three Shoal Bays: East, Upper and West. All have excellent beaches. East is the widest and most popular, Upper offers similar attractions on a smaller scale, and West is simply beach, water and private resorts.

### UPPER SHOAL BAY

Walk east along Shoal Bay East, go around the point where the beach elbows sharply south, and you'll come upon another mile of superb beach, Upper Shoal Bay. It's better to drive, though, because chances are you'll like this spot so much you'll want to stay (from Bay View Road, simply follow the signs for Gwen's Reggae Grill).

It's at Upper Shoal Bay that you'll walk on the whitest sand on the island — and arguably the entire Caribbean. The dazzling, snow-white scene is the result of a high concentration of oatmeal-like calcareous algae flakes, halimeda, produced by the extensive offshore reef and swept ashore here by currents.

The beach runs from the villa-dotted hills at the southern end, past Gwen's, then along a stretch of nothing but sand. Fine snorkeling is just a fin kick off the beach.

**Where to Stay:** Serenity Cottage (\$175 to \$375; 264-497-3328; [www.serenity.ai](http://www.serenity.ai)) has four cottages split into one- and two-bedroom studios; as well as a restaurant and tiki bar.

**Where to Play:** Gwen's Reggae Grill (\$\$; 264-497-2120; [www.gwensreggae grill.com](http://www.gwensreggae grill.com)) is the coolest spot on the beach, with a full bar and barbecue; it's open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., showcasing live reggae on Sundays. Shoal Bay Scuba & Watersports (264-497-4371; [www.shoal bayscuba.ai](http://www.shoal bayscuba.ai)) offers scuba, snorkeling and sailing trips.

**Hot Stuff:** Though Uncle Ernie's gets all the attention, Gwen's is the best choice when you want to spend the entire day at one place. Great drinks (try her piña colada), superior food, easy snorkeling a few feet off the beach and, best of all, a palm grove — practically the only naturally shady spot on the entire island — complete with a fleet of hammocks.

## SAND ON THE ISLAND — AND ARGUABLY THE CARIBBEAN.

### FAR NORTHEAST

There are two notable beaches at the far end of the 16-mile long island: Captain's Bay on the Atlantic side, and Windward Point Bay just around the corner on the Caribbean coast. Both are prone to rough water and strong currents and have no facilities, but they're spectacular walking beaches if you're willing to make the trek. From Windward, you can hike on the ironshore at the very tip of the island, with views of offshore Scrub Island and its leeward-side beach, as well as St. Martin and St. Barts beyond.

**Hot Stuff:** If you plan on spending a lot of time exploring these and other remote beaches, rent a four-wheel drive.

### SAVANNAH BAY

Driving out to Savannah Bay on a series of sand and gravel paths that wind through lonely scrub, you're sure that by the time the search party finds you, you'll be nothing but a pile of bleached bones. Then suddenly you round a corner and come upon a colorful shack, Palm Grove Beach Bar & Grill (\$\$; 264-497-4224), the only manmade structure for miles.

Park here and walk between the dunes past a single raggedy palapa onto a slender arc of sand nearly a mile long, backed by sea grapes and fronted by excellent snorkeling.

**Hot Stuff:** For total privacy, simply carry your cooler and walk south until your legs give out. The best snorkeling, though, is close to the beach bar, which is conveniently located so you can fuel up on fresh lobster or fish and chill out with a rum punch between forays to the reef.

### SOUTHEAST COAST

Heading west from Savannah Bay along the main road, there are several off-the-beaten-path bays with worthwhile beaches. Mimi's, Sea Feathers and Little Harbour are all found at the very end of rough, same-named roads. Mimi's is remote, and the seas and currents can be strong and its beach strewn with seagrass, but it's wildly beautiful. Sea Feathers/Sandy Hill Bay offers a long stretch of beach you can usually have to yourself, with interesting snorkeling around the north-side rocks.



Little Harbour is a sheltered bay; its ironshore (rough limestone) coastline is softened by one large and several small sandy beaches.

## DEFENDER OF THE DUNES

**S**inger, songwriter, poet, Moonsplash host, barkeep, carpenter: Bankie Banx is Anguilla's beachfront Renaissance man. After living in the U.S. and Europe, Bankie returned home 14 years ago. "And I'm glad to be here," he says. "It's getting weirder and weirder out there."

The Banx family owned property on a pristine stretch of Rendezvous Bay, and Bankie began to build a beach bar there. The large resort to the east had just started to alter the bay's dunes, building walls and adding landscaping that Bankie felt weakened the beach's most important asset. "So the name for my bar became a protest to all careless island development: Dune Preserve."

A trained carpenter, Bankie built and then completely rebuilt his bar three times after hurricanes. He's there every day, constantly tinkering with Dune Preserve — creating walls out of old guitars, roofs out of upturned boat hulls — while he keeps a close eye on all the resort construction.

Recently, Bankie woke up in his crow's nest of an apartment to what he thought was a nightmare: the sound of a bulldozer. "I'd just



Bankie Banx used both the pen and the sword to show his displeasure over a recent bulldozing of Rendezvous Bay.

walked the beach the day before, following a sea turtle that was looking for a place to nest," says Banx. "Now they're out there chewing up the sand, destroying the sea grape runners." He grabbed his cutlass and ran to the beach, stopping the machine in its tracks.

## THE GENTLE CURVE OF PINK-HUED SAND FACES ST. MARTIN'S

### RENDEZVOUS BAY

The Caribbean side's endless beach, Rendezvous Bay, lays out a stunning 2½-mile arc of sand facing St. Martin. One of the world's great walking strands — with Dune Preserve, the region's most artistically eclectic beach bar, conveniently located at the midpoint — Rendezvous is also a superb swimming beach when the water is calm.

The buzz on the bay is the sound of construction equipment pounding a large chunk of real estate behind the beach into what will become a golf course, villa community and Anguilla's largest resort — all under the Tenemos Estates moniker. Though the new development will eat up the western end of the bay, Rendezvous Bay (like all of Anguilla's coastline) is a public beach and its entire length will remain open to all. **Where to Stay:** Opened in 1962 by a local hero, the late

Jeremiah Gumbs, and still owned and operated by the Gumbs family, Rendezvous Bay Hotel and Villas (Doubles from \$255, villas from \$800; 800-274-4893; [www.rendezvousbay.com](http://www.rendezvousbay.com)) attracts a loyal following to its 60-acre setting and waterfront Cedar Grove Café (\$\$\$). Anguilla Great House (\$250 to \$280; 800-583-9247; [www.anguilla-greathouse.com](http://www.anguilla-greathouse.com)) is another modestly priced (for Anguilla), family-run beachfront resort. Its alfresco Old Caribe restaurant (\$\$\$) is open daily and hosts weekly poolside barbecues. Until Tenemos comes online, Mediterranean-style Cuisinart Resort & Spa (\$550 to \$3,150; 800-943-3210; [www.cuisinart-resort.com](http://www.cuisinart-resort.com)) is the big fish of the bay — its 93 rooms and suites range from 900 to

7,500 square feet, and it's the world's first resort to have its own hydroponic garden growing fresh produce.

**Where to Play:** Bankie Banx's Dune Preserve (\$\$; see Defender of the Dunes) is the artistic expression of one man and the chosen place to chill for many. Bankie keeps it real in the kitchen ("No burgers or fries, just genuine beach-bar barbecued chicken and ribs") and onstage, where he performs three times a week (there's live music most other nights as well).

**Hot Stuff:** Find Dune Preserve by driving

and a big plate of barbecue at Smokey's at the Cove (\$\$; 264-497-6582). A rock and coral reef at the east end makes for good snorkeling in calm weather.

### MAUNDAY'S BAY

The recent *Today* show wedding event showered even more publicity on the sole resort on Maunday's Bay: Cap Juluca (\$780 to \$5,725; 888-858-5822; [www.capjuluca.com](http://www.capjuluca.com)), where superlatives roll in like the tide. The sand is silkier, the bay somehow seems warmer, and the view

from Pimm's restaurant (\$\$\$\$; 264-497-6666) looking down the length of the beach — backed by the resort's 18 Moorish-style villas — is sublime.

Ironically, the only complaint heard from Cap Juluca guests is that there are too many obtrusive weddings held there.

**Hot Stuff:** Cap Juluca's summer rates are about half the high-season tariffs.

### SHOAL BAY WEST

This gentle one-mile curve of soft sand (tinged pink by a liberal sprinkling of red foram shells) faces St. Martin's undulating north coast across six miles of sea — Saba's sharp silhouette stands off to the west. At the waterline, a ticklish border composed of larger bits of coral and shells produces a soothing rainstick-like tinkling whenever southerly or westerly swells stir up the beach.

Those seasonal swells sculpt the beach, sometimes carving it into two tiers; another sharp little drop just offshore makes certain stretches poor spots for weak swimmers. Decent snorkeling is found around the submerged rocks along the west end of the beach. There are no public facilities, and the beach is usually quiet, with few people other than guests of the villas and apartments.



Cap Juluca at Maunday's Bay

past Cuisinart's gated entry and taking the first left. New this season, Bankie and his bartender Elvis have beached a boat in front of the Dune in order to add bar service right on the sand.

### COVE BAY

There are two beaches on Cove Bay. Upper Maunday's Point is accessed from the Cap Juluca parking lot (walk east through a break in the sea grapes). Cove Bay is at the end of Cove Road and borders the western edge of Tenemos Estates. Both are ungroomed and so will hold beach wrack after rough seas, but Upper Maunday's, especially, has ideal sand and few people. Cove Bay is a popular anchorage and local fishermen use the dock. Day-trippers stop in the cove for a swim

UNDULATING NORTH COAST ACROSS SIX MILES OF SEA.

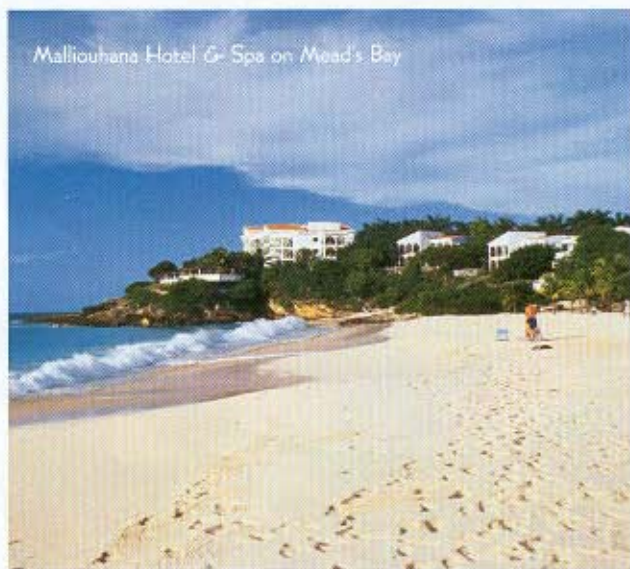


Altamer Restaurant  
on Shoal Bay West



Mead's Bay

**Where to Stay:** The bay's clear blue water serves as backdrop for the talents of architect Myron Goldfinger. Cove Castles' (\$895 to \$4,295; 800-223-1100; [www.covecastles.com](http://www.covecastles.com)) seven villas and eight beach houses feature his audacious, love-it-or-hate-it swept-back roof design, and picket the western end of the beach. The spacious, breezy accommodations open directly onto the sand. To the east stand the restaurant and three majestic villas of Altamer (from \$5,600 per night; 264-498-4000; [www.altamer.com](http://www.altamer.com)). For these, Goldfinger's wife June took inspiration from Brazil, Africa and Russia, running authentic themes through the interiors. The smallest villa sleeps 10 and the largest is 14,000 square feet of elegantly appointed luxury, with a floating hot tub and a



screening room. Tucked between the Goldfinger creations are the Blue Waters Beach Apartments' (\$275 to \$390; 264-497-6292) nine self-catering units and Italian restaurant right on the beach.

#### MEAD'S BAY

Mead's Bay by itself would be enough to qualify any island as a top beach destination. But with Anguilla's embarrassment of beaches, Mead's soft golden sands are overshadowed by Rendezvous Bay and Shoal Bay East. That's just fine for those who'd prefer to keep this mile-plus smile of sand the way it is: ideal for strolling, swimming and sunbathing, with generous stretches of empty beach between resorts.

**Where to Stay:** Carimar Beach Club (\$340 to \$515; 800-235-8667; [www.carimar.com](http://www.carimar.com)) has 23 apartments with full kitchens, living and dining rooms. Four units walk right out onto the beach, and the others stretch back into a lovely flowered courtyard. Malliouhana Hotel & Spa (\$620 to \$2,940; 800-835-0796;

www.malliouhana.com) is a five-star resort that sits on a promontory just above the beach, with 55 rooms and suites, two restaurants, a vast wine cellar and a 15,000-square-foot spa. It features a commanding view down the beach from Mead's Point looking west into the sunset. Frangipani Beach Club (\$300 to \$1,400; 800-892-4564; www.frangipani.ai) offers 16 Spanish-style rooms and suites, a seaside French-Caribbean restaurant and a beach café.

**Hot Stuff:** Mead's is home to Blanchard's (\$\$\$\$; 264-497-6100; www.blanchardsrestaurant.com), the gourmet restaurant owned and operated by Robert and Melinda Blanchard, authors of *A Trip to the Beach* — the book that gave many their first taste of Anguilla.

#### LONG BAY & BARNES BAY

Respectively east and west of Mead's Bay, Long and Barnes both offer similarly inspiring sands and sunset views, and both feature beach restaurants. Oliver's (\$\$\$\$; 264-497-8780) on Long Bay is a three-level cliff-climber with steps leading down to a nice sweep of beach. Mango's (\$\$\$; 264-497-6479), down a rough, rocky road, overlooks Barnes Bay, which, along with its sugary sand, has good views of the offshore islands.

#### SANDY GROUND/ROAD BAY

When Anguillians want to party, they do it here on this curl of brown-sugar sand embraced by high cliffs. From the August boat-race blowouts to the weekly Friday-night beachy bacchanal, Sandy Ground on Road Bay is the island's seaside Funky Town. It's also Anguilla's best natural anchorage and main commercial harbor, so while the bay is very calm, anyone swimming in its not-quite-so-clear water should keep a careful eye out for boat traffic, from little local fishing skiffs to huge freighters.

**Where to Play:** A tin-roofed beach bar/restaurant-cum-jazz club called Johnno's (\$\$; 264-497-2728) serves up

specialties such as lobster-salad sandwiches. Sandy Ground is the best nighttime beach scene, especially on Fridays, when the little road running behind the beach comes alive with smoking barbecue stands, limin' locals and music pouring out of both the Pumhouse (on the old salt pond side of the street, not the beach) and Johnno's.

**Hot Stuff:** It's at Johnno's that you can find boat drivers who will ferry you out to Prickly Pear Island and Sandy Island for sun, snorkel and picnic day trips.

#### LITTLE BAY

One of the Caribbean's great "secret" beaches, Little Bay is more about the water and the cliffs than the few feet of tan sand washed into the curve of this fishhook-shaped section of coast. Wildlife here is more exuberant than at any other spot on Anguilla: Pelicans soar along cliffs prickly with turks head cactus, then peel off to dive-bomb schools of baitfish while goats look down from the rocky slopes. The snorkeling — from the east side cliff and monolith-like boulders all the way back along the coast to Crocus Bay — is as good as you'll find without taking a boat to the offshore reefs.

**Hot Stuff:** To get to Little Bay, park in Crocus Bay where boat drivers sit waiting under the big tree near Roy's restaurant. Ask for Calvin. Load your picnic and drinks into his boat and let him know when you want to be picked up — it'll cost you \$10 per person round trip.

#### LIMESTONE BAY

A pocket-size beach hemmed in by crusty ironshore pocked with tide pools, Limestone offers a single shade tree and a great sunset view. There's good snorkeling all along the rocks when the water is calm.

**Hot Stuff:** The new Limestone Bay Café should be completed for this season.

*Bob Friel is editor in chief of Caribbean Travel & Life.*

## OFFSHORE BEACHING



Just 100 yards off the beach at Island Harbour, Scilly Cay is close enough to swim to — although then you'd have to sit in soggy drawers while you eat your grilled lobster. It's better to wave over Africa, who will pick you up for the free three-minute boat ride past colorful local fishing skiffs. Scilly (264-497-5123; open Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays) has a single sandy beach; the rest of the island is ironshore surrounded by coral heads offering good snorkeling. Grilled lobster lunches and rum punches are the cay's claim to fame — expensive (lunch and drinks will run \$100 per couple), but worth the splurge.

Sandy Cay and Prickly Pear Island present similar experiences (one beach bar/grill on Sandy; two on Prickly Pear) with the added adventure of longer boat trips — four and six miles from the Sandy Ground dock, respectively — larger beaches and better snorkeling. Find a boat at Johnno's — round-trip rides cost \$40 per person; full day trips including snorkeling stops, picnic lunch and drinks cost about \$80 per person.

Scrub Island and Dog Island are Anguilla's two total castaway cays: no beach bars, no facilities. The aptly named Scrub, off the northeastern tip, has one beach; Dog, which should have been named "Goat," for all the billys and nannies running around, lies out past Prickly Pear off the northwest coast of the island and has several incredible beaches.