



The Bahamas

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Why Go?

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

So what's in it for travelers? There's sailing around the Abacos' history-filled Loyalist Cays. Partying til dawn at Paradise Island's over-the-top Atlantis resort. Diving the spooky blue holes of Andros. Kayaking the 365 Exuma Cays. Lounging on Eleuthera's pink-sand beaches. Pondering pirates in Nassau. There's a Bahamian island to match most every water-and-sand-based compulsion, each framed by a backdrop of gorgeous, mesmerizing blue.

So paint your own adventure – the palette awaits.

When to Go

The Bahamas enjoy around 320 sunny days a year. Daytime temperatures December to April average 70°F (21°C), and June to September a perfect 80°F (26°C). In general, the islands are balmy year-round, with cooling, near-constant trade winds blowing by day from the east. The so-called rainy season extends from late May to November; hurricane season is June to November.

High season typically runs from mid-December to mid-April, when hotel prices are at their most expensive. Some hotels are booked solid around Christmas and Easter, and college spring break in March means Nassau and Grand Bahama crawl with rum-fueled revelers. During low season, many hotels reduce their rates significantly. Some Out Island hotels close, but tourist accommodations are always available.

Best Beaches

- » Cabbage Beach (p154)
- » Cable Beach (p161)
- » Pink Sands Beach (p179)
- » Treasure Cay Beach (p174)
- » Gold Rock Beach (p172)

Best Places to Stay

- » Graycliff Hotel (p157)
- » Hope Town Harbour Lodge (p177)
- » Pink Sands Resort (p179)
- » Kamalame Cay (p188)

Itineraries

THREE DAYS

Explore Pirates of Nassau, the National Art Gallery and Fort Fincastle in downtown Nassau, grab a *jitney* for beach-bar cocktails, hike over the Paradise Island bridge to gawk at Atlantis' shark tanks, and snooze on Cabbage Beach.

ONE WEEK

Add a Bahamas ferry ride to Harbour Island for pink-sand shores and boutique browsing, or to Andros for mind-blowing dives to the Tongue of the Ocean and hikes to hidden blue holes.

TWO WEEKS

Add a trip to the Abacos for cay hopping, or to the Exumas for kayaking, kitesurfing and adventuring.

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

Lynden Pindling International Airport in Nassau is the Bahamas' number-one entry point. From here, island hoppers can make the jump to nearby island nations such as the Turks and Caicos, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. A variety of airlines service these routes, making interisland travel a snap. Though mail boats and ferries run between the various Bahamian islands, there is no regular sea service to other island nations. If you're dead set on seeing multiple Caribbean islands by sea, chartering a yacht or signing up for a cruise are your best bets.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Conch** Roasted, cracked (fried), chopped into salads or dipped in dough and fried into fritters, this chewy sea snail is the most ubiquitous food in the Bahamas. Think calamari. Starchy side dishes like peas 'n' rice (rice with beans), mac 'n' cheese and potato salad round out the menu.
- » **Boil fish** A breakfast dish of grouper stewed with lime juice, onions and potatoes. Usually served with johnnycake, a type of flat cornbread.
- » **Spiny Caribbean lobster** The Bahamas' native lobster, often served sauteed with onions and pepper.
- » **Souse** A thick stew of lamb, sheep's head, pig's trotter or other 'leftover' meats.
- » **Guava duff** Boiled pastry filled with sweet guava paste and topped off with rum or cream sauce.
- » **Beer** Wash everything down with a cold Kalik or Sands beer.
- » **Rum cocktails** Try Goombay Smash or a Bahama Mama.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Bahamian (BS\$) and US dollars are equal and interchangeable
- » **Language** English
- » **Money** ATMs widely available on Nassau and Grand Bahama, rarer in the Out Islands
- » **Visas** Not necessary for Americans, Europeans and citizens of most Commonwealth countries

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 5358 sq miles
- » **Population** 354,000
- » **Capital** Nassau
- » **Telephone country code** 242
- » **Emergency** 911 or 919

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** BS\$100
- » **Two-course evening meal** BS\$40
- » **Museum entrance** BS\$10
- » **Beer** BS\$4
- » **Bus ticket** BS\$1

Resources

- » **Lonely Planet Bahamas** (www.lonelyplanet.com/the-bahamas) Destination information, hotel bookings, traveler forum and more
- » **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (www.bahamas.com) Useful hotel, dining, transportation, activity and events info