

Post-Hurricanes, This Captivating Caribbean Island Is Back in Business

By Ashlea Halpern 4.10.2019 From the May/June 2019 issue



Devastating storms in 2017 wrought havoc on the Caribbean. But thanks to local efforts, the people of Anguilla have cleaned their beaches and rebuilt their businesses—and they’re ready for you to join them.

“Life is too short to sink completely.”

I glimpsed the phrase spray-painted on the overturned hull of a half-sunken fishing vessel on my speedboat ride between St. Maarten’s Princess Juliana International Airport and the Caribbean island of **Anguilla**. The wreck was one of several in the harbor, reminders of devastating back-to-back hurricanes in 2017.

But amid that lingering destruction, I also saw the unbreakable spirit of Anguilla’s residents. During my stay at **Altamer**, a quartet of high-end villas designed by architect Myron Goldfinger, I learned that the staff stayed on payroll and helped rebuild over the 14 months the property was fully shuttered. Meanwhile, Altamer’s parent company founded the Anguilla United Relief Fund, raising more than \$263,000 and delivering 7,400 pounds of emergency relief supplies to the island.

These days, two villas have been reconstructed (now with surge wall protection and windows that can withstand Category 5 gales). A comfy hammock flanks the swimming pool, guests do yoga on the beach or sway to steel drum rhythms, and it’s hard to imagine this place was ever anything but dreamy.



Photo by Julien Capmeil

Although Anguilla suffered major damage during Hurricanes Irma and Maria, most of its businesses are now up and running.

At dinner with Jeff and Susan Goldstein, owners of the reopened five-star hotel **Zemi Beach House**, I learned how they rallied alongside other businesses to form the **Anguilla Stronger** campaign, raising nearly \$2 million for schools, hospitals, and families whose homes had been devastated. Today their hotel is a picture of elegance, with its tropical landscaping, an upscale rum bar, and a historic Thai spa all restored to pre-Irma glory.

Signs of resilience abounded elsewhere, too. People who lost jobs and homes figured out ways to make something out of nothing. For example, Josveek Huligar of **Anguilla Sands and Salts** began harvesting the island’s greatest resources—salt and sand—and packaging them after the storm as location-specific jewelry and keychains. Volunteers led clean-up efforts on many of Anguilla’s 33 beaches, and the three I visited all looked perfect. The roads are in decent shape, and most restaurants, bars, and shops have reopened. Taken altogether, the message to travelers is clear: We haven’t sunk, and we can’t wait to see you.