

Biminis, Berry Islands & Andros



These three island groups on the western side of the Bahamas make up a little piece of heaven for anglers, divers and explorers.

Just 50 miles east of Miami (the city's glow can be seen at night) and 120 miles northwest of Nassau, the Biminis, or 'islands in the stream,' were made famous by Ernest Hemingway in his novel of that name. The Gulf Stream brings marlin close to shore, making sportfishing visitors an economic mainstay of the islands. Hemingway fished, fought and caroused in the Biminis during the mid-1930s, and became the first vice president of the International Game Fishing Association (IGFA), which heralded the start of modern-day game fishing around the world. Since then, four out of the six IGFA world records have been made in Bimini waters.

Divers can enjoy the company of rare Atlantic spotted dolphins here, while at Andros, the vast 140-mile-long barrier reef lies a couple of miles offshore. The Great Bahama Bank's scary 6000ft drop-off in the Tongue of the Ocean canyon harbors some amazing marine life.

On Andros, bird-watchers, hikers and those who want the untrodden path have 2300 sq miles of wilderness to explore, while anglers can head to the island's bights or boneflats.

The Berry Islands sit closest to Nassau, on a plateau rising between the Northwest Providence Channel (to the north) and the Tongue of the Ocean (to the south). There, birds outnumber humans, and it's possible to find a deserted cay where your cares will disperse in the wind.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the glorious Andros seas off the wall of the third-longest **coral reef** (p135) in the world
- Hike through the unspoilt forests of Andros while avoiding mythical **chickarnies** (p135)
- Toast hard-living Hemingway, before kicking up your heels to rake 'n' scrape music at North Bimini's **Compleat Angler Hotel** (p131)
- Dive with **wild dolphins** (p129) in the Bimini seas, on the mammals' terms
- Follow in Martin Luther King's footsteps and bathe in the waters of North Bimini's **Healing Hole** (p127)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 242

■ POPULATION: 9858

■ AREA: 2321 SQ MILES

BIMINIS

pop 1736

Big-game fishing devotees in the know have headed to North and South Bimini for decades, and are a mainstay of the local economy, as are the less-welcome rowdy US college students living large during spring break.

Scuba divers are also lured to these small islands' sunken Spanish galleons and the wreck of a WWI freighter. Then there's the underwater Bimini Road, claimed to be part of the lost city of Atlantis; the famous Bimini Wall, plummeting over 4000ft; and a unique opportunity to dive with wild Atlantic spotted dolphins in the open ocean.

There is a lot of mystery on these 9 sq miles of land: the Healing Hole and Memory Ledge in particular are immersed in it. And for more earthly pursuits, there are Hemingway's still-great haunts; this man certainly knew his bars!

North Bimini's unpretentious Alice Town is the center of activity, with the most beautiful beach in Bimini Bay, while the less-

developed South Bimini has long been favored by Americans, who fly or boat in to their weekend island homes.

History

Pirates like Henry Morgan thought the Biminis a splendid lair from which to pounce on treasure fleets, while the five founding families here in 1835 were licensed wreckers – 'rescuing' ships and their cargoes. Later Biminites tried the more honest occupation of sponging, which thrived until a decimating blight in the 1930s. Prohibition in the 1920s boosted the Biminis' economy (if not reputation) when Alice Town became the export capital for illegal Scotch whisky runs into the US.

Ernest Hemingway (see the boxed text, p129) briefly made the Biminis his summer home. Other infamous visitors included Howard Hughes, Richard Nixon and Adam Clayton Powell Jr (New York congressman and Harlem preacher), who arrived with his mistress. Back in 1987, US presidential contender Gary Hart's aspirations were sunk when he was spotted here cavorting with a woman who was not his wife – on a yacht appropriately named *Monkey Business!*

In ensuing decades the Biminis became a major stopover for drug shipments. The work of the US and Bahamian authorities continues; in June 2004 the US attorney general announced the smashing of an international cocaine-trafficking network, in which Bahamians were arrested in the Biminis, New Providence and Eleuthera.

The Biminis have been featured in films such as *Cocoon* and *Silence of the Lambs*.

Getting There & Around

Most visitors fly into the Biminis, while others arrive by mail boat. The Biminis are served by two airports: **Bimini Seaplane Landing** (NSB) at Alice Town, North Bimini, and **South Bimini Airport** (BIM; ☎ 242-347-3101) on South Bimini.

The following airlines fly between the Biminis and other Bahamian islands.

Bahamasair (UP; ☎ 242-377-5505, Freeport ☎ 242-352-8341; www.bahamasair.com; hubs Nassau & Freeport) Includes some flights to the Berry Islands, but schedules are variable.

Chalk's Ocean Airways (OP; ☎ 1-800-424-2557, 242-363-3114; www.flychalks.com; hubs Paradise Island Nassau & Fort Lauderdale) Uses the seaplane landing.

Major's Air Services (☎ 242-352-5778; www.thebahamasguide.com/majorair; hubs Grand Bahama & Eleuthera)

Tropical Diversions Air (US ☎ 954-921-9084; www.tropicaldiversions.com/air-charter.htm) Flies from Fort Lauderdale on charter only.

Western Air (☎ 242-329-4000; fax 242-329-3167; hubs Andros & Nassau)

One-way fares include South Bimini Airport flights to Nassau (\$65, twice daily) and South Bimini Airport flights to Freeport (\$70, once daily).

With only one compact settlement on North Bimini, feet are the main transportation for getting around, although bicycles and golf carts are easily hired for longer excursions.

NORTH BIMINI

This skinny island stretches for almost 7 miles before fanning out into a quilt work of mangrove swamps and fishing flats. A narrow sliver of lovely white sand, shaded by palm and pine trees, colors the edge of the eastern ocean shore. The beaches are generally prettier to the north, with the most beautiful being Bimini Bay, but take your mosquito spray along.

The only settlement is unassuming Alice Town (population 950), at the south end of the island. King's Hwy, the main street, runs along the inner shore, while Queen's Hwy, a one-lane concrete path, runs along the western shore. The suburb where Biminites mainly live is Bailey Town, which merges into Porgy Bay (or 'Poggy Bay'). You can continue north along the dirt road that leads to Bimini Bay and beyond.

Information

There are public telephone booths all along King's Hwy. A small library is opposite the customs building at the mail-boat dock.

Bahamas Ministry of Tourism (☎ 242-347-3529; fax 242-347-3530; Government Bldg, King's Hwy, Alice Town; ☎ 9am-5:30pm Mon-Fri)

BaTelCo (☎ 242-347-3311; King's Hwy, Alice Town) Sells phone cards.

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-347-2210; King's Hwy, Alice Town)

Police (☎ 242-347-3144, 919; King's Hwy, Alice Town)
Post office (☎ 242-347-3546; Government Bldg, King's Hwy, Alice Town)

Royal Bank of Canada (☎ 242-347-3031; King's Hwy, Alice Town; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon, Wed & Fri)

Sights

The one-room **Bimini Museum** (☎ 242-347-3038; King's Hwy; admission \$2; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun), above the library opposite the straw market (customs building), tells the island's history through videos and photos, and has sections on fishing legends, Hemingway, and sporting figures.

No visit to the Biminis is complete without raising a drink at the famous Compleat Angler Hotel, where Hemingway duked it out with all comers every Sunday in a ring he made (he had a standing offer to pay \$100 to any resident of the Biminis who could punch him out). This lounge is now the **Ernest Hemingway Museum**, complete with black-and-white photos of Hemingway that recall his time here (1935–1937).

Local lore attributes the inspiration for Martin Luther King Jr's 'I Have a Dream' speech to the mystical effect of the **Healing Hole**, south of Easter Cay. The great man bathed in this freshwater sulfur spring shortly before speaking those memorable words. Many visitors here experience an enigmatic calming sensation.

Several restaurants, such as Captain Bob's (p131), have photographic **Fishing Halls of Fame** celebrating those who've made the islands' angling heritage an international draw. Dozens of photos and other memorabilia recall celebrities and commoners who have pulled prize-winning fish from the drink.

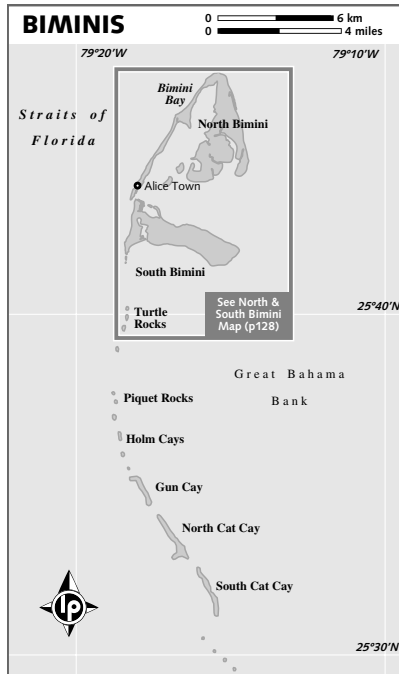
Ask a local to point out **Memory Ledge**. It is claimed that if you lie down here, you'll be flooded with flashbacks.

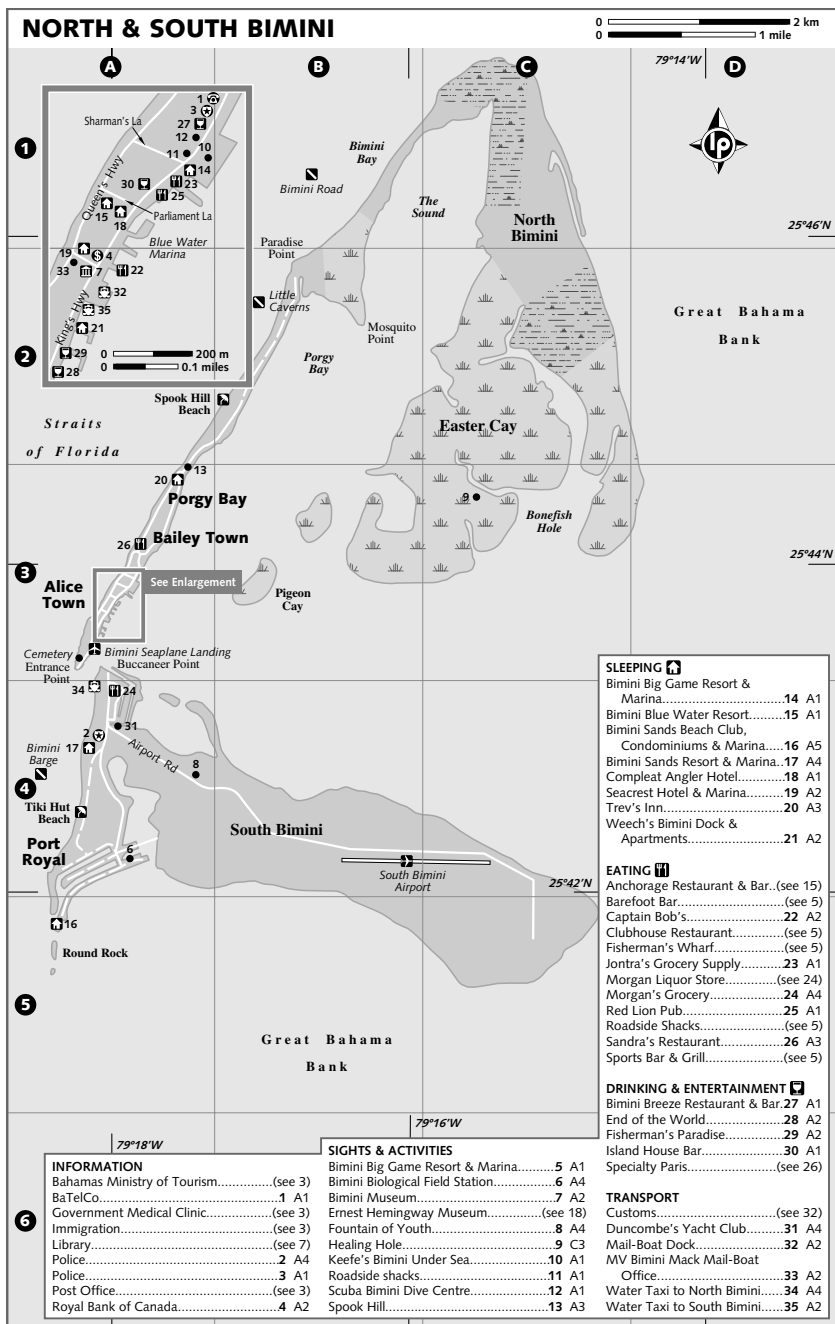
The ridge above **Spook Hill**, a cemetery at the east end of Porgy Bay, drops to a **beach** popular with locals on weekends for picnics. It's a great spot for enjoying sunsets.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELING

Some grand dive sites include the Bimini Barge, where the 270ft *Sapona* wreck lies 75yd from the Gulf Stream drop-off, and where prolific reef life and pelagic big boys roam. You can't miss Bimini Road, where 1000ft-long underwater formations resemble the Incas' hand-hewn blocks and are claimed as 'The Lost Outpost of Atlantis.' (The discovery in 1977 of 500ft-long sand mounds shaped as a shark, a square, a cat and a seahorse in the eastern part of Bimini added fuel to the Atlantis fire).





BIMINIS, BERRY ISLANDS & ANDROS

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HEMINGWAY AND THE BIMINIS

Ernest Hemingway put the Bimini on the map when he briefly made them his summer home during the mid-1930s, and later featured the islands in his best-selling novel *Islands in the Stream* (published in 1970, nine years after his death).

One of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, Hemingway was born in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois. His spare, stylized realism – which he attributed to his background as a newspaper reporter – revolutionized modern literature, and he was awarded both the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes for Literature during his lifetime.

Hemingway based much of his fiction on his adventurous and troubled life, including his traumatic experiences as an ambulance driver during WWI. In 1918 Hemingway was severely wounded in a mortar attack in Italy; although his legs were riddled with shrapnel, he reportedly carried a wounded soldier to safety. The horror of the war and his relationship with his nurse while recuperating in Milan formed the basis of his antiwar novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). His short story *Soldier's Home* tells of a soldier returning home to a family and town that doesn't comprehend what he's been through.

In 1921 Hemingway was sent to Paris as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star Weekly*. There he was introduced to such literary greats as Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, and wrote some of his most important novels. Hemingway later moved to Key West, where he developed a passion for big-game fishing, a sport he pursued in the Bimini and later made the topic of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1953). In the Bimini, Hemingway was legendary for winning fishing tournaments and unofficial boxing matches, and for nights of drunken debauchery.

It's been suggested that his father's depression and eventual suicide in 1928 influenced not only Hemingway's own psychological well-being but also his manic pursuit of love, alcohol and life. Hemingway had four wives and many mistresses, and actively pursued some nerve-racking adventures. These included hunting big game in Africa in 1933 and covering the Spanish Civil War in 1937; his experiences there resulted in the evocative *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Following the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway moved to Cuba, where he spent the early part of WWII hunting for German submarines along the coast, an activity also pursued by the protagonist of *Islands in the Stream*. Hemingway then traveled to Europe to cover the end of WWII, and was there for the liberation of Paris.

Hemingway's escapades were eventually curtailed by the severe injuries he received in one of two plane crashes during a trip to Africa in 1954 – he was so badly hurt that he was unable to collect his 1954 Nobel Prize. By this stage, his deteriorating health had affected his writing, leaving Hemingway suicidal and drinking up to a quart of liquor a day. In desperation his fourth wife organized electroshock therapy to treat his depression. When these 'therapies' erased many of his extraordinary memories, Hemingway finally gave up the fight. On July 2, 1961, Ernest 'Papa' Hemingway followed his father's lead; he took a 12-gauge shotgun and shot himself in the head.

But despite his tragic end, Hemingway's legacy is very much alive in his body of writing, his lasting influence on literature, and – in the Bimini and elsewhere – in his many former haunts, such as the Compleat Angler Hotel (p131), which now houses the Ernest Hemingway Museum. The Bimini Museum (p127) also has a section on Hemingway.

Hawksbill Reef is home to lobsters and reef fish; Little Caverns has mountainous coral formations that rise from a sandy bottom at 65ft; and at the Wall, a popular drift site at 130ft along the continental shelf, the Gulf Stream carries you. Beyond, the abyss drops to 2000ft.

Snorkelers should head for the Bimini Shoreline, where coral and rock formations are smothered by sponges, Eagle Ray Run, where these graceful stingrays fly and

LaChance Rocks, with its many marine critters. Also try Turtle Rocks, where there are plenty of coral, fish and turtles, and the highlight, Stingray Hole, where friendly rays glide around waiting to be hand-fed.

Bill & Nowlde Keefe's Bimini Undersea (☎ 242-347-3089; www.biminiundersea.com; Bimini Big Game Resort & Marina, Queen's Hwy, Alice Town) offers two-tank dives (\$90) and snorkel trips (adult/child \$40/20). Their tremendous 'Wild Dolphin Excursions' (adult/child \$120/100)

leave the dolphins completely in charge, and encounters last about an hour. They also run diving and accommodation packages, which can include videos and night dives.

The **Scuba Bimini Dive Centre** (☎ 242-347-4444; www.scubabimini.com; South Bimini Yacht Club, King's Hwy, Alice Town) offers one-tank dives for \$50, two-tank dives for \$80 and three-tank dives for \$100 (gear is extra). Snorkeling trips are \$30. They will also organize wild dolphin observation and interaction for \$119 per person with accommodation (based on double occupancy).

Enjoy leisurely diving excursions with **K&B EZ Dive** (☎ 242-347-4071; www.knbzdive.com; Bimini), which offers one-tank dives for \$50, spear-fishing (\$150 per half day; bring your own mask, fins and snorkel), snorkeling (\$35) and beach picnics (\$125 per person). Learn to use the Hawaiian sling to catch a lobster or visit Honeymoon Harbour for a cookout.

BONEFISHING & SPORTFISHING

What drew Hemingway more than half a century ago still draws people today – the famous big fish. The catch of the day in winter months is wahoo. All manner of other game fish – tuna, sailfish, mako shark, barracuda and, above all, blue marlin and other billfish that put up a bruising battle – are caught year-round. The hot spots are Bimini Road, off Paradise Point; just off Bimini Bay's Three Sisters Rock; and off Great Isaac, 15 miles north. Those bonefishing fans who prefer smaller fry such as snapper and grunt look east to the Biminis flats.

Typical fishing charter fees are \$400 to \$500 for a half day and \$800 to \$900 per full day. Marinas in North and South Bimini offer charters, bonefishing and deep-sea adventures including **Bimini Big Game Resort & Marina** (☎ 242-347-3391; www.biminibiggame.com; King's Hwy) and **Bimini Blue Water Resort** (☎ 242-347-3166; fax 242-347-3293; King's Hwy).

Also contact these excellent guides:

Bonefish Ansil Saunders (☎ 242-347-2178) The world champ. Charges around \$300/600 per half/full day.
Bonefish 'Ebbie' David (☎ 242-347-2053; shannys home@msn.com) Runs bonefishing trips (\$250/400 per half/full day for two people).

Captain Jerome's Deep Sea Fishing (☎ 242-347-2081; www.biminifishing.com) Fishing for 25 years, he charges \$550/900 for half-/full-day trips, and runs shark trips all year round, hunting lemon, hammerhead and black tip sharks.

BIMINIS FISHING TOURNAMENTS

Month	Tournament
Feb	Hemingway Championship Midwinter Wahoo
Mar	Bacardi Billfish Tournament
May	Billfish Championship Bimini Beach Blue Marlin Rendezvous Memorial Day Weekend Tournament
Jun	Big Five Club Tournament
Jul	Fourth of July Tournament
Aug	Junior Anglers Tournament
Sep	BOAT Tournament
Nov	All Wahoo Tournament

Tours

Bonefish Ansil Saunders (☎ 242-347-2178) Runs tours that take in the Bonefish Hole, Healing Hole, East Point, Creeks (mangroves) and Bimini Bay. Maximum of four people for \$125.

Bonefish 'Ebbie' David (☎ 242-347-2053; shannys home@msn.com) As well as fishing trips, he runs the Healing Hole Tour, with a half-hour in the pool for \$35 per person, and a maximum of 17 people.

Festivals & Events

The Biminis' party-hearty islanders put on a **Junkanoo** extraordinaire each Boxing Day and New Year's Day, and on July 10 in celebration of **Bahamian Independence**. There's also a festive, despite being early, 5am **Christmas Day parade**.

The **Bimini Regatta Blast** at the end of March features live reggae and other bands. The **Bimini Festival** in mid-May features a sportfishing tourney and cookouts.

The Biminis welcome yachters in the annual **Bahamas Boating Flings** each June through mid-August, when first-time boaters arrive en masse from Fort Lauderdale.

Sleeping

All the hotels in Alice Town are strung along King's Hwy. Hotel rooms are usually sold out during big fishing tournaments.

Compleat Angler Hotel (☎ 242-347-3122; fax 242-347-3293; King's Hwy, Alice Town; r \$90; ☎ ☒ ☒) For atmosphere, the best bar in town and a look at Hemingway's old hangout, take a room and a drink here. Mr Hemingway's snoring could be heard from Room 1; you may prefer a sea view. Character-laden rooms are wood paneled and imbued with the spirit

of bar tales and Bahamas living. Weekly live music makes the joint jump.

Seacrest Hotel & Marina (☎ 242-347-3071; www.seacrestbimini.com; King's Hwy, Alice Town; r standard/dockside \$100/125; ☎ ☒ ☒) Take a third-floor room for views over the marina in this pleasant, modern and friendly place. Room facilities include cable TV and a fridge. The beach is 30yd away.

Weech's Bimini Dock & Apartments (☎ 242-347-3028; fax 242-347-3508; King's Hwy, Alice Town; r \$125; ☎ ☒) For an atmosphere that is friendly and welcoming, this is the place. Airy and clean rooms overlook the marina.

Bimini Blue Water Resort (☎ 242-347-3166; bluewaterresort@boipb.com; King's Hwy, Alice Town; r standard/suite \$90/190, Blue Marlin cottage \$285; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) This resort has a full-service marina, restaurant and bar. Choose from the three-bed Blue Marlin cottage (Hemingway's home away from home), rooms in the more atmospheric older building or cheaper, motel-type rooms. A variety of water-based activities is offered, including sportfishing.

Bimini Big Game Resort & Marina (☎ 242-347-3391; www.biminibiggame.com; King's Hwy; r \$185, cottages \$225, penthouses \$325; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) A favorite of anglers and yachters, with a large, fully equipped marina. Charter boats are available, as are bonefishing and deep-sea adventures.

Trev's Inn (☎ 242-347-2452; www.trevinn.com; Pory Bay; r \$80, additional person \$15; ☎ ☒) Basic but clean and tidy rooms.

Eating

Most hotels and pubs around town offer meals.

Captain Bob's (☎ 242-347-3260; Blue Harbour Marina, Alice Town; breakfast \$10; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon) Bahamians pack in here early for scrumptious corned-beef hash with eggs, as well as French toast and omelettes.

Anchorage Restaurant & Bar (☎ 242-347-3166; Bimini Blue Water Resort, King's Hwy, Alice Town; mains \$12-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Good, reasonably priced Bahamian food includes burgers, salads and tasty seafood dishes.

Red Lion Pub (☎ 242-347-3259; King's Hwy, Alice Town; mains \$10-23; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) This intimate place prepares succulent seafood (fish and lobster) and meat dishes, followed by yummy lime pie and banana cream pie.

Clubhouse Restaurant (☎ 242-347-3391; Bimini Big Game Resort & Marina, King's Hwy; mains \$15-30; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon) For something different

and tasty, head here. Try the spicy Bahamian gumbo, pepper pot stew, Asian-style dishes or smoked game fish. Reservations are recommended.

Sandra's Restaurant (☎ 242-347-2336; Bailey Town; mains \$6-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) This nice little place has lunch and dinner specials daily, ranging from chicken snacks to stuffed lobster. There's also a bar and lounge.

The following are all based at Bimini Big Game Resort & Marina (left): **Fisherman's Wharf** (mains from \$12; ☎ lunch & dinner), with a large menu of seafood and steaks and an extensive wine list; the **Barefoot Bar** (☎ lunch & dinner), serving snacks; and **Sports Bar & Grill** (☎ lunch & dinner), which has three satellite TVs and features Bahamian and US dishes as well as pizza. You can buy the Biminis' exquisite, renowned homemade white bread and confections at roadside shacks opposite the resort. Try coconut candy, raisin bread and delicious banana cake.

Head to **Jontra's Grocery Supply** (☎ 242-347-3401; Alice Town) or **Bimini Food Supply** (☎ 242-347-2305; Bailey Town) for groceries.

Entertainment

Compleat Angler Hotel (☎ 242-347-3122; fax 242-347-3293; King's Hwy, Alice Town; ☎ 11am-1am) The larger-than-life hotel where Ernest Hemingway hung his hat is still the center of action more than 50 years later, drawing colorful, offbeat characters. It's the place to be when the calypso band strikes up and the dance floor begins to cook. The band plays three to seven nights a week December to April, and Wednesday night and weekends the rest of the year. One of the rooms holds the original bar, fashioned from prohibition-era rum kegs.

End of the World (☎ 242-347-3277; Alice Town) The health authorities had the original shack condemned, and it's been replaced with a modern wooden unit. But the floor is still covered in sand, dogs wander in and out, and you can add your scrawl to the graffiti-covered walls. It closes at 3am.

Dancing also takes place on weekends at **Fisherman's Paradise**.

Also try the **Island House Bar** (☎ 242-347-2439), opposite the Red Lion Pub, and nearby **Bimini Breeze Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 242-347-3419; Alice Town).

In Bailey Town check out the upstairs bar known as the Specialty Paris (there's no

sign), opposite the Anglican Church, where a rake 'n' scrape band play occasionally.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Refer to p288 for information on international flights to the Bahamas and p126 for information on getting to the Biminis.

BOAT

Call the **Dockmaster's Office** (☎ 242-394-1237) in Nassau and check the website of the **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (www.bahamas.com) for the latest schedules and prices.

MV Bimini Mack mailboat (\$45, 12 hours) departs Nassau for Bimini, Cat Cay and Chubb Cay on Thursday, returning on Monday.

Marina

Boaters and pilots arriving from abroad must clear **Immigration** (☎ 242-347-3446; Government Bldg, King's Hwy) and **Customs** (☎ 242-347-3100; by the mail-boat dock) in Alice Town.

Bimini Big Game Resort & Marina (p131) has around a hundred slips and full-service facilities. Bimini Sands Beach Club, Condominiums & Marina (right) on South Bimini also has a full-service marina.

Getting Around

Most places are within walking distance. However, golf carts can be hired at the marinas in North and South Bimini for \$65 per day.

Water taxis between North and South Bimini depart near the Bimini mail-boat dock; the trip costs \$5 one way.

SOUTH BIMINI

Less-developed South Bimini has long been a weekend hideaway for wealthy expats, but has also maintained large areas of mangroves, tropical hardwood forest and saltwater pools. This tiny 5-mile-long isle is therefore still popular with waterfowl, who head for Duck Lake, their winter getaway.

A paved road leads from the water-taxi dock on the northwest tip to the airport. A dirt road loops around the west and south shores, connecting with Airport Rd.

There is a public phone booth located at the Bimini Sands Beach Club, Condominiums & Marina along with the **police** (☎ 242-347-3424, 919).

Sights & Activities

Ponce de Leon's mythical **Fountain of Youth** is said to be 2 miles southeast of the water-taxi berth on Airport Rd. Look for the sign amid the undergrowth to the side of the road. It's actually a natural, 18-inch-wide hole (often dry) in the limestone, surrounded by a crumbling wall.

The remains of the **Sapona**, a concrete ship, lie half submerged offshore, 4 miles south of South Bimini. It was built by Henry Ford during WWI. During prohibition it was anchored here and turned into a private club – a favored haunt of the rum-runners.

Officially named the **Bimini Biological Field Station** (Dr Samuel H Gruber in the US ☎ 305-274-0628; www.miami.edu/sharklab/index.html; VHF Channel 88), this 'Shark Laboratory' east of Port Royal researches the lemon shark, one of the 13 shark species common hereabouts. Visitors are welcome. There are no sharks here, however.

Tiki Hut Beach is a lovely 2-mile strip of white sand on the west shore. Snorkeling is best close to **Corner Reef**, half a mile south of Tiki Hut Beach, where spotted eagle rays and grunts can be seen close to shore, and tiny caves and rocks are home to lobsters, octopus and crabs. Snorkelers should also try **Buccaneer Point**, at the north end of the beach, but beware of strong currents. An **airplane** forced down by the US Drug Enforcement Administration lies just offshore.

The Bimini Sands Beach Club, Condominiums & Marina charters sportsfishing boats and skippers, and can suggest guides.

Rodney Rolle (VHF Channel 68) rents sea kayaks for \$25/40 per half/full day.

Sleeping & Eating

Bimini Sands Beach Club, Condominiums & Marina (☎ 242-347-4500; www.biminisands.com; r \$175, units \$250-385; P ☒ ☕ ☺) One of two types of accommodation at this resort, the attractive motel-style lodgings here are popular with scuba divers. Rooms are bright and comfortable and offer either sea or marina views. The spacious and light-filled one- and two-bedroom units have either a marina or an ocean view, and are well fitted with large kitchens. There's a restaurant and bar, and facilities at the sibling Beach Club are open to guests. Water taxis run day and night to Alice Town. A two-night minimum applies.

You can stock up on drinks and snacks at Morgan's Grocery or Morgan's Liquor Store, the only stores on the island; they're near Duncombe's Yacht Club.

Getting There & Around

Refer to p126 for additional information on travel to and from these islands.

The Bimini Airport is 3½ miles east of the ferry dock.

BICYCLES, BOAT & KAYAK

Bimini Sands Beach Club, Condominiums & Marina rents bikes for \$15 per day, an 18ft boat for \$120 per day, and single/double kayaks for \$25/35 per day.

MARINA

Please contact **Immigration** (☎ 242-347-3447) and **Customs** (☎ 242-347-3101) when arriving at the island.

Bimini Sands Beach Club, Condominiums & Marina (opposite) has a 150-slip full-service marina.

WATER TAXI & TAXI

TSL Water Taxi and PHK Water Taxi run water-taxi services (\$5) between North Bimini and South Bimini, leaving from the water-taxi dock on the northwest tip.

Minibus taxis wait at the South Bimini wharf for the water taxis.

NORTH CAT CAY

Ten miles south of South Bimini, North Cat Cay is a private island run as an exclusive, members-only club, beloved by magnates, Hollywood stars and the late former US president Richard Nixon. Nonmembers are restricted to the marina area. For information on membership, call the **Cat Cay Yacht Club & Marina** (☎ 242-347-3565; www.catcayclub.com).

The medical clinic is open 10am to noon daily. The staff are available at other times for emergencies.

The marina has grocery and liquor stores.

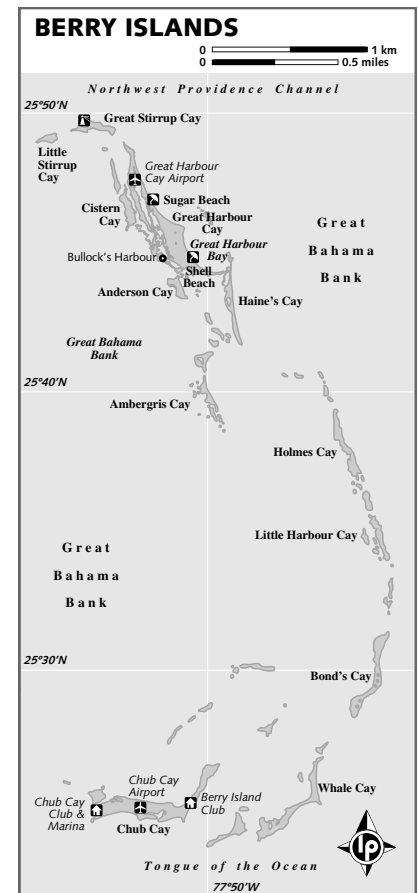
BERRY ISLANDS

pop 742

Despite being so close to New Providence, these solitary islands and cays receive few mainstream visitors. There is a much greater population of birds than humans,

and it is quite possible to find a tiny cay where you can be alone – provided you have your own boat.

The 30 mostly uninhabited islands and cays of the Berry Islands only make up 12 sq miles of land, but span a distance of about 25 miles across the ocean. The largest and most important island is Great Harbour Cay, a 10-mile-long, mile-wide island of scrub-covered rolling terrain. Chub Cay, renowned among the wealthy elite, also attracts those who enjoy game fishing and boating. Several other cays are privately owned, such as Bond's Cay, where a private bird sanctuary is maintained, and Cistern Cay, a stone's throw northwest of Great Harbour Cay.



History

In the 1960s Douglas Fairbanks Jr and others among the US social elite took Great Harbour Cay to their hearts. The Great Harbour Cay Club was formed, nine rippling fairways were sculpted on the rises falling down to the sea, and marinas were built and lined with luxury waterfront homes. Jet-setters flocked to these shores, including Brigitte Bardot, Cary Grant and members of the Rockefeller clan (mobster Meyer Lansky also had a stake). However, the troubled club was closed and ransacked in the '70s.

Since then the island has mostly kept its own counsel. Occasional visitors arrive to restock their boats and join the locals in fishing expeditions.

Getting There & Around

Most visitors arrive at Great Harbour Cay either by charter plane, private boat or mail boat. You can get around mainly on foot, or rent a bicycle or scooter.

GREAT HARBOUR CAY

pop 370

This is the main center of the islands, where most islanders live and where most visitors will find company, lodgings and food. Great Harbour Marina is built on a narrow channel south of Bullock's Harbour and is entered via a slender cut with cliffs to each side.

The island's main attraction is the 8-mile-long white-sand beach along the eastern shore, where the warm shallows are every shade of green. The beach is formed by two great scallops: Sugar Beach to the north and Great Harbour Bay to the south. A few dozen expats have houses along the shore. Great Harbour Bay runs south to Shell Beach and a reef (exposed at low tide) that is good for finding sand dollars.

Birds prefer the mangroves, flats and salt pools on the west of the island, where herons and egrets hunch and watch for their lunch. Most of the interior is smothered in thatch palm, scrub and casuarinas, and snakes and butterflies abound. There are vast flats for bonefishing. Great Harbour Dr runs the length of the east coast.

The island's annual Homecoming Regatta is held each August, with plenty of home cooking, live music and fun.

Information

BaTelCo (☎ 242-367-8199; Bullock's Harbour)

Medical clinic (☎ 242-367-8400; Bullock's Harbour; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Police (☎ 919, 242-367-8344; Bullock's Harbour)

Post office (☎ 242-367-8293; Bullock's Harbour; ☎ 9am-5:30pm Mon-Fri) Has a public telephone kiosk.

Activities

There are good dive and snorkel sites north-east of Great Harbour Cay. The Berries are also superb for fishing. Permits are required for sportfishing boats.

Happy People's Gift Shop & Rentals (☎ 242-367-8117; Great Harbour Marina; ☎ 8am-5pm) rents snorkel gear for \$10 per day, and a 15ft bonefishing skiff for \$85/105 per half/full day. It also rents fishing rods for \$15 and sells tackle.

Bonefishing guides can be hired through the marinas. Rates are around \$250/375 per half/full day, including boat charter for bonefishing, and \$375/550 per half/full day for deep-sea fishing. Try **Percy Darville** (☎ 242-367-8119; Great Harbour Yacht Club & Marina).

Sleeping & Eating

Some private homes will rent out rooms, so just ask around.

Ogbum's Conch Villa (☎ 877-669-5275; www.a1vacations.com; villas per week \$900; ☎ ☎) This ocean-front villa in Great Harbour Cay sleeps six, and has a fab wraparound balcony perfect for a sunset tippie. This super place is modern, and kids will love the loft rooms.

Tropical Diversions Resort at Great Harbour Cay (☎ 954-921-9084; www.tropicaldiversions.com/great-harbour-cay.htm; d \$135-195, villas \$494-630; ☎ ☎ ☎) This resort provides two-bedroom, two-story townhouses with patios and decks overlooking the marina, with private docks below. All of the rooms are splendidly decorated and have a TV, a washing machine and a full kitchen. It also has studio units and beach villas. Daily maid service is included with villa rentals.

Wharf (☎ 242-367-8762; mains \$7-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) This place overlooking the marina serves hearty US-style and Bahamian breakfasts. Also head here for salads, soups and burgers and a wide-ranging dinner menu including seafood starters and pizza.

Tambo Dinner Club (☎ 242-367-8203; Great Harbour Marina; mains \$25-50; ☎ Wed & Sat) Dress up and book ahead to eat at this elegant club along with the expats. The menu includes

boned duck, Bahamian-style spicy chicken and seafood. Booking is compulsory.

Watergate Bar & Restaurant (☎ 242-367-8177; mains \$8-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Try this place, opposite the school, for huge servings of pork chops, peas 'n' rice and potato salad. It's a gas at lunchtime when the schoolkids pour in for their takeout lunches.

Mama & Papa T's Beach Club (☎ breakfast, lunch & snacks until 3pm) For a beer and burger try this eatery on the beach facing Great Harbour Bay.

You can buy groceries and general goods at the **Marina Store** (☎ 242-367-8768), and there are plenty of other small grocery stores.

Try Roberts Disco & Lounge for evening activities.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Refer to p288 for information on international flights to the Bahamas and p126 for details on getting to the Biminis.

The Berry Islands are served by two airports: Great Harbour Cay Airport, based on Great Harbour Cay; and Chub Cay Airport, at Chub Cay. The one-way fare from Great Harbour to Nassau is \$70.

BOAT

Call the **Dockmaster's Office** (☎ 242-394-1237) in Nassau and check the website of the **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (www.bahamas.com) for the latest schedules and prices.

The following mail boats are available: **MV Bimini Mack** Departs Nassau for Chub Cay, Bimini and Cat Cay on Thursday (\$45, 12 hours), returning Monday.

MV Captain Gurth Deane Departs from Nassau for Bullock's Harbour (\$45, seven hours) on Friday, returning Sunday.

Marina

Boaters and pilots arriving from abroad must clear **Immigration** (☎ 242-367-8112) and **Customs** (☎ 242-367-8566) at Great Harbour Cay.

Berry Island Club (☎ 800-933-3533; VHF Channel 16; Frazier's Cay) Provides eight moorings and 10 slips, and has a restaurant and bar.

Great Harbour Cay Yacht Club & Marina (☎ 242-367-8076; VHF Channels 16 & 68) Has 86 slips and full services.

Getting Around

Happy People's Gift Shop & Rentals (☎ 242-367-8117; Great Harbour Marina; ☎ 8am-5pm) rents bicycles (\$20 per day), scooters (\$50 per day)

and Suzuki jeeps (\$65 per day). Deposits are required and weekly rates are available.

CHUB CAY

The southernmost isle in the chain, this little place has been popular over the years with all sorts of moneyed folk who like to fish, from Texan businessmen to Quincy Jones and Bill Cosby.

The 4-mile-long Chub Cay sits at the edge of the Tongue of the Ocean and offers fabulous white-diving. One of the best sites is **Mama Rhoda Rock**, protected by the Bahamas National Trust and known for its moray eels, lobsters and yellow trumpettefish, as well as healthy staghorn and elkhorn coral. There's a shipwreck with cannon nearby. Divers will require their own gear.

Favored by boaters and sportfishing fans, **Chub Cay Club & Marina** (☎ 242-325-1490; www.chubcay.com; ☎ ☎ ☎) offers a range of comfortable rooms and three-bed villas on the beach. The club's amenities include tennis courts, diving and fishing trips. At the time of writing this exclusive club was closed for extensive renovations; it's due to reopen in March 2006. The historic two-story **Berry Island Club** (☎ 800-993-3533; VHF Channel 68; Frazier's Cay; r \$130; ☎ ☎) on Frazier's Hog Cay has nicely appointed rooms over the stone-and-timber clubhouse; one room has a four-poster bed. Its restaurant has a fine reputation among sailors and its charming little bar also draws mariners.

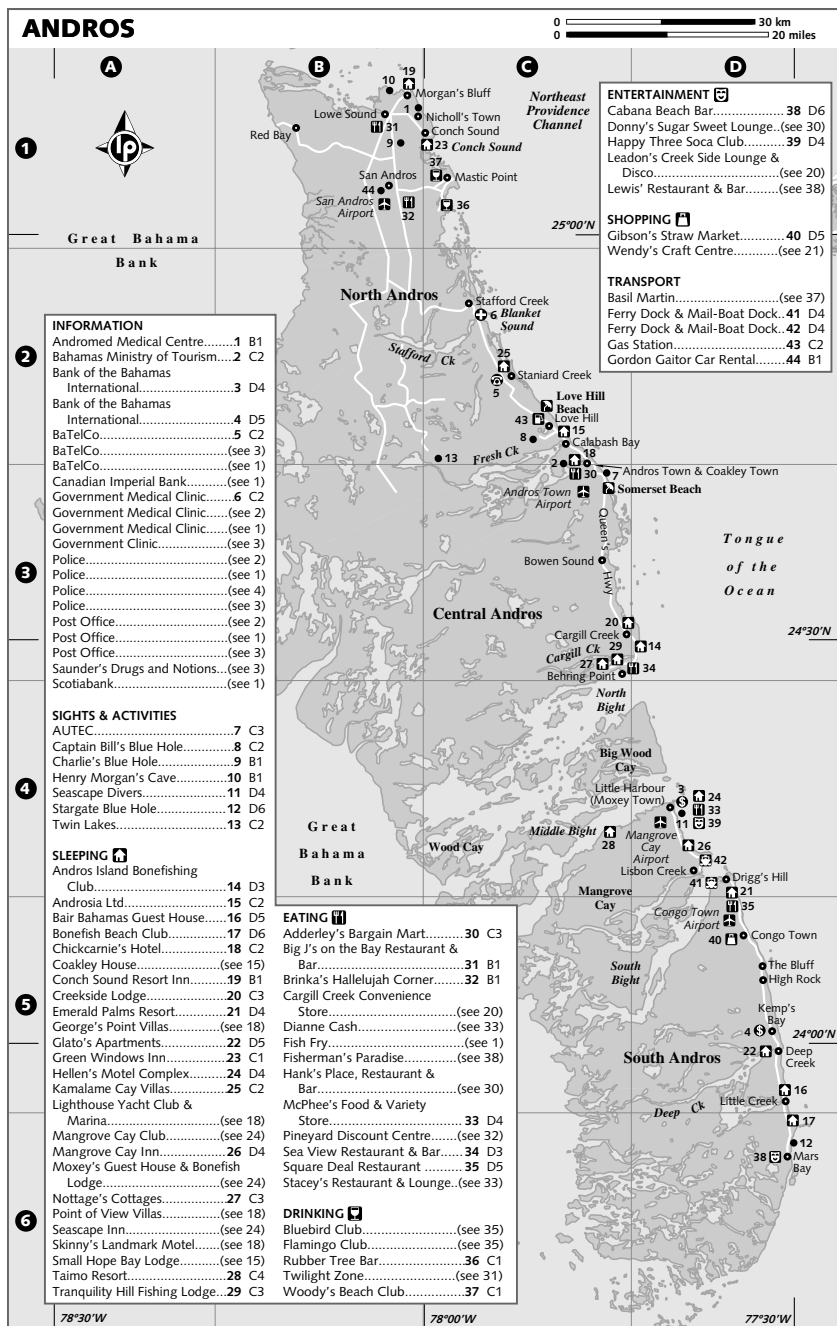
Refer left for information on travel to the Berry Islands.

ANDROS

pop 780

Andros is the largest island in the Bahamas, a whopping 2300 sq miles, and has been barely touched by the tourist dollar. It actually comprises three main islands separated by enormous bights, or sounds, that are up to 25 miles across and spotted with numerous cays. Divers and bonefishing fans go mad for Andros' seas, which offer some of the best diving and bonefishing in the Bahamas.

It is bounded on one side by the Great Bahama Bank, an underwater plateau that is about as shallow as the island is high. A 140-mile-long coral reef lies a few hundred yards to 2 miles off the east shore (surpassed



in length only by Australia's Great Barrier Reef and the Reef off the Caribbean Coast of Central America). Beyond it, barely two miles from shore, the plateau drops off to a very dark 6000ft in the Tongue of the Ocean canyon.

Andros is akin to a tremendous 100-mile-long and 45-mile-wide jigsaw puzzle, divided by countless creeks, lakes, palm savannas and eerie primal forests of mahogany, pine and palmetto, as well as vast mangrove swamps. This probably helps explain why it has so far escaped the commercial development of Nassau, just 25 miles away.

Various Bahamian settlements sprawl along Queen's Hwy on the east coast, separated by an immensity of scrub and forest filled with wildlife. Unfortunately much of this fauna is hunted; wild boar in particular, but also dove, duck, quail and white-crowned pigeons (the latter are slaughtered each spring). During late spring and early summer, giant land crabs cross the road en masse for a paroxysm of mating and egg laying, though many end up in Androsian cooking pots. The skies are also busy; patrolled by turkey buzzards and shrieking ospreys. Or is that the mythical and evil chickcarnies (see the boxed text, p139) you can hear...?

History

The wild island became a refuge for both Seminole Indians and runaway slaves fleeing Florida during colonial days. A community of their descendants still exists in Red Bay on the northwest coast.

Andros' renowned sponge beds, west of the island, supported much of the population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, until a mysterious blight in 1938. Some believe that the island was named by Greek spongers for the Mediterranean island of Andros. A few locals still make a living sponging (see the boxed text, below), but most earn a living from fishing. The famous Androsian sloops, however, have been replaced by fiberglass outboards.

Dangers & Annoyances

A word of warning, especially for hikers and bird-watchers; the gargantuan forests, marshlands and scrublands are also used by Bahamians hunting wild boar and birds, so be careful.

Also come well prepared for the aggressive horsefly (or 'doctor fly,' because its bite hurts like a syringe) and clouds of mosquitoes.

Getting There & Away

Many visitors arrive in Andros by plane. There are four regional airports, however,

SPONGERS

The sponges that made this island so famous lie in water or mudflats so shallow that they can be pried from the coral with rods.

The sponge is a marine animal composed mainly of microscopic calcareous rods, stars and hooks held in place by elastic fibers. Nourishment is extracted from water via a vast network of pores and canals. Although they don't have hearts or brains, sponges produce sperm and eggs. There are various species, including the supersoft 'velvet' or wool sponge, and the 'hardhead,' so durable that it has many industrial uses.

Sponging in the Bahamas began in earnest in 1841 after a Frenchman, Gustave Renouard, was shipwrecked here and discovered superior sponges to the Mediterranean varieties. Greek deep-sea sponge divers left their homeland to make their money from the Bahamian seabed, using glass-bottom buckets and a hooked pole. (Today spongers dive with snorkel or scuba gear. They also slice the sponges at the base, leaving the root to regenerate). Ashore, the sponges were beaten to death and put in shallow-water 'kraals' to allow the flesh to rot and decompose. Then they were rinsed, pounded to a pleasing fluffiness, and strung up to dry before being shipped for sale at the Greek Sponge Exchange in Nassau.

At the close of the 19th century, 500 schooners and sloops and 2800 smaller vessels were working the sponge beds, and in the peak year of 1917, 1½ million lb of sponges were exported. 'The Mud,' an extensive 140-mile-long, 40-mile-wide shoal off Andros, was a major source of income for sponge divers. Sponging was the chief source of livelihood on all the Bahamian islands until 1938, when a fungal blight killed the sponges overnight.

BIMINI'S, BERRY ISLANDS & ANDROS

BIMINI'S, BERRY ISLANDS & ANDROS

so be sure to fly to the correct one for wherever you intend to stay. You can also catch a fast ferry (car and passenger) or mail boat to the islands.

Getting Around

This is a tough place to get around. Car rentals are mainly organized on an informal ad hoc basis. This means that you may not get a rental unless you book ahead, and even then it won't be guaranteed. Taxis also run on an informal basis, and can be very expensive.

Getting between the islands that make up Andros is only possible by flight or coordinating mail-boat schedules, though a small passenger ferry runs between Lisbon Creek and Drigg's Hill in South Andros.

NORTH & CENTRAL ANDROS

Technically one island, North and Central Andros are the largest of the three islands that make up Andros (North Andros lies north of Stafford Creek and Central Andros lies to the south). Much of the island is smothered in pine forests that have twice been logged – first to provide pit props for English coal mines and later for Chicago newspapers. The island's exotic hardwoods, mahogany and lignum vitae (sometimes called 'sailor's cure' because its sap provided a cure for syphilis in the 19th century), for example, are long gone, but the logging tracks remain. It's the most popular of the Andros islands, and visitors here enjoy great diving, fine beaches and bonefishing.

For information on getting to and from North and Central Andros, see p142.

Nicholl's Town Area

A small sleepy center, Nicholl's Town (population 270) has small stores, a supermarket, a gas station, a Georgian-style government building and equally endearing, more venerable colonial-era buildings at its heart.

Fishing boats line the shore and palms fringe the beach. Behind which the town's

houses and shacks dot along the roads, with US-model cars rusting on their front lawns.

To head south, follow the road via the little fishing village of Lowe Sound, and then pass Conch Sound to Mastic Point. This small commercial harbor dates from 1781, and is the place to hunt down *gombay* music. Much of the land inland around San Andros is intensively farmed for citrus, potatoes, tomatoes and other produce.

INFORMATION

Banks open Monday and Wednesday, but the hours across the whole island are erratic.

Andromed Medical Centre (☎ 242-329-2171;

Queen's Hwy, Nicholl's Town).

BaTelCo (☎ 242-329-2131)

Canadian Imperial Bank (☎ 242-329-2164)

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-329-2399;

Nicholl's Town)

Police (☎ 919, Nicholl's Town ☎ 242-329-2353, Lowe

Sound ☎ 242-329-7095)

Post office (☎ 242-329-2034; Nicholl's Town)

Scotiabank (☎ 242-329-2700)

SIGHTS

There's a nice beach west of **Morgan's Bluff**, and a wharf where tankers and barges take on 6 million gallons of water daily for New Providence. The water is drawn from a massive reservoir north of San Andros that is fed by a vast underground aquifer.

If you believe local lore, Henry Morgan, the wily Welsh pirate, hid his treasure in a cave – **Henry Morgan's Cave** – about 30yd from the road (it's well signed). Bring a flashlight.

Scuba divers who first explored **Charlie's Blue Hole** (refer to the boxed text, opposite) were quite astonished to find sharks swimming in the narrow caverns. There is a sign off Queen's Hwy.

Another blue hole, **Benjamin's Blue Hole**, boasts fabulous underwater stalactites and stalagmites.

ACTIVITIES

Rates are around \$250/375 per half day/day for bonefishing, \$250/420 per half day/day for reef fishing and \$300/500 for deep-sea fishing. The following are recommended bonefishing guides:

Arthur Russell (☎ 242-329-2484; Nicholl's Town)

Bonefish Andros (☎ 303-338-8540; www.bonefish

andros.com; Stafford Creek) Bonefishing packages are

\$1095 per person for three nights' accommodation, meals

BEWARE THE CHICKCARNIES AND LUSCA'S LAIR

To you or me, the cheeky chickcarnie is a product of local imagination. But to the Androsians, the devil-in-disguise is as real as the nose on your face.

Chickcarnies are a strange hybrid of man and bird; red-eyed, three-fingered, owl-like elves with beards and feathered scalps that supposedly live atop cotton or pine trees and hang by their tails. They wreak mayhem on whoever disturbs them, screech like the damned and are quite vain. Additionally, if you don't show them the proper respect, your punishment could be pretty severe. Local opinion is that if you happen upon one, it is wisest to strip down to your underwear; it shows that you have nothing to hide (though this advice does sound a bit like a leg-pull for credulous visitors!).

At the end of the 19th century, when sisal growers were thriving, young Neville Chamberlain (British prime minister 1937–40) and his father ran a 4000-acre sisal plantation, **Twin Lakes Farm**, 16 miles inland up Fresh Creek, but the enterprise failed. Locals firmly believe this happened because the Chamberlains disturbed the chickcarnies, who caused Neville no end of grief – not least the Munich Pact (the treaty signed between Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini in 1938, which resulted in the annexation of Czechoslovakia). Twin Lakes now lies in ruins, but the two blue holes that gave the plantation its name can still be accessed by a rough, overgrown track.

Don't miss the **Chickcarnie Festival**, held in October at Fresh Creek, North Andros, which celebrates and respects these creatures.

Meanwhile **Charlie's Blue Hole**, near Nicholl's Town, is renowned for its 'boil,' a whirlpool caused when water is sucked out to sea through subterranean passages. Any boats that happen to be on the surface can be pulled underwater. Several boats have been lost this way, adding to the local legend of the monstrous octopus, Lusca, in residence here. Scuba divers have not yet discovered this vile leggy monster, or maybe we just didn't hear them scream...

and two days' fishing with guides. Weeklong packages are \$2615 per person.

Neville 'Uncle JT' Dean (☎ 242-329-7629; Lowe Sound)

SLEEPING & EATING

Credit cards may not be accepted at some lodgings, so check when booking.

Conch Sound Resort Inn (☎ 242-329-2060; conch

soundresort@yahoo.com; Conch Sound; d/ste \$85/190;

☎ ☎ ☎) The motel-style lodgings are surrounded by pine forests (good for hiking), with the beach a free 10-minute shuttle away. Pleasant but modest rooms have satellite TV, while simple units have kitchens. Meals are served at the relaxing restaurant and bar. Fishing and other activities can be arranged.

Green Windows Inn (☎ 242-329-2194; fax 242-329-2016; Nicholl's Town; r \$80; ☎ ☎ ☎) This

charming green-roofed inn and guest restaurant is set in a tropical garden with orchids and fruit trees, a 10-minute walk from the beach. Rooms come with satellite TV. Bicycle and car rentals and scuba diving are offered, and babysitting and bonefishing trips can be arranged.

Big J's on the Bay Restaurant & Bar (☎ 242-369-1954; Lowe Sound; mains \$8-22; ☎ breakfast, lunch

& dinner) Here you can munch on home-style Bahamian dishes and seafood, watch a game in the satellite lounge and sip a beer or two.

You can stock up at the **Pineyard Discount Centre** (☎ 242-329-4595; San Andros) on the main road south of Nicholl's Town, next to which a stall called Brinka's Hallelujah Corner serves real Bahamian fare at its finest.

DRINKING

For bars try the **Twilight Zone** (Mastic Point; ☎ 9pm-late), **Woody's Beach Club** (☎ 242-329-3454; Mastic Point) and nearby **Rubber Tree Bar**, where dominoes is the name of the game.

For real atmosphere, however, enjoy fresh fish and a rum cocktail or Kalik beer at the Fish Fry on the beach in Nicholl's Town.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

For information on flights, boats and ferries, see p142.

You can rent cars from around \$70 per day and there's a gas station at the entrance to Nicholl's Town.

Basil Martin (☎ 242-329-3169; Mastic Point)

Gordon Gaitor Car Rental (☎ 242-329-3043; San Andros)

TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Take note! The peak holiday time in Andros (February 20 to April 23) is different to the rest of the Bahamas. This coincides with the peak bonefishing season through March and April.

Red Bay

The descendants of the Seminole Indians and runaway slaves who fled Florida in the 17th and 18th centuries live at this down-at-the-heels settlement on the west coast of Andros. A few locals earn an income from weaving, using practices passed down from Seminole forebears. Handwoven, watertight straw baskets are sold, along with others interwoven with locally made batik fabrics.

Stafford Creek Area

The southern road from Nicholl's Town cuts inland through pine forest before heading south. It then turns east and leaps over the mouth of Stafford Creek. On the northern side of the bridge is the disheveled village of **Staniard Creek**, which sits on the southern end of a cay. A really lovely 2-mile-long beach forms the eastern shore, with swaying palm trees and enticing tranquility.

For medical services try the **Government Medical Clinic** (☎ 242-368-6238).

Kamalame Cay Villas (☎ 242-368-6281; www.kamalame.com; r marina/beach \$560/650; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒), tucked away at the north end of Staniard Creek, has thoroughly luxurious rental villas where you will want for nothing. Big and beautiful rooms are furnished with polished antiques, while your watery requirements are met by the azure sea, the marina and water sports. Rates include all meals, house wines and liquor.

Fresh Creek Area

pop 2456

Andros Town and Coakley Town make up the Fresh Creek township and are the crossroads of Central Andros, lying about 30 miles south of Nicholl's Town. A giant plastic crab greets visitors at Coakley Town on the north side of the creek; the hamlet of Andros Town is on the south side. Fresh Creek itself extends from the inland depths of Andros. This is an area popular with divers and anglers, many of whom head here for the facilities at Small Hope Bay Lodge.

INFORMATION

Bahamas Ministry of Tourism (☎ 242-368-2286; Andros Town)

BaTelCo (☎ 242-368-2521)

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-368-2038)

On the north side of the Fresh Creek Bridge.

Police (☎ 242-368-2626, 919; Coakley Town)

Post office (☎ 242-368-2012; Coakley Town)

Royal Bank of Canada (☎ 242-368-2071; ☎ 9:30am-3:30pm Wed)

SIGHTS

The jointly run US-UK navies' **Atlantic Undersea Test & Evaluation Center** (Autec) antisubmarine warfare testing facility is a mile south of town and strictly off limits; the same goes for the waters up to 2 miles offshore.

Somerset Beach is 2 miles south of town, and when the tide recedes, the miles-long beach is extremely deep and splendid. Wading birds patrol the shore, and you can admire the sand dollars at low tide.

The famous Androsia batiks of **Androsia Ltd** (☎ 242-368-2020; www.androsia.com; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) are sold throughout the Bahamas. Melding age-old wax techniques and island motifs, workers create a wide range of clothing out of four types of natural fabrics. A guide will show you around and there's a factory outlet.

Calabash Bay is a small coastal settlement, which gains a certain charm from its several churches and the flats that are picked at by herons when the tide is out. An apocryphal story has Henry Morgan and Blackbeard together here with a cache of treasure. The two rogues rowed ashore with six sailors, buried the loot and then killed the witnesses. As they were rowing back, one of the two supposedly said 'There's small hope that'll ever be found.' Hence the bay's alternative name, **Small Hope Bay**.

The Small Hope Bay settlement merges into the **Love Hill** settlement, where a side road just north of the gas station reaches pleasant **Love Hill Beach**. Nearby, **Captain Bill's Blue Hole**, amid pine forests, is popular with divers. There's a ladder and a rope swing for would-be Tarzans. Twin Lakes Farm (see the boxed text, p139) and the two blue holes that gave the plantation its name are also nearby.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkeling

For some fabulous dive sites, try the following: the Barge, where a wreck lies 70ft below the surface and is now a home to large groupers; the Black Forest, with its crop of three dozen black coral trees; the deep Blue Hole, where large rays and sharks often gather; and the *Potomac*, a 345ft British tanker that sank in 1929.

Expert divers may venture to Alex & Cara Caverns, descending 90ft on the edge of the Tongue of the Ocean, and to Over the Wall, which begins at 80ft and plunges another 100ft at the edge of the Tongue of the Ocean. The Tongue itself drops another 6000ft.

Snorkelers should seek out the Solarium, shallow flats favored by lobsters and sting-rays; Red Shoal, for schooling grunts and elkhorn reef; and China Point, where blue tangs and sergeant majors frolic. Also try the Compressor, where, yes, a compressor has metamorphosed into a reef; Central Park, with acres of corals; and Trumpet Reef, home to brittle stars and spiny urchins.

The only operator is Small Hope Bay Lodge, highly acclaimed by divers, which offers a whole range of specialist and basic one-/two-tank dives (\$50/70) and night and shark dives (\$60/85), as well as snorkeling trips (\$25). Divers should ask about blue-hole dives and wall dives to 185 feet.

Bonefishing & Sportfishing

Small Hope Bay Lodge and Coakley House offer bonefishing (\$250/375 per half/full day; add \$40 for fishing North Bight or Stafford Creek), reef fishing (\$250/420 per half/full day) and deep-sea fishing (\$300/500 per half/full day).

Lighthouse Yacht Club & Marina also has bonefishing (\$250/300 per half/full day).

TOURS

The Small Hope Bay Lodge offers some great bird-watching treks with ornithologists. Check what is planned closer to the time of your visit.

SLEEPING

Credit cards may not be accepted by guest-houses or some smaller lodgings; check when booking.

Skinny's Landmark Motel (☎ 242-368-2082; Coakley Town; r \$70; P ☒ ☑ ☒) This no-frills place has simply furnished, pine-walled rooms above a lively restaurant and bar. The rooms have TVs, and balconies overlooking the village. Skinny's wife, Carmetta, brews up a mean hot-pepper sauce to enliven her traditional-style dishes at their restaurant and bar.

Lighthouse Yacht Club & Marina (☎ 242-368-2305; www.androsighthouse.com; r \$120, villas \$140; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) Named for the neighboring

107-year-old lighthouse, these nicely furnished modern rooms and villas, replete with fridges and balconies, are often enjoyed by yachtsies. A spacious, elegant restaurant and bar serves seafood, Bahamian dishes and great buffet breakfasts. Breakfast and dinner packages for guests are \$40 per person. Facilities include a games room, bicycle rentals, tennis courts and fishing charters.

Small Hope Bay Lodge (☎ 242-368-2014; www.smallhope.com; Calabash Bay; r \$209; P ☒ ☑) Families and anglers head to this cozy, informal dive resort made out of coral rock and pine. A central lodge strewn with couches and throw pillows incorporates a library, games room, music, and a bar hewn from half a boat. All rooms and cottages look out onto the beach, and have king-size beds, screened windows and Androsia batik fabrics. Fine US-style breakfasts, pig-roast barbecues and buffets are served on a tree-shaded patio by the beach. Restaurant reservations are essential for nonguests. They will host weddings (\$500) for those taken by the moment.

The following we also recommended.

Coakley House (☎ 242-368-2013; www.smallhope.com/CH; Calabash Bay; r night/week \$300/1750; P ☒ ☑ ☒) A large three-bedroom villa.

George's Point Villas (☎ 242-368-2238; www.georgespoint.com; Fresh Creek; nightly/weekly \$95/600; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) Waterside (perfect for spotting dolphins) and spacious.

Point of View Villas (☎ 242-368-2750; fax 242-368-2761; Fresh Creek; r \$300; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) A little village complex of two-bed cottages, which also has a great little restaurant.

EATING & DRINKING

Hank's Place Restaurant & Bar (☎ 242-368-2447; Fresh Creek; mains \$10-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) For inexpensive but good food head to Hank's, where a shady deck overhanging the creek is the prime spot to munch buffalo wings, baked snapper or lobster washed down with the house drink, a lethal cocktail called the Hanky Panky. Look out for weekend fish fries and roasts.

Donny's Sugar Sweet Lounge (☎ 242-368-2080) This is the place to drink and dance despite the less than glamorous surroundings. Who cares, it gets packed at weekends with some hot music and cold beers.

Chickcharnie's Hotel (☎ 242-368-2026; Coakley Town; mains \$8-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) Try this

place for simple and tasty Bahamian dishes, served in the dining room which overlooks the creek. They also have a grocery store.

Square Deal Restaurant (☎ 242-368-2593) Serves simple Bahamian fare.

Captain Crunch Fish Fry (Calabash Bay) Should be visited for the name alone.

Adderley's Bargain Mart (☎ 242-368-2201) For fruit and veggies; it's by the lighthouse.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Refer to p288 for information on international flights to the Bahamas.

Andros is served by four airports:

Andros Town Airport (ASD; ☎ 242-368-2030) Three miles south of Fresh Creek.

Congo Town Airport (TZN; ☎ 242-369-2640) Four miles north of Congo Town.

Mangrove Cay Airport (MAY; ☎ 242-369-0083) Sits on Mangrove Cay.

San Andros Airport (SAQ; ☎ 242-329-4224) About 10 miles south of Nicholl's Town.

Flights between these airports are \$30 one way and depart twice weekly.

The following airlines fly between Andros and other Bahamian islands:

Bahamasair (UP; Andros ☎ 242-377-5505, Freeport ☎ 242-352-8341; www.bahamasair.com; hubs Nassau & Freeport)

Major's Air Services (☎ 242-352-5778; www.thebahamasguide.com/majorair; hubs Grand Bahama & Eleuthera)

Western Air (☎ 242-329-4000; fax 242-329-3167; hubs Andros & Nassau)

The following fares are one way.

Route	Price	Frequency
Andros Town—Freeport	\$150	2 weekly
Andros Town—Nassau	\$68	2 daily
Congo Town—Freeport	\$150	2 weekly
Congo Town—Nassau	\$68	2 daily
San Andros—Freeport	\$150	2 weekly
San Andros—Nassau	\$68	2 daily
South Andros—Freeport	\$150	2 weekly
South Andros—Nassau	\$68	2 daily

Boat

Call the **Dockmaster's Office** (☎ 242-394-1237) and check the website of the **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism** (www.bahamas.com) for the latest schedules and prices.

The following mail boats are available for travel:

MV Lisa JIII Departs Nassau for Morgan's Bluff and Nicholl's Town (\$30, six hours) on Wednesday, returning Tuesday.

MV Lady D Departs Nassau for Fresh Creek (\$35, 5½ hours) on Tuesday, returning on Sunday.

MV Mangrove Cay Express Departs Nassau for Drigg's Hill, Mangrove Cay and Cargill Creek (\$30, 5½ hours) on Thursday, returning on Tuesday.

MV Captain Moxey Departs Nassau for Kemp's Bay, Long Bay and the Bluff (\$35, 7½ hours) on Monday, returning Wednesday.

Ferry

Bahamas Ferries (☎ 242-323-2166, 242-323-2168; www.bahamasferries.com; child/adult/car \$20/35/140) operates a car-and-passenger ferry service from Nassau to Morgan's Bluff (2½ hours) on Monday and Saturday, and to Fresh Creek on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

GETTING AROUND

The Mastic Point harbor is clogged by sunken boats and is not recommended for private boaters.

The Lighthouse Yacht Club & Marina (p141) has 18 slips for vessels.

You can rent a car for \$80 to \$90 per day (plus \$200 deposit) from several places. There's an Esso gas station in Love Hill, and gas pumps on Edgcomb's St in Calabash Bay. **AMKLCO** (☎ 242-368-2056) garage also rents cars.

When booking accommodations ask about taxis, as they run on an informal basis. However, be warned: the drivers can be a little greedy as there are no formalized rate structures.

Cargill Creek Area

You are now in supreme bonefishing territory; anglers, polish your rod and head onwards. **Cargill Creek** opens westward into the expansive flats of both the North and Middle Bights. Queen's Hwy continues south approximately 2 miles to **Behring Point**, which is located on top of a bluff overlooking the mouth of North Bight. North Bight separates the island from Mangrove Cay.

Contact Tranquillity Hill Fishing Lodge and Nottage's Cottages, which will put you in touch with some excellent bonefishing guides working out of Cargill Creek and Behring Point.

SLEEPING

The lodgings are designed for anglers seeking bonefishing packages, not romantic beachy getaways.

Andros Island Bonefishing Club (☎ 242-368-5167; www.androsbonefishing.com; Cargill Creek; ☎ ☒ ☑) Small wood and concrete bungalows each have a fridge and private bathroom. They lie just 100yd away from a productive wadable flat with bonefish. Seven- and three-night packages (single/double \$1540/2240) include all meals and transfers.

Tranquillity Hill Fishing Lodge (☎/fax 242-368-4132; www.tranquillityhill.com; Behring Point; s/d \$175/320; ☎ ☒ ☑) It may look blocky from the outside, but its interiors are clean and bright and all rooms have TV. Rates include all meals. Fishing packages are offered.

Also recommended:

Creoside Lodge (☎ 242-368-5395; Cargill Creek; s/d \$185/320; ☎ ☒ ☑)

Nottage's Cottages (☎ 242-368-4297; bigcharlieandros@yahoo.com; Charlie's Haven; s/d \$180/345) Upgraded in 2004.

EATING & DRINKING

You can dine and drink at any of the fishing lodges.

Sea View Restaurant & Bar (☎ 242-368-4005; Behring's Point) Locals frequent this place, 100yd south of the Cargill Creek Bridge.

Leardon's Creek Side Lounge & Disco (☎ 242-368-4167; Cargill Creek) Open till around 3am on weekends, head here for some classic Bahamian artists and rake 'n' scrape bands like Kelly & the Boys.

Cargill Creek Convenience Store (☎ 242-368-5221) Buy groceries here.

SOUTH ANDROS

Virtually bypassed by tourists, South Andros has superb bonefishing and some beautiful beaches. Look out for Androsian iguanas, which can grow to 5ft in length and dwell in scattered coppices.

Most locals reside on lobstering, crabbing or sponging, but pockets of poverty do exist. Sir Lynden Pindling (the 'fallen' former Bahamian prime minister) hails from here (see p24).

Refer opposite for information on travel to Mangrove Cay and South Andros. For getting around, ask about taxis or possible car hire when booking accommodation. A cash deposit for rentals will be required.

Mangrove Cay

The cay makes up northern South Andros. A narrow but lovely beach stretches out along the eastern shore, and at least 23 blue holes await exploration. Little Harbour or 'Moxey Town' is the (only) center and was blessed with electricity in 1989.

Andros' southernmost airport is at Mangrove Cay.

INFORMATION

Banks open on Monday and Wednesday, but the hours are erratic.

Bank of the Bahamas International (☎ 242-369-0502)

BaTelCo (☎ 242-369-0131)

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-369-0089)

Police (☎ 242-369-0083)

Post office (☎ 242-369-0494)

Saunders's Drugs & Notions (☎ 242-369-0312)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Lynward Saunders (☎ 242-369-0414) will show you how sponges are cleaned and dried and made ready for export.

There is no shortage of bonefishing guides who will charge around \$350 per day for two people. On Mangrove Cay, try **Ralph Moxey** (☎ 242-369-0218) or 'Bonefish' John (ask around, everyone knows him).

Seascape Divers at Seascape Inn rents scuba equipment and offers Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) instruction (prices on application).

SLEEPING & EATING

Seascape Inn (☎/fax 242-369-0342; www.seascapeinn.com; standard/superior cabanas incl breakfast \$135/145; ☎ ☒ ☑) Right on the beach, 2 miles south of Little Harbour, these attractive and simply furnished off-ground cabanas come with private decks, ceiling fans and beach views.

Hammocks encourage lounging, while free bicycle and kayak trips are on offer, and quotes for diving and bonefishing can be given. There's a lofty all-timber restaurant and bar on tall stilts, with a TV, dartboard and stereo. On Sunday a Fish Fry is hosted. Breakfast is included in the rates.

Moxey's Guest House & Bonefish Lodge (☎ 242-369-0023; fax 242-369-0726; r \$90; ☎ ☒ ☑) Dating from the 1930s, this attractive two-story yellow and white stuccoed lodge sits directly on the water in Little Harbour. A vast and generous almond tree shades the front,

and the rooms are modestly yet attractively furnished. There's a delightful dining room and a splendid and popular bar. Packages are on offer.

Mangrove Cay Inn (☎ 242-369-0069; fax 242-369-0014; r \$110; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) This place is set amid lawns about 200yd from a beach, and there are three blue holes nearby. Bicycle and snorkel-gear rentals, a guest laundry and a bar with an electric piano are on offer. Credit cards are not accepted.

Taimo Resort (☎ 242-357-2489; http://www.tiamoresorts.com/; r \$380; ☒ ☞) This award-winning and solar-powered resort has ecofriendly beachside bungalows for adults.

Hellen's Motel Complex (☎ /fax 242-369-0033; s/d \$70/85; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) Small, clean rooms.

Mangrove Cay Club (☎ 242-369-0731; www.mangrovecayclub.com; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) For dedicated bonefishing fans. Three- and seven-night packages are offered (for the latter, single/double \$4995/6380).

Stacey's Restaurant & Lounge (☎ 242-369-0161) Bahamian dishes include fish and grits or chips.

Dianne Cash (☎ 242-369-0430) For great sides and peas 'n' rice, head here; she has a small place a mile south of the Seascape Inn.

You can buy groceries at McPhee's Food & Variety Store, opposite Seascape Inn.

ENTERTAINMENT

Happy Three Soca Club (☎ 242-369-0030; Grants) Has live soca music, dancing and a pool table.

Drigg's Hill to Congo Town

Visitors to South Andros proper will land at Congo Town airport, 3 miles south of Drigg's Hill, a scrawny hamlet facing Mangrove Cay across South Bight at the northern tip of the island. The equally diminutive settlement of Congo Town, also known as Long Bay, is 2 miles south of the airport.

Stanley 'Jolly Boy' Forbes (☎ 242-369-4767) will take you bonefishing for \$375 per day for two people.

Emerald Palms Resort (see following) can organize a guide for **walking tours** to the blue hole and swampland. It takes about two hours.

The only true beach resort on Andros, the rooms at **Emerald Palms Resort** (☎ 242-369-2713; www.emerald-palms.com; r \$195; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) are small but quite nicely furnished. An elegant dining room opens to the pool and the

beach, where buffets are hosted. Hammocks are strung between palms. Bonefishing, diving, snorkeling and excursions are offered. A MAP (breakfast, lunch and dinner) plan costs \$70 daily and ocean-view lodgings start at \$495.

Four hundred yards south of the resort, **Square Deal Restaurant** (☎ 242-368-6050) serves Bahamian meals, as do the Bluebird Club and **Flamingo Club** (☎ 242-369-2671; Drigg's Hill). Both clubs have pool tables and host local nightlife.

For shopping, try **Gibson's Straw Market** (Congo Town). You can buy homemade jewelry crafted from shells at **Wendy's Craft Center** (Drigg's Hill), opposite the BaTelCo office.

A small government-run passenger ferry runs from Lisbon Creek to Drigg's Hill.

The Bluff & High Rock

Three miles south of Congo Town, The Bluff is the largest and most orderly settlement on the island. The village extends south to the suburb of High Rock, a disorderly place atop a limestone bluff overlooking fabulously blue flats. Two narrow yet beautiful beaches run north and south.

Kemp's Bay to Mars Bay

Five miles south of High Rock, Kemp's Bay is a small yet lively center of action, with the island's high school and a concentration of services.

Tinker's Rock, a mile offshore, is favored by fishermen. Catches are shipped aboard the weekly mail boat to the Nassau market.

The road continues south through the tiny settlement of **Pleasant Bay** and onto Mars Bay. This colorful seaside settlement has quaint wooden and emancipation-era stone houses painted in bright pastels. You may see old ladies weaving straw, and fishermen scaling their catch down by the wharf, where a grand old Androsian schooner lies beached.

Stargate Blue Hole, looking like a country pond, is actually the local harbor! It descends to about 300ft, with galleries of stalactites and stalagmites.

Based in Kemp Bay, there is the **Bank of the Bahamas International** (☎ 242-369-1787) and **police** (☎ 242-368-4733, 919).

SLEEPING & EATING

This area is truly for anglers, exemplified in the accommodation choices and packages.

Glato's Apartments (☎ 242-369-4669; www.islandaze.com/glato's; Johnson's Bay; r \$80; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) Four hundred yards north of the bridge over Deep Creek, this two-story guesthouse is simple but modern, surrounded by lawns and within yards of the ocean. Fishing packages for three days are \$1500 and the owners adhere to a strict catch and release policy for fish.

Bair Bahamas Guest House (☎ /fax 242-369-4518; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) For a more intimate experience, head to Little Creek and check in at this charming, strawberry-pink three-bedroom guesthouse with TV lounge and meals, including fabulous coconut shrimp and key

lime pie. Bonefishing packages are \$580 per person per day.

Bonefish Beach Club (☎ 242-369-1608; fax 242-369-1934; r \$75; Ⓟ ☒ ☞) This place to stay is also recommended, with six-night fishing packages at \$3175/4600 per single/double.

Grab a Bahamian snack in Mars Bay at **Fisherman's Paradise**. **Lewis' Restaurant & Bar** offers barbecues and dances on weekends, as does the **Cabana Beach Bar**. On weekends head for the Fish Fry north of town at Smith Hill beachfront.

A minibus from Drigg's Hill occasionally stops at Kemp's Bay.

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