

# DEPARTURES



Big, Bold  
Jewels  
p236

Your Own  
Private Caribbean  
p66

Shopping  
the World  
p148

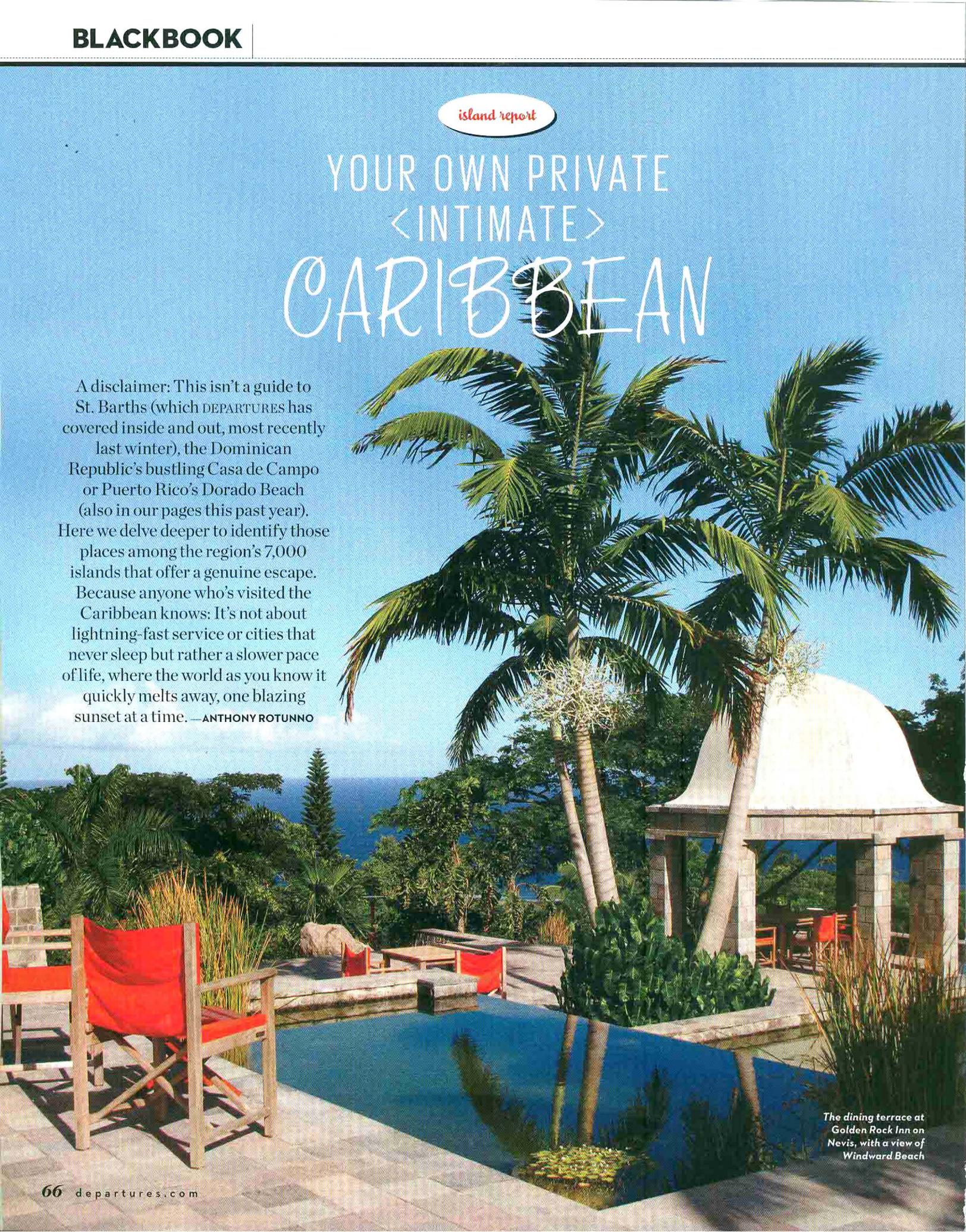
...Let the  
Holidays Begin!



island report

YOUR OWN PRIVATE  
<INTIMATE>  
CARIBBEAN

A disclaimer: This isn't a guide to St. Barths (which DEPARTURES has covered inside and out, most recently last winter), the Dominican Republic's bustling Casa de Campo or Puerto Rico's Dorado Beach (also in our pages this past year). Here we delve deeper to identify those places among the region's 7,000 islands that offer a genuine escape. Because anyone who's visited the Caribbean knows: It's not about lightning-fast service or cities that never sleep but rather a slower pace of life, where the world as you know it quickly melts away, one blazing sunset at a time. —ANTHONY ROTUNNO



The dining terrace at Golden Rock Inn on Nevis, with a view of Windward Beach

the wanderer

## NEVIS'S NEVER-ENDING STORY

On the Eastern Caribbean isle, each day holds an adventure for those curious enough to explore.

Navigating a slow SUV climb through the green jungle leading to Nevis's namesake volcanic peak, I turn off a dirt road overrun with mango trees, wild goats and "Caution: Monkey Crossing" signs and arrive in a vast clearing. There sits Tower Hill, a 1,000-acre former sugar plantation. It's a clear day, and St. Kitts, Nevis's sister island, looms large across the two-mile channel between their closest points, while St. Barths is visible some 50 miles away in the Caribbean Sea. But standing amid the stone skeletons of a windmill and a refinery, I can't help but think that the glamorous French enclave must be part of a different universe entirely.

By no means is the tiny island of Nevis—36 square miles populated by 13,000 people—a stranger to the 21st century. There are luxury cars and smartphones; hell, locals even watch Bravo. Yet with nary a trendy boutique, celebrity chef outpost or even a Starbucks, the island retains an untainted appeal. This means when visiting today—whether to soak in the curative natural hot springs, hike Nevis Peak or simply flit between beaches (more than adequate, but not the Caribbean's best)—unexpected surprises like Tower Hill can be found around every corner.

When I heard Tower Hill was on the market, I came down as soon as possible," says its new owner, Anne Bass. The New York philanthropist is part of a rarefied crowd that has fallen under Nevis's spell. Among her peers: Princess Diana, *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour and Bass's friend, Amanresorts founder Adrian Zecha, who, in-the-know islanders whisper, could begin developing his own property on Nevis as early as next year. Bass, who is also building a palatial beachfront estate designed by Amansara Angkor Wat architect Kerry Hill, is a passionate gardener and intends to turn Tower Hill into a



Montpelier's pool overlooks Mill Privée restaurant, which occupies an old windmill.

farm capable of supplying the island with local produce.

Until both projects are complete, she spends time at **Montpelier Plantation & Beach** (rooms, from \$205; Pond Hill; 869-469-3462; [montpeliernevis.com](http://montpeliernevis.com)), itself a former hillside plantation, albeit a more famous one. It's the site of Nevisian Frances "Fanny" Nisbet's wedding to British admiral Horatio Nelson in 1787, a marriage celebrated to this day. (Asking around, I discover why: Nisbet is somewhat the Nevisian Jackie Kennedy, a beloved national figure most

remembered for her nuptials.) Like Montpelier, many of Nevis's old plantations have been turned into hotels, including **Nisbet Plantation Beach Club** (rooms, from \$400; St. James Parish; 869-469-9325; [nisbetplantation.com](http://nisbetplantation.com)), where today 36 rooms are divvied up among 15 yellow cottages.

Montpelier is run by the hospitable Hoffman family. Muffin Hoffman and her late husband, Lincoln, a former New York Citibank executive, relinquished life as they knew it when they purchased the hotel 11 years ago and relocated to Nevis full-time. Now

the manicured grounds hold 19 rooms in eight stylish cottages. Quintessential Caribbean they are not; the aesthetic is more modern, with airy white rooms and a few exotically colored accents. (Those looking for a quaint, colonial feel should opt for one of the 15 pastel cottages at **The Hermitage** [rooms, from \$180; Pond Hill; 869-469-3477; [hermitagenewis.com](http://hermitagenewis.com)].)

Hours after I check in to Montpelier, Muffin's daughter Tonya whisks me away to Charlestown, the island's capital, to visit Fort Charles. It was a



**TRAVEL TIP: TAKE TRADEWIND** Here's why: Unmatched in the Caribbean for both comfort and convenience, the charter airline recently started offering regularly scheduled flights from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to the islands of Nevis, Anguilla and St. Barths. The VIP service on the eight-seater planes is worth every penny—because while the airline handles customs and immigration, you can enjoy another complimentary glass of Veuve Clicquot. From \$345 one way; 800-376-7922; [flytradewind.com](http://flytradewind.com). —A.R.

17th-century British military base where 26 cannons once served as protection against rival empires. By its crumbling stone walls I spy iron husks hidden by brush. Each is emblazoned with the crest of King George III; they are so heavy, there's no question they've been sitting there for centuries.

Later Bass is playing host in Montpelier's main dining room, where the daily-rotating prix-fixe menu features a generous portion of plump lobster. It's a laid-back affair joined by her longtime friends-turned-Nevisian neighbors, New York artists Brice and Helen Marden. After discussing local politics (raves all around for the new Oxford-educated deputy premier, Mark Brantley), I learn that Bass had been tipped off to Tower Hill by the Mardens, who had become the unlikely owners of Nevis's **Golden Rock Inn** (rooms, from \$210; Charlestown; 869-469-3346; goldenrocknevis.com) in 2006 after two decades of regularly visiting St. Barths. "There were

On Nevis  
**UNEXPECTED SURPRISES**  
can be found around every corner.

too many cars, too many people from New York and the art world," Brice says of the jet-setters' haven. "Our tendency is to go the other way."

Over breakfast the next morning at the Mardens' Golden Rock, the couple explain that their ownership has been marked by seven years of renovations, with the hotel open throughout. "When I look back, buying the place was crazy," Helen says. "But I love the way it looks now." To start, the Miami-based Raymond Jungles (of 1111 Lincoln Road fame) helped them transform the once untended grounds into a vibrant garden where 11 simple rooms sit inside six cottages and a duplex suite occupies a windmill. Next up was construction of a new restaurant, The Rocks, and an outdoor dining terrace, designed by Paris-based architect Ed Tuttle, also an Amàn alum.

That evening at The Rocks, Deputy Premier Brantley meets me for dinner. The eatery is buzzing with patrons—some of whom can't resist a peek at the smartly dressed politician and his sunburned companion. Brantley says he loves how Nevis is hard to reach, a natural deterrent to the type of all-inclusive obsessives he hopes to keep at bay. I begin to wonder how Bass's other favorite hotel, **The Four Seasons Nevis** (rooms, from \$375; Pinney's Beach, Charlestown; 869-469-6238; fourseasons.com)—with four restaurants, a bar, three pools, a spa and one of the region's best golf courses—isn't counterintuitive to this. But before I ask him about it, Brantley suggests a nightcap at **Lime** (869-469-1147), an iffy shack of a bar on Pinney's Beach. To my surprise, the dance floor is packed with a mix of locals and bodies whose flailing clearly indicates they're tourists. Later I notice many of the latter walking across the sand toward the neighboring Four Seasons, and I stand corrected: The megaresort's guests are explorers, too, just ones who prefer retiring to the lap of luxury.—A.R.

the **A** list

**ANTIGUA OR ANGUILLA?**

The two Eastern Caribbean islands, located less than an hour apart by plane, are best described as fraternal twins, with both offering very similar vacation experiences (check in to a sprawling resort and, theoretically, never venture off campus). Still, they have their differences. Herewith, each destination's distinguishing features.—A.R.

**ANTIGUA**

**CATEGORY**

**ANGUILLA**

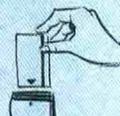
**Rosewood Jumby Bay** is still the opulent classic. On its own private island (ten minutes off Antigua by boat), it just added two palatial villas to book: Lazy Lizard and Harbour Heights. Rooms start at \$1,050; St. John's; 268-462-6000; rosewoodhotels.com.



**BIG, ICONIC RESORT**

**Malliouhana Hotel & Spa** once defined what it meant to visit the Caribbean in style. Now it's poised to rise again when it reopens in February after a multimillion-dollar, nine-month makeover by Auberge Resorts. Rooms will start at \$650; Meads Bay; 866-282-3743; aubergeresorts.com.

Among the 25 beach- and hillside cottages at **Hermitage Bay**, nos. 37 to 39 offer the most privacy. You'll want to sleep with all the windows open—and can, thanks to the mosquito nets over the beds. Rooms start at \$920; Jennings; 855-562-8080; hermitagebay.com.



**INTIMATE HOTEL ALTERNATIVE**

**Cap Juluca's** domed roofs might call to mind the resort's mid-1980s heyday. But the suites (inside 18 villas) have evolved. Case in point: The recently rebuilt Jonquil Suite has two bedrooms and an infinity pool. Rooms start at \$495; Maundays Bay; 264-497-6666; capjuluca.com.

For \$50,000 a week, Eric Clapton's fortress-looking **Standfast Point** boasts a two-floor main house, two guesthouses, two pools and several terraces with views of Guadeloupe and Montserrat islands. At Standfast Point; 212-213-6435; vaanyc.com.



**A HOME OF YOUR OWN**

From the outside, the newly renovated **Cerulean Villa** on Barnes Bay looks like it could belong on Malibu's Billionaire's Beach. But inside, the nine suites couldn't feel more island. From \$200,000 a week; 212-213-6435; vaanyc.com.

Tired of seared tuna? **Papa Zouk** ups the fresh-fish ante with its seafood-loaded bouillabaisse, a Creole-style soup smothered in grated cheese. At Hilda David Dr.; 268-464-6044.



**NO-FRILLS LOCAL DINING**

Take a break from red snapper: The Jamaican chef's spiced curried goat at **Smokey's at The Cove** is so tender, it practically falls off the bone. At Cove Bay; 264-497-6582; smokeysatthecove.com.

Antigua is ideal for sailing—it's cove-dotted, whereas Anguilla has broader beach stretches. Helped by an Atlantic breeze, **Nonsuch Bay** is a sailors' hub with more than 20 boats for guests. Rooms start at \$118; Hughes Point; 268-562-8000; nonsuchbayresort.com.



**ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE BEACH**

For one of the few places to tee off in the Eastern Caribbean, head to **CuisinArt's** Greg Norman-designed 18-hole golf course, which will be all the more appealing when the resort adds a new 62-room golf hotel in October 2015. Rooms start at \$325; greens fees, at \$145; Rendezvous Bay; 264-498-2000; cuisinartresort.com.

Like most other islands in the region, Antigua requires driving on the left side of the road. Not surprisingly, the majority of its visitors are British.



**DRIVING FACTOR**

Like in Antigua, cars are driven on the left, but many rental cars have U.S.-style steering wheels on the left-hand side, which might help explain why it's a favorite among American travelers.