

T+L'S AIRPORT REPORT: THE BEST + THE WORST

TRAVEL + LEISURE

ROME
GARDEN
TOUR

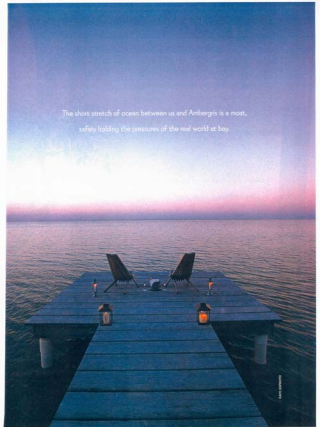
NEW
FOODIE
HAVEN:
BAJA

INSIDER'S
MARRAKESH

30 SECRET ISLAND ESCAPES

FLORIDA KEYS GREECE BAHAMAS FRANCE BELIZE MAINE GALÁPAGOS





The short stretch of ocean between us and Ambergis is a moat,
safely holding the pressures of the real world at bay.

As we fly over a small isle speckled by palms and a few sprawling villas, brushed oceanfront villas roll through the cabin. — “What’s that place?”

“That,” we reply to no one in particular, “is Cayo Espanto.”

There are people who would rather be visited than loved, so to experience both oceanfront views and romance on one short sojourn is sublime.

We want more than privacy; we want isolation. We’ve taken three plane rides, left our jealous husbands on comparatively leafy Ambergris Caye and taken a taxi and a powerboat, and found just that.

Cayo Espanto has only five villas. There are no built-in restaurants, no villa bars, no lagoon-styled pools with waterfalls. There’s you and yours, a “houseman” and

whatever you request. Full body massage room to your plunge pool? Yes. One-on-one fly-fishing, because on the sprawling flats of Belmó? Tell them what day you want to go. Private diva trip with Cayo’s dressmaker? Pick a time.



ourselves out of this cozy nest each morning, lured only by the knowledge that breakfast will bring watermelon juice and pancakes with fresh fruit, oranges and thick slices of meat. So we put on the big and heavy robes and make our way down the wooden stairs.

We find plenty of diversion; another staff member, Alfonso, takes us — and only us — on a two-hour snorkel tour of Hal Chan Marine Reserve, then leaves the rest of us alone. We hold hands and he points out fish I didn’t know he knew squirrelfish, tangfish, blue tang. We have about a huge head of brain coral while a damselfish nibbles at our fingers.

Back at the villa, we nap before we arrive. Carlos appears with a white tablecloth, porcelain teapot, cups

Left: Cayo Espanto’s plunge pool invites you to cool off. **This page:** Tucked among palm trees, the secluded villa at Cayo Espanto is surrounded by sea views and decorated in tropical elegance.

cayo espanto offers elegant isolation

The staff greets us at the dock and leads us to our two-bedroom villa, Cayo Esfanta. Our houseman, Carlos, will come back once an hour or once a day, depending on our wishes, softly asking permission before he intrudes.

We have endless water on two sides, with two docks leading to our villa. Shuttered doors painted sky blue open in both of them, and though we can close them at night, we never do. Just outside is a shady deck with hammocks hanging at its corners.

The short stretch of ocean between us and Ambergris is a maze, hiding the presence of the real world as long it takes a day or two to get used to the stillness. The only sounds are the lapping of waves, the chatter of small birds and the island’s golden lab, making himself at home. Time moves down, and down still, the longer we’re here.

Days are spent in hammock-to-hammock conversation, with Carlos appearing at exactly the right time with our lunch. At night, we dine on the deck before heading up to the second floor, with its open-air shower and king-sized bed covered in crisp, white down pillows and cushions. It’s all we can do to drag

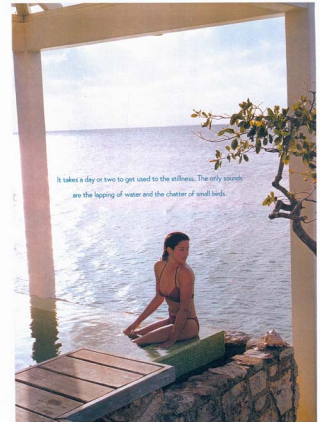
and saucers, cookies and cucumber and tomato finger sandwiches. We choose our tea, then sit in the quiet of the afternoon and consider the dinner menu: tomato bisque, macadamia nut-crusted shrimp and Key lime pie. “It sounds wonderful,” I smile at Carlos. “But I’d like something else for dinner.”

During dinner, a strolling maraca appears at our villa, softly announcing his guitar as he sings Spanish ballads. Candlelight flickers on his face as we savor the mixed fruit tartlet with Grand Marnier chocolate sauce and finish off our bottle of wine.

After the table is cleared, we ask for a movie we haven’t seen before. Carlos retrieves it from the library and asks, “Would you care for something else?”

“Just another bottle of the wine, please.” Because, as we sit curled up on the couch, we’re certain that we can take care of the rest. — *Julia Clayman*



A woman in a dark bikini is sitting on a stone ledge of an infinity pool, looking out at the ocean. The scene is framed by a white architectural structure. The text is overlaid on the image.

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