



# Ecotourism in the Turks & Caicos Islands

## Ecotourism TCI

Eco-tourism is participating in ecologically sustainable activities, which ideally bring benefit to the local ecosystem. Turks and Caicos Islands has set aside over 33% of its entire land and sea regions for preservation purposes : National Parks, Natures Reserves, Sanctuaries and Protected Areas. The world's largest biodiversity saltwater wetland reserve – the Ramsar Site – accounts for of 1/3 of East Caicos, ½ of Middle Caicos and ¼ of North Caicos and provides a breeding ground for myriad birds. By preserving these areas, the Turks and Caicos Islands have taken a stand to ensure future generations may still enjoy the natural wonders of this tiny island country.



Hiking is another way to enjoy the beauty of Turks & Caicos Islands, stretching your legs while the fantastic scenery fills your eyes. Miles of pristine beach, path-

ways to old colonial ruins and trails along the cliffs all await for you to explore. The tough indigenous vegetation colours the land with green, and while surprising yellow or orange leaps up from cactus and flowering shrubs. Take a local guide and listen to the tales of bush medicine made from a wide variety of the plants, good for most ailments. Mountain bikes offer another route through the



landscape, and stops at local houses where a warm welcome awaits add to your day.

Although it may seem odd to pair ecotourism and convenience in a sentence, the simple access to unspoiled nature in Turks & Caicos Islands is indeed convenient – both getting to the country and getting to pristine sites once here. This is a tiny country, of forty individual islands – of which only a dozen are inhabited. The archi-



pelago formed by the islands creates a circle, nestled within which we find a wide variety of lifestyles, culture and natural habitats.

The reef is the major feature here in Turks & Caicos, with spectacular walls of coral disappearing into the ocean depths – and TCI is noted as one of the world's top scuba diving destinations. The protection of the reef is paramount, with dive boat anchor bouys set



up, dive etiquette taught to all and knowledgeable dive operators strictly licensed.

## Crossing Place Trail

- ♦ *Crossing Place Trail is the traditional walking path that allowed residents of North and Middle Caicos to visit across the water*
- ♦ *The waters of the channel between the islands could only be crossed at low tide*
- ♦ *There are two natural water holes and cache-ments along the trail*
- ♦ *Seven beaches line the north shore of Middle caicos as you walk westward along the Crossing Place Trail*
- ♦ *Local guides are available to tell of the days gone by when they walked to school along the trail*

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The health and vibrance of the TCI reefs is glorious and the experience of drifting gently as an underwater visitor quite awesome. Best yet, for those not inclined to the complexity of scuba diving, the experience of the reef is available by pattering along the surface with a mask and snorkels, lazily watching the myriad small darts of colour, as fish dart in and out of the coral heads.



Kayaking is another special venture here. Sitting on the water, moving through the waves and exploring the mangroves that provide habitat for thousands of birds and nurture the early sealife.... Channels of sand open into quiet bays, tide shifts and dry land becomes covered again – a constant flow that is mesmerizing and fascinating. Kayaking trips are offered on all islands and allow you to commune at your own pace with the sparkling world where the seas meets the shore.

The inner banks are miles of shallow sand set apart from the deep ocean beyond the reef by the circle of islands, and it here that the bonefish cluster. One of the fisherman's most respected challenges, bonefishing in TCI is a catch and release sport, full of excitement as the bonefish expertly dive and defy the skills of the cast lines. Their bright silver bodies twist and sparkle in the tussle and if caught, they are returned to the sea. A glorious day on the banks leaves you tired and exhilarated, yet pleased to have had your fun in an ecologically viable way.

Most visitors to TCI stay on Providenciales, the main developed island but eco -tourist excursions to the other islands provide a welcome contrast, and take you into the island culture in a fascinating way. The local residents on the 'family islands' live a life far removed from the bustle of international tourism on Providenciales, maintaining a dignity and traditional lifestyle that is well worth a visit.

Native grasses and palmtops are cleaned, dried, cut and then sewn into baskets, hats, brushes, brooms and bags for all uses

The handcrafts produced on many islands by the residents use raw materials gathered from the land, grasses and palmtops cleaned, dried, cut and sewn into baskets, hats, brushes, brooms and bags for all uses. A stop to the Middle Caicos Co-op outlet in Blue Hills on the island of Providenciales will introduce you to this traditional art, and your purchases directly support the local residents. This is sustainable ecotourism at its best.



*Traditional straw work handcrafts make wonderful souvenirs and gifts to carry home*  
[www.middlecaicos.biz](http://www.middlecaicos.biz)

Here is a quick outline of the islands and excursion alternatives:



**Little Water Cay:** A short boat trip from Providenciales you can explore the Turks and Caicos rock iguana preserve, and visit with these fascinating prehistoric wee beasts.

**North Caicos:** Spend the day exploring a world gone by...strolling through the pastures of former plantation Wade's Green whose ruins depict island life long ago. Find the natural splendours at Cottage Pond, a bottomless cenote in the limestone rock, and see the protected pink flamingos in their natural habitat.

Kayak in Bottle Creek to the east



bay islands reserve...sand islands lost offshore, or ride a bicycle through the winding roadways of Kew. Meet the residents and stop for a taste of local food in a variety of local establishments along the way.

**Middle Caicos:** A day trip to the most undeveloped island of all...with 300 residents, three villages and five churches. Hike an



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historic trail along the cliffs, a trail used by natives of long ago to cross between North and Middle Caicos. From the village of Conch Bar, up over the spectacular cliffs at Mudjin Harbour, following the shore to Blowing Hole and all the way to the Crossing Place. The trail is marked with beautiful ceramic cameos and is an inspiration to hike. A picnic and swim at Mudjin Harbour is truly spectacular, and walk to the Dragon Cay set just offshore at the end of a sandspit. A challenging mountain biketrip along the King's Road, a handcraft demonstration and a lunch in local home is another great day activity on Middle Caicos. The Conch Bar Caves National Park are famous throughout the Caribbean and guided tours easily arranged.



*The ruins of Loyalist Plantations are scattered throughout all of the Turks & Caicos Islands*

**South Caicos** : This island is well known as the fishing capital of TCI. Its placement near the deep Columbus Passage, dividing the Turks and the Caicos island banks, allowed for easy deep water access, but the plethora of small cays nearby allowed for safe plentiful fishing grounds nearby. Cockburn Town was the original seat of government in colonial times. It is an island of huge variety as the salt pans are circled by high ridges, which offer truly astounding views . In some ways, it is the only real town in the

country, as the settlement has stayed relatively focused on the harbour – whereas most villages and towns in TCI are rather indistinct and spread out. The international School for Field Studies has been on South Caicos for decades, doing important marine research and assisting best practices to keep the fishing industry viable.

**Salt Cay:** A day trip via airplane or an overnight exploration, Salt Cay is a very tiny island with a very active history. Walking tours through Balfour Town, echoing the days of the salt merchants and salt rakers who made this island thrive in the 1800's, are informative and fun. Whale watching from January to March is awe-inspiring, as each year the pregnant whales pass by and frolic on their way. Simply flying over to Salt Cay is a fabulous chance to observe this island country from a new perspective.

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Should you choose to focus your whole trip to Turks & Caicos Islands as an ecotourism adventure, there is no better place to stay than on Pine Cay. This island, since the early 1970's, has been protected as a private oasis...800 acres of pristine nature, 37 homes and a 12 room hotel. The quiet tranquility of Pine Cay is a real joy, and you can feel the clean unspoiled environment easing and relaxing you as each day drifts by.....

**Grand Turk:** A day trip via airplane or an overnight exploration to the capital of country takes you to a world of colonial architecture and pallet of pastels that make up this island. Take time to visit the Turks and Caicos National Museum which features Taino treasures, messages found at sea in bottles, as well as some momentos recovered from old ship wrecks. Grand Turk has charm if its own, and its history is tangible in the buildings, salt pans, and narrow streets. Although now boasting a modern cruise ship terminal and destination, this island still retains its own identity to explore.

Add a day excursion to another island during your visit on Pine Cay for a special treat – whether to the bustle and glamour of Providenciales, or the history and traditions of Middle Caicos. Further information at any of the websites listed on the next page , all recommended tour operators.

**Welcome to the world of  
ECOTOURISM TCI 2008  
please send all and any questions  
or comments to the author :**

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**Pine Cay** offers in a microcosm all the variety of ecological habitats in TCI : gorgeous white sand beach, endless mangroves, inlets and coves of ironshore, offshore islets on the banks, pine forest, and inland fresh water ponds. Because of the members commitment to preservation, the indigenous vegetation of the island is intact, the trees full of birds and the ecosystem at peace. The



north shore of the island is one long curve of glistening sand, with very few footsteps and rolling waves beckoning you to swim. The eastern shoreline is a protected channel, with mangroves holding the island edges and the marina sheltered from the open sea. The southern shoreline is ironshore, that peculiar rock formed by millennium of coral dying and rising from the sea, with small bays and coves to explore. On the western end of Pine Cay, the Aquarium sits, intriguing and special, formed by Hurricane Donna in the 1960's when the passage between Pine Cay and next door Water Cay was closed.

## ECOTOURISM TCI : Pine Cay Adventure

The island of Pine Cay offers a tremendous base from which you may embark on ecotourism activities to fill each day. Young or old, there is a spectrum of activities at hand and readily available for your pleasure...without ever leaving the island!

On Pine Cay, you can stay at the exquisite and exclusive **Meridian Club** hotel, or rent one of the Pine Cay cottages. The hotel offers a atmosphere of casual elegance, warm welcome and dedication to your comfort and enjoyment. The indoor and outdoor dining areas are at your service for breakfast, morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea and the evening gourmet dinner. Excellent service, gorgeous beaches, sparkling sea.....

You can also enjoy the simplicity and privacy of your own cottage; sitting on your deck for sunset, splashing into the beach at your feet, star -gazing at night. For those renting a cottage or home on the island, reservations at the hotel are required for any meals, and all costs extra.

The hotel pool is a great meeting spot for all members and guests – as it is the only pool on the island! One of the preservation measures taken to ensure the underground water lens of the island stays secure was to allow no private pools at members cottages and homes.

All guests visiting the island are invited to join scheduled activities through the hotel and can utilize

the kayaks, hobbycat sailboats, tennis court and pool. More detailed information on activities will be provided at arrival.

### DAY TRIPS & ACTIVITIES

- \* Snorkeling on coral heads and the Aquarium
- \* Kayak through the mangroves and to the offshore islets
- \* Birdwatch in the pine forests and inland ponds
- \* Sail inside the barrier reef or in the Caicos flats
- \* Bicycling the quiet trails of the island
- \* Hike the beach or nature trails

**VISIT [www.meridianclub.com](http://www.meridianclub.com)**

For those who wish to visit a number of islands during their time in Turks & Caicos, it is possible to organize a custom holiday where you stay a few nights on different islands, and really get a chance to explore the variety available in this tiny country. For the truly adventurous, alternatives include day sailing from island to island, or kayaking from island to island and camping out for several nights on deserted cays. For those seeking a bit more creature comfort, locally run inns and small hotels are used each night and travel along the route can include any of sailing, kayaking, biking, or hiking at your choice. Logistical support to get bags sent forward, meals, supplies etc are all in place on each island. One popular ecotour is outlined below :

- Day One – arrive to TCI, overnight on **Pine Cay**, orientation
- Day Two – kayak around the island, snorkel the Aquarium, hotel gourmet dinner,  
Overnight on **Pine Cay**
- Day Three – sail to **North Caicos**, overnight on HorseStable beach at local hotel,  
dinner at local restaurant, dance/live local band.
- Day Four - drive to **Middle Caicos**, hike to Mudjin Harbour on Crossing Place Trail,  
picnic/swim, visit Conch Bar Caves National Park, overnight local inn
- Day Five - mountain bike King's Road, picnic Bambarra beach and sail model handcarved sailboats, camp out option on **Middle Caicos**
- Day Six – mountain bike trip to Kew, tour Wades Green plantation ruins, visit  
Cottage Pond, Flamingo Pond, overnight **North Caicos** same as Day  
Three, or return to **Providenciales** for party night
- Day Seven - Departure / **Providenciales** activities if time permits : artisan studio visit, plantation ruins, sailing on Chalk Sound

As you have noted, this visit across the Turks & Caicos Islands is a terrific adventure across four islands, and a chance to really explore the lifestyle and culture of this country while its natural wonders are on parade for you each day. Combinations which involve trips to the other islands are also available – and any customized itinerary you wish can be supported. Private or custom ecotours, and excursions throughout the islands are available from Amphibious Adventures, [www.amphibiousadventures.org](http://www.amphibiousadventures.org), Big Blue Unlimited [www.bigblue.tc](http://www.bigblue.tc), the Middle Caicos Co-op [www.middlecaicos.biz](http://www.middlecaicos.biz), and Ecotourism TCI [www.ecotourismtci.com](http://www.ecotourismtci.com). These operators are well known for their commitment to ecotourism, collaborate effectively to make your ecotour a success, and are eager for you to fully enjoy the land , sea and people of TCI. >



**For further details or questions arising from this article please email the author : Sara J Kaufman at [middlecaicos@tciway.tc](mailto:middlecaicos@tciway.tc) . If you wish information about property available in Turks & Caicos Islands, please go to [www.forbesrealttyci.com](http://www.forbesrealttyci.com) . If you wish information about properties available on Pine Cay, please go to [www.pinecay.biz](http://www.pinecay.biz) or to [www.pine-cay.com](http://www.pine-cay.com) .**