

CULTURE / CARIBBEAN CHILL

## Caribbean Chill

Global jet-setter Bill Zwecker takes us to the tropics.

BY BILL ZWECKER



FROM LEFT: Grace Bay pool; Grace Bay Club

**LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT** beach getaway, an island paradise to recharge your batteries? Then a quick jaunt down to Turks and Caicos could be just the ticket, especially as Chicago's impending winter makes us think about a way to escape the Hawk as it whistles loudly down Michigan Avenue.

I recently headed to this tranquil, sun-washed collection of British Overseas Territory islands situated 575 miles southeast of Miami, and I made a happy discovery on the principal island, Providenciales: the Grace Bay Club. This luxury hotel complex is actually three resorts in one, strung like pearls along the seemingly endless Grace Bay Beach. The grande dame property, the Grace Bay Club, is also divided into three distinct areas: adults-only hotel, family-friendly villa, and superluxe Estates, each featuring its own pool informal dining areas.

Upon arrival you're issued a cell phone for keeping in touch with your personal concierge. Along with booking reservations at the resort's fine-dining oceanfront restaurant, Anacaona, or the Caribbean's longest bar, Infinity, your concierge (like our Bob!) is more than happy to get you a great table at such top-rated eateries as the chic Bagatelle Bistrot at the Gansevoort Hotel, the Caribbean-focused Coyaba or Bella Luna, which features excellent Italian fare.

Some travel tips: Don't go to Turks and Caicos expecting high-end shopping. Though it's a dutyfree port, there's not much to find beyond T-shirts and beachwear, with the exception of a few good watch deals at Jai's Jewelers. You *will* find a slew of super restaurants and opportunities to exercise, especially if you're into water sports. In short: This is a place to chill out in a very warm environment, from the weather to the hospitable folks who are more than happy to welcome you to their friendly island home.

### VIEQUES HEATS UP

The long-overlooked island of Vieques, an intriguing sliver of land located eight miles off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, is a fast-rising Caribbean destination. Formerly best known for the controversy surrounding the US Navy's use of the island for target practice, the official end of that bombing has ignited a different kind of boom: luxury hotel development.

One of the newest and best additions to Vieques is the oceanfront W Retreat & Spa Vieques Island, the W chain's first property in the Caribbean. This 157-room, 30-acre spread features Mix on the Beach restaurant, the first Caribbean venture from internationally renowned chef Alain Ducasse. The central focus of the W Retreat & Spa Vieques Island is, however, the 6,000-square-foot Spa Chakra. Virtually any spa treatment is available; the full menu includes massages, manicures, pedicures and other treatments, all delivered with a holistic approach.



### CLUB RITZ

Ritz-Carlton, one of the world's most famous luxury hotel brands, offers an even more exclusive layer of upscale privilege: The Ritz-Carlton Club Level of covetable accommodations. The Club Level is usually located on the upper floors of the hotel and features deluxe rooms and suites; amenities, which vary by location, often include multiple complimentary food and beverage presentations served daily in a spacious lounge accessed by a special keycard and staffed by a dedicated concierge. While our hometown Ritz-Carlton Chicago does not offer Club Level service, it is available at all other Ritz-Carltons, such as those in New York; Marina del Rey, California; Naples, Florida; and Atlanta.

