

Nine of Cups – 45' Liberty Cutter – 7' draft – March 2002
Subject area: Turks & Caicos Islands

We spent the month of February and part of March exploring the Bahamas and left Southeast Point, Mayaguana on March 15, 2002 at 0200 arriving in Sopadilla Bay, Provo, Caicos Islands at around 1300. The trip was uneventful, but we motor-sailed much of the way as the North wind promised petered out way too soon.

In addition to our chart kit, we found "The Turks & Caicos Guide" by Stephen Pavlidis to be invaluable, especially his chartlets. We also had Bruce Van Sant's "Gentlemen's Guide" as a reference. The trip through Sandbore Channel was quick and uneventful and though we were cautious with our 7' draft, we had no problems whatsoever. The water depth in Sopadilla Bay was a bit skinny for us close in, but we managed a good anchorage in about 9' with enough protection from the point to be quite comfortable. The holding in sand was good.

Clearing customs was painless (\$5.00) at Sopadilla Bay for a 7-day travel permit; no cruising permit required. If you wish to extend beyond that, it is \$50/per person for a 30-day visa from Immigration and a cruising permit is required (no charge) from Customs. We have a cat aboard and had to show a recent vet certificate of good health and shot history.

Traveling about in Provo from Sopadilla Bay is a challenge to say the least. It's a long way to most anywhere and there is no real central area to visit, but rather several miles of road with shops and services in strip malls along the way. Being somewhat frugal, we hitched rides to Leeward Highway (the main road) and walked to different stores we wanted to visit. Taxis are available (very expensive...\$2-3/person/mile...negotiate first!). Also there are local "buses" (vans) which beep at you as they pass. If you need a ride, just raise your hand to hail them and they'll stop. These were less expensive (\$2-3 per person each way depending on where you wanted to go).

We tried to locate several restaurants suggested in Pavlidis' book ("Jimmy's Beach Bar, for instance), but disappointingly, many had closed. We did have dinner at "Hey Jose's" which was moderately priced and quite good (\$40/ 2 dinners and 2 beers plus chips and salsa). The biggest treat for us was shopping at the IGA, which, after 6 weeks of Bahamas grocery shopping, was an awesome experience. The store is big, bright, clean and as well stocked as any U.S. grocery store. The prices weren't as much of a shocker as I expected and the store brand of canned veggies, etc., were good quality and much cheaper. We bought fresh, lean hamburger and delighted in "A Cheeseburger in Paradise" when we got back to the boat complete with Jimmy Buffet singing in the background. Note that the IGA does **not** provide transportation back to the dock as some cruising guides suggest, so a bus or a prearranged ride is necessary to get yourself and your groceries back to Sopadilla Bay.

We did little sightseeing on Provo. We found the ruins of the Cheshire Plantation to be interesting as well as the rock carvings on the top of Sopadilla Hill.

Since we only had a week, we opted to leave Sopadilla Bay (check out with the customs officer there...no charge) and head out across the Caicos Banks to Grand Turk. We opted to take the safe, deeper route which was a bit longer and anchored overnight off Ambergris Cay. Again, with a careful watch of the water, we had no problems with either depth or coral heads following Pavilidis' suggested route through the Starfish Channel across the Banks.

We anchored off South Dock in Grand Turk. Although advised by Provo customs to check in at Grand Turk, the customs officer there said there was no need till we wanted to leave. Grand Turk is a lovely, charming island and I think overlooked by many cruisers since they only have a week in the TCIs and are usually anxious to head out to the DR from there. The Turks and Caicos Museum is excellent and quite a surprise for such a small island. For a \$5 donation, you can go back and visit as many times as you'd like while you're there. We ate at the Poop Deck down the street from the museum. Portions were huge, the food was great (especially the fried chicken), beers were cold and the price was right. Peanuts Butterfield's place, touted by all the cruising guides, is no longer in operation.

The Bermudian Saltrakers first settled the area and their influence is seen throughout the island in the architecture, the narrow, cobble-stoned streets and the salt pans in the center of town, which are now home to pink flamingos and tricolored herons. The donkeys, which once roamed the streets freely, are rounded up on an infrequent basis and corralled north of town, but you can visit them along with the Grand Turk Lighthouse on Northeast Point. Hitching a ride is the easiest way to get there.

We cleared out of Grand Turk (no charge) and sailed to Salt Cay for the afternoon. We weren't sure this was allowed, but when we got ashore at Salt Cay, a woman identified herself as the Deputy Commissioner and asked some questions. We told her the truth and she had no problem with our being there. Salt Cay was interesting to visit. The salt pans and windmills are all still there in varying stages of disrepair. We anchored overnight at Salt then sailed to Big Sand Cay the next morning to stage our departure for the DR that afternoon. A quick visit ashore to Big Sand was pleasant and a last swim before leaving the Turks and Caicos was wonderful.

We've just arrived in the DR and will update our travels soon. Things have REALLY changed here!

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