



The Exumas

TELEPHONE CODE: 242 / POPULATION: 3540 / AREA: 121 SQ MILES

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Best Beaches

- » Tropic of Cancer Beach (p165)
- » Cocoplum Beach (p163)
- » Pretty Molly Beach (p165)
- » Hooper's Bay Beach (p163)

Best Places to Eat

- » Café Alesha (p164)
- » Big D's Conch Spot (p164)
- » Santana's Grill (p166)
- » Club Thunderball (p168)

Why Go?

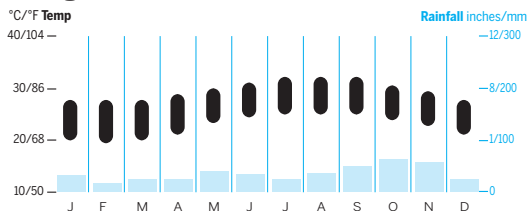
The Exumas are an extraordinarily beautiful string of some 365 islands and cays, of which just a few are inhabited. Some of the cays are mere dots on the map, some are barren, and others luscious and fertile, but they all have glittering white sands and small harbors of turquoise water.

The main island, Great Exuma, is well set up for tourism, and is especially popular with yachties, many of whom stock up on supplies in tiny George Town before disappearing to explore the pristine beaches of the Exuma Cays. The island itself is well worth getting to know, however, boasting miles of great beaches and extremely friendly locals.

Elsewhere in the Exumas elegant Stocking Island has fine beaches, tranquil lagoons and is a hiker's paradise, while the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park, which protects birds, marine life and the endemic iguanas, teems with life for birders, divers and nature lovers.

When to Go

George Town



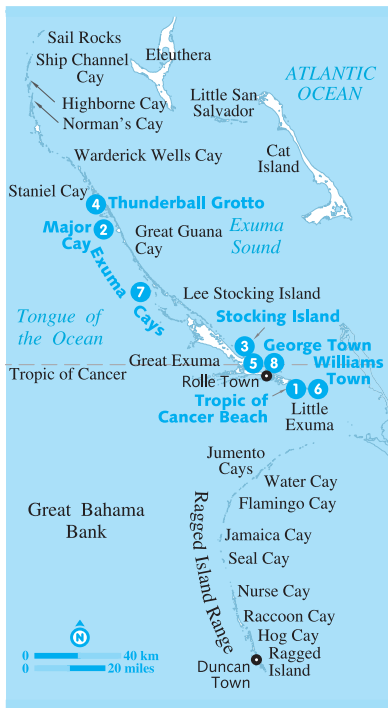
April Join the crowds at the annual four-day Family Island Regatta, the island's biggest festival.

October The annual Bahamas Bonefish Bonanza, held in George Town, attracts fisherfolk from around the world.

December Junkanoo begins on Exuma at 3am on Boxing Day – a noisy, colorful carnival you won't want to miss.

History

During the 17th century, many residents of New Providence settled Great Exuma to escape ruthless buccaneers, and made a living as salt rakers. Following the American



The Exumas Highlights

- 1 Lazing the day away on **Tropic of Cancer Beach** (p165)
- 2 Seeing the friendly swimming pigs of **Major Cay** (p168)
- 3 Discovering the hiking paths of beautiful **Stocking Island** (p163)
- 4 Snorkeling or diving in the exquisite **Thunderball Grotto** (p167)
- 5 Joining the crowds for the fabulous **Family Island Regatta** (p162)
- 6 Hearing tall stories about the making of *Pirates of the Caribbean* at **Santana's Grill** (p166)
- 7 Finding your own virgin beach cruising the incredible **Exuma Cays** (p166)
- 8 Chilling out and catching up on the local gossip in the bars and restaurants of **George Town** (p158)

Revolution, Loyalists under Lord Denys Rolle arrived with 140 slaves aboard a ship named the *Peace & Plenty*. Granted 7000 acres on which to plant cotton, Rolle's plantations blossomed until the chenille bug chewed through the cotton crop. The salt industry also (rather ironically) evaporated, done in by more profitable operations on neighboring islands. In 1834, the year of emancipation, most white people uprooted and left, while the newly freed slaves stayed and took over Rolle's land.

It was common back then for slaves to adopt the name of their master. Today every second person in Exuma is a Rolle, and since the 1890s every Rolle has been permitted to build and farm on common land. Rolleville and Rolle Town, the two most important historic settlements on Great Exuma, are certainly worth a look. Although now claimed by bush, there are decrepit forts and ruined plantations lying scattered around in between the farming and fishing villages.

The island plunged headlong into the modern world with the arrival of mass tourism in the shape of the Four Seasons Resort (now the Sandals at Emerald Bay), which opened in the 1980s and suddenly saw plane-loads of tourists touching down each week, changing the island's once quiet face forever.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Most travelers to Exuma fly into the small Exuma International Airport, 6 miles north of George Town. There are several flights (one way \$85) per day on Bahamas Air, Western Air and Sky Bahamas, as well as international connections to Miami (American Eagle), Fort Lauderdale (Continental), Atlanta (Delta) and Toronto (Air Canada).

BOAT

If traveling in your own boat, George Town is the official port of entry to the Exumas. You'll need to call ahead to arrange clearance with **Customs** (242-345-0071) and **Immigration** (242-345-2569), both in the Government Administration Building on Queen's Hwy. You will also require a special sailing license for traveling around the islands.

FERRY An overnight ferry on **Bahamas Ferries** (www.bahamasferries.com) leaves Nassau (one way \$60) at 8:30pm on Monday and Wednesday and arrives in George Town at 6:30am the following day.

MAIL BOAT If you fancy taking it slow, two mail boats connect the Exumas to Nassau.