

The PADI Travel Network's Professional Guide to Diving...

BAHAMAS

Everything you need to know to book travel or to lead a group to this spectacular dive destination.



Sunset on Grand Bahamas' famed Lucayan Beach.

Photo by Al Hornsby

The Bahamas at a Glance.

By Ellen Sarbone

Lying close to the United States' Florida coast, the Bahamas is both an action-packed destination and an out-of-the-way tropical paradise. It's also casinos, duty-free shopping, sleepy little islands and glorious, pristine reefs. The many enchanting islands in this chain offer a myriad of choices for you and your dive group, both above and below the water.

Page 65 photo by Ellen Sarbone

The Bahamas is an independent nation of about 700 islands (30 are inhabited) with 2500 islets called "cays." The cays are strung out over 750 miles/1205 kilometres, and are only 50 miles/80 kilometres from Florida at the closest point.

With the world's third largest barrier reef, Bahamas diving can include beautiful, healthy reefs teeming with tropical fish, steep drop-offs, drift dives along the edge of the Continental Shelf, wrecks, blue holes, caverns, and specialty dives with dolphins and sharks. It is possible to see large pelagics like hammerheads, giant turtles, and whale sharks.

The two best-known islands, New Providence (Nassau) and Grand Bahama (Freeport), boast large hotels, casinos and shopping centers, plus restaurants and entertainment for every taste. The other islands, "The Out Islands" or "The Family Islands," are quieter, more remote, less populated, have quaint towns and miles of deserted beaches.

Going roughly from north to south, divers will be interested in the Abacos

— Walker's Cay, Green Turtle Cay and Marsh Harbour, Grand Bahama, Bimini and the Berry Islands, Andros, Eleuthera/Harbour Island, New Providence, Cat Island, San Salvador, Exuma and Long Island.

The dazzling waters in the Bahamas are usually clear, with ever-changing colors from cobalt blue to pale green. The average visibility is excellent (60-100 feet/20-30 metres in winter, 50-70 feet/15-20 metres in summer). Average winter water temperature is 73-75 degrees Fahrenheit/23-24 degrees Celsius, so a 3 mm (1/8 inch) wet suit is recommended. The water temperature is 85 degrees Fahrenheit/30 degrees Celsius in summer and a skin suit should be sufficient. A jacket is handy when the air is chilly (60-80 degree Fahrenheit/16-27 degrees Celsius from September to May). Summer air temperature is around 90 degrees Fahrenheit/32 degrees Celsius.

There are now three hyperbaric facilities on the islands. UNEXSO operates one on Grand Bahama. The second is at Club Med Columbus Isle on San Salvador. The third is operated by the U.S. Navy on Andros.

Overview of Bahamas Diving

Bahamas diving is special because of three unique features. The Gulf Stream provides clear water that brings in some of the larger fish. The Bahamas Banks, which are shallow, sandy plateaus with an average depth of 20 feet/6 metres, are fertile breeding and feeding grounds for an abundance of marine life. Finally, the Bahamas Trenches are areas of very deep water that also keep the water clear and provide exciting wall diving.

Other features beckoning divers to the Bahamas are the blue holes on Andros, Exuma and New Providence. It is fascinating diving and swimming with dolphins on Grand Bahama (wild dolphin encounters may occur anywhere in the Bahamas), and shark dives on Grand Bahama, New Providence, and Long Island are also thrilling.

Vigorous, healthy reefs covered with flourishing corals of all varieties are accessible, as are many of the following inhabitants or visitors: schools of grunts, snappers, and jacks; queen, black and gray angels; green and spotted moray eels; triggerfish; trumpetfish; goatfish; tangs; cowfish and boxfish; lobsters and an assortment of iridescent smaller fish too numerous to list. Then there are the occasional big guys — black-tipped Caribbean reef sharks, hammerheads, silky sharks, whale sharks, nurse sharks, manta rays, large spotted eagle rays and sting rays, barracuda, huge black and Nassau groupers, dolphins, amberjacks, pompano, and giant 100-year-old turtles.

Individual Islands

Grand Bahama

It has a highly developed infrastructure, many activities for tourists, and cultural roots that go back to the Lucayan Indians and Loyalist settlers during the U.S. revolution.

Diving. Grand Bahama is characterized by prolific marine life, deep

channels with dramatic drop-offs and visiting pelagics. *Picasso's Gallery* is mostly sand with scattered coral heads at 45 feet/14 metres, and *Ann's Paradise* features excellent coral formations, swim-throughs and the potential to see big sharks at 60 feet/18 metres, both are good sites for training and practicing skills.

Some of the best sites for photography are *Theo's Wreck*, the *Dolphin Dive*, and the *Shark Junction*. *Theo's*, a steel freighter in 100 feet/30 metres, is a guided dive. It has resident green and spotted morays, schools of yellowtail snapper, gray angels, and possibly lobsters as you swim through parts of the superstructure. The *Dolphin Dive* takes place on a sandy bottom with isolated coral heads at 50 feet/15 metres. Divers kneel in a semicircle as trainers bring two Atlantic bottlenose dolphins to the site for interaction and photo shots. Each diver has a chance to swim with a dolphin. The *Shark Junction*, also carefully orchestrated, lasts about 30 minutes and affords an opportunity to photograph 10-15 Caribbean reef sharks as they swoop past to be hand

play golf. Shopping, dining, and nightlife are centered at the International Bazaar and Port Lucaya. The latter has live bands and outdoor entertainment. It's home to Club Estee Disco, Luciano's Gourmet Restaurant, The Brass Helmet (above UNEXSO), and Lionel's friendly, reasonably priced Bahamian Restaurant. The Safari Lounge is another lively disco.

Bimini

Closest to the U.S., Bimini retains its remote, relaxed, character. Actually two islands, South Bimini is small, mostly agricultural, with one hotel, a small airstrip, and water taxi transfers to the main island (North Bimini).

Diving. Bimini draws divers with its sheer number of fish and other marine life. "Popcorn Coral" reefs, the same type as the patch reefs in Andros and Grand Bahama, have sandy channels between prolific coral outcroppings covered with sponges. Besides the multitude of grunts, snappers, jacks, and goatfish, larger animals seen here include: sharks, amberjacks, barracudas, spotted eagle



Photo by Al Hornsby

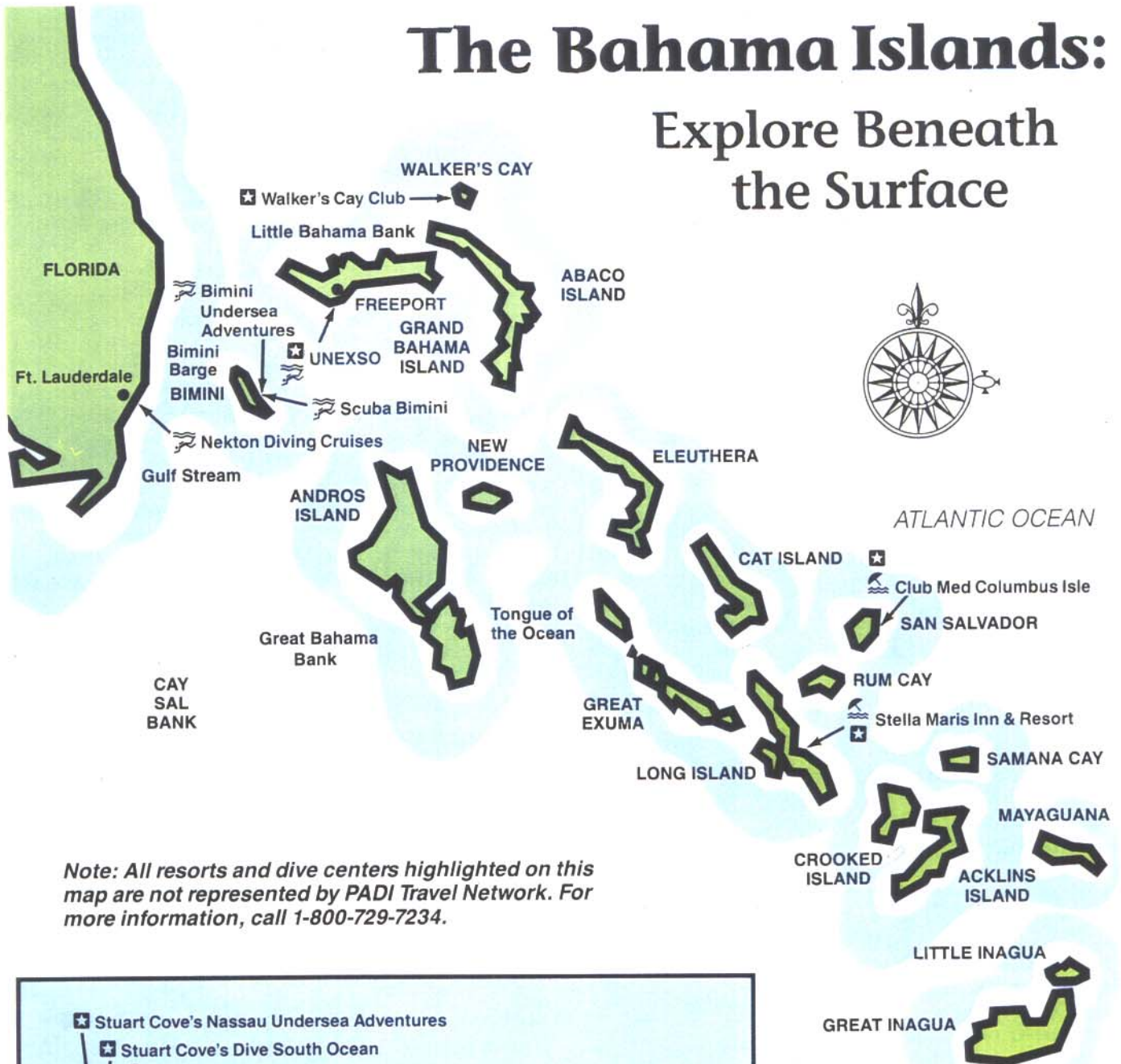
fed by a divemaster in chain mail suit. After swimming over a lush reef to a sandy site in 45 feet/14 metres, divers line up in front of an old recompression chamber to watch the feeding frenzy. Huge groupers and swarms of yellowtail snappers vie with other predators for the food.

On Land. Explore deserted beaches or

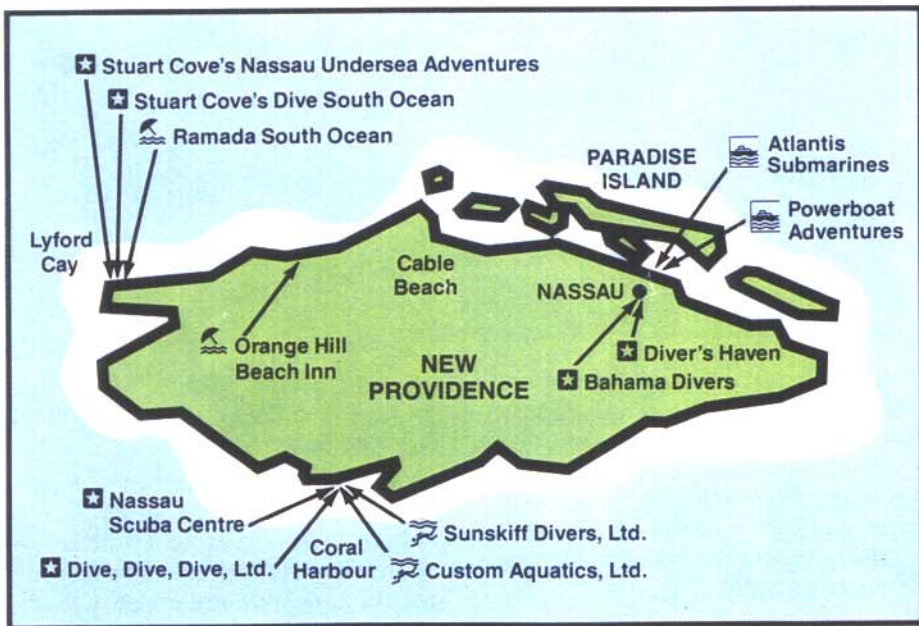
rays, pompanos, permits, tuna, large triggers, and the game fish for which Bimini is famous.

Moray Alley reef starts at 55 feet/17 metres, sloping to a sandy plateau at 77 feet/23 metres, with sand channels between 12-18 feet/4-5 metres high coral pinnacles. A huge porcupine pufferfish, spotted moray

The Bahama Islands: Explore Beneath the Surface



Note: All resorts and dive centers highlighted on this map are not represented by PADI Travel Network. For more information, call 1-800-729-7234.



- ★ PRA MEMBERS
- 🤿 PTN ASSOCIATES
- 🤿 PIRA MEMBERS
- 🚢 OTHER ACTIVITIES

eel, queen angels, and schools of amberjacks, barjacks, and snappers are commonly seen at this site. *The Strip* is a 50 by 70 yard strip/46 by 64 metres of reef at 35-45 feet/11-14 metres. Being the only coral in the area, it's rife with scorpionfish, lobsters, a resident nurse shark and green moray at the north end, groupers, ocean triggers, stingrays, jacks, and schools of grunts, yellow-tails and goatfish.

Rainbow Reef is a great dive in 25-30 feet/8-9 metres, again with many large animals like nurse sharks, jacks, rays and groupers. The *Bimini Barge Wreck* is close to the drop-off and the Gulf Stream on a permanent mooring at depth of 75 feet/23 metres. Divers dump out all their air before entering the water and pull themselves all the way

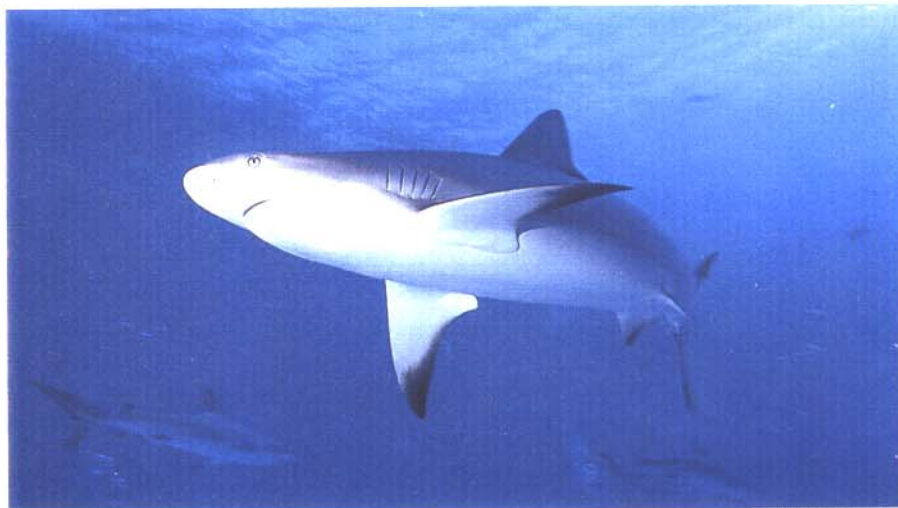


Photo by Al Hornsby

down (and back up) the line. Below the main decks, are schools of permit, pompano, horse-eye jacks, and barjacks. Further south are *Victory*

Reef and Tuna Alley, requiring good weather conditions to dive their drop-offs and caverns, which swarm with fish at 40-90 feet/12-27 metres. A unique dive found only in Bimini is *Atlantis or Bimini Road*. It's a long, double line of large rocks close to the north shore in 17 feet/5 metres.

On Land. There's a lot to do while meandering from one end of Alice Town to the other. Several hotels afford a range of accommodations. Big game fishing, popularized by Ernest Hemingway, is still prevalent. Bimini Big Game Club and Hotel is the center of these activities, hosting several Billfish Tournaments a year. You can rent kayaks or windsurfers as a break from diving, or hire a bonefish guide to go bonefishing or to the Healing Hole, a deep hole hidden amid shallow mangrove swamps.

Restaurants abound in Bimini. At the upper end of the scale are Bimini Big Game Club and the romantic, gourmet ambiance of Bimini Bay Restaurant (in a former mansion on the north shore, transportation for the 10 minute ride is provided). The Anchorage and Red Lion are in the middle range, with many local eateries like Captain Bob's, Bimini Breeze, C J's Deli, and a decent pizza place at the south end. Nightlife consists of bar hopping between The Compleat Angler, The End of the World bar, Sand Bar, and Star Sea View Disco. They have live bands and dancing several nights a week.

New Providence (Nassau)

Nassau is the seat of government

BAHAMAS

PADI Retail Association

5★ BAHAMA DIVERS (1976) LIMITED S-2299
IDC PO Box 5004

Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas
(809) 393-5644 Fax: (809) 393-6078

Club Med Columbus Isle S-2797
San Salvador, Bahamas
(809) 331-2000 Fax: (809) 331-2222

Dive, Dive, Dive, Ltd. S-1937
PO Box N-8050, Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 362-1143 Fax: (809) 362-1994

5★ NASSAU DIVE SUPPLY/
IDC **dba DIVERS HAVEN S-1002**

PO Box N1658, East Bay Street
Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 393-0869 Fax: (809) 393-3695

Nassau Scuba Centre S-2260
Coral Harbor Beach Club
PO Box CB11863, Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 362-1964 Fax: (809) 362-1964

Stella Maris Inn & Resort S-1005
1100 Lee Wagener Blvd, Suite 319
Ft Lauderdale, FL 33315
(809) 336-2016 Fax: (305) 359-8238

5★ STUART COVE'S DIVE SOUTH OCEAN S-1875
IDC

PO Box CB11697 Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 362-4391 Fax: (809) 362-5227

Stuart Cove's Nassau Undersea Adventures
S-1540
PO Box POCB-11697, Nassau Bahamas
(809) 362-4171 Fax: (809) 362-7528

UNEXSO S-2088
Box F-2433, Freeport, Bahamas
(809) 373-1244 Fax: (809) 373-8956

Walker's Cay Club S-3151
700 SW 34th Street
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33315
(809) 352-5252 Fax: (305) 359-1414

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Club Med Columbus Isle S-2797
San Salvador, Bahamas
(809) 331-2000 Fax: (809) 331-2222

Orange Hill Beach Inn
P.O. Box N-8583, Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 327-7157 Fax (809) 327-5186

Ramada South Ocean
Adelaide Road, South Ocean
New Providence, Bahamas
(809) 362-4391 Fax (809) 362-4728

Stella Maris Inn & Resort S-1005
1100 Lee Wagener Blvd, Suite 319
Ft Lauderdale, FL 33315
(809) 336-2016 Fax: (305) 359-8238

PADI International Resort Association

Bimini Undersea Adventures S-13649
PO Box 21623, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33335
Alicetown, Bimini, Bahamas
(800) 327 8150 (809) 347-3089
Fax: (809) 347 3079

Custom Aquatics Ltd R-16543
PO Box CB11411
Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 362-1492 Fax: (809) 362-1942

Nekton Diving Cruises R-16492
1057 SE 17th St, Suite 202
Ft Lauderdale, FL 33316
(305) 463-9324 Fax: (305) 463-8938

Scuba Bimini R-16546
1100 Lee Wagner Blvd #13
Ft Lauderdale, FL 33315
(305) 359-2705 Fax: (305) 359-2707

Sunskiff Divers, Ltd. R-11987
PO Box N-142, Nassau, Bahamas
800 548-8570 Fax: (809) 362 1979

UNEXSO S-2088
Box F-2433, Freeport, Bahamas
(809) 373-1244 Fax: (809) 373-8956

Other Activities

Atlantis Submarines
PO. Box CB10955
Cable Beach Shopping Center
Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 356-3842 Fax (809) 356-2837

Powerboat Adventures
PO Box N 4855, Nassau, Bahamas
(809) 327-5385 Fax: (809) 322-4527

For a complete list of PADI Dive Centers, write, call or fax:
1251 East Dyer Road #100 • Santa Ana, CA 92705-5605 USA
(714) 540-7234 • FAX (714) 540-2609

and New Providence is the best-known island.

Diving. The best diving is on the southwest side where the wall is closest to shore and 6000 feet/1825 metres deep. *Tongue of the Ocean* offers spectacular drops decorated with colorful sponges and networks of tunnels visited by pelagics like

shelf dive. Starting at 45 feet/14 metres, the wall drops to a sand patch where a big coral head rises from the shelf. Look for green morays, sharks, large groupers and spotted eagle rays here. *Southwest Reef* is about 1½ miles/2 kilometres long at a depth of 15-35 feet/4-11 metres. Covered with elkhorn and huge star coral, you're likely to see

newer divers because they're near the sand flats of the Bahamas Banks and have lots of small tropicals. Wrecks feature abundant fish life and make good wide-angle photo subjects. The steamship *Mahoney* is perfect for mixed groups. *Deep Mahoney* reaches 100 feet/30 metres, while *Shallow Mahoney* sits at 30-40 feet/9-12 metres. A most



The chain-mail suited shark feeder at Shark Junction.

Photo by Al Hornsby

sharks, dolphinfish, and rainbow runners. The northern side, near Nassau, can be affected by winds and features shallow reefs with schools of fish, shipwrecks, and a blue hole.

With the top of the wall starting at 40 feet/12 metres, diving is perfect for groups with varied abilities. Experienced divers in buddy teams can dive the wall while open water training is conducted with beginners. *Hole in the Wall* is a large coral pinnacle in 110 feet/33 metres, which has a hole through it at 105 feet/32 metres where sharks and large black groupers swim around together with queen and gray angels, trumpetfish, plus the usual assortment of jacks and grunts. Nearby, the *Pinnacle* is a

hammerhead and whale sharks between February and April.

Shark dives are a great attraction on New Providence. Shark dive sites include *Shark Buoy*, *Shark Wall*, *Shark Runway* and *Shark Arena*. The *Arena* is near the edge of the wall in 50 feet/15 metres. It's a sandy area with scattered coral heads forming a sort of amphitheater. The feeder, in a chain mail suit, uses a long pole. Besides the 10 or more Caribbean reef sharks, the feed attracts black groupers, schools of yellowtail snapper, "Bandit," a small nurse shark, and a large green moray that occasionally rushes in to steal a morsel of bait.

Fish Hotel and *Barracuda Shoals*, in 25 feet/8 metres, are good for

impressive dive, the *Lost Blue Hole* is a massive circular opening (100 feet/30 metres in diameter) in a white sand bottom at 45 feet/14 metres. Isolated coral heads around the perimeter sport communities of Nassau grouper, morays and other creatures. Several PADI Dive Centers dive this site, but only on certain days, so be sure to check in advance.

On Land. There aren't enough hours in your trip to cover all the options on this island. Try excellent restaurants like the elegant 5-star Graycliff, or the appealing Tamarind Hill in Nassau. Atlantis Submarines is a different way for the whole family to visit the deep, and sightseeing choices include Coral World marine park, several forts, Ardastra Gardens and the Zoo.

You can also explore uncrowded beaches in Coral Harbour, go to the Exuma Cays for a full day of snorkeling and adventure or shop at the Straw Market. Liquor, perfume and cameras are sold duty free, but check prices at home before leaving to know if you're really saving money. Nightlife includes elaborate shows and casinos on Paradise Island and Cable Beach, discos, Bahamian bands and star gazing.

San Salvador

The small island (6 by 12 miles/10 by 19 kilometres) where Columbus made his first landfall has excellent diving on healthy reefs and walls. Until last year, it had only one dedicated dive resort.

Diving. Many of the dive sites have moorings installed to protect the

reefs. The best diving is on the south side where the south-facing wall starts at 45 feet/14 metres. Expect numerous swim-throughs exiting on the wall, plentiful deep-water gorgonians and black coral, an amazing variety of fish, plus excellent chances of sighting large pelagics.

North Pole Cave, Devil's Claw, and Hole in the Wall are near one another and somewhat alike. The first is a narrow hole at 60 feet/18 metres, increasing to a cavern at 90 feet/27 metres, then exiting on a sheer cliff at 120-130 feet/36-40 metres. The second site consists of three deep gorges in the face of an east-west wall with perpendicular pillar coral ridges jutting out into the ocean and forming swim-throughs. The third is a hole that drops from 40-80 feet/12-24 metres. The upwelling from the caves brings rich plankton and more schools of fish than at any other site.

They include chubbs, goatfish, jacks, and hammerheads in the winter. Huge coral heads (some of the most beautiful on the island) soar at 120-160 feet/36-49 metres, while schooling hammerheads may circle an 80 feet/24 metres high underwater island.

Also in this area, *Telephone Pole, Shark Alley, and Gardner's* all feature tunnels, caverns, grottos, and sheer drops; a lush mix of soft and hard corals, gorgonians, tube sponges and black coral; and the greatest likelihood of seeing sharks, manta rays and turtles.

On Land. Perhaps the most low-key island, it rivals Andros for the "most laid back" title. Resort guests usually stay on the property for their activities and entertainment. A band performs Wednesday nights at the Riding Rock Inn and most people on

Dive Centers / Resorts	DSD available	Boat Operation Hotels Served	AOW/OW referral	Dive Op.			Pkg. Incl.			Rental			Types of Dives							
				Boat capacity	Number boats operated	Use dive computers	Wet suits	BCDs	Regulators	Dive computers	Cameras	U/W video cameras	2-tank morning	2-tank afternoon	1-tank morning	1-tank afternoon	Shore diving	Night diving	Wreck diving	Wall diving
Bahama Divers ☉	X	All hotels on Paradise Island	X	15	3	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Bimini Undersea Adventures ❖	X		X	20	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
Club Med - Columbus Isle ☉			X	30	2	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X			X
Custom Aquatics, Ltd. ❖	X		X	8	1	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dive, Dive, Dive, Ltd. ☉	X	Radison, Crystal Palace, Ambassador All Paradise Island Hotels	X	20	3	X	X	X	X	X		X	X				X	X	X	X
Diver's Haven ☉	X		X	15	4	X	X	X	X			X		X		X	X	X	X	X
Nassau Scuba Centre ☉	X	Orange Hill Beach Inn, Le Meridien	X	25	5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Nekton Diving Cruises ❖	X		X	34	1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Scuba Bimini ❖	X	South Bimini Yacht Club, Diandria's Inn, Bimini Bay	X	20	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stella Maris Inn & Resort ☉			X	12	4		X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	
Stuart Cove's Dive South Ocean ☉	X	Ramada South Ocean Golf and Beach Resort	X	20	5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Stuart Cove's Nassau Undersea Adventures ☉			X	20	5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Sunskiff Divers, Ltd. ❖			X	5	2	X	X	X	X			X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO) ❖	X	Princess Resorts, Radisson, Atlantic Beach Lucayan Beach, Port Lucaya Resort & Yacht Center	X	15	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		
Walker's Cay Hotel and Marina ☉	X	Walkers Cay Hotel	X	40	2	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X

☉ = PADI Retail Association

❖ = PADI International Resort Association



Photo by Al Hornsby

the island will stop by. Bicycles are available for exploring the settlement of Cockburn Town, which consists of a few small stores, a pharmacy (the largest, most modern building in town), the Palm Tree Restaurant and Bar, The Three Ships Restaurant, and two night spots — Harlem Square Club and Ocean View.

This extraordinary destination offers exciting dive sites along with

exquisite scenery and activities. Any dive trip to the Bahamas should include at least one of the Out Islands with Grand Bahama or New Providence.

Bahamian Facts

- Peak tourist season is June, July and March (spring break).

- Electrical outlets and current are 120 volt/60 cycles.
- Vehicles drive on the left side of the road.
- The Bahamian dollar and U.S. dollar are freely interchangeable and equal in value.
- Public telephones use U.S. quarters.
- Restaurants may automatically apply a 15% tip charge to the bill.

