

The 10 ultimate Bahamas experiences - CNN.com

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Eleuthera in the Harbour Islands of the Bahamas is home to several ultimate experiences for tourists.

(Lonely Planet) -- The Bahamas. Seven hundred islands. Twenty-five hundred cays. Four days of vacation. What do you do?

From Nassau to the Out Islands, here's our cheat sheet

for the Bahamian best in exploring, imbibing and just plain loafing.

1. Kayaking & kiteboarding, Exumas

Hundreds of cays swoosh over a 120-mile span of crystal blue in the Exumas, a shimmering natural playground anchored by lonely coves and critter-filled reefs. Glide past palmettos and plovers near George Town or paddle to iguana-owned shores in Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park. Adrenaline junkies may prefer swooping the gusty banks by kiteboard.

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Visit www.starfishexuma.com and www.outislandexplorers.com for kayaking info, www.exumakitesurfing.com for catching air. Find need-to-knows for Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park at www.exumapark.info.

2. A goombay smash at Miss Emily's, Abacos

Miss Emily's Blue Bee shines like a bright blue gumdrop near the center of New Plymouth, a gingerbread town clinging tight to windswept Green Turtle Cay on Abacos. For decades, yachties and day-trippers have drifted into the Blue Bee for jug-poured goombay smashes -- the drink was created here -- and the easygoing charm of Violet Smith, Miss Emily's daughter. Tack your business card to the wall.

Ferries depart the Green Turtle Ferry Dock near Treasure Cay (\$15 roundtrip).

3. Diving with friends, Andros

Divers swap stories and lies at Small Hope Bay Lodge, Andros, where the only thing better than peering over the Tongue of the Ocean is talking up the adventure with friends. And everyone's a

friend at this affable, family-owned retreat near Fresh Creek. With its home-cooked buffets, eco-friendly accommodations and laugh-filled happy hours, Small Hope serves up everything but the camp songs.

4. Junkanoo, Nassau

Christmas doesn't leave Nassau on lullabies and sugarplums. It parades out of town in a jostling blast of whistles, horns, drums, and cowbells that whirls down Bay Street in the wee hours of Boxing Day. In this brightly costumed celebration, which traces its roots to West Africa and plantation-era religious rites, neighborhood teams compete for prizes.

If you miss the parade on Boxing Day, there's a second one on New Year's Day and a warm-up in the summer.

5. Stylish loafing, Harbour Island, Eleuthera

Roving roosters and sputtering golf carts are part of the charm in Dunmore Town, a chichi Harbour Island village where Wall Streeters, supermodels and kitesurfers come for the shimmering pink sand beach. Beyond loafing, requirements are few: lunch at Sip Sip, cocktails at Rock House and mingling at Vic Hum, where the basketball court doubles as a dance floor.

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6. Aquaventure & aquariums, Paradise Island

Got the grownup blues? Hurtle back to your childhood with a 60-foot plunge, a bobbing river ride and a shark-encircled waterslide at the 141-acre Aquaventure at Atlantis, on New Providence. More than 20,000 exotic fish and sea creatures -- from orange Nemos to stately manta rays -- float past in the resort's vast-but-walkable network of tanks and lagoons.

7. Apres-snorkel at Nippers, Abacos

Mother Nature smiled when she created Great Guana Cay, a breezy isle floating just a few kicks away from the fish-and-coral treasures of the Great Abaco Barrier Reef. Nippers Beach Bar & Grill adds a wink to that smile with cold Kaliks, beach-shack conviviality and free use of its snorkel gear. The Sunday afternoon pig roast is a legend.

The ferry to Guana Cay (\$25 roundtrip) docks beside the Conch Inn in Marsh Harbour.

8. Pirate wanderings, Nassau

Governor Woodes Rogers may have expelled Nassau's pirates in 1718, but that doesn't mean they actually left. Engaging displays about parrots, peg legs and Blackbeard keep swabby legends alive at the Pirates of Nassau Museum while the 260-year-old Graycliff Hotel charms guests with swashbuckling tales of its buccaneer founder. A statue of Rogers stays vigilant from his pedestal in the middle of town.

9. Smith's Point Fish Fry, Grand Bahama

Every taxi driver on the island knows the way to the Fish Fry, a Wednesday night tradition at Smith's Point, east of Lucaya on Grand Bahama. Locals queue early for grouper, lobster and snapper, fried up Bahamian-style under a wooden shack by the sea. Trust us, everyone's here or on the way. Stick around for after-dinner dancing.

10. Friday-night jam at Elvina's, Eleuthera

First-timers always ask the same question: Where did all these people come from? Elvina's, a ramshackle roadside shack in lonely Gregory Town, lures 'em in from far and wide for short sets by native musicians and traveling pros. Who's here? Low-key locals, gregarious old salts, sun-baked surfers and, occasionally, Lenny Kravitz.