

The itinerary

Compiled by Sandy Guerra-Cline
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Rent a villa on Kamalame Cay. Kamalame Cay

Escape to the Bahamas

Kamalame Cay, a private island hideaway in the Bahamas, has a March promotion for those who like their beach retreat heavy on luxury and seclusion. During March, Silver Top and Magnolia, two of its three-bedroom luxury villas, will be discounted 40 percent, to \$1,510 per night, in a package deal that is specially tailored for families or groups of couples. The deal includes free breakfast, a high-speed boat trip to a remote white-sand island, and a picnic lunch and guided snorkeling trip for six, including transportation and equipment. Conditions include a minimum five-day stay, and up to six people per villa. Other activities and services include eco tours, sea kayaking, deep-sea and bone fishing and the Overwater Spa at Kamalame. 800-790-7971; www.kamalame.com

Books & guides



Paris is especially lovely in the spring. AP/Michel Lipchitz

Three for springtime in Paris

Plan for a trip to the City of Light with: Frommer's EasyGuide to Paris 2014, by Margie Rynn (FrommerMedia LLC, \$10.95): Insider feel, concise recommendations for where to spend your time — and what to avoid. Paris Day by Day, by Anna E. Brooke (FrommerMedia LLC, \$13.95): Compact, easy to carry and good for first-time visitors whose time is limited. Top 10 Paris, part of the Eyewitness Top 10 Travel Guides series, by Mike Gerrard and Donna Dailey (DK, \$14): Crisp series, all new entries. — Ellen Creager, Detroit Free Press

Q&A: Two for Paris

There's a tradition that the year a mother is twice her daughter's age, the two should take a trip. This is the year for my daughter and me, so we're going to Paris. I'd appreciate a recommendation for a hotel that won't break the bank. And for restaurants.

I've recommended the Hotel Therese before, and stand behind that one. As for restaurants — hoo boy, there are so many! I highly suggest that you look at a couple of great resources: DavidLebovitz.com and Parisby-Mouth.com.

— Joe Yonan, The Washington Post

Fun fact

You get what you pay for

If you fly on a low-cost airline, you may complain less about the service because your expectations for low-cost airlines are lower. That is the conclusion of a recent study by MIT graduate student Michael Wittman published in the Journal of Air Transport Management. The study looked at complaints filed with the U.S. Department of Transportation about service on major network carriers such as Delta, United and US Airways, as well as low-cost carriers like Southwest and JetBlue. It found that even when airline service levels for such categories as delays, baggage handling and overbooking were similar among airlines, low-cost carriers had a significantly lower rate of complaints.

— Los Angeles Times

Great Britain



Dalhousie Castle is known for its falconry program and has some 65 birds, from owls to eagles. Special to the Star-Telegram /Cindy Baldhoff

Royal respites

An American sightseer finds that there's nothing more regal than staying in a fortress replete with history and a ghost story or two

By Paula Felps
Special to the Star-Telegram

In Scotland, there are essentially two ways to be able to spend a night in a castle: be part of royalty (either through birth or marriage), or buy your way in. Not having the ancestral advantage to accomplish the former, I chose the latter.

I had spent 10 days sightseeing in Scotland, and my traveling companion and I had logged several miles each day touring the magnificent gardens and grounds of its finer castles. We'd ventured inside whenever possible, but some castles offer limited indoor access because they are residences to some of Scotland's and England's royals.

These intriguing glimpses of castle life heightened the appeal of spending the night inside an ancient fortress, and we knew we didn't want to leave the country without parking our heads on pillows in a grand palace with a notable past.

We set our sights on Dalhousie Castle, an imposing structure dating to the 13th century. It isn't as large as some of the royal castles we had visited, but its walls have housed an impressive amount of history and scandal. As the private residence of the noted Ramsay clan for eight centuries and the former seat of the Earls of Dalhousie, it was converted into a hotel in the early 1970s. Dalhousie's prime location in Bonny-



Dalhousie Castle dates to the 13th century. Special to the Star-Telegram/Cindy Baldhoff

rigg, just eight miles from the busy, tourist-centric hub of Edinburgh, makes it a great first stop when arriving from the U.S., as well as a convenient final destination before departing the country.

Just roaming through the castle is an adventure in itself; the scars of its past — which include a six-month siege led by King Henry IV in 1400 — collide nicely with its modern amenities. The stone hallways easily transport you back in time even while they lead to rooms that have been updated for comfort and

style. Rich tweeds, tartan plaids and twill dominate the decor, keeping the Scottish heritage alive at every turn. Like the others, our room wasn't spacious but it boasted a four-poster bed and was designed to emphasize the castle's historic past.

For the birds

Although Dalhousie is home to Scotland's first hydro-spa, as we began our explorations, we decided to forgo pam-

More on CASTLES, 12E

Beat a quiet retreat to Ocean Club Resorts

Activities include sitting, daydreaming and taking a trip to the conch farm.

By Debbra Dunning Brouillette
Special to the Star-Telegram

PROVIDENCIALES, Turks and Caicos — Twenty years had passed since my toes had touched the powdery, talcum-soft sand on Grace Bay. Time hadn't changed the intensity of the calm turquoise waters, sheltered by the coral reef located a half-mile offshore, but my surroundings at Ocean Club West, a 68-unit all-suite beachfront property, were decidedly different from the livelier, party atmosphere of Club Med, the all-inclusive resort where I'd stayed in the early '90s. It's more serene here, grown-up — ideal as either a quiet couples or family-centered retreat, and very accessible from Dallas-Fort Worth, with weekly direct flights on American Airlines.



The day ends spectacularly on the water in Providenciales. Special to the Star-Telegram/Debbra Dunning Brouillette

Ocean Club West and its nearly identical twin, Ocean Club, less than a mile east on Grace Bay's much-lauded 12-mile stretch of sand, are on Providenciales, or Provo for short. While it is the most developed of the 40 islands and cays that make up the Turks and Caicos Islands, mega-resorts are nonexistent and no cruise ships visit; the only

cony. Accommodations range from studios with kitchenettes up to spacious one-, two-, and three-bedroom suites with fully equipped kitchens.

All units include a washer/dryer, so there is no need to overpack. Families traveling with children can pack lightly, too, since the resorts offer cribs, high chairs, strollers and baby monitors, if needed. If you can't resist staying plugged in, complimentary in-room Wi-Fi is provided, or you may pick up books and board games from the lending library.

Typically, guests stroll along the beach, ride bikes or take a shuttle to eat or play at both resorts. I chose Ocean Club West, which has the advantage of being closer to shops, restaurants and a well-stocked grocery, but the east location is great for golfers, because it is next to Provo

More on RESORTS, 13E

Resorts

Continued from 11E

vo Golf Club's 18-hole tournament-level course, ranked among the Caribbean's 10 best.

It's a perfect place to escape from technology, traffic and to-do lists — a place where I could do (almost) nothing at all. I could sip tropical drinks under a pale peach umbrella and gaze at the sea for hours. Eventually, after a few beach walks and a couple of mojitos, I was ready to trade my beach chair for a few additional stress-relieving activities that would nurture mind, body and soul.

Taking on the waves

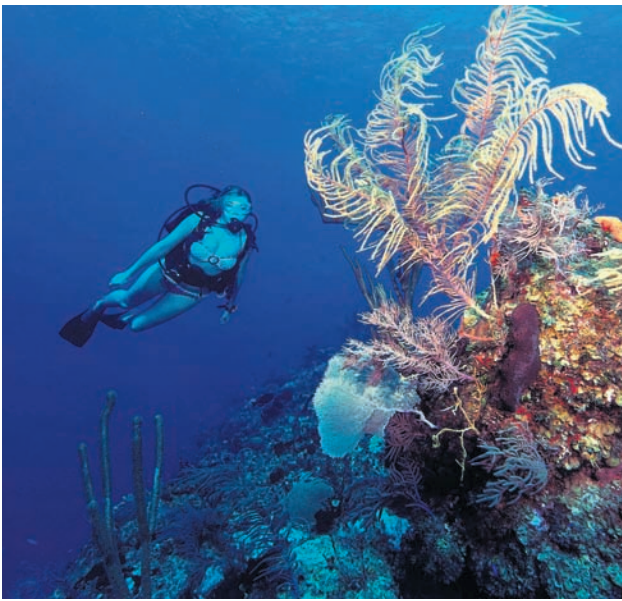
Having a meditative experience underwater always tops my list of vacation essentials. My first ocean dives were here in Provo in 1992, so I was eager to explore the reefs with Provo Turtle Divers. After taking the plunge on two colorful dive sites near the West Caicos Bank, I was already getting my mojo back.

If you'd rather snorkel on the surface, book an excursion through the resorts' activity concierge, who can place you smack dab on top of an amazing reef.

Cruises and conchs

Above water, I found sailing serenity on an afternoon sail through Sun Charters aboard the Atabeyra, a 77-foot former schooner. The cruise through the crystalline waters northeast of Provo includes sunning, snacking and snorkeling on a random reef. After stopping at Pine Cay to search for sand dollars in the shallows, we reboarded in time to witness a spectacular sunset.

Another island treat is a tour of Caicos Conch Farm, the world's first and only commercial conch farm (pronounced conk). I learned about the Queen Conch's life cycle and viewed the various stages of growth of the marine mollusk that forms its own distinctive conical shell.



Turks and Caicos offers opportunities for reef diving. David Volkert



Ocean Club West is closer to shops, including a grocery store. Ocean Club Resorts

Later, at Da Conch Shack and Rum Bar on Blue Hills Beach, my challenge of the day was choosing between the wild variety of ways this local delicacy is prepared, including my personal favorite: marinated conch salad.

Topping it off

Both Ocean Club locations have excellent beach-side restaurants — the Seaside Cafe and the Cabana Bar and Grill. The ambiance at the more upscale Opus Wine Bar and Grill at Ocean Club is on par with the food and extensive wine list.

With more than 50 restaurants clustered in the Grace Bay area, other gourmet dining experiences are within walking distance. The fresh catch from local waters ranges from snapper, tuna and grouper to mahi-mahi, wahoo, lobster and, of course, conch.

Finally, a spa visit is a natural fit for this type of vacation, whether during the stay or as a perfect way to wrap it all up with a tidy

If you go ...

Ocean Club Resorts, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos Islands
Reservations: 800-457-8787; www.oceanclubresorts.com
Rates discounted 25-30 percent for travel May 1-Dec. 20, based on room type and length of stay.
Units are available for purchase at Ocean Club West, \$193,000-\$995,000. www.oceanclubresorts.com/real-estate.
How to get there: American Airlines flies direct from DFW to Providenciales (PLS) on Saturdays. Other airlines require a connecting flight.

bow. You can't go wrong with a visit to the Spa Tropic — with locations at both Ocean Club resorts — to smooth any knotted muscles acquired while doing (almost) nothing on Provo. My last morning included a "Knotty but Nice" Swedish massage that left me saying "aah" all the way to the airport.

RETAIL FOREIGN CURRENCY RATES		
Country	Sell	Buy
Australia	1.014	.793
Canada	1.005	.829
England	1.823	1.547
Euro	1.487	1.274
Japan	0.011	0.008
Mexico	.087	.064
China	0.190	0.143
Switzerland	1.266	.991
Foreign currency in US Dollars		
Source: Gulliver's Travel		
Rates effective 2/18/14, subject to change.		
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Thursday, March 20, 2014

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Advertorial

TRAVEL COLUMN

COZUMEL...Something for everyone!

Cruise ships sail to many ports of call...right from Galveston or Houston...but one port that almost all cruise ships sail to is COZUMEL, Mexico. There seems to be something for everyone here! Your only problem will be deciding how to fit it all in. But what you don't catch this time, you can always put on your list for the next trip as a lot of folks find this place seriously addicting.



The largest inhabited island in Mexico and the oldest in the Caribbean group, Cozumel is located 12 miles off the eastern coast of the mainland (Yucatan Peninsula.) The limestone plateau that forms the base of the island is 34 miles long (north to south) and 11 miles wide (east to west) and, despite the boom in tourist and residential development in the past few years, continues to have vast expanses of untouched jungle and shoreline.



Your adventures could include: (just a sampling!)

- **SIGHTSEEING:** the Mayan culture once flourished here and the temples and cities they left are fascinating. Visit the SanGervasio site or beautiful seaside Tulum.
- **XCARET:** visit this eco-archeological park, a natural theme park where you can swim, visit the aquarium, lazily tube a river, visit the zoo, or relax seaside
- **PLAYA DEL CARMEN:** take the 45 minute ferry boat ride to mainland Mexico (great shopping, beach & nightclubs)
- **SHOPPING** in the area: shop for Mexican handicrafts & learn the art of "bargaining"!
- **SWIM WITH THE DOLPHINS**
- **DIVING:** the island is one of the top 5 dive destinations in the world --with the 2nd largest coral reef in the world and visibility up to 200'
- **DEEP SEA FISHING**
- **ATLANTIS SUBMARINE:** Prefer to stay dry? You can travel up to 100 feet below the ocean's surface in this 48-passenger submarine to explore the wonders of "Chankanaab."
- So many other options!



PaulsCruises.com special travel tips:

- There are as many as 3 cruise piers in Cozumel at which to dock...be sure you know exactly which one you are docked at when you leave the ship!
- Do book your shore tours before you leave home...the specialists at Pauls Cruises & Travel will be happy to offer suggestions when you book your cruise.
- **SAVE** money... be on the "Special Savings" list with PaulsCruises.com...just send them your e-mail address!
- Book that summer vacation cruise NOW -- don't wait -- especially if you need a quad cabin!

Pauls Cruises & Travel offers special savings on 4, 5 or 7 night cruises from Galveston...on Carnival and 7 night Royal Caribbean cruises- which are now sailing round trip from Galveston year round (including all summer)...or NCL and Princess which sail from November thru April from Houston so call the cruise specialists at Pauls Cruises & Travel. In the Mid-Cities @ 941 Melbourne, se of NE Mall (Subway shopping strip) -- 817-589-SHIP (7447). In the Arlington-Mansfield area @ 5767 SW Green Oaks (se corner of I20) -- 817-572-PAUL (7285). Outside the DFW metroplex 800-327-3533. E-Mail: Info@PaulsCruises.com, or visit their website www.PaulsCruises.com.

Even if you missed AAA's travel shows last weekend, there's still time to save money on your next vacation!

Go into any of AAA's 14 DFW-area branches before February is over to book your cruise or land vacation, and enjoy exclusive Member Benefits. Whether it's a cruise from Galveston, a cruise to Alaska, or a summer vacation in Europe that will earn you five times the points on your Member Rewards Visa credit card, AAA has the special for you. A sampling:

- Exclusive AAA DreamWorks Experience Package on select sailings with **Royal Caribbean**
- Shipboard credit, complimentary beverage package, and reduced shore excursions, cruise fares and deposits on select sailings with **Holland America**
- Beverage package, pre-paid gratuities and shipboard credits on select sailings with **Celebrity Cruises**
- Customized holidays with credit toward additional hotel nights, sightseeing, meals and transfers or car rentals on select **Rocky Mountaineer** departures

And no matter where you're traveling, you'll benefit from the destination expertise and peace of mind that comes with booking with North America's largest full-service travel agency.

Don't miss out! Come into any of AAA's 14 DFW locations this week to secure your end-of-February special. Not sure which location is most convenient for you? Call **888-467-4957** and press **2** to get connected.

AAA wants to book your next vacation!

