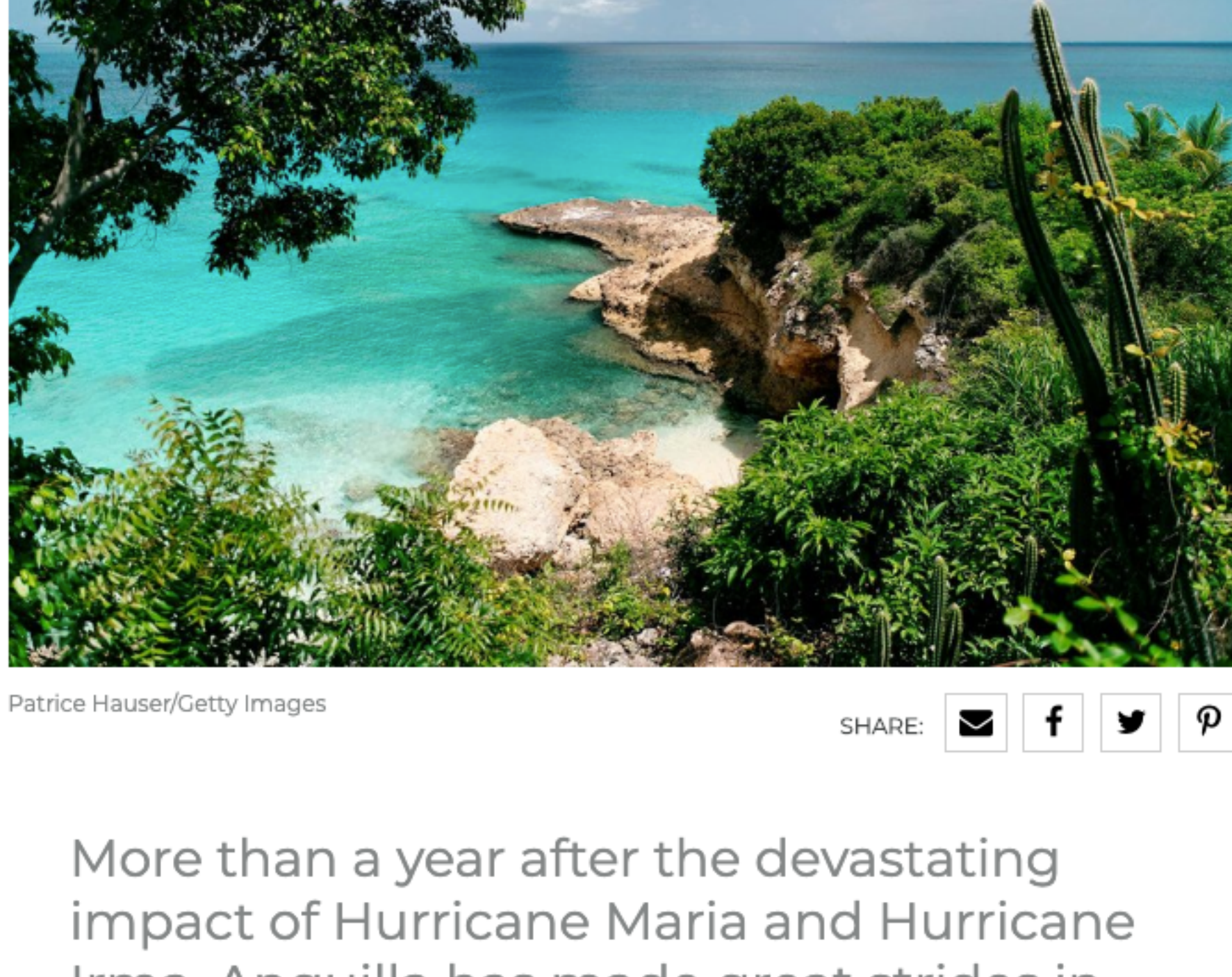


Why You Should Travel to Anguilla Now



Patrice Hauser/Getty Images

SHARE: [Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Pinterest](#)

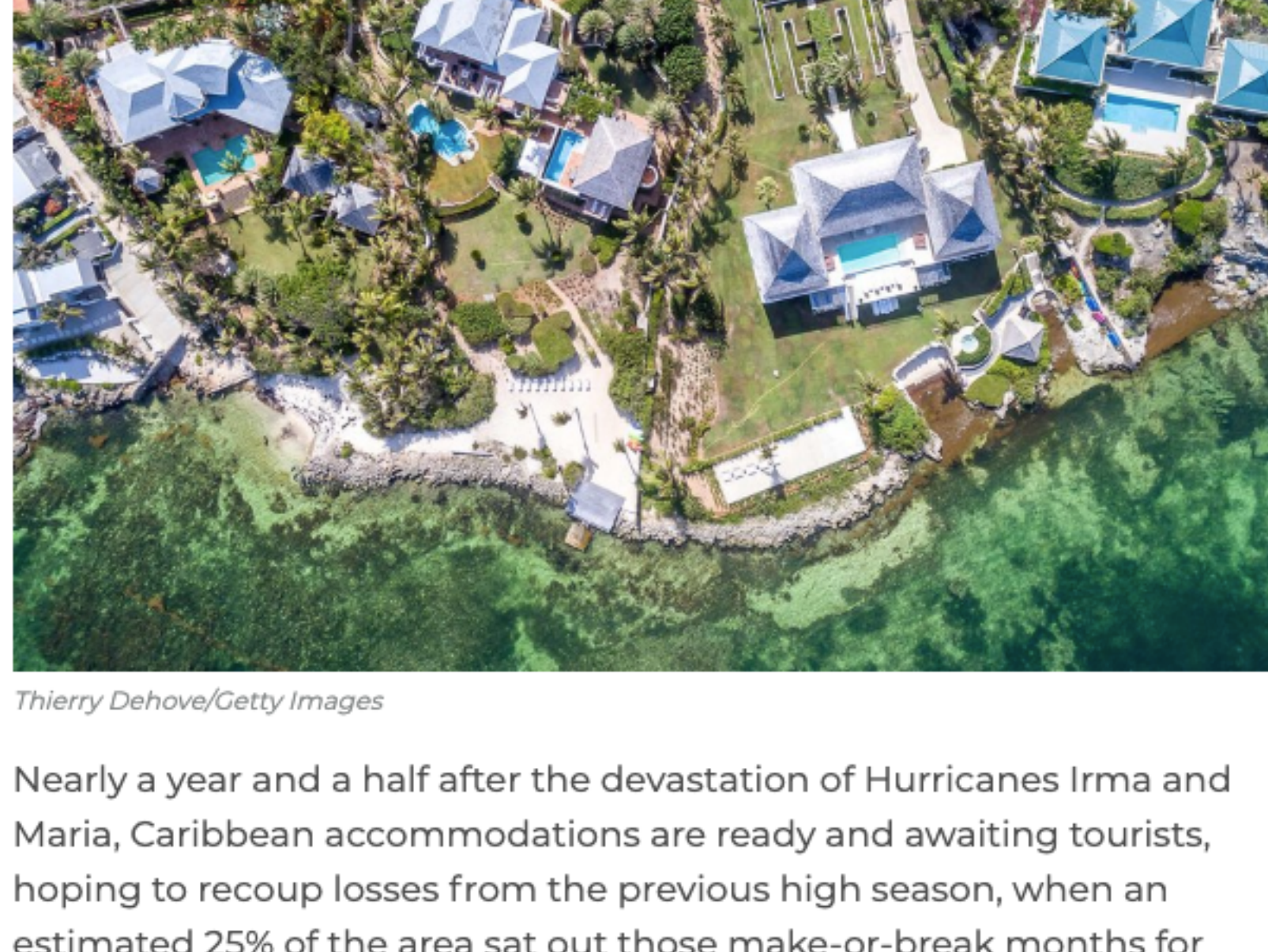
More than a year after the devastating impact of Hurricane Maria and Hurricane Irma, Anguilla has made great strides in getting back on their feet—and tourists are taking notice.

By Guelda Volen on March 14, 2019

"By the way, what is the corporate tax rate here?" This is actually a question I asked my cab driver the first time I was in the [Caribbean](#), a few years back. He peered back at me, puzzled given my beach garb, and said he didn't know. Chiding me about this exchange became a favorite pastime those on the trip—I'd unwittingly stereotyped the whole Caribbean.

In my mind it was a destination for Spring Break, cruise ships, and offshore accounts. The appeal for the wealthy had to be easy yacht accommodations. Of course, as I've now learned, this is a vast and varied chain of islands, and there are places—like the smaller, quiet Anguilla—that offer much more than wet t-shirt contests and tax havens.

White-sand beaches and clear water are first and foremost, sure, but Anguilla stands out from most of the region for its intimately scaled accommodations, exquisite (and low-key) dining and calm demeanor, even if it is not exactly exempt from celebrity attention. LeBron James has instagrammed himself and his son cliff diving during their Anguilla respite, but the beaches aren't topless and, as a rule, there's no DJ poolside.



Thierry Dehove/Getty Images

Nearly a year and a half after the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, Caribbean accommodations are ready and awaiting tourists, hoping to recoup losses from the previous high season, when an estimated 25% of the area sat out those make-or-break months for repairs. The Caribbean Tourism Organization estimates the region lost \$1 billion revenue due to the storms, because even areas that were up and running suffered from the perception that the hurricanes had wreaked havoc on local infrastructure.

Starting in mid-November, JetBlue restarted flights to St. Maarten (where you can then connect to Anguilla via speedboat), and Air Canada followed suit in December. [This was a quick recovery](#), given that the St. Maarten airport was almost completely destroyed. But admittedly, the airport once-noted for its spectacular views is not the same—the tent-like temporary structure is crowded and has no air conditioning.

Electricity was down for most of the island for about four months, said Francis Greenburger, a New York-based real estate developer who visits frequently and owns rental properties there. Residents lacked access to supplies, such as diapers, which were often flown in by the various European governments of these overseas territories (Anguilla is an overseas territory of Britain). "Some people have left the island," because of the strife, Greenburger said.

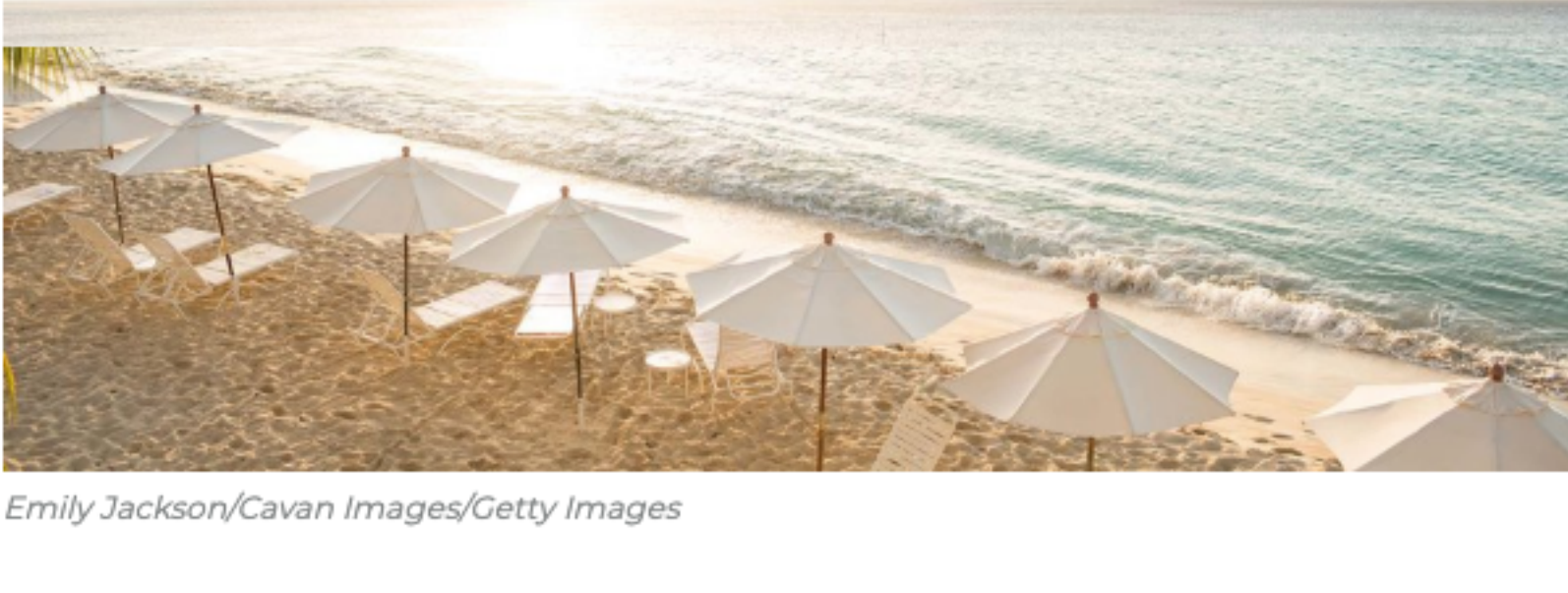


Macduff Everton/Getty Images

All the windows and frames of Greenburger's [Altamer Villas](#) development in Anguilla's West Shoal Bay were blown out by the storm, Greenburger said. Although those were just the beginning of the repairs they had to undertake. The other side of the island fared a little better, although developer Jeff Goldstein said he clocked 195 mile-per-hour winds at the [Zemi Beach House](#) resort in East Shoal Bay.

"All the major hotels closed and had to do one level or another of rebuilding," said Greenburger. "You could say we went from a tourist economy to a construction economy."

But residents took a lighthearted approach to their lot, according to Natalie Diaz, chief of staff to Greenburger, who helped coordinate aid with local organizations in the hurricanes' wake. She said she began to realize the extent of the situation after overhearing a woman say she "didn't know there were so many ways to make salt fish." Turns out you can eat the preserved staple with rice, with pasta, or on crackers—if you must.



Emily Jackson/Cavan Images/Getty Images

December saw a much anticipated development on the island: Johnno's, a bar-cum-seafood restaurant that's formal address is just "Sandy Ground 2640, Anguilla," reopened.

Two of the islands largest hotels—the [Belmond Cap Juluca](#) and the [Fouliouhanna](#)—began courting visitors that same month (joining the [Four Seasons](#), which had reopened in March 2018). Memories of salt fish-based meals have begun to fade, although there is still a long way to go.

Altamer began renting in late November, although about half of the development is still being repaired and it's not clear when it will be up and running.

The Myron Goldfinger-designed villas are emblems of the intimate feel of Anguilla. Bold white geometric totems in the sand deflect the strong winds Anguilla is known for. Still, none rise more than three stories and all offer enough privacy—private security is included—to thwart all but the most enterprising paparazzo.

Bonnie Bloom, the owner's representative at Altamer, said the lack of hulking hotel developments is part of why she and her husband chose to move to Anguilla, trading in their stressful corporate jobs in Hong Kong for island life more than a decade ago.

"There aren't any cheap timeshares, no 600-room hotels," she said. Local laws have discouraged out-of-scale real estate projects.

Of course, not everything in Anguilla is locally made or architecturally distinct. For travelers more inclined to a traditional resort, there are options like the Four Seasons or Zemi Beach House.

Zemi was early to re-open, in February 2018. It's a resort with all the attendant trimmings, but restrained. It's perched on Shoal Bay East, which appears frequently on Best Beach in the Caribbean lists, and sports the only air conditioned beachfront dining on the island.

And Altamer visitors aren't exactly suffering. The property offers add-ons such as an in-home chef, private yoga instruction on the beach, or steelpan drum accompaniment for your outdoor meal (nothing like an instrumental version of Harry Belafonte's "Jamaica Farewell" at sunset).



Thierry Dehove/Getty Images

It's a far cry from my stereotype of offshore accounts by the beach. Some of Anguilla's visitors may have made fortunes investing with hedge funds, yes, but they aren't here trying to launder them.

Indeed, Anguilla's most distinctive feature may be the absence of that hard-to-pinpoint feeling tourists get elsewhere in the Caribbean, a vague discomfort surely related to the power imbalance in places dependent on tourist dollars. And while Anguilla is that, as most of the Caribbean is, interactions don't take a transactional tone.

Locally owned businesses, which have been a backbone of the economy here for decades, have especially proliferated lately. Food trucks and small boutiques pepper the island's main transverse, the Valley Road.

Josveek Huligar began infusing sea salt he harvested using a special technique after a dead tourist season last year, and eventually founded his company, Anguilla Sands and Salts, Diaz said. How special could this salt be? I was a skeptic, but Huligar is really on to something.

Some of this is bittersweet. "There's been more and more makeshift entrepreneurialism after the storm," Diaz said, as businesses sprung up when locals lost employment tied to tourism.

A premier Anguilla attraction also just regained its sea legs, if you will.

There was a question as to whether Sandy Island, a cay about two miles from the main island, would even exist after the hurricane, explained Simone Connor. Her family holds a 99-year lease on the tiny islet, where they serve sumptuous yet simple Caribbean cuisine to visitors during the tourist season.

At Sandy Island's petite restaurant, bartenders operate deftly even in high winds, and homemade food is served by a friendly, welcoming staff. Try the island speciality, crayfish, with macaroni salad and ribs.

Right after the hurricane, Sandy Island barely existed. Now, although structures have been rebuilt, it's like the island is actually in a slightly different place, Connor said.

The logistics of reconstructing their business weren't simple.

Anchoring load-bearing poles into sand isn't easy, and supplies and equipment had to be hauled on small boats because larger ones cannot anchor close enough to Sandy Island for offloading. (Indeed, when you offload yourself to visit the island you have to wade through a couple feet of water.)



Don Hebert/Getty Images

Hurricane recovery extends past the physical structures that must be redesigned and reinforced, of course.

"For the island in general, there are practical problems, and then there are emotional problems," said Greenburger. "Emotionally it was devastating for a lot of people that were there." After all, eating salt fish in every possible preparation is inventive, but not actually quaint or pleasant.

When Bloom recounts her storm experience one morning at breakfast, she quietly breaks down.

"The island was very very severely hit," Greenburger said, but the cracks are mostly mended, now. "For a visitor, I think it looks like it's old charming self."