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WHERE

YOU CAN GO ANYWHERE IF YOU KNOW THE WAY



On the flats with guides from Bootle Bay Fishing Lodge

CALL IN SICK **Bonefishing and Blackjack on Grand Bahama Island**

THE CHOICE IS YOURS: SITTING IN YOUR CUBICLE WATCHING THE CLOCK TICK OR SIPPING A BAHAMA MAMA ON THE DECK AT RUMRUNNERS. BY DAVID LaHUTA

As if there weren't enough reasons to take Friday off. Grand Bahama Island is just 57 miles east of Palm Beach, so flights from Florida to Freeport, its main town, take less than half an hour—and **Florida Express** ferries from Fort Lauderdale cost \$165 round trip. Where the West Indies hug the East Coast, there's a long weekend for anyone. Bosses beware. **BEACHGOERS** On GBI's tranquil East End, 30 miles east of Freeport, **Bishop's Bonefish Resort** offers waterfront suites and 14 miles of sugar-white sand. It's a short drive (renting a car is easy at the airport) to never-ending Gold Rock Beach—by far the most beautiful stretch of sand on the island. Low tide unveils a welcome mat of rippled sandy peaks, perfect for seaside strolls. Afterward, head to Freeport for the International Bazaar's straw market, where ladies sell handmade

hats, baskets, and totes for less than \$15 an item—they'll even make things to order, on the spot. On Fridays, **Le Chicken Shack Garden Bar**, a casual hangout nearby, holds its weekly feast of boiled Andros crab, caught off neighboring Andros Island. When the sun goes down, Port Lucaya's Count Basie Square has steel-drum bands, reggae DJs, and the occasional limbo contest. And don't forget to order a tropical Bahama Mama at nearby **Rumrunners**. Anyone who finishes the drink gets to autograph the wall. **FISHERS** GBI has long been known as home of "the bone"—the elusive bonefish. Spend a Saturday on the virgin flats searching for a nibble from the wily, silver-skinned fish. Most boats are only big enough for two passengers, so expect an intimate experience. On the lazy West End, ➤

WHERE

GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND

TRANSPORTATION

Florida Express
866/313-3779, www.ferrybahamas.com, \$165 round trip

LODGING

Bishop's Bonefish Resort 242/353-4515, www.gbweekly.com/bishopsbonefish, doubles \$160

Bootle Bay Fishing Lodge 242/349-4010, www.bootlebay.com, doubles \$90

Sheraton at Our Lucaya 800/325-3535, www.ourlucaya.com, doubles \$129

FOOD

Le Chicken Shack Intl. Bazaar, 242/351-2692, crab meal \$10

Rumrunners Port Lucaya, 242/373-7233, Bahama Mama cocktail \$4.60

Chicken's Nest 242/346-6440, four fritters \$1

Fat Man's Nephew Port Lucaya, 242/373-8520, lobster tail \$27

ACTIVITIES

Isle of Capri 242/350-2000

Lucayan Natl. Park 242/352-5438, \$3

Kayak Nature Tours 866/440-4542, www.grandbahamanaturetours.com, \$69

Garden of the Groves 242/373-5668, \$10



30 miles from the airport, **Bootle Bay Fishing Lodge**—where legendary Bonefish Foley has hosted Presidents Nixon and Kennedy—rents doubles for \$90 and runs half- and full-day fishing excursions. Bootle Bay's full-day outing (\$375) is one of the least expensive on the island. After a day on the flats, treat yourself to some fresh conch fritters and a cold Kalik—the local brew—just down the road at the **Chicken's Nest**. Bring quarters (both American and Bahamian dollars, always worth the same, are accepted everywhere), since there'll be plenty of folks to shoot pool with.

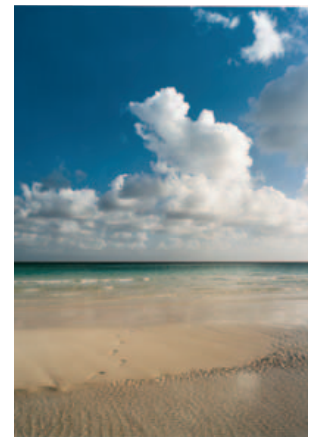
GAMBLERS Last December, the 19,000-square-foot **Isle of Capri Casino**—across from the Westin and the Sheraton—opened in Port Lucaya, a touristy open-air mall where you'll find souvenirs like Androsia batik sarongs, duty-free liquor, and polished conch shells. The Port bustles with shoppers, pub patrons spill onto the walkways, and restaurants serve sweet Caribbean lobster tails (try **Fat Man's Nephew**, overlooking colorful Count Basie Square). Don't expect to mingle with Bahamians



Clockwise from top: Port Lucaya's Count Basie Square; Gold Rock Beach; the wetlands of Lucayan National Park; pool at the Chicken's Nest

over blackjack—it's illegal for locals to participate in organized gaming. There are no guest rooms at the casino, but in the summer, you can stay at the **Sheraton** for \$129; it's a five-minute walk to the Capri, so you won't need a car.

NATURE LOVERS At the 40-acre **Lucayan National Park**, about 25 miles east of Freeport, take a self-guided tour through the well-labeled trails dotted with wild guava, tamarind, towering Caribbean pines, and gumbo-limbo trees.



Unique to the preserve are the Lucayan tunnels, the longest surveyed underwater cave system in the world. When they're hit by sunlight, the water turns a dizzying blue (sorry, no swimming). At Gold Rock Creek, across the road, **Kayak Nature Tours** leads six-hour excursions through the mangrove swamps, home to snappers, crabs, and barracuda. The tour includes 90 minutes in a two-person kayak, lunch on Gold Rock Beach, and a nature walk. Spend

Sunday bird-watching against a backdrop of waterfalls, flowers, and alligators at the 12-acre **Garden of the Groves**, seven miles west of Lucayan Park. The Garden exhibits nearly 5,000 varieties of plants, many native to the islands. Understandably, it's a popular spot for tropical weddings. ■

