

# TCI's Grande Dame

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## **Taking a look at the Middle Caicos real estate market.**

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Middle Caicos (historically known as Grand Caicos) is the largest of the Turks & Caicos Islands, with over 50 square miles of natural wilderness to explore and enjoy. It is also the least visited and known island in TCI, despite famous sites like Conch Bar Caves National Park, Mudjin Harbour and the Crossing Place Trail.

Isolated for years with rough sea passage from east or west and limited flights, Middle Caicos is blossoming with the new causeway to North Caicos (damaged but drivable indeed!) and regular ferries to Provo daily. The population of under 300 residents is skewed with a remarkable group of elders, all 70 to 100 years old, making up 40% of the population. The spacious landscape, warm people, defined villages and living respect for TCI traditional culture make Middle Caicos a very special place.



Cliff-lined seascape at Mudjin Harbour on Middle Caicos

Nearly 50% of Middle Caicos is dedicated to the International Ramsar Biodiversity Wetland Reserve, a major treaty-preserved site dedicated to protection of habitat for the local flora and fauna. While the reserve literally covers 90% of the south side of the island, the commitment to wildlife and the unspoiled nature of Middle Caicos is, logically, a critical development goal across the entire island. Here is the heartland of TCI culture, including traditional straw craft, fanner grass basketry, native sloop building, model sailboat carving/ racing and bush medicine. The importance of ecotourism, rather than mainstream tourism, will be crucial to the sustainable development of Middle Caicos.

In general terms, real estate on Middle Caicos was very slow in both sales and price

movement during the 1990s, with perhaps one or two sales per year across the whole of the island. Property started moving a bit faster in 2000–2005, predominantly with local resort Blue Horizon moving forward, and Bambarra beachfront lots bought and sold. The island hit its realty boom stride in 2006/2007 with three new development areas, two developments sold directly on Internet, over 20 individual MLS listings and numerous private offers. Also during this time, a number of government development agreements were put into place with great fanfare, yet minimal activity has been undertaken to date. By 2007, prices had spiraled upwards, well beyond rational market value, but buyers piled on board — one acre beachfront lots on Middle Caicos sold for \$425,000. in 2007! Then, along with the rest of the real estate world in 2008/2009/2010, property sales crashed and prices now rest at roughly 2005 levels. During 2009 and 2010, only three lots have sold on Middle Caicos. Remember that very limited infrastructure is in place on Middle Caicos. Water is supplied by rain collected in cisterns, locally called “tanks,” and if it doesn’t rain for a long spell, tanks run dry! With a stable population of under 300 people, the economics of a water plant and delivery service are not good. The same applies for small trades — plumbing, electrical, masonry, mechanics — such that all tradesmen are brought to Middle Caicos when needed. Since 2000, less than ten buildings have been constructed here; building costs are high and logistics difficult, although roll on/roll off capacity for trailers and containers from North Caicos has made life easier.



View of flamingos from causeway connecting North and Middle Caicos

The island can be divided into three regions centralized around the local villages: Conch Bar (Western Region), Bambarra (Central Region) and Lorimers (Eastern Region). Each is very distinct.

**Western Region:** The west of the island is the most populous and developed, with 180 residents in Conch Bar, nine buildings at the Blue Horizon Resort on Mudjin Harbour just before the village, the now defunct airport, the Doris Robinson Primary School with 33

students, and the ghastly, ghostly shell of an enormous government building stalled in naked cement splendor. This western region also boasts glorious cliffs, and the Crossing Place Trail takes you along them from Conch Bar to Juniper Hole, past seven empty beaches, to reach the channel between Middle and North. Local homes have been upgraded in the village, a new government subdivision encouraged young families to make their home and new homes were built at Blue Horizon Resort. The Juniper Holdings land scandal has hit Middle Caicos residents hard, but the sense of betrayal has focused clear determination to see all the land restored to the Crown. Anyone who visits knows that Middle Caicos is never the place for a luxury golf course or millionaires' retreat . . . but bring on the eco-tourism! Both at the resort and in Conch Bar village, properties are currently for sale at quite sensible prices.

**Central Region:** Central Middle Caicos is an open expanse of green bushland, with a splendid coastal road and ridges marching away to the south. Bambarra has become synonymous with beach, and Bambarra Beach is a very fine one, with over four miles of gently curving shoreline, whispering casuarinas and no people. While many lots have been subdivided along the shore, only 10 villas have been built to date. The gorgeous public beach facility sits nestled under the pines, fronting a sand spit where you can walk to a tiny offshore cay. With tiki huts, bandstand, shade, latrines and lots of parking, this is one of TCI's best public beach areas and a strong pier was constructed for local boats nearby. This area is home to the annual Valentine's Day Cup, where each year traditional hand-carved model sailboats race all day, while families play.

Some development of lots off the beach is underway and it is likely more homes will come along in this area soon. Paved road, neighbors, power nearby, beach a stone's throw away, and once the public beach access lanes are defined it will be a prize neighborhood. The village of Bambarra is on the ridge overlooking the bay, with about 13 homes, fabulous views and fresh breezes. If you are ready to take on an unfinished building, this is your place — with 3 such homes for sale! Much of this region is tied up as generational land, and the struggle to effectively sort out the heirs and equal inheritances from these huge parcels of land is not for the faint hearted.

**Eastern Region:** Drive on and on, until Lorimers emerges, a tiny village tucked beside the enormous lagoon on the east of the island. Amazingly, in the early 1900s Lorimers was the heart of TCI, while the tall ships still plied the tradewinds with cargos of sisal from East Caicos. Over 75 homes are to be found hiding in the greenery, with just six families now living in the village. Fruit trees grow tall here, and farming is a passion. Just before the village a road breaks left to follow for another ten miles and reach the channel between Middle and East Caicos. It takes you out again to the coast, through the massive Haulover Plantation to Half Creek — where a major development has been bespoke for 12 years with nothing yet! Follow the right- hand turn and the power poles to reach the government subdivision of over

300 lots which continues to the end of the island.

Major issues with valuations, planning of public beach areas, method of parcel allocation and potential generational claim make this an area not soon to bloom. Eastwinds and Caicos Holdings are private developments along this peninsula, Crown land purchased in chunks and being resold, with no homes built to date. Both undertook little activity at their property sites this past few years, in sales or infrastructure. There is a vast tract of generational land (500 acres) offered for sale, beachfront lots and some backland for farming here.

My 16 years on Middle Caicos have flown by, and while change is evident, it is the enduring flavor of this giant island that remains calm, dignified and peaceful. May the future development that must inevitably come — albeit slowly — keep these values intact. Middle Caicos appeals to those looking for the remote, the simple and the quiet. It is an island where the difficult logistics and everyday inconveniences can drive you mad . . . and then the breeze blows your head clear and the turquoise sea takes your breath away. It is an island where long term goals make sense, to preserve an oasis of beauty and sanity for yourself, for your family.

Investment in speculation here is awkward and again, only for the long term buyer. At this point, properties are available to suit every taste — from isolated splendor to full convenience, property management on site. For the handyman, several unfinished homes offer fabulous starters, and friendships in the villages. It is an amazing buyer's market, so do it now!

Please contact us with questions or for further information via e-mail [forbesrealty@tciway.tc](mailto:forbesrealty@tciway.tc) and call 649 231 4884.

Sara J. Kaufman is manager of Forbes, Forbes & Forbes Ltd. realty brokerage. She moved to Middle Caicos in 1995, and to this day is in love with this island and its people. In 1995, she developed the Blue Horizon Resort with partners, then met Daniel Forbes in 1998 and her heart “came home.” Together they started the Middle Caicos Co-op with friends, opened the Crossing Place Trail and began cooking up a storm at Daniel's Café. In 2005 they opened the doors of Forbes, Forbes & Forbes Ltd. By 2008 they started building a home in Conch Bar and finished a new office and café buildings. In 2009 they built the MC Co-op shop and finally moved into their spectacular seaside home.