



Fantasy Islands

With breathtaking hotels, sophisticated dining and unique cultural events, the Bahamas, Saint Lucia and Turks and Caicos are shining jewels of the Caribbean

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There is no such thing as a standard Caribbean experience. In addition to the mesmerizing beaches, zesty cuisine and inescapable feeling that you've, well, escaped from everything back home, the true beauty of the region lies in the collision of cultures that formed it—indigenous, African, British, Spanish, Indian, French, Chinese and Dutch—and the sheer variety of activities to be enjoyed on its many shores.

When you calculate the numerous languages, races and histories that intersect differently on each island, a sprawling mosaic of culture, color and flavor is mapped out before you. No two islands are the same, but for a luxe getaway, certain destinations and experiences stand out, each for entirely different reasons.



Turks and Caicos

“Remember: Make sure you find a conch while you’re down there!” shouts Pop, laughing as we leap off the side of the boat into the beckoning ocean below. “I’m serious—no conch, no lunch!”

It’s around midday off the coast of Providenciales, the most populated island in Turks and Caicos, and we’re anchored just off the third-largest barrier reef in the world. On a good day, you may spy a whale in the distance. I’ve spent a lot of time on the world’s most beautiful beaches, from Thailand to Barbados, but these might be the most crystalline waters I’ve ever seen.

After a half-day excursion filled with many highlights—a visit to a city-block-sized island populated only by tiny iguanas, some of the best snorkeling I’ve ever done, and, yes, conch salad freshly prepared by our captain, Pop, with a mollusk we plucked from the ocean floor—the boat returns to the shore steps away from my oceanfront room at Gansevoort Turks + Caicos. The resort sits in the middle of Grace Bay Beach, consistently ranked as one of the best in the world and also home to a string of high-end resorts that make Provo, as it’s locally known, one of the region’s centers of luxury. Gansevoort stands out not only for its chic design, 7,000-square-foot infinity-edge pool and Exhale, possibly the best spa in

Provo, but also a new collection of private villas less than 10 minutes away on the secluded hills of Turtle Tail. Each two-story unit features four or five bedrooms, two pools and a private mini-dock that leads to the ocean. On most days, the waters of Turtle Tail, possibly the most pristine on the island, are shallow enough that you can walk far out toward the horizon, in the full embrace of the shimmering sapphire sea.

As elevated as the entire Gansevoort experience may be, it fits harmoniously into Provo’s laid-back, no-fuss vibe. Everybody’s welcome, so you’re likely to find locals as well as guests popping in to visit the resort’s restaurant Stelle, which showcases the adventurous mixology of bartender Paolo Patitucci and the cuisine of chef Joel Vallar, who serves sophisticated island fare inspired by the Caribbean and his native Southeast Asia. The restaurant is at once thoughtful and bold, from the use of local milled salt and painstakingly selected seafood to the spectacular presentations. The Indonesian-inspired beef *rendang*—slowly braised Wagyu beef cheeks, Asian spices, potato, coconut milk and jasmine rice—is its most popular dish.

That spirit of fusion can also be found close by at Coyaba, a bewitching experience from the minute one steps into the dining room, >





Clockwise from upper left: Villa at Gansevoort Turks + Caicos; private residence; custom carved conch shells by Stanford Handfield; bass at Stelle at Gansevoort; garden dining at Coyaba