



west

OF THE CITY

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getaways
TURKS & CAICOS

by Tamara Moore

Breathtaking turquoise in every hue
surrounds me. The blinding white seems
endless. The brilliant heat warms my skin.

TURKS & CAICOS

I pinch myself to make sure that I am
not dreaming. I am relieved to find that
I am very much awake and lying on a
12-mile stretch of perfect sand. I am
on Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos
Islands. I am in paradise. ■



Home to the world's third largest barrier reef, Turks and Caicos is legendary for its diving and snorkeling, with some of the best snorkeling found on reefs right off the beach.



photo by Tamara Moore



photo courtesy Grace Bay Club



photo courtesy Grace Bay Club

Clockwise from top: The white sand and azure waters of Sapodilla Bay; The Lounge at the Grace Bay Club; The penthouse at the Grace Bay Club and Chalk Sound.



photo by Tamara Moore

» Providenciales, (Provo), is located just 550 miles south of Miami, and is the largest and most developed of the 40 islands and cays that make up the Turks and Caicos. Home to famous Grace Bay Beach – voted “best beach” by *Conde Nast* magazine for several years running – Grace Bay is best known for its luxury boutique hotels. There are no high rises and only two all-inclusive resorts on the whole island. Most accommodations are beautiful condo-style properties.

Grace Bay Club & Villas is one of Provo's most stunning resorts. It was the first all-suite luxury resort to be built on Grace Bay and enjoys the closest proximity to the ocean of any hotel on the island. It also boasts an expansive 1,100 feet of »



The spa at The Palms resort is a breathtaking facility that has graced the pages of many magazines.

Dining on the island is a gastronomic travellers dream. Undoubtedly the most romantic setting belongs to Grace Bay Club's Anacoana. Lit by tiki torches, guests may dine oceanfront at tables tiered under circular papalas or amid beach foliage in pods, just steps from the sand. Anacoana's new chef, Gary Gnassi, most recently of Barton G fame in Miami, tempts with his Trilogie Tasting menu. It begins with an amuse bouche, followed by a lobster appetizer, a fish course, a meat course and ends with a decadent chocolate desert. The meal is truly exquisite and completely unforgettable. A perfect evening ends at the adjacent lounge. It has a sexy South Beach feeling with daybeds surrounded by torches and firepits with sensual music playing in the background. Coyaba, an Arawak word meaning heavenly, is the only way to describe the experience at this decadent restaurant. Reputed to have the best dining on the island, it does not disappoint. The service is flawless; the food sublime; and the wines impressive, with all the finest champagnes gracing the extensive list.

Bay Bistro is one of the oldest oceanfront restaurants on the island. A favourite dinner spot for locals, expats and tourists alike. Coco Bistro is a fusion-style restaurant featuring a completely open-air dining room, set in a coconut grove with wonderful and innovative cuisine.

The Turks and Caicos has become a popular wedding destination in recent years. A couple may apply for a marriage license after "residing" in Turks »

» beachfront. The 21-suite adults-only hotel just re-opened in March after a multi-million dollar makeover, and is a contemporary vision. The villas, which opened last year are family-friendly and feature their own restaurant, pool and "Kid's Town," an eco-activity children's program.

Further down the beach, you'll find The Palms, a \$95 million, 72-suite luxury resort boasting a \$1.8 million infinity pool complete with swim-up bar and water banquettes, where guests can enjoy drinks without ever having to leave the pool. Another attractive feature is The Conch Kritters Club, where kids enjoy activities ranging from yoga to tennis. But, perhaps the most outstanding feature of the resort is the spa, which has graced the cover of numerous magazines. While awaiting their services, guests sip lemon water and relax by a breathtaking reflecting pool. I indulged in the Vespers Drift Away treatment: A head to toe massage complemented by stretches and aromatherapy.

Provo is an island meant for exploring and the best way to do so is by renting a car. If you crave tranquility, travel to the south side of the island. There you'll find Sapodilla Bay. Blink twice and you'll miss the turn, but it's worth the extra effort to search for it. The water is a beautiful shade of aqua, shallow and still as glass. You can pass hours there and the only footprints in the sand will be your own.

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» and Caicos for just 48 hours. The ceremony can then be performed anytime after the license is granted, which takes between one and two days, with the cost for the license just \$100. Weddings range from a simple barefoot beach ceremony for two, to a star-studded affair. Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner held their ultra private nuptials at the exclusive Parrot Cay Resort. Almost all resorts on the island offer wedding packages. Or, a couple may choose something entirely different; saying their "I do's" during a sunset sail aboard a catamaran, or having a private ceremony on a deserted isle. Either way, with Provo as a background any bride and groom are guaranteed a spectacular experience.

As beautiful as Provo is, you have to go out on the ocean to truly appreciate the pristine beaches and azure waters. There are many opportunities to do just that, with a plethora of tour companies and excursions to pick from. Home to the world's third largest barrier reef, Turks and Caicos is legendary for its diving and snorkeling, with some of the best snorkeling found on reefs right off the beach. If you don't fancy getting into the water, in Turtle Cove you will find the Undersea Explorer, a semi-submarine which is a favourite for children of all ages. Captain Alastair and host Betty will keep you entertained while you tour three exceptional reefs without ever getting your feet wet.

Provo is growing at a rapid pace, with many projects currently under construction. The development boom has also spread to the other, once remote Turks and Caicos Islands. Grand Turk is now home to a \$40 million cruise ship port and the opulent St. Charles Resort recently opened on North Caicos. The previously uninhabited West Caicos will become home to the ultra-luxurious and exclusive Ritz Carleton-managed, Molasses Reef Resort and Villas in 2008.

As I lounge on the beach, sipping my last strawberry daiquiri before I must leave for the airport, I'm already dreaming about my return trip to these magical islands. Perhaps, the penthouse suite at Grace Bay Club? Or will it be a private villa at The Ritz? Well a girl can dream, can't she? ■