

Fluffy Cat Dives Grand Turk

by

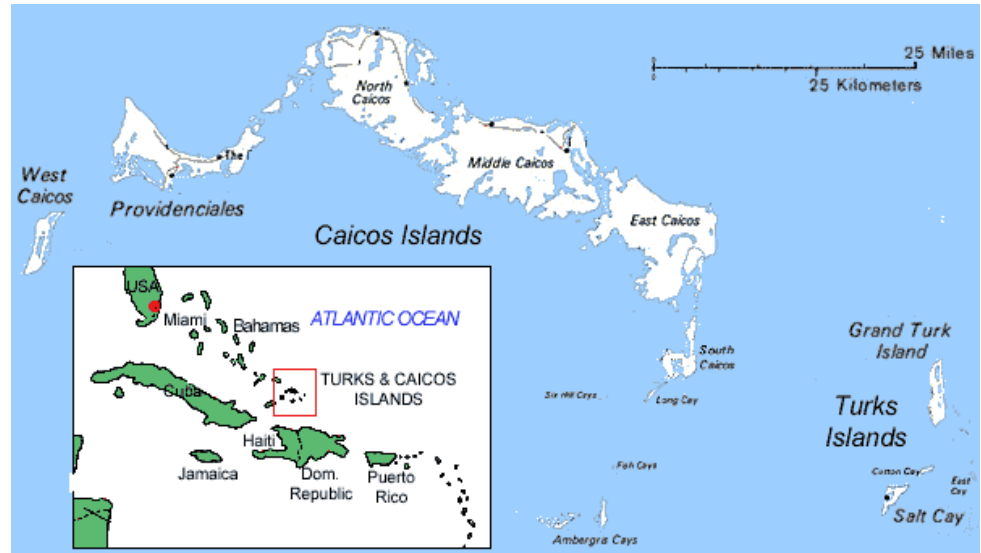
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Meow.....! I am a very fluffy kitty. My master is a dive instructor. I was his first certification. All those fish to chase...yummm... We have many underwater adventures. He brought me along to Grand Turk in 1999. He wanted to...

- Research accommodations suitable for our clients' preferences,
- Research Dive Operators who best match our clients' experience levels and preferences,
- Research Dive Sites in Grand Turk waters,
- Become familiar with Grand Turk's offerings—food, sights, environment.
- [I wanted to check out the fish and birds!]

We flew American Miami to Provo and then flew Turks and Caicos Airways to Grand Turk. Because they were filled and could only take one human, they endorsed us both over to Sky King Airlines. We stayed four nights at the Arawak Inn, and dived with **Oasis Divers**. Then we flew back to Provo on T&C (10 pax) to change to American back to Miami.



Grand Turk had less than its usual pristine dive conditions due to cold fronts coming from the US—lower visibility, wind, waves, cold. Air temp ranged in the lower 80°F. and the water temp ranged around 78°F. Depending upon the site as well as depth, visibility ranged 40–90 feet. We did 6 dives with **Oasis Divers**. We plan to return to dive the sites we missed.

Arawak Inn

We lodged at the **Arawak Inn and Beach Club** situated on a beautiful beach with easy–entry shore diving to the wall—about 200 yards out. We had a second floor 1-br with 2 beds and a cot; the living room area had a couch with pull-out bed.

Explore the Land and Restaurants

Our first adventure involved renting a car upon landing. The one with airport presence was

closed because of lack of cars. The other one was 3-block walk. The few cars left all had 3 good tires and one almost bald which was quietly hissing at me. Their merchant account provided an imprinter instead of electronic. Since phoning for authorization is very expensive, we had to agree to pay cash.

Freedom of a car meant we were not at the mercy of a dearth of cabs, all with various means of computing fares! This car was necessary for us in order that we do site inspections and dine at various resorts/restaurants.

The nicest dinner we had was at **The Turks Head Hotel**—so excellent that we had breakfast there on our last day. I scored some great fish tidbits. Dinners at **Salt Raker** and **Waterside** were also very well prepared.

Oasis Divers

Captain Everette Freitas, a former Aggressor captain, and wife Dale Barker, own and operate Oasis Divers. A first-class operation providing extras such as dry towels after every dive. I liked that...cats stay a little wetter, longer than humans. Entries are backward roll and exits via ladder near outboard, after removing all equipment. I was able to scramble up the anchor rope. Surface intervals are spent on shore. All sights just a short ride from shore. On calm days, they pick up via boat in front of the Arawak. Very safe and excellent support by all personnel.

One of the most in-tune dive masters we have ever discovered is Austin, offering just the right amount of support to each diver's level of experience. Of particular note was his short little prayer just prior to each dive. We feel this is quite in keeping with the modern trend of diving in-tune with Nature rather than against Nature. One does not have to be "religious" in order to appreciate a little wish for positiveness!

The Dive Log—Oasis Divers

Dive 1—12/2—Tiki Hut—100fsw for 50min. Reef and Wall. Usual assortment of colorful fish, coral and sponges. I stalked a large Spider crab. Nassau Grouper. Very diver-friendly hawksbill turtle! I wasn't too sure about the bill and kept my distance.

A word about turtles and other sea critters. In general the diver must never be the aggressor. If the creature is interested in the diver, and I know that opinion is divided here, it is sometimes OK to make contact. E.g. most lobster love to explore with their antennae and it is kind of nice to have a gentle contact with them. Some of my best underwater conversations have been between my whiskers and their antennae. But the creature must always take the lead in this encounter with a member of another species. Some contact is dangerous to the sea critter—sea horses, e.g. And, some contact is dangerous to our species—nurse sharks, very large grouper and dog fish, e.g. If it seems appropriate to make contact, use your best intuition, buoyancy control, motor skills and common sense, and respect the critter's territory.

Dive 2—12/2—Cables—83fsw for 58min. Reef and Wall. Good assortment of colorful fish, coral and sponges, stingrays, large green moray eel who was very interested in me...I hid behind my

master..

***** Outing-12/2—Gibbs Cay—Absolute must!** After second dive, there was just enough time to climb aboard a larger "skiff" and head out across open water to a desert island. We stopped midway in about 15fsw and free-dived for conch. I didn't see any, but upon returning to the boat, there was already a small pile of conch there. Oh!...that's what they look like in their environment! Not like the ones you see displayed in stores ;-) My master's second attempt was rewarded with a nice sized conch and I would have helped him spot more had we not had enough collected for our salad.

My master was caught up in the image of his ancestral hunter-oriented society. We guys went hunting for conch while the ladies stayed on board. I had become a saber-toothed dive kitty. Then the fact we were using an outboard motor and fins, face mask, snorkel brought us back to reality.

Upon arrival at Gibbs Cay, the sting rays began showing up—in 3–6 inches of water, cruising in the gentle surge across the sandy beach. They could be fed and petted. I am small enough that I was able to ride the backs of several after they told me to climb aboard. They have tails too! Just don't step on them—a very easy mistake. Same with us saber-toothed dive kitties. And beware when feeding they don't get too aggressive. This close encounter had rays and their tails! slip-sliding around my master's ankles. And...these tails were not the kind that I like to play with.



We all helped put up a tent for shade and shelter. I helped by digging holes for the stakes. The barbecue was started. There was such an overabundance of burgers, that some became "hockey pucks" and my master managed to get 3 skips from one across the water. Hot dogs. Salad. Soft drinks. AND rum punch! Then, before leaving, a beautiful conch salad prepared by master-conch-salad-maker, Backom, made from our catch of the day. That fresh conch was wonderful...I wish we had caught more. A great way to enjoy a surface interval!

Dive 3-12/3—Tiki Hut North—92fsw for 53min. Reef and Wall. Peacock flounder...they don't look like birds...but probably taste just as good. Large grouper. 2 large Lizard fish who wouldn't play with me, large spider crab.

Dive 4-12/3—Windmills—66fsw for 54min. Reef and Wall. Great variety of color, critters and schools which liked to tease me..I almost got one...don't mess with this saber-toothed dive kitty.

Dive 5-12/4—Chief Minister—96fsw for 36min. Reef and Wall. Purposely went deep in order to have more depth opportunity in second dive. Lot's of schooling but, as usual, most of the life is in 45fsw and higher. Did look in holes for some of the deeper inhabitants worth stalking.

Dive 6-12/4—Tunnels—79fsw for 44min. Reef and Wall. There were 2 tunnels (swim-throughs), one opening at 50fsw and one opening at 80fsw—our earlier deep dive kept our dive plan deep—not-so-deep allowed us to enjoy the deeper tunnel, which was narrower and more interesting. Standard colorful critters and schools. My night vision kicked in and I really saw

more than the humans did, in spite of their bright dive lights which made my potential prey scurry for cover.

On both the above dives, Austin's brother, Paul, was divemaster, and his care and attention to every diver according to their skill/experience level was outstanding. Instead of unceremoniously dumping me into the water...he gently placed me in...after checking my air.

Note: Because of a cold front, waves and low visibility, we dived sites to the south. Must return someday to do the sites midway and to the north! I still want to meet a tiger shark...maybe I'll find one up there...

Grand Turk's Diving and Tourism

Diving is pristine. The wall runs very close to shore, making shore diving very easy. This is a very quiet environment! It is more difficult to get to. We flew out to make our Provo connection on a 10-seat airplane (one of those seats was where the co-pilot usually sits). Car rental is difficult. You usually have to go outside normal channels to make things happen. It's much easier to arrange a car ahead of time. **Oasis Divers** will pick you up in order to avoid the variable prices from the few cabbies there. Once out of the "normal" system there, the resorts take very good care of you. It would seem that the dive operators and resorts want the tourism, but many inhabitants don't care one way or another. **Resorts** tend to be small, but very elegant.

There is a stable adjoining the Arawak property. Wish I'd had more time there—my master likes to ride sometimes and often flushes out field mice and birds for me. Upon returning the car, we discovered they have a brilliant use for an 80cu.ft. dive tank—attach a hose to it with a gauge to add air to tires. Not only at the car rental/gas station, but also if there's a flat out in the dingles. Well, owner Duchie turned out to be Everette's uncle, so there would seem to be a symbiosis between gas stations, car rentals and diving ;-)

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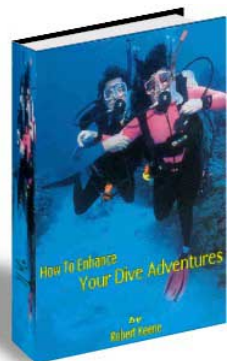
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