

Taking Her Shots

It's Monday morning. So why isn't Christine Morden making people sweat?

BY KATE PARHAM

> YOU WOULD NOT HAVE WANTED TO BE THE FOCAL POINT OF CHRISTINE MORDEN'S gaze a few years ago. A high-powered Washington, D.C., attorney, she would show up on Monday mornings carrying a Kate Spade handbag and an intimidating confidence. Look at her today. She's sporting a wide-brim hat and toting a camera bag. This is work. Christine, 43, traded a big salary and bigger benefits for an all-or-nothing freelance photography gig in the Turks and Caicos. "I could have gone to work as a lobbyist or I could venture out." Way out.

Q: You went from D.C. to T&C. How does that work?

A: Well, I left my government job in 2006 to take six months off to travel and figure out what I wanted to do with my life. On my first stop, I ended up buying a condo in the Turks.

Q: That's a quick commitment.

A: It was luck. I met a great real-estate agent at a bar and bought my condo five days after I arrived. Condos in the Turks come fully furnished, so it felt like I was moving into a resort.

Q: So was D.C. really that bad, or was Turks just that enticing?

A: It was a little bit of both. I've always had that entrepreneurial, adventuresome spirit inside me. I thought, "Wouldn't it be neat if you could live where you loved to go on vacation?"

Q: But going from lawyer to photographer, that's a leap.

A: I thought it would be an accomplishment if I could make a living off my passion. That meant I'd have to simplify things quite a bit. I left lots of things behind and only brought the essentials. It's a big change to go from a comfortable salary to wondering if the phone will ring for a photo assignment. I worked really hard that first year to build a business and make sure I could support myself.

Q: You're still here, so that's a good sign. How good is it?

A: Put it this way: 90 percent of my work is done barefoot



Christine Morden grew tired of life inside the beltway and followed her passion to the Turks and Caicos.

on the beach. Yeah, I said "work," though I suppose you could say the same thing about my downtime. Tourists visiting the island are my main clients, particularly destination weddings.

Q: If you could change something, what would it be?

A: Equipment is the biggest thing. Unlike in the United States, if something breaks here, you can't get it replaced in the same day. Once I was shooting a wedding where the bride and groom decided to get in the ocean for the last few photos. It was going great. I was taking photos of them embracing in the crystal-blue water when a wave soaked me — plus my most expensive lens and camera. That set me back a little bit. But the photos were stunning.

Q: Go back to your first month on the island. You must have been shocked by the change of pace.

A: One of the biggest changes from home was mail delivery. Mail from the States is almost nonexistent. If it comes, it's about four months late. Other than that I was prepared for how slow things can move because I lived through all the bureaucracy in "the district." And the traffic there was good preparation. Traffic, by the way, is slow here too.

Q: There's traffic on the island?

A: I'm not talking about the highway gridlock, like in the big cities back home. Down here, it's human traffic.

Q: Human traffic?

A: I'd run into the grocery store for some cereal, and it would take 45 minutes just to pick it up. Once you're inside an establishment of any kind you run into everyone you know and you just have to stop to talk.

Q: Is that the unspoken rule?

A: On the island it's rude just to have small talk and be on your way, so you have to build in time for longer chats.

Q: The cost of living must be lower in the Turks and Caicos than in D.C.

A: Actually, I had some sticker shocks. My first utility bill here was four times more than what I was paying back home. And Internet costs \$150 a month, with bandwidth speed about one-third of what it is in the States. You also have to invest in stuff you never had to, like medevac insurance.

Q: Health care is pretty different?

A: Very. When I first moved here, they didn't even have a hospital.

I NEVER EXPECTED

HOUSE PETS

"There are geckos all over my house. Little tiny ones show up everywhere. It's not an infestation. They're too cute to call it that, but you do have to look where you're walking."

"CLOSED" SIGNS

"Stores close so early. Coming from the States, I was used to 24 hours for everything, but stores on the island lock up at 5 p.m., and banks at 3 p.m."

THE GROCERY BILLS

"I pay way more for food. My favorite box of cereal is \$8.50. A bag of chips: \$6. My first trip to the grocery store was a shock!"

Q: Is anything more affordable on the island than it is back in D.C.?

A: Everything costs 30 percent to 40 percent more here because of duties. But there's no income tax and no property tax. Then again, if you bring a car,

you have to pay to have it shipped to the island, which costs about \$2,200.

Q: Any other tough adjustments?

A: Driving on the right-hand side in vehicles. At first I'd get in on the wrong side of the car and see no steering wheel.

Q: It's an island, so you must run into a few unexpected quirks.

A: Island slang. One day, when I first moved here, I was coming out of the bank and a girl in a school outfit asked me for a jitney. I had no idea what she was talking about; maybe she wanted money, so I just walked away. I asked someone afterward, and it turns out she was asking me for a ride.

Q: Any "wow" moments?

A: Every morning when I wake up and look out my balcony at the water it's another "wow" moment. A lot of people said they expected me to come back to the States because I've always had an exit strategy. But now I don't need an exit strategy. ■ ISLANDS.COM/turksandcaicos

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