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Anguilla... Again!

Revisiting romance at Cap Juluca Resort

By Lisa Codianne Fowler



had been there, and on Cap Juluca Resort for its striking Moorish architecture. Its majestic white domes, parapets and turrets harkened back to Patrick's early years in Morocco, where his dad was stationed with the CIA. (Another story, another time.)

It was dreamlike. So, what better place – and way – to celebrate our ten-year anniversary than with a vow-renewal ceremony on these virgin shores where we first said “I do.”

The resort

Perched on a mile-long crescent beach in Anguilla, one of the Leeward Islands of the British West Indies, Cap Juluca is a favored, discrete escape for financial barons and A-list celebrities; it even has paparazzi-chasing boats. The star-studded list of guests has included the likes of Bill Gates; Brad Pitt; Jennifer Aniston; Denzel Washington; Katie Couric; Kevin Bacon; Courtney Cox; Glenn Close; Michael J. Fox; Charlie Sheen; Tyra Banks; Sheryl Crow, Janet Jackson and Arnold Schwarzenegger, to name just a few.



No wonder. Offering tennis, aqua-golf, a healing spa, afternoon tea, croquet and more, Cap Juluca epitomizes ultra-luxe. Impeccably designed for privacy, all you can hear is the wind, the lapping of waves and the lyrical sounds of songbirds, even when the resort is full. Its level of service goes beyond merely answering needs but anticipating them. Like having a roving beach waiter deliver a refreshing cup of passion fruit sorbet, at precisely the moment you feel a bit parched.

Its ambiance is terminally romantic, with unmatched tropical vistas during the day and, after each blazing sunset, dramatic nightscapes of the lights of nearby St. Maarten, twinkling like diamonds on black velvet. Cap Juluca is the quintessential luxury retreat: secluded, peaceful and sophisticated.

The homecoming

It was just as we remembered. And apparently, “it” remembered us. Upon our arrival, we were pulled out of the registration line, whisked away to a private reception room, handed chilled cloths to cool our brows and rum punch to quench our thirst. Wedding Coordinator Verna Rogers and staff greeted us with big smiles and bear hugs. We are certainly not rich or famous, but they sure made us feel like stars.

Once upon a time

Fairytales do come true. And sometimes, twice. Ten years ago, Patrick and I eloped to an obscure Caribbean island known mostly to the rich and famous. We agreed on Anguilla because neither of us



Verna reviewed the details of our “1 Karat” package, which includes minister, vow renewal certificate, photographer, flowers and champagne. And while we expected a junior suite as before, she explained we would be staying in a “pool suite”. We didn’t quite grasp the concept.

A room with a view

Among those in our welcoming committee was Ace Fortunanto, who transported us, via golf cart, to the far end of the property. He led us along a palm-tree and hibiscus fringed path to a set of enormous mahogany doors. We stepped through them to a stone-tiled, tropically landscaped lanai with a sparkling swimming pool. Lining the whitewashed privacy walls were umbrella-topped tables, lounge chairs and rafts – enough for a small pool party.



“Is this just... for us?” I asked. “This is

your pool suite, and this is your pool,” smiled Ace.



Another set of mahogany doors led us inside our villa. Before us was a floor-lit dining room, flower-topped marble table and four ornately carved wooden chairs. To the left, a full-sized kitchen with state-of-the-art appliances, and straight ahead, a spacious step-down living room, as comfortable looking as it was elegant. Three arched picture windows framed an expansive view of the powder-white shoreline and cerulean sea, just steps from our suite. There were two sprawling balconies, one off the bedroom; the other off both kitchen and living room. Swaying palms, frangipani and sea grapes were visible from every lookout. I was speechless. And that never happens.



Ace broke the silence by informing us that he was our personal butler. Butler?! Turns out he was at our beckon call, delivering complimentary continental

breakfasts to our balcony each morning and granting our heart’s desire. Uncomfortable for us common folk at first, but we acclimated quickly to being butted.

We declined his offer to unpack for us, but accepted the room tour, which included the decadent bath. A showcase of travertine marble, mirrors and glass, it was generously appointed with thick, fluffy towels and bathrobes and BVLGARI amenities.

The villa was beyond our wildest expectations and, under non-celebratory circumstance, quite beyond our means. We were tempted to not leave our suite, much less the resort, but our favorite island tugged at our heartstrings. We decided to take a quick tour to see if anything had changed over the years. Happily, nothing that we could discern.

Island life

Celebrity visitors to Anguilla don’t have the corner on talent and good looks. The natives are well-dressed, well-spoken, politically involved, and accomplished, particularly in the arts. Galleries, museums and musical venues abound. Other activities enjoyed by all are, naturally, water sports, but also horseback riding, hiking and bird watching. Cuisine is exemplary, and local markets bear signs such as, “Fine Food, Cheese and Pates,” and “Italian Ice-Cream and Afternoon Tea.”

Though not a lush island, Anguilla boasts 33 stunning beaches, not including the dollop of sand called Scilly Cay – a must-see, even though it’s an hour’s drive from the resort to the ferry dock. Brod, our obliging taxi driver, waited on shore while we ventured off for lunch. Just a free, two-minute boat ride away, the islet is dotted with curious formations of driftwood and brilliant fuchsia, red and yellow flowers. Low



walls of pink conch shells hug the walkways, and thatched tiki huts surround the open-air restaurant, where lobsters are freshly caught and barbecued to succulent perfection. Both the restaurateur and bartender greeted us heartily, remembering us from our visit ten years earlier. Not sure if that's a good thing, but it made us feel incredibly at home. Friendly folks, these Anguillans.

The ceremony

Our man Brod deposited us back at the resort in enough time for us to “unwind” in our pool before our moment in the sun. In the meantime, Verna sent flowers to our room – a boutonniere for Patrick, a bouquet for me and serendipitously, dainty fresh blossoms for my hair.

Just before sunset, an escort appeared to take Patrick to the beach, at a picture-perfect spot that Verna selected, according to our wishes. There was a flower-covered arbor at the water's edge, where the minister awaited. Minutes later, my chariot/golf cart arrived at our villa. My chauffeur delivered me far enough away from the ceremony site to make a jaunty, barefoot entrance along the sandy path, photographer snapping my every step.



As I approached my beaming husband, I was stricken with realizations. This minister, Pastor Lucien MacDonna, married us ten years ago! This photographer, Rocklyn Maynard of Professional Photos, photographed the event. Okay, so you thought my revelation was that I shouldn't be tying the knot, to the same man, again. Not even close. It wasn't just Pastor MacDonna and Rocklyn



that were thrilled we were still together.

“We are gathered here today... I now pronounce you man and wife” – the pastor had performed yet another stirring ceremony. And Rocklyn captured its essence on film, once again. We all shared champagne and stories until sundown.

Getting fresh

Cap Juluca has several diverse dining venues, all employing a “garden-to-table” approach. Each uses fresh, indigenous ingredients, including herbs and spices grown on property. While all three restaurants provide the superior quality a discerning diner would expect, the most appropriate for this evening was Pimms, the epitome of fresh, fine dining.

We were seated seaside, the sounds of waves crashing against the rocks an exhilarating backdrop. Just as refreshing was glimpsing Pastor MacDonna at a nearby table with his wife and two children. We were celebrating 10



years of marriage; Pastor and wife were commemorating 17.



They, as we, could have chosen anywhere else on this exceptional island, or in the world for that matter, to mark our private chapters in personal history. There's a reason we chose Cap Juluca. It's where fairytales come true.



The end

Or rather, the beginning. Again.

Postscript

Last year, renowned hospitality executive Adam M. Aron purchased Cap Juluca. As if perfection weren't fine enough, Mr. Aron decided to give his new resort a "little" \$22 million facelift, the first phase in an overall \$80 million enhancement program. Solar-powered golf carts, mood lighting, new furniture and beach grooming equipment were among the enhancements. Each guestroom features new plush bedding and Frette linens, hand-sewn bedspreads and handmade rugs personally selected from the souks of Morocco by Mr. Aron and renowned designer Paul Duesing. All guests now also enjoy flat screen televisions, Bose CD players, iPods, DVD players and free wireless internet access. Spice, a Pan-Asian concept restaurant, and Blue, a casual beachfront eatery now join Pimm's in providing exceptional cuisine.

If you go

Cap Juluca – and Anguilla - is not inexpensive... but special packages and seasonal discounts make it more accessible to those of us who aren't featured in Forbes. For more information, call Cap Juluca Resort at 888-858-5822 or 264-497-6666; or visit www.capjuluca.com.

Cap Juluca's Accolades

Condé Nast Traveler Gold List

Travel + Leisure World's Best Service Award

Brides Magazine 50 Sexiest Hotels

Harper's Hideaway Report's #1 Resort in Caribbean

The Travel Channel World's Sexiest Beaches

Fodor's "Fodor's Choice" best hotel on Anguilla

Yachting Magazine Top 5 Caribbean Resort Hotels