

VOGUE

New Hotels and Ever-Gorgeous Beaches Make Anguilla the Place to Be



Anguilla

Photo: Alamy



With new hotels and perennially pristine beaches, sublime food and rugged hiking trails, Anguilla feels like the place to be. Much of the island was battered by Hurricane Irma, but it's poised for a strong comeback with recently developed properties such as the chic boutique hotel Zemi Beach House and the nine-room ultra-luxury Quintessence Hotel. The way to experience all the glory of this West Indies paradise is to follow the path of what's new, while leaving ample time to head for under-the-radar places that have been whispered about for years by locals and regular visitors. Here, an insider's guide to the ideal mix of hidden gems and proven pearls in Anguilla.

Where to Stay in Anguilla

In 2016, a New York family that had visited Anguilla for many years opened Zemi Beach House, on the eastern end of the island, where there typically hasn't been as much development. Complete with a premier spa and a fine dining sea-to-table restaurant called Stone, the 65-room hotel sits on the world-famous Shoal Bay East, known for its wide white beaches, crystal-clear water, and protected coral reefs.



Zemi Beach House

Photo: Courtesy of Zemi Beach House



Blink and you'll miss it, since the turnoff is only marked on a discreet rock emblazoned with the letter "Q." The Q Hotel, as it's called on the island, is the Quintessence, which opened in January. However modest its announcement might seem from the main road, no expense was spared on the rooms that pay homage to the owner's Haitian and African art. If you can't swing the four-figure rates, spend an evening dining al fresco at their restaurant, Julian's. The Q benefited from hiring some of the most seasoned and talented hands from the Malliouhana, the famed hotel next door that shuttered after Hurricane Irma.

Taking over what was once the Viceroy, The Four Seasons, which opened in late 2016, now occupies that prime piece of real estate between Meads Bay and Barnes Bay. The former includes some of Anguilla's most elite addresses, while the latter is a favorite for snorkeling and privacy. The modernist hotel, which has 181 rooms in addition to villas, will reopen later this month. Their on-property store Boutique sells designers that can't be found elsewhere on Anguilla, and holds trunk shows during the holidays.

Where to Eat in Anguilla

Hibernia Restaurant Art Gallery has been open on the island for 30 years. But its co-owner Mary Pat O'Hanlon says many of the people who come to dine on the French-Asian fusion cuisine aren't first-timers to the island. That might be because the restaurant, which is situated in O'Hanlon's home with her husband Raoul Rodriguez and also boasts an Asian art gallery and eclectic sculpture garden, is tucked away in a mostly residential area. The cuisine is inspired by the three months a year the couple spends in Southeast Asia, and it includes dishes like smoked duck with endive salad and their famous Tom Yam Pla, fresh Caribbean fish in a hot and sour broth.



A dish at Hibernia Restaurant Art Gallery

Photo: Courtesy of Hibernia Restaurant Art Gallery



It's practically criminal to come to Anguilla and not eat directly on the beach at open-air cafes and bars that are the social pulse of the island. Located on the less busy east end of the island, Madeariman is technically a beach shack, but that undersells its excellent food that goes way beyond bland beach cuisine.

Madeariman serves a dish that is worth the trip to Anguilla alone: yellow curry with fresh grouper. Come to eat, but stay for the music—live reggae bands play on the weekends.

Jacala, which has neither a website nor a good track record of answering and returning calls, is a dinner reservation worth fighting for. (Hint: you have to phone at a certain time of day on Friday.) Owned by chef Alain Laurent and the affable Jacques Borderon, who personally takes everyone's order, the feeling at the restaurant is that the diners have come home to old friends—but also to excellent food. As the names of the owners suggest, this is French cooking, so anything a la meunière is excellent, as are their desserts.

What to Do in Anguilla

No one knows the island's terrain better than the Anguilla National Trust, the local non-profit environmental organization which, for \$50 a person, will take you on a walking tour almost anywhere you want to go—a service that should not be taken for granted in a place where 90 percent of the land is private, there are endless back roads, and very little is marked. With a local, you'll find the best limestone beaches, rock formations, and rugged parts of the island like remote Windward Point, where it feels like no soul has ever set foot.

As wonderful as the hikes are, you need to get out on the water to see the island, since many of the mega-properties are hidden, and the most scenic beaches and cliffs are inaccessible by land. Those in the jet-set crowd call Garfield, of Gotcha Garfield's Sea Tours, to charter his luxurious boats and hire his knowledgeable crew. The company will customize tours, but a two and half hour tour around the island with stops at tucked-away swimming and snorkeling spots like Little Bay might just be the perfect way to spend an afternoon.



An ocean view of Anguilla

Photo: Alamy



Generally, other hotels' spas are not worth leaving your own hotel for, but that's not the case with Zemi Thai Beach House. They've recreated, piece for piece, a 300-year-old Thai structure (all the wood was shipped in from Thailand). Try one of the treatments that pays homage to Taino, the island's indigenous people, with rituals that focus on layering the body with herbs, fruits, muds, and salts. The hammam, the only on the island and the largest one in the entire Caribbean, feels like an airy white marble temple. Following a steam, treatment, or massage, stay and lounge in the serene tropical gardens.

Anguilla doesn't immediately scream dude ranch, but there is a horse culture on the island nurtured by Sea Side Stables. The company will set you up with a horse for a beach, moonlight, or ocean ride. If you haven't already found your personal bliss in Anguilla, there's nothing like a leisurely ride, with azure water lapping at your feet and sea breeze in your hair, to achieve an island state of mind.

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