

KEVIN BACON REVEALS  HIS FAVORITE ISLAND HIDEAWAY

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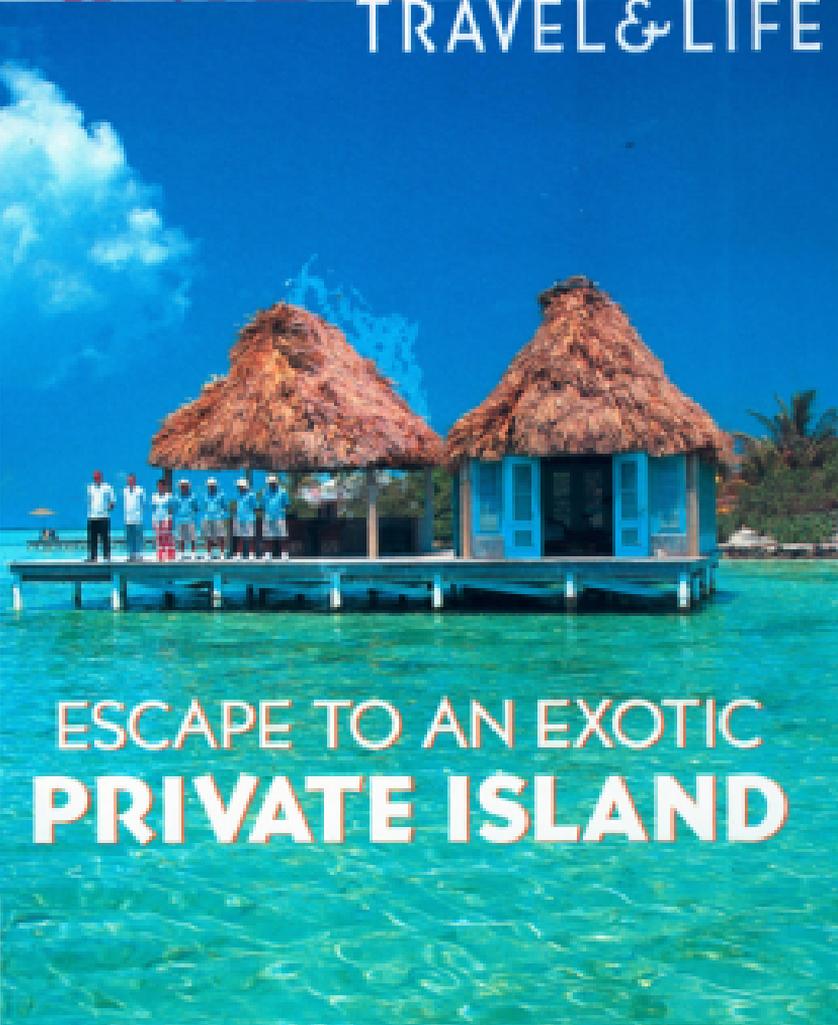
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*The island rises just a foot or two above Belize's excellent flats, a favorite haunt of sportfishing's most prized catch: the elusive bonefish. But it isn't really about the fish ...*



## CAYO ESPANTO

I CAN'T HIDE THE GRIN. "YOU'RE IN HEAVEN," says my companion. I step out of the ocean, pop my fly rod against a sun lounger and join her in the plunge pool. We'd been soaking under our villa's pyramid-shaped pergola when the sparkle of a silvery tail beating the surface caught my eye. I grabbed the rod, climbed out of the pool and into the sea. My first cast laid the fly surprisingly close to where I intended it to go. Two ticks of the line to make the lure dance, and the rod bent double as a bonefish pounced and took off like a shooting star across the flats. After a lively battle, I released the fish back into its home waters and plunged back into what, over the last couple of idyllic days, had become mine.

Our villa, *Esperilla*, is one of only five on Cayo Espanto, a private island resort just west of Ambergia Cay, Belize. As a landman, there isn't much to Cayo. A sandy path winds through a forest of palms down the center of the 4-acre island, branching off to each breezy, mahogany-decked villa, which is screened from its neighbors by silver-trunked black mangrove trees.

The focus is on the spectacular villa. And their focus is on the outside world of turquoise and royal blue. The island rises just a foot or two above the surrounding water, which are the favorite haunts of bonefish. The chaotic splendor of an anglingfisher's most prized catch, and Cayo Espanto, Spirit Island, could be named for these silver glimmers of the flats. But it isn't really about the fish.

I reach for the link-blue walkie-talkie that keeps me connected to David, our houseman. It took me awhile to get used to the idea of having someone at my beck and call, but now I'm like a long-hand mackerel at the head of a coxswain. "Breaker, breaker, come in, David. We need two pitas at the plunge pool and appetizers on our west dock in time for sunset. Ten-four, roger, over and out." A few minutes later he arrives, saying "knock, knock" before rounding the corner just in

case we're taking advantage of the two-story villa's sublimely romantic privacy. David is the picture of tropical attentiveness in his crisp blue shirt, khaki shorts and pink helmet. He places the drinks within easy reach and asks if he may present the chefs.

Twice a day, Cayo's chefs appear at each villa to offer suggestions for the next meal. Substitutions, alterations and entirely different dishes are no problem. But, as future guests are asked to fill out profiles noting favorite foods and special diets, the chef's pitas are usually right on.

We receive our visitors while still ensoaked in the refreshingly cool water. We've spent every day wearing bathing suits — there's no need for clothes when your

daily activities include snorkeling the nearby barrier reef or heading to a deserted beach for a private picnic. And we dress for dinner merely to impress each other. We've only had fleeting glimpses of the other six guests as they peddled by on kayaks or sailed off on day trips. We give the menu a thumbs up, and as the time and the place for tonight's lobster feast 7-15, on one of our villa's two docks. Before he leaves, I ask David to have the pool's heater turned on so we can enjoy some sports-dinner hot-tub stargazing. He responds as he does to all our requests, "With pleasure."

It's now my favorite time of the day here on Cayo Espanto. I perch on the infinity edge and watch as the late afternoon sun dims from scorching white to molten gold and the water over the flats turns from milky-rose aquamarine to a rich jade that exactly

matches the pool's mosaic tiles. Directly below me, two bonefish nose around in the sandy bottom. Without moving, I could dangle a fly in front of their eyes. But it's not about the fish. I wade back across the pool to where she's collecting. We embrace arms and legs to enjoy the twilight's sparkle and play off the waves, not the

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— *Bob Field*



Cayo Espanto is, simultaneously, a Caribbean island experience at its most basic and most luxurious. Sunbites, blue skies and clear water make the tiny island, while guests soak in the pleasures of ideal accommodations and indulgent meals.