



Grand Bahama

TELEPHONE CODE: 242 / POPULATION: 51,800 / AREA: 530 SQ MILES

Includes »

- Freeport & Lucaya75
- East of Freeport..... 90
- West of Freeport.....91

Best Places to Eat

- » Billy Joe's on the Beach (p85)
- » Sabor (p85)
- » Miss Zelma's Conch Stand (p91)
- » Smith's Point Fish Fry (p86)
- » Churchill's Chophouse (p85)

Best Places to Stay

- » Pelican Bay (p83)
- » Our Lucaya Beach & Golf Resort (p83)
- » Seagrape Bed & Breakfast (p83)
- » Old Bahama Bay Resort & Marina (p92)
- » Paradise Cove (p92)

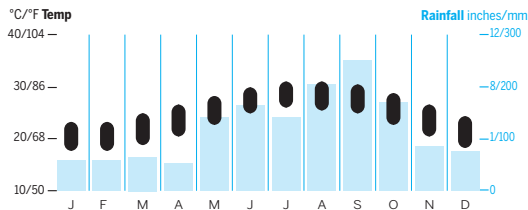
Why Go?

After years of playing second banana to bigger, more glamorous Nassau, Grand Bahama is finally coming into its own. If you're looking for a laid-back, affordable getaway with a minimum of fuss, this is your place. The streets of its main city Freeport and Lucaya, are clean and calm. Its golden beaches and aquamarine waters are rarely overcrowded, even in high season. All the amenities of a perfect vacation – dive shops, restaurants, pubs, boutiques – are at your fingertips within a few blocks' radius. No wonder then, that Grand Bahama has become so popular with cruise-ship tourists and families on quickie weekend breaks.

Outside the city, the 85-mile-long island is an unexplored playground of mangrove swamps, sea caves and uninhabited sandy cays. There's world-class diving and snorkeling, great kayaking and world-famous bonefishing. All this, just a hop, skip and a 55-mile jump from the US.

When to Go

Freeport



March–May
Balmy weather and blooming hibiscus equal high season, with crowds lasting through April's Spring Break.

July Summer Junkanoo festival brings color and flair. Weather is hot, and crowds are thinning.

September–December Low season means killer deals but chilly weather, with Junkanoo parades in December.

History

Juan Ponce de León visited Grand Bahama in 1513 while searching for the Fountain of Youth, and pirates marauded their way around the island during the 17th and 18th centuries. The islanders benefited from the pirates' spoils, and briefly from acting as a supply depot for the Confederacy during the US Civil War. Another prosperous time came when Grand Bahama acted as a staging post for rumrunners during Prohibition.

For many decades the islanders then lived meagerly from the proceeds of lumbering, fishing and diving for sponges, until the 1950s when American Wallace Groves and Brit Sir Charles Hayward developed the area. This turned a vast, uninhabited area into a town known as Freeport, complete

with an airport and a port with an oil-bunkering storage complex that would prove a bonanza for the Bahamas. (Oil is still purchased, stored and resold to the US at a handsome profit.)

The British crown then granted permission for these men to buy and develop a further 150,000 acres of the island's middle section, which led to the destruction of the remaining West Indian and British architecture. Initial plans for tourism floundered, and Freeport was then (optimistically) promoted as an offshore financial and high-technology industrial center.

The city is still overseen by the Grand Bahama Port Authority, which maintains strict zoning laws and governs which cars can drive in which areas, depending on their tax status.



Grand Bahama Highlights

- 1 Paddling a kayak through Lucayan National Park with **Grand Bahamas Nature Tours** (p80)
- 2 Vegging out on the powdery sands of **Lucaya Beach** (p79)
- 3 Shopping for duty-free diamonds, fancy French perfumes and local straw work at the **Port Lucaya Marketplace** (opposite)
- 4 Snorkeling, paddle-boarding and sunning at **Junkanoo Beach Club** (p80) on Taino Beach
- 5 Spending an afternoon swimming and wading at secluded **Gold Rock Beach** (p79)
- 6 Splashing and playing with a pod of friendly dolphins with UNEXSO's famous **Dolphin Experience** (p77)
- 7 Listening to Junkanoo bands rock out on weekends at **Count Basie Sq** (p85), daiquiri in hand
- 8 Mixing up your very own perfume blend at the **Perfume Factory** (p76)
- 9 Strolling past waterfalls, tropical birds, labyrinths and historical chapels at **Garden of the Groves** (opposite)
- 10 Bonefishing the vodka-clear shallows of the **East End** (p78)