

Open access

Anguilla is getting back on its feet again after Hurricane Irma, discovers Meera Dattani

No, I'm not going to Angola, I tell one concerned friend. Another writes: "Have fun in Antigua." Thanks, I reply, adding it's actually Anguilla. "Where?" she types back.

It's not an unusual exchange, I'm told. This tiny island, a British overseas territory in the eastern Caribbean with a resident population of about 15,000 (there are more Anguillans in the UK, mostly around Slough, of all places), has managed to stay more or less under the radar.

That is until Hurricane Irma swept through on its destructive path across the Caribbean, leaving this tourism-dependent island in the news for all the wrong reasons. The damage was significant, with many hotels out of action during their

all-important winter season.

Now, after months of rebuilding, the outlook is far more positive. Most properties have either reopened or announced a date to do so later this year; public amenities are back to normal; and with the same blue skies and sandy shores as before, there's every bit as much to look forward to on holiday here. Perhaps more, knowing every tourist dollar spent is contributing to the island's ongoing recovery.

The tiny island – the most northerly of the Leeward Islands, 100 miles northwest of Antigua – is just 16 miles by three. "It's old-school Caribbean," says one local. "It's like other islands were before they got touristy."

With one main island and a

handful of islets, Anguilla is often twinned with Antigua or St Barts using inter-island charters and ferry operators. Trans Anguilla Airways took over a scheduled service to Antigua this week, flying each way on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays, from about £355 return, making for easy connections with BA's Antigua service.

GOOD NATURE

Anguilla has long stretches of dazzling sand such as Rendezvous Bay; secluded bays and coves like Little Bay; and pristine coral and limestone terrains. It's worth noting



TOP TIP
Keep up with the latest post-hurricane reopenings in Anguilla
irma.ivisitanguilla.com



Carrier offers 14 nights' B&B from £3,975, staying in a garden suite at Carlisle Bay in Antigua and a superior room at Zemi Beach House in Anguilla, departing November 6. The price includes BA flights from Gatwick and inter-island flights, and private transfers. carrier.co.uk

A 10-night B&B stay in a garden-view deluxe room at Malliouhana starts at £3,516 in October with **Abercrombie & Kent**, including transfers and flights. abercrombiekent.co.uk

Inspiring Travel Company has a twin-centre, staying five nights at Blue Waters, Antigua, and five at Four Seasons Anguilla, from £3,335 B&B, with international and inter-island flights, ferry and private transfers, for bookings by February 7. Valid May 1 to December 19. inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk



LEFT:
Crested hummingbird

RIGHT:
Malliouhana

BELOW:
Four Seasons Resort Anguilla



➔ all its beaches are open, so its ever-popular sunset cruises, nature walks and night-time kayaking remain firmly on the tourist agenda.

Six designated marine parks make it a natural home for sea turtles and other underwater life, with snorkelling, diving, fishing, sailing, and paddleboarding practically everywhere.

But there's more to island life than the beach. The Anguilla National Trust excels at promoting the island's history with tours around historic buildings in capital The Valley and beyond. Its heritage trail visits the plantation estate of Wallblake House, prehistoric petroglyphs at Big Spring Cave and the Heritage Collection Museum.

Nature hikes visit protected spots such as Dog Island, while sea turtle night patrols shine a light on the turtle protection programmes in place around the island.

OLD SCHOOL

Anguilla's history is potted, to say the least. It was inhabited by Arawak-speaking Amerindians from 2000BC



While there is still post-hurricane work to be done, Anguilla has plenty to offer new and returning visitors in 2018

until Europeans arrived at the end of the 15th century, then colonised by the English in 1650. Caribs, French and Irish all fought for control, while west African slaves – working on cotton, tobacco and sugar plantations – formed much of the population.

Eventually, Anguilla joined a federation with nearby St Kitts and Nevis, until declaring independence from its neighbours with the Anguilla Revolution on May 30, 1967, although it remains a British dependent territory.

Its beaches are so white and its water so clear, they wow even the most frequent Caribbean traveller,

but aside from its shores you'll find wetlands and salt ponds, once a hub for salt production. Birdlife is abundant, particularly on the offshore cays, attracting more than 130 species throughout the year. Nature Explorers Anguilla, the island's first ecotourism company, offers nature tours and hiking on Scrub Island.

STAYING POWER

This low-key, local approach extends to accommodation. Big resorts, casinos and cruise liners are non-existent, at least for now.

The largest hotel by far is Four Seasons, reopening in March, which was the Viceroy Anguilla until a multimillion-dollar revamp two years ago. Given it is Anguilla's only large-scale resort, it manages its size and presence well, with a laid-back vibe and delicious food at Bamboo Bar & Grill.

At the other end of Meads Bay, above Turtle Cove beach, is the much-loved 44-room Malliouhana, which is due to reopen in April. Its mishmash of fabrics, colours and styles is ➔





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ASK THE EXPERT



Carolyn Brown,
UK, Ireland and
Scandinavia
director, Anguilla
Tourism Board
"Anguilla has made
a remarkable
recovery since
Irma. The beaches
are pristine, the
infrastructure is
up and running,
and many of the
smaller hotels,
villas, restaurants
and attractions
have been open for
some time. While
there is still work to
be done, Anguilla
has plenty to offer
new and returning
visitors in 2018.

In fact, with a new
scheduled flight
from Antigua, and
a number of great
reopening offers
from hotels, there
has never been a
better time to visit."

→ a masterclass in mix-and-match. Rooms have bold tropical prints and there's a welcoming bar with artefacts scattered about, plus a herb garden, two sea-view pools and spa. And, as is invariably the case in Anguilla, the food is excellent.

Luxurious Cap Juluca, acquired by Belmond last May, is another Anguillian classic, though it remains closed until November while a top-to-toe renovation takes place, bringing it up to 121 rooms and with renovated suites, villas and spa.

So far, so five-star, but while Anguilla isn't a budget island, some places offer an alternative to these luxury options, and many of its three and four-star properties have been quicker to reopen to guests.

Frangipani Beach Resort has bright rooms and villas, while Carimar Beach Club boasts breezy well-equipped beachfront suites; both have already reopened post-hurricane.

At the eastern end is quiet Shoal Bay East, where Zemi Beach House, one of Anguilla's newer properties, taking guests again from February 15, cultivates a 'beach house' feel. Rooms are calming, stylish and luxurious, there's a kids' club, and the Thai House spa is one of Anguilla's most atmospheric.

Channelling a different vibe altogether is CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa on the southwest coast, with its Greek islands-inspired design and suites facing magnificent Rendezvous Beach. The most unusual feature is its hydroponic farm, where water instead of soil is used to grow ingredients –



ABOVE: Tokyo Bay, CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa

worth visiting just to taste the tomatoes.

If clients can't wait for the hotel to reopen in autumn, suggest stopping by for a round of golf on its 18-hole Greg Norman-designed course, or sampling fresh sushi at restaurant Tokyo Bay, both of which are already back in action. Or book a stay at next-door sister hotel The Reef by CuisinArt, which promises to be open by April, and wander down to another truly mind-blowing beach nearby, Shoal Bay West.

ISLAND VIBES

What also makes Anguilla special is the number of restaurants and bars, from roadside stands and beach shacks such as Falcon Nest by Island Harbour – try the signature Falcon sauce – to fine-dining restaurants such as Veya. Seafood and fish is the mainstay, but chefs offer sushi, meze, top-notch

Italian and Mexican-inspired tacos.

By night, Sandy Ground, a tiny yachting hangout, has several lively bars and restaurants such as Elvis Beach Bar and Dad's Bar and Grill. Music is integral to Anguillian life; you'll find low-key bars playing reggae, calypso, pop and jazz across the island.

There are art galleries with works by local and Caribbean artists. And for a tiny island, its events calendar is anything but, from Anguilla Day independence celebrations to regattas, beach parties, and the annual reggae festival, where local musician Bankie Banx and his son Omari attract crowds.

For Caribbean connoisseurs or first-timers, Anguilla is the original island experience, where one of the best things to do is nothing very much at all.

TW

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