

# Islands in the Sun

**Even if you've run programs here before, there's always something new to discover in The Islands of The Bahamas**

By Jacquelin Carnegie

Christopher Columbus made the discovery: His first stop in the New World was on an island in an area his crew referred to as *bajamar*—Spanish for “shallow water.” Columbus was the first in a long line of visitors to enjoy The Islands of The Bahamas, the beautiful beaches and the stunning, turquoise water surrounding this chain of 700 islands off the coast of Florida. But he was a little too early to enjoy the resort hotels, gambling in the casinos, shopping in the international bazaars or sipping a Bahama Mama at poolside. Your incentive travel group, however, will arrive just in time.

“All incentive travel locations have to have

motivational appeal,” says Trish Adams, director of industry relations for Maritz Travel in St. Louis. “Just the word ‘Bahamas’ does the trick.” Maritz brings about 2,000 people to the islands each year with various incentive travel programs.

“The Bahamas have the unique advantage of being out-of-country yet close by,” Adams says. Just 35 minutes off Florida’s coast, The Bahamas represent a good value in time and expense.

There are three distinct areas to choose from: 1) Grand Bahama Island, with the Lucaya area; 2) Nassau/Cable Beach, on the island of New Providence, and Paradise Island, which is connected by bridge; and 3) the Out Islands—a grouping of smaller islands

including Abaco, Bimini, Eleuthera and Exuma among others.

### Grand Bahama Island

The Lucaya area on Grand Bahama is known for its international shopping, casino gambling and fabulous golf. In 2007, Minneapolis-based Carlson Marketing ran a month-long incentive travel program for a high-tech company at the 740-room Westin Grand Bahama Island Our Lucaya. There were seven back-to-back, four-night stays for groups of 100 to 500 couples; 3,000 attendees in all.

“The groups came in from four different cities, so the hotel and The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism got the various airlines to add flights to accommodate us,” relates Cindy Kramer, senior buyer, engagement & events, for Carlson Marketing. “This can-do attitude of the friendly Bahamian people added to the

and suites in a secluded setting and combination of modern amenities and traditional charm were perfect for Silverpop, a provider of technology solutions for online marketers.

“The resort helped us organize a team-building, ‘Survivor’-type event,” relates Tupy. “On a nearby uninhabited island, teams had to make rafts, catch fish, build fires and then cook a meal in Bahamian style. It was a terrific success, and the entire stay was a unique and distinctive experience for our client.”

According to James Malcolm, until recently the executive director of group travel for The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism—an excellent resource for planners—the top incentive activities on Grand Bahama are: kayaking in Lucayan National Park and Peterson Cay; Jeep safari tours; sport-fishing; and the thrill of swimming with dolphins at the Underwater Explorers Society



The Atlantis resort on Paradise Island is a favorite with incentive planners for family-friendly programs, while on the same property, The Cove Atlantis, offers a totally different, super-luxurious Bahamian experience

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Beverly Tupy, president, True North Incentives, in Laguna Beach, Calif., was looking for an extraordinary place for a super-creative, think-outside-the-box client. Old Bahama Bay by Ginn sur Mer on Grand Bahama fit the bill. Its 73 rooms

(UNEXSO), considered one of the most sophisticated diving operations in the world.

### Nassau/Paradise Island

Nassau is the capital of The Bahamas, and among its features are the lovely, Colonial-style buildings. Take your incentive

group sightseeing on a horse-drawn carriage tour of the historic area, followed by shopping for handmade items at the Straw Market on Rawson Square, and for great buys on imported goods at the shops along Bay Street.

Paradise Island, a 97-acre playland connected to Nassau by a

### The Bahamas: Popular In-Room Gifts

“Authentically Bahamian” products such as:

- ▶ Handmade straw purses and bags
- ▶ Watercolor paintings of Bahamian scenes
- ▶ Locally made soaps and bath crystals
- ▶ Handmade shell picture frames and shell jewelry
- ▶ Local hot sauces and jams; conch-shell sauce dishes for serving them

## Planner Resources

### Grand Bahama Island

- ▶ Old Bahama Bay by Ginn sur Mer  
www.oldbahamabay.com
- ▶ Grand Bahama Yacht Club  
www.grandbahamayachtclub.com
- ▶ Grand Bahama Nature Tours  
(Kayak & Jeep Tours)  
www.grandbahamanaturetours.com
- ▶ UNEXSO (Dolphins)  
www.unexo.com

### Nassau/Paradise Island

- ▶ Atlantis  
www.atlantis.com
- ▶ Sheraton Cable Beach Resort  
www.sheraton.com/cablebeach
- ▶ The Ritz-Carlton Rose Island  
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/  
Properties/Roseland/Default.htm
- ▶ Bahamas Ferries (to Harbour island)  
www.bahamasferries.com

### The Out Islands

- ▶ Bimini Bay Resort and Marina  
www.biminibayresort.com
- ▶ Four Seasons Resort  
Great Exuma at Emerald Bay  
www.fourseasons.com/greatexuma
- ▶ Cotton Bay Estates & Villas  
Eleuthera (Starwood)  
www.discovercottonbay.com

### DMCs

- ▶ Cacique International  
(Nassau & Exuma)  
www.caciqueintl.com
- ▶ DMC Bahamas Ltd.  
(Nassau, Grand Bahama & Exuma)  
www.dmc-bahamas.com
- ▶ Island Destination Services  
(Nassau & Exuma)  
www.islanddmc.com
- ▶ Sunbound (Nassau &  
Grand Bahama)  
www.sunbound.com

short bridge, is a unique resort with a variety of accommodations set among lagoons, pools and marine habitats. Spectacular Atlantis resort is a favorite of incentive travel planners. Carlson, ITA Group, Landmark Incentive, Maritz and USMotivation are among the incentive houses that run programs here.

“Atlantis is perfect for family-friendly programs,” says Caren Bigelow, director of travel planning and vendor relations for USMotivation in Atlanta. “There’s something for everyone—an educational dolphin experience at Dolphin Cay, a wild water ride at Aquaventure, a spa, a casino, fine dining and nightlife.” Day passes are available.

Cable Beach is a scenic, three-mile strip of white sand just minutes from downtown Nassau. The centerpiece is the beautifully renovated 694-room Sheraton Cable Beach Resort with its own casino, great for incentive groups that would like a more tranquil, relaxing experience.

Malcolm recommends fun and memorable incentive activities on Nassau/Paradise Island: A day trip by high-speed ferry to picturesque Harbour Island; powerboat adventures to Exuma; Sail Nassau—a team-building experience on America’s Cup yachts; a day cruise to one of the nearby, secluded islands; and, of course, lots of great golf.

### The Out Islands

The hotel properties on the Out Islands tend to be intimate, deluxe hideaways, perfect for top producers and smaller, high-end incentive groups.

“We are seeing more and more groups doing two-tier, two-island programs, such as using The Cove Atlantis [a 600-room resort-within-a-resort] on Paradise Island and the Four Seasons in Exuma,” says Malcolm. In fact, Adams of Maritz and Joan McKee, director of group operations for ITA



The islands of The Bahamas are known for fabulous golf courses (above); planners can welcome their groups with a Junkanoo “rush out” (inset)

Group, in West Des Moines, Iowa, have programs like that.

The Four Seasons Resort Great Exuma at Emerald Bay has 183 guestrooms and suites, a championship golf course, spa and the only casino in the Out Islands.

The Ritz-Carlton’s Abaco Club on Winding Bay, set on a cove along a private beach, has a links-style golf course and an equestrian center. Accommodations are in privately owned cottages or cabanas. On Eleuthera, Cotton Bay Estates & Villas, part of the Starwood Luxury Collection, sits on 200 unspoiled acres with panoramic sea views from its one- to four-bedroom villas.

The island of Bimini, a favorite hangout of Ernest Hemingway, is known as the “big game fishing capital.” Bimini Bay Resort and Marina’s pastel villas resemble a Bahamian village—a good spot for family-friendly incentive programs.

In addition to this wealth of possibilities, in 2010, Hilton will add a 250-room Conrad with a casino to the Bimini Bay Resort. The Ritz-Carlton’s Rose Island, a resort-hotel on a private island off Nassau, has been announced as a 180-room hotel. Disney Cruise Lines plans a series of four- and five-night itineraries to the Bahamas for the 2010 season. The Disney *Wonder* will depart from Port Canaveral, for Disney’s private Bahamian island, Castaway Cay, as well as either Nassau or Florida’s Key West. ■