

# Buccaneering luxury for adventure lovers

## Anna Tyzack finds laid-back exclusivity in the Turks and Caicos Islands

Desert islands are all the rage among pioneering second-home buyers. They are after an adventure: "schooners, islands, buccaneers, and buried gold", as Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in *Treasure Island*.

Ambergris Cay, a tiny island in the British territory of Turks and Caicos (see map, left), offers a modern take on Stevenson's "age-old romance" of palm-fringed beaches and blue lagoons. Open-necked fishing shirts and caps are worn to dinner at Calico Jack's members' club. On the menu are fresh lobster and yucca fries, but most guests tuck in to the spoils of their afternoon's deep sea fishing. Afterwards they may drink whisky by the bonfire before buggy-driving back to their colonial-style beach house. The sandy track passes clumps of cacti and wild orchids, and stars twinkle in a jet-black sky.

"In how many places can you buy something like this?" says Tim Weller, group chief executive of Incisive Media and one of the Caribbean island's founder residents. He first visited Ambergris Cay while on holiday in the Turks and Caicos with his wife, Jackie, three years ago.

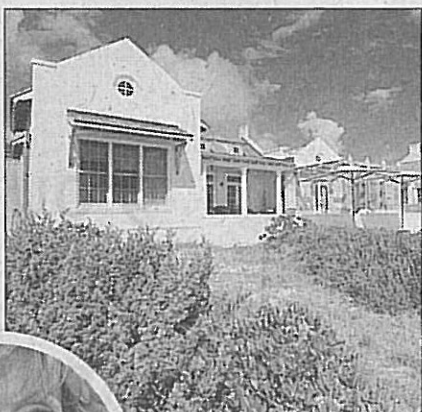
"We had no intention of buying, but a friend said we should go on a day trip," he recalls. "One house was half-built and there was no runway, but it was amazing. You don't get many places where you just walk on to the beach from your garden."

Their four-bedroom plantation house was completed last year and is a big hit with their three children, Emily, 19, Harry, 17 and George, 15. "The boys love fishing and kite-surfing and the nature element." There is a deep-water marina and tennis courts; a spa and fine dining restaurant are due to be completed next year.

Celebrities are eyeing plots on the 1,100-acre island. "Tom Cruise turned up last time I was here, and Jane Fonda has stayed in our place," says Tim. "It is so secluded." Only residents and friends are allowed on the island, which has the Caribbean's longest private airstrip. Two planes are on standby to fly to Providenciales on the main Turks and Caicos islands for short-haul flights to Miami.

Paradise rarely comes without trouble however; last week it emerged that Britain's Foreign Affairs select committee has called for an investigation into allegations of corruption on Turks and Caicos involving the sale of Crown lands.

Happily



ANDREW CROWLEY; LAWRENCE LUCIER; STEPHEN LOCK

So secluded: Tim and Jackie Weller (below with daughter Emily) fell for a house (above) on the island, which has attracted Jane Fonda and Tom Cruise (left)



Ambergris Cay has been privately owned since 1800 and is not part of the Crown estate. "We've done everything by the book. All permits have been applied for, reviewed and approved by the government," says a spokesperson for DPS Development, who owns the island.

Turks and Caicos's tax-free status will appeal to some buyers, but it was the favourable rate of the dollar and the lifestyle that attracted the Wellers. "We much prefer staying in our own house to in a hotel. Other developments we saw were based around hotels."

The beach house is largely open-plan with high ceilings, outdoor wetroom and pool, though the Wellers did not buy the developer's furniture pack as it was "brash and American".

Over the next decade, about 70 architect-designed houses will be built on the island. But for the time being, iguanas are the predominant inhabitants. "It is great being the only person on the beach," says Tim. "Even if it all goes pear-shaped, and they don't do any more development, there is enough there already to enjoy. But we do need a few more Brits."

- ❖ Ambergris Cay plots start at £300,000. Four-bedroom plantation houses with pool and beach buggy cost £3 million. [www.quintessentiallyestates.com](http://www.quintessentiallyestates.com)
- ❖ For more information see [www.dpsdevelopment.com](http://www.dpsdevelopment.com)

