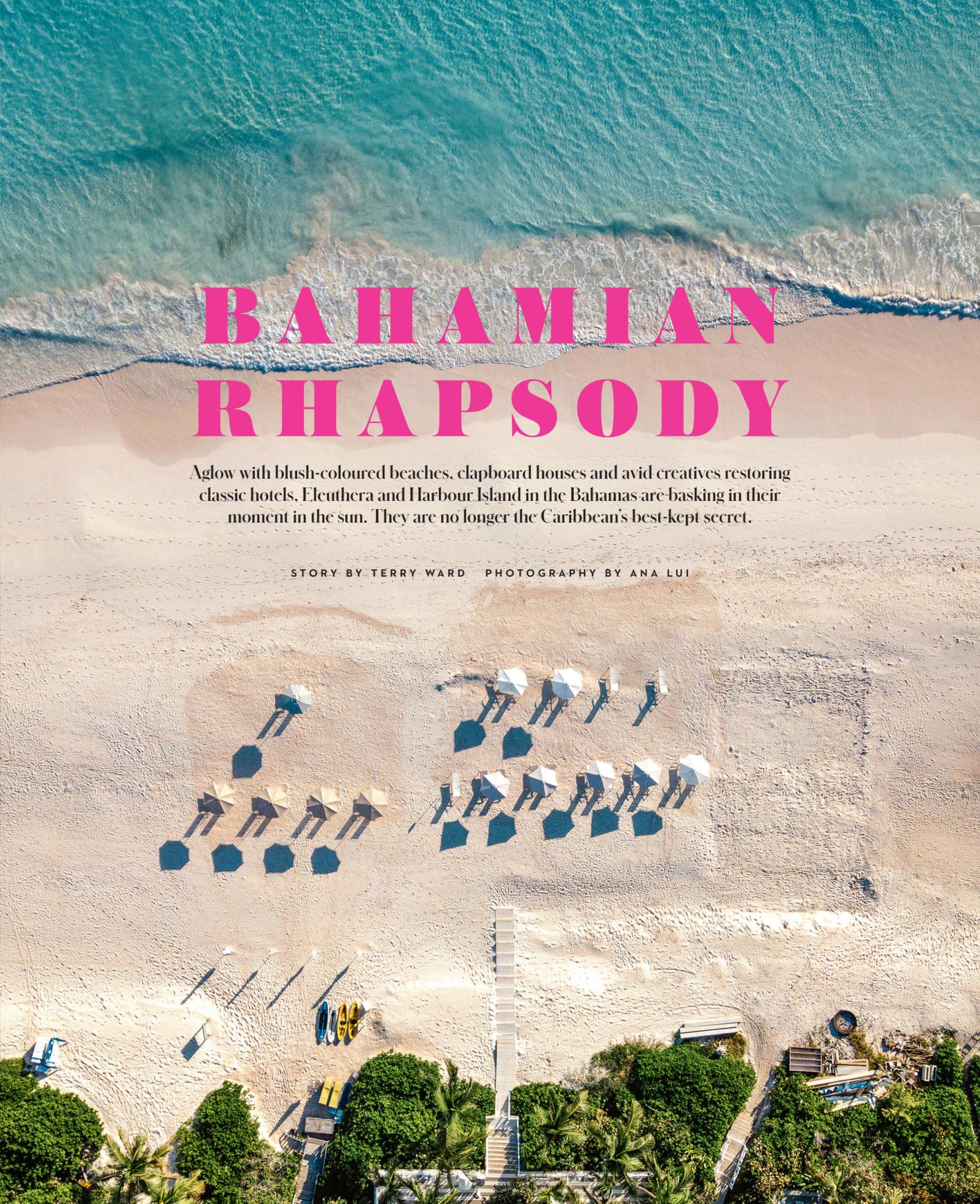


EXPLORE

VIVID IMAGINATION

The lobby lounge at Coral Sands Inn & Cottages is awash in exuberant shades, prints and materials. Opposite: aerial view of Harbour Island's painterly vibrancy.



BAHAMIAN RHAPSODY

Aglow with blush-coloured beaches, clapboard houses and avid creatives restoring classic hotels, Eleuthera and Harbour Island in the Bahamas are basking in their moment in the sun. They are no longer the Caribbean's best-kept secret.

STORY BY TERRY WARD PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANA LUI

EXPLORE



Fifteen minutes out from wheels up in Miami and I'm feeling removed from the pressure cooker of home life in Florida. The view from the plane's oval window is swallowed by the Atlantic Ocean, shifting in multitudes of blues before my eyes as though some celestial barista is busy making latte art on its surface – the turquoise water is the espresso and the striated white sandbars the crema, all magical swirls and curls painted to the horizon. Maybe I should have picked up an airport coffee, but I have an entirely different type of stimulant to rely on today. The Bahamas are calling.

In no time, we're descending towards Eleuthera, a narrow, 180-kilometre-long island whose name is derived from the Greek word for freedom – *eleutheria*. It's the longest isle in the Bahamas, an independent nation and member of the Commonwealth that counts some 700 islands and cays within its vast archipelago (just 30 are inhabited). While not technically the Caribbean – the Bahamian islands lie in the Atlantic Ocean, just north of the Caribbean Sea – the destination has always embodied tropical escapism for American visitors, with a name that lingers exotically on the tongues of travellers from the opposite side of the world.

While islands Grand Bahama and New Providence (home to Nassau, the Bahamian capital) cater largely to cruise ship crowds, Eleuthera, 100 kilometres east of Nassau, has always flown off the radar. But the Out Islands, as they're known, are lately very much in. None more than Eleuthera and, just off its northern tip, Harbour Island, a tony enclave accessed by a five-minute water taxi ride.

The former is a pencil-thin crescent of secluded beaches, precipitous cliffs, pineapple plantations and fishing villages, with not one set of traffic lights to interrupt its flow. Eleuthera's most famous resident is musician Lenny Kravitz – he has Bahamian lineage – who resides in an Airstream trailer when he's here. On Harbour Island, a tidy grid of streets lined with pastel-coloured New England-style houses has long lured in-the-know jet-setters.

With my two young kids in tow, we splash and stroll for hours on the cake-flour shore of Pink Sands Beach, unfolding in front of our cottage at Harbour Island's recently renovated grande dame hotel, Coral Sands. We dip into sapphire water as clear as a swimming pool's, and debate serious subjects like whether the sand's rosy shade is closer to strawberry gelato or, as my young daughter maintains, piglet skin. The distinct hue stems from tiny marine organisms, foraminifera, that live on the underside of reefs and have bright red and pink shells.

Those vibrant shades have been transposed to, and deliriously amped up for, the new-look lodging. After a seafood dinner surrounded by shell-inlaid walls and whimsical local art at the hotel's Pink Mermaid restaurant, we decamp to our cottage's patio and lay like beached mermaids on its wooden planks to watch the Milky Way's starry gash brighten in skies far inkier than at home.

On another day at The Farm, a newcomer on Eleuthera proper, we board the resort's cruiser for a boat excursion and don snorkels and masks to wade into the shallows at Bottom Harbour Beach. Scores of juvenile sea turtles seeking shelter in the protected waters swim within inches of our widened eyes as small stingrays flutter past. At a rocky reef nearby, my kids keep me busy pursuing their own juvenile frolics through clouds of yellow and black sergeant majors and parrotfish.

We also check into Pink Sands House, a private villa at The Potlatch Club. The place was a social club during the 1960s that fell into disrepair before Hans Febles and his business partner, Bruce Loshusan, bought it in 2016 and spent seven years building anew and restoring the original clubhouse and pool. Over dinner one evening with Febles, a quiet man with the understatedness of Eleuthera itself, he explains that his vision for the property was about reviving its elegance.

"When I walked inside for the first time and saw the black and white floor tiles and wrap-around porch, even though it was all dilapidated, it still had this majesty about it," he tells me. "It was classy old Bahamas." We spend our time at The Potlatch Club much like those socialites might have, swinging in a hammock in our cottage's private gazebo, swimming till pruned at the property's exquisite beach, and rinsing off under an outdoor shower beneath swaying palms. "The three luxuries left are time, space and privacy – and that is what Eleuthera is all about," Febles says.



HARBOUR VIEWS
Clockwise from above: casting a net on Harbour Island; handcrafted treasures and vintage collectibles at Shine; zipping around on golf carts is common. Opposite, clockwise from top: horseback riding on the beach; a native conch shell; Dunmore Town is known for its traditional clapboard houses in pastel hues.



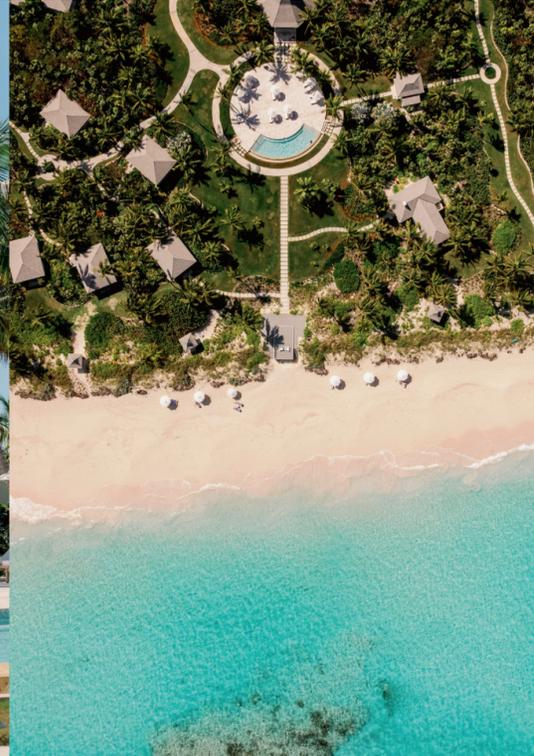
EXPLORE

WHERE TO STAY

The Potlatch Club: Not far from Governor's Harbour, one of the oldest settlements in the Bahamas that dates back to the 1600s, is this playful lodging built on a former pineapple plantation. During the 1960s and 1970s, The Potlatch Club was a boutique bolthole for British royalty, celebrities and pleasure seekers, before falling into disrepair in the 1980s. Elizabeth Taylor was reportedly a fan, Paul and Linda McCartney honeymooned here, while there are vintage snaps of Greta Garbo swimming at the club's beach on the library walls. The new iteration stretches across five oceanfront hectares with vibrant embellishments by interior designer Amanda Lindroth and inspired landscaping by co-owner Hans Febles, who personally selected some 25,000 tropical trees and plants for the gardens. The hotel's 11 accommodations include suites, cottages and a four-bedroom villa with a private pool, chef and concierge. Coral stone floors, powder-blue sofas and rattan furnishings convey and capture the languorous, sun-kissed mood. The pièce de résistance is the pink sand beach at its doorstep, with paddleboard and snorkelling gear at the ready and never more than a smattering of other people on it, even during high season (from December through April). thepotlatchclub.com



CLUB PARADISE
 Clockwise from left: a Garden Suite; seared tuna salad at the hotel's Fig Tree restaurant; the bed at Pink Sands House, a private villa; a cosy corner of the great room; aerial view of the resort; the Sand Bar with towering spire is adjacent to the main pool; gelato treat.
 Opposite: Fig Tree's fetching dining room and another view of Pink Sands House (bottom).





CORAL BRIEF
Clockwise from far left: the resort's beach; its retro signage; the bathroom of a Garden Cottage; its bedroom; the enticing pool; the terrace at The Pink Mermaid restaurant; rosy loungers.



Coral Sands Inn & Cottages: A celebrity magnet since the 1960s, this storied hideaway on Harbour Island was reborn in late 2024 after renovations transformed it into a tropical-maximalist fever dream. It now features 24 oceanfront guest rooms as well as a sprinkling of bungalows, cottages and ultra-luxe villas. Nashville-based hospitality firm A.J. Capital Partners acquired the property and tasked in-house designer Krissy Melendez with remaking it. Melendez prescribed a palette of pink, coral and teal, tapped local artisans for fittings, and distilled the island's retro glamour with fanciful elements like fringed sofas, treillage ceilings and giant seahorses. Thousands of seashells, handpainted signs, chinoiserie wallpaper and pressed palm artworks imbue the public spaces with an easy-breezy charm. Bungalows named after tropical fish have private boardwalks with stairs descending straight down to chaise lounges under candy-striped umbrellas on the pink sand. Sipping a Mango Mojito at the hotel's open-air Beach Bar, perched above the ocean on a dune where chickens parade past, is about as relaxing as island time gets. coralsands.com



EXPLORE

SOW COOL

Aerial view of The Farm on Eleuthera, which blends rustic and refined pleasures. Below from left: ceviche with flowers and herbs; one of its jaunty cottages; owners Charlotte Phelan and Ben Simmons with their children.



The Farm: Bahamian Ben Simmons and his Irish wife, Charlotte Phelan (the pair met in boarding school in Ireland), opened The Farm on Eleuthera late last year, as the sister property to their nearby beachfront glamping hotel, The Other Side. The couple employ five full-time farmers to tend to melons, squash, cucumber, peppers, tomatoes and other produce sprouting from more than 200 raised garden beds that are surrounded by an orchard of trees laden with papayas and mangoes. Guests stay in 12 smartly designed wooden cottages and enjoy meals that celebrate ingredients grown onsite and sourced from the bounty of Bahamian waters, with Sunday brunches particularly decadent and playing out at long tables under the fruit trees. littleislandhotels.com

Eleven Bahama House: This 11-room beachside retreat is enlivened with vibrant coral tones, vintage rattan furnishings and an air of genial conviviality. Its interiors are filled with driftwood lamps, bamboo mirrors and nautical-themed bibelots. Guests congregate around the umbrella-edged freshwater pool with its own tiki bar. A rooftop lounge, rum bar and private chef are other enticements. elevenexperience.com

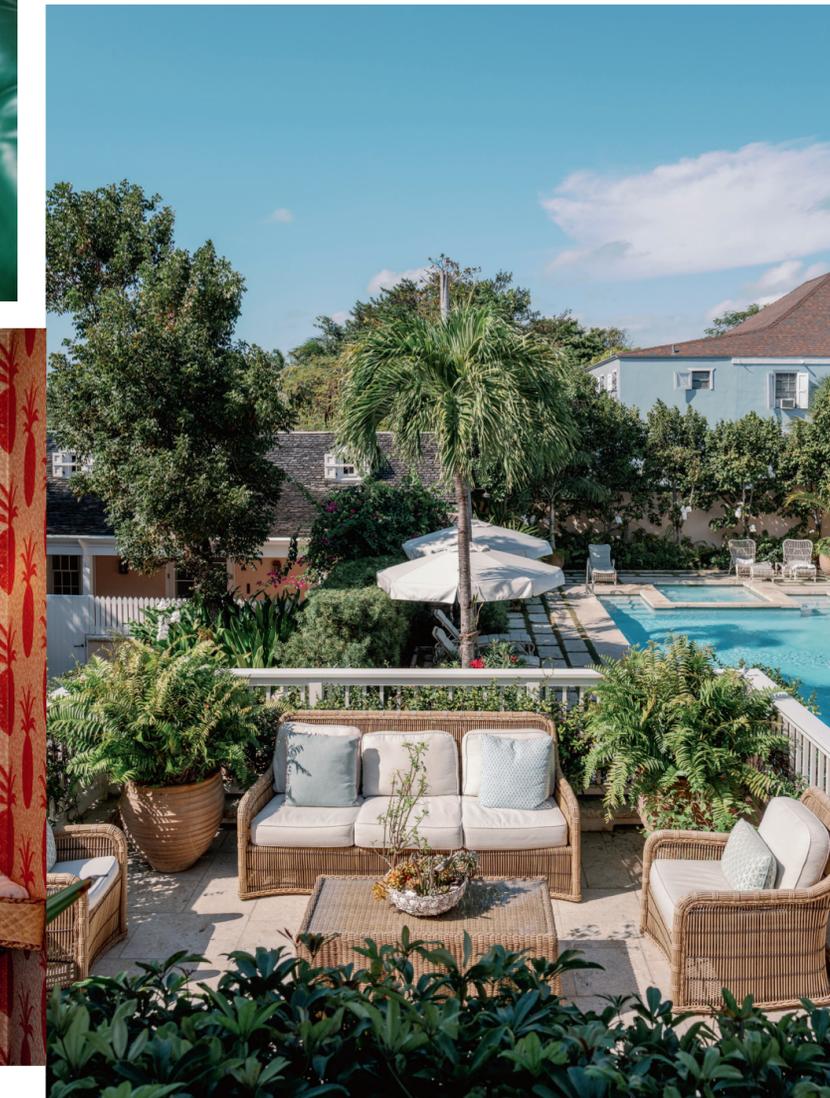
King's Crown: With eight ensuite bedrooms, expansive indoor and outdoor living spaces, and a 20-metre lap pool, this private estate is one of the ritziest pads on Harbour Island. The chicly decorated abode can accommodate up to 18 guests, and would be ideal for a gaggle of friends or a multigenerational family seeking a Bahamian escape. It's situated on the island's tranquil bayside, with snorkelling, diving, boating and horseback riding at your doorstep. kingsbahamas.com

King Surf Shack: Also on Harbour Island, this eco-accented, five-bedroom private villa is built from reclaimed barn wood and blithely decorated with Cuban tiles and Bahamian artworks in eye-popping shades. A remodelled 1973 VW bus parked out front has a grill for cookouts and there's a sparkling backyard swimming pool lined with swinging chairs. kingsurfshackhi.com



BAHAMA DRAMA

Clockwise from left: the zesty living room at King Surf Shack, a rental villa on Harbour Island; catching rays on its sun-deck; the pool at Eleven Bahama House, also on Harbour Island; a powder room at Eleven with pineapple-print wallpaper.



EXPLORE



WHERE TO SHOP

Most people don't come to the Bahamas to shop (retail traffic primarily flows in the other direction, with Bahamians flying to Miami for bargains), but there are a few addresses worth putting on your radar on Harbour Island, starting with **The Sugar Mill**. The Dunmore Town boutique belongs to long-term resident and British designer, India Hicks. A relative of the British royal family, she was Princess Diana's bridesmaid when she was just 13 years old and is known for her keen eye blending British colonial and Caribbean flair. Shop for handpainted scarfs by local artisans, designer bucket hats for the beach, or a glamorous Tuckernuck x India Hicks caftan or toile dress. indiahicks.com

At **Shine**, right across from the fishermen's boat dock on Bay Street, artisan Stephanie Dorsett sells vintage jewellery and her own vivid handmade baubles that conjure the island's pink sands and turquoise waters with shiny conch pearl beads. To the mix, Dorsett has added an array of vintage collectibles, high-wattage apparel and island-inspired wares. [@shineharbourisland](http://shineharbourisland.com)

Next to Valentines Resort & Marina, in a tiny open-air store with no name, **Rosita Roberts**, who shares stories of the days when there were just horses and buggies to get around the island, purveys delightful handwoven mats, baskets and bags made from the fronds of local silver top palm.

MUST-DO EXCURSIONS

Rent a jeep to explore on your own or hire a guide for a road trip along the Queens Highway, Eleuthera's island route that runs from its tip for about 100 kilometres south, with several interesting stops along its length. The Bahamas' limestone rock is pierced with "blue holes" filled with fresh and sea water, much like the cenotes of Mexico. In Eleuthera's northern reaches, **Sapphire Blue Hole** lives up to its name, with shimmering depths that plunge to almost 30 metres. Leaping off a wooden deck is easy but the climb back up the vertical walls via a swinging rope ladder is trickier (there are locals on hand to help).

Nearby, the gaping maw of **Preacher's Cave**, where beehives instead of bats hang from the ceiling, is where the island's first European settlers, the so-called Eleutheran Adventurers, set up camp after shipwrecking offshore in 1648 following their departure from Bermuda in search of religious freedom. Further south, **Seahorse National Park** protects saltwater Sweetings Pond, a landlocked lagoon connected to the ocean and home to what's believed to be the world's densest population of seahorses.

The island winnows to its narrowest point, just nine metres across, at **Glass Window Bridge**, where the contrast between the deep blue Atlantic Ocean waters and light teal of the Bight of Eleuthera on either side of the road is striking. Not far away, a low-tide stop is obligatory to bathe in the calm, crystal-clear waters of the **Queen's Bath**, shallow natural tidal pools carved into the limestone coastline that become as toasty as bathwater in the beaming Bahamian sun.

EATING AND DRINKING

Dining and raising a glass on Harbour Island is, for the most part, a laid-back affair best savoured somewhere open to sea breezes and with a fabulous view. The quintessential Bahamian dish – served with no frills and plenty of flavour at street corner shacks and beachfront decks – is conch salad. It's made by pounding the meat of the queen conch shell until tender and marinating it in citrus juices tossed with finely chopped vegetables, and sometimes island fruits, like pineapple and mango.

With tables overlooking the beach on Bay Street in Harbour Island's Dunmore Town, **Queen Conch** is the spot to see it prepared before your eyes (note the conch's spectacular iridescent eyes, too, if you can bear it, once it's pulled from its shell). Order the "exotic" if you prefer to try conch salad with the sweetness and tartness of tropical fruits and enjoy it from a piled-high bowl.

Also on Harbour Island, **The Landing** draws the breakfast faithful for its ricotta hot cakes slathered with honeycomb butter. Down the road, **Cocoa Coffee House's** fan-cooled upstairs deck overlooking Bay Street is worth seeking out for specialty coffees and healthy options like açai bowls. **The Clubhouse** at The Dunmore Hotel is an ideal lunch spot, with tantalising options like stone crab tostadas and tune poke bowls. harbourislandlanding.com; cocoacoffeehouse.com; dunmorebeach.com

On Eleuthera, **The Fig Tree** is a restaurant set under the sprawling branches of the eponymous tree at The Potlatch Club. Helmed by Bhutanese chef Choki Wangmo, supported by an attentive and friendly waitstaff, the eatery focuses on the freshest catch (Caribbean spiny lobster and hogfish, perhaps, depending on the day) and works with local farmers for its seasonally inspired pan-Asian menu. If you express an interest in trying Bhutanese cuisine, Wangmo will gladly prepare an off-menu feast with a spread of the egg and goat cheese dish, gondo datshi, the spicy chicken dish, jasha maru, and other favourites she pulls off with the island's available ingredients. thepotlatchclub.com

Situated on a residential hillside in Governor's Harbour proper, **Buccaneer Club** occupies a 19th-century farmhouse that was fully restored a few years back. It has a large outdoor deck shaded by flowering bougainvillea and coconut palms, and serves traditional Bahamian cuisine, like cracked conch, conch fritters and stew fish (grouper) with Johnny cakes, a cornmeal flatbread. The local thirst quencher is a Goombay Smash, a heady blend of rums, tropical juices and apricot brandy. [@buccaneerclubeleuthera](http://buccaneerclubeleuthera.com)

Within walking distance along the beach from The Potlatch Club, **Tippy's** is a classic Bahamian bar furnished with rustic wooden tables and soundtracked with reggae music. Its deck commands million-dollar water views. Stop by for a frosty Sands Beer and fish tacos. tippysbeachbar.com

The writer was a guest of Coral Sands Inn & Cottages, The Potlatch Club and The Farm.



ISLE OF BITE
Clockwise from left: fish tacos at The Clubhouse at Dunmore Beach Hotel; the chic setting at Fig Tree; the bar at The Landing, which offers breakfast and dinner; its outdoor deck; pineapple juice mocktail poolside at The Potlatch Club; watermelon, feta and mint salad at Fig Tree.



CARIBBEAN QUEEN
Clockwise from top left: Valentines Dive Centre on Harbour Island; a zingy display at Shine; boats docked at The Other Side, sister property to The Farm; the pool and terrace at King's Crown villa; its kitchen is ready for a seafood dinner.

