



Cruising Man-O-War Cay & Hope Town

As if the Disneyland of The Bahamas, the Sea of Abaco is a perfect playground for boaters, which may be why I return periodically to eat fresh conch, stroll along white beaches and catch up with friendly locals.



JL AMBERT PHOTOGRAPHY

The sheltered waters of this boomerang-shaped swath of turquoise-colored water is roughly 60 miles long and five miles wide so it's easy to visit in a short time. Only 200 miles from the southeast coast of Florida, the sea is a perfect weeklong boating getaway although some cruisers get lost in its comfortable ebb and flow for many seasons. Recently, I hopped a 45-minute flight from Ft. Lauderdale to Marsh Harbour to join friends aboard for a leisurely few days visiting two of its unique gems, Man-O-War Cay and Hope Town on Elbow Cay.

Strong trade winds sometimes cook up a local weather condition known as "The Rage" when winds gust into the 40s and the Atlantic serves up angry waves on the outside that make me grateful to be in the flat waters that rarely hold boaters captive in their slips. So, although we had a bit of crusty weather, we set sail east, from Marsh Harbour to Man-O-War Cay, only about 5 nautical miles away.

Man-O-War is a 2 ½-mile-long spit of sand where the community is small and tightly knit. A few last names like Albury, Archer and Lowe repeat on local business signs as



Counterclockwise from above: Treat the chef to an evening away from the galley at Firefly Grill, one of the best eateries in the Abacos. The landmark sign points the way to more island fun and adventures. Pick up a colorful, canvas bag for yourself or others at Albury's Sail Shop. Even from a distance, cruisers can pick out Hope Town's candy cane-striped lighthouse. Colorful colonial architecture can be seen throughout the town.



these families have been here since the settlement was established in the 1700s. Everyone knows one another by first name so when you're looking for baked goods you might get a response like, "Sarah used to bake out of her house but she's retired now. Try Jane in the yellow house by the marina."

Entering Man-O-War Cay involves a bit of threading the needle. The entrance is only about one-catamaran wide and shallow. Once inside, it's as if you've stepped through the looking glass because this township has barely changed in the past hundred years. We caught a \$20 mooring and decided to stretch our legs with a hike to the northernmost tip where the calm waters of the sea and the rougher waves of the Atlantic commingle and result in water colors you'll be hard-pressed to find anywhere else.



Man-O-War has been known for its boatbuilding expertise since the 1880s. You can still stroll along the waterfront and see boats like the popular Abaco dinghies in mid-build at Albury Brothers Boatyard. A must-see is Albury's Sail Shop where handmade canvas bags have been sewn for three generations. Each of the colorful creations is uniquely Sojer (the name of the local residents) and they make great gifts, so I always stock up.



Bahama Beach Club: A Perfect Getaway



Situated between a glittering coastline and a lush tropical landscape, the Bahama Beach Club continues to provide the pinnacle of world-class service for its guests. Boasting one of the best beaches in the Caribbean as well as a plethora of amenities, the resort offers a pristine getaway for sun seekers looking for the perfect vacation spot. Multiple beachfront condominiums, each one uniquely furnished and meticulously maintained, overlook the tranquil, soft white shores of Treasure Cay. Whether you want to spend the day out on the water or simply wish to soak up the sun by one of the freshwater pools, the resort offers families and individuals alike the privacy of a luxury vacation home at a fraction of the cost.

Simply sip on a refreshing Bahama Mama at the in-pool bar to realize what sets the Bahama Beach Club apart from the competition. With two crystalline freshwater pools, as well as two revitalizing jacuzzis, guests can easily soak away the stress and tension of the mainland. However, if you want to venture off property, the notable Treasure Cay Marina is only a short golf cart ride away. With over 150 slips, the marina can easily provide for all your boating needs. The area also boasts a wide variety of aquatic activities, from snorkeling with schools of tropical fish amidst vibrant reefs to deep-sea fishing. If you would rather stay on land, the nationally renowned 18-hole golf course designed by Dick Wilson offers the best ocean view golf in The Bahamas. With its emphasis on service and guest satisfaction, “Do Lots, or Little”, the Bahama Beach Club’s tagline really sums up the comprehensive resort experience.

Each spacious condominium unit has a beautifully furnished and fully functional kitchen for guest use. However, if you would like someone else to do the cooking for you, head over to one of the resort’s two premier restaurants. Whether you’re looking for a casual lunch of delectable fish tacos by the pool or an exquisite steak dinner on the terrace overlooking the sea, the Bahama Beach Club offers multiple dining options. After dinner, head down to the shore to enjoy one of the nightly beachfront bonfires or watch one of the special firework displays. The professional staff is gracious and attentive, ensuring that both your meal and evening are truly memorable.

Exuding luxury while maintaining a hospitable and family-oriented atmosphere, the Bahama Beach Club is an enticing getaway that continues to promote the highest level of care and attention to the comfort of its guests. Treasure Cay on Abaco Island is easy to get to whether you travel by air or by sea. You’ll find yourself far from the crowds that flock to most other Caribbean resorts, allowing for an incredible stay in one of the most beautiful parts of the Abacos. However you get to the Bahama Beach Club, if you’re looking for a stay in paradise, this is it.

— By *Susanna Botkin*

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Hablamos Español



Above & across: Homemade tiramisu from Firefly Grill; wine and appetizers are more enjoyable during Bahamian sunsets.

Water, ice, groceries, and the Dock 'n Dine restaurant are all on the waterfront, but don't expect much to happen on a Sunday when everyone is in one of the dozen or so churches of just about every denomination. This island is dry, which means you can't buy alcohol, so we opened a bottle of wine and dined aboard in perfect bliss so long as we kept the bug spray handy as the surrounding mangroves are thick with mosquitos. The protected anchorage was possibly the best sleep I'd had in months.

Word of incoming heavy weather got us up early the next morning to motor to Hope Town, almost literally around the corner, just four miles or 40 minutes away if you dawdle. Tucked in a tiny and well-protected harbor on Elbow Cay, Hope Town is probably where Sherwin Williams sends all the crazy colors of house paint they don't sell anywhere else.

Settled in 1785 by British Loyalists (loyal to the crown of England after the U.S. War of Independence), Hope Town boasts many fine examples of colonial architecture. The two-street waterfront is chock-a-block with houses showing off fun design details including carved lace-like trim and pineapple motif shutters. But the centerpiece of Hope Town's skyline is its 130-year-old candy stripe lighthouse, which is one of only two manned, kerosene-fueled lighthouses still in operation in the world. A trek up





the 200-plus steps inside is a must if only for the fantastic views from the top.

The Hope Town Harbor entry is well marked, if a bit tricky. A shallow channel leads from the sea into the round harbor full of moorings. We picked up another \$20 mooring and dinged to Cap'n Jack's on the waterfront for breakfast. When a downpour started, it seemed the perfect time to duck into the two-story Wyannie Malone Historical Museum dedicated to documenting the lives of fishermen, pirates and the early settlers. We learned a bit of history as we waited out the rain and chatted with the curator.

The sun popped out and wanting to stretch our legs, we took a hike south to Tahiti Beach. This half-moon-shaped white sand beach transports you from one paradise in the East to another somewhere deep in the South Pacific. Along the way, direction poles were frequent but even though we were on an island, we managed to get lost if ever so briefly. Having underestimated the length of our walk (about seven miles round trip) we fortified ourselves with unbeatable conch salad and a Kalik (local) beer at the Abaco Inn Resort where their tag lines says it all, "Tan your Toes in the Abacos."

Back in the harbor, it was time to check in with the real world via email and text. Hope Town Inn and Marina is cruiser friendly offering showers, laundry and free Wi-Fi, so we stopped in for happy hour and a bit of Web surfing. The

Opposite & below: Recap the day's adventures in the Abaco Inn Bar & Lounge on Elbo Cay.



JLAMBERT PHOTOGRAPHY

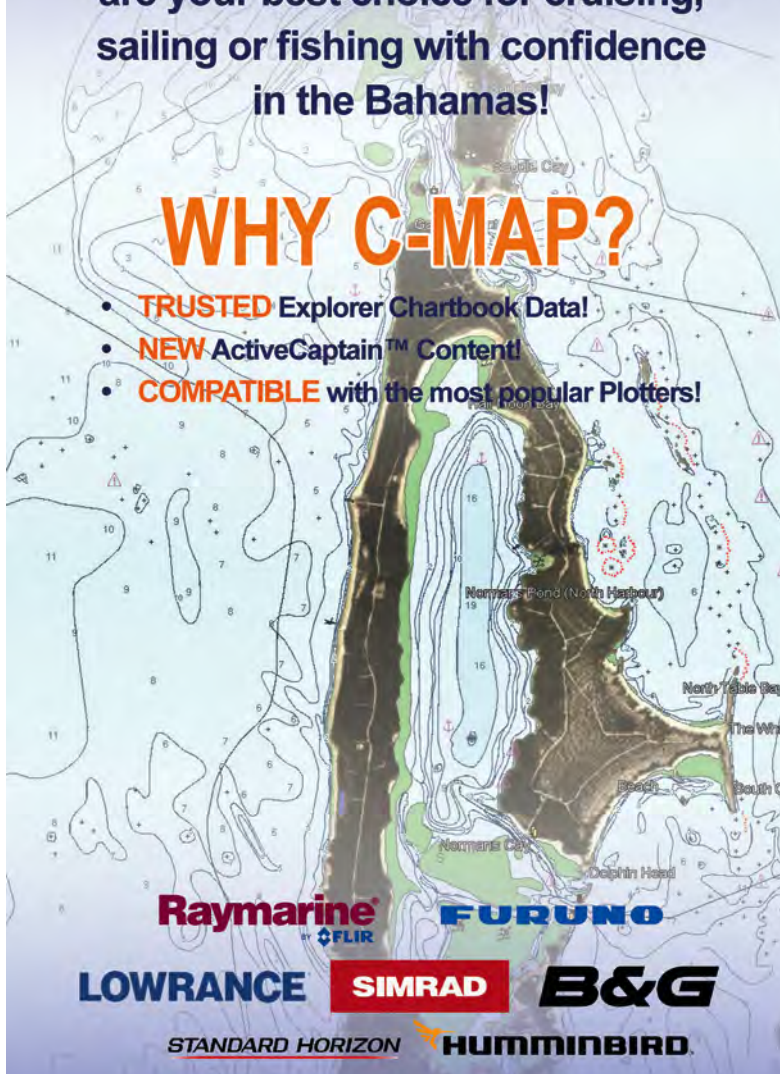


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docks were full of boats from far-flung destinations and the bar resonated with distinctly Canadian accents.

That night, we made reservations at Firefly Grill and Resort that dispatched a “golf cart bus” to ferry six of us halfway down the same trek we had done earlier. It was shockingly short given how long we had spent on our afternoon slog. The grouper was sublime and the homemade tiramisu was artfully presented. Lit by strings of light bulbs, the dining deck

defined the romance that captivates so many cruisers in The Bahamas. The sultry evening renewed my determination to return again soon, because Hope Town and Man-O-War Cay just never get old. 🐟

— By Zuzana Prochazka

Best Time to Go

December through March can be chilly with temps in the 60s

and 70s while July to September may be sweltering, not to mention right in the middle of hurricane season. Your best bet is April to June and again October to November, although if you do go in October you might want to consider trip insurance. Winds are usually 5-20 knots except when “The Rage” is on.

What to Watch For

Depth! The Sea of Abaco is shallow and punctuated with unexpected (and at times uncharted) coral flats. There are not many coral heads to sneak up on you but the bottom does change even when well away from any island. Beware the no-see-ums especially in Man-O-War.

Anchoring & Mooring

In Hope Town and Man-O-War, your best bet is to pay for a mooring – about \$20 per night. Marina’s include Hope Town Inn & Marina, Lighthouse Marina and Man-O-War Marina.

Food & Fuel

Provisioning is excellent in Marsh Harbour in a large grocery store, which is walking distance from most of the marinas. Hope Town has a convenience store right at the docks near Cap’n Jack’s. Man-O-War can be a provisioning challenge, so bring what you need with you, especially any alcohol. Fuel is available at both locations.



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