

HURRICANE GUARANTEES



STORMPROOF YOUR VACATION, PAGE 94

CARIBBEAN

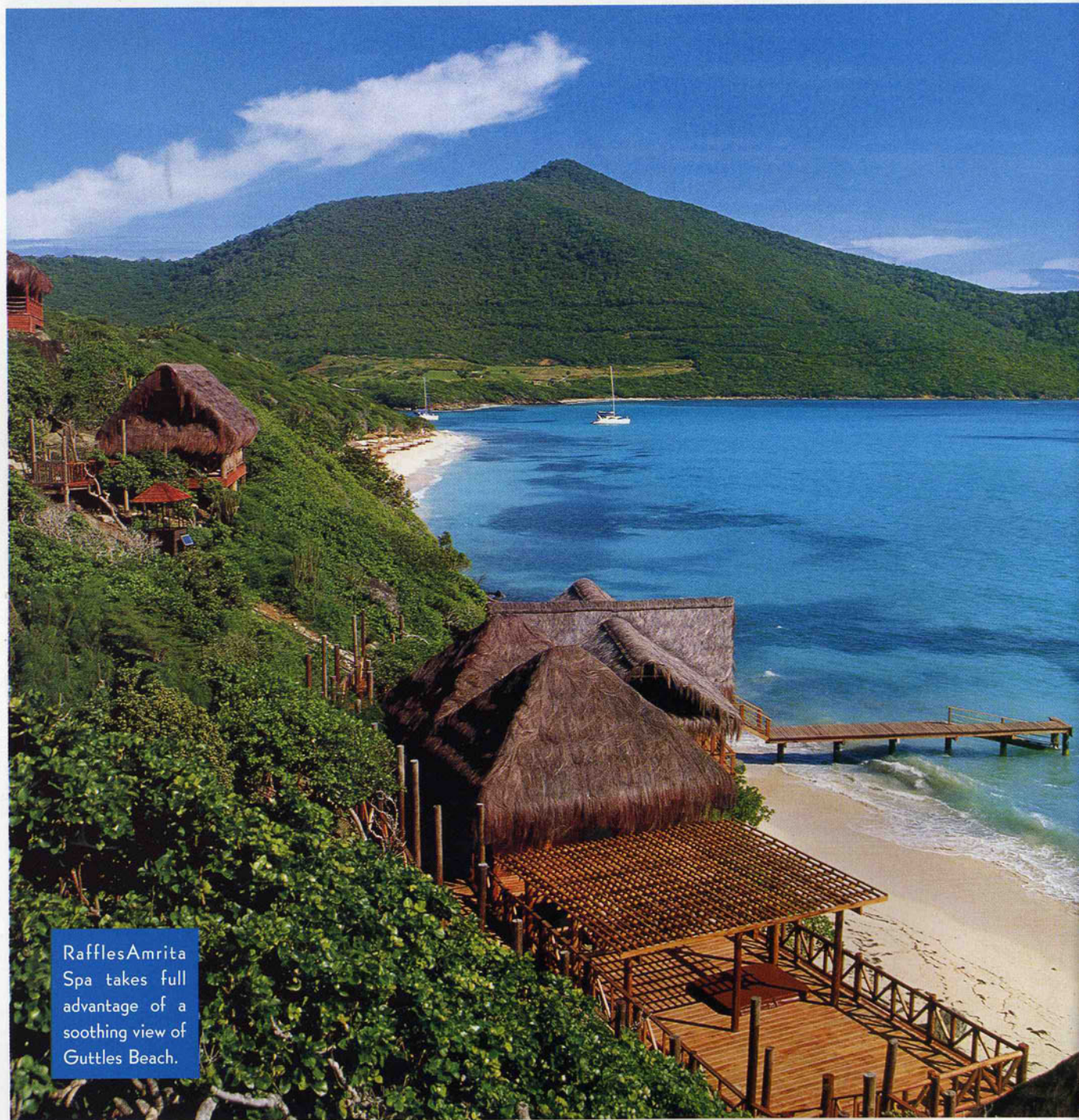
APRIL 2005

TRAVEL & LIFE



ISLAND

JOURNEY, ENGAGE, INDULGE,



RafflesAmrita
Spa takes full
advantage of a
soothing view of
Guttles Beach.

HOPPING

UNWIND, DISCOVER AND PLAY

JUST BACK CANOUAN

Second Time's the Charm

Fifteen years ago, Canouan was just another Grenadine — a pretty green gumdrop for the yachties who frequented this 32-isle archipelago that hop-scotches south from St. Vincent toward Grenada. Back then, those who went ashore found a tumbledown village of 739 Canouanians, idyllic hills and a half-dozen

picture-perfect beaches. There was barely a bed for rent.

By 1991, though, the island could no longer escape notice — neighboring Mustique had offered a successful model for the wholesale remaking of a tiny backwater into a luxury outpost. So Canouan Resorts Development lavished \$160 million on the three-square-mile island, opening the 156-room Carenage Bay Resort in 1999. Three years later it closed, not only a victim of disputes between developers and the management company, but also because the original design had serious flaws, from rooms without air conditioning to a golf course with only 13 holes. Two years and another \$39 million were spent recasting the resort, and Singapore-based Raffles International was brought in to run the show; the ribbon-cutting was last November.

■ **SPOTLIGHT, PLEASE** Now called **Raffles Resort Canouan Island** (877-226-6826; www.raffles-canouan.island.com), the hotel has been transformed. Though the original layout is intact, the grounds were enhanced by the addition of Asian-influenced water features and a 12,900-square-foot swimming pool. A restored Anglican church — brought over from England, stone by stone, in the 19th century — sits next to reception. Accommodations are appropriately deluxe: Frette linens, a personal golf cart, and yes, air conditioners to keep guestrooms crisp as a martini. Speaking of which, the resort's martini list is 88 choices long, topped by four \$300 cocktails replete with 24-karat



SWINGERS CLUB

With a redesign by Jim Fazio, the **Trump International Golf Club** is now a spectacular, state-of-the-art facility. The front nine lies in the amphitheatre of the resort, while the back nine is over the hill on the otherwise untouched north lobe of the island. Golfers seeking the Caribbean's next big thing will be challenged to keep their eye on the ball, especially at the 13th hole, which follows a slender ridge 440 feet above sea level, flanked by the Caribbean on the left and Mt. Royal and the Atlantic on the right.



DAVID SWANSON (2)

ISLAND HOPPING

gold-plated miniature sword stirrers. Though Raffles' room rates aren't cheap (doubles from \$385 to \$1,010 in low season; \$675 to \$1,770 high), dining prices at La Varenne, one of the resort's four restaurants, set a new level for the Caribbean, with \$23 to \$38 appetizers and entrées ranging from \$41 to \$60 (for veal sweetbreads). Bang for the buck? We found the meals memorable and service exceedingly friendly, if somewhat leisurely.

■ **HE'S HIRED** Canouan's casino, Villa Monte Carlo, was a bit of a white elephant, visually and otherwise, perched on a remote shoulder of 877-foot Mt. Royal. To seduce the high rollers, the room was spruced up, a members-only salon was added, and **The Donald** was brought in to keep the European-style gambling tables busy — hence the new moniker, Trump Club Privee.

■ **RAILWAY TO HEAVEN** The **RafflesAmrita Spa** is the island's jewel. Eleven treatment rooms — including two palapas on stilts over the lagoon, reachable only by boat — are all draped in delicate *chiqui chiqui* thatch from Venezuela. The main rooms are reached via funicular (dubbed the well-o-vator by one waggish clutch of guests).

■ **BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE** If island fever strikes, you can always sail over to a neighboring islet. The 40-foot catamaran **Splendid Adventurer** (www.splendidadventurer.com) makes daytrips to nearby

Mayreau or the Tobago Cayes, a quintet of uninhabited islets with grand snorkeling (and a memorable location from *Pirates of the Caribbean*).

■ **THE AFFORDABLE CANOUAN** The island is a non-starter for the backpacking set, but 10-year-old **Tamarind Beach Hotel & Yacht Club** (784-458-8044; www.tamarindbeachhotel.com) is a fine option for those who prefer a cold local Hairoun beer to a decadent \$300 martini. Tamarind's two-story buildings house 40 rooms with wicker

furnishings and louvered jalousie windows. The restaurant serves surprisingly good Italian meals, and live bands appear Friday and Saturday evenings. The hotel is set along gleaming Grand Bay beach, just outside Canouan's main village, Charlestown. Next door is **The Moorings'** charter yacht base (800-368-9991; www.moorings.com) and **Canouan Dive Centre** (784-482-0820), which takes divers through these fertile, sun-splashed islands.

— David Swanson

