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CARIBBEAN SWOON

Anguilla's Cap Juluca—with customized refinement from beach to boudoir—boosts its luxe factor with a gorgeous \$15 million face-lift.

By Michael McCarthy

WE're on the beach dining with a small group, and my wife briefly turns away from a nearby conversation, leans over and kisses me. It's a quick, passionate strike. There's meaning behind this rum-punch smooch. Was she caught up in the atmospheric moment? You be the judge. Candlelight flickers on the white linen tablecloth; a server refills our wine glasses; tiki torches glow across our corner of the abandoned beach; and, above us, the Milky Way sparkles across a jet-black sky. With our feet buried in the cool nighttime sand, I whisper a one-word question to her: "Happy?" She is, and we are—Cap Juluca, Anguilla's revitalized gem, has us under her spell.

I've always believed that life—with friends and significant others alike—is filled with a series of snapshots. During a visit to this 179-acre haven, your mental photo album will overflow. The beachfront property, a member of The Leading Hotels of the World, is a favorite among Hollywood celebs (reportedly, Liam Neeson is a regular, as are Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie) and Europe's jet-setting moguls. The resort has benefited greatly from a \$15 million renovation over the past few years. The additional sprucing—including new furnishings, the revitalization of its signature restaurant and the addition of 60,000 flowering plants—has taken what was already the finest resort on the island and placed it among the best in the Caribbean.

Besides the billowing cabanas and pop-up bar oases, the property's pristine mile-long beach hasn't changed much for thousands of years. The island was occupied in 1500 B.C. by

the Arawak tribe native to South America. Much of what we know about the indigenous people comes from petroglyphs and archeological discoveries unearthed in two caves on the island. Cap Juluca, or "rainbow," gets its name from the Arawak word for the multicolored spirit that emerges when the sun shoots through the occasional warm rain shower.

Fifteen villas house 70 guest rooms, which showcase Greco-Moorish architecture. Each room faces the Caribbean and features a private covered terrace and floor-to-ceiling louvered plantation shutters for additional evening privacy. "I know every inch of every room, and I want guests to fall in love with this stretch of beach the way I did nearly 25 years ago," says Linda Hickox, who, along with her husband, Charles, opened the property in 1992.

Hickox, one of my dinner companions on the crescent-shaped Maundays Bay beach, is the rare resort owner who understands the essence of a getaway and fine-tunes everything from decor to activities to assure a seamless vacation. The owner and her staff figure that the one-size-fits-all getaway is a relic of the Caribbean's past; the watchword here is customization, from private dining on the beach to exploring **CONTINUED...**

PRISTINE PASSAGE From left: Cap Juluca's private mile-long beach is perfect for sunrise yoga, paddling on the gentle waves in a kayak, luxuriating under a fully staffed cabana or dining by brilliant starlight; each of the 70 rooms in the 15 Greco-Moorish-style villas faces the Caribbean—all surrounded by stunning flora.

jet set



CAPPING THE DAY Clockwise from top: Cap Juluca co-owner Linda Hickox is an interior designer in New York, and her hand-picked decor for each guest room includes plenty of modern touches throughout, including abstract art; the Jonquil Suite, perfect for honeymoons or girls' getaways, features an infinity pool; private dining on the beach with food from Pimms.



...CONTINUED abandoned beaches with nothing but an affable local guide, a snorkel and a cooler packed with icy Red Stripe lagers.

The first considerations for the property's renewal were the overall aesthetics of each guest room. Hickox, a New York City-based interior designer, added new furniture and abstract art that contrast playfully with the cool, white ceramic floors. Other charms include Frette linens and towels, Molton Brown bath amenities and Bose Wave Music Systems. But the owner gets especially animated when she leads me on a tour of the 3,290-square-foot Jonquil Suite.

The suite, boasting two master bedrooms, a full-service kitchen, a dining terrace and a private infinity pool with marble Jacuzzi, was the flashpoint for the property's renovation. "Our vision for this space carried over into the rest of the property," Hickox says. Guests will find modern art, wood-beam ceilings and textured jute rugs with bursts of turquoise that reflect the water just outside. "The property is such a passion for me. I test the form and function of everything here—from every closet to every faucet. I want a flawless stay for everyone." The obsession shows. The suite's open floor plan is intimate enough for honeymoons and anniversaries, but



the space is also perfect for private cocktail parties that spill onto the terrace.

Of course, one comes to Cap Juluca for the sand and sun, and this is where the resort shifts into custom overdrive. A staff member explains that anything guests want—scuba, snorkeling, sea kayaking, sunrise yoga—can be arranged. We first opt for midday snorkeling and find a spot on Juluca Pride, the resort's 38-foot luxury cruiser.

We climb aboard and are ferried by Elvis—the resort's affable captain and local legend—to a private beach roughly 20 minutes away. The crew anchors in a cove. My wife and I slip fins onto our feet, adjust masks and snorkels, and flop into the clear, 80-degree water. I carry my GoPro HD camera to document the fish species, and we follow a sea turtle as it glides away from us toward gray coral cliffs, hinting that this is where

we'll find our visual treasure. We kick smoothly in unison; our heads are submerged below the surface, pivoting to see a vibrant color grid in 360 degrees. The current is gentle as it nudges us toward the beach. We grip the subsurface rock to steady ourselves while watching showy schools of trunkfish, rock beauties and gray angels.

After exploring for an hour—bravado on full display, I also climb a rope ladder to the top of a rock that juts 30 feet above the water, and jump—we clamber aboard the Juluca Pride and are handed our choice of rum punch or the aforementioned Red Stripe. The simplicity is grand, especially as we dine on fresh lobster rolls and plantain chips prepped for us by the resort's new Michelin-starred, French-born chef Daniel Le Guenan.

Guests can follow up snorkeling forays by grabbing a couple of sea kayaks from Cap Juluca's watersports center (complimentary paddle boards, Sunfish and Hobie Cat vessels are also available). Paddle the mile stretch across the bay's mouth, which is a hot spot for yachts to anchor for the evening as their occupants visit one of the resort's restaurants. Most visitors head for the elegant signature restaurant Pimms, which hugs



TO THE SEA! The resort's attentive watersports staff will help you launch a complimentary kayak.



BAY WATCH Clockwise from top: The resort's open-air lounge, housed under a dome, is a nightly stop for cocktails and taking in views of Maundays Bay; yoga on the beach at sunrise and sunset is typically led by a renowned visiting instructor; Pimms' 2016 menu, revised by new Michelin-starred, French-born chef Daniel Le Guenan, includes standouts such as grilled island lobster (pictured), spice-rubbed line-caught tuna, grilled whole sea bass and poached grouper with shellfish nage.



...CONTINUED the edge of the bay. Pimms' 3,200-bottle wine inventory has received lots of recent hosannas, and with Le Guenan now leading the kitchen, the seafood—from Anguillian paella valencia to grilled island lobster and crayfish—marries the lofty execution of Michelin-style dining with local culinary traditions that taste wonderfully authentic.

This sense of ease is mirrored throughout Cap Juluca, even at sunrise. Visitors can roll out a yoga mat near the beach as a perfect start to the day. The resort's visiting instructor will lead you through a series of poses for 45 minutes. My instructor wraps up the session by telling us to remember this moment and the swaying palms above. "Take these moments home with you," she says.

Later that afternoon, we hear a knock at our room door. Two masseuses stand before me. "Ready for your massage?" one asks. We've

arranged for a couples massage on the terrace, and the session turns out to be one of the best I've experienced in years. A breeze mingles with the palms as the sleek trees do a slow rango. The water laps in primeval succession, the soundtrack to a memorable stay.

Twenty minutes into the treatment, I open my eyes to see my wife on her own massage table a few feet away. She's staring at me as her masseuse kneads her shoulders. "Happy?" I ask. My wife closes her eyes, grins and says nothing. After 72 hours at Cap Juluca, I already know her answer. *From \$995 per night in season, \$595 offseason; Jonquil Suite, from \$2,045-\$5,865 per night; Romantic Rendezvous package (featuring a private beach dinner), \$4,278 for five nights, \$5,470 for seven nights; Epicurean Escapade package (featuring a five-course, wine-paired dinner), \$4,228 for five nights, \$5,742 for seven nights, capjuluca.com ■*



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—LINDA HICKOX, CO-OWNER, CAP JULUCA »