

First Class ESCAPISM

NOT YOUR TYPICAL CHARTER DESTINATION, THE ISLANDS OF THE TURKS AND CAICOS OFFER MILES OF UNSPOILED BEACHES, WATERSPORTS AND AMENITIES TO RIVAL ANY CARIBBEAN HOT SPOT.

TEXT BY DANIELLE ARAGON CABRERA



BLUE HAVEN RESORT AND MARINA

TO ME, ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING ASPECTS OF TRAVEL is meeting expats—people who took everything they cherished in their lives and moved to a vacation destination or to the middle of nowhere. Maybe they wanted to get away from a too-hecktic life. Maybe they always had itchy feet as nomads meant to absorb as much of the world as possible. I've always been somewhat jealous of these types. But that is also the nature of the yachting lifestyle, isn't it? Having the ability to move from one destination to another by simply picking a point on a map and saying, "I want to go there."

The Turks and Caicos is such a destination. Many people you meet are not from there and those who are typically only are second or third generation. Aside from long-time Turks islanders, many residents first came to this British Overseas Territory on vacation and vowed to move here. Who could blame them? There's nearly 350 days of sunshine and with miles of uninhabited beachfront property, your neighbor could be anywhere from mere feet away to miles down the beach.

Now, Providenciales, or Provo as it is affectionately nicknamed, the territory's most developed island and largest town, is not what you would call a bustling city or business center—everything here caters to the tourist. You can move from hotel to hotel, availing yourself of each one's facilities. You're staying aboard your yacht in Blue Haven but want to use the spa at Amanyara? No problem. Heard that the breakfast at The Beach House was first rate? Well, then by all means, it can be arranged for tomorrow morning with no fuss. The stretch of beach at Grace Bay has been voted time and time again as the world's best and you can have beach chairs and lunch set up at The Alexandra Resort on that famous beach tomorrow. Nowhere have I seen so many hotels working together like a network, all willing to share in the wealth of and cater to the visitor.

Located 575 miles from Miami, Florida, south of The Bahamas chain and north of Hispaniola, the Turks and Caicos has traditionally been a stopping point for refueling and provisioning rather than a large-yacht destination. IGY Marinas looks to change that. The international group manages the marina part of the newly renovated Blue Haven Resort and Marina, the former Nikki Beach resort on Provo's northwestern tip. Catering to yachts up to 220 feet, the marina began welcoming yachts in summer 2013 before the grand opening in December. We spent a night here, sampling the marina's and island's many amenities before boarding the 142-foot Palmer Johnson *Lady J*, our host for the next three days.

While the aquamarine waters of the Turks and Caicos beckoned the next day, so did the island's delights. We began by taking a conch-cracking lesson at Da Conch Shack and then sampled some of the ubiquitous conch ceviche, which was lemony and superb, some of the best and freshest I've had. We then moved on to afternoon drinks at the Grace Bay Club, one of the island's adults-only resorts. Grace Bay Club has everything from a beachfront pop-up restaurant and bar to the Caribbean's longest bar: 90 feet long with an infinity edge that stretches it even farther into the horizon.

On land, there aren't many attractions beyond hotel amenities, but there are biking trails, some shopping in Grace Bay and high-end restaurants. Also, bird watching is given high marks. Watching flamingos frolicking in their natural habitat at the aptly named Flamingo Lake—also popular with anglers for bonefishing—enthralled me. The best sighting opportunities, however, are on North, Middle and East Caicos, where you can see plenty of flamingos in the lagoons, salt ponds and

PHOTOS BY DANIELLE ARAGON (LEFT PAGE, TOP RIGHT); COURTESY OF BLUE HAVEN (RIGHT PAGE)





mangrove wetlands, along with more than 170 bird species.

An afternoon helicopter flight over Provo revealed abundant undeveloped land between the many resorts that dot the islands and beachfront properties belonging to celebrities like Donna Karan, Bruce Willis, Oprah Winfrey and Keith Richards. They find here a sanctuary-like atmosphere that's conveniently close to the States.

We crisscrossed over miles of empty beaches, secluded bays and waters so blue they looked like someone had dropped food coloring in them. The barrier reef that surrounds the islands, the world's third largest barrier reef, creates a mirror-flat sea. We caught sight of a couple

of kitesurfers taking advantage of the area's trade winds and shallow beaches ideally suited to the sport.

We returned to Blue Haven Marina to board *Lady J*, eagerly anticipating our own sojourn and ready to get out on the water. Captain Stephen Bay leads the seasoned crew aboard *Lady J*. They are all watersports enthusiasts and were ready to show us the best of anchorages for a week of activities.

After a short cruise to the Northwest Point anchorage, we tendered to land for lunch and a spa treatment at the Amanyara resort. The resort sits inside two protected areas comprising 5,000 acres, the Northwest Point Marine Natural Park and Pond Nature Reserve, and is one of the most serene places I have ever visited. Wedged into natural surroundings, Amanyara feels more like Thailand or Bali than the British West Indies, although

these pages
The Turks and Caicos' horseshoe-shaped barrier reef makes for calm waters, perfect for kayaking, kitesurfing and paddleboarding. The crew of *Lady J* (far right, center) prepared sportfishing trips and a beach picnic for a fun day of watersports.



With miles of uninhabited beachfront property, your neighbor could be anywhere from mere feet away to miles down the beach.



LEFT PAGE: PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRISTA RECKHORNTURKS & CAICOS MAGAZINE (TOP LEFT), LJ HOUGHTING (TOP RIGHT), COURTESY OF LADY J (BOTTOM LEFT), DANIELLE ARAGON (BOTTOM RIGHT), LJ HOUGHTING (BOTTOM, TOP RIGHT)

AMANYARA



continuing that Robinson Crusoe-lost-in-paradise feel.

We returned aboard for an afternoon of watersports, swimming and snorkeling off of Amanyara where, just beyond the barrier reef, a 6,888-foot drop along the ocean floor forms an ideal wall for diving.

The next two days went by in a flash. While some of the ladies partook of another spa experience, this time at the Regent Palms Turks & Caicos, others enjoyed an afternoon of sportfishing, which is superb in this area. South Caicos is a renowned spot for lobster and conch. Captain Bay and crew are avid fishermen and returned from a short jaunt with no less than five three-footers in hand. Their appetites whetted, they planned for an afternoon of bonefishing upon their return to Blue Haven Marina.

One afternoon, the crew took us all aboard *Lady J's* 32-foot Intrepid for a beach picnic on Fort George Cay. Uninhabited and a protected national park, this tiny cay was once a fortified island that protected the waters from pirates. Snorkelers easily can spot 19th century cannons lying underwater among swirling shades of turquoise and natural sandbars appearing at low tide.

As *Lady J* made her way south to the more typical charter destination of the British Virgin Islands, Captain Bay vowed to return at the end of the charter season. The Turks and Caicos had proven to be a worthy spot, a little slice of heaven away from the Caribbean's crowded docks. I promised to come back as well. Who knows, maybe you'll find me here five years from now, a true expat, having left the rat race and living the dream. ■

fact file

CAPITAL: Cockburn Town

POPULATION: 31,000 over the entire 40-island chain

CURRENCY: U.S. Dollar

LANGUAGE: English

TIME ZONE: Eastern Standard Time, UTC-5

CLIMATE: The average annual temperature is 83°F. The hottest month is September. With less than 30 inches of rainfall per year, the island receives plenty of sunshine.

GETTING THERE: Providenciales International Airport has daily flights arriving from New York, Miami, Canada and England. Provo Air Center is the private FBO on Providenciales and has on-site customs and immigration.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS: A valid passport and a return ticket are required for all visitors. Most

nationalities do not need a visa.

YACHT ENTRY: Fees for pleasure craft are currently \$50 at entry and departure (total of \$100), entitling the vessel to remain in the islands for seven days without paying customs duties. After seven days, the captain must obtain a cruising permit from the Collector of Customs for \$300.

DOCKAGE: Blue Haven Resort and Marina accepts yachts up to 220 feet. The channel depth when entering the marina is 8.5 feet at low tide.

Adam Foster,
Marina General Manager
Tel: +1 (649) 332-7676
Email: afoster@bluehaventci.com

TOURISM:
www.turksandcaicostourism.com

CHARTERING LADY J:
www.ladyjyachtcharters.com

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