



Cat & San Salvador Islands

TELEPHONE CODE: 242 / POPULATION: 2580 / AREA: 119 SQ MILES

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Best Beaches

- » Port Royal Beach (p176)
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- » Snow Bay Beach (p180)

Best Places to Stay

- » Shannas Cove Resort (p176)
- » Fernandez Bay Village (p173)
- » Pigeon Cay Beach Club (p175)
- » Riding Rock Resort & Marina (p179)

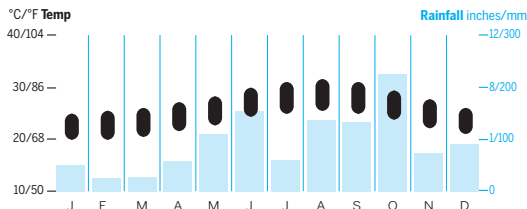
Why Go?

The childhood home of Bahamian screen legend Sydney Poitier, rural and undeveloped Cat Island is one of the country's most scenic places; blessed with the Bahamas' highest point (an incredible 206ft!), miles of virgin beach, superb diving and extremely friendly locals. Tiny 'San Sal' is one of the best wall-dive destinations in the world. There are more than 40 dive sites within 30 minutes of shore, and even more near Rum Cay and Conception Island. The island's waters are known for visibility up to 200ft; on special days it can exceed a miraculous 250ft!

Life on both islands continues much as it has for centuries, and the modern world couldn't really feel further away. However, don't expect island idylls; both Cat and San Sal are significantly poorer than the rest of the country.

When to Go

San Salvador



June The Annual Rake 'n' Scrape Music Festival is a fantastic chance to immerse yourself in Bahamian culture.

August Scores of Cat Islanders return from afar for the Cat Island Regatta.

October San Sal celebrates Discovery Day on October 12 with a party and regatta at Graham's Harbour.

CAT ISLAND

Cat Island is a fascinating place to visit and one where the heart of traditional African-Bahamian culture continues to beat, though you'll have to dig deep to discover: there is no tourism infrastructure handing you the island's culture on a plate; non-Bahamian visitors are rare, and those who come here go to several diving resorts on the south coast.

A single road, inventively named the Queen's Hwy, runs down the west shore, lined by plantation ruins and ramshackle settlements where unemployment and poverty are rife. Despite this, Cat Island is blessed with rolling hills and is crowned by Como Hill (206ft) and its atmospheric hermitage, while the Atlantic or 'north' shore is crowned with miles of bluish-colored beaches and dramatic cliffs.

The wall-diving accessed from the southwest coast is exceptional and there

is some great hiking along old logging and plantation trails.

History

Following the American Revolution, Loyalists arrived with many African slaves and established around 40 cotton and cattle estates. Many homes still retain traditional African ovens for baking bread and teacakes, while the African culture of bush medicine and obeah are still powerful influences. Some of the islanders are said to be skilled witches, always happy to prescribe a home-made cure.

Since emancipation, things in a material sense haven't changed much for most of the population. Many depend upon selling their few tomatoes, onions, and pineapples (planted in limestone pot holes, where nutritious soils are aided by guano or bat excrement, gathered from caves for fertilizer) and on small stipends from the National Insurance Board.



Cat & San Salvador Islands Highlights

- 1 Experience a Cat Island sunrise from Father Jerome's hilltop **Mt Alvernia Hermitage** (opposite)
- 2 Hike through dense scrub forest from Shanna's Cove to the beautiful beaches at **Man O' War Point** (p176)
- 3 Dive the pristine waters

and numerous wall-dive sites of **San Salvador** (p177)

- 4 Chat with islanders in Arthur's Town about Bahamian history and **obeah** (p176)
- 5 Take a **guided walk** (p179) to learn about San Salvador's old plantations and bush medicine

- 6 Wander down Greenwood Beach along miles of virgin sand to spectacular **Columbus Point** (p174)
- 7 Dive with hammer head sharks, green turtles and huge eagle rays in the waters off **Conception Island** (p180)