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The Tampa Tribune

April 5, 1998

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CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean

Anguilla's beaches and turquoise waters are trademarks of the islands in this picturesque sea.

Author: *MARY S. GILBERT; Tribune correspondent*

Article Text:

ANGUILLA, British West Indies - A day at the beach creates an appealing dilemma on Anguilla.

This idyllic, 16-mile-long Caribbean island, part of the British West Indies, has some of the world's finest powdery-white-sand **beaches**. Thirty-three **beaches** stretching over 12 miles ring the island. Paired with clear, **turquoise waters**, coral reefs and coves, each beach radiates its own particular tropical splendor and breathtaking, pristine beauty.

With so many must-see **beaches**, how does the intrepid beachcomber establish the day's agenda? Sorting through a checklist of personal preferences is helpful.

Want to view the beach generally acknowledged as the best in the Caribbean? Visit Shoal Bay East - which reputedly has the whitest sand - for snorkeling, swimming, shelling and boat racing, **Anguilla's** national sport. Savor the barbecue baby back ribs at Uncle Ernie's, one of **Anguilla's** celebrated rustic beach shacks.

Interested in a boat ride? Simply wave from the short pier at Island Harbour Bay, and the restaurant on Scilly Cay - just a quarter mile away - will send over its private boat to pick you up. Dozens of brightly colored fishing boats make daily trips out to sea from this bay.

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Looking for luxury resorts? Go to Mead's Bay, home to the exclusive Malliouhana Hotel and site of the locals' favorite picnic spot.

Have a yen for history? Stroll along Rendezvous Bay, once the invading point of French soldiers from nearby St. Martin before friendly ties were established between the two islands.

Despite no historical record, local legend persists that Christopher Columbus, while on an expedition in 1493, named Anguilla after the Spanish word for "eel" because of its long, flat, narrow shape.

The climate is arid, but the interior vegetation is surprisingly lush and green, though fairly scrubby. Anguilla claims to have a premium of days with abundant, uninterrupted sunshine. Caressed by ocean breezes and warmed by a year-round average temperature of 80 degrees, Anguilla seems to have but one season: summer. Because of its proximity to the equator, the sun is intense, so sunbathers should use plenty of sunscreen to ensure some protection from the strong rays.

Anguilla is less well-known, less developed commercially, less cultivated and, therefore, less crowded than many of its neigh-

boring Caribbean islands. But therein lies a large part of its charm.

Anguilla's relative seclusion can be attributed in large part to its longstanding refusal to build gambling casinos or serve as a destination for cruise ships. The Anguilla Hotel and Tourism Association recently softened that stance by agreeing to allow one cruise ship to dock there.

Tourism ranks as the island's primary industry, and friendliness is its chief commodity. Hoteliers, restaurant workers and even taxi drivers often greet visitors with a handshake and a cheery smile.

Anguillans are noted for their easy, gracious informality and politeness, which certainly helps account for the country's almost nonexistent crime rate. Their requests of tourists are simple: Obtain permission before taking their photographs, and kindly forgo topless or nude sunbathing in public.

True to **Anguilla's** British heritage, its official language is English, and cars are driven on the left side of the road (a small sign above the steering wheel of rental cars reminds drivers to stay left).

Driving poses another challenge to the uninitiated. The roads on touring maps are marked as either primary or secondary, with no other designation. Nor are there any signs with street names. Primary roads are paved, but many secondary roads are simply bumpy dirt trails.

The most expedient way to navigate Anguilla is to follow the general direction for major restaurants and hotels as indicated on randomly posted signs.

The view on Anguilla is, as yet, relatively unspoiled. No gaudy billboards or fast-food restaurant signs obscure the dramatic scenery. A word of caution: Keep alert to dodge the ubiquitous herds of goats that freely roam the island.


Lodging ranges from unpretentious bed-and-breakfasts to world-class resorts. If determined by architecture alone, the place to stay is the romantic, elegant Cap Juluca. Majestically situated on tranquil Maunday's Bay with a view of the mountains of St. Martin six miles away, the deluxe resort's gleaming white domes, turrets, parapets and beach-side villas appear to be half-mirage and half-oasis inadvertently transplanted from some remote Moroccan desert.

You almost expect this Moorish-inspired property to fade away at dusk and reappear in the morning like the mythical Scottish village of Brigadoon.

Cap Juluca's stellar reputation rests on more than good looks. Tastefully appointed rooms, efficient but unobtrusive service, exotic landscaping, a meticulously maintained private beach and two gourmet restaurants attract the discerning vacationer.

Eclipse, the resort's signature restaurant, features California cuisine blended with the influences of Provence. With its white walls, latticework and carved archways, the setting evokes comparisons to Rick's American Cafe in "Casablanca," where Ilsa beckoned Sam to "play "As Time Goes By." "

Other restaurants of note include Mango's on Barnes Bay - for grilled seafood, especially



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the local Anguillian lobster - and Blanchard's. The proprietors of Blanchard's were the original owners of Mango's. They sold it and moved to Aspen, Colo., where they established another restaurant - fittingly named Anguilla. They became so homesick for the real Anguilla, they moved back to the island and opened Blanchard's.

Peace and tranquillity are priorities on Anguilla, but for more active pleasures, tourists can take the 30-minute ferry trip to Marigot, the capital of St. Martin. This picturesque waterfront city is a haven for shoppers looking for perfumes, cosmetics, designer apparel, china, jewelry and leather goods.

Anguilla's peace is contagious. Visitors cannot help but slow down and appreciate the island's natural beauty. But isn't that what ones expects from paradise?

Caption:

(C) Cap Juluca, a resort with Moroccan- inspired architecture, gracefully arcs around Maunday's Bay in Anguilla. MARY S. GILBERT/for the Tribune

(C) Dozens of brightly colored boats make daily trips out to sea from Island Harbour Bay. Photo from Medhurst & Associates Inc.

(C) Once the site of an invasion, Rendezvous Bay now offers peace and tranquillity. Photo from Medhurst & Associates Inc.

(MAP) (C) (The Caribbean) CAITLIN HOPE WRIGHT/Tribune map

(2) The place to stay in Anguilla is the romantic and elegant Cap Juluca, above, on tranquil Maunday's Bay, below. Anguilla is less well-known
PHOTO 5(3C)

MAP (C)

Memo:

(Related story, page 2.)

Mary S. Gilbert is a freelance travel writer and owner of the Gilbert Group, a public relations and events and sports marketing company in Pittsburgh.

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Record Number: 04/05/98 149

Record 1 of 1

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