

Bravo for Provo

Cabanas on the beach at Grace Bay Club on Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos Islands of the British West Indies. Below: Judith Evans Thomas and her diving instructor with conch she found after snorkeling on the reef during a Caicos Dream Tour.



On the breathtaking Providenciales—or Provo—of the British West Indies, you'll find the Grace Bay Club and hear one travel writer's high praise. BY JUDITH EVANS THOMAS

Imagine a breeze blowing at 75 degrees, sand soft as silk, endless blue skies and calm, warm water lapping at your feet. Your rum punch is getting low, so you stroll back to the beach chaise and retrieve your handy “service” flag. Before you have time to stick it into the sand, a waiter appears. How did life get so good? That’s what I thought on the first day we arrived at the Grace Bay Club on Providenciales (also known as Provo) in the Turks and Caicos Islands of the British West Indies. Little did I know it would only get better.

Located between the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, Provo is one of only eight inhabited islands and cays in the 40-island Turks and Caicos chain. Tourists come to dive on the world’s third-largest coral reef, and to fish, sail and eat conch 10 ways, or just to hang out on the islands’ magnificent beaches.

The official capital of Turks and Caicos (TCI) is Grand Turk Island, but the hub of tourism is Provo. My husband, Steve, and I discovered Provo in the late-1980s when we brought our young family for a vacation at Club Med Turquoise. I remember being awed by Grace Bay’s fine white sand and warm water so clear you could snorkel for miles with schools of fish that seemed as curious about us as we were about them. At that time, not much else was happening on the island.

Fast-forward to 1993, when Grace Bay Club opened on 11 acres of undisturbed beachfront as the only all-suite hotel. Additions in the last few years include the 5,000-square-foot Anani Spa and Fitness Center, on-the-beach pool, 38 all-suite

villas, the world’s longest infinity-edge bar, an eco-friendly program for kids and The Estate, a collection of 22 custom-designed owner/rental suites.

Our journey to Provo began in a Pittsburgh snowstorm and ended with blue skies and sun. Like a bunch of shipwrecked sailors, we all but kissed the ground when we arrived. Grace Bay’s reception staff greeted us with rum punch and radiant smiles. From that day forward, we were treated as if our every need was theirs. From dining under the stars to beach massages to luxurious suites stocked with fruit, champagne and coffee, we were pampered. Every evening, housekeepers surprised us with a treat. One night it was chocolate-covered strawberries, another night a bougainvillea-filled bubble bath.

The days rushed by. We rented open-air vehicles to tour the island and had a near-death

experience getting used to British driving rules. At the island's famous Da Conch Shack, we helped clean freshly caught conchs, which then became our lunch. On another day we went with Caicos Dream Tours to snorkel on the reef.

Each evening we watched the sun set and wandered to the Infinity Bar to chat with other guests. One couple from New York told us they had been coming to Provo for 10 years and had tried all of the hotels at least once. This was their second time staying at Grace Bay Club and would be the only place they would come in the future. Their reason? The staff made them feel at home. We couldn't agree more.

By the time we left, we were on a first-name basis with general manager Anderson Howard, Raj, Anthony, Kevin, Bjorn, our concierges Boda and Ewan, Katiana, Shaneka, Leidra, Pauline, Mario, Jeffrey, chef-extraordinaire Martin Davies, Spa staffers Zanika, Sofia, Sharon and many others who were so special.

In all my travels, I never came away from a trip with more business cards and promises to "keep in touch." These are people, and a very special place, that I am truly looking forward to seeing again. **PM**

**PROVIDENCIALES, TURKS AND
CAICOS ISLANDS, BRITISH WEST
INDIES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.**

**Turks & Caicos Tourist Board:
800/241-0824,**

turksandcaicostourism.com

**Providenciales: Stubbs Diamond
Plaza, 649/946-4970**

**Grand Turk: Front Street,
649/946-2321**

Travel planning: provo.net

**Great information for lesser-known
islands: turksandcaicos.tc**

**A seasonal magazine filled with
interesting facts: timespub.tc**

**What is happening on the island
and a restaurant guide:
wherewhenhow.com.**

Grace Bay Club: gracebayclub.com

Currency: U.S. Dollar

Passport required

Electricity: 110 volts, 60 cycles AC

Language: English

Departure tax: \$15

**For more on Judith Evans Thomas'
excursion, visit
pittsburghmagazine.com.**