

# BAHAMAS BOUND

We start December waiting in Miami for a “crossing” opportunity. There are several routes to the Bahamas. We’re new at this, so we’re taking the simplest, easiest, and shortest one. We’ll cross over from Miami to Bimini.

While in Miami, we spend time in the Biscayne Bay anchorage behind South Beach. It’s well protected, and there’s lots of interesting sights ashore. Here’s Mary on the Lincoln Road street mall in Miami Beach.



After a few days, we move down to the Dinner Key mooring field. There’s Coconut Grove ashore, a great area that we’ve enjoyed on previous trips.



The “Coco Walk” shopping center is only a few blocks from the dinghy dock! HOW CONVENIENT ! (Smile!)

And, on Sunday, we are faithful. We always try to attend church in whatever port we’re in, when we can.



In Coconut Grove, it’s Plymouth Congregational church, started in 1887. It’s also in walking distance from the marina.

Days pass quickly; we do some final “provisioning” from the Fresh Market in Dinner Key while we wait for a weather window. Cold fronts come through south Florida every week or ten days. As one passes, the winds will clock around from Southeast to South to West to North and finally back to the Northeast. The day before a cold front, the winds are usually mild with a southerly component.



SO... the day before a cold front is usually a good time to cross the gulf stream. We listen to Chris Parker on SSB every morning, and watch the weather forecasts.



Every day is an adventure ashore from the mooring field. Exploring, shopping, and enjoying the local color.

Finally, a week later, there's a forecast that a nice fat little cold front was approaching...

Forecast for December 7<sup>th</sup>...

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### **WEDNESDAY**

NEAR SHORE...EAST SOUTHEAST WINDS AROUND 5 KNOTS BECOMING SOUTH. WELL OFFSHORE...EAST SOUTHEAST WINDS 7 TO 10 KNOTS BECOMING SOUTH SOUTHEAST 5 TO 7 KNOTS. SEAS 2 TO 3 FEET. DOMINANT PERIOD 10 SECONDS. INTRACOASTAL WATERS A LIGHT CHOP. SLIGHT CHANCE OF LIGHT SHOWERS.

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Hey... 2 to 3 foot waves with a 10 second period. WE'RE BAHAMAS BOUND!





We leave in the dark, dropping the mooring at Dinner Key at 4:30 a.m.

Hey... so that's why I have radar! There's a lot of "blips" trying to squeeze through the same channel out of Biscayne Bay!

Even on a "mild" crossing, the Gulf Stream still tosses us around. It's only 3 foot waves, but in the Gulf Stream the wave patterns are confused. It's like being in a washing machine for a couple of hours.

BUT... a few miles further, out of the current, and the seas calm down. The ocean east of the stream is almost as smooth as Lake Lanier!



And... BIMINI! WE'RE IN THE BAHAMAS !!!

We run aground on the entrance into the harbor, since it's poorly marked. But hey, it's all part to the experience, No? I was going slow, and we simply backed off and tried again, in a different approach. That's cruising!

We tie up at the Bimini Blue Water Resort. The word gets passed among cruisers, about the marinas that are value-priced, but still have docks in good condition and good service. By arriving late we get the preferred spot, out on the T-head of the dock. GREAT !

Our first Bahamas sunset. Do you see Mary's "halo"? My First-Rate First-Mate deserves it !





We spend a day ashore and explore the island. Actually... one day is about all it takes. (Smile!). Bimini isn't that big!

The big surprise is "The Dolphin House". It's a treasure of local color.

Ashley Saunders, a retired teacher has built the house entirely by himself, over several years.

He works with tile. So, whenever he finds some ceramics or shells, he incorporates it into the house. AMAZING! The house is a beautiful work of Bahamian "folk art".

You can take a tour for a small donation; It's available as a rental, at \$100 per room per night. Mr. Saunders has also published a hardcover history of Bimini, which is available.

This is a true Bahamas experience, not to be missed if you visit Bimini!



Next day we depart "across the banks", headed for the Northwest Light by the Berry Islands. It's 58 miles, and we did what many cruisers do; we went as far as we could, and then anchored on the banks.

It starts as a mild ( boring ) day. This looks real stimulating, doesn't it? Mile after mile in 15 feet of water. Mary takes a nap...

BUT... I wished it had stayed boring! During the afternoon, the wind built.





Although the banks are shallow, they can still build short choppy waves. We anchored at evening twilight with short, heavy 2 to 3 foot waves; and they continued through the night!



We had a heavy anchor, on an all chain rode, with plenty of scope out. We were “safe”, but we weren’t comfortable! Mary and I were both stressed and physically exhausted by the constant motion by the time we finished anchoring.

We had dinner and then went to bed at 7:00 pm, while the boat continued to pitch and buck! The only thing we could do was sleep!

Sometimes the banks are mild, and sometimes they roll. We saw both in one day and one night! Trust me, the photo doesn’t do this justice!

We made the east side of Fraziers Hog Cay as our next stop. There are moorings in front of the Berry Island Club; we take a mooring for the night thinking this would be safer than anchoring.

**HA! BAD DECISION!**

Since the moorings are in a fast current run, the mooring ball bangs against the hull for 6 hours with every tide change! Have you ever tried to sleep with a ball banging the hull? After two nights we moved on up the channel to a sheltered area and anchored.



A week later, we hear that a boat on a mooring at Fraziers Hog broke loose at night, when the rig on the mooring failed! The boat went up on the rocks on the shore line in the middle of the night! (It was later pulled off, and still floated, although there was damage.)

LESSON LEARNED... don't trust "moorings" in the Bahamas! The one exception is the government provided moorings in the Exumas Land and Sea Park, which are well maintained.

I had another lesson as a "newbie" to the Bahamas at Fraziers Hog. The next leg was a day sail to Nassau. BUT... The wind was over 20 knots, with gusts to 25 or 30. And it stayed at 25 to 30 knots for the next six days!

As a "coastal cruiser", I never worried about weather delay due to wind. Due to rain or thunderstorms, yes; but not simply "wind". In the islands, IT'S DIFFERENT! The wind off the ocean isn't moderated by trees or coastline. There are high winds lasting for days, and it's compounded since the winds generate steep waves. With a forecast of winds 25 with gusts to 30... you wait. And wait. And wait... until you get milder conditions.

An old Bahama cruiser gave his guidelines; "Roy, it's the wind direction that I base my decisions on. Casa Mare' likes 17-20 when the wind is behind the mast. If the wind is forward of the mast my limit is usually 4 ft. seas and 15 knots. I don't have a hard fast rule, just judgment and how much I want to punish myself." ...Captain Fred Lux.

Four boats waited, and four left for the passage to Nassau, facing the 20 knot winds. One of them radioed back and reported 8 foot seas! I'm glad that we waited! LESSON LEARNED... be willing to wait for weather... and it can be a week or more!



Of course, the fun of cruising is to enjoy where you are. You're not stuck; you're just getting a few extra days in paradise!

We walked to the back side of Fraziers Hog, and found a beautiful deserted beach.



We paid \$5 for a souvenir conch shell in Bimini. Here... they're laying on the sand!

Ah, the cruisers life... delayed by weather... and life is a beach!

After six days waiting and listening to Chris Parker, the winds eased, and we proceeded across the “Tongue of the Ocean” to Nassau. The waves were still about five feet; but, it was 1 to 2 foot wind fetch over 3 foot long swells. Still a bit rough for us, but tolerable. We had the mainsail raised so it would “steady” the boat, which it did; but we also got another knot of speed from it as we motor-sailed.

We spent a week in Nassau; partly to enjoy the sights, and partly (again!) waiting for milder wind conditions before proceeding further south into the Exumas.



Here's a pot-pourri of photos from our time there:

The lighthouse at the west entrance to Nassau Harbor;



Passing the cruise ship docks, which are just inside the west entrance;



The fabled “Atlantis”. No, we didn't stay at their marina. The rates are exorbitant!

Having a “safe arrival” beer at the Poop Deck.

U.S. beer is pricey; so everyone drinks the local Bahamas Kalik beer.







Mary making a new friend with a street vendor, at the Farmers Market, under the bridge.

Somehow Mary never caught on to the idea of haggling. Perhaps that's why the vendor is smiling?

A Nassau "Bobby" directing traffic on west Bay Street, in the cruise ship area.

West Bay Street by the cruise ships is "different" from East Bay Street, where the marinas and local Bahamas shops are located.

It's the difference between Rolex and Timex; for a Rolex, look on West Bay. For a Timex, try a drug store on East Bay.



Christ Church Cathedral, part of the Anglican Church in the Bahamas. It was established in 1670 during the British colonial period. The building was built in 1841. We joined their Sunday worship service while we were here.



Mary with the statue celebrating the spirit of the women of the Bahamas.

Notice how clean and nice the background is? Yes, it's part of the "West Bay Street" area. (Smile!).





At the observation deck atop Fort Fincastle, the highest point on New Providence Island.

And the Nassau Yacht Club, near our marina.



Here's Rapid Roy at The Nassau Harbor Club marina. It's the "value priced" marina and it's popular with cruisers.

The hotel building looks questionable; but the docks are in good condition and the marina staff are attentive and friendly. Highly Recommended!

Do I look different? I just turned 60! Mary organized a birthday party at the Marina. By this time, we knew people on several boats heading south. Cruisers from "Quick Sticks", "Jenny Mae", and "Lady Anne" all joined in for a Happy Birthday party! It proves cruisers will use any excuse to have a party!

OK... we've spent enough time in Nassau. It's time to move further south, to the Exumas. Our southern destination is Georgetown! GEORGETOWN OR BUST !

The month isn't over, but I'll "break" the dialog here, and continue the blog for December in my next installment.

...Roy & Mary  
S/V "Gideon"