

# **Cruising the Bahamas**

## **With the Lucky Me**

***Helpful suggestions, ports of call, and general advice for the Captain and Crew planning their first trip to the Islands & Cays of the Bahamas.***



**Cruiser \* Sailboat \* Yacht \* Fishing Boat \* Trawler**  
**A guide for 2 to 12 weeks boating in the Bahamas**

**Produced By: Lucky Me Captain Greg Costa  
& First Mate Susan Costa**

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*Excerpts from various sources are recognized throughout and often found boxed*

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We truly appreciate our many boating friends that have supported us and offered great advice. And those that lead important boating organizations and companies.

- Kim Russo, Exe. Dir. AGLCA , America’s Great Loop Cruisers’ Association
- John & Katia - Our Looping Mentors
- Mike, Nicole & Cindy From Borden Light Marina, Fall River, MA
- Our Boating Family at Taunton Yacht Club, Dighton, MA (Commodore Donna Webster)
- Great Boating Friends at Borden Light Marina Especially: Kim, Sean, Alicia, Lon, Tina, Peter, Bob, Cathy, Janice and Many Others (meatball sandwiches will be back in 2020!)
- Aaron with the #1 Facebook page “Boat Owners United” with over 99,000 members,
  - Waterway Guides
  - Dockwa
  - Simrad
  - West Marine
  - Andrew Maryott at Galati Yacht Sales

## Introduction

A couple of years back, we started talking about long-distance cruising. We learned about “The Great Loop,” and felt a calling to navigate this amazing journey of 6,000+ miles through the US Intercostal Water Ways. We joined AGLCA (*America's Great Loop Cruisers' Association - [greatloop.org](http://greatloop.org)*), attended a three-day seminar, and purchased a wall map that still hangs in our home. We wanted to take at least a year to visit the many states we would travel through, and before long we added another 6 months to the trip (18 months total) with side trips to the Bahamas over the winter months.



In early 2019, we documented our cruising trip to the Bahamas on our travel Facebook page: **Lucky Me Looping**. Soon the page grew to over 5,000 followers, and many asked for our notes and more details. Members sent us messages asking specific questions about islands we visited, weather issues and general advice. One morning Greg said, “We need to write a book with all the details and share the information we learned.” What he really meant was Susan please type it all up and I’ll edit it! 😊

We asked ourselves a few times, “Why write this book?” Of course, one of the answers is, “Why not?” But the true answer is, we met boaters on their first boat trip to the Bahamas that had spent limited time planning. They learned about the weather firsthand by going out in “bad weather windows”. They paid \$9 for a box of Ritz crackers because no one warned them about the high cost of groceries, and when they couldn’t get internet connection, they had no access to online

information for the next port or local things to do. While we strongly recommend ***(almost insist)*** the purchase of the latest updated Waterway Guide Bahamas book, at over 400 pages we realize that most will not read it cover to cover.

**“Cruising the Bahamas with the Lucky Me”** will assist the first time Bahama boater with helpful information. We also include our two-month route with visits to 24 Islands and Cays. We did not visit every island and skipped a few “must stop here” suggestions. Some readers will undoubtedly question why we didn’t visit “this or that,” and instead went to an out island off the beaten track.

Our trip, and hence this book, was never intended to cover every island, every cay, and the over 200 different marinas and fuel stops in the Bahamas. What it does offer, are some highlights that cover many different ports of call including some of the more popular stops. If you are traveling for only 2 weeks, you might pick 2 or 3 islands. If you are planning on three or more months in the Bahamas, use this book, but add additional stops or stay at a few locations longer.

We had a few goals in mind during our months of pre-planning: visit a mix of the tourist spots, well known ports, and a few out islands that would not be on the typical boaters’ port of call. We are extremely pleased with the overall trip and hope that this book provides the reader in the planning stages of boating in the Bahamas a helpful resource.



Last but not least, please visit and like our travel Facebook page **Lucky Me Looping**, for hundreds of photos of our stops in the Bahamas and join us as we travel The Great Loop.

Best Regards,

*Greg & Susan*

Lucky Me Looping

## About the Authors

**WHO:** Greg grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts. After high school, he joined the Air Force and served 9 years. He spent 22 years working for an international refrigerated warehouse company in New Bedford, MA, and retired as the Operations Manager in January 2019. Greg is 54, has two adult married children, and two beautiful grandchildren.



Susan spent most of her life in Attleboro, Massachusetts. For the past 25 years she owned a real estate appraisal company. She also has a background in marketing, fundraising for non-profits, and politics. She is 53 and also has two adult children

Greg and Susan met in early December of 2015, at the Borden Light Marina restaurant Topsy Toboggan, in Fall River, MA. (A crazy story they love to share with new boating friends over drinks on the Lucky Me!) Fast forward four-months to April 2016, where they were married in a fairytale wedding at the Colonel Blackinton Inn before 150 family and friends in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

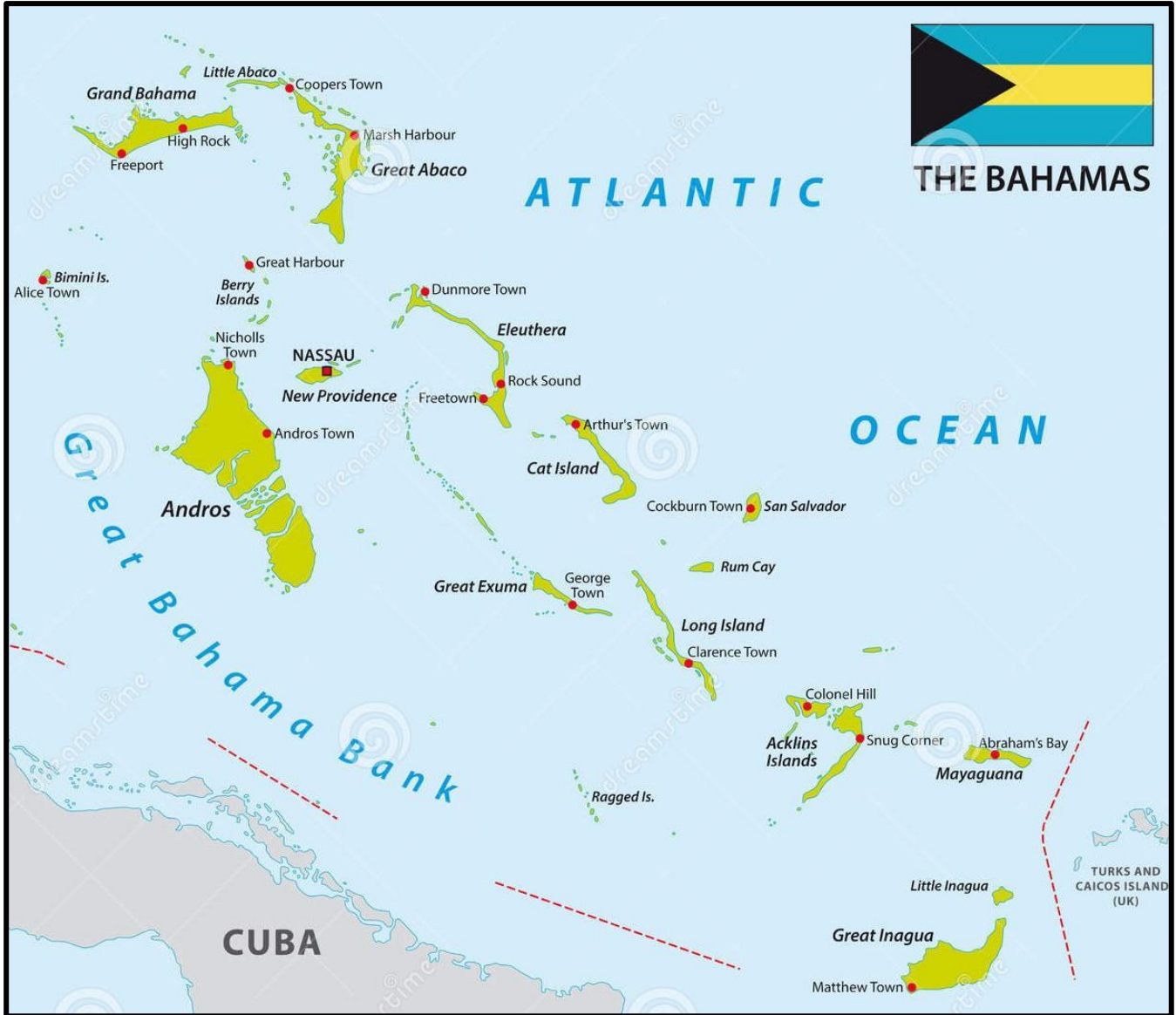
**BOAT LIFE:** Susan has been boating since childhood. Greg never owned a boat until after they married. To the amazement of family and friends, in a few years with lots of practice Greg has become quite the Captain.

**HOMEPORT:** The Lucky Me's homeport is Mount Hope Bay, Rhode Island. Greg and Susan enjoy membership in the Taunton Yacht Club of Dighton, MA. They have yearly moorings in Rhode Island. They also use a slip at Borden Light Marina in Fall River, MA, home to the Topsy Seagull waterfront floating bar and Topsy Toboggan Restaurant (where Greg & Susan met).

**BOAT:** The "Lucky Me" is a 35-foot Tiara 3500 Sovran with Volvo IPS drives.

**TRAVEL PLANS:** After island hopping the Bahamas, travel plans include a year traveling the famous Great Loop; a total of 18 months, 6,000 + miles, 16+ states, and Canada. February 2020 will find them back in the Bahamas followed by a return to Borden Light Marina for summer 2020.

# Bahamas Map



(Map: Dreamstown.com)

## Why Visit the Bahamas?

*(Excerpt from: Frommers.com) The Bahamas is one of the most geographically complicated nations of the Atlantic. It's a coral-based archipelago comprising more than 700 islands - hundreds more if you count the rocky outcroppings that have damaged the hulls of countless ships since colonial days.*

*Most of the population is centered on New Providence Island (Nassau / Cable Beach / Paradise Island) and Grand Bahama Island (Freeport / Lucaya).*

*The 760-mile-long chain of islands, cays, and reefs that make up The Bahamas stretches from Grand Bahama Island, whose western point is 75 miles almost due east of Palm Beach, Florida, to Great Inagua, southernmost of The Bahamas, which lies about 60 miles northeast of Cuba and less than 100 miles north of Haiti. Cay (pronounced "key") is the Spanish word for small-island.*

*Sandy beaches, fishing (some of the best in the world), boating, nearly perfect weather (even though the islands are in the often stormy Atlantic Ocean), and accessibility to the U.S. mainland put this archipelago on the world tourist map. The Bahamas lies right off the Florida coast and is ideal for both quick 4 or 5 day jaunts or much longer vacations.*

It is important to note, that less than 50 of these islands and cays offer highly populated towns, villages, or community centers. Out islands might be small outcrops with limestone shorelines, cays with interesting wildlife, or a sparsely inhabited island with miles of beautiful beaches. No matter where you travel, just about every stop will offer beaches with hints of pink, peach or sugar white sand. One can find miles of mangroves, lush vegetation, hidden blue holes, and abandoned ruins reflecting interesting local history. On land you will find curly-tail lizards, hermit crabs, birds, interesting insects, and on a few islands pigs!

The amazing turquoise water is the Bahamas' most remarkable feature. These beautiful ocean waters are filled with sharks, sea turtles, spiny lobsters, queen conch, crabs, shrimp and fish of every color. The pace and culture are charmingly Caribbean. Residents are friendly and welcoming. With some research, you will be able to find fuel, water, provisions, and amenities to make your visit truly enjoyable and filled with memories to last a life time.

## Bahamas After Hurricane Dorian\*\*

\*\*This page was added to this book for Version 3 (10/2019) to address Hurricane Dorian.



On September 1, 2019, the eye of Hurricane Dorian made landfall on the Abaco Islands with maximum sustained winds of 185 mph. On September 2, the eye of Dorian moved over the eastern end of Grand Bahama Island, and drifted across the island. This is the strongest hurricane on record to affect the Bahamas.

We are heartbroken over the devastation by Hurricane Dorian to the Abacos and Grand Bahama Island. The loss of life, destroyed homes and business, and the destruction to the infrastructure is overwhelming to comprehend. It is sad to think that some areas in the Abacos and Grand Bahama Island may need years to fully rebuild.

*"The Bahamas is a country of 700 islands and cays beginning 50 miles off the Florida coast and stretching for 750 miles from Bimini in the north to Inagua in the south. The best thing that people can do to help the Bahamas is simple: Visit." said Ellison Thompson, Deputy Director General of the Bahamas Tourism Ministry, in an interview a week after the hurricane.*

**Grand Bahama Island:** By mid-October, good news of re-openings were being noted on social media and in news reports. Several tourist areas on the island were enthusiastically bouncing back including many marinas, hotels, restaurants, and shops. Grand Bahamas Island was spreading the word that they were "open for business".

**Abacos:** Sadly it appears that marinas in Marsh Harbour, Treasure Cay, Hope Town and the Man of War Cay area in the Abacos will not be "open for business" as quickly as Grand Bahama Island. Although there are some Abacos favorites that are open and ready to welcome back the boating community including: Pete's Pub & Gallery in Little Harbour, Green Turtle Club on Green Turtle Cay and Spanish Cay Marina on Spanish Cay.



## Best Boat - Island Hopping the Bahamas

With two islands (Bimini & Grand Bahamas) only 50 miles from Florida's east coast, it is possible for even a modest sized boat under 30 feet, to cruise or sail to the Bahamas. Facebook pages are available for those traveling with jet boats, jet skis, and small fishing boats to cross together.



Spend a night at a marina or travel through a mooring field and you will see just about every boat imaginable: sailboats, cruisers, fishing boats, sail and power catamarans, trawlers, and large yachts. Even boats lacking cabins and sleeping births can visit and enjoy on-site lodging at many marinas.

It is important to note that boating in the Bahamas is at times challenging. Reliable aids for navigation are often non-existent, relocated by a storm, or just few and far between. Your trip will include crossing the open ocean with no land in sight for miles. You will navigate waters in remote areas with reefs, limestone ledge, and sandy shoals. Plans need to be made for overnights at marina docks, moorings, or protected anchorages. You need access to fuel, clean water, and for extended stays fresh food. Research and plan well for a safe and enjoyable trip.

Weather and time are also important factors. A slower boat traveling 4 to 8 knots will require most of the day (and decent weather) to get from a Florida departure point to a safe harbor in the nearest Bahamas port. However, a faster boat traveling at 20 knots or more can reach the western islands of the Bahamas in a few hours and even some out islands in less than a full day.

Although a faster boat allows you to maximize shorter weather windows and travel significant distance in short time, there are many that prefer the pace of a slower boat which is more economical for long distance travel. What is one person's "perfect" boat for the Bahamas is someone else's "nightmare". The only perfect boat is the one that works for you!

*Quotes from people who love cruising/sailing in the Bahamas ....*

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**“We love our power catamaran, because of her shallow draft and long-range capabilities.”**

**Lesli & Don, Rhode Island, on *Salt Pondering*, 39’ Leopard Power Cat**

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**“We love our sailboat as it is a safe and economical with low cost on fuel and electric, while giving us plenty of room to stretch out for our 5 months in Hope Town, Abaco”**  
**Vince & Linda, Canada, on *Fort Night*, 37’ Custom Sailboat**

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**“We feel confident and safe in a very seaworthy boat with twin 300hp Yamaha engines. Our boat is also a good size to get into the islands of the Bahamas”**

**Ian & Liz, Florida, on *Golden Gael*, 28’ Grady White Freedom 285**

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**“We love cruising the Exumas. The colors are just amazing and inspired us to paint our boat first Bahama Blue and then Island Turquoise! Always looking forward to going back”**  
**Jonathan & Desiree, Florida, on *Synergy 4*, 60’ Prestige Yacht**

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**“This boat is safe for crossing the Gulf Stream. I really enjoy the wahoo and mahi-mahi fishing in the excellent waters of the Bahamas.”** Barry, Oregon, on *Job Site*, 46’ Post Sport Fish

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**“The Lucky Me is the perfect boat for us as we cruise the Bahamas. Seaworthy, quality built, and very comfortable for a couple of months of island hopping.”**  
**Greg & Susan, Rhode Island, on *Lucky Me*, 35’ Tiara Sovran**

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## Getting Ready – Planning Before You Go

This list is not all inclusive but is some of the many steps we took to get ready for our voyage to the Bahamas. If you are planning a quick two-week vacation to one or two islands you might have less planning needs versus those considering months of living in the Bahamas.

### 90-120 Days Out

- ✓ Order passports. If you already have passports check the expiration date.
- ✓ Research Bahamas Custom & Immigration requirements. Print out the Custom Forms at: <https://www.bahamas.com/faq/enteringexiting-policies>
- ✓ Understand the requirements for the return trip to the United States. With a little pre-planning you may be able to use the **CBP Reporting Offsite Arrival - Mobile (ROAM)**. This could make your return to the US less complicated. Visit the website at: <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/pleasure-boats-private-flyers/pleasure-boat-overview> or go to [cbp.gov](http://cbp.gov) (search pleasure boats).
- ✓ Research online the many Bahamas Islands and Cays, marinas, anchorages and sites you want to visit. Waterway Guide Bahamas covers all of the Bahamas. Order any reference books, maps or guides you want in print. Waterway Guide Bahamas (updated daily online and yearly in print) was our go-to book for general information on the islands, marinas and sites not to miss!
- ✓ Make a rough schedule and map of your route
- ✓ Order online a yellow quarantine & Bahamas courtesy flag. You need to fly the quarantine flag 3 miles off shore before you clear customs at your first destination. After clearing you will fly the Bahamas courtesy flag till you re-enter US waters. Most boats will fly the 12" x 18" size.
- ✓ Learn about the weather in the Gulf Stream and how to judge the right "weather window" to cross over to your first destination.
- ✓ Plan your exit point from the United States. In Florida some of the more common departure ports include: Fort Pierce, Palm Beach (aka: Lake Worth), Port Everglades (aka: Fort Lauderdale) and Miami. Boaters going to the Bahamas for the first time, typically choose West End, Freeport, or Port Lucaya on Grand Bahama Island or Bimini Island as their point of entry, due to their proximity to the Florida east coast.

- ✓ Consider joining Facebook pages dedicated to those traveling in the Bahamas. There are many. Also pages of marinas and areas you want to visit.

*We recommend ....*

- a) Bahamas Cruising and Sailing (Over 11,000 members)
- b) Abaco, Bahamas – Living on Island Time! (Over 20,000 members)
- c) Bahamas Meteorology (Weather and marine forecast- 4,500 members)
- d) Boat Owners United (General Boating site with over 99,000 members)
- e) Sailing and Cruising (General Boating site with over 44,000 members)

*Additional Facebook pages to consider:* Travel Bahamas, Bahamas National Trust, Hope Town Bulletin Group, NEMA – Bahamas

- ✓ Explore options for cell service and internet connection. We added international calling to our Verizon phone plan. A friend who did not ended up with a cell phone bill over \$2,000 for 5 weeks out of the country! We strongly recommend **MyIslandWifi.com** for your internet use. Unlimited data is \$75.00 a month.
- ✓ Arrange for online bill payment and paperless bills if long term travel is planned.
- ✓ Check your credit cards and use the cards that do not have any out of country fees. Read the fine print. Some credit card companies charge transaction fees for *each* charge outside of the United States.
- ✓ Find someone to keep an eye on your residence, collect mail and keep the yard maintained.
- ✓ Ask your doctor for a vacation supply of your prescriptions. You can get most medications in 90 day supplies even if your insurance only allows for 30 days with a “vacation request” in writing from your doctor to the pharmacy. While the pharmacy will fill this request, your insurance may not cover more than 30 days. If the insurance refuses to cover, consider paying out of pocket. Check your medical records to see if you are up to date on a tetanus shot and any other needed vaccinations.
- ✓ Read through your boat insurance policy. Do you have a Bahamas or out of country endorsement? This rider could cost between \$50 to \$500 to add to your existing marine policy. Many insurance policies do not allow travel in the

Bahamas' hurricane season; June 1 to November 30. If that is the time you want to be in the Bahamas, make sure you have the correct coverage.

- ✓ If you plan to fish know the rules! Spear guns are not allowed in the Bahamas and will be confiscated if found on the boat during an inspection. Also, no type of underwater air is allowed for fishing or collecting any marine life (example: conch and spiny lobster). Research the restrictions on size, season and total allowed catch on board.
- ✓ Update your boat navigation program. We use Navionics Platinum and do online updates often.
- ✓ Consider installing a small safe on board for valuables. Online tool company Harbor Freight sells a .19 cubic foot electronic digital safe for \$28 or a .53 cubic foot for \$60.
- ✓ Do all possible preventive boat maintenance as it will cost significantly more (if available) in the Bahamas.
- ✓ Check all safety equipment. Will flares, fire extinguishers, CO detectors, or life vest CO<sub>2</sub> cartridges expire during your trip and need replacement? Do you have the correct number and type of life jackets? If you do not already have on board, consider purchasing the following: handheld portable VHF radio & EPIRB (Emergency position-indicating radio beacon). We added an AIS system (Automatic Identification System) before we left as an extra measure of security.
- ✓ Have a spare parts box on the boat. Getting parts shipped to the Bahamas is possible but people have waited weeks for shipping as some islands only have a weekly mail boat. We have heard stories of people having to fly back to the states to pick up parts needed quickly or pay large shipping fees for expedited service.

## One Week Out

- ✓ Stock your “Ships Store”. This is your “personal use” inventory you are allowed to bring into the Bahamas without paying any duty. This is for personal consumption only and cannot be sold, traded or bartered. Just about everything in the Bahamas must be shipped in and when you add shipping cost plus the government 12% VAT tax to items, they will typically be 2x to 4x what you might spend at home. Stock up on canned goods, paper products, soft drinks, alcohol, personal items, and everything you can fit in your refrigerator and freezer. You will not be happy paying \$5.35 for one roll of paper towels or \$8.75 for toothpaste.
- ✓ Check weather daily using multiple sources. We use Chris Parker Weather (paid subscription at [www.mwxc.com](http://www.mwxc.com)), NOAA, Sirius Marine, Windy App and NOAA Weather Radio. *See section on Bahamas weather*. Crossing the Gulf Stream should only be done with a “weather window” that each Captain feels comfortable with. For us that is seas 3 feet or less and winds under 15 knots.
- ✓ Bring cash! Especially a bunch \$1’s and \$5’s. ATMs are not always easy to find on the more populated islands and out islands don’t offer ATMs at all. Also, there could be up to three fees associated with your withdrawal; a fee from the bank in Bahamas, your typical home bank ATM use fee, and an out of country transaction fee. Most ATMs will provide Bahama currency although some ATM’s in major tourist areas will give you an option to receive US dollars. When you pay a bill with US currency, be prepared to get change in Bahama currency. On rural islands with limited tourist, restaurants and shops often do not take credit cards and are cash only. We found that every marina and fuel stop took credit cards, although most charge a 3% to 5% service fee for credit card use. \$1 US Dollar = \$1 Bahama Dollar

## Taking a pet to the Bahamas\*\*

*\*\*This page was added to this book for Version 3 (10/2019). While we do not have pets onboard, we are often asked by boaters planning to visit the Bahamas questions regarding pets.*

If you plan on taking your cat or dog to the Bahamas, you will need a pet permit before you arrive. We have met boaters that highly recommend the services of “Wellington” in the Bahamas to help with the application process.

### **Bahamaspetpermit.com**

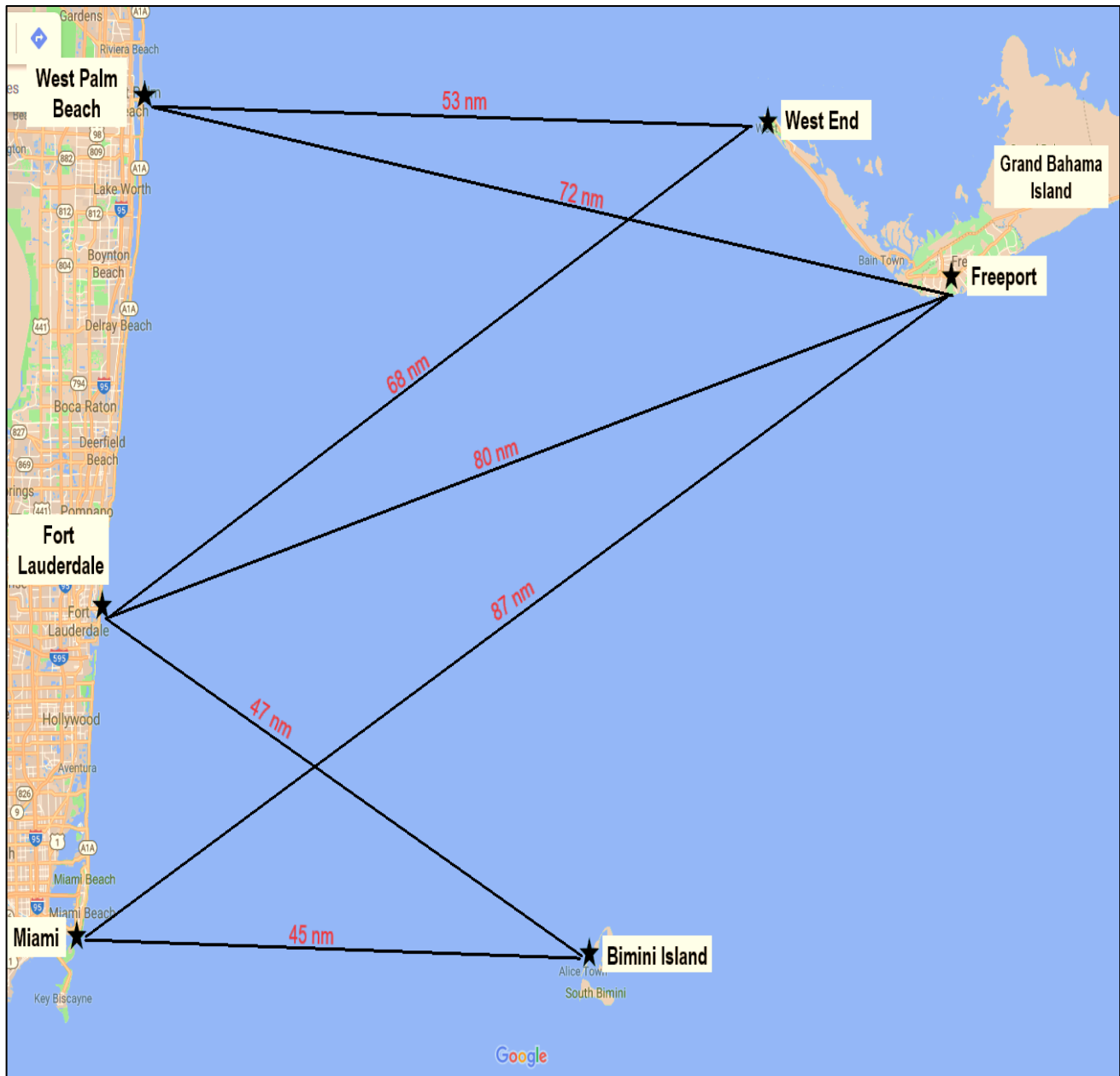
The website has the application form, requirements, fees, and restricted breeds. You should plan up to 3 weeks from application through permit approval, although it is typically done in less time.

A few interesting notes:

- Must be 6 months of older
- Requires pet to be micro-chipped
- Recent veterinary health certificate is required
- Pet permit is valid for 1 entry within 1 year
- 6 dogs and 3 cat breeds are not allowed entry

## Florida Departure Ports

In Florida some of the more common departure ports for Bahamas travel include: Fort Pierce, Palm Beach (aka: Lake Worth Inlet), Port Everglades (aka: Fort Lauderdale) and Miami. Boaters going to the Bahamas for the first time, typically choose West End, Freeport, or Port Lucaya on Grand Bahama Island or Bimini Island as their point of entry, due to their proximity to the Florida east coast.





## Gulf Stream & Weather

*“This is weather that you can quickly get used to. The trade winds have blessed us with warm year-round weather, with winter lows averaging a comfortable 70 degrees Fahrenheit and summer highs with high humidity at around 80-90, with a gentle dip at night of just 5 to 7 degrees. The result? A climate where you can have fun anytime of the day, any season.” ~ Bahamas Tourism (Bahamas.com)*

For most reading this section, this trip will be your first time crossing the Gulf Stream. Many boaters along the eastern United States know it’s “out there ... somewhere” but the average recreational boater has probably not crossed the Gulf Stream before.

Think of the Gulf Stream as a strong river traveling north that you will need to cross over. It brings warm water from the Gulf of Mexico into the Atlantic Ocean along the eastern coast of the US and extends towards Canada and Europe. Depending on where you depart in Florida, you might see the edge of the stream in under 5 miles or over 20 miles off shore. (<https://ocean.weather.gov>) Crossing it in good weather conditions can be a wonderful trip, but crossing it in the wrong conditions, like during a cold front or strong northerly winds, could result in a very risky and threatening ride.



Map: <https://scijinks.gov/gulf-stream>

All experienced boaters know that weather is important and plays a big part in the safety and well-being of the Captain and crew. This is especially true with travel throughout the islands of the Bahamas. Know what you consider “good” or “acceptable” travel weather and what is “no go, no way”. This depends on many factors including boating experience, the size of your boat, style, and personal preference.

Our 35-foot power boat is very seaworthy. We often joke that the boat can handle more than the Captain and crew. On the Lucky Me, we prefer to cruise in seas three feet or less and wind under 15 knots. Besides wave height, we also look at the interval / period between waves. We would rather have three foot rolling seas with an eight second interval versus choppy two footers.

Each morning check the weather using multiple sources. We consult both free and paid weather services and apps such as: Chris Parker Weather (paid subscription at [www.mwxc.com](http://www.mwxc.com)), NOAA, Sirius Marine, Windy App, and NOAA Weather Radio.

We **highly** recommend a paid subscription to Chris Parker Weather ([www.mwxc.com](http://www.mwxc.com)). Every day but Sunday, Chris offers a weather forecast and routing advice. Chris Parker weather includes various areas in the Caribbean (each in 30 to 60-minute segments). Tune in live online or listen on your SSB radio. Replays are available online throughout the day. The live segment for Gulf Stream crossings and Bahamas weather starts at 6:30 a.m. (Eastern Standard Time).

## Bahamas Best Travel Months\*\*

*\*\*This page was added to this book for Version 3 (10/2019).*

The Bahamas Hurricane season officially runs from June 1st through November 30th. During that time of the year, there is a higher chance the islands will be hit by hurricanes.

As the weather throughout the Bahamas is enjoyable year-round, travel by boat to any of the islands and cays can be appreciated in any season, although boating during hurricane season could result in challenging weather issues.

Your boat insurance policy may include travel restrictions during the six months of hurricane season. All preplanning must include a full review of your insurance coverage and all riders before traveling to the Bahamas.



## Entering Bahamas - Customs and Immigration

All Information in this chapter is from Bahamas.com and updated as of 9/12/2019 © 2019  
The Islands Of The Bahamas Visit: <https://www.bahamas.com/faq/enteringexiting-policies>

*(\*Italic comments were added by us for clarification purposes)*

To enter The Islands of The Bahamas, private vessels need the following:

- a) One (1) copy of The Bahamas Customs Clearance Form  
*(\*Print the Bahamas Customs Clearance Form on legal size paper before you leave to save time – the website above has links to the required paperwork.)*
- b) One (1) Bahamas Immigration Card per person
- c) Proof of Citizenship - Passport
- d) Vessel registration documents (Vessel title / proof of ownership)

Visiting boaters must clear Customs and Immigration at the nearest designated Port of Entry. As you enter each port, fly the yellow quarantine flag and notify Customs of your arrival. Only the captain is permitted to leave the boat until your vessel has been cleared.

*(\*The Captain will travel to the nearest Customs and Immigration location(s) to submit paperwork for all passages on board and pay fees) Customs and Immigration officials (\*may) will come to your vessel. Everyone on board must have proof of citizenship and fill out an immigration card. US citizens must present a passport. Before leaving The Islands of The Bahamas, be sure to surrender your copy of the immigration card at the last Bahamian port you visit. (\* If not possible to surrender as you leave, you may mail to the address noted on the card, once you arrive back in the United States.)*

If you have a firearm on board (shotguns and handguns only) you must declare it with Bahamas Customs. You must provide the serial number, name of the manufacturer, plus an exact count of ammunition. While you are allowed to have a firearm on your boat, you cannot remove it. Weapons must be under lock and key at all times. In cases of emergencies, which require your departure by air, you must notify Bahamian Police or Customs. They will accompany you to retrieve the firearm and present you with a receipt. Upon your return to the island, Bahamian

Police or Customs will escort you to your vessel and return your firearm. Any infraction of this law will be dealt with severely.

### **Entry Fees:**

All boaters entering The Bahamas are required to pay an entry fee.

Updated fees effective January 1, 2020 are as follows:

Up to 34': \$150 for 3 months; \$300 annually

35' – 100': \$300 for 3 months; \$600 annually

100' – 150': \$500 for 3 months; \$1,000 annually

150' – 200': \$800 for 3 months; \$2,000 annually

Over 200': \$1,000 for 3 months; \$2,000 annually

### **The fees will cover:**

1) Cruising Permit

2) Fishing Permit

3) Departure Tax for up to three (3) persons. Each additional person above three will be charged a \$20 departure tax. This fee is good for a second re-entry within a 90-day period.

If you plan to stay longer than 12 months, special arrangements must be made with Bahamas Customs and Immigration. Bahamas Customs and Immigration office hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Officers are on call during holidays and weekends. There is no overtime charge.

*(\*Out islands may have limited employees to process boaters on the weekend and holidays, they also may take a lunch break – call ahead to confirm hours. Keep your permit in a safe place. This is the proof you paid your entry fee and are legally in the country. During our 8 weeks in the Bahamas, about 20% of the marinas requested to see the permit and a few made a copy for their records.)*

### **VISA Requirements:**

US Citizens - A valid passport is required. A visa is required for stays exceeding eight months.

Canadian Citizens - A valid passport is required for proof of citizenship. A Bahamas visa is required for stays exceeding three months.

## Returning to the US - Customs and Immigration

All Information in this chapter is from CBP – Customs and Border Protection. Last updated online on 10/2018. Visit the online site for additional information. [www.cbp.gov/travel/pleasure-boats-private-flyers/pleasure-boat-overview](http://www.cbp.gov/travel/pleasure-boats-private-flyers/pleasure-boat-overview)

### Pleasure Boat Reporting Requirements

*Small Vessel Reporting System (SVRS) is no longer in service and float plans will no longer be accepted. Boaters looking for a new, faster way to report their arrival and/or apply for a registered boater program may use the CBP ROAM app, available for free on the Apple App and Google Play stores. Boaters may also continue to report their arrival via designated telephone reporting numbers, if desired.*

Pursuant to 19 CFR 4.2, operators of small pleasure vessels, arriving in the United States from a foreign port or place to include any vessel which has visited a hovering vessel or received merchandise outside the territorial sea, are required to report their arrival to CBP immediately (see 19 U.S.C. 1433). These reports are tracked in the Pleasure Boat Reporting System. Pursuant to 8 CFR 235.1, an application to lawfully enter the United States must be made in person to a CBP officer at a U.S. port-of-entry when the port is open for inspection.

### Reporting Requirements

CBP has designated specific reporting locations that are staffed during boating season for pleasure boats to report their arrival and be inspected by CBP. The master of the boat must report to CBP telephonically and be directed to the nearest Port of Entry to satisfy the face-to-face requirement, or report to the nearest designated reporting location along with the boat's passengers for inspection.

### Exceptions to Face-to-Face reporting to CBP

Alternative Inspection Systems (AIS) satisfy the boat operator's legal requirement to report for face-to-face inspection in accordance with 8 CFR 235.1, but boaters must still phone in their arrival to satisfy 19 USC 1433.

There are three exceptions to the face-to-face inspection at a designated reporting location, CBP Reporting Offsite Arrival – Mobile (CBP ROAM), NEXUS, and the Canadian Border Boat Landing Permit (I-68). Participation in any of these programs does not preclude the requirement for physical report upon request by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Any small pleasure vessel leaving a United States port into international or foreign waters, without a call at a foreign port, does not satisfy the foreign departure requirement. Therefore, certain fishing vessels, cruises to nowhere, or any vessel that leaves from a United States port and returns without calling a foreign port or place, has not departed the United States.

### **CBP Reporting Offsite Arrival - Mobile (ROAM)**

The CBP ROAM app is a free mobile application that provides an option for pleasure boaters to report their U.S. entry to CBP via their personal smart device or a tablet located at local businesses to satisfy the above reporting requirements. In limited areas, travelers arriving remote areas may also be eligible to use the CBP ROAM app. Travelers using the CBP ROAM app may use the app to apply to become Verified Travelers (which includes existing LBO, SVRS, and I-68 numbers) and receive expedited processing on future arrivals.

*In addition, all private vessels 30+ feet are required to purchase a border crossing decal, this can be done at <https://dtops.cbp.dhs.gov>, you will need this decal number to use the CBP ROAM app.*

### **NEXUS**

NEXUS Marine program is a joint Canada-U.S. initiative that offers facilitated customs and immigration clearance for recreational low-risk boaters entering either country through registration into the program. NEXUS is valid for 5 years and satisfies the boat operator's legal requirement to report to a port-of-entry for face-to-face inspection in accordance with 8 CFR 235.1, but boaters must still phone in their arrival to satisfy 19 USC 1433.

## Marinas - Dockage, Electric, Water, Trash & Fuel

Every boat owner has their personal preference. Some boaters love the quiet of being “on the hook” in a private cay or protected cove, while others enjoy moorings. We like the convenience of being tucked into a slip most nights.

**DOCKAGE:** Options are plentiful throughout the Bahamas from large resorts, to yacht clubs and small marinas. Dockage will average around \$2 to \$2.25 a foot per night. Mooring costs varied. The least expensive dockage we found was \$1 a foot at marinas in Bimini. The most we paid was \$4.50 a foot (50’ minimum) at the Marina at Atlantis, Paradise Island, but that also included free day passes to Atlantis. Occasionally, a marina will add an additional resort or service fee. Remember to ask up front if there are any additional charges and what this charge includes. Your bill will also include a 12% VAT tax.

**ANCHORAGE:** You will save a ton of money if you want to anchor out as it is free just about everywhere. The Exuma Land and Sea Park which charges .50 cents a foot in the park (payable online) is one of the few exceptions.

**ELECTRIC:** Expect to pay anywhere from .45 to .85 cents per kwh for electric dockside. Occasionally, it will be a set fee per night for unlimited use. We paid \$10 to \$25 per day for electric. The hot water tank, AC and refrigerator are the biggest draws on electricity.

**WATER:** There is (almost) no potable (safe to drink) free water. On average it will cost you .35 to .50 cents a gallon to fill up. A few marinas charge a set fee of \$10 to \$20 per night. The water you purchase could come from a well, rain water or desalinated. Boaters concerned about water quality, can consider testing the water before filling tanks. We use both a dockside filter and one onboard and only filled from trusted sources. Water quality was never an issue for us.

**FUEL:** Both diesel and gas are readily available with a bit of planning. The range for us was \$4 to \$5 a gallon. One out island was over \$6 a gallon. Always fill up when you arrive as it’s possible that by the time you leave the pump could be empty!

**TRASH:** A few marinas charge \$5 to \$7 per bag for trash disposal. Most that we encountered did not charge for trash as long as you were also using the facilities.



## Scuba Diving & Snorkeling

Your trip will probably include walks along pink, peach or white sugar sand beaches, but to really enjoy the Bahamas, consider a visit to the underwater world. Exploring the amazing reefs with either scuba diving or snorkeling gear is easy due to the amazing crystal-clear visibility, often to more than 20 feet beneath the ocean's surface. The water temperature is comfortable, basically year-round.

On-board, we carry our own snorkeling equipment, so we can enjoy an unexpected find at any moment. On just about every island you will find reefs, coral, and limestone brimming with marine life within swimming distance to the beach or a short boat ride off shore. More populated islands offer half-day tours or consider hiring a guide for a more private experience.

### **BEST DIVE SITES IN THE BAHAMAS**

**According to the international team at LiveAboard.com**

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● **EXUMA CAYS:** Scuba diving in the Exuma Cays will reward divers with an intriguing combination of shallow reefs and colorful walls. The Exumas are an archipelago of 365 cays and islands 35 miles southeast of Nassau. Considered a unique geographical feature, diving in the Bahamas offers the only tidal blue hole experiences in the world such as the Angelfish Blue Hole off of Stocking Island where the crystal blue shallow waters turn to dark-turquoise almost instantly as the sea floor drops to 100 feet. At other Exuma dive sites, swift drifts may carry you along the vast beds of coral reefs bustling with large schools of brightly-colored fish. Find sharks lurking about while diving Amberjack Reef and don't miss the Austin Smith wreck, the 400-foot Mystery Cave blue hole or Thunderball Grotto named for the James Bond film shot on location

● **TIGER BEACH:** This shallow sand flat is the most reliably consistent spot in the Bahamas for shark encounters. An hour off the coast of the West End of Grand Bahama Island, this rarely visited area of the Bahamas allows for scuba diving exploration and passive shark observation at a relaxed pace. The shallow waters allow for great photo ops of Caribbean Reef sharks, Lemon Sharks, Hammerheads, Bull sharks, Oceanic whitetips and, of course, the Tiger sharks for which the dive site is named. Divers often encounter dolphins as well. Extra weight is often recommended on this dive to help divers anchor to the sandy bottom without churning it up and obstructing view or rousing the sharks. Sharks are not an immediate threat to humans; however they deserve a high level of respect and inexperienced divers may or may not be ready for the rush that comes with so many circling sharks.

● **AUSTIN SMITH WRECK:** Every wreck dive has a tale to tell. The Austin Smith, named for a Bahamian marine killed in a 1980 attack, was a 90-foot Bahamian Defense Force patrol decommissioned in 1995 and destined to become an artificial reef and dive destination off the coast of San Salvador. Unfortunately for San Salvador, the ship sank while being towed and now rests in 60 feet of water on a flat coral bottom off the coast of the Exuma Cays. Now abundant with marine life and astounding regrowth of brilliant corals and delicate sea fans and sponges, visibility typically reaches more than 100 feet. Marine life is expected to continue to thrive in the area thanks to the accidental mishap with the Austin Smith. Diving the Austin Smith is only possible by dive boat and mooring buoys help prevent any damage to the beautiful dive site by boat anchors.

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## Adventure Calling – Blue Holes, Ruins & Caves

If you are traveling to the Bahamas and looking for a little more excitement than walking the beach and looking for shells, or maybe even sitting under the hot sun working on a tan that family and friends back home will marvel at, fishing, snorkeling and scuba diving may be on the agenda - but we already covered that in other chapters in this book.

Lucky for you many islands and cays offer “off the beaten track” adventures.

**Blue Holes** {Definition from Wikipedia} *Blue holes are roughly circular, steep-walled depressions, and so named for the dramatic contrast between the dark blue, deep waters of their depths and the lighter blue of the shallows around them.*

The Bahamas islands and cays are full of blue holes. If you have never visited one before, then you are in for a treat. You will find blue holes as noted tourist attractions on both public and private lands. Some can be found on land protected by the Bahamas National Trust. Many are barely noted in public resources with limited or no signage to help you in your search. If that is the case “local knowledge” by a resident of the island can be very helpful. As we traveled, we would research online if a blue hole was nearby and how to get there. When we had the time, we rented cars and drove miles to find one. While some are right off paved roads, others are hidden deep in the pine forest on rocky paths or old logging dirt roads. Some are even located in the ocean near the shore. There are hundreds perhaps thousands of blue holes in the Bahamas. No one really knows the total count.

**Ruins** {Definition from Wikipedia} *Ruins are the remains of human-made architecture: structures that were once intact have fallen, as time went by, into a state of partial or total disrepair, due to lack of maintenance, (natural disaster) or deliberate acts of destruction*

We spent an afternoon walking the many acres of the 20-year abandoned Club Med resort overlooking French Leave Beach, Governors Harbor, Eleuthera. A hike on a small overgrown path led us to the derelict shell of a light house on the bluffs in Little Harbour, Abaco, near Pete’s Place. Cat Island has the remains of Civil War Plantations and an interesting hermitage on Como Hill, the highest elevation in

the Bahamas. Most of our “ruin” finds were stumbled upon, learned about over conversations with residents or found through online research.

**Caves:** Professional cave diver, Brian Kakuk, through his research, books and online posts, has allowed viewers an opportunity to marvel at the photos of the underground waterways connecting miles of caves and caverns found on many of the Bahama islands. Diving at these sites is dangerous and only possible by professional cave divers with permits. However, you can visit the openings and in some cases, enjoy a section of the interior to a point above the waterline.

We visited a few of the well-known caves in the Bahamas. Ralph, Nancy & Dan’s Caves are located in the recently dedicated Blue Hole Conservation Forest (32,774 acres) near Treasure Cay, Abaco. We also spent two days exploring caves near Freeport, Grand Bahamas including Ben’s Cave and Burial Mound Cave in the Lucayan National Park.

Cave exploring allows visitors to enjoy local history and legends, amazing rock formations, clear blue waters, and wildlife both in and near the caves. This was truly one of our highlights of traveling the Bahamas.

There is one cave-like structure that is very welcoming to swimming, scuba diving and snorkeling. Thunderball Grotto, is located on a small no name cay a short distance from Staniel Cay, Exuma. At low tide you can swim in under the low hanging rocks and enter a large cavern with light peeking through from openings above. This is typically a family friendly stop with many tourists. You will see loads of tropical fish swimming around the coral and rocks.

**Want to find your Bahama adventure? Do a bit of online research:**

[Bahamas.com](http://Bahamas.com) - search caves and blue holes

[Bnt.bs](http://Bnt.bs) - Bahamas National Trust

[Bahamascaves.com](http://Bahamascaves.com) Bahamas Caves Research Foundation

Brian Kakuk - Author, teacher and professional Cave Diver

Photos and information of the various blue holes, caves and ruins we visited is documented on our Facebook page Lucky Me Looping (Feb-April 2019).

## Fishing; Off Shore, Light Tackle & Bonefish

While we have a few friends that could almost be classified as professionals with their fishing hobby, for us it was not something we had as a major “must do” in the Bahamas. We are in the minority as it seemed like we saw fishing gear on at least 50% of the boats at most marinas. A few of the out islands even catered to the fishing enthusiast with over 80% of the boats there for off-shore fishing.

***Below information on fishing from: Bahamas Fishing Charters of Freeport & Nassau. <https://www.fishinthebahamas.com>***

**OFF SHORE FISHING:** Located right in the Atlantic Ocean, the islands of the Bahamas are in very close proximity to some of the deepest waters in the Caribbean. This proximity is ideal for excellent world-class sport fishing. We are not talking about just your run-of-the-mill fishing; we are talking about tournament-style fishing. In the deep blue waters just a few miles offshore from the islands of the Bahamas you will have the chance to go after species such as blue marlin, sailfish, swordfish, white marlin, wahoo, mahi mahi, and tuna, just to name a few! When you think of fishing in the Bahamas, many people think of off-shore deep sea fishing.

**LIGHT TACKLE FISHING:** Using spinning reels and rods (in the) massive coral reef ecosystem of the Bahamas (is) where you will get a chance to catch the wide variety of fish that live among the coral reef. Light tackle fishing uses good old-fashioned rod and reel technique. You might be going after smaller fish on these charters, but the thrill, excitement, and satisfaction is undeniable. Light tackle fishing is a technique used by fisherman throughout the world and is a time-honored and beloved method of fishing.

**BONEFISHING:** While all kinds of fishing is good in the Bahamas throughout the year, it is the elusive Bonefish that is our year-round resident and thus one of the biggest attractions for fishing enthusiasts from all over the world. First off, the Bahamas flats and shallower waters are teeming with bonefish! These guys could almost be a mascot for the islands of the Bahamas. The second reason bonefishing in the Bahamas is so popular, is that bonefishing itself is one awesome sport! The bonefish is a slick, sleek, and stealthy fish that has been nicknamed the “silver ghost.” Catching a bonefish is no simple matter. In fact, there is no other type of fishing quite like bonefishing. And since there is no other fishing like bonefishing, there is no better place to do it than a place that has the world’s best bonefishing guides.

## Misc. Facts & Things to Remember

- Just about everything you buy (food, paper products, gifts) and do (tours, rentals, services) will get the Bahamas VAT tax added of 12%.
- Many restaurants, bars, takeout food and tours, will automatically add 15% to 18% gratuity and note on the bill a spot for "extra gratuity!" Some note the gratuity as a service charge although it is basically the tip. Some do NOT add gratuity; hence you really need to get in the habit of checking the bill. We also found a few mischarges (both higher and lower) when an establishment was busy.
- No matter what you see online, watch on TV or read about in a book, it is so much more beautiful than you could ever imagine.
- You will occasionally be out of your comfort zone. When that happens make the decision to step back a bit or take a jump!
- Watch out for the pigs ... they bite.
- Everything costs much more than in the United States. Grocery stores on rural islands might be found in a small one room building with a limited supply that arrives by mail boat once a week. Bring as much as you can hold on board. We love spending money on each island, but we would rather buy a great \$25 dinner versus spending \$9 for toothpaste or \$10 for a small shampoo.
- Bring a dinghy to explore. Also bring snorkel equipment as the opportunity to use it will happen often.
- Take lots of photos and consider a waterproof camera for under water shots.
- Waterway Guide Bahamas – At over 400 pages, you will find lots of suggestions on what to see and do on each island and cay, along with list of marinas and anchorage spots. We consider an updated edition as a **must** have onboard.
- If you are a healthy eater, a vegetarian, or do not like seafood, eating out will be a challenge. The menu will always include seafood and at least one chicken or burger option. Fried food is very popular with nicer restaurants also offering grilled, jerk seasoned, and blackened. Popular side dishes include coleslaw, peas & rice, macaroni & cheese and fries. Restaurants in larger tourist areas will have salads on the menu. We saw no gluten free options and lists of ingredients would be difficult to find for those with food allergies. The “catch of the day” is often grouper or mahi mahi. Expect everything to cost more than in the United States. Bahamas beer (Sands & Kalik) will be at least a \$1 less than imported.

## Provisioning – Ships Store

On the next page, is a basic boat provisioning list. Grocery stores (some large and some very small) are available, although on out islands there may be limited supplies and the store could be miles away. **Everything in the Bahamas must be shipped in (which adds shipping cost and import fees) add the 12% VAT tax and you will find that most items are 2 to 4 times more expensive than a discount store in the US.**

On most boats extra storage space is limited, so plan with care. We found that provisions for 8 to 10 weeks in the Bahamas took up a considerable amount of area on the boat, more than we had expected. Consider how many meals you will eat off the boat. We know boat owners that prefer to eat most of their meals at local restaurants, others enjoy cooking and eating onboard.

This seems silly to say, but do not buy food simply because of its shelf life. At home, we never eat canned meats, but we bought 8 cans of chunk chicken just in case. Needless to say there are 7 cans still onboard. If you don't eat it at home, you probably won't eat it on the boat!

**Breakfast:** We always eat breakfast onboard, preferring coffee and a simple breakfast together to start the day. Think eggs, muffin mix, bread, cereal, milk (fresh and packaged) and fruit.

**Lunch:** A few times a week we like sandwiches with a salad or chips for lunch. Another quick option is hotdogs (with or without beans). We loaded a shelf in the refrigerator with packaged lunch meat, sausages and hotdogs as they have a long shelf life. Also, canned tuna and plastic bottles of mayo last for months.

**Dinners:** If you like to eat dinner out, you will still need some backups when there is no restaurant nearby. Think rice, canned vegetables and frozen meats.

**Snacks:** Bring plenty as this is a very expensive pick up in the Bahamas. Think chips, popcorn, and peanuts for your "Docktail" party.

**Drinks:** Boaters typically drink more soft drinks and beer when they travel. To save storage space, purchase Crystal Light powder to make up gallon jugs (an empty soda bottle works great). Think wine, juice, soda, energy drinks. We didn't bring bottled water as it is readily available.

PAPER PRODUCTS, PERSONAL ITEMS & NON-FOOD  
NEEDS

- Bug Spray
- Sunscreen
- Matches and Lighters
- Aluminum Foil
- Plastic Wrap
- Quart and Gallon Storage Bags
- Soap – Shower and Hand
- Cleaning Supplies
- Paper Towels
- Napkins
- Boat Toilet Paper
- Trash Bags
- Plastic Utensils
- Paper Plates
- Plastic Cups
- Shampoo
- Deodorant
- Moisturizer
- Makeup
- Box Hair Color
- Hair Spray
- Laundry Detergent & Dryer Sheets
- Toothpaste

DRINKS

- Soft drink
- Crystal Light Powder Packs
- Coffee & Tea
- Wine
- Beer
- Hard Liquor
- Soda or Seltzer Water
- Fruit Juice

**FOOD NEEDS**

- Seasonings (salt, pepper, spices)
- Condiments (mustard, ketchup, mayo)
- Cooking Oil
- Spray Oil
- Sugar and/or Artificial Sweeteners
- Fresh Fruit
- Fresh Vegetables
- Cheese
- Butter
- Milk & Coffee Creamer
- Eggs
- Bread, English Muffins, Roll Ups
- Onions, Peppers, Potatoes
- Can Vegetables
- Can Soup
- Beans
- Can Tuna and/or Meats
- Rice
- Pasta
- Tomato Sause
- Salad Dressing
- Muffin Mix
- Cake, Brownie, Cookie Mix
- Cake Frosting
- Pancake Mix & Syrup
- Chips, Nuts & Snack Food
- Microwave Popcorn

**MISC.**

- Passports
- Prescriptions
- Credit Cards & Cash
- Snorkel Gear
- Underwater Camera
- Boat Registration & Insurance



## Giving Back – Little Things Add Up

We left home planning on spending at least 18 months on the boat cruising the Bahamas and The Great Loop. As both of us had a history of community involvement and charitable giving, we wanted to somehow give back along our route. We created a program called "Loopers ❤️ Care". At various stops, we have a goal of either volunteering, donating or doing something to make a difference. This has averaged about a half a day every 10 days to two-weeks.

We picked a wide variety of groups to sponsor a specific need, give volunteer hours, or donate.

- Delivered lunch to the Coast Guard station in Charleston, South Carolina during the government shutdown
- Cleaned trash from the beach on Peanut Island in Riviera Beach, Florida
- Bagged and sorted groceries for those in need (Mustard Seed Ministry Program, Fort Pierce, Florida)
- Delivered dog and cat supplies for vet clinics on Bimini, Bahamas (The Stray Dogs of Bimini)
- Sponsored eye glasses and exams for children on Little Farmers Cay, Bahamas ([giveachildvision.com](http://giveachildvision.com))
- Sponsored new moorings at the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park
- Donated towards the repairs/repainting of Elbow Reef Lighthouse, Hope Town, Abacos

How can you make a difference? A simple idea is every time you walk a beach, stroll a park or hike a path, bring a bag to collect trash or pick up just three pieces of trash as part of the ever growing "Pick 3" campaign. We love this program and hope it becomes more common in the Bahamas and U.S.

Want to do something on a larger scale? Bring \$50 to \$100 worth of school supplies from the States. Pick up paper, pens, note books, and crayons from a discount store. Donate them to a public school on an island you visit.

As you travel the Bahamas, you will see many opportunities to a make a difference. Try to find at least a small way to give back to the local community.

## Is the Bahamas safe cruising grounds?

We were often asked on our Facebook page questions about safety in the Bahamas. On February 25, 2019, the U.S. Department of State published an updated Bahamas Travel Advisory. The issue of course is how many people read the full report and how many people hear or read just the first line, “Exercise increased caution in The Bahamas due to crime”.

Travel Advisory February 23, 2019	The Bahamas - Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution
Exercise increased caution in The Bahamas due to <b>crime</b> .	
Violent crime, such as burglaries, armed robberies, and sexual assault, is common, even during the day and in tourist areas. Although the family islands are not crime-free, the vast majority of crime occurs on New Providence and Grand Bahama islands. U.S. government personnel are not permitted to visit the Sand Trap area in Nassau due to crime. Activities involving commercial recreational watercraft, including water tours, are not consistently regulated. Watercraft are often not maintained, and many companies do not have safety certifications to operate in The Bahamas. Jet-ski operators have been known to commit sexual assaults against tourists. As a result, U.S. government personnel are not permitted to use jet-ski rentals on New Providence and Paradise Islands.	
Read the Safety and Security section on the <a href="#">country information page</a> .	
If you decide to travel to The Bahamas:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exercise caution in the area known as “Over the Hill” (south of Shirley Street) and the Fish Fry at Arawak Cay in Nassau, especially at night.</li><li>• Do not answer your door at your hotel/residence unless you know who it is.</li><li>• Do not physically resist any robbery attempt.</li><li>• Enroll in the <a href="#">Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)</a> to receive Alerts and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.</li><li>• Follow the Department of State on <a href="#">Facebook</a> and <a href="#">Twitter</a>.</li><li>• Review the <a href="#">Crime and Safety Report</a> for The Bahamas.</li><li>• U.S. citizens who travel abroad should always have a contingency plan for emergency and medical situations. Review the <a href="#">Traveler's Checklist</a>.</li></ul>	

- The vast majority of the crime occurs in New Providence (Nassau) and Grand Bahama Island (Freeport). It is not a wide spread major problem on all islands. There is an increase in crime in two of the most populated areas. This is probably similar to some large cities in the United States. Crime can happen anywhere you travel, but the report is basically about two islands only.
- There has been an increase in reports of unsafe waters tours and rentals per the travel advisory. The Bahamas does not fully regulate tours like you find in the United States, hence there are issues with poorly maintained unsafe equipment. The report also talks about sexual assaults against tourists from jet ski operators. Young people on vacation to the Bahamas rent jet skis from residents on the beach, and reports are made of sexual assault.

We even dug deeper on the US Department of State website and found this information to note: *Criminal activity on the outlying family islands does occur, but to a much lesser degree than on New Providence or Grand Bahama. Armed robbery and sexual assault are major criminal threats facing U.S. citizens in New Providence. We have received multiple reports of tourists being robbed at gunpoint or knifepoint in downtown and tourist areas of Nassau, including during the day. We have also received reports of sexual assaults in tourist areas.*

Again, they are talking about the Nassau and Freeport area. We visited both on our boat. We stayed at Marinas that were busy and kept the boat locked when we left. We didn't stray outside of well-lit tourist areas at night and used extra caution when walking the streets during the day.

## Our Route, Ports of Call, Side Trips

In 8 weeks' time we traveled to a total of 24 different islands and cays. We spent six months planning this trip with a few goals in mind: visit a mix of the tourist spots, well known ports, and a few out islands that would not be on the typical boaters' port of call. Did we meet this goal? Yes, in every way possible.

We even changed our way of thinking along the way. We became more conscious of the issues of plastic and ocean trash due to walks on deserted beaches with washed up litter. We learned about history and became quite adventurous with off-road drives in rental cars to blue holes, caves, and long abandoned ruins. We found shell, coral and animal fossils on beaches and spent hours online learning about trilobites (common fossils found in sedimentary rocks, pre-date dinosaurs, and bug like). We immersed ourselves in Bahamian life trying to understand each islands different social and economic issues.

Most of all we had lots of fun. We enjoyed the native beer, good food, local attractions, and purchased handmade souvenirs at the straw markets. We fell in love with pink sand and turquoise water. We even enjoyed watching the nurse sharks that seem to live at just about every marina. And of course, we fed the swimming pigs on Big Major Cay, Exuma.

In general, people were extremely friendly and welcoming. For many islands the money tourists spend on food, drinks, tours, and lodging is an important part of the island's economy.

We left after two-months of cruising with no regrets. We never intended to visit every island and quickly learned that we were lucky to hit at least a handful of the recommended dining, attractions, and "best" beaches at each stop.

The following pages offer details on our route. It may give the reader ideas for a possible itinerary that would cover many different ports of call including some of the more popular stops. We hope you use this book as an additional reference for successful planning of your first trip to the Bahamas. As we have mentioned in other chapters, we highly recommend you purchase the most recent Waterway Guide Bahamas book. At over 400 pages it offers significantly more details than we could ever hope to include.

**How many miles and fuel cost?** In eight-weeks we made a nice counter clock wise loop covering about 938 statute miles or 816 nautical miles. (1 statute mile = .869 nautical miles). We use nautical miles when noting our cruising distance.

We departed Florida from the Port of Miami and our arrival back to the United States was to the Port of Palm Beach (aka: Lake Worth Inlet), Florida.

Our typical open water cruising speed was 22 to 24 knots. We used 705 gallons of diesel fuel at an average of \$4.40 a gallon. You do the math, we would rather not think about the total.



## **1) Bimini**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 47 nautical miles

***Bimini unique features per Bahamas.com:*** Bimini consists of two main islands — North Bimini Island and South Bimini Island, and numerous cays. The history of Bimini is as fascinating as the islands themselves. Famed explorer, Ponce de León, was allegedly lured here in the early 1500s in search of the 'Fountain of Youth, and a site still bears that name today. Located just 50 miles from the United States, the islands served as a convenient offshore speakeasy and liquor store during the prohibition era. Rumrunners used to store their stash on the shores and in the *S.S. Saponia*, now a wreck in the water. And speaking of rum, Ernest Hemingway called Bimini his summer home and Jimmy Buffett spent time here while writing his book. Also of note, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited the island in 1968 and composed parts of his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech while sailing with local boat builder, Ansil Saunders.

***Marina:*** Bimini Blue Water Resort, North Bimini. Dockage at \$1 a foot. Electric at \$10 a day - Metered Water at .75 cents a gallon

***Area Attractions Visited:*** We toured the island with a golf cart rental (\$50 half day) with stops at Radio Beach in the south, and Luna Beach at Hilton Resort World in the north. Traveling both the King's and Queen's Highway we found Nate's Bakery where we purchased coconut and cinnamon bread for \$8 a loaf. Everyone recommended the pizza at Edith's Pizza, which was outstanding! We also spent a few minutes in the small local museum and the straw market across the street. Finally, we visited Dolphin House for a private tour (\$5 per person/ 45 minutes) by Ashley Saunders. Dolphin House was privately built over the past 26 years from material salvaged on the island, beach, and trash dumps. It is an eclectic collection of mostly mosaic dolphins, mermaids, and colorful art - one of the highlights of the afternoon.

***Summary:*** We loved Bimini as it was our first stop in the Bahamas. The ride from Miami to Bimini harbor was 2.5 hours at a comfortable 22 knots. Within an hour of arriving we had cleared Customs and Immigration. Our first lunch on the island was grilled chicken cooked on the beach at Bimini Big Game Resort. Following lunch we watched bull and nurse sharks circling the docks. We were surprised to

see that Bimini Big Game Resort had afternoon “shark cage” encounters for \$60 per person. We were told this was offered by an outside vendor and not the resort. The Bahamas have become very shark friendly and shark fishing is not allowed, although some marinas permit feeding.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** We tried fresh conch salad and fritters at both Joe's and Stuart's Conch Stand. When we asked a few questions about conch removal, the staff friendly “insisted” we learn the process hands-on. We chatted with a few local residents at Stuart's over cold Sands beer. As we were all leaving, we noticed they were walking home, so we offered a ride on our golf cart. They invited us to stop for a drink at a local family bar, where we enjoyed an afternoon of Bimini hospitality.

## **2) Great Harbour Cay, Berry Islands**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 85 nautical miles

***Berry Islands unique features per Bahamas.com:*** The Berry Islands are made up of a land mass that totals just over twelve square miles. Many of the 30 cays that comprise the islands are great for snorkeling, hiking, diving and beachcombing. Great Stirrup features a now-abandoned lighthouse built in 1863 during the reign of Prince William IV. Little Stirrup Cay is a private island that's used by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines as a one-day stopover. Chub Cay is known as The Billfish Capital of The Bahamas, as it borders the Tongue of The Ocean and attracts countless numbers of baitfish. And then there's Great Harbour Cay. It boasts seven continuous miles of magnificent beaches and one of the best protected harbors in The Bahamas. It once was a major golf resort for the rich and famous.

***Marina:*** Great Harbour Cay Marina. Dockage special at \$9 a foot per week. Metered Electric at .75 cents kwh - Metered Water at .45 cents a gallon

***Area Attractions Visited:*** The Marina is located in a protected harbor with a few small "entrepreneurs" nearby. The town center is quite simple with a grocery store, bar, police station and handful of other businesses. We enjoyed a casual lunch at the Beach Club and a lovely formal dinner at the Carrierl Boutique Hotel. We spent hours together walking on beaches and sand flats without ever seeing

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another person. Our favorite daily adventure was exploring the old ruins throughout the island in a beat-up “vintage” rental car.

**Summary:** This island was considered an out-island experience with limited commercial influences. We rented a "Jeep" at \$60 for 24 hours, to tour the island. With a map in hand, we were able to find many of the long-abandoned ruins from the islands glory resort days. In the 1960's to 1970's the island was developed to be a resort community with a golf course, clubhouse, airport, marina, beach, restaurant, sailing club, villas, homes, etc. But by 1977 the project went bankrupt. The marina and airport managed to survive but the rest of the resort amenities are vacant buildings and sites long forgotten. Interestingly the golf course is regularly cut with at least nine of the holes “slightly” playable. We learned a few homeowners pay a local resident to cut the grass. Island residents and visitors are welcome to play for free.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** On the second occasion of renting the “Jeep”, the owner Mr. Rolle invited us to attend his church. We agreed to meet him for Sunday service. As we arrived, we learned that he was the choir leader and had an amazing voice. The service lasted over two hours and was truly enjoyable.

### **3) Paradise Island, New Providence Island**

**Travel Distance from Previous Location:** 67 nautical miles

**Paradise Island unique features per Bahamas.com:** With the lure of a big city and the ease of tropical utopia, Nassau & Paradise Island are considered by many as, well, paradise. Nassau, the capital of The Bahamas, is a bustling metropolitan hub full of culture and modern amenities. To the north lies Paradise Island. Its name tells you everything. It’s 685 acres of pure euphoria, developed almost exclusively to delight and accommodate visitors. The island boasts resorts, hotels, shops, restaurants, nightlife, a golf course, an aquarium and a casino.

**Marina:** The Marina at Atlantis, Paradise Island. Dockage was \$4.50 a foot (minimum 50 feet), Metered Electric at .70 cents kwh - Metered Water at .30 cents a gallon. This was expected to be the most expensive marina during our 8

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weeks in the Bahamas. When you consider the location in the Atlantis Resort and that the dockage included 2 adult passes for all the resort amenities for the duration of the stay, it turned out to be somewhat reasonable. The pass value: \$160 each x 2 per day.

**Summary:**

The Marina at Atlantis is within a short walk to all of the resort's amenities. There is so much to see and do that each day was full of fun and discovery. If you don't mind walking, there are hundreds of acres of beaches, a golf course, swimming pools, water park rides and around every corner fish, sharks, and other sea creatures in beautiful natural settings. While many attractions are included, there is an endless list of "extras" you can purchase. Like a cruise ship, the extras could really add up.

On the resort site can be found over 60 different shops from Gucci, Michael Kors, Pandora, and all types of jewelers. You can also find a large casino open 24 hours a day, spa, comedy club, free movie theater, golf, tennis courts, many different bars, casual lounges and nightclubs. Add in over 40 different restaurants and express dining. It truly is Paradise but be prepared to pay for it!

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** One of the most interesting exhibits at Atlantis is called, "The Dig". You enter a twisty tunnel in the lower level of the Royal Towers and travel back in time. For the next hour, it's possible to imagine you are part of an underwater archaeology adventure. After enjoying the underground dark passageways, we visited the upper level outside for a totally different view of the displays.

#### **4) Nassau, New Providence Island - {Daytrip}**

**Travel Distance from Previous Location:** Taxi ride 3 miles

**Nassau unique features per Bahamas.com:** Nassau, the capital city of The Bahamas, is located on 21-mile-long New Providence, Bahamas 11th largest island. The harbor attracted settlers in the early days, particularly pirates. In fact, Nassau's population consisted mainly of pirates until 1718, when The Bahamas first Royal Governor, Woods Rogers expelled them, restored order and built Fort



Nassau. The Bahamas for centuries adopted Rogers' motto, "Expulsis Piratis, Restituta Commercium," which means, "Pirates Expelled, Commerce Restored." Now, 212,000 people call New Providence Island home, with a large portion of them residing in Nassau.

**Summary:** We left Paradise Island Resort for an afternoon to walk around downtown Nassau and had lunch at the Bearded Clam restaurant where Greg tried the \$100 pole hanging challenge - which he didn't win! We did a little shopping at the Nassau Straw Market, and had a friendly chat and photo with the local Police Captain walking the downtown area. We spent over an hour at the historic Graycliff Hotel & Restaurant to view the onsite cigar making and chocolate factory. We finished with rum tasting tour at John Watlings Distillery, followed by a purchase of a bottle at the gift shop.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** After an afternoon in Nassau, we enjoyed drinks and great conversation that evening with Dave and Dana Rost on the Lucky Me. They have the distinct honor of being the first Facebook friends/followers to join us on route for drinks on the boat. Dave started following the "Lucky Me Looping" Facebook page shortly after it started and reads our daily post. It was funny to meet someone for the first time and have them know all about you, for instance Greg would start a story and Dave would say "Oh yea ...I read all about that."

## **5) Highbourne Cay, Exuma**

**Travel Distance from Previous Location:** 36 nautical miles

**Exuma unique features per Bahamas.com:** The Exumas are an archipelago of 365 cays and islands, beginning just 35 miles southeast of Nassau. Once called Yumey and Suma (names of Amer-Indian origin), the islands have gone through many changes over the years. Rich in history, they were settled by British Loyalists with their slaves following the American Revolution, and remnants of that storied past remain. The islands are divided into three major areas—Great Exuma, Little Exuma, and The Exuma Cays. Each one offers its own unique experience. Great Exuma and Little Exuma are known for their laidback surroundings, while The Exuma Cays act as a playground for the rich and famous, boasting numerous

private homes, luxury resorts and beachside condos. One of the amazing sights in the cays is the "Mile-long Sandbar," a stretch of pure white sand emerging from the blue-green water at low tide.

**Marina:** Highbourne Cay Marina & Resort. Dockage at \$2.75 a foot, Electric at \$25 per night - Metered Water at .40 cents a gallon

**Summary:** This 500 acre private cay is 42 nautical miles southeast of Nassau and was our first stop in the northern Exumas. Nearby cays and beaches were fun to explore in the dinghy. The marina restaurant Xuma was simple and elegant for a romantic dinner. There are no commercial amenities on the cay besides the simple store and restaurant at the marina. The waters and beaches are pristine.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** Throughout the day, the nurse sharks gather near the fish cleaning dock at the marina. We enjoyed floating the dinghy over the area with the GoPro on a pole underwater taking videos of the sharks. Also, this was our first sighting and photos of the Cassiopea (aka: upside down jellyfish).

## **6) Leaf & SW Allen's Cay, Exuma {Daytrip}**

**Travel Distance from Previous Location:** Dinghy trip about five-miles total

**Statistics:** Small Cays located near Highbourne Cay, Exuma

**Summary:** We took the dinghy 2.5 miles north from Highbourne Cay, Exuma to Leaf & SW Allen's Cay, Exuma. These small protected sanctuary cays are home to rare Marine Rock Iguanas. We had a small welcoming party as we approached the beach and within minutes 25 iguanas were fighting for our attention. Some of the larger ones were over two feet long! The iguanas seemed very aggressive, but never left the beach, so we stayed in ankle deep water just in case. As we left the cove, two large sting rays circled the dinghy.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** During our dinghy ride Greg was able to get some amazing videos of the iguanas and sting-rays with the GoPro. The iguanas are on many local tour groups list of "eco tours". Most tour

guides appear respectful of the environmental impact, but it is an interesting argument that the popularity of the tours has changed the wild life's (iguanas, pigs, sharks) behavior towards people.

## **7) Warderick Wells Cay in the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park - {Daytrip}**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 22 nautical miles

***Exuma Cays Land and Sea National Park unique features per Bahamas.com:*** The 176-square-mile Exuma Cays Land and Sea National Park, created in 1958, was the first land and sea park in the world and is one of the most successful marine parks. It is the first "no-take reserve" (all fishing is prohibited) in the wider Caribbean. This stretch of pristine water, land and beaches is an ecological preserve and wildlife refuge famous for its breath-taking marine environment.

***Area Attractions Visited:*** The modest office and small gift shop, sits at the water's edge on a beautiful cay with hiking trails, beach, and snorkeling area.

***Summary:*** We had the most amazing afternoon on a mooring at the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park. We went snorkeling over the reef near the mooring and took a dinghy ride around the cove. Every stop in the Bahamas was beautiful but this park took our breath away. Boaters who prefer a mooring versus anchorage can rent a mooring for \$20 at three different locations within the amazing park.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** At various stops along our travels, we have a goal of either volunteering or doing something to make a difference. When we visited the park, we enjoyed meeting the manager Cherry Elliott and talking about the conservation issues and how the staff/team manages the park. We also made a donation towards new moorings that were being installed.

## **8) Staniel Cay, Exuma**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 18 nautical miles

***Marina:*** Staniel Cay Yacht Club. Dockage at \$3.50 a foot. Metered Electric at .85 cents kwh - Metered Water at .40 cents a gallon

***Area Attractions Visited:*** Staniel Cay is near two of the more famous local attractions, Big Majors (Pig Island) and Thunderball Grotto, but you don't have to leave the island to keep busy. Local business can be found within walking distance of the marina including two small grocery shops, bakery, laundromat, and few restaurants/bars. We spent most of our time at the marina or on the water with our dinghy, but many visitors rent a golf cart to visit beaches on the other side of the island.

***Summary:*** This was one of our favorite stops. The Yacht Club marina is casual with bar, lounge with pool table, rental cottages, pool, and boat slips. The food is somewhat reasonable for the Bahamas and very tasty. In the evening they offer a formal dining room with a four-course dinner for around \$30. This includes soup, salad, entree with vegetable and starch, plus dessert. This was one of our favorite meals with great service.

Throughout the day, we watched tourists petting and even swimming with the many marina resident nurse sharks. We had no interest in getting that close, but the variety of fish in the marina was quite a site to see. We were able to take underwater videos and still shots with our GoPro of: Sergeant Majors, Blue Parrotfish, Stoplight Parrotfish, Rainbow Parrotfish, Redband Parrotfish, Angelfish, White Grunt, and Blue Striped Grunt. The quality of photos and videos was spectacular as the water was very clear.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** We loved the dinghy ride about half mile from Staniel Cay, to the airplane wreck in shallow waters. We were told it was a drug smuggling plane ditched in the 1970's. This definitely would have been a great snorkeling spot, but we didn't have an anchor to secure the dinghy.

## **9) Big Major Cay (Pig Island), Exuma - {Daytrip}**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** Dinghy ride around the island was about five miles, although the beach with the pigs was only about a mile from Staniel Cay Yacht Club.

**Swimming Pigs information per Bahamas.com:** Big Major's Cay is home to these "domesticated" creatures. It all began in the early 1990s with five baby pigs (four females and one male) and the number has grown. They are sociable, whenever a boat arrives, they swim out to be fed.

***Summary:*** A dinghy ride to Big Major Cay just a mile north from Staniel Cay was a great adventure. It was exactly as everyone described: beautiful island, tourists all over the beach, tour boats, large yachts, HUGE pigs, and a fun experience but one visit was more than enough.

This beautiful beach and slightly protected anchorage was a busy spot filled with boats of every size including the very large rental yachts. With all the recent publicity, we were prepared for a lot of people but there are plenty of pigs for everyone to engage with, as long as you have food. I had read some of the pigs were aggressive, but I was not prepared for huge adult pigs getting up close and practically demanding to be fed. Did I mention the pigs are **huge**? The piglets were small and cute, but the larger adults were up to 200 pounds each!

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** Yes, pigs bite! One of us was feeding a rather large pig and turned to feed another. Well pig #1 was none too happy about that. A quick nip on the outer leg had one of us running down the beach. Not only did Greg capture this on video but he still can't keep a straight face when the story is told. Within a few days, the nip spot grew to a bruise the size of a grapefruit. I'm glad we did the "pig encounter" but it is not on our list for a repeat visit.

## **10) Thunderball Grotto (No Name Cay off Staniel Cay) Exuma {Daytrip}**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** Dinghy one-mile round trip

**Thunderball Grotto information per Bahamas.com:** Located just west of Staniel Cay, this fantastic underwater cave system is great for snorkeling, diving, and wading. It is teeming with exotic marine life and a kaleidoscope of brilliantly colored coral reefs and fish, like yellow-tail snappers, Angel fish, Sergeant Majors and the like. The grotto's mystique is heightened by the small, almost hidden entrance. It is advised to enter at ebb tide (low or slack tide) and snorkeling equipment is optional. At high tide, however, diving equipment is necessary. The grotto got its name from the 1965 James Bond spy film "Thunderball," which was shot there. It was also the site of another James Bond film, "Never Say Never Again" in 1983, also based on the Thunderball novel.

**Summary:** The cave is full of coral and reefs with marine life just waiting for handouts. The small mostly hidden entrance is best accessed at low tide otherwise we were told you will need to swim under the rocks to enter. The sun peaks through the cave roof openings so once inside it's easy to see. While we were there, small boat tours were constantly coming and going, but as most only stay a half hour, it was never very crowded.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** We arrived by dinghy but didn't have an anchor onboard to set, and without an anchor you can't jump off and swim to the cave. Lucky for us, a nice tour guide allowed us to tie up to his boat and we were able to spend a half hour in the grotto.

## **11) Little Farmers Cay, Exuma**

**Travel Distance from Previous Location:** 18 nautical miles

**Marina:** Farmers Cay Yacht Club. Dockage at \$2 a foot. Electric at \$50 per day for 50 amps - Metered Water at .40 cents a gallon

**Summary:** Little Farmers Cay, Exuma is a small island about 3.5 miles long with 70 full time residents. We enjoyed a few nights at a slip at the Farmers Cay Yacht Club. The club offers four boat slips, eight moorings, and a restaurant that owner Roosevelt Nixon runs with family. Mr. Nixon is a fifth generation descendant from

the freed slaves that purchased the island from the British Crown. Little Farmers Cay center offers limited amenities, but we found a few local merchants that were very happy to have us stop by. We learned that the mail boat arrives weekly with supplies and freight.

The area is well known for the abundance of sea turtles, a few greeted us on our arrival. Each day we visited Little Farmer Cay center to see the sea turtles that call the area home. Tour guides on fast boats with visitors from Staniel Cay and other points north arrived often with visitors for in the water hand feeding of the turtles. The tour guides have been promoting lunch with the tours which has given some of the local restaurants a bit of much needed additional business. Most evenings we walked to the small airport to watch the beautiful sunsets.

One morning we invited Roosevelt and his son Julian onboard for fresh muffins and coffee. The two shared with us that the island needed an expanded airstrip to accommodate small commercial air traffic. Due to insurance requirement changes a few years back, regarding minimum airstrip runways of 3,000 feet, commercial flights to Little Farmer Cay are no longer possible.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** During our visit to Little Farmers Cay, we met Tom and Susan Vanderpool on their boat, "Visions for Children". Dr. Tom is a retired optometrist from Oklahoma, traveling throughout the Bahamas offering free exams and eye glasses to the children living on the islands they visit. He carries all the equipment and supplies onboard. This warmed our hearts, so we sponsored the children's eye glass needs for Little Farmers Cay.

## **12) Great Guana Cay, Exuma - {Daytrip}**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** Dinghy ride .5 mile round trip

***Summary:*** We took a dinghy ride across the harbor from our slip at Farmers Cay Yacht Club to the southern section of Great Guana Cay, Exuma. The settlement of Black Point in the northern section of Great Guana Cay has some restaurants, shops and amenities with the rest of the 10 mile long island mostly undeveloped. We explored a large rusted ship-wreck on the beach and collected shells.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** We took photos of the rusted commercial fishing boat on the beach, wondering about its past and why it was not worth salvaging years ago before it became so far gone. We found fossils in the limestone on the beach which we documented with photos but didn't remove from the beach. We have a personal rule of never taking anything from the beach except shells and of course trash, which we pick up all the time.

### **13) Emerald Bay, Exuma**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 31 nautical miles

***Marina:*** The Marina at Emerald Bay. Dockage at \$2.25 a foot (40 foot minimum) Metered Electric at .85 cents kwh - Metered Water at .40 cents a gallon

***Summary:*** Emerald Bay is a rural out island with limited amenities, but it is located next to the beautiful Grand Isle Condo Resort and a Sandals All Inclusive Adult Resort. We enjoyed a relaxing week making new friends at the friendly marina which is owned by Sandals. Guests of the marina have access to over a mile of sandy beach, a few dining options, entertainment and the world class 18-hole golf course. With the purchase of a day pass, you can visit the Sandals Resort to enjoy all the amenities.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** Greg surprised me by getting a group together for dinner and drinks for my birthday. One of our new friends, Karla could not resist getting me a t-shirt with, "I survived the swimming pigs" across the front.

### **14) Cat Island**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 38 nautical miles

***Cat Island unique features per Bahamas.com:*** Untainted and unspoiled, there is much to be discovered on Cat Island. Said to be named after the infamous pirate, Arthur Catt, the island runs deep with history and culture. Its 150 square miles of



natural landscape offer every traveler a rich Bahamian experience. You'll find the plot of land where Sir Sidney Poitier's boyhood home once stood. You'll also discover the birthplace of The Bahamas' indigenous rake and scrape music, along with numerous myths and folklore that still hold a place in Bahamian culture today. The island is also home to one of the best climates in The Bahamas. Its location near the Tropic of Cancer means temperatures range from the mid-60s in the short winters to the high-80s in the summer, perfect for getting out and exploring Cat Island's untouched landscape and rich history.

**Marina:** Hawks Nest Resort and Marina. Dockage \$2.50 a foot. Electric at \$40 a day - Metered Water at .35 cents a gallon. No shops, amenities or sites to walk to within 20 miles of the marina. This stop would not be on the typical tourist map, with mostly fishing boats in the marina. The onsite restaurant offered good food and the "honor system" bar was reasonably priced. I was able to purchase a fresh loaf of bread for \$6 from the restaurant, as we were getting low on supplies. The resort includes an airstrip, which visitors cross as they walk from the marina to the beach, office or restaurant.

**Summary:** Cat Island will be remembered for the lack of cats as we only saw two in four days! We did have to stop our rental car a few times for goats in the road. As we enjoy learning local history, we visited the Colonel Deveaux Plantation and Mansion. The ruins include the great house and a few out buildings in Port Howe, on an ocean front site.

Cat Island, like every stop in the Bahamas, has its charm, although with the few shops and sites spread out over 50 miles from north to south, without a rental car (rental+fuel+fees about \$145 a day) there is little to see or visit from the only marina on the island.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** We unfortunately, spent a couple of hours one afternoon stuck on the side of the road in a rental car that quit about 30 miles short of our destination! That morning we rented a car to explore the island from the Marina at the very southern point, to the northern tip about 50 miles north. We found a few beautiful beaches, inland waterholes, a small bakery and many old abandoned buildings, some which date back to the 1700's, when the island was full of cotton plantations.

## **15) Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 89 nautical miles

***Eleuthera unique features per Bahamas.com:*** Eleuthera is the fourth most populated island of The Bahamas, with approximately 11,000 residents. Most who live here either fish for bounty or farm the rolling acres of pineapple plantations. Eleuthera is an island of casual sophistication, housing isolated communities, well-developed resorts, rocky bluffs, low-lying wetlands and massive coral reefs that create magnificent backdrops. It also boasts lush tropical greenery and magical pink sand beaches.

***Marina:*** French Leave Harbour Resort. Dockage \$3.50 a foot. Daily resort fee of \$50 but includes a golf cart for on resort use.

***Area Attractions Visited:*** We loved the downtown shops and restaurants along with the pretty homes, but one of our most memorable afternoons was exploring the remains of the old Club Med French Leave Resort. With a bit of luck and knowing where to search, you will find the ruins near the marina beach. Club Med was closed 20 years ago due to heavy damage by hurricane Floyd in 1999. While the beautiful pink sand crescent beach is still one of the best beaches on the island, there is sadly little left of the abandoned resort.

***Summary:*** The marina is in a great location within walking distance to the downtown area. All dockage and moorings at this high-end resort comes with access to all on-site amenities; restaurant, pool, hot tub, watersports, miles of beautiful beaches and a golf cart. The resort has a reputation for mostly larger yachts (up to 180 feet), but we were told at check in they would love all boaters to consider this a welcoming stop.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** Governors Harbour is on our list of places we must visit again. We loved walking the French Leave Beach with gorgeous bright pink sand contrasted by the dark rock formations to the north. The residents are proud of their community, with streets and homes well maintained. The Friday night fish fry was fun with music, vendors and good food.

## **16 & 17) Spanish Wells and Russell Island, Eleuthera**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 42 nautical miles

***Marina:*** Spanish Wells Yacht Haven & Resort. Dockage at \$2.50 a foot. Metered Electric at .65 cents kwh - Metered Water at .50 cents a gallon

***Area Attractions Visited:*** Both Spanish Wells and Russell Island have amenities including small businesses catering to both the year-round residential community and visiting tourists. There are numerous friendly bars and casual restaurants. The Sandbar beach bar on Russell Island is a well-known spot for visiting boaters and local residents.

***Summary:*** Spanish Wells, Eleuthera looks like a New England fishing village with well-maintained painted homes in many colors. While some residents have cars, most travel the small island by golf cart. A one lane bridge connects Spanish Wells to the neighboring Russell Island. Renting a golf cart cost \$40 a day and allowed easy access to both Islands. We liked the beaches, museum, large supermarket and small shops.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** Spanish Wells produces about 75% of the nation's export of spiny lobster. Very impressive for an island less than 3 miles long! We found residents proud of their history and supportive of the local fishing fleet.

**Please note that in October 2019, we updated select pages of this book for Version 3. While we did not want to remove our visits to the Abacos, it is recognized that some of the marinas on the following pages had significant damage from Hurricane Dorian and will not be open for business in 2019/2020. We strongly recommend that you reach out to marinas in the Abacos before planning your visit. Our hope is that in the near future these communities will rebuild and once again be open to recreational boating.**

## **18) Hope Town, Elbow Cay, Abaco**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 65 nautical miles

***Hope Town unique features per Bahamas.com:*** The community of Hope Town has done a tremendous job in the preservation and education of their past. The Wyannie Malone Museum exhibits and preserves much of the settlement's rich and diverse history through memorabilia, artifacts, old photos and documents. The community has also sustained other parts of their history: the cholera graveyard and the building of the Abaco dinghies that are seen at regattas throughout The Islands of The Bahamas. Adjacent Elbow Reef is home to one of the most recognizable landmarks in the country, the candy-striped lighthouse. Residents of Hope Town initially opposed this lighthouse being built in the 1860's, as it was foreseen as a direct threat to their wrecking trade. They now lovingly embrace it and actively resist automation to its remaining beacons.

***Marina:*** Hope Town Inn & Marina. Dockage at \$2.60 a foot. Water and electric metered and added about \$25 a day for both.

***Area Attractions Visited:*** In Hope Town, island life surrounds the harbor which offers protection for the many visiting boaters. The downtown area includes a couple of grocery stores, gift shops, bakery, ice cream shop, restaurants and a liquor store. No cars or golf carts are allowed in the downtown area. Free transportation is provided if you make reservations for any of the restaurants and resorts further away in the southern section of the island.

***Summary:*** Hope Town Inn & Marina is first class with two pools, gift shop, landscaped grounds, rental homes and lodging, restaurant, bar and free water taxi. Beautiful beaches are a short stroll away. Hope Town's main attraction is the famous kerosene fired, mechanically wound, Red and White Lighthouse (officially Elbow Reef Light but often called the Hope Town Light by visitors). Hope Town and the lighthouse are often described as the most photographed places in all of the Bahamas. The village and harbor are truly a delight; from the many boats on moorings, the lighthouse and the brightly painted houses all landscaped with flowering shrubs and plants.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** Firefly Sunset Resort is a couple of miles south of Hope Town center. We enjoyed an ocean front dinner and entertainment by an amazing duo visiting the island from California. Jacqui Naylor and her husband Art Khu play a jazzy bluesy combination of classics, rock and what she refers to as "acoustic smashing".

The weather throughout the day had been building. That night was so windy we were concerned the pontoon water taxi ride back to the marina might be canceled, stranding us in the downtown area. We were very happy to see Michael arrive at the town dock for our pick up with the back-up fishing boat.

## **19) Marsh Harbour, Abaco**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 8 nautical miles

***Marina:*** Conch Inn Resort and Marina. Dockage at \$1.40 a foot. Electric at \$18 per day and free water.

***Marsh Harbour unique features per Bahamas.com:*** This town is the commercial center of The Abacos and hosts the larger of two international airports. It has a growing number of shops, cafés, a selection of hotels and resorts, restaurants and other service amenities, and the only stop light to be found in The Bahamas' Out Islands. The lively downtown area offers all city amenities, yet it maintains a small-town feel.

***Summary:*** We tried many of the local restaurants including Blue Hole, Colors by the Sea, and Snappa's Chill. We purchased needed food items from Maxwell's, which was one of the biggest supermarkets we had seen on any island. Many amenities are within walking distance to the harbour and the busy waterfront restaurants offer weekend entertainment. We rented a car to drive south to visit Pete's Pub and Gallery in Little Harbour.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** Most of the local marinas were full the few days we wanted to stay. Conch Inn staff was so nice to allow us to spend a few hours at the end of the gas dock waiting for a slip to open up.

## **20) Little Harbour, Abaco - {Daytrip}**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** Rental car 40 miles round trip

***Summary:*** Between Hope Town, Abaco and Marsh Harbour, Abaco, is an interesting daytrip to Little Harbour, Abaco. Ralph Johnson and his family left Northampton, Massachusetts in 1952 on their schooner to escape civilization. They landed in Little Harbour and in true Swiss Family Robinson style, lived in caves before eventually building a foundry for the family's bronze sculpture business. The father passed in his late 80's in 1992, but his son Pete has expanded the foundry along with creating a very successful "Pete's Pub". We visited the pub, beach, artist gallery, exterior of the caves, and high on the bluff the ruins of Little Harbour Lighthouse. The small community of about 50 homes is totally off the grid, run by solar power and rain water!

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** While we were walking around the grounds, a man drove up, got out of an old pickup truck and started to walk to one of the homes. He smiled and said, "How ya doing?". Thinking he was just another visitor we said, "Great, another day in Paradise" and kept walking. We realized after he walked away, that it was the owner Pete Johnson and we had missed a chance to have a few words!

## **21) Treasure Cay, Abaco**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 16 nautical miles

***Marina:*** Treasure Cay Beach, Marina & Golf Resort. Dockage at \$2.25 a foot. Metered Electric at .75 cents kwh - Metered Water at .30 cents a gallon

***Summary:*** Large resort community with five-restaurants on site, pool, dive shop, evening activities, and many shops within walking distance. There is a beautiful 3.5 mile beach across the street from the marina. We especially enjoyed the Topsy Seagull Pool Bar, which offered fresh pizza made to order. At night, pretty lights illuminated the palm trees and loud music played till the last guests left.

Treasure Cay is an active popular area for tourist and year-round residents. There are residential neighborhoods and sizeable condo developments. The area also includes many rental units (condos, homes, resort rooms) for visiting tourists. This is due to the international airport 7 miles away. Exploring from this central location with a rental car or golf cart is easy.

Off site, we had lunch at Treasure Sands Club and walked miles of soft sand beaches on the northern side of the cay. A few nights we had dinner at the Bahamas Beach Club, with live entertainment on the beach including a beach bonfire. National Geographic notes Treasure Cay in the top 10 best beaches in the world.

***Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:*** We rented a car to find the Treasure Cay Blue Hole. Located in the middle of a pine forest in Treasure Cay, about 4.5 miles off the main road, this geological 100' wide, limestone rimmed hole, contains a mixture of both salt and fresh water. The water was truly blue and quite clear with a recorded depth of 254 feet. There is a local legend about a monster with a shark head and an octopus body, that lives beneath the depths. Someone who didn't bring a bathing suit may have decided to be brave and take a dip!

## **22) Great Guana Cay, Abaco**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 11 nautical miles

**Great Guana Cay information per Bahamas.com:** The largest cay in the Abaco chain, the residents of this charming community are direct descendants of the Loyalists who settled on Great Guana Cay in the 1800's. Their influence is still evident today through the architectural design of the homes. Accessible by water only, it is a very popular vacation spot in The Abacos. Its convenient location makes it a perfect jumping off point to visit nearby cays. Visitors are also drawn to its intimate charm and serenity, spectacular beaches, excellent snorkeling and diving sites, great reef and deep-sea fishing nearby, as well as restaurants, stores, and perhaps the most celebrated beach bar in The Islands of The Bahamas – Nippers.

**Marina:** Orchid Bay Marina & Yacht Club. Dockage at \$2.25 a foot. Electric at \$15 per day. Metered Water at .35 cents a gallon

**Summary:** One-night stop at Orchid Bay Marina & Yacht Club on Great Guana Cay, allowed us time to explore this quiet island of a little over five miles in length. The big tourist bars are Nippers Beach Bar and Grabbers Bar & Grill. Both bars offer waterfront casual food, a swimming pool, games, and music. Nippers overlooks a large reef on the Atlantic side of the island and seemed busier, but we enjoyed visiting both to share an appetizer and our favorite Bahamas beer Sands Light.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** We posted on our Facebook page Lucky Me Looping about our visit to Nippers Beach Bar. One of our active page followers said her brother worked there and coincidentally he had served us lunch!

## **23) Green Turtle Cay, Abaco**

**Travel Distance from Previous Location:** 15 nautical miles

**Marina:** Leewood Yacht Club. Dockage at \$2 a foot. Metered Electric at .65 cents kwh - Metered Water at .30 cents a gallon

**Summary:** Due to rough weather, we stayed four days at Leewood Yacht Club which is located in a protected harbor. We rented a golf cart to explore the island shops and the sites in New Plymouth center, with stops at the memorial sculpture garden, old jail and beautiful beaches.

**Interesting, Funny or Memorable Experience During Visit:** We had dinner with new boating friends at Green Turtle Club Resort. During the cocktail hour in the lounge, I received a few strange looks and giggles. I didn't realize that my dress completely matched the seating. Just about the whole lounge noticed before I caught on. The eerie dark golf cart ride back to the boat after dinner, felt like the beginning of a zombie movie.



## **24) Port Lucaya & Freeport, Grand Bahama Island**

***Travel Distance from Previous Location:*** 127 nautical miles

***Freeport unique features per Bahamas.com:*** Freeport is the youngest, but more popular sister of the island's other towns — which include West End, Pinder's Point, Russell Town, Smith's Point, William's Town, and more — most named after the families who founded them. They serve as cultural hotspots for visitors wanting to learn more about the destination and each is unique in its own way. No visit to Freeport would be complete without checking some of them out on an island tour. The natural attractions, though, are among Freeport's finest assets, and it is the only place where you can see all six of The Bahamas' ecosystems on one trail. You won't have to stray too far from your hotel or resort to enjoy all that Freeport has to offer.

***Marina:*** Port Lucaya Marina. Dockage at \$2.20 a foot. Electric \$20 per day – Water \$10 a day

***Area Attractions Visited:*** Tour and tasting at The Bahamian Brewery (\$10 for a 15-minute tour and 30 minutes of unlimited tastings). We spent hours walking the vendors at the straw markets and visiting the various shops in Port Lucaya center.

***Summary:*** As this was our last stop in the Bahamas we decided to rent a car to visit as many caves, ruins, and blue holes that we could find.

1) Lucayan National Park (about 24 miles east of Freeport center) has two amazing caves - Ben's Cave and Burial Mound Cave. The 40-acre park also includes pine forests, tidal creek, walkways through the mangroves, coastal dunes, and sandy beaches. The extremely well-maintained park offered stairs and wooded platforms to allow you to access each cave. \$5 admission

2) A visit to Owl's Hole Blue Hole was a test on Greg's amazing backroad driving skills. Located about 3.5 miles south of the main road on a rocky path, this was one of the more difficult blue holes to access, but it was a true reward once found. To enter the water, you cliff jump or descend a 30-foot ladder into this amazing cavern. The water was crystal-clear allowing us to see the pyramid of rocks that was once the ceiling.

3) From 1954 to 1987 the US Air Force maintained a missile tracking station on the island near High Rock. It was used mainly in connection with launches from Cape Canaveral, Florida and NASA's manned space flights. Sadly, little remains to explore except a few old buildings and bulkheads along the beach. A community library was established at a later date in the abandoned telecommunication building near the main road, although that also was at some point abandoned.

**We left Freeport and traveled 81 nautical miles to cross back into the United States arriving at the Port of Palm Beach (aka: Lake Worth Inlet), Florida**