

The Land of Adventure

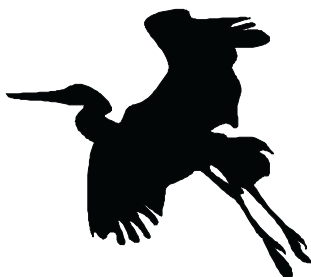
As one might imagine, in a nation completely surrounded by the clearest water in the world, the emphasis is on water sports. And while the great outdoors is where most people want to be when they visit the islands, there's a lot to do in the Bahamas beyond the beach and the ocean. The shops and the nightlife of New Providence Island and Grand Bahama Island provide that little bit extra that makes the islands the ideal vacation spot for almost everyone.

A small taste of what's available throughout the islands is listed here. You'll find more specific information about the attractions and activities on individual islands by checking the appropriate chapter, and the *At a Glance* section at the end of the book.

■ Bird Watching

Guides & Self-Guided Tours

Bird watching has, over the last several years, become very popular in the Bahamas, although qualified guides are still few and far between. On New Providence Island these include **Carloyn Wardle**, ☎ 242-362-1575, **Eric Cash**, ☎ 242-356-4625, **Keva Hanna Lawrence**, ☎ 242-324-2274, and **Sam Durcombe**, ☎ 242-393-7604. You can call any of these guides to arrange day trips, or something more extensive. Self-guided tours are available at **The Retreat**, headquarters of the Bahamas National Trust, Village Road, Nassau,



☎ 242-393-1317. On Grand Bahama, contact the **Rand Nature Centre** in Freeport, ☎ 242-351-4187. Both agencies offer monthly field trips through the Ornithology Group; all are welcome.

■ Boating & Sailing

Rentals

There are endless possibilities for getting out and about on the water – from the self-drive rental boat available by the hour, to the full-blown chartered day-sailor yacht that comes complete with captain and crew, not to mention champagne and lobster lunches. Most of the hotels have Hobie Cats, Sunfish or Sailfish for rent. Some even have Boston Whalers and other outboard-driven craft available. All come at a great variety of hourly or daily rates. Sometimes they are free. It's worth checking before you make your hotel reservations.

Private Boats

For boat owners, the islands have vast expanses of calm, clear open water, safe bays and inlets, and any number of convenient anchorages and marinas that offer everything from a quick lunch and a glass of cold beer to chilled champagne and a gourmet lobster dinner. All sizes of sailboats are available, from the crewed to the bareboat, and there's something for you no matter what your level of experience.

Arrangements can be made through any number of outlets, including your travel agent, hotel or one of the many special outfits you will find listed throughout the pages of this book.

■ Golf

Across the islands you will find a number of fine courses, some laid out by famous names in golf architecture: Robert Trent Jones Jr. and Sr., Pete Dye, Dick Wilson and Joe Lee, to name but a few.

The Best Courses

The best courses are on the two most populated islands: New Providence and Grand Bahama. But the Out Islands, too, have some fine courses. Most notable are those at the now defunct Cotton Bay Club on Eleuthera, The Treasure Cay Golf Club, and the small but challenging nine-hole course on Great Harbour Cay in the Berry Islands. All 18-hole courses on New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Out Islands provide players with a complete range of facilities, including a resident pro, rental carts and clubs. Most facilities offer clinics and private lessons.

■ Hiking & Bicycling

Though you will be very much on your own as to where and how you hike, the opportunities to enjoy an afternoon, or even a week, hiking the quiet country lanes and beaches are just about endless. There's not a single island in the entire archipelago that doesn't offer something.



Be aware that the route you take will almost always be lonely, often dusty, and the facilities along the way pretty well non-existent. Be sure to carry everything you need with you, especially an adequate quantity of water and sun block.

Bicycling offers even more opportunities to see the islands at a more leisurely pace than by car or taxi. While bicycles are readily available for rent on the two main islands, they are not quite so easily come by in the Out Islands. Some of the hotels in the Out Islands offer them free of charge to their guests, and some do rent them to guests staying at other hotels. Check with your travel agent.

There are virtually no designated walking, hiking or bicycling trails on any of the islands. These activities are very much go-as-you-please affairs, especially on the Out Islands. The main roads are the first and most obvious choice, but there are also the beaches, of course, and the hundreds of unmarked side roads that seem to lead nowhere and often end up at a secluded beach where you can enjoy a picnic lunch and a swim. At least in the Out Islands, there's no reason why you

shouldn't wander at will. The locals are friendly and willing to give ideas, directions and the benefit of their knowledge about the best places to go and sites to see. Don't be afraid to ask.

Guided bike rides are offered by some of the larger hotels on New Providence Island, and **Pedal & Paddle Ecoventures** in Nassau, ☎ 242-362-2772, and **Kayak Nature Tours** on Grand Bahama Island, ☎ 242-373-2485, both offer guided rides and day-trips. Both use modern, off-road bikes.



If you are going to one of the more remote islands you could, of course, take your own bike along with you. Check with the airline as to procedure and costs.

■ Honeymooning

The Bahamas epitomize romance. From the soft sounds of the steel drum and calypso wafting gently over the beaches on a warm evening under a spectacular sunset, to deserted beaches where the palms wave gently over the crystal waters of an emerald sea, the islands have much to offer.



Check first with your travel agent when making your booking and be sure to do so well in advance. The Bahamas are a very popular honeymoon destination and many suites are booked up a year or more in advance.

■ Horseback Riding

There's not much horseback riding on the islands and outfitters are often booked weeks in advance. There are stables on both Grand Bahama and New Providence. On New Providence, you can contact **Happy Trails Stables**, ☎ 242-362-1820; on Grand Bahama, **Pinetree Stables** is at ☎ 242-373-3600. The going rate is \$25 per hour, and you have a choice of English or Western saddles. Don't hesitate to give it a try. Long rides along quiet country lanes lined with seagrapes, cocoa plums, casuarinas and white sandy beaches provide hours of quiet relaxation and often new friends and good company.

■ Parasailing

Parasailing is available from private operators at most of the major resorts both on New Providence Island and Grand Bahama Island.

■ Jet-Skiing

Jet-skiing is available at most of the beachfront hotels on Grand Bahama and New Providence Islands, but not on the Out Islands. This is because the skis damage the fragile coral heads. Rates vary from hotel to hotel, but start at around \$40 for 30 minutes.

■ Shelling

As it grows ever more popular, shelling is a hobby that can bring back memories of your vacation for years to come. Put on your swim suit, leave the big cities behind, and go to the east end of Grand Bahama or New Providence at low tide. Wade out to the dark spots in the water where the seaweed grows. There, conch feed in the thousands. There's always someone around willing to clean the shells for you. Sand dollars can be found almost everywhere, and literally hundreds of varieties of exquisite shells lie on the high water line of a thousand Out Island beaches.

■ Sport Fishing

Fishing is not just a sport. For many Bahamians, it's the way they make their living. But if you're a sport fisherman, fishing here is unlike anywhere else on earth. You don't have to be a world-class angler to take advantage of what the islands have to offer. In fact, it's okay if you've never fished before in your life. There are plenty of skilled guides willing to take you in hand and show you exactly how it's done. A couple of hours of instruction, a fast boat or a calm, shallow-water flat, and you're in business, hooked in the worst way, a new enthusiast in a sport where the fanaticism of its devotees is rivaled only by that of the most avid golfers.

The Lure of Fishing

Nothing compares with the feeling you'll get aboard a slowly trolling boat on a calm sea under a hot summer sun, a heavy rod between your knees, and a can of something cold in your hand. And then it happens. There's a jerk on your line; something's taken the bait, and in seconds you're involved in the fight of your life. But wait, the line goes slack, it's gone. No, it's still there, and suddenly the water a hundred yards from the boat explodes and the great fish is in the air. Your first sailfish hurls itself out of the water in a breathtaking arc. The sight leaves you speechless, awed and, for a moment, not knowing what to do next. And then it hits again and the fight is on. Slowly you reel in, the clutch slipping under the strain, three winds on the crank for every inch of line you gain. As suddenly as it began, it's over. Your opponent, exhausted at the side of the boat, is gaffed and hauled aboard. It's more than five feet long and weighs perhaps as much as 90 pounds – you won't know until you get it back to the scale on the dock, but it's a good one; you know it is. You go home at day's end satisfied and tired, but still excited, ready to do it all again tomorrow, the next day, next year. You're hooked more strongly than any fish you've ever caught, and for good.

There are any number of ways to go fishing in the Bahamas. Of course, off-shore fishing is the premier sport here, but there really is something for everyone. You don't need to charter an expensive deep-sea boat to enjoy a good day of fishing. You can do it from a small rental boat all by yourself, or even wade to your waist in the crystal waters of one of a hundred or more bonefish flats for a day of sport.

Blue Water Fishing

Other than the **sailfish**, the king of them all is perhaps the **blue marlin**. Catches of the *big blue* typically range from 100 to 300 pounds or more. Four and five hundred pounders are not uncommon and stories of the one that got away tell of fish in excess of 1,000 pounds. Fantasy? Perhaps; perhaps not. The wide, wide ocean is full of surprises.

Tuna is another fine blue water catch. Every spring the bluefin make their annual run through the Bahamas, and every spring the anglers leave the docks in droves, headed out to participate in any one of a dozen or more tournaments from Bimini to Walker's Cay. Catches weigh from 100 to 800, even 900 pounds. Then there's the blackfin and yellowfin tuna – smaller, but no less fun to catch.

Other excellent deep water species include the **kingfish** or **king mackerel**. They can be caught through the year, although peak time is during the spring and summer. And what about the dolphin? The fish; not Flipper (he's a mammal). **Dolphin** are usually found fairly close in along the shoreline, weigh anywhere from five to 20 pounds, and are excellent to eat. Then there's the **wahoo**, weighing from around 15 to 30 pounds; even 60 pounds is not unusual. They, too, make for good eating and are highly prized by sport fishermen. The wahoo are most often found lurking in the deep water off the edge of a reef. The **amberjack** is another prized sporting fish found most often during the summer months in the cooler, deep waters just off the edge of the reef and closer in-shore the rest of the year. Amberjack can run from a low of about 20 pounds to a high of 40 pounds.

Sharks, too, are common throughout the Bahamas, especially the Out Islands, and can be found in both shallow waters and deep. Bull sharks, blues, hammerheads, and tiger sharks abound. The truth is, however, that when one is caught, the fight usually lasts only as long as it takes for the shark's razor-like teeth to bite through the wire traces that hold him. Even so, you'll remember the battle for a long time to come.

The wily **barracuda** also can be found in large numbers, in shallow or deep waters. They can often be seen swimming close to the surface in the clear waters over reefs and sandy banks. Barracuda range in size from a few pounds to about 15 or 20 pounds and, small though they might be, you're sure of a good fight if you can get one on your hook.



Unfortunately, barracuda are often the victims of ciguatera poisoning and are, therefore, risky to eat.

For good eating you can't beat **grouper**. Grouper – black, Nassau and yellowfin – can be found swimming lazily around, close to the bottom

on the reefs throughout the Bahamas. Catches ranging from 15 to 25 pounds are the norm, and fish of 30 to 45 pounds are not uncommon. Often your hotel will be willing to clean and cook your grouper for you. There's nothing quite like a grouper steak, caught in the afternoon and eaten the same evening. Likewise the **snapper**. It, too, may be caught on reefs throughout the islands. Most common are the red and gray variety and, though a fish may weigh only a pound or two, fresh-caught snapper is delicious.

Bonefishing

Inside the reef, before you reach the deep blue waters of the ocean where the glamorous, deep-water sportfish hog most of the limelight, there's a second, very exciting sporting opportunity – bonefishing. The elusive bonefish, often called the *ghost fish*, is rapidly becoming one of the most popular sportfish on the islands. Until quite recently, bonefishing was almost unheard of among mainland anglers. Today people from around the world flock here in search of this hard-fighting denizen of the flats.

Bonefish, so named for the huge numbers of bones in their bodies, live in deep water but come up onto the flats to feed, and that's where you'll have to go to find them. Unlike most deep-water sportfish, they offer those that seek them not only a good fight, but the thrill of the hunt as well.



Bonefish, like deer, must be stalked, and they are just as skittish. Make a wrong move at the wrong time and your quarry will be gone in a flash, leaving you standing alone in the water, totally frustrated, and wondering what went wrong.

Bonefish, in comparison to other sportfish of the blue waters, are not very big. They weigh in around six to 15 pounds, with some growing as large as 20 pounds.