



The stunning superyacht Nero, designed in the style of a classic steam yacht, costs \$525,000 per week to charter in the Turks and Caicos during the high winter season



Posh villas at the Wymara Resort and Villas include private pools with ocean views coveted for their privacy and luxury; Turks and Caicos Cigar Shop and Cigar Factory is the place to go for high-quality smokes

Smoke Show

The tropical paradise is also a haven for cigar lovers

If you should never judge a book by its cover, then it's also wise to never judge a cigar by its wrapper, or at least by its nation of origin. For while some might turn their noses up at anything that wasn't born in Cuba, the truth is that world-class cigar rollers today can be found in lots of locales, and it just so happens that the Turks and Caicos Islands is on the exclusive list of places crafting cigars of a quality on par with those produced anywhere in the Caribbean.

There's no denying the Cuban influence on cigars in the Turks and Caicos, especially when you enter **Cuban Crafters TCI**, also known as the Turks and Caicos Cigar Shop and Cigar Factory. Using Cuban-seed tobacco, top quality cigars are rolled throughout the day and are only available on the island. You can watch as expert fingers hand roll the choicest of tobaccos into cigars of your selection and personal preference.

Master cigar rollers allow you to see their expertise up close, as they cut, sculpt and roll their masterpieces with the precision and finesse that only years of experience and long-held traditions can teach. Order a box of your favorites and watch the resident craftsmen (and women) go to work on your customized cigars, or relax away from the midday sun with a round of dominoes while you wait.

There's a satisfaction that comes from observing the entire pro-

cess, appreciating the skill and artistry that goes into sculpting the final products. Of course you can always place your order and take a single exquisite cigar for a walk around the scenic area, or down to the heavenly beaches, while their craftsman execute your exact wishes. Besides, the only thing better than enjoying paradise with a fine cigar is enjoying the ultimate paradise with a local cigar that would pass judgement on any Havana street corner.—Keith Gordon



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TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY OF WYMARA RESORT; WWW.BRILLIANTSTUDIOS.COM

Below the Surface

The Turks and Caicos offer some of the world's best diving

While it may be captivating to stare out over the clear, turquoise waters of the Turks and Caicos, there is perhaps just as much beauty underneath the surface of this jaw-dropping archipelago. To experience the wonders that surround the islands, hook up with one of the dozens of dive operators and guide services that are available on the islands, must-visit destinations for the world's scuba diving enthusiasts.

The islands boast access to the third largest barrier reef system in the world. This ensures a beautiful array of colorful reef fish, and the imposing predators that follow them (sharks, stingrays, and so on). But the islands also sit on an underwater plateau that quickly falls off more than 7,000 feet to the ocean floor, offering not only a diversity of marine life, but dramatic undersea views of this drop into the abyss. This makes the area ideal for divers of all experience levels, and ensures an array of dive options to suit anyone's personal preference.

The four major zones for diving include the area around Providenciales, various sites on Salt Cay, the awe-inspiring wall dives on offer at Grand Turk, and the myriad quirky dive sites found throughout North and Middle Caicos. Salt Cay offers not only diving, but from January through March, whale-watching possibilities as well. Only **Salt Cay Divers** is currently operating on this small island, which also offers some limited wreck diving for adventurous types, including what's left of a British 44-gun warship that sank in 1790.

Grand Turk is home to the Columbus Landfall National Park, one of several islands where Christopher Columbus is speculated to have first set foot in the New World. A playground for the scuba enthusiast, this area offers anything a diver could desire. Reefs are stuffed full of a diversity, and density, of fish found in only a few places on Earth. At the edge of these plateaus, cliffs drop off into a darkening, mysterious world that entices those divers with the courage — and deep-water certification — to explore these walls as they fall away into the unknown. While there are numerous well-regarded dive outfits, the longest continuously running operator is **Blue Water Divers**, who know the area well and are conveniently located in Cockburn Town.

For sheer convenience, diving from Providenciales makes a lot of sense. Not only is it where you'll most likely spend time on land, but the number of quality dive operators is topped only by the number of high-quality dive spots in the area. Diving takes place largely within three protected zones, the Princess Alexandra, Northwest Point Marine, and West Caicos Marine national parks. Trips are available for long, multi-tank outings that will get hardcore scuba divers all of the underwater time they can handle exploring the more than 70 miles of available barrier reefs and walls. But one can also create a day filled with shallow snorkeling, easy scuba dives, and relaxing time for family, a celebration with friends or whatever one can imagine in a paradise like this, above and below the surface. —*KG*



Left: A perfect day for scuba diving off Providenciales with Big Blue Collective, one of the most comprehensive watersports and ecotour outfits in the Turks and Caicos. Below: Fay Ninon, artist and founder of Oceanic Alchemy, which aims to protect the reef and preserve marine life in the Turks and Caicos, finds a shell off Salt Cay

COURTESY OF MICHELLE NACE

COURTESY OF PHOTOGRAPHER JUSTIN OKOYE AND MODEL FAY NINON. ARTIST & FOUNDER OF OCEANIC ALCHEMY, WWW.OCEANICALCHEMY.COM