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5

Grand Bahama (Freeport/Lucaya)

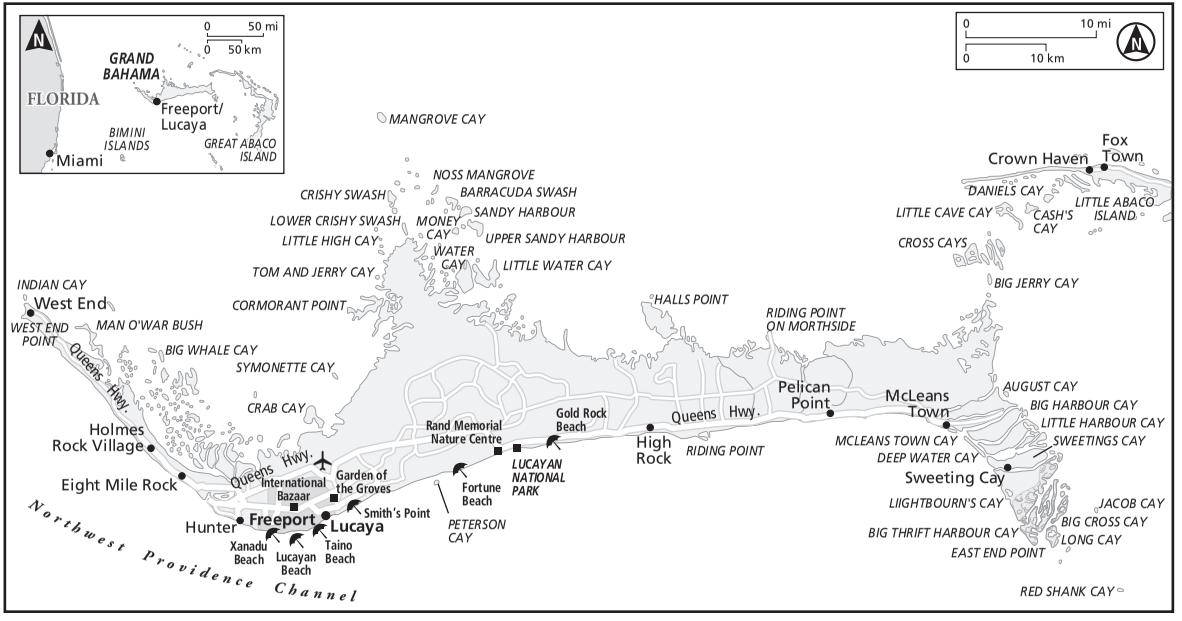
Big, bold, and brassy are the words that best describe Grand Bahama Island, where you'll find the resort area of Freeport/Lucaya. Though there's a ton of tourist development, it doesn't have the upscale chic of Paradise Island, but it does have fabulous white-sand beaches and a more reasonable price tag.

It may never return to its high-roller days with the gloss and glitz of the '60s, when everybody from Howard Hughes to Frank Sinatra and Rat Packers showed up, but recent improvements and massive redevelopment have brought a smile back to its face, which had grown wrinkled and tired over the latter part of the 20th century.

The second-most-popular tourist destination in The Bahamas (Nassau/Cable Beach/Paradise Island is 1st), Grand Bahama lies just 81km (50 miles) and less than 30 minutes by air off the Florida coast. That puts it just 122km (76 miles) east of Palm Beach, Florida. The island is the northernmost and fourth-largest landmass in The Bahamas (118km/73 miles long and 6.5km–13km/4 miles–8 miles wide).

Freeport/Lucaya was once just a dream—a low-lying pine forest that almost overnight in the 1950s turned into one of the world's major resorts. The resort was the dream of Wallace Groves, a Virginia-born financier who saw the prospect of developing the island into a miniature Miami Beach. Today, with the casino, the International Bazaar, high-rise hotels, golf courses, marinas, and a bevy of continental restaurants, that dream has been realized.

The Lucaya district was developed 8 years later, as a resort center along the coast. It has evolved into a blend of residential and tourist facilities. As the two communities grew, their identities became almost indistinguishable. But elements of their original purposes still exist today. Freeport is the downtown area and attracts visitors with its commerce, industry, and own resorts, whereas Lucaya is called the "Garden City" and pleases residents and vacationers alike with its fine sandy beaches.



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Grand Bahama is more than an Atlantic City clone, however. If you don't care for gambling at one of the island's two casinos, or if you're not interested in Vegas-style cabaret revues, there are alternatives. Because the island is so big, most of it remains relatively unspoiled. There are plenty of quiet places where you can get close to nature, including the Rand Memorial Nature Centre (see later) and the Garden of the Groves. Lucayan National Park, with its underwater caves, forest trails, and secluded beach, is another major attraction. Just kilometers from Freeport/Lucaya are serene places where you can wander in a world of casuarina, palmetto, and pine trees. During the day, you can enjoy long stretches of open beach, broken by inlets and little fishing villages.

The reviews of Grand Bahama Island are definitely mixed. Some discerning travelers who could live anywhere have built homes here; others vow never to set foot on the island again, finding it "tacky" or "uninspired." Judge for yourself.

1 Orientation

For a general discussion on traveling to The Bahamas, refer to chapter 2.

ARRIVING

A number of airlines fly to Grand Bahama International Airport from the continental United States, including **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300;** www.aa.com) and **Bahamasair** (✆ **800/222-4262;** www.bahamasair.com), both with daily flights from Miami. **Lynx Air International, Inc.,** a Fort Lauderdale–based commercial carrier (✆ **888/596-9247**), flies from Fort Lauderdale to Freeport. **Gulfstream Continental Connection** (✆ **800/231-0856**) flies to Freeport from both Fort Lauderdale and Miami. **US Airways** (✆ **800/428-4322**) flies daily from New York's LaGuardia Airport, and also has a daily flight from Charlotte, North Carolina.

Many visitors arrive in Nassau, then hop a Bahamasair flight to Freeport. These 35-minute hops run $158 round-trip.

No buses run from the airport to the major hotel zones. But many hotels will provide airport transfers, especially if you've bought a package deal. If yours does not, no problem; taxis meet arriving flights and will take you from the airport to one of the hotels in Freeport or Lucaya for about $11 to $14. The ride shouldn't take more than about 10 minutes.

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VISITOR INFORMATION

Assistance and information are available at the **Grand Bahama Tourism Board,** International Bazaar in Freeport (✆ **242/352-6909**). Another information booth is at the **Freeport International Airport** (✆ **242/352-2052**). There's also a branch at the cruise-ship docks. Hours are 9am to 5pm Monday through Saturday.

ISLAND LAYOUT

Getting around Freeport/Lucaya is fairly easy because of its flat terrain. Although Freeport and Lucaya are frequently mentioned in the same breath, newcomers should note that Freeport is a landlocked collection of hotels and shops rising from the island's center, while Lucaya, about 4km (2½ miles) away, is a waterfront section of hotels, shops, and restaurants clustered next to a saltwater pond on the island's southern shoreline.

Freeport lies midway between the northern and southern shores of Grand Bahama Island. Bisected by some of the island's largest roads, it contains the biggest hotels, as well as two of the most-visited attractions in the country: the Resorts at Bahamia Casino and the International Bazaar shopping complex. The local straw market, where you buy inexpensive souvenirs, lies just to the right of the entrance to the International Bazaar.

To reach **Port Lucaya** from Freeport, head east from the International Bazaar along East Sunrise Highway, then turn south at the intersection with Seahorse Road. Within about 4km (2½ miles), it will lead to the heart of the Lucaya complex, Port Lucaya.

Set between the beach and a saltwater pond, Port Lucaya's architectural centerpiece is **Count Basie Square,** named for the great entertainer who used to have a home on the island. Within a short walk east or west, along the narrow strip of sand between the sea and the saltwater pond, rise most of the hotels of Lucaya Beach.

Heading west of Freeport and Lucaya, the West Sunrise Highway passes industrial complexes such as The Bahamas Oil Refining Company. At the junction with Queen's Highway, you can take the road northwest all the way to **West End,** a distance of some 45km (28 miles) from the center of Freeport. Along the way you pass Freeport Harbour, where cruise ships dock. Just to the east lies Hawksbill Creek, a village known for its fish market.

Much less explored is the **East End** of Grand Bahama. It's located some 72km (45 miles) from the center of Freeport and is reached

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via the Grand Bahama Highway, which, despite its name, is rather rough in parts. Allow about 2 hours of driving time. First you pass the **Rand Memorial Nature Centre,** about 5km (3 miles) east of Freeport. About 11km (7 miles) on is **Lucaya National Park,** and 8km (5 miles) farther lies the hamlet of **Free Town;** east of Free Town is **High Rock,** known for its Emmanuel Baptist Church. From here, the road becomes considerably rougher until it ends in **MacLean's Town,** which celebrates Columbus Day with an annual conch-cracking contest. From here, it's possible to take a water-taxi across Runners Creek to the exclusive Deep Water Cay club, catering to serious anglers.

In Freeport/Lucaya, but especially on the rest of Grand Bahama Island, you will almost never find a street number on a hotel or a store. Sometimes in the more remote places, you won't even find a street name. In lieu of numbers, locate places by prominent landmarks or hotels.

2 Getting Around

BY TAXI

The government sets the taxi rates, and the cabs are metered (or should be). If there's no meter, agree on the price with the driver in advance. The cost is $3 for the first kilometer (¾-mile), plus 40¢ for each additional half-kilometer (¼-mile).

You can call for a taxi, although most taxis wait at the major hotels or the cruise-ship dock to pick up passengers. One major taxi company is **Freeport Taxi Company,** Old Airport Road (✆ **242/352-6666**), open 24 hours. Another is **Grand Bahama Taxi Union** at the Freeport International Airport (✆ **242/352-7101**), also open 24 hours.

BY BUS

There is public bus service from the International Bazaar to downtown Freeport and from the Pub on the Mall to the Lucaya area. The typical fare is $1 for adults, 50¢ for children. Check with the tourist office (see "Visitor Information," above) for bus schedules. There is no number to call for information.

BY CAR

If you plan to confine your exploration to the center of Freeport with its International Bazaar, and Lucaya with its beaches, you can rely on public transportation. However, if you'd like to branch out and explore

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the rest of the island (perhaps finding a more secluded beach), a rental car is the way to go. Try **Avis** (✆ **800/331-2112** or 242/352-7666; www.avis.com) or **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** or 242/352-9277; www.hertz.com). Both of these companies maintain offices in small bungalows outside the exit of the Freeport International Airport.

One of the best local companies is **Star Rent-a-Car,** Old Airport Road (✆ **242/352-9325**), which rents everything from a new-style Volkswagen Beetle to a Toyota Corolla. Rates range from $69 per day with unlimited mileage, plus another $14 per day for a CDW (Collision Damage Waiver). Gas is expensive, usually costing about $7 per gallon.

BY SCOOTER

This is a fun way to get around as most of Grand Bahamas is flat with well-paved roads. Scooters can be rented at most hotels, or, for cruise-ship passengers, there are motor scooters for rent in the Freeport Harbour area. Helmets are required and provided by the outfitter. There are dozens of stands along the road in Freeport and Lucaya and also in the major parking lots. Rentals cost $50 per day. Call ✆ **242/352-9661** for more information.

ON FOOT

You can explore the center of Freeport or Lucaya on foot, but if you want to venture into the East End or West End, you'll need to rent a car, hire a taxi, or try Grand Bahama's erratic public transportation.



FAST FACTS: Grand Bahama

Climate See "When to Go," in chapter 2.

Currency Exchange Americans need not bother to exchange their dollars into Bahamian dollars, because the currencies are on par. However, Canadians and Brits will need to convert their money, which can be done at local banks or sometimes at a hotel, though hotels tend to offer less favorable rates.

Dentists A reliable dentist is Dr. Larry Bain, Sun Alliance Building, Pioneer's Way, Freeport (✆ **242/352-8492**). Hours are Monday through Wednesday from 8:30am to 5pm and Thursday and Friday from 8:30am to 1pm.

Doctors For the fastest and best service, just head to Rand Memorial Hospital (see "Hospitals," below).

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Drugstores For prescriptions and other pharmaceutical needs, go to Mini Mall, 1 West Mall, Explorer's Way, where you'll find **L.M.R. Prescription Drugs** (✆ **242/352-7327**), next door to Burger King. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 8am to 9pm and Sunday 8am to 3pm.

Embassies & Consulates See "Fast Facts: The Bahamas," in chapter 2.

Emergencies For all emergencies, call ✆ **911,** or dial 0 for the operator.

Eyeglass Repair The biggest specialist in eyeglasses and contact lenses is the **Optique Shoppe,** 7 Regent Centre, downtown Freeport (✆ **242/352-9073**).

Hospitals If you have a medical emergency, contact the **Rand Memorial Hospital,** East Atlantic Drive (✆ **242/352-6735** or 242/352-2689 for ambulance emergency). This is a government-operated, 90-bed hospital.

Information See "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter.

Laundry & Dry Cleaning Try **Jiffy Cleaners and Laundry,** West Mall at Pioneer's Way (✆ **242/352-7079**), open Monday through Saturday from 8am to 6pm.

Newspapers & Magazines *The Freeport News* is a morning newspaper published Monday through Saturday except holidays. The two dailies published in Nassau, the *Tribune* and the *Nassau Guardian,* are also available here, as are some New York and Miami papers, especially the *Miami Herald,* usually on the date of publication. American news magazines, such as *Time* and *Newsweek,* are flown in on the day of publication.

Police In an emergency, dial ✆ **911.**

Post Office The main post office is on Explorer's Way in Freeport (✆ **242/352-9371**).

Safety Avoid walking or jogging along lonely roads. There are no particular danger zones, but stay alert: Grand Bahama is no stranger to drugs and crime.

Taxes All visitors leaving The Bahamas from Freeport must pay an $22 departure tax—in cash. (Both U.S. and Bahamian dollars are accepted.) There is no sales tax, but there's an 8% hotel tax.

Taxis See "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter.

Weather Grand Bahama, in the north of The Bahamas, has temperatures in winter that vary from about 60°F to 75°F

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(16°C–24°C) daily. Summer variations range from 78°F to the high 80s (26°C to the low 30s). In Freeport/Lucaya, phone ✆ **242/352-6675** for weather information.

3 Where to Stay

Your choices are the Freeport area, near the Bahamia Casino and the International Bazaar, or Lucaya, closer to the beach.

Remember: In most cases, a resort levy of 8% and a 15% service charge will be added to your final bill. Be prepared, and ask if it's already included in the initial price you're quoted.

FREEPORT

EXPENSIVE

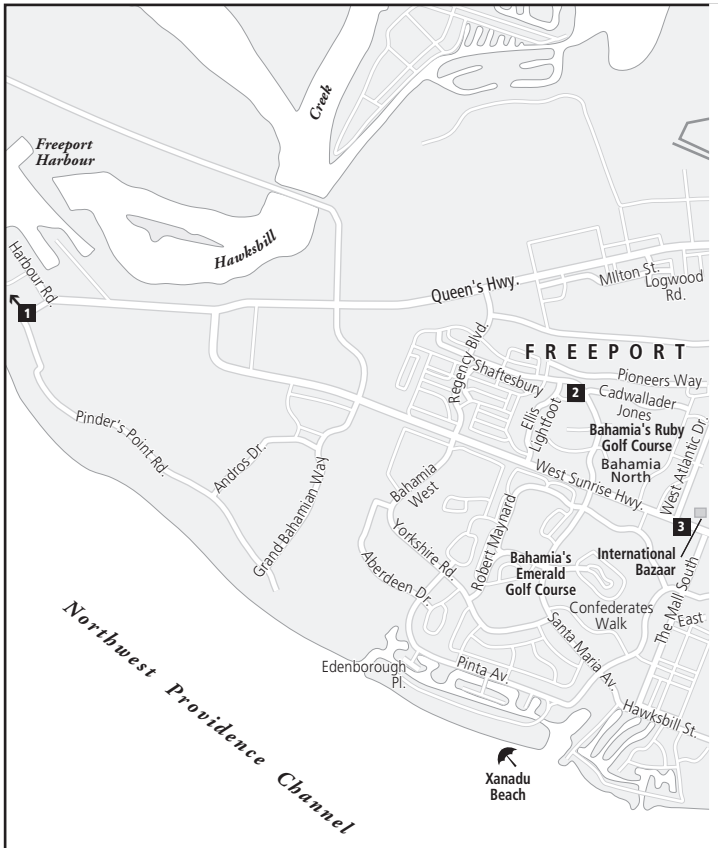
Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino ★ *Kids* This mammoth complex actually consists of two differently styled resorts combined under one umbrella: the 10-story Crowne Plaza at Bahamia and the less glamorous, three-story Holiday Inn SunSpree at Bahamia. Reinventing itself to stay competitive, the resort spent some $42 million on its once-tired, built-in-the-1960s properties, hoping to revive some of their old glitz and glamour.

Flanked by a pair of fine golf courses, and thus catering to the convention crowd, the resorts are set on 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) of tropical grounds. As it 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 "Bahamias" also jointly share one of the largest casinos in the entire country, a serviceable site that's functional—though nowhere near as flashy or cutting edge as, say, the Atlantis Casino on Paradise Island.

The Holiday Inn at Bahamia attracts families, honeymooners, frugal couples, golfers, and others who don't need or want luxury. The hotel's design is rather like an enormous low-rise wagon wheel, with a Disney-inspired minimountain surrounded by a swimming pool at its core. The hotel is so spread out, guests often complain that they need ground transport just to reach their bedrooms. (Nine wings radiate from the pool.) Some of the rooms have kitchenettes and are sold as timeshare units. Regular accommodations come in several classifications; 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—

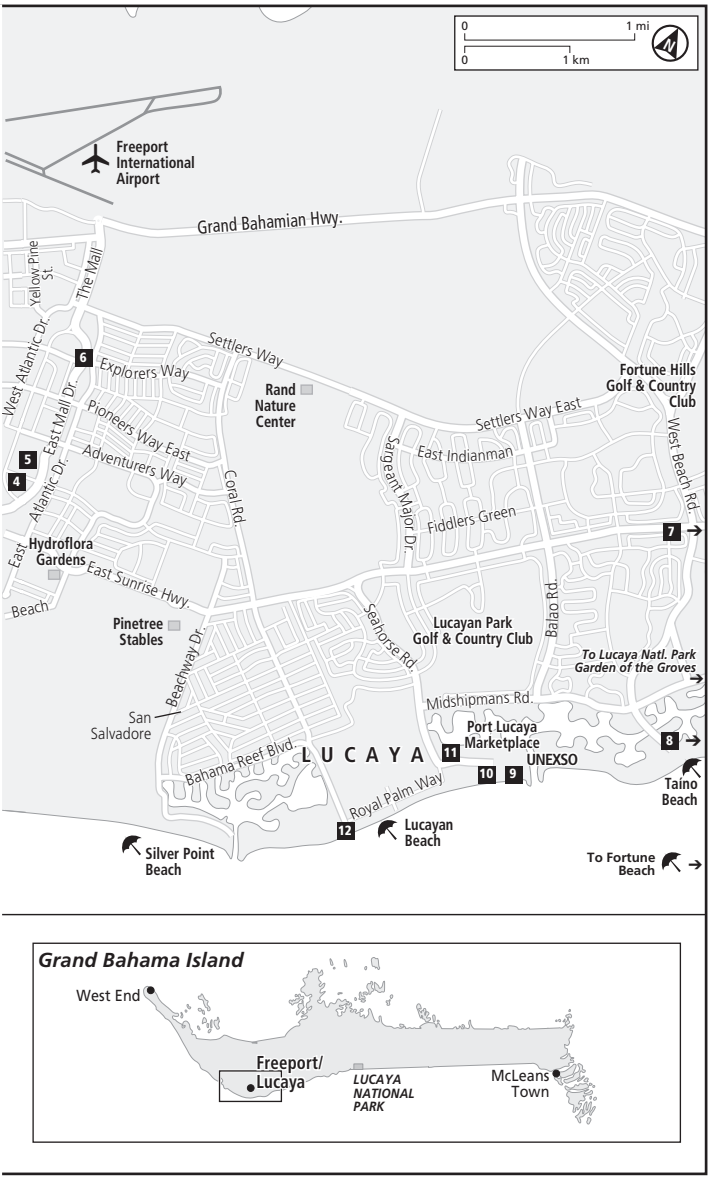
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Freeport/Lucaya Accommodations



Best Western Castaways **6**
Club Villa Fortuna **7**
Coral Beach **12**
Deep Water Cay Club **8**
Island Palm **6**
Island Seas Resort **13**
Lakeview Manor Club **2**
Old Bahama Bay **1**
Paradise Cove **1**
Pelican Bay at Lucaya **10**
Port Lucaya Resort & Yacht Club **11**
Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino **3**
The Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya **9**

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and are usually the ones that sell out first. Both resorts also rent out a number of suites, each furnished in summery fabrics plus beachy but durable furniture.

Crowne Plaza, lying across the Mall from its larger sibling, is smaller and more tranquil, and a bit more posh, containing 22 suites and 352 luxuriously furnished large units. The tower structure adjoins the Casino and the International Bazaar. The somewhat passé and even vaguely campy Arabic motif, the crowning glory of which is the Moorish-style tower (with turrets, arches, and a white dome), continues through the octagon-shaped lobby. Lots of conventioneers and folks on quick getaways from Florida tend to stay here, as do high rollers.

The Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. (P.O. Box F-207), Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **800/545-1300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 242/350-7000. Fax 242/350-7002. http://cpgrandbahama.crowneplaza.com. 965 units. Winter Holiday Inn $145 double, $210 1-bedroom suite, $250 2-bedroom suite; winter Crowne Plaza $175 double, $350 1-bedroom suite, $420 2-bedroom suite; off-season Holiday Inn $130 double, $195 1-bedroom suite, $240 2-bedroom suite; off-season Crowne Plaza $160 double, $300 1-bedroom suite, $360 2-bedroom suite; $99 extra per person for all-inclusive items. Up to 2 children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 6 bars; 2 pools; tennis courts; health club; spa; watersports equipment/rentals; room service (available 7:30am–10pm); massage; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Island Seas Resort A timeshare property open to nonmembers, this resort opens onto a secluded beach, although it also offers its own water fun in the form of a pool, hot tub, and waterfall. Also on site is a Tiki-hut restaurant and bar. The location is convenient for the Port Lucaya Market and the Lucaya Golf and Country Club. Depending on their individual owners, each condo is different, ranging from one-bedroom units to large two-bedroom suites. Each contains a full bathroom with tub and shower, plus a kitchenette and balcony. Although not part of the hotel facilities, there are many water sports outfitters available right on the beach.

William's Town, Freeport, Grand Bahamas, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/373-1271.** Fax 242/373-1275. www.islandseas.com. 149 units. Winter $159–$210 double; off-season $130–$180 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; tennis court; bike rentals. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron/ironing board, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Best Western Castaways *Kids* Castaways is a modest and unassuming hotel despite its platinum location adjacent to the International Bazaar and the casino. You stay here because of its location

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and the low price. It's not on the beach, but a free shuttle will take you to nearby Williams Town Beach or Xanadu Beach. Surrounded by gardens, the four-story hotel has a pagoda roof and an indoor/outdoor garden lobby with a gift shop, a clothing shop, a game room, and tour desks. Rooms are your basic motel style, and the best units are on the ground. The Flamingo Restaurant features remarkable Bahamian and American dishes, though only on Friday and Saturday from 6 to 10pm; Monday to Friday from 7:30 to 11am, it also serves one of the island's best breakfasts. There's also a swimming pool area with a wide terrace and pool bar serving sandwiches and cool drinks. A children's playground adjoins the pool.

International Bazaar (P.O. Box F-42629), Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/352-6682.** Fax 242/352-5087. www.grand-bahama.com/castaways. 118 units. Winter $120 double, $150 suite; off-season $95–$104 double, $140 suite. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; pool; bike rentals; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Island Palm Set within the commercial heart of Freeport, this simple three-story motel, completely renovated in 1999, consists of four buildings separated by parking lots and greenery. Within an easy walk from virtually everything in town, and 2km (1¼ miles) from the International Bazaar, it offers good value in no-frills, eminently serviceable rooms with well-kept bathrooms equipped with shower-tub combinations. Complimentary shuttle-bus service ferries anybody who's interested to nearby Williamstown Beach (also called Island Seas Beach), where you can use the beachfront facilities (including jet skis and snorkeling equipment) of its sibling resort, a timeshare unit known as Island Sea. The Safari Restaurant, under separate management next door, is recommended separately (see "Where to Dine," below).

E. Mall Dr. (P.O. Box F-40200), Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/352-6648.** Fax 242/352-6640. 150 units. $105 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; pool. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Lakeview Manor Club Today this 1970s-era resort is a timeshare, but it was originally built as private apartments. It's a good bargain for those who want peace and privacy, but the staff seems a bit lax. Catering to self-sufficient types, it offers midsize one-bedroom and studio apartments, each with tropical furniture, a private balcony, plus small bathrooms with shower stalls. The club overlooks the fifth hole of the PGA-approved Princess Ruby Golf Course. It's 8km (5 miles) from the beach, but it's ideal for golfers

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or for anyone to whom a sea view isn't important. A complimentary shuttle bus travels to International Bazaar and beach areas.

Cadwallader Jones Dr. (P.O. Box F-42699), Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/352-9789.** Fax 242/352-2283. www.bahamasvg.com/lakeview. 52 units. $75 double, $450 weekly double; $100 1-bedroom apt., $600 1-bedroom apt. weekly. MC, V. Closed 1 week in Nov. **Amenities:** Pool; 2 tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Royal Islander Don't be fooled by the corny-looking, storm-battered exterior of this place. It was built during an unfortunate Disney-style period in Freeport's expansion, during the early 1980s, with an improbable-looking pyramidal roof inspired by a cluster of Mayan pyramids. Inside, it's a lot more appealing than you might think, with rooms arranged around a verdant courtyard that seems far, far removed from the busy traffic and sterile-looking landscape outside. Rooms have white-tile floors and bathrooms that are on the small side, with tiny sinks and shower stalls. Otherwise, the motif is Florida/tropical, with some pizzazz.

There's a coffee-shop-style snack bar on the premises, but other than that, you'll have to wander a short distance, perhaps to the International Bazaar just across the street, to find diversions and dining.

E. Mall Dr., Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/351-6000.** Fax 242/351-3546. www.bahamasvg.com/royalislander.html. 100 units. Winter $124 double; off-season $82–$92 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; pool; Jacuzzi; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV.

LUCAYA

EXPENSIVE

The Westin & Sheraton at Our 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 Taíno Beach. The first of the three sections was completed late in 1998 under the name **The Reef Village.** It's the only one of the three branches of Our Lucaya to focus exclusively on all-inclusive holidays, whereby all meals, drinks, and most activities are included in one set price. With a vague South Beach Art Deco design, it's a massive, open-sided hexagon, with rooms facing the beach and the swimming pool. The resort is contemporary but relaxed; the developers have created a young vibe that draws a high number of families. Bedrooms are whimsical and fun, thanks to fabrics you'd expect on a loud Hawaiian shirt from the Elvis era and maple-veneered furniture, all put together with the kind of artful simplicity you'd expect in a California beach house.

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There are smaller subdivisions of the property neither of which is marketed as an all-inclusive property. The smaller and somewhat more private of the two is **Lighthouse Pointe,** a 221-unit, low-rise complex that focuses specifically on an adult clientele. Its larger counterpart is the 550-unit **Breakers Cay,** a grand, 10-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 diversity of restaurants, each designed with a different theme and ambience. The best of the resort's cuisine selections will be reviewed under "Where to Dine," later in this chapter. 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 also been added in recent years, and there's an increasing emphasis on golf thanks to the opening of the spectacular Reef Course (separately recommended later in this chapter). Children aged 2 to 12 can be amused and entertained throughout daylight hours every day at Camp Lucaya, whose headquarters lie adjacent to the pool at the Reef Village.

P.O. Box F-42500, Royal Palm Way, Lucaya, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **800/LUCAYAN** in the U.S., or 242/373-1333. Fax 242/373-8804. www.ourlucaya.com. 1,350 units. Reef Village (all-inclusive) winter $165–$205 double; off-season $120–$160 double; $30 extra per day for 3rd and 4th occupant. Lighthouse Pointe or Breakers Cay winter $275–$325 double; off-season $195–$245 double; $30 extra for 3rd and 4th occupant. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 16 restaurants; 16 bars; 3 pools; 2 golf courses; 5 tennis courts; health club; spa; watersports equipment/rentals; children's programs; 24-hour room service; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, iron/ironing board.

MODERATE

Pelican Bay at Lucaya ★★ Here's a good choice for travelers with champagne tastes and beer budgets, a hotel with more architectural charm than any other small property on Grand Bahama. It's built on a peninsula jutting into a labyrinth of inland waterways, with moored yachts on virtually every side. Pelican Bay evokes a Danish seaside village, with rows of "town houses," each painted a different color and sporting whimsical trim, and each overlooking the harbor. Its location couldn't be better, right next to Port Lucaya Marketplace, where restaurants and entertainment spots abound. Lucayan Beach, one of the best stretches of white sand on the island, is just across the street, and Taíno Beach, with equally good sands, lies immediately to the east of the hotel. UNEXSO, providing some of the best dive facilities in The Bahamas, is next door.

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The spacious accommodations have Italian tile floors and white-washed furniture, with either a king-size bed or twin beds. The end rooms have cross ventilation and are the ideal choices for those who don't want to rely entirely on air-conditioning. Nonsmoking accommodations can also be requested. Each unit comes with a wet bar and satellite TV, as well as a balcony with a view of the nearby waterway and marina. Bathrooms, although of standard size, contain oversize cotton robes and tub and shower combos.

Port Lucaya (P.O. Box F-42654), Lucaya, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **800/600-9192** in the U.S., or 242/373-9550. Fax 242/373-9551. www.pelicanbayhotel.com. 69 units. Winter $155–$195 double, $360 suite; off-season $125–$165 double, $250 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; Jacuzzi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Port Lucaya Resort & Yacht Club ★ With its own 50-slip marina lying next to the Port Lucaya Marketplace, this club opened in 1993. The resort consists of a series of pastel-colored two-story structures that guests reach via golf cart after checking in. The wings of guest rooms separate the piers—site of some very expensive marine hardware—from a verdant central green space with a gazebo-style bar and a swimming pool. All of this is in the heart of the Port Lucaya restaurant, hotel, and nightlife complex. Although set back inland on a waterway, Lucayan Harbour, this resort lies within a few minutes' walk of Lucayan Beach, one of the island's finest, and is also close to Taíno Beach. Even though it's not right on the beach, it's such an easy walk that no one seems to complain. Some guests actually prefer the nautical, yachting look of the place and the nearness to Port Lucaya Marketplace. The medium-size rooms have tile floors and are attractively and comfortably furnished with rattan pieces and big wall mirrors. The rooms are divided into various categories, ranging from standard to deluxe, and open onto the marina (preferred by yachting guests), the Olympic-size swimming pool, or the well-landscaped garden. (If you don't want to hear the sounds coming from the lively marketplace, request units 1–6, which are more tranquil and away from the noise. Nonsmokers can reserve a room in units 5 or 6.) Bathrooms with newer shower-tub combinations are tidy and well maintained, with adequate shelf space.

Bell Channel Bay Rd. (P.O. Box F-42452), Lucaya, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **800/582-2921** or 242/373-6618. Fax 242/373-6652. www.portlucayaresort.com. 160 units. Winter $100–$145 double, $175–$250 suite; off-season $80–$120 double, $125–$200 suite. Extra person $25. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; pool; Jacuzzi; room service for breakfast only 7am–11pm; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV.

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INEXPENSIVE

Coral Beach Built in 1965 as privately owned condominiums, this peacefully isolated property near a sandy beach sits amid gardens and groves of casuarinas in a residential neighborhood. Some of the apartments and rooms have verandas, and four contain kitchenettes. More suitable for older travelers, the complex rents large but rather sparsely furnished units. The Garden Cafe provides international food at reasonable prices and is open daily for breakfast and dinner. You're also within walking distance of the Port Lucaya Marketplace.

Coral Rd. at Royal Palm Way (P.O. Box F-42468), Lucaya, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/373-2468.** Fax 242/373-5140. 10 units. Winter $113 double, $129 triple; off-season $91 double, $100 triple. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; pool. *In room:* A/C, TV.

OUTSIDE FREEPORT/LUCAYA

EXPENSIVE

Club Viva Fortuna ★ Think of this as an Italian Club Med. It caters to a mostly European, relatively young crowd, who appreciate the 14 secluded hectares (35 acres) of beachfront and the nonstop sports activities that are included in the price. Some guests like to go topless, not the norm in The Bahamas. Established in 1993, Club Fortuna lies 9.5km (6 miles) east of the International Bazaar in the southeastern part of the island, amid an isolated landscape of casuarinas and scrubland. Midsize bedrooms lie in a colorful group of two-story outbuildings. About three-quarters have ocean views; the others overlook the garden. Each has a private balcony, and two queen-size beds, with a small bathroom with shower stalls. Singles can book one of these rooms, but they are charged 40% more than the per-person double-occupancy rate. All meals, which are included in the rates, are served buffet-style in a pavilion near the beach, and the Italian cuisine is actually some of the best on Grand Bahama Island. In addition to the buffet, there is a casual Italian restaurant, La Trattoria, where you can order sit-down dinners within a candlelit setting. Bahamian and Italian performers provide nightly entertainment.

1 Dubloon Rd. (P.O. Box F-42398), Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. ✆ **242/373-4000.** Fax 242/373-5555. www.vivaresorts.com. 276 units. Winter $160–$320 double, $207–$407 triple, $256–$456 quad; off-season $200–$230 double, $261–$306 triple, $304–$364 quad. Children under 7 stay free. Children 7–11 50% off per day in parent's room (maximum of 2 children). Rates include meals, and land and watersports. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants, bar, pool; health club; watersports equipment/rentals; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, safe, no phone.

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Deep Water Cay Club *Finds* The ultimate hideaway, even more so than Paradise Cove, this is a secret address passed around privately by bonefish devotees. Bahamian-style cottages are strung along a pristine beach of white sand on a private island. The bonefishing is first-rate among these saltwater flats. The club has been a tradition since it was established in 1958 by Gilbert Drake, a sportsman and avid fisherman. The club continues today as the premier bonefishing lodge in The Bahamas. Bonefish here average 4 to 5 pounds, and licensed guides head a fleet of customized Dolphin Super Skiffs. Bedrooms are exceedingly spacious and well-furnished, with private entrances and roomy bathrooms with tub and shower. Some 22 guests at a time are housed here in an intimate, relaxed setting. Everyone dines together on a well-prepared but simple continental and island cuisine. Naturally the favorite dish is the catch of the day.

Deep Water Cay (1100 Lee Wagener Blvd., Suite 352, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33315). ✆ **242/353-3073** or 954/359-0488. Fax 242/353-3095. www.deepwatercay.com. 11 units. Dec–Feb $1,465 per person double occupancy; Mar–Nov $1,555–$1,630 per person double occupancy. Rates all-inclusive for 3 nights and 2½ days of fishing. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; 2 tennis courts; watersports equipment/rentals; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

MODERATE

Old Bahama Bay ★★ A cottage-style resort, this former Jack Tar Village is the centerpiece of an 11-hectare (28-acre) site with home sites and a marina. Its opening is hailed as part of the overall renaissance of Grand Bahama Island. In an oceanfront setting, the boutique hotel has cottages adjacent to the marina complex; a private beach is only steps away. The colonial-style architecture graces a setting 40km (25 miles) west of Freeport, consisting of suites set in six two-story beach houses and three spacious buildings overlooking the marina. The living space is the most generous on the island, with custom-designed furnishings along with private beachfront terraces. Bathrooms are luxurious with deluxe toiletries, and a tub and shower combo. Dockside Grill serves quite good Bahamian and American dishes for three meals a day.

West End (P.O. Box F-42546), Grand Bahama Island, The Bahamas. ✆ **800/572-5711** in the U.S. or 242/350-6500. Fax 242/346-6546. www.oldbahamabay.com. 47 units. $360–$560 double. $8 extra per child. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; 2 tennis courts; health club; watersports equipment/rentals; massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, safe.

Paradise Cove *Finds* Deadman's Reef sounds unappetizing but teems with rainbow-hued tropical marine life and a vast array of

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coral to delight the snorkeler in you. This is a secluded hideaway on a beach, 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. Yet you are only a 20-minute drive east of West End. Snorkeling, swimming, kayaking, and sunbathing fill the day here. All units are good size and have full kitchens for those who want to cook their own grub.

Deadman's Reef (P.O. Box F-42771), Freeport, Grand Bahama Island. ✆ **242/349-2677.** Fax 242/352-5471. www.bahamasnet.com/paradisecove. 7 units. Nov–Apr $100 apt., $125 cottage, $175 2-bedroom villa; off-season $75 apt., $105 cottage, $175 2-bedroom villa. Extra person $12.50 per day. **Amenities:** Bar; watersports equipment/rentals. *In room:* A/C, kitchen, no phone.

4 Where to Dine

Foodies will find that the cuisine on Grand Bahama Island doesn't match the more refined fare served at dozens of places on New Providence (Nassau/Paradise Island). However, a few places in Grand Bahama specialize in fine dining; others get by with rather standard fare. The good news is that the dining scene is much more affordable here.

FREEPORT

EXPENSIVE

The Rib Room ★ SEAFOOD/STEAKS The Rib Room serves the island's best steaks, in huge portions. Everything is served in the atmosphere of a British hunting lodge. If you don't want one of the steaks, opt instead for the blue-ribbon prime rib of beef with a passable Yorkshire pudding. Special praise goes to the broiled Bahamian lobster, but steer clear of the grouper. Shrimp can be succulent when it's not overcooked, and steak Diane, although rather fully flavored, is meltingly textured. The wine list is reasonably priced.

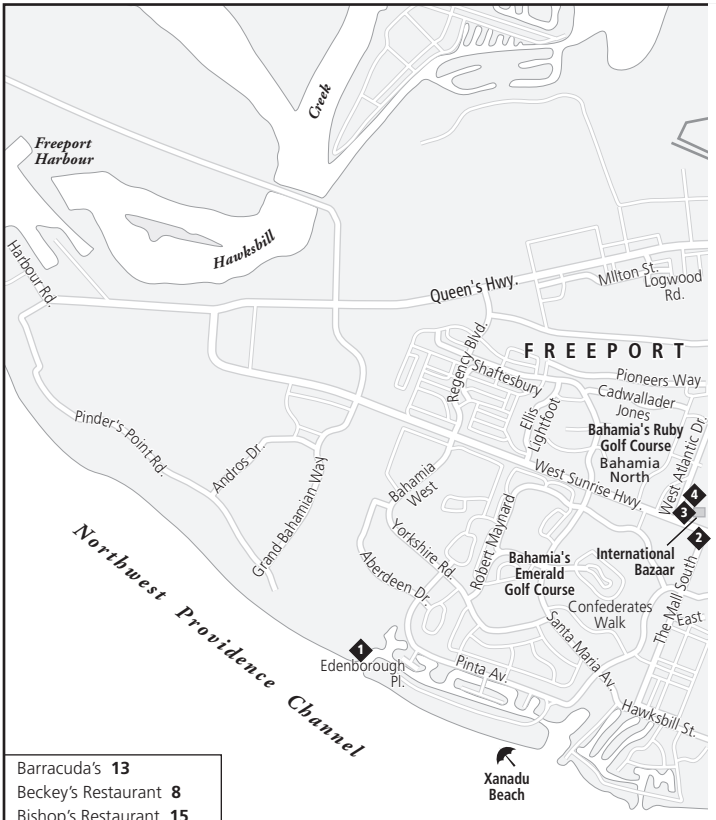
In Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino, the Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/352-6721.** Reservations recommended. Jackets required for men. Main courses $20–$34. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon 5:30–10:30pm.

MODERATE

Silvano's ★ ITALIAN This is the only authentic Italian dining spot in Freeport. The 80-seat restaurant with its Mediterranean decor serves a worthy but not exceptional cuisine. The standard repertoire from Mama Mia's kitchen is presented here with quality ingredients, most often shipped in from the United States. Service

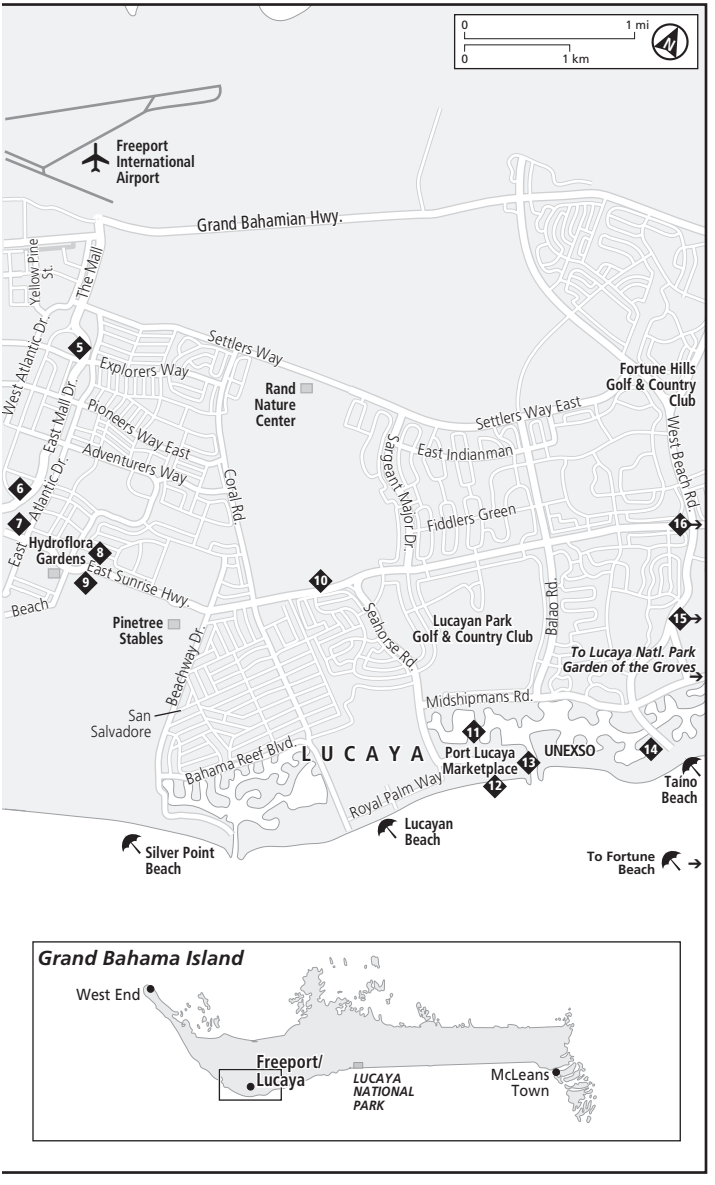
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Freeport/Lucaya Dining



Barracuda's **13**
Beckey's Restaurant **8**
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China Beach **13**
China Temple **4**
Churchill's **13**
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The Stoned Crab **14**
Willy Broadleaf **2**
Zorba's Greek Restaurant **-**

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is polite and helpful. The grilled veal steak is our favorite, although the home pastas are equally alluring. They're served with a wide variety of freshly made sauces. The chef also works his magic with fresh shrimp. Other traditional Italian dishes round out the menu.

Ranfurley Circus. ✆ **242/352-5111.** Reservations recommended. Lunch $5.50–$11; main courses $13–$36. MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 5:30–11pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Beckey's Restaurant BAHAMIAN/AMERICAN This pink-and-white restaurant offers authentic Bahamian cuisine prepared in the time-tested style of the Out Islands. Go here to rev up before a day of serious shopping at the International Bazaar, which is right at hand. Owned by Beckey and Berkeley Smith, the place offers a welcome dose of down-to-earth noncasino reality. Breakfasts are either all-American or Bahamian and are available all day. Also popular are minced lobster, curried mutton, fish platters, baked or curried chicken, and conch salads. Stick to the local specialties instead of the lackluster American dishes.

E. Sunrise Hwy. and E. Beach Dr. ✆ **242/352-5247.** Breakfast $5–$10; lunch items $7–$17; dinner main courses $8–$24. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

Geneva's BAHAMIAN/SEAFOOD If you want to eat where the locals eat, head for Geneva's, where the food is made the old-fashioned way. This restaurant is one of the best places to sample conch, which has fed and nourished Bahamians for centuries. The Monroe family will prepare it for you stewed, cracked, or fried, or in a savory conch chowder that makes an excellent starter. Grouper also appears, prepared in every imaginable way. The bartender will get you into the mood with a rum-laced Bahama Mama.

Kipling Lane, the Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/352-5085.** Lunch sandwiches and platters $8–$11; dinner main courses $10–$25. DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

Kokonuts Beach Bar & Restaurant BAHAMIAN *Kids* This south Seas restaurant attracts both visitors and islanders. With picnic tables placed outside to take advantage of the view, it is beautifully situated on the ocean before kilometers of white sand stretching in either direction. The menu is wisely limited, the chef preferring to concentrate on grilled seafood. The catch of the day is usually done to perfection. Nothing is too fancy or elaborate here. The place is also a real family favorite because of its location on the beach. It lies about a 10-minute drive from the center of Freeport.

St. Andrew Dr. ✆ **242/351-5656.** Lunch $7–$13; main courses $13–$24. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–1am.

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The Pepper Pot BAHAMIAN This might be the only place on Grand Bahama that specializes in Bahamian takeout food. You'll find it after about a 5-minute drive east of the International Bazaar, in a tiny shopping mall. You can order takeout portions of the best guava duff on the island, as well as a savory conch chowder, the standard fish and pork chops, chicken souse (an acquired taste), cracked conch, sandwiches and hamburgers, and an array of daily specials. The owner is Ethiopian-born Wolansa Fountain.

E. Sunrise Hwy. (at Coral Rd.). ✆ **242/373-7655.** Breakfast $3–$5.50; main courses $7–$8.25; vegetarian plates $2.50–$5.50. No credit cards. Daily 24 hr.

The Pub on the Mall INTERNATIONAL Located on the same floor of the same building and under the same management, three distinctive eating areas lie across the boulevard from the International Bazaar and attract many locals. The **Prince of Wales** serves such Olde English staples as shepherd's pie, fish and chips, platters of roast beef or fish, and real English ale. One end of the room is devoted to the **Red Dog Sports Bar,** with a boisterous atmosphere and at least three TV screens blasting away for dedicated sports fans. **Silvano's** (see above) is an Italian restaurant serving lots of pasta, usually with verve, as well as veal, chicken, beefsteaks, and such desserts as tiramisu. The Bahamian-themed **Islander's Roost** has a tropical decor of bright island color and a balcony overlooking the Bazaar. The food is good if not great; the main platters are a good value, usually very filling and satisfying. Menu items include sandwiches, salads, grilled fish, beefsteaks, and prime rib.

Ranfurley Circle, Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/352-5110.** Reservations recommended. Main courses in Prince of Wales Pub and Red Dog $5.95–$36; main courses in Silvano's $13–$36; main courses in Islander's Roost $13–$37. AE, MC, V. Prince of Wales and Red Dog daily noon–1am; Silvano's daily noon–3pm and 5–11pm; Islander's Roost Mon–Sat 5:30–11pm.

Safari Restaurant INTERNATIONAL At breakfast or lunch, you'll place your order at a kiosk-style snack bar and carry simple paper plates to an outdoor table near the pool. But at dinner, more formal meals are served in a large, conventional, sit-down restaurant, which has a bar and a stage for live music. The menu is full of straightforward staples like New York strip steaks, pork chops, hot roast beef, broiled or grilled snapper, broiled chicken, or seafood platters. After 10:30pm every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, the place becomes a disco (with a $10 cover charge that includes the first drink). Locals often stop by for dinner and nightclubbing. Women are admitted free on Wednesday and Sunday night.

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E. Mall Dr. ✆ **242/352-2805.** American breakfast $4.95; lunch main courses $3.75–$9.75; dinner main courses $10–$34. AE. Daily 7:30–11am, 11am–5pm, and 5:30–10pm.

IN THE INTERNATIONAL BAZAAR

INEXPENSIVE

Cafe Michel BAHAMIAN/FRENCH The name implies that you've found a real French bistro set amid the bustle of the International Bazaar, but alas, it turns out to be a mere coffee shop. Nevertheless, it's a good place for refueling when you're shopping the bazaar. There are about 20 tables outside, placed under red and white umbrellas and bistro-style tablecloths. Inside are about a dozen more. Local shoppers know to come here not only for coffee, but also for platters, salads, and sandwiches throughout the day. Both American and Bahamian dishes are served, including seafood platters, steaks, and, of course, grouper. The house specialty is a Bahamian lobster platter with all the fixings.

International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-2191.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses $4.95–$35. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–8pm.

China Temple CHINESE This is a Chinese joint—not a lot more—that also does takeout. Over the years it's proved to be the dining bargain of the bazaar. The menu is familiar and standard: chop suey, chow mein, and sweet-and-sour. It's certainly not gourmet Asian fare, but it's cheap; and it might hit the spot when you're craving something different.

International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-5610.** Lunch $6.75–$8:506.758.50; main courses $10–$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm.

Le Rendezvous INTERNATIONAL Under one roof is practically a United Nations of a restaurant. What you get isn't bad, but the chefs can hardly be expected to excel in all cuisines, especially those that travel from India to the West Indies, from Mexico to sunny Rome, with stops around the world in spicy Thailand and exotic Indonesia. They even feature Bahamian food. For a main course, we generally opt for the Thai stir-fries, which we find to be the best items on the menu. Because of its diverse menu, there is no more appropriate restaurant for the International Bazaar than this one.

International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-9610.** Lunch main courses $5–$13; dinner main courses $10–$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–10:30pm.

LUCAYA

EXPENSIVE

The Stoned Crab ★ SEAFOOD Tired of frozen seafood shipped in from the mainland? Come here for the sweet stone crab claws and

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the lobster, both caught in Bahamian waters. There's none better on the island. You can't miss this place—a triple pyramid (1968) whose four-story wood and steel framework is strong enough to withstand any hurricane. Swiss-born Livio Peronino is the manager and chef, preparing a seafood platter with everything on it, including grouper, conch fritters, and all kinds of shellfish. The best pasta on the menu is linguine al pesto with lobster and shrimp. For starters, try the zesty conch chowder. Have a salad and home-baked raisin bread with your meal, and finish with Irish coffee.

At Taíno Beach, Lucaya. ✆ **242/373-1442.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$39. AE, MC, V. Daily 5–10:30pm.

Willy Broadleaf INTERNATIONAL At the first-class Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya, you're treated to one of the most lavish buffet dinners in the entire Bahamian chain. The chefs conceive of their lavish offering as a giant spread of exotic dishes based on recipes from around the globe. The decor fits the cuisine, evoking a courtyard patio in Mexico, a marketplace in old Cairo, the dining hall of an Indian maharajah, even an African village; from India comes tandoori chicken, from Greece moussaka. Another tasty treat is a sausage made from wild boar. Expect freshly made salads, both hot and cold dishes, and luscious, often fruit-based desserts.

The Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya, Royal Palm Way. ✆ **242/373-1333.** Sun–Thurs $30 buffet, Fri–Sat $38 buffet. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30–11pm.

MODERATE

Barracuda's INTERNATIONAL With high ceilings and big windows, this space is the size of an airplane hanger, and it's done up with playful art and a whimsical, hip decor that would be at home in Miami's South Beach. The kitchen turns out light international dishes that are loaded with flavor. The best examples are a tantalizing red snapper in a Bahamian pepper and thyme sauce. Chicken breast appears in a savory lemon and thyme sauce, and there are all means of steaks, including a grilled sirloin served with baked potato topped with a dollop of sour cream. A selection of seafood and pasta dishes also appears daily. If you want to drink your dessert, consider a China Beach, a chocolate-laced affair that's made with crème de cacao, Kahlúa, and Carolans Irish cream.

In the Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya, Royal Palm Way, Lucaya. ✆ **242/373-1333.** Main courses $15–$21 AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–10:30am and 5:30–9:30pm.

Captain's Charthouse Restaurant INTERNATIONAL In a casual, treetop-level dining room, guests can select from a menu of

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1950s favorites, such as prime rib of beef, teriyaki steak, and grouper filet, along with some other good seafood dishes. You don't come here for New Wave cooking; this is the place for the old standards that mom and pop enjoyed. The chunky lobster thermidor, baked in its shell, is a taste treat. Meals are served with tasty homemade bread and a do-it-yourself salad bar. Portions are large, but if you still have an appetite, the homemade desserts include Key lime pie. A happy hour is held in the Mates Lounge from 5 to 7pm, with complimentary hors d'oeuvres. In winter, there's nightly entertainment and courtesy transportation to and from your hotel.

E. Sunrise Hwy. and Beach Dr. ✆ **242/373-3900.** Early-bird dinner $7–$16 (5–6:30pm); main courses $16–$24. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm (last seating).

China Beach ASIAN FUSION At the Westin & Sheraton, you can cruise the Pacific Rim, feasting on exotic delights, including the spicy hot cuisines of Vietnam and Thailand, with calls at Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The menu changes every month but some dishes appear with regularity. Our favorites among these are a savory Hong Kong roast duckling and a zesty Thai chicken. The beef marinated in soy sauce is served with fresh spring onion, and the grouper filet appears with fresh ginger and scallions. Other Far East specialties include a seafood teppanyaki and stir-fry conch.

At the Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya. ✆ **242/373-1333.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10:30pm.

Churchill's AMERICAN One of the island's most elegant restaurants, Churchill's lures discerning palates to Our Lucaya—even guests staying in Freeport. We like to arrive early for drinks in the colonial-style bar with its dark wood floors, potted plants, and ceiling fans, even a grand piano. (All the setting needs to feel complete is a new Bogie-and-Ingrid-Bergman combo willing to remake *Casablanca* on-site.) This is the island's best chophouse, featuring both succulent steaks flown over from the mainland and locally caught seafood. The manor house setting is a perfect foil for the finely honed service and top quality ingredients, deftly prepared.

At the Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya. ✆ **242/373-1333.** Reservations required. Main courses $8.75–$65. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–11pm.

Oasis Café *Kids* BAHAMIAN/AMERICAN This restaurant on the lobby of the Royal Oasis resort adjoins the casino. As you eat, you can view the gamblers winning and losing (mostly the latter). If you order a la carte, the menu consists mainly of snacks and sandwiches. But many diners come here for the hot and cold dishes on

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the buffet. The chefs do a good job with their roasting at night, especially with the prime rib, which can be carved for you. Homemade soups are featured daily, and there are many choices of fresh salads and tasty desserts. The best time to come for island flair and fun is on Bahamian night each Friday.

At the Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino, The Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/350-7000.** Buffet lunch $17.50–$18.50 daily; buffet dinner $22.50 daily. AE, DC, MC, V. Call for hours.

Palm Grill & Coconut Bar BAHAMIAN/INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD Off the lobby at the Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino, this eatery offers two distinct dining experiences. The Palm Grill is a fashionable bistro with tables inside or out; the kitchen serves a beautifully roasted prime rib at whatever doneness you prefer, fettuccine Alfredo with the tantalizing addition of fresh shrimp, and Bahamian snapper cooked just right—still moist—and served with grilled vegetables. At the more convivial Coconut Bar, you can order your fill of well-stuffed sandwiches, juicy burgers and fries, freshly made salads, and, of course, conch and other main courses from the same kitchen.

Crown Plaza at Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino, The Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/350-7000.** Palm Grill lunch main courses $6.25–$12; dinner main courses $12–$22. Coconut Bar main courses $7.50–$18. AE, DC, MC, V. Palm Grill daily 6:30–11:30am, noon–3pm, and 5:30–11pm. Coconut Bar daily 10am–1am.

Paradiso ★ ITALIAN This is an oasis of fine Italian dining, its setting of dark woods and high booths both elegant and tasteful. As you enjoy an aperitif, peruse the menu of selections representing some of the best recipes from the Italian kitchen. Veal saltimbocca (the word literally means "jump in your mouth") is a concoction with cheese and ham, and is most rewarding, as is the marinated filet mignon wrapped in pancetta. Nothing is finer nor more expensive than the lobster al Sardinia (with fresh tomatoes and vegetables). Dishes for the most part, are spiced, flavored, and sauced, especially the tender cutlets of oregano-flavored scaloppine and the fettuccine with "fruits of the sea," including Bahamian conch, scallops, lobster, and shrimp (among other seafood). Waiters are prompt and attentive, and there's a good wine list.

Crown Plaza at Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino. ✆ **242/352-7000.** Reservations required. Main courses $18–$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues, Thurs–Sun 5:30–11pm.

Prop Club AMERICAN/INTERNATIONAL With a name like Prop Club, you expect a kind of laid-back airplane hangar decor.

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Instead, you get parts of aircraft that crashed off the coast of Grand Bahama Island. When the weather's right, which it is most of the time, large doors open to bring the outdoors inside, and the party overflows onto the beach. This is not the most enticing menu on the island, but the place is a lot of fun—and the offerings far exceed most pub grub. Dig into a "mountain of ribs," or else savor the crab cakes (which actually contain a lot of crab, not just stuffing). Ever had a grilled margarita chicken sandwich? You can order one here, along with juicy burgers, fajitas, and the like.

At the Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya. ✆ **242/373-1333.** Main courses $12–$23. AE, DC, MC, V. Call for hours.

AT PORT LUCAYA MARKETPLACE

EXPENSIVE

Luciano's CONTINENTAL Its tables usually occupied by local government officials and deal makers, Luciano's is the grande dame of Freeport restaurants, with a very European atmosphere. It's the only restaurant in Port Lucaya offering caviar, foie gras, and bouillabaisse, all served with a flourish by a formally dressed waitstaff wearing black and white. You can go early and enjoy a cocktail in the little bar inside or on the wooden deck overlooking the marina. Lightly smoked and thinly sliced salmon makes a good opener, as do snails in garlic butter. Fresh fish and shellfish are regularly featured and delicately prepared, allowing their natural flavors to shine through, with no heavy, overwhelming sauces. Steak Diane is one of Luciano's classics, along with an especially delectable prime rib of beef.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-9100.** Reservations required. Main courses $21–$59. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm (last seating).

MODERATE

Ferry House *Kids* BAHAMIAN/CONTINENTAL This restaurant's bar floats on pontoons, beneath a canvas canopy, above the waters of Bell Channel, the waterway that funnels boats from the open sea into the sheltered confines of Port Lucaya Marina. On the waterside deck, you can order breakfast every day between 7 and 10am, joining a crowd of locals. Lunches are relatively simple affairs, consisting of pastas, catch of the day, and meal-size salads. Dinner might feature a seafood platter laden with calamari, fish, and shrimp; a delectable broiled chicken breast stuffed with crabmeat or shrimp; fresh salmon with hollandaise sauce; and savory grilled lamb chops with garlic sauce. But our favorite meal here is the ginger and honey glazed tiger shrimps with a lobster bisque.

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Beside Bell Channel, Port Lucaya. ✆ **242/373-1595.** Reservations recommended for dinner. Lunch platters $9–$18; dinner main courses $19–$30. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and Tues–Sun 6–9pm.

Giovanni's Cafe ★ ITALIAN/SEAFOOD Tucked away into one of the pedestrian thoroughfares of Port Lucaya Marketplace, you'll find a yellow-sided clapboard house that opens into a charming 38-seat Italian trattoria. The chefs (including head chef Giovanni Colo) serve Italian-influenced preparations of local seafood, specializing in seafood pasta (usually prepared only for two diners) and a lobster special. Giovanni stamps each dish with his Italian verve and flavor whether it be Bahamian conch, local seafood, or scampi. Dishes show off his precision and rock-solid technique, exemplified by sirloin steak with fresh mushrooms, delectable shrimp scampi, and fattening but extremely good spaghetti carbonara.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-9107.** Reservations recommended. Lunch main courses $5–$8.50; dinner main courses $11–$20. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–10pm.

La Dolce Vita ★ ITALIAN Next to the Pub at Lucaya (see below), this small upscale Italian restaurant has a modern decor and traditional food. Enjoy freshly made pastas and Italian-style pizzas on a patio overlooking the marina or in the 44-seat dining room. Start with portobello mushrooms, fresh mozzarella with tomatoes, and a vinaigrette, or else carpaccio with arugula and spices. Homemade ravioli appears with different fillings such as cheese, lobster, or spinach. An excellent risotto flavored with black ink is served, or else you can order roast pork tenderloin or a crisp and perfectly flavored rack of lamb.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8652.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Closed Sept.

Pisces ★ BAHAMIAN/INTERNATIONAL This is our favorite among the many restaurants in the Port Lucaya Marketplace, and we're seconded by a healthy mix of locals and yacht owners who pack the place every weekend. Decorated with Tiffany-style lamps and captain's chairs, it boasts the most charming waitstaff on Grand Bahama Island. Lunches are relatively simple affairs, with fish and chips, sandwiches, and salads. Pizzas are available anytime and come in 21 different types, including a version with conch, lobster, shrimp, and chicken. Dinners are more elaborate, with a choice of curries (including a version with conch); lobster in cream, wine, and herb sauce; all kinds of fish and shellfish; and several kinds of pasta.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-5192.** Reservations recommended. Pizzas $3–$27.; dinner main courses $13–$30 AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5pm–2am.

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Pub at Lucaya ENGLISH/BAHAMIAN Opening onto Count Basie Square, this restaurant and bar lies at the center of the Port Lucaya Marketplace. Returning visitors might remember the joint when it was called Pusser's Pub, named after that popular brand of rum.

You can come here to eat, but many patrons visit just for the drinks, especially rum-laced Pusser's Painkillers. You can order predictable pub grub such as shepherd's pie or steak-and-ale pie. Juicy American-style burgers are another lure. But you can also dine on substantial Bahamian fare at night, especially Bahamian lobster tail, cracked conch, or the fresh grilled catch of the day. The tables outside overlooking the water are preferred, or else you can retreat inside under a wooden beamed ceiling, where the rustic tables are lit by *faux* Tiffany-style lamps.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8450.** Sandwiches and burgers $6–$12; main courses $10–$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–1am.

Shenanigan's Irish Pub CONTINENTAL Dark and beer-stained from the thousands of pints of Guinness, Harp, and Killian's that have been served and spilled here, this is the premier Irish or Boston Irish hangout on Grand Bahama Island. Many visitors come just to drink, sometimes for hours at a time, soaking up the suds, and perhaps remembering to eventually order some food. If you get hungry, there's surf and turf, French-style rack of lamb for two, seafood Newburg, and several preparations of chicken.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-4734.** Main courses $12–$40. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 10:30am–2am.

INEXPENSIVE

Fatman's Nephew ★ BAHAMIAN In another location, "Fatman" became a legend on Grand Bahama Island. Although he's no longer with us, the Fatman must have left his recipes and cooking skills to another generation of cooks. Today the place, which used to cater mainly to locals, has gone touristy, but much of the same traditional fare is still served with the same unflagging allegiance to Bahamian ways. The restaurant overlooks the marina at Port Lucaya from an eagle's-nest position on the second floor. You can enjoy drinks or meals inside, but we like to head out to an outdoor covered deck to watch the action below. There are usually at least eight kinds of game fish, including both wahoo and Cajun blackened kingfish, plus curried chicken, mutton, or beef. Bahamian-style shark soup, made from the flesh of hammerheads ("little tender

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ones," according to the chef), is sometimes featured on the menu. Most dishes, except for expensive shellfish, fall at the lower end of the price scale.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8520.** Main courses $5–$35. DISC, MC, V. Mon and Thurs–Sat 10am–midnight; Tues–Wed and Sun 5pm–midnight.

Georgie's BAHAMIAN/AMERICAN This laid-back, informal restaurant allows you to dine harborside at Port Lucaya for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. It gets particularly busy at happy hour in the late afternoon when prices on drinks are reduced. Service shows more effort than polish, but dishes do arrive and they are quite flavorful time-tested recipes, a repertoire of old favorites like cracked conch (similar to breaded veal cutlet) served with tasty coleslaw. The catch of the day is usually pan-fried grouper or snapper served with peas 'n' rice. The chef almost daily prepares hot roast beef, serving it with mashed potatoes and mixed vegetables; for lunch, try one of the island's better chef's salads, loaded with turkey, ham, fresh tomatoes, cheese, and other good things. Other favorites here include fresh lobster, conch fritters, and barbecue chicken.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8513.** Lunch main courses $78–$11; dinner main courses $8–$17. DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

Outrigger's Native Restaurant/White Wave Club BAHAMIAN Cement-sided and simple, with a large deck extending out toward the sea, this restaurant was here long before the construction of the nearby Port Lucayan Marketplace, which lies only 4 blocks away. The restaurant area is the domain of Gretchen Wilson, whose kitchens produce a rotating series of dishes that include such lip-smacking dishes as lobster tails, minced lobster, steamed or cracked conch, pork chops, chicken, fish, and shrimp, usually served with peas 'n' rice and macaroni. Every Wednesday night, from 6pm to 1am, the restaurant is the venue for "Outrigger's Famous Wednesday Night Fish Fry," when as many as a thousand diners will line up for platters of fried or steamed fish, priced at $10 each, which are accompanied by live music. Drinks are served within the restaurant, but at any time of the week, you might consider stepping into the nearby ramshackle bar, the White Wave Club, which serves only drinks.

Smith's Point. ✆ **242/373-4811.** Main courses $8–$15. No credit cards. Daily 4pm–1am.

Zorba's Greek Cuisine BAHAMIAN/GREEK First thing in the morning, you'll see locals standing in line for the Bahamian breakfasts served at Zorba's. From chicken souse to corned beef and grits,

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all the island eye-openers are on the menu. Eggs and fluffy Greek pastries snag less daring early risers. Lunch could be a fat gyro or a souvlakia kebab. Dinner can begin with a Greek salad and then move on to moussaka, with baklava for a sweet finish. We won't pretend the food here is like a trip to the Greek isles, but it's satisfying and filling. At this casual dining spot, you can eat either inside or enjoy your meal al fresco.

Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-6137.** Lunch main courses $7–$13; dinner main courses $10–$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

OUTSIDE FREEPORT/LUCAYA

Bishop's Restaurant ★ *Finds* BAHAMIAN For those real down-home favorite dishes, known mainly by locals, this is a little known East End favorite. The restaurant opens onto views of the sea. Far from the high-rise hotels, this little restaurant and lounge looks the way they did in The Bahamas of the 1920s and 1930s. Some of the best cracked conch we've sampled on Grand Bahama Island is served here, rolled in a light batter and fried in piping hot oil so that its crust is slightly crunchy. Another favorite, always on the menu, is fried grouper with classic peas 'n' rice. Or, for a savory dish, order the chicken barbecued in zesty sauce.

High Rock. ✆ **242/353-4515.** Main courses $9–$12. No credit cards. Daily 9am–9pm.

Club Caribe AMERICAN/BAHAMIAN Set about 11km (7 miles) east of the International Bazaar, beside a beach and an offshore reef that teems with underwater life, this restaurant is a funky and offbeat charmer. You can spend a day on the beach here, renting the club's snorkeling equipment, sunbathing or swimming, and perhaps enjoying one of the house-special cocktails (try a Caribe Delight, made with bananas, banana-flavored liqueur, and rum). When it's lunchtime, you might order up a heaping platter of cracked conch; barbecued ribs; snapper or grouper that's fried, steamed, or grilled; or a sandwich or salad. This place is simple, outdoorsy, and a refreshing change from the more congested parts of Grand Bahama.

Churchill Beach, Mather Town, off Midshipman Rd. ✆ **242/373-6866.** Lunch $5–$14; main courses $7.50–$35. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–6pm.

5 Beaches, Watersports & Other Outdoor Pursuits

HITTING THE BEACH

Grand Bahama Island has enough beaches for everyone, the best ones opening onto Northwest Providence Channel at Freeport and

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sweeping east for some 97km (60 miles) to encompass Xanadu Beach, Lucayan Beach, Taíno Beach, and others, eventually ending at such remote eastern outposts as Rocky Creek and McLean's Town. Once you leave the Freeport/Lucaya area, you can virtually have your pick of white sandy beaches all the way east. Once you're past the resort hotels, you'll see a series of secluded beaches used mainly by locals. If you like people, a lot of organized watersports, and easy access to hotel bars and restrooms, stick to Xanadu, Taíno, and Lucayan beaches.

Though there's fine snorkeling offshore, you should book a snorkeling cruise aboard one of the catamarans offered by Paradise Watersports (see below) to see the most stunning reefs.

Xanadu Beach ★★ is one of our favorite beaches, immediately east of Freeport and the site of the famed Xanadu Beach Resort. The beach may be crowded at times in winter, but that's because of those gorgeous, soft, powdery white sands, which open onto tranquil waters. The beach is set against a backdrop of coconut palms and Australian pines. You can hook up here with some of the best watersports on the island, including snorkeling, boating, jet skiing, and parasailing.

Immediately east of Xanadu is **Silver Point Beach,** a little white sandy beach, site of a timeshare complex where guests are out riding the waves on water bikes or playing volleyball on the beach. You'll see horseback riders from Pinetree Stables (see below) taking beach rides along the sands.

Most visitors will be found at **Lucayan Beach,** right off Royal Palm Way and immediately east of Silver Point Beach. This is one of the best beaches in The Bahamas, with kilometers of white sand. It might be crowded for a few weeks in winter, but in general there is beach-blanket space for all. At any of the hotel resorts along this beach, you can hook up with an array of watersports or get a frosty drink from a hotel bar. It's not for those seeking seclusion, but it's a fun beach-party scene.

Immediately to the east of Lucayan Beach is **Taíno Beach,** a family favorite and a good place for watersports. This, too, is a fine, wide beach of white sands, opening onto generally tranquil waters.

Another choice not too far east is **Gold Rock Beach,** a favorite picnic spot with locals on weekends, although you'll usually have this beach to yourself on weekdays. Gold Rock Beach is a 19km (12-mile) drive from Lucaya. At Gold Rock you are at the doorstep to the **Lucayan National Park** (see below), a 16-hectare (40-acre) park

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filled with some of the longest, widest, and most fabulous secluded beaches on the island.

BOAT CRUISES

Ocean Wonder, Port Lucaya Dock (✆ **242/373-5880**), run by Reef Tours, is supposedly the world's largest twin-diesel-engine glass-bottom boat. Any tour agent can arrange for you to go out on this vessel. You'll get a panoramic view of the beautiful underwater life that lives off the coast of Grand Bahama. Cruises depart from Port Lucaya behind the Straw Market on the bay side at 9:30, 11:15am, 1:15pm, and 3:15pm, except Monday and Friday, when only two tours leave at 9:30 and 11:15am. The tour lasts 1½ hours, costs $25 for adults and $15 for children 6 to 12, and is free for children 5 and under. When calling for a reservation, confirm the departure times mentioned above, because there may be seasonal variations.

Superior Watersports (P.O. Box F-40837, Freeport; ✆ **242/373-7863**), offers trips on its *Bahama Mama,* a two-deck 22m (72-ft.) catamaran. Its Robinson Crusoe Beach Party, offered daily from 11am to 4pm, costs $59 per person. There's also a sunset booze cruise that goes for $35. (In summer, these cruises are on Tues, Thurs, and Sat night from 6–8pm.)

For an underwater cruise, try the company's quasi-submarine, the *Seaworld Explorer.* The sub itself does not descend; instead, you walk down into the hull of the boat and watch the sea life glide by. The "sub" departs daily at 9:30 and 11:30am, and 1:30pm, and it costs $39 for adults and $25 for children 12 and under.

THE DOLPHIN EXPERIENCE

A pod of bottle-nosed dolphins is involved in a unique dolphin/human familiarization program at Dolphin Experience, located at **Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO),** next to Port Lucaya, opposite Lucayan Beach Casino (✆ **888/365-3483** or 242/373-1250). This "close encounter" program viewed as "politically incorrect" by some groups allows participants to observe these intelligent and friendly animals close up and to hear an interesting talk by a member of the animal-care staff. This project seems very eco-sensitive; this is the world's largest dolphin facility, so there are no cramped conditions. Dolphins can swim out to sea, and if they don't like the project, they could in theory never return to it. But they seem to enjoy interacting with humans and do return. You can step onto a shallow wading platform and interact with the dolphins;

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the experience costs $59 and is a highly educational, yet fun adventure for all ages. Children under 5 participate free. You'll want to bring your camera. An "Assistant Trainer" program is an all-day interactive experience in which a maximum of four people, ages 16 or older, learn about dolphins and marine mammals from behind the scenes. Participants help feed the animals and swim with them for a cost of $219. Dolphins also swim out from Sanctuary Bay daily to interact with scuba divers from UNEXSO in a "Dolphin Dive" program, costing $169.

FISHING

In the waters off Grand Bahama, you can fish for barracuda, snapper, grouper, yellowtail, wahoo, and kingfish, along with other denizens of the deep.

Reef Tours, Ltd., Port Lucaya Dock (✆ **242/373-5880**), offers one of the least expensive ways to go deep-sea fishing around Grand Bahama Island. Adults pay $80 if they fish, $45 if they only go along to watch. Four to six people can charter the entire 42-foot craft for $480 per half day or $950 per whole day. The 32-footer can be chartered for $320 half day and $620 for a whole day. Departures for the half-day excursion are at 8:30am and 1pm, 7 days a week. Bait, tackle, and ice are included in the cost.

GOLF

This island boasts more golf links than any other in The Bahamas. The courses are within 11km (7 miles) of one another, and you usually won't have to wait to play. All courses are open to the public year-round, and clubs can be rented from all pro shops on the island.

Moments Land & Sea Eco-tours

If you're a nature lover, escape from the casinos and take one of the **East End Adventures** (✆ **242/373-6662** or 242/373-1652; www.bahamasecotours.com/safari.cfm) bush and sea safaris. You're taken through dense pine forests and along deserted beaches, going inland on hikes to such sites as blue holes, mangrove swamps, and underground caverns. You may even learn how to crack conch. A native lunch is served on a serene beach in Lightbourne's Cay, a remote islet in the East End. Most of the tour is laid-back, as you can snorkel in blue holes or shell hunt. Safaris are conducted daily between 8am and 5:30pm, costing adults $110 and kids ages 2 to 12 $55.

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Bahamia's Emerald Golf Course, the Mall South, at the Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino (✆ **242/350-7000**), was the site of The Bahamas National. Open some years back, and more recently, in conjunction with the Ruby course (see below), it's the site of the annual January Grand Bahama Pro-Am Tournament. The course has plenty of trees along the fairways, as well as an abundance of water hazards and bunkers. The toughest hole is the ninth, a par 5 with 545 yards from the blue tees to the hole. In winter, greens fees to either of these courses are $95 per day, reduced to $85 in summer.

The championship course **Bahamia's Ruby Golf Course,** Sunrise Highway, also at Royal Oasis Resort & Casino (✆ **242/350-7000**), received a major upgrade in 2001 by Jim Fazio Golf Design, Inc. The Ruby course was lengthened to increase the rating and to enhance play. A fully automated irrigation system was installed. For greens fees, see the Emerald Golf Course, above. It's a total of 6,750 yards if played from the championship blue tees.

Fortune Hills Golf & Country Club, Richmond Park, Lucaya (✆ **242/373-4500**), was originally intended to be an 18-hole course, but the back 9 were never completed. You can replay the front 9 for 18 holes and a total of 6,916 yards from the blue tees. Par is 72. Greens fees are $31 for 9 holes, $43 for 18. Electric carts cost $34 and $44 for 9 and 18 holes, respectively.

The best-kept and most-manicured course on Grand Bahama is the **Lucayan Park Golf & Country Club,** Lucaya Beach (✆ **242/373-1066**). Recently made over, it is quite beautiful and is known for a hanging boulder sculpture at its entrance. Greens are fast, and there are a couple of par 5s more than 500 yards long, totaling 6,824 yards from the blue tees and 6,488 from the whites. Par is 72. Greens fees are $65 for 18 holes. This includes a mandatory shared golf cart. We'll let you in on a secret: Even if you're not a golfer, sample the food at the club restaurant—everything from lavish champagne brunches to first-rate seafood dishes.

The first golf course to open in The Bahamas since 1969 made its premiere late in 2000. **The Reef Course** ★★ at Royal Palm Way, Lucaya (✆ **242/373-2002**), was designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., who called it "a bit like a Scottish course but a lot warmer." The course requires precise shot-making to avoid its numerous lakes: There is water on 13 of its 18 holes and various types of long grass swaying in the trade winds. The course boasts 6,920 yards of links-style playing grounds. Residents of Our Lucaya, with which

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the course is associated, pay $65 for 18 holes or $40 for 9 holes. Nonresidents are charged $120 for 18 holes, but the same price, $65, for 9 holes.

HORSEBACK RIDING

The **Pinetree Stables,** North Beachway Drive, Freeport (✆ **242/373-3600**), are the best riding stables in The Bahamas, superior to rivals on New Providence Island (Nassau). Pinetree offers trail rides to the beach in winter Tuesday through Sunday at 9am, 11:30am, and 2pm, but only at 9am and 11am off-season. The cost is $65 per person for a ride lasting 2 hours. No children under 8 are allowed. There is a 200-pound weight limit per person.

SEA KAYAKING

If you'd like to explore the waters off the island's north shore, call **Kayak Nature Tours** (✆ **242/373-2485**), who'll take you on trips through the mangroves, where you can see wildlife as you paddle along. The cost is $69 per person, and trips are offered daily from 9am to 4pm, with a meal included. Both single and double kayaks are used on these jaunts, and children must be at least 5 years of age.

SNORKELING & SCUBA DIVING

Serious divers are attracted to such Grand Bahama sites as the Wall, the Caves, Theo's Wreck, and Treasure Reef. Other sites frequented by UNEXSO include Spit City, Ben Blue Hole, and the Rose Garden. Keep in mind that UNEXSO's specialty is diving, while Paradise Watersports primarily entertains snorkelers.

Paradise Watersports, located at the Xanadu Beach Resort & Marina (✆ **242/352-2887**), offers a variety of activities. On the snorkeling trips, you cruise to a coral reef on a 14m (48-ft.) catamaran, "Lady Paradise." The cost is $30 per person. Kayaks rent for $8 for a half hour, $12 per hour, and water-skiing is priced at $20 for a 2.5km (1½-mile) ride. Parasailing costs $50 for a 5-minute ride. See "Boat Cruises," above, for their offerings.

Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO) ★★★ (✆ **888/365-3483** or 242/373-1250) is one of the premier dive outfitters in The Bahamas and the Caribbean. There are seven dive trips daily, including reef trips, shark dives, wreck dives, and night dives. This is also the only facility in the world where divers can dive with dolphins in the open ocean (see "The Dolphin Experience," above).

A popular 3-hour learn-to-dive course is offered daily. Over UNEXSO's 30-year history, more than 50,000 people have

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successfully completed this course. For $99, students learn the basics in UNEXSO's training pools. Then, the same day, they dive the beautiful shallow reef with their instructor.

6 Seeing the Sights

Several informative tours of Grand Bahama Island are offered. One reliable company is **H. Forbes Charter Services Ltd.,** the Mall at West Sunrise Highway, Freeport (✆ **242/352-9311;** www.forbescharter.com). From headquarters in the International Bazaar, this company offers half- and full-day bus tours. The most popular option is the half-day Super Combination Tour, priced at $35 per adult and $25 per child under 12. It includes guided visits to the botanical gardens, drive-through tours of residential areas and the island's commercial center, and stops at the island's deep-water harbor. Shopping and a visit to a wholesale liquor store are also included on the tour. Departures are Monday through Saturday at 9am and 1pm; the tour lasts 3½ hours.

See also "Beaches, Watersports & Other Outdoor Pursuits," above, for details on UNEXSO's Dolphin Experience, and "Shopping," below, for coverage of the International Bazaar and the Port Lucaya Marketplace.

Hydroflora Gardens At this artificially created botanical wonder, you can see 154 specimens of plants that grow in The Bahamas. A special section is devoted to bush medicine, which is widely practiced by Bahamians (who have been using herbs and other plants to cure everything from sunburn to insomnia since the native Lucayans were here centuries ago). A guided tour starts at 10:30am and costs $6 per person.

On East Beach at Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/352-6052.** Admission $3 adults, $1.50 children. Mon–Fri 9am–5:30pm; Sat 9am–4pm.

Lucayan National Park This 16-hectare (40-acre) park, filled with mangrove, pine, and palm trees, contains one of the loveliest, most secluded beaches on Grand Bahama, a long, wide, dune-covered stretch of sandy beach that you'll reach by following a wooden path winding through the trees. There's a coral reef offshore; bring your snorkeling gear along so you can glimpse the colorful creatures that live beneath these turquoise waters. As you wander through the park, you'll cross Gold Rock Creek, fed by a spring from what is said to be the world's largest underground freshwater cavern system. Two of the caves can be seen, because they were exposed when a portion

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of ground collapsed. The pools in the caves are composed of 2m (6 ft.) of freshwater atop a heavier layer of saltwater. Spiral wooden steps have been built down to the pools, and there are 36,000 passages in the cavern system.

The freshwater springs once lured native Lucayans, those Arawak-connected tribes who lived on the island and depended on fishing for their livelihood. They would come inland to get fresh water for their habitats on the beach. Lucayan bones and artifacts, such as pottery, have been found in the caves, as well as on the beaches.

Settlers Way ✆ **242/352-5438.** Admission $3; tickets available only at the Rand Memorial Nature Centre (see below). Daily 9am–4pm. Drive east along Midshipman Rd., passing Sharp Rock Point and Gold Rock.

Parrot Jungle's Garden of the Groves *Kids* One of the island's major attractions is this 12-acre garden, which honors its founder, Wallace Groves, and his wife, Georgette. Eleven kilometers (7 miles) east of the International Bazaar, this scenic preserve of waterfalls and flowering shrubs has some 10,000 trees. Tropical birds flock here, making this a lure for bird-watchers and ornithologists. There are free-form lakes, footbridges, ornamental borders, lawns, and flowers. Parrot Jungle of Miami, the new managers, have introduced a number of animals to the site, including macaws, cockatoos, pygmy goats, potbelly pigs, and American alligators. Other species introduced include the park's first Bahamian raccoons and the white-crowned pigeon, the latter on the endangered species list. The park also has a children's playground. A lovely little nondenominational chapel, open to visitors, looks down on the garden from a hill. **The Palmetto Café** (✆ **242/373-5668**) serves snacks and drinks, and a Bahamian straw market is located at the entrance gate.

Midshipman Rd. and Magellan Dr. ✆ **242/373-5668.** www.gardenofthegroves.com. Admission $9.95 adults, $6.95 children 3–10, free for children under 3. Garden daily 9am–4pm; Palmetto Café daily 9am–4pm.

Rand Memorial Nature Centre This 100-acre pineland sanctuary, located 3km (2 miles) east of the center of Freeport, is the regional headquarters of The Bahamas National Trust, a nonprofit conservation organization. Nature trails highlight native flora and "bush medicine" and provide opportunities for bird-watching; as you stroll, keep your eyes peeled for the lush blooms of tropical orchids or the brilliant flash of green and red feathers in the trees. Wild birds abound at the park, and a freshwater pond is home to a flock of West Indian pink flamingos, the national bird of The

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Bahamas. There is a bird-watching tour on the first Saturday of every month at 8am and a wildflower walk on the last Saturday of the month, also starting at 8am. Other features of the nature center include native animal displays, an education center, and a gift shop selling nature books and souvenirs.

E. Settlers Way. ✆ **242/352-5438.** Admission $5 adults, $3 children 5–12, free for children under 5. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm. Guided tours must call in advance to book.

7 Shopping

Shopping hours in Freeport/Lucaya are 9:30am to 3pm Monday through Thursday, 9:30am to 5pm on Friday. Many shops are closed on Saturday and Sunday. However, in the International Bazaar, hours vary widely. Most places there are open Monday through Saturday. Some begin business daily at 9:30am; others don't open until 10am, and closing time ranges from 5:30 to 6pm.

THE INTERNATIONAL BAZAAR

One of the world's most unusual shopping complexes, the International Bazaar, at East Mall Drive and East Sunrise Highway, covers 4 hectares (10 acres) in the heart of Freeport. Although it remains one of the most visited sites in The Bahamas, it frankly is a bit tarnished today and is due for a makeover. Looking better every day is its rising competitor, the Port Lucaya Marketplace (see below). There is a major bus stop at the entrance of the complex. Buses aren't numbered, but those marked INTERNATIONAL BAZAAR will take you right to the gateway. Visitors walk through the much-photographed Torii Gate, a Japanese symbol of welcome, into a miniature World's Fair setting (think of it as a kitschy Bahamian version of Epcot). Continental cafes and dozens of shops loaded with merchandise await visitors. The bazaar blends architecture and cultures from some 25 countries, each re-created with cobblestones, narrow alleys, and authentically reproduced architecture. True, it's more theme-park-style shopping than authentic Bahamian experience, but it's fun nevertheless. In the nearly 100 shops, you're bound to find something that is both unique and a bargain. Here you'll find African handcrafts, Chinese jade, British china, Swiss watches, Irish linens, and Colombian emeralds—and that's just for starters.

The **Straw Market,** next door to the International Bazaar, contains items with a special Bahamian touch—colorful baskets, hats, handbags, and place mats—all of which make good gifts or

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souvenirs from your trip. (Be aware that some items sold here are actually made in Asia.)

Here's a description of the various shops in the bazaar.

ART

Flovin Gallery This gallery sells original Bahamian and international art, frames, lithographs, posters, and Bahamian-made Christmas ornaments and decorated coral. It also offers handmade Bahamian dolls, coral jewelry, and other gift items. Another branch is at the Port Lucaya Marketplace (see below). In the Arcade section of the International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-7564.**

CRYSTAL & CHINA

Island Galleria There's an awesome collection of crystal here. Fragile, breakable, and beautiful, it includes works of utilitarian art in china and crystal by Waterford, Aynsley, Lenox, Dansk, and Swarovski. Anything you buy can be carefully packed and shipped. Another branch is located in the Port Lucaya Marketplace (✆ **242/373-8400**). International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-8194.**

FASHION

Cleo's Boutique This shop offers everything from eveningwear to lingerie, and all in between. A warm and inviting destination, Cleo's prides itself on capturing the Caribbean woman in all of her moods. You can also find a wide array of costume jewelry beginning at $25 per piece. International Bazaar. ✆ **242/351-3340.**

HANDICRAFTS & GIFTS

Bahamian Souvenir Outlet This place, just below the Ministry of Tourism, has lots of inexpensive souvenirs and gifts: the usual array of T-shirts, key rings, mugs, and all that stuff. International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-2947.**

Caribbean Cargo This is one of the island's best gift shops, specializing in such items as picture frames, candles, clocks, and clothes. In the Arcade section of the International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-2929.**

Far East Traders Look for Asian linens, hand-embroidered dresses and blouses, silk robes, lace parasols, smoking jackets, and kimonos here. There's also a branch location inside the Island Galleria at the Port Lucaya Marketplace. International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-9280.**

Paris in The Bahamas This shop contains the biggest selection of luxury goods under one roof in the International Bazaar. The staff wears couture black dresses like you might have expected in Paris,

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and everywhere there's a sense of French glamour and conspicuous consumption. There are both Gucci and Versace leather goods for men and women; crystal from Lalique, Baccarat, Daum, and Kosta Boda, and a huge collection of cosmetics and perfumes. International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-5380.**

Unusual Centre Where else can you get a wide array of items made of eel skin or goods made from exotic feathers such as peacock? There's another branch at the Port Lucaya Marketplace (✆ **242/352-3994**). International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-3994.**

JEWELRY

Colombian Emeralds International This is a branch of the world's foremost emerald jeweler, offering a wide array of precious gemstone jewelry and one of the island's best watch collections. Careful shoppers will find significant savings over U.S. prices. The outlet offers certified appraisals and free 90-day insurance. There are also two more branches at the Port Lucaya Marketplace (✆ **242/373-8400**). South American Section of the International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-5464.** www.dutyfree.com.

PERFUMES & FRAGRANCES

Les Parisiennes This outlet offers a wide range of perfumes, including the latest from Paris, and it also sells Lancôme cosmetics and skin-care products. There's a branch office at the Port Lucaya Marketplace (✆ **242/373-2974**). In the French section of the International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-5380.**

The Perfume Factory Fragrance of The Bahamas This is the top fragrance producer in The Bahamas. The shop is housed in a model of an 1800s mansion, in which visitors are invited to hear a 5-minute commentary and to see the mixing of fragrant oils. There's even a "mixology" department where you can create your own fragrance from a selection of oils. The shop's well-known products include Island Promises, Goombay, Paradise, and Pink Pearl (with conch pearls in the bottle). The shop also sells Guanahani, created to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first landfall, and Sand, the leading Bahamian-made men's fragrance. At the rear of the International Bazaar. ✆ **242/352-9391.** www.perfumefactory.com.

PORT LUCAYA MARKETPLACE

Port Lucaya Marketplace on Seahorse Road is a shopping and dining complex set on 2.4 hectares (6 acres). Free entertainment, such as steel-drum bands and strolling musicians, adds to a festival

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atmosphere. A boardwalk along the water makes it easy to watch the frolicking dolphins.

The complex rose on the site of a former Bahamian straw market, but the craftspeople and their straw products are back in full force after having been temporarily dislodged.

The waterfront location is a distinct advantage. Many of the restaurants and shops overlook a 50-slip marina, home of a "fantasy" pirate ship featuring lunch and dinner/dancing cruises. A variety of charter vessels are also based at the Port Lucaya Marina, and dockage at the marina is available to visitors coming by boat to shop or dine.

Bandolera The staff can be rather haughty here, but despite its drawbacks, this store carries a collection of chic women's clothing that's many, many cuts above the usual run of T-shirts and tank tops that are the norm within many of its competitors. Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-7691.**

Coconits by Androsia This is the Port Lucaya outlet of the famous batik house of Andros Island. Its designs and colors capture the spirit of The Bahamas. Fabrics are handmade on the island of Andros. The store sells quality, 100%-cotton resort wear, including simple skirts, tops, jackets, and shorts for women, and it also offers a colorful line of children's wear. Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8387.**

Flovin Gallery II This branch of the art gallery located in the Port Lucaya Marketplace sells a collection of oil paintings (both Bahamian and international), along with lithographs and posters. In its limited field, it's the best in the business. It also features a number of gift items, such as handmade Bahamian dolls, decorated corals, and Christmas ornaments. Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8388.**

Harley-Davidson of Freeport This is one of only two registered and licensed Harley outlets in The Bahamas. You can special-order a motorcycle if you feel flush with funds from a casino, but it's more likely that you'll content yourself with T-shirts, leather vests, belts, caps, sunglasses, and gift items. Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8269.**

Jeweler's Warehouse This is a place for bargain hunters looking for good buys on discounted, closeout 14-karat gold and gemstone jewelry. Discounts range up to 50%, but the quality of many of these items remains high. Guarantees and certified appraisals are possible. Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-8400.**

UNEXSO Dive Shop This is the premier dive shop of The Bahamas. It sells everything related to the water—swimsuits, wet

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suits, underwater cameras, and video equipment, shades, hats, souvenirs, state-of-the-art diver's equipment, and computers. Port Lucaya Marketplace. ✆ **242/373-1250.**

8 Grand Bahama After Dark

Many resort hotels stage their own entertainment at night, and these shows are open to the general public.

ROLLING THE DICE

Casino at Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya This is the newest and the best casino on the island, far exceeding the glamour of the rival casino in Freeport. The casino's 30 tables offer guests their choice of games, ranging from baccarat to Caribbean stud poker. Blackjack and roulette are also popular games of chance here; for the frugal gambler, some 400 slot machines await. The casino is open daily from 10am to 2am. Entrance is free. The Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya, Royal Palm Way. ✆ **242/373-1333.**

Royal Oasis Casino Most of the nightlife in Freeport/Lucaya centers around this glittering, giant, Moroccan-style palace, one of the largest casinos in The Bahamas and the Caribbean. Under this Moorish-domed structure, visitors play games of chance and attend Las Vegas–inspired floor shows. Open daily 10am to 2am. Entrance is free. In the Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino, the Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/350-7000.**

THE CLUB & BAR SCENE

Located in the center of the **Port Lucaya Marketplace** waterfront restaurant and shopping complex, **Count Basie Square** contains a vine-covered bandstand where the best live music on the island is performed on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings from about 7:30 to 8pm. And it's free! The square honors the "Count," who used to have a grand home on Grand Bahama. Steel bands, small Junkanoo groups, and even gospel singers from a local church are likely to be heard performing here, their voices or music wafting across the 50-slip marina. There are several bars in the complex where you can sip a beer or a tropical rum concoction. (See "Where to Dine," earlier in this chapter, for details on a few of these, including **Fatman's Nephew** and **Shenanigan's Irish Pub.**)

Club 2000/The Ruthnell Deck The setting is a sprawling green and white Bahamian-style house with a wraparound veranda, immediately adjacent to the International Bazaar. There's a large interior

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with a dance floor that offers a high-tech lighting system and lots of gyrating bodies, but lots of people gravitate to the wraparound deck, where beer and drinks are passed through open windows to the crowd outside. Frequent contests reward anyone who qualifies for the "sexiest black dress" or "most muscular male." It's open daily from 10pm until at least 2am. In the International Bazaar. ✆ **242/351-2692.** $10 cover for men only; women admitted free.

Holiday Inn SunSpree at the Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino Inside a formidable pile, this club offers some of the best live entertainment on the island. At the outdoorsy John B Lounge, live music is presented Wednesday through Monday. The bar lounge and adjoining dance club are open nightly from 9pm to 2am. Most visitors attend, however, for the Goombaya production on Tuesday and Saturday. If you want dinner and a show, arrive at 6:30pm; otherwise, showtime is at 7:30pm. The cost of both is $45.Or you can attend just to see the show, paying from $5 per drink. In the Royal Oasis Golf Resort & Casino, The Mall at W. Sunrise Hwy. ✆ **242/350-7000.**

Prop Club This sports bar and dance club is the most action-oriented of them all at Lucaya, and you can also dine here on hearty fare. Each night something different is happening: karaoke on Tuesday, Sumo wrestling on Wednesday, cultural show nights on Thursday, island "jam nights" on Friday, and '70s revival nights on Saturday. But also expect a "get down with the DJ" snooze-a-thon on Sundays, and game nights on slow Mondays. The highlight is the cultural show with a live Junkanoo finale. You can also dine here, enjoying the likes of beef and chicken fajitas and baby-back ribs, paying from $10 for a full meal. For decor, as the name suggests, remnants of an old airplane and antique propellers adorn the walls. Lunch is served daily from noon to 3pm and dinner daily 6 to 10:30pm, but the bar is open 11am to 2am. The Westin & Sheraton at Our Lucaya, Royal Palm Way. ✆ **242/373-1333.**