

The Sands at Grace Bay

A Peaceful Spot on Turks & Caicos.

JUDITH GLYNN



You never have to leave The Sands at Grace Bay to relax beside the property's several pools or walk a few steps to its magnificent beach.

Some guests are so excited to be here, they don't care if their room is ready. They change into swimsuits and run to the beach until the end of the day," said Pierre Beswick, general manager of The Sands at Grace Bay. And who can blame them? The beachfront is part of a 12-mile stretch of calm, translucent-turquoise water and super-fine white sand. Both are complemented by nearby indigenous plant life, which the ecologically savvy Turks and Caicos government mandates cannot be removed. And lucky for The Sands that the 23 beachfront palapas shelters are grandfathered in since they are banned for new developments.

"We are one of the properties that caters to everyone," Beswick continued and mentioned families, couples and wedding parties as guests at the four-star resort. "You can be wealthy or not when you stay here. At other resorts you'll need a lot of money," he continued, acknowledging the deep pockets of most island visitors. Many stay on Providenciales, nicknamed "Provo" which is the largest of the Turks and

Caicos eight islands and 40 small cays within the country's 166 square miles of land.

The 114-room Sands at Grace Bay resort is located on six oceanfront acres with six, low-rise, Caribbean-style buildings grouped around several free-form swimming pools, some with connecting canals, cascading waterfalls, a Jacuzzi and small grottoes. Most guests will have a direct or "peek" ocean view. The lush grounds (cared for with recycled water) include meandering walkways, blooming gardens and a secluded three-hammock oasis under palm trees. A recent \$6 million rejuvenation throughout the property enhanced the open-air lobby and brought upgrades to all the accommodations, which are privately owned condos. Sizes range from studios to three-bedrooms and from 1,000-1,600 square feet. Furnishings are identical in all and include granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, dishwasher, washer/dryer (including detergent), microwave, dishware, cutlery, ceiling fans, air-conditioning, color TV with cable and free WiFi. Some amenities vary between the smaller and larger units;

however, all are decorated in muted blues and greens and have terracotta tile flooring. An added and most welcome feature is the screened-in patio; some wrap around to include living room and bedroom entrances.

Cost-cutting is chic and necessary these days, which makes the freebies offered at The Sands very appealing. Your clients have free use of non-motorized Hobie Cats, kayaks, windsurfing equipment, snorkel gear, plus daytime and evening use of the tennis courts (rackets provided), indoor fitness center, computer station and bicycles. Upon arrival, guests are greeted with a rum cocktail, and every Tuesday the manager hosts a sunset rum punch party with complimentary appetizers.

The onsite Ocean Vibes (www.oceanvibes.com) tour desk handles dives, charters and other equipment rentals not offered by The Sands. Most of the islands are surrounded with distant reefs that teem with fish, magnificent coral and even exotic medium turtles. The Spa Tropicale (www.spatropique.com) can tailor-make a treatment such as an in-room massage; one at poolside or on the beach. "We don't claim to be the best at everything so we brought in the best island companies that are service-oriented," Beswick said recently when he explained The Sands' decision to out-source certain guest services, in addition to having a knowledgeable staff man its Concierge desk.

Considering almost everything on Turks and Caicos is imported, dining-out costs might be higher than anticipated. Guests at The Sands, and especially families, have the benefit of a first-class kitchen in their residence to prepare home-cooked meals. Also on-site is a small convenience store, but the local food-shopping treasure is the nearby IGA supermarket where everyone goes to stock up – from food provisions to Cuban cigars (\$21) to the no-taxes liquor section. Turks and Caicos' locally produced rum, Bambarra Gold, sells for \$15 a liter. A twice-daily, round-trip shuttle from The Sands to the IGA is available at \$8 per person.

Hemingway's restaurant at The Sands is an al fresco, three-meal dining experience that is both a poolside and a beachfront experience offered seven days a week. "The high-end traveler knows good food," remarked Beswick when he observed the diners who were not guests but chose to eat at the property's restaurant. Its simple décor has ample spacing between the tables, soft piped-in music and a small, unobtrusive bar area. The genteel atmosphere of Hemingway's is like having a country club venue in your own backyard. Dress is casual to casual-chic with no outrageous bling to distract from the restaurant's understated, yet comfortable, ambiance. Also, Hemingway's does not automatically include a 10% service charge to the check, unlike some other island restaurants.

Special packages for your client's consideration are: Honeymoon Over Grace Bay costs \$1,250 for up to 10 partic-



All units have a screened-in patio, which guarantees insect-free comfort – day or night.

ipants and includes a beach wedding ceremony; processing of legal documents; services of a Justice of the Peace or Pastor, wedding cake and much more. The Luxury Romance Package costs \$550 or \$1,125 per couple and can include massages, cruises, a personalized photography session of 10 images in a hard cover story book (www.tropicalimaging.com), plus other amenities.

Room rates vary considerably and are seasonal: \$185 for a studio to \$1,200 for a three-bedroom, deluxe waterfront suite. There is a 10% government tax and a 10% service charge added to all rates. When visiting The Sands Resort at Grace Bay, there are a few tips to remember. The dollar is the local currency, and English is spoken. There are approximately five ATMs island wide and no traffic lights. Driving is on the left side of the road. Cab rides to other resorts cost about \$10 per person, each way, which makes a car rental more desirable. There is one semi-private, 18-hole golf course.

The Sands at Grace Bay, 877-77-SANDS, www.thesandstc.com

SUITE DEALS FOR THE NEW YEAR

- Book 4 nights and get the 5th night free for Studio and One-bedroom Units *
- Book 6 nights and get the 7th night free for Two- and Three-bedroom Suites *
- Hertz offers a 10% discount to The Sands' guests (year-round).

* Room offer applies to new bookings and for stays started and completed between February 1 – May 1, 2009.