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**GORGEOUS  
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JUNE 2016

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# NAVIGATOR

Where To Go Now On The Coast

EXPLORE

## IN PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT BEACH

A quest for the ideal leads to Anguilla, where 33 stretches of sand compete for top honors

Hard to reach,  
and worth it:  
Anguilla's Little Bay



## NAVIGATOR (EXPLORE)

**IN A THATCHED-ROOF** beach bar on Anguilla's Sandy Island, a perfect round of shell-littered, cloud-white sand, I do some math. You'd think I'd be distracted by the whorls of ink blue waves before me. Or by a nearby hammock, strung between two coconut trees and gently swaying in the briny breeze. Or, perhaps most pressingly, by a heaping plate of lobster and crawfish that's just arrived, along with an icy cup of rum punch.

Here's my challenge: In addition to this circle of paradise I'm currently occupying, 32 more beaches make up Anguilla, known among the sand-struck cognoscenti for having the most beautiful beaches in the world. I've set out to find the best of the best. Can I possibly see them all in one visit, much less find the nonpareil? I'm here to try, but the algebra makes it clear: If I'm to continue my quest, I've got to get going.

I pry another forkful of sweet, freshly grilled lobster out of the shell and feel

the stealthy gravity of a superlative beach work on me.

OK, a few more minutes.

Composed of 16 miles of coral and limestone, Anguilla sits north of St. Martin in the Caribbean's Lower Antilles, and didn't have electricity or telephones until the 1960s. When the sleepy oasis attracted the attention of the yachting set a few decades ago, it didn't let fame go to its head. The government forbade casino development, and the ports have remained free of large cruise ships. That restraint has protected Anguilla's native gifts: sand as fine as fairy dust, with sea grapes and palms proffering shade among quiet resorts, villas, and homes. Many beaches link, so walkers can perambulate from one to the other, and back again. Most can be accessed through the back door of hostelries, or entered by means of public footpaths. Some, like the one I'm dallying on, encircle little offshore cays.

My quest calls. I join a boat heading back to the main island, to Sandy Ground—perhaps Anguilla's most social beach. Mottled with small wooden piers and beach bars, it's the veritable living room of the isle, particularly after the sun goes down. In the relative quiet of daytime, it's easy to spot my driver, Accelyn Connor, chatting near the dock. His small circle of men gently opens to allow me to join. "What's your favorite beach?" I ask, suddenly. They pause. "That depends," they say, seriously.

Connor himself has been to all 33, he tells me later as we bump down the road in his van, dodging chickens and goats. "Can we do it? Visit them all?" I ask, as wide-eyed and ebullient as a child. He just laughs, and takes me to another expert, and another stellar bar ... and beach.

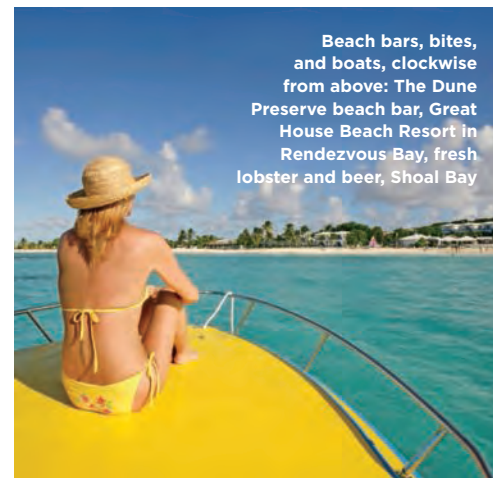
On the tawny crescent of Crocus Bay, we meet musician Omari Banks for a drink at da'Vida Bayside Grill. "What's

your favorite?" I ask him, while watching the shadows of passing clouds scud across the sand. "Well, this one's nice, but I like Little Bay," he says. "Because it takes some effort to arrive." That's an understatement. Just up the coast from our spot on the midsection of the island, Little Bay is tiny, as well as isolated by a tight embrace of towering cliffs. I make plans with a yacht-blessed friend on the island to salute Little Bay tomorrow at sunset, with Champagne. This research is proceeding nicely.

At the bleach-white Moorish resort of Cap Juluca on tranquil Maundays Bay, sunrise yoga adds to my roster of beachy greatness. I leave my third eye to handle the meditations, peering down the beach to watch guests gallop on horses through the gentle waves, the talcum curl of land their path. Fairly perfect, that vista.

Connor and I hit some crowd favorites: two miles of cream-colored sand on Rendezvous Bay (home to reggae ►

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOHN CULLEN (2), MELANIE ACEVEDO/GETTY IMAGES, DESIGN PICS INC./NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE



Beach bars, bites, and boats, clockwise from above: The Dune Preserve beach bar, Great House Beach Resort in Rendezvous Bay, fresh lobster and beer, Shoal Bay



superstar Bankie Banx's The Dune Preserve beach bar), and Meads Bay, bookended by the Malliouhana resort and the Viceroy, and buzzing with paddleboarders.

The next morning I snorkel a coral reef off the Prickly Pear Cays, a pair of uninhabited little "wildlands," as they're called in environmental circles. And from across the shimmering turquoise, they look just that: scrubby and beautifully wild, with smooth sweeps of white forming ribbon boundaries along their edges.

The variations on what we've all pictured as the perfect castaway

beach continue to multiply. That afternoon, Connor and I wander the palm-studded sands of Shoal Bay East at the island's eastern end. At nearby Island Harbour, we stand on the pier and wave across the water to owners of a restaurant on Scilly Cay, a teeny coral island on the harbor's outer reach. The Anguillan version of hailing a city cab works—they spot our oversize gestures and zip their bright white open boat over the water to pick us up for a visit and a drink at their bar.

Rum in hand, I return to my math. What I really need, I realize, is 33 days, not a handful. In fact, I want more than that; I want to know Anguilla's beaches like Monet painted the Rouen Cathedral—in every type of weather, in every type of light. Is this a month-long sabbatical? Is it a life-changing move? Suddenly, I see what my Anguillan friends mean when they say, "It depends." It's sneaky shorthand for what a beach really is: a canvas for experience, a portal to possibility. Anything can happen here, on the sandy edge of eternity. Especially, I've learned, in Anguilla. ■



The bleach-white shoreline of Maundays Bay

## THE DETAILS

### GET HERE

Easily accessible by air and by sea, Anguilla's main gateways are Puerto Rico and St. Martin, from which private planes, charter ferries, or scheduled public ferries whisk you to the island.

### STAY HERE

Check in to one of the island's original luxury resorts: **Cap Juluca**, with its beachfront Moroccan villas and stellar service (rates start at \$595; 888/858-5822 or capjuluca.com) or the elegant, recently renovated **Malliouhana**, **An Auberge Resort** (rates start at \$525; 877/733-3611 or malliouhana.aubergeresorts.com).

### EAT HERE

**Veya** (veya-axa.com) in Sandy Ground features specialties from equatorial countries. **Jacala** (264/498-5888) updates classic French and overlooks Meads Bay. The **Restaurant at Malliouhana** (malliouhana.aubergeresorts.com) marries Caribbean spices with sea-to-table catch.

### DRINK HERE

Anguilla's many (and excellent) beach bars are as cool as its beaches. Favorites include **The Restaurant** on Sandy Island, **da'Vida Bayside Grill** on Crocus Bay, **Scilly Cay**, **Trattoria Tramonto** on Shoal Bay West, **Elodias** on Shoal Bay East, and **Johnno's Beach Stop** and **Elvis' Beach Bar**, both in Sandy Ground.