

REVEALED! SECRET HAWAIIAN BEACHES pg 93

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FEBRUARY 2007

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Cayo Espanto

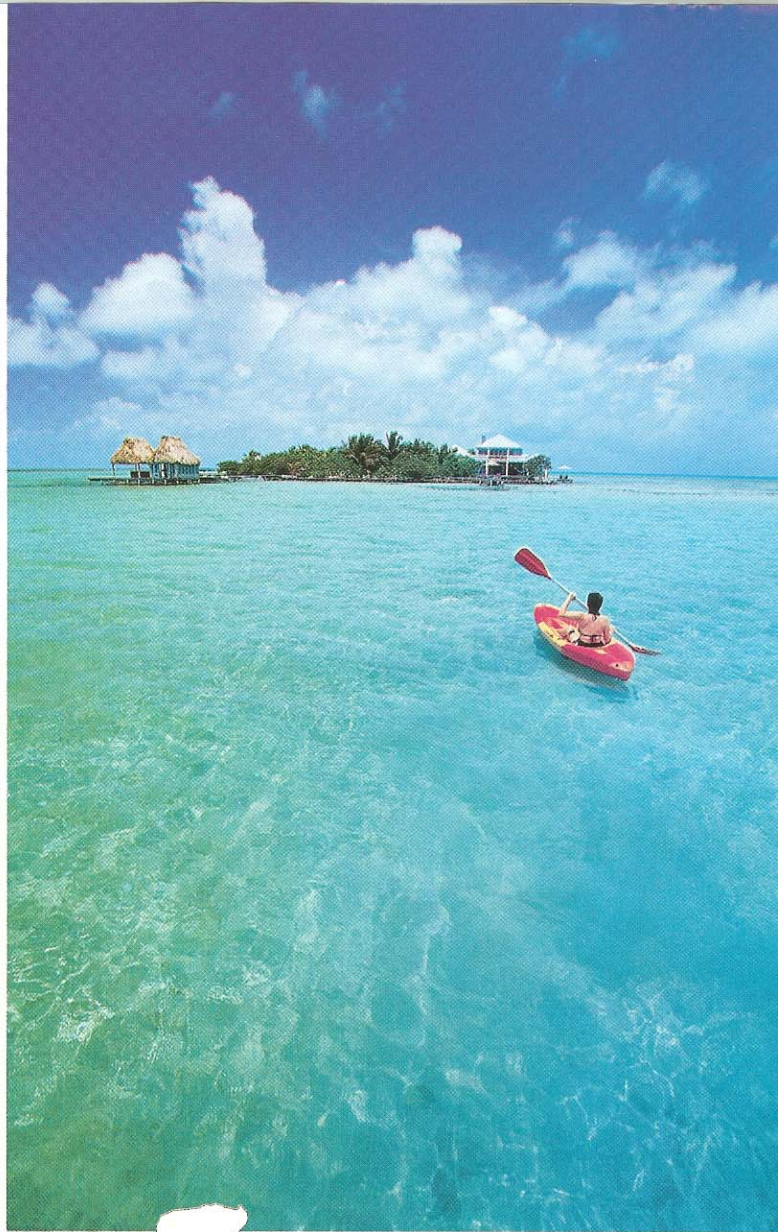
OFF AMBERGRIS CAYE, BELIZE

7 am Casa Aurora, my open-air villa with turquoise shutters, is approximately 99 steps from Cayo Espanto's dock. Insignificant information really, but I awoke early and wanted to explore my private slice of Belize. So I decide to measure the size of it in footsteps. A walk across the entire length of the islet (223 steps total) takes me through a palm-tree-studded forest with a sand floor that has been raked with spiral patterns by someone who evidently got up earlier than I. Four more *casas* are hidden near the Caribbean shore, but I see no other castaways. The moment I return to my villa, Eddie, my houseman, delivers chunky banana pancakes and fresh slices of fruit. Significant information: "Aurora" means dawn.

11 am German, my boat captain, brings me to Shark Ray Alley, part of Hol Chan Marine Reserve, about 15 minutes by boat from Cayo. The snorkeling is stupendous; I spot an eagle ray, nurse sharks and many tropical fish. We motor to the west side of Ambergris Caye for a picnic. Eddie and the staff have transported a Hobie Cat and kayaks, and a CD player is spinning my favorite musician, Aimee Mann. Then German prepares my favorite lunch, grilled snapper and lobster, while I nosh on my favorite appetizer, ceviche. A perfect afternoon of favorites all because Cayo Espanto knows the art of pampering.

5 pm I'm floating in my villa's pool with a frozen margarita in hand when Eddie comes in to announce the chef's arrival. Chef Patrick recites the dinner specials as I float. I choose the third: *achiote*-rubbed flank steak. Moments later, I walkie-talkie Eddie to confirm my poolside coconut body scrub. It's all been arranged, he tells me.

8 pm Tiki torches and candles flicker along the dock. The staff has set up this corner of the islet especially for me. Next to the single, white-linen table is a sofa with a tent-like draping over it that whips in the ocean breeze. I sit on its cushions and take in all the curves of the universe. Eddie walks up the dock, carrying a silver tray, stars twinkling behind him. Cayo Espanto, I think, has directed the best movie of the year. I call it, "*Cayo Pamperato*" (I'm Never Leaving). — CR



GET THERE

Fly to Belize City on American Airlines and then to San Pedro, Ambergris Caye on Tropic Air. Ferry from there to Cayo Espanto on the resort's private boat. Rates from \$1,695 per night with a five-night minimum stay, including meals and a private houseman. aprivateisland.com



Top: Casa Brisa.
Bottom from left:
Take your meals,
such as this prawn
salad, anywhere
you'd like. Then,
relax in Casa
Manana's open-air
bedroom. Opposite:
Paddle around tiny
Cayo Espanto.

