

An eco-minded Brit pioneers adventure tours in the Turks and Caicos, leading kiteboarding expeditions to dozens of pristine beaches that still await their first riders.

# going blue

by aaron sales  
photos by bill doster



## On a calm, breathless afternoon,

20 miles south of Providenciales — the third-largest island in the Turks and Caicos — 35-year-old Philip Shearer tells our kiteboarding crew: “Here, you need to be flexible; be ready for anything. This ocean is active with more life below than you can imagine.” Shearer, who was born in Germany and grew up between the UK and Turks and Caicos, is the owner of Big Blue Unlimited, a charter boat company he founded in 1997 to offer the first custom diving, kayaking and boat charter adventures to many of the outer reefs and cays in Turks and Caicos, where shark and humpback whale sightings are commonplace.



**Clockwise from above: We encounter a dolphin calf and mother. Sam Light throws a back mobe on a downwinder through the mangroves. Philip Shearer rides into a sunset on Providenciales.**

had reservations about swimming in the open ocean for fear of sea creatures larger and less friendly than she.

When Shearer invited me to the Turks and Caicos, all I knew about this 200-square-mile archipelago south of the Bahamas was it has amazing blue water, phenomenal scuba diving and a prolific conch population, a staple of the local diet. We talked for several hours by phone and Shearer pitched what sounded like the adventure of a lifetime. He offered four boats fast enough to reach all of the country's 45 islands and cays. He tempted us with virgin surf breaks, stand-up paddling through the mangroves and scuba diving over thriving reefs in crystal-clear water. His knowledge of the islands was immense. But what sold me was his contagious stoke for kiteboarding and his willingness to take me to the most remote beaches in the country, white sandy gems that had never been ridden. I bought my ticket the next day, assembled a crew and, in late November, the beginning of the windy season, I arrived in Turks and Caicos expecting undiscovered bliss. It didn't disappoint.

Swimming with dolphins is perhaps one of the most memorable experiences of my life. The water is transparent at the surface. Looking down, past my dive fins, the water darkens as light dissipates, from warm aqua blue into black. I feel small and defenseless, like a slow floating target for the tiger sharks or

Shearer is true to his word. I'm standing on the stern of his boat, *Live and Direct*, when he suddenly shouts, “Look up ahead, dolphins at 11 o'clock.”

Four adult bottlenose dolphins and a calf seem to be engaged in a game of pass-the-seaweed. Our 40-foot, twin-engine dive boat slows to 5 knots and begins circling. This creates a bow wake for the dolphins to surf. Shearer, a divemaster and experienced waterman, spent much of his life exploring the Turks and Caicos. Shearer rushes to the stern and grabs his snorkel gear. He gives me a nodding smile that implies we are in for a treat and then plunges into the sea less than 20 feet from the pod. Next in is Sam Light, a 19-year-old British kiteboarding champion. I follow. Then goes Big Blue's kiteboarding instructor and guide Wes Matweyew, Florida-based photographer Bill Doster and finally my wife, Brigette, who until now

