

Southern Bahamas



Head for Long Island, the Crooked Island District and the Inaguas, and you will be surprised and delighted. There are clear sparkling seas, huge blue holes and perfect reefs for snorkeling and diving. Deserted beaches and striking azure bays invite days of splashing around in the sea, picnics and walks along sugar-soft sands. Vast scrub and forested lands entice all manner of birds, and occasional hikers and bird-watchers to wander in the wilderness.

The Crooked and Acklin Islands are renowned for Christopher Columbus' visit. He named Crooked the 'Fragrant Island,' where the aromas of herb and Cascarilla bark impregnate the air (and flavor Campari's liquor). Inagua's parklands are striking, with flying pink clouds of flamingos emerging at dusk and dawn. The age-old Bahamian industry of 'white gold' production is alive and well on this island, where huge hills of glittering salt are exported worldwide.

Long Island, the most developed and populated island of this group is dotted with pretty villages, which are accentuated by vivid flowering shrubs. Roadside schools fill with chattering, waving and giggling children during lesson breaks. Clusters of immaculate tiny Gothic churches gleam in the sunlight, marking settlements across the island.

This is a charming and happy place to visit and explore. Discover ancient Arawak drawings and blinking bats in a string of covert caves or the faded grandeur of old plantation ruins. Venture into genial local eateries and bars for a chat, beer and a bite of crispy fish, or down bumpy sideroads to those tranquil bays of pleasure.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dance to *goombay* music and toast the handmade boats racing at the **Long Island Regatta** (p226)
- Eat and sleep like a very comfortable Robinson Crusoe in a beach hut on the ocean at **Chez Pierre Bahamas** (p225) on Long Island
- Head for gorgeous Long Island's **Guana Key** (p226) to snorkel a wreck and visit the snoozing iguanas of deserted Guana Key Island, just a short splash away
- Dive Crooked Island's wreck, the **Million Dollar Mistake** (p231) where maybe the odd quarter still lies
- Marvel at the garish and leggy supermodels of the bird world, flamingos at **Bahamas National Trust Park** (p237)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 242

■ POPULATION: 4957

■ AREA: 1179 SQ MILES

LONG ISLAND

pop 2978

This is one of the prettiest Family Islands; a 2-mile wide narrow strip that stretches for 60 miles. Follow the solitary road, the Queen's Hwy past plantation ruins, stunning white and sky-blue Gothic churches, lush greenery, pretty villages brimming with bougainvillea and pastel-colored schoolyards full of curious and happy children.

You'll also come to a myriad of magnificent bays, blue holes, and miles and miles of beach. The island's inhabitants live in about 35 settlements, growing bananas and rows of corn, along with vegetables and pineapples. On the east shore, Atlantic rollers crash against dramatic cliffs and offshore reefs, while the west coast consists of a string of shallow bays. In late spring hundreds of yellow butterflies appear.

The northern tip of the island is heralded by a monument to Columbus, while caves that once were home to the Lucayans and pirates are now occupied by families of myopic bats.

This pristine diving paradise has untapped treasures, such as the newly discovered Neuritis Wall that drops off the Bahamas Banks, and the fast-paced action of Shark Reef is justifiably acclaimed. For those who prefer to eat fish rather than commune with them, the island also has top fishing year-round.

The highlight of the island's festivities is May's Long Island Regatta, held at Salt Pond.

History

The Lucayan Indian caves (they called this island Yuma) have yielded *duhos* (wooden seats) that archaeologists believe suggest chieftainship and ceremony, and *zemi* figurines bearing religious connotations. To the south, the island – Columbus' 'Fernandina' – ends at Cape Verde, where Columbus supposedly anchored on October 24, 1492.

A large percentage of Bahamians on the island are descendants of the 18th-century Loyalists. The colonists established a plantation system as viable as any in the archipelago. Uniquely, sheep-rearing remained profitable well into last century, and a few sheep remain. Farming, too, endures today

in large groves of bananas and rows of corn (especially around Deadman's Cay), in stock-rearing, and in cultivation of vegetables and pineapples in limestone potholes. You still can see wooden sailing dinghies being made up by hand in fishing villages on the island.

Getting There & Away

Visitors fly to Stella Maris Airport at the northern end of the island or Deadman's Cay Airport in the middle, or take the mail boat from Nassau to Clarence Town, Deadman's Cay, Salt Pond and Seymours.

Getting Around

You'll need your own transport if you want to explore the island. Car hire companies are based at Deadman's Cay Airport (look left, right and up before crossing the plane's landing strip to reach the car rental places), and north of the island towards Stella Maris Resort & Marina. Car insurance is not generally on offer.

Remember when receiving directions that everyone here says 'up south' and 'down north,' the opposite of what you might expect.

NORTH LONG ISLAND

The north of the island is certainly worth exploring, from the Columbus Memorial to the vivid jade-colored seas which proffer great snorkeling and diving. Take insect spray – mosquitoes and sand flies up this end of the island get pretty hungry at dawn and dusk.

Stella Maris

The upscale residential community of Stella Maris stretches for about a mile along the coast amid palms and scrub. Dominating the area is the Stella Maris Resort Club & Marina (p224).

INFORMATION

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-338-8488)

Located at Simms.

Police (☎ 242-338-2222; Stella Maris Airport)

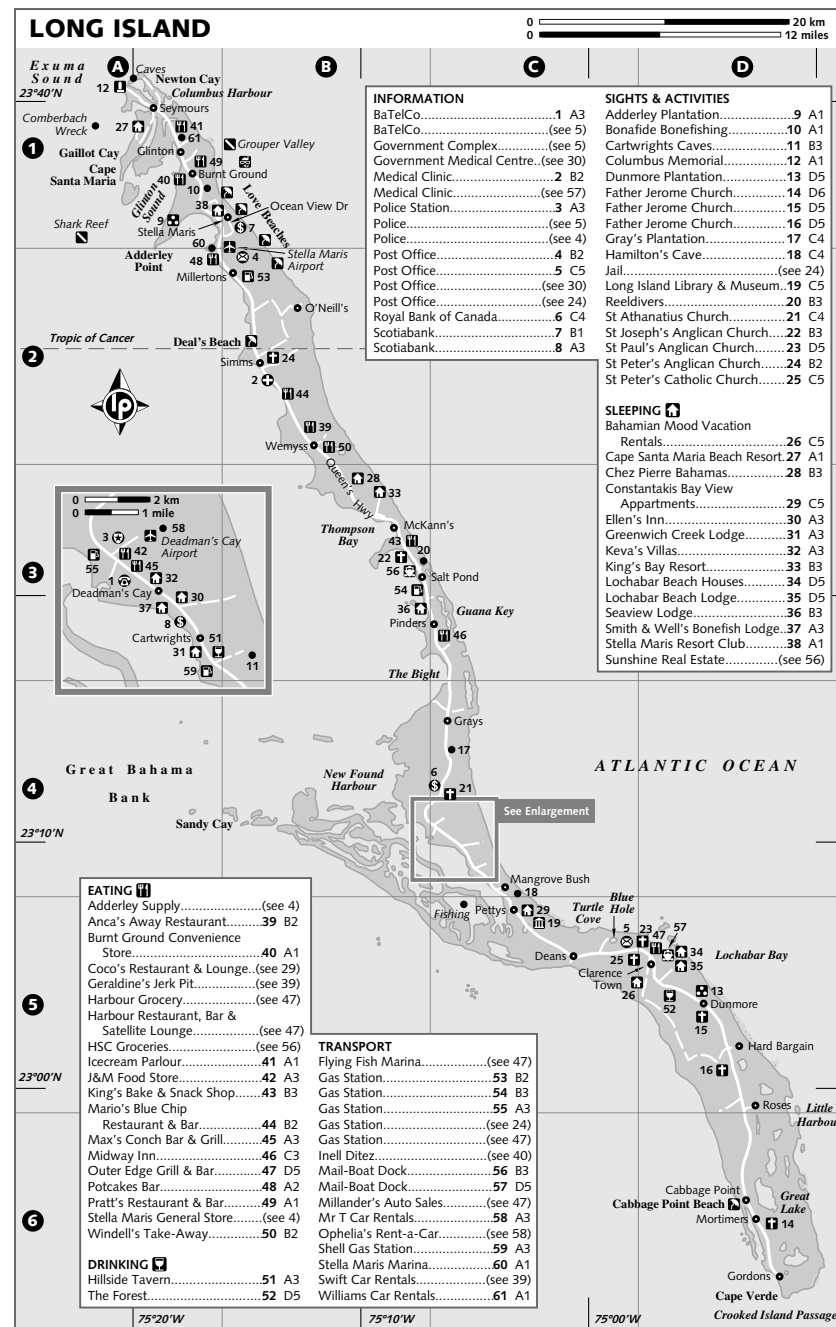
Post office (☎ 242-338-2010; Stella Maris Airport)

Scotiabank (☎ 242-338-2057; ☎ 9:30am-1pm

Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The remote **Columbus Memorial**, a 15ft-tall stone obelisk, sits at the northern tip of



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SOUTHERN BAHAMAS

SOUTHERN BAHAMAS

Long Island, bearing a plaque dedicated to 'the peaceful aboriginal people of Long Island and to the arrival of Christopher Columbus.' The views and snorkeling around the headlands are stunning. Be careful on the mile-long rocky path that leads to the monument from Seymours.

The 3-mile-long **Galliot Cay** peninsula is linked to Long Island by a narrow spit with mangrove creeks, a gorgeous beach and turquoise shallows. Snorkeling is especially good at the reef gardens at the southern end.

The area's best beaches are the four pink-sand **Love Beaches** (the first has a shallow 'pool' perfect for small children). Head for Ocean View Dr.

The ruins of **Adderley Plantation** are smothered in vegetation, as are the graves in the slaves' cemetery.

At the shores of **Columbus Harbour**, a shallow bay lined with mangroves, you can cross the narrow tidal creek on a footbridge to reach **Newton Cay**, a small island with a beach on the Atlantic shore. There are caves around the headland to the north.

Stella Maris Resort Club & Marina (below) offers two-tank dives (without/with gear, \$85/125) and resort courses (from \$100). The resort also offers water-skiing for \$40 and rents boats (\$350 for a 27-footer).

Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort (☎ 242-338-5273; www.capesantamaria.com) offers diving (two-tank dives \$85) and snorkeling (\$45), and rents water sport, scuba and snorkeling equipment. They also offer bonefishing (half-/full-day \$200/250), reef fishing (half-/full-day \$450/600), as well as deep-sea fishing (half-/full-day \$550/800) for up to six people.

Guided bonefishing is offered by **Bonafide Bonefishing** (☎ 242-338-2035; www.bonafidebonefishing.com; Queen's Hwy, Burnt Ground) and its owner 'Docky' Smith is one of the best local guides on the island, and has taken out John Grisham, Laurence Fishburne and Michael Keaton of novel and Hollywood fame. Fly-fishing lessons are on offer (per hour \$60) as well as bonefishing (half-/full-day \$300/350). A reef-fishing boat can be hired (full-day \$475) and rates are available for snorkeling and sight-seeing tours.

SLEEPING & EATING

Stella Maris Resort Club & Marina (☎ 242-338-2051; www.stellamarisresort.com; Stella Maris; r \$135;

☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The ocean views are stunning from this comfortable and well-equipped old plantation, now a resort, dotted with palm groves and modern, breezy and delightful hillside apartments. The beach isn't the best but a cabana on the gorgeous Cape Santa Maria beach and shuttle service makes up for it. The relaxed and informal clubhouse serves a range of cuisines and the bar has some entertainment on each night. Free facilities include snorkel trips, small boats, bicycles, movies and lots of water sports. The resort hosts a Saturday night dance with live music, plus uses a cave as a nightclub on Monday night, with a barbecue and dancing to a rake 'n' scrape band (percussion music using household objects).

Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort (☎ 242-338-5273; www.capesantamaria.com; Cape Santa Maria; r \$285; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Made for romancing couples of any age, these deluxe cottages are superb. Cool, restful and tropical they open to screened porches facing the beach. A wooden walkway leads to an airy and handsome two-tier restaurant and bar in gingerbread plantation style and offering vast views. Free facilities include catamarans, sailboats, sailboards, volleyball, diving, and snorkeling. Fishing can be arranged. The resort has its own private airstrip and charters.

Pratt's Restaurant & Bar (☎ 242-338-7051; Burnt Ground) To dine with locals and a cut-out of Miss Bacardi (you're warned) try this place; it serves Bahamian seafood and regional dishes.

Potcakes Bar (☎ 242-338-2018; Stella Maris) This place is next to the Stella Maris Marina. It has an upscale restaurant, and a bar by night.

There's an ice cream parlor at the north end of Glinton.

You can stock up your kitchen at the **Stella Maris General Store**, **Adderley Supply** or the **Burnt Ground Convenience Store** (Burnt Ground).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Please refer to p288 for information on international flights to the Bahamas and Long Island.

Stella Maris Airport serves north Long Island and **Deadman's Cay Airport** is best for the middle and south Long Island.

Bahamasair (UP; www.bahamasair.com; hubs Freeport & Nassau) Freeport (☎ 242-352-8341); Nassau (☎ 242-377-5505) has daily flights from Nassau to

Stella Maris and Deadman's Cay (both \$85 one-way).

Stella Maris Resort Club & Marina (opposite) offers private plane charters for hotel guests only from January 5 to December 21. From Nassau, it costs \$110 to fly one-way and, from Exema, it costs \$80 one-way in conjunction with your hotel booking.

Boat

Please contact the **Dockmaster's Office** (☎ 242-393-1064) at Potter's Cay in Nassau to confirm mail-boat schedules. **Customs and Immigration** (☎ 242-338-2012).

MV Mia Dean (\$45 one-way, 12hrs) sails from Nassau to Clarence Town on Tuesday.

MV Sherice M (\$45 one-way, 15hrs) calls at Seymours weekly from Nassau, also stopping at Salt Pond and Deadman's Cay.

Stella Maris Resort Club & Marina (opposite) is an official port of entry, and has a full-service marina with boat yard and slips for boats up to 70 feet.

GETTING AROUND

Matthias Pratt (☎ 242-338-7051/7022) operates a minibus charter service. He charges about \$150 for a ride for four people from Stella Maris to Clarence Town, in the southern part of the island. Matthias charges about \$25 to drive four people from Stella Maris to the memorial.

Stella Maris Resort Club & Marina (opposite) rents cars for \$75 a day plus mileage which can add up to well over \$100 as Queen's Hwy runs 60 miles north to south. They also rent scooters (half-/full-day \$30/46).

Williams Car Rentals (☎ 242-338-5002; Glinton) charges \$65 daily, including unlimited mileage, and will deliver to Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort.

Inell Ditez, in Burnt Ground, rents scooters for \$40 daily; there is also a simple **gas station** in Burnt Ground.

Stella Maris to Salt Pond

Queen's Hwy runs south from Stella Maris along the leeward shore. **Deal's Beach**, has fabulous snorkeling over a sea-fan garden. You can follow a road east from here to **O'Neill's**, a tiny hamlet with two beaches that also offer good snorkeling.

Simms, a quaint seaside hamlet about 10 miles south of Stella Maris, dates back to the plantation era. It is dominated by

well-kept **St Peter's Anglican Church**. The most endearing structure is a prim little **post office** and, nudging up behind it, an equally diminutive **jaill** still bearing the sign 'HER MAJESTY'S PRISON.'

South of Simms, the road moves inland until it touches the shore again at **Thompson Bay**, about 5 miles further south. The bay is scenic, but far more spectacular is the one at **McKann's**, about half a mile east; turn east at the sign for King's Bay Resort.

SLEEPING & EATING

Chez Pierre Bahamas (☎ 242-338-8809; www.bahamahouseinn.com; Simms; d \$130; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Another hell-of-a-road leads you to this piece of heaven. A stretch of tucked-away beach contains chef Pierre's home, restaurant and dining room. There are also some modern and delightful wooden huts on stilts overlooking the ocean. Who needs mod-cons and TV? Dinner and breakfast for two are included in these excellent rates. Fall asleep after enjoying a delicious pasta dinner to the sound of the sea. Bliss. Hire cars and airport transfers can be arranged.

King's Bay Resort (☎ 242-338-8945; fax 242-338-8012; r \$70; ☎ lunch & dinner) This rundown place enjoys a fabulous and breezy location atop the dunes on the Atlantic shore north of McKann's. There's a restaurant and bar serving Bahamian food.

Just past Simms, you can grab a bite to eat and drink at **Mario's Blue Chip Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 242-338-8106; ☎ lunch & dinner), the local hangout of choice that specializes in seafood platters. For spicy chicken, try the open-air **Geraldine's Jerk Pit** (☎ lunch & dinner), 2 miles further south. The air-conditioned **Anca's Away Restaurant** (☎ 242-338-8593; ☎ lunch & dinner), next door, serves steaks and seafood.

If hunger gets the better of you, check out either the very casual **Windell's Take-Away** or **King's Bake & Snack Shop** (☎ 242-338-8916; Queen's Hwy, McCann's; ☎ 7am-6pm), simply the best bakery on the island; Bahamians start trooping in here early to grab daily specials like yummy pineapple tarts, pumpkin bread and hot savory patties.

Swift Car Rentals (☎ 242-338-8533; Queen's Hwy, Simms) also rents cars (from \$60 per day) from their garage situated north of Deadman's Cay.

Salt Pond

Twenty miles south of Stella Maris, Salt Pond is the main commercial node of the island, despite its diminutive size. A small lobster fleet is based here and a mail boat calls in weekly (see p225). There's a fish-processing plant, major supply store (Harding's Supply Store; HSC), and a gas station...about the only place on the island that's open on Sunday.

The **Royal Bank of Canada** (☎ 242-337-0100; ☎ 9am-1pm Thu, 9am-5pm Fri) is 3 miles south of Grays.

Just north of Salt Pond is **St Joseph's Anglican Church**, enjoying a sublime setting on a ridge above the beach and boneflats. Break out your camera!

Immediately north of HSC supply store (right), there is a road that leads east to the Atlantic shore and a headland with blush-pink beaches and a craggy, untouched shoreline. You can hike trails that lead south for several miles.

At Pinders, about 2 miles south of Salt Pond, another road (this one is in appalling condition) leads to **Guana Key**, a beautiful, well-protected, shallow bay; Guana Key Island is a short swim offshore. In good weather you are able to snorkel over the wreck of an old freighter in 15ft of water.

The highlight of the island's annual calendar is the **Long Island Regatta**, held at Salt Pond in mid-May. Sloops from throughout the islands compete during the festive four-day event.

ACTIVITIES

The snorkeling and diving here are simply superb. Divers should head for **Cape Santa Maria Ship's Graveyard** or **Grouper Valley** where thousands of these friendly (and possibly endangered) fish gather to spawn every November. There is also **Grouper Village**, where resident groupers and Brutus, a mammoth jewfish, expect to be fed. **Ocean Blue Hole**, a dramatic, ever-widening funnel, is worth seeing. Some like the adrenalin of feeding sharks at **Shark Reef** although this practice is now widely frowned upon.

Snorkers should head for **Coral Gardens** – Hawksbill turtles favor these awesome caves, overhangs, and valleys – and **Eagle Ray Reef** where rays flutter around guarded by a friendly grouper. **Flamingo Tongue Reef**

and **Watermelon Beach** are both favored by countless species of corals and fish. Some very experienced divers have set up shop at Salt Pond, but they cover all the dive sites.

Reel Divers (☎ 242-338-0011; www.reeldivers.com; Salt Pond) have two-tank dives (\$125), snorkel trips (3 hours \$50), kayak/snorkeling trips (half-day \$65) and underwater scooters (\$35). Great-value dive-stay packages are also available with this professional friendly and highly recommended bunch.

SLEEPING & EATING

Seaview Lodge (☎ 242-333-0100; Salt Pond; r \$90; (P) (X) (Z)) For great value you don't need to go further than these modern, clean white and spacious apartments. Fully equipped kitchens and comfy living areas in these one- and two-bedroom lodgings make this a bargain for couples or families.

The **Midway Inn**, 3-miles south of Salt Pond at Pinders, has a fish-fry on Friday.

The large **HSC** (Harding's Supply Centre; ☎ 242-338-0333; Queen's Hwy) store is very well stocked.

SOUTH LONG ISLAND

There is a lot to see and enjoy down this end of the island, with caves, some gorgeous beaches, and supposedly the world's deepest blue hole (660ft) leading to a vast underwater cavern and magnificent cove. The soaring church spires of Clarence Town and the dazzling Lochabar Bay with another vast blue hole, white-sand beach and coral reefs put another little piece of heaven within your reach.

Deadman's Cay Area

Deadman's Cay is the site of another airport. There is no discernible center to the town, but Max's Conch Bar & Grill is the next best thing if you want friendly gossip and information.

INFORMATION

Public phone booths can be found in most villages and along Queen's Hwy.

Ambulance, fire, police (☎ 242-377-0999)

BaTelCo (☎ 242-337-1337; Deadman's Cay)

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-337-1222; Deadman's Cay)

Post office (☎ 242-337-1064; Deadman's Cay)

Scotiabank (☎ 242-338-2057; Deadman's Cay;

☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

History buffs might enjoy the overgrown ruins of **Grays Plantation**, 2 miles north of Lower Deadman's Cay near Grays.

Lower Deadman's Cay is dominated by **St Athanasius Church**, which dates from 1929.

Cartwrights Caves, near the settlement of Cartwrights, immediately south of Deadman's Cay, were once used by Lucayan Indians. Harmless bats now live in the 150ft-long caves. They're on a private property, half a mile east of the main road. You'll see the sign. **Hamilton's Cave**, at the hamlet of Pettys, 4 miles southeast of Deadman's Cay, is 1500 feet long and is one of the largest caves in the Bahamas. It, too, contains bats, as well as stalactites, stalagmites, and a stone walkway with salt water on one side and fresh water on the other.

Reached from Queen's Hwy by a side road beginning at the Hillside Tavern, 1 mile south of Cartwrights, the fishing hamlet of **Mangrove Bush** is a center for traditional boatbuilding. Today the wooden vessels are built exclusively for racing regattas.

The **Long Island Library & Museum** in Pettys has a collection of photographs and artifacts (such as historic glass bottles) that chronicle the island's history and culture.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are also some fabulous rental properties on the island, just ask around or contact **Sunshine Real Estate** (☎ 242-338-0089; www.sunshine-real-estate.com; Salt Pond).

Ellen's Inn (☎ 242-337-1086; Queen's Hwy, Buckleys; s/d \$75/90 (P) (X) (Z)) This little white bungalow is an immaculate and homely guesthouse. A guest lounge is comfortably furnished and even pastries and sweets are put out for guests. The guest kitchen makes this an affordable and good-value option. Rates are inclusive of taxes and Ellen also rents out cars for \$60 per day.

Constantakis Bay View Apartments (☎ 242-337-0644; Pettys; r \$70; (P) (X) (Z)) These attractive blue lodgings are again in a perfect location for a fisherman in need for bed, balcony and a beer. However, the comfortable kitchen, cable TV and two-bedroom also makes this ideal for a family looking for a quiet spot that overlooks the sea, although there is not really a beach here.

Keva's Villas (☎ 242-337-1054; Queen's Hwy, Deadman's Cay; r \$70; (P) (X) (Z)) Within walking

distance of Max's Conch Bar & Grill, these very plain but clean units are also good value, comfortable enough and owned by Mr T (who runs the car rentals; see below). Rates include taxes.

Smith & Wells Bonefish Lodge (☎ 242-337-1056; Queen's Hwy; r \$65; (P) (X) (Z)) Sitting on the quiet edge of town, and adjacent to the water, this is the place for fishing fans who want nothing more than a simple but clean place to kip, somewhere to gut and store their fish, and a screened veranda for a beer in the evening.

Max's Conch Bar & Grill (☎ 242-337-0056; www.maxconchbar.com; Deadman's Cay; mains \$6-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) THE hot spot in town, everything you need to know and want to share, you can do whilst sitting around this circular outdoor bar. A lively and convivial host is well-matched by his customers and family. Daily specials can satisfy the appetite while good humor is enriching.

Coco's Restaurant & Lounge (☎ 242-337-6242; Hamilton's) This is a nice place to stop, and serves daily specials of Bahamian dishes.

You can buy groceries at the **J&M Food Store** (☎ 242-337-1446), 400 yards north of the BaTelCo office. On Sunday when the entire island closes shop, you can buy basic foodstuffs at the Shell **gas station** south of Cartwright.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

For further information, please refer to Getting There & Away, p224.

Mr T Car Rentals (☎ 242-337-1054; Deadman's Cay Airport) rents good, reliable air-conditioned vehicles from \$60 per day. Remember to look left, right and up, as you drive across the airport's runway to and from Mr T's residence!

Ophelia's Rent-A-Car (☎ 242-337-1042) is right next door to Mr T, and offers cars for the same rates.

Keep in mind that insurance is not on offer at car rental places.

Local taxis meet the planes, and Ellen's Inn can supply a taxi service, although it's more convenient to hire a car to get around.

Clarence Town Area

The peaceful harbor settlement of **Clarence Town** (population 1571) and its surrounds are perfect for those seeking some solitude, or a few quiet days living on a beach and

pottering around. Long Island's administrative headquarters is very quiet, and has a lovely hillside setting that falls gently to the clear and sparkling waters of the town's small harbor.

INFORMATION

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-337-3333; ☏ 9am-3:30pm Mon-Fri) Located near the mail-boat dock. **Police** (☎ 242-338-3919) Use this number for emergencies. **Post office** (☎ 242-337-3030) On the north side of Clarence Town.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Even the spiritually unattached will be inspired by the simple beauty of the two churches that rise over the town; **St Paul's Anglican Church** and the sparkling white and blue **St Peter's Catholic Church**. Both were designed by Father Jerome, the enigmatic architect-hermit-cleric of Cat Island (see p211). The first was designed prior to, and the second after, his conversion to Catholicism. You can climb the ladders within one of its two medieval spires for a marvelous bird's-eye view.

Immediately east of town is **Lochabar Bay**, a stunning half-mile-wide, flask-shaped cove that funnels east to a vast **blue hole**. It is rimmed by a splendid and lonesome white-sand beach, surrounded on three sides by dense thickets of thatch palm and scrub. Coral reefs lie just offshore, with staghorn coral at 30ft.

The 2-mile wide **Turtle Cove** near Deans, has a fabulous beach and turquoise shallows. Its real treasure, however, lies to the south-east beyond a headland, where perhaps the world's deepest **blue hole** (660ft) leads to the world's eighth-largest underwater cavern. The neck of the aquamarine hole opens to a beautiful cove rimmed by gorgeous white sands. Magnificent! Bring a picnic.

The turnoff from Queen's Hwy is marked. Turtle Cove also can be reached by a shoreline trail from Mangrove Bush, north of Pettys.

The sound west of Deadman's Cay is superb for bonefishing.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bahamian Mood Vacation Rentals (☎ 242-337-0056; www.bahamianmood.com; Clarence Town; r US\$100; ☏ ☒ ☑) This colorful two-story house contains four small units and a wrap-around

sundeck and has a startling white-sand beach on its doorstep. Each pristine white-and-navy apartment sleeps four, has comfortable furnishings and is just made for those who love solitude. Weekly and monthly rates are also excellent.

Lochabar Beach Lodge & Houses (☎ 242-337-0025, 242-337-6033; Clarence Town; r \$130; ☏ ☒ ☑) This wonderfully lonesome and charming lodge is a mile away from town at Lochabar Bay. Spacious studio apartments and little villas have sponge-painted wooden walls, tile floors, a kitchenette, and wide French doors that open to a patio facing the bay, all with the beautiful white-sand beach just a step or two away. Weekly rates are good too. Highly recommended!

Greenwich Creek Lodge (☎ 242-337-6278; www.greenwichcreek.com; Clarence Town) One for the really serious bonefisherman, the lodge charges approximately \$2500 per week for very comfortable accommodation, meals and bonefishing.

Outer Edge Grill & Bar (☎ 242-337-3445; Flying Fish Marina; mains \$8-18; ☏ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed & Fri-Mon) Not a bad setting for this tiny outdoor harborside bar and restaurant. The food is quick and tasty, the rums are smooth and the atmosphere relaxing.

Harbour Restaurant, Bar & Satellite Lounge (☎ 242-337-3247; Lighthouse Point Rd; mains \$7-20) Another popular place to eat and drink; it can get a bit smoky inside.

The Forest (☎ 242-337-3287; mains \$7-18) This is a lurid-pink bar and restaurant that also doubles as the areas hotspot with live music and dancing at weekends. Checkout the great seashell bar.

You can stock up with groceries in town and at **Harbour Grocery** (☎ 242-337-3934).

GETTING THERE & AROUND

For information on getting to Long Island, please refer to Getting There & Away, p222.

Flying Fish Marina (☎ 242-337-3430; flyfishmarina@batenet.bs; Lighthouse Point Rd, Clarence Town) has a 15-slip marina, provisions store, laundry, bathrooms and showers, plus accommodations for sailors, and a bar and food.

Millander's Auto Sales (☎/fax 242-337-3227) rents cars for around \$65 per day.

Dunmore to Cape Verde

The final 15-miles of the Queen's Hwy will take you past three exquisite **Father Jerome**

churches, whitewashed and painted in trademark blue, in **Dunmore**, **Hard Bargain**, and **Mortimers**.

Also just north of the church at Dunmore are the gates to some overgrown **plantation ruins**, named for a former governor of the Bahamas who had an estate producing sisal, cotton, and pineapples. You can follow a dirt track half a mile to the ruined hilltop mansion.

The road then passes turnoffs for shell-covered **Cabbage Point Beach**, some abandoned salt ponds and materially-desolated villages including the aptly-named **Hard Bargain** and quaint **Roses**, until it reaches **Gordons** settlement. From here you can hike the mile to **Cape Verde**, the island's southern-most point.

CROOKED ISLAND DISTRICT

pop 342

Crooked Island District consists of Crooked Island, Acklins Island, Long Cay, and outlying Samana and Plana Cays. These southerly islands are not developed for tourism, which is definitely part of their allure, but they are also not wealthy. Electricity still hasn't reached many areas and the island's descendants still fish, tend the land, and draw an income from stripping cascarilla bark and selling it to the manufacturers of Campari liquor (it is also used in medicines).

But other adventurers have arrived: Cubans and Haitians make the desperate run for a new life, and, not infrequently, drug-runners rush in aboard small planes to off-load bales of cocaine.

A 50-mile barrier reef rings the entire island chain, offering drop-offs beginning at about 50ft and plunging to 3600ft in the Crooked Island Passage. Bring whatever you need, especially diving, snorkeling or fishing equipment. Make sure you pack mosquito repellent; in summer the mosquitoes are ferocious.

History

Recent evidence suggests that Columbus made Crooked Island his second New World landfall (he named it Santa María de la Con-

cepción after the Virgin Mary, although there is no mention made of this on the isle itself).

In the late 18th century the islands, like their northern neighbors, were settled by Loyalists from North America who attempted to develop a cotton industry. By the 1830s depleted soils, weevils, and emancipation of the slave-labor workforce doomed the plantations forever. The white landowners left. The black laborers remained and turned to subsistence fishing and farming.

Getting There & Around

Visitors mainly fly into the main airfield just east of Colonel Hill, and Pittstown Point Landing has its own 2000ft airstrip. A weekly mail boat also brings people from Nassau.

A small passenger ferry runs between Cove Point, Crooked Island, and Lovely Bay, Acklins Island, twice daily. Other than that you may be able to rent a car from a resident. Ask your hosts for suggestions and bear in mind that the daily rate is \$80 to \$90 per day on some of the other islands. Likewise ask your hosts about organizing a boat trip to Long Cay.

CROOKED ISLAND

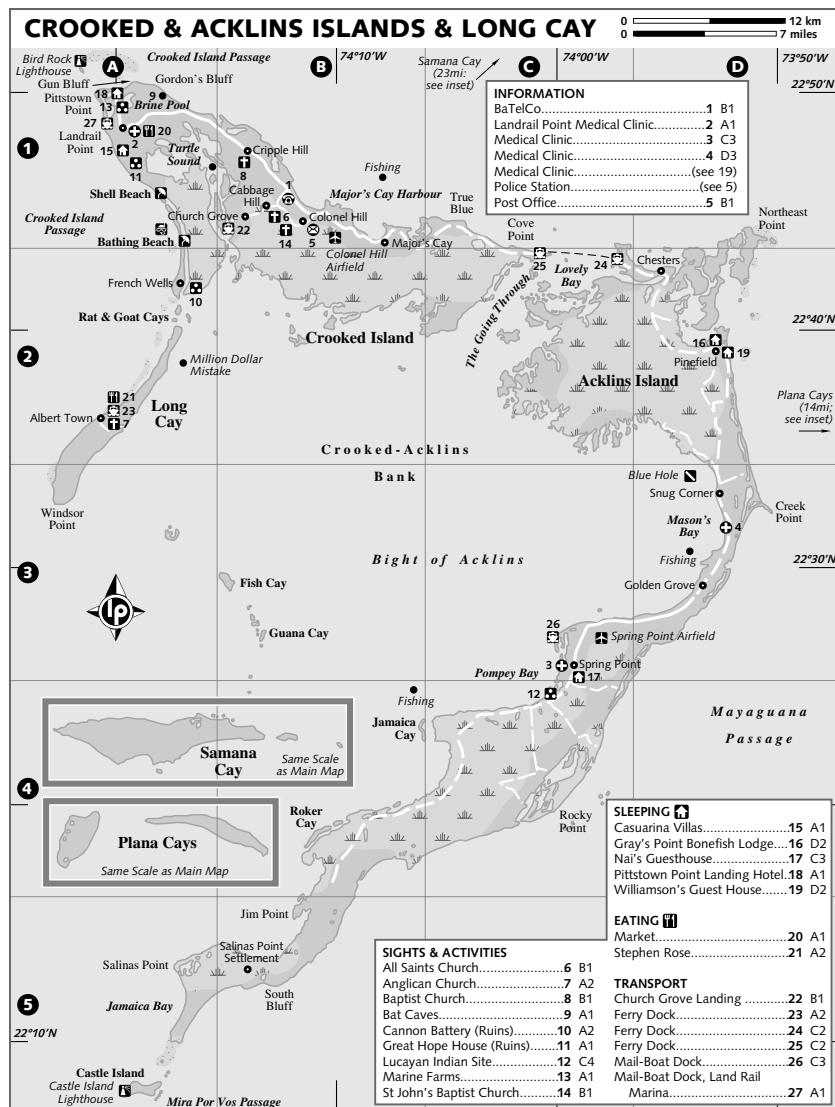
Spring on Crooked Island releases dozens of fluttering, vividly colored butterflies, which tentatively explore scrub and dense pockets of woodland, while herons, ospreys, egrets, mockingbirds, finches, wild canaries, hummingbirds, and flamingos swoop over briny lagoons and swamps. There is also a rugged shoreline with deep inlets, sounds and many lovely beaches on this isle. The island lies about 250 miles-southeast of Nassau.

One main road runs along the north shore and leads to Landrail Point and Colonel Hill, the island's main villages which run on farming and fishing, a number of generators and a lot of faith. About 60% of the islanders are Seventh-Day Adventists (the rest are Baptists and Presbyterians), and a devout lot they are, too! From Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, the island comes to a virtual halt.

Colonel Hill Area

pop 240

The only major settlement of **Colonel Hill** flanks a hill midway along the north coast. The scrub-covered plain below slopes down



to a beach-rimmed bay. The village comprises a few dozen ramshackle clapboard huts, emancipation-era houses, and pastel-painted modern concrete homes. The only building of note is **St John's Baptist Church**, atop the hill.

The road leads northwest 1½ miles to the lime-green **All Saints Church**, surrounded

by African flame trees in Cabbage Hill, and the small **Baptist church**, fronted by a tiny bell tower in Cripple Hill.

There are no banks in the Crooked Island District. The **post office** (☎ 242-344-2526), beside the **police** (☎ 242-344-2599) in the administration building in Colonel Hill, may provide basic banking transactions.

The **BaTelCo office** (☎ 242-344-2590) is in Church Grove and the medical clinic is in **Landrail Point Community Clinic** (fax 242-344-2345).

A few eateries and very basic guest-houses exist here, but visitors mainly head for Landrail Point.

You can buy groceries at the **Cabbage Hill Supermarket**.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The main airfield is 1½ miles east of Colonel Hill, and Pittstown Point Landing has its own 2000ft airstrip.

Bahamasair (UP; www.bahamasair.com; hubs Freeport & Nassau) Freeport (☎ 242-352-8341); Nassau (☎ 242-377-5505) flies between Nassau and Colonel Hill twice weekly (\$105 one-way), also stopping at Acklins Island.

Contact the **Potter's Cay Dockmaster's Office** (☎ 242-393-1064) in Nassau for mail-boat departure times.

MV United Star (\$70 one-way, 18hrs) sails from Nassau weekly, stopping at Acklins Island and Long Cay.

GETTING AROUND

Car rentals are organized on a haphazard basis, and may not be possible, but ask around when booking accommodations or when you arrive.

A small passenger ferry runs between Church Grove Landing, Crooked Island, and Lovely Bay, Acklins Island, twice daily.

Ask at the **Land Rail Marina** (☎ 242-344-2676; landrailpoint) to see if any boats will take you to Long Cay (about \$130, 30 minutes) or on sightseeing trips.

Landrail Point Area

This hamlet, 9 miles northwest of Colonel Hill, has a teeny harbor, a wealth of adjacent natural sights and most of the fun. The mail boat calls here, and a sandy 4WD track leads north 1½ miles to Pittstown Point, the northwestern tip of the island.

Crooked's most impressive site is a small, coral-encrusted, sand-edged cay a mile offshore from Pittstown Point. It is pinned by a stately 115ft-tall **Bird Rock Lighthouse** (1876), erected to guide ships through the treacherous Crooked Island Passage. The cay is a prime nesting colony for snowy white terns and tropical birds, and is a five-minute boat ride from Pittstown Point.

Bat Caves lie 100yd inland from the shore, near Gordon's Bluff near Gordon's Beach. They're easily explored, the walking is level and there are stalactites in the depths.

Brine Pool is a lagoon, stretching from Landrail Point north to Pittstown Point, along whose shore several expats have built modest homes, and seabirds, ospreys and sometimes flamingos flock.

Marine Farms, a salt farm on an island in the midst of the pond, began life as a cotton plantation and a Spanish or British fort that is said to have managed a firefight with US warships in the War of 1812. Cannons still can be seen lying amid the ruins and salt pans. **Great Hope House**, about a mile south of Landrail Point, was once the centerpiece of a 19th-century plantation.

The lovely **Shell Beach** and **Bathing Beach** stretch south from Landrail Point for 7 miles to **French Wells**. Snorkeling is divine, with fabulous coral heads just below the water. Alas, sharks are often present.

For bonefishing guides, ask at **Pittstown Point Landings Hotel** (☎ 242-344-2507; www.pittstownpointlandings.com). Rates vary from (half-day \$200-400, full-day \$500-700) for up to six people. Also try **Elton 'Bonefish Shakey' McKinney** (☎ 242-344-2507) and **Derrick Ingraham** (☎ 242-556-8769; half-/full-day \$200/450).

Ask if the ferry can drop you off at the old Landing's Point ferry stop. The Captain may oblige.

SLEEPING & EATING

Pittstown Point Landings Hotel (☎ 242-344-2507; www.pittstownpointlandings.com; Landrail Point; s/d \$105/115; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The main lodge once housed the Bahamas' first post office, and now houses a nice little library, bar and restaurant (most guests take a meal-plan

A MILLION DOLLAR MISTAKE

This famous **plane wreck** is in 12ft of water about 50yd offshore Long Cay. The plane was on a drug run when it crashed at sea. Locals found a suitcase containing about \$1,000,000. It was handed to an official from Nassau who, it seems, pocketed the money and went on to live the life of Riley. Nowadays divers hoping for any crumbs of this hoard will find no money but a wealth of fish and marine-life instead.

option) decorated with fishermen's nets. The rooms are shaded by coconut palms and decorated in tropical pastels and face onto a splendid beach.

Diving, snorkeling, fishing, and volleyball, bicycle, and boat rental are on offer.

Casuarina Villas (☎ 242-344-2197; Landrail Point; \$90-130) As well as leading diving expeditions, the owner of these beachfront cottages can organize car rental for guests. The villas come with full kitchen facilities and a deck, and are located around 1 mile from Landrail Point.

There's a local market in Landrail Point.

Colonel Hill to Cove Point

Follow the north shore to **Major's Cay**, a hamlet facing turquoise-jade waters rimmed by a narrow yet splendid beach. Further east, the road becomes a narrow track leading to **Cove Point**, 12 miles east of Major's Cay. There's nothing here but a tiny concrete wharf where the ferry departs for Acklins Island.

LONG CAY

This small island is separated by a mile-wide channel from Crooked Island. Columbus, it seems, landed here on October 19, 1492. The explorer named the island Isabela after the Spanish queen who funded his jaunts to the New World.

The island was later known as Fortune Island and once boasted thriving sponging

and salt industries. Flamingos wade in the bight on the south side of the island and an endemic subspecies of iguana inhabits two tiny cays – Fish Cay and Guana Cay – that lie 7 and 10 miles southeast of Long Cay.

In the 19th century **Albert Town**, also called Windsor and the island's only settlement, was the main base in the archipelago for transatlantic mail and freight ships hiring and dropping off stevedores, or 'coast crew.' Wild goats have taken over the ruins, though the largest **Anglican church** south of Nassau still stands.

Stephen Rose (☎ 242-344-3011) has a small grocery store and acts as a bonefishing guide.

ACKLINS ISLAND

pop 435

Another place for those seeking a true outpost is the undeveloped 45-mile-long Acklins Island, separated from Crooked Island by a shallow passage called 'The Going Through.' Reefs lie offshore to the east and there are fabulous and lonesome beaches along the shores. Flamingos also inhabit the briny flats. Hiking fans should head for the hilly and rugged north and east coasts.

The main settlement is **Spring Point**, midway down the west coast. Public electricity arrived in 1998, although plenty of homes still use a small generator. To bathe, most

locals scoop water from barrels, while their earnings come from fishing and beating bark for Campari.

Information

There is a **Government Medical Clinic** (☎ 242-344-3615) at Spring Point, plus a nurse in Mason's Bay (☎ 242-344-3628) and a **BaTelCo** (☎ 242-344-3536) office at Spring Point.

Sights & Activities

A partially excavated **Lucayan Indian site** along the shore of Pompey Bay, immediately south of Spring Point, may have been the largest Lucayan settlement in the Bahamas. The only other site of interest is the remote **Castle Island Lighthouse** (1867) at the southern tip of the island.

The annual **Acklins Homecoming & Regatta** is held during the first weekend of August.

The bonefishing is as good as it gets, as the Bight of Acklins has more than 1000 sq miles of knee-deep water. Most hotels can arrange fishing trips.

Sleeping & Eating

Nai's Guesthouse (☎ 242-344-3089; r \$65) Nai's has four rooms and offers meals by appointment. Its restaurant has a bar with pool table and TV, and music keeps things humming along.

Gray's Point Bonefish Lodge (☎ 242-344-3210; r \$65) This is another simple guesthouse in Pinefield.

Williamson's Guest House (☎ 242-344-3210) This family also rents rooms.

Head to Spring Point and Cabbage Hill for groceries.

Getting There & Around

Please refer to the Getting There & Away, p231, for flight and boat information on getting to the island.

The airfield is immediately northeast of Spring Point.

The government operates a passenger ferry from Cove Point (Crooked Island) to Lovely Bay, 3 miles west of Chesters, twice daily except Sunday (\$7 one-way). The mail boat dock lies north of Spring Point.

SAMANA CAY

This uninhabited cay still fits Columbus' description: 'quite large...flat...green...with many waters and white cliffs facing south.'

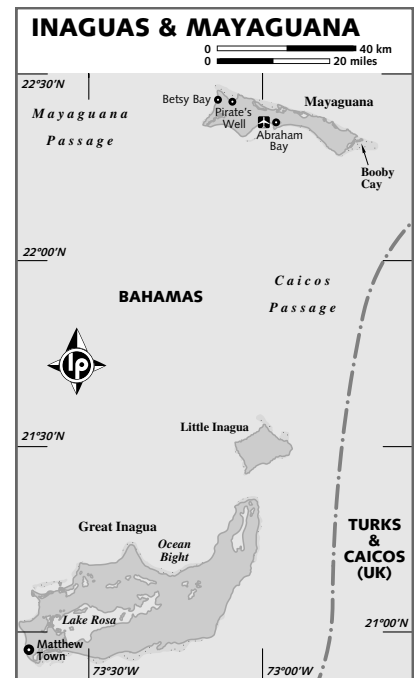
Archaeological digs led by the National Geographic Society have found 10 **Lucayan sites** (plus a Spanish earthenware vessel) and an ancient causeway of conch shells.

PLANA CAYS

This string of small cays, beginning 15 miles east of Acklins Island, is a protected reserve for endangered great iguanas and estimated hutias (which resemble a guinea pig); the Bahamas' only endemic mammal. No dogs are allowed ashore.

INAGUAS & MAYAGUANA

This group consists of three islands; Great Inagua (the southernmost Bahamian island) is famous for a vast flamingo sanctuary and salt industry, it also lies a spit away from Cuba and Haiti, and a long 325 miles from Nassau. Little Inagua is a diminutive isle to its northeast, while Mayaguana can rightfully be called one of the most lonesome of all



COLUMBUS STOOD HERE

No one (except perhaps residents of the Turks and Caicos) disputes that Columbus' first landfall in the New World in 1492 was in the Bahamas. But the question of which island he landed on has aroused considerable controversy. Nine first landfalls have been proposed, although, incredibly, no one had taken into account 'dead reckoning' – the cumulative effect of current and leeway (wind-caused slippage) on a vessel's course – in tracing the route of the round-bottomed fleet.

In November 1986, following five years of extensive study by Joseph Judge and a team of scholars interested under the aegis of the National Geographic Society, *National Geographic* magazine announced that it had solved the 'grandest of all geographic mysteries.' Judge ordered a new translation of the Columbus diaries, drew the first-ever track of the log, then input all the variables into a computer to adjust for leeway, current, and magnetic variation, and traveled to the islands to find actual evidence. Judge's team also was the first to track Columbus' course using the Spanish league (2.82 nautical miles), not the English league (2.5 nautical miles) previously used. Presto! The exact landing spot turns out to be latitude 23°4'09"00"N and longitude 73°4'29"13"W...the island of Samana Cay.

If the claim is true, the *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa María* anchored on Samana's southwest side, at a spot where the reef opens. Columbus explored inside the reef in a rowboat and recorded the features of the island that he named San Salvador.

Bahamian islands, lying just 50 miles northwest of Providenciales (Turks and Caicos).

Half of Great Inagua lies within Bahamas National Trust Park and therefore much of the island is only accessible with some arduous trekking through brush, with vast acres of exceedingly briny lakes where wild boars, horses and donkeys roam (the latter two outnumber humans by five-to-one). If this matches your sense of adventure then you're in for some excitement! You will be made welcome by local Bahamians and the birdlife, including some rare feathered-beauties and the hemisphere's largest flock of West Indian flamingos, is fabulous.

The islands are hot; the mosquitoes are overwhelming. However the islands are free

of mainstream tourists and the air-kissing set, only occasional fellow bird- and nature-lovers ever appear in these parts.

History

Great Inagua's human settlement was financed and supported by salt. 'Crystal farming' was began in the late 18th century. The island became a major salt exporter (as told in *Great Inagua* by Margery O Erickson).

Great Inagua's southernmost position also makes it a prime piece of real estate for drug-runners heading in from Colombia and other drug-producing nations. So many islanders profited from the drug trade in the 1980s that when a policeman became overzealous, locals burned down the police

station and took him hostage. The Drug Enforcement Administration now have a permanent presence on the islands.

Getting There & Around

Most visitors fly into Great Inagua or Mayaguana. Others catch the weekly mail boat from Nassau.

You'll need your own transport if you want to explore the islands. Car hire companies are based at Matthew Town. Car insurance is not generally on offer.

GREAT & LITTLE INAGUA

pop 951

With salt traders and birds the most recognizable visitors, not many realized that

novelist Ian Fleming also visited the islands in the 1950s. He thought Great Inagua quite strange, with its lake 'only a couple of feet deep and the color of a corpse.' Thus it became the home of Dr No, the villain of the first James Bond film.

Great Inagua is 35 miles east to west and 20 miles north to south at its widest. Uninhabited Little Inagua lies to the northeast.

Matthew Town is the only settlement and is also a center for the Morton Salt Company, who produces nearly a million pounds of salt here annually. Also likely to make you thirsty is the knowledge that the islands have no potable water supply; water currently is shipped in and distributed by truck.

Sport fishing and scuba-diving fans will enjoy these pristine waters but will need their own gear.

Matthew Town

pop 452

The white gold of former years is still a regular income for most of the town's folk, while others get by on fishing and farming. The faded bungalows and old two-story whitewashed houses with green shuttered windows make up the town center along with a few shops and bars and the island commissioner's office, topped by a clock tower. There's a small beach to the south, with shade trees and picnic benches.

INFORMATION

Public telephone booths are scattered around town.

Bank of the Bahamas (☎ 242-339-1264; Ground fl, commissioner's office, Gregory St; ⌚ 9:30am-2pm Mon-Thu, 9:30am-5:30pm Fri)

BaTelco office (☎ 242-339-2002; Matthew Town)

Government Medical Clinic (☎ 242-339-1249, 242-339-1226 after 5:30pm; Victoria St)

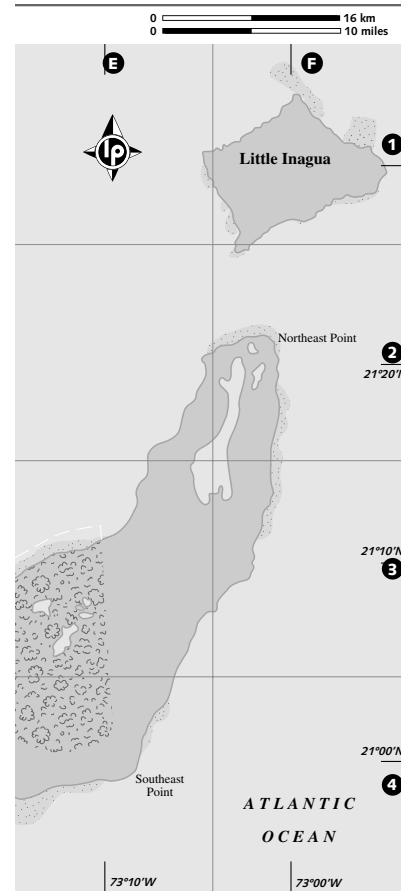
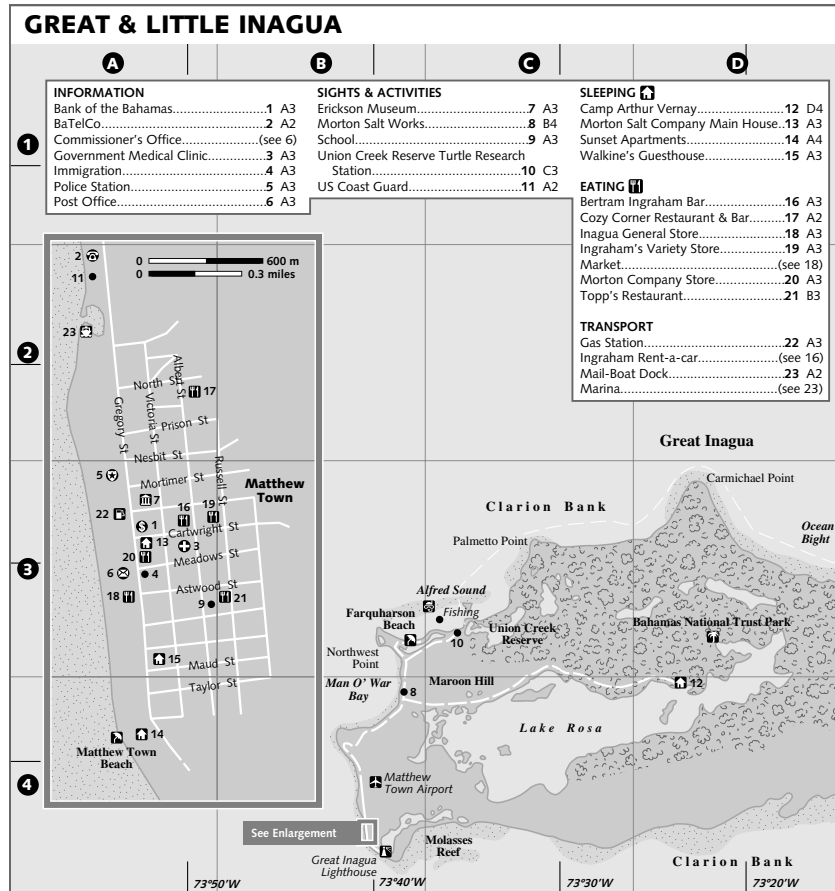
Police station (☎ 242-339-1444, 919; Gregory St)

Post office (☎ 242-339-1248; Ground fl, commissioner's office, Gregory St)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The small **Erickson Museum** (☎ 242-339-1863; Gregory St; ⌚ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) contains profiles on salt production and native fauna, including flamingos. Ask the librarian to open it for you.

The **Great Inagua Lighthouse** (☎ 242-339-1370; Southwest Point) is one of four kerosene



lighthouses in the country that that must be wound by hand every 1½ hours throughout the night.

A good place for snorkeling is **Alfred Sound**, at the end of the road north of town, where bonefishing also is said to be excellent.

SLEEPING & EATING

Great Inagua is a bit of a culinary wasteland and there is little seafood or vegetables, but at least there's no shortage of salt. Cash is preferred here.

Morton Salt Company Main House (☎ 242-339-1267; Gregory St; d \$70-90; P ☒ ☕) This endearing and well-maintained little two-story guesthouse sits in the town, albeit across from a noisy power plant. Three rooms have their own bathrooms, and all are very clean and adequately furnished. Gideon's Bibles can occupy you in the toilets!

Walkine's Guesthouse (☎ 242-339-1612; cnr Gregory & Maud Sts; r \$80-90) A more modern option is this guesthouse with five well-maintained rooms, all with crisp, attractive decor, neat bathrooms, and modern furniture, including TVs.

Sunset Apartments (☎ 242-339-1362; r \$120) In the south end of town, and sitting right on the water, these units are cheerful and nicely furnished with tiles and rattan furniture. It is only a five-minute walk to the nearest beach.

Cozy Corner Restaurant & Bar (☎ 242-339-1440; North St; mains \$7-18; ☒ lunch & dinner) Your best bet on the island; enjoy some boiled fish, fried chicken and burgers or have a drink and a game of pool.

Topps Restaurant (☎ 242-339-1465) in town and **Bertram Ingham Bar** (☎ 242-339-1659; Kortwright St) both sell the liquid stuff we all enjoy so much.

Inagua General Store (☎ 242-339-1460; Gregory St) and **Inghams Variety Store** (☎ 242-339-1232; Cartwright St) are useful stores, while a market is held intermittently by the beach.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

For international flights to the Bahamas please refer to p288.

Matthew Town Airport (☎ 242-339-1680) is 2 miles north of town.

Bahamasair (UP; www.bahamasair.com; hubs Freeport & Nassau) Freeport (☎ 242-352-8341); Nassau (☎ 242-377-5505) flies from Nassau to Matthew Town

Inagua, and Mayaguana (\$111 one-way, three times a week).

For boat schedules and departure times, call the **Dockmaster's office** (☎ 242-393-1064) on Potter's Cay in Nassau.

MV Trans-Cargo II (\$70 one way; 24hrs) sails from Nassau weekly to Inagua and Mayaguana.

Matthew Town Harbour (☎ 242-339-1427) has slips and fuel, and you can 'enter' the island at **Immigration** (☎ 242-339-1234; Gregory St). There is also a US Coast Guard.

For car rentals call **Ingham Rent-a-Car** (☎ 242-339-1667) or **Henry Nixon** (☎ 242-339-1616; Victoria St). There is a gas station on Gregory Street.

Ingham's Variety Store (☎ 242-339-1232; Cartwright St) rents bicycles out at \$12 per day.

North of Matthew Town

About 4 miles past Matthew Town, the dirt road passes between the southernmost of part the Morton Salt Works' salt pans; the pans are contained by dikes that connect them to equally briny natural lakes. Further

FLAMING FLAMINGOS

The West Indian (or roseate) flamingo is restricted to Great Inagua, the Turks and Caicos, Bonaire, portions of the Yucatán Peninsula, and Cuba. Around 60,000 of these leggy birds inhabit 12-mile-long Lake Rosa in the Bahamas National Trust Park. In season (November through June) the birds can be seen in great flocks in the park, most magnificently, taking off en masse in a pink blizzard. The birds mate in December and January and nest from February to April. They migrate annually to Cuba. There are other rare birds to entice even the most jaded bird-watcher, including the reddish egret. Each spring a **bird count** is undertaken. You're welcome to volunteer.

Flamingos have started to repopulate neighboring islands, a sure sign of success, as the birds have been hunted ruthlessly for meat and milliners' stores during the past 200 years. Locals still have a taste for flamingo steak (the flesh is said to taste like partridge) and occasionally shoot the birds for meat, despite a \$1000 fine and a penalty of three months' imprisonment. Hogs are the birds' other main enemy.

north, the dirt road passes sporadic beaches, the ruins of an old sisal plantation, and an abandoned loyalist settlement.

The road finishes at **Farquharson Beach**, a protected bay and a prime snorkeling and bonefishing spot where the abandoned US Aerostat station is located. A turnoff here leads east – inland – to the Union Creek Reserve (see right).

The **Morton Salt Works** are the second-largest solar **saline plant** in the hemisphere; comprising 34,000 acres of reservoirs and salt pans surrounding a cleaning, storage, and bulk-freight loading facility.

Each pan is 'harvested' once a year between March and June, and its salt is transported and washed. The soggy crystals then are stacked into huge mountains to dry in the sun. Each pile of salt contains crystals of a specific size and shape; the different grades of salt are each intended for a different purpose.

The company's **managing director** (☎ 242-339-1811) is normally happy to organize a tour to show you around.

Bahamas National Trust Park

This 287-sq-mile national park protects the world's largest breeding colony of West Indian (or roseate) flamingos and has been in operation since 1963. Drought-resistant scrub, bonsai forests and vast acres of deceased, leafless trees indicate the effects of the briny waters. However, the super-salty soup teems with brine shrimp and larval brine flies, foods favored by flamingos and a parade of other waders. Dominating the park is Lake Rosa, a precious mirror reflecting the antics of roseate spoonbills, endemic reddish pink egrets, avocets, cormorants, tricolored Louisiana herons, and flamingos.

Sometimes you can see flamingos in the brine pools on the edge of the Morton Salt Works, outside the park boundary. But the large flocks are within the park, far from traffic and other disturbances. The best times to visit are early morning and late evening.

There are also burrowing owls, Bahamian pintails, endemic Bahamian woodstar hummingbirds, brown pelicans, stripe-headed tanagers, American kestrels and endangered Bahama parrots.

Before you arrive, contact the **Bahamas National Trust** (BNT; ☎ 242-393-1317; Nassau, New

Providence) to make reservations, buy a day pass (\$25) or book a tour (\$50 for four adults, including tip). Taking in the salt works, tours are run by **Henry Nixon** (☎ 242-339-1616; fax 242-339-1850; VHF Channel 16), the BNT warden on Inagua. All visitors must be accompanied by a warden and passes have to be bought in advance.

Hawksbill turtles also come ashore to nest and freshwater turtles inhabit ponds on these isles. **Union Creek Reserve**, lies at Bahamas National Trust Park's northwest corner and encompasses tidal creeks and beach where sea turtles – notably green turtles – feed and come ashore to nest. The sanctuary is the only natural feeding ground in the Caribbean region and mid-Americas where sea turtles are not hunted or exploited in any way. The BNT is working in conjunction with the US-based **Caribbean Conservation Corporation & Sea Turtle Survival League** (US ☎ 800-678-7853, 352-373-6441; www.ccturtle.org) to protect the turtles.

The cactus-covered limestone ridge of **Maroon Hill** is a good vantage point for spying the location of flamingos, which usually can be seen in the brine ponds immediately to the west.

Camp Arthur Vernay (☎ 242-339-1616; fax 242-339-1850; VHF Channel 16; dm per person \$30) The plain bunkhouse sleeps nine and has two shared showers with cold and lukewarm water and an outdoor kitchen. Take your own food, but the BNT warden Henry Nixon may cook for you on request; be prepared to tip extra.

Little Inagua

This 30-sq-mile island, 5 miles northeast of Great Inagua, is uninhabited, despite its relatively rich soils, which support a dense stand of Cuban royal palm and sizeable populations of wild burros and goats. Several bird species and marine turtles also nest here.

MAYAGUANA

pop 251

The silent beaches, rugged and rocky shores, and unspoilt reefs entice occasional boaters to this 25-mile-long isle that is barely 6 miles wide, and is located 65 miles from Great Inagua. Some fantastic snorkeling can be enjoyed here and **Booby Cay**, offshore, is an important nesting site for seabirds.

Abraham Bay, on the south coast, is the largest of three small settlements on the island. Roads northwest lead to the other settlements: **Pirate's Well** and **Betsy Bay**. Electricity and a full telephone service arrived here only in 1997, despite the US Air Force's missile-tracking station (now defunct) that was here during NASA's Apollo and Mercury programs.

Probably your bet on the island, **Reggie's Guest House & Lounge** (☎ 242-422-0131; Abraham's Bay; r \$150) can offer breakfast, dinner and

fishing excursions. While the beachside restaurant and bar, **Buccaneers' Rest** (☎ 242-339-3605; Pirate's Well; r \$130), offers 16 simple rooms in its little single-story yellow building.

Brook's, **Brown's**, and **Farrington's** are all tiny grocery stores open daily.

Most visitors fly here, but it's possible to catch the weekly ferry from Nassau. The airfield is 2 miles west of Abraham Bay.

Ask at the grocery stores about water-taxi services.