



The Bahamas

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Tropic Breeze (p183)
- ➔ Fish Fry (p152)
- ➔ Café Matisse (p153)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Pineville Motel (p179)
- ➔ Graycliff Hotel (p151)
- ➔ Hope Town Harbour Lodge (p169)

Why Go?

Renowned as a maritime playground for sun-starved Americans, this stunning string of subtropical islands is so much more than a cruise-ship stopover. Stretched between the depths of the North Atlantic and Florida's eastern coast, the Bahamas comprises more than 700 islands and 2400 cays, most uninhabited, and all fringed by spectacular coral and fathomless ocean trenches. From the grit and bustle of funky Nassau to the vast mangroves of Andros, there's an astonishing array of beaches, reefs, forests and historic towns to be discovered, all within the compass of an hour's flight.

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.

When to Go

Jun–Sep Daytime temperatures average a perfect 80°F (26°C) June to September.

mid-Dec–mid-Apr High season, when hotel prices are highest.

Mar Spring break means Nassau and Grand Bahama crawl with rum-fueled revelers.

NEW PROVIDENCE

What New Providence lacks in size, it more than makes up for in energy, attitude and devil-may-care spirit. In fact, this 34km-long powerhouse of an island is a perfect fit for the extroverted tourist with money to burn. Plummet down a 15m waterslide, puff on a hand-rolled stogie, place your bets on a high-stakes hand and carouse like a pirate into the wee hours – it's all there for the grabbing.

But all is not lost for quieter types, who can escape the beach-bar and cruise-ship scene with minimal effort. Behind Nassau's eager touristic facade are engaging museums, historic buildings and locally owned restaurants that are crowd-free and full of personality. The western end of the island is set aside as a handsome heritage park, and there are some good snorkeling and diving sites a little way offshore.

Getting Around

BOAT

Water taxis (p191) Run between Woodes Rogers Walk in Nassau and the Paradise Island Ferry Terminal for BS\$8, round-trip.

BUS

New Providence's public transport consists of private fleets of minibuses called jitneys, which follow government-prescribed routes from roughly 6am to 8pm. However, there are no fixed schedules and many routes stop running earlier, once the demand from local workers dries up. No jitneys run all the way to Paradise Island or the airport, although some routes can drop you within easy walking distance. All routes go to downtown Nassau at some point.

Destinations are clearly painted on the front of the jitneys, which can be waved down at any point. To request a stop, simply call out, 'Bus stop!' when you want to get off, paying the driver as you leave. Fares start at BS\$1.25 for downtown Nassau and rise to BS\$2.50 for the airport. Some useful routes:


10 & 10A Running through Cable Beach, Sandyport Bay and Lyford Cay, this is the busiest route, and the cheapest way to get a tour of the island.

1, 7 & 7A Paradise Island bridges.

12b Love Beach and the airport.



CAR & SCOOTER

You don't need a car to explore downtown Nassau or to get to the beaches, but you will if you intend to explore New Providence (taxi fares would quickly outweigh rental costs). The major car-rental companies have booths at the airport; local companies rent more cheaply. Ask your

hotel to recommend a company or try **Virgo Car Rental** ( airport 242-377-1275, main office 242-393-7900; www.virgocarrental.com; Kemp Rd, Nassau: ☀ 9am-5pm).

Scooters are widely available for around BS\$75 per day, and can be found outside most major hotels or at the Prince George Wharf. Bear in mind that New Providence roads can be dangerous, especially in busy Nassau.

TAXI

Taxis can be hailed on any busy road (they'll often hail you, if you seem in need of transport) and await fares on Woodes Rodgers Walk, near the cruise-ship dock. If you need to call one, try  242-323-7900 or  242-323-4323.

Nassau

Nassau is the gritty, vivacious alter ego to the relaxed character of most of the Bahamas. The country's only city, it teems with haring jitneys, bawling straw-goods vendors, rum-happy locals and endless waves of cruise-ship passengers.

It's appropriate that Nassau has some hustle to it – it's been a redoubt of hustlers for centuries. From the 18th-century pirates who blew their doubloons on women and wine to the Confederate steamers smuggling cargo past the Union blockade during the American Civil War, the city has long sheltered daring dodgers on the make. The make-a-buck spirit of this global tax haven animates the duty-free shops and cigar salesmen of Bay St, while the historic wealth of the ruling classes finds tangible expression in grand, Georgian government buildings and homes. Whether you come to shop, eat, party or sightsee, Nassau is *the* place for a dose of urban excitement.

Sight

Downtown Nassau and Bay St largely consist of modern commercial buildings dedicated to the cruise-ship market, although some historic buildings remain. Other sights are dotted throughout Nassau, in walkable proximity to each other, especially to the landward side of Bay St.

Junkanoo Beach

(Map p152) Between downtown Nassau and Araway Cay, Junkanoo is popular with locals and visitors alike, with beach-shack bars, volleyball nets, sky-juice vendors and friendly Bahamians in ample supply.

BEACH