

Caicos Islands



These islands, headed by Providenciales (or 'Provo'), have pristine resorts dotted with palm trees, perfect beaches lined with honey-brown sunbathers and warm, glistening shallows.

At night wine and wafts of garlic accompany the chatter from intimate alfresco restaurants, and people stroll under the stars to lively bars where the music has a *goombay* beat. Belongers mix with visitors at karaoke nights, where hilarity and talent are shown in equal measures.

The Caicos chain arcs through West Caicos, Providenciales, North Caicos, Middle Caicos, East Caicos and South Caicos. The rocky landscape of Middle Caicos has created some picturesque coves and private beaches overlooked by a range of cute cottages perfect for solitude, while lush North Caicos produces a range of exotic sweet fruits and fantastic conditions for biking and hiking. West Caicos has small sandy beaches and a historic plantation, while the East and South Caicos celebrate their undisturbed inhabitants; flocks of leggy flamingos and sleepy wild donkeys.

The islands, despite their different characters, share a common bond; magically warm and soothing jade seas that soak away the stresses of modern living. While there are any number of wonderful diving experiences around the Caicos Islands, snorkeling is also an easy option with some reefs just a short swim off the beach.

The tiny cays sprayed around the main islands are made for day trips. Visit some docile and friendly rock iguanas, wander white shores looking for shells and sand dollars, cycle through tiny villages or just sit and stare at that incredibly beautiful and wide blue horizon.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Heading out for a boisterous night of bingo or exuberant karaoke at a **Turtle Cove** (p249) nightspot
- Meeting Curious, an iguana who belts across the sand like Michael Jordan when thrown an edible morsel, on **Little Water Cay** (p252)
- Biking around lush **North Caicos** (p253) spotting gangly flamingos and predatory ospreys
- Melting into a chocolate soufflé under the stars at romantic Grace's Cottage restaurant, **Grace Bay** (p249)
- Swimming with docile stingrays as they glide through the shallows of **French Cay** (p252)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 649 ■ POPULATION: 13,302 ■ AREA: 178 SQ MILES

History

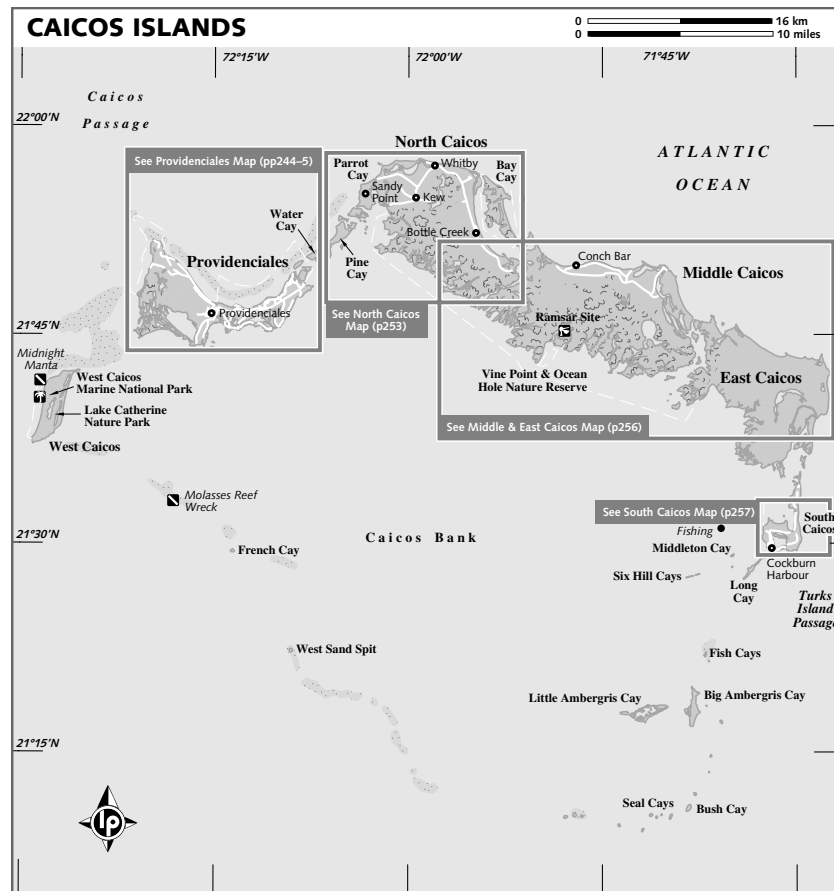
From something as simple as an ancient paddle and a few cave drawings, historians have observed that Lucayan Indians simultaneously inhabited the Turks, Caicos and Bahamian islands, and were therefore the earliest known inhabitants of the region. These two countries also share a history of mining 'white gold' or salt, which in the Turks and Caicos proved highly viable until the 1950s.

The Caicos Islands were 'discovered' by seven millionaires (including Teddy Roosevelt III and a couple of DuPonts) in the early 1960s – they leased land from the British government, built a small airstrip for their private planes, and constructed a deep-water anchorage for their yachts and those of

friends escaping the rigors of US East Coast winters. By the 1970s, Providenciales was the near-private domain of a group of wealthy escape artists from long-john climates.

Around the same time, Count Ferdinand Czernin, son of the last prime minister of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, planned a Walden Pond-like resort on tiny Pine Cay, which later became the exclusive Meridian Club. This development was followed by Club Med, which opened its doors on Provo in 1984, and with this the Turks and Caicos started to boom. In the blink of an eye, the islands, which previously had no electricity, acquired satellite TV.

Today finance, tourism and fishing generate most income but the islands cannot



survive without British aid, despite continuing calls for independence.

National Parks

Nature lovers will enjoy exploring this region. There are more than 30 protected national parks, sanctuaries, nature reserves and historical sites, run by the **Turks & Caicos National Parks** (p44).

The **Turks & Caicos National Trust** (☎ 649-941-5710; tc.natrust@tcitway.tc; PO Box 540, Providenciales, Caicos) has established two underwater snorkeling trails off Provo's Smith's and Bight Reefs. It has initiated countrywide studies of bird populations, and in 1999 gained international funding to manage the Ramsar wetlands in North, Middle and East Caicos. See the Environment chapter (p44) for more information and contact details.

Providenciales has the **Northwest Point Marine National Park**, whose inland saline ponds attract roseate spoonbills and other waterfowl, and the **Chalk Sound National Park**, a cay-studded lagoon. **Princess Alexandra National Park** includes the shore and offshore reefs along Grace Bay and the cays northeast of Provo.

West Caicos has the **West Caicos Marine National Park**, and **Lake Catherine Nature Reserve**, a breeding ground for flamingos, ospreys and water birds.

The North, Middle and East Caicos share the **Ramsar Site**. The **Middle Caicos Reserve & Trail System** is part of this park, and incorporates a marsh and intertidal wetlands; a breeding site and nursery for waterfowl, lobster, conch and fish. Middle Caicos also has the **Conch Bar Caves National Park**, an extensive cave system, and the **Vine Point & Ocean Hole Nature Reserve**.

North Caicos enjoys the **Three Mary Cays National Park** and **East Bay Islands National Park**, both favored by seabirds.

South Caicos has two parks; the **Admiral Cockburn Land & Sea Park** with coral reefs, and the **Belle Sound & Admiral Cockburn Cays Nature Reserve**.

Getting There & Away

Most travelers to the Caicos Islands fly into Providenciales International Airport in downtown Providenciales. For information on flights to the islands, see (p251).

Getting Around

You will need your own transport if you want to explore the main island outside of

Providenciales' main tourist centers. You can rent cars, scooters and bicycles. Some public buses run infrequently on limited routes.

Scheduled flights depart to the other Caicos islands regularly. Otherwise a plethora of trips, charters and tours depart daily to the islands and their cays from Turtle Cove and the Leeward Marinas (see Tours, p247).

PROVIDENCIALES

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As recently as 1964, the island of Providenciales (colloquially called 'Provo') did not have a single wheeled vehicle. Provo is now the most developed island of the Turks and Caicos Islands and tourism is booming.

Provo's iconic beach, the sugar-white **Grace Bay Beach** with its extraordinary aquamarine waters, begins east of Turtle Cove and stretches along the north shore's 5-mile-long Grace Bay to Leeward Marina. White flamingos often alight on the beaches and golf courses at sunrise, while tourism sleeps.

A wealth of resort hotels and residential developments are expanding along the beach and the whole north shore at a rate of knots. This is especially so now that seven-story buildings are permitted on the seafloor, both saddening and infuriating Belongers.

East of Provo, the entire north shore and offshore waters are within the protected Princess Alexandra National Park. The south shore is a series of connecting lakes and sounds. Away from the beaches, Provo's appeal lies in its western rugged hills and ridges, and national parks.

Despite the boom in tourism, Provo still has a quiet charm that makes the place a pleasure to explore, and the Belongers are a delight to chat and joke with. The island's tiny cays and surrounding pockets of sparkling sea are visually and sensually stunning. These can be easily reached by chartered boat or excursion, while miles and miles of coral reefs lie temptingly close to shore. Smith's Reef, offshore from the Turtle Cove Marina, and the beach outside the Coral Gardens hotel both offer highly rewarding snorkeling.

Orientation

The main four-lane highway, Leeward Hwy, runs east from downtown along the island's spine, ending at Heaving Down Rock on the eastern coast. A coastal highway, Grace Bay Rd, parallels Grace Bay.

A separate coast road runs northwest from downtown to Blue Hills and Wheeland settlements, beyond which it continues to Northwest Point. This potholed and corrugated road has been slightly improved, but take care when driving. Another very potholed route is South Dock Rd, which runs from South Dock to Sapodilla and Taylor Bays, and along the peninsula that passes Silly Cay.

Information

BOOKSTORES

Most resort boutiques sell a small supply of books and magazines.

Unicorn Bookstore (☎ 649-941-5458; IGA Graceway Mall, Leeward Hwy) Has a large selection including local publications, some great books and maps on the Turks and Caicos, newspapers and magazines.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance & Emergencies (☎ 911)

Fire (☎ 649-946-4444)

Police (☎ 649-946-4259; Old Airport Rd)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Associated Medical Practices Clinic (☎ 649-946-4242; Leeward Hwy) Clinic with several private doctors; has a recompression chamber.

Provo Discount Pharmacy (☎ 649-946-4844; Central Square Plaza, Leeward Hwy; ☎ 8am-10pm)

MONEY

First Caribbean International Bank (☎ 649-946-4245; Butterfield Sq, Leeward Hwy)

Scotiabank (☎ 649-946-4750; Cherokee Rd) Has a 24hr ATM.

Western Union (☎ 649-946-5484; Butterfield Sq, Leeward Hwy)

POST & COMMUNICATIONS

There are public phone booths at several roadside locations. Dial ☎ 111 to place credit-card calls.

DHL Worldwide Express (☎ 649-946-4352; Butterfield Sq, Leeward Hwy)

Federal Express (FedEx; ☎ 649-946-4682; www.fedex.com; Center Complex, Leeward Hwy)

Post office (☎ 649-946-4676; Old Airport Rd; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Thu, 8am-12:30pm & 2-5:30pm Fri) Next to the police station.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information booth (Arrivals Hall, Providenciales International Airport)

Tourist office (☎ 649-946-4970; www.turksandcaicos tourism.com; Stubbs Diamond Plaza; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Sights

Attractions for sightseers are rather slim downtown, but history buffs might check out the ruins of **Cheshire Hall** (Leeward Hwy), a 1790s plantation house constructed by British Loyalists.

A rugged road leads from the settlement of Wheeland (a 4WD might be more comfortable), northwest of downtown, to **Malcolm Roads**, a superb two-mile-long beach good for snorkeling and popular with locals on weekends. Following this arduous, windy, hilly, rocky track, you're soon amid cacti, with views over the inland saline lakes.

Another dirt road leads from Crystal Bay Resorts, northwest of Wheeland, to **Northwest Point**. From here you can walk east to a light-house. It's a desperate drive, with deep sand

JOJO: A NATIONAL TREASURE

JoJo is a wonderful ambassador for marine life who well and truly holds the hearts of Turks and Caicos islanders. For more than two decades this 7ft bottlenose male dolphin has cruised the waters off Provo and North Caicos on his own, abandoning or deserted by his fellow dolphins. He actively seeks out human contact and has built a close relationship with a handler appointed and paid for by the state.

When he first appeared, he was shy and limited his human contact to following or playing in the bow waves of boats, but he now often appears when people are in the water to join in the fun. JoJo even crossed the Turks Island Passage and hung around Grand Turk for a month some years ago.

Recognized as a national treasure by the Ministry of Natural Resources, JoJo's handler studies his behavior and looks out for him as part of the **JoJo Dolphins Project** (☎ 649-941-5617; www.marinewildlife.org; PO Box 153, Providenciales, Caicos).

JoJo, as with any wild dolphin, interprets an attempt to touch him as an aggressive act, and will react to defend himself, so please bear this in mind if you're lucky enough to experience his playfulness and companionship for a while.

PROVIDENCIALES

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ATLANTIC OCEAN

Downtown Providenciales

CAICOS ISLANDS

and potholes, and you shouldn't attempt it unless you have courage and a large 4WD.

Protecting reefs off Provo's west shore, Northwest Point Marine National Park encompasses several saline lakes that attract breeding and migrant waterfowl. The largest is Pigeon Pond & Frenchman's Creek Nature Reserve. Other ponds – notably Northwest Point Pond and Frenchman's Creek – encompass tidal flats and mangrove swamps along the west coast, attracting fish and fowl in large numbers. You'll have to hike to get here, and come equipped with food and water.

CHALK SOUND NATIONAL PARK

The waters of this 3-mile-long bay, 2 miles southwest of downtown, define 'turquoise.' The color is uniform: a vast, unrippled, electric-blue carpet eerily and magnificently studded with countless tiny islets.

A slender peninsula separates the sound from the sea. The peninsula is scalloped with beach-lined bays, notably Sapodilla Bay. A potholed road runs along the peninsula; although it is accessible, drive carefully! Unfortunately large vacation homes along both sides of the peninsula clip the views and hinders public access from the roads to the water and beaches.

At the far eastern end of the Sapodilla Bay peninsula, a rocky hilltop boasts rock carvings, dating back to 1844. The slabs are intricately carved with Roman lettering that records the names of sailors shipwrecked here and the dates of their sojourns. The carvings are reached via a rocky trail that begins 200yd east of the Mariner Hotel; it leads uphill to the summit, which offers wonderful views over the island and Chalk Sound.

CAICOS CONCH FARM

Located near the northeastern tip of Provo, Caicos Conch Farm (☎ 649-946-5643/5330; fax 649-946-5849; tour adult/child \$6/3; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) claims to be 'the world's only conch farm.' This place is a little creepy and is basically a battery-farm of the critters. Nonetheless, the farm is striving to protect the Caribbean queen conch from extinction by raising the mollusks commercially for export and local use. On a 20-minute tour, you can learn how conchs are grown from eggs to adults.

Activities

DIVING

All the dive operators offer a range of dive and snorkel options, from introductory 'resort courses' to PADI certification (\$350 to \$395). Most offer free hotel pick-ups and drop-offs. Dive sites include most Caicos islands and cays. For further snorkeling options, see right.

Art Pickering's Provo Turtle Divers (☎ 649-946-4232; www.provoturtledivers.com; Turtle Cove Marina) is a popular outfit offering two-tank and night dives (\$95/65). Tailored trips to French Cay and West Caicos are also popular. This company also has facilities at the Ocean Club Resort (p248).

Big Blue (☎ 649-946-5034; www.bigblue.tc; Leeward Marina) runs a large range of diving trips and courses, including a useful refresher course for \$125. Two-tank dives are \$135 and the diving packages are good value (four days of two-tank dives costs \$485).

Dive Provo (☎ 649-946-5040; www.diveprovo.com; Ports of Call, Grace Bay Rd) has two-tank dives (\$100) and night dives (\$71) at sites around the island, plus photo and video services.

SPORTFISHING & BONEFISHING

A plethora of boat charters and trips can be arranged from Leeward and Turtle Cove Marinas. Try the following operators.

Catch the Wave Charters (☎ 649-941-3047; catchthewave@tcway.tc; Leeward Marina) runs a heap of chartered trips, from \$400/800 per half day/full day for three fishing fans, and cruisers from \$500/1050 per half/full day for up to eight people. Yummy luxury lobster and wine picnics, and barbecues, can be provided.

Bonefish Unlimited (☎ 649-946-4874; www.provo.net/bonefish) is run by veteran bonefishing guide Captain Barr Gardiner. Call to arrange a tailored half- or full-day fishing trip.

Silver Deep (☎ 649-946-5612; www.silverdeep.com; Turtle Cove Marina) specializes in fishing excursions, but also runs a number of day trips to other Caicos islands and cays. Prices upon application.

J&B Tours (see right) has bonefishing excursions for \$240/450 per half/full day.

Beyond the Blue (☎ 649-231-1703; www.beyondtheblue.com; Leeward Marina, Providenciales) will take you on fishing excursions to Belle Sound, South Caicos and design itineraries to suit your requirements.

BOAT EXCURSIONS & SNORKELING

There are plenty of operators offering snorkeling trips to the cays. The following are some renowned and popular choices.

J&B Tours (☎ 649-946-5047; www.jbtours.com; Leeward Marina) is a friendly team who runs great, affordable trips to suit all tastes, budgets and ages. A half-day trip (adult/child \$35/20) takes in a snorkel and visit to Little Water Cay's protected iguanas; ask to meet the iguana aptly named Curious. Also on offer is a romantic island getaway (\$225 per couple), glow-worm cruise (adult/child \$60/40), power-boat charters (from \$675), deep-sea fishing charters (from \$150 per person) and waterskiing (\$60).

Sail Provo (☎ 649-946-4783; www.sailprovo.com; Leeward Marina) offers half-day (\$58) and full-day (\$108) snorkeling excursions to Little Water Cay aboard 48- to 52ft catamarans. It also offers sunset cruises (\$58) and private charters.

Undersea Explorer Semi Submarine (☎ 649-231-0006; www.caicosouts.com; Turtle Cove Marina; adult/child \$40/30) will take you on a cruise to the reef in a boat with a glass observatory. The observatory, located 5ft below the waves, was developed for Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Private charters are also on offer.

Scooter Bob's (☎ 649-946-4684; scooter@provo.net; Turtle Cove Marina Plaza) Rents snorkel gear for \$10 per day.

WATER SPORTS & BOAT RENTALS

Turtle Parasail (☎ 649-941-0643; Leeward Marina) offers parasailing (\$70) and banana-boat rides (\$25).

Windsurfing Provo (☎ 649-241-1687; windpro@tcway.tc; Ocean Club Resort) offers windsurfing for \$25 per hour, as well as lessons for beginners. Sailing is \$35/20/90 per hour/additional hour/day, or rent kayaks for \$15 per hour. Motor boats can be rented for \$70/110/190 per two hours/one day/two days.

Sun & Fun Seasports (☎ 649-946-5724; Leeward Marina) rents jet skis (\$90/240/300 per hour/one day/two days) and jet boats (\$160/300/400 per hour/one day/two days), for two to eight people.

Parasail 500ft above the ocean for \$70 (a minimum weight applicable for children) at **Captain Marvin's Watersports** (☎ 649-231-0643; www.captainmarvinsparasail.com), or take a banana-boat ride (\$25).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Club Med Turkoise (p248) is noted for its tennis facilities, but you'll find similar tennis facilities at most resorts.

Phillip Outten (☎ 649-941-3610; phillipoutten@tcway.tc; Venetian Rd, off Leeward Hwy), one of the island's noted artists (p250) and a really nice guy, offers horseback rides along the beach (\$60 per 1½ hours).

Provo Ponies (☎ 649-241-6350; Long Bay; from \$70) also offers rides along quiet hill roads, canals and beaches.

Tours

Big Blue (☎ 649-946-5034; www.bigblue.tc; Leeward Marina) Runs cycling eco-adventure and kayak tours on North Caicos (\$60), plus diving trips and courses (opposite).

J&B Tours (☎ 649-946-5047; jill@jbtours.com; Leeward Marina) Offers an 'Island Exploration' tour combining historical and scenic sites with snorkeling (including the Marifax wreck), plus picnic and free drinks (\$119; children \$70). Also runs fishing and boat trips (opposite).

Ocean Outback (☎ 649-941-5810, 649-231-0824; www.provo.net/oceanoutback/oceanoutbackhome.html) Runs a great-value full-day 'Outback Adventure Cruise' (adult/child \$90/40) that takes in a pirates' cave (with 200-year-old carvings), and includes snorkeling, visits to secluded beaches and a barbecue lunch with unlimited drinks. Boat rentals and private charters are available along with glow-worm cruises. Island drop-offs and live-aboard diving (all inclusive board and meals plus access to dive sites) are also on offer.

Festivals & Events

The archipelago's biggest bash is held on Provo each July and August. The **Provo Summer Festival** features regattas, float parades, partying and a 'Miss Turks & Caicos Beauty Pageant' that garners noisy input from everyone. These lively events are spread over a week around Emancipation Day.

The **Turks & Caicos International Billfish Tournament** and the **Invitational Billfish Tournament** are held in July; the two events comprise the Turks & Caicos Billfish Challenge.

A **Culture Night** is held in mid-May.

Sleeping

Much of the accommodation on Provo is quite pricey, but the hotels, resorts, villas and condominium resorts along Grace Bay Beach are of very good quality. Several dozen fab villas are available for rent along Chalk Sound and the Sapodilla peninsula. Cheaper efficiency apartments are in lovely spots along Turtle Cove and the northwestern

beaches. Browse these websites for some alternative rentals; www.wherewhenhow.com and www.provo.net. Also check the hotels' websites listed here for discounts.

DOWNTOWN & TURTLE COVE

Airport Inn (☎ 649-941-3514; fax 649-941-3281; Airport Plaza; r \$65-75; ☎ ☎) A perfect option if you're in transit between islands, this small inn is at the airport and has rooms with modern decor, cable TV and phone; some have kitchenettes. It offers special rates for airline crew, free rides to the beach, plus 15% off car-rental rates for guests.

Turtle Cove Inn (☎ 649-946-4203; www.turtlecoveho.tel.com; Turtle Cove Marina; d \$85; ☎ ☎ ☎) Don't pay any extra here for rooms that overlook the marina, it's not worth it. Although this place is a bit tired and the pool is tiny, it is a good budget option (ask about specials), set in the centre of Turtle Cove's small bar and restaurant strip. Rooms have cable TV and phone. There are also some excellent dive packages available, too. Ask about rates.

Travellers Rest Hotel (☎ 649-946-4927; www.travelersresthotel.com; Airport Rd, downtown Provo; r \$100; ☎ ☎ ☎) This neat and spacious hotel is good for those jumping on a plane. It's two minutes away from the airport, and you can take the complimentary shuttles that run between the airport and Princess Alexander National Park's 12-mile-long beach.

Miramar Resort (☎ 649-946-4240; www.miramarresort.tc; Turtle Cove; d \$120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Set on a hill above the Turtle Cove Marina, it is a steep walk up from the area's bars and restaurants. The 6-acre site has a pleasant Mediterranean air about it, and the rooms are spacious, attractive and airy, with great views. All rooms come with fridge, cable TV, phone and Internet connection. The resort has a pool, gym, tennis court, wine bar and fairly gloomy restaurant. Diving packages are on offer.

Mahluf Apartment (☎ 649-946-4989; www.silkroad.tc; Turtle Cove; apt \$150; ☎ ☎) This modern, light apartment, with a fab L-shaped pool and clear ocean views, is close to the night life of Turtle Cove. It's located in the lower level of a private home and a five-night minimum stay is required.

GRACE BAY & EAST PROVIDENCIALES

Midrange

Caribbean Paradise Inn (☎ 649-946-5022; www.para-dise.tc; Grace Bay; r \$140; ☎ ☎ ☎) At Paradise

Inn's heart is a small, attractive pool fringed by bougainvillea. There's a bar in a canopied patio, where buffet breakfasts are served. Rooms have rattan furnishings, terracotta-tiled floors, king-size beds, light that pours in through French windows opening onto wide balconies. It's only 300yd from the beach.

Comfort Suites (☎ 649-946-8888; www.comfortsuites.com; Grace Bay; r \$150; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) This comfortable, friendly and amazingly efficient hotel is a great deal. The location is central to Grace Bay's restaurants and bars, but it's a fifteen-minute walk to the beach. The rooms are cheerful and roomy, and furnished with sofas, refrigerator, coffeemaker, cable TV, in-room safe and ceiling fans. A complimentary breakfast of croissant and *pain au chocolat* (chocolate croissant) is served in the courtyard alongside the lively outdoor bar and small swimming pool. Good dive packages should also be checked out.

Sibonné Hotel & Beach Club (☎ 649-946-5547; www.sibonne.com; Grace Bay; r \$175; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) This small and romantic inn sits on the beach and has comfortable rooms set around a garden strewn with hammocks and palm trees. A fabulous restaurant and bar sit adjacent to the freshwater pool and overlook the beach. The renowned Bay Bistro serves a delicious grilled vegetable and brie tart, and desserts involve lots of chocolate wickedness. What else do you need other than elasticized clothes? Dive and golf packages are offered, and regular specials bring this place within a midrange budget.

Other beachside recommendations include **Alexandra Resort & Spa** (☎ 649-946-5807; www.alexandrasort.com; Grace Bay; r \$140; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) for its great views, children's activities and bubbling spa and the **Aquamarine Beach Houses** (☎ 649-941-5690; www.aquamarinebeachhouses.com; Grace Bay; r \$145; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)), which has stunning views over Grace Bay and a white and light decor.

Top End

Ocean Club Resort (☎ 649-946-5880; www.oceanclubresorts.com; Grace Bay; r \$225; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) The first-class condos here are set in beautifully manicured grounds with shaded hammocks slung between the palms, a swim-up bar, fitness room and a night-lit tennis court. The resort also runs a dive operation.

Sands (☎ 649-941-5199; www.thesandsort.com; Grace Bay; d \$225; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) This beachside

resort is quiet and has modern rental condos plus it's blessed with the convivial Hemingway's Bar & Restaurant (p250); the cocktails and mango-and-shrimp salad are delicious.

Coral Gardens (☎ 649-941-3713; www.coralgardens.com; Grace Bay; d \$300; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) Has huge, well-lit two-bedroom suites with king-size beds and wrap-around plate-glass windows. The hotel sits on the beach and has the Whitehouse Reef directly offshore; great for easy snorkeling. You will need transport to get around as it's away from the action.

Also recommended:

Beaches Resort & Spa (☎ 649-946-8000; www.beaches.com; Grace Bay; r \$350; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) A popular all-inclusive 45-acre resort preferred by families; there's a great kid's club on site.

Club Med Turkoise (☎ 649-946-5500; www.clubmed.com; r per person \$190; (X) (B) (D) (E)) This 70-acre all-inclusive adult-only resort is beloved of single thirty-somethings who want to play hard.

Point Grace (☎ 649-946-5096; www.pointgrace.com; r \$600; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) There's real class and luxury at this boutique hotel.

Grace Bay Club (☎ 649-946-5757; www.gracebayclub.com; r \$650; (P) (X) (B) (D) (E)) A lush 5-acre world centered on an Andalusian-style mansion and a plaza with fountain, waterfall and real burping frogs.

WEST PROVIDENCIALES

Serendipity (☎ 649-946-4787; www.serendipity.tc; Babalua Beach; apt per week \$800) This pristine, modern and airy one-bedroom, self-contained apartment is on the lower level of a private home that sits on a ridge overlooking the ocean. The views are fabulous, although it's a 15-minute walk from the beach.

Eating & Drinking

There are French influences aplenty in the Provo restaurants, and this doesn't just mean lots of cream and butter sauces. Subtle flavorings and fresh combinations create some imaginative menus.

The northwestern shore has some good Bahamian takeouts; vegetarians are well catered for.

DOWNTOWN & TURTLE COVE

Tiki Hut (☎ 649-941-5341; Turtle Cove Inn, mains \$10-25; (X) breakfast, lunch & dinner, closed Sun) Adjacent to Turtle Cove Marina, this is a good place for breakfast, but an even better place for Wednesday night's \$10 barbecue; a 13-year tradition that packs out the place. Chicken,

ribs or steaks are served with sautéed vegetables, and with garlic-mashed potatoes so creamy they would make an Irishman cry. Buckets of beer at \$20 are guzzled by this happy crowd. Don't miss out!

Baci Ristorante (☎ 649-941-3044; Harbour Towne Plaza, Turtle Cove; mains \$10-27; (X) Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat & Sun) This classy place has terracotta-tiled floors and wrought-iron furnishings, plus a bougainvillea-shaded patio. It serves some truly grand grub; blackened snapper with lemon sauce, penne with vodka-chicken and the luscious chocolate pâté with crème anglaise and fruit coulis.

Magnolia Winebar & Restaurant (☎ 649-946-4240; www.miramarresort.tc; Miramar Resort, Turtle Cove; mains \$12-28; (X) lunch & dinner) The restaurant offers a view over Turtle Cove, a selection of mainly French wines and specializes in Asian-Caribbean cuisine, such as sesame seared tuna with wok-fried veggies, baby bok choy, and coconut wasabi with mashed potato.

Go Fish (☎ 649-941-4646; Centre Mews, Leeward Hwy; (X) breakfast & lunch) Offers fish specials to eat in or takeout. Also has herb roast chicken.

IGA Supermarket (☎ 649-941-5000; Graceway Plaza, Leeward Hwy; (X) 7am-10pm) For deli foods, great fresh fruit and veg, vegetarian soya dishes and all other foodstuffs, head for the region's best and largest food store.

GRACE BAY & EAST PROVIDENCIALES

Many of the resort hotels also have fabulous restaurants and some lively and fun bars that are open to nonguests.

There's a heap of great informal eateries at the Ports of Call plaza and along Grace Bay Rd, within a five-minute walk of the Comfort Suites, all with vegetarian dishes on the menu.

Island Scoop Icecreams (☎ 649-241-4230; Grace Bay Plaza, Grace Bay Rd; ice cream \$3; (X) 10am-9pm) A couple of very smart cookies are selling heaps of this lush and creamy ice cream, gelato and sorbets to outlets around the island. Try the wonderful mango gelato; it's magic!

Calico Jack's (☎ 649-946-5120; upstairs, Ports of Call plaza; mains \$8-20; (X) dinner Sun-Fri) This lively bar and restaurant is known for its gazpacho (\$5) and yummy great-value pizzas. Friday nights it is the place to be; and on the outdoor deck carousing with the band and fun-loving residents.

Danny Buoy's Irish Pub & Restaurant (☎ 649-946-5921; Grace Bay Rd; mains \$9-15; (X) lunch & dinner)

A Celt set up this pub, and did a genuinely good job on it. Walk in and see the polished wooden bar, draft beers and row of behind-shined barstools, and you would swear that you're in a misty part of boggy Ireland. That is, apart from the Becks beer and a menu that would please an English country lord no end; bangers and mash with baked beans, fish and chips – oh, simple joys. Live music and quiz nights add to the fun.

Coyaba (☎ 649-941-3713; Coral Gardens, Grace Bay; mains \$18-35; (X) lunch & dinner) This place offers elegant dining under a canopy at a lovely beachside spot. Highlights feature such dishes as Atlantic salmon wrapped in filo and stuffed with goat cheese, anise, lobster mushroom, saffron and vanilla: yum!

Coco Bistro Restaurant (☎ 649-946-5369; Ports of Call plaza, Grace Bay Rd; mains \$25-30; (X) lunch & dinner) The combined tropical and rustic style of Coco Bistro is obviously French, as is the influence on the menu. Surrounded by abundant Haitian art, choose from fresh indoor dining, or the alfresco option on a palm-shaded patio. Creative dishes include mussels in curry and hurricane ginger shrimp.

Grace's Cottage (☎ 649-946-8147; www.pointgrace.com; Point Grace; mains \$26-35; (X) lunch & dinner) Possibly the finest dining in Caicos. There's an old wood-lined bar and intimate tables clothed in crisp white linen set among flowering shrubs in an outdoor courtyard. The superb dishes are unpretentious and delicious; gorgonzola and broccoli soup, grilled mango with lemon and orange duck, and chocolate soufflé. A romantic and very special meal is enhanced by professional and friendly staff.

Entertainment

Banana Boat Bar & Grill (☎ 649-941-5706; mains \$15-18; (X) lunch & dinner) This atmospheric and gaily painted place, adjoining Turtle Cove Marina, serves good grilled dishes, burgers and Bahamian cooking. And the nightlife here is brilliant: Thursday is CD night (bring your own, and preferably not Leonard Cohen or The Wiggles); Friday is a live calypso or reggae band; Saturday is karaoke, with renditions sung to much mirth and commentary; and Sunday night is bingo, with jackpots of up to \$15,000! The latter is a raucous event that could possibly be the best night in town.

Calico Jack's (☎ 649-946-5120; upstairs, Ports of Call plaza) This place gets packed on a Friday

night, with live calypso, reggae and soca bands playing on the outdoor deck. Regulars also recommend the pizza restaurant.

Bambooz Bar & Grill (☎ 649-946-8146; Salt Mills Plaza, Grace Bay Rd; mains \$9-18; 🍷 dinner) *The* hot spot: Thursday night karaoke brings in the heavyweight political and religious hoopla, as well as some serious crooners to belt out their favorites (country-and-western ballads go down a storm). The action starts around 9pm and on weekends continues until the early hours.

Hemingway's on the Beach (☎ 649-946-5199; Sands Resort, Grace Bay) This great little bar serves some multihued cocktails and tasty plates of food, while also celebrating the sunset with regular live music.

Hey It's José (☎ 649-946-4812; Central Square Plaza, Leeward Hwy) The free movies on Saturday night from 9pm pull in the crowds, as do the half-price Margaritas at happy hour (which in Provo normally lasts two hours).

COLORFUL MEMORIES

Art fans will love the range of original and affordable artworks on sale in Provo. Some are sold in local stores and hotel reception areas from \$15 for an original oil or acrylic painting! Many of these artworks are copies of original Haitian paintings, but are still talented depictions in their own right. Make sure you hunt out the truly talented Turks and Caicos stars, including the following headline acts/galleries.

- **Anna Bourne** The North Caicos Art Society in Whitby (North Caicos) sponsor local art, emphasizing silkscreen painting. Bourne, who lives on Provo, is perhaps the leading artist in the genre; she paints on silk with French dyes.
- **Dwight A Outten** (☎ 649-941-4545; www.artprovo.com; Art Provo, Ocean Club Plaza) Love of nature and all things Caicos obviously flows in the blood, for Dwight's flamingos, indigenous birds and island houses are similarly as catching, and arguably as good as the paintings of his Rastafarian cousin Phillip Outten.
- **Jean Taylor Gallery** (☎ 5649-231-2708; Grace Bay Plaza, Grace Bay Rd) The gallery opens on demand only, but Taylor's unique vision of Bahamian life and humor also can be seen at Art Provo in Ocean Club Plaza.
- **Phillip Outten Gallery** (☎ 649-941-3610; phillipoutten@tcway.tc; Venetian Rd, off Leeward Hwy) Some people consider genial Rastafarian Phillip Outten the leading artist in the Turks and Caicos. His home – gaily painted in Rasta colors – is his gallery, and he always welcomes visitors. His best paintings are of the animals and nature he so obviously relishes.

Al Vern's Craft Market sits on the side of Turquoise Rd, and is a collection of small huts selling local paintings and crafts. You will also find some wonderful metal carvings depicting a range of scenes: underwater mermaids and mermen entwined with fish and seaweed; school buses full of cheerful kids; and cycling Rastafarians. The artists use metal cut from old car wrecks, which is then painted and varnished.

Bamboo Gallery (☎ 649-946-4748; www.provo.net/bamboo; Market Place, Leeward Hwy) and **Art Provo** (☎ 649-941-4545; www.artprovo.com; Ocean Club Plaza) are two fabulous galleries that sell many leading and local artists' vibrant works.

DANCE CLUBS

Most of the upscale resorts in Grace Bay have dance clubs, including Beaches Resort & Spa and Club Med Turkoise who welcome nonguests with a paid entry fee (both places charge \$30).

Sound Stage (Grace Bay, Leeward Hwy; 🎧 4pm-midnight Mon, 4pm-2am Fri & Sat, 1-9pm Sun) This is the best nightspot (if you ignore the poker machines indoors), with a great outdoor bar and dance club fringed by palm trees and ocean views. A mix of DJ nights, live bands and jazz evenings keeps everyone happy. Comedy nights are also planned. There's a choice of varied, tasty buffet dishes (mains \$18 to \$45). Tight security keeps out the rougher crowds, and a strict dress-code applies – smart casual and no beanies (knitted skullcaps).

Shopping

A large selection of beachy items, casual clothing, and batiks is offered at **Tattooed Par-**

rot (☎ 649-946-5829), Marilyn's Crafts, and the Night & Day Boutique, all in the Ports of Call plaza.

Getting There & Around

AIR

For information on flights to and from the Turks and Caicos Islands, see p291.

There are no buses from Providenciales International Airport. A taxi to Grace Bay costs \$16 one-way for two people; each extra person costs \$5. Some resorts have their own minibus transfers.

The following airlines fly between the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Air Turks & Caicos (www.airturksandcaicos.com) Grand Turk (☎ 649-946-2709); Provo (☎ 649-946-4181); Salt Cay (☎ 649-946-6900) Flies between the Caicos, Grand Turk and Salt Cay.

Sky King Airlines (☎ 649-941-5464; www.skyking.tc) Flies between Provo, Grand Turk and South Caicos. Also to the Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Turks & Caicos Airways Provo (☎ 649-946-4255); Grand Turk (☎ 649-946-2709); Sth Caicos (☎ 649-946-3279); Mid Caicos (☎ 649-946-6136); Nth Caicos (☎ 649-946-7246); Salt Cay (☎ 649-946-6928; fax 649-946-4483) Flies between Provo and other Caicos Islands, Salt Cay and Grand Turk.

The following prices are for one-way flights from Provo.

Destination	Price	Frequency
Grand Turk	\$75	several daily
Mid Caicos	\$45	4 weekly
Nth Caicos	\$35	several daily
Salt Cay	\$55	several daily
Sth Caicos	\$65	several daily

BICYCLE

Provo Fun Cycles & Autos and Scooter Bob's (see right) rent mountain bikes.

BOAT

A plethora of boat charters and trips can be arranged to the islands and cays from Leeward and Turtle Cove Marinas. See p247.

Caicos Marina (☎ 649-946-5416; VHF Ch16) Has a few slips and basic facilities.

Leeward Marina (☎ 649-946-5553; VHF Ch 16) At the eastern end of the island, has limited services and dockside berths only.

South Side Marina (☎ 649-946-3508; VHF Ch 16) Has a few slips.

Turtle Cove Marina (☎ 649-941-3781; fax 649-941-5782; VHF Ch16) Has more than 100 deep-water slips plus full services and accommodations.

CAR, MOTORCYCLE & SCOOTER

Mandatory insurance costs \$14 and a one-off government tax is also payable. Most rental companies offer free drop-off and pick-up. The local companies are very good, and can be cheaper than the internationals. Rental drivers may be required to have a minimum age of 25 years.

Hertz (☎ 649-941-3910; mystique@tcway.tc), **Avis** (☎ 649-946-4705; www.avisci.com) and **Budget** (☎ 649-946-4079) are at the airport. Hertz also has an outlet at Southern Shores Centre, and Budget has an outlet at Town Centre Mall, both on Leeward Hwy.

Provo Fun Cycles & Autos (☎ 649-946-5868; provofuncycles@tcway.tc; Port of Call plaza) based across the street from Comfort Suites, is friendly and helpful. It rents good compact cars and jeeps from \$45 per day, scooters for \$42, and rents mountain bikes for \$15 per day.

Scooter Bob's (☎ 649-946-4684; scooter@provo.net; Turtle Cove Marina Plaza) rents cars and jeeps from \$60 per day, motorbikes from \$50 per day, and rents mountain bikes for \$15 per day.

Tropical Auto Rentals (☎ 649-946-5300; tropical@tcway.tc; Ocean Club Plaza, Grace Bay) charges from \$65 for compacts and \$76 for jeep hire.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Sporadic buses run routes to some of the settlements out of town. A public minibus runs along Leeward Hwy; it also runs southwest as far as South Dock and Sapodilla Bay (\$2). Ask at the tourist office for schedules.

TAXI

There are several taxi companies that mainly use minivans. Many congregate around the main hotels' entrances, and are quick to respond to a call. You can call VHF Channel 06 for the dispatcher, or contact the following companies.

Nell's Taxi Service (☎ 649-941-3228)

Provo Taxi & Bus Group (☎ 649-946-5481)

WEST CAICOS

This island is renowned for its fabulous diving, and attracts many dive operators from Provo. West Caicos was a successful sisal plantation in the 1800s, complete with railroad tracks and a small township. Inland,

Lake Catherine is a nature reserve that attracts flamingos, ospreys, ducks and waders. On the coast, the small, sandy beaches make perfect picnic spots.

The island is 6 miles southwest of Provo, and was undergoing private development at the time of writing, which may limit access.

However the sea remains a public domain. Molasses Reef harbors the remains of the oldest known shipwreck in the western hemisphere, dating from 1513. The reefs off the west shore are protected within West Caicos Marine National Park. Other prime dive sites include Elephant Ear Canyon, named for the resident 95ft sponges – the biggest found in the Turks and Caicos. One 10ft-wide monster masks a cave. There's also the Magic Mushroom: a sand chute leads to a precipice where sponges and black coral anchor the coral buttresses and nervous lobsters pack the cracks.

There's no scheduled transport to West Caicos. To get there, you'll need to hire a boat or take a diving tour. See Diving, p246

FRENCH CAY

This tiny cay, about 15 miles due south of Provo, is an uninhabited wildlife sanctuary protecting more than 2000 nesting and migrating species of birds, including frigate birds and ospreys. Stingrays gather in the seas to give birth, and nurse sharks are also drawn here during summer to breed. You will need a permit to visit the cay.

The French pirate L'Olonnois hid here while he preyed on Spanish galleons.

Art Pickering's Provo Turtle Divers makes this trip, see p246 for details. Trips include swimming and snorkeling with the friendly sharks in summer, and with stingrays year-round.

CAYS EAST OF PROVIDENCIALES

Little Water Cay

This small cay within the Princess Alexandra National Park is a sanctuary for endangered and very cute Turks and Caicos rock iguanas, as well as graceful ospreys. Many official and unofficial operators bring out visitors (around \$55 for a half-day trip from Provo), who must each buy a \$5 permit and be accompanied by an official guide.

The guides will handfeed some of these little critters who can run like the wind when food or danger is in sight. One of the guides'

favorite iguanas named 'Curious' normally checks out visitors. He also outruns and outwits larger iguanas to reach any food in the offing. Show these creatures due respect; iguanas live for up to forty years, and are a lot more successful at monogamous relationships than humans, managing it for life.

The 170yd-long **North Shore Trail** leads from the beach to a shallow mangrove estuary where you can learn about this vital ecosystem. A lookout deck offers views over a pond and large osprey nest. Iguanas frequently forage along the 225yd-long **South Shore Trail**, which passes through a lush coastal coppice and also has a lookout deck. You are requested to stay to the trails to avoid trampling the iguanas' burrows and the ecologically sensitive plants.

Pine Cay

Two miles northeast of Provo, this idyllic little isle isn't really for most travelers, unless you really want to spoil yourself, or just happen to be a wealthy mega-star. This 800-acre private cay only welcomes guests by prior arrangement. Seasonal residents include a few little-known characters; Bill Cosby, Denzel Washington and Jimmy Buffett, who has a passion for bonefishing here.

The cay is so far out that it doesn't take note of daylight saving time, thereby constituting its own little time zone. About two-thirds of the island is set aside as a nature preserve, accessed by 9 miles of nature trails. There are semitame iguanas and 120 species of birds, including white-tailed tropic birds.

A fabulous beach runs almost the full length of the west shore. At its northern end, **Sand Dollar Point**, you can wade out 400yd in knee-deep water and search for the eponymous shells. A 70ft wreck lies partially submerged a stone's throw from shore, with a cannon on the seabed. Snorkeling is superb at the **Aquarium**, a cove on the east shore of Pine Cay, with two anemone-covered coral arms embracing a sandy floor – the anemones pulse like little translucent green hearts. Pine Cay has a packed-sand airstrip.

All-inclusive packages and a ban on guest phones and pagers appeal to travelers with a taste for luxurious and unpretentious isolation at **Meridian Club** (US ☎ 1-203-602-0300; www.meridianclub.com; d per week \$4,555; ☒ ☑ ☎). One-bed cabañas are tucked amid sand dunes, each with lounge, kitchen and screened

porch fronting the beach. Rooms are austere, with neither telephones nor TVs. There's also a tennis court, sailboats, sailboards and bicycles, and boating tours on the fancy launch, with crew decked out in yachting whites. Two children per family (aged four to 17) enjoy complimentary stays.

Fort George Cay

This tiny cay, just north of Pine Cay, is a national historic site as it's home to the remains of an 18th-century British fort built to protect the Caicos Islands from attack. Divers and snorkelers can inspect barnacle-encrusted cannons lying on the bottom of the ocean. The site is protected within Fort George Land & Sea National Park.

Dellis Cay

Next north in the necklace of cays, Dellis is locally called Shell Island, and is another regular stop for tour operators. Enjoy a stroll, swim and the gorgeous 360-degree views. Thanks to a mix of tide patterns and current, there's a wealth of shells here. However no shells may be removed from the isle.

Parrot Cay

This private cay, west of North Caicos, is said to have been the lair of pirates Calico Jack and vicious Anne Bonney in the 1720s. The only treasure today is a deluxe resort once owned by a Kuwaiti shah and the scintillating 3-mile-long beach. Bring bug spray.

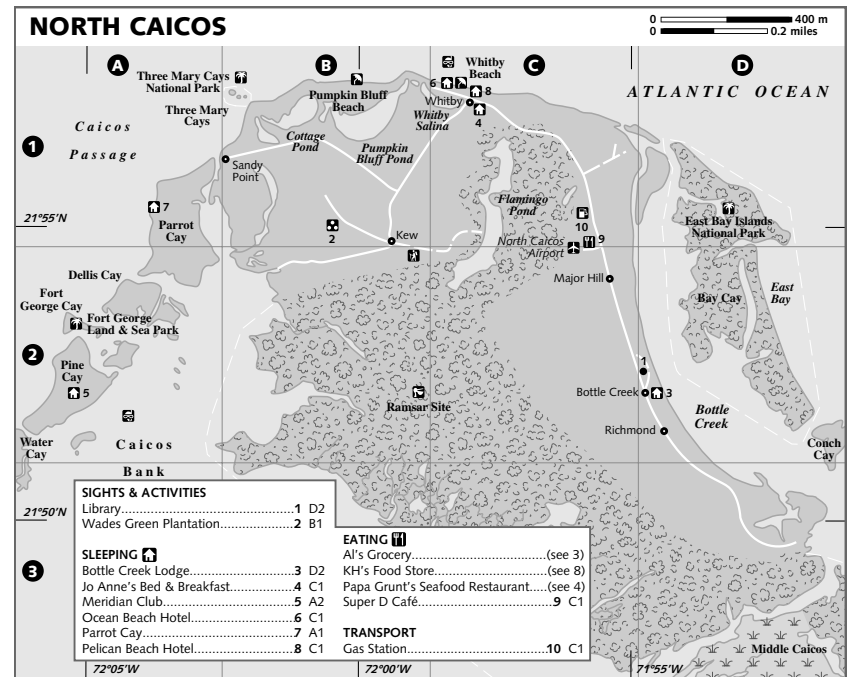
The boat to parrot cay leaves by demand from Leeward Marina on Provo. To arrange a ride, you call ahead to Parrot Cay club.

Parrot Cay (☎ 649-946-7788; www.besthotelsresorts.com/parrotcay.htm; r \$590; ☒ ☑ ☎) This upmarket place, with lots of white and Indonesian furnishings, is favored by air-kissing celebrities such as Donatella Versace. You can cool off in the infinity pool and relax in the super-deluxe Asian spa. Ancient Eastern treatments, yoga packages and the week-long healing Como Shambhla Retreat encourage mind-over-material-matter thoughts.

NORTH CAICOS

pop 2075

Little-visited North Caicos appeals to ecotourists. Paved roads make scooters and bicycles a great way to get around. There are



four small settlements; tiny Sandy Point and Kew, and larger Whitby and Bottle Creek.

Kew is located near the island's center with a fresh-water sinkhole, and Bottle Creek is on a breezy coastal bluff 2 miles south of the airport.

North Caicos gets more rainfall than other islands and hence has more lush vegetation. Traditionally the bread basket of the island chain, in the last century it was also the seat of government for these islands. Farms evolved in colonial times and sloops were built to transport crops to the other islands. Mangoes, oranges, and other fruits and vegetables still thrive beside sea grapes and sugar apples.

North Caicos hosts the **Festarama Festival** each July. This annual regatta includes beach parties, while October's **North Caicos Extravaganza** features a Junkanoo carnival (a street 'Carnivale' with parades, costumes and *goombay* music).

Information

There's a post office in Kew, and Bottle Creek has a small public library. A fax and email service is available in the office of Papa Grunt's Seafood Restaurant. For emergencies contact the **police** (Bottle Creek ☎ 649-946-7116; Kew ☎ 649-946-7261), or call ☎ 911. There are also two **government medical clinics** (Bottle Creek ☎ 649-946-7194; Kew ☎ 649-946-7397).

Sights & Activities

The Kew area has several historic ruins, including the interesting **Wades Green Plantation**, granted to a British Loyalist by King George III. The owners struggled to grow sisal and Sea Island cotton until drought, hurricanes and bugs drove them out. The plantation lasted a mere 25 years; the owners abandoned their slaves and left.

Beaches include **Pumpkin Bluff**, **Horsestable** and the lovely deserted **Whitby Beach**. Pumpkin Bluff beach is especially beautiful and the snorkeling is good, with a foundered cargo ship adding to the allure.

Cottage Pond, a 150ft-deep blue hole on the northwest coast, attracts waterfowl such as West Indian whistling ducks, grebes and waders. Bellfield Landing Pond, Pumpkin Bluff Pond and Dick Hill Creek attract flamingos, as does a large brine lake, **Flamingo Pond**, which floods the center of the island. The ponds are protected as individual na-

ture reserves and the gangly birds strut around.

A series of small cays off the northeast shore are protected within **East Bay Islands National Park**, and a trio of cays to the northwest form **Three Mary Cays National Park**, another flamingo sanctuary and an osprey nesting site. The snorkeling is good at Three Mary Cays National Park and further west at Sandy Point Beach.

Vast bonefish flats extend east of the island. The entire south shore is encompassed by the **Ramsar Site** sanctuary, which is comprised of a vast series of marsh and intertidal wetlands. It extends to East Caicos, and protects an important breeding site and nursery for waterfowl, lobster, conch and fish. The creeks are full of schooling bonefish and tarpon.

Sleeping & Eating

The best website displaying the North Caicos' accommodations and rentals is www.tcimall.tc.

Jo Anne's Bed & Breakfast (☎ 649-946-7184; www.tcimall.tc/joannesbnb/index.htm; Whitby; r \$80; ☒) This modest accommodation option has an adjoining restaurant and the beach is a short walk away. Jo Anne also offers a courtesy van service. More comfortable villas (\$200) and two-room oceanfront suites with kitchen (\$110) are also available.

Pelican Beach Hotel (☎ 649-946-7112; www.pelicanbeach.tc; Whitby; r \$145; ☒ ☒) Spacious, modestly furnished oceanfront rooms have wood-paneled walls, tiled floors, and patios with lounge chairs. The bathrooms are small but enhanced by hand-painted motifs. There are no telephones or TVs. Breakfasts, sandwich lunches and dinner meals are prepared on request, while a friendly little bar and restaurant serves good local dishes including the freshest of grilled fish with the ubiquitous peas 'n' rice (mains around \$12 to \$25).

Ocean Beach Hotel (☎ 649-946-7113; Whitby; s/d \$115/130) This nice little place has a homey feel and all the rooms are beachfront with patios. Rattan furniture adds to the bright atmosphere. An on-site restaurant and bar serves meals on request. Fishing charters are available, and children under 12 stay free.

Bottle Creek Lodge (winter ☎ 649-946-7080, summer ☎ 410-968-2214; www.bottlecreeklodge.com; Bottle Creek; r per six nights \$960) A small, modern-style

eco-lodge perched on a ridge on the northeastern side of Flamingo Pond. It's simple and airy, and features modest furnishings. All rooms face the sea and prevailing trade winds. Complimentary kayaks, bikes, snorkel gear and fishing rods are supplied.

Papa Grunt's Seafood Restaurant (☎ 649-946-7113; mains \$6-28; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☒) Dinners are by reservation at Jo Anne's no-frills diner (which adjoins her B&B). Here seafood dishes rule, although other fare includes pizza, sandwiches and burgers.

Super D Café (☎ 649-946-7528) For traditional Caicos fare head for Super D Café at the airport.

You can buy produce and groceries at KH's Food Store in Whitby and at Al's Grocery in Bottle Creek.

Getting There & Around

For information on flights to and from the island, see p251.

A taxi from the airport to Whitby costs \$10 one-way. Mac of **M&M Tours** (☎ 649-946-7338) offers island tours for \$30 per hour. You won't need more than three hours to see the entire island.

Many boat and diving operators listed under Activities (p246) go to North Caicos (and also have kayaking and cycling).

You can hire bicycles at Whitby Plaza for \$20 per day.

Car rental costs around \$80 per day. Try the following options. They deliver to your location:

Gardiners (☎ 649-946-7141)

Old Nick (☎ 649-946-7280)

MIDDLE CAICOS

pop 437

The largest of the Caicos islands (48 sq miles) retains evidence of pre-Columbian Lucayans: around 38 of their dwelling sites have been discovered here, many of which have been excavated by archaeologists.

The fishermen and farmers in the tiny hamlets of Conch Bar, Bambarra and Lorimers give visitors a warm welcome. Bambarra was named for people from the Bombarras tribe of the Niger River, who were shipwrecked here in 1842 when a slave trader ran aground.

The southern half of the island is composed of vast intertidal swamplands. Offshore, **Vine Point & Ocean Hole Nature Reserve** protects a

HIKING THE ISLAND: MIDDLE CAICOS RESERVE & TRAIL SYSTEM

Many of the growing ecotourism operations will take you on an adventure where you'll use your feet or a bicycle to experience the beauty of these islands. However, you may want to organize this trip yourself.

Miles of beaches, large freshwater lakes and lavish pine forests can be accessed by 10 miles of trails along the north coast, created in conjunction with the Turks & Caicos National Trust as part of the Ramsar Site. One trail leads from Mudjen Harbour Beach to join the historic Crossing Over Trail that leads from Middle to North Caicos. En route, it passes the ruins of several Loyalist cotton plantations, as well as brine pools favored by cranes and flamingos. Signs at regular intervals point out highlights of the trek.

The north coast is dramatically scenic, with long beaches and scalloped bays beside rugged limestone cliffs. Mudjen Harbour Beach features a huge amphitheater carved from the raw limestone bluffs. Here, the long unfurling of turquoise waves is broken by pretty Dragon Cay, connected to the shore by a sand spit and surrounded by placid sea pools; perfect for soaking your feet in after a trek.

frigate-bird breeding colony, plus a 210ft-deep, 400yd-wide marine blue hole favored as a hangout by turtles and sharks. Kayak, dive or snorkel here; you'll have a ball.

The **Conch Bar Caves National Park** protects 15 miles of underground caverns. Some have lagoons and stalactites and stalagmites, and most are home to colonies of bats. The caves were used as sacred sanctuaries by the Lucayan Indians, who left petroglyphs on the walls. The most notable Lucayan site is the **Armstrong Pond Village Historical Site**.

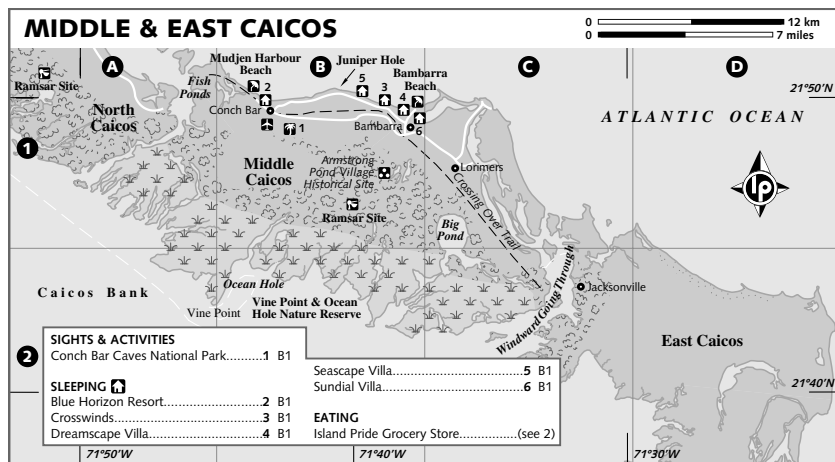
The island hosts the **Middle Caicos Expo** each August.

Contact the operators listed under Activities, p246, for diving and boat trips from Provo to Middle Caicos.

Sleeping & Eating

Budget rates can really only be achieved by sharing rental accommodation.

Crosswinds (☎ 828-479-1056; www.crosswindstci.com; per week \$900; ☒) Also close to the little



village of Bambarra, this two-bed house sits on stilts, with views of the surrounding bush and ocean in the distance. There's a modern kitchen, and the cool and spacious open-plan living is enhanced by the simple, white rattan furniture.

Sundial Villas (☎ 604-576-9369; www.sundialvillas.com; r per night/week \$150/1050) This colorful and cheerful two-bed villa close to Bambarra has comfy appeal, with a great family room, kitchen and screened veranda. Perfect for families, additional joys (simple ones are always the best) include a bread machine, dried herbs, spices and use of the houseowner's private thatched tiki hut on the adjacent beach. Get out the Jackie Collins novel and watch your kids splash in the sea. Bliss.

Blue Horizon Resort (☎ 649-946-6141; www.bhresort.com; r \$185; ☒ ☑) This residential and vacation community in pretty Mudjen Harbour overlooks Dragon Cay and has stunning views of the ocean. Set in 50 acres, it has attractive blue-and-white rental cottages with porches, full modern kitchens and a TV.

Also recommended is the spacious three-bedroom **Dreamscape Villa** (☎ 649-946-6175; www.middlecaicos.com; r per week \$1700; ☒ ☑) at stunning Bambarra Beach (priced for four adults). **Seascape Villa** (per week \$1850; ☒ ☑), also priced for four adults, is a three-bedroom home with sea views, cathedral ceiling, flowering shrubs and a screened-in porch.

Groceries can be bought at the Island Pride Grocery Store.

For flight information, see p251.

EAST CAICOS

The least-visited island of the chain is often labeled 'uninhabited,' although there is an impoverished settlement of Haitians. It's also home to small herds of wild cattle and flocks of flamingos flaunting their neon-pink liveries. Never-ending miles of beaches are perfect for the adventurous beachcomber.

With no air service; East Caicos can be reached only by boat.

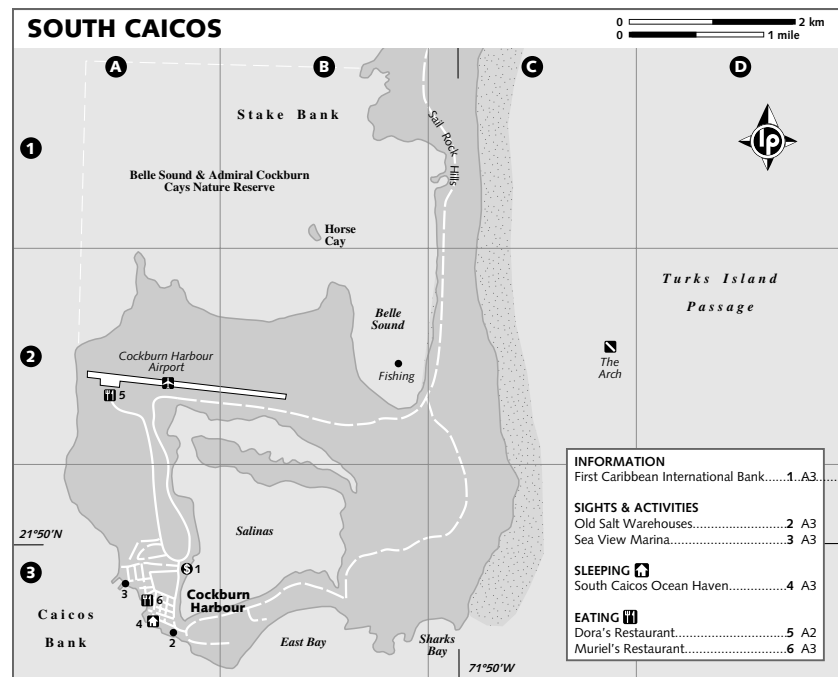
SOUTH CAICOS

pop 1939

After the salt industry passed on, lobster-and-conch-fishing long provided this arid island, 22 miles west of Grand Turk, with a reasonably healthy income. However this industry has also experienced problems and many islanders have drifted to Provo in the last decade.

Cockburn Harbour, the only settlement, is perfect to launch across the 40-mile-wide Caicos Bank in search of bonefish. In addition bird-watchers may flock here (sorry) to see the flamingos that inhabit the vast *salinas* (salt ponds) on the northeast edge of the harbor; dozens of flamingos are resident year-round. However it is divers who will really bubble with joy. A reef and wall run the length of the east coast, meaning both 20ft and wall dives offer fabulous marine-life encounters.

In town, withdraw money from the **First Caribbean International Bank** (☎ 649-946-3268; fax 649-946-3388; Lee St).



Most historic buildings are at the south-east end of town, centered on the old **Wesleyan church** with its tall spire. By its lone-some atop Tucker's Hill at the south end of town is the **old commissioner's house**.

Much of the island is within the **Belle Sound & Admiral Cockburn Cays Nature Reserve**. It encompasses the **Sail Rock Hills**, a ridge extending along the panhandle and rising to 178ft. The hills offer spectacular views east over the Turks Island Passage and west over **Belle Sound**, a vast turquoise bay opening to the flats of the Caicos Bank. The reserve extends west for several miles to protect the mangroves and bonefish flats, and also extends windward to protect the offshore coral reefs.

South Caicos is known for its wall-diving, plus you're sure to see plenty of pelagic animals, including eagle rays, Atlantic rays,

blacktip sharks, and the highlight, humpback whales in January and February. Boat and diving operators based in Providenciales make this trip (see p246); contact them for details.

Sitting over the ocean at the edge of town, the comfortable rooms at **South Caicos Ocean Haven** (☎ 649-946-3444; r \$120; ☒ ☑ ☑) have cable TV and refrigerators. The meals here are also tasty and filling. Keep in mind that meal reservations are required for nonguests.

Other good spots to eat include **Muriel's Restaurant** (☎ 649-946-3535; Graham St; mains \$6-20; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) and **Dora's Restaurant** (☎ 649-946-3247; Airport; mains \$7-22; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner), which serves a great lobster sandwich.

The airport is about a mile north of town. See p251 for flight information.

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