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CUSTOM GUIDES

MAYAGUANA





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MAYAQUANA



Written by Blair Howard



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Introduction

To describe Mayaguana Island as Paradise Lost would be an understatement. No more than a tiny spot on the map of the western Atlantic, it is one of our planet's last undiscovered gems.

Mayaguana is a sun-drenched tropical island surrounded by jewel-hued waters and swaths of sugar-white beaches. It beckons irresistibly to those who are looking for something a little out of the ordinary, whether that be the back-to-nature, exploratory vacation of a lifetime, or something a little more permanent.

The island is the outdoor adventurer's dream: scuba diving, snorkeling, bonefishing, deep-sea fishing, bird watching, sailing, hiking – it has all this and more, and is totally unspoiled. The colors of the reef are more vibrant and the reef-life is fearless. The fish are bigger, they bite harder and faster, and they fight like the devil. If you like to bonefish, don't miss a fishing experience on Mayaguana. Looking for solitude? You can wander endless miles of deserted beaches in a place so peaceful you might think it is your own private retreat.

If you've spent a lifetime looking for the perfect place to get away from it all, and a new place to get into, you have found it in Mayaguana.

Location

Mayaguana quietly sits at the far southeastern tip of the great archipelago that is the Islands of The Bahamas. There are some 700 islands in The Bahamas and at least 2,000 more much smaller islets, called cays, that lie scattered over 750 miles of the western Atlantic Ocean. These islands have provided generations of seafarers and travelers with more adventure than many of them might ever have imagined.



Mayaguana is one of the least-known of the Out Islands of The Bahamas, and the only one to have retained its original Indian name. Situated some 300 miles southeast of Nassau, it's an unspoiled, mostly undiscovered island where time seems to have little effect on the

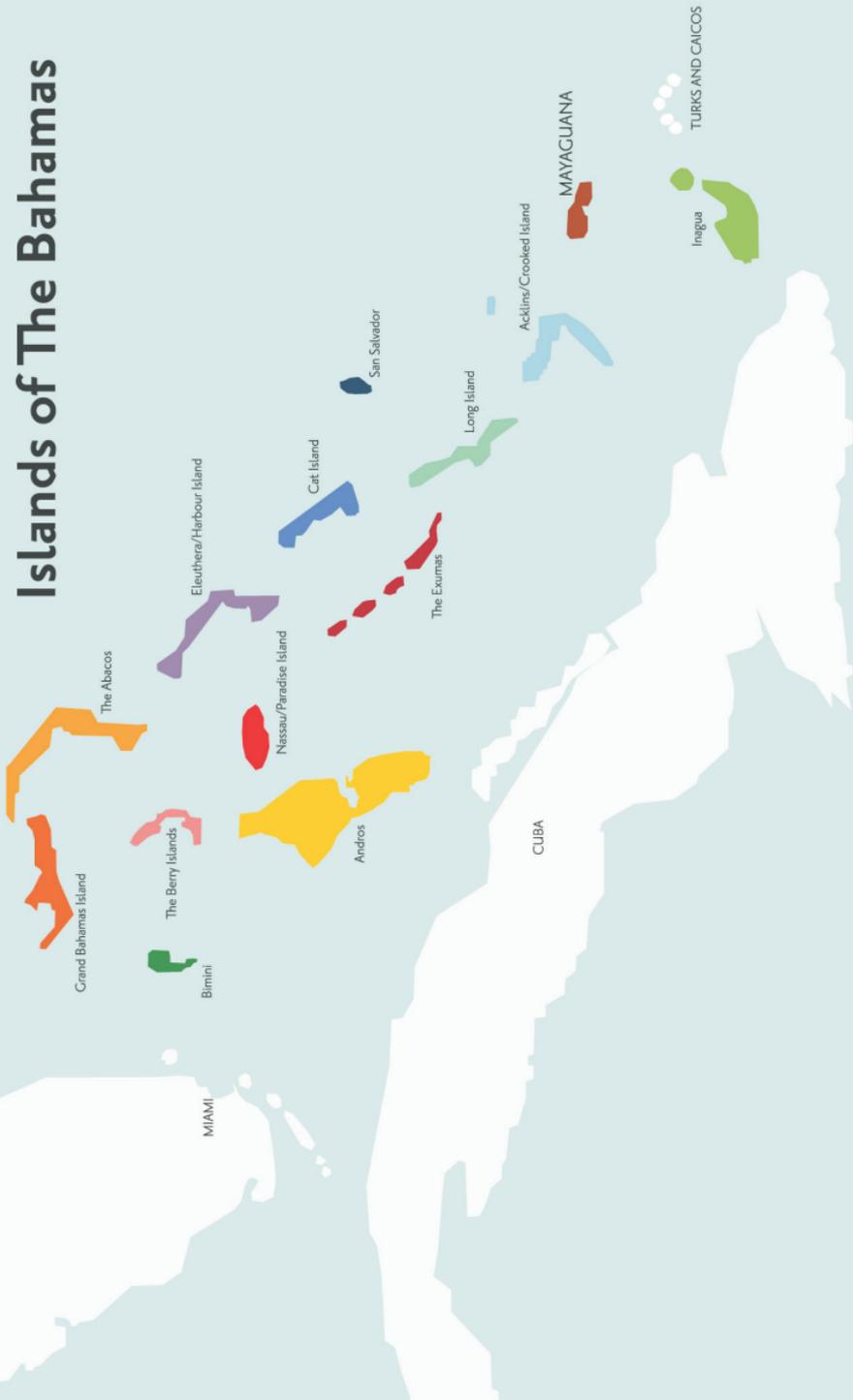
island's population. Nothing happens quickly; no one ever seems to be in a hurry.

Mayaguana is a land of vibrant colors – from the air, a hundred shades of green compliment the pastel colors of the ocean and the brightly painted island homes. It's a land of peace and tranquility disturbed only by the sounds of seabirds wheeling high overhead and waves lapping gently on the beaches.

As you walk the pristine beaches and byways of Mayaguana, the hustle and bustle of city life seems a million miles away.



Islands of The Bahamas



Geography

The Archipelago

To know the geography of Mayaguana, you have to understand the geography of The Bahamas as a whole. From a point roughly 70 miles east of West Palm Beach, Florida, the great archipelago extends some 750 miles southeast into the northern Caribbean, almost to the island of Hispaniola.

The islands that make up The Bahamas are generally low and flat. The highest point in the entire archipelago, on Cat Island, is just 206 feet above sea level. Only Andros, the largest island of the chain, features rivers and streams.

Although many islands and cays make up the archipelago, only about 15 are inhabited. The vast majority are deserted, with pristine beaches and tropical forests that are untouched by humankind. The residents of Mayaguana, though few, are welcoming and friendly.

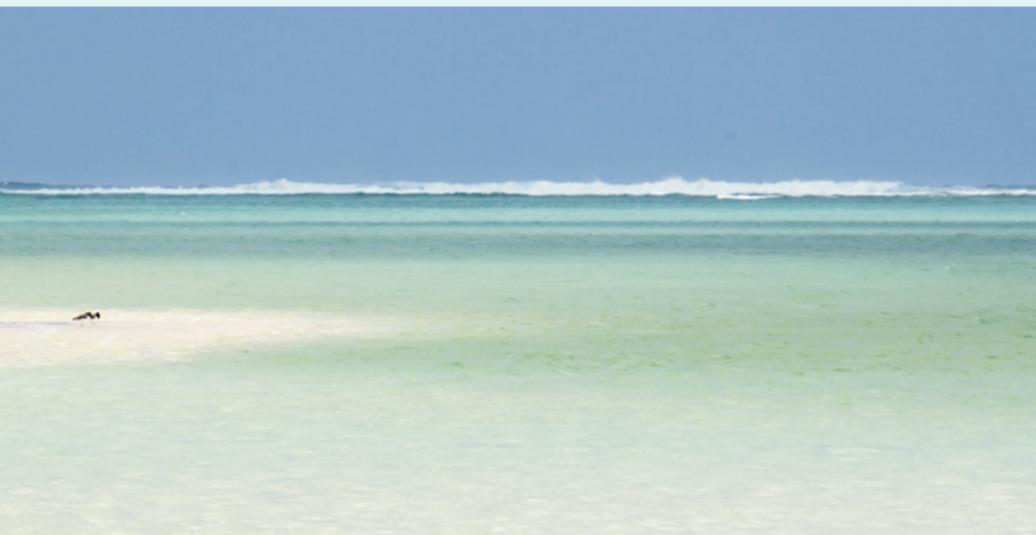


The largest and best known city in The Bahamas is **Nassau**. Located on the island of New Providence, it boasts a popula-

tion of more than 200,000 people. In times gone by, Nassau was an international playground for royalty, the rich and the famous. Today, the first city of The Bahamas attracts not only the affluent of the world, but also vacationers of every class and culture, especially from America.

Throughout the Christmas and New Year's holidays, at the height of the Bahamian tourist season, **Junkanoo**, a spirited, Mardi Gras-style celebration, explodes across the islands, but nowhere is it quite as exciting as in Nassau.

The **Out Islands** are another world entirely: Abaco, Andros, the Berry Islands, Bimini, Cat Island, Crooked Island, Eleuthera, the Exumas, Harbour Island, Long Island, Great Inagua, the Acklins and, of course, Mayaguana.



The Out Islands have long been a popular destination for sailors, sport fishermen and divers. But due to increased accessibility and an interest from people looking for something different, they are fast becoming popular with active travelers.

Some 40,000 people pursue their everyday lives on the Out Islands, living in sparsely settled towns and villages, where traditional patterns of farming and fishing prevail. Fruits and vegetables are grown; pigs, sheep, goats and turkeys are raised. Crayfish (the Bahamian lobster), conch, lumber, and pulpwood are exported, chiefly to the United States.



Thick vegetation, mostly shrubs and bushes, covers a lot of Mayaguana and most of the Out Islands. Each is a tiny land of dunes and rocks, sea grass, spider lilies, seagrape, mangrove, casuarina and palm. Each is a land of endless shores, tiny bays and rocky inlets, where the colorful families of the ocean live and play in the clear waters of the reefs.

If it's seclusion you're after, you'll find it in the Out Islands. Shipwrecks, coral reefs, and mysterious blue holes dot the vast stretches of empty flats and shallow reefs. Hundreds of tiny bays and inlets, and mile upon mile of deserted beaches await you. Beaches with sand the color of pink champagne where



you can wade in shallow waters, lie in the sun, or cast a line into the gently rolling surf. Beaches where you can hook a chunky snapper, bake it on a stick over a small fire, and eat it as the sun goes down in a blaze of red and gold. Get lucky and you could be eating fresh lobster instead of snapper.

The people of the Out Islands are friendly. They are real, without pretensions, and have their roots anchored firmly in the past. They say “God bless you,” rather than good-bye, and think nothing of letting a stranger into their home for a drink of water. They are jolly people who look forward only to the next day, and are grateful for it.



John Hanna of Pirate's Well

Mayaguana

Mayaguana is an island of quiet mystery and tranquility; a land bypassed by time and tide; a beautiful uncharted island of The Bahamas, a secret waiting to be discovered. It boasts a warm, year-round climate with mostly sunny days, cooling trade winds, more than 50 miles of unspoiled beaches, and stunning scenery.

One of the largest of the Out Islands, Mayaguana is almost 27 miles long and some six miles at its widest point. It sits 52 miles northwest of Providenciales (Provo) in the Turks and Caicos Islands, and is the most easterly of the Bahamian Island chain.

Like many other remote, virtually uninhabited Out Islands, Mayaguana is a mostly forested strip of low-lying land ideally





suites for fishing and minimal agriculture. Its eastern end is an unspoiled wilderness where vast tracts of *lignum vitae* (the official tree of The Bahamas), low-growing hardwood forests of *casuarina*, mahogany, black mangrove flats and seagrape blanket the landscape. There are no roads here, just a few barely discernable tracks through the dense undergrowth that have all but given themselves back to nature. The greater portion of the island is accessible only by boat.



Eastern Mayaguana is ringed on three sides by a magnificent coral reef whose shallow, emerald Atlantic waters are home to a dazzling and vibrant undersea world of tropical fish, giant lobsters, conch, barracuda, sea turtles, bonefish and more. The shoreline is one long, powder-white sandbar

after another: untouched, unspoiled. All of this makes the eastern side of the island attractive to hikers that enjoy the challenge of exploring without developed trails.

The western half of the island is inhabited by a laid-back population of about 300, more than half of whom are schoolchildren. The islanders are happy people who make an effort to attend the three-times-weekly visits by Bahamas Air. Hours before each flight is due – whether they are flying or not,



meeting travelers or not – island residents gather in force at the terminal to sit, chat, discuss island affairs, play dominoes and enjoy a plate of home-made macaroni and cheese.

Mayaguanians live a seemingly idyllic, but very quiet life, in three quaint settlements that are unquestionably old-world Bahamian, in appearance and in spirit. **Abraham's Bay** sits on the edge of a shallow water flat on the south coast. **Betsy's Bay** is a tiny settlement on the west coast. **Pirate's Well** is a vibrant little community on the western side of the north coast.

Farming is an important occupation on the island. Farming produce is not grown for revenue but primarily for eating and bartering with other islanders.

While the island has long been a favorite stopover for yachting enthusiasts, tourists have still to discover this tiny paradise. Located far from the beaten path, guidebooks mention it only in passing, usually saying little of its wonders.



History

In order for you to understand the history of Mayaguana, you have to understand that of The Bahamas as a whole, so closely are they woven together.

Bahamian History

From the earliest times, Spanish explorers headed west from Cadiz in search of riches and excitement. The Spanish were followed by the Portuguese, then by the English, the French, the Dutch and then by anyone else who could find a craft seaworthy enough to endure the hazardous crossing. But before the Europeans arrived, The Bahamas were inhabited mostly by native **Lucayan Indians**.

Christopher Columbus, on his way to the New World, made landfall on a southeastern island – perhaps San Salvador, perhaps Mayaguana – in 1492. The islands became known as Bahama, from the Spanish “baja mar,” or shallow seas. Europeans arrived and almost immediately began enslaving the Lucayans.

In 1649, a band of Englishmen calling themselves the **Eleutherian Adventurers** arrived in the islands from Bermuda seeking religious freedom, hence the Island of Eleuthera. In 1666, New Providence was settled by a second group of Englishmen, also from Bermuda. By then, however, adventurers of a different sort had already realized that The Bahamas, close to the already busy shipping lanes from the New World to Spain and Portugal, offered quick and easy pickings. Pirates, corsairs, brigands, ne'r-do-wells and privateers flocked to The Bahamas in the thousands.

Pirates

Sir John Hawkins had already made several journeys to the Caribbean selling slaves when he was joined by a wily teenager, **Francis Drake**. These two men played havoc among the islands, and their impact upon them was immeasurable. They were followed by an endless stream of privateers and pirates that included such notables as Sir Henry Morgan, Blackbeard and “Calico” Jack Rakkham.



The pirates were finally driven out of The Bahamas by Captain Woodes Rogers, who was appointed Royal Governor in 1718. Rogers blocked the harbor with two ships so that the outlaws couldn't escape the harbor. A fierce fight followed, but Rogers finally took possession of the island and the pirates were driven away. A statue of Rogers stands in front of the British Colonial hotel in Nassau, a tribute to his accomplishment.

Emancipation

By 1790, the black population of the islands had tripled. Emancipation came to The Bahamas in August 1834, and the newly liberated slaves left Nassau and moved “over the hill” to New Providence and established settlements of their own. Their descendants still live in Carmichael, Gambier, Adelaide, and Grant's Town, as well as on the Out Islands of The



Rashad Deveaux of Pirate's Well

Exumas, Rum Cay, San Salvador, Long Island and Mayaguana.

Today, the Lucayan Indians, pirates and adventurers are long gone, but a little of their legacy remains, especially on the Out Islands and on Mayaguana in particular.

Mayaguanian History

So, how then does Mayaguana figure into this rather grand picture? Mayaguana is one of three islands that lays a legitimate claim to be the spot where Christopher Columbus first made landfall in 1492 (San Salvador and Cat Island are the others).



Taking into account its position on the map and its deep-water access points, it's a claim that makes a lot of sense; Mayaguana was likely the first port of call for Columbus.

In the 17th century, Mayaguana saw its share of pirates too. In fact, the tiny settlement of Pirate's Well on the northwest shore is named for them. Legend has it that even Blackbeard stopped here from time to time.



Once the pirates were banished, residents lived quietly until 1960, when the island became part of the US military Missile Tracking program. This led to the construction a runway, a hilltop fresh water catchment, a deep-water dock and a series of roads that today provide easy, though somewhat bumpy, access to and from the island's three settlements. The military presence here ended when the base closed in 1963. The old dock is little more than a skeleton, but the runway has been re-furbished and is the center of Mayaguana International Airport.

Climate

Mayaguana has a superior climate. In the throes of winter, it is substantially warmer than the rest of the island chain and it receives only half the annual rainfall of Nassau. Cooling trade winds blow almost constantly. September through May, when the temperature averages 80-90° F, is the most refreshing time to visit. The rest of the year is somewhat warmer. Even then, though, the humidity is low and the heat rarely becomes uncomfortable. A visit in July can be hot, but not overbearing.



The People



Andrea Black of Pirate's Well

Bahamians, on the whole, are very friendly. There's always a cheerful "good morning," a happy smile and an eagerness to help. It's done with a genuineness and a desire to please.

With a population of only 300, Mayaguana barely qualifies as an inhabited island. To say that, though, does the lovely people who live here a serious injustice. These islanders are some of the friendliest people

you'll ever come across. They greet you with a warm, welcoming smile, wherever you go, no matter the time of day. There are two schools on the island: a primary school in Pirate's Well and a secondary school in Abraham's Bay. The children that attend are respectful and courteous, always displaying good manners and happily responding to your questions with "Yes, Ma'am" or "No, Mam."

Language

The language spoken on all Out Islands is English – with a Bahamian accent. The old language has been shaped and reshaped over more than 300 years by a potpourri of cultures, of which the British and Caribbean have had a large influence. Some say the Bahamian accent is decidedly West Indian, others say it has a sound all its own. If it's spoken quickly, it's almost impossible for an outsider to understand. The secret is to listen carefully, and don't be afraid to ask the speaker to repeat, a request that will often bring a delighted grin to his or her face.

Pirate's Well school girls





Discovering Mayaguana

You won't have to seek the sun on Mayaguana, it will find you. Most of the days bring spectacular sunshine. Rain showers last no more than a few minutes before the sun comes bursting through again. Beaches are plentiful, some 50 miles of them. Only those located around the three settlements are used by Mayaguanians, usually children. Rarely will you find another person at your chosen spot, so you are almost always assured of finding that special, secluded place where you can spend an afternoon toasting yourself.

What to Expect

Before you go, you'll need to understand that you are traveling to an island that has long stayed off the tourist radar. As such, it affords you the opportunity to experience the island and its people as they always have been, without the intervention of strip malls, chain hotels and everything that comes with them. This is the real Bahamas. Currently, there are few amenities: no real restaurants or formal car rental companies, just one crafters shop and one hotel. However, there are places to eat and cars for rent. Things you need for day-to-day living such as trail mix, cookies and granola bars should be packed,

Mayaguana Island

110 square miles of land | 27 x 6 miles | 87 miles of coast line | Highest elevation: 88 ft | Population: 291



Airport



Government Building



Coral Reef



preferably in your checked luggage so you don't get held up at airport security in the US, Canada or Europe.

Drinks are not difficult to find, especially if you're staying at the island's one hotel. There are several friendly bars where you can buy bottled water, juices and beer (not recommended for consumption during the day, especially if you're hiking, because of the heat).



Exploring the Island

The Beaches

Mayaguana's beaches are beyond compare. From the Northwest Point to Blackwood Point; from Flamingo Island to Curtis Creek; and from Guano Point on the island's south side





all the way to the far Southeastern Point, the coastline is banded by long strips of deserted beach. The pristine sand ranges in color from sugar-white to pleasing shades of pale pink. Within the confines of the reef, great saltwater flats offer

endless possibilities for wading, shelling, fishing and swimming. Best of all, a private stretch of sand is always available.

Communities

The tiny population is concentrated in three settlements on the western portion of the island: **Abraham's Bay**, **Pirate's Well** and **Betsy Bay**. These communities are all colorful and appealing, with tiny collections of dwellings and other assorted buildings. They are typically Bahamian, with small, brightly painted homes, wide streets (if streets exist at all) and easy access to the ocean.

Abraham's Bay

Situated on the south side of Mayaguana, on the rim of the great sound from which it takes its name, Abraham's Bay is the largest of the three communities. It has a collection of some 50 or so homes, a couple of small stores, several bars, the island's government buildings, a morgue and the island's clinic. This medical facility is open every day and is staffed by three capable nurses who are able to handle most of their patients' concerns. The nurses can be reached off-hours, and three days a month a doctor flies in from Inagua. The **E&F Variety**



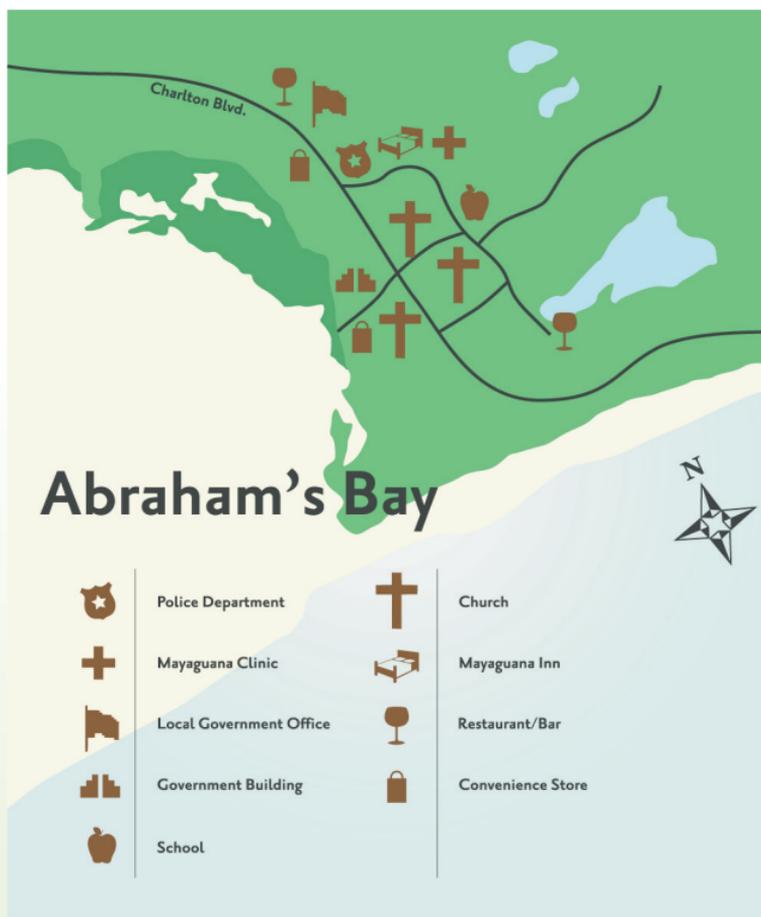
Store in town is run by Eulesa Brooks and offers limited groceries. Abraham's Bay has a unique atmosphere of laid-back, happy living.

The main industry in Abraham's Bay is fishing. Each morning, several small boats head out from the dock toward the edge of the reef where the men on board free dive for lobsters and conch and to spearfish for grouper. The catch, often valued in the several thousands of dollars, is then taken back to the dock where it is cleaned, packed and transported to the airport for shipment to the market in Nassau.

Abraham's Bay is a happy place. Kids here spend hours at the waterside fishing with hand lines, or riding ramshackle bikes explor-



ing the beaches, flats and surrounding wilderness. They serve as proof that life really can be lived without all the modern gadgets and toys.



Pirate's Well

Smaller by half than Abraham's Bay, Pirate's Well is no less appealing. The big draw here are the endless miles of pristine, pink sand beaches. Some of the older residents claim that Blackbeard was a regular visitor to the island, and to Pirate's Well in particular.



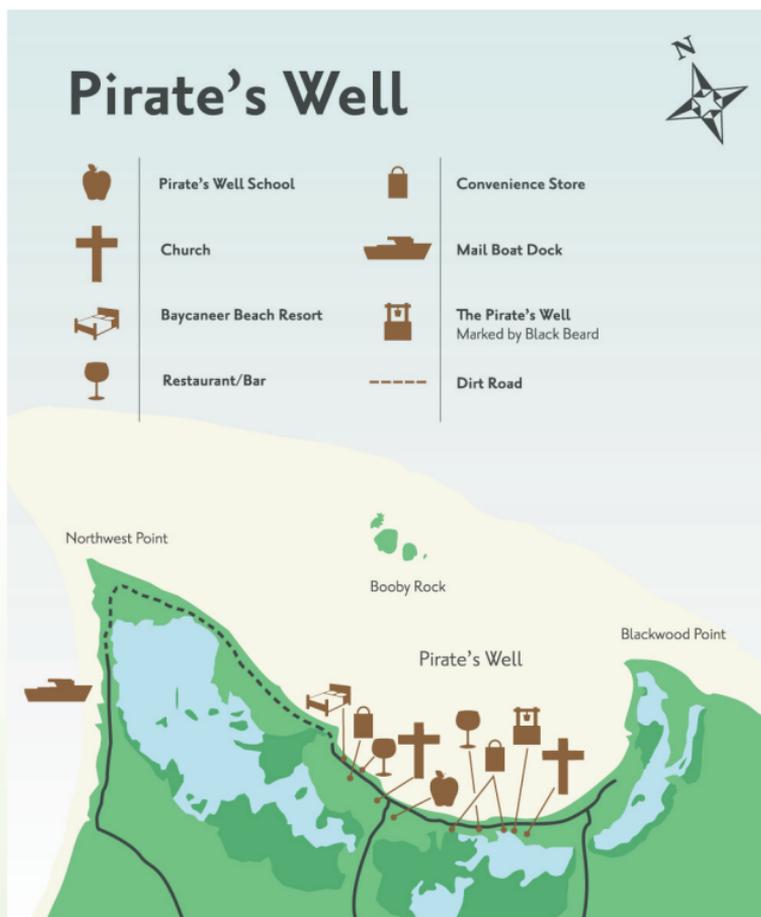
The little settlement of Pirate's Well is named for a well that was discovered by pirates looking for a safe haven from the British Royal Navy.

Today, Pirate's Well is home to **Mrs. Louise McPhee**, one of three crafters on the island. Mrs. McPhee has been crafting baskets and headwear from straw for more than 70 years and is still going strong. Just a few hundred yards down the road from her little shop is the **After Hours Bar**, owned and operated by Cornelius "Bus" Collie. This quaint gathering place on the main road always makes visitors welcome, with cold beer and interesting conversation.

The Baycaner Beach Resort is also located in Pirate's Well. This 16-room resort is the only one of its kind on the island – a real tourist facility. Read more about it on page 80.

The sound to the northwest of Pirate's Well stretches from the shore road in the settlement, northward all the way to Booby Rock, south to Blackwood Point and west to the extreme tip of the island at Northwest Point. Fishing on the sound is outstanding, though rarely will you see people taking advantage of it.





Betsy Bay

Betsy Bay on the western shore of Mayaguana is a collection of maybe a dozen or so small homes and a small store. It is inhabited by more wild chickens and roosters than people.

How Betsy Bay got its name is a guess. However, on a quiet evening at the After Hours Bar, you might hear some of the older island residents tell the tale of two women of ill repute, banished from the Turks and Caicos islands in the 18th

century, who landed on the eastern shore and settled in Abraham's Bay. Before long, local gents were seen to be paying more attention to these young ladies than their spouses thought was healthy, so the two ladies were banished from Abraham's Bay and set up home on the western shore. Soon, more people moved to the location and it was named for the older of the two ladies: Betsy.

A second explanation as to how the settlement was named claims that the community was founded in the late 18th century by a man called Mr. Betsy. Rather mundane, but perhaps the more believable of the two stories.



This is the end of the world as far as Mayaguana is concerned. There's nowhere to go other than back the way you came, via North-west Point to Pirate's Well. The drive is a pretty one. Consider hiking along the shore from Pirate's Well to Betsy Bay – it's an experience that shouldn't be missed.

Nature Preserves & Other Sights

Flamingo Island

Flamingo Island is a staggeringly beautiful spot. Laden with pristine beaches and surrounded by clear waters, it is a picture-perfect place to retreat and relax.

Points of Interest





Curtis Creek

This is one of the most beautiful sections of the island and has officially been set aside as a nature preserve. As far as the eye can see, the great sound that makes up the creek stretches in every direction. Not really a creek at all, it is in fact an inlet from the Atlantic Ocean beyond the reef to the north. At low tide the water is rarely more than a couple of feet deep, except in the central channel that runs through the sound from north to south – fish and other marine life come in from deep waters through the channel to feed.





This is bonefishing, birding and kayaking country, one of those incredible places where you can experience what nature is all about. To come here alone on a warm summer day and sit on the sand bar is to become one with all that's truly wonderful about this world. Look north toward the ocean; look east across the sound; or look south to the mangrove flats that bound the creek. To enjoy one of the last great, unspoiled tropical reserves is a rare privilege indeed.

Northwest Point

This is the far western point of the island, where hiking, shelling, and birding are the best Mayaguana has to offer. It's here that you'll see pile upon pile of conch shells, leading me to name this unique spot Conch's Graveyard. It lies on the rocks facing Atlantic Ocean to the west. All around, the waters crash against the rocks and make for incredible photographs.



Blackwood Point

Blackwood Point, another official nature preserve, is just north of Pirate's Well. It's an ideal spot for birding, hiking and bonefishing and it hosts a large flamingo population. Keep your eyes open for osprey, also known as the sea eagle or fish eagle. Not as shy as they are in more populated areas, they will allow you to approach within 20 or 30 feet before taking wing – have your camera ready. Blackwood Point is located east of the sound – you can see Booby Rock way off to the northwest.



Booby Rock

Booby Rock is just what its name suggests, a rock where brown boobies nest. It's located on the edge of the reef just two miles north of the Baycaner Beach Resort at Pirate's Well. This collection of rocks is home to a huge population of seabirds, including terns and plovers. The rock is approachable only by





boat. The ride out is exhilarating, over waters never more than six or seven feet deep and plenty of opportunity to stop and snorkel along the way. Booby rock stands like a fortress on the outer limits of the reef. The waters to the south, beside the rock and just inside the reef, are shallow and quiet; beyond the rock the water's boil against the reef before dropping off to more than 1,000 feet deep. The birds are curious, and ever hungry. As you approach, they wheel overhead and dive down to within feet of the boat. When they realize you have nothing to feed them, they soon return to their nesting grounds high up on the rock.



Booby Cay & Northeast Point Nature Preserve

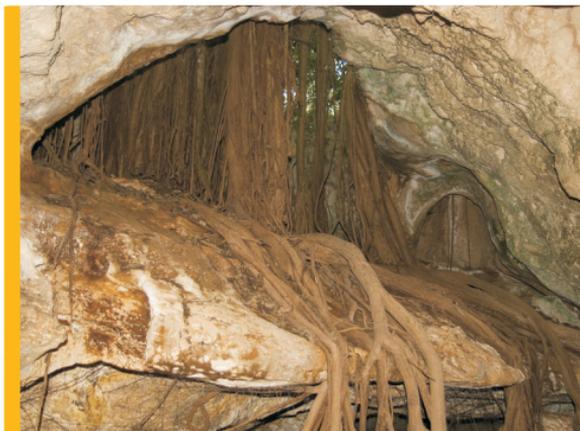
Booby Cay is a small island at the extreme eastern end of the island. It's accessible only by boat, and any of the local guides will take you, providing the weather is good. The island is famous for its population of iguanas, goats and, of course, boobies. It's also home to Mayaguana's flock of West Indian Flamingos – they alone make the long journey here worth your while. Booby Cay is a secluded place, a little windswept and pounded by the

surf. It's part of another official nature preserve – also best approached by boat, but backpackers can make it there on foot by way of the beaches along the north shore. The fishing off Booby Cay is excellent.

The Bat Caves

The Bat Caves are northeast of Abraham's Bay and Guano Point. To reach them, you'll need a four-wheel-drive vehicle and must be prepared to do some serious uphill hiking. The dirt road leads upward and eastward from the rear of Abraham's Bay school.

The final 300 yards is all uphill across some of the most rugged terrain on the island, but it's well worth the effort. The caves themselves are entered through a small opening that's hard to find; have a guide show you the way. The caverns spread underground to cover a couple of acres. The small



bats living here are very accommodating and not easily disturbed. The ceilings are low, so mind your head.

The soil in the caves is extremely rich due to the guano and locals often venture here to gather the soil for use as fertilizer in their gardens and farms.

Island Activities

As an island completely surrounded by unbelievably clear waters, the emphasis on Mayaguana is watersports. And this untouched escape in the middle of the Windward Passage has plenty to offer.

Sailing, deep-sea fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, swimming, and walking are the main pastimes. If you need to rent gear or hire a guide for an organized outing, you can do so – not from chain watersports agencies, but from locals who make sure you have all you need for a full and happy vacation. The guides are all local experts, and the equipment is fine.





Scuba Diving & Snorkeling

Diving The Bahamas is probably the best you'll find anywhere in the Western Hemisphere. The waters off Mayaguana are crystal clear and shallow, offering spectacular dive sites with an abundance of coral reefs and gardens for you to explore. Mayaguana also has a number of shipwrecks. You'll need to bring all of your own equipment, and the Baycancer Beach Resort will refill tanks. There are no dive operators, and only experienced divers should go down.

Neal Watson, President of the Bahamas Dive Association, is one of the original pioneers of scuba diving, having set a number of world records and distin-

guishing himself equally as a pioneer in the businesses of sport diving and dive travel. He has dived all over the globe and, specifically, has seen many of the best dive locations in The Bahamas and the Caribbean. He recently explored the diving in Mayaguana and remarks "Mayaguana has absolutely the best diving anywhere. The virgin condition of the reefs and marine life offers an extraordinary scuba diving experience." Mr. Watson has provided the following reviews of eight dive sites he experienced while on Mayaguana. Please refer to the corresponding map for site locations.



Snorkeling & Diving

-  Snorkeling Location
-  Dive Location
-  Dive Spot referenced in pages 39-41
-  Shipwreck Location
-  Coral Reef



- *Dive Site 1: West of Government Dock, west side of island, off Betsy Bay. This is a wall dive, with large coral heads perched on the edge of the wall. Coral structure is high profile in nature, and offers great diving. Numerous barrel sponges can be seen here, some measuring 10 feet across. The marine life is typical of coral reefs in the Bahamas, with schools of grunts, jacks, grouper and snapper.*
- *Dive Site 2: North of Government Dock, west side of island, off Northwest Point. This deep wall dive, starting around 80*

Juvenile Queen Angel Fish





Blue Tang Fish

feet, has very little relief on top of the wall. The coral structure is low profile in nature, with many barrel sponges, pillar coral and soft corals.

- *Dive Site 3: Booby Rock, northwest side of the island, off Pirate's Well Bay. A shallow coral reef with ample elkhorn coral gardens and lots of marine life. Site is somewhat weather dependent. Reef line is typical barrier reef structure, drawing schools of grunts, small jacks, grouper and snapper.*
- *Dive Site 4: Devil's Point, southwest side of island. An excellent wall dive with outstanding coral formations and swim-thrus. The site offers gigantic barrel sponges, lots of vertical coral heads with tunnels, caverns and swim-thru caves that*

exit on the wall. This site is characteristic with world-class Cozumel-style wall diving, featuring large coral heads perched on the edge of the wall. It has outstanding varieties and schools of Bahamian fish and marine life. Two Caribbean reef sharks were spotted at this site, in addition to a variety of small reef fish and schools of grunts, jacks, grouper and snapper.

- *Dive Site 5: Old US Navy Pier, south side of the island, west of Abraham Bay. This site offers a variety of shallow-water snorkeling and coral gardens, with a variety of soft and hard corals, including elkhorn coral gardens.*
- *Dive Sites 6, 7 & 8: Off Big Cove, going north, west side of island, south of Betsy Bay. A deep wall dive location, very similar to Site 2, above, with very little relief on top of the wall. The wall starts deep, at about 80 feet. Coral structures are low profile in nature, with many barrel sponges, pillar coral and soft corals.*

Learn more about Neal Watson and his company, Neal Watson's Undersea Adventures at, www.nealwatson.com.

Wreck Diving

The Bahamas has more than 500 shipwrecks, and some half-dozen are on the reefs around Mayaguana. These include two located on the reef at Wreck Bay just east of Curtis Creek on the north shore, two more off Booby Cay and the Northwest Point, and



another south of Abraham's Bay. Some of these wrecks, especially those with access to their interiors, are dangerous to explore. Even experienced divers should not go alone into unknown wrecks, many of which are likely to be home to fire coral and moray eels.

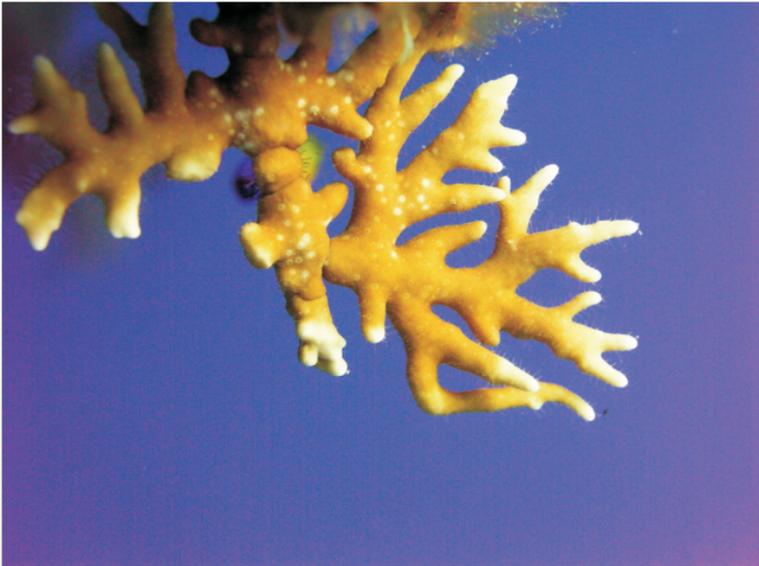
AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Dr Brian Ardel, an underwater photographer and 30-year dive veteran, has explored the waters in Tonga, Palau, Truk, Fiji, Yap, Belize and the Cook Islands. He has this to say about Mayaguana's offerings:

Diving is spectacular. Enormous groupers prowl the reef and myriads of tropical marine species flutter around like beautiful butterflies. For the macro photographer, there are tons of hard and soft corals, as well as flamingo tongues, Christmas tree worms and feather dusters. I have seen lion fish and nudibranks, most likely the progeny of pets that escaped from the aquarium trade.... If someone offers you a trip to this diving paradise, run, don't walk, to your dive gear closet. Pack your camera and prepare for a great time.

While most of what you will see beneath these clear waters is a treat, there are a few caveats. **Sharks** attack only when hungry and rarely do they attack a human. Shark attacks are extremely rare, especially in The Bahamas. **Moray eels** are nocturnal creatures that very much like to be left alone. A few have become accustomed to humans and hand-outs from them, but those that haven't can give you a very nasty bite when disturbed. Stay at a respectful distance. **Barracuda** are not really dangerous, just scary-looking. This sleek, curious creature will often follow you around, which can be unnerving. And, if you happen to be feeding the local reef fish, *which you shouldn't*, always be on the lookout for something bigger. A barracuda after his share of the pie will attack like lightning and, although

he's only after your hand-out, it might be your hand he takes. One more thing: Barracuda are attracted by sparkly things and a watch, ring or gold chain offers a real temptation. Take off all jewelry. **Rays** are fascinating to watch as they flap over the sandy bottom. Though generally not dangerous, if you tread on a stingray buried in the sand you're probably in for a helicopter ride to the hospital in Provo. Shuffle your feet in the sand as you walk. **Scorpionfish** hang out on coral heads or close to the ocean floor. The thick spines on their backs can inflict a nasty sting. Keep your hands and feet clear. The well-camouflaged **stonefish** can give a nasty sting if you inadvertently put your hand on it. **Jellyfish**, transparent and often difficult to see, are almost all harmless. There are, however, some that are not. It's best to avoid them all.



Fire coral

Coral is a delicate living organism and divers should avoid making contact. It is often sharp, and tiny pieces can become dislodged in cuts and abrasions. With regular coral, you'll be in for a painful couple of days. Fire coral, however, can present a bigger problem; avoid touching it. **Sea urchins** are spiky little

black balls that lie on the sandy ocean floor or in nooks and crannies of the reef. Step on a sea urchin with bare feet at your peril. The brittle spines are often barbed. Fortunately, urchins are easily seen and thus easily avoided. If you do happen to get stung by coral, jellyfish, or an urchin, treat the sting first with vinegar. This will neutralize the poison. Then you should get some medication from the local nurse to ease the pain.



Fishing

For the islanders, fishing is one way they earn their daily bread. But if you're an angler, the sport fishing here is unlike anywhere else on earth. You don't have to be a world-class player to take advantage of what Mayaguana has to offer. In fact, it's okay if you've never fished in your life – skilled guides are willing to show you how it's done.

There are many ways to fish the waters around Mayaguana, and there are more species of fish than you're ever likely to catch. Reef fishing and bonefishing are the premier sports, but there really is something for everyone.

Drift-Fishing

They do things a little differently when fishing the reefs on Mayaguana: no heavy sea rods here, at least that I've seen. The standard equipment (unless you're bonefishing, of course – more about that later) consists of a hand-line with a couple of



Fishing & Boating

-  Bone Fishing
-  Deep Sea Fishing
-  Reef Fishing
-  Coral Reef





Clint Kemp at Blackwood Point

hundred yards of 60-pound test, a couple of sinkers, a couple of hooks, some fresh conch meat and a small, drifting boat.

Nothing compares with the feeling one gets aboard a slowly trolling boat on a calm sea under a hot summer sun, a light-weight reel in one hand and a can of some-

thing cold in the other. It's so quiet out there you can hear nothing more than breakers crashing on the distant reef. The gently rocking boat, the steamy air, the lapping of the water on the underside of the boat, the warm afternoon.... And then it happens: the line jerks in your hand and you're suddenly wide awake. The fight is on.

Bonefishing

The stories of Mayaguana fly fishing are the stuff of legends. On a recent visit I had a much anticipated opportunity to see for myself. I was not disappointed. The fishing was epic, with schools of five- to eight-lb fish in numbers that amazed me. The beauty of the fishing became surreal when a flock of flamingos flew over my head and landed just 50 feet away. The only thing that brought me back to reality were the tails of feeding bonefish among the legs of the beautiful pink birds. Bonefishing in Mayaguna was an unforgettable moment in my fishing adventures, a moment I hope to repeat as soon as possible. Clint Kemp

Captain Clint Kemp, an Orvis-endorsed fly fishing guide, runs Secret Soul Fly Fishing Adventures in The Bahamas. He has a commitment to the environment, practicing catch and release exclusively.



Inside the reef, the shallow water flats offer bonefishing. The elusive bonefish, often called the “gray ghost,” is rapidly becoming one of the most popular sportfish on the islands, and anglers from around the world flock to The Bahamas in search of this hard-fighting fish. That’s the bad news. The good news is that Mayaguana is undiscovered terrain.

Mayaguana is the end of the trail for me – Curtis Creek is a unique creek system in the bonefish world. It is one of the last places in The Bahamas where you can spot, stalk, cast to, hook up and land a tailing bonefish over 10 lbs. There is no place else I’d rather fish. John Pinto.

John Pinto began fishing in The Bahamas in 1983 and over the past 20 years has fished every island in the Bahamas. John was awarded the title of Honourary Fly Fisherman of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas by an act of Parliament in Nassau in 1990 for his continued efforts toward promoting The Bahamas.

Bonefish, so named for the huge numbers of bones in their bodies, live in deep water but come up onto the flats to feed, and that's where you'll have to go to find them. Bonefish, like deer, must be stalked. Make a wrong move at the wrong time and your quarry will be gone in a flash. The bonefish of Mayaguana are some of the largest in the Bahamas. Most often they weigh in around six to seven pounds, with some growing as large as 15 pounds.

Bonefishing on Mayaguana is good almost everywhere, and it's available throughout the year. Locals say that in some areas bonefish can be caught by casting into the surf, or from a skiff, but there's no doubt that the best way is to hunt them on foot on the expansive flats just inside Mayaguana's reef system. This is where your guide will earn his fee. He will know where to go, what flies to use, and he'll guide you through the basics of how to fish for the "gray ghost."

To hunt bonefish, move slowly, disturbing the water as little as possible as you go. Keep your eyes on the school, take one step at a time until you're close enough to cast. Aim your fly or jig at a spot close to the center of the school. If you're lucky there'll be a slight tug, then a stronger one, and then the fish sprints off like a prized thoroughbred, sometimes running for 100 yards or more before tiring.

To do it right, you'll need a guide who knows the area and where the best flats are found. Guides charge about \$100 for a full day, or \$75 for a half-day. Bring food and beverages. If you don't have your own gear, your guide can supply everything you need. **Scully**, an Abraham's Bay resident, is one of the best. Captain Vincent Cartwright (Scully) grew up on Mayaguana and earned his nickname while working for his father. It was his job to scull the small skiff while his father free-dived for fish and conch. Scully's knowledge of the sea, tides, weather conditions, fish, and local lore make him the ideal

choice for any kind of water-borne activities. He has a dry sense of humor, and an incredible work ethic. Call him on his cell (242) 464-9524. He charges \$100 per day for fishing and snorkeling trips, and \$75 per day for sightseeing and shelling excursions. Fuel is extra. Shorty Brown at the Baycanner Beach Resort (242-339-3726) can arrange fishing guides, including **Trevor Collie**, one of his employees. Other guides include **Calvin Roll** of Pirate's Well and **Calvin Brown** of Abrahams Bay.



Blue Water Fishing

This is the premier sport in The Bahamas, but it's quite new to Mayaguana. If you are visiting on your own boat, however, you're in for a treat. This section of The Bahamas has been fished rarely, if at all.

The **blue marlin** is the king of all sportfish. Catches of the "big blue" typically range from 100 to 300 pounds or more, but 500- and 800-pounders are not uncommon and stories of the one that got away tell of fish in excess of 1,000 pounds. Fantasy? Perhaps, perhaps not. The ocean is full of surprises.

Tuna is another fine blue water catch. Every spring the bluefin make their annual run through The Bahamas, and every spring

anglers leave the docks in droves, headed out to participate in any one of a dozen or more tournaments from Bimini to Walker's Cay. Catches weighing anywhere from 100 to 800 pounds, even 900 pounds, are not uncommon. Then there's the blackfin and yellowfin tuna, smaller, but no less fun to catch.



Other excellent deep-water species include **kingfish**, or king mackerel. They can be caught through the year, although peak time is during the spring and summer. **Dolphin** (the fish, not Flipper – he's a mammal) weigh anywhere from 10 to 50 pounds, and are excellent to eat.

Wahoo average 20 to 60 pounds, but an 80-pound wahoo is not unusual. They, too, make for good eating and are highly prized by sport fishermen. Wahoo are most often found lurking in the deep water off the edge of a reef.

Amberjack is another highly prized sporting fish found most often during the summer months in the cooler, deep waters just off the edge of the reef and closer in-shore the rest of the

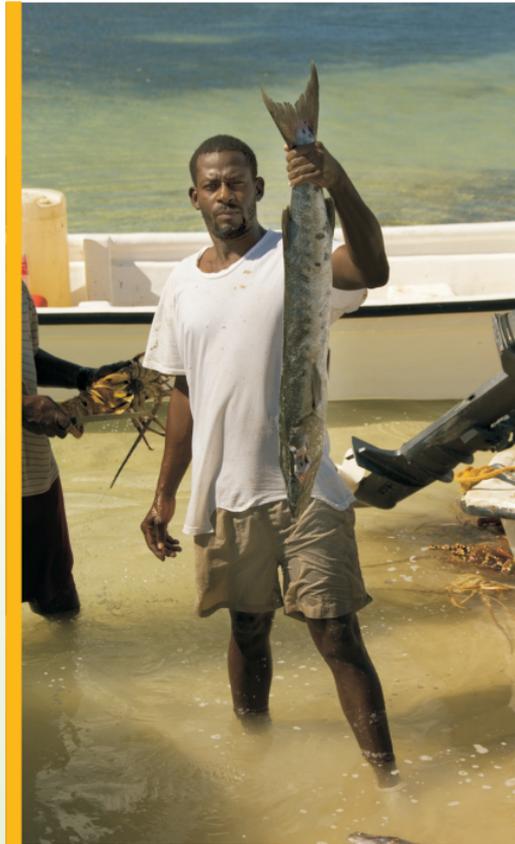


year. Amberjack can run anywhere from a low of about 20 pounds to a high of 40 pounds.

Sharks are common throughout The Bahamas, especially the Out Islands. Nurse sharks, blues, hammerhead, tiger, yellow and bull sharks are all possible catches, but the fight to land one usually lasts only as long as it takes for its teeth to bite through the wire traces.

The **barracuda** (shown here) also can be found in large numbers, in shallow or deep waters, around Mayaguana. They can often be seen swimming close to the surface in the clear waters over reefs and sandy banks ringing the island. On average, barracuda will range in size from a few pounds to about 15 or 20 pounds. But don't judge this fish by its size. Small though barracudas might be, you're sure to have a good fight on your hands – if you can get one on your hook. Unfortunately, barracuda are often the victims of ciguatera poisoning and are, therefore, risky eating; be careful.

For good eating you can't beat **grouper**, which is plentiful around Mayaguana. Grouper – black and Nassau – can be found swimming lazily around close to the bottom on the reefs. Catches ranging from 15 to 25 pounds are the norm, and



Lloyd Strachan of Abraham's Bay

fish of 30 to 45 pounds are not uncommon. The staff at the Baycaner Beach Resort will clean and cook your catch; if you're staying at one of the small guest houses in Abraham's Bay, just ask one of the local ladies. A small tip (\$10, or so) will be gratefully received. There's nothing quite like a grouper steak, caught in the afternoon and eaten the same evening.

Snapper can also be caught on the reefs around Mayaguana. Most common are the red and gray variety. This small fish, which weighs in at only a pound or two, makes a delicious meal and is commonly served on the island.

Fishing Licenses & Permits

There are no fishing seasons in The Bahamas; it's open season year-round. Licenses are not required if you're fishing from a Bahamian-registered boat.

You will, however, need to obtain a sport fishing permit if fishing from your own craft. A single-visit permit costs \$20 and is available at your legal port of entry into The Bahamas. An annual permit will cost you \$250. On Mayaguana, you'll need to visit the government offices at Abraham's Bay. This is always a quick and easy visit because the offices are no more than a couple of very small buildings that house less than a half-dozen employees. Visitors are rare, so you can expect a very warm and friendly welcome.

You can also obtain your permit in advance by contacting the Department of Fisheries, PO Box N-3028, Nassau, The Bahamas, 242-393-1777.

Hook and line fishing only is allowed in The Bahamas; use of a speargun is illegal. In fact, spearguns themselves are illegal in The Bahamas. However, spearfishing is allowed on Mayaguana, but not with a speargun. The islanders use the hand-held variety of speargun known as a Bahamian sling. Watch the locals use it; this is a very skillful way to fish.

The number of lines per boat is limited to six in the water at any one time. The bag limit per person per boat for dolphin, kingfish and wahoo, or any combination of the three species, is six. Above that limit, fish should be released unharmed, as should all fish unless they are to be used for food.

Jr. Moss, Cleveland Brown and **Trevor Collie** are all fishing, snorkeling and diving guides. They can be reached through Captain Brown at 242-339-3116, or simply by going to the boat dock and asking around; they are there usually early morning and late afternoons.

Boating

There are just a few small boats available on Mayaguana – more are expected, though. Most vessels are owned by local fishermen, including motorized and non-motorized vessels and the paddle-it-yourself variety for boating inshore. While that might not be attractive to those who like to run an out-board flat out, you're certainly going to see more when you take things slowly. The great flats are an exciting undersea world where the white, sandy bottom is rarely more than two or three feet below the surface.



YACHTSMAN INFORMATION

Mayaguana (Lat 22° 22' 46.20" N, Lon 73° 00' 48.60" W) is a mere 52 miles northwest of the Turks and Caicos Islands. Its coastal areas offer a few anchorages and two good harbors. **Abraham's Bay** has two entrances through the reef that forms the southern side of the harbor. Once inside the reef, a boat drawing six feet can reach the settlement. The second opening at **Guano Point**, carries seven feet at low water and is more intricate. It lies very close to the reef and should not be attempted in southeasterly conditions or strong onshore conditions – it should be entered only in good light when there is no swell.



Boating is a very casual affair on Mayaguana. Boats are simply dragged ashore and left high and dry ready for the next user. All you need do is find an owner, cut a deal (usually just a few dollars), and he will supply paddles. Away you go.

For those who simply must get motorized, small boats are available for rent from local owners at reasonable rates. These are usually Boston Whalers or skiffs with small outboard motors. Again, the deal is casual, and the owner will trust you with

his boat in the expectation that you will return it in exactly the same condition in which you received it.

Shorty Brown, owner of the Baycaner, has a motor boat and several row boats. Reach him by e-mail, info@baycanerbeach.com, or by phone, 242-339-3726.



Sea Kayaking

Kayaks offer one of the most exciting ways of getting to those out-of-the-way areas. Almost impossible to capsize, kayaks are faster than regular canoes, are easier to maneuver, and some can be equipped with sails. Best of all, anyone can use them; no experience is necessary. Sea kayaks are available for rent at the Baycaner Hotel, 242-339-3726, info@baycanerbeach.com.

Birding

About 118 bird species are found on Mayaguana, including West Indian flamingoes, plovers, herons, terns, osprey and brown boobies, of which there are two large colonies.

The colorful **West Indian flamingo**, known locally as the fillymingo, is the national bird of The Bahamas.





Once hunted extensively for its striking plumage, the species came very close to extinction. At the end of mid-20th century, the flamingo population was less than 10,000. Today, thanks to protection by the Bahamian government, more than 60,000 of these beautiful birds make the Out Islands their permanent nesting home. Flamingos feed on alkaline flats, filtering small crustaceans, diatoms and salt marsh fly larvae from the water and marl bottom. They lay one egg in a nest built of mud, and rear the hatchling on secretions of blood and other nutrients. West Indian flamingoes live at the uninhabited eastern end of Mayaguana and on Booby Cay, also to the east.

The **brown booby** (*Sula leucogaster*) is a large seabird of the gannett family, *Sulidae*. The adult brown booby reaches about 30 inches in length and has a wingspan close to seven feet. Its head and upper body are dark brown, with a contrasting white body. Juveniles are gray-brown with darkening on the head, wings and tail. While these birds

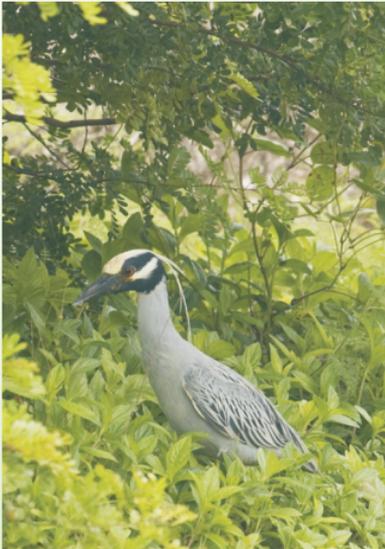


are typically silent, there have been reports of sounds similar to grunting or quacking.

This species breeds on islands and coasts in the pantropical areas of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. They frequent the breeding grounds of the islands in the Gulf of

Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. It winters over a wider area. Brown booby pairs may remain together for several seasons. They perform elaborate greeting rituals and nest in large colonies. The females lay two chalky blue eggs on the ground in a mound of broken shells and vegetation.

Brown boobies are spectacular divers, plunging into the ocean at high speed. They mainly eat small fish or squid gathered in groups near the surface and may even catch leaping fish while



skimming the water. Although they are powerful and agile fliers, they are particularly clumsy in takeoffs and landings; they use strong winds and high perches to assist their take-offs.

The best place to observe the boobies, their habitat and nesting habits is on Booby Rock, just a couple of miles offshore close to Pirate's Well.



The **osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*), also known as the fishhawk, seahawk or fish eagle, is a fish-eating raptor. It tolerates a wide variety of habitats and is found on all continents except Antarctica, nesting in any location that is near a body of water and provides an adequate food supply.



Because the osprey has many unique characteristics, it has been given its own taxonomic genus, *Pandion*, and family, *Pandionidae*. It reaches 24 inches in length with a wingspan of slightly more than six feet. The feathers on the upper part of its body are brown, while those on the underside and head are predominantly white, with a brownish eye patch and wings.

The osprey's diet consists almost exclusively of fish. It has evolved particular physical characteristics and unique behaviors to assist in the hunting and catching its prey. Its toes are of equal length, and its talons are rounded, rather than grooved. The osprey is the only raptor whose outer toe is reversible, allowing it to grasp prey with two toes in front, if needed.

Osprey can be found sitting in trees all around the island of Mayaguana. They are, for the most part, fearless and will allow you to approach and photograph them, if you are quick and don't try to get too close.

Shelling



Shelling is a hobby that can bring back memories of your trip for years to come. Put on your swimsuit and head for any one of Mayagüana's 50 beaches and flats.

Probably the best place to look for conch shells is in the shallow waters just inside the reef. You'll need a guide and snorkeling equipment but, if your guide knows his stuff (and they all do) you won't be able to get the shells into your boat fast enough. There are also great opportunities for conch in the much shallower water just off the beaches. Wade out to the dark spots in the water where the seaweed grows. There, conch by the hundreds feed. You'll have to find a local who's willing to clean it for you, and the shell will be your own. Locals will bang a hole in the shell in order to get the meat out, but if you are lucky enough to spot a king conch (most of what you find will be queen conch), make sure



Vincent Cartwright of Abraham's Bay



Visitors shelling, Abraham's Bay

everywhere on the shallow water flats around the island's coastline.

Sand dollars are just as ubiquitous and you can quickly gather a good collection. Plus, literally hundreds of varieties of exquisite shells lie on the beaches high water line.

Hiking

There are endless opportunities for hikers. You can enjoy an afternoon, or even a week, hiking the almost deserted trails and beaches at the island's west end. More adventurous backpacking can be had on the eastern side of the island. If you love to hike, Mayaguana is a dream come true.

Mayaguana is a sparsely populated island. The lack of people in the more remote parts of the island means that help may not be immediately available. Always tell someone – at your lodgings, per-

the shell remains intact. The only way to clean a conch without damaging the shell is to freeze and hang it, so the meat slips out while it thaws. Shells can be worth a lot, but keep this as your own island treasure.

Beautiful starfish can be found almost ev-

*Visitor exploring
Pirate's Well beach*



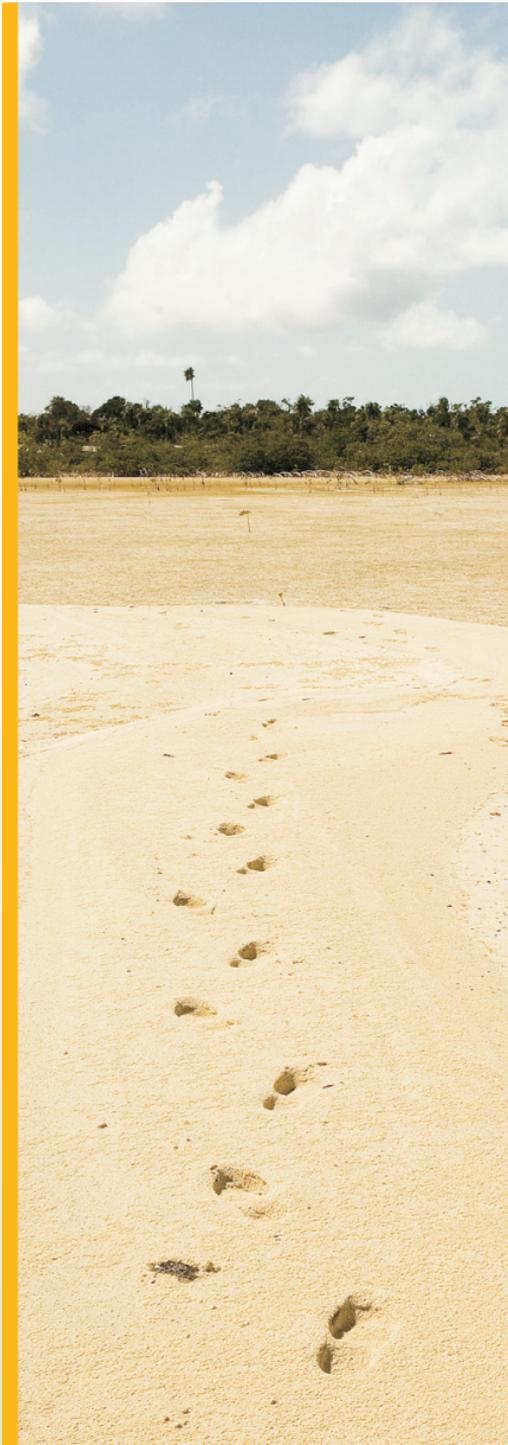
haps – where you are going and how long you expect to be gone. If you can, provide them with the rough route you intend to take. And of course, always let them know you are safely back.

Cell phone reception is intermittent, so calling might not be an option. See page 79 for more on cell phones.

As is the case wherever you hike, always carry an adequate supply of drinking water. There are a few stores in the three settlements, but they are rarely open. You'll need to find the store owner and ask him to open up for you. Water is available at all seven bars and at the Baycaner Beach Resort. You should also take several snacks. Avoid chocolate and other goodies prone to melting. Granola bars, trail mixes, and cookies are good choices. A good pair of walking shoes or boots is another essential item.

Beach Walks

Mayaguana's beaches are especially favorable for walking. The island is literally ringed



with a narrow strip of sand with only a few areas inaccessible to walkers. Individual beaches stretch for miles on end. The dry sand is firm and makes for good walking. Those around Pirate's Well are very pretty, and those that stretch from Flamingo Island to Curtis Creek are spectacular. The North Beach is also a great place to hike. And there are more beaches that curve eastward from Guano Point at Abraham's Bay all the way to the Southeast Point, a long and lonely hike that will take more than a day each way. This one is for extreme hikers.



Visitors looking at shells on Curtis Creek beach

Hiking is a very gratifying way to see the beaches. There's more going on in the shallow waters than you might imagine. All sorts of sea life come inshore to forage and to enjoy the

hot sun. There are shells to be found, combings to be picked through, and birds to watch.

Walking the Highways & Byways

The roads on Mayaguana are, for the most part, deserted and make for great hiking. All the advice on what to take with you applies here just as much as it does for the extreme hikers heading east. Above all, carry plenty of water.

The roads are the legacy of the US military presence on the island (see page 16). Like the Roman roads of old, they tend to be very long and very straight. The old blacktop is beginning to crumble and in many places is already non-existent. But hiking Mayaguana's roads is a rewarding way to see the island's trees, plants, birds and crabs. Don't be afraid to divert along the in-

tersecting tracks: at the end of them you might find a tiny garden where some enterprising islander is growing his own little crop of bananas, corn and other goodies.

Three really good byways to hike run along the north shore: From Curtis Creek to Flamingo Island (about two miles); North Beach (about three miles); and from Blackwood Point, through Pirate's Well to the Northwest Point (about six miles). The scenery along the way borders on the spectacular, with white surf crashing



onto the offshore reef, the cobalt blue of the Atlantic outside and the many shades of aquamarine inside. Occasionally, the surf comes straight into the rocks, leaving small salt water pools filled with sea life, and “conch graveyards,” rocky flats littered with hundreds of crusty old shells. Most of the plant life is lush and green – only the blackwood trees look dead, and they are far from it – and the sunsets over the palm trees are incredible. All this makes Mayaguana’s byways a photographer’s dream, so be sure to bring your camera.

Hiking or Backpacking

Mayaguana’s “East,” which comprises almost 60% of the island, is still a wilderness. There are no roads, just a few tracks forged by the military back in the 1950s, and even those are largely unidentifiable, almost reabsorbed by the wilderness from whence they came. To find the old military tracks and make use of them, you’ll need a sharp machete and a lot of



muscle. Alex Dedes, a photographer who shot some of the images in this book, has made several treks into the eastern wilderness. His hike to reach the bluffs (shown here) on the northeast coast takes between four and five hours, there and back.

Alex maintains that the best way to hike this area is to use the beaches, always taking care to watch the tides. Where the cliffs hug the ocean, many sandy stretches disappear at high tide, and what once was an inviting strip of virgin beach can be

come a lively surf crashing upon the rocks at the foot of the bluffs. So, know the tides and times before venturing out, and take notice of which way the water is moving upon the sand – a large stretch of wet sand often means the tide is going out; no wet sand usually means it's coming in.

Shopping

Shops throughout The Bahamas are now permitted to open on Sundays and some national holidays, although many remain closed. In Nassau, shops open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. On Mayaguana, the law is somewhat irrelevant as shopping is not a pastime. It is, however, a unique experience.

Seven tiny **grocery/variety stores** are located around the island. Abraham's Bay has the **E&F Variety Fair** and **Brooks Food Store**, while Betsy Bay has **L&L Variety Store & Res-**



restaurant. Pirate's Well has four grocery stores – **C&B Convenient Store, Gibson Convenient, End Time Variety** and **Tanya's Variety Store** – as well as Mrs. McPhee's tiny **basket weaving shop**. Mrs. McPhee is one of Mayaguana's grand old ladies. She's been weaving baskets and other craft pieces for more than 70 years.



Mrs. McPhee

All of these businesses open only when someone needs to make a purchase. Inevitably, shop doors remain locked, their



Mrs. Brooks

goodies looking back at you as you press your nose to the glass. The trick is to go knock on a nearby door and ask. In minutes, a smiling face will walk you back to the shop door and you can buy what you need – for cash, of course.

Culinary Delights

Bahamian food is always an interesting culinary treat, but dining on Mayaguana can be a truly unique, delicious and satisfying experience. Surprisingly, the fact that Mayaguana has very few restaurants expands the usual possibilities. There just aren't a lot of other places where you can



walk into a restaurant carrying your own fresh fish purchase or catch of the day, and a talented local chef will happily clean and prepare it for you, either in a traditional Bahamian style, or in any other way you want.

The larder of Mayaguana and The Bahamas in general is the sea that surrounds it; seafood is the staple, and there's plenty of it.

Feast from the Sea

Conch, pronounced “konk,” is chief among the many foods gathered from the ocean. Claimed by the locals to be an aphrodisiac and residing in the large, colorful shells seen on post-cards, conch can be prepared in numerous ways. For conch



salad, the flesh is chopped, spiced, and eaten raw with vegetables and lime juice. **Conch Foolishness** is a dish that originated on Mayaguana. Created by Sharon Moss, it is similar to conch salad – but with a few extra secret ingredients. Everybody loves it.

Be sure to try it while you're there; it's delicious. Cracked conch is beaten and fried. An island favorite are conch fritters, and you can't get them any fresher than on Mayaguana. Fritters made with freshly caught conch are tender, juicy and oh so sweet.

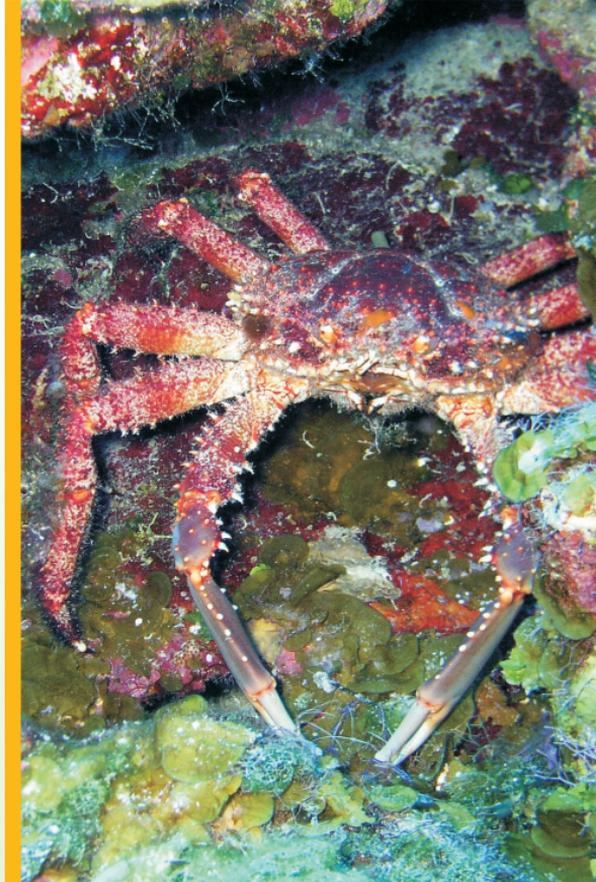
Fish, especially **grouper**, is the principal fare of the Mayaguanian people. It's caught, prepared and served the same day, one way or another, for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The **Bahamian lobster** (the locals call it crayfish) is plentiful, often huge, and not as expensive as it is in the States (US \$10/pound, right on the dock.) Try minced lobster, a mixture of shredded lobster meat cooked with tomatoes, green peppers and onions, and served in the shell. Delicious. Crayfish is also wonderful battered and deep fried.

Traditional Island Food

Mayaguanians eat a lot of **crab** and **chicken**. The crab is caught locally and you see the chickens running wild in all three communities.

Almost everything is served with huge portions of **peas and rice**, a concoction of pigeon peas, peppers, celery, tomatoes, and rice, seasoned and then cooked to varying shades of golden brown. Like all Bahamian food, the Mayaguanian versions are tasty and highly satisfying.





Fish is prepared in a number of ways. **Boil fish** is served for breakfast. It's cooked with salt pork, green peppers and onions, and served with grits. **Stew fish** is prepared with celery, tomatoes, onions, and spices, all combined in a thick brown gravy; it is also served for breakfast. **Steamed fish** is cooked in a

tomato base, and is as tasty as it is novel.

For dessert, try **guava duff**, a Bahamian delicacy made by spreading guava fruit pulp on a sheet of dough that's then rolled and boiled. The end result is sliced and served with a white sauce.

Beverages

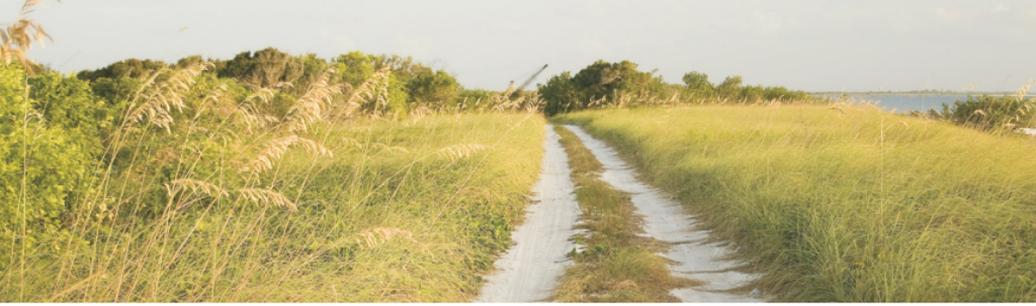
Popular Bahamian drinks are the **Bahama Mama**, the **Goombay Smash**, and the **Yellow Bird**. But while island residents have definitely heard of such concoctions, they mostly stick to beer, or dark **rum** served straight from the bottle.



Beers cost \$3 and imported beer, especially **Guinness**, is popular with locals. Mayaguanians also drink **Kalik**, the national beer of The Bahamas.

In the two or three of Mayaguana's lovely little bars, shelves are stocked with a variety of bottled spirits and liquors, including some that most Americans have probably never even heard of.





Practical Information

Getting Here

Air Travel

Air travel to Mayaguana means a stop in either Nassau. **Bahamas Air**, 800-222-4262, www.bahamasair.com, runs the only scheduled flights to the island three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) from Nassau.

Charter flights are available out of Provo, Nassau and Fort Lauderdale from a variety of companies, including **Abaco Air**, 242-367-2266, www.abacoaviationcentre.com; **Air Charter Bahamas**, 866-FLY-ISLANDS; and **Take Flight Charters**, 242-362-1877, www.takeflightcharters.com.

Services out of other major airports in the US and elsewhere are projected as Mayaguana develops.

The Baycaner Beach Resort, the island's largest accommodations, runs **transfers** from the airport via van.

By Mail Boat



Even though most of the Out Islands are now accessible by airplane, mail boats still ply the waters back and forth between them. This in one way to visit Mayaguana, and to take advantage of this traditional and unique transport you'll need plenty of time. Officially, the mail boat visits Mayaguana every other week. In reality, the schedule is flexible as the long journey is subject to change.

Mail boat *Lady Matilda* leaves from Potter's Cay in Nassau weekly. It stops at Crooked Island, Acklins Island and Great Inagua and each leg from one island to the next takes about a day. Travel is usually overnight, and the voyage from Nassau to Mayaguana could

take up to 10 days. Only very limited food is available on board (snacks and such), so pack a good supply. Bunks are not available; you sleep on deck.

If you decide to take part in this unusual adventure, expect to find the decks crowded with Bahamians, freight, livestock and a variety of unusual cargoes. Passage cannot be arranged in advance, only after arrival in The Bahamas. For information call the dock master at Potter's Cay, Nassau, 242-323-1064.

Documents & Customs

To enter The Bahamas you'll need a valid **passport** and a **return ticket**. At the time of writing, if you do not have a passport in time for your travels, a receipt showing you have applied will do.

Dutiable items such as **jewelry**, **china** and **linens** must be declared. Each adult can bring in duty-free 200 **cigarettes**, 50 **cigars** or 1 lb. of **tobacco** and one quart of **alcohol**. Returning home, U.S. residents, including children, can bring duty-free purchases valued up to **\$600**, including up to 32 ounces of alcohol per person over the age of 21; Canadian citizens can bring up to \$300 in purchases. Residents of Great Britain can take home up to £32 in duty-free purchases and each adult visitor is allowed 200 **cigarettes**, 50 **cigars** or 1 lb. of **tobacco** and a liter of **alcohol** duty-free.

Getting Around

A couple of locals will gladly **drive** you here and there for a very reasonable price, but if you need transport to the airport, order it in advance. All the locals know exactly when the flights are due in and out of the airport, and they will not let you miss a flight.

You can also make arrangements with a local to borrow a car. Daily rates: anything goes. **Captain Brown**, 242-339-3116, is the local entrepreneur. In addition to cars, he has a couple of rental houses and a small, local





boarding house that's used mainly by the construction workers at the Mayaguana Company. **Mrs. Vernice Gibson**, the school principal in Abraham's Bay, offers her car for rent. She can be reached at 242-339-3747. A valid U.S., Canadian or British driver's license is required to drive a car on Mayaguana.

Bicycles are a common mode of transport on the islands; on Mayaguana the three-wheeled variety (shown opposite) is most popular. There are several of these on the island and, if you can get one, it's a great way to get around. Ask one of the owners, who will probably be willing to rent you the steed for a day or two. The rate should be negotiated.

Motor scooters are another great way to travel the highways and byways of Mayaguana. The **Baycaner Beach Resort** (242-339-3726) has a few for rent.

Tourist Information

There is no tourism representation on Mayaguana. You'll need to deal directly with The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, PO Box N-3701, Market Plaza, Bay Street, Nassau, Bahamas, 242-322-7501; fax 242-328-0945.

Communications

The islanders have cell phone service via **Bahamas Telecom**. Those with international roaming chips work best. If your flight to Mayaguana involves a stop over in Nassau, consider obtaining a prepaid Bahamas Telecom cell phone. This will certainly provide you with service all over the western portion of Mayaguana, and limited service if you're heading east.

Wireless Internet is available only in the Baycaner's lobby and bar.

Accommodations

There are four places to stay on Mayaguana, including **The Baycaner Beach Resort** in Pirate’s Well and **Reggie’s Guest House, Paradise Village** and **Mayaguana Inn** in Abraham’s Bay. The Baycaner Beach Resort, a comfortable guest house with 16 rooms, is owned by Earnell Brown, called “Shorty” by all the locals.



Baycaner Beach Resort, Pirate’s Well

It’s wonderful to find a reasonable place to stay this far off the beaten path in The Bahamas. There is a restaurant and a bar, but other amenities are minimal.

Guestrooms have a bed or two, a night stand, a TV and a small air-conditioner that does a great job of keeping the rooms cool. You can relax totally, as there are no telephones in the rooms and Internet access is available only in the main lobby and bar. The TV is controlled from the bar, so whatever is being watched in the bar is what’s available in your room – but why would you be watching TV on beautiful Mayaguana?

The bathrooms are functional, clean and well maintained. Towels and small bars of soap are supplied – you’ll need to take all other toiletries with you.

The lobby adjoins the dining room and bar, which is popular with locals. There’s rarely a bartender on duty, so the honor system applies. Simply help yourself, note what you’ve taken, then settle up at the end of your stay.

The dining room is spacious, clean and cool, and you might find that you have it all to yourself. Breakfast, which is ordered the night before, usually consists of eggs, bacon and French toast. Dinner is also served on a casual, as-needed/as-ordered basis and always includes the Bahamian staple of peas ‘n’ rice. Most evening meals feature conch – perhaps in a chowder or freshly made salad – and grouper, the most popular fish caught off island. The hotel cook makes delicious fresh bread daily and will happily turn your catch into a delicious dinner.



The Baycaner’s beach is truly private. You can lay out and enjoy the sun, sand and sea, and a good book with never a thought of being disturbed.

Rates for a double at the Baycaner are \$106 September-April; \$88 May-August, including taxes. Breakfast,

lunch, and dinner can be included for an extra \$80 per person, and it's well worthwhile, because there's really nowhere else offering a meal every day. MasterCard and Visa only are accepted. **The Baycaner Beach Resort**, Pirate's Well, Mayaguana, Bahamas, 242-339-3726, www.baycanerbeach.com.

Alternately, you can stay at one of the island's tiny Bahamian homes, where the people are friendly and ever-willing to please, but facilities are minimal. Those who have stayed at guest houses often return. Try **Captain Brown**, 242-339-3116.

Dress



To overdress on Mayaguana is to wear shorts and a shirt with long sleeves. Bring lightweight shirts and shorts and at least a couple of bathing suits. If you burn easily, cover up. A good pair of walking shoes is a must, and a strong pair of water shoes is also recommended – if not water shoes, then a strong pair of sandals, not flip-flops.

Medical

The majority of Bahamian islands are blessed with an excellent health service. Hospital facilities – both public and private – are available in Nassau and Freeport, and most of the larger Out Islands are served by health centers, clinics and general practitioner doctors. On Mayaguana, the clinic in Abraham's Bay is staffed by three nurses capable of performing most minor

medical procedures. They are on call 24 hours a day. Additionally, a doctor from Inaugua flies in three days each month. Serious injuries involve an emergency flight to either Nassau's Princess Margaret Hospital, or to Provo only 52 miles away. Medical attention is expensive, so check your insurance coverage first.

Money Matters

Legal tender is the **Bahamian dollar**, which is always equivalent in value to the US dollar. Both US and Bahamian dollars are accepted interchangeably, and visitors are likely to receive change in mixed American and Bahamian paper and coins.

On Mayaguana, **credit cards** are accepted only at the Baycaner Beach Resort. And while **traveler's checks** are accepted throughout The Bahamas and may be cashed at banks and hotels, Mayaguana has no banks, meaning cash is king. There are no ATMs on Mayaguana, so be sure to carry enough cash to get you through your stay.

If you are traveling through Nassau and need a bank, their hours are 9:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 9:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Friday. ATMs are located at strategic spots in the town, including the casinos.

Photography

There's no place quite as photogenic as Mayaguana. The ocean changes color from emerald green to sapphire blue, the sand from pristine white to the most delicate shades of pink. Add the amazing Technicolor décor of the typically Bahamian buildings – from delicate pastels to riotous shades of red, yel-

low, green and blue – the eclectic mix of ramshackle architecture, the flora and fauna, the magnificent sunsets.

As the digital age advances from one stage to the next, photography is easier than ever. If you own a digital camera, simply put the machine on “auto,” point and shoot. You’ll get some great images. Remember that the best light for photography is in the early morning and late afternoon, when the colors are warmer. If you’re using film, make sure you pack a supply as you may not find any on Mayaguana.

Things You Need to Know

DISABLED TRAVELERS: As of this writing there are no provisions for disabled travelers to Mayaguana. Bahamas Air flights are, of course, equipped to carry disabled passengers, but once on the island... nothing is available.

ELECTRICAL: All U.S. and Canadian appliances can be used without adapters. Visitors from the United Kingdom will need adapters to 120 volts.

TIME: Time on Mayaguana and the rest of The Bahamas is the same as the Eastern United States. If it’s noon in New York City, it’s noon here.

The Future of Mayaguana

As this guidebook goes to press, it appears that beautiful and long-sleepy Mayaguana is about to enter a new and unprecedented era. Any prospect of any change can be troubling to a particular status quo, of course, but usually change occurs slowly and carefully for a more general good, which is what this era appears to herald.

For lack of broader attention, Mayaguana has served for decades primarily as a destination for a select community of international bone fishing and deep-sea fishing enthusiasts, and as an exclusive hideaway for the occasional non-fishing, off-the-beaten-path sojourner who happened to stumble into its serene surroundings, and, in all likelihood, to immediately conclude that he or she had discovered a valuable secret that should not be shared any further. While this state of affairs may have entirely suited Mayaguana's most recently acquainted visitors, it has not, over the long run, worked for the benefit of its devoted, multi-generational residents.

**In the same way, but probably to a greater degree than most Bahamian Family Islanders, Mayaguanans fight a daily battle simply to persist in their own ancestral homeland.

As recently as 1973*, Mayaguana had a resident population exceeding 2,000* spread across much of the island. Since then, Mayaguana's population has fallen by five-sixths, and its barely 300 remaining residents have withdrawn to only three settlements in its western end. The entire eastern half of Mayaguana is deserted and is overgrown to the point of inaccessibility – vestiges of once-happily occupied homes, work

buildings and even churches observable from off-shore can no longer be reached overland.

The reality faced by Mayaguanans is endemic to the Family Islands. Staying may be the preferred and noble course, but it is simply impossible to remain in the absence of economic opportunities. This entirely explains the incessant migration from all of the Family Islands into Nassau and Freeport, where the jobs are.

Recently, The Government of The Bahamas implemented an initiative that envisions the eventual creation of a number of environmentally friendly resorts and residential communities, as well as other businesses (both tourism-related and non-tourism-related), intended over time to provide Mayaguana with a robust, sustainable and broad-based economy, in stark contrast to current circumstances.

The “conventional wisdom” is that development always involves tradeoffs, but MID* shares the view of both the Government and of anyone who lives in, or has even ever visited the island: Mayaguana is so precious specifically because it is so pristine. It is rich in nature trails, bird and marine life and promises to provide among the best fishing and diving in The Bahamas.

Implementing that view, MID commissioned a comprehensive Regional Land Use Plan by respected international land use planning consultants. It considered not only the very limited areas under consideration for near-term development, but the entire island. The plan has now been independently reviewed and approved by the Government and on an island-wide basis sets up nature preserves that will provide a rich environmental experience for island guest and residents.

Under the terms of the agreements, a broad-based authority to control, and thereby to completely head off, sub-development inconsistent with the Government’s objectives, was also lodged with the joint venture.

Mayaguana is, remarkably, not only pristine, but also so large that it will, over time, be able easily to accommodate the development of a number of residential complexes and luxury brand resorts, separated by rich nature preserves allowing space for privacy and miles of land and water to explore. Initial efforts are underway to offer upscale luxury villas and prime ocean front lots as part of the founding development programs, along with an initiative to create the first Fishing Lodge at Curtis Creek.

Mayaguana is over 110 square miles of virtually untouched land, over 86 miles of coastline combined with near shore fringing reefs and cays and world-class resort brand and island activity offerings all under one master planner ensures a *very* special development. For updates on development progress, please visit www.mayaguana-island.com.

