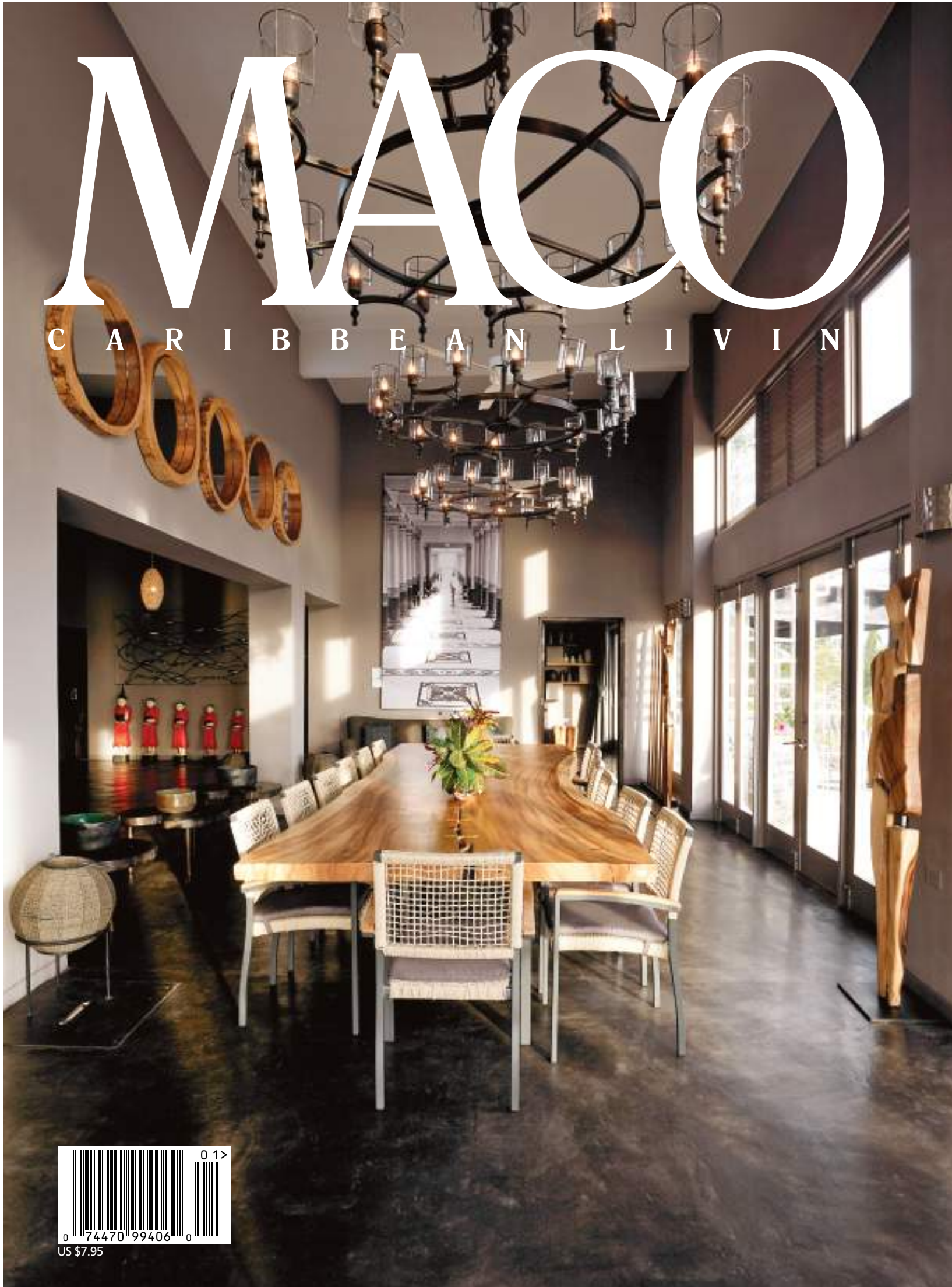


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US \$7.95

anguilla revival

THE ISLAND WITH THE BEST BEACHES IN THE CARIBBEAN
HAS A HOST OF CHIC NEW HOTELS AND LUXE VILLAS FOR VISITORS TO ENJOY



SYBARITES VISIT ST BARTHS TO BE SEEN, AND ANGUILLA TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL. Several islands in the region boast a VIC (very important celebrity) guest list, but the appeal of this British overseas territory for the likes of Justin Bieber, Robert De Niro, Sandra Bullock, Justin Timberlake, and others looking quietly to reconnect with the finer things in life, is the ease with which they can escape the crowds and paparazzi.

For a start, getting there isn't that easy. Most commercial jets are too big for AXA- Clayton J. Lloyd airport—so many passengers fly into St Martin, then ferry across. I arrived on the splendidly friendly and efficient Trans Anguilla Airways, which island hops between Antigua, St Barths, Nevis and other nearby hotspots, so was in my hotel within 45 minutes of landing. Bliss.

Anguilla is all about pristine white sand fronting crystal-clear Caribbean waters; so the recently opened 25-key Manoah sitting along one of the island's very best beaches is right on the money. Outside, the loungers, bar and awnings of this boutique hotel on Shoal Bay East have a turquoise palette more Mediterranean than West Indian; inside, the stylish bedrooms also have a distinctly European aesthetic.

The restaurant is French, featuring dishes like lobster bisque, foie gras and calamari brochette. To work that off, the pool is practically Olympic-sized, fitness centre well equipped, and spa an oasis of calm. It all works like a Patek Philippe watch.



FAR LEFT Shoal Bay East from the Manoah

LEFT The Manoah's

MIDDLE Trump styling at the Reef

BELOW The Reef's beachside suites

Then it was on to the new Reef at CuisinArt. Two hundred yards along Rendezvous Beach from the original hotel, this new addition is all gold columns and shining marble, so could best be described as Tropical Trump. From either the spacious beachside suites or 50 rooms in the main block, looking out over the water at night to lights twinkling away on St Martin is a delight.

Of the restaurants at the two sites, Tokyo Bay, where chef Joe creates flawless Japanese fare with the help of the hotel's own hydroponic garden, is probably the pick. I'd recommend his "Omakase"—effectively a tasting menu—washed down by a cloudy Nigori sake. Guests can also play the superb Greg Norman golf course, which CuisinArt has nurtured back to life after several years of neglect.



LEFT Thai House Spa at Zemi Beach

MIDDLE LEFT Zemi's impeccable service

MIDDLE Barnes Bay and the Four Seasons

BELOW LEFT Four Seasons' Sunset Lounge

TOP RIGHT Stylish symmetry at Malliouhana

BELOW Malliouhana overlooking Meads Bay

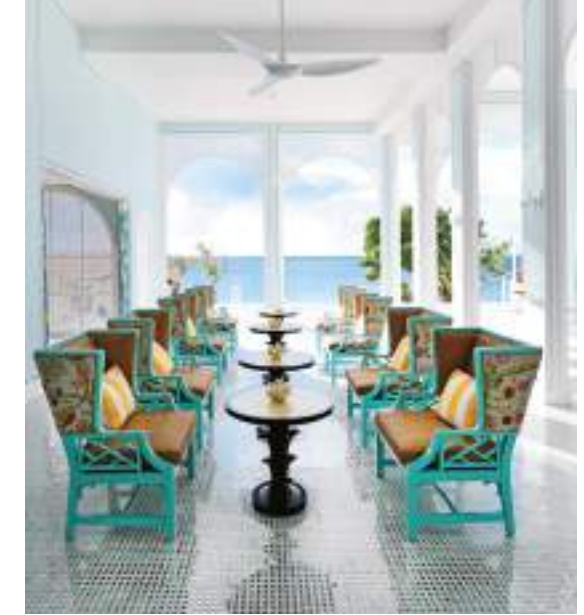


The relatively compact Zemi Beach is the third new hotel on island, although ironically its best feature is centuries old. The award-winning Thai House spa is accommodated in a series of ancient wooden buildings that include a 300-year-old rice barn shipped over from the Far East. Open to non-residents, the hammam, mud ara, yoga deck and meditation garden make this the most Zen space on island, and precisely the type of off-the-grid locale that makes Anguilla so special.

Since 2009, the biggest five-star on island has been the Viceroy. Last year, Four Seasons took over its management and have since added their own impeccable service ethic and design flair to what was already a very contemporary resort with outstanding amenities.

Several luxe pools, elegant eateries, miles of beach, a gym, plus a well-equipped children's club make this sophisticated Meads Bay hotel equally well suited to families, romantic couples and more mature guests. I particularly like the spa where instead of canned music, therapists simply open the shutters allowing the sound of the ocean immediately below to wash over their clients.

Having already reconfigured the reception area and Cobà, the fine dining venue, GM Ilse Hartley is now embarking on more improvements this year. Watch this sandy space...



On a rather smaller scale, the legendary Malliouhana, up on a bluff at the other end of Meads Bay, has also benefited from a recent makeover under the watchful eye of manager John Vasatka, with Belle Époque flourishes, a new pool complex and tranquil spa restoring the 44-suite property to its former pre-eminence.

My room, comfortable yet chic, overlooked the virtually private Turtle Cove—if there's a more romantic beach for a late night or even early-morning dip, I have yet to find it.

Five-star Anguilla personified, this is a discreet home-from-home that appeals to those wanting style and seclusion with, in this case, a side order of fine food from talented chef Marc Alvarez.





A mile or so east, on Long Bay, Santosha is a rather more traditional colonial-style affair. Guests staying in any of the four grand bedrooms can walk through the verdant garden straight onto the sand where they'll find, built into the cliff, the Rock Grotto pavilion with a summer kitchen—perfect for lounging, dining, and admiring the sheltered beach lapped by cobalt clear water.

Somewhere in between an exclusive villa and a private resort, the opulent Ani Villas is the brainchild of Ira Bloom and his wife Bonnie. Overlooking Little Bay, where rock formations, exotic fish and perfect visibility make for magical snorkelling, two adjacent, very contemporary villas can accommodate up to 20 guests in lavish style.

It's a perfect set-up for celebratory groups or even corporate retreaters: both villas have all the accoutrements of a palatial residence—spacious suites, infinity pools, libraries and gyms—but are serviced by a butler, housekeeping team and concierge, plus the amazing chef Sweets, a magician in the kitchen. Sitting at the secluded cliff-top dining table enjoying his lobster with fresh mango, watching leatherback sea turtles paddle lazily about below convinced me that this is a concept whose time has arrived.

New hotels, restored classics and soigné villas: Anguilla has rediscovered its mojo and is back to being one of the hospitality stars of the Windies. M



TOP Modish minimalism at the Beach House
 ABOVE The Beach House's laid-back living room
 TOP RIGHT Santosha sits on Long Bay
 RIGHT FAR MIDDLE Colonial grandeur at Santosha
 RIGHT MIDDLE Super contemporary Ani Villas
 RIGHT Ani Villas offers cliff-top seclusion

Staying on the beatific Meads Bay, the eight-suite Beach House epitomises the private villa rental scene that makes the island so appealing to Hollywood A-listers. Having just been revamped, this ultra-modern beachside residence is all glass, petrified wood and white horizontals; add an elegant home theatre, tennis court, infinity pool and games room, plus spacious indoor and outdoor entertaining spaces, all discreetly serviced by fulltime staff, and this must now be one of the best-appointed villas in the whole region.