

BRIDAL GUIDE

The Honeymooner's Guide to Turks and Caicos

If your idea of marital bliss includes rest, relaxation, and a spectacular tropical beach that's close to home, then we've found the perfect place for you.

By:

Stefania Sainato

For our first wedding anniversary, my husband and I jokingly fantasized about celebrating on a deserted island, just the two of us. We made good on our romantic promise by going to Providenciales in Turks and Caicos. Nestled in the British West Indies, just 575 miles southeast of Miami, the Turks and Caicos island chain used to be a hidden gem that was frequented mainly by serious scuba divers and reclusive A-listers. Now it's become one of the most sought-after honeymoon destinations in the world, thanks to its extraordinary beauty. We couldn't picture a more idyllic setting than award-winning Grace Bay Beach to reflect on all of our milestones as husband and wife from the past year.



Photo courtesy of West Bay Club

*Photo Credit: **Paradise Photography***

Fun facts: The islands allegedly got their name from the native Turks Head cactus, which resembles a Turkish *fez* (hat), coupled with the Spanish word *cayos* (which means small keys). Christopher Columbus first set foot on the island of Grand Turk in 1492 before departing for Cuba.

Where To Stay

Jason and I immediately felt at home in **West Bay Club**, an intimate boutique hotel that was rebranded by Grace Bay Resorts in July 2013. Here, we were more than just Room 409B — staffers referred to us by name and they went out of their way to personalize our experience and make it extra special. We were blown away when our personal concierge, Wellington, transformed our room with rose petals, candles and chocolate-covered strawberries on the night of our anniversary. Another highlight was when Chris, the beach

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director, took us for exciting sails on the Hobie Cat (non-motorized water sports are free of charge).



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After exploring the rest of the island, we realized that not only does this hotel offer couples unparalleled luxury with all of the comforts of home but it also occupies the widest (and most peaceful) stretch of Grace Bay Beach. The grocery store is about a 15-minute walk away and the main resort strip, including the Saltmills Shopping Plaza, is about a 10-minute cab ride away. This 46-suite resort doesn't skimp on room amenities; we were positively goo-goo eyed over our luxury suite's massive wraparound balcony, his-and-hers bathroom vanities, immaculate kitchen, living room and master bedroom. We couldn't ask for a more magical anniversary. In fact, we may have set the bar a little too high for future years! (Room rates start at \$500 for a one-bedroom suite and include daily breakfast; thewestbayclub.net.)

Tip: Factor in a 12% government tax and 10% service charge into your stay on the island.





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Photos courtesy of West Bay Club

Adventures By The Sea

Home to the third largest coral reef in the world, TCI is the ultimate diver's and snorkeler's playground. We took a private cruise with Island Vibe Tours, where we marveled at parrotfish, grouper, barracuda, a lemon shark (!) and my personal favorite, the majestic Eagle Ray. (If you're lucky, you may even spot JoJo, a wild bottlenose dolphin who occasionally makes an appearance and is considered to be a national treasure.) Captain Sean made the expedition just as entertaining as it was informative by rocking out to reggae music and persuading us to jump off the diving board, a scarier-than-it-looks 15-ft drop.

We stopped at the nature reserve Little Water Cay, which is inhabited by endemic rock iguanas — miniature, dragon-like creatures who were so busy basking in the sun, they didn't mind us snapping away with our cameras. The private beach here was jaw-dropping to behold, the white sand blinding our eyes against all that aquamarine. (Fun fact: The sand never gets hot in Turks!) We were more than thrilled to bask in Provo's underwater splendor but if you can manage to tear yourselves away, there's a wide variety of other offsite excursions that couples can partake in, including parasailing, deep sea fishing, horseback riding, golf, kite surfing and much more.



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Foodie Boom

Provo has become a top epicurean destination thanks to their annual Caribbean Food & Wine Festival in November, where top international guest chefs and winemakers highlight the best local cuisine in interactive seminars that quickly sell out. But culinary adventures await no matter what time of year you come here.

No trip to Turks is complete without tasting conch (a shellfish with a large, spiral-shaped exterior). Fun fact: According to Caribbean lore, consuming the piston raw can be a potent aphrodisiac! We couldn't get enough of raw conch salad, but bisque soup, fritters, curried versions and cracked conch also abound on restaurant menus.



Photo Credit: Stefania Sainato

There's no shortage of both fine dining and casual dining outposts on the island, but perhaps Coco Bistro is the most famous. Splurge on a three-course dinner here and you won't be disappointed. The setting is enchanting: Tucked away in a coconut grove, there are so many palm trees here that they create a virtual canopy of thick fronds swaying in the night breeze. Most importantly, executive chef Stuart Gray's menu showcases bold Caribbean flavors and the finest local ingredients. Think mouthwatering dishes like lobster tacos, ahi tuna sashimi, avocado rolls, prime-cut rib eye and tandoori mahi-mahi. Leave a little room in your bellies for a slice of their to-die-for coconut pie.

