

Calm after the storm

Tourism to the Bahamas is back up and running in the wake of last year's hurricane, finds Sarah Gilbert



With images of the destruction wrought by hurricane Dorian splashed across the news last September, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the Bahamas weren't open for business.

In fact, the vast area covered by the Bahamian archipelago meant that of the 16 main islands, only Grand Bahama and the Abacos were affected.

"When people ask me what they can do to help, I just tell them to keep visiting us. With 700 islands and thousands of cays, we have something for everyone," says Emmett Saunders, manager of the Ministry of Tourism on Grand Exuma.

More than a dozen hotels have reopened on Grand Bahama – beloved by divers, nature lovers and birdwatchers – including

Old Bahama Bay Resort & Yacht Harbour in early November, a resort that played a key role in the hurricane relief efforts; Viva Wyndham Fortuna Beach, which reopened in December and is offering 40% off room rates; Grand Lucayan Lighthouse Pointe; and Taino Beach Resort & Clubs.

Likewise in the Abacos, some properties on cays far from the devastation of Marsh Harbour have also reopened, such as The Abaco Club at Winding Bay, Sandpiper Inn and the Abaco Inn.

Transport links to the islands have also resumed, including Bahamasair flights between Fort Lauderdale and Freeport on Grand Bahama, and Palm Beach and Marsh Harbour, along with Silver Airways flights from Fort Lauderdale to Freeport and Marsh Harbour. ➤

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TRAVEL BETWEEN 05 SEP - 04 DEC '20
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DESTINATIONS

THE BAHAMAS | CARIBBEAN



FAR LEFT AND CENTRE:

Grand Hyatt Baha Mar

LEFT: Paradise Island

PICTURES: Doug Scaletta; Tadeu Brunelli; Shutterstock

GETTING AROUND



Bahamasair offers the most comprehensive range of inter-island routes, including North Eleuthera, Exuma, Crooked Island, Acklins, Mayaguana, Inagua and Long Island, as well as international flights to Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Orlando.

bahamasair.com

Pineapple Air flies to Eleuthera's three airports and **Southern Air** to North Eleuthera and Long Island.

pineappleair.com

southernair.com

WHAT'S NEW IN NASSAU?

There's certainly lots going on in Nassau. Opened in 2017, the Baha Mar mega-resort – the Bahamas' largest – is just a 10-minute drive from the airport and home to three hotels, where guests have access to the Caribbean's largest casino, a Jack Nicklaus-designed 18-hole golf course, a high-end shopping arcade, six swimming pools, and countless restaurants and bars.

At the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, the 1,800 rooms and suites are light, bright and contemporary (room-only doubles from \$331). There's an Espa spa and no end of activities on offer for all ages, from watersports to tennis courts. Like a mini-Las Vegas, all roads seem to lead to the casino, with the full gamut of slot machines and tables, as well as private salons for big spenders.

Aimed at a younger, party-loving crowd, the pretty-in-pink SLS Baha Mar has 300 white-themed rooms,

“Guests have access to the Caribbean's largest casino, a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course and a shopping arcade

dramatic decor and outsized contemporary art (King Room from \$458 January-April, \$336 August-October, room-only). Grab a poolside cabana and you'll feel like an A-lister for the day. Follow it up with creative cocktails at Monkey Bar or drink in the views from the Skybar.

The newest hotel – and the most exclusive, with a host of high-end perks and impeccable service – is the serene Rosewood Baha Mar, which opened in ➤

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Exumas; Big Major Cay; 'Chat 'n' Chill', Stocking Island
PICTURES: Shutterstock; The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism and Aviation

June 2018. Turn left at Cartier and it's easy to forget everything that lies just beyond its walls.

The 237 ocean-view rooms, suites and beachfront villas – including a new one with six bedrooms – come in neutral tones and tactile fabrics, with a sophisticated beach-house feel and a strong sense of place, from the lobby's hand-painted murals to local art in the rooms (doubles from \$660, room-only).

There's also a mega-yacht for diving excursions, a pool that isn't open to other Baha Mar guests, four restaurants – the latest is a gourmet Indian restaurant, a Nassau first – and a new kids' club.

This summer, the 150-room Margaritaville Beach Resort and Marina will open as part of The Pointe complex, a mixed-use development that will include an entertainment centre and a water park. Both facilities will be open to cruise ship passengers, who will be able to walk there from the port.

“The Exumas' big draw may be Big Major Cay's Instagram-worthy swimming pigs, but there's far more to discover

CAPITAL CRUISING

Nassau's port and Prince George Wharf are set to benefit from a \$250 million investment. The improvements will include a new cruise terminal, a state-of-the-art entertainment pavilion and a boardwalk that will take passengers directly into the downtown area.

The Bahamas has also signed agreements with Carnival Corporation for an \$80 million expansion of private island cruise port Half Moon Cay, and a \$100

million cruise port development in Freeport on Grand Bahama.

Royal Caribbean's private island, Perfect Day at CocoCay, completes its phased opening at the end of this month, with the addition of South Beach, Coco Beach Club and the Floating Cabanas.

Virgin Voyages, meanwhile, has unveiled plans for its Beach Club at Bimini, a seven-mile-long island that will be available only to passengers of *Scarlet Lady*, which launches later this year.

Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line has also introduced its popular cruise-and-stay programme to Nassau. Cruises depart from West Palm Beach, and passengers can choose from a two or six-night stay at a participating resort, including SLS Baha Mar.

From the end of March, British Airways will increase the frequency of its direct service from Heathrow to Nassau to five times a week with the addition of a Tuesday flight.

There's also a new daily direct Delta flight from Boston to Nassau until April 30.

ISLAND-HOPPING

It's possible to tie in Nassau with the Bahamas' Out Islands by flying in to Nassau and out of Great Exuma or North Eleuthera airport – or vice versa – via the US with American Airlines.

About 125 miles southeast of Nassau, the laid-back Exumas – Great Exuma, Little Exuma and the mostly uninhabited Exuma Cays (all 365 of them) – are the archetypal Bahamian paradise. The big draw may be Big Major Cay's Instagram-worthy swimming pigs, but there's far more to discover, such as sailing to castaway islands, where powder-soft beaches are lapped by impossibly turquoise water, wreck diving and snorkelling the Thunderball Grotto of James Bond fame.

The largest resort is the couples-only Sandals Emerald Bay,

which offers all-inclusive luxury on Great Exuma. Set in 200 hectares bordered by a mile-long beach, it has 249 rooms and suites (which include butler service), two large pools, an 18-hole championship golf course and 12 restaurants and bars.

There's plenty to keep guests occupied in and out of the resort, not least 'Chat 'n' Chill' on Stocking Island, which has been a favourite with locals and visitors for more than 20 years. Reached by water taxi, you can idle away an afternoon over a conch (pronounced 'conk') salad and a hog roast, all washed down with a Goombay Smash that packs a (rum) punch.

ELEUTHERA AND HARBOUR ISLAND

About 50 miles northeast of Nassau, historic Eleuthera – christened by English Puritans who settled there from Bermuda in the

DESTINATIONS

THE BAHAMAS | CARIBBEAN

BOOK IT

Kuoni has seven nights' all-inclusive at Sandals Emerald Bay Golf Tennis & Spa Resort from £3,099, including flights from Heathrow and transfers, for selected dates in March and May. kuoni.co.uk

Funway Holidays offers a week's all-inclusive in a Classic Room at Breezes Bahamas in Nassau from £1,529, flying with BA from Heathrow on September 7. funway4agents.co.uk

Carrier offers four nights' B&B at Rosewood Baha Mar, Nassau, and three at Pink Sands Resort, Harbour Island, from £5,140 in June-October, including American Airlines flights from Heathrow and transfers. carrier.co.uk



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