

2J CRUISES: MIAMI CHEF TAKES TO THE HIGH SEAS

5J QUICK TRIPS: FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

TRAVEL

The Miami Herald



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CARIBBEAN AND BAHAMAS ISSUE

Pair your
travel
personality
with island
character
and find
your
perfect
vacation
spot.

**BAHAMAS
MATCH
GAME**



ENDLESS SUMMER: Sparkling waters attract beach-lovers to Taino, one of Grand Bahama's loveliest stretches of sand. The Hermitage, below, is Cat Island's main attraction.

• Lolling to the beat of the tropics in tranquil Tortola, 8J

BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON
Special to The Miami Herald

With 700 major islands and thousands of smaller cays, the Bahamas poses a quandary along with its inherent allure: How in the name of Bahama Mama do you pick the best island for you?

In my experience, quaffing a Bahama Mama can't hurt the decision-making process. (Unless you're a teetotaler, in which case, you'll be comfortable on Abaco's Man-O-War Cay, where no liquor is sold.)

Luckily, the sheer number of islands and cays can be whittled down to those with practical public access. Each, however, has its distinct personality. What island personality best fits yours? Read on.

Personality Type: You are a Pisces and own a dozen Columbia fishing shirts in various colors and sleeve lengths. You tie your own flies, and your deck shoes smell like fish. Your idea of nightlife involves the moon, the sea and a six-pack.

Your Island Match: Central Andros Island.

The Bahamas' biggest island, sparsely populated Andros is moored between the bonefish-fertile estuaries of its West Side and the dramatic Tongue of the Ocean, a trench that plunges 6,000 feet deep.

The first attracts fly-fishermen to fishing lodges around Cargill Creek and Behring Point on the island's south end; the latter, rabid scuba divers and snorkelers.

One of the Bahamas' least-known destinations, its lodging nonetheless can cost dearly because most places package meals and diving or fishing.

Resorts and lodges are adventure-oriented and, for the most part, minimal. Andros Island Bonefishing Club in Cargill Creek is legendary for its fishing packages. Small Hope Bay Lodge takes good care of both divers and anglers.

Nightlife and dining are insignificant sidebars to Andros vacationing, and even getting to the island can be an adventure that requires a layover in Nassau. Most resorts provide their own meals and entertainment, but Andros Town and Fresh Creek do offer some alternatives near the airport.

Personality Type: You like pizza and foie gras (not together), baseball caps and dress-up, the smell of expensive

• TURN TO THE BAHAMAS, 6J



STUART COVE'S DIVE BAHAMAS

BREAK OUT THE BUBBLY: Celebrating the big day in the deep blue makes for an inimitable ceremony, like this one by Stuart Cove's Dive in Nassau.

ROMANCE

Island-style weddings, honeymoons and secluded getaways

■ Don't just stand on ceremony. In the Caribbean, you can also swim on it, stroll on it, even fly on it.

MELANIE REFFES
Special to The Miami Herald

Whether you're still smitten with an old flame or igniting sparks with a new one, the Caribbean tempts lovers for a romantic getaway with sandy strands, mountain-coddled coves and tie-dyed sunsets.

"The pressure on creativity is heating up with planners thinking of more innovative ways to satisfy the demands of couples from weddings underwater and in palm-fringed gazebos to the always romantic sunset backdrop," says Hugh Riley, incurable romantic and secretary general of the Barbados-based Caribbean Tourism Organization.

From Anguilla and Aruba to St. Lucia and St. Maarten, the Caribbean is paradise found for brides and grooms saying their I Do's on the beach, honeymooners in search of a hammock in the shade, and couples just wanting to get away from the nine-to-five.

SOMETHING BLUE

Whether it's aboard a catamaran or presided over by a PADI-certified diving preacher, the big day in the deep blue makes for an inimitable ceremony. In Nassau, the planners at Stuart Cove's are experts at underwater weddings. "Couples

• TURN TO ROMANCE, 4J

TRAVELWISE

Trends change hotel costs and ambience

■ From the disappearance of bathtubs to the advent of electronic check-in, hotels are gradually changing the way they serve their guests.

BY BETH J. HARPAZ
Associated Press

Pump bottle on the shower wall or individual shampoos and lotions you can take home? Luxurious tub for an indulgent bath or no tub at all? A friendly greeting from a well-informed local or a code transmitted electronically that will open your hotel room door with no human interaction at check-in whatsoever?

Here are some details on some hotel trends bubbling up in the industry right now, and how they affect your stay.

• **Increasing fees:** Your hotel bill may include some unpleasant surprises. Not just a \$20-a-day resort and amenity fee, which you pay whether or not you use the tennis courts and pool complex, but how about a required \$12 housekeeping surcharge or a fee for storing your luggage in the lobby?

Total fees and surcharges collected by U.S. hotels increased from \$1.7 billion in 2010 to a record \$1.8 billion in 2011, according to new research from Bjorn Hanson, dean of New York University's Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality and Sports Management. Hanson recommends that consumers ask when getting a rate for a hotel what fees will be added to the bill. If you're booking online, you may have to hunt around the listing to see what might be added to the quoted rate in addition to taxes.

• **Lobbies are social hubs:** Colorful seating, free Internet service and trendy cocktail and coffee bars are helping to turn once-sterile hotel lobbies into social hubs. Hanson says while baby boomers might see the lobby as a place to meet at 6 p.m. sharp before heading out to a prearranged restaurant, younger travelers may gather informally in the lobby, hang out for a while, socialize and take their time choosing where they'll spend the evening. They might check email, go online using a cell phone or iPad to look for dining recommendations, or try whatever snacks or drinks are readily available from the lobby market or bar.

Hilton's new Home2 Suites extended stay brand was launched earlier this year with a lobby concept designed to

• TURN TO TRAVELWISE, 7J

THE BAHAMAS

There's a perfect island for every personality

• THE BAHAMAS, FROM 1J

cologne and outboard engines, roulette and kayaking, dolphins and bats. You suspect you're a touch AADD.

Your Island Match: Grand Bahama Island

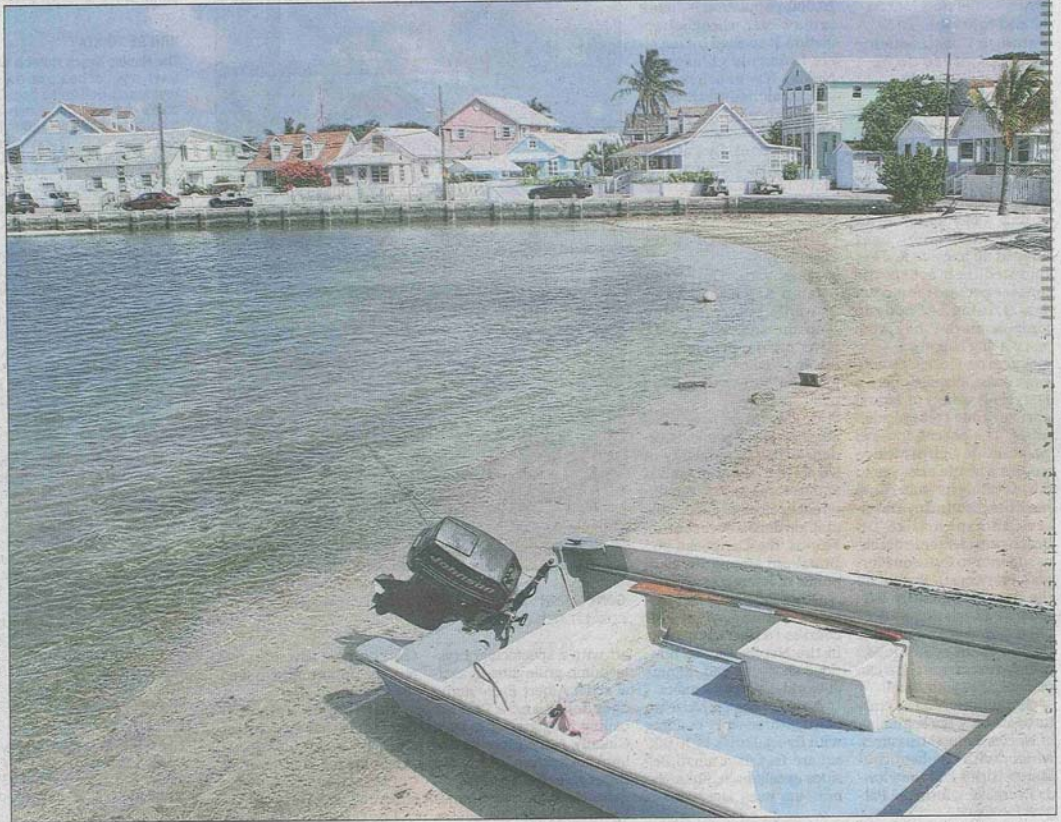
Because of its infinite diversity and sheer size (96 miles long), Grand Bahama Island is the place for the easily bored renaissance type. Plus, it's easy to get to with direct flights from South Florida. (On Nov. 3, Vision Airlines will begin economical direct flight service from Fort Lauderdale.)

Grand Bahama's Freeport-Lucaya ranks as the Bahamas' second largest metro area after Nassau. More affordable and less traffic-clogged than Nassau, its treasures range from destination resorts, terrific golf, and a modern casino to a historic garden attraction, a national park with bat caves and a gorgeous beach, and unspoiled beachfront fishing settlements.

Beach-lovers who crave seclusion find it in gradations of sugar-white edged with clear blue-green water made for snorkeling and diving. Dolphin programs, shark dives, Bahama Mama party cruises, duty-free shopping, good restaurants in all flavors, and kayaking excursions: Grand Bahama has all that and then some.

Lodging covers all bases, whether you're looking for an inexpensive diving hotel or a full-service beach resort. The newly rebranded Grand Lucayan Bahamas fits the latter bill with an assortment of room types, lots of restaurants, a spa, two golf courses, a small water park, and close proximity to the island's casino and best shopping.

Personality Type: You decorate your kitchen with basketware you've collected and hate crowds. You're a fan of Travel Channel's An-



CHELLE KOSTER WALTON

TRANQUIL SHORE: New Plymouth on Green Turtle Cay, a ferry hop from Abaco Island, reflects its New England roots.

Pond to be more centrally located for exploring.

Personality Type: You love Key West and have read *Old Man and the Sea* five times. As soon as you shed your corporate uniform, you don cutoff jeans and a Guy Harvey T-shirt. You'll drink whatever the bartender's making and get to know him by name after only one.

Your Island Match: North Bimini

Going to the Bahamas

Information: 800-BAHAMAS or www.bahamas.com.

WHERE TO STAY

Prices do not include taxes and gratuities, which can add as much as 12 percent or more.

Abaco Beach Resort, 800-468-4799, www.abacobeachresort.com. Rates from \$290 to \$1,700 year-round.

Andros Island Bonefishing Club, 242-368-5167, www.androsbonefishing.com. All-inclusive fishing packages start at \$1,235 per person for three nights/two days.

Atlantis, 242-363-3000, www.atlantis.com. Low season

and culture with you.

Their most notable claim to cultural fame is the rake 'n' scrape impromptu style of music-making that started here and has spread chain-wide. Accordions often figure into the band, but also goat-skin drums, tambourines, saws and screwdrivers, and animal jawbones come into play.

As far as history, The Hermitage perches atop Como

to the resort.

Once there, feet will get you pretty much everywhere you're going — unless you want to hop back over to the main island of Eleuthera to tour the beaches, check out Lenny Kravitz's fave hangout bar (Elvina's in Gregory Town), or do some underwater sightseeing.

Look for the stars "slumming" at night with the lo-

drew Zimmer and love trying new and unusual foods. You can't wait to tweet about fresh finds none of your friends knows about.

Your Island Match: Long Island

One of the archipelago's most undersung, Long Island is also one of its most old-timey treasures. Its north end holds a couple of better-known resorts — Stella Maris and Cape Santa Maria.

South of there, explorations by rental car will reveal such anomalies as old plantation ruins, caves, an eccentric shellcraft artisan, flamingoes, goat farms, and a dramatic blue hole rimmed by cliffs and beach that is the site of a biannual international free-diving competition.

Best find? The town of O'Neil's, where the local workforce has been employed for decades in the art of hand-plaiting palm fronds to be sewn into bags, hats, baskets, and dozens of other authentic souvenirs.

With the exception of the resorts, the restaurants sell some of the islands' more peculiar home-cooked specialties such as steamed mutton, stuffed breadfruit, and okra soup.

Long Islanders are mostly employed in farming or fishing, and the resulting freshness makes it worth eating outside your comfort zone. Don't miss Max's in Deadman's Cay when coming from or going to the airport.

Although the north end resorts are outstanding for their natural and manmade features, I recommend stationing mid-island at Long Island Breeze Resort in Salt

If it's possible to be soulmates with an island, North Bimini is yours. As the closest island to South Florida (50 miles away), it welcomes floods of boat-ins and fly-ins coming to party, relax, and fish, fish, fish.

Ernest Hemingway made the island famous. He fished, guzzled rum, brawled and wrote *Islands in the Stream* there. Floridians today follow pretty much the same agenda (maybe not so much the writing and brawling) in Alice Town.

Bimini's appeal is limited and doesn't come cheaply. Despite the Florida influence, it does manage to keep its Bahamian identity where dining is concerned. All the "downtown" restaurants and conch shacks in adjacent Bailey Town serve local.

Mostly it's about partying at the island's beaches — less spectacular than on many of the islands — and fishing. Best party spots: End of the World Saloon in Alice Town and Mackey's Sand Bar on South Bimini — both with floors of sand. Transportation is by boat, foot, or golf cart.

For a truer eco-experience and better beaches, hop the five-minute ferry to South Bimini for a day. Or hook up with the Saunders brothers on North Bimini to tour the Dolphin House and learn about Hemingway, Martin Luther King, and local history.

The resorts are avidly fishing oriented, from the small lodges to the grandiose Bimini Bay. Newest on the scene, Guy Harvey Outpost Resort has taken over

rates \$280 to \$390, high season \$480 to \$615.

Bimini Bay Resort, 888-891-2263, www.biminibayresort.com. Low season rates \$199 to \$349 for studio and two-bedroom accommodations; \$199 to \$499 in high season.

Fernandez Bay Village, 800-940-3905, www.fernandezbayvillage.com. Rates \$250 to \$490 in low season, \$280 to \$2,870 in high season.

Grand Lucayan Bahamas, 855-582-2926, www.grandlucayan.com. Low season rates \$139 to \$169; \$189 in high season.

Guy Harvey Outpost Resort, 800-867-4764, www.biggameclubbimini.com. Low season rates \$159 to \$350, high season \$189 to \$350.

Hotel Greenwood Beach Resort, 242-342-3053, www.greenwoodbeachresort.com. Rates \$110 to \$130 year-round.

Long Island Breeze Resort, 242-338-0170, www.longislandbreezersort.com. Rates \$75 to \$200 for bungalows to an apartment.

One&Only Ocean Club, 800-321-3000, www.oneandonlyresorts.com. Low season rates start at \$495, high season \$845.

Pink Sands, 242-333-2030, www.pinksandsresort.com. Off-season rates start at \$495; high season rates start at \$750.

Small Hope Bay Lodge, 800-223-6961, www.smallhope.com. All-inclusive daily rate for adults in low season \$235, in high season \$260 to \$285.

Bimini Big Game Club.

Personality Type: You will pack stiletto heels and five of the latest, skimpiest designer bikinis. You thrive on sushi and sake-tinis and dancing with the stars. Your idea of recreation? An all-day spa package.

Your Island Match: Paradise Island

Whether you decide to check in at the Atlantis or One&Only Ocean Club, you will find your Zen and zootopia on Paradise Island. A short drive or ferry ride across the bay from downtown Nassau, Atlantis feels privileged and exciting with its cathedral-sized casino, fine dining, duty-free shopping, superlative beaches, and high price tags.

You can get away with merely expensive rooms in Atlantis' Coral and Beach towers. But if you're going for the gold, check into the adult-only Cove or sister property One&Only. Guests have privileges at both. Show off those new bikinis on the beach or around one of 15 pools between the two properties.

Slip into the stilletos for an over-the-top dinner at Nobu and an evening partying at Aura, where celebs such as Mariah Carey, Derek

Jeter, and Samuel L. Jackson pay \$500 or more for a four-top in the VIP section.

The 171-acre Atlantis has enough to keep a person busy for days right on property, with dolphin and stingray programs, golfing at One&Only, a movie theater, and top-flight dining such as Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill and The Dunes at One&Only, where a burger costs in the 20s.

Outside the resorts, the compact island offers a small glimpse of local life at the straw market. At the ferry terminal, a fleet of boats waits to whisk you to private islands and snorkeling, dolphin, and other watery adventures.

Personality Type: You never miss Sunday services because you love meeting and talking to people and that whole religious mystique. You have read every Dan Brown book and are a huge *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* fan. You dabble at the accordion.

Your Island Match: Cat Island

Cat Island feels like a homecoming, even if you've never visited before. Folks — all 1,800 (counting one doctor) — are friendly and happy to share their history

with you. The island, aka "the Bahamas Alps," elevation 206 feet, the highest in the islands. Built by the reclusive priest-architect Father Jerome, the diminutive cluster of buildings inspires a sense of religious wonder.

Cold Kalik and dominoes at Hazel's is another defining experience on the island where Sidney Poitier once called home. Resorts are few and family-run, until the new PGA Village opens in 2012, if predictions are accurate. Rates are high at full-service resorts such as the popular but ultra-casual Fernandez Bay Village. Those looking for surfing, diving, and more affordability stay on the windier side at Hotel Greenwood.

Even at the resorts you eat Bahamian-style on this 48-mile-long island, which usually requires a layover in Nassau to reach.

The island suffered some minor damages from Hurricane Irene, most of which had been repaired by mid-September.

Personality Type: Beach: that's the operative word in your vacation planning. You prefer beaches of the rich and famous. You don't care what you have to pay or how far you have to travel to be able to post on Facebook that you saw a star on vacation. Besides being a beach snob, you are also a food snob. Favorite color? pink.

Your Island Match: Harbour Island, North Eleuthera

Jennifer Aniston, Cameron Diaz, Susan Sarandon, Robert DeNiro, Robin Williams, Sean Penn, Michael Bolton, Julia Roberts: You're in good company on the pink sands of Harbour Island.

Most of the celebs stay at the Pink Sands resort overlooking its famous beach, but any of its handful of designer properties are likely stalking spots. They come here, like you, to get away from the crowds that make the easy beeline for the beach. For regular folks, it requires a flight from Florida, a taxi ride, boat transport, and a golf cart lift to get

to the beach spots. Curly Tail, aka Mount Alexander, aka "the Bahamas Alps," elevation 206 feet, the highest in the islands. Built by the reclusive priest-architect Father Jerome, the diminutive cluster of buildings inspires a sense of religious wonder.

Personality Type: Your favorite fabric is neoprene and your favorite bubbly is the kind that you breathe out of your SCUBA regulator. You have a hat that says "Divers do it deeper," and like your rum punch with lots of punch. When you can't be under water, you want to be on or near it.

Your Island Match: Abaco Islands

Off Abaco stretches the fourth longest barrier reef in the world. You will find dive schools and operators on the main Great Abaco Island as well as some of its smaller cays.

On Green Turtle Cay, a ferry hop from the main island, Brendal's Dive Center (www.brendal.com) has a long-running reputation for its full-service setup. Brendal himself is a legend; he caters also to snorkelers.

Afterwards, treat yourself to a Goombay Smash in New Plymouth at funky Miss Emily's Bee Bar, where the potent rum concoction was invented.

For from-shore snorkeling with a side of rum, take a ferry trip to Great Guana Cay and Nippers Beach Bar, a world-famous yachting pit stop. Here the signature rum tippie is a frozen Nipper Tripper.

The town of Marsh Harbour on Great Abaco makes a good place to base your diving, sailing, and island-hopping excursions to the smaller cays.

Abaco Beach Resort has a full-service marina and dive shop to facilitate your obsessions. It offers packages that include a boat rental.

Marsh Harbour has some of the best dining in the Abacos. Most Abaco restaurants serve typical Bahamian conch and seafood dishes, plus a signature fried chicken-in-da-bag specialty. Curly Tail's is one that breaks the mold with more creative fare.

Chelle Koster Walton is author of the new Explorer's Guide: The Bahamas.

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