

Turks & Caicos Islands



Status: British Overseas Territory in the north Atlantic Ocean, southeast of The Bahamas

Population: 22942 (2009 est)

Area: 166 sq miles

Currency: U.S. Dollar

The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) consist of two groups of about forty islands, eight of which are inhabited. Geographically they are an extension of atolls and cays that make up The Bahamas. The Turks Islands received their name from a distinctive local cactus resembling a turban. For years, Grand Turk Island had a claim to being the site of Columbus's first landing in the New World. Although most scholars today favor San Salvador Island in The Bahamas, a monument in front of the philatelic agency identifies that as one of two sites on the island for the landfall.

Ponce de Leon's discovery the islands in 1512 laid the basis for a Spanish claim the islands, but no settlement was attempted until 1578 when settlers from Bermuda arrived on Grand Turk to rake salt for the American market. The settlement was harassed by the Spanish and French until 1766 when the islands were awarded to England by treaty. Permanent settlement followed in 1781.

Following Bahamian independence in 1973, TCI received its own governor. At that time the U.S. dollar replaced the Bahamian dollar as the official currency. Although independence was agreed upon in 1982, the decision was reversed and the islands remain a British overseas territory.

There are indications Grand Turk had a branch office of the British GPO in the 1840s. The Turks received their first post office on December 11, 1854. Jamaican stamps were used until 1897, when the islands received their own postage stamps. In 1900 the stamps' inscription was changed to "Turks and Caicos Islands" in recognition of the growing importance of the settlement and the salt production in the Caicos Islands. From 1981 to 1985 stamps were issued with the inscription "Caicos Islands." These stamps were sold at post offices throughout the TCI alongside Turks and Caicos Islands stamps and were valid for postage at any island post office.

