

Turks & Caicos

The Turks and where? That's the reaction most people have when you mention these tropical isles. Like all great Shangri-Las, this one is hidden just under the radar. Be glad that it is, as this tropical dream is the deserted Caribbean destination you've been looking for. And the best part – it's only 90 minutes by plane from Miami; this slice of paradise is just around the corner.

So why would you want to go there? How about white-sand beaches, clear blue water and a climate that defines divine. Secluded bays and islands where you'll see more wild donkeys than other travelers. Historic towns and villages that look like something out of a pirate movie, where life creeps along at a sedate pace.

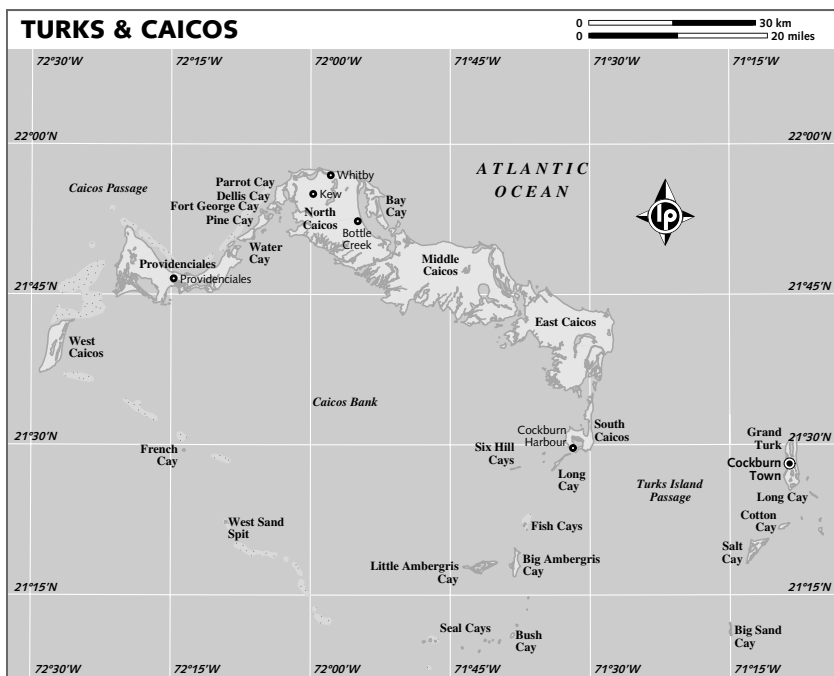
Divers and beach aficionados will rejoice at the quality of the sea here. Clear warm water teem with sea life, yet are devoid of crashing waves. Even the most ardent land lover can't help but be mesmerized by the azure water and golden sand.

Islands like Grand Turk – set in a time long since past, with its dilapidated buildings, salt ponds and narrow lanes – contrast with the ever expanding Providenciales. While development is on the rise, all one has to do is dig a bit deeper, catch a boat to the next island over and the solace of solitude returns.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** Over 40 islands together add up to 430 sq miles of land
- **Capital** Cockburn Town, Grand Turk
- **Country code** ☎ 649
- **Departure tax** US\$35 (normally included in ticket prices)
- **Famous for** Diving, whale-watching, tax evasion, pristine beaches
- **Language** English
- **Money** US dollar (US\$); US\$1 = €0.65 = UK£0.51
- **Official name** Turks and Caicos Islands
- **People** Belongers, residents
- **Phrase** Alright, alright (a common way of saying 'hello')
- **Population** 30,000
- **Visa** Not required by North American, British and most Western European travelers. Other nationalities need to get them in advance; see p133.





HIGHLIGHTS

- **Diving** (p116) Believe the hype – the diving here is as good as it gets; get wet on Grand Turk where the fish are plenty and the reef pristine
- **Grace Bay Beach** (p121) Spend a day lounging on this white, wide and wonderful beach
- **Grand Turk** (p115) Step back in time on this beautiful sun-kissed island. Historic buildings, salt ponds and top-shelf beaches
- **Middle Caicos** (p129) Seek out Mudjin Harbor and discover one of the best beach entrances anywhere
- **Whale-Watching** (p119) Look out for the graceful gods of the sea – humpback whales – on Salt Cay

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Spend the day admiring Grace Bay on Providenciales then wake up the next day to go for a snorkeling trip to French Cay and hand feed some sting-rays. Finally on the last day rent a bike

and explore the island under your own steam.

- **One Week** Add a trip to the islands of North Caicos and Middle Caicos and discover what solitude is really all about.
- **Two Weeks** Complete the trip by heading to Grand Turk to explore the town, do some great diving and spend a day or two on Salt Cay – the best-kept secret in the country.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The Turks and Caicos' climate is a beach lover's dream, with temperatures rarely getting excruciatingly hot or anything approaching cool. Temperatures average 77°F (25°C) in winter and 90°F (32°C) in summer. The hottest months are August to November, and average humidity is 35%. Average annual rainfall is 21in and it's wettest in summer.

The winter season is most definitely the peak season for visitors. Hotel availability plummets and the prices soar from December through to April. Despite increasing popularity, even at the height of the high season, rooms to fit most budgets are generally avail-

able. A good option for travelers is to visit during the low season, when there are bargain rooms aplenty, deserted beaches and months of weather better than wherever you live.

HISTORY

Recent discoveries of Taíno (the indigenous population) artifacts on Grand Turk have shown that the islands evolved much the same indigenous culture as did their northern neighbors. Locals even claim that the islands were Christopher Columbus' first landfall in 1492.

The island group was a pawn in the power struggles between the French, Spanish and British, and remained virtually uninhabited until 1678, when some Bermudian salt rakers settled the Turks islands and used natural *salinas* (salt-drying pans) to produce sea salt. These still exist on several islands.

Fast forward to the mid-20th century: the US military built airstrips and a submarine base in the 1950s, and John Glenn splashed down just off Grand Turk in 1962, putting the islands in the international spotlight.

Administered through Jamaica and the Bahamas in the past, the Turks and Caicos became a separate Crown colony of Great Britain in 1962 then an Overseas Territory in 1981. In 1984 Club Med opened its doors on Providenciales (Provo), and the Turks and Caicos started to boom. In the blink of an eye, the islands, which had lacked electricity, acquired satellite TV.

The Turks and Caicos relied upon the exportation of salt, which remained the backbone of the British colony until 1964. Today finance, tourism and fishing generate most income, but the islands could not survive without British aid. The tax-free offshore finance industry is a mere minnow compared with that of the Bahamas, and many would be astonished to discover that Grand Turk, the much-hyped financial center, is just a dusty backwater in the sun.

The per capita GDP in 2002 was estimated at US\$11,500. Illegal drug trafficking, a major problem in the 1980s, has also been a source of significant revenue for a few islanders.

Relations between islanders and British-appointed governors have been strained since 1996, when the incumbent governor's comments suggesting that government and police corruption had turned the islands into a haven for drug trafficking appeared

in the *Offshore Finance Annual*, and opponents accused him of harming investment. Growing opposition threatened to spill over into civil unrest. The issue created a resurgence in calls for independence, calls that still continue today.

While some pine for more autonomy, there are calls for closer ties with Canada, of all nations. Recently there have been moves to join the northern nation as an official province. The drive is for economic spillover, better trade relations and a more prominent international voice. Whether this comes to pass is still up in the air, but if it does the influx of frostbitten patriots would certainly change the current population landscape.

THE CULTURE

The culture of the Turks and Caicos is that of a ship that is steadied by a strong religious keel. There is a strong moral fiber to these islands, and the populace is friendly, welcoming and a bit sedate. Native Turks and Caicos islanders, or 'Belongers' as they are locally known, are descended from the early Bermudian settlers, Loyalist settlers, slave settlers and salt rakers.

There are a few expats lurking about calling the Turks home; Americans because of the proximity, Canadians because of the weather and Brits because of the colonial heritage. Some have come to make their fortunes, some to bury their treasure like the pirates of old and others to escape the fast-paced life that permeates nearly everywhere else in the world.

More recently hundreds of Haitians have fled their impoverished island and landed on the Turks and Caicos Islands; for some this is only a port of call on their way to America, while others are happy to stay. Some Belongers resist this invasion, some have sympathy and others seem not to notice. Time will tell how these impoverished fresh arrivals are treated in the long term.

HOW MUCH?

- **Turks Head beer** US\$3
- **Two-tank dive** US\$75
- **Midrange double room** US\$110
- **Cracked conch and fries** US\$14
- **Gallon of gas** US\$5.50

Nightlife in the Turks and Caicos is of the mellow variety for the most part. There are a few night spots in Provo, and some beachside bars on the outer islands. Those seeking a roaring party of a holiday should look elsewhere – having said that, the local rake’n’scrape music can really get the crowd going. For those not in the know, rake’n’scrape or ripsaw (as it is locally known) is a band fronted by someone playing a carpenter’s saw by rhythmically scraping its teeth with the shaft of a screwdriver.

ARTS

The art scene in the Turks and Caicos is slowly evolving. Traditional music, folklore and sisal weaving evolved during colonial days, and have been maintained to this day. Paintings depicting the scenery are popular and the quality appears to be improving. The Haitian community has had a strong influence on the Turks and Caicos art scene.

There are a few shops in Provo that have a good selection of locally produced art; unfortunately, except for a few choice locations, most of the art that’s available outside Provo is tourist crap, made in China and slapped with a T&C sticker.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Much of the Turks and Caicos can be described as flat, dry and barren. The salt industry of the last century saw fit to remove much of the vegetation from Salt Cay, Grand Turk and South Caicos. Low-lying vegetation now covers the uninhabited sections of these islands. The larger islands are in a much more pristine state, with vegetation and a higher degree of rainfall prominent on North, Middle and East Caicos. Small creeks, inland lakes – often home to flamingos – and wetlands make up the interior of these larger land masses.

On Providenciales the most common sight on land is not anything natural but the explosive degree of development. Everywhere you look, there seems to be another new property and resulting heap of building garbage. The scrubby landscape is still visible among the fresh buildings – but for how long?

All the islands are rimmed with stunning beaches. Most are great and some are exceptional – truly world-class stretches of sand worthy of every accolade and hyperbolic description of sun, sand and gentle surf.

Wildlife

Walking down a dusty laneway and coming upon a donkey is a quintessential T&C experience. Their forebears once carried 25lb burlap bags of salt from the ponds to the warehouses and docks. Having earned their rest, they were set free.

Iguanas once inhabited much of the Turks and Caicos until they lost their lives to introduced dogs and cats, and their habitats to development. Now Little Water Cay, Fort George Cay and the Ambergris Cays are all protected iguana reserves.

The waters are favored by four species of turtle: hawksbills (an internationally endangered species, although sadly not recognized in this region), green, loggerheads and, occasionally, leatherbacks.

Countless species of seabirds and waders have been sighted, both migratory and nonmigratory. Ospreys are numerous and easily spotted, as are sparrow hawks and barn owls. Flamingos – once numerous throughout the chain – are now limited to West, North and South Caicos, where you may also see Cuban herons.

A flourishing population of bottle-nosed dolphins lives in these waters. Also, some 7000 North Atlantic humpback whales use the Turks Island Passage and the Mouchoir Banks, south of Grand Turk, as their winter breeding grounds between January and March. Manta rays are commonly seen during the spring plankton blooms off of Grand Turk and West Caicos.

FOOD & DRINK

You can’t come to the Turks and Caicos and not try the local delicacy – conch (pronounced conk). The chewy sea creature lives in the amazing spiraled shells that are often found on the beach. The meat is liberally tenderized, seasoned with Cajun spices and grilled to perfection. There are some issues elsewhere in the Caribbean with declining conch numbers, but the heavily regulated local fishing industry and the Conch Farm on Provo ensure there is plenty of grilled gastropod to go around.

Jamaican flavors such as jerk are a heavy influence on local cuisine, meaning that beans and rice are a stalwart dinnertime side dish. With a growing number of upper-end establishments an air of sophistication is creeping into mealtime. French, Italian and other continental specialties are popping up – mixing

the local seafood with classic dishes to fuse the best of both worlds.

Turks Head beer is a good local drop on a hot day and the ever-present rum punch always seems to be on offer at the bar. There is some local rum worth tasting such as Spicy Gosling. Do beware of some of the lower-end varieties of rum – though the cheap price point may be enticing, it's first cousin to paint thinner.

TURKS ISLANDS

The Turks group comprises Grand Turk and its smaller southern neighbor, Salt Cay, in addition to several tiny cays. The islands lie east of the Caicos Islands, separated from them by the 22-mile-wide (35km) Turks Island Passage.

Getting There & Away

For flight information, see p133.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis meet incoming flights; to Cockburn Town (1 mile north of the airport) costs US\$8. There are no buses, but pre-booked rental cars will meet your plane.

BICYCLE

Most, if not all, hotels on Grand Turk provide bikes for their guests as they are the perfect way to get around the tiny island. On Salt Cay, **Trade Winds Guest Suites** (☎ 946-6906; www.tradewinds.tc; Victoria St, Salt Cay) will get you pedaling for US\$10 per day.

BOAT

A ferry runs biweekly from Grand Turk to Salt Cay (US\$12 round-trip). Contact **Salt Cay Charters** (☎ 231-6663; piratequeen3@hotmail.com). Whale-watching boat trips with this bunch cost US\$75. Arrangements can also be made with any of the Grand Turk dive companies to take you over to Salt Cay; costs vary depending on numbers, but expect to pay about \$60.

CAR & SCOOTER

You're hardly likely to need a car in town, but do pay attention anyway to the one-way system along Duke and Front St. You can rent cars from **Tony's Car Rental** (☎ 231-1806; Airport Rd), located at the airport.

TAXI

Taxis are an inexpensive and reliable way to get around Grand Turk. A taxi from the airport to town will cost you about US\$8, but be sure to settle on a price before you head out as the cabs are unmetered. Your hotel can easily sort you a cab, or call **Carl's Taxi Service** (☎ 241-8793).

GRAND TURK

Happily lacking the modern development that has enveloped Provo, Grand Turk is a step back in time. At just 6.5 miles long, this dot amid the sea is a sparsely populated, brush-covered paradise.

Cockburn Town, the main settlement, is still the capital of the country and is lined with buildings that date back to colonial times. Narrow streets are frequented by wild donkeys and the odd local cruising by.

Where salt was once the main industry, tourism has taken over and you are blessed with a slew of charming guesthouses to choose from. Beaches rim the land and calm blue water invites you in for a refreshing swim. There is a quiet peace to the island and a feel among the locals, discovered long ago, that this is the place to be.

Cockburn Town

pop 5500

Without knowing beforehand you'd be hard pressed to guess that sleepy Cockburn is the capital city of the Turks and Caicos. What it lacks in polish and sophistication it more than makes up for in rustic charm. The town itself is comprised of two parallel streets that are interconnected with narrow laneways. Colonial-era houses line the tiny streets, looking not dissimilar to how they would have a century ago. Former salt storage sheds connect back to a bygone era of dusty roads and donkey-filled lanes. Like a time capsule to a gentler age, walking among the architectural relics is a love letter to a bygone era.

ORIENTATION

The heart of town is sandwiched between the ocean and the salt pond named Red Salina. Front St runs one way, along the waterfront, then narrows and becomes Duke St three blocks south of the government plaza.

Pond St runs parallel 50yd to the east, along Red Salina. To the north, Pond St divides: Hospital St runs north to the hospital;

Lighthouse Rd runs northeast to the lighthouse at Northeast Point, then divides to follow the waterfront to Governor's Beach and the dock, or southeast to the airport.

INFORMATION

Businesses and government offices close at 3pm on Friday. Some businesses open from 9am to 1pm on Saturday. Public phones can be found at most central places.

Cable & Wireless (☎ 946-2200; www.cwcaribbean.com /turkscaicos; Front St) Offers internet access.

Federal Express (☎ 231-6097)

General Post Office (☎ 946-1334; Front St)

Grand Turk Hospital (☎ 946-2333; Hospital Rd)

Police (☎ 946-2299; Hospital Rd)

Scotiabank (☎ 946-2507; Front St)

Turks & Caicos Islands Tourist Board (☎ 946-2321; www.turksandcaicostourism.com; Front St)

SIGHTS

The Turks & Caicos Island Tourist Board, the museum and most hotels have free Heritage Walk pamphlets.

Front St

The stretch of road along the waterfront has some magnificent buildings. The salt air and the rough treatment of time have not been kind to many of these structures. Some have begun the slip into dilapidation. But there are still highlights here, and a walk among the architecture is recommended.

The **General Post Office** is a relic of a forgotten era, and still shines brightly. Nearby, four large cannons point to sea, guarding the site that Columbus supposedly set foot upon land – the reality of that claim is still up for grabs, but it does make for a nice photo. The fringing coral reef just offshore is protected within the confidently named **Columbus Landfall National Park**.

The little **Turks & Caicos National Museum** (☎ 946-2160; www.tcmuseum.org; Front St; admission nonresidents US\$5; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 6pm Wed, to 1pm Sat) boxes above its weight with a great selection of displays. Everything from shipwrecks to messages in bottles and crash-landing spacecraft are covered. The new curator is full of enthusiasm and expansion ambitions – be sure to ask to see the cabinet of cannons.

Duke St

South of the heart of downtown, Duke St narrows off to form a twisting lane of old build-

ings. Even the most jaded of futurists will be left enchanted by the colonial-era structures.

Around Town

The long and pothole-covered road to Northeast Point is the way to get to the old cast-iron **lighthouse**. It's open when cruise ships are in port and offers a good vantage of the crashing waves.

Corktree and **Pillory Beaches** are good for bathing and enough out of the way that you'll likely have the sand to yourself.

Lovely pine-shaded **Governor's Beach** lies 1.5 miles south of town, and is a popular place for a picnic, a dip in the sea or an impromptu party.

Waterloo (1815) is the official Governor's residence. The island's dock is here, and the old US missile-tracking station sits as a reminder of the Cold War. In 1962 Grand Turk was briefly put on the world stage when astronaut John Glenn splashed down in his Mercury spacecraft off the coast of the island. He made landfall at this dock and was debriefed at the missile-tracking post.

Dirt roads lead south to **White Sands Beach** for snorkelers and east to three prime **bird-watching spots**: Hawkes Pond Salina, Hawkes Nest Salina, and South Creek National Park, which protects the mangroves and wetlands along the island's southeast shore.

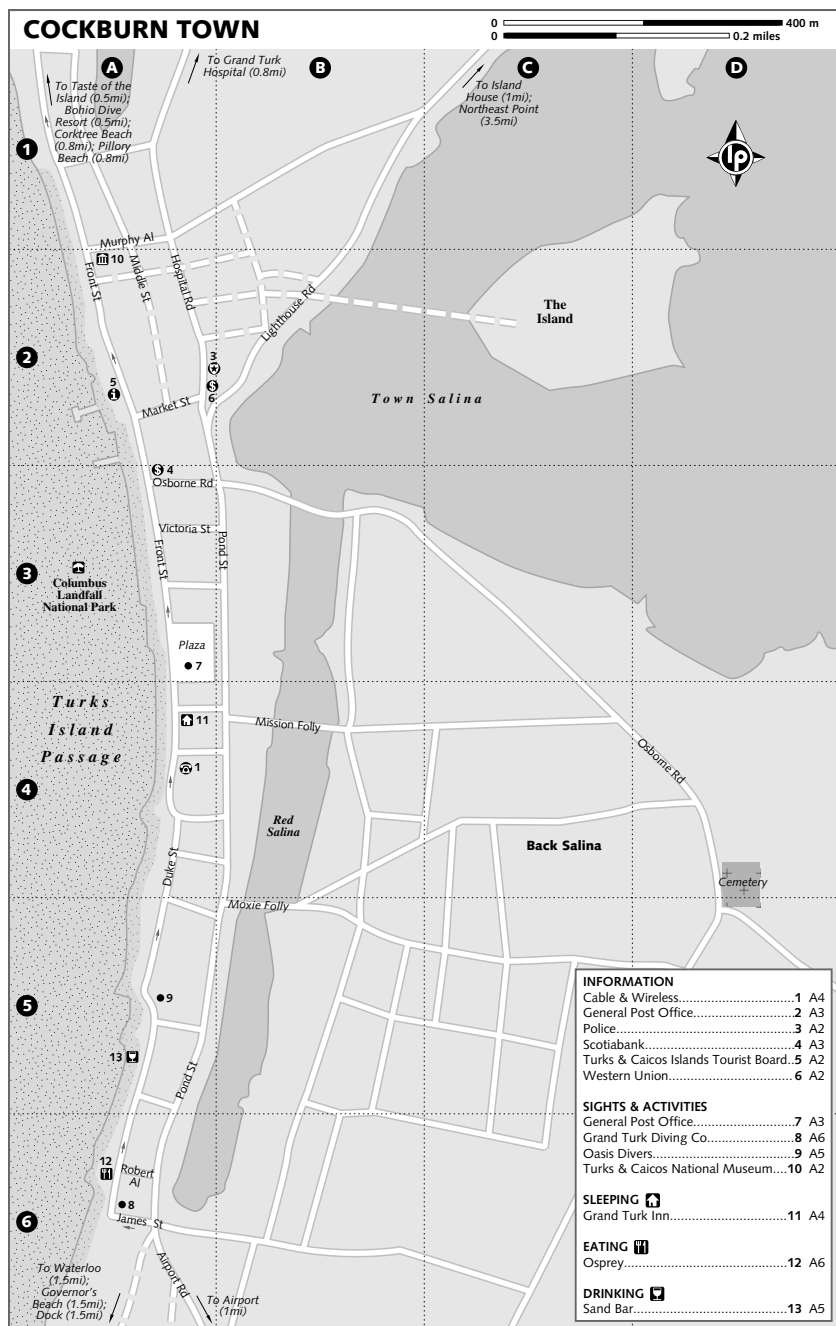
ACTIVITIES

The magnificent diving off of Grand Turk and Salt Cay is not only popular with travelers but with the local community. These operations will take you snorkeling if you're not a diver, and run courses if you want to learn, and all have good equipment for rent.

Diving & Snorkeling

Oasis Divers (☎ 946-1128; www.oasisdivers.com; Duke St) will take you down on a two-tank dive (US\$75), a single tank in the afternoon (US\$50) or a night dive (US\$55). It rents out gear at good rates and has a great reputation for service and professionalism. It also runs trips to Gibbs Cay, where you can hand-feed stingrays (US\$60 plus diving rates).

Local legendary divemaster Smitty has started up **Grand Turk Diving Co** (☎ 946-1559; www.gtdiving.com; Duke St). There are two-tank dives for \$75 and singles for \$55 and night dives for \$60. This new company's reputation is already building as a first-class dive operation.



CRUISE CONTROL?

Grand Turk used to be a forgotten oasis of quiet in the eastern Caribbean, devoid of overtourism and huge visitor numbers. That was until a few years ago, when Carnival Cruise Lines dredged out a harbor on the south end of the island so that it could park its ships up for the day. More than just a simple jetty, the complex that the company has built is a sight to see. Like some sort of pre-molded, plastic, pseudo-Caribbean port, it sticks out like a palm tree on a plain. Included in the madness is **Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville** – a sort of Disneyland with booze. It's a fascinating place for people-watching as newlyweds and nearlydeads get drunk in the swim-up bar and scoff down their cheeseburger in Paradise. Local reaction to this development is mixed, but the fact that it's miles from town and is now a major employer is a help. On a busy day, two ships will be in port – offloading nearly 7000 people, suddenly outnumbering the residents of Grand Turk.

Fishing

Screaming Reels (☎ 231-2087) will take you out and help you land the big one. Charters are based on a per boat basis and start at US\$500 per day, but that cost can be shared between up to eight people.

Horseback Riding

Chukka Caribbean Adventures (☎ 232-1339; www.chukkacaribbean.com; adult/child \$65/46) is a great one for horse lovers as there is the added bonus of swimming in the ocean while still atop your noble steed – good fun for families.

Kayaking

If you're looking to get out and explore the ocean in a bit of a different way, the folks at **Oasis Divers** (☎ 946-1128; www.oasisdivers.com) will take you for a guided sea-kayaking mission through the mangrove forest. The half-day trip costs US\$45 including your gear.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See p131 for a list of festivals and events on Grand Turk, most of which happen in and around Cockburn Town.

SLEEPING

There are several accommodations options in both downtown Cockburn and elsewhere on the island. Everything is close enough that staying on one end of the island doesn't preclude you from enjoying the other. Bikes are often provided to guests and are a great way to get around.

ourpick Island House (☎ 946-1388; www.islandhouse-tci.com; d US\$112; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Walking through the doors at Island House you'll be met with Mediterranean-influenced architecture, whitewashed walls and arched doorways.

Further in you'll discover the inviting pool and opulent courtyard. The rooms are airy and nicely put together. There's wi-fi, guests have free use of a car while staying and there are bikes too, if you're feeling energetic.

Grand Turk Inn (☎ 946-2827; www.grandturkinn.com; Front St; ste US\$300; 🍷) You can't get a better Caribbean endorsement than the place where Jimmy Buffet stays when he's in Grand Turk. The Balinese bamboo furniture sets the tone in this classic old house that just celebrated its 160th birthday. There are full kitchens in each of the five suites and its central location in Cockburn Town is hard to beat.

Bohio Dive Resort & Spa (☎ 946-2135; www.bohioresort.com; Front St; s/d per 3 nights US\$360/600; 🍷 🍷) Boasts a prime location on a stunning stretch of sand, in-house dive packages and a friendly atmosphere. The staff here is top notch and the rooms are pleasant and clean. There are kayaks, sailboats, snorkeling gear and even yoga classes available. The only downside is the restaurant, which is overpriced and decidedly average. The resort is just north of the town center.

EATING & DRINKING

Taste of the Island (☎ 946-2112; West St; mains from US\$10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Come to this locals' beachside restaurant and bar to have a great feed and work on your Creole. The food is simple, fresh and cheap. It can get loud, boisterous and a little crazy, a real taste of the island. It's just north of the town center.

Osprey (☎ 946-2666; Duke St; mains from \$15; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Make sure you drop by on Sunday night for the legendary BBQ. Amazing seafood, poultry and beef grilled before your eyes, bombarded with salads and served up poolside. There are great ocean views and the

band gets going after dinner so you can dance off that desert.

ourpick Sand Bar (☎ 946-1111; Duke St; 🕒 noon-1am) This small yet lively bar is a popular hot spot with locals, expats and tourists alike. It has yummy burgers if you've got the munchies, and the potential for spotting the green flash (a Caribbean phenomenon where you can see a green flash as the sun sets into the ocean) is great, especially if you've had a few Turk's Heads first.

SHOPPING

The best shopping to be found on the island is in the street stalls that open up on Duke Street when the cruise ships are in port. There is a good variety of locally made goods, Haitian artwork and hand-drawn maps. Conversely if you are seeking cheap T-shirts, snow globes and shot glasses, head to the cruise-ship center where you will be inundated with an ocean of cheap rubbish.

SALT CAY

If you can't quite envision what the Turks would have been like in the 19th century, take a trip to Salt Cay. Like stepping into a time machine, this picturesque island is the sort of hideaway that you search your whole life to discover. A few dusty roads interconnect the handful of structures, and donkeys wander aimlessly through the streets intermixed with friendly locals. While the land is quiet, the sea surrounding the island is awash with life. Turtles, eagle rays and the majestic humpback whale all frequent the waters. Hard to get to and even harder to leave, this place is a true haven for scuba divers and for those seeking an escape from the modern world.

A WHALE OF A TALE

Salt Cay could very well be one of the best places on earth to see whales – by the thousands. Every winter the gentle giants make their annual pilgrimage to the warm seas of the Caribbean to mate and give birth. From the sandy shores of Salt Cay you can watch the majestic beauties of the sea saunter past from February to March. They are plain to see from the beach but you can also get among it on a whale-watching trip or dive trip organized from either Grand Turk or Salt Cay.

Activities

Salt Cay Divers (☎ 946-6906; www.saltcaydivers.tc) is a one-stop dive shop. The owner is a long-term local who has her finger in most pies on the island. The staff can take you out for a dive (\$40 per tank), and sort you out with accommodation and a hearty meal too. The annual humpback whale migration (January to March) is a big draw, and this operation takes pride in showing off the whales yet not disturbing them (whale-watching trips \$75).

Sleeping

ourpick Pirate's Hideaway Guesthouse (☎ 946-6909; www.pirateshideaway.com; Victoria St; r US\$165; 🍷 🍺) Some places have pirate names and that's as deep as the theme goes; Nick, who runs the Pirate's Hideaway, is a pirate. Nearly as colorful as the establishment, he goes out of his way to make you feel at home. Recent renovations have changed things up a fair bit with an 'infinity bed' in the crow's-nest room and a new freshwater pool to cool you off. You can see the whales from the upstairs rooms as they pass by, or just hang out with the parrots – it is a pirate's place after all.

Trade Winds Guest Suites (☎ 946-6906; www.tradewinds.tc; Victoria St; r US\$187; 🍷 🍺) Right on the beach, just a few steps from town. Trade Winds is a great spot to base yourself for an extended stay: there are weekly rates and the location is tops. There are complimentary bikes and dive packages available too. The rooms are tidy, ocean facing and good value.

Eating & Drinking

Green Flash Cafe (☎ 649-6977; mains from \$10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Right off the main dock and the perfect vantage point to watch out for its namesake. Nothing pretentious here, just simple food enjoyed on picnic tables in a beautiful setting. Great burgers, conch and cold beer – what more could you want?

Island Thyme Bistro (☎ 649-6977; mains from \$20; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This little restaurant and bar is set to be the big memory of your Salt Cay stay. The food is great and is prepared and presented with a sense of fun; there's even wi-fi. Ever wanted to get behind the grill in a proper restaurant? Well here's your chance – they have a guest chef night, where you get to strut your stuff in

THE KEY TO SALT CAY

Porter Williams is one of those iconic members of the Salt Cay community that you'd struggle *not* to meet on your visit. For the last eight years he's called the tiny island home. In that time he's opened up two restaurants, become the driving force in promoting Salt Cay to the outside world, and even managed to relax on the beach from time to time.

So how has Salt Cay changed in the time that you've been here?

Salt Cay has become a world-class destination for those looking to escape the rigors of our modern world. In the past it was primarily a dive destination, but now is a destination for those looking to return to a simpler time and place where they can be absorbed into the community and culture.

Has that increase in tourism affected life here in Salt Cay?

No, Salt Cay is still the island time forgot, the Caribbean of yesteryear. We aren't affected by cruise ships here so things are staying pristine, just how we like it.

Are people in Salt Cay, and Turks and Caicos for that matter, thinking about climate change?

Salt Cay is proposed to be a Green Island, the first in the Caribbean. There is an emphasis on keeping the population density low and we're striving to maintain the historical character of the island. So far climate change hasn't affected the annual humpback whale migration; in fact there have been more sightings this year than in the past.

So what does the future hold for Salt Cay?

Salt Cay is going to develop over time. However, the emphasis is on preserving the beauty, heritage and the pristine nature of the island. It's a wonderful place, nothing on Salt Cay is world class in itself but the total experience is world class.

the kitchen. Friday is pizza night and the restaurant prides itself on a flexible menu – so what do you feel like tonight?

CAICOS ISLANDS

The fan of islands that form the main landmass of this nation are the Caicos Islands. West Caicos, Providenciales (the main tourist gateway), North Caicos, Middle Caicos, East Caicos, and South Caicos, plus numerous other tiny islands both inhabited and deserted.

PROVIDENCIALES

pop 8900

It wasn't too long ago that Providenciales, or Provo as it's known locally, was a sleepy little corner of the Caribbean. But unlike the rest of the islands in the T&C, the secret is out. Everywhere you look there is a new hotel sprouting from the ground and the promise of more to come.

The upside to all this development is that finding a room beachside isn't a mission – there are stacks to choose from. But that's one of the few positives – hotels are getting taller and the rate of development is staggering. One must wonder where all the tourists are going to come from? For the moment, rooms are

easy to come by, deals are simple to find and the beach is still quiet.

Provo is home to Grace Bay Beach, one of the best beaches in the country – the whiter than white sand draws visitors from around the globe. Despite the explosive growth there is an unhurried feel to Provo – people walk slow, talk slow and sail through life at a relaxed pace.

Orientation

The main highway, Leeward Hwy, runs east from downtown Providenciales along the island's spine, ending near Bird Rock. 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 turns into a dirt track to Northwest Point. A fourth road runs south from downtown to Sapodilla Bay.

Information

EMERGENCY

Fire (☎ 946-4444)

Police (☎ 946-4259; Old Airport Rd)

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

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

MONEY

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

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

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

POST

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

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

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

TELEPHONE

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

Cable & Wireless (☎ 111; Leeward Hwy) Make calls here; give telephone information and can sort you out with a cell phone.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information booth (Arrivals Hall, Providenciales International Airport)

Turks & Caicos Tourism (☎ 946-4970; www.turksandcaicostourism.com; Stubbs Diamond Plaza, Provo; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Sights

The biggest attraction on the island is the world-famous **Grace Bay Beach**. This stunning stretch of snow white sand is perfect for relaxing, swimming and evening up your sunburn. Though it's dotted with hotels and resorts, its sheer size means that finding your own square of paradise is a snap.

If you feel inclined to tear yourself away from the beach and see some sights, there are a few worth taking in. Though the options are limited, there are some historic points that should perk scholarly interest. Check out the ruins of **Cheshire Hall** (Leeward Hwy), a plantation house constructed in the 1790s by British Loyalists.

If you've got a rental car that can handle a bit of dirt road, be sure to check out the lighthouse at **Northwest Point**. Caution is the word as the road has been known to swallow cars whole.

Once you get all that history out of your system go for an anti-intellectual cleanse and seek out the sparkling beach at **Malcolm Roads**. From the settlement of Wheeland, northwest of downtown, a rough dirt road leads to this top-notch sandy spot.

Protecting reefs off of Provo's west shore, Northwest Point Marine National Park also encompasses several saline lakes that attract breeding and migrant waterfowl. The largest is **Pigeon Pond**, inland. This part of the park is the 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 here, and come equipped with food and water.

CHALK SOUND NATIONAL PARK

The waters of this 3-mile-long (5km) 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 horribly potholed road runs along the peninsula; although it is accessible, drive carefully! Unfortunately, large vacation homes line both sides of the peninsula from top to toe, which clip the views and hinder some 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 of rock are intricately carved with Roman lettering that records the names of sailors apparently 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 200yd to the summit, which offers wonderful views over the island and Chalk Sound.

If you want to see what you've been chowing down on, head to the northeast corner of Provo and have a look at **Caicos Conch Farm** (☎ 946-5643; tour adult/child US\$6/3; 🕒 9am-4pm). Slightly ramshackle and a little strange, it has a speedy 20-minute tour to show you how they grow the Caribbean Queens. Feels a bit like visiting a turkey farm – you leave there a little bit disturbed, and a little bit hungry.

PROVIDENCIALES

A

72°20'W

B

C

72°15'W

D

INFORMATION

Associated Medical Practices Clinic	1	D5
Cable & Wireless	2	D5
DHL Worldwide Express	(see 11)	
Federal Express	3	C5
First Caribbean	4	E1
Police Station	5	E2
Post Office	6	E2
Provo Discount Pharmacy	7	D5
Scotiabank	8	E5
Scotiabank (24-Hour ATM)	9	E1
Turks & Caicos Tourism	10	E5
Western Union	11	E1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Art Pickering's Provo Turtle Divers	(see 21)	
Caicos Conch Farm	12	F5
Catch the Wave Charters	(see 30)	
Cheshire Hall	13	F1
Dive Provo	(see 26)	
J&B Tours	(see 30)	

Ocean Vibes	(see 30)	
Rock Carvings	14	B6
Turtle Parasail	(see 30)	
Undersea Explorer Semi Submarine	(see 21)	
Windsurfing Provo	(see 18)	

SLEEPING

Airport Inn	15	C5
Comfort Suites	16	E5
Miramar Resort	17	D5
Ocean Club West	18	E5
Sands	19	E5
Sibonné Hotel & Beach Club	20	E5
Turtle Cove Inn	21	D5

EATING

Baci Ristorante	22	D5
Big Bamboo	(see 26)	
Calico Jack's	(see 26)	
Coyaba	23	D5
Danny Buoy's Irish Pub & Restaurant	24	E5

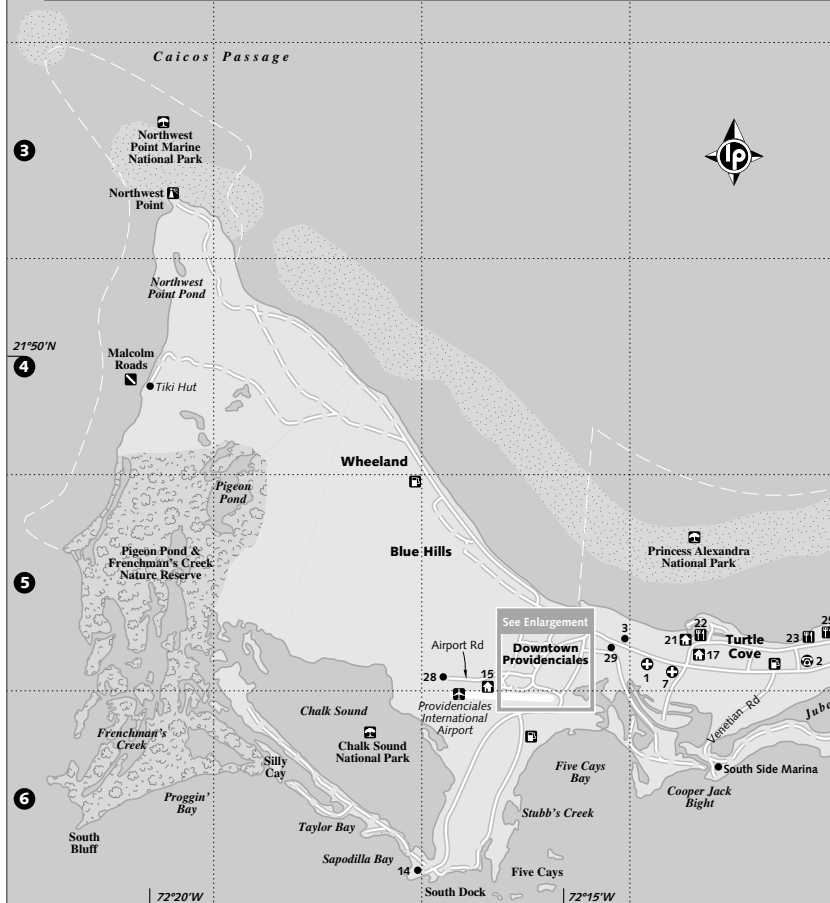
Grace's Cottage	(see 19)	
Island Scoop Ice-Cream	(see 24)	
Magnolia Restaurant & Wine Bar	(see 17)	
O'Soleil	25	D5
Tiki Hut	(see 21)	

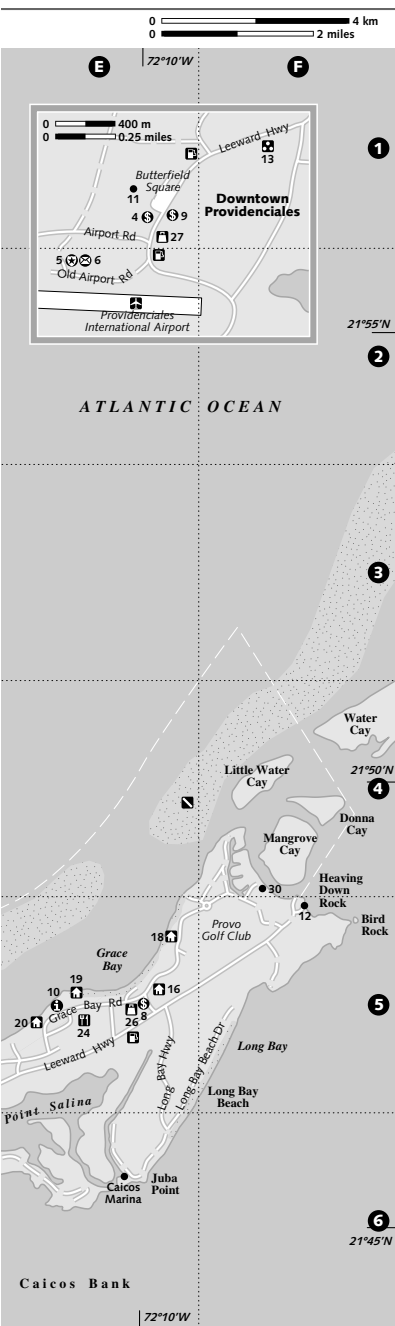
SHOPPING

Marilyn's Crafts	(see 26)	
Night & Day Boutique	(see 26)	
Ports of Call Plaza	26	E5
Tattooed Parrot	(see 26)	
Town Centre Mall	27	E1

TRANSPORT

Budget	28	C5
Budget	(see 27)	
Hertz	29	C5
Hertz	(see 28)	
Leeward Marina	30	F4
Scooter Bob's	(see 21)	
Turtle Cove Marina	(see 21)	





THE CAYS

French Cay

Shiver me timbers, this old pirate hideaway is now more frequented by migrating birds than swashbuckling scoundrels. Uninhabited and a permanent wildlife sanctuary, this small island 15 miles south of Provo is home to a staggering number of bird species. Just offshore the waters are teeming with stingrays who use the calm waters as a nursery. Nurse sharks gather here in summer where they feed, breed and scare swimmers. You can snorkel among the menagerie of sea life on a day trip from Provo; just remember the sharks are more scared of you – well, almost.

Little Water Cay

Northeast of Provo and separated from it by the 400yd-wide channel, Little Water Cay is a nature reserve within Princess Alexandra National Park and is the home of about 2000 endangered rock iguanas. Please don't feed or touch the iguanas. Also keep to the trails to avoid trampling their burrows and the ecologically sensitive plants. Look out for Curious Iguana, so-named for obvious reasons!

Pine Cay

Some cays are rife with seabirds, some are teeming with iguanas. Pine Cay's primary residents are celebrities. The 2 miles of ocean separating it from the northeast edge of Provo is plenty of moat to keep the riffraff out. You can visit this 800-acre private island by prior arrangement, just be sure to say hi to Denzel Washington, Bill Cosby and Jimmy Buffet for me – they all call the island home for at least part of the year.

Fort George Cay

Close enough that you could lob a champagne cork from neighboring Pine Cay, Fort George Cay is home to the remnants of an 18th-century British built fort built back in the day to protect the islands. Now the only invaders are divers and snorkelers there to inspect the gun emplacements slowly becoming one with the sea bottom. The site is protected within Fort George Land & Sea National Park.

Dellis Cay

Oh the irony – Dellis Cay has some of the best shells around, but being in the park precludes you from taking them home. Perhaps that's why it has the best shells around.

JOJO: A NATIONAL TREASURE

Since the mid '80s a 7ft bottle-nosed male dolphin called JoJo has cruised the waters off of Provo and North Caicos. When he first appeared, he was shy and limited his human contact to following or playing in the bow waves of boats. He soon turned gregarious and has become an active participant whenever people are in the water.

JoJo is now so popular that he has been named a national treasure by the Ministry of Natural Resources. This treasure is protected through the **JoJo Dolphins Project** (☎ 941-5617; www.marine.wildlife.org; PO Box 153, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos). In addition to looking out for JoJo, it educates and raises awareness of issues affecting the ocean.

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

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELING

All the dive operators offer a range of dive and snorkel options, from introductory 'resort courses' to Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification (US\$350 to US\$395).

Most offer free hotel pickup and drop-offs. Dive sites include the other Caicos islands and cays.

Art Pickering's Provo Turtle Divers (☎ 946-4232; www.provoturtledivers.com; Turtle Cove Marina) has been going strong for 35 years now; it offers two-tank/night dives for US\$112/80. Visits all the major dive sites – the company is all about service.

Dive Provo (☎ 946-5040; www.diveprovo.com; Ports of Call plaza, Grace Bay Rd) has two-tank/night dives (US\$115/80) at sites around the island, plus photo and video services.

Ocean Vibes (☎ 231-6636; www.oceanvibes.com; Leeward Marina) is the only dive operation on the island run by Belongers. It specializes in small groups and an intimate feel to its aquatic adventures. Two-tank dives are US\$110 and a useful refresher course costs US\$125.

FISHING

A plethora of boat charters and trips can be arranged from Leeward and Turtle Cove Marinas (see right). Try the following:

Catch the Wave Charters (☎ 941-3047; www.catchthewavecharters.com; Leeward Marina) runs a variety of boat charters to suit your taste. Fishing costs US\$500 for half a day. Deep-sea/bottom fishing is US\$750 for a half-day rental of a boat that will fit four fishers.

Bite Me Sportfishing (☎ 231-0366; biteme@tcway.tc) is not just a great name, but a good group of folks to help you land the big one.

BOAT TRIPS

J & B Tours (☎ 946-5047; www.jbtours.com; Leeward Marina) is a friendly team that runs a heap of great affordable trips to suit all tastes, budgets and ages. Offerings include a half-day trip that takes in a snorkel and visit to some protected iguanas (adult/child US\$50/30), to a romantic island getaway (US\$225 per couple), or glowworm cruise (adult/child US\$70/50). Also available are power-boat charters (from US\$650 for a half day) and deep-sea fishing charters (from US\$250 half-day)

Undersea Explorer Semi Submarine (☎ 231-0006; www.caicostours.com; Turtle Cove Marina; adult/child US\$50/40) is a moving underwater observatory that's a big hit with kids and those with a phobia of actually getting wet. It's a neat way to see three different sections of the reef – as long as you're not claustrophobic.

WATER SPORTS

Turtle Parasail (☎ 941-0643; www.captainmarvinsparasail.com; Leeward Marina) offers parasailing (US\$70), wake boarding (US\$60) and banana-boat rides (US\$25).

Windsurfing Provo (☎ 241-1687; www.windsurfingprovo.tc; Ocean Club, Grace Bay) has windsurfing (US\$25 per hour), sailing (US\$100 per day) and kayaking (US\$15 per hour) on offer.

Festivals & Events

See p131 for a list of festivals and events on Providenciales.

Sleeping

Provo most definitely isn't lacking in places to spend the night. Hotels, condos and resorts dot the island with a frequency that may make you wonder if there really are enough tourists to possibly fill all these rooms. Most

GO FLY A KITE

The steady winds that buff the coastline of the Turks and Caicos mixed with the reef-sheltered shoreline are the perfect combination for the snowboarding of the aquatic world – kitesurfing. The bastard child of stunt kite flying, wakeboarding and windsurfing, this sport is going off right now. Imagine flying the biggest kite you've ever seen, strapping yourself onto a wakeboard and holding on for dear life. Depending on how much sugar you like in your tea, it either sounds terrific or terrifying. The warm T&C waters are already on the radar of the sport's elite – but don't be put off, it's also a great place to learn. Chat to Mike at **Windsurfing Provo** (☎ 241-1687; www.windsurfingprovo.tc; Ocean Club, Grace Bay) to get hooked up with the how-to (US\$150 for a two-hour lesson). Who said all there is to do in the Caribbean is lie on the beach?

budgets are accommodated for, but there is a skew to the higher end so those with deeper pockets will be spoiled for choice. At present, supply outnumbers demand so there are some good deals to be found, especially in the low season.

Browse the following websites: www.wherewhenhow.com, www.provo.net and www.tcimall.tc/villas. Also check the hotels' websites listed here for some great discounts.

DOWNTOWN & TURTLE COVE

Airport Inn (☎ 941-3514; airportinn@tcitway.tc; Airport Plaza; s/d US\$99/110; 🏠) Sporting unencumbered views of the runway, the Airport Inn isn't the sort of place to spend your holiday. But it is a perfect option for those catching an early flight or on a very tight budget. It's steps from the airport and at time of research was undergoing some renovations in the rooms, bringing them up a notch. There are plenty of eating options nearby, all with a local flavor.

Turtle Cove Inn (☎ 946-4203; www.turtlecovehotel.com; Turtle Cove Marina; d US\$105; 🏠) If you're here to dive and lounge by the pool, this older property in the heart of the Turtle Cove Marina is a good option. Nothing too flashy, and it's getting a bit worn, but it puts you in a great location. There are numerous restaurants a few steps away, and dive boats, fishing charters and rental cars all leaving from the doorstep.

Miramar Resort (☎ 946-4240; www.miramarresort.tc; Turtle Cove; d US\$145; 🏠) Has bright, clean and spacious rooms with patios, fridges and good views of Turtle Cove from the hill above. It does lack a bit of character and there are some quirks to the place. It's also a fair trek from the beach. But it has a pool, tennis courts and a gym to keep you busy, plus wi-fi, and there is the excellent Magnolia Restaurant in the adjacent building so, all up, it's a winner.

GRACE BAY & EAST PROVIDENCIALES

Comfort Suites (☎ 946-8888; www.comfortsuitesd.com; Grace Bay; r incl breakfast US\$170; 🏠) If you're searching for an affordable resort and are willing to accept that it isn't beachfront, this is a great option. Clean and spacious rooms stack in three stories above the pool and chilled poolside bar. Couches in the rooms, free wi-fi and chilled-out staff are thrown in. There are even designated chairs on the beach for guests. Nothing too special, but if you're here to dive, lie on the beach or not liquidate your finances, this is the place to stay.

Sibonné Hotel & Beach Club (☎ 946-5547; www.sibonne.com; Grace Bay; r US\$185; 🏠) Deservedly popular and occupying a divine stretch of sand on Grace Bay, Sibonné is a real anti-resort. While some of its neighbors are big and flashy, the focus here is small and intimate. Trees dominate the courtyard with plenty of shade for when that sun gets to be flammable. Hammocks dot the property and are prime real estate with the relaxed set. The rooms are basic and a few years old now, but Sibonné still holds it own.

Ocean Club West (☎ 946-5880; www.oceanclubresorts.com; Grace Bay; r US\$260; 🏠) With a great location in the heart of Grace Bay, the OC is a safe bet. The enchanting pool is complete with an arch-bridge-appointed 'river' and the requisite swim-up bar. Rooms are a bit cramped, but the kitchenettes and balconies more than make up for it. There's also wi-fi.

Sands (☎ 946-5199; www.theandstc.com; Grace Bay; d US\$275; 🏠) A great family option with a kiddy pool, and kitchenette in every room. The recent renovations have yielded rooms with clean lines and an elegant design. There are tiki huts on the beach for the sun worshippers and the excellent Hemingway's Bar and Grill on site. Offers wi-fi.

Eating & Drinking

Outside influences have helped to create an abundance of eclectic dining options in Providenciales. Those on a budget or wishing for a simple meal have the choice of some great pubs and family-style restaurants. Conversely, if you want to spend it up and have a truly memorable meal there are more than a few venues that will fit the bill to a delicious tee.

DOWNTOWN & TURTLE COVE

Tiki Hut (☎ 941-5341; Turtle Cove Inn, Turtle Cove Marina; mains from US\$10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Many a salty sea dog has spun a fish story or two under the umbrellas at the Tiki Hut. Set right on the wharf at Turtle Cove Marina, this is where you can sit with a cold beer and spy the boats as they return to port. There are cheap burgers that hit the spot, pizzas to share, daily specials and enough local cred to keep it real.

Baci Ristorante (☎ 941-3044; Harbour Towne Plaza, Turtle Cove; mains from US\$20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Maritime chic at its best with wrought-iron scrollwork lining the ceilings, all with an authentic Italian-infused flavor. The bronzed mermaids keep watch as you dine on nice cuts of veal, fresh pasta and other delightful dishes. There are choice views of the marina and an upscale feel at this classy Turtle Cove eatery.

Magnolia Restaurant and Wine Bar (☎ 941-5108; mains from US\$25; ☺ dinner) Sitting on the hill overlooking Turtle Cove, Magnolia is a real find – the view is almost as delicious as the food. The fairy-light-rimmed balcony is the perfect setting for the signature dish, a cracked-pepper and sesame-encrusted rare-seared tuna. It's so tender it melts in your mouth. The restaurant has an ample wine list to choose from and the service is impeccable. Book ahead to get a table with a good view – it's worth it in every way.

GRACE BAY & EAST PROVIDENCIALES

There is a plethora of dining options in this neck of the woods. The Ports of Call shopping plaza has a stack of midrange options and most of the hotels have some form of restaurant too.

Island Scoop Ice-cream (☎ 241-4230; Grace Bay Plaza, Grace Bay Rd; ice cream US\$3; ☺ 10am-9pm) When the sun is shining and it's all starting to get just a bit too hot, slide into Island Scoop for the

therapy you need. Twenty-four flavors of goodness to choose from piled into homemade waffle cones. Go on, make it a double – you're on holiday!

Calico Jack's (☎ 946-5120; upstairs, Ports of Call plaza; mains from US\$10; ☺ dinner) Comes with a generous helping of nautical paraphernalia and is named after a pirate named Jack – no not *that* pirate named Jack. Nightly drink specials, Spanish-armada-sized portions and a friendly atmosphere make it a locals' favorite. The conch is awesome, and be sure to swing by on a Thursday when the place really hops to the sounds of live music.

Danny Buoy's Irish Pub and Restaurant (☎ 946-5921; Grace Bay Rd; mains from US\$10; ☺ lunch & dinner) This lively little pub is a slice of the emerald isle, in a place about as far from Dublin as you can get. Traditional Irish fare mixed with Caribbean classics makes for an odd sort of fusion – the Guinness is good and if you have enough of them, you might just be convinced you're in the old country.

O'Soleil (☎ 946-5900; The Somerset, Princess Dr; mains from US\$25; ☺ dinner) Fresh seafood is the specialty in this stylish eatery. The Mediterranean-influenced architecture is the perfect backdrop for the culinary designs created in the kitchen. Be sure to try the Turks and Caicos chowder; it's loaded with fresh seafood and the secret ingredient that makes it nearly irresistible – Caribbean rum.

our pick **Grace's Cottage** (☎ 946-8147; www.pointgrace.com; Point Grace; mains from US\$25; ☺ dinner) If you're looking for a romantic setting to drop to one knee and pop the question, or perhaps just in the mood for an amazing meal, Grace's is the place. Tables are spread out among the foliage in a fan of private patios, and crisp white linen tablecloths adorn the surfaces, creating a visual feast. And that's before you try the food – fresh fish, poultry and beef all cooked to perfection, topped off with a fine selection of wine. What more could you want in a place to eat dinner?

Big Bamboo (☎ 946-5832; Ports of Call plaza, Grace Bay Rd; mains US\$25-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) If you want to hang out with some Belongers and sample some great authentic Caribbean delicacies, this is the place to do it. The staff is superfriendly and the feel is relaxed and inviting. Tuck into some beans and rice and a serve of the jerk chicken. You'll feel right at home – irie mon!

Coyaba (☎ 946-5186; www.coyabarestaurant.com; Paradise Inn; mains from US\$35; ☺ dinner) Off Grace

Bay Rd, Coyaba somehow treads the line of fine dining while retaining a relaxed atmosphere. The food is a clever fusion of Caribbean flavors and faithful classics. The legendary chef shows his skills with daily specials that outnumber the menu standards. This is a real food-lovers' paradise. Be sure to make a reservation – word's out about this one.

Shopping

A large selection of beachy items, casual clothing and batiks is offered at **Tattooed Parrot** (☎ 946-5829), Marilyn's Crafts and the Night & Day Boutique, all in the Ports of Call plaza.

Getting There & Around

AIR

For flight information to and from the Caicos Islands, see p133.

There is no bus service from Providenciales International Airport. A taxi from the airport to Grace Bay costs US\$20 one way for two people; each extra person costs US\$5. Some resorts arrange their own minibus transfers.

BICYCLE

Scooter Bob's (☎ 946-4684; scooter@provo.net; Turtle Cove Marina Plaza) rents out mountain bikes for US\$20 per day.

BOAT

A plethora of boat charters and trips can be arranged to the islands and cays from Leeward and Turtle Cove Marinas (see p124).

BUS

Sporadic buses run routes to some of the settlements out of town; if you see one of the small vans, flag it down. There is also a tourist-oriented bus called the **Gecko Bus** (☎ 232-7433; US\$4); get tokens at most hotels and they'll call for a pick-up. The schedule is on island time and only runs when needed.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You'll find the following rental agencies on the island:

Budget (☎ 946-4079; www.budget.com; Providenciales International Airport)

Hertz (☎ 941-3910; www.hertzci.com; Providenciales International Airport)

Rent-a-buggy (☎ 946-4158; www.rentabuggy.tc) Specializes in 4x4 rentals.

Scooter Bob's (☎ 946-4684; scooter@provo.net; Turtle Cove Marina Plaza) Rents out cars and 4WDs from US\$70 per

day and scooters from US\$50 per day. It also rents out bicycles for US\$20 per day and snorkeling gear for US\$15 per day.

TAXI

Taxis are a popular way of getting around the island. Most are vans and although unmetered the pricing is consistent. It's best not to be in a hurry as they often take forever to come pick you up. Your hotel can arrange a taxi for you and they meet all flights at the airport. Here are a couple of good options:

Nell's Taxi Service (☎ 941-3228)

Provo Taxi & Bus Group (☎ 946-5481)

NORTH CAICOS

pop 1500

There was a time a century ago when bountiful North Caicos, with its lush farmland and bustling towns, was the center of action in the island chain. But those times have long since passed. These days there are only stone ruins and a few small towns to show for these early expansions. But don't despair; there remains a pristine tropical isle that is a joy to visit.

There are a few tiny settlements, more groups of dwellings than towns – but that is where the charm lies. There is a distinctive lost-world feel to this island. As you wander along the empty roads, shell-strewn beaches and green interior you have the feeling that you've discovered something new, something that not many people are lucky enough to see. And isn't that the whole point?

Information

There's a post office in Kew, and Bottle Creek has a small public library. The nearest hospital is in Provo (p120). In an emergency, dial ☎ 911.

Government clinic Bottle Creek (☎ 946-7194); Kew (☎ 946-7397)

Police Bottle Creek (☎ 946-7116); Kew (☎ 946-7261)

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. It's a sobering place to visit and worth the effort.

Beaches include **Pumpkin Bluff**, **Horsestable** and most importantly, **Whitby Beach**. On any

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

For as long as everyone can remember North Caicos has always been the ultraquiet neighbor to Provo. But times are a changing – there is an unprecedented amount of development underway on the island. Granted, it's not going to look like Miami Beach any time soon, but there are quite a few new projects under way. The new ferry has increased numbers and there's a deep-water harbor under construction that will make bringing building materials to the island much easier. This translates into more people, and soon more options for places to stay, eat and drink. Sadly it does signal the end of a very quiet era on North Caicos; the days when you got the beaches all to yourself are numbered. So if you want to see NC the way it's supposed to be – quiet as a mouse – you better get here ASAP.

one, yours will be the only Robinson Crusoe footprints. 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 (45.7m) 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 also attract flamingos, as does a large brine lake, **Flamingo Pond**, which floods the center of the island. Here the gangly birds strut around in hot pink. The ponds are protected as individual nature reserves.

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 and further west at Sandy Point Beach.

Sleeping

Generally accommodation on North Caicos is set up with self-catering in mind. All the options listed here come standard with kitchenettes, except for the Pelican Beach Hotel, which cooks for you. The best website displaying the island's accommodation and rentals is www.tcimall.tc.

ourpick Ocean Beach Hotel (☎ 946-7113; www.turksandcaicos.tc/oceanbeach.com; s/d US\$115/130) Popular with families and often full of returning guests, Ocean Beach is a treat. Beautifully maintained with simple homely touches, it feels like you're staying at a friend's cottage – with the best view money can buy. There are rooms here to accommodate every type of group; big or small they'll sort you into the right spot. Ocean Beach has been a trendsetter in sustainability from its inception: the 'so simple it's clever' solar-heated rooftop water-collection

system provides all the water for the hotel, and it doesn't stop there – compact fluorescent lighting, room orientation to take advantage of the wind and avoid air-con use, and a commitment to reducing linen and towel washing. Big hotels around the world could learn a lot from this little inn on North Caicos.

Pelican Beach Hotel (☎ 946-7112; www.pelicanbeach.tc; r US\$160) For those looking for a relaxed, back-to-basics place to stay, this is an excellent option. Suzie and Clifford's place is getting a bit old and tired, but the old-school feel adds to the experience. There is nothing fancy here; plain TV-less rooms sit in a row only a few feet from the beach. There is the option to have breakfast and dinner included, which is available to nonguests on a limited basis too. This option is hard to beat – Suzie is a legend in the kitchen!

St Charles (☎ 946-7042; www.stcharlesnc.com; r from US\$180; ☎ ☎ ☎) The future has arrived in North Caicos in the form of the St Charles. Dominating the skyline, this five-story resort is by far the tallest building on the island. With all the appointments you'd expect in a high-end resort, it doesn't disappoint. Beautifully designed and furnished rooms all come standard with stunning views. The penthouse suite has the best view on the island – but the \$3000 per night rate will prohibit most from getting to see it. There's an aesthetically pleasing pool with a swim-up bar and a nice stretch of beach out front too. Has wi-fi.

Hollywood Beach Suites (☎ 231-1020; www.hollywoodbeachsuites.com; ste from \$260; ☎ ☎) With a maximum capacity of a whopping eight guests, finding space on the beach won't be an issue. The rooms are tidy, modern and well set up for a relaxing holiday, with couches, TVs and DVD players for when the stress of sun worshiping just gets to be too much. There are complimentary kayaks and

bikes for guests. Your dinner is cooked for you the first night of your stay too – go for the lobster!

Eating

Wharf Restaurant (☎ 946-7042; www.stcharlesnc.com; mains US\$6-20; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Situated just off the pool at the St Charles, this casual restaurant is a great place to grab a bite and watch the sun set. Island fare is intertwined with burgers, sandwiches and fish and chips. Very stylish and tasty too.

Silver Palm (☎ 946-7113; Ocean Beach Hotel; mains US\$8-15; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Lobster and conch are the specialties here – all of course sourced locally. Informal and friendly, small and intimate, this place epitomises the North Caicos experience: simple and delicious.

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 getting to/from the island by air or boat, see p134. A taxi from the airport to Whitby costs US\$10 or about US\$40 from the ferry landing, one way. Mac of **M&M Tours** (☎ 231-6285) will pick you up; be sure to prebook.

Most hotels and condos offer complimentary bikes to their guests. Ask around at Al's Rent A Car; it should be able to track one down for about US\$20 per day.

Car rental costs around US\$75 per day. Try the following options:

Al's Rent A Car (☎ 946-7232)

Pelican Car Rentals (☎ 241-8275)

MIDDLE CAICOS

pop 300

If you're really looking to get away from it all, treat yourself by checking out Middle Caicos. With an area the size of North Caicos and a population of only 300 you'll be lucky to see *anyone*. The topography is much the same as North Caicos, with a green, lake-filled interior surrounded by white-sand beach and azure water. Recently a causeway has been completed connecting North and Middle, making the visiting process a whole lot easier. There are few places to stay on the island and even fewer places to eat, so those not intending on a self-catered, pre-arranged stay would do well to plan a day trip. But for those who do decide to stay, your efforts will most certainly

be rewarded – this is the way the Caribbean used to be.

There are a few tiny settlements dotted along the island; Conch Bar and Bambara are the largest, but there still isn't much to them.

Information

There are few services to speak of on the island, save the odd seemingly abandoned gas pump (which may or may not have gas) and a few phone booths that have seen better days. The proximity to North Caicos dictates that traveling over to the neighboring island is the way to go if you want to buy groceries or head out for a meal.

Sights & Activities

The aim of the game on Middle is to relax – but if you're keen to get the blood flowing a bit there are a few options worth checking out. Directly in front of Blue Horizon Resort is **Mudjin Harbor** – the rocky shore rears up to form a bit of rare elevation. Walking along the cliff top you'll be surprised to see a staircase appear out of nowhere, leading into the earth. Take it down through the cave and emerge on a secluded cliff-lined beach. Looking seaward you'll be entertained by the waves crashing into the offshore rocks in spectacular fashion.

A great way to get a feel for the island is to go for a walk on the **Crossing Place Trail**. Hugging the northern edge of Middle Caicos and crossing into North Caicos, this easy-to-follow and straightforward track supports

TWIST MY ARM: THE SPOTS THE AUTHORS WANTED TO KEEP SECRET

A beach is a beach, right? Wrong – there are beaches and then there are *beaches*. And this one is most definitely the latter. **Bambara beach** on the far northeast corner of Middle Caicos is the Caribbean beach that you've been dreaming about. Impossibly white sand, robin-egg blue water and not a soul around. On the quiet end of a blissfully uninhabited island, this beach sees little traffic of any sort. If there just so happens to be somebody else there, just go for a walk – seclusion is only a few steps away.

BEST OF THE REST

If you really want an adventure and want to escape from any sort of tourist infrastructure, then all you have to do is head to either South or East Caicos. These islands are a paradise for those with a phobia of development, tourism or other people.

East Caicos is the least inhabited island on the chain. There is a Haitian immigrant community on the island but little else. The beaches are renowned and odds are you will have them all to yourself.

South Caicos is the place to go for unspoilt scuba diving. The waters are pristine and prized for the effort required to get there. The land itself is a windswept wasteland of sand and scrub. The towns are microscopic and you really will find more donkeys than people here. Each May things spark up a bit for the annual **Big South Regatta** – but don't worry, this is still way off the radar of most T&C visitors.

good ocean views and bird-watching opportunities. It's easily picked up from Mudjin Harbor or from other points along the main road – keep an eye open for the signs.

Sleeping

At present there are only a few sleeping options on the Middle Caicos. The emphasis is on longer term stays where self-catering is a must.

Blue Horizon Resort (☎ 946-6141; <http://bhrefort.com>; cabins from \$450; 🏠) The distinctive blue roofs are the iconic landmarks of this beautiful property. The five cabins are spread out among the greenery, all with prime ocean views. The decor is simple and muted with a pastel theme that harks back to the '80s. But the views and the seclusion more than make up for the slightly dated sense of style. The units all have kitchens and you can provide a shopping list so the cupboards are full for you when you arrive. The best part is the location, sitting atop a cliff overlooking one of the best views in the T&C.

ourpick Dreamscape Villa (☎ 946-7112; www.middlecaicos.com; per week US\$2000) You might just think you're dreaming when you walk into this stunningly situated villa. It's beautifully maintained and on a pristine section of land, only a few yards from the sea. The house itself has three bedrooms and is set up to sleep four comfortably. It has all the modern conveniences and is perfectly arranged for a week of relaxation. There are bikes and sea kayaks to keep you busy, and great snorkeling, right out front, if the mood strikes. Nice touches like an outdoor shower, hammocks and BBQ add up to make Dreamscape a perfect little oasis in the heart of paradise.

DIRECTORY**ACCOMMODATIONS**

Accommodation in the Turks and Caicos is mostly in hotels, resorts and the odd smaller establishment. On Provi you'll mostly find larger resorts, but as you head out to the less populated islands the establishments get more intimate.

The **Turks & Caicos Hotel Association** (www.turksandcaicoshta.com) has a useful website, while the following agencies arrange villa rentals:

Coldwell Banker (☎ 946-4969; fax 946-8969)

Grace Bay Realty (☎ 941-4105; info@gracebayrealty.com)

Prestigious Properties (☎ 946-4379; www.prestigiousproperties.com)

Turks & Caicos Realty (☎ 946-4474; www.tcrealty.com)

ACTIVITIES

The most popular activities are diving and snorkeling, fishing and boating.

Diving highlights include Salt Cay (p119) where you can dive with humpback whales during their annual migration. Grand Turk (p116) has pristine reefs and spectacular wall diving, while the exceptional diving on rarely visited South Caicos (above) is worth the hassle of getting there. And then there is diving off Provo (p124), where you might just get the chance to share the sea with JoJo the dolphin. See p57 for more on diving here.

In Caicos, a two-tank dive typically costs around US\$100 and a half-day snorkeling trip is around US\$65. Fishing can cost US\$400 to US\$800 per half-/full day, while windsurfing is US\$25 per hour.

A two-tank dive in the Turks typically costs from US\$40 to US\$80 and snorkeling around US\$50 per half-day. Fishing is around US\$300 to US\$400 per half-/full day.

BOOKS

The Turks & Caicos Islands – Beautiful by Nature by Julia and Phil Davies is a beautiful coffee-table book.

Water and Light by Stephen Harrigan is a splendid memoir by a Texan who spent several months diving off of Grand Turk.

The Turks & Caicos Islands: Land of Discovery by Amelia Smithers covers the history and idiosyncrasies of these charming islands.

Charles Palmer, a 'Belonger,' as those born on the islands describe themselves, depicts island living and the changes from the early 1950s to the current day in *Living in the Turks & Caicos Islands: From Conch to the Florida Lottery*.

BUSINESS HOURS

The following are standard business hours on the islands; exceptions are noted in individual reviews. Expect limited hours away from Provo or touristy areas.

Bars ☎ to 1am or 2am

Businesses ☎ 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday

Restaurants ☎ breakfast from 8am, lunch from noon, dinner 6:30pm to 9pm

CHILDREN

The Turks and Caicos is a fantastic kid-friendly destination although you will struggle to find specific programs and activities

aimed at younger travelers. Crime is low, traffic is sparse, waves are tiny and the locals are friendly. Some hotels are specifically non-kid-friendly so it's a good idea to check with your hotel beforehand.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There are few real worries on the islands. Crime is nearly unheard of, but normal precautions are advised like not leaving valuables on the beach unattended.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

There are no foreign embassies or consulates in the Turks and Caicos. Contact the relevant officials in Nassau, New Providence (see p104).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Big South Regatta Held on South Caicos in late May, this regatta is a classic for the sea dogs.

Annual Music and Cultural Festival Held in July and August, this annual event is the islands' biggest party – good times and hangovers guaranteed.

Grand Turk Game Fishing Tournament Held end July/early August. I once caught a fish that was this big...

Marathon Run December. Why relax when you can run 26.2 miles?

Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony Grand Turk hosts this special event in mid-December for kids of all ages.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

As in most Caribbean destinations, the attitude towards gay and lesbian travelers in the Turks and Caicos is sadly behind the times. Gay men in particular will find they aren't

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** There are two newspapers in the Turks and Caicos: the biweekly *Free Press* and the weekly *Turks & Caicos News*.
- **Radio & TV** The official Turks and Caicos government radio station is Radio Turks and Caicos (106FM) on Grand Turk. There are several private stations. For contemporary light rock, try 92.5FM; country and western 90.5FM; easy listening 89.3FM; and classical music 89.9FM. WPRT at 88.7FM is a religious and public announcement channel, as is WIV at 96.7FM. Multichannel satellite TV is received from the USA and Canada. The islands have one private TV station.
- **Video Systems** VHS is the standard, and tapes can be purchased from photo-supply shops.
- **Electricity** Hotels operate on 110V (60 cycles), as per the USA and Canada. Plug sockets are two- or three-pin US standard.
- **Weights & Measures** The British Imperial and metric systems are both in use. Liquids are generally measured in pints, quarts and gallons, and weight in grams, ounces and pounds.

welcomed with open arms. Having said that, some of the cruise ships that enter port are gay and lesbian cruises so there is some degree of acceptance.

HOLIDAYS

Turks and Caicos national holidays:

New Year's Day January 1

Commonwealth Day March 13

Good Friday Friday before Easter

Easter Monday Monday after Easter

National Heroes' Day May 29

Her Majesty The Queen's Official Birthday June 14
(or nearest weekday)

Emancipation Day August 1

National Youth Day September 26

Columbus Day October 13

International Human Rights Day October 24

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access in the Turks is getting easier all the time. Wireless internet is offered free of charge in many hotels, and internet terminals are popping up everywhere. Connections are generally fast and the computers are good quality.

INTERNET RESOURCES

North Caicos (www.northcaicos.tc) Lots of great info about North Caicos, including maps, updates on the goings-on and accommodation links.

Providenciales (www.provo.net) This site concentrates on the tourism aspects of Providenciales and provides some good links to the island's activities.

Salt Cay (<http://saltcay.org>) Everything you wanted to know about Salt Cay, but were afraid to ask.

TCI Mall (www.tcimall.tc) Lots of general information and a good gateway into everything TCI.

Times of the Island (www.timespub.tc) This online magazine gets under the surface of the islands and gives the skinny on what's up.

Turks & Caicos Islands Tourist Board (www.turksandcaicostourism.com) The official site of the Turks and Caicos tourism board; great general information and a good place to start.

Turks & Caicos National Museum (www.tcmuseum.org) A plethora of online information on the history of the islands.

MAPS

Tourist maps of Provo and Grand Turk are easily acquired from the tourist offices, the

arrivals hall in the airport and at most hotels. The tourist offices have some substandard maps of the less populated islands, but finding one with any sort of detail is a challenge.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are small hospitals on Provo and on Grand Turk. There are clinics on the smaller islands and a recompression chamber in Provo.

MONEY

The Turks and Caicos are unique as a British-dependent territory with the US dollar as its official currency. The treasury also issues a Turks and Caicos crown and quarter. There are no currency restrictions on the amount of money that visitors can bring in.

The country is pricey. Credit cards are readily accepted on Provo and Grand Turk, as are traveler's checks. Elsewhere, you may need to operate on a cash-only basis. Foreign currency can be changed at banks in Provo and Grand Turk, which can also issue credit-card advances and have ATMs. Major credit cards are widely accepted in the Caicos and Grand Turk. However, credit cards are not widely accepted for small transactions in the more remote cays and islands.

Traveler's checks are accepted in the Caicos and Grand Turk, but you may be charged a transaction fee of 5%.

If you find yourself in need of an emergency cash injection, you can arrange a telegraphic or mail transfer from your account in your home country via **Western Union** (Grand Turk ☎ 946-2324; Dots Enterprises, Pond St; Providenciales ☎ 941-5484; Butterfield Sq, Leeward Hwy).

POST

Post offices can be found on Provo, Grand Turk and North Caicos. To send a postcard to the US will cost US\$0.50; a letter is US\$0.60.

TELEPHONE

The Turks and Caicos country code is ☎ 649. To call from North America, dial ☎ 1-649 + the local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international access code + ☎ 649 + the local number. For interisland calls, dial the seven-digit local

number. We've included only the seven-digit local number in Turks and Caicos listings in this chapter.

Phone calls can be made from **Cable & Wireless** (☎ 1800-804-2994), which operates a digital network from its offices in Grand Turk and Provo.

Public phone booths are located throughout the islands. Many booths require phone cards (see below).

Hotels charge US\$1 per local call. Frustratingly, some also charge for unanswered calls after the receiving phone has rung five times.

Following are some useful telephone numbers:

Directory Assistance (☎ 118)

International Operator Assistance (☎ 115)

Local operator (☎ 0)

Cell Phones

Most cell phones will work in the Turks and Caicos; you can either set your phone up for global roaming prior to leaving home or purchase a SIM card for it once you get here. Global roaming is easy and more expensive; be sure to check rates with your phone company prior to dialing. If you have a GSM phone that is unlocked you can purchase a new SIM card for it (\$10 from Cable and Wireless). This gives you a local number to call from and is much cheaper in the long run.

Phone Cards

Phone cards cost US\$5, US\$10 or US\$15, and can be bought from Cable & Wireless outlets, as well as from shops and delis.

You can also bill calls to your Amex, Discover, MasterCard or Visa card by dialing ☎ 1-800-744-7777 on any touchtone phone and giving the operator your card details (there's a one-minute minimum).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Turks & Caicos Islands Tourist Board (☎ 946-2321; www.turksandcaicostourism.com; Front St, Cockburn Town, Grand Turk)

Turks & Caicos Tourism (☎ 946-4970; www.turksandcaicostourism.com; Stubbs Diamond Plaza, Providenciales)

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Some of the larger hotels have rooms that are wheelchair accessible, but it's best to enquire before arriving.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** (☎) 911
- **Fire** (☎) 911
- **Police** (☎) 911

VISAS

No visas are required for citizens of the US, Canada, UK and Commonwealth countries, Ireland and most Western European countries. Citizens from elsewhere require visas, which can be obtained from British representation abroad.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

The Turks and Caicos is a relatively safe place to travel and no special precautions are required for women travelers.

WORK

Those wishing to work in the Turks and Caicos will need to get a work permit from the immigration department. See www.immigration.tc for more information.

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Turks & Caicos

All visitors, including US citizens, need a valid passport to enter the country. Proof of onward transportation is required upon entry.

Air

There are three airports handling international traffic to Grand Turk and Provo, but most international flights arrive at Provo. The Provo airport has a tourist info booth in arrivals, a restaurant and not much else. Other islands have local airstrips.

Grand Turk International Airport (GDT; ☎ 946-2233)

Providenciales International Airport (PLS; ☎ 941-5670)

South Caicos International Airport (XSC; ☎ 946-4255)

There are limited flights to elsewhere within the Caribbean from Turks and Caicos; those planning on island-hopping may find themselves backtracking to Florida before delving deeper into the region. The following airlines fly into Turks and Caicos:

American Airlines (☎ 1-800-433-7300; www.aa.com)
Miami, New York

Bahamas Air (☎ 941-3136; www.bahamasair.com)
Nassau

British Airways (☎ 1-800-247-9297; www.ba.com)
London

Delta Airlines (☎ 1-800-221-1212; www.delta.com)
Atlanta

Spirit Air (www.spiritair.com) Fort Lauderdale

US Airways (☎ 1-800-428-4322; www.usairways.com)
Charlotte

GETTING AROUND

Air

Following are airlines flying within the Turks and Caicos:

Air Turks & Caicos (☎ 941-5481; www.airturksandcaicos.com) Flies from Providenciales to Grand Turk six times daily, North Caicos three times daily, Middle Caicos four times per week, and Salt Cay daily. It also flies from Grand Turk to Salt Cay daily.

Skyking (☎ 941-5464; www.skyking.tc) Flies from Providenciales to South Caicos three times daily, Grand Turk eight times daily, and from Grand Turk to South Caicos three times daily.

Bicycle

Cycling is a cheap, convenient, healthy, environmentally sound and above all fun way to travel. Bicycles are complimentary to guests at many hotels or can be rented at concessions for around US\$20 per day.

Boat

TCI Ferry Service (☎ 946-5406) is a new ferry operation taking passengers from the Leeward Marina on Providenciales to North Caicos (US\$25, \$40 round-trip same day), eliminating the need for the expensive and inconvenient flight. There are four departures each way daily.

A ferry runs biweekly trips from Grand Turk to Salt Cay (US\$12, round-trip). Contact **Salt Cay Charters** (☎ 231-6663; piratequeen3@hotmail.com). Whale-watching boat trips with this company cost US\$75.

Bus

The **Gecko Shuttle** (☎ 232-7433) is a privately run bus service on Provo. One ride is \$4 or you

can buy a day pass for \$11. There isn't a regular schedule; when you purchase tickets from a hotel desk they'll call the bus for you.

Car, Motorcycle & Scooter

Taxis get expensive in the long run so renting a car makes sense if you plan to explore Provo or Grand Turk. The local companies are very good, and may be cheaper than the internationals. Rentals are around \$80 per day and the cars are generally in good nick; most rental companies offer free drop-off and pickup. A government tax of \$15 is levied on car rentals (\$8 on scooter rentals). Mandatory insurance costs \$15. A minimum age of 25 years may be required.

Driving is on the left-hand side. At roundabouts (traffic circles), remember to circle in a clockwise direction, entering to the left, and give way to traffic already on the roundabout.

Speed limits in the Turks and Caicos are 20mph (around 32km/h) in settlements and 40mph (around 65km/h) on main highways.

Please refer to island destinations for rental companies.

DRIVER'S LICENSE

To rent a car, citizens of the US, Canada, and the UK and Commonwealth countries are required to have a valid driver's license for stays of up to three months. Everyone else requires an International Driving Permit. You must get this permit before you arrive on the Turks and Caicos Islands.

FUEL

Gas stations are plentiful and usually open from 8am to 7pm. Some close on Sunday. Gasoline costs about US\$5.50 per US gallon – luckily most destinations are pretty close. Credit cards are accepted in major settlements. Elsewhere, it's cash only, please!

Taxi

Taxis are available on all the inhabited islands. Most are minivans. They're a good bet for touring, and most taxi drivers double as guides. Be sure to negotiate an agreeable price before setting out as the cabs are unmetered.

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