

Luxury and adventure in the Bahamas

Tracey Teo, For The Tennessean 11:03 p.m. CST December 26, 2015



(Photo: Wesley K.H. Teo)

When I ate an unconventional, but delicious, breakfast of conch fritters at a little Grand Turk joint called [Barbie's](http://turksandcaicostourism.com/things-to-do-in-turks-and-caicos/restaurants-bars-dinning-in-turks-and-caicos/) (<http://turksandcaicostourism.com/things-to-do-in-turks-and-caicos/restaurants-bars-dinning-in-turks-and-caicos/>), I didn't give much thought to what it takes to extract conch meat from its shell. I contemplated the meal no further than acknowledging it was a nice change from cereal. But when I later found myself standing on a beach with a native guide showcasing a kayak full of sea life indigenous to [Turks and Caicos](http://turksandcaicostourism.com/) (<http://turksandcaicostourism.com/>), an island chain southeast of the Bahamas, I was forced to give my breakfast much more consideration than I otherwise would have, or wanted to.

The guide, sporting short, Medusa-like dreadlocks and a Bob Marley medallion, held up a large conch shell for us visitors to examine.

"Want to see how to get that guy out of there?" he asked with an island lilt as smooth as the sea.

Before we could answer, his pal raised a hammer. Bam!

With a sharp knife, the friend expertly extracted a big, slimy blob of weirdness from the shell and offered everyone a sample. Yes, we were supposed to eat this — raw.

"Caribbean sushi," he said with a grin.

My husband has an adventurous palate, so he popped the unappetizing-looking bite into his mouth as though it were popcorn.

"Pretty good," he said.

Some of those brave enough to try it agreed. Others made "ick" faces that got a laugh from the rest. I didn't try it because I firmly believe conch should be battered, deep-fried and served as fritters, preferably with some rum-based, fruity island cocktail.

Whether we liked the conch or not, we would all go home with an entertaining story to share, and we joked that we had just decreased our chances of starvation if we were ever stranded on a deserted island — as long as a hammer and a knife could be found somewhere on that island.

I had many such memorable experiences during a five-day Caribbean cruise aboard [Princess Cruises](http://www.princess.com/) (<http://www.princess.com/>)' newest ship, the 3,560-passenger [Regal Princess](http://www.princess.com/learn/ships/gp/) (<http://www.princess.com/learn/ships/gp/>). A half-day coast-to-coast shore excursion on Grand Turk takes visitors across the island in an open-air safari bus. The beach stop, which provides an introduction to marine life, such as sea urchins, sea cucumbers and, most notably, conch, is popular with Princess passengers.

Back on the bus, we all agreed that sushi cravings were probably best satisfied at the Ocean Terrace, the ship's seafood bar, which serves not only sushi, but caviar and oysters.

Our next stop proved that not all the island's captivating wildlife lives in the sea. We parked at a picturesque spot to check out an old lighthouse that stood like a soldier at attention, just in case the calm Atlantic Ocean should suddenly turn moody and ominous, but a welcome committee of scraggly but adorable wild donkeys distracted us from what we had come to see. I'm not sure they knew they were "wild," because they happily let me pet them, as though they were domesticated golden retrievers. (I was told it's OK to touch them as long as you don't stand behind them.)

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When the tour concluded, I grabbed my beach bag and joined a group of sunbathers determined to soak up as many tropical rays as possible before the ship sailed.

Tranquility at Princess Cays

Snorkeling has long been my favorite beach activity, so when the ship docked at [Princess Cays \(http://www.princess.com/excursion/exlistfordestination.do?portid=RSD&t=C&exType=S\)](http://www.princess.com/excursion/exlistfordestination.do?portid=RSD&t=C&exType=S), Princess Cruises' private resort on the island of Eleuthera, I plunged into the pristine, emerald-green water, eager for the mysteries of this aquatic world to reveal themselves.

The general din of the beach was replaced by silence and tranquility. Near a shallow reef, a friendly school of yellow- and gray-striped fish greeted me by fanning their tails. Rocks and shells of all shapes and sizes shimmered like jewels. Neon blue and yellow queen angelfish, the peacocks of the sea, swam through a forest of gently swaying sea anemones.

There were many bizarre creatures on the reef I couldn't identify, and I tried to emblazon them on my brain so I could look them up later. I told myself for the 100th time that I need to buy an underwater camera.

Self-indulgence on the sea

As much as I loved those sun-drenched ports of call in the Caribbean, I also looked forward to relaxing sea days so I could explore the ship and join some of the onboard activities. I never turn down a good glass of vino, so when I got wind of the super Tuscan wine tasting, I was in.

"Super Tuscan" generally refers to Italian red wines based on Bordeaux varietals, such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot, or a blend of those varietals with Tuscany's famous sangiovese. In the '70s, these wines were viewed by Italy's winemaking industry as rebellious avant-garde experiments and were given the lowly "table wine" label, but today, they are highly collectable.

To my delight, each wine was paired with a sample from [Sabatini's \(http://www.princess.com/cruise-tips-vacation-ideas/video/onboard-experience/sabatini.html#.Vnrd0vkrKY0\)](http://www.princess.com/cruise-tips-vacation-ideas/video/onboard-experience/sabatini.html#.Vnrd0vkrKY0), the Italian specialty restaurant that served as the wine tasting venue. I raised an eyebrow when a smooth ruby red [Ammiraglia \(http://www.frescobaldi.it/en-us/home/ourwines/ammiraglia.aspx\)](http://www.frescobaldi.it/en-us/home/ourwines/ammiraglia.aspx) with notes of black currants and cherries was paired with chicken polenta, but it turned out to be the perfect marriage of flavors.

Sampling a wine that costs upward of \$200 a bottle is a rare treat, so when the steward poured a 2009 [Ornellaia \(http://www.ornellaia.com/\)](http://www.ornellaia.com/), I savored every fruit-infused, spicy mouthful.

I sipped and swirled away a pleasant afternoon, learning about terroir, acidity and tannins — concepts that were clearer before my fourth sample.

It seemed impossible to get much more relaxed without being comatose, but a post-tasting trip to the [Lotus Spa \(http://www.princess.com/learn/onboard/activities/lotus_spa_fitness/\)](http://www.princess.com/learn/onboard/activities/lotus_spa_fitness/) proved otherwise.

A hot aroma stone therapy massage left me as limp as a noodle. I emerged 75 minutes later in a cloud of lavender and stumbled to the Enclave, the spa's luxurious thermal suite, where I submerged myself in the churning waters of the hydrotherapy pool.

The grand finale to my day of shameless self-indulgence was a decadent chocolate dessert made with love — [Norman Love \(http://www.normanloveconfections.com/\)](http://www.normanloveconfections.com/), that is. The world-famous master chocolatier and pastry designer recently partnered with Princess Cruises to launch [Chocolate Journeys \(http://www.princess.com/ships-and-experience/food-and-dining/chocolate-journeys/\)](http://www.princess.com/ships-and-experience/food-and-dining/chocolate-journeys/), a new onboard chocolate experience that offers almost endless ways to satisfy a sweet tooth. Join a chocolate and wine pairing, sip a chocolate libation, attend a dessert demonstration or simply order whatever tempts you in the main dining room. Want to take home some of these exquisite little confections? Norman Love boxed chocolates are sold in the onboard shops.

For more information about Princess Cruises, visit [princess.com \(http://princess.com\)](http://princess.com) or call (800) 774-6237.

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