

# TASTE & TRAVEL

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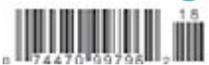
PROVIDENCIALES

*Big Island*  
**HAWAII**

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T&T



FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read, love to eat, and love to travel*

# *Turks and Caicos*

## Caribbean Food and Wine Festival

*by* ANNE DESBRISAY



*Turks and Caicos Islands*

WHERE ON EARTH

**“ASK ANYONE BORN AND RAISED ON** the Turks and Caicos Islands,” says the woman whose name may be Gloria, “and if they’re over sixteen, they’ll describe the stratospheric changes they’ve witnessed.”

We were new friends, seated together at a long table around the pool at the splendid Beach House on Grace Bay, Providenciales. Her story was compelling and I scribbled down madly everything she said. Everything except her name.

“Our island home, you see, was a scrubby collection of small, sleepy islands where the primary occupations were salt raking, fishing and conch farming. There was a truck on the island and a few bicycles. No cars, no paved roads and many miles of salt. And here I am, forty years later, poolside, at this beautiful restaurant eating food prepared by a chef flown in from Austria.”

It was Day Two of the 2014 Caribbean Food and Wine Festival and we were guests at the ‘Women of Wine Luncheon.’

Chatting with Gloria in her splendid hot pink dress, I learned that we had children the same age, we were both fond of good wine and of the lovely food being dished up, but that was about the extent of our common ground. I grew up in Toronto, Canada, she on Salt Cay, TCI. My job as a little kid was to unload the dishwasher when asked. Hers was to help her mother and grandmother in the salt ponds of her little island whenever an auntie was unavailable to mind her. Her children are now sixth generation (that she can count) TCI, and she credits bush medicine for the fact she has aunties in their hundreds.

It was the first windless day at the Festival, and the Providenciales sun was high and hot. We were being treated to generous pours of Austrian whites by visiting Winery Salzl Seewinkelhof and discovering more and more in common as the pouring proceeded. The wines were being paired with dishes by the formidable team of Chilean-born Beach House Chef Cristian Rebolledo and visiting Austrian chef Hans Peter Haider of the boutique art hotel — the one currently “stratospherically” high on my wish list of places to visit — called Hotel 12.

Chef Haider had shipped salmon trout and cured Gurktaler pork to Providenciales from Carinthia, along with sharp Drautaler cheese to pair with a stunning pear soup.

Assisting Haider and Rebolledo in the kitchen was a crackerjack troupe of ‘Lit’l Chefs,’ as they’re called, splendid in chef whites — Provo high school kids likely too young to remember their island pre-tourism. These were teens keen on the culinary arts, being taught the basics of cuisine, the essence of hospitality, learning about the 18-hour days involved in running a successful kitchen and what showtime looks like.

I would bump into these kids in whites all Festival long.

That the Turks and Caicos Islands have been roused by tourism is pretty clear. It’s an industry still in its infancy as these things go, but one that appears admirably well managed. No high-rise hotels on the islands, no fast food anywhere, nary a nuisance jet ski to interrupt the peace of a Grace Bay beach walk. A national park, the Princess Alexandra, protects a significant portion of the Provo waterfront; the endemic rock iguana has its own sheltered sanctuary; and the native (and highly esteemed) Queen conch, along with warm-water fin fish, are being raised at the Caicos Conch Farm — the only commercial conch farm in the world.

I knew all these great things from past visits to this lovely island. What I didn’t know is the extent to which Provo resorts are collaborating to foster home-grown talent for the TCI hospitality industry of tomorrow.

The Lit’l Chefs Program is an initiative developed by TCI’s Hotel and Tourism Association. It looks for kids interested in culinary arts and hospitality and sends them to cooking camp. For one week, the students are put through their paces in the kitchens of various Provo hotels under the guidance of a group of island chefs.

Chefs like Lauren Callighen, Executive Chef of the Regent Palms Resort. I discovered at our breakfast together that Callighen’s a Newfoundland-born, Ottawa-trained chef who hasn’t seen a snowflake since 2005. It was a bloody cold Canadian winter day when her phone rang. Did she want a job in the Turks and Caicos Islands? Lauren got out her atlas, then she signed a six-month contract and booked a flight. That was ten years ago.

Callighen has had a number of Lit’l Chefs through her kitchens. She helped judge the Black Box competition at the close of the culinary camp. “Tourism is now the bread and butter of this island, and the Lit’l Chefs Program developed out of necessity,” she tells me.

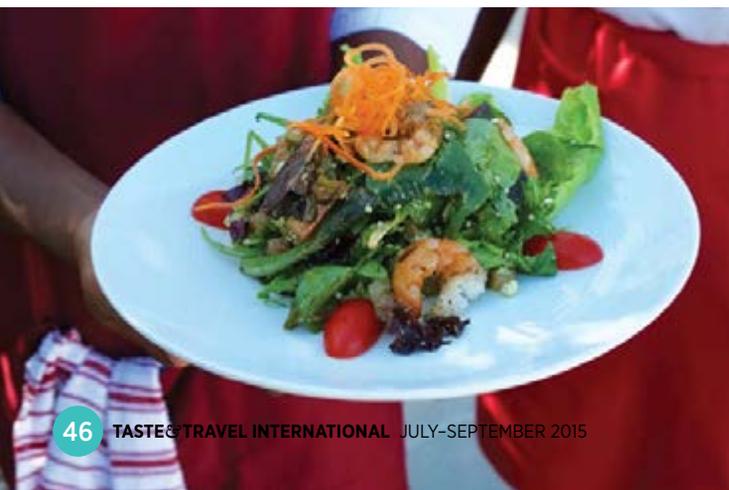
TCI-born Chef Joseph Charles agrees with the need to encourage TCI-born talent. His culinary journey began at a high school summer program in 2005 where he caught the cooking bug from a passionate teacher. He started at the bottom and worked his way up the ranks to Executive Chef at West Bay Club. Now he’s reaching out to island youth encouraging them along a similar path.

Charles was supervising a small troupe of Lit’l Chefs at the Caribbean Food and Wine Festival, with visiting chef David LeFevre of the California restaurant, Manhattan Beach Post. They were plating meaty dishes — braised short ribs with a marrow crumble — paired with wines from Sonoma’s Benziger Winery.

At the Festival’s welcome dinner, the same team was pitching in at the stunning Fire & Ice Restaurant, under the direction of Executive Chef Rebolledo. Course three was »



THIS PAGE FROM TOP Yardley at the bar of Mr Grouper's; Catching conch; Lit'l Chefs; Lit'l Chefs' salad.



«the dish that rocked my world: perfectly cooked spiny lobster, paired with sweet parsnips, on a purée of rutabaga scented with vanilla.

Manhattan chef Leah Cohen, of Top Chef fame, owner of Pig & Khao restaurant on the lower east side, teamed up with Lit'l Chef 'Roman.' Cohen and company were in charge of the opening moves at the cocktail party at The Grace Bay Club, preparing a bold Filipino-style ceviche with torched sea scallops, a lobster tom kha soup, and deeply more-ish taro chip-topped, Korean-inspired beef tartare.

But it was at the Saturday Food Fair where the young chefs seemed most at home, grilling the street food of their island for the appreciative crowd, and accepting kudos for the hard work of the Festival weekend.

I brought home some salt from Gloria's childhood home. "Wolfgang's Chocolate Salt" was a parting gift from Grace Bay Club chef, Wolfgang Von Wieser — an integral member of the Caribbean Food and Wine Festival team and its partnership with the Lit'l Chefs Program. He makes it at home, he tells, me, a base of evaporated TCI seawater blended with cocoa beans and fine cocoa powder.

The salt I mostly deal with is the stuff that comes in big yellow bags, to be sprinkled liberally on the icy driveway of my Ottawa home. Then I reach for Wolfgang's bottle. "Sprinkle on vanilla ice cream, bananas and chocolate desserts" the instructions say. Well, OK then. 



Click

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**Caribbean Food & Wine Festival**

2015 dates are November 5-8  
[www.caribbeanfoodandwinefestivaltci.com](http://www.caribbeanfoodandwinefestivaltci.com)



Eat

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[www.regenthotels.com/EN/Palms/Cuisine/Parallel23](http://www.regenthotels.com/EN/Palms/Cuisine/Parallel23)

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**Kitchen 218, Beach House**

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**Mr Grouper's Restaurant**

73 Princes Rd, Providenciales

ANNE DESBRISAY is an award-winning Canadian food writer, restaurant critic, editor and culinary judge. 

Cook

SERVES 4-6

## STICKY TOFFEE PUDDING with SALTED CARAMEL ICE CREAM

*RAJASEKAR RAVINDRAN is the brilliant pastry chef at the Regent Palms on Grace Bay, and this is his signature dish.*

### PUDDING

**Butter** 1 cup  
**Brown Sugar** 1 cup  
**Eggs** 4  
**All-Purpose Flour** 1 cup  
**Dates** 1 cup, finely chopped  
**Baking Powder** 1 tsp  
**Baking Soda** 1 tsp  
**Molasses** ½ cup  
**Hot Water** ½ cup

- 1 BLEND** dates, baking powder, baking soda, molasses and hot water and keep aside.
- 2 CREAM** the butter and brown sugar well, beat the eggs one by one, then fold in the flour.
- 3 STIR** in the date mixture and let stand in the refrigerator at least an hour.
- 4 PREHEAT** the oven to 350°F. Divide the pudding mix between 6 ramekins or pudding moulds. Place them in an ovenproof dish and half fill the dish with hot water. Cover the dish with foil and bake for 35-45mins.

### TOFFEE SAUCE

**Dark Brown Sugar**  
2 cups  
**Heavy Cream**  
2 cups  
**Butter** ½ cup

- 1 MIX** the brown sugar, heavy cream, and butter together in a saucepan. Boil, stirring constantly, for about 3 minutes, until the sauce coats the back of a spoon.

### SALTED CARAMEL ICE CREAM

**Milk** 1 cup  
**Heavy Cream** 1 cup  
**Sugar** 2 oz  
**Egg Yolks** 12  
**Liquid Glucose** 1 oz  
**Salt** ½ tsp  
**Vanilla Extract** 1 Tbs

- 1 WHIP** the egg yolks, glucose, salt and vanilla, keep aside.
- 2 HEAT** the sugar in a saucepan over medium heat and cook, stirring, until it turns a deep golden colour. Carefully pour in the milk and cream (it will spit) and bring to a boil then turn off the heat.
- 3 STIR** a quarter cup of caramel into the egg yolk mixture to warm it, then stir the egg yolk mixture into the caramel in the saucepan. Allow to cool then churn in an ice cream maker. Allow to firm up in the freezer.

### TO SERVE

- 1 UNMOULD** the puddings onto dessert plates and pour the hot toffee sauce over. Top with a scoop of the ice cream.

