


Pack with Purpose for the Turks and Caicos

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Turks and Caicos is an archipelago of 40 coral islands with the gateway island of Provo, short for Providenciales, home to the sprawling Grace Bay Beach, with luxury resorts, restaurants and shops. The British Overseas Territory sits in the Atlantic Ocean southeast of the Bahamas.

The trip started before we even left Canada as I packed my bags with intention. This time, my packing list included items for a local school, one of five schools supported by the resort where we were staying.

After hearing about Turks and Caicos for years, I didn't think it could live up to the label on the can, but oh, it did and more so. When I think of the four glorious days relaxing, snorkelling, kayaking, eating fabulous fresh fish, it was an ideal winter escape. The colours of the entire island look photo-shopped with unbelievable turquoise, bright blue and pink and purple tones in the translucent water as a movie-like backdrop to pristine beaches and colourful hotels shops and houses.



Oceta Jolly Primary School, Provo – Photo Melody Wren

Pack with a Purpose:

Our resort, [Ocean Club Resort in Turks and Caicos](#), has a link on their website to the [Pack for a Purpose website](#), listing area schools they support with a detailed listing of what the schools need. Friends I mentioned this initiative to were surprised that such a beautiful island had poverty and needs – a common misperception? Combined with the new Air Canada waiver for excess baggage fees for humanitarian purposes, I collected school supplies and filled a large suitcase with Crayons, construction paper, pencil crayons, glue sticks, pencil cases, rulers, paints, and band-aids. I accompanied General Manager Wilbert Mason to Oceta Jolly Primary School. Some of the boys fought over who could carry my case. Weighing 50 lbs, I was surprised that one boy carried it himself.



These kids are the purpose for which I packed – Photo Melody Wren

Mr Mason visits a boys class every Wednesday to share affirmations with them. When he walks into the room, he says “Anything is....” And the boys all shouted “possible.” He has shared with them that anything is possible and that they can do anything building their confidence and self-respect in the meantime. I stood on the stage of the school and told the children that I couldn’t gather everything to fill the suitcase by myself and asked what they thought I should do. A little boy put up his hand and said: “you should ask your friends and family for help.” I told him that’s what I did. Photos show the suitcase full of supplies and the children from the school. A hurricane one year ago destroyed all the school’s books and supplies, so they need everything. Check out any destination on their website before you go and take a few items on your next trip.



Pink umbrellas on the beach – Photo Turks and Caicos Ocean Club

Arrival at Ocean Club Resort exceeded all expectations. Pink and white buildings rim Aqua pools with pops of colour from surrounding bright pink hibiscus bushes. Pink and white umbrellas dotted throughout paint a clean and crisp Caribbean scene. The condo-style resort has studios, one bedroom, two and three bedrooms either with garden or ocean views.



Ocean Club East Suite copy – Photo Melody Wren

My suite was in a building with a view of the ocean, convenient steps away from the pool and the poolside Cabana bar and grill. The suite itself was so well equipped I could have happily moved right in. A living room with dining, large kitchen with full sized appliances, two bathrooms, washer and dryer and large bedroom with king-sized bed. The living room couch is a fold up to accommodate a third person, hence the second bathroom.

The resort itself is divided into Ocean Club West and Ocean Club East, each with their own restaurant, and a third shared fine dining restaurant. A shuttle runs between both, but it's a short 10-minute walk along the beach.



Grounds and pool – Photo Turks and Caicos Ocean Club

Spa Tropique, nestled in the middle of the resort within the gym, has a host of treatments available. I enjoyed a Swedish massage, a medium pressure massage, slightly different than an aromatherapy treatment or more intensive deep tissue massage. Relaxing and muscle soothing, I was snoring in minutes.

With a fitness centre, tennis court and all the water sports equipment, this can be an active or relaxed holiday or a mixture of both.

The resort has everything you need, and you could stay put, however, shops and galleries are a short walk away to explore, or Guest Services will happily arrange off-island activities for you. It was a wonderful base to explore from, for families, couples or singletons, and a comfortable temporary home to return to after a day out.

A person has to fuel their activities! Fortunately, there are many options! **Opus**, on-site at Ocean Club East has a full menu with a focus on local fish and vegetables and a choice of dining inside or out. With beautiful balmy evenings, outside was the only choice.

Solana at Ocean Club West, a 15-minute walk or short shuttle ride away has a different personality as its close to town with a modern profile. The menu offerings have an Asian twist accommodating all allergies this traveller has, so any guest or parent of a child with allergies can eat assured it's safe. Sushi starters and grouper encrusted in fresh coconut were delicious from start to finish and dessert was gluten-free apple pie with lactose-free ice cream.

The ocean view and clear starry sky was a perfect atmosphere.

It would be easy to stay on resort for all your meals but other fab choices off site include:



Da Conch Shack – Photo Melody Wren



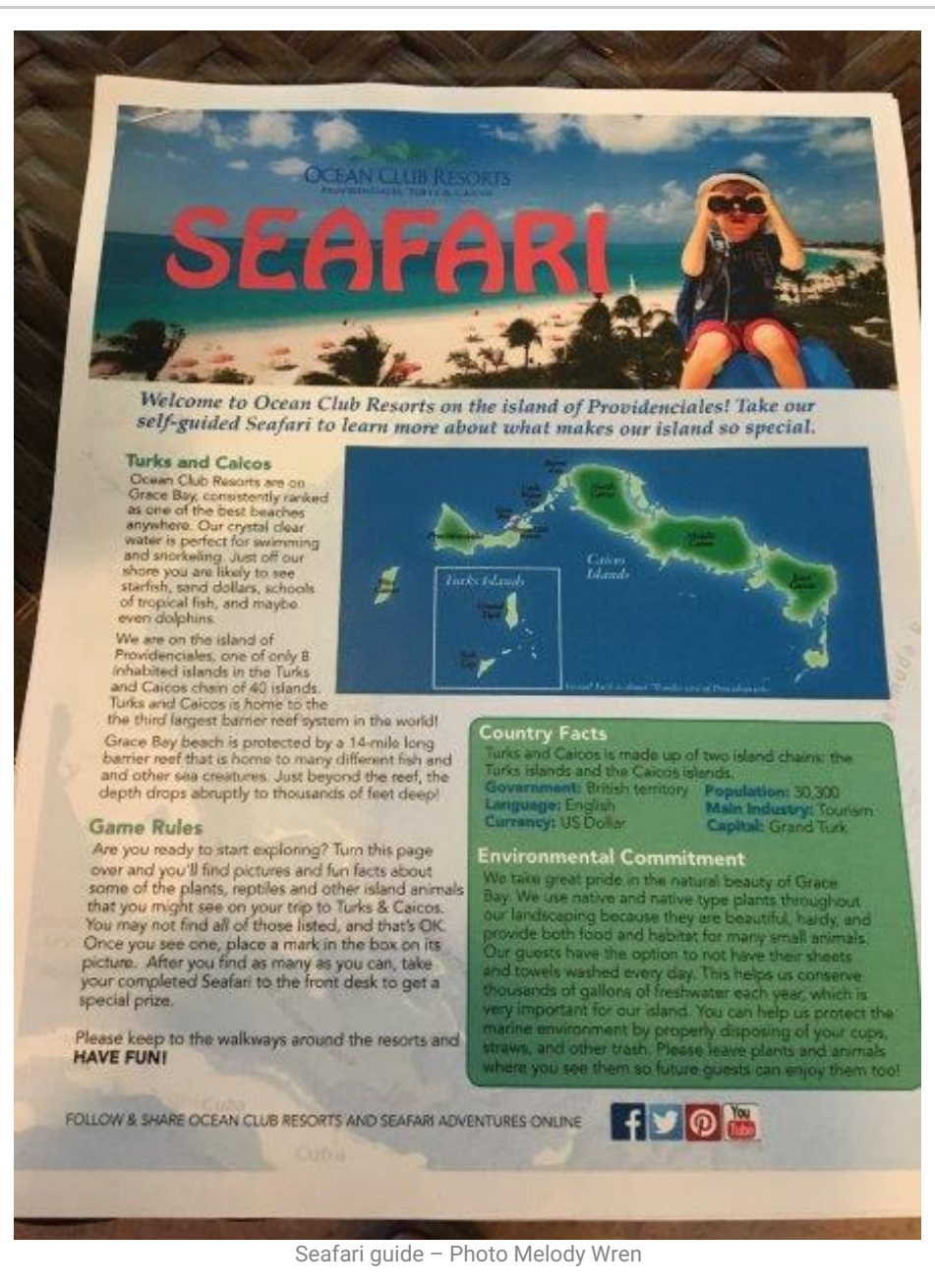
The view at Da Conch Shack – Photo Melody Wren

Da Conch Shack: pink, white and turquoise picnic tables face the same hues of the calm, clear Caribbean. Obviously Conch is the star of the menu with fritters, chowder, curried and coconut. Johnny fries are flavoured with paprika and served with black bean sauce. Conchs are harvested out front with staff demonstrating how to cut open a conch and tourists sampling raw pieces describing it as very sweet.



The food at Coco Van – Photo Melody Wren

Coco Van Airstream lounge: Part of the Coco Bistro, a vintage 1974 Airstream trailer parked under an umbrella of palm trees offers an extensive menu and many gluten-free options. Chicken Tandoori in a corn tortilla with wedge fries and an “Airstreamer” cocktail of Tequila, mango and lime was sublime. Eat at lantern lit picnic tables under the palms.



Seafari guide – Photo Melody Wren

Seafari Treasure hunt: When they check in, children 12 and under are given a Seafari booklet with species of birds, lizards and fish to identify. A brief description of each listing teaches them easy to recall information. Easy to find and when completed, they get a Seafari Badge.



Kayaking by the mangroves – Photo Melody Wren

Can't sit, won't sit still on vacation? No need!

We went kayaking on another sunny day through the Leeward Channel, led by [Adventure Sports TCI](#) employee Francesca. After crossing the channel, we manoeuvred through narrow canals weaving our way through mangroves where we spotted juvenile Lemon Sharks, Nurse Sharks and Black tipped sharks, sea turtles, and several upside-down jellyfish and a brightly coloured Kingfisher. A wonderful way to catch some sun, and see the island from the water and suitable for children 4 and up. They also offer paddleboard, kitesurfing and boating.



Photo Melody Wren



Fresh food on the boat – Photo Melody Wren

Snorkelling the translucent waters was a definite highlight of the trip was a few fun-filled hours with [Island Vibe Tours](#) to snorkel the third largest barrier reef in the world, with the Great Barrier Reef first and Belize second. After going out for about 15 minutes on a fast boat, we donned masks and flippers and jumped off, seeing so many fish coming towards us in the translucent water, it was as if someone had emptied a bucket of most colourful fish available.

Parrot Fish, Grouper, Snapper, Trumpet Fish, Black Sturgeon, Sargent Majors and a seven-foot-long Black-tipped reef shark. One of the guides snorkelled along with us pointing out fish to ensure we didn't miss anything.

After getting back on the boat, some took advantage of the slide to get back in, and others relaxed with rum punch, and snacks made fresh. Captain Stephen carved open a conch that the other guide had found in the water, mixing it with chopped peppers, and onions into a conch salad he served. We then drove over to Half Moon Quay where the water was warm

lagoon like that we in swam before leaving it to have a walk at Big Water Cay to watch the sunset. Music, rum punch, snacks and some of the best snorkelling ever experienced added up to a fabulous afternoon. 1-649-231-8423.



Conch jewellery – Photo Melody Wren



Wellington Michael Williams with Sand Art jewellery – Photo Melody Wren

Shop: We don't all shop or have time to on holiday but a small memento of a special family trip that fits easily in carry-on luggage is jewellery. It's compact, and every time it's worn you are transported to the place you bought it. The Wellington Collection with jewellery by Wellington Michael Williams jewellery is the place to check out. All handmade on site from local Conch, and sea sand, it was the shoreline collection that caught my eye. Hues of the shoreline and water are captured in each piece and pure Turks and Caicos. Prices from 5.00 to 75.00 U.S., so it's easy to pick up the perfect piece for yourself or a gift. #28 The Salt Mills Plaza

*** Wish I knew before I flew: Pack plenty of bug repellent and wear it everywhere you go. The mosquitos and sand flies were very busy. I would also pack an anti-itch cream to deal with the bites. The locals said we were visiting in a particularly bad two week period for insects, but go prepared just in case.*

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About The Author

Melody Wren

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the



Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.