

Bruce McKay
www.Travel-Pix.ca



Bahamas



Bahamas

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Bahamas

Introduction

An escape to a warmer climate for a few days in the middle of a Canadian winter is good for both body and soul.

Here are photos from two winter breaks in the Bahamas. I planned some beach days but also set out to explore other aspects of Nassau and its surroundings.

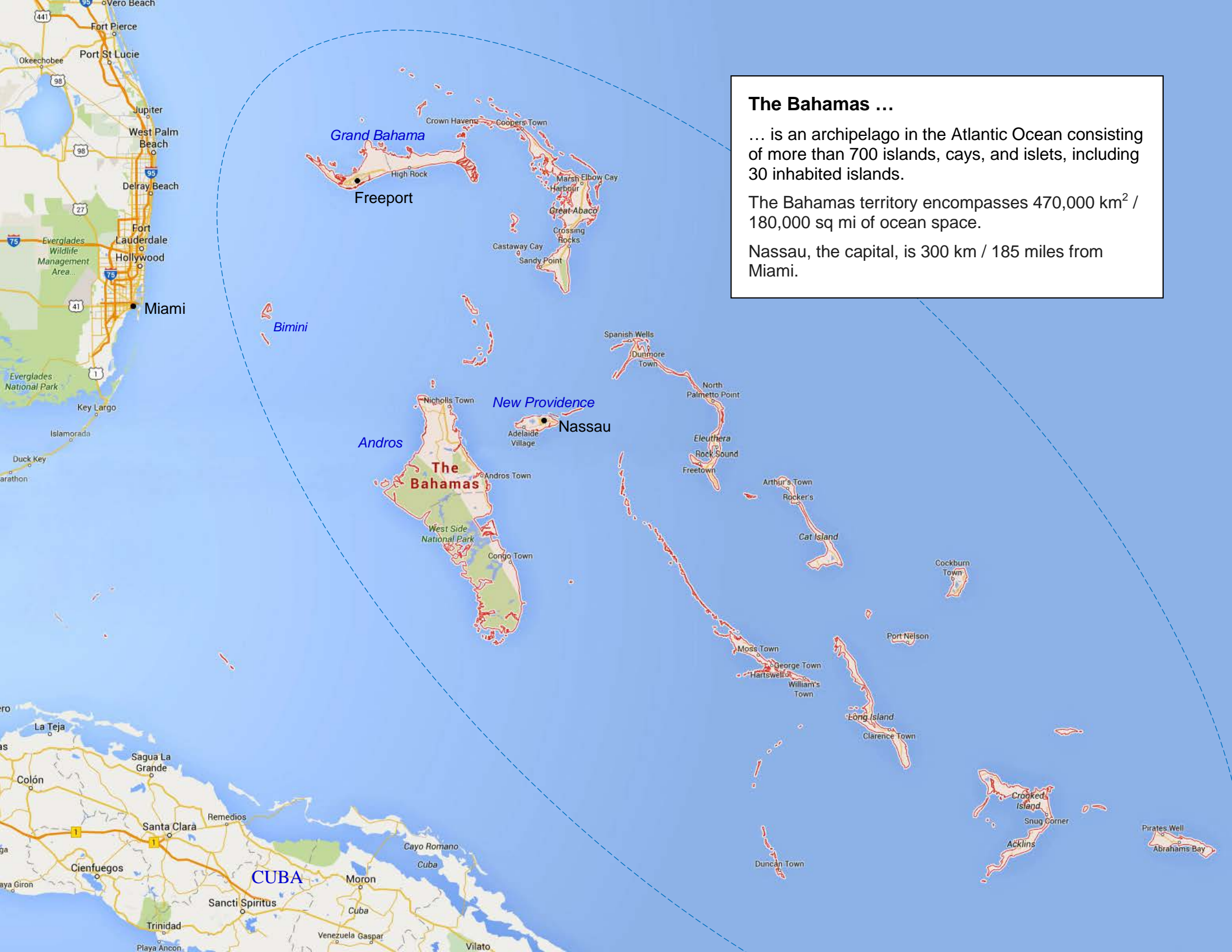
The history is more than a bit tortured. The Spanish raided the Bahamas to capture slaves in the 1500s. British settlers arrived during the 1600s but Nassau was overrun by pirates by the early 1700s. Britain declared the Bahamas a crown colony and installed a colonial government to suppress piracy. Slavery continued until 1834.

The Bahamas became an independent nation in 1973. It's a member of the Commonwealth and retains the British monarch as head of state. There's an optional 2-page History at the back if you're really interested.

The Bahamas now relies on tourism rather than piracy to generate most of its economic activity. But the evolution of mass tourism, with 6,750 passenger cruise ships and 7,000 room hotels has changed the industry dramatically in the past few decades, conspicuously so on small Caribbean islands.

I've tried to weave together information about the Bahamas and pretty pictures, but you can ignore the notes if you wish. Some areas remain in their natural state and are stunningly beautiful.

– Bruce McKay



The Bahamas ...

... is an archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean consisting of more than 700 islands, cays, and islets, including 30 inhabited islands.

The Bahamas territory encompasses 470,000 km² / 180,000 sq mi of ocean space.

Nassau, the capital, is 300 km / 185 miles from Miami.



Nassau ...

... is located on the island of New Providence.

New Providence is home to about 250,000 people, about two-thirds of the population of the Bahamas.

The island is 34 km / 21 miles long and has a land area of 207 km² / 80 square miles.

The highest elevation is 5 m / 16 feet.



**Pirates of
Nassau**

The *Revenge* is a captured French Corvette, 130 feet long with 16 guns and a huge pirate crew of 200 in order to overpower victims swiftly.



Pirates of Nassau

The Golden Age of Piracy lasted from 1690 to 1720 and Nassau was at its heart. It was said that pirates didn't dream of going to heaven, but of returning to Nassau.



Pirates of Nassau

This exhibition reveals that Nassau was the ideal pirate capital because its waters were too shallow for a large man-of-war but deep enough for shallow pirate vessels.



**Pirates of
Nassau**

Life aboard a pirate ship was cramped, but somewhat easier than for the small crews on merchant ships driven by cruel captains under pressure from demanding shipowners.



**Pirates of
Nassau**

Lots of interesting notes accompany these exhibits. Life on board a pirate ship consisted of long periods of drunken idleness and brief periods of violent action.



Pirates of Nassau

The pirates became too successful. They far outnumbered inhabitants in Nassau, but foolishly began to target both British merchant ships and the Royal Navy.



Pirates of Nassau

In order to restore order Britain made the Bahamas a crown colony in 1718 and sent a Governor with 7 ships and 100 soldiers. Eventually piracy was successfully suppressed.



Pirates of
Nassau

Piracy is serious business, unless you're a kid.



Nassau Forts

After piracy the new colonial government next had to contend with Spanish raiders and invaders, and began building forts to defend Nassau.



**Nassau
Forts**

Fort Montagu was built to protect the eastern approach to Nassau's harbour during 1741 and 1742.



**Nassau
Forts**

In its only action the fort was captured by the United States in 1776 to get the gunpowder stored there. But it had been moved.



**Nassau
Forts**

**Fort Charlotte, Nassau's largest fort at 100 acres, followed in 1788.
It's located on a hill overlooking the far west end of the harbour.**



**Nassau
Forts**

**Fort Charlotte has a moat, dungeons, underground passageways,
and 42 cannons that have never been fired in an act of aggression.**



**Nassau
Forts**

**The British built Fort Fincastle in 1793. It was placed atop
Bennet's Hill to protect Nassau town and watch for pirates.**



**Nassau
Forts**

600 slaves carved out a 66-step staircase to connected Fort Fincastle to the town below in 1793 and 1794. It was later renamed the Queen's Staircase for Victoria.



Nassau Forts

Since Fort Fincastle was located atop the highest point on the island, it provides fantastic views of Nassau, Paradise Island, and the eastern approaches to the island.



**Nassau
Forts**

The view north from Fincastle over downtown Nassau is now dominated by the massive cruise ships in the artificially deepened harbour. More later.



**Nassau
Forts**

**The view to the north-west is now dominated by the massive
Atlantis hotels on Paradise Island. More later.**



Government

The Bahamas has been independent since 1973, but with a distinctively British flavor. This is Government House, home of the Queen's representative in the Bahamas.



Government

A statue of Columbus stands in front of Government House to remind us that what Columbus actually discovered in 1492 was the Bahamas.



Government

**The current Governor General is Dame Marguerite Pindling.
Her late husband, Lynden Pindling, was Prime Minister from 1969 to 1992.**



Government

I happened to arrive at Government House during the Changing of the Guard, the Bahamas version of a ceremony also performed at Buckingham Palace.



Government

The buildings in Parliament Square were constructed in 1815 by Loyalists who fled the independent United States, in the architectural style of the old capital of North Carolina.



Government

Queen Victoria's statue in front of the Senate building was erected in 1905 from funds donated by the public who held her in high esteem.



**Nassau
Harbour**

The British Colonial Hilton on the waterfront, "the Grand Dame of all Nassau hotels", continues to emphasize British connections despite its new Chinese ownership.



**Nassau
Harbour**

The Hilton now has a new neighbour, the Lukka Kairi Waterfront Bar and Grill, promising a spectacular view from every seat.



**Nassau
Harbour**

A truly unique waterfront lunch spot.



**Nassau
Harbour**

**Nassau was founded and originally grew because of its harbour,
and the harbour remains the key to the island's prosperity.**



**Nassau
Harbour**

Cargo port operations are at Arawak Cay, just west of downtown.



**Nassau
Harbour**

**Potter's Cay hosts some of the special services required by a country of
30 inhabited islands scattered over 470,000 km² / 180,000 square miles.**



Nassau
Harbour

And the harbour is vital to the tourism industry, with all manner of cruises, excursions, and charters setting sail daily. But ...



**Cruise
Ships**

**Cruise ships have taken over Prince George Wharf
at the centre of Nassau.**



Cruise Ships

**The deepened harbour can accommodate seven large cruise ships.
These deliver 70 % of all visitors to Nassau.**



Cruise Ships

Royal Caribbean operates the world's four largest cruise ships, each carrying up to 6,780 passengers. *Anthem of the Seas* here can only take up to 4,905.



**Cruise
Ships**

**Cruise lines now compete to have the best cruise ship water parks.
Waterslides are one of the favourite features.**



Cruise Ships

Local tourism industry schedules give priority to cruise ship passengers, and downtown Nassau has evolved into a reception centre for them.



Cruise Ships

Seven duty-free diamond, watch, and jewelry stores are now lined up side-by-side along Bay Street, immediately opposite the cruise ship docks.



Cruise Ships

The Straw Market on Bay Street originated as an informal outlet for local baskets and other straw crafts in the 1940s, and moved to this building in 1983.



**Cruise
Ships**

**A small portion of the Market remains devoted to Bahamian crafts.
This aisle features local carvers.**



Cruise
Ships

But the the Straw Market now mostly offers souvenir
items for cruise ship passengers, mostly imported.



**Cruise
Ships**

**Traffic efficiency yields to tourism opportunities in downtown Nassau.
(Three of the four largest banks are Canadian – Scotia, RBC, and CIBC).**



**Paradise
Island**

**Huntington Hartford, A&P supermarket heir, bought Hog
Island (right) in 1959 and renamed it Paradise Island.**



**Paradise
Island**

Hartford began resort development with a golf course in 1962, a bridge to Nassau in 1966, and a hugely profitable gambling casino in 1968.



**Paradise
Island**

There are now two bridges between Nassau and Paradise Island. You can leave for free on one, but you have to pay to get onto the island on the other.



**Paradise
Island**

The island already had manufactured scenery, *The Cloisters*. The 14th century remains of a French Augustinian Monastery were imported in the 1920s. With more to come.



Atlantis

The original Paradise Island resort has changed hands several times and expanded to cover a third of the island. The resort now has an estimated value of US \$ 2 billion.



Atlantis

The six hotels offer over 3,800 rooms, and the resort complex now boasts 12 swimming pools, 18 waterslides, a casino, a rock-climbing wall, a golf course, a movie theatre, ...



Atlantis

... a faux-archaeological dig with underwater caves and lagoons, and a swim-with-the-dolphins experience. Day passes cost US \$ 161 (dolphins experience extra).



Atlantis

**The complex includes the Atlantis Marina,
designed to dock large yachts and mega-yachts.**



Atlantis

Atlantis boasts one of the most expensive hotel suites in the world. The space between the two Royal Towers is a suite, not a bridge, and can be yours for US \$ 25,000 per night.



Atlantis

I'm on an orientation tour that includes glimpses of how other people spend their money. It all seems overly contrived to me.



Atlantis

The Atlantis Marina Village is open to the general public and offers specialty restaurants and high end shopping experiences.



Atlantis

But it looks like a Disney village and feels every bit as artificial as the rest of the resort.



Atlantis

These people have no shame. This Atlantis version of Monopoly is on sale in an Atlantis store in the Atlantis Marina Village.



**Real
Estate**

**Much of the rest of Paradise Island is occupied by homes of the rich and famous.
These can be seen by average citizens cruising by on harbour tours.**



**Real
Estate**

**These homes are in the Ocean Club area on the east side of Paradise Island,
adjacent to a luxury golf course and private club.**



**Real
Estate**

Property prices here are reported to range above US \$ 40 million.



**Comfort
Suites**

**I'm staying on Paradise Island too,
but in more modest accommodations.**



**Comfort
Suites**

**Comfort Suites is not part of Atlantis.
It's modern, comfortable, well-managed, and affordable.**



**Comfort
Suites**

**It has a pool and a pool-side bar and restaurant.
But it's not ostentatious.**



Ferry
Terminal

My hotel choice was partly to be near the Paradise Island
Ferry Terminal, the origin point for my planned day trips.



Ferry
Terminal

The terminal turns out to be a concept, not a building.
Lots of adventures depart from the docks around this sign.



Ferry
Terminal

The local Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville is the only building nearby. It turns out to be a welcome refuge from the deafening hip-hop in many local restaurants.



**Blue
Lagoon**

**My first excursion is to a beach day at Blue Lagoon Island,
also home of more dolphin encounters.**



**Blue
Lagoon**

The Blue Lagoon Island attraction is on Salt Cay, north-east of Paradise Island, about 6.5 km / 4 miles from the ferry terminal.



**Blue
Lagoon**

**I have access to this beach, but beach chairs are in short supply.
It turns out that many things are optional extra cost items.**



**Blue
Lagoon**

**This is the Dolphin Encounter, from a distance.
All of the dolphin activities are optional private items.**



Blue
Lagoon

No discussion here about whether the dolphins
belong in these enclosures in the first place.



**Blue
Lagoon**

This excursion is designed primarily for cruise boat passengers, and they come in waves throughout the day, and seem to leave satisfied. I'm not so thrilled.



**Sandy
Toes**

**This time I'm off on the *Sandy Toes* adventure to Rose Island,
about 11.4 km / 7 miles east of the ferry terminal.**



**Sandy
Toes**

This doesn't appear to be over-developed.



**Sandy
Toes**

The stone steps leading up the hill are almost primitive.



**Sandy
Toes**

There's a beach bar overlooking the beach.



**Sandy
Toes**

Great beach stretching to the east.



**Sandy
Toes**

More beach stretching west.



**Sandy
Toes**

This place is gorgeous, and feels almost deserted.



**Sandy
Toes**

**The dining hall offers an excellent all-you-can-eat buffet.
Not a hint of over-commercialization anywhere. Wow.**



**Sandy
Toes**

A chance encounter with a featured attraction.



Sandy

The main attractions are the island's swimming pigs.



**Sandy
Toes**

**The staff has trained these porkers to swim for their treats,
and guests are invited to help with the feeding.**



**Sandy
Toes**

**The pigs turn out to be excellent swimmers
if sufficiently motivated.**



**Sandy
Toes**

**Sandy Toes has hired a trainer and the pigs are
now pleased to pose for souvenir photos too.**



**Arawak
Cay**

**The local fishing fleet operates from Arawak Cay,
on the west side of Nassau harbour.**



Arawak
Cay

The Cay is home to the Bahamian Fish Fry, with vendors selling made-to-order conch salad, fried fish, and other Bahamian dishes.



**Fish
Market**

We get to see behind the scenes at the Montagu Beach Fish Market.



**Fish
Market**

Rows of vendors offer freshly-caught snapper, grouper, shrimp, and lobsters.



Fish
Market

Big lobsters.



Fish
Market

And we learn a lot about conch, the large edible sea snails with large, solid, and heavy shells with knob-like spines.



**Fish
Market**

Conch delicacies are on most menus here and in the Florida Keys, and the shells are sold as souvenirs. Overfishing is a growing global concern.



**Ardastra
Gardens**

The Ardastra Gardens nature preserve is home to many endangered plant, animal, and bird species of the Caribbean and South America.



**Ardastra
Gardens**

Some of the animals, such as this Madagascar Lemur, are in enclosures.



**Ardastra
Gardens**

Some of the birds, such as this white Indian peafowl, are in the open.



**Ardastra
Gardens**

Blue and Gold Macaws



**Ardastra
Gardens**

Ardastra Gardens is best known for its breeding program for the endangered Caribbean Flamingo, the national bird of the Bahamas.



**Ardastra
Gardens**

**Flamingos frequently stand on one leg.
Curling a leg under the body keeps the foot warm and conserves body heat.**



**Ardastra
Gardens**

**The Gardens presents its Marching Flamingo Show
(in the Flamingos Arena) three times daily.**



**Ardastra
Gardens**

**There's a bit of herding involved,
but it's all fun just the same.**



**Island
Tour**

The City of Nassau and its attractions are clustered on the north-east corner of the island so I enlist the help of Keith Bryan to get beyond the obvious.



**Island
Tour**

We head out clockwise around the island, first down the east side where consulates, professional services, and corporate offices are located.





**Island
Tour**

**But other parts, and there are many of them, are far less prosperous.
Unemployment in the Bahamas is 12.6 %. Youth unemployment is 25 %.**



**Island
Tour**

We visit one of the beaches on the south shore. Beautiful, but totally deserted. The tourists are all in the north-east corner.



**Island
Tour**

Coral Harbour is home to a pleasant middle-class community organized along a pair of pleasure craft canals.



**Island
Tour**

Further west is Albany, one of the most exclusive resorts in the Bahamas. It features a private golf course, a marina with 71 slips for 300 foot yachts, and an equestrian centre.



**Island
Tour**

A bit further west the Clifton Heritage Park preserves the remains of plantations where slaves worked from dawn until dusk, cultivating crops, clearing roads and building.



**Island
Tour**

**Some plantation buildings have been restored. Other sites are preserved as-is.
90 % of the current Bahamian population is descended from slaves.**



**Island
Tour**

A bit north is Lyford Cay, a gated community founded in 1959 by Canadian tycoon E.P. Taylor, and now home to some of the world's wealthiest people.



Island
Tour

Old Fort Bay is an even larger private community for the rich. The juxtapositions of extreme wealth and poverty on this side of the island is dizzying.



**Island
Tour**

The appearance of beach hotels on the north shore signals our return to the main tourism zone, and the end of this revealing exploration.



**Sunset
Cruise**

There's nothing like a sunset at sea
to produce stunning tour photos.



**Sunset
Cruises**

On my first trip to the Bahamas we headed out just as the cruise ships are departing for their next islands.



**Sunset
Cruises**

It was a gorgeous evening for a cruise.
But there was a surprise coming.



**Sunset
Cruises**

The sun set behind Atlantis, not at sea.
I should have expected as much.



**Sunset
Cruises**

At least the sunset on my second trip was closer to normal.



Bye

WestJet is here to take me home. I head back with pleasant memories, like of the days at Sandy Toes, and with lots of contrasts to think about.



Bahamas

History

Around the 11th century Lucayan people from South America moved into the Bahamas. About 30,000 inhabited the islands at the time of Christopher Columbus' arrival in 1492, when trouble began.

The Spanish forced much of the Lucayan population to Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) for use as slave labour. The slaves suffered from harsh conditions and European diseases, with half dying from smallpox alone. The indigenous population of the Bahamas was decimated.

In 1648 English Puritans from Bermuda established the first permanent European settlement in the Bahamas, and in 1666 they settled what is now the island of New Providence.

In 1670 King Charles II of England granted the islands to the landlords of his Carolina possessions. But under this loose arrangement the Bahamas began to become a haven for pirates.

The settlement on New Providence was attacked by the French and Spanish navies, and in 1684 the Spanish burned it to the ground.

In 1686 new English colonists from Jamaica came and settled. By 1695 the town was rebuilt, with a fort, and given a new name, Nassau. But the Spanish attacked in 1700, and after another French and Spanish attack in 1703 most of the colonists abandoned the settlement.

By 1713 there were over 1000 pirates in Nassau, outnumbering the 400-500 law-abiding citizens.

In order to restore order Britain made the Bahamas a crown colony in 1718, and sent a Governor who was eventually successful in suppressing piracy.

... continued



Bahamas

History, continued

In 1720 the British drove off a Spanish attack.

Things were quiet for a while, but the American War of Independence (1775-1783) stirred things up again.

In 1776 American military forces successfully attacked Nassau and spent two weeks taking cannons and mortars before heading home.

In 1782 a Spanish fleet captured Nassau, but it was recaptured by the British. The Treaty of Paris in 1783 ended the Revolutionary War.

Following the war the British resettled some 7300 Loyalists with their slaves in the Bahamas, and granted them lands for plantations. Slaves outnumbered Europeans and European Americans, and more were on the way.

In 1807 the British abolished the slave trade (but not slavery itself). In the years that followed as the British intercepted slave ships in the area they resettled thousands of slaves in the Bahamas.

In the 1820s, during the Seminole Wars which the U.S. waged against the indigenous peoples of Florida, hundreds of native Americans and escaped slaves fled to the Bahamas.

Slavery in the Bahamas was abolished in 1834. Today the descendants of slaves and free Africans make up nearly 90 % of the population.

Modern political development began after WW II. The first political parties formed in the 1950s. The British Parliament authorized the islands to be self-governing in 1964, and granted the Bahamas independence in 1973. It is a member of the Commonwealth and retains the Queen as monarch.

< End >



Bahamas