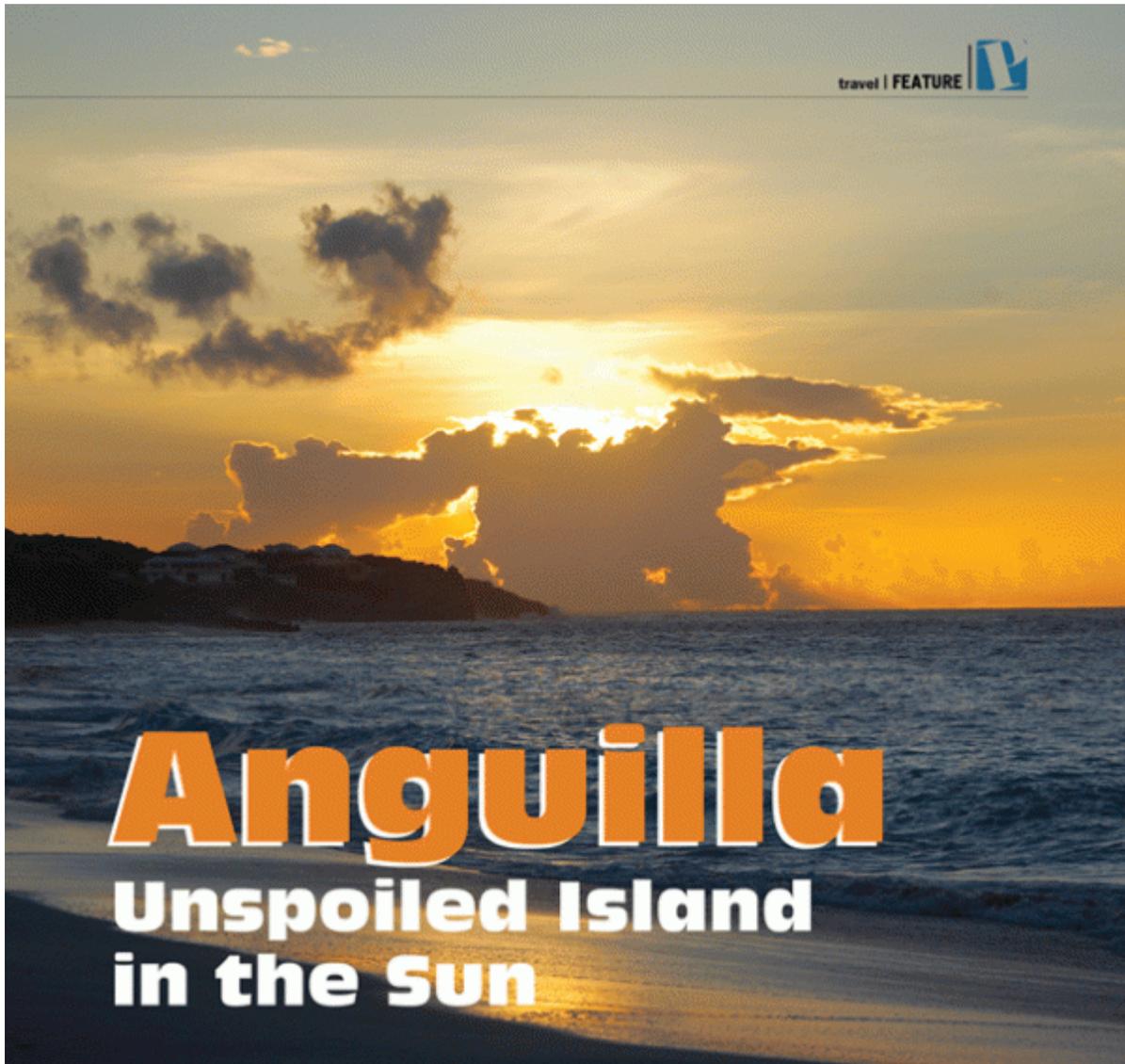


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Tiny, tranquil and loaded with charm, Anguilla is a Caribbean island where relaxation reigns supreme. With over thirty pristine white beaches, numerous luxury resorts and tony restaurants, it has become known as a hideaway for the rich and famous. That said this “island wrapped in blue” is a treat for all visitors.

Part of the British West Indies, Anguilla (rhymes with vanilla) is the most northern of the Leeward Islands nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. It is only 16 miles long and three miles wide, but offers some of the most spectacular beaches you will find in the Caribbean. Shoal Bay, in particular, is a gorgeous expanse of sun-drenched sand, turquoise water, coconut trees and tiki huts, with the lush mountains of St. Martin framed in the distance. Fishing and boating have a rich history here so be prepared to indulge in any number of water sports, or you may choose to stretch out under a beach umbrella armed with a Pyrat rum punch.

Welcoming and laid back, most of the Anguilla's 13,000 inhabitants tend to operate on "island time" and you will soon be glad to do the same. Though rich in Caribbean culture, the Queen's English is spoken here so be prepared to drive on the left side of the road and have your breakfast coffee served English-style with hot milk. The Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$) is the official currency though US dollars are welcome everywhere.

Unlike some Caribbean islands, Anguilla does not offer pulse-pounding nightlife, glitzy casinos and historic "old towns." Though live music can be heard at Elvis' Beach Bar and you might spot a celebrity enjoying the vibe at The Pumphouse or Johnno's, this locale is mainly about peace and quiet. It is much more suited to a special romantic getaway than a bachelor party or a Disney-style vacation.

High season is mid-December through mid-April with the temperature topping out at a balmy 80 degrees. Major events during the season include the Moonsplash Music Festival featuring an array of local and international musicians in March, and the Festival Del Mar, a culinary celebration of ocean cuisine, in April.

Luxury resorts such as Cap Juluca are designed to cater to your every need. Once ensconced in one of their well-appointed beachfront villas, you will be trading in your cares for comfy beach chairs. Meanwhile the CuisinArt Resort & Spa offers a Mediterranean-inspired resort with an enticing spa, while newcomer Viceroy is an ambitious and opulent nod to Hamptons-style luxury. For those on a less grand budget, make sure you visit Anguilla's Charming Escapes Collection a joint venture between the tourist board and local hotels.

With almost 85 restaurants, ranging from beach barbeque to elegant chic, Anguilla is a culinary delight. Creole, Caribbean, African, French, Italian, Asian and more can all be sampled in varied infusions, but the fresh local seafood is what you should aim for. Crayfish is an island favorite so try it grilled with lime and a touch of curry. Add a plate of johnny cakes (slightly sweetened cornmeal cakes), rice and pigeon peas and a bottle of Ting (grapefruit soda) and you have an island feast.

The resorts offer a variety of restaurants but if you want to venture out, try the pumpkin soup and crayfish mango salad at Tasty's Restaurant or the curried goat at Smokey's at the Cove. If you are not budget-conscious, there is the French-infused Asian fare at Hibernia or the Euro-Caribbean cuisine at the historic KoalKeel, housed in a 1700's sugar plantation (ask to see their 200-year-old rock oven). Mango's, which specializes in seafood, is an island favorite, but for the ultimate beach-comer experience, it is hard to beat the super-casual barbeque lunch on Sandy Island, a tiny offshore "cay." It is reachable only by boat from the main harbor, Sandy Ground, and remember to bring along your snorkel gear.

Though you travel to Anguilla for the sun and surf, not all island sports are limited to the ocean, which is good news for avid golfers. The Temenos Golf Course is a magnificent 7,000-yard championship course designed by Greg Norman and enjoyable for all skill levels.

If you have an extra day and want to tour the island, Anguilla's history has been lovingly preserved by Colville L. Petty, OBE, historian and curator of the Heritage Collection Museum. Located in The Valley (capital city) it is well worth a visit. There are also a few local art galleries and crafts shops to browse.

There are no direct international flights to Anguilla, but you can fly into San Juan, Puerto Rico or St. Martin on American, Delta, Continental, US Airways or JetBlue. From St. Martin, it's an easy 20-minute ferry ride, or a 7-minute flight on a puddle jumper.

The Caribbean has all variety of vacation opportunities but if you want to experience a lovely, unspoiled island where you can instantly kick back and let the tropical vibe envelop you, Anguilla is an excellent choice.

For more information on planning your trip visit the Anguilla Tourist Board website, [anguilla-vacation.com](http://anguilla-vacation.com).

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A Long Island native, Karen Jones, is a freelance lifestyles journalist who has covered travel, food, technology, arts & entertainment and non-profits for over ten years. Her byline has appeared in The New York Times, The New York Daily News, Newsday, Super Lawyers, Parade Magazine, Reader's Digest and more.

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