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 By ELAINE GLUSAC, The New York Times

A WAVE of new hotels and resorts usually open their doors during high season in the islands. And despite the economic stasis, this year is no exception. There is, however, one discernible difference: they're highlighting experience along with escape. Whether high-end or mid-range, the most interesting newcomers are underscoring their location through cuisine, cultural events, design or programs.

Anguilla Anacaona Boutique

The British expatriate hoteliers Robin and Sue Ricketts have managed some of Anguilla's most exclusive hotels, including the Malliouhana Hotel & Spa and Cap Juluca. Now they are trying out ownership for the first time. The Rickettses have acquired, refurbished and reopened the former Sirena Resort as the 27-room Anacaona Boutique Hotel. Located in the affluent West End on Meads Bay beach, the resort, opened last month, aims to promote local culture by offering weeklong packages themed to art, photography or bird-watching; concerts by local musicians; talks by Anguilla historians; and watercolor-painting sessions with local artists. There's also some local cuisine: the restaurant serves dishes like curried goat. Winter rates from \$250, dropping to \$150 in April. Information: anacaonahotel.com

St. Lucia Hotel Chocolat

In the early 20th century, St. Lucia had a thriving chocolate trade, which was eventually supplanted by tourism and bananas. Now the England-based boutique confectioner Hotel Chocolat aims to revive St. Lucia's cocoa industry - and live up to its name -- by inviting tourists to stay at its first hotel, on a working cocoa plantation that the company uses to supply its estate line of chocolates. On Dec. 28, Hotel Chocolat plans to open six cottages on the 140-acre Rabot Estate that feature whitewashed stone walls, corrugated metal roofs and views of the Piton Mountains at the south end of the island. Agritourism meets luxury on the estate, where guests can tour the plantation, get cocoa butter massages and dine on gourmet dishes sprinkled with cocoa nibs. Doubles \$550, with breakfast. Information: thehotelchocolat.com

Puerto Rico St. Regis Bahia Beach

Puerto Rico has urban luxury hotels and boutique coastal hideaways, but it has few properties that combine exclusivity and nature. The 139-room St. Regis Bahia Beach, set to open last week, fills the gap. The property sits on 483 acres fronting an undeveloped two-mile beach with inland views of El Yunque National Forest. The Espiritu Santo River runs from the park along the property, which received Audubon International's highest certification for environmentally conscious development. Staff naturalists guide bird-watching on more than seven miles of nature trails and kayak outings on the 63 acres of canals, ponds and lakes on the grounds. More glamorous amenities include a spa with seven indoor-outdoor treatment rooms, a golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. and a restaurant from Jean-Georges Vongerichten supplied with organic produce by an on-site 2.4-acre garden. Rooms start at \$759. Information: stregisbahiaibeach.com

Jamaica GoldenEye Hotel

The British author Ian Fleming created his fictional spy James Bond at GoldenEye, the Jamaica north-coast property he bought in 1946. The founder of Island Records, Chris Blackwell, has owned the home and 15 surrounding acres since 1976, and later turned it into a six-villa hotel before closing it two and a half years ago. Now Mr. Blackwell has reopened the property in expanded form, as a 52-acre resort with 22 units, each with an outdoor shower and touch-screen sound system loaded with Island Records-produced music. Two new restaurants serve local cuisine, including ackee and saltfish for breakfast. The Jamaican Olympic triathlete Iona Wynter is in charge of activities; she combines fitness and fun in stretch and snorkel classes, moonlight yoga and leg and ab workouts designed to buff those Jet Skiing muscles. Over-lagoon suites start at \$536. Information: goldeneye.com

Dominican Republic Balcones del Atlántico

Every January through March, humpback whales migrate off the Samaná Peninsula in the northeast Dominican Republic, a relatively unspoiled coast praised for its white sand beaches and forested mountains. The new Balcones

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del Atlántico, a RockResorts property opening mid-December, tees off on those natural attractions, featuring whale-watching excursions, hikes to El Limón Falls, cave tours at Los Haitises National Park and boat rides to secluded beaches. Though the resort urges exploration, it pampers guests in 86 two- and three-bedroom villas, all with full kitchens, most with plunge pools. Though the resort has its own restaurant, it encourages culinary adventures too, highlighting cafes in the nearby fishing village of Las Terrenas. Two-bedroom suites from \$404. Information: balcones.rockresorts.com

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