



# The inns of the Outs



Joanna Booth gets friendly with the locals in the Bahamian Out Islands

» **T**he sun is shining, the sea is blue, and Georgette is sucking my toes. Her son, Harvey, impatient to take his turn, butts his velvety nose against the back of my ankles.

Who knew this service was available on one of The Abacos' deserted beaches?

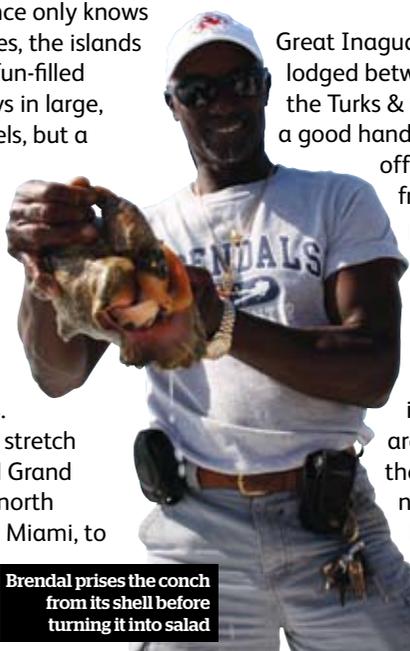
It's a little less saucy than it sounds, but no less exciting. Georgette and Harvey are wild stingrays, and their desire to Hoover around my feet is more to do with the small pieces of fish I've clamped between my toes than any real desire to get up close and personal with my pedicure.

This is the first time I've touched one of these magical creatures, and it's all thanks to The Abacos' friendliest resident and stingray-charmer extraordinaire Brendal, who, along with his wife Mary, runs Brendal's Dive Centre. Six of us have spent a magical day on his boat, snorkelling and sailing between deserted, white-sand cays, and

after feeding the stingrays – Brendal's signature experience – it's time to feed ourselves, sitting down to freshly-prepared conch salad, lobster tails, and the jacks we reeled in this morning. We've spotted any amount of marine life, but no other tourists since we left the dive centre in Green Turtle Cay.

Anyone who associates the Bahamas with the mega-resort of Atlantis and a bustling, mass-market experience only knows half the story. Yes, the islands can offer busy, fun-filled package holidays in large, all-inclusive hotels, but a short internal flight opens up a world of other options too. Nassau/Paradise Island is just one bead on the necklace of the Bahamas. The Out Islands stretch from Bimini and Grand Bahama, so far north they almost kiss Miami, to

**FAST FACT**  
Clients can clear US immigration at Nassau airport, saving time if they want to twin the Bahamas with a visit to the States



Brendal prises the conch from its shell before turning it into salad

Great Inagua in the south, lodged between Cuba and the Turks & Caicos. With a good handful of airlines offering daily flights from Nassau, plus private charter options, most are easy to reach. Each island has its own distinct identity, but there are characteristics they all share – and not simply the bath-warm sea

and powder-white sand.

The Bahamas are viewed as a very American version of the Caribbean. Partially true, this is by no means a negative. Safe, friendly and very easy to navigate, here it's possible to have an American-style holiday in a Caribbean setting. This is a Caribbean where it's easy to self-drive, where you can let your teenage kids wander into town for a few hours without supervision and where locals and tourists sip bottles of Kalik side by side. Everywhere in the Caribbean makes claims about friendliness, but you'd be hard pushed to find wider smiles than in the Out Islands.

● **THE ABACOS**

Great Abaco Island and its scattering of cays are popular with the yachting crowd, and as a result it's as sociable a spot as you could wish for. Bars, restaurants and hotels are full of chatty folk keen to share a beer and a sailor's tale or two as they pass through.

Sailing, snorkelling, diving ▶

– Abaco is famed for its watery activities and Brendal is the island's poster boy, but there's plenty of fun to be had on land too. A morning in pretty Hope Town is a must, climbing the candy-striped lighthouse, built in the 1860s by the British – a none-too-popular move with the locals, who made a living from salvaging cargo from wrecks – and visiting the Wyannie Malone Museum. This small museum is housed in one of the island's signature clapboard houses, and gives a great overview of Bahamian history.

There's no better guide to the nature and wildlife of Abaco than Ricky Johnson, the island's own Indiana Jones and founder of Abaco Nature Tours. Ricky will rocket you around the island in a four-wheel drive, pausing to spot rare birds including hummingbirds



and the brightly-coloured – and very loud – Abaco parrot, and kayak in the inland lagoons over deep blue holes.

#### ● HARBOUR ISLAND

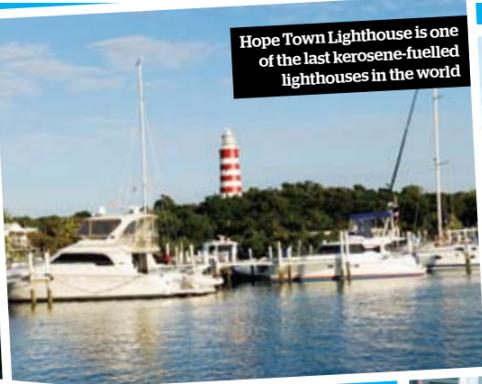
Small but perfectly formed – celeb-hangout Harbour Island rather resembles the type of guest it attracts. I was the only person to bat an eyelid when Brooke Shields bombed past me in her golf cart. Beautiful people are commonplace here, if not holidaying in one of the deluxe hotels or huge yachts, they're on a fashion shoot – lithe ladies in bikinis are frequently draped over

the iconic Lone Tree, which sits on the rather aptly named Girls Bank beach. Everyone buzzes about in golf carts, and the laid-back, low-key, flip-flops-at-dinner atmosphere suits the rich and privileged retreating

Long Island Blue Hole is popular with the dive community as the world's deepest sinkhole at 202 metres



Hope Town Lighthouse is one of the last kerosene-fuelled lighthouses in the world



Stingrays get up close and personal with Joanna's feet



Celebs and locals rub shoulders at Harbour Island's beachside eaterie Queen Conch



from the rat race.

A wander among the narrow streets of white clapboard houses that make up Dunmore Town reveals local galleries and chic boutiques, and it's almost impossible to find a bad meal, from exquisite dinners at Pink Sands (Where to Stay, page 58) and Rock House to daytime snacks at the unmissable Queen Conch, a beachside shack serving the Bahamian staple conch in salad, fritter and any other imaginable form. The Landing isn't just a charming boutique hotel with an interesting history and a great restaurant – owners Tracey and Toby Tyler are so passionate about quality that they source and market their own rum, coffee and wine.

**TOP TIP**  
Bahamas Flavour founder Kim Valente recommends twinning an Out Island with exciting Nassau for trips of more than seven nights

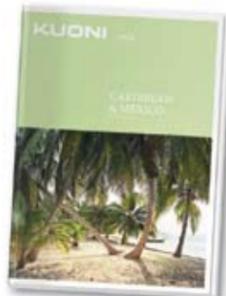
#### ● LONG ISLAND

Relatively quiet and undeveloped, Long Island is a real hideaway. There's a little museum tracing the island's history back to the Lucayans – the original inhabitants Christopher Columbus stumbled over in 1492 –

plus more churches than you can shake a stick at, something to be marvelled at in these God-fearing islands. The island is popular with the scuba community as it's home to the world's deepest blue hole, a sinkhole plunging to 202 metres just yards from shore. But for most, this is somewhere to do as little as possible, filling the day with some light reading and lazing on the deserted beaches. It's hard to imagine a more peaceful spot. **Find out more at myoutislands.com TW**

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All packages are for seven nights with **Bahamas Flavour**, including return flights from Heathrow, a one-night stay at A Stone's Throw Away B&B in Nassau including breakfast and airport transfers, and onward connections to the relevant Out Island.

[bahamasflavour.co.uk](http://bahamasflavour.co.uk)  
0870 066 9975

### **Pink Sands, Harbour Island**

This utterly idyllic luxury hideaway sits just a five-second skedaddle away from its eponymous beach. There are 25 cottages, all colonial-style dark wood and pale fabrics. The public areas – from the beachside Blue Bar and Caribbean Terrace restaurant to the pool, tennis courts and lobby lounge with a pool table – are beautifully

**Pink Sands is seconds from the beach**



furnished. From £1,999 in a garden view room including breakfast, with the option to upgrade to half board for £89 per person per day.

### **Green Turtle Club, Abaco**

You won't find a more sociable spot in the Out Islands than the bar at Green Turtle Club, where live bands play and guests, other tourists and locals mingle and dance the night away. This

mid-range favourite offers large rooms in comfortable cabins that surround the pool. From £1,199 in a water view room.

### **Treasure Cay, Abaco**

A budget choice that works well for families, Treasure Cay offers one, two and three-bedroom units with kitchens and dining areas in a resort with shops and cafés. Furnishings are rather old-fashioned but it's within walking distance of a stunning beach and a golf course. From £1,199 in a one-bedroom unit.

### **Gems at Paradise Private Beach Resort, Long Island**

This peaceful boutique offers spacious, well-equipped rooms and two-bedroom suites just a stone's throw from a deserted

stretch of beach. The owner Shavonne is the most welcoming of hosts, and guests can use the honesty bar and the well equipped kitchen or opt into the meal plan for delicious – and huge – portions of Caribbean favourites. From £1,690 in a water view room including breakfast.

### **Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort, Long Island**

This resort on a pristine beach is popular with the wedding and honeymoon crowd. Choose one of the swish luxury villas with Wi-Fi and satellite TV over the somewhat tired beach bungalows – it's worth the extra £150 per week. From £1,900 in a luxury villa including a complimentary bottle of wine and half-hour massage for two.

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