

1

The Best of The Bahamas

The Bahamas is one of the most geographically complicated nations of the Atlantic. A coral-based archipelago, it is composed of more than 700 islands, 2,000 cays (pronounced “keys,” from the Spanish word for small islands), and hundreds of rocky outcroppings that have damaged the hulls of countless ships since colonial days.

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas came into being in 1973 after centuries of colonial rule. After Great Britain granted The Bahamas internal self-rule in 1964, the fledgling nation adopted its own constitution but chose not to sever its ties with its motherland. It has remained in the Commonwealth, with the British monarch as its head of state. In the British tradition, The Bahamas has a two-house Parliament, a ministerial cabinet headed by a prime minister, and an independent judiciary. The queen appoints a Bahamian governor-general to represent the Crown.

As The Bahamas moves deeper into the millennium, the government and various investors continue to pump money into the tourism infrastructure, especially on Paradise Island, across from Nassau, as well as Cable Beach adjoining Nassau. Cruise-ship tourism continues to increase, and a more upscale crowd is coming back after abandoning The Bahamas for many years in favor of other Caribbean islands such as St. Barts and Anguilla.

When Hubert Ingraham became prime minister in 1992, he launched the country down the long road toward regaining its market share of tourism, which under Prime Minister Lynden Pindling had seen a rapid decline. Exit polls revealed some first-time visitors vowing never to return to The Bahamas under the administration of the notorious Pindling, whose government had taken over a number of hotels and failed to maintain them properly.

When Ingraham took over as prime minister, however, he wisely recognized that the government wasn't supposed to be in the hospitality business and turned many properties back over to the professionals. After a painful slump, tourism in the post-Pindling era is booming again in The Bahamas, and more than 1.6 million visitors from all over the world now flock here annually. In the capital of Nassau, it's easy to see where the government's money is being spent: on widened roads, repaved sidewalks, underground phone cables, massive landscaping, sweeping esplanades, a cleanup campaign, and additional police officers walking the beat to cut down on crime.

Perry Gladstone Christie, prime minister from 2002–07, continued to carry out those same policies to better Nassau. Ingraham was reelected prime minister in May 2007.

Unlike Haiti and Jamaica, The Bahamas has remained politically stable and made the transition from minority white rule to black majority rule with relatively little tension.

Economic conditions have slowly improved here as well. You do not see the wretched poverty in Nassau that you see in, say, Kingston, Jamaica, though many poor residents do still live on New Providence Island's "Over-the-Hill" section, an area where few tourists venture to visit (although the neighborhood is gritty and fascinating).

Nassau really is the true Bahamas. You'd think a city so close to the U.S. mainland would have been long since overpowered by American culture. Yet, except for some fast-food chain outlets, American pop music, and Hollywood films, Nassau retains a surprising amount of its traditionally British feel. (By contrast, Freeport/Lucaya on Grand Bahama Island has become almost completely Americanized, with little British aura or Bahamian tradition left.)

The biggest changes have occurred in the hotel sector. Developers have vastly expanded the Atlantis Resort on Paradise Island, turning it into a virtual water world. Even more expansions have been announced, to be completed in 2009 and beyond. The Hilton interests have developed the decaying old British Colonial in Nassau, restoring it to life.

And Grand Bahama Island is in an interesting state of flux. Hotels along the entire Lucayan strip are being upgraded.

If there's a downside to this boom, it's the emphasis on megahotels and casinos—and the corresponding lack of focus on the Out Islands, which include the Abacos, Andros, Bimini, Cat Island, the Exumas, Long Island, and San Salvador. Large resort chains, with the exception of Four Seasons and Club Med, have ignored these islands; most continue to slumber away in relative seclusion and poverty. Other than the Four Seasons megaresort that opened in the Exumas, development in the drowsy Out Islands has been minor. The very lack of progress here will continue to attract a certain breed of adventurous explorer, the one who shuns the resorts and casinos of Paradise Island, Cable Beach, and Freeport/Lucaya. Little change in this Out-Islands-versus-the-rest situation is anticipated in the immediate future, except for the island chain of Eleuthera, which is planning to open several boutique hotels in the near future.

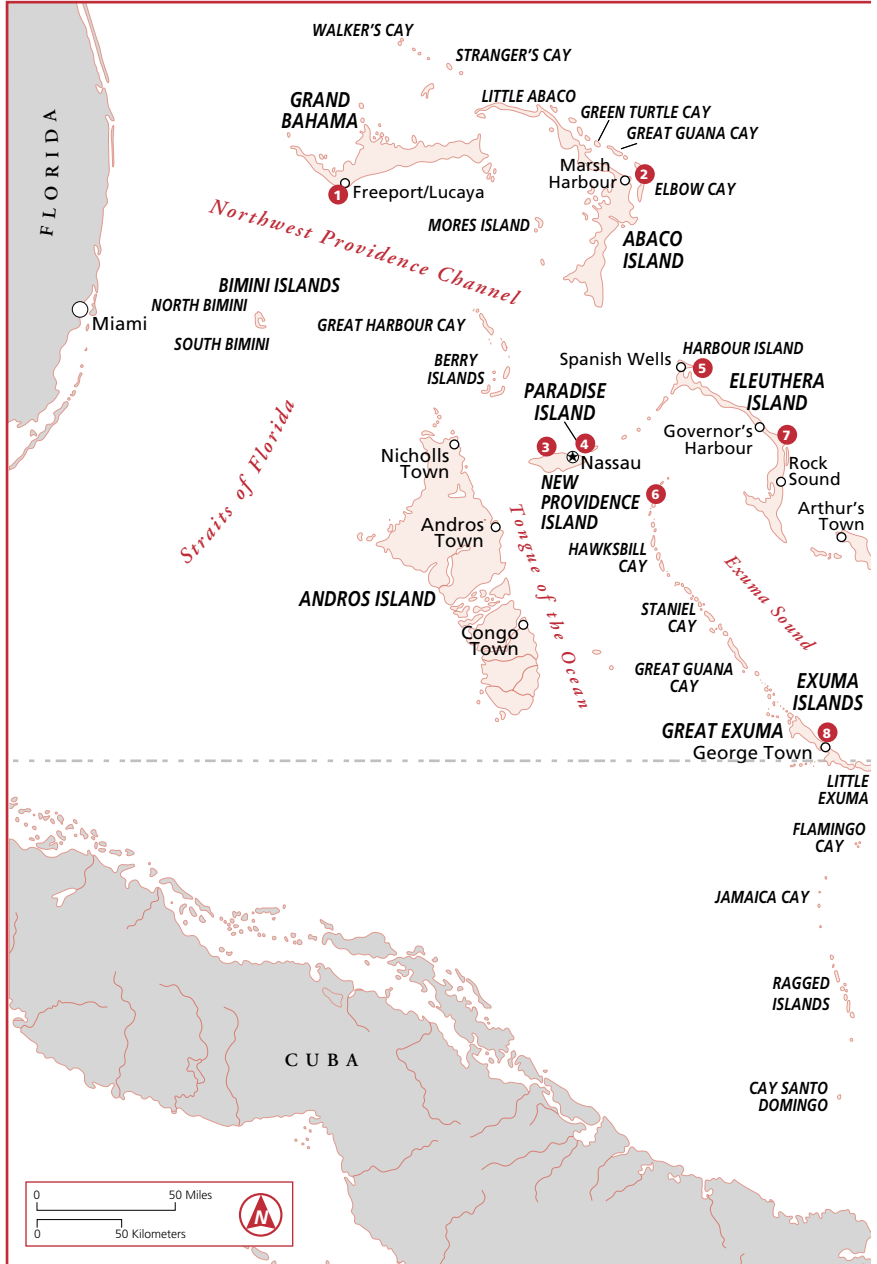
There's another trend to note in The Bahamas. After a long slumber, the government and many concerned citizens here have awakened to eco-tourism. More than any government in the Caribbean except perhaps Bonaire, this nation is trying to protect its ecology. If nothing else, residents realize this will be good for tourism because many visitors come to The Bahamas precisely for its natural wonders.

Government, private companies, and environmental groups have drawn up a national framework of priorities to protect the islands. One of their first goals was to save the nearly extinct West Indian flamingo. Today about 60,000 flamingos inhabit Great Inagua Island. Other programs aim to prevent the extinction of the green turtle, the white-crowned pigeon, the Bahamian parrot, and the New Providence iguana.

Although tourism and the environment are bouncing back, many problems still remain for this archipelago nation. While some Bahamians seem among the friendliest and most hospitable people in the world, others—particularly those in the tourist industry—can be downright hostile. To counter this, the government is working to train its citizens to be more helpful, courteous, and efficient. Sometimes this training has been taken to heart; at other times, however, it still clearly has not. Service with a smile is not assured in The Bahamas.

Drug smuggling remains a serious problem, and, regrettably, there seems to be no immediate solution. Because the country is so close to U.S. shores, it is often used as

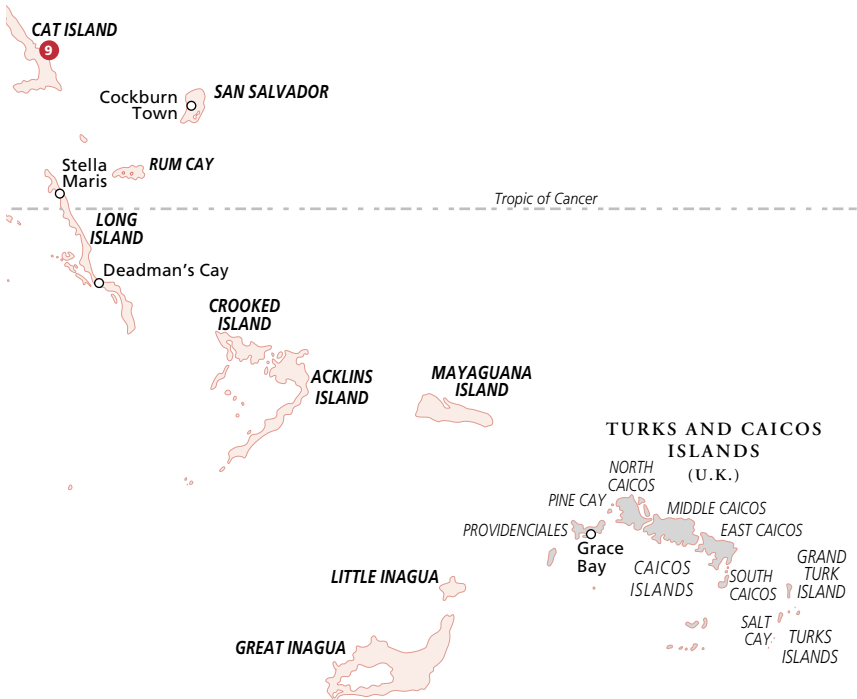
The Best Beaches of The Bahamas



THE BEST BEACHES

- Cabbage Beach **4**
- Cable Beach **3**
- Cat Island's Beaches **9**
- Pink Sands Beach **5**
- Saddle Cay **6**
- Stocking Island **8**
- Tahiti Beach **2**
- Ten Bay Beach **7**
- Xanadu Beach **1**

A T L A N T I C
O C E A N



Beaches 101: Paradise Island, Cable Beach & More

In The Bahamas, the issue about public access to beaches is a hot and controversial subject. Recognizing this, the government has made efforts to intersperse public beaches near private ones, where access would otherwise be impeded. Although megaresorts discourage nonguests from easy access to their individual beaches, there are so many public beaches on New Providence Island and Paradise Island that all a beach lover has to do is stop his or her car (or walk) to many of the unmarked, unnamed beaches that flank these islands.

If you stay in one of the large beachfront resorts, all you need to do is leave the grounds of the hotel and head for the ocean via the sand in front of the resort. But if your accommodation is not beachfront or you want to explore another beach, here are a few details:

Cabbage Beach ★★. On Paradise Island, this is the real showcase, with broad, white sands that stretch for at least 3km (2 miles). Casuarinas, palms, and sea grapes border it. While it's likely to be crowded in winter, you can find a little more elbowroom by walking to the northwestern stretch of the beach. You can reach Paradise Island from downtown Nassau by walking over the bridge, taking a taxi, or boarding a ferryboat at Prince George Dock. Cabbage Beach does not have public facilities, but you can patronize one of the handful of bars and restaurants nearby and use their restrooms. Technically, you should be a customer, even if that means buying only a drink, even a Coca-Cola.

Cable Beach ★★. No particular beach is actually called Cable Beach, yet this is the most popular beachfront on New Providence Island. Instead of an actual beach, Cable Beach is the name given to a string of resorts and beaches that lies in the center of New Providence's northern coast, attracting the most visitors. This beachfront offers 6.5km (4 miles) of soft white sand, and the types of food, restaurants, snack bars, and watersports offered at the hotels lining the waterfront vary. Calypso music floats to the sand from hotel pool patios where vacationers play musical chairs and see how low they can limbo. Vendors wind their way among sunblock-slathered bodies. Some sell armloads of shell jewelry, T-shirts, beach cover-ups, and fresh coconuts for sipping the sweet "water" straight from the shell. Others offer their hair-braiding services or sign up visitors for water-skiing, jet-skiing, and banana boat rides. Kiosks advertise parasailing, scuba diving, and snorkeling trips, as well as party cruises to offshore islands. Waters can be rough and reefy, then calm and clear a little farther along the shore. There are no public toilets here because guests of the resorts use their hotel facilities. If you're not a guest of the hotel or a customer, you are not supposed

a temporary depot for drugs shipped from South America to Florida. The Bahamas previously developed a tradition of catering to the illicit habits of U.S. citizens as well; during the heyday of Prohibition, long before cocaine, marijuana, and heroin were

to use the facilities. The Cable Beach resorts begin 4.8km (3 miles) west of downtown Nassau. Even though resorts line much of this long swath of beach, there are various sections where public access is available without crossing through private hotel grounds.

Caves Beach. On the north shore, past the Cable Beach Properties, Caves Beach lies some 11km (6¾ miles) west of Nassau. It stands near Rock Point, right before the turnoff along Blake Road that leads to the airport. Since visitors often don't know of this beach, it's another good spot to escape the hordes. It's also a good beach with soft sands. There are no toilets or changing facilities.

Delaporte Beach. Just west of the busiest section of Cable Beach, Delaporte Beach is a public access beach where you can escape the crowds. It opens onto clear waters and boasts white sands, although it has no facilities. Nonetheless, it's an option.

Goodman's Bay. This public beach lies east of Cable Beach on the way toward the center of Nassau. Goodman's Bay and Saunders Beach (see below) often host local fundraising cookouts, where vendors sell fish, chicken, conch, peas 'n' rice, or macaroni and cheese. People swim and socialize to blaring reggae and calypso music. To find out when one of these beach parties is happening, ask the staff at your hotel or pick up a local newspaper. There is a playground here, plus toilet facilities.

Paradise Beach ★★. On Paradise Island, this is one of the best beaches in the entire area. The white sandy beach is dotted with *chikees* (thatched huts), which are perfect when you've had too much of the sun. Mainly used by guests of the Atlantis Resort (p. 122), it lies at the far western tip of the island. If you're not a resident, access is difficult. If you're staying at a hotel in Nassau and want to come to Paradise Island for a day at the beach, it's better to go to Cabbage Beach (see above).

Saunders Beach. East of Cable Beach, this is where many islanders go on the weekends. To reach it, take West Bay Street from Nassau in the direction of Coral Island. The beach lies across from Fort Charlotte, just west of Arawak Cay. Like Goodman's Bay (see above), it often hosts local fundraising cookouts open to the public. These can be a lot of fun. There are no public facilities.

Western Esplanade (also called Junkanoo Beach). If you're staying at a hotel in downtown Nassau, such as the British Colonial Hilton (p. 75), this is a good beach to patronize close to town. The narrow strip of sand is convenient to Nassau and has toilets, changing facilities, and a snack bar.

outlawed, many Bahamians grew rich smuggling rum into the United States. Things have improved, but you'll still see stories in the newspapers about floating bales of marijuana turning up in the sea just off The Bahamas' coastline and such.

Though this illicit trade rarely affects the casual tourist, it's important to know that it is a factor here—and so, armed with this knowledge, don't agree to carry any packages to or from the U.S. for a stranger while you're visiting. You could end up taking a much longer vacation on these islands than you had ever imagined.

1 The Best Beaches

See also “Beaches 101: Paradise Island, Cable Beach & More” box on p. 8.

- **Cable Beach** (New Providence Island): The glittering shoreline of Cable Beach has easy access to shops, casinos, restaurants, watersports, and bars. It's a sandy 6.5km-long (4-mile) strip, with a great array of facilities and activities. See p. 80.
- **Cabbage Beach** (Paradise Island): Think Vegas in the Tropics. It seems as if most of the sunbathers dozing on the sands here are recovering from the previous evening's partying, and it's likely to be crowded near the mega-hotels, but you can find a bit more solitude on the beach's isolated north-western extension (Paradise Beach), which is accessible only by boat or on foot. Lined with palms, sea grapes, and casuarinas, the sands are broad and stretch for at least 3km (2 miles). See p. 137.
- **Xanadu Beach** (Grand Bahama Island): Grand Bahama has 97km (60 miles) of sandy shoreline, but Xanadu Beach is most convenient to Freeport's resort hotels, several of which offer shuttle service to Xanadu. There's more than a kilometer of white sand and (usually) gentle surf. Don't expect to have Xanadu to yourself, but if you want more quiet and privacy, try any of the beaches that stretch from Xanadu for many miles in either direction. See p. 168.
- **Tahiti Beach** (Hope Town, the Abacos): Since the beach is so isolated at the far end of Elbow Cay Island, you can be sure that only a handful of people will ever visit these cool waters and white sands. The crowds stay away because you can't drive to Tahiti Beach: To get there, you have to walk or ride a rented bike along sand and gravel paths from Hope Town. You can also charter a boat to reach the beach—which isn't too hard, since the Abacos are the sailing capital of The Bahamas. See p. 219.
- **Pink Sands Beach** (Harbour Island): Running the entire length of the island's eastern side, these pale pink sands stretch for 5km (3 miles) past a handful of low-rise hotels and private villas. A coral reef protects the shore from breakers, making for some of the safest swimming in The Bahamas. See p. 256.
- **Ten Bay Beach** (Eleuthera): Ten Bay Beach lies a short drive south of Palmetto Point, just north of Savannah Sound. Once upon a time, the exclusive Cotton Bay Club chose to build a hotel here because of the fabulous scenery. There may not be facilities here, but now that the hotel has closed, the white sands and turquoise waters here are more idyllic and private than ever. See p. 241.
- **Saddle Cay** (the Exumas): Most of the Exumas are oval-shaped islands strung end to end like links in a 209km (130-mile) chain. One notable exception is Saddle Cay, with its horseshoe-shaped curve near the Exumas' northern tip. It can be reached only by boat but, once achieved, offers an unspoiled setting without a trace of the modern world—and plenty of other cays and islets where you can play Robinson Crusoe for a few hours, if you like. See p. 262.

- **Stocking Island** (the Exumas): One of the finest white sandy beaches in The Bahamas lies off Elizabeth Harbour, the main harbor of the archipelago, close to the little capital of George Town. You can reach Stocking Island easily by boat from Elizabeth Harbour, and the sands of this offshore island are rarely crowded; snorkelers and divers love to explore its gin-clear waters. In addition to its beach of powdery white sand, the island is known for its “blue holes,” coral gardens, and undersea caves. See p. 270.
- **Cat Island’s Beaches:** The white beaches ringing this island are pristine, opening onto crystal-clear waters and lined with coconut palms, palmettos,

and casuarina trees—and best of all, you’ll practically have the place to yourself. One of our favorite beaches here, near Old Bight, has a beautiful, lazy curve of white sand. Another fabulous beach lies 5km (3 miles) north of New Bight, site of the Fernandez Bay Village resort. This curvy beach is set against another backdrop of casuarinas and is unusually tranquil. Another good beach here is the long, sandy stretch that opens onto Hawk’s Nest Resort & Marina on the southwestern side. None of the Cat Island beaches has any facilities (bring everything you need from your hotel), but they do offer peace, quiet, and seclusion. See “Cat Island,” in chapter 10.

2 The Best Diving

- **New Providence Island:** Many ships have sunk near Nassau in the past 300 years, and all the dive outfitters here know the most scenic wreck sites. Other attractions are underwater gardens of elkhorn coral and dozens of reefs packed with underwater life. The most spectacular dive site is the **Shark Wall**, 16km (10 miles) off the southwest coast of New Providence; it’s blessed with incredible, colorful sea life and the healthiest coral offshore. You’ll even get to swim with sharks (not as bait, of course). See p. 100.
- **Grand Bahama Island:** The island is ringed with reefs, and dive sites are plentiful, including the Wall, the Caves (site of a long-ago disaster known as Theo’s Wreck), and Treasure Reef. Other popular dive sites include Spit City (yes, that’s right), Ben Blue Hole, and the Rose Garden (no one knows how this one got its name). What makes Grand Bahama Island a cut above the others is the presence of a world-class dive

operator, **UNEXSO** (the **Underwater Explorer’s Society**; ☎ 800/992-DIVE or 242/373-1244; www.unexso.com). See p. 172.

- **Andros:** Marine life abounds in the barrier reef off the coast of Andros, which is one of the largest in the world and a famous destination for divers. The reef plunges 1,800m (5,904 ft.) to a narrow drop-off known as the Tongue of the Ocean. You can also explore mysterious blue holes, formed when subterranean caves fill with seawater, causing their ceilings to collapse and expose clear, deep pools. See p. 203.
- **Bimini:** Although Bimini is most famous for its game fishing, it boasts excellent diving, too. Five kilometers (3 miles) of offshore reefs attract millions of colorful fish. Even snorkelers can see black coral gardens, blue holes, and an odd configuration on the sea floor that is reportedly part of the lost continent of Atlantis (a fun legend, at any rate). Divers can check out the wreck of a motorized yacht,

the *Sapona* (owned by Henry Ford), which sank in shallow waters off the coast in 1929. See p. 188.

- **Harbour Island** (Eleuthera): In addition to lovely coral and an array of colorful fish, divers can enjoy some unique experiences here, such as the Current Cut, an exciting underwater gully that carries you on a swiftly flowing underwater current for 10 minutes. Four wrecked ships also lie nearby, at depths of less than 12m (39 ft.), including a barge that was transporting the engine of a steam locomotive in 1865, reportedly after the American Confederacy sold it to raise cash for its war effort. See p. 256.
- **Long Island** (The Southern Bahamas): Snorkeling is spectacular on virtually all sides of the island. But experienced divers venturing into deeper waters offshore can visit underwater cages to feed swarms of mako, bull, and reef sharks. Dive sites abound, including the Arawak “green hole,” a blue hole of incomprehensible depth. See p. 291.
- **Lucayan National Park:** This park on Grand Bahama Island is the site of a 9.5km-long (6-mile) underground freshwater cave system, the longest of its type in the world. The largest cave contains spiral staircases that lead visitors into a freshwater world

inhabited by shrimp, mosquito fish, fruit bats, freshwater eels, and a species of crustacean (*Spelionectes lucayensis*) that has never been documented elsewhere. On the 16-hectare (40-acre) preserve you’ll find examples of the island’s five ecosystems—pine forests, rocky coppice, mangrove swamps, whiteland coppice, and sand dunes. Pause to sunbathe on a lovely stretch of sandy beach, or hike along paths where you can spot orchids, hummingbirds, and barn owls. See p. 174.

- **Pelican Cays Land and Sea Park:** Known for its undersea caves, seemingly endless coral reefs, and abundant plant and marine life, this park, 13km (8 miles) north of Cherokee Sound at Great Abaco Island, is a highlight for scuba divers. See p. 213.
- **Exuma Cays National Land and Sea Park:** A major attraction of The Bahamas, this park is the first of its kind anywhere on the planet. The 35km-long (22-mile), 13km-wide (8-mile) natural preserve attracts scuba divers to its 453 sq. km (177 sq. miles) of sea gardens with spectacular reefs, flora, and fauna. Inaugurated in 1958, it lies some 35km (22 miles) northwest of Staniel Cay and 64km (40 miles) southeast of Nassau, and is accessible only by boat. See p. 272.

3 The Best Snorkeling

- **New Providence Island/Paradise Island:** The waters that ring densely populated New Providence Island and nearby Paradise Island are easy to explore. Most people head for the Rose Island Reefs, the Gambier Deep Reef, Booby Rock Channel, the Goulding Reef Cays, and some easily seen, well-known underwater wrecks that lie in shallow water. Virtually every resort hotel on the island offers

equipment and can book you onto a snorkel cruise to sites farther offshore. See p. 100 and 138.

- **Grand Bahama:** Resort hotels on the island can hook you up with snorkeling excursions, such as the ones offered by **Ocean Motion Water Sports Ltd.** (☎ 242/374-2425; www.oceanmotionbahamas.com), which is the best outfitter for snorkeling. In addition, the outlet can connect you

with any number of other water-sports, from banana boating to water-skiing. The clear water around Grand Bahama is wonderful for snorkeling because it has a rich marine life. Snorkelers are fond of exploring Ben's Cave, a stunning cavern that's part of Lucayan Caves, as well as the coral beds at places like Silver Point Reef and Gold Rock. See p. 172.

- **Bimini:** Snorkelers are enthralled with the black coral gardens that are easily accessible from shore, and the colorful marine life around the island. Sometimes when conditions are right, snorkelers enjoy frolicking with a pod of spotted dolphins. Off North Bimini, snorkelers are attracted to a cluster of huge flat rocks that jut from 6 to 9m (20–30 ft.) out of the water at Paradise Point. The most imaginative snorkelers claim these rocks, which seem hand-hewn, are part of a road system that once traversed the lost continent of Atlantis. See p. 189.
- **Long Island** (The Southern Bahamas): Shallow bays and sandy beaches offer many possibilities for snorkeling, and the staffs at both major resorts will direct you to the finest conditions near their stretches of beach. The southern end of the island is especially dramatic because of its unique sea cliffs. Many east-coast beach coves also offer fantastic snorkeling opportunities. See p. 293.
- **Elbow Cay:** With its 209km (130-mile) string of beautiful cays and some of the best beaches in The Bahamas, the Abacos are ideal for snorkeling, especially in the waters off Elbow Cay. Visibility is often

great because the cay lies close to the cleansing waters of the Gulf Stream. Mermaid Beach, a particularly colorful reef, is a favorite. **Froggie's Out Island Adventures** (© 242/366-0431; www.froggiesabaco.com) provides equipment and the best snorkeling advice. See p. 220.

- **Stocking Island:** George Town is the capital of the Exumas, which is celebrated for its crystal clear waters so beloved by yachties. From George Town, Stocking Island lies across Elizabeth Harbour, which is only 1.6 km (1 mile) away. Stocking Island is a long, thin barrier island that attracts snorkelers who explore its blue holes (ocean pools of fresh water floating on heavier saltwater). The island is also ringed with undersea caves and coral gardens in stunning colors. You'll find that Stocking Island has some of the most gorgeous beaches in the Southern Bahamas. See p. 272.
- **San Salvador:** Following in the wake of Columbus, snorkelers find a rich paradise on this relatively undiscovered island, with its unspoiled and unpopulated kilometers of beaches that are ideal for swimming, shelling, and close-in snorkeling. A week's stay is enough time to become acquainted with only some of the possibilities, including Bamboo Point, Fernandez Bay, and Long Bay, which are all within a few kilometers of Cockburn (the main settlement) on the western side of the island. At the southern tip of San Salvador are some of our favorite places for snorkeling, Sandy Point and nearby Grotto Bay. See chapter 10.

4 The Best Fishing

- **New Providence:** The waters around New Providence teem with game fish. In-the-know fishermen long ago

learned the best months to pursue their catch: November to February for wahoo found in the reefs, June

and July for blue marlin, and May to August for the oceanic bonito and blackfin tuna. Nassau is ideal for sportfishing. Most boat charters allow their passengers to start fishing within 15 minutes after leaving the dock. The best outfitter is **Born Free Charters** (☎ 242/393-4144); anchoring and bottom-fishing are also options. See p. 99.

- **Grand Bahama:** The tropical waters along Grand Bahama lure anglers in search of “the big one” because the island is home to some of the biggest game fish on earth. Off the coast, the clear waters are good hunting grounds for snapper, grouper, yellowtail, wahoo, barracuda, and kingfish. Many fishermen catch dolphin (we mean the mahimahi kind, not Flipper). And Deep Water Cay is a fishing hot spot. The best outfitter is **Reef Tours, Ltd.** (☎ 242/373-5880). See p. 171.
- **Green Turtle Cay:** The deep-sea fishing possibilities off the coast of this cay draw anglers from all over the world. An abundance of giant game fish as well as tropical fish live in these beautiful waters. Both dedicated fisherman and more casual anglers come to the little island seeking yellowfin tuna, a few dolphinfish, and the big-game wahoo, among other catches. Green Turtle Cay boasts some of the best fishing guides

in The Bahamas, weather-beaten men who’ve spent a lifetime fishing the surrounding waters. The best place to hook up with one of these guides is **Green Turtle Club** (☎ 242/365-4070). See p. 229.

- **Treasure Cay:** In the Abacos, some of the best fishing grounds are in the sea bordering this remote island. At the **Treasure Cay Marina** (☎ 242/365-8250), fishermen from all over the world hire experienced skippers to take them out in their search for barracuda, grouper, yellowtail, snapper, tuna, marlin, dolphinfish, and wahoo. Deep-sea, bottom-, and drift fishing are yours for the asking. The cay’s own bonefish flats are just a short boat cruise from the marina. See p. 226.
- **The Exumas:** Anglers from all over America descend on this beautiful archipelago for deep-sea fishing or bottom-fishing. Fishermen hunt for kingfish, wahoo, dolphinfish, tuna, and bonito in the deepest waters off the coastline of the Exumas. Many visitors also fly here just to go bonefishing. Among other outfitters who can hook you up with fishing outings is **Club Peace & Plenty** (☎ 800/525-2210 or 242/336-2551), which rents the necessary equipment and can arrange experienced guides to accompany you. See p. 267.

5 The Best Sailing

- **Marsh Harbour and Hope Town** (the Abacos): Known among yachties for their many anchorages, sheltered coves, and plentiful marine facilities, the Abacos are considered one of the most perfect sailing areas in the world. You can charter boats of all shapes and sizes for a week or longer, with or

without a crew. See “The Active Vacation Planner” in chapter 2, and p. 212 in chapter 7.

- **The Exumas:** Yachties head to these beautiful sailing waters to see some of the most dramatic coastal scenery in The Bahamas. **The Family Island Regatta**, the most popular boating

spectacle in The Bahamas, is held here annually. Most of the recreational boating is in the government-protected **Exumas Cays Land and Sea Park**, an area of splendid sea gardens and rainbow-hued coral reefs that stretches south from Wax Cay to Conch Cay. You can rent motorboats at **Minns Water Sports** (☎ 242/336-3483) in George Town. See p. 271.

- **New Providence Island:** Although sailing in the waters off New Providence Island isn't the equal of those yachting favorites the Exumas and the Abacos, boaters can still find many delights. More organized boating excursions are offered in New Providence than anywhere else in The Bahamas, especially by outfitters such as **Barefoot Sailing Cruises** (☎ 242/393-0820; www.barefoot-sailingcruises.com) and **Majestic Tours Ltd.** (☎ 242/322-2606). You can also choose from an array of sunset cruises, such as the ones **Flying Cloud** (☎ 242/363-4430) features aboard its fleet of catamarans. The most popular—and the most scenic—trip is sailing to tranquil **Rose Island**, which is 13km (8 miles) east of the center of Nassau and is reached after sailing past several small uninhabited cays. In addition, **Blue Lagoon Island**, 4.8 km (3 miles) northeast of Paradise Island, is a magnet for boaters, offering seven white sandy beaches along with seaside hammocks. The drawback to this

island, however, is that cruise-ship passengers flock here and many beach buffs like to come over on day trips. See p. 70.

- **Grand Bahama Island:** On the beautiful waters off this large island, you can go sailing aboard *Ocean Wonder* (☎ 242/373-5880), which is supposedly the world's largest twin-diesel engine glass-bottom boat. This vessel offers the best and most panoramic picture of underwater life off the coast of Grand Bahama Island—a view most often reserved for scuba divers. You can also go sailing aboard *Bahama Mama*, a two-deck 22m (72-ft.) catamaran, on a Robinson Crusoe Beach Party. The catamaran also sails at sunset on a booze cruise. **Superior Watersports** (☎ 242/373-7863; www.superior-watersports.com) operates this catamaran. See p. 169.
- **Marsh Harbour:** One of the finest anchorages in the Out Islands is found in Marsh Harbour, which is called “The Boating Capital of The Bahamas.” **The Moorings** (☎ 888/952-8420 or 242/367-4000; www.moorings.com) is one of the leading charter sailboat outfitters in the world and rents boats to sail the waters of the Abacos. Passengers discover white-sand beaches and snug anchorages on uninhabited cays. Sailing here is one of the great experiences of visiting The Bahamas. See p. 213.

6 The Best Golf Courses

- **Cable Beach:** The main draw is the **Cable Beach Golf Course** (☎ 242/327-1741). The oldest golf course in The Bahamas, this par-72 green was the private retreat of British expatriates in the 1930s. Today it's managed by a corporate namesake of Arnold

Palmer and owned by Cable Beach casino marketers. Small ponds and water traps heighten the challenge, amid more than 7,040 yards of well-maintained greens and fairways. See “The Active Vacation Planner,” in chapter 2, and p. 52.

- **Paradise Island:** Tom Weiskopf designed **Ocean Club Golf Club** (☎ 242/363-3000; www.oneandonlyresorts.com), an 18-hole, par-72 course, and it's a stunner. With challenges that include the world's largest sand trap and water hazards (mainly the Atlantic Ocean) on three sides, the course has received praise from Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player. For the best panoramic ocean view—good enough to take your mind off your game—play the par-3 14th hole. See “The Active Vacation Planner,” in chapter 2, and p. 52.
- **Grand Lucaya, Grand Bahama Island:** Designed by Robert Trent

Jones, Jr., **The Reef Course** (☎ 242/373-1333) opened in 2000. The Bahamian press called it a bit like a Scottish course, “but a lot warmer.” The course boasts 6,920 yards of links-style greens. See p. 171.

- **The Exumas:** At long last, the Southern Bahamas has a world-class golf course: **Four Seasons Resort Emerald Bay Golf Club** opens onto the waters of Emerald Bay (☎ 242/366-6800). The par-72, 18-hole course was designed by Greg Norman, who created six oceanfront holes. The course is challenging yet not daunting, so it appeals to golfers of various skills. See p. 271.

7 The Best Tennis Facilities

- **Paradise Island:** Well-heeled tennis buffs check into the **One&Only Ocean Club** (☎ 242/363-2501; www.oneandonlyresorts.com). Many visitors go there just for tennis, which can be played day or night on their six Har-Tru courts. Guests booked into the cabanas and villas of the club can practically roll out of bed onto the courts. Although beginners and intermediate players are welcome, the courts are often filled with first-class competitors. Tennis is free for guests of the One&Only Ocean Club. The tennis complex at the **Atlantis**

(☎ 242/363-3000; www.atlantis.com) is more accessible to the general public, with 10 courts (6 regular asphalt and 4 hydro quartz), some lit for night games. See p. 139.

- **Freeport** (Grand Bahama Island): Freeport is another top choice for tennis buffs. The best tennis courts on the island are at the **Ace Tennis Center** at the **Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya Resorts**, Royal Palm Way (☎ 242/373-1333), with four courts, including one that's grass. See p. 173.

8 The Best Honeymoon Resorts

- **Sandals Royal Bahamian Hotel & Spa** (Cable Beach, New Providence Island; ☎ 800/SANDALS or 242/327-6400; www.sandals.com): This Jamaican chain of couples-only, all-inclusive hotels is a honeymooners' favorite. The Bahamas' branch of the chain is more upscale than many of its Jamaican counterparts, and it offers 27 secluded honeymoon suites with semiprivate plunge pools. Staff

members lend their experience and talent to on-site wedding celebrations; Sandals will provide everything from a preacher to flowers, as well as champagne and a cake. It's more expensive than most Sandals resorts, but you can usually get better prices than the official “rack rates” through a travel agent or a package deal. See p. 83.

Eco-Tourism Highlights of The Bahamas

The Bahamas spreads over 258,998 sq. km (101,009 sq. miles) of the Atlantic Ocean. The largest oceanic archipelago nation in the tropical Atlantic Ocean, it offers miles of crystal-clear waters rich with fish and other marine resources. Its natural attractions include a series of underwater reefs that stretch 1,224km (759 miles) from the Abacos in the northeast to Long Island in the southeast. It has the most extensive systems of blue holes and limestone caves in the world.

And, unlike Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Barbados, and other Caribbean island nations, The Bahamas possesses large areas of undeveloped natural mainland. It all adds up to plenty of opportunity for getting up close and personal with nature.

Start with the reefs. Lying off the coast of Andros, The Bahamas includes approximately 2,330 sq. km (909 sq. miles) of coral reef, comprising the third-largest barrier reef system in the world. Rich with diverse marine life, the reef attracts green moray eels, cinnamon clownfish, and Nassau grouper. When officials realized that long-line fishing threatened this fragile ecology, The Bahamas became one of the first Caribbean countries to outlaw the practice.

The nation's Parliament also passed the Wild Birds Protection Act to ensure preservation of rare bird species. That law has made a big difference: Great Inagua Island now shelters more than 60,000 pink flamingos, Bahamian parrots, and a large portion of the world's population of reddish egrets. These birds live in the government-protected 743-sq.-km (290-sq.-mile) Inagua National Park.

And that's not all. The islands of The Bahamas are home to more than 1,370 species of plants, plus 13 species of mammals; the majority of them, it must be said, are bats, but wild pigs, donkeys, raccoons, and the Abaco wild horse also roam the interiors of the nation's islands. You'll see whales and dolphins, including humpback and blue whales and the spotted dolphin, swimming in the sea.

To keep an eye on all this natural wealth and share it with the public, the **Bahamas National Trust** administers 25 national parks and more than 283,279 hectares (699,699 acres) of protected land.

- **One&Only Ocean Club** (Paradise Island; ☎ 800/321-3000 in the U.S. only, or 242/363-2501; www.oneandonlyresorts.com): It's elegant, low-key, and low-rise, and it feels exclusive. The guests include many older honeymoon couples. With waterfalls, fountains, reflecting pools, and a stone gazebo, the Ocean Club's formal terraced gardens were inspired by the club's founder (an heir to the A&P fortune) and are the most impressive in The Bahamas. At the center is a French cloister, with carvings from the 12th century. See p. 127.
- **Old Bahama Bay** (Grand Bahama Island; ☎ 800/444-9469 or 242/350-3500; www.oldbahamabay.com): Perfect for honeymooners seeking a

quiet hideaway in a boutique-style hotel with cottages adjacent to a marina. The casinos, entertainment, shopping, and dining of Freeport/Lucaya are 40km (25 miles) away, but here you can sneak away for luxury, solitude, and romance. See p. 158.

- **Kamalame Cay** (Staniard Creek, Andros; ☎ 242/368-6281; www.kamalame.com): You'll need deep pockets to afford one of the most exclusive resorts in the Out Islands, a perfect honeymoon retreat for the couple who wants to escape casinos and resorts. With its 5km (3 miles) of white-sand beaches in both directions, this pocket of posh specializes in luxury and comfort. And don't worry if you've already taken your honeymoon; this is the perfect place to take a second one, or even a third. See p. 197.
- **Green Turtle Club** (Green Turtle Cay, the Abacos; ☎ 242/365-4271; www.greenturtleclub.com): Romantics appreciate this resort's winning combination of yachting atmosphere and well-manicured comfort. It's small (31 rooms) and civilized in an understated way; the charming, clapboard-covered village of New Plymouth is nearby, accessible by motor launch or, even better, a 45-minute walk across windswept scrublands. See p. 229.
- **Abaco Inn** (Elbow Cay, The Abacos; ☎ 800/468-8799 or 242/366-0133; www.abacoinn.com): For barefoot elegance and romance in the sands, this sophisticated little hideaway is one of the gems of the yachting haven known as the Abacos. Luxury villa suites with sunrise and sunset views are the way to go. You and your loved one should seek out a hammock in the gardens. See p. 216.
- **The Bluff House Beach Hotel** (Green Turtle Cay, the Abacos; ☎ 800/745-4911 or 242/365-4247; www.bluffhouse.com): This place was named because of its location atop a 24m (79-ft.) cliff towering over a pink-sand beach. Its 4.8 hectares (12 acres) front the Sea of Abaco on one side and the harbor of White Sound on the other. The accommodations are very private, with a rustic, seafaring decor that has its own elegance. In addition to rooms, the hotel offers beach and hillside villas, and colonial suites with private balconies that overlook the water. See p. 228.
- **Pink Sands** (Harbour Island, Eleuthera; ☎ 800/OUTPOST or 242/333-2030; www.pinksandsresort.com): You can have a spectacular getaway at this elite retreat on an 11-hectare (27-acre) beachfront estate owned by Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records. Its location on a 5km (3-mile) stretch of private pink sand, sheltered by a barrier reef, is just one of its assets. You can ask for a bedroom that evokes an upscale bordello in Shanghai to put you in a romantic mood, and you can also enjoy the best meals on the island. See p. 251.
- **Stella Maris Resort Club** (Long Island, the Southern Bahamas; ☎ 800/426-0466, 242/338-2051, or 954/359-8238; www.stellamarisresort.com): Right on the Atlantic, built on the grounds of an old plantation, Stella Maris has become a social hub on Long Island. Sailing is important here, as are diving and getting away from it all. Many of the guests hail from Germany, and they lend the place a European flair. The sleepy island itself is one of the most beautiful in The Bahamas, and honeymooners fit into the grand scheme of things perfectly. See p. 293.

9 The Best Family Vacations

- **Sheraton Cable Beach Hotel** (Cable Beach, New Providence Island; ☎ 800/325-3535 or 242/327-6000; www.sheraton.com): A family could spend their entire vacation on the grounds of this vast resort. There's a pool area that features the most lavish artificial waterfall this side of Tahiti; a health club at the nearby Crystal Palace that welcomes both guests and their children; Camp Junkanoo, with supervised play for children 3 through 12; and a long list of in-house activities that includes dancing lessons. Major changes and redevelopment are planned for this resort. See p. 84.
- **Atlantis Paradise Island Resort & Casino** (Paradise Island; ☎ 800/ATLANTIS in the U.S., or 242/363-3000; www.atlantis.com): This is one of the largest hotel complexes in the world, with endless rows of shops and watersports galore. Both children and adults will enjoy the 5.6-hectare (14-acre) sea world with waterslides, a lagoon for watersports, white sandy beaches, and underground grottoes, plus an underwater viewing tunnel and 240m (787 ft.) of cascading waterfalls. Its children's menus and innovative, creative children's programs are the best in The Bahamas and perhaps even in the Caribbean. See p. 122.
- **Best Western Castaways Resort & Suites** (Grand Bahama Island; ☎ 800/780-7234 in the U.S., or 242/352-6682; www.bestwestern.com): Here's a good choice for families on a budget. The pagoda-capped lobby is set a very short walk from the ice-cream stands, souvenir shops, and fountains of the International Bazaar. Children under 12 stay free in their parent's room, and the in-house lounge presents limbo and fire-eating shows several evenings a month. The hotel offers a babysitting service and a free shuttle to Williams Town Beach. See p. 149.
- **Regatta Point** (George Town, Great Exuma; ☎ 800/688-0309 in the U.S. or 242/336-2206; www.regattapointbahamas.com): This resort offers efficiency apartments at moderate prices. On a palm-grove cay, it is family friendly, with its own little beach. Bikes are available, and Sunfish boats can be rented. There's also a grocery store nearby where you can pick up supplies. Many units are suitable for families of four or five. See p. 268.

10 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

- **Green Turtle Club** (Green Turtle Cay, the Abacos; ☎ 242/365-4271; www.greenturtleclub.com): Secluded and private, this sailing retreat consists of tasteful one- to three-bedroom villas with full kitchens. It opens onto a small private beach with a 35-slip marina, which is one of the most complete yachting facilities in the archipelago. Many rooms open poolside, and there's a dining room decorated in Queen Anne style. See p. 229.
- **Rock House Hotel** (Harbour Island, off the coast of Eleuthera; ☎ 242/333-2053; www.rockhousebahamas.com): A glamorous and stylish inn—really, a glorified B&B—this posh little hideaway is drawing more and more of the glitterati to its shores. Set on a low bluff above the harbor, it is tranquillity itself with whimsically

decorated bedrooms. No one will find you if you decide to hide out here. See p. 252.

- **Club Med–Columbus Isle** (San Salvador, the Southern Bahamas; ☎ **800/CLUB-MED** or 242/331-2000; www.clubmed.com): This was the first large resort to be built on one of The Bahamas' most isolated islands, site of Columbus's first landfall in the New World. It's unusually luxurious, and unusually isolated, for a Club Med, and it occupies a gorgeous beach. The sheer difficulty of reaching it adds to the get-away-from-it-all mystique. See p. 286.

- **Fernandez Bay Village** (Cat Island, the Southern Bahamas; ☎ **800/940-1905** or 242/342-2018 or 954/474-4821; www.fernandezbayvillage.com): The dozen stone and timber villas of Fernandez Bay Village are the closest thing to urban congestion Cat Island ever sees. There's a funky, thatch-roofed beach bar that'll make you feel like you're in the South Pacific—a great place to enjoy a cold beer each afternoon after you leave the stunning sands and turquoise waters behind for the day. There's only one phone at the entire resort, and your bathroom shower will probably open to a view of the sky. See p. 282.

11 The Best Restaurants

- **Sun and . . .** (Nassau, New Providence Island; ☎ **242/393-1205**) has made a comeback after being closed for many years. Once again, it is the leading independent choice on New Providence Island, serving a finely honed international cuisine. It's a throwback to Nassau in its grand heyday. Originally built in the 1930s as a private residence, it lies in an upscale residential neighborhood east of the center of Nassau. See p. 88.
- **Moso** (in the Wyndham Nassau Resort, Cable Beach, New Providence Island; ☎ **242/327-6200**) is the best Asian restaurant on island. A well-trained staff here has learned the secrets of the cuisines of the Far East, and they dispense an array of some of the best-known and tastiest dishes, including teriyaki specialties. See p. 94.
- **Nobu** (the Atlantis Paradise Island Resort's Royal Towers, Paradise Island; ☎ **242/363-3000**) brings a member of this celebrated chain to The Bahamas. It's the most-talked-about and arguably the best restaurant on island, attracting a string of

celebrities. The setting is glamorous, and the cuisine is top rated, prepared with either market-fresh ingredients or exotic ingredients shipped in. See p. 134.

- **Dune** (in the One&Only Ocean Club, Paradise Island; ☎ **242/363-2501**, ext. 64739): The most cutting-edge restaurant in either Paradise Island or Nassau, Dune is the creation of French-born restaurant guru Jean-Georges Vongerichten, the moving force behind several of New York City's top dining spots. Every dish served here is something special—from shrimp dusted with orange powder to chicken and coconut milk soup with shiitake cakes. See p. 133.
- **Bahamian Club** (Paradise Island; ☎ **242/363-3000**): A notch down from the superb Dune, this establishment is one of the leading restaurants in The Bahamas and our favorite at the sprawling megaresort of Atlantis. Strictly upscale, it presents superb French and international cuisine against a backdrop that evokes the British Colonial era. The restaurant

serves the island's finest cuts of meats. See p. 131.

- **Mangoes Restaurant** (Marsh Harbour, the Abacos; ☎ 242/367-2957): For the best and most authentic Bahamian food in the Abaco chain, head for this welcoming spot, where both visiting yachties and locals flock for the fine cuisine. Order up a conch burger for lunch, then return in the evening for the catch of the day—straight from the sea and grilled to your specifications. The namesake mango sauce really dresses up a plate of grilled pork tenderloin. See p. 211.
- **The Landing** (Harbour Island, Eleuthera; ☎ 242/333-2707; www.harbourislandlanding.com): This attractive restaurant at the ferry dock has awakened the sleepy taste buds of Eleuthera. Brenda Barry and daughter Tracy feed you well from a choice

of international cuisines, often prepared from recipes gathered during world travels. Under mature trees in their garden, you feast on delicious pasta dishes, freshly made gazpacho, pan-fried grouper, or a warm duck salad. See p. 254.

- **Rock House Restaurant** (Harbour Island, Eleuthera; ☎ 242/333-2053; www.rockhousebahamas.com): On the increasingly chic Harbour Island, the restaurant in the Rock House Hotel serves a superb international cuisine. Its hip bodega aura evokes Miami, but it's thoroughly grounded on the island. At lunch you can get a rock lobster sandwich, but at night the chefs display their culinary prowess with an array of satisfying dishes. See p. 255.

12 The Best Nightlife

- **Cable Beach:** Cable Beach has a lot more splash and excitement than Nassau, its neighbor on New Providence Island, and wandering around Cable Beach is also much safer than exploring the back streets of Nassau at night. The main attraction is the **Wyndham Nassau Resort & Crystal Palace Casino** (☎ 242/327-6200; www.wyndhamnassauresort.com), with an 800-seat theater known for staging glitzy extravaganzas and a gaming room that will make you think you're smack dab in the middle of Vegas. One of the largest casinos on the islands, the Crystal Palace features 750 slot machines, 51 blackjack tables, nine roulette wheels, seven craps tables, and a baccarat table (we think the Paradise Island casino has more class, though). Despite all the glitter, you can still find cozy bars and

nooks throughout the resort, if you'd prefer a tranquil evening. See p. 118.

- **Atlantis Paradise Island Resort's Casino and Discothèque:** Paradise Island has the flashiest nightlife in all of The Bahamas, hands down. Not even nearby Nassau and Cable Beach can come close. Nearly all of the action takes place at the incredible **Atlantis Paradise Island Resort & Casino** (☎ 242/363-3000; www.atlantis.com), where you'll find high rollers from Vegas and Atlantic City alongside grandmothers from Iowa who play the slot machines when the family isn't looking. It's all gloss, glitter, and show-biz, with good gambling (though savvy locals say your odds of beating the house are better in Vegas). For a quieter night out, you can also find intimate bars, discos, a comedy club, and lots more in this sprawling behemoth of a hotel. See p. 141.

- **Grand Bahama Island:** If you want to gamble, and gamble seriously, head for either Cable Beach outside Nassau or Paradise Island. There is also gambling at Lucaya on Grand Bahama Island, but it's less elaborate. The action takes place at the **Isle of Capri**, at the Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya Resorts, Royal Palm Way (☎ **242/373-1333**). The facility also contains a bar and restaurant. See p. 178.