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Out of the Blue

From top: The serpentine infinity pool and swim-up bar at Regent Palms Turks and Caicos; take a powercat boat with Caicos Dream Tours out for conch diving; the open air spa's treatment cabanas



Saving Grace

Take rescue from the real world with a short jaunt to picturesque Grace Bay on Providenciales. | *By Stephanie Davis Smith* |

Chef Thomas Musson—roque of Parallel23 at the Regent Palms Turks and Caicos—shuffles down the wooden boardwalk to deliver yet another exquisite dinner course to our private, candlelit table on the beach. He sets down two beautifully plated dishes and the aromas explode against the sea air. “Here we have a Caicos grouper with chickpea purée, glazed vegetables and Moroccan spiced jus,” he says, living up to the hype of his team’s Four-Diamond Award accolades. First, with a beet salad with frisée lettuce and hibiscus—all pulled from the organic garden around the corner—

and then with yellow fin tuna topped by tomato jam. It’s late. The moon is high in the sky and my husband and I are only halfway through what has been an exquisite seven-course. Our only reminder of Grace Bay is the sound of waves lapping against the shore. It’s all the incentive we need to dive into yet another plate of perfectly prepared fish.

This culinary experience makes it hard to believe that Turks and Caicos is just a short, three-hour, nonstop flight from Atlanta. From wheels down, we zip through town and are in the hotel lobby in under

... A quick arrival in a beautiful country, in the same time zone, no encumbering time change—welcome to paradise.

...met by a friendly concierge in the open-air lobby of the Regent Palms, a five-star property on Providencia (nicknamed Provo), designed to reflect the weathered Colonial style of the British West Indies. In this breezy spot we are escorted to our suite in one of the five separate buildings connected by ramp-like walkways lined with banyan trees. The island-inspired décor permeates the expansive, family kept grounds—picture pops of bright color everywhere. Taking the tiny elevator up to our room, then watching an old-fashioned skeleton key open the double oak doors to our suite—I can't believe that not only have I landed in paradise, but I'm in a luxury hotel.

...The resort's vibe is expertly nostalgic and decidedly Caribbean, but we're not fooled—everything is state-of-the-art. Eight extraordinary suites feature vaulted ceilings, keyed access, Internet, flat-panel LCD TVs, two private terraces, an interior "water room" with a hot tub, and an adjacent Sun Suite featuring a private shower, garden and Jacuzzi. Equally impressive are two-, and three-bedroom suites, each with wet bars, hydro-massage bathtubs and private terraces and ocean views, round our accommodations. Despite amenities galore, it is the enormous king bed with a soft, hand-tufted headboard in our suite that provides the most welcome respite after course of culinary pampering. The bed is so delightfully full, the bed is the only thing I want to see.

...And so, we wake to a scene every bit as beautiful as our first night at the Regent Palms—a view of the crystal box-blue water. Logically, our first stop is the swim-up bar for tropical rum concoctions, where a bartender greets us affectionately and nicknamed "The Doctor"—and yes, he's got your Rx.

We follow our day of recovery with a more spirited excursion—conch diving. Heading this adventure are the good folks at Caicos Dream Tours (caicosdreamtours.com), who dock their powerboat on the beach for the most efficient pickup ever. Once on the water, we make friends with the other diving hopefuls and bond in between snorkeling drop-off points, which include a shipwreck site and tons of gorgeous reef.

...Caicos claims 365 miles of rocky undersea terrain (some of the oldest dive schools in the area.) In the hands of the guides, we motor to uninhabited Cay Cay (aka Iguana Island) where we learn to open a conch from the shell via a small hammer and



ISLAND TREASURES
From top: A ghost ship marooned off the coast is perfect for snorkeling; seared tuna at Paraiso 23; tropical drinks made by "The Doctor," a charming bartender at Paraiso; the terrace at Paraiso 23

...we wake to a scene every bit as indulgent as our first night at the Regent Palms—a stretch of Tiffany box-blue water. Logically, our first full day is dedicated to floating in the smooth-as-glass water, and paddling to the swim-up bar for tropical rum concoctions...

knife. Contents are then tossed into a savory native salad with red and yellow peppers and onion, which we enjoy amid the unexpected company of the lost colony of iguanas trapped here.

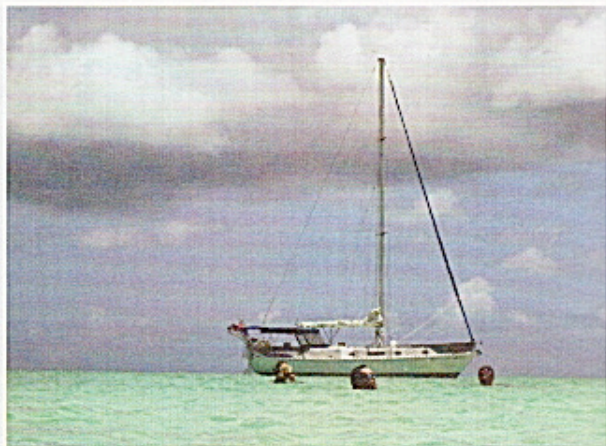
Back on dry land, we meet up with our fellow snorkelers, now friends, at the Bagatelle Beach Club at the Gansevoort Hotel—the NYC import boasts the hottest nightlife on Providenciales—for dinner and dancing. Here, the after-dark crowd—an interesting mix of locals, French Canadians and Irish ex-pats—gather for a lively night out.

The next day begins with morning-after respite courtesy of The Regent Spa. Conceived by Angel Stewart of Las Ventanas al Paraiso and Golden Door fame, this award-winning, 25,000-square-foot oasis doles out indulgence. And, though spacious, the spa still feels intimate—shirking traditional hallways and rooms for 17 private bungalows joined together by walkways perched over a tranquil reflecting pond.

Paul Dussey, one of the best therapists I've ever met, invented the resort's signature "Zareeba" treatment. Meaning "protected enclosure," this **CONTINUED...**

...CONTINUED experience involves sitting in a tiny pup tent stirring a hot pot filled with nourishing herbs with a wooden paddle. As herbal steam enters the pores, cue the sweating, cleansing and detoxification process. After 20 minutes of this purification ritual and a massage, I emerge a new woman. Pampering my husband is the spa's interpretation of a man cave—complete with alligator-embossed walls and an HDTV—where he is enjoying beer, a cigar and a shave.

Relief at the Regent Palms also comes by way of fitness. Tennis courts and a yoga, Pilates and meditation studio offer morning classes daily—what better place to strike a pose than this spot, which overlooks the 150-foot central palm-flanked water garden? Another popular activity on the island is world-class golf—the best of which is found at nearby Provo Golf & Country Club. Designed by Karl Litten in 1991, this course boasts 14 holes over the water. Even better are the preferred rates for guests of Regent Palms.



Also lingering outside the resort is no restaurants—Magnolia Wine Bar for Banoff Vix for lunch and the Conch Shack (a loc where we saw a sweet native dog called a “ps and no shortage of water sports, one of which day sailing excursion. Before we set sail, an takes us to the K&A Gourmet (a mini Wh where we scooped up a baguette, Brie and sa picnic on board the boat.

Well, “boat” doesn’t exactly do this ves foot, ’84 Demato sailboat named “Turtle (turtlevoyager.com) owned by John Ward and Leathers—justice. To our surprise, both ma roots in Georgia: Leathers lives part-time and Ward near Lake Burton, where he has home. While anything but homesick, we w to hang with fellow Georgians. Raised in parents who sailed the Atlantic, Ward belong the island’s first Anglo families. He enraptur the stories of the island circa 1960s and ’7

TAKING ATOLL

FROM TOP: The Turtle Voyager; Provo Golf & Country Club, a glass-the Grand Bay; a penthouse suite at the Regent Palms

of which belong in the historic registry. Servin drinks mixed in the h deck, Leather and Ward different islands during regaling us with more soup in several cays at around near the shorelin

new friends before sailing into the sunset (lit finally, back to Turtle Bay Marina.

Filled with thoughts of our impending we refuse to call it a night. Instead we hit t Tiki Hut restaurant (tikihut.tc), sit at a loo looks like something out of a 1970s Hawaii and throw back a round of sweet mai tais. we can’t remember our hectic life at hom week in the rearview, but worlds away on is It’s all gone by too fast. So, with one final clink glasses and toast to many happy retu at The Regent Palms during high season (to April) from \$1,250 per night. 866.8 regentsurksandcaicos.com