

# South Beach, Miami and The Bahamas

by Verne Maree

Not an obvious pairing, you might say, and you'd be right – they're not even in the same country! But Miami, Florida is the gateway to the Caribbean, including the ex-British colony, The Bahamas.







the much nicer, authentic Art Deco hotels situated between 5th and 15th Streets.

The glorious 1930s architecture along Ocean Drive's Deco District has made it famous and remains the world's largest collection of Streamline Moderne Art Deco buildings. It's by no means a museum, though: the string of hotels, clubs, bars and restaurants is alive and abuzz with party animals.



We were there during Spring Break, and the whole of trendy South Beach was heaving with students making merry, the beachfront punctuated by massive parties featuring supersonic speakers and the usual Neanderthal doormen. At a crowded rooftop bar on Ocean Drive, we joined the kids in sampling a range of frozen daiquiris with warning names, the most lethal of which was 'Call a Cab'.



Sixteenth Street is Lincoln Road, a wonderful place to shop, eat, drink, see and be seen. Miami is a popular location for fashion shoots, and South Beach is decorated with lissom waifs in varying degrees of appealing emaciation. But it wasn't always this way. Until the TV show *Miami Vice* made it glamorous, South Beach was considered a poor area, awash with crime. While no longer dangerous, they say, you still hear and see police cars screeching around with sirens blaring ... late for their lunch, perhaps?

On Sunday morning, I put on my running-shoes, grabbed my little camera and headed south along the wide, white beach as far as I could go, stopping to snap photographs of the brightly painted lifeguard huts that South Beach is famous for. Later, I went back to spend time at the Woolfsonian Museum of Design, in an exquisite Art Deco building on the corner of Collins and Tenth.

Roy and I flew into Miami from icy New York one March day and revelled in the tropical heat that awaited us.

A taxi from the airport took us from the sprawling metropolis of Miami City across the vast blueness of the Bay of Biscayne to the northern part of South Beach and the quaint Indian Creek Hotel. Overpriced and under-renovated, it did not live up to its website's promise. Instead, we should have chosen one of

Another highlight was going out with Roy's Miami-based colleague, a Colombian, and his Cuban wife, to their favourite Cuban restaurant, Mojito's, in the suburban Dolphin Mall. Our waitress spoke not a word of English, but that's not unusual in Miami. After an excellent meal accompanied by the potent rum-and-lime drink the restaurant is named for – we now have the glasses in our cupboard – the four of us joined the rhythmic crowd of ecstatic revellers on the dance floor, mamboing to the irresistible beat of the in-house Cuban band. The ensuing headache was worth every aspirin.

# The Bahamas

A 45-minute flight from Miami Airport on American Airways and we touched down in the Bahamian capital, Nassau, on the northern coast of New Providence Island.



Story and photographs by  
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But not before we'd had to jump up and down and insist that our "unconfirmed" \$5700 seats, booked and paid for three months earlier, had better become confirmed bloody quickly. *And* they temporarily lost one of my bags (perhaps on purpose, because of the shouting).

Having picked up our hired car from the airport, we easily found our way to the hotel, a mere ten-minute drive away. Picturesque Compass Point is a series of luxurious beach-hut-style rooms and suites painted in vivid pastels and situated right on the beach. The hotel was recommended to us by daughter Wendy, who was on a year's contract on New Providence Island at the time; to see her was our main reason for visiting The Bahamas.

Waiting for our room at a table on the hotel verandah, with a view of the impossibly blue, wind-tossed Caribbean Sea, I immediately ordered a Bahama Mama cocktail and a shrimp cocktail; after all, I'd waited all my life to eat shrimp in America.

## Getting Around

New Providence Island is where part of the latest Bond movie, *Casino Royale*, was filmed. You may remember the scene where 007 drives his sexy new 2007 Ford Mondeo along the atmospheric coastal road; we drove our little Ford Focus along it, too, and all around the island.

Driving on the island is an interesting experience. Though cars drive on the left – a hangover from British rule – the majority of vehicles, cheap imports from the US, have left-hand drive! It's incredibly dangerous. Most of the cars sport dings on their right-hand sides, as the drivers simply can't see to pass safely. Sitting in the suicide seat, I've never been a more terrified passenger.

What's more, the islands are full of roundabouts; but there's no uniformity when it comes to who has right of way – the rule is different for each particular roundabout. That's all right if you live there and you know the score, but it's pretty hairy for a foreigner!







### Conch and Such

A must-try culinary adventure, Arawak Cay on the outskirts of Nassau is a row of casual local restaurants collectively known as The Fish Fry. They all front the water and have their own supply of fresh conch (inexplicably pronounced 'konk'), which they pull up live out of the water as needed. It's the shells of these magnificent molluscs that over the millennia have been ground down to make the sparkling white sand that causes the sea to appear so wonderfully blue.

We chose Goldie's, as it's one of Wendy's favourites. The highlight was conch salad: raw and diced, the seafood delicacy is mixed with freshly chopped tomato, onion and green pepper and liberally laced with piquant lime juice and piercingly spicy 'hot sauce' made from red chillis. We were less impressed with the conch fritters – something of a national dish – as cooking had toughened the meat. A pile of fried chicken wings, a bowl of peas and rice, some potato

salad and potato fries rounded off this terrifying meal, and we washed it all down with bottles of the local Kalik beer.

Though The Bahamas is comparatively prosperous, there is nevertheless a huge chasm between the super-rich and famous, who live in the gated community of Lyfford Cay, for example, and the ordinary Bahamian villager. Eighty-five percent of Bahamians are black, descended from the slaves of the Loyalists who brought them here from America in the early 18th century. They're a colourful, friendly community. Everyone speaks English, and the service in hotels, shops and restaurants is adequate – if not particularly enthusiastic.

### Around and About

Near Arawak Cay is Fort Charlotte, one of a number of fortifications built to defend the British colony from a succession of French, Spanish and American




pirates who wanted control of the islands. Rather quaint and rundown, its exhibits still give you some idea of the history of the island.

New Providence Island is the gateway to Cuba: Americans fly in to board another 45-minute flight to that controversial country. Nassau is also an important stop for the massive cruise liners—Carnival, mostly – that ply the Caribbean. Christmas is the cruise season here; come summer, they go up north to Europe.

Of course, we had to go shopping – once – in the tourist trap that is Nassau’s Bay Street. With its tax-free and duty-free shops, it’s a magnet for the cruise passengers that stream in from the adjacent terminal. Apart from the Fendi, Montblanc and Versace shopfronts, the main items for sale are perfumes, watches and cigars. The price of basic goods in supermarkets and pharmacies was astronomical. “It’s because we’re an island,” explained more than one shop assistant. “So is Singapore,” I thought.





A causeway takes you across to Paradise Island, where the massive new Atlantis resort – a breathtaking achievement or an ugly monstrosity, depending on your point of view – is attracting thousands of well-heeled American visitors. It's worth a visit, if only to admire the sheer size of the place and marvel at the money represented by the glamorous mega-yachts at its marina. It has umpteen restaurants – we chose burgers at Johnny Rockets. Also on Paradise Island are the Ocean Club and Paradise Beach, locations for more scenes from *Casino Royale*. 



### When to Go

March is Spring, and by no means ideal weather for an island holiday. It was windy and rather cloudy most of the time, with limited bursts of sunshine, and the evenings were chilly. May to August are probably the best months to visit The Bahamas; you wouldn't want to go there during the winter.

### Getting There

We took the painless 17-hour Singapore Airlines flight to New York. American Airways took us to Miami and from there to Nassau. Don't get me started on the internal US flights: suffice it to say that any air travel around or from the US nowadays is fraught with annoyance. When they say you need to allow three hours to be sure of getting through airport formalities, believe them.

### Useful Links

- [www.singaporeairlines.com](http://www.singaporeairlines.com)
- [www.compasspointhotel.com](http://www.compasspointhotel.com)
- [www.atlantis.com](http://www.atlantis.com)