



The  
luxury of  
nature in

# Anguilla

By Jennifer Bain

Mesmerized by the green glow of our LED kayaks, the sea turtles glided through the Caribbean Sea underneath us like seasoned solo performers. We watched their acrobatics through the bottom of the clear boats as they repeatedly surfaced and dove, circling us while giving each other plenty of space.

The green turtles of Anguilla stole my heart that night with Liquid Glow. Owner Lynn Morancie kept us away from the ballyhoo fish, which are attracted by light and have been known to jump in boats. So while I didn't get to shriek at a skinny fish with an elongated beak flip-flopping in my kayak, I finished my paddle by watching an eagle ray gracefully glide through the water.

Everything moves in slow motion in Anguilla, a self-governing British Overseas Territory with barely 15,000 people, 33 beaches and a reputation for discretion and luxury.

Anguilla is just slightly off the beaten track. First you fly to St. Maarten and then island-hop in 20 minutes with Funtime Boat Charters, or half that time in a nine-passenger plane with Anguilla Air Services. The wee island – about 26 kilometres long and five kilometres wide – has just six traffic lights.

There is no finer base than the Malliouhana resort, which put this island on the luxury tourism map when the late British businessman Leon Roydon opened it in 1984. He was an avid diver and his antique scuba helmet collection is a focal point in the lobby.

Named for the Arawak word for eel-shaped island, Malliouhana is on a bluff above azure waters and white sand beaches. Its 63 rooms and suites ooze low-key glamour. Flat-screen TVs are cleverly hidden in ornate mirrors. For turn-down service, bedtime treats include rum cake, guava cheese, lavender-scented aromatherapy bracelets, and infused H2O served alongside a lavender linen spray.

Minutes from Malliouhana is Cheddie's Carving Studio, where Cheddie Richardson transforms driftwood into sculptures.

One of his pieces – dolphins carved in driftwood and mounted on polished limestone – was given to Queen Elizabeth II during a 1994 royal visit.

"Well, driftwood always has beauty for me," the artist confided in his basement studio. "You pick up driftwood from the beach and you always can see something in it. I just use those twists and natural



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curves – animals, fish, birds, et cetera. Whatever its shape, I just try to create it in a simple form for you to see it better, like a cloud – like looking at clouds."

I don't remember seeing many clouds in Anguilla, especially when I did the Goat Cave hike with Quest Experiences and baked in the sun. We scrambled like goats over treacherous limestone and volcanic rock, then climbed down into a tiny sea cave for a swim.

"We're a flat island, so there's not much up-and-down climbing, but we do have sea rocks," AXA Hike Life guide Jahdo Vanterpool admitted.

We didn't see any goats, but did admire a bizarre-looking chiton. This edible, oval mollusc with eight overlapping dorsal shell plates clings to rocks, just like we did; only it was in the water and we were on cliffs above the ocean.

My forays into nature were interspersed with more leisurely pursuits, namely eating, shopping and sightseeing with Accelyn Connor of Premier Taxi, Tours, Bicycle Rentals & Adventures.

He made sure we pronounced ang-GWILL-a correctly, showed us Wallblake House (a plantation house built in 1787 by enslaved



Cheddie Richardson of Cheddie's Carving Studio | Photo Credit: Jennifer Bain



Night Kayak with Liquid Glow | Photo Credit: Jennifer Bain



Quest Experiences with owners Clemvio Hodge and sister Gesel Hodge | Photo Credit: Jennifer Bain



Guide Accelyn Connor of Premier Taxi & Tours at Tropical Sunset for lunch | Photo Credit: Jennifer Bain

"It's nice to see what you can do beyond the beach."

men), and guided us through Albert's Market Place. That supermarket boasts a statue of its late founder, Albert Lake (with his wife Octavia), who was the only Anguillian to have been honoured twice with a British Empire Award by Queen Elizabeth II for his contributions to the island.

I popped into Aurora Anguilla Resort & Golf Club, which is owned by Best Buy founder Richard "Dick" Schulze, to eat at the island's only steakhouse – D Richard's. And while E's Oven prepared my pumpkin soup and roasted chicken one day, I dashed across the road to Anguilla Sands & Salts to taste Josveek Huligar's infused sea salts and artisan chocolates and admire his sand jewelry.

"Everybody comes to Anguilla for the exact same thing: beach, beach, beach," said Huligar. "To a lot of people, sand is sand – it all looks the same." He encases sand from different beaches in rings, bracelets and pendants, organizing the creations by which beach they came from, so people can see the spectrum of colours and textures.

Back at Malliouhana, Quest Experiences organized a rum tasting at Bar Soleil with Gloria Leveret of Glo's Flavoured Rums. Sorrel (hibiscus), soursop and guava were all memorable.

Quest, run by Clemvio Hodge and his sister Gesel, curates more than a dozen experiences that showcase Anguilla's culture and history. When people leave the island, Clemvio wants them to be able to say, "I've really been to Anguilla."

Help on that front can also come from the Anguilla National Trust. Led by executive director Farah Mukhadi, a Canadian from Nova Scotia, the trust does important ecological work but also offers nature, heritage and walking tours.

She took me birding at the East End Pond Conservation Area and to look for Lesser Antillean iguanas and hawksbill turtles on one of the Prickly Pear islands. On uninhabited Sombrero Island, we saw brown boobies guarding their ground nests, while endangered Sombrero ground lizards ran fearlessly underfoot.

"We try to take people off the beaten path," Mukhida explained after all those transcendent nature moments I've come to expect from Anguilla. "It's nice to see what you can do beyond the beach."

