

This Must Be Kokomo
Provo Golf Course in the Turks and Caicos Islands
By Tim Cotroneo



In the 1988 song *Kokomo*, Aruba and Jamaica received top billing as the most exotic destinations to get away from it all. At that time, the Turks and Caicos Islands were the Caribbean's best-kept secret. Today, this scattering of eight islands nestled 30 miles southeast of the Bahamas, is fast becoming the retreat of choice for those seeking ultra blue water, miles of beach, and easy access to top-flight golf.

The Turks and Caicos Islands are the polar opposite to the hectic lifestyle most vacationers seek to escape. Turks and Caicos is also home to Grace Bay Beach, one of the world's most spectacular stretches of powdery white sand surrounded by turquoise water. About one mile inland from Grace Bay is Provo Golf Course. Built in 1992, Provo is the perfect trifecta for vacationers who like fairway green with their white and blue.

Provo, named after Providenciales, Turks and Caicos' most inhabited island, is the area's only golf course. This unique oasis is a 6700-yard track of Bermuda grass, trademark pearl white sand, and home to an occasional pink flamingo. Provo is a delicious dessert after sampling Turks and Caicos' main entrée of unending beach and picture postcard water.

For those who find the links to be a quiet refuge from the pressure and problems of the real world, playing 18 holes at Provo is the golf equivalent to floating on an air mattress while sipping a rum punch. On the back nine you can literally feel the tension flow from your body. Your score becomes secondary to absorbing the quiet essence of your golf environment. A golfer can't help but visually and physically bond with the sway of the palm trees that serve as a backdrop on most greens.



Palm trees greet golfers with a friendly wave.

Newcomers do a double take the first time they launch a drive next to the conch shell tee markers that adorn each hole. Next, golfers are challenged by the 100-plus yards of white sand that stretches in front of most tee shots on par fours and fives. The plentiful white stuff is an effort to maximize the grassy areas on an island that features terrain comprised primarily of limestone and sandstone.

Quenching a golf course's thirst on an island with just 25 inches of rainfall annually is as simple as borrowing from a next-door neighbor. In order to keep Provo's greens and fairways lush, the nearby Turks and Caicos Water Company pumps 300,000 gallons of distilled water on a daily basis. This neighborly endeavor plays a major part in ensuring Provo's annual rating as one of the Caribbean's Top 10 courses.

The severity, or generosity, of Provo is often determined by whether the trade winds decide to blow on any given day. The signature Par 5, 529-yard, 12th hole is a challenge if the wind is in your face. Another example of Provo transforming from a beauty to a beast is the Par 3, 110-yard, 15th hole. A relatively simple wedge shot can have real teeth if you come up short and land on the crown-shaped limestone barrier at the base of the elevated green.

Just as vacationers from around the world are catching on to Turks and Caicos, Provo is beginning to develop a following of its own. The course has played host to notables such as the NBA's most legendary superstar, the actor who played opposite the *Pretty Woman*, and even a king from the Middle East. The good news is that at least for today, getting a tee time on this Caribbean jewel is as easy as counting on a gorgeous sunset after your round.



Exotic bird life is part of the Provo golf experience.

Finish 18 holes at Provo and you'll go home with memories that stretch from here to Kokomo. Provo warms to a golfer like a first kiss and makes one yearn for more. Like they say to vacationers visiting Turks and Caicos for the first time, "It's your first day here? Welcome home."

Want more? When Burlington, CT native Bob Casarella was asked which Provo golf hole was his favorite, Casarella smiled and said, "The 19th hole." After his round, Casarella's preferred place to unwind is the Provo Clubhouse outdoor deck. The

deck is perched high above the 18th green and is a great vantage-point to relax and observe incoming golfers. It's also the perfect setting to hoist a locally brewed Turks Head beer and savor your day. At Provo, play a round, then buy a round, and feel how Turks and Caicos is a great place to "get away from it all."

Tim Cotroneo is a freelance writer from Lino Lakes, MN, with a passion for golf and a future Caribbean zip code.