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By Kristin Braswell • March 21, 2022

For the Love of Rum and Sand: A Return to Turks and Caicos

After a two-year hiatus, a writer makes her way back to the serene Caribbean for sun, sand, and of course, rum.





Wymara Resort & Villas overlook Turtle Tail Bay's turquoise water. Courtesy of Wymara Resort & Villas

The teal-hued water below that reveals itself as my plane nears the ground is always the prelude to the forthcoming joy. There is no region in the world that fills my spirit more than the Caribbean, and after two years of separation due to the pandemic, I was finally heading back for a taste of rum, soca music, and sunshine in **Turks and Caicos**. The outdoor market tables spilling over with bright fruits and spices, a glass of fiery, toffee-flavored rum at a nameless beach bar, the stillness between a sunset and shoreline, the warmth from people that's hard to find in my frenetic city life—these are the Caribbean moments that I always revel in, fully.

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Even though I've made annual trips to the Caribbean for as long as I can remember, I've only been to Turks and Caicos once before. The island was the location of my last prepandemic visit in 2019, and I've been thinking about that cobalt blue ocean ever since.

Settling into beach life in Providenciales

The country spans more than 40 cays and islands—8 of which are inhabitable—and my trip kicks off in Providenciales (often referred to as Provo), the hub for most of the archipelago's tourism. Even so, you won't find rows of high-rise hotels crowding the roads, which is a huge part of its draw for me. I welcome this open space between sand and sea.

After a 90-minute flight from Miami, I check into [Wymara Resort & Villas](#), an oceanfront property located at the west end of Grace Bay on Bight Beach's porcelain-white sands. The open-air lobby is framed by a large pool, and that glittering Atlantic Ocean just beyond reach lets me know that I have truly arrived. After completing renovations in November 2020, the four-acre property reopened with 91 rooms and 7 villas. My oceanfront studio is like the Caribbean home I've always dreamed of owning one day, complete with a washer and dryer, stand-alone bathtub, kitchen with a bar area, and patio with ocean views that make it impossible not to head down to the sand to see up close. Wymara has two dining options: the beachfront venue [Zest](#) and a new restaurant from chef Andrew Mirosch—who is both an award-winning chef and local fisherman—called [Indigo](#).

In the evening at Zest, I never shy away from the selections of fresh produce and wild-caught seafood (all sustainably and locally sourced from farmers and fisherman), including a delicious and meaty piece of Turks lobster that's butter poached in Bambarra black rum, lime, garlic, chile, and butter, served alongside spicy crushed potato and cabbage slaw. Lobster of any variety is a typical Turks & Caicos dish, as is conch made into either fritters or a ceviche-style salad. **Da Conch Shack** serves up some of the best variations of conch on the island, and for Creole dishes like griot (fried pork shoulder) and rice and peas, head to **Saved by Grace**. The **Turks and Caicos Island Fish Fry**—which happens every Thursday with a celebration that includes masqueraders, music, and over a dozen food vendors—is a favorite among guests and residents that will return later this year.

On my last night, a lively beach barbecue at Wymara plays the sweet soca sounds that I've missed for so long. Hotel guests at other tables chatter about what has become the norm in casual conversations now: what it took to get here (Turks and Caicos **requires** a negative test taken no more than three days before arrival) and how good it feels to be back. On my final day in Provo, I visit the south shore for a dip in Sapodilla Beach Bay's outrageously clear water—so shallow you'd have to walk for at least 10 minutes before the waves hit your shoulders. This works out perfectly, because I've got a rum punch from nearby Jerome's Conchy Conchy bar in one hand that I can't risk spilling as I wade into the warm, turquoise-colored water. The next time I return, I hope to visit Salt Cay island to witness the annual migration of humpback whales from January through April.

Ambergris Cay a three-mile-long island and an all-inclusive resort where guests use golf carts to get around. Courtesy of Ambergris Cay

Solitude, nature, and daily massages in Ambergris Cay

Though Providenciales is hardly a place with a frenetic energy, I leave to embrace even chiller vibes at an island just an 18-minute plane ride away in southern Turks & Caicos: **Ambergris Cay.**

The all-inclusive, three-mile-long island feels like a mashup of Jurassic Park with unassuming luxury in the middle of the ocean. Iguanas roam the property more than guests at times, and sleek villas and beachfront suites with wraparound verandas make you feel secluded in nature. Ambergris Cay has the longest runway of any private airport in the Caribbean, with a length of 5,700 feet—making it easier for private jets to skip customs in Providenciales, but also making it convenient for non-private jet owners like me, who can take the island's complimentary flight for guests coming over from Provo.

Ambergris Cay opened in 2018 with 10 private, beachfront suites, which are very popular with families and honeymooners. Then in 2019, the resort added three- and four-

bedroom luxury villas for purchase or rental, and most recently in 2019, a six-bedroom villa that features two pools, three vehicles, a chef and a butler, a gourmet kitchen, beach access, and outdoor living space that includes seating areas and a bar with a television. I spend my days winding on dirt roads in my very own golf cart (included in the stay to get around the island), enjoying activities like kayaking, guided nature walks, and ping-pong in the Clubhouse. Dinner includes many of my Caribbean favorites: ceviche with mango, grilled mahi mahi, and of course, rum punch. Guests also enjoy daily complimentary massages, though you'll hardly feel tense while roaming this slice of serenity in the sea.

The Palms pairs classic Caribbean decor with perfect views. Courtesy of The Palms

Capping it off with a luxury resort stay

My trip has been so fulfilling that I decide to extend my stay in Provo before heading back to the United States. I check in to **the Palms**, an island fixture that has drawn repeat visitors for years. The Palms exudes classic Caribbean decor without being too

flashy: 72 oceanfront suites decked out in mahogany wood, white linens, and touches of coral and seafoam green.

Parallel23, the resort's signature dining experience, serves international cuisine on an outdoor terrace draped in lush bougainvillea. The menu includes a lobster bisque so good that even the Caribbean heat can't stop me from enjoying the warm soup, perfectly paired with one of my favorite French pinot noirs from **Albert Bichot**. Reggae music competes with the crashing of waves, and I am so content. The Caribbean and I will always have a love affair.

Where to stay in Turks & Caicos

- **Book Now:** **Wymara Resort & Villas**
- **Book Now:** **The Palms**
- **Book Now:** **Ambergris Cay**

>> **Next:** **Which Caribbean Island Should You Visit?**

Kristin Braswell

Kristin is a travel journalist and founder of **Crush Global Travel**. She has penned pieces for *Vogue*, *CNN*, *USA Today*, *Essence*, *NPR*, *Architectural Digest*, *Ebony*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. Her perfect day includes soca music, rum, and the ocean.



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