

# The Bahamas

Scattered like dabs of possibility on an adventurer's palette, the Bahamas are ready-made for exploration. Just ask Christopher Columbus, he bumped against these limestone landscapes in 1492 and changed the course of history. But adventure didn't end with the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*. From pirates to blockade dodgers to rum smugglers, wily go-getters have converged and caroused on the country's 700 islands and 2400 cays for centuries.

So what's in it for travelers? There's sailing to Abaconian villages. Diving Androsian blue holes. Kayaking Exumian cays. Lounging on Eleutheran beaches. Pondering pirates in Nassau. Indeed, there's a Bahamian island to match most every water-and-sand-based compulsion. Each of them framed by a backdrop of gorgeous, mesmerizing blue.

But every adventure has irritations, and here indifferent service, high prices and hungry no-see-ums take the lead. Nassau and Paradise Island are the prime troublemakers. But if casinos, Aquaventure and duty-free shopping don't top your to-do list, consider dropping off the grid for a bit in the Out Islands. Prices remain high but there's more bang for your Bahamian buck, with friendlier service, fewer crowds and, well, the pesky no-see-ums haven't gotten the memo. But don't wait long. Change is in the air and the Out Islands are blipping onto the radar screens of mega-developers and land grabbers the world over.

For now loaf, paddle, dive and après-snorkel. Paint your own adventure, the palette awaits.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** Over 700 islands spread in a 760-mile (1206km) arc that add up to some 5363 sq miles (13,890 sq km) of land
- **Capital** Nassau, New Providence
- **Country code** ☎ 242
- **Departure tax** US\$15. Normally included in ticket prices.
- **Famous for** Spectacular diving and snorkeling, Sir Sidney Poitier, James Bond films
- **Language** Bahamian Standard English
- **Money** Bahamian dollar (BS\$); BS\$1 = US\$1 = €0.64 = UK£0.51
- **Official name** Independent Commonwealth of the Bahamas
- **People** Bahamians
- **Population** 307,000
- **Visa** North American, UK and most Western European travelers don't require a visa; other nationalities need to get one in advance; see p106



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Fish Fry** (p86) Debate the win-win choice between lobster or snapper at the Wednesday night fish fry at Smith's Point on Grand Bahama
- **Eleuthera** (p92) Navigate hidden turns and bumpy roads to find that perfect secluded beach
- **Exumas** (p96) Kayak through a stunning array of blues while exploring scores of lonely cays
- **Miss Emily's Blue Bee Bar** (p92) Hear engaging tales of the infamous goombay smash and the overserved cay-hoppers who left photos on the walls at Miss Emily's Blue Bee Bar on Green Turtle Cay
- **Andros** (p100) Hurtle off the platform above Captain Bill's Blue Hole, praying that the people-eating Lusca doesn't really exist

## ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Explore Pirates of Nassau, the Pompey Museum and Providence Square in downtown Nassau, grab a *jitney* for beach bar cocktails, wander shark-filled Predator's Lagoon then snooze on Cabbage Beach.
- **One week** Add a Bahamas Ferry ride to Harbour Island for pink sand shores and boutique browsing or ferry to Andros for mind-blowing dives to the Tongue of the Ocean and mysterious hikes to hidden blue holes.
- **Two weeks** Add a trip to the Abacos for cay-hopping or to the Exumas for kayaking, kitesurfing and adventuring.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The Bahamas enjoy around 320 sunny days a year; and daytime temperatures during winter (December to April) average 70°F (21°C) and a perfect 80°F (26°C) in summer. In general, the islands are balmy year-round, with cooling, near-constant trade winds blowing by day from the east.

The so-called rainy season extends from late May to November and humidity in the northern islands is relatively high year-round, but declines from northwest to southeast across the archipelago. Hurricane season is June to November.

The high season typically runs from mid-December to mid-April, when hotel prices

## HOW MUCH?

- **Jitney bus ride** US\$1
- **Two-tank dive** US\$99
- **Kalik bottle** US\$5
- **Conchy Joe Hot Sauce** US\$4.40
- **Mid-sized book on pirates** US\$25

are highest. Some hotels are booked solid around Christmas and Easter. The rest of the year, many hotels reduce their rates significantly. Some Out Island hotels close for the low season, but tourist accommodations are always available.

## HISTORY

The original inhabitants of the Bahamas were a tribe of Arawaks, the peaceful Lucayans, who arrived near the turn of the 9th century. Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492 and soon after the Spanish began shipping out the Lucayans as slaves.

Pirates such as Henry Jennings and 'Blackbeard' (Edward Teach), who terrorized his victims by wearing flaming fuses in his matted beard and hair, took over New Providence, establishing a pirates' paradise that in 1666 was lined with brothels and taverns for 'common cheats, thieves and lewd persons.' With the aid of Woodes Rogers, the Bahamas' first Royal Governor and a former privateer, the British finally established order and an administration answerable to the English crown in 1718. The Bahamas' new motto was *Expulsis Piratis – Restituta Commercium* (Pirates Expelled – Commerce Restored).

Following the American Revolution, Loyalist refugees – many quite rich or entrepreneurial – began arriving, giving new vigor to the city. These wealthy landowners lived well and kept slaves until the British Empire abolished the slave trade in 1807. During the American Civil War the islands were an exchange center for blockade runners transferring munitions and supplies for Southern cotton.

While Nassauvians illicitly supplied liquor to the US during Prohibition, Yankees flocked to Nassau and her new casino. When Fidel Castro then spun Cuba into Soviet orbit in 1961, the subsequent US embargo forced revelers to seek their pleasures elsewhere; Nassau became *the* new hot spot.

Tourism and finance bloomed together. The government promoted the nascent banking industry, encouraging British investors escaping onerous taxes.

This upturn in fortunes coincided with the evolution of party politics and festering ethnic tensions, as the white elite and a growing black middle class reaped profits from the boom. Middle-class blacks' aspirations for representation coalesced with the pent-up frustrations of their impoverished brothers, leading to the victory of the black-led Progressive Liberal party and leader Sir Linden Pindling in 1967. On July 10, 1973, the Bahamas officially became a new nation; the Independent Commonwealth of the Bahamas, ending 325 years of British rule.

In 1984 it was revealed that Colombian drug barons had corrupted the new Bahamian government at its highest levels and the country's drug-heavy reputation tarnished its image abroad. Tourism and financial investment declined, so the government belatedly launched a crackdown led by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (US DEA). In response, the electorate voted in the conservative, business-focused Free National Movement (FNM) in 1992.

Devastating hurricanes ravaged various islands between 1999 and 2007, wreaking havoc on tourism. Despite these storms, the tourism juggernaut continues and massive resorts on New Providence, Grand Bahama and several Out Islands are chugging toward completion. Debates rage over whether these enclaves – many of them isolated from the primary settlements – will be a long-term boon or bust. Pick up a local paper on any island, flip to the editorials and you'll read a passionate range of opinions.

## THE CULTURE

Contemporary Bahamian culture still revolves around family, church and the sea, but the proximity of North America and the arrival of cable TV has had a profound influence on contemporary life and material values.

In Nassau and Freeport most working people are employed in banking, tourism or government work and live a nine-to-five lifestyle. The maturation of the banking and finance industries has fostered the growth of a large professional class, many of whom have become extremely wealthy.

The citizens inhabiting the islands outside of New Providence and Grand Bahamas, called the Out Islands or Family Islands, are a bit more neighborly as well as more traditional. Thus the practice of obeah (a form of African-based ritual magic), bush medicine and folkloric songs and tales still infuse their daily lives. Though tourism is bringing change to the Out Islands, many still live simple lives centered around fishing, catching conch and lobster and raising corn, bananas and other crops.

## ARTS

The Bahamas rocks to the soul-riveting sounds of calypso, soca, reggae and its own distinctive music that echoes African rhythms and synthesizes Caribbean calypso, soca and English folk songs into its own goombay beat.

Goombay – the name comes from an African word for 'rhythm' – derives its melody from a guitar, piano or horn instrument accompanied by any combination of goatskin goombay drums, maracas, rhythm sticks, rattles, conch-shell horns, fifes, flutes and cowbells to add a *kalik-kalik-kalik* sound.

Rake'n'scrape is the Bahamas' down-home, working-class music, usually featuring a guitar, an accordion, shakers made from the pods of poinciana trees and other makeshift instruments, such as a saw played with a screwdriver.

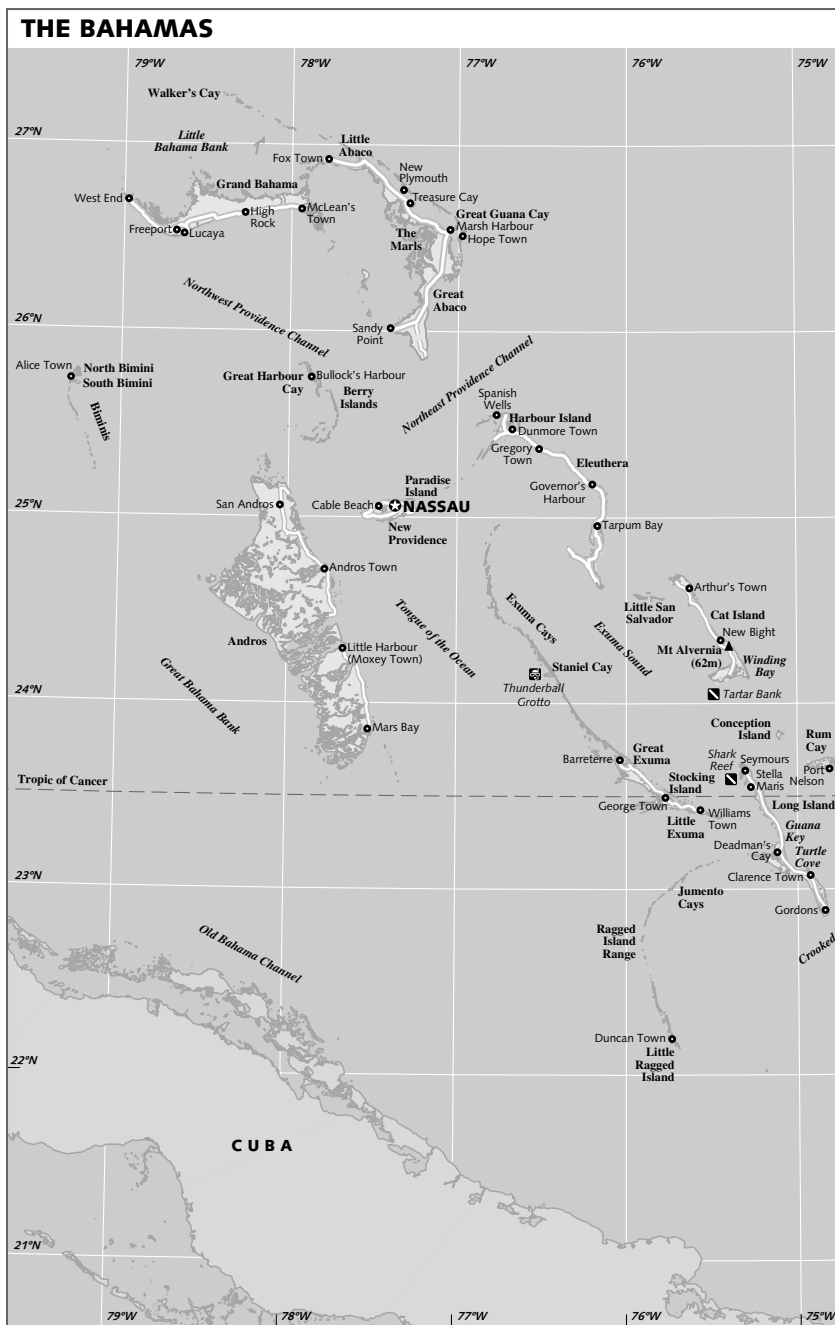
## ENVIRONMENT

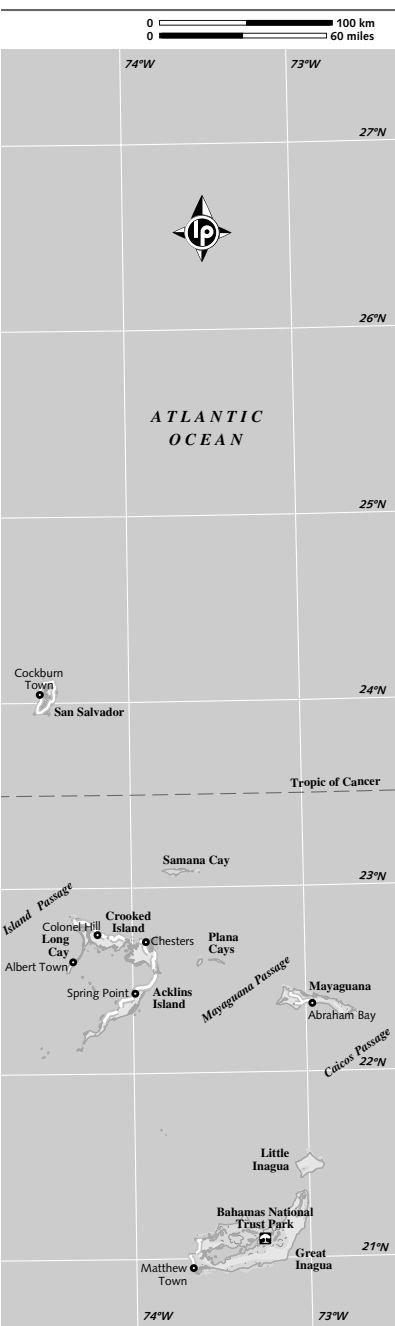
### The Land

The Bahamian islands are strewn in a linear fashion from northwest to southeast. Several of them – Great Abaco, Eleuthera, Long Island and Andros – are more than 100 miles (160km) in length. Few, however, are more than a few miles wide. All are low lying, and the highest point in the Bahamas – Mt Alvernia on Cat Island – is only 206ft (62m) above sea level.

Virtually the entire length of these shores is lined by white or pinkish sand beaches – about 2200 miles (3540km) in all – shelving into turquoise shallows. The interiors are generally marked by scrub-filled forests, and on some of the more remote islands, the plants found here are still used in bush medicine remedies.

The islands are pocked by blue holes – water-filled circular pits that open to underground and submarine caves and descend as far as 600ft (182m).





## Wildlife

The islands are a bird-watcher's paradise, with about 300 recorded species of birds. Only a few are endemic, including the Bahama swallow, the endangered Bahama parrot, and the Bahama woodstar hummingbird, a pugnacious bird weighing less than a US nickel. The West Indian (Caribbean) flamingo – the national bird – inhabits Crooked Island, Long Cay and the sanctuary of Great Iguana.

Iguanas inhabit some outlying isles and cays, and are protected. The archipelago's largest native land animal, they can reach 4ft (1.2m) in length.

The region's marine life is as varied as its islands and coral reefs. Depending on who you believe, the Bahamas has between 900 sq miles and 2700 sq miles (2330 sq km and 6992 sq km) of coral reef; it also has countless species of fish, such as bonito, stingrays, sharks, kingfish, jewelfish and deep-blue Creole wrasse.

Humpback whales pass through the waters windward of the Bahamas and blue whales are also frequently sighted.

## Environmental Issues

The Bahamas National Trust maintains 22 national parks and reserves, including large sections of the barrier reef, but outside of the national park system, inappropriate development, pollution and overexploitation increasingly threaten wildlife and marine resources. Although the Bahamas was the first Caribbean nation to outlaw long-line fishing, the islands' stocks of grouper, spiny lobster, and conch all face the consequences of overfishing. Commercial poaching, mostly by non-Bahamians, has also been a significant problem. In the late 1970s the problem stirred several island communities to establish their own nongovernmental reserves.

Today, local groups are leading the eco-charge. The Abacos' **Friends of the Environment** ([www.friendsoftheenvironment.org](http://www.friendsoftheenvironment.org)) organizes communitywide projects and passes the ecomessage along in the schools. In Eleuthera, the **Eleuthera School** ([www.islandschool.org](http://www.islandschool.org)) is earning kudos as an environmental learning center, drawing US high-schoolers, as well as adult 'students' looking to become environmentally engaged global citizens.

## FOOD & DRINK

Conch fritter? Conch ball? Conch salad? Cracked conch? Pronounced 'conk,' this

tough snail-like mollusk is a culinary celebrity. Served pounded, marinated, grilled, diced, 'soused' (stewed) and 'cracked' (battered and deep-fried), it's the Britney Spears of the Bahamas – try as you might, you just can't get away from its ubiquitous presence. And you're not entirely sure you want to. But there's a sad road ahead if the addiction isn't managed. Conch, as well as grouper, are being loved to death. Grouper populations are commercially extinct in much of the Caribbean and the Queen conch has been listed as endangered by the Convention on the Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES).

So what are the alternatives? Most food is imported, and vegetarian and vegan visitors will have a tough time of it. There are few fruit and vegetables, and conch, meat, fish, chicken and carbohydrates rule (much of the food is fried or baked). Colonial cultural hangovers include steak and kidney, bangers and mash and shepherd's pie, while main courses are served with coleslaw, slices of fried plantain, baked macaroni cheese and the ever-popular peas'n'rice.

The Bahamian beer Kalik is the perfect complement to any beach-bar sunset. If tropical cocktails are more your speed, the Green Turtle-originated goombay smash is a lethally easy-to-drink fruit juice and rum cocktail popular through the islands.

Most restaurants in the Bahamas now include an automatic 15% gratuity on the bill; many claim this addition has contributed to the country's notoriously bad restaurant service.

## NEW PROVIDENCE

pop 212,500

What New Providence lacks in size, it more than makes up for in energy, attitude and devil-may-care spirit. In fact, this 21 mile (33km) long powerhouse of an island is a perfect fit for the Type A tourist with money to burn. Plummet down a 50ft waterslide, puff on a hand-rolled stogie, place your bets on a high-stakes hand and party like a pirate into the wee hours – it's all there for the grabbing. Even rejuvenation is high-energy, with Paradise Island and Cable Beach boasting some of the liveliest beaches around. But who'd expect less on an island 007 calls home?

But all is not lost for value-minded Type B's, who can escape the go-go party track with minimal effort. In Nassau, just a few blocks off Bay St, there are engaging museums, historic buildings and locally owned restaurants that are crowd-free and personality-full. Scenery hounds can head to the island's western shores and hilltops as well as a few spots on Paradise Island. Those really wanting to disappear should beeline for the ferry terminals where sailing jaunts, fishing trips and snorkeling cruises are only an impulse away.

Don't spend too much time in contemplative isolation – it's not the island's strong point. Just ask Sean Connery. According to rumor, even he rouses from stodgy Lyford Cay for beach bar karaoke on the odd Friday night.

### Getting There & Away

For information on international flights to and from the Bahamas, as well as travel information between the Bahamian islands, see p106.

There are ferries and mail boats from Nassau to other Bahamian islands; see p108 for details.

### Getting Around

Scooters, ferries and taxis are parked along Woodes Rogers Walk, the harborside gateway, waiting for travelers ready to explore further afield.

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

No buses travel to or from Linden Pindling International Airport. A few hotels provide shuttles, and taxis line the forecourts of hotels and the airport outside the arrivals lounge. For **taxi bookings** (☎ 242-323-5111/4555), call a day ahead. Destination rates are fixed by the government and displayed on the wall; all rates are for two people and each additional person costs US\$3.

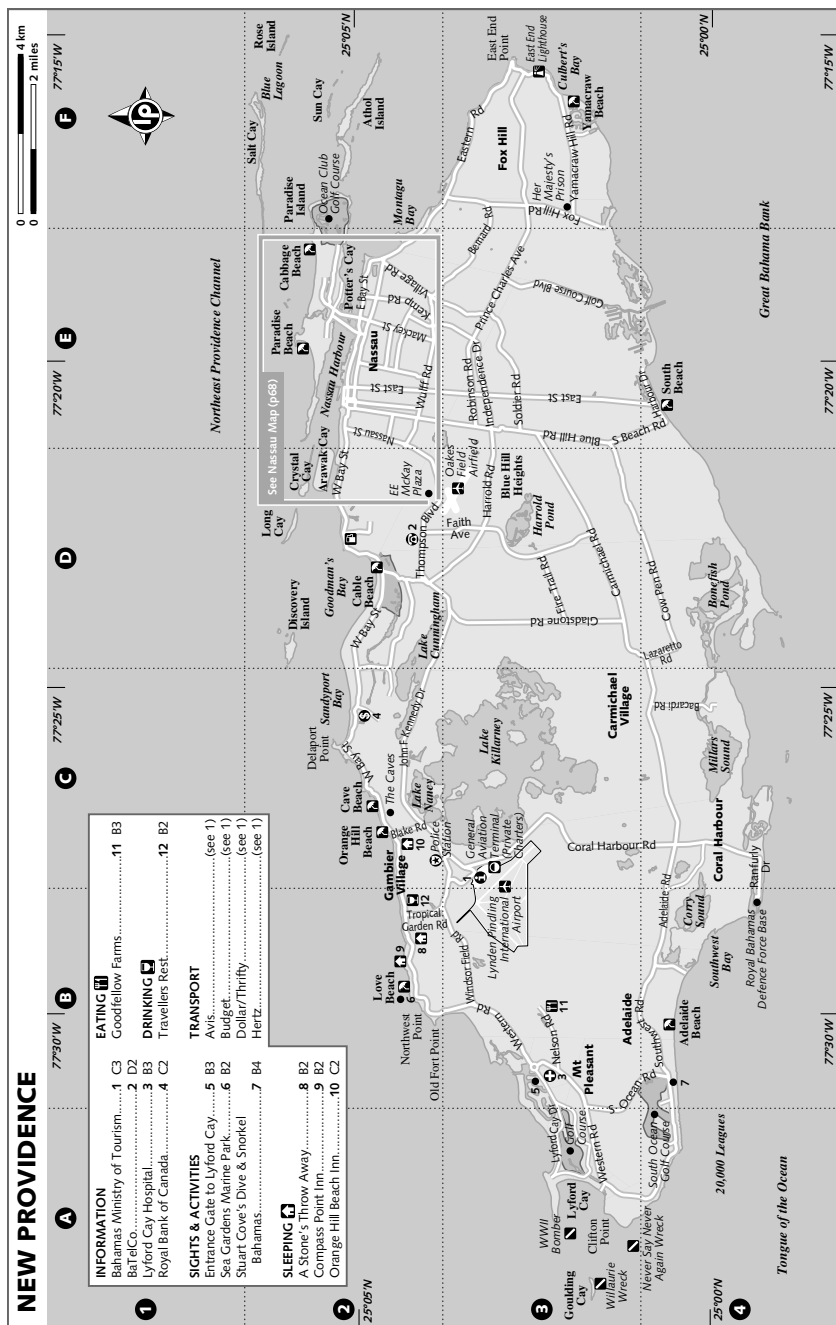
One-way rates are as follows: Cable Beach US\$15, downtown Nassau and Prince George Wharf US\$22 to US\$23 and Paradise Island US\$30.

### BOAT

Ferry boats and water taxis run between Woodes Rogers Walk and the Paradise Island Ferry Terminal for about US\$6 round trip.

### BUS

Nassau and New Providence are well served by minibuses, called *jitneys*, which run from 6am





to 8pm, although there are no fixed schedules. Buses depart downtown from Frederick St at Bay St and designated bus stops. No buses run to Paradise Island, only to the bridges. Destinations are clearly marked on the buses, which can be waved down. To request a stop anywhere when you're onboard, simply ask the driver. The standard bus fare is US\$1 (children US\$0.50) paid to the driver.

There are numerous buses and routes, but no central listing. Check with the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism Welcome Centre (opposite) for specifics, look at the destinations marked on the front of the *jitney*, or try one these common routes:

**Buses 10 & 10A** Cable Beach, Sandy Point & Lyford Cay  
**Buses 1, 7 & 7A** Paradise Island Bridges

### CAR & SCOOTER

You don't need a car to explore downtown Nassau or to get to the beaches. If you intend to explore New Providence, it's worth saving taxi fare to and from Nassau by hiring a car at the airport. Collision damage waiver insurance costs about US\$15 a day. For information on road rules, see p109.

The following companies have car-rental booths at the airport (Dollar is the cheapest, costing from around US\$55 per 24 hours for economy):

**Avis** Cable Beach – Cumberland St (☎ 242-322-2889); Nassau International Airport (Map p65; ☎ 242-377-7121)

**Budget** Nassau International Airport (Map p65; ☎ 242-377-7405); Downtown Nassau (☎ 242-322-3321)

**Dollar/Thrifty** Nassau International Airport (Map p65; ☎ 242-377-8300); Cable Beach (☎ 242-677-6000; Sheraton); Nassau (Map p71; ☎ 242-325-3716; British Colonial Hilton Nassau);

**Hertz** (Map p65; ☎ 242-377-8684; Nassau International Airport)

Local companies may rent more cheaply. Ask your hotel to recommend a company or try **Orange Creek Rentals** (Map p68; ☎ 242-323-4967, 800-891-7655; West Bay St, Nassau).

Scooters are widely available and can be found outside most major hotels or the Prince George Wharf. **Knowles Scooter Rentals** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-3415; Festival Pl, Nassau) rents scooters for US\$50/day plus \$15 for gas and insurance with a \$20 returnable deposit.

## NASSAU

Who needs Red Bull when there's downtown Nassau? This cacophonous blur of bouncing

*jitneys*, hustling cabbies, bargaining vendors, trash-talking pirates and elbow-knocking shoppers is a guaranteed pick-me up for even the sleepest of cruise-ship day-trippers.

And it's been luring high-energy hustlers for centuries. From the 17th-century pirates who blew their doubloons on women and wine to the dashing blockade runners who smuggled cargo from the Confederacy during the American Civil War, the city has a history of accommodating the young and the reckless. The trend continues today, with bankers dodging between downtown's international banks as they manipulate millions on this offshore banking haven. But Nassau's not just for those wanting to earn or burn a quick buck. Banished royalty and camera-fleeing celebs have found refuge in Nassau too, with the disgraced Duke and Duchess of Windsor keeping tongues wagging in the 1940s and the ultimately tragic Anna Nicole Smith hiding out here in 2006.

Today, duty-free shops jostle for attention on Bay St with jewelry, coins, perfumes and rum cakes. Just east, historic Georgian-style government buildings glow like pink cotton candy confections. West of the wharf, the informative Pompey Museum describes the slaves' journey from Africa to the Caribbean while faux buccaneers set a rowdier mood at the Pirates of Nassau museum a few steps south.

Nassau has a grittier vibe than you might expect from a cruise-ship destination, but don't be put off by the initial hustle. Slow down, look around, then embrace its unabashed verve – it might be the perfect high-energy antidote to your lingering case of cabin fever.

### Orientation

Historic downtown Nassau is 10 blocks long and four blocks wide and faces north toward Paradise Island and Nassau Harbour. The town rises south to Prospect Ridge, a steep limestone scarp that parallels the entire north shore about 0.5 miles (800m) inland. A second, higher ridge – Blue Hill Heights – rises to 120ft (36m) and runs east to west along Nassau's southern border, 3 miles (4.8km) inland. The major residential areas lie between the ridges.

The main thoroughfare through town is Bay St, which runs east to the Paradise Island Bridge; beyond it follows the windward shore



known as Eastern Rd. West of downtown, Bay St becomes West Bay St, which runs west to Cable Beach, past Lyford Cay and eventually joins Eastern Rd to complete an island loop.

Paradise Island is 4 miles (6km) long and 0.5 miles (800m) wide. Two road bridges (one to enter and the other to exit the island) link Paradise Island to New Providence. Both bridges have pedestrian walkways.

## MAPS

The free *Bahamas Trailblazer* foldout map for Nassau, Cable Beach and Paradise Island is a handy supplement to the maps in this guide. It includes emergency numbers, traffic rules and tourism-related coupons. Look for it in hotel lobbies.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Island Book Shop** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-1011; Bay St, 2nd fl; ☎ 9am-5:30pm Mon, 9am-6pm Tue, Fri & Sat, 9am-5pm Wed & Thu, 9am-3pm Sun) Magazines, current fiction and books on Bahamian travel and history.

### EMERGENCY

**Ambulance** (☎ 911, 919, 242-322-2881)

**Fire** (☎ 911, 919, 242-302-8404)

**Med-Evac** (☎ 242-322-2881)

**Police** (☎ 911, 919, 242-322-4444)

**Red Cross** (☎ 242-323-7370)

### INTERNET ACCESS

Expect to pay US\$5 to US\$10 per hour for internet services.

**Cyber Café** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-3206; Prince George Plaza; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, until 4pm Sun)

**Internet Works** (Map p71; ☎ 242-323-1000; West Bay Hotel, West Bay St, Nassau; ☎ 8am-9:30pm)

**Nassau Public Library & Museum** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-4907; Shirley St; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacies are located in all shopping malls, but keep mainly standard hours.

**Doctors Hospital** (Map p68; ☎ 242-322-8411, 242-302-4600; www.doctorshosp.com; cnr Shirley St & Collins Ave) Privately owned full-service hospital, provides emergency services and acute care.

**Princess Margaret Hospital** (Map p68; ☎ 242-322-2861/2/3/4; cnr Elizabeth Ave & Sands Rd) The main facility is this government-run, full-service hospital providing emergency services and acute care.

## MONEY

Banks cluster around Rawson Sq and Bay St. ATMs dispensing US and Bahamian dollars are found throughout Nassau and at banks like the Royal Bank of Canada (Map p71) and Scotiabank (Map p71).

## POST

**DHL Worldwide Express** (Map p68; ☎ 242-394-4040; Island Traders Bldg, East Bay St, Nassau)

**FedEx** (Map p71; ☎ 242-323-7611; www.fedex.com; Frederick St inside Norfolk House, Nassau)

**Main post office** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-3025; cnr E Hill & Parliament Sts, Nassau; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

## TELEPHONE

For telephone information and the services available in Nassau and New Providence, see p105.

**BaTelCo** East St (Map p71; ☎ 242-325-5661; ☎ 7am-10pm); Festival Place (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-9001/2); John F Kennedy Dr (Map p65; ☎ 242-302-7000) All three locations have public phones.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

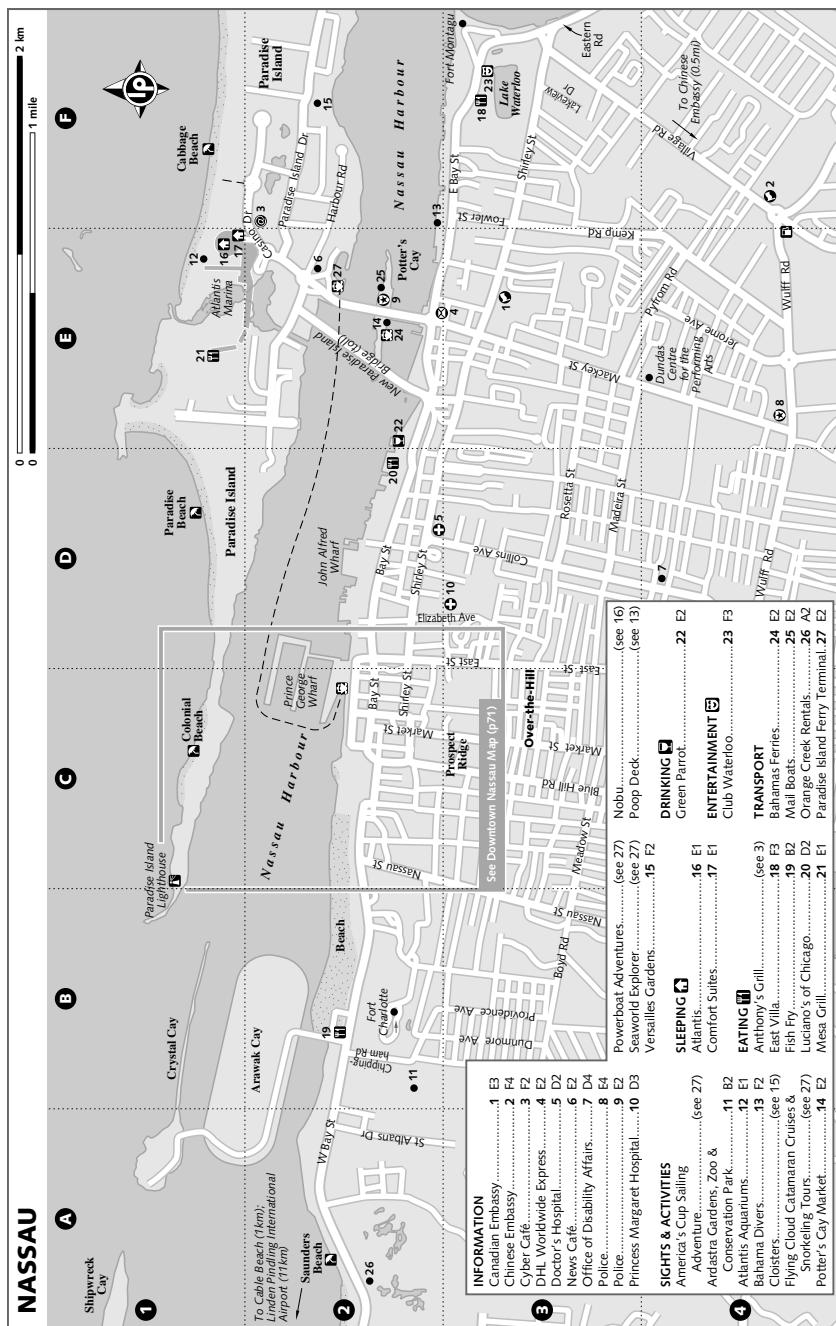
The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism is a government department with offices in Nassau and across the Bahamian islands (see p106). Information at its Nassau offices is surprisingly limited. Your best bet is to access the official Bahamas website and others listed under Internet Resources on p104. Tourist centers in Nassau can be located as follows:

**Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (www.bahamas.com) Downtown (Map p71; ☎ 242-302-2000; George St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri); Nassau International Airport (Map p65; ☎ 242-377-6806; Airport Arrivals Terminal); Welcome Centre (Map p71; ☎ 242-323-3182/3; Festival Pl; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun) The Welcome Centre branch may stay open later on weekdays depending on cruise-ships schedules.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Crime was a hot topic in 2007. Local papers kept a close tally on the country's record high murder rate, which reached 79 by year's end. 60 of these murders occurred on New Providence. Although most criminal activity occurred in the 'Over-the-Hill' neighborhood outside of tourist-filled downtown, travelers should still take reasonable precautions during the day and extra care at night, as there has been recent spillover to the more touristed areas.

Watch for scams by taxi drivers. Rates are regulated and posted at the larger hotels, but



the occasional driver will try to overcharge you. Avoid unlicensed drivers offering to give you a lift. All licensed taxi drivers will have a government ID badge.

## Sights

### DOWNTOWN NASSAU & BAY STREET

For those stepping off a quiet cruise-ship, Bay St may seem to teeter on the verge of absolute chaos. Scooters, trucks and *jitneys* hurtle through the center of town on this narrow artery, dodging trongs of tourists looking for duty-free deals. But there's more to downtown than liquor stores and T-shirt shops.

Don't even try to ignore the pirate pacing outside the **Pirates of Nassau** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-3759; www.pirates-of-nassau.com; King St; adult/child US\$12.50/6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12:30pm Sat) museum. Like any seafaring ruffian worth his parrot and peg-leg, he had you in his sights the moment you turned the corner. But that's okay – with its partial recreation of a 130ft-long sailing ship, animatronic pirates and accessible exhibits on everything from marooning to pirate hall-of-famers, this museum provides the right mix of entertainment and history for kids, parents and students of piratology. Great gift shop, Plunder, next door.

It may be blasphemous to mention in this piratical context, but a dashing statue of pirate menace **Woodes Rogers** stands guard just across the street.

Named after a Bahamian slave who led an unsuccessful rebellion, the spare but moving **Pompey Museum** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-0495; Vendue House; adult/child/senior US\$3/1/2; ☎ 9:30am-4:30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 9:30am-1pm Thu) traces the harrowing 'Middle Passage' slave voyages from Africa to the Caribbean and Americas. Stark exhibits – a 45lb ball-and-chain, a branding iron and slave collars – reinforce the horrors inflicted on millions of Africans between the 1500s and 1860s. The building is located on a former slave auction site.

A bustling warren of stalls at the corner of Bay and George Sts, **Straw Market** (Map p71) is worth a mention, but just barely. A maddening array of knock-off purses and cheap tee's obscure too few straw products. And even if you do find them, it's not always clear they're locally made. The decline of the market has been the subject of sincere hand-wringing in Bahamian newspapers but at press time their efforts appear to have made little difference.

For Bahamian-made products and straw goods, stay in Festival Place at the wharf.

**Parliament Square** (Map p71) is an oasis of gardens and government buildings that's seemingly unchanged from the 1800s. The pink-and-white Georgian buildings house the Leader of the Opposition (on the left), the House of Assembly (right) and the Senate (facing Bay St). **Queen Victoria's statue** (1905), perched in front of the Senate, is another reminder of the Bahamas' allegiance to the Crown.

A few yards south is the small **Garden of Remembrance** with a cenotaph honoring Bahamian soldiers killed in the two world wars.

For chills with your historical thrills, stop by the **Nassau Public Library & Museum** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-4907; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), the oldest government building downtown. This pink octagon, built in 1797, served as a jail in the 1800s but its cells are now crammed with books and dusty periodicals. There's a jumble of haphazardly marked artifacts – jars of corn, boxes of shells and a big animal skull – that presumably constitute the museum. Ask the librarian for the key to the tiny but creepy dungeon underneath the building. The dank walls bear scratches carved on their surface – a somber marking of days by prisoners long dead?

### WEST & EAST HILL STREETS

The Georgian **Government House** (1737; Map p71), residence to the Bahamas' Governor-General, sits atop Hill St like a pink candied topping. Below, the **statue of Christopher Columbus** (Map p71) has maintained a jaunty pose on the steps overlooking Duke St since 1830. Come here for the changing of the guard on alternate Saturdays at 10am. Call 242-322-1875 for specific dates.

Cigar aficionados and those who put up with them will enjoy the **Graycliff Cigar Co** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-2795; West Hill St, Nassau; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) just west of the Graycliff Hotel. At this tiny stogie factory visitors can watch a dozen Cubans roll pounded sheets of aromatic tobacco, supervised by a former personal roller for Fidel Castro.

### EAST & WEST OF DOWNTOWN

Hardscrabble **Potter's Cay market** (Map p68) lurks beneath the Paradise Island Exit Bridge. Locals gather here for fresh-off-the-boat seafood. For a cheap meal, stroll the wooden

stalls and see what strikes your fancy. It's a bit dodgy at night, but patrol cars cruise through regularly. The offices and docks for Bahamas Ferries and mail boats are just northwest and northeast of the market respectively. From downtown, grab eastbound buses labeled PI Bridge.

The conservation-minded **Ardastra Gardens & Zoo** (Map p68; ☎ 242-323-5806; www.ardastra.com; Chippingham Rd, Nassau; adult/child/under 4yr US\$15/7.50/free; ☒ 9am-5pm) houses nearly 300 mammals, birds and reptiles. Watch your step – many of the birds freely wander the premises. The zoo's highlight is the small regiment of marching West Indian flamingos, who strut their stuff at 10:30am, 2:10pm and 4:10pm daily.

**Cable Beach** (Map p65) is a curved stretch of white beach and sparkling turquoise sea west of downtown. Named for the undersea telegraphic cable that came ashore here in 1892, Cable Beach has for years been populated with nondescript resorts. Currently, these resorts and the casino are in the midst of a massive redevelopment project overseen by Baha Mar Resorts. Harrah's Entertainment made headlines in 2008 when it announced its intent to withdraw as a partner in the enterprise, raising concerns about the projects future development. Although the major hotels are open, by 2010 many of them will have been torn down or completely revamped as Starwood properties fitting within the theme and scheme of the new 1000-acre Vegas-style megaresort.

## Activities

### DIVING & SNORKELING

There's superb diving close to shore, including fantastic shallow reef, wall and wreck dives. The most noted sites lie off the southwest coast between Coral Harbour and Lyford Cay. Equipment can be rented from the operators listed below.

**Stuart Cove's Dive & Snorkel Bahamas** (Map p65; ☎ 242-362-4171, 800-879-9832; www.stuartcove.com; PO Box CB-13137, Nassau) offers Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification (US\$950, less if more than one person) as well as a bone-rattling shark wall and shark-feeding dive (US\$145); a two-tank dive trip (US\$99); and wall-flying – a two-tank underwater scooter adventure (US\$145). Snorkeling trips are also available (adult/child US\$55/30).

**Bahama Divers** (Map p68; ☎ 242-393-6054, 800-398-3483; www.bahamadivers.com; PO Box 5004, Nassau) offers

the Lost Blue Hole dive (famous for its sharks and schools of stingrays) and wrecks. A three-hour learn-to-dive course can be taken prior to PADI certification courses (US\$449). A two-tank morning dive costs US\$99, the two-tank blue hole dive is US\$119 and half-day snorkeling trips are US\$45.

Both companies include complimentary hotel pick-up and return.

### BOAT TRIPS

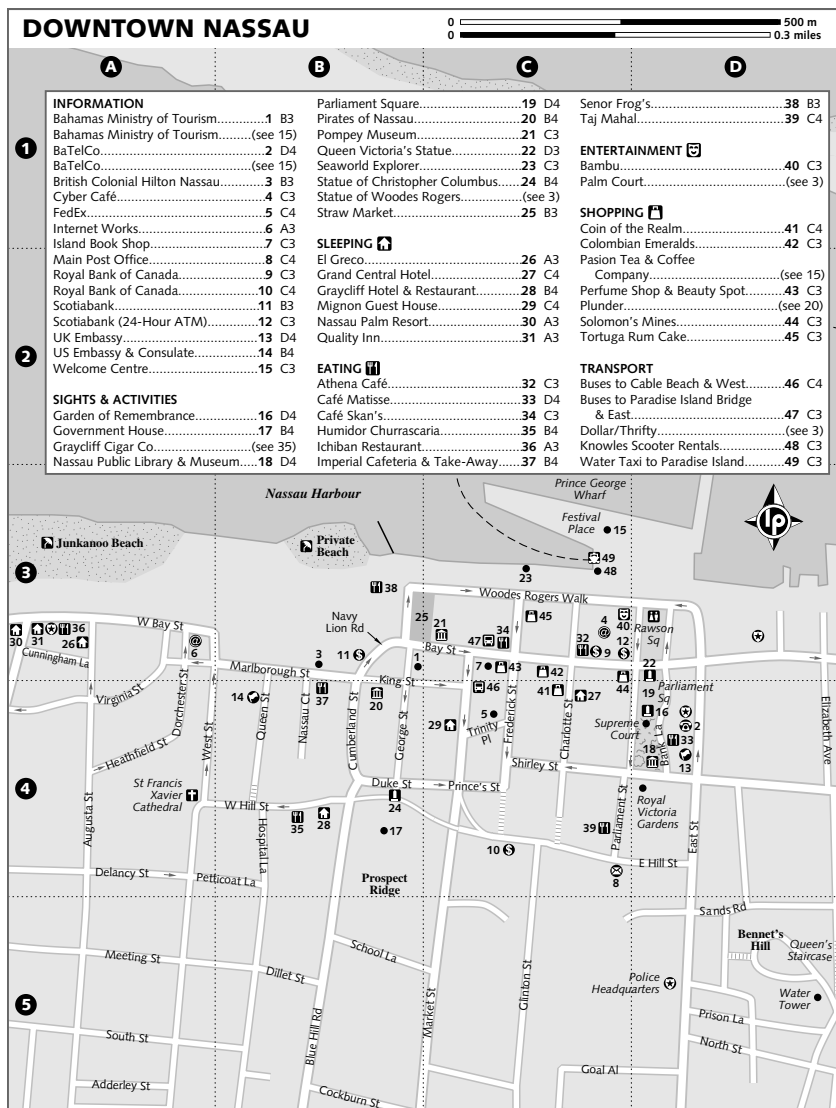
There's a jaunt for every type of adventurer in New Providence. Most vessels depart from the Woodes Rogers Walk area or the Paradise Island Ferry Terminal between the PI bridges.

**America's Cup Sailing Adventure** (Map p65; ☎ 242-363-1552; www.sailnassau.com; Paradise Island Ferry Terminal; adult/child US\$95/65) Feel the rush of an America's Cup Race as a crew member on one of two 76ft sailboats that competed in the 1992 event. Since the two boats race, this trip is perfect for competitive families or big groups. Wannabe yachtsmen can take the helm or trim the sails while determined nonsailors are allowed to sit back and enjoy the ride.

**Bahamas Ferries** (Map p68; ☎ 242-323-2166; www.bahamasferries.com) offers a 'Harbour Island Day Away' excursion to shimmering Harbour Island just off the coast of northern Eleuthera. It departs from Potter's Cay, takes two hours each way and includes a golf cart, an island tour and choice of lunch at one of several restaurants (adult/child US\$174/114).

### PIRATE HUNTING

'It was a short life, but a merry one,' said Captain Bart Roberts about life as a way-faring pirate. In downtown Nassau you can easily imagine pirates striding the gritty, narrow streets, looking for two-bit grog and a one-night girlfriend after a long few months at sea. Spend the night at gothic **Graycliff** (see p73), the hillside former home of Captain Graysmith, who plundered ships off the Spanish Main. Learn about marooning, parrots and peg-legs at the **Pirates of Nassau** (p69) then walk to the British Colonial Hilton to gaze upon the statue of pirate hunter **Woodes Rogers** (p69), who restored order to the city in 1718 and inspired the motto 'Expulsis Piratis, Commercium Restituta.'



**Flying Cloud Catamaran Cruises & Snorkeling Tours** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-4430; [www.flyingcloud.info](http://www.flyingcloud.info); Paradise Island Ferry Terminal) offers half-day adventures that include a catamaran cruise, beach time and a bit of snorkeling (adult/child US\$60/30). Sunday trips are five hours and include reef snorkeling and a BBQ on low-key Rose Island (adult/child US\$75/37.50).

**Powerboat Adventures** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-1466; [www.powerboatadventures.com](http://www.powerboatadventures.com); Paradise Island Ferry Terminal) A custom-built powerboat roars 38 miles to the northern Exuma Cays on this high-octane day trip. Feed hungry stingrays, snorkel isolated reefs and mingle with iguanas of unusual size. All-you-can-eat lunch buffet and open bar are included (adult/child US\$190/120).

**Seaworld Explorer** (Map p68; ☎ 242-356-2548; Paradise Island Ferry Terminal, Woodes Rogers Walk, Nassau; adult/child US\$45/25), a 45-passenger semisubmarine with a window-lined hull, has a great 90-minute excursion above the fish-filled coral reefs of the Sea Gardens Marine Park off the north shore of Paradise Island.

### KITESURFING

Cross-Shore runs kitesurfing classes in southern New Providence; see p93 for details.

### NATURE TOURS

For guided birding tours, nature walks or off-road bikes trips, book a tour with **Bahamas Outdoors** (☎ 242-457-0329; [www.bahamasoutdoors.com](http://www.bahamasoutdoors.com)). For two or more, birding and nature trips cost \$59 each and biking tours cost \$99 each.

### FISHING

Nassau is a launch pad for fishing, with sites just 20 minutes away. Game species include blue marlin, sailfish, yellowfin tuna, mahi mahi and wahoo. Charters can be arranged at most major hotels or by calling a charter company. The following recommended companies charge two to six people about US\$600/1200 per half/full day:

**Born Free Charter Service** (☎ 242-393-4144; [www.bornfreefishing.com](http://www.bornfreefishing.com))

**Brown's Charter** (☎ 242-324-2061; [www.brownscharter.com](http://www.brownscharter.com))

**Chubasco Charters** (☎ 242-324-3474; [www.chubascocharters.com](http://www.chubascocharters.com))

### Festivals & Events

For information on Boxing Day's brilliant Junkanoo, see opposite. Otherwise contact the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism (p67) for events and dates or check [www.bahamas.gov.bs](http://www.bahamas.gov.bs). Following are two fun local events:

**Emancipation Day** Held on the first Monday of August, this holiday celebrates the abolition of slavery. Fox Hill features a very early morning 'Junkanoo Rush' followed by bands, dancing and shows.

**Police Band Annual Beat Retreat** In December, the Royal Bahamas Police Force Band celebrates the season with lively drill performances in Rawson Square.

### Sleeping

High prices, indifferent service and sad-sack furnishings seem to be the norm in Nassau. Ask about specials and remember that low-season (April to mid-December) rates drop between 25% to 60%. Surcharges and taxes

can be hefty; quoted rates here do not include these additional charges, so inquire when making your reservation.

### DOWNTOWN NASSAU

The hotels listed here tend to be cheaper than those in Cable Beach and Paradise Island.

### Budget

**Mignon Guest House** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-4771; 12 Market St, PO Box N-786; s/d US\$50/65; 🍷) Six small but pleasant rooms with TV have been kept in top-notch shape for several decades by a friendly Greek couple. Bathrooms, microwave and fridge are shared, usually by an intriguing international crowd. Security is good and rates are inclusive. Don't be put off by initial language barriers or rigid house rules. This is a great bargain in the heart of downtown.

**Grand Central Hotel** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-8356-8; [www.grand-central-hotel.com](http://www.grand-central-hotel.com); Bay & Charlotte Sts; s US\$78; 🍷) On first blush, the in-room sign reading, 'Please do not iron on the carpet' seems rather sad. On second blush, perhaps it's a reassuring indication that this lime-green, balconied hotel is doing what it can to maintain a whiff of decorum in an iron-on-the-carpet kind of world. Despite basic furnishings and worn fixtures, rooms are clean and serviceable. Not a bad deal considering its prime location near Bay Street. Ask for a room with a balcony. Rates are inclusive.

### Midrange

The three properties below are across Bay St from tiny Junkanoo Beach. All are within a five-minute walk of both Arawak Cay (to the west) and downtown (east).

**Nassau Palm Resort** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-0000; [www.nassau-hotel.com](http://www.nassau-hotel.com); cnr West Bay & Nassau Sts; r US\$108; 🍷 📺 📺) Formerly the Holiday Inn Junkanoo Beach, this bustling 183-room property works best for on-the-go travelers looking for a simple home base at the end of a busy day. Bright tropical colors splash across bedspreads, brightening otherwise standard rooms. Each has a TV, hairdryer, iron and coffeemaker while some have a fridge. Wi-fi available in lobby (US\$10 per hour). The front desk area can get congested, so plan ahead.

**Quality Inn** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-1515; [www.qualityinn.com](http://www.qualityinn.com); cnr West Bay & Nassau Sts; r US\$109; 🍷 📺) The six-story, 63-room Quality Inn is notable for its relatively low prices, fairly helpful staff and good views of incoming cruise-ships from



## JUMPING AT JUNKANOO

You feel the music before you see it...a frenzied barrage of whistles and horns overriding the *ka-LICK-ka-LICK* of cowbells, the rumble of drums and the joyful blasts of conch shells. Then the costumed revelers stream into view, whirling and gyrating like a kaleidoscope in rhythm with the cacophony. This is Junkanoo, the national festival of the Bahamas, a mass of energy, color and partying that starts in the twilight hours of Boxing Day.

Junkanoo is fiercely competitive and many marchers belong to 'shacks,' groups who vie to produce the best performance, costume, dancing and music. The most elaborately costumed performers are one-person parade floats, whose costume can weigh over 200lb (90kg) and depict exotic scenes adorned with a myriad of glittering beads, foils and rhinestones.

The name (junk-uh-noo) is thought to come from a West African term for 'deadly sorcerer.' Others say it's named for John Canoe, the tribal leader who demanded that his enslaved people be allowed to enjoy a festivity. Junkanoo, which had its origins in West African secret societies, evolved on the plantations of the British Caribbean among slaves who were forbidden to observe their sacred rites and hid their identity with masks.

In Nassau the first 'rush,' as the parade is known, is on Boxing Day (December 26); the second occurs New Year's Day and the third in summer, when teams practice. Parades begin at about 3am. Elbow into a viewing spot along Shirley or Bay Sts, where crowds can be thick and rowdy. For a less-hectic bleacher seat, contact the Ministry of Tourism for information on obtaining tickets.

its upper floors. The few-frills, yellow rooms sport wooden furnishings more functional than fancy. In fact, dresser handles serve as handy bottle openers for impromptu Kaliks. Don't leave food sitting out – the lack of an in-room fridge exacerbates a Bahamas-wide ant problem.

**El Greco** (Map p71; ☎ 242-325-1121; cnr W Bay & Augusta Sts; s/d US\$129/189; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The hotel's name may be evocative of a divey, beans-and-rice joint, but don't be dissuaded by first impressions. With its bougainvillea-draped balconies, bright monochromatic doors and cute central courtyard, this compact, two-story hotel is a welcome respite from the clatter of nearby Bay St. The sin of slightly worn furniture is forgiven once you discover the lobby phone – free calls for guests to the US and Canada. Upstairs rooms are larger, have balconies and offer a little more light.

### Top End

**Graycliff Hotel & Restaurant** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-2796/97; [www.graycliff.com](http://www.graycliff.com); 8-12 W Hill St, Nassau; r/ste US\$325/450; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Nassau's most discreet and character-laden hotel is this slightly spooky 260-year-old home built by a wealthy pirate. Hidden above town on West Hill St, the Georgian-style main house is reminiscent of a gothic mansion, filled with high-ceilinged rooms, musty antiques, marble bathrooms and intriguing nooks and corners begging further exploration. Huge gardenside cot-

tages are equally alluring. The hotel's common rooms feature unique Cuban art, comfortably faded and eclectic furnishings, a smoking room and a library resplendent with the rich aroma of Cuban cigars, an astonishing wine cellar and a five-star restaurant beloved by deep-pocketed gourmards. Former guests include Sir Winston Churchill, the Beatles and LL Cool J.

### WEST OF DOWNTOWN

**our pick Orange Hill Beach Inn** (Map p65; ☎ 242-327-7157, 888-399-3698; [www.orangehill.com](http://www.orangehill.com); W Bay St, Orange Hill Beach; s/d/cottage US\$110/125/150; 🍷 🍷 🍷) If Fido would just bring your slippers, you'd swear you never left home. Low-key Orange Hill is a welcoming way station for those wanting distance from downtown or a nice place close to the airport. Rustic-style furniture covers clean, tiled floors in fairly spare rooms; some of the 36 units come with kitchenettes. An international crowd mingles around the inviting lobby (which has free wi-fi) and dining room. Diver friendly, and locals recommend it to their friends.

**A Stone's Throw Away** (Map p65; ☎ 242-327-7030; [www.astonesthrowaway.com](http://www.astonesthrowaway.com); West Bay St, Nassau; r US\$200-290, ste US\$290; 🍷 🍷 🍷) If blockade runner Rhett Butler strode through the door at this gorgeous, plantation-style B&B, one would hardly be surprised. Inviting balconies, well-appointed sitting rooms and a fine honor bar enhance the glow of Southern-minded



hospitality. The stone-blasted entranceway and sweeping ocean views add a melodramatic flair, making it hard to believe this delectable getaway is only four years old. The 10 rooms and suites boast wooden floors, bright quilts and rustic vintage furnishings. Wi-fi is available.

**Compass Point Inn** (Map p65; ☎ 242-327-4500; [www.compasspointbeachresort.com](http://www.compasspointbeachresort.com); West Bay St, Gambier Village, Nassau; r US\$300-500; 📶 📺 🍷) With a color scheme best described as jellybean Junkanoo, this jumble of vibrantly colored huts is an automatic mood enhancer. Rooms are on the small side, but hip furniture, cute porches and astounding views make up for tight quarters. And who's staying inside when Love Beach and a sweet beach bar are steps away? On Friday nights, keep an ear out for karaoke-singing Sean Connery, who's been known to drop in from Lyford Cay. There's free wi-fi access.

## Eating

### DOWNTOWN NASSAU

**Imperial Cafeteria & Take-Away** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-4522; Marlborough St, Nassau; mains US\$5-10; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Ignore the grubby yellow walls and worn red booths, this busy number consistently offers the best-value takeout in Nassau. Beloved of many Nassauvians and guests of the lordly British Colonial Hotel opposite, its Bahamian highlights include fried chicken, cracked conch and souse.

**Café Skan's** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-2486; cnr Bay & Frederick Sts, Nassau; mains US\$7-23; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Typically stretched to its deep-fried seams, this down-home diner bustles with office workers, moms with babies, and the occasional hungry cop. If the happy hordes and friendly service don't pull you in, the tiered dessert case by the door should close the deal. Fried daily specials look to be most popular.

**Athena Cafe** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-8833; Bay & Charlotte Sts; mains US\$10-25; 🍷 breakfast & lunch 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sun) Locals have a love-hate affair with this cozy Greek café perched tightly over the bustling Bay and Charlotte Sts intersection. The authentic Greek food may be scrumptious, but \$15 for a gyro? Pass the ouzo, take another bite and blame the just-off-the-boat cruise-ship crowd. Enter through the jewelry store.

**Senior Frog's** (Map p71; ☎ 242-323-1777; Woodes Rogers Walk; mains US\$11-18; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Snubbed

by locals and most gourmets, this raucous tourist trap is actually, er, kind of fun if your mood's right. Down-and-dirty Mexican grub, cheesy pop tunes, bad frog puns and colorful tropical cocktails – it's tacky, it's wacky and don't tell anyone we sent you.

**Ichiban Restaurant** (Map p71; ☎ 242-326-7224; W Bay St, Nassau; mains US\$14-32; 🍷 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) *Pad thai, kung pao* chicken and spicy tuna handrolls crowd the menu at this welcoming Pan-Asian restaurant across from Junkanoo Beach. Warm ambience, good food and reasonable prices – a rare Nassau triple play.

**ourpick Café Matisse** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-7012; Bank Lane, Nassau; mains US\$15-26; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Tucked in the shadows of historic buildings and leafy palms, this casually elegant bistro just off Parliament Sq is a delightful escape from the cruise-ship-and-Bay-St mob scene. Savor top-notch pastas, pizzas and seafood dishes on the inviting back patio where you'll be served by crisp-shirted waiters to the sounds of cool world beats. If you don't opt for wine, try the refreshing ginger lemonade.

**Taj Mahal** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-3004; 48 Parliament St, Nassau; mains US\$16-38; 🍷 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) British expats claim that wood-paneled Taj Mahal serves the city's best Indian food. Lucky they didn't have to move from their bar stools to find it – the restaurant assumed the dark, clubby space formerly known as Green Shutters Restaurant & Pub, a very English watering hole. Look for tandoori dishes, curries and rice specialties.

**Humidor Churrascaria** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-2796 ext 301; W Hill St; mains US\$40; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) Machismo hangs in the smoky air at this wood-paneled Brazilian steakhouse where slow-roasted tenderloins are delivered with gauchoed flair. The *prix-fixe* menu includes a salad bar stuffed with seafood apps, veggies and pastas. Conclude with a fine Graycliff stogie, hand rolled at the cigar factory next door.

### EAST & WEST OF DOWNTOWN

**Luciano's of Chicago** (Map p68; ☎ 242-323-7770; 701 E Bay St; lunch US\$9-28, dinner US\$14-36; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Bring your love to Luciano's and improve your odds of getting lucky. This Italian restaurant may be part of a chain, but its gorgeous harbor-side patio sets an easy stage for romance. Dishes include shrimp-and-scallop tossed fettuccini in a light

cream sauce, fresh pan-seared salmon and eggplant parmigiana.

**East Villa** (Map p68; ☎ 242-393-3377; E Bay St; mains US\$11-29; ☺ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner daily) Superb, lightly seasoned Chinese dishes are the draw at this popular restaurant east of the Paradise Island bridges.

**ourpick Goodfellow Farms** (Map p65; ☎ 242-377-5000; Nelson Rd, Mt Pleasant; mains US\$14; ☺ lunch 11am-3pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun, market 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) This inviting gourmet market and deli proves the power of strong word of mouth. From humble beginnings as a small purveyor of homegrown produce, 'the Farm' has rapidly become a fave of yachties, picnickers and Lyford Cayers who lunch. Relax at umbrella-ed tables just steps from the fields. The chalkboard menu changes daily but most salads and sandwiches are can't miss.

**Poop Deck** (Map p68; ☎ 242-393-8175; E Bay St; lunch US\$15-26, dinner US\$17-50; ☺ lunch & dinner) It's a pick-your-lobster kind of place where old salts ogle fresh snappers at the been-there-forever front bar. On the back deck, locals and tourists select from a seafood menu heavy on Bahamian favorites – conch, grouper, mahi mahi – that's complemented by scenic views of the harbor. Second location in Sandypoint (☎ 242-327-3325; W Bay St).

For fresh seafood with a daiquiri, try the colorful jumble of shacks at Arawak Cay (Map p68), also known as 'the Fish Fry.' Locals advise that those trying the tasty coconut-and-gin concoction sold here, known as Sky Juice, keep an eye out for, er, nearby bathrooms as the popular drink has sudden diuretic properties.

## Drinking

Nassau has several fantastic outdoor beach bars accessible by *jitney* or short taxi ride.

**Travellers Rest** (Map p65; ☎ 242-327-7633; W Bay St, Gambier Village) For laid-back ocean views framed by palm trees, hop aboard bus 10 heading west.

**Compass Point Inn** (Map p65; ☎ 242-327-4500; W Bay St, Gambier Village, Nassau) You're three times cooler than you used to be the moment you step onto the inn's thatched deck. Here, a stylish crowd sips potent cocktails with the deep blue sea as a backdrop. Stunning.

**Green Parrot** (Map p68; ☎ 242-322-9248; E Bay St) The beloved original at PI's Hurricane Hole is slated for closure – another victim of Atlantis' continued expansion. This new

outpost, overlooking Nassau Harbour west of the Paradise Island entrance bridge, keeps the cocktails-and-Kalik crowd satisfied with its happy central bar, hearty apps and twinkling harborside views.

## Entertainment

Check hotel lobbies for flyers blaring theme nights and admission specials. Most action starts after 10pm. Downtown, join the sweaty, dancing masses at stylish **Bambu** (Map p71; ☎ 242-326-6627; Prince George Dock), the newest club on the block, which keeps its doors open late for the cruise-ship crowds; perennial favorite **Club Waterloo** (Map p68; ☎ 242-393-7324; E Bay St; admission Fri & Sat US\$20), east of the PI bridges near Fort Montagu, keeps spring-breakers happy with several bars and dance areas.

**Palm Court** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-3301; British Colonial Hilton Nassau, Bay St, Nassau) is a lower key spot, and offers jazz on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights.

## Shopping

The masses flock to Bay St for duty-free liquor, jewelry, perfume and cigars, but savings are not guaranteed. Check prices at home before your trip. Most stores close at night and on Sunday, even when the cruise-ships are in port. Bahamian-made products are sold at booths throughout Festival Place. The Straw Market? Not necessarily.

## CIGARS

Premium Cuban cigars are relatively inexpensive in Nassau. Too bad Uncle Sam prohibits US citizens from importing them.

**Graydiff Cigar Co** (Map p71; ☎ 242-302-9150; W Hill St, Nassau; ☺ 9:30am-7pm Mon-Fri) Castro's own cigar roller, Avelino Lara, oversees fellow Cubans hand-rolling these award-winning cigars; see also p69. Since they're not made with Cuban tobacco, they're permitted by US customs.

## DUTY-FREE GOODS

Designer clothing, leather, linen and perfume outlets blanket Bay St and its offshoots.

**Colombian Emeralds** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-2230; Bay St, Nassau) Bright sparkling emeralds and much more.

**Perfume Shop & Beauty Spot** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-2375; cnr Bay & Frederick Sts, Nassau) Fragrances to the left, cosmetics to the right.

**Solomon's Mines** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-6920; Bay St, Nassau) This jewelry and luxury goods powerhouse first opened in 1908.

**PLUNDER, RUM CAKE & TEA**

**Coin of the Realm** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-4497; Charlotte St, Nassau) Salvaged Spanish doubloons are the coolest find at this busy coin and jewelry shop.

**Pasion Tea & Coffee Company** (Map p71; ☎ 242-327-7011; www.pasionteas.com; Festival Place, Nassau) Look for tropically flavored gourmet teas, created by Bahamian Julie Hoffer, at its stall in Festival Place and at shops throughout town. Hot pepper tonics, spices and bush-medicine-inspired remedies are sold too.

**Plunder at Pirates of Nassau** (Map p71; ☎ 242-356-3759; King & George Sts, Nassau; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12:30pm Sun) Eye patches, black flags, pirate tees and a good selection of pirate lit for buccaneering bookworms.

**Tortuga Rum Cake** (Map p71; Charlotte St) Tasty yes, local no. Tortuga's treats are made in the Cayman Islands. But the samples are delish.

**PARADISE ISLAND**

Paradise Island (PI) glitters off the northern coast of Nassau like a gorgeous siren, luring travelers with easy promises of glistening shores, decadent restaurants and one mind-blowing water park. But tread carefully. Like a true mythological beast, she'll shred the soul of the unprepared visitor – dashing vacation dreams against the rocky shores of outrageous pricing, pre-fab blandness and infuriating indifference.

But she can sure be fun if you know what you're getting into. Known for years as 'Hog Island' – for the pigs once raised there – PI took steps toward respectability in 1939 when Dr Axel Wenner-Gren, a Swedish industrialist, developed his own Shangri-La here. He spruced up his holdings – creating the sweeping 35-acre Versailles Gardens – before selling them to the equally wealthy Huntington Hartford. Hartford developed a golf resort and marina, simultaneously persuading Bahamians to rename the property Paradise Island. Resorts and property here passed through the hands of several more developers, with the majority of it landing in the hands of billionaire Sol Kerzner in 1994. His company South African International owns the ever-expanding Atlantis resort and casino.

Today, two arcing bridges connect the island to Nassau, the first constructed in 1967, the second in 1998. The western bridge leads northbound traffic onto the island while the eastern span leads visitors back to Nassau. The cost to enter is \$1. See p64 for details of transportation from Nassau.

**Information**

**Cyber Café** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-1253; Casino Dr, Paradise Island Shopping Plaza; per hr US\$10; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, until 5pm Sun) Has high-speed internet access.

**News Café** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-4684; Harbour Dr, Hurricane Hole Plaza; per min US\$0.20; ☎ 24hr) Great indie spot for newspapers, magazines, computers and coffee – at least until the rumored Atlantis expansion consumes it. It's US\$3 sign-on plus US\$0.20 per minute for internet access.

**Sights****ATLANTIS AQUARIUMS & AQUAVENTURE**

Strolling through a clear glass tunnel while sharks glide overhead is, simply put, awesome. This underwater thrill is found in the Predator's Lagoon, one of the 'exhibits' in the **Discover Atlantis Tour** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-3000; adult/hotel guest/child US\$32/free/22; ☎ 9am-5pm), a popular walking tour meandering past big-windowed aquariums and predator-filled lagoons. Buy tickets outside the Dig, a faux archaeological site on the lower level of the Royal Towers lobby. Look for manta rays, spiny lobsters, striped Nemos, translucent jellyfish and thousands of other underwater creatures – 250 species and 70,000 fish to be specific.

Arrive early to beat oppressive crowds. Since the biggest windows lack any fish-identifying signage, join one of the regularly departing guided tours but stick close to the guide – they move fast and can be hard to hear. See the desk for tour times.

And then there's the Atlantis' astounding **Aquaventure** (Map p68; adult/hotel guest/child US\$105/free/75). No matter how much you despise 'imagineered' reality, the resort's newly enhanced 63-acre water park is likely to change your mind. Plummet down a 50ft waterslide, bob over 4ft waves on a mile-long river ride, or float through a shark-filled lagoon from the safety of a long clear tube. It's 20 million gallons of liquid fun – almost enough to make you forget how expensive it all is. You can purchase tickets at Guest Services inside Royal Towers.

**BEACHES**

You don't have to overnight at a posh seaside resort to enjoy the gorgeous white sand of **Cabbage Beach** (Map p65) – though it helps. For nonguests, there's a public access path through the pines east of RIU Hotel on

Casino Dr. This 2-mile beach is perfect for people-watching, indolent lounging and water sports. Another beauty, **Paradise Beach** (Map p68), curves around the northwest side of the island. With the recent completion of the sleek Cove hotel at Atlantis, however, a bit of this paradise has been lost.

### GARDENS

Paradise Island Dr runs through **Versailles Gardens** (Map p68). Developed as a hideaway by industrialist Axel Wenner-Gren in 1939 and modeled on Versailles, this lovely sweeping 35-acre (14-hectare) tiered garden is lined with fountains and classical statues depicting the millionaire's heroes.

At the southern crest is **Cloisters** (Map p68), a romantic gazebo overlooking the harbour. This genuine 14th-century cloister was purchased by newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst from an Augustine estate in France.

Visitors are welcome to wander the gardens but don't dare place a toe onto the restricted One & Only Ocean Club next door. Security is on high alert for peasants at this uber-exclusive resort, with the Club clearly forgetful of the fates of the cake-eating denizens of the original Versailles.

### Activities

See p70 for details of activities. Many outfitters depart the Paradise Island Ferry Terminal underneath the PI Exit Bridge.

### Sleeping

**Comfort Suites** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-3680, 1-800-228-5150; [www.comfortsuites.com](http://www.comfortsuites.com); Casino Dr; r incl breakfast US\$350; 📺 📺 📺) Occupants of this all-suites hotel enjoy full guest privileges at neighboring Atlantis, typically at a much better rate. The rooms are slightly bigger than average, with a sitting area, and include a refrigerator and safe. The continental breakfast, served by the pool, is substantial. There's also a guest laundry. Wi-fi is US\$5 per hour.

**Atlantis** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-3000; [www.atlantis.com](http://www.atlantis.com); Atlantis Resort, Paradise Island; r US\$425-495; 📺 📺 📺) If Disneyland, Vegas and Sea World birthed a lovechild, this watery wonderland would be its overpriced but oddly irresistible spawn. The newest addition to this busy multitowered megaresort is the stylish, all-suites the Cove, catering to adults and children over 12. Prices vary, with costs

typically increasing as you move west from the Beach Tower toward the Cove. The resort boasts 20 restaurants and lounges (not including those in adjacent Marina Village), three shopping areas, a kid's club and a library; and an entertainment complex with a casino, comedy club and theater. Check for resort packages. Give your patience a workout before your stay – staff can be surprisingly unhelpful. See opposite for information on Aquaventure.

### Eating & Drinking

**Anthony's Grill** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-3152; Casino Dr, Paradise Island Shopping Center; mains US\$9-29; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Burgers, pasta, nachos and a few Bahamian specialties crowd the menu at this family-friendly, reasonably priced spot that's off the Atlantis compound.

**Nobu** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-3000 ext 29; Royal Towers, Atlantis; mains \$14-49) Trendy Zen decor complements top-notch sushi and high-grade celebs. Try the black cod with miso or the yellowtail sashimi.

**Mesa Grill** (Map p68; ☎ 242-363-6925; 1 Casino Dr W, The Cove at Atlantis; mains US\$32-60; 🍷 5:30-10pm) Sip cocktails on cattle-print chairs at Bobby Flay's latest, a southwestern rendezvous inside the ever-so-chic Cove. The spice-rubbed-pork is popular and the *dulce de leche* crepes are *dulce*-delicious for dessert.

## GRAND BAHAMA

pop 47,000

In the Bahamas family of islands, Grand Bahama is the scrappy middle kid – usually overlooked, occasionally knocked down and ultimately misunderstood. The one-two punch for this 85-mile-long isle came in 2004 and 2005 when hurricanes ripped across its low-lying shores, ravaging hotels, restaurants and businesses. While the island was shaking off its daze, its once shy siblings, the Out Islands, charged ahead, establishing distinct personalities and snapping up glossy headlines and ever-so-fickle celebs.

But who needs glitz and glamour when you've got fish-filled reefs, tree-lined nature walks, kayak-friendly creeks and dolphins ready for kisses? Grand Bahama is slowly realizing its nature-minded strengths and is poised to strut its stuff as the best Bahamian bet for outdoor adventure and ecotravel. It just needs to spread the word – and quick –



before the megaresorts swoop in, gobble up the goodies and ruin it all. Which is a distinct possibility now that Ginn sur Mer, a massive hotel-condo-marina complex, is rumbling toward completion on the western shore.

For now, take the nature tour, kayak under the mangroves, ride a horse along the sand – prices are right and the best views still open to the public. At times the island can be frustrating – unexplained closings, indifferent customer service – but if you take time to see what's under the surface, you'll probably like what you find. Best of all, it's only 95 miles from Ft Lauderdale.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

For international and regional flight information, see p107 and p108.

### BOAT

For information on mail boats to/from Nassau, see p109.

Pinder's Ferry runs a small boat – maximum 20 people – from MacLean's Town, Grand Bahama, to Crown Haven, Abaco.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**Grand Bahama International Airport** (Map p81; ☎ 242-352-6020) lies 2 miles (3.2km) north of Freeport. There's no bus service to or from the airport. However, car-rental booths are based in the arrivals hall and taxis meet each flight. Displayed fares are set by the government. Taxi rides for two people to/from the airport to Freeport are US\$11, and US\$20 to/from Lucaya. Each additional passenger costs US\$3.

### BUS

A handful of private minibuses operate as 'public buses' on assigned routes from the bus station in Freeport at the City Market parking lot (formerly Winn Dixie Plaza), traveling as far afield as West End and McLean's Town. Buses are frequent and depart when the driver decides he has enough passengers. The bus stop in Freeport is at the parking area behind the International Bazaar; and the bus stop in Lucaya is on Seahorse Dr, 400 yards (365m) west of Port Lucaya Marketplace.

The eastern end of the island is known as the 'East End' and the western part as the 'West End.' Fares from Freetown include

Port Lucaya Marketplace (US\$1), East End (US\$8, twice daily) and West End (US\$4, twice daily).

A bus usually runs twice daily, morning and afternoon, from downtown's City Market to McLean's Town on Grand Bahama's eastern edge, timed in conjunction with the Pinder's Ferry departure to Crown Haven, Abaco. Ask drivers at City Market which of them is running that route.

Buses will occasionally drop you in taxi-designated city areas for US\$2.

Free shuttles also run from most downtown hotels to the beach and town.

## CAR & SCOOTER

The following companies have car-rental agencies inside or close to the airport. Rentals cost from US\$50 to US\$95 per 24 hours. Collision waiver damage insurance is about US\$17 to US\$18 a day.

**Avis** (☎ 242-352-7666) A quarter of a mile from airport. Look for the shuttle.

**Brad's** (☎ 242-352-7930)

**Dollar** (☎ 242-352-9325)

**Hertz** (☎ 242-352-9277) Across the street from airport. Look for the shuttle.

**KSR Rent A Car** (☎ 242-351-5737)

Scoters are available for rent from the parking lot in front of the Port Lucaya Resort & Yacht Club for US\$50 per day, plus a hefty cash deposit.

## TAXI

You'll find taxis at the airport and major hotels. If you like your driver, ask for his or her card. Some can be quite helpful with trip planning. Fares are fixed by the government for short distances.

You can call for a radio-dispatched taxi from **Freeport Taxi** (☎ 242-352-6666) or **Grand Bahama Taxi Union** (☎ 242-352-7101). **Buddy's Mobile Transportation Service** (☎ 242-646-7287) plans to add a wheelchair lift to its van later this year. **G Cooper's Taxi-Cab Service** (☎ 242-646-3336) was also reliable.

## FREEPORT & LUCAYA

pop 33,000

Freeport and its southeastern suburb Lucaya are the primary settlements on Grand Bahama, dominating the economic, cultural and tourism landscape. Freeport is the sun-parched, slightly sprawling business



center buzzing with banks, insurance companies, the hospital, the library and several tasty Bahamian restaurants. Budget travelers should start their lodging search here, realizing that loss of beach proximity is the trade-off for \$100 rooms. Most hotels provide complimentary shuttles, however, and \$1 *jitneys* regularly bounce back and forth between downtown and the beach.

The party vibe picks up in Lucaya, with yachties, beach bums, divers and gamblers wandering their way into Port Lucaya Marketplace to shop, eat, or hire an outdoor outfitter. Located within steps of Unexso (Underwater Explorers Society), several hotels and Bell Channel Bay, the complex is the hub of the social scene, where you can savor coffee in the morning then knock back a tropical cocktail after a day on the water. And if crowds aren't your thing, try a sunset stroll on gorgeous Lucayan Beach – it's just across the street.

## Information

Free copies of the *Grand Bahamas Trailblazer Map* are stacked in hotel lobbies and tourist shops.

## BOOKSTORES

**H&L Bookstore** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-8947; Port Lucaya Marketplace, Lucaya) Books, magazines and Bahamian maps and history books. Second location across from City Market downtown (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-5470; Freeport).

## EMERGENCY

**Ambulance** (☎ 242-352-2689)

**Police** (☎ 911)

## INTERNET ACCESS

**Charles Hayward Library** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-7048; East Mall Dr, Freeport; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Fantastic used bookstore in back that's popular with yachties. Internet access for \$2.50 per hour.

**Cyber Café** (Map p85; ☎ 242-225-0460; Port Lucaya Marketplace; per 30min US\$5; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun) For long-distance calls and internet access, although rates are expensive.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**LMR Drugs** (Map p82 ☎ 242-352-7327; 1 West Mall Dr, Freeport; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun)

**Lucayan Medical Centre East** (Map p81; ☎ 242-373-7400; East Sunrise Hwy, Freeport)

**Rand Memorial Hospital** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-6735; East Atlantic Dr, Freeport) Entrance on East Mall Dr.

**Sunrise Medical Centre & Hospital** (Map p82; ☎ 242-373-333; E Sunrise Hwy, Lucaya)

## MONEY

**Royal Bank of Canada** Freeport (Map p82; ☎ 242-373-8628; East Mall Dr); Lucaya (☎ 242-352-6631; Port Lucaya Marketplace)

**Scotiabank** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-6774; Regent Centre, Explorers Way, Freeport)

## POST

**FedEx** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-3402; www.fedex.com; Seventeen Centre, cnr Woodstock St & Bank Lane, Freeport)  
**Post office** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-9371; Explorers Way, Freeport)

## TELEPHONE

**BaTelCo** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-6220; Pioneer's Way, Freeport) Public phones can be found here.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Grand Bahama Island Tourism Board** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-8044; www.grand-bahama.com; Poinciana Dr, Freeport)

**Tourism information booth** (Map p81; ☎ 242-352-2052; Grand Bahama International Airport)

## Dangers & Annoyances

At night use caution downtown near City Market and west of Freeport at Pinder's Point and Eight Mile. Post hurricanes there have been problems with street lighting in some of these areas and there have been some reports of drug-related violence.

## Sights

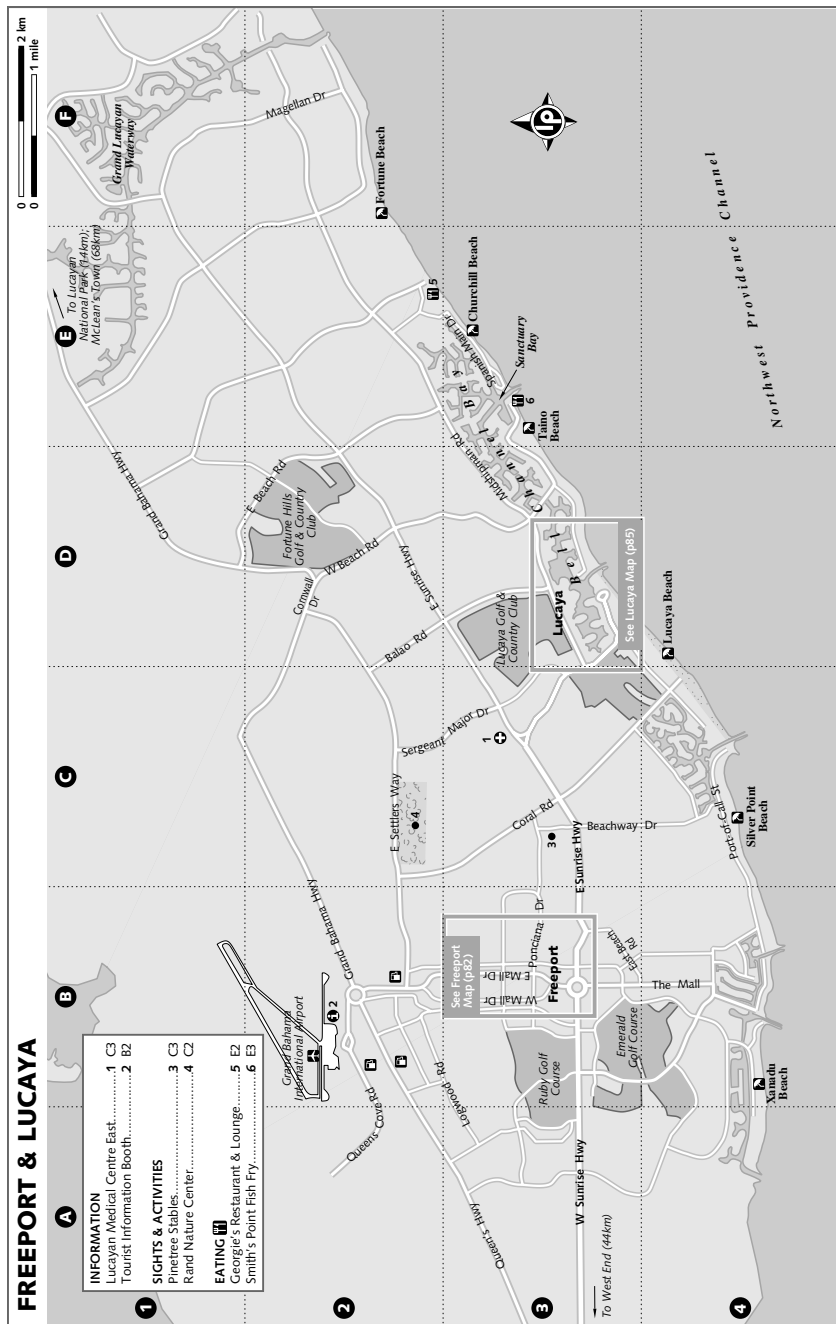
### PORT LUCAYA MARKETPLACE & MARINA COMPLEX

A 12-acre (4.8-hectare) shopping, dining and entertainment area, **Port Lucaya Marketplace** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-8446; www.portlucaya.com) fronts the Port Lucaya Marina. Together they form an integrated yacht basin and waterfront tourism area, much more appealing than the International Bazaar. At its heart beats **Count Basie Sq**, where everything from church choirs to Junkanoo bands perform on weekends.

## BEACHES

In Port Lucaya, the best beaches include **Silver Point** (Map p81) and **Lucayan Beach** (Map p85). For a nice sunset stroll, start at



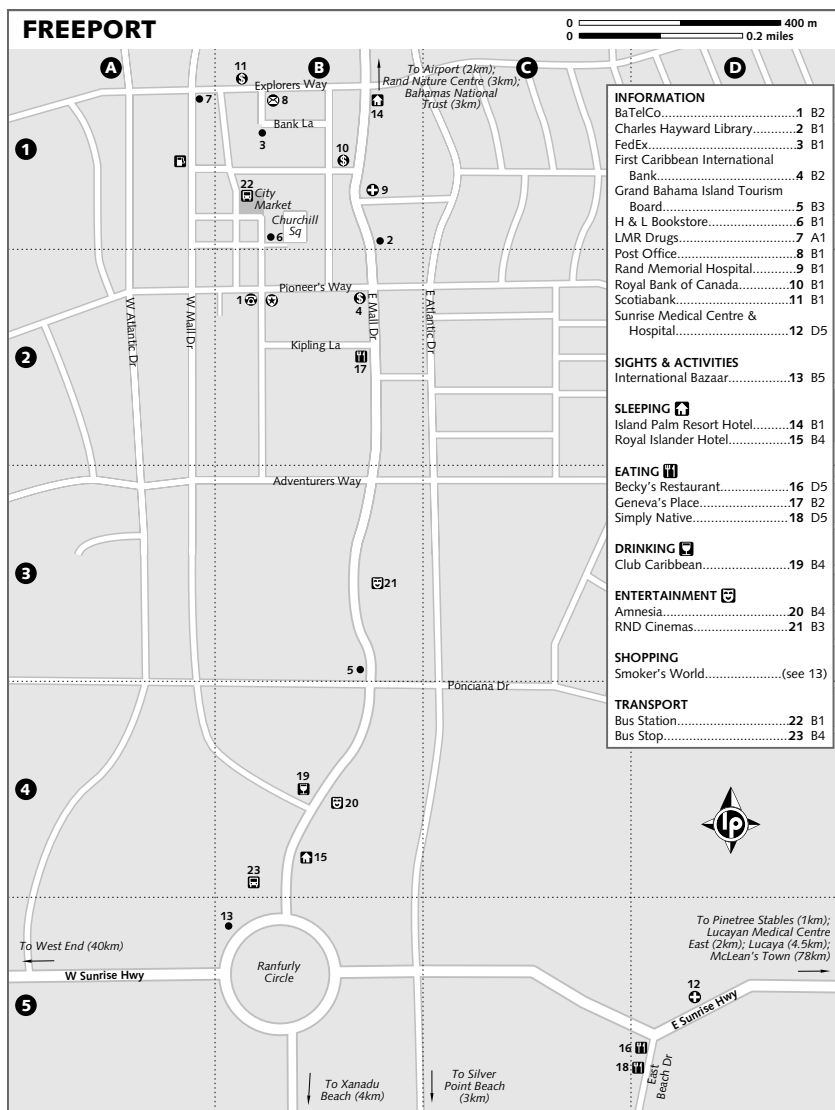


Lucayan Beach and walk west. Crowds thin and views expand as you approach Silver Point. **Taino Beach** (Map p81) offers a long stretch of fine sand and if your timing's right you might stumble upon a beachfront conch stand allegedly selling some of the island's best conch salad. **Churchill Beach** (Map p81) and **Fortune Beach** (Map p81) extend several

miles east of Taino Beach; and the stunning **Gold Rock Beach** (Map p78) preens just south of Lucayan National Park, about 20 miles away. It's worth the trip.

### INTERNATIONAL BAZAAR

If you doubt the strength of your soul, avoid this pit of despair (Map p82). Abandoned res-



taurants, empty alleyways, suspicious shopkeepers, Japanese *torii* gates to nowhere – it's a wonder this 'marketplace' still adorns every tourist map. If dragged here against your will, the Straw Market, Smoker's World and China Arts & Handicraft are worth a brief look.

## Activities

### BIRD-WATCHING & NATURE WALKS

**Rand Nature Centre** (Map p81; ☎ 242-352-5438; www.thebahamasnationaltrust.org; adult/child US\$5/3; 🕒 9am-4:30pm Sun-Fri) Bird-watchers and nature hikers can spend a tranquil hour or two exploring tree-canopied trails and meditating by a quiet pond at this 100-acre reserve run by the Bahamas National Trust. This nonprofit conservation agency manages the country's 25 national parks and has its local headquarters here. An exhibit area in the main building has loads of books on Bahamian flora and fauna as well as handouts on endangered Bahamian species. Don't miss the peacocks and red-tailed hawk just outside the main building. Hour-long tours depart on Tuesday and Thursday at 10:30am.

### DIVING & SNORKELING

Diving is excellent here. One prime site is the *Theo* wreck, a 230ft-long (73m) sunken freighter with safe swim-through areas; and East End Paradise, an underwater coral range. Another good spot is Deadman's Reef, off Paradise Cove; see p87 for details.

**Pat & Diane Fantasia Tours** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-8681; www.snorkelingbahamas.com; behind Port Lucaya Resort) Offers half-day snorkeling trips on a double deck catamaran (adult/child US\$40/20) to a shallow coral reef.

**Seaworld Explorer** (☎ 242-373-7863; adult/child US\$45/25) Ogle tropical fish in their natural habitat from the comfort of a 'semi-submarine' – a 49ft boat with a glass-bottom hull. Trip includes 30 minutes of snorkeling. It provides a courtesy van to and from your hotel.

**Underwater Explorers Society** (Unexo; Map p85; ☎ 242-373-1244; www.unexo.com; Port Lucaya Marina) One of the biggest draws on the island, Unexo offers a full range of dive programs, including a two-tank dive to the *Theo* wreck (US\$89), a shark dive (US\$89) and a night dive (US\$70). The Open Ocean Dolphin Experience allows interaction with trained dolphins in their natural element, the open sea, for US\$199.

### FISHING

The Gulf Stream, off the west coast of Grand Bahama, teems with game fish. The Northwest Providence Channel drops to 2000ft (609m)

just 400 yards (365m) off the south shore, where snapper and barracuda are prevalent. Bonefishing is superb on the flats of the Little Bahama Bank to the north and east of the island.

**Reef Tours Ltd** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-5880; Port Lucaya Marina) offers 3¼-hour bottom-fishing tours (adult/child US\$50/35) that travel about two miles out. Bait and tackle included. For deep-sea fishers, there's a half-day trip (adult/spectator US\$110/50) going six miles out. Prey can include mahi mahi, barracuda, wahoo and yellow-fin tuna.

### HORSEBACK RIDING

**Pinetree Stables** (Map p81; ☎ 242-373-3600; www.pinetree-stables.com; Beachway Dr, Freeport) offers two-hour horseback rides (US\$85) through pine forests and along a southern beach. Guides provide ecominded information on local woodlands and birds.

### KAYAKING

**Grand Bahama Nature Tours** (☎ 242-373-2485; www.gbntours.com) Enthusiastic, knowledgeable guides lead a variety of active ecotrips outside Freeport. Kayak through a mangrove forest (US\$79), paddle across the sea to a gorgeous cay (US\$79), bike along the beach (US\$79) or bounce through the backcountry in an open-top jeep (US\$99). The kayaking tour includes an interesting stop at the caves in Lucayan National Park and a picnic lunch on Gold Rock Beach where a Disney-esque family of raccoons begs for scraps.

### WATER SPORTS & BOAT TRIPS

**Lucaya Watersports & Tours** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-4677; www.lucayawatersports.com; Seahorse Rd, Port Lucaya) offers a variety of trips and rentals for water rats of every age and courage level, most leaving from Flamingo Bay Marina at Taino Beach. Trips include a 90-minute waverunner island tour (US\$120 for two-seater), a banana boat ride (adult/child \$15/10) and parasailing (US\$60). There's also a two hour sunset cruise offering unlimited Bahama Mamas (US\$45). Kayak and waverunner rentals also available.

### Festivals & Events

For information on these festivals and events and many others, contact the **Grand Bahama Island Tourism Board** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-8044; www.grand-bahama.com; Poinciana Dr, Freeport).

## PIRATE HUNTING

Like any self-respecting Bahamian island, Grand Bahama has a pirate-filled past, though evidence tends toward the celluloid variety. In 2005 an infusion of Hollywood cash boosted the economy when *Pirates of the Caribbean II* and *III* spent several months filming at Gold Rock Creek. The massive shell of a faux-ship from the movie now glowers like a nautical Ozymandias from a sandy grave just east of Lucayan National Park. To get there, take the first major dirt road on your right after passing the park (a few hundred yards), drive toward the beach and there she lays, visible through the fencing.

**Conch Cracking Contest** In October, sleepy McLean's Town, at the east end of the island, hosts this contest. It's not much fun for the conch, but a great day for the humans.

**Junkanoo Parade** Held on Boxing Day and New Year's Day. For more details, see the boxed text, p73.

## Sleeping

Budget options are hard to find. However, nearly all accommodations reviewed here offer great specials, even in high season. Expect heavy additional taxes and daily service charges nonetheless.

## FREEPORT

**Island Palm Resort** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-6648; <http://bahamasvg.com/islandsisters.html>; East Mall Dr, Freeport; r US\$89; 📶 📺 📺) Pastels and palm trees give this 143-room property a beachy feel, even though it's nowhere close to the ocean. This carefree vibe continues inside the mid-sized, slightly spare rooms where tropical bedspreads and bright pictures keep things festive. An inviting L-shaped pool attracts sun-loving guests not up for a ride on the courtesy beach shuttle. Five minutes from the airport.

**Royal Islander Hotel** (Map p82; ☎ 242-351-6000; [www.royalislanderhotel.com](http://www.royalislanderhotel.com); East Mall Dr, Freeport; r US\$100; 📶 📺 📺) Bold floral-print bedspreads, colorful pictures and faux rattan furniture keep things bright at this well-traveled property. Mid-sized rooms surround a courtyard pool and come with in-room safe, cable TV and phone. Late-night partiers will appreciate the proximity of two popular clubs, Amnesia and Club Caribbean. Wi-fi access costs US\$10 per day.

## LUCAYA

**Port Lucaya Resort & Yacht Club** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-6618; [www.portlucayaresort.com](http://www.portlucayaresort.com); Bell Channel Rd; r/stc US\$112/196; 📶 📺 📺) The word 'resort' might be stretching it, but the 10 brightly painted buildings here are a convenient, serviceable option for families, divers and budget-minded groups. Red-tiled floors, lots of mirrors and beds sporting green-and-blue jungle-flora prints distract from slightly shabby, not-entirely-chic furniture. All rooms have a patio or balcony. It's adjacent to Port Lucaya Marketplace.

**Flamingo Bay Hotel & Marina** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-5640; [www.tainobeach.com/flamingo](http://www.tainobeach.com/flamingo); Jolly Roger Drive; r US\$120; 📶 📺 📺) If you don't mind a short water shuttle ride to get to the action, this three-story hotel on the east side of Bell Channel is a reasonably priced alternative to the larger resorts near the marketplace. Guests enjoy full use of the pool, beach and business center at Taino Resort, the hotel's sister property and have easy access to several small outfitters docked out back. Bright, mid-sized rooms include a small kitchenette and there's a laundry on site. Service can be a bit nonchalant.

**Sheraton & Westin Grand Bahama Island Our Lucaya Resort** (Map p85; ☎ Sheraton 242-373-1444, Westin 242-373-1333; [www.starwoodhotels.com](http://www.starwoodhotels.com); Seahorse Rd, Port Lucaya; Sheraton r US\$129, Westin r US\$279; 📶 📺 📺) Incorporating two hotels, the Sheraton and Westin, this perfectly coiffed beachfront complex hogs the best views of stunning Lucayan Beach. The resort sits on 7.5 acres (2.8 hectares) and incorporates numerous restaurants, bars, a casino, three fabulous swimming pools, kids' facilities, the Port Lucaya Marketplace & Village promenade of boutiques, cafés, bars and shops and two 18-hole golf courses, all linked by a 0.75-mile (1.2km) boardwalk. The ambience at the pricier Westin is a bit more sophisticated and low-key. Don't miss the towering palms in the two-story lobby. Rates seem to have actually gone down in the last few years. Free wi-fi access is available in the lobbies.

**Pelican Bay at Lucaya** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-9550, 800-600-9192; [www.pelicanbayhotel.com](http://www.pelicanbayhotel.com); Seahorse Rd, Port Lucaya; r US\$179; 📶 📺 📺) A burbling pineapple fountain greets guests at this upscale retreat where crisp, monochromatic buildings stand in secluded attention between Port Lucaya Marketplace and Bell Channel. The beach chic allure continues inside the 182 rooms, with wicker furniture and bold green bedspreads

enlivening standard rooms. Three pools and proximity to Unexso round out the appeal.

**Villas at Paradise Cove** (☎ 242-349-2677; www.deadmansreef.com; r per week US\$1400; ♿) Rebuilt after the recent hurricanes, the two oceanfront cottages here have a relaxed, beachy style incorporating white wicker furniture, ceiling fans and a screened porch with a view. Best part? Unbeatable access to one of the island's top snorkeling spots at Deadman's Reef. Telephone, TV and full kitchen in both villas. Nightly rentals also available.

## Eating & Drinking

Downtown restaurants and the Wednesday night fish fry serve up the best traditional Bahamian meals. Most restaurants are open 'until' – meaning until the last person goes home. For a variety of cuisines, stick to Port Lucaya Marketplace. Live music and dancing often feature at Count Basie Sq here on Thursday nights and weekends.

## FREEPORT

For Bahamian cooking in town, consider these recommended spots:

**Simply Native** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-5003; East Beach Dr; mains US\$6-12; ☎ from 8am) Hands-down best grits we have had in ages. If you want to try chicken souse, johnnycakes and other traditional Bahamian dishes – and eat where locals eat – ditch Port Lucaya and come here. Hanging baskets of flowers don't go far in sprucing up the dim, wood-railed dining room but who cares, just pass the grits.

**Geneva's Place** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-5085; cnr East Mall Dr & Kipling Lane; mains US\$6-17; ☎ from 7am) Don't be deterred by the shale-strewn lawn and the it's-not-clear-I'm-open exterior. The ambience improves inside with friendly waitresses, colorful murals and lots of open space. Peas-and-rice accompany every main at this long-popular spot where cracked conch and stew fish are most requested.

**Becky's Restaurant** (Map p82; ☎ 242-352-5247; East Beach Dr; mains US\$6-18; ☎ breakfast, lunch, dinner) Simply Native's popular neighbor is also good, and serves American dishes as well as Bahamian.

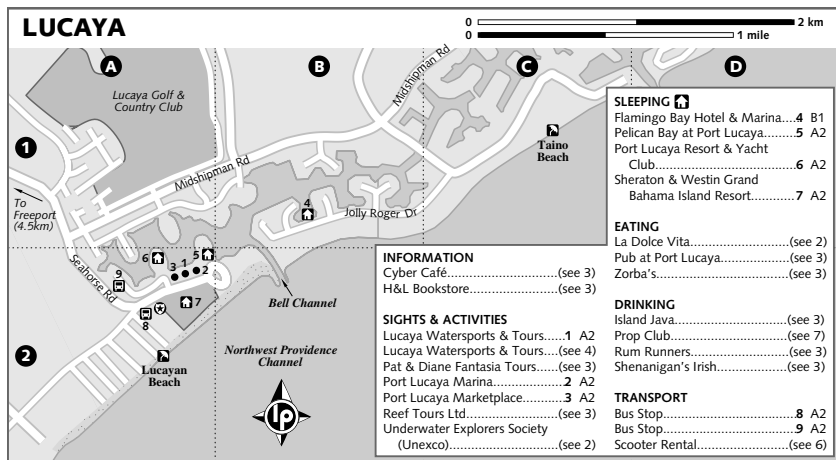
## LUCAYA

The following eateries and bars are located in the Port Lucaya Marketplace or across the street at the Sheraton & Westin complex.

**Zorba's** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-6137; mains US\$7-26; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Savor souvlaki and spanakopitas beneath a canopy of grapevines and pink bougainvillea at this reasonably priced and commonly recommended Greek diner in the heart of the marketplace.

**Pub at Port Lucaya** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-8450; mains US\$10-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) There's a choice for every palate at this busy corner spot beside Count Basie Square and the marina. Staples are burgers, grilled fish and a few British dishes including shepherd's pie.

**La Dolce Vita** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-8652; mains US\$13-29; ☎ dinner) For a 'sexy' meal, locals recommend La Dolce Vita, a romantic bay-side rendezvous where fine Italian dishes are



served under twinkling lights. Settle in on the plantation-style porch or the brick-lined patio for yacht-filled marina views.

For coffee or cocktails, consider:

**Island Java** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-6137) Linger over lattes and pastries at batik-covered patio tables at this brand new Java joint. Friendly staff are a bonus.

**Rum Runners** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-7233) Follow the laughter and crowds to Rum Runners, a jovial watering hole overlooking Count Basie Sq.

**Shenanigan's Irish Pub** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-4734) For Guinness and lively conversation.

**Prop Club Beach Bar** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-1333; Sheraton Hotel) At sunset, walk straight past the propellers and wingnut decor. Grab a stool on the patio. Order a cocktail. Repeat as needed.

## TAINO BEACH

If you're exasperated by indifferent service and high prices in town, these friendly outposts will re-affirm your faith in Bahamian hospitality.

**Smith's Point Fish Fry** (Map p81; Taino Beach; mains US\$10-22; ☎ from 6pm Wed) Smitty's is the place to be on Wednesday nights. Locals and tourists alike queue for grouper, lobster and snapper, all fried up under a bustling beachfront shack.

**our pick** **Georgie's Restaurant & Lounge** (Map p81; ☎ 242-373-8513; Mather Town off Mid-shipman Rd; mains \$10-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) Formerly Club Caribe, Georgie's is owned by friendly George Gibson – who might just pick you up from your hotel if you need a ride. Complement an order of can't-miss cracked conch and peas-and-rice with a sunset view on the wooden deck. Waitress Faith Rolle will steer you right with her menu and traveling tips. Live music on Saturdays.

There's usually a line, so grab a Kalik at the **Outrigger Beach Club** (☎ 242-373-4811) next door then make a few friends while you wait. A DJ mixes things up around 7:30pm – a reggae version of 'Cotton-Eyed Joe'? Every taxi driver knows how to get here. Recommended.

## Entertainment

**Galleria 5 Cinemas** (Map p82; ☎ 242-351-9190; RND Plaza, East Atlantic Mall Dr, Freeport; admission adults/children US\$7/3) Five-screen cinema showing mainstream hits.

**Amnesia** (Map p82; ☎ 242-351-2582; East Mall Dr, Freeport; ☎ 9pm-late Thu, Fri & Sat) This tropical-themed nightclub has a state-of-the-art light-

and-sound system blending reggae, soca, goombay and hip-hop. Hours and admission fees vary, so check beforehand.

The resorts offer in-house entertainment, while the **Port Lucaya Marketplace** (Map p85; ☎ 242-373-8446; www.portlucaya.com) hosts live music Thursday to Sunday. This is a great open-air setting, with a stage and dance floor surrounded by open bars and cafés.

## EAST OF FREEPORT

East of the Grand Lucayan Waterway (a 7.5-mile, or 12km, canal), the Grand Bahama Hwy runs parallel to the shore to the east end of the island. Side roads lead to the south shore's talcum-powder-soft beaches.

### Peterson Cay National Park

This 1.5-acre (0.6-hectare) park is the only cay on Grand Bahama's south shore. It's a popular getaway, busy with locals' boats on weekends. Coral reefs provide splendid snorkeling and diving. You can hire a boat from any marina in Freeport and Lucaya. Take snorkel gear and a picnic. Also try Grand Bahama Nature Tours (p83).

### Lucayan National Park

This 40-acre (16-hectare) park is Grand Bahama's finest treasure. About 25 miles east of Ranfurly Circle, the park is known for its underwater cave system, which is one of the longest in the world. Visitors can easily check out two of the caves via a short footpath. Bones of the island's earliest inhabitants, the Lucayans, were discovered in **Burial Mound**, the second cave, in 1986. The park is also unique because it's home to all six of the Bahamas' vegetation zones.

Mangrove trails spill out onto the secluded and beautiful **Gold Rock Beach**, definitely worth a stop if you're out this way. Watch your food at the picnic area near the beach, the raccoons are unabashed – but harmless – beggars.

For park entry conditions and further information contact the **Bahamas National Trust** (☎ 242-352-5438; www.thebahamasnationaltrust.org; E Settlers Way, Freeport) or stop by its office at the Rand Nature Center (p83) east of downtown.

## WEST OF FREEPORT

West of Freeport, a slender, scrub-covered peninsula, separated from the 'mainland' by



Freeport Harbour Channel, extends north-west to West End.

The channel opens to **Hawksbill Creek**, named for the once-common marine turtles that now only infrequently come ashore. There's good diving offshore, especially at Deadman's Reef at **Paradise Cove** (☎ 242-349-2677; www.deadmansreef.com). This mini-resort sits on one of the few beaches on the west coast, about 15 miles west of downtown Freeport, and it's a fun place to spend a beach day. Snorkeling here is great for newbies and pros alike, just walk into the surf then kick your way to the reefs for an assortment of tropical fish. Not a snorkeler? Lounging on the beach, kayaking, playing volleyball and enjoying a burger and Kalik at the resort's tiny Red Bar are also on tap. Word to the wise, irritating the fry cook may result in momentary unpleasantness. Snorkel Tour A includes lunch and hotel pick-up (adult/child US\$35/23). There's a small access fee if you don't take the tour.

## OUT ISLANDS

Just when the glossy mags started tout-ing the Out Islands as 'in,' the Ministry of Tourism slapped a new label on them and confused the issue. In order to highlight the slower pace and small-town values of the islands scattered beyond New Providence and Grand Bahama, they're now also marketed as 'the Family Islands.' Whatever you call them, it's hard to deny the allure of the quiet rhythms and unspoiled views that make the Out Islands the best of the Bahamas for off-the-beaten-path exploring.

### ABACOS

pop 13,200

Though the Out Islands might rightly be described as sleepy, the Abacos will be the first to shake off the snooze. Yachtsmen and divers flock to this glittering crescent of islands and cays – stretching south for 200 miles just east of Grand Bahama – for stellar sailing, spectacular reef diving and sunny ports-of-call.

The main island is 130-mile-long Abaco, with most Abaconians living in bustling Marsh Harbour. Home to the Out Islands' only stoplight – a lone beacon of either progress or doom depending on who's got your ear – this marina-crammed community is a prime launch pad for exploring the sur-

rounding cays and reefs. The Loyalist Cays – Elbow, Great Guana, Man O' War and Green Turtle – beckon offshore just a short ferry ride away. Named after the 18th-century settlers who came here to avoid prosecution during the American Revolution, they're an inviting collection of clapboard homes, narrow streets and chock-a-block museums. The Great Abaco Barrier Reef, allegedly the third largest in the world, lures divers and snorkelers alike, with some of the best snorkeling just a short kick from shore.

But it's not all fish and history. The Abacos may be most fondly known for their fantastic island bars – Miss Emily's Blue Bee and Nippers to name two – which make this lovely chain the best Bahamian spot for a yacht crawl.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

For information on air travel to the Abacos, see p106 and p108.

#### Boat

**Bahamas Ferries** (☎ 242-323-2166; www.bahamas.com) runs between Sandy Point, Great Abaco and Nassau. There was no bus service at press time between Marsh Harbour and Sandy Point, which is 60 miles south of the city. This means that savings garnered from the ferry may be lost on cab fare – which is about \$120. Scaredy-cat flyers won't care.

There's also a ferry between Grand Bahama and Little Abaco and a mail boat between Nassau and Abaco (see p108 for details).

### GETTING AROUND

#### Boat

Ferry schedules can be found on maps, in the *Abaconian*, or on the websites for Abaco and Albury's ferries. You can set your watch by the latter. Get there on time.

**Abaco Ferry** (☎ 242-367-3277; www.abacoferry.com; round trip adult/under 6yr/child US\$20/free/10) The new kid on the block offers prices slightly cheaper than Albury's. Its dock is the second one on the right as you approach the end of Bay St. They travel to Hopetown and White Sound.

**Albury's Ferry Service** (☎ 242-367-0290; www.alburysferry.com; round trip adult/under 6yr/child US\$22/free/11) operates scheduled daily water taxis to Elbow (Hope Town), Man O' War and Great



Guana Cays. The dock for Elbow and Man O' War ferries is first on your right at the east end of Bay St; the dock for Guana Cay is at Conch Inn Marina. One-way tickets are \$16 for adults, \$8 for kids.

**Green Turtle Ferry** (☎ 242-365-4166; round trip tickets adult/child US\$15/8) departs from the ferry dock just south of Treasure Cay airport and arrives at the New Plymouth ferry dock on Green Turtle Cay 12 minutes later. One-way tickets are US\$10 for adults, US\$5 for children.

### Bus

Call the **Abaco Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 242-367-3067) for the latest information on who, if anyone, is running bus service between Crown Haven and Marsh Harbour. Otherwise pray for a cab or hitch. This trip can be an adventure if ill-prepared.

### Car, Motorcycle & Golf Cart

**Rental Wheels** (☎ 242-367-4643; Bay St, Marsh Harbour; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) has rental rates as follows: bicycles US\$10/45 per day/week and cars US\$65/300 per day/week. You need a motorcycle license for the motorbikes, which cost US\$45/200 per day/week. The economy cars book fast, so call ahead.

Golf carts can be hired on the cay docks for around US\$50 per day.

### Taxi

Taxi fares are pre-established. A ride between Marsh Harbour's airport and most hotels is US\$12 for two people. Taxis run up and down Bay St and are easy to flag down. Also try the Curly Tails parking lot at the ferry dock. **Knowles Taxi Service** (☎ 242-359-6270) has two vans.

The cab ride from Marsh Harbor to Treasure Cay and the Green Turtle ferry dock can cost \$60 one way – for a 17-mile trip! It's cheaper to rent a car for the day.

### Marsh Harbour

Home to the Abacos' one stoplight and countless curly-tailed lizards, Marsh Harbour is the place to stock up on supplies, check emails, get cash and take advantage of culinary diversity. Many hotels and restaurants cluster around the Conch Inn & Marina on Bay St, just east of Don McKay Blvd. Traffic here and downtown has gotten heavy surprisingly quickly and the flow of trucks filled with construction workers seems constant during daylight hours.

Like many communities in the Bahamas, Marsh Harbour is facing potentially long-term problems resulting from ill-planned development, absentee homeowners and environmental degradation. Just read the editorial page of the *Abaconian* and its letters to the editor for a summary of the conflicts. Prominent locals have taken the initiative environmentally through **Friends of the Environment** ([www.friendsoftheenvironment.org](http://www.friendsoftheenvironment.org)), which highlights key eco-issues through education and communitywide projects.

The ferry docks for Elbow Cay and Man O' War are at the eastern end of Bay St. and the Guana Cay ferry stops beside the Conch Inn. For Treasure Cay, follow the Bootle Hwy 17 miles north from Marsh Harbour. The Green Turtle Cay ferry dock is a few miles further north off the Bootle.

### INFORMATION

Public telephones can be found at BaTelCo and the Conch Inn & Marina, and scattered throughout downtown. The Abacos' free and helpful weekly, *The Abaconian*, provides ferry schedules, taxi cab fares and phone numbers for restaurants, fishing guides and rental companies. The websites [www.go-abacos.com](http://www.go-abacos.com), [www.abacolife.com](http://www.abacolife.com) and [www.abacomessageboard.com](http://www.abacomessageboard.com) are also helpful.

Abaco Life sells the informative *Map of the Abacos* (US\$3), which has helpful drawings of Great Abaco, Marsh Harbour and the busiest cays, plus ferry schedules. The free, bright yellow Abaco maps are also good, if not quite as comprehensive.

**Bahamas Family Market** (☎ 242-367-3714; cnr Queen Elizabeth Dr & Don McKay Blvd) Enjoy a homemade meat pie while internet surfing at this popular local market. It's US\$2 for 10 minutes.

**Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 242-367-3067; Memorial Plaza, Queen Elizabeth Dr; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

**Hospital clinic** (☎ 242-367-2510)

**Out Island Internet** (☎ 242-367-3006; Queen Elizabeth Dr) Offers wi-fi packages for those cruising the cays, starting at \$US10 for 12 hours. On-site internet rates are US\$5 for 20 minutes then US\$0.25 for each additional minute.

**Police** (☎ 242-367-2560; 911 emergencies)

**Post office** (☎ 242-367-2571)

**Royal Bank of Canada** (☎ 242-367-2420) ATM.

**Scotiabank** (☎ 242-367-2141) ATM.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Most outfitters in Marsh Harbour are clustered on Bay St east of Don McKay Blvd. A

few sights and tour companies are based in Treasure Cay, about 17 miles north.

## Beaches

**Treasure Cay Beach** is the pin-up girl of the Abacos. Located about 17 miles north of Marsh Harbour, her white sand and turquoise shallows garner kudos from travel magazines as well as one reality TV family – the Rolloffs, whose popular Learning Channel show *Little People, Big World* followed them here in 2007.

## Diving & Snorkeling

Wade in and try the snorkeling at Mermaid Reef on the north side of the city.

**Bahamas Underground** (☎ 242-359-6128; [www.bahamasunderground.com](http://www.bahamasunderground.com); Marsh Harbour) is best for advanced divers who want to explore underwater caves and blue holes. Guide and co-owner Brian Kakuk is a local diving legend with more than 17 years' experience exploring the region's intricate cave systems. Call for details.

**Dive Abaco** (☎ 242-367-2787; [www.diveabaco.com](http://www.diveabaco.com); Conch Inn Resort & Marina, Marsh Harbour) has two-tank dives (US\$100), two-tank shark dives (US\$135) and night dives (US\$100), as well as wreck and inland blue-hole trips. Daily and weekly rentals also available.

## Boat Trips & Fishing

Sailboats and motorboats can be rented at most marinas. Demand often exceeds supply, so reserve early. See the Visitors' Guide in the weekly *Abaconian* for a full listing of rental companies.

**Blue Wave Boat Rentals** (☎ 242-367-3910; [www.bluewaverentals.com](http://www.bluewaverentals.com); Harbour View Marina, Bay St) charges US\$200 per day, US\$500 for three days and US\$1000 per week for its 21ft boats.

**CJ's Abaco Dorado Boat Rentals** (☎ 242-367-1035; [www.abacodoradoboatrentals.com](http://www.abacodoradoboatrentals.com); Conch Inn Marina, Bay St) rents 22ft (6.7m) boats for US\$200 a day, US\$1085 a week. Newly available are 26ft (8m) boats with GPS navigation systems for \$350 per day or \$1400 per week.

**Captain Justin Sands** (☎ 242-367-3526; [www.bahamasvg.com/justfish.html](http://www.bahamasvg.com/justfish.html)) is a highly recommended bonefishing guide who will prepare and price tailor-made trips for you.

## SLEEPING

Marsh Harbour is a good central base for those day-tripping to the various cays. The

occasional brief electrical outage seems to be a common problem.

**Conch Inn Marina & Hotel** (☎ 242-367-4000; [www.go-abacos.com/conchinn](http://www.go-abacos.com/conchinn); Bay St; r US\$130; ☎ ☎) Yachties, divers and cay hoppers inevitably buzz past this queen bee during extended Abaco vacations. Adjacent to a busy marina, Curly Tails restaurant, Dive Abaco and the Guana Cay dock, it's a well-situated gateway for exploring. Mid-sized rooms have white tile floors, wicker-style furniture, a fridge and a coffee maker. A few rooms have occasional hot water problems, so ask before you book.

**Lofty Fig Villas** (☎ 242-367-2681; [www.loftyfig.com](http://www.loftyfig.com); Bay St; r US\$176; ☎ ☎ ☎) This minivillage of canary-bright duplexes works well for budget-minded travelers wanting to be close to, but not in the middle of, the harbor-side action. Rooms are big, bright, airy and clean; and each has a small kitchen, wi-fi access and screened porch. Rooms don't have phones, but the office does. Don't doubt any helpful tips provided by the Fig's friendly owner, Sid. The man knows Abaco and if he says it's cheaper to rent a car than hire a taxi to get to Treasure Cay, believe him.

## EATING & DRINKING

Marsh Harbour has the Abacos' widest array of choices, from fast food to fine dining, while the cays offer a mix of beach bars and mom-and-pop joints – most with ocean or marina views.

**Jamie's Place** (☎ 242-367-2880; Bay St; mains US\$6-13; ☎ breakfast, lunch, dinner) It's T-shirts, ball caps and flip flops at this sparsely decorated diner where locals greet each other by name and Bahamian and American dishes are served up piping hot. For a hearty breakfast, try the scram special, a mix of eggs, onions, garlic and mushrooms.

**Curly Tails Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 242-367-4444; Bay St; lunch US\$9-25, dinner US\$18-39; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Named for the island's ubiquitous curly-tailed lizard, this is the see-and-be-seen spot for upscale noshing. Fancy wraps, gourmet burgers and international dishes *du jour* are best enjoyed on the breezy marina-side patio where day-trippers queue for the Guana Cay ferry.

**our pick Snappa's** (☎ 242-367-2278; Bay St; mains US\$11-28; ☎ lunch & dinner) We love Snappa's for its awesome grilled seafood – which can be darn hard to find on the Out Islands. The thick, grilled mahi mahi sandwich is superb

## LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

Penny Turtle is an Abaco good-life connoisseur. She was the local film liaison during *Thunderball* and *Help!*, and has been a Bahamas resident since 1959.

### How did you assist with *Help!*?

I was a den mother to the Beatles, protecting them from girls hiding in the bushes and up in trees.

### Any stories from the Bond film *Thunderball*?

We did a shark scene at a friend's house. They kept the sharks in a pool with transparent fiberglass down the center of the pool. Sharks were on one side, Sean on the other. There was a gap...and the shark came around the corner and Sean came out of the pool muttering an expletive.

### Where do those-in-the-know hang out on weekends in Marsh Harbour?

The Jib Room is great fun on a Saturday night. They have a band and the head bartender is the lead singer.

### Best beach spot?

Nippers has one of the most special beaches. It has two pools and a beautiful view.

### Any misconceptions about your name?

Everyone thought I ran Green Turtle Cay.

### What's your favorite thing about living here?

The people I meet.

and with a splash of Conchy Joe's Pepper Sauce you might just nibble into heaven. Live music is the evening draw at this marina-side mecca Wednesday through Saturday, with the biggest party crowds descending on Friday.

**Jib Room Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 242-367-2700; Pelican Shores Rd; lunch US\$10-15, dinner US\$25; ☺ lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Wed & Sat) Got the post-snorkel munchies? After a morning at Mermaid Reef, order a salad or sandwich on the Jib's harborside deck and tell fish tales as the yacht's pull in. On Saturday nights, everyone's here for steaks, live music and dancing.

For java, pastries and local art, try friendly **Java of Abaco** (☎ 242-367-5523; Bay St; ☺ 8am-1pm).

## Elbow Cay

The Queen's 'Highway' isn't much more than a sidewalk through parts of Hope Town – the heart of Elbow Cay – but that's not unexpected in a gingerbread town guarded by a candy-stripe lighthouse. Beyond the impossible cuteness of clapboard houses and flower-lined streets, you'll find plenty of historical attractions that highlight the adversities faced by the Loyalists and their descendants. The ferry, which takes about 20 minutes, stops at three Hope Town docks – the lower dock, the government/post office dock and the Harbour Lodge dock. To visit the lighthouse, located across the channel from the lower dock, tell the ferry driver you'd like to stop. He'll drop you off then pick you up on his next loop.

## INFORMATION

Public restrooms and a slim-pickings tourist information board are across from the Government Dock.

The **Post office** (☎ 242-366-0098; Queen's Hwy) is above the tourist information board.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The island's signature attraction, the candy-striped **Elbow Cay Lighthouse**, was an object of community-wide loathing when built in 1863. Many here supplemented their incomes by salvaging loot off ships that crashed against the cay's treacherous reefs – usually one a month. An 89ft lighthouse was the last thing these 'wreckers' needed. Today, you can check out views from the top. There's no admission, just follow the signs, walk up 101 steps and – if you dare – push your way through a small trap door to panoramic views from a scare-your-mother balcony.

In Hope Town, the engaging exhibits at the **Wynnie Malone Museum** (☎ 242-366-0293; Back St; adult/family US\$3/5; ☺ 10am-3pm Mon-Sat, closed Aug-Oct) examine the island's Loyalist roots and its maritime history. Downstairs, check out a 1783 *New York Post* article calling for a meeting for all Tories intending to move to the Abacos. Upstairs, look for the exhibit discussing the aforementioned wreckers as well as an account of the wreck of the *Athel Queen*, an Italian tanker torpedoed off the coast here in 1942.

Take in tranquil ocean views from the small gazebo at the **Byrle Patterson Memorial Garden**. Just north on Back Street is a small dune fronted by a white picket fence. This is the **Cholera Cemetery** where victims of an 1850s cholera epidemic are buried. At the top of the dune is a moving **monument** overlooking the ocean. Erected in 2007, it's dedicated to the souls lost at sea off the Elbow Cay Reef with a bronze plaque memorializing the three lost men from the *M/V Athel Queen*.

### Cycling

Rent bikes at **Sundried T's** (☎ 242-366-0616), located beside the Government Dock, for US\$10 per day.

### Diving & Snorkeling

**Froggies Out Island Adventures** (☎ 242-366-0431; [www.froggiesabaco.com](http://www.froggiesabaco.com)) offers one-/two-tank dives (US\$95/105) as well as half- and full-day snorkeling trips (US\$55/45 per half/full day, children are \$15 less). Tanks rentals are US\$10 per day, and mask and fin rentals are also US\$10 per day.

### Surfing

The offshore waters boast several good surfing breaks on the south Atlantic shore, especially in the winter. Try Rush Reef or the reef off Garbanzo Beach for some of the Bahamas' best surfing. Rent boards for US\$30/day at **Sundried T's** (☎ 242-366-0616), located beside the Government Dock.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hope Town Harbour Lodge** (☎ 242-366-0095; [www.hopetownlodge.com](http://www.hopetownlodge.com); Back Street; r/cottage US\$175/275; 📶 📺 🚿) With her white picket fence and frosting-blue balconies, this hilltop charm-cake will have you at hello; palm-framed harbor views will keep you from saying goodbye. Orange bedspreads, island prints and inviting balconies enhance smallish rooms in the main house. For more space and a kitchenette, try one of the cottages.

**Cap'n Jack's** (☎ 242-366-0247; Queen's Hwy; mains US\$7-17; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) If *Cheers'* barflies Norm and Cliff drank beer in Abaco, this wood-planked watering hole is where you'd likely find them. Locals linger over burgers, salads and fish sandwiches at tight booths inside while tourists opt for marina views on the waterside deck. Everyone heads

here for Monday night bingo and Thursday night trivia.

### Green Turtle Cay

If you've got time for only one cay, make it Green Turtle. By far the friendliest island in the Abacos, if not the Bahamas, the inhabitants are more than willing to point you in the right direction for hearty dining, primo diving and Loyalist-minded sight-seeing. And being the birthplace of the goombay smash isn't such a shabby distinction either. The northernmost of the four Loyalist cays, it takes a little more effort to get here, but only the most determined curmudgeons will leave unhappy.

The compact town of New Plymouth is easily explored on foot though golf carts are for rent near the ferry dock at **Kool Karts** (☎ 242-365-4176; per day US\$50). Note that many shops and businesses close for lunch.

In sum? The roosters here are so darn jazzed, they crow about it all day long.

### INFORMATION

The **police station** (☎ 242-365-4450, 911) and **post office** (☎ 242-365-4242) are located inside an old pink-and-white building on Parliament Street.

### SIGHTS

Take a left off the ferry dock, walk to Mission St and turn right. Miss Emily's Blue Bee is on your right. You'll be stopping here later. Just past the Blue Bee are the pink ruins of **Ye Olde Jail**. Diagonally across the intersection is a small, windswept **cemetery** where the headstones have sweeping views of Great Abaco.

Every small town needs a musty, knick-knack filled repository and the 1826 **Albert Lowe Museum** (☎ 242-365-4095; Parliament & King Sts, Loyalist Rd; admission US\$5; 🕒 9am-11:45pm Mon-Sat), serves this purpose admirably. Once home to future Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, the museum now boasts a fine collection of locally crafted model ships and black-and-white photographs highlighting the cay's history. Ask to see the collection of old liquor bottles excavated from the outhouse.

At the **Loyalist Memorial Sculpture Garden** you'll discover that the inspirational can sometimes be creepy. Here, 24 busts of notable Bahamian loyalists and slaves all gaze in dead-eyed wonder at bronze statues of two girls, one holding a conch and the other a Union Jack.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Brendal's Dive Center** (☎ 242-365-4411; www.brendal.com; White Sound), winner of the Bahamas Tourism Cacique Award in 2006 for Sustainable Tourism, offers one-/two-tank dives (US\$82/102) as well as half-day snorkeling trips (US\$70), island-hopping tours (US\$80) and a variety of family and group-oriented adventure packages. Kayaks and bikes also available for rent.

**EATING & DRINKING**

**McIntosh Restaurant & Bakery** (☎ 242-365-4625; Parliament St; mains US\$10-25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Leave your willpower at the door at this homey spot where hearty fried Bahamian dishes, fresh breads and decadent squares of cheesecake are more than happy to ruin all dietary resolutions. Also worth a savor are the cracked conch sandwich and the key lime pie.

**ourpick** **Miss Emily's Blue Bee Bar** (☎ 242-365-4181; Victoria St, New Plymouth; mains \$6-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) From the walls slathered with business cards, photographs and personal messages to the convivial customers who return year after year, it's clear this bar is truly loved. A portrait of the original owner, Miss Emily, perches high above the front counter, a perfect vantage point for watching over the happy hordes enjoying her signature drink, the goombay smash. Created for a thirsty customer decades ago, the potent concoction is poured straight from a plastic gallon jug into your cup – the exact ingredients still a secret.

Miss Emily's charming daughter Violet Smith runs the bar today. After years of watching guests leave to grab meals at neighboring restaurants, she opened her own at the Blue Bee on Thanksgiving Day 2007. It's a hit and her plate-filling fried chicken, cracked lobster and burgers are earning kudos beyond the tiny cay.

So what's the record for goombay smashes consumed in one evening? One male imbiber drank 29 and played golf the next day. And for women? According to Violet, one lady consumed 19 and claimed she felt fine, although she no longer drinks.

**Great Guana Cay**

Everyone's here for one reason. Maybe two. But trust me, if you ask your ferry mates if they're heading to **Nippers Beach Bar & Grill** (☎ 242-365-5143; www.nippersbar.com; mains lunch US\$11-

US\$16, mains dinner US\$20-US\$30; ☺ lunch & dinner), it's almost guaranteed they'll say yes. This candy-bright beachside Shangri-La is a forget-your-cares kind of place where Kaliks taste better, your sweetie looks cuter and everyone in sight is your new best friend. The Sunday afternoon pig roast is legendary, drawing party-hearty locals and intrepid tourists from across the Abacos. The timid need not stay home. There's 5½ miles of stunning white sand for those itching to slip the crowds. Other distractions include tasty burgers, a gift shop, inviting pools and an Australian owner who looks like Russell Crowe. To get here, take a right off the ferry dock, walk a bit, then follow the signs. The no-see-ums can be pesky so bring spray.

The second big draw? Awesome **snorkeling** off the Great Abaco Barrier Reef. It's a short beach stroll and a few strong kicks from the bar. Forget your gear? No worries, Nippers has some for the borrowing.

**ELEUTHERA**

pop 8200

So what do you do in Eleuthera, a 100-mile-long wisp curving east like an archer's bow? According to literature, research and dependable local gossips, most people come here to do...absolutely nothing. That's right. While shoppers, kiteboarders and divers might find themselves graciously indulged, the beach bum is the true king here, his every do-nothing need met by a slew of obliging shores.

The first non-native settlers to land here were a bit more industrious. These forward thinkers, the Eleutheran Adventurers, arrived in 1648 to establish a community where 'Freedom of Conscience' in the practice of religion would be a guiding tenet. Though most Adventurers eventually left due to the hardships of island life, religion has flourished, and according to one count, 112 churches stretch from north to south.

For those looking for more than a suntan, Eleuthera offers a number of high energy distractions. Wreck divers can explore the Devil's Backbone; fashionistas can wander the upscale boutiques of Harbour Island; and seasoned kitesurfers can skip across waves off eastern shores.

Hotels across Eleuthera and Harbour Island are typically pricey with a handful of exceptions. To save money, avoid high season from



mid-December through mid-April and time your visit for early summer or late fall.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

For flights to Eleuthera, see p107 and p108.

Ferries and mail boats run to Harbour Island and Governor's Harbour from Nassau; see p108 for details. One-day vacation packages are also available; see p70.

From Harbour Island, water taxis run between the Government Dock and North Eleuthera (US\$10).

### Harbour Island

This 3-mile speck has done such a great job touting itself as the chichi home of supermodel Elle MacPherson and style maven India Hicks that you're vaguely disappointed when they fail to greet you at the dock with muffins and scented candles. In fact, glossies tout 'Briland's' charming mix of rustic and chic to such a nauseating degree that it's hard not to hate the place on sight – an inclination abetted by knowledge that Masters of the Universe are snapping up the island's best parcels as quick as they can.

But ignoring these facts for a moment – as well as the island's less-than-captivating golf carts, pain-in-the-ass roosters and snooty boutiques – the shimmering pink sand beach here does glow with a soul-replenishing beauty. One that's frustratingly hard to hate. Another plus? Thrill-seeking kiteboarders, recently drawn to the island's superb mix of shallows, wind and crowd-free beaches, have added a 'Hey bro' friendliness to the trendy mix. And divers continue to descend for pristine reefs and ancient wrecks.

In sum, supermodels, scented candles and land-grabbing moguls are the price one pays for gorgeous sand and surf. And according to local rumor, MacPherson has already left the building.

### INFORMATION

Harborside Dunmore Town is the island's administrative center and dates back 300 years. The commonly seen appellation 'Briland,' is a local slurring of Harbour Island.

**Arthur's Bakery & Café** (☎ 242-333-2285; ☎ 8am-2pm, closed Sun) Internet access is US\$7.50 per 30 minutes.

**Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 242-333-2621; Dunmore St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

**Harbour Island Medical Clinic** (☎ 242-333-2227; Colebrook St)

**Police** (☎ 242-333-2111, for emergencies 333-2919; Gaol St)

**Post office** (☎ 242-333-2215; Gaol St)

**Royal Bank of Canada** (☎ 242-333-2250; Dunmore St)

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

One of the finest examples of Loyalist architecture is the **Loyalist Cottage** (Bay St), west of Princess St, dating back to 1797.

The funky side of things is to be found at the corner of Dunmore and Clarence Sts, where a mish-mash of signs, international license plates and driftwood relics are displayed, painted with humorous limericks and aphorisms.

The wide and stunning length of **Pink Sands Beach** shimmers with a pink glow that's a faint blush by day and a rosy red when fired by the dawn or sunset.

Harbour Island is surrounded by superb snorkeling and dive sites, highlighted by the Devil's Backbone. The pristine reefs are littered with ancient wrecks. **Valentine's Dive Center** (☎ 242-333-2080; [www.valentinesdive.com](http://www.valentinesdive.com); Bay St) offers a two-tank dive (US\$75), a one-tank night dive (US\$85) and snorkeling (US\$45). Fishers can charter boats for US\$750/950 per half/full day. Kayaks are US\$30/45 per half/full day. Kayaks are also available at Michael's Cycles (p95) for US\$20/40 per half/full day. At the southern end of town, try the 28-year veteran **Ocean Fox** (☎ 242-333-2323; [www.oceanfox.com](http://www.oceanfox.com)). Two-tank dives are US\$110.

Kitesurfing is 'taking off' here, with internationally known pros dropping in for perfect – but unforgiving – gust-and-wave combos off Harbor Island. Beginners can take lessons on the shallow shores of nearby Spanish Wells with **Cross-Shore** (☎ 242-393-3261; [www.cross-shore.com](http://www.cross-shore.com)) run by friendly Aussie AJ Watson. Currently, two-day beginner lessons cost US\$450. Cross-Shore also offers lessons off the southern coast of New Providence.

### SLEEPING

**Royal Palm Hotel** (☎ 242-333-2738; Chapel St; r US\$90; 🍷) Rooms could be cleaner, but units are bright and spacious. Deluxe rooms come with a kitchenette. The hotel is comprised of several two-story buildings scattered along Dunmore St. The lobby is at the corner of Dunmore and Clarence Sts. Golf carts available for US\$47/day.

**Bahama House Inn** (☎ 242-333-2201; [www.bahama-houseinn.com](http://www.bahama-houseinn.com); cnr Dumore & Hill Sts; r US\$160; 🍷) Outdoor



decking connects cool and comfy living areas at this welcoming inn where rooms are furnished with eclectic colonial furniture. Rooms have private baths and overlook a large garden and patio deck. No children under 12. Full breakfasts provided.

**Rock House** (☎ 242-333-2053; www.rockhousebahamas.com; Chapel St; r US\$380; 🍷 📺 📶) Thatch-covered cabanas, bamboo walls, flickering torches – it's a tiki-chic cocktail at this hill-top retreat where shimmering harbor views recharge a stylish but friendly crowd. Steep stone steps lead from Bay St to Rock House's nine rooms, decorated in crisp earth tones discreetly splashed with tropical color. Bright pillows distract from sometimes smallish digs – though you do get your own private poolside cabana. It has a full gym and wi-fi by the pool. Visitors flock to the bar and restaurant for poolside cocktails or a late-night 'hokey pokey' – homemade vanilla ice cream with honeycomb.

**Pink Sands Resort** (☎ 242-333-2030; www.pinksandsresort.com; Chapel St; r US\$750; 🍷 📺 📶) Sweeet! Luxurious cottages dot tropical gardens like private minikingdoms, but perky conch shell 'fences' do much to keep pretension at bay. Inside, envision throw rugs on rough-cut marble-like floors, uniquely crafted beds and decor seamlessly merging Asian and Caribbean designs with flat-screen modern functionality. This is where bad-boy celebs tumble from oceanfront decks and supermodels snooze past noon. Mayhem is discreet but indulged. Even if you're not a guest, stop by the infamous Blue Bar for a seaside cocktail. There's wi-fi for guests.

## EATING

**our pick** **Arthur's Bakery & Café** (☎ 242-333-2285; mains under US\$10; 🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) One of the friendliest spots in town, this cornerside nook is the place to catch up on gossip, gather travel advice and relax over warm fresh bread and coffee. Sandwiches available for lunch.

**Ma Ruby's** (☎ 242-333-2161; Tingum Village Hotel & Bar; breakfast & lunch mains up to US\$20, dinner mains US\$8-40; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Alleged home of Jimmy Buffett's 'Cheeseburger in Paradise.'

**Sip Sip** (☎ 242-333-3316; Court Rd; mains US\$15-30; 🕒 lunch, closed Tue, closed Tue & Wed Jun-Aug) Treat yourself to a little taste of fabulous at this chichi lime box preening at the end of Court Rd. Gourmet fusion lunches – lobster ques-

dillas, conch chili – are best nibbled on the crisp white deck. Here you can enjoy pink sand views while indulging in a little 'sip sip' – the local term for gossip. US\$15 hotdogs may leave you murmuring as well.

**Aqua Pazza** (☎ 242-333-3240; Harbour Island Marina; mains lunch US\$15-20, mains dinner US\$20-38; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Tucked between a haunted house and the harbor, this new kid on the block is earning raves for its Italian cuisine. The wine list, marina views and romantic ambience are impressive; the service, alas, a smidge less so. But ah, those views and that pasta.

For gourmet deli sandwiches and fancy sides, try **Dunmore Deli** (☎ 242-333-2644; King St; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat)

Some of the island's best meals are served at the shacks lining Bay St north of the harbor. There's always a line for Bahamian fare at Harry O's and people risk missing the ferry for a fresh, tart bowl of conch salad at Queen Conch.

## DRINKING

**Vic Hum Club** (☎ 242-333-2161; cnr Barrack & Munnings Sts; 🕒 11am-late) For ramshackle good times, park your putter at this late night party shack and abandon all reserve at the door. From kick-back natives to Aussie kiteboarders to yacht crews on shore leave, it's a funky, rum-fueled bazaar where a basketball court doubles as a dance floor. Miss it and forever rue the day. Pronunciation is key: Viccum.

Late night, try **Gusty's Bar** (☎ 242-333-2165; 🕒 9:30pm-1am) on Coconut Grove Ave where Jimmy Buffett's been known to jam.

## SHOPPING

Harbour Island's not kidding around when it comes to boutiques, even earning kudos from *Travel + Leisure* in 2007 as the best Caribbean island for shopping. Try the blue-shuttered **Blue Rooster** (☎ 242-333-2240; King & Dunmore Sts) for stylish sun dresses, wraps and accessories; and **The Sugar Mill Trading Company** (☎ 242-333-3558; Bay St) for unique gifts and island-minded merchandise. The most fun may be had at boldly bright, non-boutique **Dilly Dally** (☎ 242-333-3109), unabashedly jam-packed with flip-flops, bikinis, Briland tees and Bahamian books. Most stores are closed on Sunday.

## GETTING AROUND

Briland is a mini-LA – no one walks if they can help it. For golf carts, try **Dunmore Rentals**

(☎ 242-333-2372) on Bay St by the Government Dock (US\$50) or **Ross Rentals** (☎ 242-333-2122) on Colebrook St just past Alice St (US\$45). If you find sputtering golf carts non-charming, **Michael's Cycles** (☎ 242-333-2384) rents bikes for US\$12/day.

## Gregory Town

Quiet six nights out of the week, this low-key village is 25 miles north of Governor's Harbour and five miles south of the Glass Window Bridge, where the island narrows dramatically to a thin span straddling the divide between pounding Atlantic waves and the tranquil green shoals of the Bight of Eleuthera. A hurricane destroyed the natural bridge that was once there, so a narrow man-made substitute is now the only thing connecting north and south Eleuthera.

Gregory Town, once famous for its thriving pineapple industry, sits above a steep cove on a sharp bend in the Queen's Hwy. Just before the bend, stop at the **Island Made Gift Shop** (☎ 242-335-5369; Queen's Hwy) for Bahamian-made hot sauces, prints, candles and batik

clothing. Just south – at the bend – is a colorful, snapshot-worthy **mileage marker**. Surfer's Beach is two miles south (see below). To get there, creep up the axle-testing road at **Surfer's Haven** (☎ 242-333-3282; www.surfershavenbahamas.com; r\$US25), a laid-back, hostel-style retreat five minutes' walk from the beach. Rooms are inside or attached to the main house, with full use of the den, kitchen and large wooden deck with sea views. The apartment (US\$75) has a kitchenette. Owner Tom Glucksmann runs ecominded kayaking, snorkeling and nature trips with his company **Bahamas Out-island Adventures** (☎ 242-335-0349; www.bahamasadventures.com; half/full day US\$59/99). The man knows his birds and is a passionate advocate for preserving lonely Lighthouse Point at the southern tip of the island.

The towering stone silos dotting the skyline as you continue south once held cow feed. Just past these are the brightly painted, octagonal cottages of the **Rainbow Inn** (☎ 242-335-0294; www.rainbowinn.com; rUS\$140; ☎ ☎), another good lodging choice. The nautical-themed restaurant's popular for supper on Friday Steak Nights.

## BEACHES

The island's secluded shores are some of the best in the Bahamas for lounging, loafing, lollygagging and maybe, just maybe, a little beachcombing. For beach hunters, there's the helpful *The Elusive Beaches of Eleuthera*, by Geoff and Vicky Wells (US\$25.95), which is sold at Haynes Library and The Island Made Gift Shop. The Tarbox map (US\$10) sold at the Rainbow Inn is also good. Here are a few of the best starting from the north:

- Pink Sands Beach – The sand really does glow a light shade of pink. Follow Chapel St or Court St to public access paths to the Atlantic side shores.
- Surfer's Beach – Windswept bluffs are a primo perch for watching surfers catching waves below. Follow the trail down to the protected beach. Two miles south of the Island Made Gift Shop in Gregory Town, take the rutted dirt road at the Surfer's Haven sign on the Atlantic side and follow the occasional marker to the bluffs and a small parking area.
- Club Med Beach – Majestic pines sway beside a softly curving shore at this beautiful beach, one of the prettiest in the Bahamas. Known for years as Club Med Beach, for the resort that once stood here, the shores will probably be renamed after the French Leave Resort opens, probably in 2008. For now, drive toward the Atlantic on Haynes Ave, passing the Quality Inn on your left. Turn right at the T, drive about an eighth of a mile to a dirt pull-off.
- Ten Bay – South of Palmetto Point, this quiet, palm-shaded alcove borders Savannah Sound on the Caribbean side. Great for beachcombing, its shallows hold starfish and tiny conch shells. Heading south on Queen's Hwy, drive 3.5 miles past the Palmetto Point junction then turn right at the telephone pole with red reflectors that's next to the white sale-pending sign. Yes, slightly vague, but that's Eleuthera.
- Lighthouse Beach – It's a drive, but the dazzling 6 miles of rosy-pink beach at the southern tip of the island are inspiring. Bring snorkel gear, a picnic and your soulmate. And hurry – developers are circling.

And about that not-so-quiet seventh George Town night? Fridays are Jam Night at **Elvina's Bar & Restaurant** (☎ 242-335-5032), just south of the bend. By 9:30pm this old-school party shack – don't count on getting food – is rumblin' to the rafters with half-hour sets by natives and visiting musicians. You might just see local landowner Lenny Kravitz strolling through the upbeat crowd of low-key locals, over-served yachties, sun-dried surfers and befuddled tourists – who can't figure out where all these people came from. Everyone's here or on the way.

### Governor's Harbour

The sleepy island 'capital' overlooks a broad harbor that runs west along a peninsula to Cupid's Cay, apparently the original settlement of the Eleutheran Adventurers in 1648. Centrally located, this is a great home base for exploring the rest of the island.

#### INFORMATION

**Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 242-332-2142; Queen's Hwy; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

**Governor's Harbour Medical Clinic** (☎ 242-332-2774; Queen's Hwy)

**Haynes Library** (☎ 242-332-2877) Housed in a two-story building constructed in 1897, the library has about a dozen computers. Internet US\$5 per hour.

**Police** (☎ 242-332-21117)

**Post office** (☎ 242-332-2060; Haynes Ave)

#### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

**Clearwater Dive Shop** (☎ 242-332-2146) rents tanks for US\$12/day and snorkel gear for US\$10/day, both requiring a US\$50 deposit. The shop doesn't run its own dive or snorkel trips.

#### SLEEPING

**Laughing Bird Apartments** (☎ 242-332-2012; Queen's Hwy; 1-2 person apt US\$100; ☹) Just steps from the beach, these beautifully landscaped apartments are a great deal, with the clean, cozy units boasting kitchenettes and palm-framed ocean views. The British owner is absolutely delightful but won't get in your way. Lots of returning international guests.

**Duck Inn** (☎ 242-332-2608; www.theduckinn.com; Queen's Hwy; d US\$110, 3 night min; ☹) This 200-year-old colonial complex, set amid an orchid garden, incorporates three comfortable, fully equipped cottages. Perfect for couples, Cupid's Cottage offers harbor views, while the four-

bedroom Flora Cottage works well for large families. A local map and the *Elusive Beaches of Eleuthera* are found in every cottage.

**Quality Inn Cigatoo** (☎ 242-332-3060; www.choicehotels.com; Haynes Ave; r US\$120; ☹) This spot is also good; it has bright, mid-sized rooms and an on-site restaurant.

#### EATING

Friday night, try fresh fish and live music on the waterfront at the **Fish Fry** (mains US\$10-20; ☹ 6pm-midnight) just past Haynes Library. Tourists start showing up around 7pm, locals a little later. Almost too cool for its own good, **Tippy's** (☎ 242-332-3331; Banks Rd; mains US\$8-21; ☹ lunch & dinner, bar open until last person goes home) is an upscale beach shack that's the current darling of visiting celebs, the *New York Times* and a host of fawning travel mags. Tippy's specializes in gourmet seafood dishes – lobster wraps, shrimp pizzas, conch fritters with chili mayo – prepared with Bahamian flair. In sum? Delicious food, great views and service a whiff shy of the hoopla.

To create your own fresh dishes, **Island Farm Fresh Produce** (Palmetto Pt, Queen's Hwy; ☹ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) offers a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as locally made jams and hot sauces. Try extra-hot Pirates' Revenge.

#### GETTING AROUND

**North Eleuthera S/S Car Rental** (☎ 242-335-1128) Located at the Shell station just west of the ferry dock and airport; cars rent for about \$US80 and require a US\$100 deposit. Staff will pick you up at the dock.

### EXUMAS

pop 3600

Life's a little snappier in the Exumas. Whether kayaking, kiteboarding or trimming a sail, a crisp palette of ocean blues sharpens every adventure. And with 365 cays unspooling over more than 100 miles, there's a lot of adventure to go around. Wannabe Robinson Crusoes can wander lonely isles in Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park. Lifetime-To-Do-Listers can paddle shimmering Moriah Cay. Determined bonefishers can track wily prey on glass-clear shallows. And that's without mentioning the gregarious yachtsmen who can mix their way to the perfect on-deck cocktail during the festive Family Island Regatta.

Landlubbers have distractions too, with the 62-mile Queen's Highway winding past

historic ruins, hidden beaches and convivial beach bars on Great Exuma and Little Exuma, the two largest islands in the chain. In fact, the biggest thrill in Exuma may be the hair-raising one-lane bridge that connects them.

The launch pad for exploring is George Town, the bustling administrative center of Great Exuma that sits on the western shore of the sail-dotted blue waters of Elizabeth Harbour. Bordering the harbor to the east is Stocking Island, a sliver of land best known for its soft white sand and the infamous Chat & Chill Sunday pig roast.

## Information

There are public telephone booths in all the main centers.

**Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 242-336-2430; Queen's Hwy, George Town)

**BaTelCo** (☎ 242-336-2011; Queen's Hwy, George Town) Sells phone cards and SIM cards.

**Exuma Business Centre** (☎ 242-336-2091; Queen's Hwy, George Town) Inside Seascape Real Estate; internet access is US\$0.20 per minute.

**Government Medical Clinic** (☎ 242-336-2088; George Town)

**Police** (☎ 242-336-2666, emergency 919; George Town)

**Post office** (☎ 242-347-3546; George Town)

**Royal Bank of Canada** (242-336-3251; Queen's Hwy)

**Scotiabank** (☎ 242-336-2651; Queen's Hwy)

## Sights

### GEORGE TOWN

The sugar-pink and white neoclassical **Government Administration Building** houses the post office and jail. Just south, the small **Straw Market** sells Bahamian made straw goods. Stock up here instead of Nassau, although you'll still find the ubiquitous Kalik T-shirts. Just north of town is the serene white-stoned **St Andrew's Anglican Church**, which sits atop a bluff above Lake Victoria. For a great photo-op, stop by the rainbow-colored **city mileage markers** stacked high at the southern junction of the Queen's highway and the city loop.

### SOUTH OF GEORGE TOWN

#### Historic Attractions

The Queen's Highway rolls south of George Town to Rolle Town and Little Exuma, offering an engaging half-day mix of sight-seeing, sunning and seafood nosing.

The first major settlement is **Rolle Town**. Follow the main road of Queen's Hwy to the town's hilltop crossroads. Here, turn north

and drive along a short ridge for panoramic views – you might see a parasailer catching gusts off Man O' War Cay. South of the crossroad, follow the signs a short distance to the **Rolle Town Tombs**. Here lie a few solitary 18th-century tombs, one dated 1792 and shaped like a stone double bed. The plaque notes that the young wife of a Scottish overseer, Captain Alexander McKay, slumbers there with an infant child. The captain died the following year, some said from a broken heart.

Next up is a keep-on-your-toes one lane bridge linking Great and Little Exuma islands at the town of **Ferry**. After passing through Forbes Hill, you'll soon arrive at lonely Williamstown. Just past Santana's, follow the sign road to the overgrown ruins of the **Hermitage Estate**, a cotton plantation once run by a prominent Loyalist family. They also sold salt drawn from nearby salt ponds.

## Beaches

Two stunning beaches await south of George Town. For solitary sunning, drive south on the Queen's Hwy, cross the one-lane bridge at Ferry and pass through Forbes Hill. After passing the 'Leaving Forbes Hill' sign, there's a dangerous curve then a beach access sign on your left (sometimes these disappear). Park anywhere – all four wheels off the highway – then follow the dirt track past an old stone building and an overturned jeep to the glimmering, usually shallow, turquoise water.

Next up is **Tropic of Cancer Beach**. About 2½ miles past the Leaving Forbes Hill sign is a series of dirt roads on the left. Take one of them – if you get to the 'Lonesome Conch' cottage on Queen's Hwy you've gone too far. These 'roads' lead to poorly-marked Ocean Rd running parallel to the beach. Turn right on Ocean Rd and follow it to a wooden beach-side hut with a small parking area. Stand on the Tropic of Cancer – there's a faded blue line marking the spot. The *Pirates of the Caribbean II* and *III* crew loaded gear onto boats here before heading to southern cays.

## STOCKING ISLAND

This 600-acre (240-hectare) slip of an island beckons about a mile off the coast, separated from George Town by the turquoise beauty of Elizabeth Harbour. For a day-trip appealing to adventurers and beach bums alike, grab one of the two daily ferries departing

Club Peace & Plenty (10am & 1pm, US\$10) to Hamburger Beach on the northern side of the island. Here you can snorkel, stroll over talcum-fine beaches, or bushwack up a nature 'trail' to the island's highest point. Don't miss the short hike across the island to the Atlantic for more deep blue views.

Order a hamburger or conch burger at **Peace & Plenty Beach Club** (mains under US\$10; ☺ lunch). American germ freaks be warned – friendly but scratched-up feral cats leap onto the counter and table tops with no apparent regard for your sily health codes.

There are no roads on the island and all access is by boat. For a cocktail at the popular **Chat & Chill Bar & Grill** (☎ 242-336-2700; www.chatnchill.com) on the other end of the island, call Elvis at **Exuma Water Taxi** (☎ 242-464-1558) for a shuttle (one way/round trip US\$10/12) that will pick you up at Club Peace & Plenty. You can also look for a water taxi on the government dock. Your taxi driver or hotel can also call the bar. The Chat & Chill's Sunday afternoon pig roast (US\$19 per person) is a don't-miss affair.

## EXUMA CAYS

The cays begin at the barren Sail Rocks, 40 miles southeast of New Providence and offer a variety of sights and experiences as they unspool to the south. A highlight of any visit to **Staniel Cay** is a snorkel or dive trip into **Thunderball Grotto**. The cavern, named for its inclusion in the Bond movie *Thunderball*, is lit by shafts of light pouring in from holes in the ceiling that sear through the water, highlighting the fish darting blow. This crystalline grotto was also used for scenes in *Splash* and another Bond movie *Never Say Never Again*. The current here can be dangerous.

The first marine 'replenishment nursery' in the world, created in 1958, the **Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park** boasts 112,640 acres (175 sq miles) of protected islands and surrounding seas. All fishing and collecting is banned – this includes plants and shells. **Hawksbill Cay** has marked trails that lead to the ruins of a Loyalist Plantation. **Little Hawksbill Cay** is a major nesting sight for ospreys.

## Activities

Exuma offers a plethora of activities, including diving, snorkeling, boat trips, fishing, kayaking and kitesurfing. Call or stop by Exuma's Ministry of Tourism Office (p97) for a list of bonefishing guides.

A day of snorkeling? Blue hole exploration? Sunset cruising? Call Steve at **Off Island Adventures** (☎ 242-524-0524; www.offislandadventures.com) to customize your own adventure. Charters for up to eight people are per half/full day US\$400/700.

**Minn's Water Sports** (☎ 242-336-3483; www.mwsboats.com; Queen's Hwy) rents 15ft Boston whalers for \$US120/day and 19ft Powercats for US\$210/day. Snorkel gear also available for rent for US\$10/day with a US\$50 deposit.

**Fish Rowe Charters** (☎ 242-357-0870; www.fishrowecharters.com) offers deep-sea fishing on a 40ft boat, from which you can hunt for wahoo, mahi mahi and kingfish (half/full day US\$800/1600).

**Dive Exuma** (☎ 242-336-2893; www.dive-exuma.com) offers two-tank wreck-and-reef dives (US\$175) and a one-tank blue hole dive (US\$125). To get there, turn off the Queen's Hwy at February Point Estates, take first right, first left, second right and go downhill through the stone gate to the bright blue building.

**Starfish** (☎ 242-336-3033; www.kayakbahamas.com; George Town) hosts a variety of activities, including four-hour guided kayak trips (adult/child US\$85/68), a snorkeling trip (adult/child US\$70/56) and three-hour Eco Boat trips (adult/child US\$70/56) that tour the harbor and include a nature hike on Stocking Island. Single/double kayaks can be hired for US\$50/60 a day. A three-hour boat charter with a captain is available for US\$500.

**Exuma Watersports** (☎ 242-336-3422; www.exumawatersports.com) charters a variety of trips from February Point Marina including a four-hour Eco-Safari Tour with snorkeling, hiking and sightseeing (US\$100/person) and a deserted cay drop-off (US\$500/group up to eight, then US\$50/per extra person). Parasailing (US\$85) and charters are also offered (half/full day US\$500/900).

You'll be skipping across waves in no time with **Exuma Kitesurfing** (☎ 242-345-0359; www.exumakitesurfing.com; 3-day course US\$925), a high-octane outfitter that 'launches' guests from some of the Exumas' most scenic cays. The action shots on its website will have you grabbing for your credit card.

## Festivals & Events

For a full listing, contact the Ministry of Tourism (p97).

During the **Family Island Regatta**, held in the last week of April, hundreds of yachts from



near and far congregate in Elizabeth Harbour for racing, socializing and general mayhem. The premier regatta in the Bahamas, it's an excuse for the hoi polloi and yachting elite to mingle and party.

## Sleeping

**Club Peace & Plenty** (☎ 242-336-2551; [www.peaceandplenty.com](http://www.peaceandplenty.com); r US\$175; 🏠 📺) Best for social butterflies and those without a car, this busy, 32-room hotel is also a way station for day-trippers hopping the Stocking Island ferry. Vacation-minded themes – African, English, Beach, Island – enliven slightly worn furnishings, but it's hard not to look tired next to the piercing harbor blues glistening out the window. The inn's restaurant and bar hum with crowds throughout the week. Check out the bathtub views from Rooms 28 and 32. There's complimentary wi-fi and computer in the lobby.

**Coral Gardens B&B & Apartments** ([www.coralgardensbahamas.com](http://www.coralgardensbahamas.com); Hooper's Bay; r US\$95; 🏠 📺) With rooms under US\$100, this two-story B&B 3 miles northwest of George Town is a gob-smackingly good deal. British expats Peter and Betty Oxley keep the three comfortable bedrooms with private baths in tip-top shape. A fiction-filled bookcase, satisfying breakfasts and a porch with a sweeping island view round out the appeal. But perhaps most memorable are the English charm, resourcefulness and can-do-itiveness of the owners. You'll be tossing off British-isms in no time. Two adjacent apartments are also available. Due to cell phone audibility issues, email for reservations through the website. There's free wi-fi.

**Peace & Plenty Bonefish Lodge** (☎ 242-345-5555; [www.ppbonefishlodge.com](http://www.ppbonefishlodge.com); Queen's Hwy; r US\$242; 🏠 📺) Adventure feels nigh in this clubby lodge where fishermen trade tall tales in the lounge while the proprietress feeds sharks by hand in the backyard lagoon. Green patchwork bedspreads brighten the lodge's eight rooms, all coming with two queen beds and ocean views. Snorkels and kayaks available for guests. Not a great option for kids, but adults will appreciate the softening bursts of bougainvillea. Its restaurant is open for lunch and dinner (closed Tuesday) and serves seafood and steaks for dinner (mains US\$20 to US\$50).

**Palm Bay Beach Club** (☎ 242-336-2787; [www.palmbaybeachclub.com](http://www.palmbaybeachclub.com); Queen's Hwy; studio/ste US\$250/359; 🏠 📺 📺) Individually owned and decorated, the Palm Bay's 80+ oceanfront cottages and

## PIRATE HUNTING

The cast and crew of the second and third *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies filmed on Sandy Cay, which is the chain's southernmost isle and, according to the tourism brochure, Keira Knightley's favorite shooting island. Equipment was loaded at Tropic of Cancer Beach (see p97) and next to Santana's Grill Pit (see below).

But celluloid pirates weren't the only ones to grace the Exumas' shores. Kidd's Cove, just off the Government Dock, is named for another infamous pirate, Captain Kidd, who ruled these shores...as harbor master.

hillside villas are typically bright and airy with tile floors and wooden ceilings. Starfish Activity Center, and Splash bar and grill are on site. Complimentary wi-fi.

## Eating & Drinking

**Edgewater Eddie's** (☎ 242-336-2050; Queen's Hwy; lunch mains US\$7-13, dinner mains US\$10-36; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) On Tuesdays, don't be distracted by the bright murals or the men drinking beer (unless you want one) at this scruffy watering hole known for its Bahamian dishes. You're here for the okra stew – potatoes, corn, onion and okra all chunked together for your slurping delight. Monday night's rake'n'scape draws crowds.

**Club Peace & Plenty** (☎ 242-336-2551; Queen's Hwy) The bar scene and harbor views are superb, the high-priced restaurant a little less so. Master mixologist and local legend Lermon 'Doc of Libations' Rolle stirs things up on the poolside patio starting at 11am. Everyone's here at some point.

**Splash at Palm Bay Beach Club** (☎ 242-336-2787; Queen's Hwy, mains US\$10-37; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) You'll find pub fare here as well as tasty versions of the usual Bahamian suspects – conch, lobster, grouper – but the biggest draw is the convivial beach-shack bar scene. Sports-filled TV screens lure sports-minded locals and tourists alike.

**ourpick Santana's Grill Pit** (☎ 242-345-4102; Williamstown; US\$14-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Sit on the bar stools of pirates at this popsicle-bright beach shack south of Georgetown, where Keira, Orlando and Johnny spent faux-pirate downtime before boating to outlying cays. Husband and wife team Denise and Edgar



will fry up your lobster on the central grill while you sip Kaliks with your counter-mates. From Venetian bonefishermen to BaTelCo workers to traveling families, it's a diverse but convivial crew. Ask to see the photo albums; they're stuffed with snapshots of the cast of *Pirates of the Caribbean II* and *III*. The crew loaded equipment onto boats just past the grill before heading south to Sandy Cay.

**Cocoplums Beach Bar & Grill** (☎ 242-554-3358; Rolleville; mains US\$20-25) Kick off your flip-flops and stay awhile at this gourmet beach hut where the food is as tasty as the views. Jade curry shrimp and coconut lobster are touted by the locals; the prices are bumped by the Four Seasons – whose wealthy guests sleep a few miles south.

For the Exumas' most famous conch salad, swing by **Big D's Conch Spot** (☎ 242-358-0059; conch salad US\$10; 🕒 noon-midnight Mon-Sat) in Steventon just off the Queen's Hwy.

The Fish Fry, just northwest of town, is a bright cluster of beach shacks and takeaways that open at sunset and on weekends. Names change with some regularity, so follow your nose or the crowds.

## Getting There & Away

For air travel information to the Exumas, see p107 and p108. For information on transport by ferry or mail boat, see p108.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis await the arrival of all flights to the airport and cost US\$28 to George Town. However, two good car-rental agencies are based at the airport.

### BOAT

Ferries (US\$10 round trip, 10am and 1pm) to Stocking Island currently depart from Peace & Plenty Bonefish Lodge's dock.

### CAR

**Don's Rent A Car** (☎ 242-345-0112; Exuma Airport; 🕒 6:30am-7pm) rents excellent air-con vehicles from US\$70 per day.

### TAXI

**Exuma Transit Services** (☎ 242-345-0232) and **Luther Rolle Taxis** (☎ 242-345-5003) and **Leslie Dames** (☎ 242-357-0015) offer taxi service around the island. The rate from the airport to Club Peace & Plenty is about US\$35.

## ANDROS

pop 7900

Those wanting adventure when they fall off the grid have no better choice than Andros. At 2300 sq miles Andros is the largest of the Bahamian islands, but its unique geographic features and rich cultural traditions have protected this lonely outpost from the reckless overdevelopment common to its neighbors.

Divers and bonefishermen have been in on its charms for years, the former flocking here to peek into the Tongue of the Ocean – a 6000ft abyss just past the world's third-largest barrier reef – while the latter fly in to cast for bonefish on miles of secluded flats. Andros' rich folkloric traditions stem from the island's unusual foundation, a limestone base that's filled with swampy mangrove swashes and thick pine forests above and caverns and blue holes below. A perfect breeding ground for monsters and legends.

In the last few years, the island's boutique resorts – Tiamo and Small Hope Bay Lodge – have garnered kudos as true leaders in the ecotourism craze, not just talking the talk but walking...the garbage. Yep, guests might be asked to carry off the recycling or otherwise help in making sustainable tourism a reality. Recycling aside, empty beaches and tasty cocktails abound, with ecofriendly attitudes just frosting on the tropical paradise cake.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

For information on flights to Andros, see p107 and p108. There are mail boats and ferries to Andros; for details, see p108.

Taxis meet arriving flights and ferries. Arrangements can also be made through your hotel. Try **Adderly's Rent-A-Car** (☎ 242-357-2149) or **Steve & Hyacinth Hanna** (☎ 242-368-6140) for car rentals which run at about US\$85/day.

## Fresh Creek Area

Just a two-hour ferry ride from Nassau, Fresh Creek is a convenient weekend destination for divers, bonefishers and hikers with a sense of adventure. Andros Town and Coakley Town make up the Fresh Creek Township. A giant plastic crab greets visitors at Coakley Town on the north side of the creek while taxis greet visitors at Andros Town on the south side as they step from the ferry at the dock. Small Hope Bay Lodge is the area's friendly diving and adventure hub that becomes a convivial social center in the evenings.

**INFORMATION**

**Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 242-368-2286; Andros Town) Stop by for maps of Andros and Fresh Creek.

**Government Medical Clinic** (☎ 242-368-2038) On the north side of the Fresh Creek Bridge.

**Police** (☎ 242-368-2626, emergencies 911 or 919)

**Post Office** (☎ 242-368-2012)

**Royal Bank of Canada** (☎ 242-368-2071) Just north of town on the Queen's Hwy; the bank has an ATM.

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

The famous Androsian batiks of **Androsia Ltd** (☎ 242-368-2020; [www.androsia.com](http://www.androsia.com); ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) are sold throughout the Bahamas. Melding age-old wax techniques and island motifs, workers at the small factory create a wide range of bright clothing. A guide will show you around and there's a factory outlet.

Two relatively short hikes off of the Queen's Hwy north of Small Hope Bay Lodge lead through thick pine forests to inland blue holes. Look out for the island's mythical beasts: the three-toed chickchamie, which likes to hang upside down from trees, or the half-dragon, half-octopus *Lusca*, which whirlpools its victims to a watery death. You'll find a platform and rope swing at **Captain Bill's Blue Hole**, located off the dirt road beside the Department of Environmental Health. For a look at Androsian flora and fauna, try the marked, slightly spooky **nature trail** to the Rainbow Blue Hole further north, just past telephone pole number 209. Look for the wooden sign.

Guests at Small Hope have the use of complimentary bicycles. You can also bring bikes from Nassau on the Bahamas Ferry. There's an easy, scenic 6-mile ride along the Queen's Hwy from the ferry dock to the Small Hope area and the blue holes further north.

**Small Hope Bay Lodge** (☎ 242-368-2013/4; [www.smallhope.com](http://www.smallhope.com); Calabash Bay), highly acclaimed by divers, offers one-/two-tank dives (US\$60/80), night dives (US\$70) and shark dives (US\$85), as well as snorkeling safaris (adult/child US\$45/25). Ask about specialty trips including blue hole dives and wall dives to 185ft.

The lodge also leads half- and full-day bonefishing, reef fishing and deep-sea trips. Call for prices.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

A handful of small hotels of varying quality cluster around Fresh Creek. Small Hope is about six miles north on Queen's Hwy.

**TWIST MY ARM: THE SPOTS THE AUTHORS WANTED TO KEEP SECRET**

A sultry pink sun dips low on the horizon. Calm seas lap the shore. Empty hammocks sway between lazy palms. Unattainable paradise? Not in Andros, where the view from Room 12 at the Small Hope Bay Lodge (below) is just a phone call, a puddle jump and two-and-a-half Benjamins away.

**Andros Lighthouse Yacht Club & Marina** (☎ 242-368-2305; [www.androsighthouse.com](http://www.androsighthouse.com); Andros Town; r US\$120; ☎ ☎) Bright, spacious rooms, an on-site restaurant and proximity to the Government Dock make this an attractive option for a short stay. The island's 116-year-old lighthouse is nearby. Complimentary wi-fi in the lobby.

**Small Hope Bay Lodge** (☎ 242-368-2013/4; [www.smallhope.com](http://www.smallhope.com); Calabash Bay; cottage per person US\$209; ☎) If you've dreamt of joining an Explorers' Club but weren't sure you had the goods, let this convivial adventure den provide that first little push. Though a famous dive destination for decades, the lodge is newbie-friendly, offering a supportive beginner's dive class. Beyond diving, the lodge provides kayaks, snorkel gear, bikes and trail maps for its guests and leads nature and bird-watching tours through neighboring forests. Children's activities are also offered. The central lodge is strewn with couches and throw pillows, and the low-slung building incorporates a library, game room and an open-bar that's hewn from half a dinghy. Coral-stone cottages look directly onto a stunning hammock-and-palm-lined beach and offer king-sized beds, screened windows and Androsian batik fabrics. No TV or phone. The rate is all inclusive, with guests enjoying hearty family-style buffets three times a day. Nonguests can come for meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$10/15/30) but reservations are recommended. Notably, Small Hope is leading the way environmentally, educating the staff and guests on their wide array of ecoconscious practices.

**Hank's Place Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 242-368-2447; Fresh Creek; mains US\$8-25; ☎ dinner) A shady deck overlooks the creek at laid-back, nautical-minded Hank's which lures 'em in with pub grub, Bahamian seafood specialties and booze.

Also recommended is **Love at First Sight** (☎ 242-369-6082; [www.loveatfirstsight.com](http://www.loveatfirstsight.com); dinner mains US\$25-40; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) in Staniard Creek, about 20 miles north of Fresh Creek.

This locally touted restaurant serves native and gourmet seafood dishes in a romantic, very pink, setting.

### South Andros

**Tiamo Resort** (☎ 242-357-2330; [www.tiamoresorts.com](http://www.tiamoresorts.com); South Andros; r per person US\$415; ♿) Take the recycling with me? Most guests would be offended if asked to lug a load of trash, but not at Tiamo, where ecosavvy travelers support sustainable tourism. Open since 2001, Tiamo is a leader in the ecotourism movement. But the resort knows ecosavviness isn't enough to lure guests; that's the role of the 11 luscious beachfront cottages – screened-in hideaways set back from the beach – and the delicious meals. Beyond top-notch accommodations and dining, the resort provides sail boats, snorkel gear and local ecotours.

## DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATIONS

The Bahamian islands offer a range of lodging that includes cottages, inns, condos, hotels and resorts. Prices tend to be high, often unjustifiably, for the level of service and quality of amenities. Taxes and imaginative surcharges are often used to hike up your bill by around 20% to 30%. Check prior to booking that quoted rates are inclusive of all these additional costs.

Nearly all hotels and inns change their rates at least twice a year between low and high season. While this guide quotes high-season rates, be aware that some hotels charge even higher prices from Christmas Eve through to New Year's Day. The good news? The low season (or summer) extends for most of the year from mid-April to mid-December. During this period accommodations prices drop between 20% and 60%, so although this region is pricy, it is possible to find value-for-money lodgings.

Weekly rentals and all-inclusive resorts are also options on many islands. Camping, however, is not: it's illegal on the beaches and there are no official campsites, even in wilderness areas.

### ACTIVITIES

Diving, snorkeling, fishing, kayaking, sailing and swimming – with or without dolphins – are all on the menu in the Bahamas. Hiking's not bad for landlubbers, though trails are usually short.

### Diving & Snorkeling

Wrecks, reefs, blue holes and sharks are the name of the underwater game. On New Providence several dive operators rent equipment and run trips. On Grand Bahama and the larger Out Islands and cays, you'll typically find one, possibly two, operators per island. For the greatest variety – peeking at the Tongue of the Ocean and plunging into

### THE BEST OF THE REST

The heart of traditional Bahamian culture still beats on **Cat Island**, one of the islands least touched by tourism. Obeah and bush medicine are still practiced. Cat has several interesting historic sites, including plantation ruins and the Mt Alvernia Hermitage.

The island's second-largest settlement is **Arthur's Town**, 30 miles (48km) north of New Bight, the island's governmental administrative center. The hamlet's main claim to fame is that it was the boyhood home of Sir Sidney Poitier, the Academy Award-winning actor. Sadly his childhood home is now derelict.

On top of **Mt Alvernia** (206ft; 62m), or Como Hill, as it is called by locals, is a blanched-stone church, built by the hermit Father Jerome, with a bell tower that looks like something Merlin might have conjured up in the days of King Arthur. You can enter the small chapel, tiny cloister and a guest cell the size of a large kennel. It's reached by a rock staircase hewn into the side of the hill. From the top, there's a spiritually reviving 360-degree view. Try to make it at sunrise or sunset.

**Long Island** is one of the most scenic Out Islands, stretching almost 80 miles south – only 4 miles at the widest – past stunning white and sky blue churches, lush greenery, bougainvillea-draped villages and pastel-colored schoolyards. The lone highway leads to magnificent bays, blue holes and miles of empty beach. Hurricane Noel caused extensive flooding in the fall of 2007, but the island is bouncing back and is ready for business.

## PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** Daily New Providence newspapers include the *Nassau Guardian*, the *Tribune* and the *Bahama Journal*. Grand Bahama offers the daily *Freeport News*, and Abaconians enjoy the weekly *Abaconian*.
- **Radio & TV** The government-owned Bahamas Broadcasting Corporation operates TV-channel 13 (ZNS) and the radio stations ZNS-1, ZNS-2, ZNS-FM and ZNS-3. Commercial radio stations include Love 97FM, More 94.9FM and Jam 100FM. Most hotels also offer American cable TV.
- **Electricity** Hotels operate on 120 volts/60 cycles, which is compatible with US appliances. Plug sockets are two- or three-pin US standard.
- **Weights & Measures** The imperial and metric systems are both in use.

a blue hole – consider Andros (p100), only a 2½-hour ferry ride from Nassau.

Some of the Bahamas' best reef snorkeling awaits just a few swift kicks from the beach. For operators and dives, see the activities section for each destination.

## Fishing

The fighting bonefish lures determined fishermen to Bahamian sandbanks from around the world.

Deep sea fishers can charter boats for about \$600/half day for trips off the coast of New Providence, Grand Bahama and some of the larger Out Islands. It's strictly regulated. Depending on the season, prey include mahi mahi, tuna and wahoo. See individual destination listings for guides.

## Kayaking

With their clear blue shallows and typically calm harborside waters, the Bahamian islands are a kayaker's nirvana. For low-key inland kayaking and informative ecotrips, try Grand Bahama (p83) and Eleuthera (p95). For cay-hopping and stunning blue water, there's the Exumas (p98). Many resorts and lodges provide complimentary kayaks for guests. The larger islands have a handful of rental companies.

## Kitesurfing

Kitesurfing is taking off, with newbies heading to Spanish Wells (p93) and Exuma (p98) and pros heading to the pink sands of Harbor Island, Eleuthera – where it's do it yourself at the moment.

## Surfing

The Bahamas best surf spots are off Elbow Cay in Abaco (p91) and at Surfer's Beach just south of Gregory Town, Eleuthera (p95).

## BUSINESS HOURS

**Banks** ☒ 9am or 9:30am to 3pm Monday to Thursday,

9am or 9:30am to 4:30pm Friday

**Businesses & Shops** ☒ 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday,  
10am to 5pm Saturday

**Supermarkets** ☒ 8am-7pm

Exceptions are noted in specific listings. Banks on smaller Out Islands and cays may be open only once or twice a week.

## CHILDREN

The Bahamas pursues the family traveler aggressively and the larger hotels compete by providing good facilities for children. Many have a babysitter or nanny service and large resorts, such as Atlantis, have a full range of activities for children. Children under 12 years normally room with their parents for free.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Murder rates reached a record high in 2007, with 79 reported throughout the Bahamas. These incidents, however, typically occurred in specific neighborhoods in larger cities or involved random disputes between citizens. Before you travel, however, check the country specific link at the website of the **US State Department** (<http://travel.state.gov/travel>) for the latest updates.

Note that the main thoroughfare on many Out Islands, typically the ubiquitous Queen's Hwy, is usually shoulderless and poorly lit. For walkers and those not used to driving on the left, the highway experience can be quite thrilling – or terrifying. Along these lines, you won't find many signs with street names either, so keep this guide and local maps handy.

As for annoyances, pesky sand flea-like bugs, called no-see-ums, can drive one to distraction on some of the prettiest beaches. Carry repellent.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Most countries are represented by honorary consuls. All listings below are located in Nassau, New Providence.

**Canada** (☎ 242-393-2123; Shirley St)

**China** (☎ 242-393-1415; Office Village Rd)

**UK** (Map p71; ☎ 242-325-7471/3)

**USA** (Map p71; ☎ 242-322-1181/2/3; <http://nassau.usembassy.gov/overview.html>; 42 Queen St, Nassau, New Providence) For emergencies call 242-328-2206.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See individual island listings, the Junkanoo boxed text (p73) or check the **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism website** ([www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com)) for information on festivals and events in the Bahamas.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

The pink dollar isn't particularly welcome in the Bahamas and there's not much public support for Bahamian gay and lesbian populations across the islands. Discretion is the better part of affection here. Antigay protesters met a gay-family-values cruise with placards and protests in 2004 and many gay-themed cruises now avoid Nassau. For more information, contact the gay-rights group **Rainbow Alliance of the Bahamas** (☎ 242-455-7242; <http://bahamianglad.tripod.com>).

## HOLIDAYS

Bahamian national holidays that fall on Saturday or Sunday are usually observed on the previous Friday or following Monday. The Bahamas has the following national holidays:

**New Year's Day** January 1

**Good Friday** Friday before Easter

**Easter Monday** Monday after Easter

**Whit Monday** Seven weeks after Easter

**Labour Day** First Friday in June

**Independence Day** July 10

**Emancipation Day** First Monday in August

**Discovery Day** October 12

**Christmas Day** December 25

**Boxing Day** December 26

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are scattered throughout New Providence and Grand Bahamas and you can

usually find a library or coffee shop with access on the larger Out Islands. Don't assume your hotel has a computer – check first. More hotels are providing wi-fi, if not in rooms, typically in the lobby or by the pool.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Helpful Bahamian-oriented websites include the following:

**Bahama Pundit** ([www.bahamapundit.com](http://www.bahamapundit.com)) Provides informative, sometime quirky, essays by Bahamian columnists on cultural, environmental and political topics.

**Bahamas – Tourist Guide** ([www.geographia.com/bahamas](http://www.geographia.com/bahamas)) Information about the country, its history and present culture.

**Government of the Bahamas** ([www.bahamas.gov.bs](http://www.bahamas.gov.bs)) Government website with official contact information.

**Islands of the Bahamas** ([www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com)) The official tourism website of the Bahamas is a good starting point and provides packages, but it's not comprehensive.

**Nassau Guardian** ([www.thenassauguardian.com](http://www.thenassauguardian.com)) The newspaper's site is a good starting point to find out about issues key to the country.

**Out Islands of the Bahamas** ([www.myoutislands.com](http://www.myoutislands.com))

This helpful sight from the Out Island Promotions Board provides information on beaches, landmarks and a fair number of hotels – reviews being promotionally positive of course. Fairly comprehensive event calendar.

## MAPS

See listings for each destination.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

Many of the Out Islands are serviced by small government clinics, usually found off the Queen's Hwy in the major settlements. Listings for local hospitals and medical clinics are listed for each destination.

## MONEY

The Bahamian dollar (BS\$) is linked one-to-one with the US dollar, so you can use US currency everywhere. The major commercial banks maintain branches throughout the islands, although in the Out Islands they are thin on the ground.

There are ATMs in the leading tourist centers. Most accept Visa, MasterCard and Amex via international networks, such as Cirrus and PLUS. Bring extra cash for small meals, sundries and tips when heading to the far reaches of the Out Islands or hopping between cays where ATMS are few and far between.

Major credit cards are widely accepted throughout the islands. Credit cards are *not*

widely accepted for general transactions in the more remote Out Islands. You can use your credit card to get cash advances at most commercial banks.

## POST

The cost for an intra-island and interisland surface mail stamp is US\$0.25 per ounce; 1oz air mail letters interisland are US\$0.35. Air mail rates for 0.5oz letters/postcards to the US are \$US0.75/0.65; to Europe and Central and South America, US\$0.80/0.65; and to Africa, Asia and Australia US\$0.90/0.65.

## TELEPHONE

The Bahamian country code is ☎ 242. You need to dial this when making interisland calls. When dialing within an island, you just need to dial the seven-digit local number. The country code has been included in the Bahamian phone listings in this chapter. To call the Bahamas from the US and Canada, dial ☎ 1-242 then the local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international access code then ☎ 242 then the local number.

The government-owned **Bahamas Telecommunications Corporation** (BaTelCo; Map p65; ☎ 242-302-7000; www.btcbahamas.com; John F Kennedy Dr, Nassau, New Providence) has an office on most Bahamian islands. Even the smallest settlement usually has at least one public phone. Many booths require phone cards, issued in denominations of US\$5, US\$10 and US\$20.

Hotel rates are typically very expensive. Many hotels also charge for an unanswered call after the receiving phone has rung five times.

If traveling in the Bahamas for an extended period and making lots of local calls, consider buying a SIM card upon arrival at a cell phone shop for about US\$15. Make sure your cell is unlocked by your provider or pay to have it unlocked at the store. Cell phones can also be rented for local use for about US\$10/day plus a phone card and security deposit.

## Cell Phones

You can bring your own cell phone into the Bahamas, but you may be charged a customs fee upon entry (refunded upon exit). Some phones may not operate on BaTelCo's cellular system until you rent temporary use of a 'roaming' cellular line. Many will have no problems and will roam without registration. Check this with your service provider

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 911, 919
- **Fire** ☎ 911, 919
- **Police** ☎ 911, 919

before leaving. Roaming fees here can be very expensive.

## Domestic Calls

Local calls are free of charge, although hotels will charge US\$0.75 to US\$1 per call.

## International Calls

Many Bahamian phone booths and all BaTelCo offices permit direct dial to overseas numbers. It is usually cheaper to call direct from a phone booth than to call from your hotel via an operator. In some hotels, however, you can dial a local pre-paid calling card access number and then pay the hotel only the cost of the local call.

Before your trip, call your cell phone provider to check for plans offering lower rates for calls from the Bahamas. US iPhone owners should note that due to the iPhone's roaming superpowers, you could come home to an astronomical bill. Keep the phone in the right travel mode or ask about disabling the dataport prior to leaving.

Many national companies also offer a service for their subscribers, issuing international charge cards and a code number. Costs for calling home are then billed directly to your home number. Check with you provider.

## Phone Cards

The majority of Bahamian public telephones accept only prepaid phone cards issued by BaTelCo, available at stores and other accredited outlets near phone-card booths. The phone cards are sold in denominations of US\$5, US\$10, US\$20 and US\$50.

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Disabled travelers will need to plan their vacation carefully, as few allowances have been made for them in the Bahamas. For a listing of transportation options and services, start with the government's **Office of Disability Affairs** (☎ 242-325-2252/3). In Grand Bahama there's also the **Northern Bahamas Council for the Disabled** (☎ 242-352-7720; Freeport).



## TOURIST INFORMATION

The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism can be reached at ☎ 242-302-2000; for comprehensive information and reservations, visit [www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com). For information on the Out Islands, visit [www.myoutislands.com](http://www.myoutislands.com).

Most large towns have tourist offices; see individual destinations for details.

## VISAS

Citizens of the US, Canada, the EU and Commonwealth countries do not currently need a visa for stays of up to eight months. Check with the Bahamian embassy for specific requirements. Citizens of most Central and South American countries, including Mexico, do not require a visa for stays up to 14 days. Visas are required for all visitors staying longer than eight months.

Citizens from the following countries require passports and visas for stays of any duration: Dominican Republic, Haiti, South Africa, all communist countries and many Asian countries. Citizens from all other countries should check the current entry requirements at the nearest Bahamian embassy or with the **Department of Immigration** (☎ 242-322-7530; PO Box N-831, Hawkins Hill, Nassau). There are also offices for Immigration at Nassau International Airport and at Prince George Wharf. Keep trying the number, they can be slow to pick up. See below for passport information.

## WORK

It is very difficult for non-Bahamians to obtain a work permit, the rule being that no expatriate may be offered a job that a qualified Bahamian can do. Employers must advertise locally and if the job is unfilled, a fairly exhaustive amount of paperwork is then required by the Department of Immigration.

# TRANSPORTATION

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Entering the Bahamas

All visitors must carry a valid passport and a return or onward ticket as well as sufficient funds to support their stay. This requirement will be extended to sea travel for US citizens; check for updates before you leave.

This section addresses transportation to the Bahamas from other countries. See p108 for information on travel between the islands.

## Air

The departure tax of US\$15 is typically included in the ticket price. For a brief summary of airlines and flight schedules by island, check [www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com). The two largest airports are Nassau International Airport and Grand Bahama International Airport. A few airlines fly directly to airports on the larger Out Islands, but the majority of flights arrive in Nassau or Freeport where passengers will connect to another flight before continuing to the Out Islands.

The national airline **Bahamasair** (☎ 242-377-5505, in Freeport 242-352-8341; [www.bahamasair.com](http://www.bahamasair.com)) has an unblemished safety record and its pilots have an excellent reputation (see [www.airsafe.com](http://www.airsafe.com) for details). Delays, however, are regular occurrences and flights are canceled without warning. Bahamians say 'If you have time to spare, fly Bahamasair.'

The listings below include international cities offering direct flights to the destination; keep in mind, however, that this information changes regularly.

## ABACOS

Abacos has two airports: **Marsh Harbour International Airport** (MHH; ☎ 242-367-3039; Marsh Harbour, Abacos) and **Treasure Cay International Airport** (TCB), located 25 miles north of Marsh Harbour. Taxis between Treasure Cay and Marsh Harbour can run US\$60, so pick the right airport when making reservations.

The following airlines fly into Marsh Harbour:

**American Airlines** (☎ 800-433-7300; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com))  
Miami

**Bahamas Air** (☎ 242-367-2095, 800-222-4262; [www.bahamasair.com](http://www.bahamasair.com)) West Palm Beach, Nassau

**Continental Connection/Gulfstream International** (☎ 242-367-3415, 800-231-0856; [www.continental.com/](http://www.continental.com/)  
[www.gulfstreamair.com](http://www.gulfstreamair.com)) Fort Lauderdale, Miami, West Palm Beach

**Twin Air** (☎ 242-367-0140, 954-359-8266; [www.flytwinair.com](http://www.flytwinair.com)) Fort Lauderdale

**Vintage Props & Jets** (☎ 242-367-4852, 800-852-0275; [www.vpj.com](http://www.vpj.com)) Daytona, Fort Lauderdale, Melbourne

**Yellow Air Taxi** (☎ 242-367-0033, 888-935-5694; [www.flyyellowairtaxi.com](http://www.flyyellowairtaxi.com)) Fort Lauderdale; charters also available

Continental flies directly from Ft Lauderdale and West Palm Beach to Treasure Cay. Island Express, **Twin Air** (☎ 242-365-8660), Vintage Props & Jets and Yellow Air Taxi fly into Treasure Cay from the same departure points listed above.

### ANDROS

There are four airports on Andros. Be sure to choose the correct one based on your lodging. The **Andros Town Airport** (☎ 242-368-2724) in Central Andros is currently serviced by **Continental Connection/Gulfstream International** (☎ 242-377-5486, 800-231-0856; www.continental.com, www.gulfstreamair.com), which has flights from Fort Lauderdale, Nassau, West Palm Beach.

### ELEUTHERA

In 100-mile-long Eleuthera, try to fly into the airport closest to your destination. **North Eleuthera International Airport** (ELH; ☎ 242-335-1242; North Eleuthera) is close to the ferry dock across the sound from Harbour Island. Governor's Harbor is in the middle of the island and Rock Sound is further south.

All airlines listed below also fly into Governor's Harbor from Fort Lauderdale.

**Continental Connection/Gulfstream International** (☎ 800-231-0856; www.continental.com/www.gulfstreamair.com) Fort Lauderdale, Miami

**Lynx** (☎ 954-772-9808, 888-596-9247; www.lynxair.com) Fort Lauderdale

**Twin Air** (☎ 242-335-1696; www.flytwinair.com) Fort Lauderdale

### EXUMAS

Located a few miles north of George Town, **Exuma International Airport** (GGT; George Town, Exuma) offers a handful of car rental agencies and a restaurant. Taxis meet most flights.

**American Airlines/American Eagle** (☎ 242-345-0124, 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) Miami

**Bahamas Air** (☎ 800-222-4262; www.bahamasair.com) Nassau

**Continental Connection/Gulfstream International** (☎ 800-525-0280; www.continental.com, www.gulfstreamair.com) Fort Lauderdale

**Lynx Air** (☎ 954-772-9808, 888-596-9247; www.lynxair.com) Fort Lauderdale

**United Airways** (☎ 800-622-1015) Charlotte, Philadelphia, Boston and New York seasonally

### GRAND BAHAMA

Just north of downtown, **Grand Bahama International Airport** (FP0; ☎ 242-352-6020; Freeport, Grand Bahama) is served by the following airlines:

**American Airlines/American Eagle** (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) Miami

**Bahamas Air** (☎ 242-352-8341, 800-222-4262; www.bahamasair.com) Fort Lauderdale, Nassau

**Continental Connection/Gulfstream International** (☎ 800-525-0280; www.continental.com, www.gulfstreamair.com) Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Orlando, West Palm Beach

**Delta Connection** (☎ 800-221-1212; www.delta.com) Atlanta

**US Airways** (☎ 800-622-1015; www.usairways.com) Charlotte

### NEW PROVIDENCE

New Providence's main airport is **Lynden Pindling International Airport** (NAS; ☎ 242-377-7281; Nassau, New Providence), called the Nassau International Airport until 2008. This hub services international and domestic flights, with most interisland flights originating and returning here. New US and international terminals are due for completion in 2011. In the meantime, you'll find a couple of ATMs, a few cafés and a bunch of duty-free shops.

The following airlines fly into the airport:

**Air Canada** (☎ 242-377-8220, 888-247-2262; www.aircanada.com) Montreal, Toronto

**Air Jamaica** (☎ 800-523-5585; www.airjamaica.com) Montego Bay

**American Airlines/American Eagle** (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) Chicago, Dallas, Fort Lauderdale, Miami

**Bahamasair** (☎ 242-377-8451, 800-222-4262; www.bahamasair.com) Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Orlando, West Palm Beach

**British Airways** (☎ 242-377-2338; www.ba.com) London

**Continental Connection/Gulfstream International** (☎ 800-231-0856; www.continental.com, www.gulfstreamair.com) Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Newark, West Palm Beach

**Delta** (☎ 242-377-1053, 800-221-1212; www.delta.com) Atlanta, Cincinnati, Fort Lauderdale, New York, Orlando, Tampa

**Jet Blue** (☎ 242-377-1174; www.jetblue.com) Boston, New York

**Spirit Airlines** (☎ 242-377-0152; www.spiritair.com) Fort Lauderdale, New York, Orlando

**United** (☎ 800-864-8331; www.united.com) Washington DC

**US Airways** (☎ 242-377-8886/7; 800-622-1015; www.usairways.com) Charlotte; flights from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington available seasonally

### Sea

#### CRUISE-SHIP

Numerous cruise ships dock in Nassau and Grand Bahama. Most originate in Florida.

Please see p830 for more information on the various type of cruises available.

## FERRY

**Discovery Cruise Line** (☎ 800-259-1579; [www.discoverycruiseline.com](http://www.discoverycruiseline.com)) runs daily between Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Freeport, Grand Bahama (US\$140). It departs Florida at 8am, returning at 10pm. Rates include three buffet meals and a Las Vegas-style casino.

## YACHT

The sheltered waters of the 750-mile-long archipelago attract thousands of yachters each year. Winds and currents favor the passage south. Sailing conditions are at their best in summer, though hurricanes can be a threat throughout the season.

## GETTING AROUND

Perusing a map, it's tempting to think that island-hopping down the chain is easy. Unfortunately, it's not – that is, unless you have your own boat or plane. Interisland air is centered on Nassau. Getting between the islands without constantly backtracking is a bit of a feat. Even the mail boats are Nassau-centric.

## Air

Interisland flights offer the only quick and convenient way to travel within the Bahamas and islanders ride airplanes like Londoners use buses. Private charter flights can be an economical option for those traveling in a group.

**Bahamasair** (☎ 242-377-5505, in Freeport 242-352-8341; [www.bahamasair.com](http://www.bahamasair.com)) The dominant airline in the Bahamas operates on a hub-and-spoke system, so to fly between adjacent islands, such as Cat and Long Islands, you'll have to first return to Nassau. If you do a lot of island-hopping, you'll feel like a yo-yo and may need to overnight in Nassau between flights; budget accordingly. Bahamasair flies to Freeport, Marsh Harbour, Treasure Cay, North Eleuthera, Governor's Harbour, Rock Sound, George Town and several southern islands including Cat Island and Long Island.

Most flights to the Out Islands are during the day since the smaller airports are not properly lighted for night flights. A few

smaller interisland airlines and charters, are listed below:

**Abaco Air** (☎ 242-367-2266; [www.abacoaviationcentre.com](http://www.abacoaviationcentre.com)) Flies from Marsh Harbour to Nassau and North Eleuthera. Charters also available.

**Southern Air** (☎ 242-323-7217; [www.southernaircharter.com](http://www.southernaircharter.com)) Flies from Nassau to Governor's Harbour and North Eleuthera in Eleuthera, as well as Stella Maris and Deadman's Cay on Long Island.

**Western Air** (☎ 242-377-222; [www.westernairbahamas.com](http://www.westernairbahamas.com)) Flies from Nassau to Andros Town, Bimini, Grand Bahama and Exuma.

## Bicycle

Cycling is cheap, convenient, healthy, environmentally sound and typically fun. Just make sure your seat has padding – most bikes are heavy, have one speed and can be a bit worn out. Major resort hotels rent bicycles for about US\$20 daily. See local listings for specific rental companies.

## Boat

### FERRY

The primary ferry operation in the islands is **Bahamas Ferries** (Map p68; ☎ 242-323-2166/8; [www.bahamasferries.com](http://www.bahamasferries.com)), a high-speed ferry linking Nassau to Andros, Abacos, Eleuthera and the Exumas.

### Nassau to Abacos

Bahamas Ferries makes the four-hour run (one way/round trip US\$60/100) between Sandy Point, Great Abaco and Nassau twice a week.

### Nassau to Eleuthera

Bahamas Ferries also currently makes a daily two-hour run from Potter's Cay in Nassau to Harbour Island (one way/round trip US\$75/115) at 8am, returning at 3:55pm Mon-Fri and 1pm Sun. It also runs a ferry (one way/round trip US\$70/80) from Potter's Cay to Governor's Harbour on Tuesdays, Thursday and Fridays and returns on the same days.

### Nassau to Exumas

A not-so-fast ferry departs the Bahamas Ferries dock at Potter's Cay for the overnight journey to the Exumas. The scheduled 12-hour trip can stretch closer to 14 depending on the weather. It's a 'sleep in your seat' deal so pack a blanket and a toothbrush, dress comfortably and expect to wake up several

times during the night. It provides a snack bar and a movie.

### Nassau to Andros

There's a two-hour ferry run by Bahamas Ferries from Nassau to Fresh Creek on Andros on Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays, returning on the same day.

### Grand Bahama to Abacos

**Pinder's Ferry** (☎ 242-353-3093, 242-557-6624; round trip/one way \$US90/45, children half price) A small boat runs twice a day between McLean's Town, Grand Bahama and Crown Haven on Little Abaco.

### MAIL BOAT

About 20 mail boats sail under government contract to most inhabited islands. They regularly depart Potter's Cay in Nassau for Grand Bahama and the Out Islands. Traditionally sailing overnight, journeys last five to 36 hours. Simple meals are typically included but you might want to bring back-up. This is the quintessential slow boat – expect delays – but it's also a great way to meet locals and soak up the island lifestyle. Call the **Dockmaster's Office** (☎ 242-393-1064) for up-to-date schedules and fares. Some information also available on the **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** ([www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com)) website.

### Nassau to Abacos

The *Captain Gurth Dean* departs Nassau for the Abacos at 11pm Tuesday and returns Friday at 5am; it's a seven-hour trip (US\$40 one way).

### Nassau to Eleuthera

The *Eleuthera Express* (US\$30 one way) departs Nassau's Potter's Cay on Monday and Thursday, returning from Harbour Island on Tuesday and Sunday.

### Nassau to Exumas

The *Grand Master* (\$US45 one way) departs Potter's Cay in Nassau on Tuesdays at 2pm and arrives in George Town in the Exumas 14 hours later. It returns Thursday at 10am. Call the boat's owner directly (☎ 242-393-1041) for an updated schedule and fare.

### Nassau to Andros

Currently, *MV Lady D* departs Nassau for Fresh Creek on Andros on Thursday, returning on Sunday.

### WATER TAXI

Water taxis ply between Nassau and Paradise Island. Several other offshore islands and their neighboring cays are served by private water taxis.

### Bus

Nassau and Freeport have dozens of *jitneys* (private minibuses) licensed to operate on pre-established routes.

There's no public transportation on the Out Islands or at airports, as the taxi drivers' union is too powerful. Likewise, few hotels are permitted to operate their own transfer service for guests. A number of adventure outfitters and tours, however, will send courtesy shuttles to your hotel before and after reserved trips.

### Car & Golf Cart

Bahamians are generally cautious and civilized drivers and main roads are usually in good condition. Side roads? Not so much. Believe any Bahamian who warns you that a road is bad. Lighting is also poor on main roads and side roads on the Out Islands, so night driving can be a bit of challenge when looking for unfamiliar destinations.

### DRIVER'S LICENSE

To drive in the Bahamas you must have a current license from your home country or state. A visitor can drive on his or her home license for three months.

### RENTAL

Several major international car-rental companies have outlets in Nassau and Freeport, along with smaller local firms. In the Out Islands there are some very good local agencies. Ask your hotel for recs, or look for display boards at the airport.

Renters must be 21 (some companies rent only to those 25 or older). Collision damage waiver insurance is US\$15 a day. Local companies may not offer insurance.

You usually rent for a 24-hour period, with rates starting at US\$70 (from around US\$80 in Nassau and from US\$65 for smaller islands).

Golf carts can be rented on the smaller islands and cays for US\$50 per day.

### ROAD RULES

Always drive on the *left*-hand side. At traffic circles (roundabouts), remember to circle in

a clockwise direction, entering to the left. You must give way to traffic already in the circle. It's compulsory to wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle or scooter.

### Taxi

There's no shortage of licensed taxis in Nassau and Freeport, where they can be hailed on the streets. Taxis are also the main local transportation in the Out Islands, where they

meet all incoming planes and ferries in the larger settlements.

All taxi operators are licensed. Taxi fares are fixed by the government according to distance: rates are usually for two people. Each additional person is charged a flat rate of US\$3. Fixed rates have been established from airports and cruise terminals to specific hotels and major destinations. These rates should be displayed in the taxi.