







Opposite page: Highlands House is one of the older structures on South Caicos and a remnant of the Bermuda salt barons who settled the Islands in the 17th century. Perched atop a typical bush-covered hill, it serves as a touchpoint for the essence of the island. Above: This beautiful, one-mile stretch of pristine beach is but one of many delights that await budding Sailrock residents.

# A Sleeping Giant Awakens

## Construction begins at Sailrock South Caicos.

By Kathy Borsuk ~ Photos Courtesy Sailrock South Caicos

As I page through the Winter/Spring TCREA magazine from 2009, I see that we trumpeted the recent opening of several new developments, including The Estate, West Bay Club, Gansevoort Turks + Caicos, Windsong and Seaflowers. On the horizon were several others, including some that never made it past the drawing board (CAYA, The Canterbury, Dellis Cay) and

others that are continuing to move forward, albeit slowly (The Shore Club, The Vellagio and The Venetian on Grace Bay).

Interestingly, not mentioned at the time, but slowly gathering steam in the background was Sailrock South Caicos, one of the most exciting and vibrant developments now on the market.

Sailrock South Caicos is a “new” development that has actually been “in progress” for five years. With a cautious, one-step-at-a-time, long-term view, Sailrock’s developers plan to restore to full glory South Caicos’ rich history, spotlight its natural beauty and use this to springboard a low-density, eco-friendly resort community from which residents and visitors will enjoy the authentic Caribbean experience so many seek.

Sailrock’s current focus is on selling home sites on 775 acres of untouched land on South Caicos’ 2 1/2 mile long, slender northern peninsula. The Peninsula has over eight miles of shoreline, including two miles of pristine beach and over 100 feet of elevation at its highest point. I went on the Sailrock “Grand Tour” which was offered to local realtors in 2011, and can attest that this area is truly stunning. We bounced along the coarse road to the site, lurching through bush and past the stray donkey, to be rewarded by the dramatic scene of the Atlantic Ocean’s azure blues framed between limestone outcroppings and lavish vegetation.

The terrain here transitions from dunes to high rocky ridges, filled in with a blend of natural plants ranging from cacti and sea grapes to rare dwarf palm trees. Home sites average over an acre in size and have been carefully surveyed in tiers, with each boasting a breathtaking view of the ocean, Caicos Bank or both. Nowhere else in the TCI will you find such a short distance between the ocean and the sound.

To the south are Peninsula Bluffs, where buyers can choose from oceanfront home sites (many with distinctive rocky alcoves or tidal beaches) or ridgetop sites, with 360° views of the ocean and Bell Sound. To the north is Peninsula Passage, offering oceanfront, ridgetop and middle layer “overlook” opportunities. We agreed that each home site had a charm all its own, and that it would be very difficult to choose only one.

Strict building guidelines promise to preserve the natural beauty. Careful spacing and height restrictions will ensure that views remain pristine. Protecting natural vegetation is a must and the use of low-level outdoor lighting will allow residents to enjoy magnificent star gazing and moonrises over their stark ocean backdrop. Sunrises and sunsets are similarly spectacular, as is whale watching during the winter months, as migrating Humpbacks commonly

pass directly in front of the peninsula.

Prices in Sailrock are currently among the best in the Caribbean, in part because there is no debt on any of the acquired property. This not only relieves the pressure to develop quickly, but also allows Sailrock to offer exceptional financing for those who want to invest in land. For instance, home sites in Peninsula Passage are priced from \$95,000 for overlook; from \$185,000 for ridgetop and from \$230,000 for oceanfront. Seller financing is available for qualified purchasers.

However, the savvy developers are mindful that a strong initial phase of villa construction is important to marketing efforts and efficiency of the infrastructure implementation. With this in mind, Sailrock has discounted the price of the land for select initial buyers who will purchase a developer-designed and built villa at the same time. They can select from a variety of two, three and four bedroom villas, each crafted to maximize views to both the ocean and the island landscape and to promote outdoor living, with patios, covered porches and swimming pool. In keeping with Sailrock’s eco-friendly approach, they utilize rainwater cisterns, natural ventilation and indigenous plantings, which also help to reduce strata costs. Priced from \$699,900 to a bit over \$1,000,000 (including the land!), they become an “offer that’s too good to pass up.” Local real estate brokers agree, including Joe Zahm, president of Turks & Caicos Sotheby’s International Realty, who several years ago was a Sailrock skeptic (prior to his “jaw-dropping” tour of Sailrock land) but is now whole-heartedly onboard. His agency is one of the local brokerages representing the project. The other firm, ERA Coralie Properties, originally represented the seller of the property when Sailrock acquired it in 2006.

Construction will be starting in January 2012 on the basic infrastructure, including roads, underground utilities (electricity, piped water, and state-of-the-art wireless Internet, phone and television services), and a reverse osmosis plant. Foundations are expected to be poured in February 2012 for the first villas, which will include a two bedroom and a three bedroom on spec, as well as several others that have already been sold.

Also planned for the early phase of Sailrock development (think 2013/14), is a small resort on 43 acres at the far southern part of the peninsula.





**Proposed plans for Sailrock villas illustrate the design that is crafted to maximize views to both the ocean and the island landscape. The expanses of patio encourage outdoor living.**

Situated atop a 40 foot ridge, the property includes over 1,350 feet of white sand beach and another 1,100 feet of water frontage on Bell Sound. With only 103 units (projected to be constructed in four phases over five years to accommodate demand), this translates into an extremely low density property. It will consist of one and two-story buildings containing

resort studios and one bedroom suites, along with two, three and four-bedroom beachfront villas.

Currently, South Caicos is best reached by air, either on a regularly scheduled Air Turks & Caicos flight or via private plane. TCI Government has out for tender the contract for an improved control tower, with long-term plans for airport expansion.

Plans are also in the works for a boat ferry service from Providenciales, similar to that which currently connects Provo to the island of North Caicos. Not only would that improve access to South Caicos, but it would open up the possibility of day trips by TCI visitors and residents.

### A rich history

The island of South Caicos seems to bridge the gap between the traditionally farming-based Caicos Islands and the salt-producing Turks Islands. Located 40 miles from Providenciales across the Caicos Bank and 25 miles from Grand Turk across the Columbus Passage, South Caicos has the finest natural harbor in the country. At one time, South Caicos produced salt in the vast salinas that cover a large part of the island and, in its heyday, exported most of the salt produced in the Turks & Caicos Islands, and the industry thrived from 1850 to the 1960s. Perched close to the TCI's most productive fishing grounds, the harvesting of lobster, conch and scalefish emerged to drive the economy, with several seafood processing plants currently in operation in Cockburn Harbour.

During WW II, the US had a submarine detection station with an air base on South Caicos. (In fact, old-timers recall seeing B-24s and B-17s passing over the island on their way to Brazil.) Caicos Holdings Ltd. later built a bulk fuel storage depot for local fishers and private yachts, and opened the South Caicos International Airport as a refuelling station for private aircraft in 1964. The airport gained a reputation as one of the busiest and best refuelling points between Florida and South America, with over 200 aircraft passing through each month at its peak. The Jursteiner Home overlooking Cockburn Harbour was converted into the Admiral's Arms inn to accommodate the increasing number of visitors, and other guest houses and a hotel soon followed. At one time South Caicos was the only island in the TCI where international flights landed, including a Bahamas Air weekly flight from Nassau and Air Florida, the country's first commercial jet service.

South Caicos also played host to the first reigning monarch to visit the country, when HM Queen Elizabeth II and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh called there in 1966. This historic visit inaugurated the South Caicos Annual Regatta, a country-wide celebration of sailing and merriment that continues to

this day as the oldest standing annual event in the TCI.

Surprisingly, tourism never caught on in a big way in the "Big South." Its vast, untouched beaches, in some areas lined with spectacular limestone bluffs, rival those on Providenciales, and the pristine waters off its shores hold little-explored dive sites teeming with marine life and fantastical coral formations. Bonefishing on the flats is legendary, and the lush natural landscape is a wealth of thriving tropical vegetation, ponds and ocean inlets, with flamingos, pelican and osprey common sights. Many of the historic salt-era buildings in Cockburn Harbour, including private homes and government buildings, are still standing in spite of assault by time and the hurricanes of 2008. Other areas of historic intrigue include the Boiling Hole, a natural source of seawater in the middle of the salinas. Folks are friendly and eager to share a meal, fishing tale or bit of gossip with visitors or students from Boston University's School for Field Studies marine biology center in Cockburn Harbour.

### Spotting the potential

South Caicos' vast potential was tantalizingly enticing to developers Colin Kihnke, Tom Weeks and Ted Weldon, all partners in Sailrock Development Ltd. and long-time associates through their successful Chicago-based real estate/development operations. Colin has been a leading Chicago developer at CMK Companies Ltd. ([www.cmkcompanies.com](http://www.cmkcompanies.com)) for over a decade, successfully developing over 2,500 condominiums and single-family homes. He first visited Providenciales for a week in 1998 with his fiancé. During a return trip in 2003 he took a day trip to South Caicos and fell in love with the island, its people, and their history and heritage. Over the next several years he purchased through local realtor Jim Brown of ERA Coralie Properties approximately 1,475 acres of privately owned land in South Caicos. Over 1,275 acres of this land was bought from old-timer Bryan Reid, who had originally bought the vast holdings from the South Caicos Salt Company.

Since the mid-1990s, Ted Weldon and Tom Weeks were also successfully developing properties in the Chicago area, as leaders of Related Midwest, a premiere Midwestern real estate firm. Ted and Tom joined forces with Colin in 2007, having also been captivated by the beauty and authenticity of South





These renderings depict the magnificent pool/patio area (top) and a peek into the interior bar (bottom) of the Great House of the Sailrock Resort and Club.

Caicos. The trio started hashing out an ambitious master plan that hoped to create a win-win situation by incorporating Crown Land mostly located inland from the oceanfront property CMK had acquired from Mr. Reid.

Through the realization of the master plan, Sailrock includes over 2,000 acres of land on South Caicos. With this much prime land on a relatively small island (about 8.5 square miles), the project has tremendous potential to change the face of the island and the lives of the local population. Fortunately, the group seems to have the right attitude and vision: cautious, careful, respectful of the Islanders and their culture, and seeks to create a legitimate, sustainable project that lets the best of South Caicos sell itself. In 2008, Sailrock took on South Caicos native Butch Clare as vice president of development. Butch notes that the fishing industry will likely not be sufficient to sustain all the island population, and says, "I believe Sailrock will open up a lot of entrepreneurial opportunities and encourage people to take a serious look at South Caicos for both investment and leisure."

### The first step

The group started by selling land in Bell Sound Estates, a 289 acre site overlooking the Bell Sound Nature Reserve and the Caicos Banks, with a public beach at its east and north ends. In this area, 236 home sites in four "villages" are on offer, with completed improvements including roads and underground electricity and phone/cable lines. In spite of a very low-key marketing effort, from 2006 until now, over 50% of the sites have been sold, with many already having seen significant appreciation! A building program is slated for owners here in 2012.

Ted Weldon, the TCI-based partner, notes, "We realize that we need to grow organically and in stages, not overbuild nor overstep demand. We wanted to learn from the mistakes of other projects that have come and gone. The fact is, our master plan has a 25 year time frame, and we're here for the long haul. We're invested in South Caicos—the island, its culture, its eco-system and preserving its beauty and history."

### Merging past and present

Sailrock plans to lead an island-wide effort to revitalize the historic town of Cockburn Harbour,

including the Bermudian-era homes, old stone walls, fishing wharf and oceanfront Queen's Parade Ground and salt shed area. Not only will this help uplift Islanders' pride in their heritage, but it will be a fascinating facet of visitors' and residents' island experience.

Over \$1/2 million has already been spent to upgrade the stone walls and start restoring homes in the historic district. In fact, 2% of the purchase price of each Sailrock land transfer is earmarked as an Island Restoration Contribution, to go into a non-profit foundation for island-improvement purposes. The community is already working to make South Caicos "the cleanest island in the country" through an island-wide campaign.

Tom Weeks says the master plan envisions a vibrant community center where Sailrock residents and visitors can interact, watch the fishermen bring in their catch and enjoy native dishes in locally run restaurants. Plans call for buildings along the proposed promenade to be renovated so Islanders can operate small shops, including a fish market, while the hurricane-damaged boat dock in Regatta Village to be rebuilt. Future plans include enhancement of the public beach and an expanded marina.

On our tour, we also visited the Highlands House, one of the older structures on the island and a remnant of the Bermuda salt barons who settled the Salt Islands in the 17th century. This fascinating historical structure serves as a touch point for the essence of South Caicos. Although fruition is years away, Ted is proud to boast that acclaimed golf course architect Tom Doak has already agreed to design a golf course in keeping with the rugged landscape surrounding the highlands; Highlands House itself will become a restaurant/club house.

The Sailrock developers continue to earn the confidence of South Caicos residents and purchasers, showing that their word is sound and that they will deliver as promised. ♦

For more information, visit [www.sailrocksouthcaicos.com](http://www.sailrocksouthcaicos.com) or call 649 333 2020.





Scenes from South Caicos. Top: This historic church reflects the timeless beauty of South Caicos' historic Cockburn Town. Bottom: A typical fishing boat is anchored at the possible future site of Bonefish Lodge.