

Chapter 15

Staying in Style in Grand Bahama

In This Chapter

- ▶ Deciding where to stay
 - ▶ Evaluating the top choices
-

In this chapter, we describe the accommodations that appeal to most first-time visitors. We considered locations, amenities, quality of service, architecture, and proximity to Grand Bahama's best attractions.

Surveying the Scene

Here you have a choice of more than 4,000 bedrooms or suites, ranging from simple double bedrooms common to most American roadside motels to one- or two-bedroom condo units of time-shares, some of which may be someone else's vacation home when she is off island.

Of course, you have your choice of sprawling resorts, just as you do on Paradise Island (prices, however, are cheaper on Grand Bahama). Many of these resorts offer various meal plans. The cost is usually less expensive if you book in on half-board terms (that is, breakfast and dinner), leaving you free to have lunch somewhere else during your exploration of the island.

If you want a beachfront location, opt for Lucaya. If gambling and shopping are more important to you, a hotel in Freeport may be just fine. For escapists, you can find some resorts in the distant East End, away from everything but those white sandy beaches.

Rack rates are for two people spending one night during the high season of winter and spring, unless we indicate otherwise. *Rack rates* simply mean published rates, but you can often do better (see Chapter 7 for details). Room rates at all-inclusive resorts include not only all meals and beverages, but also tips, taxes, transportation to and from the airport, and most activities and entertainment.

Grand Bahama Island abounds in package deals, appealing to honeymooners, golfers, gamblers, scuba divers, and others. The best deals are offered from mid-April to mid-December.

The Best Accommodations

Here are our top hotel picks on Grand Bahama Island.



Best Western Castaways Resort & Suites

\$\$ Freeport

The 118-room Castaways is a modest and unassuming hotel despite its excellent position adjacent to the International Bazaar and the casino. Guests stay here because of its location and low price. The hotel isn't on the beach, but a free shuttle can take you to nearby Williams Town Beach or Xanadu Beach. Gardens surround the four-story hotel, and the hotel has a pagoda roof and an indoor/outdoor garden lobby with shops, a game room, and tour desks. Rooms are a basic motel style, and the best units are on the ground. The hotel has a large, unheated freshwater pool with a wide terrace and a pool bar that offers sandwiches and cool drinks. The Flamingo Restaurant features unremarkable Bahamian and American dishes. The Yellow Bird Show Club stays open until 3 a.m. and features limbo dancers and fire-eaters Monday through Saturday. A children's playground adjoins the pool.

See map p. 198. East Mall Drive. ☎ **800/780-7234** or 242-352-6682. Fax: 242-352-5087. www.bestwestern.com. Rack rates: \$120 double, \$150 suite. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V.

Crowne Plaza Golf Resort & Casino

\$\$-\$\$\$ Freeport

This mammoth complex (also known as the Royal Oasis) actually consists of two differently styled resorts combined under one umbrella: the ten-story Crowne Plaza tower and the less glamorous, three-story Crowne Plaza Country Club. Reinventing the resort to stay competitive, the owners spent some \$42 million on the once-tired, 1960s-era properties, hoping to revive some of their old glitz and glamour.

Flanked by a pair of fine golf courses, the Ruby and the Emerald, and catering to the convention crowd, the resorts sit on 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) of tropical grounds. Because the resort lies inland from the sea, the complex doesn't have its own natural beach. One of the grandest additions is a marine park and a man-made, landlocked beach; otherwise, you can take frequent shuttle buses to good natural beaches nearby. The two sections also share one of the largest casinos in the entire country; the casino is a serviceable site, but it's nowhere near as flashy as the Atlantis Casino on Paradise Island.

The Crowne Plaza Country Club attracts families, honeymooners, frugal couples, golfers, and others who don't need or want luxury. The hotel's design

is like an enormous wagon wheel; at the core of this “wheel” is a Disney-inspired mini-mountain surrounded by a swimming pool. Nine wings of the hotel stretch from the pool, making up the “spokes” of the wheel. The hotel is so spread out that guests often complain that they need ground transport just to reach their bedrooms. Some of the rooms have kitchenettes and are sold as timeshare units. Even standard rooms are well equipped, with two comfortable double beds, dressing areas, and full-size bathrooms. Rooms in the 900 wing are the largest and best furnished — and they’re usually the ones that sell out first. The resort also rents out a number of suites, which are furnished in summery fabrics plus beachy but durable furniture.

Crowne Plaza Tower lies across East Mall Drive from its larger sibling. The tower is smaller, more tranquil, and a bit more posh, containing 20 suites and 362 luxuriously furnished large units. The tower adjoins the casino and the International Bazaar. A light, California-style décor prevails, and rooms most often contain cherry hardwood furnishings. Lots of conventioners, folks on quick getaways from Florida, and high rollers tend to stay here.

See map p. 198. East Mall Drive and Sunrise Highway. ☎ 800-545-1300 or 242-350-7000. Fax: 242-350-7002. www.theroyaloasis.com. Rack rates: Crowne Plaza Country Club \$145–\$155 double, \$240 suite; Crowne Plaza Tower \$175–\$205 double, \$350 suite. Up to two children under 12 stay free in parent’s room. AE, MC, V.



Paradise Cove

\$\$ Paradise Cove

This seven-room property is a secluded hideaway on a beach, with an informal series of one-bedroom apartments and two-bedroom cottages rented to those who like to escape the glitz and glam of Freeport or Lucaya. Away from the crowds, Paradise Cove is like Grand Bahama used to be before the tourist hordes invaded, and it teems with rainbow-hued tropical marine life and a vast array of coral that will delight snorkelers. Yet you’re only a 20-minute drive east of **West End**. Snorkeling, swimming, kayaking, and sunbathing fill the day here. All units are good sized and have full kitchens for guests who want to cook their own grub.

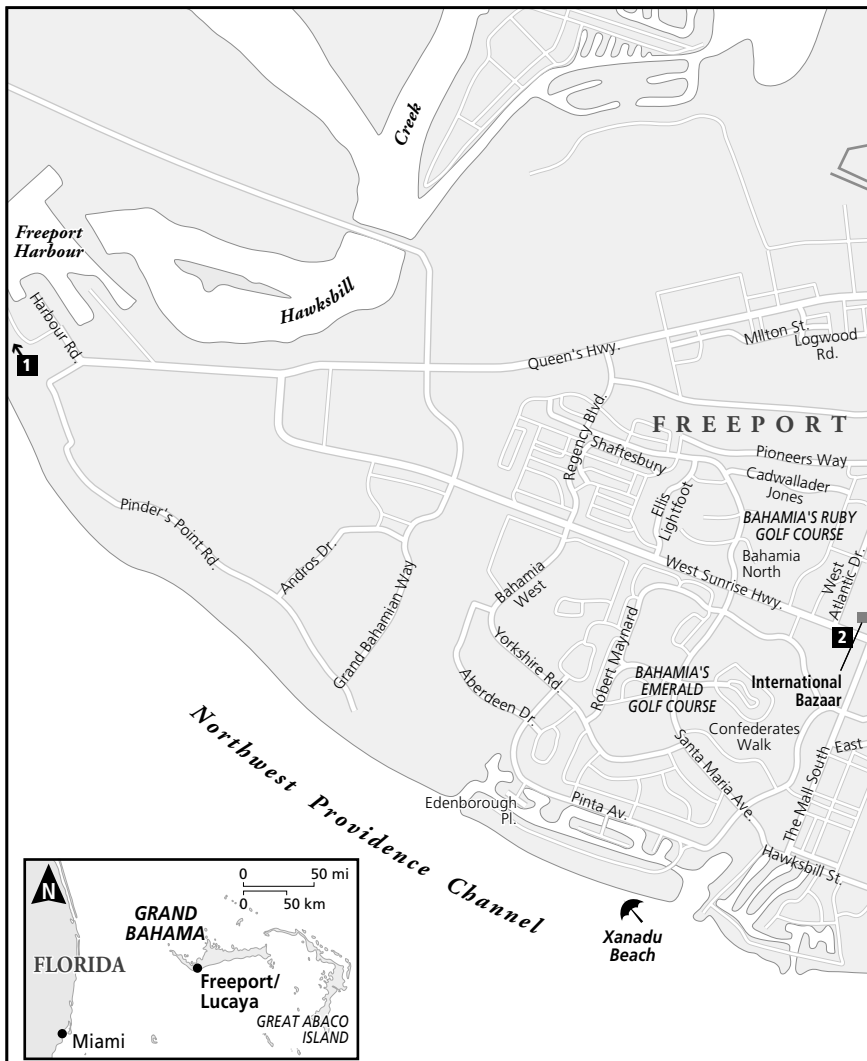
See map p. 198. Paradise Cove. ☎ 242-349-2677. Fax: 242-352-2003. www.deadmansreef.com. Rack rates: \$100 apartment, \$125 cottage, \$195 two-bedroom villa. AE, MC, V.

Pelican Bay at Lucaya

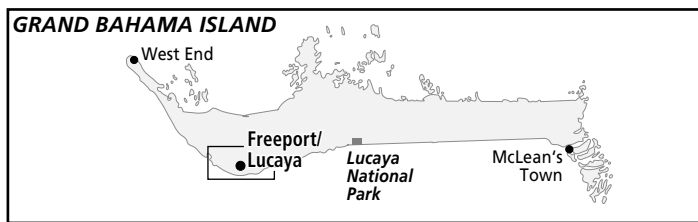
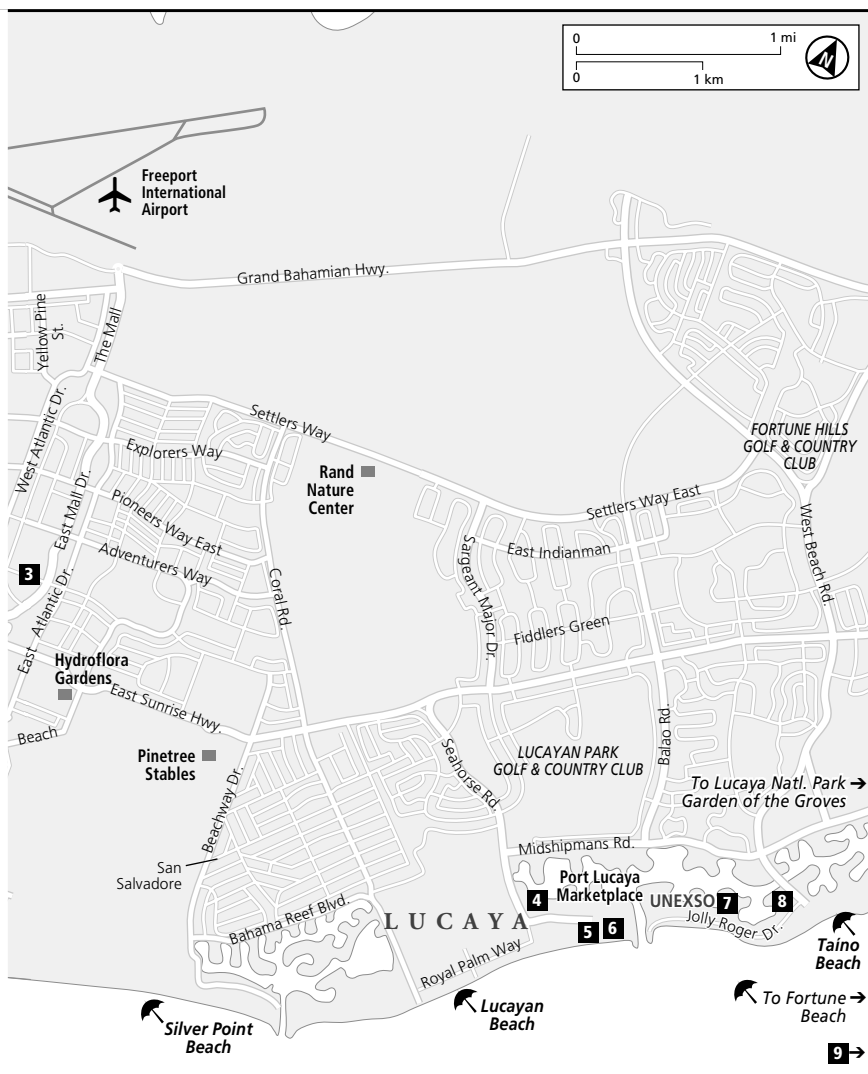
\$\$–\$\$\$ Lucaya

On a peninsula jutting into a series of inland waterways, this hotel has more architectural charm than any other on the island, evoking a Danish seaside village. Located next door to the Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO), the 69-unit Pelican Bay attracts scuba divers. Lucaya’s finest beach is across the road. Townhouse-style buildings, trimmed with white lattice-work and gingerbread, are painted in earth tones. Each large unit has a wet bar and bathrobes. Balconies offer vistas of the marina, waterway, whirlpool, or two large, unheated freshwater pools. For the breeziest stay,

Grand Bahama Accommodations



- Best Western Castaways Resort & Suites **3**
- Crowne Plaza Golf Resort & Casino **2**
- Paradise Cove **1**
- Pelican Bay at Lucaya **5**
- Port Lucaya Resort and Yacht Club **4**
- Ritz Beach Resort **7**
- Taino Beach Vacation Club **8**
- Viva Wyndham Fortuna Beach **9**
- The Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya **6**



request one of the end rooms that offer cross-ventilation. The older rooms look out on the marina, while the newer deluxe units overlook the bay.



If you dine at the **Ferry House Restaurant**, which is just a brief stroll away, you can charge the excellent meals to your room. Along the marina, a passageway leads directly to Port Lucaya Marketplace and the watersports vendors. You shouldn't take this route if you had a few Goombay Smashes or Bahama Mamas; the walkway has no outer wall or railing, so you could fall right in the water.

See map p. 198. Royal Palm Way, by Port Lucaya Marketplace and UNEXSO, the dive operator. ☎ 800-600-9192 or 242-373-9550. Fax: 242-373-9551. www.pelicanbayhotel.com. Rack rates: \$155–\$195 double, \$250 suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V.

Port Lucaya Resort and Yacht Club \$\$ Lucaya

With its own 50-slip marina, this 163-room hotel and yacht club attracts boaters and shoppers. Despite being adjacent to Port Lucaya Marketplace, the resort is surprisingly tranquil and has a secluded feel. Buildings one through six are the quietest because they're removed from the music and bustle of the marketplace. Deluxe rooms overlook the marina, and bathrooms are tidy, well maintained, and have adequate shelf space. An Olympic-size, unheated freshwater pool is set off by a whirlpool, and you can sip a drink from the poolside Tiki Bar. Plenty of watersports are at or near the hotel, and you can reach the beach by walking across the road and through the huge Lucayan resort. If you're traveling with children, consider dropping them off at Our Lucaya's Camp Lucaya (see the review of The Westin and Sheraton at Our Lucaya later in this section). The **Trade Winds Café**, Port Lucaya Resort's main restaurant, serves standard fare at breakfast and dinner, but you can find far better and more varied dining options at the nearby marketplace.

See map p. 198. Next to Port Lucaya Marketplace. ☎ 800-582-2921 or 242-373-6618. Fax: 242-373-6652. www.portlucayaresort.com. Rack rates: \$100–\$145 double, \$175–\$250 suite. AE, MC, V.

Ritz Beach Resort \$\$ Lucaya

This newly built hotel is adjacent to the **Taino Beach Vacation Club** (see the listing later in the chapter), sharing all the fun and amenities of its elaborate water park. Enveloped by semitropical gardens, the Ritz (not related to other fabled hotel chain) also is adjacent to the **Pirates of The Bahamas Theme Park**.

The origins of this resort date back to 1995. Over the years, it was constructed in three different phases. The resort is made up of two buildings, and it also embraces a 50-room complex called Coral Suites. All the bedrooms are in concrete coral buildings, and your options range from efficiency and studio units to one-bedroom suites to elaborate villa and pent-house accommodations. The bedrooms are spacious and well furnished.

Your amenities depend on how much you want to pay. Penthouses are located on the third and fourth levels and include such accommodations as a studio penthouse, which is multilevel with its own sun deck and private pool. The hotel's eating facilities are actually at the Taino Beach Vacation Club where guests can patronize two international restaurants and five bars. The Ritz also has a pool bar.

See map p. 198. Jolly Roger Drive, Taino Beach. ☎ **242-373-9354**. Fax: 242-373-4421. www.ritzbeach.com. Rack rates: \$125 efficiency, \$175 studio, \$300 penthouse. Children 12 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V.



Taino Beach Vacation Club

\$\$ Lucaya

This 37-unit resort on the southern shore offers breezy one-, two-, and three-bedroom condos furnished in a semitropical motif. These highly desirable oceanfront accommodations are set in tropical gardens; the hotel has a strong emphasis on sports, such as volleyball. The resort is near an excellent 457m (1,500-ft.) strip of white sands, only a six-minute ride from Port Lucaya. Although no beach in The Bahamas is private, this one comes the closest to being so because of its seclusion and the lack of harassment from beach vendors. It's adjacent to a water park and the Pirates of The Bahamas Theme Park.

See map p. 198. Jolly Roger Drive, Taino Beach. ☎ **242-373-4682**. Fax 242-373-4421. www.tainobeach.com. Rack rates: \$125 one-bedroom condo, \$175 two-bedroom condo, \$225 three-bedroom condo. AE, DISC, MC, V.

Viva Wyndham Fortuna Beach

\$\$\$\$ Lucaya

Evoking an Italian version of a Club Med, this property sits on 11 secluded hectares (26 acres) in front of one of the island's best white sand beaches. Although the Viva Wyndham welcomes families and hosts a children's program, most vacationers here are young couples. This European-owned resort has a definite Italian accent. You hear more *ciaos* than *hellos*. Guests play bocce ball on the beach and dine on Italian and some Bahamian cuisine. Because of its strong Continental overlay, the cuisine is better here than at your typical Grand Bahama hotel.

Not far from the **Bahamas National Trust Rand Memorial Nature Centre** and **Lucayan National Park**, this beach resort has a one-size-fits-all price tag. You don't need to dig into your pocket for food, drinks, nightly entertainment, or most activities, although you have to pay extra for scuba diving, fishing, water-skiing, and horseback riding. Six kilometers (4 miles) from Lucaya and 10km (6 miles) from Freeport, this resort is an attractive getaway. More than half the comfortable rooms have views of the water while the others overlook the gardens. If you want accommodations in an isolated setting, you won't mind staying here and having to rent a car to explore the rest of the island.

See map p. 198. Doubloon Road and Churchill Drive, 6km (4 miles) east of Lucaya. ☎ **242-373-4000**. Fax: 242-373-5555. www.vivaresorts.com. Rack rates:

\$240–\$344 double, \$312–\$442 triple, \$384–\$550 quad. Rates include all meals and most activities. Children under 11 stay free in parent’s room. AE, MC, V.



The Westin and Sheraton at Our Lucaya

\$\$\$–\$\$\$\$ Lucaya

This massive \$400 million resort, one of the largest in The Bahamas, is firmly anchored at the center of two of the best white sandy beaches in The Bahamas — **Lucayan Beach** and **Taino Beach**. Expect nearly 3 hectares (8 acres) of soft, white sand. Freeport/Lucaya, which was losing tourists to Paradise Island, got a big boost in 1999 when this sprawling metropolis opened its doors.

The first three sections of this resort were completed late in 1998 under the name **Sheraton at Our Lucaya**. It’s the only one of the three branches of Our Lucaya that focuses exclusively on all-inclusive holidays. Here, the one set price includes all your meals, drinks, and most activities. With a vague South Beach Art Deco design, the resort is a massive, open-sided hexagon, with rooms facing the beach and the swimming pool. The 528-room resort is contemporary but relaxed; the developers created a young vibe that draws a lot of families. The bedrooms are whimsical and fun, thanks to fabrics you’d expect on a loud Hawaiian shirt and maple-veneered furniture, all put together with the kind of artful simplicity of a California beach house.

In 2000, two newer subdivisions of Our Lucaya opened, neither of which is an all-inclusive property. The smaller and somewhat more private of the two is **Westin Lighthouse Pointe**, a 322-unit, low-rise complex that focuses specifically on an adult clientele. Its larger counterpart is the 528-unit **Westin-Breakers Cay**, a grand, ten-story, white-sided tower. The three sections stretch in a glittering profile along a narrow strip of beachfront, allowing residents to drop into any of the bars, restaurants, and gardens. A complex this big contains a staggering variety of restaurants, each designed with a different theme and ambience.

Each of the three properties has a dramatic or unconventional swimming pool that’s consistent with its theme. For example, the Sheraton at Our Lucaya’s pool was designed around a replica of a 19th-century sugar mill, complete with an aqueduct that might be worthy of the ancient Romans. And in recent years, a spa and fitness center, a quartet of tennis courts, a convention center, a state-of-the-art casino, and a shopping mall have all been added to the resort. Plus, increasing emphasis is being put on golf, thanks to the opening of the spectacular Reef Course. And Camp Lucaya will amuse and entertain children ages 2 to 12 throughout daylight hours every day.

See map p. 198. Royal Palm Way, across from Port Lucaya Marketplace. ☎ 800-LUCAYA-1 or 242-373-1333. Sheraton fax: 242-373-8804. Westin fax: 242-350-5060. www.ourlucaya.com. Rack rates: Sheraton \$189–\$249 double, including all meals and activities; Westin Lighthouse Point or Breakers Cay \$189–\$229 double; Sheraton or Westin \$449 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V.