

Understanding the Port

Freeport is a port that rewards a plan and punishes improvisation. The harbour is a working container terminal — past the straw market at the gate there is nothing to walk to, and every beach, garden and reef in this guide is a ride away. Book one thing before you sail and Grand Bahama turns into a good day.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

You dock alongside — no tenders. The terminal has a straw market, shops and bars, and that is the whole pedestrian world. Outside the gate is a container yard.

Cash & Currency

The Bahamian dollar is fixed at par with the US dollar and both circulate. Spend US cash anywhere; expect change in a mix. Visa and Mastercard widely, Amex and Discover less so.

Getting Around

Taxi fares are government-set and quoted for two passengers, with a surcharge per extra rider. Agree the total first and take the driver's number for the ride back.

GOOD

Port Lucaya

Best for: Short stops, easy days, minimal logistics

- ✓ The island's open-air marketplace and straw stalls
- ✓ Bars, restaurants and live music on the square
- ✓ Sand and a beach bar just behind it

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

The Reef at Paradise Cove

Best for: Snorkelers, families, nervous swimmers

- ✓ Deadman's Reef, straight off the sand
- ✓ No boat needed — you swim out from the beach
- ✓ Turtles, rays and easy shallow water

Book it as a package with the transfer included.

BEST

Lucayan National Park

Best for: Nature lovers, photographers, explorers

- ✓ Two caves under the pine forest
- ✓ Boardwalks over the mangrove creek
- ✓ Gold Rock Beach at the far end

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

Port Lucaya Marketplace

Billed as the largest open-air marketplace in The Bahamas: straw stalls, duty-free, restaurants and a bandstand, twenty-odd minutes from the ship. Be realistic — it is quieter than the brochure photos, and it opens at ten.

BETTER

Paradise Cove

The most consistently recommended thing on Grand Bahama. Deadman's Reef sits close enough to shore that you swim out from the beach — no boat, no ladder, which suits children and hesitant swimmers. Turtles and rays are routine.

BEST

Lucayan National Park

Twenty-five miles east: two caves under the pines, a boardwalk over the mangroves, and Gold Rock Beach at the end of it. The park service lists weekend-only opening, so book this as an excursion rather than turning up midweek.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

Gold Rock Beach

Voted the Caribbean's best beach by USA Today readers in 2018. Dorian stripped it in 2019 and the park service feared it was gone for good; it rebuilt itself over about three years, and the boardwalk is back.

Garden of the Groves

Twelve acres of waterfalls, a labyrinth and a hilltop chapel, and the gentlest half day on the island. Open daily, though the hours move around — worth confirming.



Taino Beach, east of Port Lucaya



The gate at Port Lucaya Marketplace

Key Considerations

Start here: nothing at Freeport is walkable. Past the terminal's straw market and bar there is a container yard and a shipyard. Everything in this guide needs a taxi or a tour, and the two best things on the island — Gold Rock Beach and Paradise Cove — are forty-five minutes apart in opposite directions. Decide before the gangway, not at it.

Make sure this is even your port. Grand Bahama now has two unrelated cruise destinations. This guide covers Freeport Harbour, the island's traditional port. Carnival ships call instead at Celebration Key, Carnival's own destination about twenty-three miles east, which opened in July 2025 — a different place entirely, with nothing in this guide. Check your itinerary.

Be ready for the scars. Dorian came ashore here in September 2019 as a Category 5 and then stalled, leaving parts of the island under the eyewall for more than a day. The beaches and the national park have come back. The Grand Lucayan, the resort that once anchored Lucaya, has not — it is closed and being cleared, and Port Lucaya is quieter for it.

Two small cautions. Agree the fare and the head count before you get into any taxi, and keep the driver's number for the return. And give the independent jet-ski rentals a miss — the U.S. Embassy has warned about them in The Bahamas more than once.



Mangrove wetland along Gold Rock Creek, Lucayan National Park



Cranes, tugs and the shipyard share the harbour with the cruise berths



Plaited straw work is the island's signature craft

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Port Orientation

FROM THE PORT (FREEPORT HARBOUR)

● Straw market, shops & bars	At the pier — and that is all
~ 10 min by taxi	
● Xanadu Beach	Closest sand to the ship
~ 20–25 min by taxi	
● Port Lucaya Marketplace	Shops, bars, live music
● Taino Beach	Ferry runs from Port Lucaya
● Paradise Cove / Deadman's Reef	Shore snorkel, west
~ 25–30 min by taxi	
● Garden of the Groves	Gardens and waterfalls
~ 45 min by taxi	
● Lucayan National Park	Caves, boardwalk, Gold Rock Beach

DON'T FORGET

Confirm your all aboard time before you leave the ship.
Set a phone alarm. The ship will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

Step off at Freeport with no arrangement and you get a terminal and a straw market. That is the whole risk of this port.

Book one thing — the reef, the park, or the gardens — and Grand Bahama pays you back handsomely.

ETA will help you choose the right experience based on your travel style.

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Did You Know?

A New Class of Animal. In 1979 a diver in the caves here collected a small blind crustacean that belonged to no known group. The paper describing it created an entirely new class, Remipedia. Finding a new species is routine. Finding a new class is not.

A City Built to Order. Freeport did not grow, it was chartered. A 1955 agreement handed an American financier a huge tract of empty pine forest to build a tax-free port from nothing, and the duty-free status still runs to 2054.

Named for People, Not Trees. Garden of the Groves is not named for its groves. It was dedicated in 1973 to Wallace and Georgette Groves, the couple behind Freeport's founding.

The Ship in Mid-Air. Look across the harbour and you may see a cruise ship out of the water. Grand Bahama Shipyard is billed as the world's largest cruise ship repair facility, and there is a fair chance the one in the dock is a sister to your own.

Older Than Columbus. In 1986 the remains of six Lucayans, the island's original people, were found in Burial Mound Cave in the national park. Smithsonian dating confirmed they were here long before anyone sailed over from Spain.