

# A WEEK IN THE ABACOS

SOUTHERN<sup>®</sup>  
BOATING







# A WEEK IN THE ABACOS


The perfect itinerary for the busy boater who needs to get away from it all.

By Addison Chan

It's no surprise that during 2020 and 2021, there were record boat sales as folks turned to boating to create a COVID-free environment in a world of lockdowns and mask mandates. Investment portfolios were healthy, so for many, a family-size express cruiser was the perfect solution. It is spacious and self-contained so once you left the dock, apart from an occasional stop for fuel, you could discontinue all the health protocols in your luxurious personal bubble on the water. The itch to go further afield has been there since the early days, but initially there was no place to go as the world was locked down. Now that business is back in full swing, work is preventing you from getting away for more than a week.

So where do you go to get the most out of a week off? The Bahamas is the answer, but it's a big country with more than 700 islands spread over an area larger than New England and New York combined. Bimini is the closest island, but a week there will seem long for most people. It's better for a power weekend which makes it a good fallback in case you get delayed by weather. The Berry Islands are a possibility, but they lack variety. If your crew wants nightlife in addition to natural beauty, you will be hard-pressed to keep them happy, unless they believe that 9PM is boater's midnight. Eleuthera or Exuma are simply too far away even for a 20- to 25-knot express cruiser to cover in a week, and the rest of the Bahamas would require flying to a boat if all you have are seven days.

For those with limited time, the Abacos are tantalizingly close and always receive high marks for the clarity of the water and the quality of the fishing. But more importantly,



*Clear water, great fishing, and a variety of destinations, like Hope Town (shown), make the Abacos great for a seven-day getaway.*





*Clockwise from top: Rosie's Place Marina in Grand Cay; Double Breasted Cays; colorful shops line the streets of Grand Cay*

they offer the greatest variety of destinations as well as boasting a higher concentration of marinas than any other part of the country aside from Nassau. You might say the Abacos were made for boaters. The following is an itinerary to make the most of a week in paradise.

**Day One:** With just a week, it is more efficient to clear customs as close as possible to where you want to spend your time. Grand Cay in the northwest corner of the Abacos is a favorite destination for families who enjoy world-class fishing and diving. Located approximately 100 miles from the east coast of Florida, it is easily within reach for most boats without refueling, and at express cruiser speeds, one can leave after breakfast and arrive well before dinner. There is a choice of marinas ranging from the well-established Rosie's Place in Grand Cay to the open but still under construction revival of Walker's Cay Marina in nearby Walker's Cay. Since the same customs officer serves both locations, clearing in is a quick procedure and provided Click2Clear was completed correctly, you can be underway in less than 15 minutes. If you prefer to overnight

ashore after a long day on the water, book a guest cottage at Rosie's Place. Staying there offers a chance to meet some of the locals, many of whom are also dive and fishing guides, and dine at the well-known marina restaurant.

**Day Two:** Sleeping in is not an option as the local roosters start crowing long before sunrise. By daylight, the hard-working fishermen that live on Grand Cay are getting their gear ready for a day on the water. It's a great time to walk the docks and strike up a conversation because they are never too busy to point out a few choice spots to a newcomer but know they will always direct you away from where they are working. Even without a recommendation, the reef apron north of Walker's Cay National Park is a mere six miles away, and the large, healthy coral heads offer spectacular snorkeling. If shelling is more your speed, the beaches along Wells Bay and Baker's Bay provide some good finds. And if simply sitting in the cockpit with your morning coffee to recover from the previous days travel sounds good, the buzz of activity in the harbor is a continuous reality show. For lunch, consider Etta J's



## A WEEK IN THE ABACOS

(continued)



*Left: Visitors enjoy spending time poolside at Pineapples Bar on Green Turtle Cay.*



*Right: The swimming pigs of Abaco are a popular attraction.*

snack bar for cheap and cheerful Bahamian fare, and for dinner, try fresh seafood and some of Maxine's famous conch fritters over at Ron's Hot Spot, an eclectic place that combines pool tables with fine dining on handmade lace tablecloths. In a small town, you have to be versatile.

**Day Three:** Today will be a special treat as you make your way over to Double Breasted Cays, a collection of long narrow rocks only three nautical miles away from Grand Cay. Between the rocks are arguably the prettiest anchorages in the country. Whether you choose a spear or rod, the sportfishing around Double Breasted is first rate, and everything from pelagic species like mahi-mahi and tuna to snapper, grouper, hogfish, and conch are abundant making it easy for even a fishing novice to bring home dinner. After a full day on the reef, having a sundowner on the inner beach at Double Breasted is a perfect way to unwind before cooking the day's catch.

**Day Four:** Take a 65-nautical mile jaunt southeast on the Little Bahama Bank to visit Green Turtle Cay (GTC). The trip is relatively weatherproof—provided winds remain under 25 knots, it is possible to make the trip on the relatively protected waters of the Little Bahama Bank, but if the weather isn't to one's taste, remaining within the well-protected confines of Double Breasted should not be a hardship. A mid-morning departure from Double Breasted will have you pulling into your choice of marina, mooring, or anchorage at GTC by mid-afternoon with plenty of time to wander the narrow streets of New Plymouth Settlement and take in the sights of its Loyalist heritage while discussing where to go for a pre-dinner sundowner. A popular spot is poolside at Pineapples Bar which is accessible by both boat and golf cart.

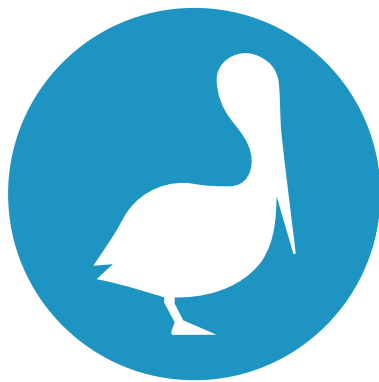
**Day Five:** Today you must assess if the weather supports going farther or if it's time to start thinking about heading

back toward Florida. In a perfect world, you can make it back to Florida in a single day from most locations in the Abacos, but a prudent mariner always includes some reserve to accommodate sudden forecast changes. If the weather permits continued travel, you can remain in GTC for another day to walk the gorgeous beaches with possibly a short side trip to No Name Cay to visit the swimming pigs of Abaco or head 25 nautical miles southeast to Hope Town and check out its iconic Elbow Cay Lighthouse that is nearing the completion of a full post-Dorian restoration.

Hope Town was ground zero when Hurricane Dorian battered Abaco in 2019, and while some classic locations such as the Hope Town Lodge were damaged beyond repair, what remains have been lovingly brought back to postcard perfection. With great marinas, well-protected moorings, and good anchorages just outside of the inner harbor, there are options to suit every taste. For example, it is possible to take a mooring ball in the inner harbor and call the Abaco Inn for its shuttle to bring you back for an elegant dinner overlooking the sea or dock your boat at the Firefly Resort for world-class cuisine.

**Day Six:** Head northwest to either Great Sale Cay for a well-protected night on the hook to enjoy your last Bahamian sundowner of the trip, or if the conditions are settled, continue another 20 nautical miles to Mangrove Cay where there is less protection, but the location makes for a shorter trip home the next day. Keep in mind that both spots are without cell coverage so be sure to check the weather before you're in the vicinity of Fox Town on Little Abaco.

**Day Seven:** Head back home across the Gulf Stream unless you call the office as you pass the cell tower at West End, Grand Bahama, and—cough, cough—need a few more days to—cough, cough—recuperate from a nasty cold. The Bahamas is the perfect cure. 🍹



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