



Beaches Turks & Caicos

Caribbean culture and an array of activities transform meetings from ho-hum to “hot diggity!”

[ON LOCATION] SARAH GREAVES-GABBADON

I'm on a British-governed Caribbean island at a Jamaican-owned resort enjoying dinner in a French restaurant, which was preceded by appetizers at a beachfront Asian eatery. It's a mildly disconcerting feeling to be in the midst of such a geographical mash-up. But it's precisely this cultural diversity that makes **Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa**—on the shores of Providenciales' Grace Bay beach—worth considering for meetings and incentive travel in this part of the world.

“We are the Caribbean,” says Mike Norton, VP of tour operator group sales with Unique Vacations, which represents family-owned Beaches and its sister company **Sandals Resorts**. “Our resorts reflect our diverse heritage, brought to us by the people who colonized the region centuries ago and those who have settled here since. On average, guests spend five days at our resorts so it is imperative that we offer them a range of tastes and experiences. Our location is the Caribbean, but we want people to experience the world.”

Hence the Asian and French restaurants here at Beaches Turks & Caicos, just two of the 19 dining options that comprise the chain's Discovery Dining program, a gastronomic globetrot from Texas to Thailand. “Even Caribbean folk like to go out for Chinese food on occasion,” Norton laughs, noting that each of the specialty restaurants are run by chefs native to that particular region, with the all-inclusive staple, the buffet, serving as only one of numerous dining options.

Beaches Turks & Caicos also offers planners a dizzying array of room choices; 758 contemporary-styled rooms are spread over a whopping 44 categories in four neighborhoods: Key West, Caribbean, French and Italian Villages. Smart TVs will soon be

standard across all hotels, enabling groups to book tours, make restaurant reservations and order photos. More than 35 percent of the inventory is suites (served by concierges or private butlers, depending on the category), a strategy that keeps with the 34-year-old company's goal to offer an increasingly luxurious experience.

IT'S ON

With over 112,000 sf of meeting space and a robust menu of group experiential offerings resort-wide, meetings and incentives are on the rise at Beaches Turks & Caicos, Sandals Grande Antigua and Sandals Emerald Bay on Great Exuma in the Bahamas. “Groups that build cultural aspects into their programming are more successful,” Norton says, “so each resort can create a unique experience that's customized to the group's goals and incorporates cultural aspects of the destination—our resorts reflect the setting where they operate.” At Beaches Turks & Caicos, activities may include Beach Olympics for up to 1,500, conch “cracking” contests or a nighttime, adults-only “wet fete” in the resort's Pirates Island water park.

Groups can participate in traditional Bahamian Junkanoo parades and take conch-themed cooking classes at Sandals Emerald Bay, and at Sandals Antigua, a 90-minute cruise to sister island Barbuda provides plenty of opportunity for teambuilding (and a rum punch or three). Unlimited scuba for certified divers, exclusive amenities such as the Scratch DJ Academy and complimentary WiFi, are all factored into the initial rate. All Sandals resorts offer hands-on CSR opportunities through the **Sandals Foundation**.

beaches.com; sandals.com