



Adjacent to Andros Island  
in the Bahamas, the  
all-inclusive Kamalame  
Cay private island resort  
makes a perfect island  
hopping stay.



# island hopping

Exploring the Bahamas by private plane is the ultimate in indulgence. We asked photographer Bill Curry if he'd be willing to do some firsthand research on the subject. He was only too willing to oblige.

By Bill Curry

I was just sitting down to watch the final episode of *Six Feet Under* when my phone rang. It was Deedee Morrison from *Private Air* asking if I would be available to fly to the Bahamas the next day to cover a once-in-a-lifetime tour of the out islands. "There will be bonefishing in Exuma, kayaking in Abaco, and horseback riding on the beach in Eleuthera—can you go?" Can I go? No arm-twisting was necessary.

I recently shipped my professional cameras for an overdue cleaning, so I grabbed my point-and-shoot digital Sony as I decided to jet away as a tourist instead of a professional photographer. I inserted a VHS tape to record the final episode of *Six Feet Under*, but the VCR wasn't working. (The sacrifices I make for my art!) Sixteen hours later, I was on a Chalks Ocean Airways 1937 Grumman G-73 seaplane on my way to the mythic fishing utopia called Bimini.

Chalks Ocean Airways is a company rich with aviation history, being the oldest scheduled airline in the world. From its Watson Island seaplane base, it's a 30-minute flight to Bimini, a historical haven in the 1600s for buccaneers and pirates such as Edward Teach, aka Blackbeard, Henry Morgan, and Calico Jack Tackham. Centuries later, the island inspired Ernest Hemingway to write *Islands in the Stream*; Martin Luther King Jr., wrote his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize here; and luminaries such as Errol Flynn, Judy Garland, Howard Hughes, and Al Capone made their way here via Chalks. There is something very romantic and adventurous about boarding a seaplane and heading to a remote (although close to the US coast) sleepy fishing island.

After only an hour in the air, we touched down onto the turquoise waters of the Bahamas and taxied up out of the water like a 1960s amphibar

onto a concrete ramp. With spectacular ocean views 50 feet in front of customs, I knew a true adventure was unfolding.

We cleared customs and immigration in 10 minutes and I had time to explore the quaint and authentic Alice Town, with its colorful old clapboard houses, local bars, and small streets. While wandering down a side street looking for places to take photographs I met a gentlemen named Mr. Saunders who is the published historian on Bimini. He has a shop where you can go for liquid refreshment and a blast of air-conditioning. A teacher and poet, he has interviewed hundreds of old timers since the '70s to get the oral history put into his book, now in its fourth printing. He went on with tales of great men and women traveling in search of adventure and the big catch.

Bimini is considered by diehard fisherman as the Mecca of deep-sea and light-tackle fishing. Blue marlin from 150 to 500 pounds (the record being 1,060 pounds) are caught regularly all year round. Tuna upwards of 500 pounds, exceptionally large wahoo, sailfish, dolphin, and white marlin also abound, along with world-class kingfish, tarpon, and mackerel.

The Bimini Wall is a quarter-mile offshore and drops from 145 feet to 3,000 feet within a few yards. This makes Bimini a diver's paradise with drift dives, abundant shipwrecks in 25 to 100 feet of water, and crystal-clear waters teeming with fish. The feeling here was like coming to a true out island, no traffic, clocks, or manic money race and after only one piña colada I was instantly on island time. Unfortunately, for me I had to head back to the plane to get on to Abaco before dark. I did have just enough time to get a taste of the old-time flavor here to want to bring my family here for some fishing, diving, and deep relaxation.



**We then flew into** the marsh town of Abaco, with its airstrip and private customs clearance for **Abaco Beach Resort & Boat Harbour**. Located east of Nassau, Abaco is a haven for flyers and boaters, with its three airstrips, safe harbor anchorages, and many little cays with deserted powder-sand beaches and fresh-seafood restaurants.

I checked into the hotel and toured the marina. I noticed the Bahamian, American, and British flags were stiff with a 40-mph wind from the northeast. In the distance, dark clouds were rolling toward the island. I went to the bar and ordered a piña colada from Miss Delia. She told me that a storm was coming—the beginnings of Hurricane Katrina, I later found out—and to have three drinks. Then, in an angelic voice, she sang a rendition of the junkaroo song “Please Please Tell Me Why Some People Are Never Satisfied.”

I stuck to only one drink since my secondary mission was to find the best piña colada in the out islands, and I didn’t want the rum to decide for my taste buds.

Abaco is an island in transition. Booming development is evident, as are its definite strong cultural ties to the USA. With CNN blaring Iraq headlines at the airport, American music on the radio (albeit ’70s Motown), and even the teenage boys speaking with an American accent, I could sense that a trip to the cays by boat or to Winding Bay would be necessary to get the island vibe that I was searching for.

**Next morning I** headed by taxi to the 500-hundred acre property of **The Abaco Club on Winding Bay**. Even with howling winds and driving rain, the first view of the one-of-a-kind beach and old Scottish-link-style golf course at The Abaco Club made my heart lurch with its natural beauty. I had heard from my driver that it looked like the Exuma bonefishing trip was to be canceled, and the kayaking later that day at Treasure Cay would be in the rain. No worries—I found a bar and ordered a piña colada.

At the Overlook Bar in Winding Bay, Archie the bartender resides as the resident entertainer and diplomat for all of the Bahamas. He made me the creamiest, finest-tasting piña colada this side of Bimini, and with a spectacular view of the beach and thunderous waves crashing upon Sugar Cay, the scene reminded me of a tropical Montauk, Long Island, with its bluffs and beautiful dunes. I was lulled into near-Nirvana sitting there listening to the rain beat onto the thatched roof.

I toured the property with Gina, the marketing director of The Abaco Club, and saw the painstaking care that went into hand-planting saltwater-tolerant grasses. Even the quarry that was dug out by hand to fill the surrounding rock with rich topsoil was being planted with natural local flora and fauna to create a walking and sitting meditation park. The whole property reflects the sensitivity and vision of founder and chairman Peter de Savary. From the shaping of the golf course to the lovely cottages with Bahamian style, every detail is crafted with true delicacy. The resort is a family paradise, with horseback riding on the beach, boating, tennis, diving, snorkeling, fishing, world-renowned golf, a luxury spa, and land parcels available for dream homes. Even the old secret fishing shack on the north side of the property has been kept in its original style with its access dock to challenging bonefishing.

I did get to Treasure Cay that afternoon and kayaked to a deserted island that seemed “just over there,” as the beach boy told me. It turned out to be an hour of hard paddling against a near squall and 3-foot waves. I made it just in time for the sun to sort of come out and color the surrounding waters like gems. I stripped off my soaked clothes and set off to circumnavigate the island. I was in paradise lost. In a mere 25 minutes, I walked around this tiny cay and

saw rock cliffs with scurrying crabs, a dolphin blowing just off the point, and found a 30-foot pristine beach that made me feel like a marooned Tom Hanks. I sat down and let the misty rain rid me of all notion of the modern world. How fortunate I was to be here and have this experience. I made it back across the bay just in time to beat the next heavy rains and catch a ride back to the hotel. Tomorrow, weather permitting, we’d be off to Eleuthera, “land of freedom.”

**The morning was** a bit gray but a great day for flying. The hour trip over to Eleuthera was calm, and with the colorful ocean views the time quickly passed. We landed at the airport and were taken to our accommodations at **The Cove** by Mr. Mingo, a movie-star-looking man in his 60s.

The Cove is located between Gregory Town and Harbor Island in a lovely setting overlooking two private coves with pink-sand beaches. There were no TVs shouting doom and fear, no in-room phones, no computers. Getaway heaven indeed. I stayed in the exclusive Point House, with its 360-degree views of the ocean and property. I was just relaxed enough to be served the lobster tail with rice, pumpkin soup, and a very tasty chocolate cake prepared by Ludwig Javland, a world-renown French chef who doubles as the electrician and handyman. My after-dinner nightlife consisted of lying on a recliner at the water’s edge and looking at the most brilliant rendition of the Milky Way I have ever seen.

The combination of ultra-high-thread-count bed linens and the tallest piña colada I had yet in my quest, as well as the rolling waves embracing the rugged cliffs outside my open door, made for the best sleep I’ve had in years.

The next day I had breakfast by the pool and watched a multitude of yellow butterflies swarming over the yellow elders (the Bahamas’ national flower) and dancing against the cobalt blue of the ocean. Then I set off on a bicycle ride into Gregory Town some 20 minutes away. I stopped and spoke with a local fisherman who told me of catching 50-pound grouper on a hand

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THIS PAGE PHOTO BY BILL CURRY; OPPOSITE PAGE (TOP) PHOTO COURTESY OF KAMALAME CAY (BOTTOM) PHOTOS BY BILL CURRY





(Opposite page) Flying into Abaco Beach Resort & Boat Harbour on a Chalks Ocean Airways seaplane; (this page, clockwise) the flats of the Bahamian out islands are an idyllic haven for bonefish ... and flyfisherman; view from Bimini toward amazing deep-sea fishing and drift diving; Bahamian cowgirl Celeste, an equestrian guide at The Abaco Club on Winding Bay.







## Out Island Havens

Whether your first-class ticket to paradise is chartered, or you tip your own wings, choose where to lounge from our favorite island hopping retreats:

- **Abaco Beach Resort & Boat Harbour**  
800.753.9259  
www.abacoresort.com
- **The Abaco Club on Winding Bay**  
888.303.2765  
www.theabacoclub.com
- **The Cove**  
800.552.5960  
www.thecoveeluthera.com
- **Pink Sands Resort**  
242.333.2030  
www.islandinns.com
- **Kamalame Cay**  
242.368.6281  
www.kamalamecay.com
- **Staniel Cay Yacht Club**  
242.355.2024  
www.stanielcay.com
- **Fernandez Bay Village**  
800.940.1905  
www.fernandezbayvillage.com

line. He did have heavily callused hands, but I doubt I would have accomplished such a feat even while wearing leather gloves. I stopped into a local clothing store and found Ralph Lauren linen shirts for \$35. While in the store I learned of the June pineapple festival. This whole area was at one time the pineapple capital before Hawaii got its start, and the Bahamas still claim the sweetest pineapples in the world.

I coasted the whole way down to The Cove and made it as far as the second saw palm tree up the driveway. A paltry yet gratifying accomplishment. Lunch was waiting; I had grouper lightly battered with authentic *pomme frites* and a horseradish tartar sauce. After the exercise, good company, and a quick swim, it was a meal to cherish.

That afternoon I took a wonderful ferry ride over to Harbour Island. From afar the town looked like an 1800s whaling village. Brightly painted houses were nestled into lush hillside vegetation. As we got within shouting distance, there were old fishing boats, kids swimming in the bay, bustling activity around the port, and a huge hydroplane, which is the only transportation between some out islands. (That is, unless you can fly yourself.)

When I asked how a tourist could get to Cat Island or San Salvador or any other out island, I was told that I had to fly back to Miami or Nassau and travel back to there. They say the joke in the out islands is you can't get there from here, but you can, as this is truly a prime destination for pilots. With so many private and public airfields throughout the islands, it is ideal for exploration at your own pace.


**When in Harbour Island** I went straight to Chris Blackwell's world-famous **Pink Sands Resort**, with its stellar pink-sand beach and Malaysian-inspired decor. This is a destination resort with flare to spare, laid-back with all the amenities one could wish for.

I didn't have time to walk and tour the town at leisure, but I know they have 800 golf carts to get around and during season I'm told it's impossible to rent one.

I stopped at a new trendy restaurant to wait out a passing rainstorm and to have a conch hotdog. It seems this paradise was long ago discovered by Aspenites. I would like to come back and walk to explore this odd mix of hip wealth mingling with traditional Bahamian locals.

When I got back to The Cove, I noticed a family of three swimming around the point. A half-hour later they came by the pool for a drink, and I asked them about their swim. They were beaming with bliss and the Italian father burst out, "*Molto tranquillo!*" He was quickly trumped by his 10-year-old daughter, who added, "*Tranquillissimo!*" Indeed, it is so tranquil here at The Cove.

With my trip nearly over, I took a quick look at Governor's Harbor and its Cupid Bay—lovely indeed with all the Victorian houses perfectly restored. Then it was time to head home to Florida. I wished I'd had more time to explore each of the out islands and would have liked to fly at will to the more remote islands. As it was, I learned a lot from this trip both as a photographer and traveler, enough to make me want to come back again and again.

There is beauty everywhere in the Bahamas, rain or sun. The natural beauty of the out islands is astounding, surpassed only by the beauty of its people. As long as the lovely lilt of the Bahamian accent and the left-hand drive remain and the junkaroo rhythms continue thriving, this place will continue to exemplify the slogan "It's better in the Bahamas." I hope that I can return for extended bliss one day—and a chance to continue my quest for the best piña colada in the out islands. 

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(Opposite page) Vibrant Caribbean exteriors of Harbour Island's Restaurant Sip Sip entice guests through their doors ordering off their ever-changing menu. Diner beware ... Sip Sip is open for lunch only, Wednesday through Monday; (this page, clockwise) take your pick of beautiful deserted cays (pronounced kees) sprinkled throughout Bahama's out islands; volumes can be written on adjectives describing the jewel-toned Caribbean sky and water as seen off of Fernandez Bay Village.

