



Kelly and Gerhard, BOHIO Dive Resort

unattributed

## Turks and Caicos diving: It Doesn't Get Any Better Than BOHIO



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**TURKS AND CAICOS** - What do scuba travelers list as their top three reef destinations? Australia's Great Barrier Reef, Belize's Barrier Reef, and Turks and Caicos' The Grand Turk Wall. Many rate The Wall as #1 for several reasons.

The Wall plunges 7000 vertical feet with an amazing 100-foot visibility. Active marine life is visible at a depth of only 30-feet with great light and better air production. The dive sites are close, and there's little current. Since The Wall is only a five minute boat ride offshore, divers don't spend hours getting to and from dive sites with creative names like Coral Garden, the Aquarium, the Library, McDonald's—for its coral arch—and Chief Ministers, located near the governor's mansion. The Wall teems with all kinds of marine life including huge corals and sponges, hawksbill turtles, Nassau groupers, giant Manta rays, dolphins and, in season, humpback whales migrating to the Dominican Republic. Night dives feature phosphorescence due to bioluminescence (the production of light by living organisms as a result of the oxidation of light-producing luciferin).

While Grand Turk is home to numerous dive operations, there's no contest for scuba tourists looking to maximize their dive holiday. BOHIO Dive Resort offers the best dive packages, restaurant, and beach on the island.

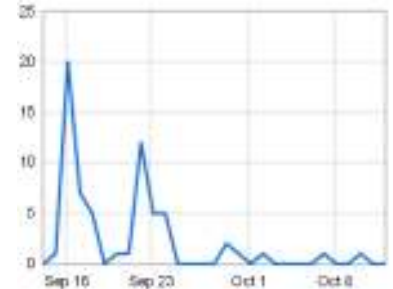
Our BOHIO experience began at 9:00 a.m. when we arrived at the resort. Nestled among the palms and casuarinas on award-winning Pillory Beach, BOHIO is a paradise on the island paradise of Grand Turk. Co-owner and general manager Kelly greeted us by name and despite the hour, announced that our room was ready. After checking in, I asked Kelly how she came to make the leap from cosmopolitan London to off-the-beaten-track Grand Turk. "I grew up in the middle of London, in the concrete jungle," she said. "They turned the Thames docks, where old ships delivered their wares, into docks offering water sports, so I was canoeing and sailing from the age of nine. Later, I taught water sports seasonally in Ardeche, France."

Eventually Kelly decided that she needed a proper job, so she learned computers. "I saved money and bought a French sailboat, a 31-foot Beneteau. Then, after traveling around the IT industry for ten years, I became sick of the rat race and decided to do something else."

That something else turned out to be wanting to own a small dive operation. "We started going on holiday around the Caribbean searching for a business to buy. We went to Salt Cay for a week looking for a hole in the market, but found Ollie and Debbie already running a good dive operation there—Salt Cay Divers." (see Salt Cay, Turks and Caicos Islands—Some Folks Call it Home, Tripulu, 2010-09-06). "Just before leaving for a week on Grand Turk, friends we'd made on Salt Cay urged us to check out Guanahani."

"We found Guanahani ( the indigenous Taino Indian name for the island) on Pillory Beach, the most beautiful stretch of beach on Grand Turk. Guanahani was not a dive operation, and with its hotel and restaurant was bigger than what we were looking for." Nevertheless, they met a fellow looking for his friends and the friends and Kelly—five in all—brought Guanahani "Sheer naïveté made us think we could

### Visits



Total Visits

63

ments, and the menus and Kelly—live in an—bought Guanahani. Chef Jorika made us think we could do it—then once we did, it was sink or swim.” All five share ownership, with Kelly managing the operation while the others holiday there.

Never wishing to be a just a hotelier, Kelly and company put in a dive operation, then added the adjacent deck and bar area to allow dining under the stars. Kelly's lifestyle changed completely. From the start, she was general manager, accent on general. Without layers of employees to whom she could delegate, she personally checked every room, worked the dives, tended bar, served dinners—whatever had to be done. “Except for cooking,” she said. “I do everything but cook. I stay out of the kitchen.” She added that she also does sales, marketing, accounting, human resources and somehow finds time to put out fires. “Five years ago we brought in another dive instructor to free up my time, so occasionally I get to have a drink with Gerhard and Chef Jorika and some of the guests.”

When I commented that Kelly's many hats and fire extinguishing reminded me of Wouk's Don't Stop the Carnival, she laughed. “There's nothing in Don't Stop the Carnival that doesn't happen here. Even my own official diary is sometimes too painful to read!” She asked if I recalled Fawly Towers, the hilarious British sitcom from the 70s set in the Fawly Towers Hotel on the “English Riviera.” “The hotel was run by a grumpy Englishman,” Kelly explained. “I see part of myself in every character.”

With such a demanding job, I wondered what kept Kelly going. “It's always been about the people who run BOHIO,” she said. “Bohio is the Taino word for home, and that's what we want—to create a relaxed atmosphere, not a five-star Caribbean resort. We want people to relax and feel at home, to slip behind the bar and make themselves a drink if the bartender's not there. We're all about the human touch, about making lifelong friends with staff. For example, we have two guys arriving tomorrow, one of whom after Hurricane Ike, put us up in his Florida home, loaned us his truck, and acted as our freight agent. Another guest came down after the hurricane and rebuilt the dive shack on his own dollar.”

We left Kelly to anything and everything and passed through the breezy bar and dining room that overlooks the ocean and offers complimentary coffee and tea all day, free wi-fi, and an eclectic small library with novels and books on marine life and corals, as well as board games like Backgammon and Scrabble. Beyond the dining room was the deck and beach-bar. During our stay, an employee had her wedding reception on the deck which provided a million dollar view in a totally relaxed setting.

From the deck we continued parallel with the beach through the open-air dive shack that's fully equipped to meet guests' diving and snorkeling needs. We followed the planked walkway past the small pool to two pink cement buildings 100 feet beyond. The length of the resort is flanked by Pillory Beach's white-sand and turquoise waters that abruptly turn navy as if a line has been drawn across the water, which in fact it has by The Wall—that 7000 foot vertical drop of reef..

Guest rooms are located in the twin pink buildings that stand side by side facing guests as they approach. Each building has four rooms on each of two floors, oriented so that their sliding glass doors offer oblique ocean views. We wondered why, with all the empty land between the buildings and the main hotel, that the buildings weren't rotated 45' to afford a full ocean view. Because guest rooms are set apart, one has the feeling of going to separate destinations when going to the beach or diving or to the restaurant, rather than being at all these areas at one location.

Our room was average. On the plus side, it was clean and fresh, and the partial ocean view was stunning. On the debit side, only one bedside lamp lit the main area. The bathroom was small but adequate with a shower, no bath. The TV screen was small but the TV offered plenty of channels. There were no luggage racks. The air conditioner was noisy, but after the first night, I didn't notice it. However, the ambience at BOHIO is so addictive that I imagine most guests readily overlook these inconveniences, especially if their objective is diving.

BOHIO's Guanahani Restaurant is renowned for offering the best cuisine on the island (see Guanahani, Tripulu, 2010-08-24). Executive Chef Jorika Mhende has earned her well-deserved reputation with preparations that are a delightful surprise at what has to be an outpost of civilization. Be forewarned: portions are huge. Breakfast omelets were light and fluffy with fresh ingredients. For lunch, the Greek salad and bacon-and-blue cheese topped garden salad were tasty with fresh greens and tomatoes. The chicken schnitzel was tender and perfectly seasoned, and the local grilled grouper and hamburger platter were delicious.

For dinner, we enjoyed Jorika's tasty rolls and Jacobs Creek Merlot. My partner's shrimp cocktail was served at room temperature and consisted of shrimp pieces in a creamed cocktail sauce. I had the Hummus and Skordalia which the menu described as “chick peas blended with spices and tahini and mashed garlic potato dip served with pita bread.” The dish arrived topped with slices of red onion and spicy dark olives. The Baked Mushroom and Feta Cheese Phyllo Parcel served with a tomato confit was by any standard exquisite.

For our entrees, my partner selected rack of lamb and I had the seafood platter. For sides we chose homemade mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables. The lamb was tasty, and nicely complemented by the port and rosemary sauce. The seafood platter consisted of shrimp kebabs, local grilled fish and New Zealand mussels. Another night, I tried the strip loin 10-oz. steak, and it was delicious. We sampled the key lime pie which was luscious, and the ice cream with rich homemade chocolate sauce! All week,

Daphne was our server. She defined efficiency while laughing and smiling and catering to needs before we knew we had them!

A key figure at BOHIO is consultant and joint manager Gerhard who was born and bred in Cape Town, South Africa. When he was thirty, Gerhard went to Toronto to work as an executive for Marsulex chemical firm. "After four years, I was sick of corporate life. I left Marsulex and went to the Dominican Republic."

Gerhard lived in the Dominican Republic for two years. During that time, he started, owned and operated a scuba center at a Dominican Republic resort that is now part of the Windham Group. I wondered how Gerhard qualified to run a dive operation. "I've always been a scuba diver," he said. "I'm self taught. Cape Town's a coastal city, and diving and fishing is what you do when you live close by the water. For sport, my friends and family went diving and spear fishing. We speared all sorts of fish like grouper, snapper, and pelagic fish like tuna and bill fish."

Gerhard began traveling through the Caribbean and was soon meeting people and helping some Italian and Spanish companies break into the North American market. He sold the Dominican Republic dive centre, returned to Canada, and went into business for himself as a commodities trader/investor.

"A couple of years later a friend, who is a minor shareholder in BOHIO, asked if with my industry experience, I'd consult on how they could improve the business. Of course, the first year is always the hardest, so I agreed to consult." Gerhard flew down and met Kelly, decided all he needed for his commodities business was computer access, and stayed.

"I stayed as consultant and joint manager, but after Hurricane Ike, we didn't know what business would be like, so I took over diving duties. Now I do a bit of everything—I do dives, take out return customers and old friends, maintain an overall view of financial performance, tend bar, sweep floors, assist Jorika—whatever is needed. I'm always busy. I prefer being more in background, however, and expect to be when our new dive instructor arrives in October. Currently Hilary is our dive instructor, so the bases are covered. I do enjoy fishing for wahoo, mahi mahi and tuna, and spearing lionfish when diving. Invariably we kill one or two lionfish on a dive."

I asked what he thought the future held. "I don't expect to stay forever, but water creates the appeal for a small island, and the water here is beautiful."

Not a diver yet? BOHIO offers instruction leading to diver certification. Certification entails classroom sessions and four open water dives. Prospective divers first fill out a scuba medical questionnaire to ensure that they're healthy enough to dive, and then they begin the certification process.

While diving is the main attraction, BOHIO also accommodates snorkelers. Just fifty yards offshore in front of the resort is a small, shallow reef, and closer to shore, the shallows host many juveniles. Sandy areas feature garden eels, flounders, hermit crabs and trunkfish. When space allows, Dive Masters Tim Dunn and Oliver "Ollie" Been take snorkelers along on dive boats to sites twenty-five to thirty feet deep.

Yoga is available at poolside in the late afternoon. Newman "Smiley" Moore performs live calypso and reggae to accompany Saturday's barbecue. And of course, there's that spectacular beach just steps from your room...

Dive Masters Tim and Ollie are waiting to share some of the best diving in the world with you. What are you waiting for? Adjust your accommodation expectations and keep in mind that BOHIO caters to divers, then make yourself at home and become part of the family. I guarantee you won't want to leave.

Rooms: in season \$195-\$225; off-season: \$165-\$190 Guanahani Restaurant: Breakfast \$4-\$12; Lunch \$6-\$20; Dinner (3-course) \$34-\$65 Complimentary wi-fi. Dive packages: two-tank boat dives \$80; six days of diving \$480 All-inclusive Packages: 7 nights in a beachfront room just steps from the ocean 5 days of two-tank boat dives Inter-island flights and airport transfers All-inclusive pkgs can be customized (equipment, inter-island flights, transfers, # dives, meal plans) Non-dive packages available.

For quotes on packages or more information contact +649 946 2135, [info@bohioresort.com](mailto:info@bohioresort.com) or visit [www.bohioresort.com](http://www.bohioresort.com).