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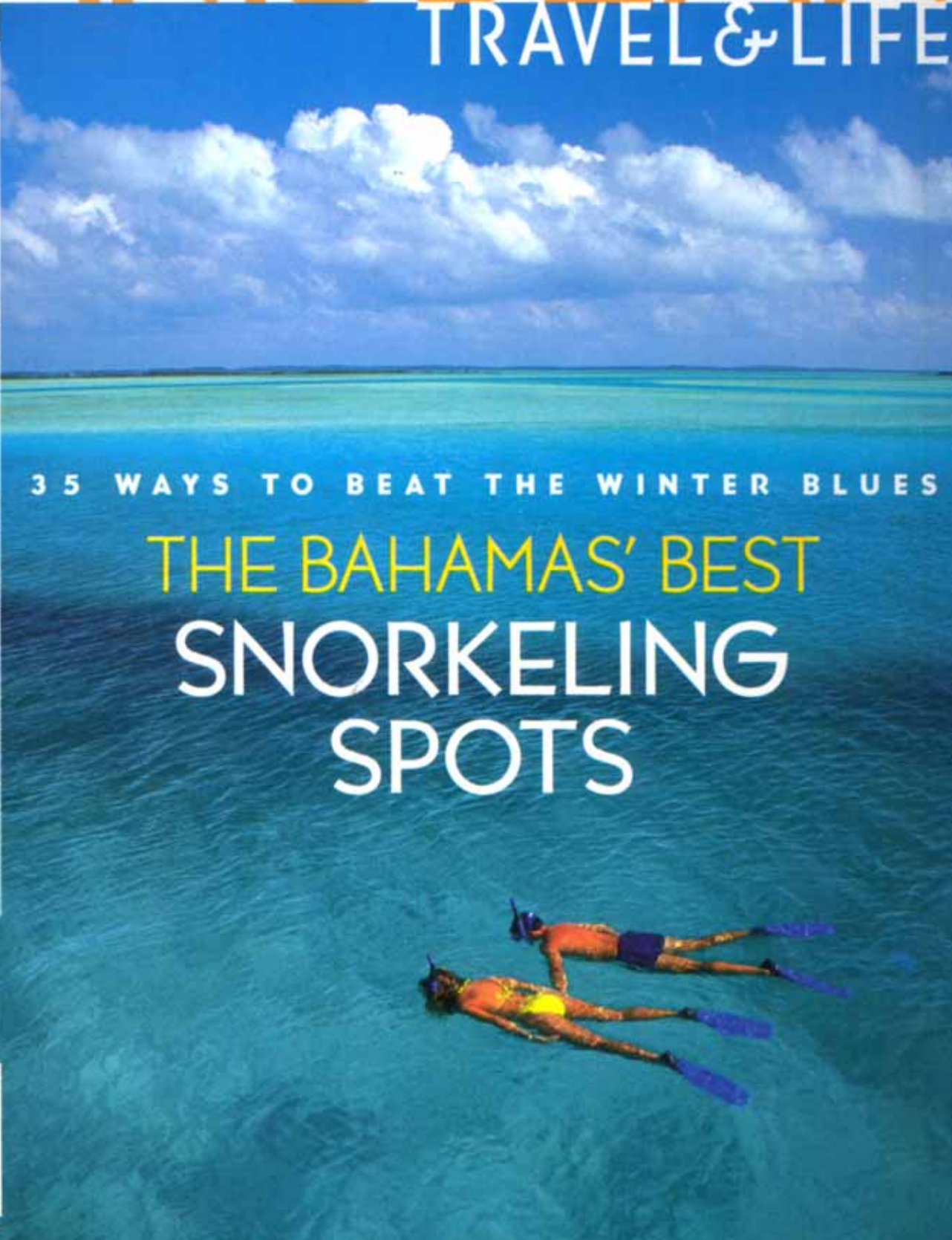
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Tobago comes from the  word "tavaco," a tobacco pipe used by the Amerindians.

JUST BACK

TOBAGO READY FOR HER CLOSE-UP

Forty-odd years ago, the best Tobago could do was play big-screen body double for uninhabited Pacific islands featured both in the Robert Mitchum roughneck-marine-teams-with-nun-to-fight-the-Japs WWII drama, *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*, and in the ultimate family getaway story, *Swiss Family Robinson*. Today, however, this easygoing island with its 200-year-old forest reserve and world-class snorkeling, diving and birdwatching has developed its own identity as a rising star in environmental tourism.

Tobago's burgeoning popularity as a scenic escape for nature lovers and weekenders from sister-island Trinidad has spurred the building of a range of accommodations — from intimate eco-lodges to a 200-room Hilton — so visitors won't have to resort to hiding in caves or building their own pirate-proof treehouses.

■ **PLAYING HOUSE** Peaked roofs, gingerbread trim and happy-to-sit-here-all-day verandas set the style for the charming new **Palms Villa Resort** (868-635-1010; www.thepalmstobago.com). The six two-story houses, each with three bedrooms and its own pool, are located on a 10-acre gated estate on Signal Hill. Inside, the décor is sophisticated and contemporary, with ceiling-height doors that fold back to



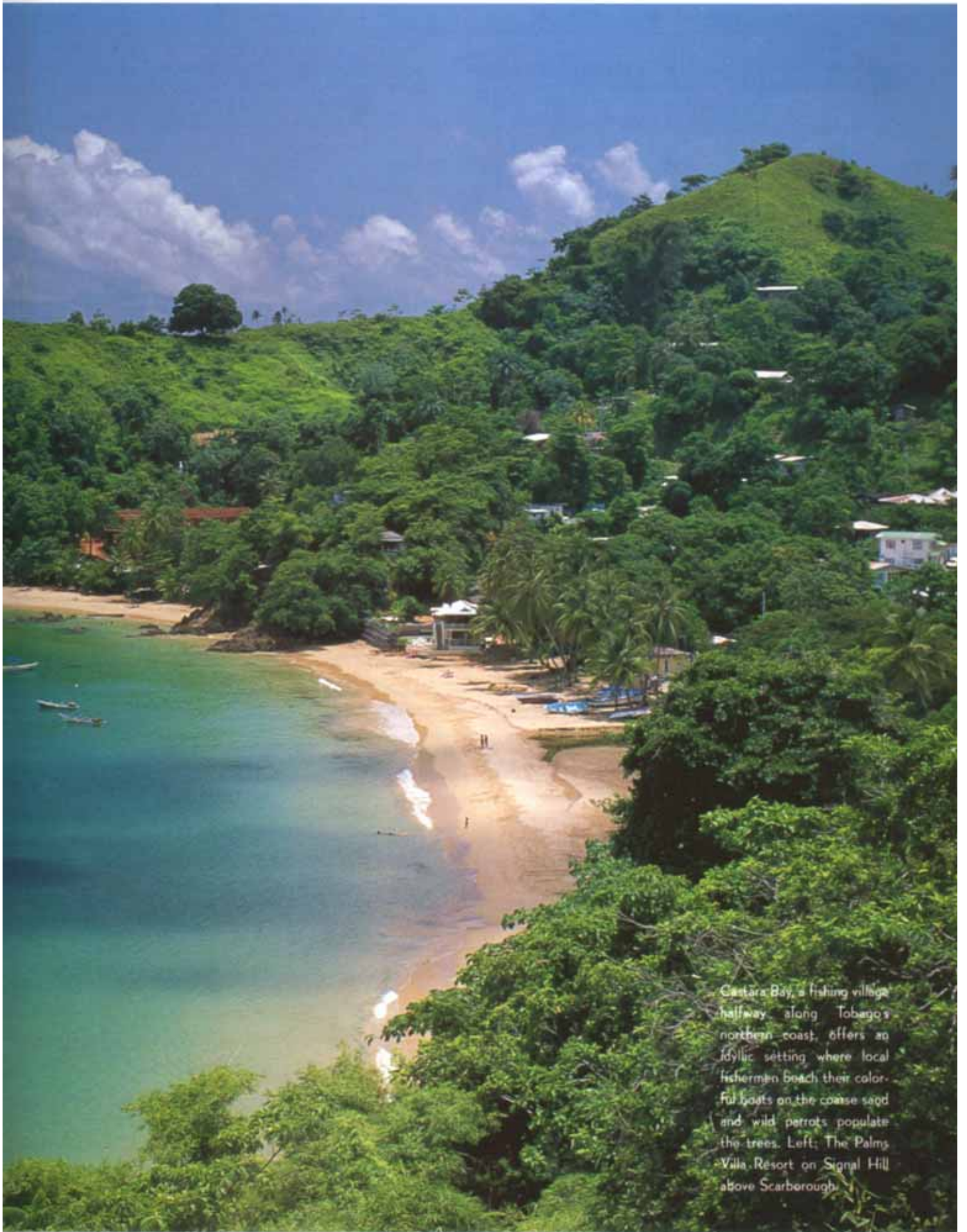
reveal a rolling green lawn favored by herons. On the first night, dinner, perhaps a superb curried flying fish, is waiting.

■ **REINCARNATION** At Bacolet Bay, the **Half Blue Moon** hotel (868-639-3551; www.halfmoonblue.com) continues to reinvent itself, recently adding a lounge-cum-gallery space. The hostelry began in 1980 as a wine bistro at the Old Donkey Cart House and morphed into a brightly decorated nine-room hotel.

Just across the road is the **Blue Haven Hotel** (868-660-7400; www.bluehavenhotel.com), once the haunt of Hollywood stars working on location — Rita Hayworth stayed in Suite 30. After a couple decades of dereliction, it reopened



NIK WHEELER (2)



Castara Bay, a fishing village halfway along Tobago's northern coast, offers an idyllic setting where local fishermen beach their colorful boats on the coarse sand and wild parrots populate the trees. Left: The Palms Villa Resort on Signal Hill above Scarborough.