

## TRAVEL STORIES

# I Travelled to Turks & Caicos and South Beach During the Pandemic – Here’s What It Was Like

BY TAMARA MOORE

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The author Tamara Moore and her son.

Tamara Moore shares her recent experience of visiting Turks and Caicos and South Beach amid the pandemic, including the flight, hotel, activities, and more.



*Editor’s Note: Those who choose to travel are strongly encouraged to check local government restrictions, rules, and safety measures related to COVID-19 and take personal comfort levels and health conditions into consideration before departure.*

Travelling with my almost 3-year-old son, for the first time alone, was daunting enough. But doing so amid the pandemic brought on heart palpitations. Would he wear his mask on the plane or would we become one of these Instagram horror stories gone viral and be kicked off the flight for non-compliance?

You may be wondering why anyone would choose to do this? For me the reward outweighed the risk. I work in the travel industry in Canada, and Covid has obliterated my business. The government “help” only amounted to bailing out big business. The Ontario Small Business Grant excluded the travel industry, even though we had been the hardest hit.

It has also been a very challenging year for me personally – a survivor of years of domestic abuse, including being alienated from my oldest child by an abusive ex-husband. I’m still embroiled in a bitter divorce that has nearly bankrupt me and put unimaginable strain on my new partner and our youngest child. My mental health was at a breaking point (like many others), and I needed work.

But I also needed a safe place. Turks & Caicos has been a second home to me: I lived there with my older son for a short time a decade ago while part of a new hotel launch. I still have longtime, close friends there and many former clients. It is the place I have felt my truest self, my strongest and most successful, at times happiest. It is the place I have turned to over and over when I need to escape for pleasure or comfort and at times salvation.

I knew this is where I needed to be but getting there was going to be complicated. Direct flights to the Caribbean had been cancelled by the Canadian government, however, flights to Florida remained open. We would fly to Miami and have to overnight on the way there and back as the connections didn’t work for same day travel. My blended family was against the trip, the quarantine was going to be challenging, but for me it was all worth it. Like most mothers, I am riddled with mom guilt and have always put everyone else first and valued their opinions above my own (it’s a character flaw I was born with), but this time, I was going to be different.

I tearfully said goodbye to my partner at the airport as he dropped our son and I off. I was anxious and scared, shocking for someone who has worked in travel and flown all over the world for the last 15 years. Covid-19 and the past year had derailed my confidence.

It turns out that despite a lot of turbulence, I had nothing to fear. My son wore his mask without issue. It was like he instinctively knew I needed him to cooperate, the flight attendants were helpful. The process was much easier than expected.

## MIAMI STOPOVER

Aerial view of IHotel South Beach.

I was a little nervous staying in South Beach with my little one. I didn’t think of it as the most family friendly destination, but I couldn’t have been more wrong. I was staying at the [I Hotel South Beach](#) enroute to Turks and Caicos and again upon my return. We are greeted by a concierge who promptly hands my son a pail, shovel and sunglasses (which he wore upside down the whole trip and would only remove for bedtime). A concierge is assigned to you for your whole trip, you simply text your every whim and desire and it is met or exceeded in minutes.

There is a little irony or nostalgia for me coming here, as it was once the Gansevoort Hotel South Beach, the hotel brand that I worked with years ago and helped bring to the Turks and Caicos. The hotel is breathtaking, it reminded me a bit of Bali all washed in white and light driftwood, minimal, peaceful and, above all, sustainable. They have no cut flowers on the properties, all plants are alive and breathing. They have the most stunning art installation of a living plant on the wall of the lobby. The gorgeous oceanfront pools were filled with kids, not just the scene to be seen that South Beach is known for.

## ARRIVING IN TURKS AND CAICOS

When I step off the plane in Providenciales, Turks & Caicos with my son, I am enveloped in the same wave of heat that I always find so protective and welcoming. I smell the saltwater air and breathe it in deeply. I feel like I’ve come home.

I pick up my rental car from [Grace Bay Rentals](#), owned by Canadians Todd and Leslie Foss, and get accustomed to driving on the “wrong side of the road again.” We are staying at a small modern condo on the beach – the same building I lived in when I first moved to the island. It’s the best kept secret on Grace Bay Beach. The balcony is steps from the white sand. We wake up to the sound of waves gently rolling onto the beach. The water is so calm, it’s perfect for toddlers like mine and it’s an indescribable blue, more beautiful than words can do justice and the scent from the ocean is mesmerizing and soothing. We are literally the only ones at the pool each day. It’s Heaven.

## HOTELS AND VILLAS

A favourite for the multi-generation set is still [Grace Bay Beach Resort](#), with its family and adult-only pools, second-to-none kids club and multiple atmospheric dining venues. “We feel travel is far more meaningful for our guests in a post-pandemic world,” Nikheel Advani, COO & Principal of Grace Bay Resorts, said. “Some families are getting together for the first time. While the Island and our resorts are fully operational with heightened levels of cleanliness, to ensure the safety and well-being of our guests, our goal is to ensure we provide experiences that cater to the needs and desires of each guest. These protocols, combined with genuine hospitality, ensure guests are most comfortable and have a truly unique experience in our beautiful by nature Islands of Turks & Caicos.”

The lobby. Courtesy of Grace Bay Beach Resort

It’s been several years since I’ve been back to “Provo,” as the locals call it. The most populated island of this 40-island archipelago, has grown since I’ve last been here. The stunning [Ritz Carlton](#) just opened. It’s going to set a new standard of luxury and amenities and is the first 5-star hotel brand to grace the shores of the island.

There are several other big changes I noticed. The first is the development of many long-term residential communities and vacation communities. One of the most talked about is [South Bank](#), brought to you by long time Turks & Caicos Developer, Ivor Stanbrook and [Beach Enclave](#) by Vascos Borges.

The second is the development of Long Bay Beach, a gorgeous, wild beach with gentle winds perfect for watersports, such as kiteboarding, that it offers. There are several resorts to stay at, including [Shore Club](#). Both its two dinner restaurants have the liveliest atmosphere on the island and are definitely a must-do for locals and tourists alike. And, just a stone’s throw from the Shore Club, is a resort like no other, [H2O Life Style Resort](#). The new hotel invites people to maintain their active lifestyles, and enjoy them in a consciously designed, sustainable setting that honours the planet. [[See In Conversation With for my interview with the resort’s Canadian developer and owner Rob Ayer.](#)] Its offering also includes residential suites. According to Ayer, as far as people buying vacation homes, real estate in Turks & Caicos is also booming.

The pool at H2O Lifestyle Resort

We end our trip with a private boat cruise with Captain Andy and Seajay tours. My son loves seeing the huge iguanas, on Iguana Island, no less, and Jo Jo the dolphin makes an appearance frolicking in the waves beside the boat. Another fun option for little ones is an hour-long reef tour on the Underwater Explorer semi-submarine.

As we prepare to leave the island our departure is made easier by Caesar Campbell, owner of [Vista Azul resort and VIP Flyers Club](#). So much more than the average hotel, La Vista Azul provides all the amenities of a private vacation rental with the convenience and services of a resort property at a reasonable price point. What’s more, the Flyers Club VIP service takes the experience to the next level with a team that looks after every detail, so you don’t have to. They took my son and I to the airport and whisked us through security and onto the boarding gate.

It was the perfect way to end a 10-day decadent adventure that was exactly the refresh and recharge that I’d needed for months. I encourage anyone looking for a low-key luxury getaway to consider Turks and Caicos. The beautiful surroundings, safe environment and leading service ensure every experience is one to remember.



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