

10C ★ (S, ★, 12C, F-8B, R-7B, R/W, G-11B)

# Out-islands provide a tranquil alternative

## No casinos, high-rises dot the Bahamas' 'other side'

**MARSH HARBOUR, BAHAMAS** — Follow the airport road to the only stoplight on the Abacos. Don't ask the name of the intersection, just turn right on "the road to Marsh Harbour." If you are looking for the center of town, you just passed it. Ahead, sailboats clutter the shoreline from the Conch Inn past Bahamas Yachting Service docks to the Marsh Harbour Marina.



**1-of-a-kind traveler**  
**Iris Jones**  
contributing travel editor

If you have visited Nassau or Freeport, you might think that the Bahamas are made up of high-rise hotels and casinos, with sand and straw markets on the side. But New Providence and Grand Bahama are only two of the 700 Bahamas islands. The 680 out-islands, some just big enough to provide a landing strip for seagulls, are a much more personal experience.

On out-islands like Great Abaco, there is absolutely nothing to do, unless you like sunbathing, sailing, historic sea towns and people.

The Abacos, dominated by Great Abaco, cover 640 square miles with 8,000 people in 20 communities on seven islands. They are less than 200 miles from Fort Lauderdale, so most of the 80,000 annual tourists come from Florida; many have second homes here. Canadians are also plentiful among permanent residents.

Many of these homes are for rent when owners are absent, especially in Marsh Harbour; 20 minutes ferry ride away in Hope Town or Man-of-War Cay; or 50 miles north on Treasure Cay or Green Turtle Cay.

**TREASURE CITY** is reputed to have the most complete all-around resort in the out-islands, but ground transportation is so expensive here that resort lovers, especially golfers, fly directly into the Treasure Cay airport.

The rest of us putter along, on island time, in Marsh Harbour and its "suburb," Freeport. If you are still on mainland time when you pass the harbour, you could easily blink your eyes and miss the yellow stucco walls of Conch Inn, but the locals don't miss it. They eat grouper and conchburgers with beer in the Conch Crawl restaurant.

A clean room in the Conch Inn, with sailboat mats for a skyline, costs \$50 for two. You can also rent a large room with small kitchen in a nice old home called the Loftly Fly across the street for about \$390 a week.

We go on half a mile, past the new time-share condos, Abaco Towns by the Sea, sometimes for beach by the week, to the Great Abaco Beach Hotel, a contemporary motel and dining room with a decent sand beach on the ocean side of the peninsula. It runs \$70 for two in season.

Owner Leonard Thompson is a quiet man full of wonderful stories. His family goes back to those first loyalist settlers who fled the American Revolution. He pioneered air travel to the is-

lands, helped found the resort at Treasure Cay and will gladly tell you about his first and last boar hunt, an activity still possible for hardy visitors to the island.

BY NOW, you've seen all the accommodations in Marsh Harbour except the Ambassador Hotel in the adjacent black community of Dundas Town, where owner Percy Archer is said to cook the best crawfish in town. Dundas Town is also home to Mother Meri's, a small green wooden restaurant, where you can drink at the bar while Meri Williams makes the best conch fritters in the Bahamas.

After all that hearty eating, you'll want to rest a bit before going to sea, either on a ferry to Hope Town or Man-of-War Cay, or on a sailboat. There are among the most protected sailing waters in the world, with good anchorage every five or six miles. Small cays form a barrier reef for 100 miles from Little Harbour northeast to Walkers Cay, at the northern tip of the chain.

Man-of-War Cay, boat-building capital of the Bahamas, reminds me of Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, except Mystic is a restored 19th-century sailing town, now a museum, and this is the real living thing. The boats are contemporary wood and fiberglass, most built by one member or another of the Albury family.

**SAILMAKER** Norman Albury has retired, but Patricia Albury sells bags and other canvas totes in his old shop. Edwin Albury makes fiberglass boats and owns the repair yards. Willard makes wooden runabouts, and Joe Albury designs and builds the Man-of-War dinghy.

Our Morgan 41 from Bahamas Yachting Service is explained by Robin Sweeting, whose family have lived on Man-of-War Cay for centuries; all his cousins and uncles are Alburys.

Robin sails us from Man-of-War across the Sea of Abaco, past the Elbow Cay Beach Inn and the candy-striped lighthouse to Hope Town. A wide concrete highway leads from the Hope Town wharf past pink and white clapboard houses, on past the renovated Hope Town Harbour Lodge to the tip of the island, where the graves of early settlers lie gently over the sea.

Next week: North to Treasure Cay and Green Turtle Cay, where they are planning the 1983 bicentennial of loyalist settlers who fled here after the American Revolution.



The Abacos, Bahamas out-islands, offer plenty of beaches like the one pictured above where you can toast your skin a golden brown. Or you can go to Mother Meri's in Dundas Town, where Meri Williams (right) makes the best conch fritters in the Bahamas.



The 680 Bahamas out-islands, some just big enough to provide a landing strip for seagulls, provide a very personal experience for the adventurous tourist. On out-islands like Great Abaco there is absolutely nothing to do, unless you like sunbathing, sailing, and historic sea towns.

## Tourism industry king in the Bahamas

The Royal Bahamas Police Force Band makes a sea of red and white helmets in the corner of the grand ballroom as convention delegates wait for the arrival of the Honorable Lynden O. Findling, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

We often scoff at ceremony, but it is goose-bump time when the glorious band plays the Canadian, American and Bahamian national anthems, and Bishop William Johnson gives the invocation in his soft island voice.

That Bahamian sound, with the educated clarity of the British and the rhythm of the islands, is the sound of the officials who follow. As his ministers speak, the P.M. sits quietly at the center of the podium, his face harder to read than the others. He has heard all these speeches before.

Findling took the country into independence in 1973 and was re-elected this year for the fourth time. When he speaks you understand at once that his deep vibrating voice, with its cultivated accents, is one of his treasures.

Tourism is the No. 1 industry, followed by banking and agriculture, in the Bahamas; the islands have the highest per-capita income from tourism in the world, \$2,485 per person. Seventy percent of the gross national product is from tourism. Two-thirds of the population is directly or indirectly involved in tourism.

Your tourist dollar is important to "an archipelago which begins some 50 miles off the coast of Florida and curves in a graceful arc almost to the coast of Hispaniola," and Findling knows it.

His government is working now towards that moment, 10 years away, when the Bahamas celebrate the 300th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first landfall on tiny San Salvador Island. They are already the leading cruise ship destination for tourists from North and South America and are working towards two million visitors a year.

"Today there are some 12,000 traditional hotel rooms in the Bahamas and another 1,000 self-catering condominiums, cottages and time-sharing facilities. In 10 years, we expect to add 3,000 more," Findling said.

"Now that casinos in our country are Bahamian owned, the government has decided to use them more effectively as an engine for resort development. Bahamians will now be permitted to work as croupiers and training programs towards this end will begin shortly."

Findling says that new casinos are scheduled for both Nassau, Freeport and the out-islands, and that the main thrust of tourist development will be in the out-islands.

"There have been voices, heard in some developing nations, which question the wisdom of heavy reliance upon tourism as a tool of development. Tourism is today one of the fastest-growing industries in the world," Findling said.

The P.M. noted that bauxite or other industrial products may come and go, but that "people will always want to travel and meet other people." So far in the Bahamas, political stability and the charming island people have made tourism a successful operation for both the islander and the tourist.

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## Out-island sailors can rent yachts in Abaco

Abaco's three yacht-chartering companies now offer more than 80 sailing yachts to boaters. The yachts can be chartered as "bareboats" or with captains and with full or partial provisions.

Bahamas Yachting Services, the largest of the three, located in the Marsh Harbour area, has acquired six Gulfstar long-range motor cruisers to phase out six 30-foot trawlers. The cruisers are live-aboard power yachts for powerboat enthusiasts. BYS president Bill DeMoraville said.

BYS has several dozen sailboats in its charter fleet. Another dozen sailboats ranging from 33 to 41 feet are also available at Marsh Harbour Marina, directly across from the Conch Inn.

In nearby Hope Town, Abaco Bahamas Charters offers day-sailing packages and combination land-sea vacations in conjunction with the Hope Town Harbour Lodge. ABC has been in operation since 1965, making it the oldest charter company.

At two Abaco islands, boat-building skills that once turned out tall ships now are used to maintain and repair hundreds of smaller vessels.

Three Man-of-War Cay and Green Turtle Cay, where most traditional schooners were built in the last century, carpenters, mechanics and painters do a wide variety of repairs and total maintenance on both small and large boats.

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