



Mr. Advani
Food & Beverage

Innovative Culinary and Wine Scene in the Turks & Caicos Islands

By [Nikheel Advani](#), Chief Operating Officer and Principal, Grace Bay Resorts

When people think of the Caribbean it's often the crystal clear, turquoise blue waters and powdery white sand beaches that come to mind first. For most, the culinary options are not at the forefront when booking a Caribbean getaway, but this perception is changing and the Caribbean Food & Wine Festival has led the way in making Turks and Caicos an international destination for sophisticated epicurean travelers over the past few years. Our award-winning team at Grace Bay Resorts, in partnership with the Turks and Caicos Tourist Board and The Wine Cellar, is proudly going into its fourth year hosting the annual Caribbean Food & Wine Festival in Providenciales on November 6 - 8, 2014. The festival brings together international chefs and winemakers who partner with local chefs to create a truly memorable, and always sold-out, event focused on the local food and flavors of the island.

We launched the Caribbean Food & Wine Festival in 2011 because we realized the islands' culinary landscape was changing. When I joined Grace Bay Club in 2004 there were only two restaurants I would recommend, but as food and beverage programs became more important to travelers worldwide, Turks and Caicos adapted and now we have over 20 restaurants with talented, award-winning chefs serving the best food in the Caribbean. As such, my partners and I designed a creative culinary experience that high-lights our local chefs and introduces our amazing new restaurants to an international audience. To establish the Caribbean Food & Wine Festival as a must attend annual event among the epicurean set, we knew that we also needed to partner with some of the best chefs and winemakers from across the globe, and that's exactly what we did. The vision and direction of key leaders like Ralph Higgs, Director of Tourism, and Anthony Garland, Co-Founder and Co-Chairman of the festival, has been invaluable in the growth and development of the event over the past few years. Now, just four years later we have gained international recognition with festival attendees traveling to Providenciales from all over the world.



Susan Magrino Agency
352 Park Avenue South, 13 FL
New York, NY 10010
212.957.3005
www.smapr.com



Why the Caribbean Food & Wine Festival is Different

Our festival has three important factors that set it apart from others. The first is our size and focus on creating a boutique festival, even as awareness of the festival grows and we see increased attendee numbers and recognition around the world each year. We insist on keeping our dinners and tasting events small so that all of our guests can interact with the chefs and winemakers directly and learn something new about Caribbean cuisine and the islands. Our goal is for everyone to have a good time, but to also walk away feeling like they really got to know our local and guest chefs and learn something extraordinary. Each year, we offer the most current culinary experience available, always one step ahead of the latest trends, and all in a stunning Caribbean setting.

We place a great emphasis on our local culinary talent. While we invite internationally known celebrity chefs, they are not our only focus. Our mission is to keep the focus on the local culinary scene and keep the event feeling very real and not too over the top. Guests are able to experience the most local cuisine available, like sea to table and farm to table dishes from farms in North Caicos. We want our guests to know they have access to the chefs, and we have found they appreciate the authenticity and unique programming of our festival year after year.

Our main differentiator is that the Caribbean Food & Wine Festival is also a non-profit event, raising money for The Department of Youth Affairs and the island's 'Little Chefs' mentor program that supports and encourages young local chefs to pursue careers in hospitality, a vital industry of Turks and Caicos Islands. It was important to launch and maintain the festival as a non-profit so that we give back to our community and encourage a new generation of chefs to continue their training on island, while also introducing new culinary talent to the island and supporting the many new resorts, restaurants and food and beverage operations on the island. In this way, the Little Chefs program provides vital support to the island economy and is a true island need. Every year we have raised more and more money for this cause. Last year, over the course of three days, we welcomed approximately 500 guests and raised an estimated \$50,000. This year our goal is to exceed that amount, and I know we will.

Looking Ahead to 2014



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With the idyllic Turks and Caicos Islands as their inspiration, the festival encourages local and guest chefs to create menus that embrace the flavors of the islands, using freshly caught seafood and other indigenous ingredients. Over the years our roster of chefs and winemakers have grown to bring a new set of discerning foodies and oenophiles to Turks and Caicos and 2014 is shaping up to be another stellar year. We're thrilled to welcome culinary all-stars Chef David Lefevre of Manhattan Beach Post in California and Chef Walter Junger, as well as renowned vintners from Benzinger Family Winery, Cuvaison Estate, Weingut Salz Seewinkelhof and Duck Pond Cellars & Desert Wind Winery. Past festival participants include Tiffany Derry, fan favorite on Bravo's Top Chef, Christina Tosi, chef, owner and founder of New York's Momofuku Milk Bar, and Xoliswa Ndoyiya, Nelson Mandela's personal chef of 20 years, as well as Chef Beau MacMillan.

This year festivities commence on Thursday with a starlit Welcome Dinner at Blue Haven Resort's Fire & Ice restaurant. Featuring a five-course dinner and carefully selected wine pairings this event typically garners more than 100 guests, including the Premier of Turks and Caicos Islands, Honorable Doctor Rufus Ewing. It is a great way to kick-off our weekend of gastronomic celebrations and we think it's important to host an intimate dinner for everyone to really get a feel for the festival and exciting culinary experiences to come.

The following day, we will host our second Women of Wine luncheon with distinctive dishes and carefully selected wine pairings. We introduced this event last year to give our guests an opportunity meet our resorts' incredible female chefs while learning about new wines in a fun and casual atmosphere. Later that evening, our most highly anticipated event of the festival weekend, the Gourmet Safari will lead guests on a progressive dinner party around Providenciales. Now in its eighth year, the Gourmet Safari was the original event that served as a catalyst for the festival and continues to be a guest favorite today. Guests will whet their appetite with innovative cocktails at Krave courtesy of Grace Bay Club and then proceed to the appetizer course. From there, guests will enjoy dinner at Coyaba, Seven Stars, The Re-geant Palms, before concluding with dessert at The Gansevoort. This interactive 'dine around' is a completely local experience that gives our festival guests an opportunity to discover our incredible restaurants and meet our talented chefs.

On Saturday, we host our annual Food & Wine Pairing event at West Bay Club, featuring four 20-person introductory food and wine pairing seminars, highlighting meat, seafood, cheese, and dessert/chocolate. Each of the tasting rooms showcase our guest chefs and winemakers with support from the young local talent of our 'Little Chefs' mentor program.

Following the Food & Wine Pairing, our third annual Island Street Food Fair focuses on the expert grilling and barbeque techniques of local chefs around the island. With the growing trend of food trucks in major cities around the world, we thought it was time for Turks and Caicos to create its own street food fair, and this event continues to receive rave reviews year after year, as it give guests a real inside look at the many cultures and cuisines of the island.

Finally, on Saturday evening, all our guest chefs will headline 'Dinner with the Stars' at Grace Bay Club, a lavish event that officially concludes the weekend festivities with a five-course food and wine pairing under the stars directly on Grace Bay Beach.



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We have found a recipe that works for the Caribbean Food & Wine Festival, and while we may alternate the schedule and introduce new chefs and wineries to partner with each year, our core mission remains the same – to showcase the elevated culinary offerings of the islands and encourage our youth, the Little Chefs, to continue the great culinary tradition we started here.

Year after year, the boutique nature of the festival allow guests access to chefs and winemakers from around the world who come together with our local chefs for completely authentic culinary experiences, with beautiful Turks & Caicos as the backdrop. The Caribbean Food & Wine Festival is unlike any other food festival experience and we look forward to celebrating for many years to come.

Nikheel Advani, Chief Operating Officer of Grace Bay Resorts, has established his reputation for hands-on management with more than 23 years of experience. Mr. Advani oversees the overall operation of Grace Bay Club, while expanding his operational responsibilities to include managing new Grace Bay Resorts in the Caribbean and other regions, including Latin America and additional properties in Turks and Caicos. Mr. Advani can be contacted at 649-946-5050 or nikheel@gracebayresorts.com ***Extended Bio...***

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