

# Anguilla

## The Mouse that Roared

The 1967 Revolution gave prominence to the island and is celebrated annually as a public holiday named Anguilla Day. Gallery owner Courtney Devonish remarks, “The first time that Anguilla really came to the front for me was when I was in England. And it was when Anguillians had their revolution, and I remember a newspaper headline that read ‘The Mouse that Roared’ which was referring to the Anguilla Revolution.”

Anguilla is a 35’ square mile island situated 18.2 degrees North Latitude and 63 degrees West Longitude, with a population of approximately 15,000. The elongated limestone island is 16 miles long and 3 miles wide at its center, tapering at both ends. History dictates that in 1493, Columbus sighted the island and aptly named it for its eel-like shape (Anguilla means eel in Spanish). Anguilla is part of a long chain of islands known as the Lesser Antilles, which stretches from Puerto Rico southward to Trinidad. The northern half of this island chain is generally referred to as the Leeward Islands, which consists of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla. The main part of the Lesser Antilles, between Grenada and Anguilla, is comprised of two parallel arcs of islands—an outer arc and an inner arc—each of which contains volcanic isles that were formed over a 40 million year period. The outer arc islands are heavily eroded and largely composed of coral limestone over a volcanic base. The topography of these islands is unsurprisingly flat and low profile. Anguilla is situated at the northern extremity of the outer arc. The eel-shaped island differs from the other Leeward Islands due to the presence of a number of satellite islets and cays, of which Scrub Island is the largest. Another distinguishing feature of Anguilla are the salt ponds. The largest pond is at Road Bay, which was of great economic importance for years.

Anguilla’s social and political history has been one of struggle and conflict. According to Reverend Franklin A. Roberts, “The story will long be told of the sterling qualities of an extraordinary people who passed through the fire of slavery, social deprivation, and the imposition of the unbearable political bonds.” Anguilla was first settled by Amerindian tribes in approximately 1300BC, and was first colonized by the British in 1650. The English maintained control for the next 300 years. In 1967 Britain granted St. Kitts and Nevis full internal autonomy but Anguilla was incorporated into a unified dependency entitled St Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla. Angered by this

diplomatic compromise, Anguillans declared their independence. Despite their attempts at revolution, British authority was fully restored on the island in 1971. It was not until 1980 that Anguilla was granted a formal separation from the associated tripartite state of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla and became a separate British colony. Today, Anguilla is peaceful, and socioeconomic conditions have improved considerably.

The truest testament that Anguilla continues to flourish is the nearly two-dozen art galleries that have remained open over the years. The first and longest running gallery on the island is Devonish Art Gallery, which was founded in 1988 by Courtney Devonish. His gallery offers a wonderful variety of works from local and migrant artists.

“When I moved to Anguilla it was one of the most peaceful and relaxing places I had ever been in. I was amazed at the entrepreneurship of the local people, which does not exist in the rest of the Caribbean islands...not to the level that it does in Anguilla. And for me, that was a plus. It made a lot of sense, and it’s one of the things that attracted me to the island...Art is becoming very important on the island...this process was achieved over the years through many efforts, one being the early 1990s international arts festival that I organized on Anguilla. It was an international juried show, and the goal was to create Anguilla as an art paradise. We had a lot of expat artists that settled here and helped to promote this notion...Because of this effort Anguilla became known for its art.”—Courtney Devonish

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