

TURKS AND CAICOS

Escape to the Caribbean for a true island paradise that's got low-key glamour down pat *by Emma Sloley*

TURKS



SHALLOW ISN'T OFTEN CONSIDERED a compliment, but when it comes to the Turks and Caicos—a string of 40 picturesque, low-lying islands and cays south of Miami in the British West Indies—the adjective takes on a whole new luster. That's because the beaches here are supremely user-friendly, with water that's never uncomfortably deep or cold and always offers perfect visibility. My husband and I got our first taste of these lovely shallow waters at the famed Grace Bay Beach, a 12-mile stretch of powdery white sand and turquoise sea on the main tourist island of Providenciales.

The journey began at the Regent Palms, a grand, 72-suite hotel on the beach. The style is breezy colonial, with outer walls of white Barbodian coral stone. Life here revolves around the huge pool and its circular white daybeds, perpetually draped with young, tan couples. There's even a swim-up bar and casual restaurant, the location for one particularly lazy afternoon we spent propped at submerged bar stools while sipping fresh fruit daiquiris and people-watching.

Our garden suite—overlooking said pool—was tastefully decked out with custom mahogany furnishings. There are more decadent lodging options to be had at the resort, like

TREASURE ISLANDS Once a pirate's lair, the Turks and Caicos Islands still harbor precious bounty—soft sands and sparkling topaz waters.

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the 3,000-square-foot ocean-view suites, but 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets and marble bathrooms are standard luxuries here. Perhaps that's part of the draw for boldface names such as Senator John Kerry, who checked in recently. He may also have been seduced by the wonderful spa, boasting an open-air relaxation area with views of a series of reflecting pools. Or the restaurant Parallel 23, which serves up refined Caribbean-European fusion dishes such as lobster risotto with truffle oil.

Our next stop, just a short drive away, was the venerable Grace Bay Club, one of the first resorts on the islands and still the gold standard in terms of setting and service. The original 21-suite hotel has been augmented with 38 spacious rooms called the Villas featuring vast ocean-view terraces. As elsewhere in the islands, the natural soundtrack provided by gently lapping waves is on high rotation. The sunny, Mediterranean aesthetic here reflects the attitudes of the ever-helpful staff, who are eager to furnish honeymooners and other guests with unforgettable experiences, be it a romantic tiki torch-lit dinner for two on the beach or a castaway picnic on a deserted island (given that only eight are inhabited, that's a feature at which this archipelago excels).

Although the once-adults-only resort has now expanded to include families, we loved the seamless way the hotel accommodates the two worlds, dedicating an elegant pool and relaxation area just for adults. The lush landscaping provides subtle natural barriers that create privacy while still allowing glimpses of the sea—especially in the lounge and acclaimed Anacaona

restaurant, where the tables are tucked amid the foliage under strings of glowing Moroccan lanterns.

We spent our final night at Parrot Cay, the islands' most famous resort, a half-hour boat ride away from Providenciales. On arrival we were shown to our suite, one of six roomy Beach Houses on the island; there are also Beach Villas, suites located in the main house, and swanky Private Residences, which draw the Parrot Cay's celebrity clientele, like Bruce Willis and Christie Brinkley. Honeymooners should splurge on a beachside room for the chance to linger in their own outdoor plunge pool and swing in the hammock on the charmingly weathered wooden deck, just steps from the sea.

Apparently there are activities to be had on the island—yoga, sailing, bike riding—but reaching a state of nirvana through sheer indolence is really the name of the game here. It's blissfully easy to get the hang of it, and we emerged only a few times from our simply furnished suite: to sample

the exquisite Southeast Asian-inspired cuisine at Lotus restaurant (try the Balinese spiced mahi mahi wrapped in a banana leaf), which comes with a side of the most beautiful sunset in the Caribbean, and to visit the Como Shambhala Retreat, a pavilion cantilevered over the wetlands where guests



PARROT CAY



THE REGENT PALMS



GRACE BAY CLUB

can experience an Asian-inspired menu of massages and treatments to soothe mind and body.

We spent our last morning at Parrot Cay alternating between soaking in the plunge pool and swaying in the hammock while watching the curly-tailed geckos play on the sand. Another perfect, action-packed day in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The Regent Palms, rooms from \$595, regenthotels.com. Grace Bay Club, rooms from \$785, gracebayclub.com. Parrot Cay, rooms from \$760, parrotcay.com.bz.