

If you like life simple and sublime, try Anguilla

ANGUILLA FROM H7

Even though it boasts several high-end resorts — including the one where Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt broke the news in 2005 that they were ending their marriage — you probably won't find yourself on Anguilla unless someone who has been there tells you about it. And that's a good thing, because too many visitors and too much development would spoil the sleepy little island's charm. It might even have to add a stoplight or two to the six it has now.

One thing past visitors are bound to mention is that you won't go hungry on Anguilla. Despite the fact that the island has little arable land, which led to the demise of the plantation system (and slavery) in the early 1800s, the island has more than 100 restaurants and a reputation for culinary excellence. In early November, the CuisinArt Golf Resort and Spa played host to Epicurea, a four-day culinary event that brought chefs from New York and France for a tribute to legendary nouvelle cuisine chef Paul Bocuse.

The location was fitting: the CuisinArt resort was built by Leandro Rizzuto, who owns the company that makes the kitchen appliances that bear the same name. Executive chef Jasper Schneider oversees a group of restaurants that feature everything from Mediterranean to Japanese cuisine, as well as a massive hydroponic greenhouse that keeps the resort supplied with fresh produce year-round.

Open-air dining is the norm in Anguilla, and one of the best places to enjoy the benefits of the cooling ocean breezes is the restaurant at Malliouhana, a newly reopened resort perched high on a bluff on Anguilla's west end. Its Mediterranean- and Caribbean-inspired lunch menu features the silkiest hummus I've had outside the Middle East and a refreshing tomato and watermelon salad with sheep's milk feta and basil.

Blanchards, near the western tip of the island, has been a favourite of Anguillians and tourists alike since U.S. expats Bob and Melinda Blanchard opened it 20 years ago. Try the Caribbean sampler, which offers a taste of the restaurant's specialties — mahi mahi, grilled local crayfish and jerk chicken.

For more casual dining, the food-truck movement that has taken off in many North American cities has been going strong in Anguilla for a while. Its epicentre is the island's capital, The Valley, where you'll find trucks selling everything from falling-apart-tender pork ribs to Jamaican-inspired patties. Don't miss Hungry's Good Food, where Irad Gumbs, who has cooked at some of the island's top resorts, cranks out dishes such as lobster quesadillas and conch soup that you'll find hard to believe were made in a truck.

You might not expect to find a French pastry shop on a small Car-



A food-truck operator grilling chicken at a tent beside his truck in The Valley, capital of Anguilla. JOANNE BLAIN PHOTOS

On Sandy Island, you can swim, lounge on the beach and, of course, eat and drink at its casual sand-floored restaurant.

ibbean island, but you can thank expats for that, too. Geraud's Patisserie is run by Frenchman Geraud Lavest and his Canadian wife, Melonie Laekas, who churn out French classics including croissants, pralines and chocolate truffles.

If I've given you the impression that the only thing to do on Anguilla is eat, my apologies. There are cocktails too. An ideal place to catch a spectacular Caribbean sunset is at the open-air Sunset Lounge at the Viceroy hotel. (Mango Bellini, anyone?) Afterward, you can retire to the hotel's spacious restaurant, Coba, where high-end steaks and grilled seafood are the specialties.

But really, there are other things

to do. Plan to spend at least half a day on Sandy Island, which is basically a large sandbar a short boat ride from the mainland community called Sandy Ground. You can hop a ferry to get there, or book a spot on a chartered boat that will stop along the way at a bay popular for snorkelling.

On Sandy Island, you can swim, lounge on the beach and, of course, eat and drink at its casual sand-floored restaurant. Rum punch is the house specialty and if you make a mess eating the grilled lobster with your hands, you can always jump in the water to wash it off.

Back at Sandy Ground, there's another place with an expat connection made obvious by the Canadian flag and Northwest Territories licence plate hanging on the wall. Laurie Gumbs, who is half-Anguillan and half-Canadian, and his Canadian partner, Deborah Vos, run the Pumphouse, popular for its live music on weekends, as well as its clambakes and pig roasts.

OK, so it's hard to get away from talking about food when it comes to Anguilla. Is that such a bad thing? Give me a place where the ocean is warm, the breezes are cool and the food is great and I'll be a happy camper.

If your wish list is similar, you might just have found your next sun destination.



A grilled lobster at the restaurant at Sandy Island.

IF YOU GO

Getting there

Anguilla's small airport can accommodate only small regional aircraft. Your best bet is to fly to St. Martin (several U.S. and Canadian carriers fly there) and hop a speedboat from the nearby port for the 20-minute ride to Anguilla.

Staying there

- The CuisinArt Golf Resort and Spa offers spacious and comfortable rooms, many of which front on pristine Rendezvous Bay: cuisinartresort.com
- The year-old CeBlue Villas and Beach Resort has clusters of villas with three, four or five private rooms, many of which share a kitchen, dining room, plunge pool and stunning views: ceblueanguilla.com
- Malliouhana is a stunningly renovated Auberge resort that reopened in November with 44 rooms and suites: malliouhana.aubergeresorts.com
- The Viceroy Anguilla has impressively modern public spaces and a range of luxurious rooms, suites and villas: viceroyhotelsandresorts.com
- Cap Juluca has a captivating spot on Maundays Bay and offers a wide range of rooms and suites, some with private pools, and Moorish-inspired design: capjuluca.com

Owl's Head ski resort salutes armed forces with two new trails

ROCHELLE LASH
THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

Owl's Head, a major downhill ski and snowboard resort in the Eastern Townships, has two new glades and has named them Kaboul and Kandahar as a tribute to the Canadian Armed Forces.

Owl's Head is a longtime supporter of the Soldier On program, which assists members of the military and veterans in rehabilitation as well as their families. Owl's Head is one of Quebec's best-value downhill areas, outstanding for great family appeal and impressive views of Lake Memphremagog.

Its wow factor comprises a thrilling choice of all-terrain skiing and snowboarding: classic trails, action-packed mogul runs, scenic wooded glades and a swooping boarder-cross feature that is designed to be conquered by all levels — mom, dad and the kids.

Owl's Head is a best-buy with a \$17.50 adult ticket on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and weekend tickets down to \$23.48 for juniors. For even more variety, the Eastern Townships has a new Ski Dans l'Est Passport. The passport costs \$25 and it offers 25-per-cent discounts at four mountains — Ski Bromont, Mont Orford, Owl's Head and Mont

Sutton — as well as many lodging establishments. Even better, the passport is valid all season, with no blackout dates, so weekends and school break are included.

Owl's Head, Mansonville: 800-

363-3342, www.owlshead.com; a 30-minute drive east of Sutton, or 90 minutes from Champlain Bridge via Highway 10 east. Eastern Townships: easterntownships.org, 800-355-5755.

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Dave Frinton
co-founder/
President
CruisePlus

This week's top offers couldn't be much farther apart! My feature is a prime time holiday cruise and stay package departing December 17th. **\$5899** CAD pp gets you your roundtrip Montreal air, 2 nights in Santiago, Chile, one transfer, the 21 night cruise in a desirable mid category oceanview stateroom aboard the lovely ms Zaandam including a \$100 per stateroom onboard credit and all taxes. The itinerary includes Puerto Montt, Castro, Puerto Chacabuco, cruising the Chilean fjords, Amalia Glacier, Canal Sarmiento and the Strait of Magellan. From there you'll port in Punta Arenas, then sail Cockburn and Beagle Channels, Glacier Alley, visit Ushuaia, then cruise via Cape Horn and Drake Passage, Palmer Archipelago, the Antarctic Sound, Falkland Islands, Puerto Madryn, Montevideo and then into Buenos Aires. I thoroughly enjoyed my trip to these waters and I believe it is a must-do destination.



Unspoiled Antarctica

Our 26 night ms Eurodam package on June 10th is going to expire soon and is an exceptional deal. **\$5649** CAD pp includes your roundtrip Montreal air, 2 nights in Copenhagen, some transfers, 24 nights in a high category balcony stateroom, a \$100 per stateroom onboard credit and all taxes. This sailing does the popular Baltic itinerary plus a number of stops in Norway, Scotland and England.

Hurry for those 14 day early season Alaska deals plus we have many new packages to check out — we also still a few staterooms still left for the spring ms Noordam Panama Canal repositioning cruise (we've sold almost 300 beds!).

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