

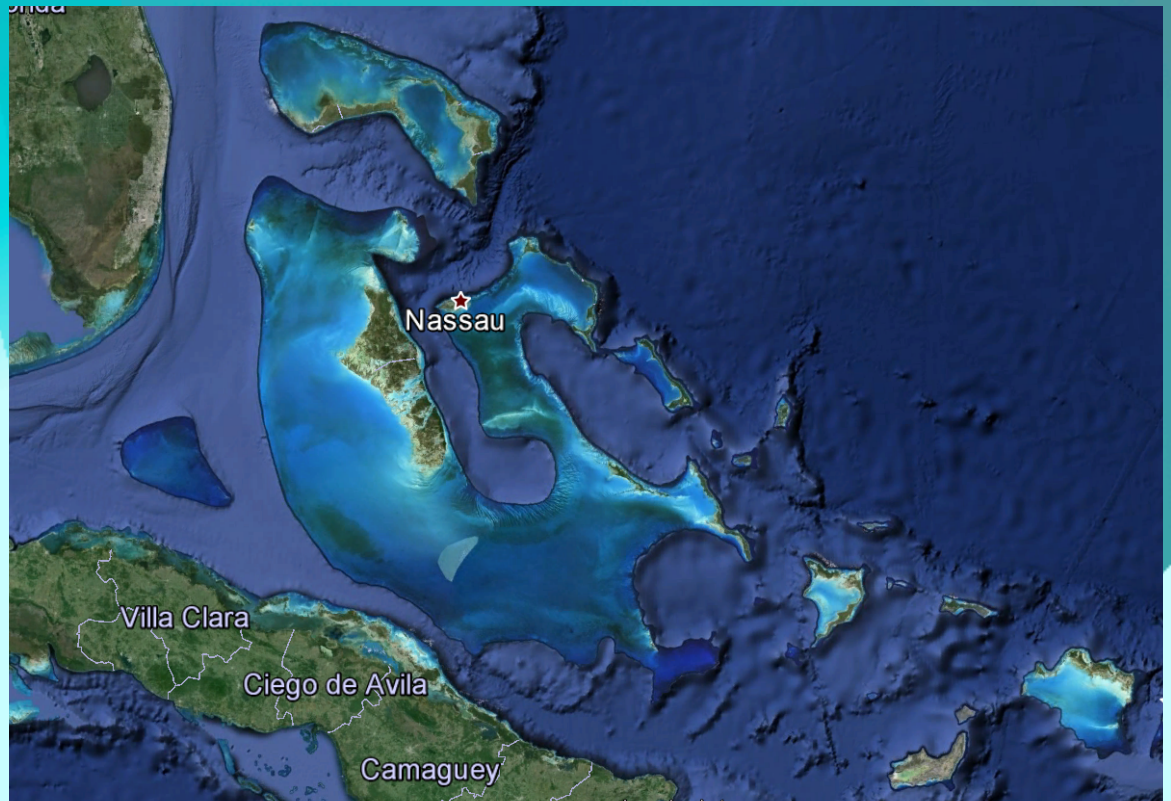


# Beginner's Guide to Cruising the Bahamas

[tigandserena.com](http://tigandserena.com)

# Geography

- **Abacos**
- Bimini
- Berrys
- Grand Bahama
- New Providence
- **Exumas**
- Eleuthera
- Long Island
- Cat Island
- Crooked & Acklins
- Mayaguana, Inagua  
Islands



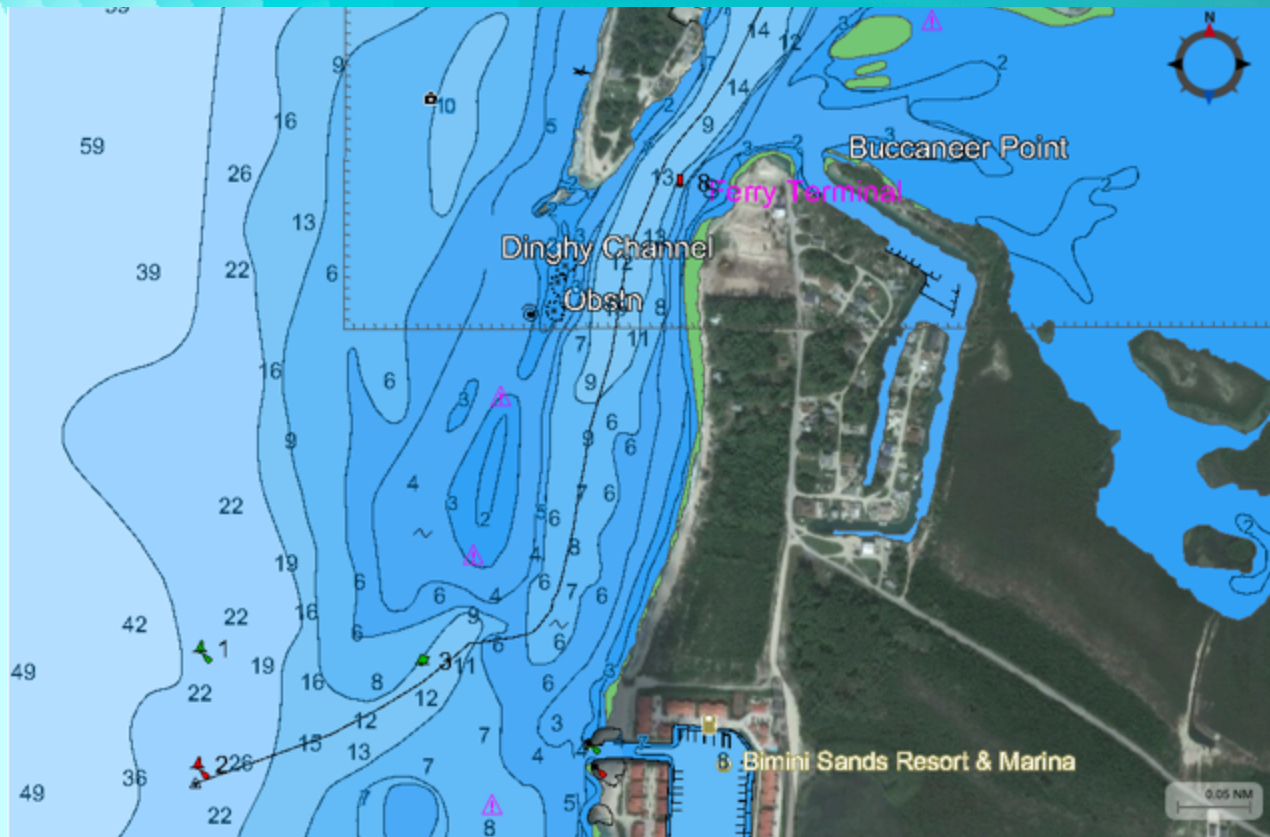
# Explorer Charts

- “Gold Standard”
- Digital
  - Garmin (Blue Charts)
  - Jeppesen (C2Map)
  - NO Navionics
- Waypoints & Distances
- Helpful info
  - Tides
  - Currents
  - Articles



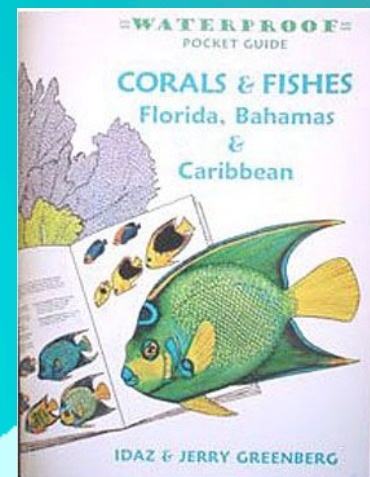
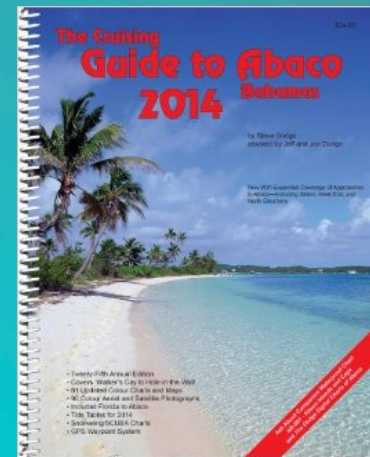
# Bimini example

- Suggested route line (similar to Magenta line for ICW)



# Books

- Cruising Guide to Abaco, Steve Dodge
  - Updated annually
- Exuma Cruising Guide, Stephen Pavlidis
  - Good history, but little outdated
- Fish ID guide for snorkeling
- Wind of the Carolinas, Robert Wilder
  - Period drama of Loyalist family settling in Bahamas
  - Often referred to as “Gone With The Wind” of the Bahamas



# Visual Navigation

- Lack of ATONs
- Read the bottom
  - Best when sun overhead (not in front or behind)
  - High viewing angle is best

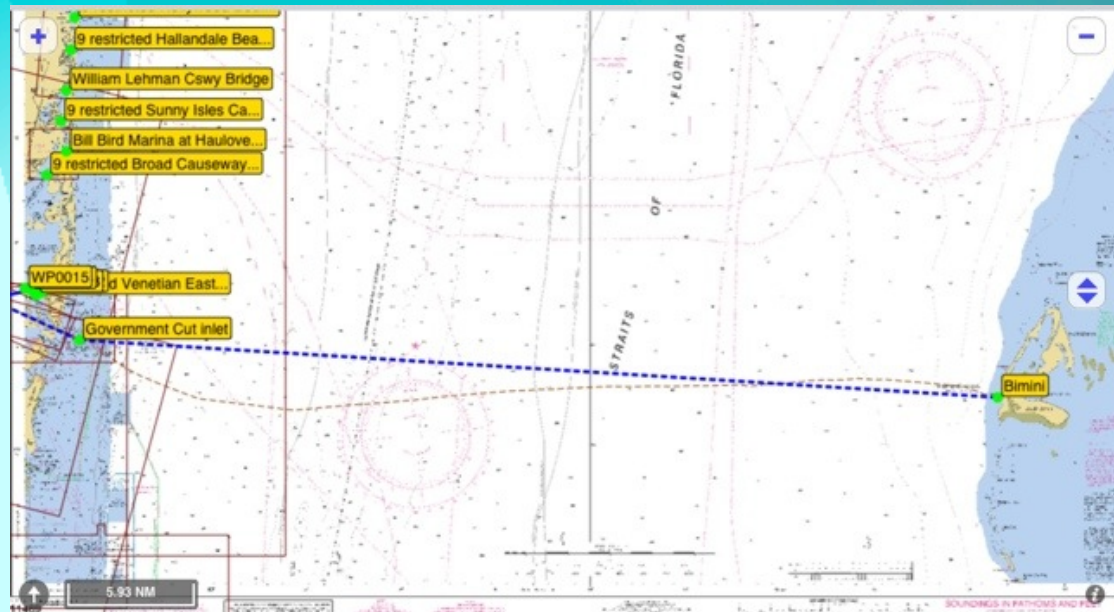


Mooring field @ Warderick Wells, Exuma Park



# Crossing the Gulf Stream

- Rhumb line is straight line
  - But have to account for current of Gulf Stream
- S curve
- Average 2 knot northerly current
- Watch angle of crossing current
  - Best to run at  $90^\circ$  or slightly with current



# When & Where to Cross

- Winter cold fronts are predictable
  - Do NOT want wind with northerly component
- Good Forecast:
  - Current wind  $S \leq 15$  knots
  - Yesterday:  $SE \leq 15$  knots
  - Tomorrow:  $S/SW \leq 20$  knots
- Miami to Bimini around 50 nm
- Ft. Lauderdale to West End (Grand Bahama) around 60 nm
- Can decide to start further south to ride more of Gulf Stream



# Arriving in Bahamas

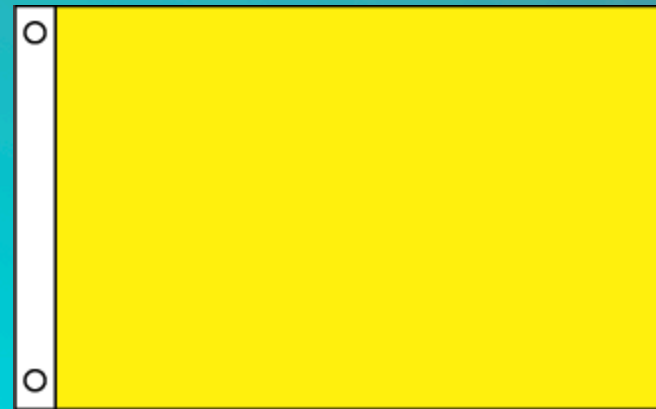
- Time trip for daylight arrival (mid-afternoon) to navigate, dock and clear customs before dark.
- Bimini & West End/Freeport are popular arrival point



Radio Beach, Bimini

# Customs & Immigration

- Passports are required
- US citizens do NOT require visa
- Usually a 3 month stay (can renew up to 8 months)
- Declare all firearms
- Ask for fishing permit (free)
- Fee
  - \$150  $\leq$  35' LOA
  - \$300  $>$  35' LOA



Yellow quarantine flag

- Certain ports of entry
- Pets require health certificate and separate application

# Flag Etiquette

- Fly national ensign (where boat is registered) astern
- When entering Bahamian port for 1<sup>st</sup> time, fly yellow quarantine flag on starboard halyard
- After clearing customs & immigration, replace quarantine flag with Bahamian courtesy flag



Bahamas courtesy flag

# Island Time

- Slow down
- Everything takes longer
- Plans written in sand at low tide



“It’s better in the Bahamas”

# Weather

- Tropical savannah
- Winter
  - Dry season
  - Prevailing winds from east 10-20 knots
  - Winds shift to west and north during cold fronts
  - Sea: 73°F avg in January
  - Average High: 78°F
  - Average Low: 63°F
- Internet
- VHF Nets in Abacos & Georgetown (68 / 72)
- Nets on HF/SSB radio
  - Chris Parker  
4045 KHz USB @ 6:30



# Tides & Currents

- Tides around 2 – 4 feet
- Tide table in Explorer Charts
- Current Cut can have 8+ knot current
- “Rage”

Dinghies  
anchored off  
Exuma Park



# Provisions

- Plan at least 2 weeks of provisions
- Everything costs more
- Time the mail boat (usually on weekly schedule)
- Fresh produce & fresh dairy will sell out
- Know where you're going
  - If spending most of the time in Abacos or Georgetown, produce & services more readily available



High prices at Highbourne Cay  
\$10 for a head of cauliflower

# Other Logistics

- Trash
  - Sparse landfill space
  - Separate metals, paper, plastics, food scraps
- Pump out
  - Facilities practically non-existent
  - Pump overboard in deep water, NOT in the banks
- Fuel
  - Plan ahead & call/hail marina to inquire
- Potable Water
  - Water maker?
  - RO fresh water available in many towns
  - Marinas charge per gallon
  - Have extra jerry jugs
- Propane
  - In larger cities like Nassau, Georgetown, etc.
- Laundry
  - Laundromats in cities
  - Hand wash & line dry



# Digital Resources

- Active Captain
- Explorer Charts
  - Garmin
  - Jeppesen (Cmap)
- Internet
  - Paid wifi (often unreliable)
  - Cellular data via BTC (Bahamas Telecom) on GSM network



# Self Reliance

- Medical care limited
- No Tow Boat US
  - Some local towing
  - Fishermen
  - BASRA
- Carry spares
- Great cruising community



# Anchoring

- Use anchor light
- Back down on anchor and check set
- Multiple Anchors
- Beware current swings



# Transportation

- Reliable Dinghy
- Bicycles (portable/ foldable)
- Public Transit
  - Freeport & Nassau
- Rentals
  - Cars, scooters, golf carts, etc.
  - Drive on Left
- Walking
- Kindness of others



# Abacos

- Abacos
  - Marsh Harbour
  - Hopetown
  - Treasure Cay
  - Man-O-War Cay
  - Little Harbor
  - Great Guana Cay
- Cruisers' Net
  - VHF 68 @ 8:15
  - Weather & local happenings



# Marsh Harbour

- 3<sup>rd</sup> most populous city
- Grocery store
- Hardware store
- Potable water available at marinas for fee



Hopetown mooring field

# Abacos (cont.)

- Protected beaches in Sea of Abaco
- Loyalist settlements
- Many beach bars



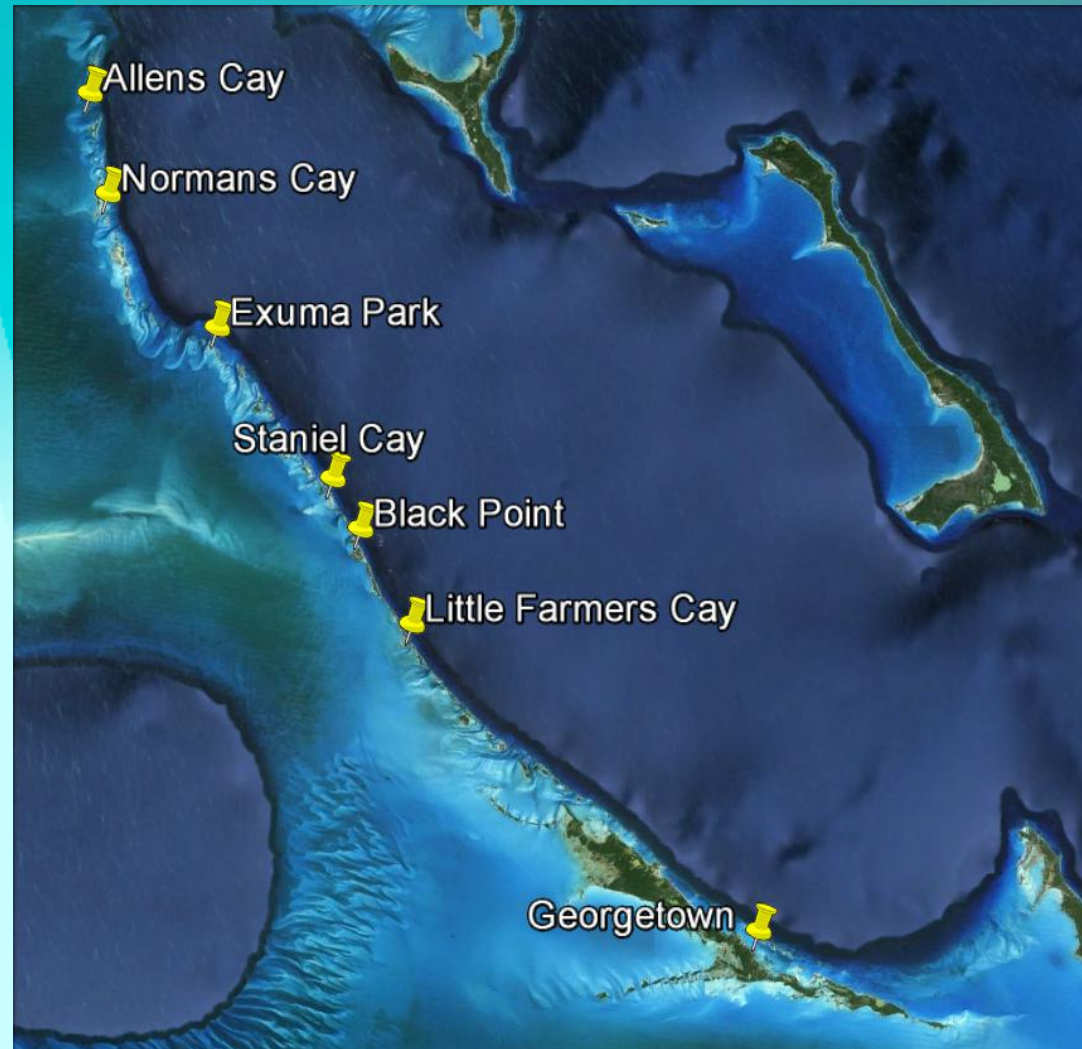
Tahiti beach on Elbow Cay



Hopetown Lighthouse

# Exumas

- > 360 islands
- 130 mile span
- Great Bahama Bank on west (shallow)
- Exuma Sound on east (deep)





# Exumas (Northern)

- Allen Cay
- Highbourne Cay
- Normans Cay



Plane wreck @ Normans Cay



Iguanas @ Allen Cay

# Exumas Land & Sea Park

- Call ahead on VHF to reserve moorings
- Protected from fishing and harvesting
  - No Take Zone including sea shells, etc)
- Great snorkeling
- Well marked trails
- Boo Boo Hill
- Blow holes
- No services available



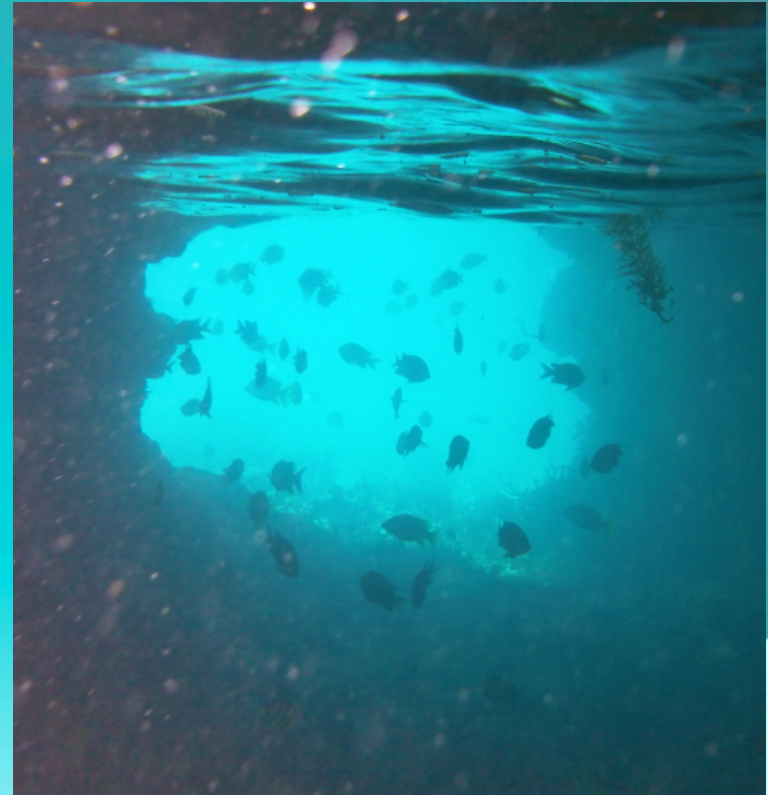
Whale bones

# Exumas (Central)

- Staniel Cay
  - Big Majors anchorage
- Thunderball Grotto
- Black Point
- Farmers Cay



Colorful waterfront homes

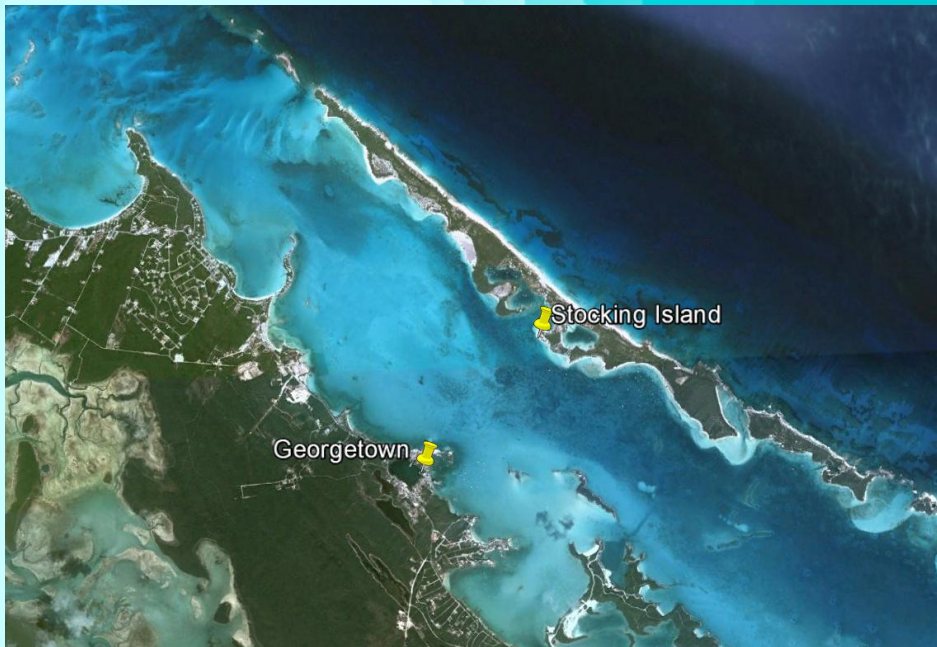


Snorkeling Thunderball Grotto

# Georgetown, Exumas

- Elizabeth Harbor, upwards of 300+ boats
- Cruisers Net VHF 72 @ 8am

Town dinghy dock



# Georgetown

- Summer Camp for Cruisers
- 2 week Cruising Regatta



Moorings & Anchorage



Chat & Chill Bar @ Volleyball Beach

# Off the Beaten Path

- Berry Islands
- Harbor Island, Eleuthera
- Any place south of Georgetown
  - Long Island
  - Mayaguana



- Wildlife
  - Dolphins, rays, manatees, sea turtles, sharks



Sharks & rays  
@ fish cleaning station

Blue hole @ Hoffmans Cay,  
Berry Islands

# Culture

- Junkanoo (New Year's)
- Rake 'n Scrape
- Fish Fry
- Festivals



# Beaches & Water

- Water clarity is excellent
- Great snorkeling



Wreck off Bimini

- Beaches
  - Secluded
  - Pink sand (Harbour Island)



Beach bonfire



# Beach Combing

- Sea Shells
- Sea Glass
- Sand Dollars
- Coral Fans
- Sea Beans
  - Can find them along high tide line
  - Most prevalent on eastern shores



Hand  
made  
hamburger  
bean  
necklace



# Green Flash



Just  
Before

Green  
Flash

- Optical phenomena
- Unobstructed view of sunset
- Tip: Don't wear polarized sunglasses

# Snorkeling & Diving

- Wetsuits give added buoyancy
  - Good for snorkeling
  - Need weight to make neutral buoyancy for diving and fishing
- Free diving Tips:
  - Hands up while surfacing
  - Head down and feet up vertically to reduce amount of energy to go down
  - Always go with a buddy



# Fishing in Deep Water

- Trolling
  - Hand line easiest / cheapest
- Limits (at any given time)
  - Wahoo/Dolphin/Kingfish/Tuna
    - 18 fish per vessel
  - Demersal Species  
Groupers, Snappers, etc
    - 60 pounds



# Mahi mahi, Dolphin fish, Dorado

- Beautiful color



# Fishing on the Banks

- Beware Ciguatera (fish poisoning)
- Ciguatera toxin bio accumulates in larger reef fish



# Spear Fishing

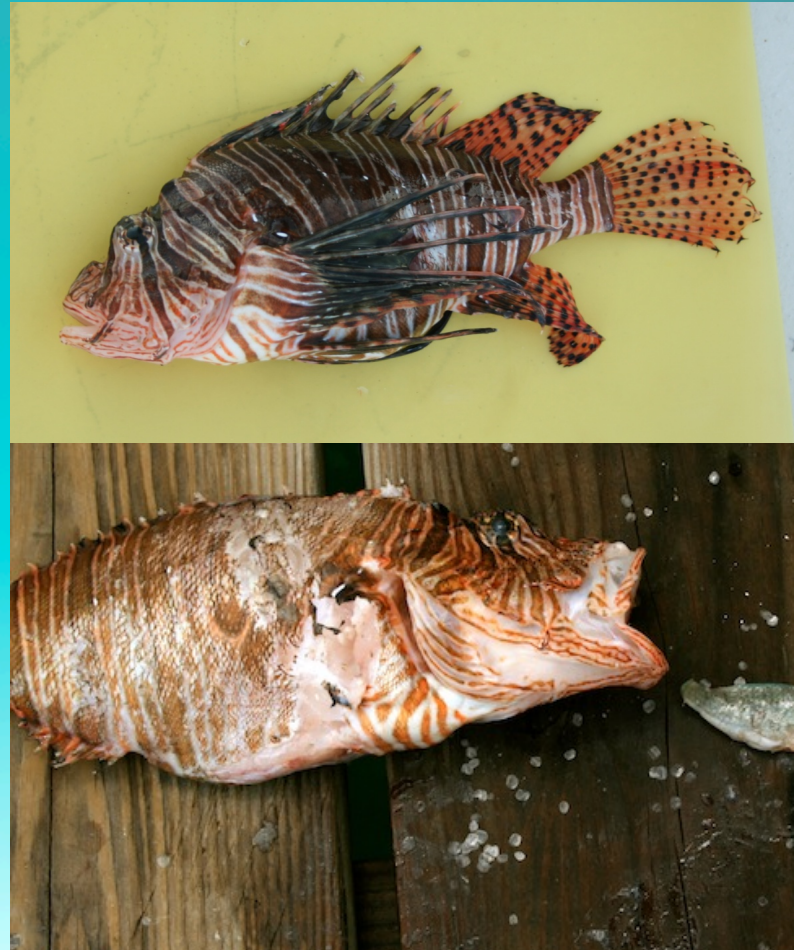
- Hawaiian sling
- Pole Spear
- Free diving only
  - No tanks



- Limits:
  - Lobster: 10 tails
  - Lobster season closed April 1 through July 31

# Lion Fish

- Invasive Species
  - No limits
- No predators
  - Not scared off easily
- Not poisonous
  - Spines are venomous
  - Pluck off spines with pliers
  - Wear gloves





# Conch

- Needs to have a well formed lip
- Limit of 6
- Flip over to see
- Fritters
- Conch Salad
- Cracked Conch



# What's next

- Go back to the US
  - Must report to US Customs within 24 hrs
  - Local Boater Option
- Head south to Carribean
  - Thorny Path
  - “Gentleman’s Guide to Passages South”

