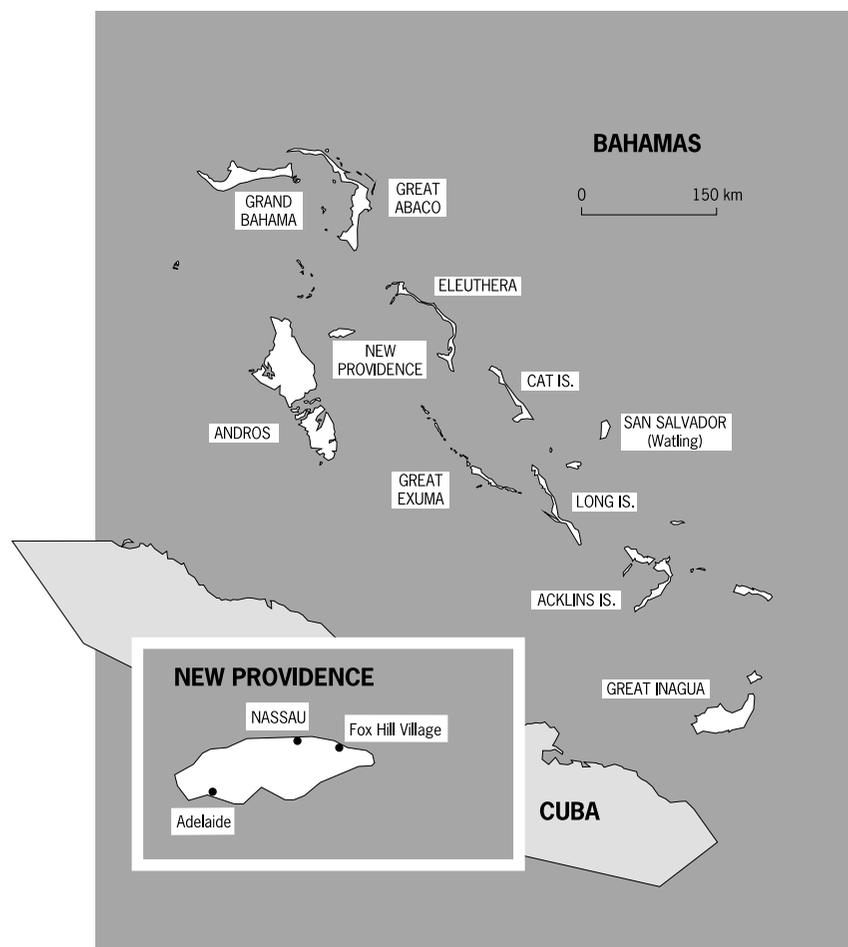


Bahamas



The Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) came back to power in the May 7 elections, winning 29 seats to beat the incumbent Free National Movement (FNM) with nine seats. The PLP are unlikely to make too many changes in policy but are expected to continue focussing on fiscal consolidation and reinvigorating economic growth and employment, while maintaining key social programmes.

The Bahamian economy is based on tourism, which in turn is dependent on the US for most of its visitors. According to the *Macroeconomic Report on Latin America and the Caribbean – June 2012*, published by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), gross domestic product (GDP)

in 2011 was 1.6 per cent, up from 0.2 per cent in 2010. The increase in growth was largely driven by the tourism sector, in particular the higher value added stopover segment. However, higher fiscal deficits and escalating debt present a major challenge to the economy. This led to the credit ratings agency Standard and Poor's announcing a downgrade of the Bahamas' economic outlook from 'stable' to 'negative' on 25 September 2012. The agency also said there could be a further downgrade if the government failed to develop a credible 'medium-term plan' to deal with the country's fiscal deficit and sharp growth in debt-to-GDP. A programme of fiscal consolidation, supported by measures to boost the competitiveness of the

KEY FACTS

Official name: Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor General Sir Arthur Foulkes (from 13 Apr 2010)

Head of government: Prime Minister Perry Gladstone Christie (PLP) (from 8 May 2012)

Ruling party: Progressive Liberal Party (from 8 May 2012)

Area: 13,935 square km

Population: 348,000 (2011)* (353,658; 2010, census figure)

Capital: Nassau

Official language: English

Currency: Bahamian dollar (B\$) = 100 cents

Exchange rate: B\$1.00 per US\$ (fixed)

GDP per capita: US\$23,175 (2011)*

GDP real growth: 2.00% (2011)*

GDP: US\$8.10 billion (2011)*

Labour force: 184,000 (2009)*

Unemployment: 14.20% (2009)*

Inflation: 2.50% (2011)*

Balance of trade: -US\$2.13 billion (2011)*

* estimated figure

tourism sector, will be an important part of the policy mix to achieve stable growth.

Activity continued to improve in the offshore financial services sector, with higher registration of entities amid improving investor confidence and efforts to rebrand the sector. Construction activity picked up with continued work on the Baha Mar project and road and airport infrastructure. Inflation edged up to 2.5 per cent February-on-February, reflecting persistently high international fuel prices, which led to a sharp increase in gasoline and diesel prices.

Inflation is expected to increase marginally in 2012, in part due to high fuel prices. The fiscal deficit is expected to grow as the new government implements key programmes in its manifesto. The balance-of-payments current account deficit is projected to widen as a result of the high bill for oil and other imports required for major projects, including government road construction and the airport expansion project.

Risk assessment

Politics	Fair
Economy	Improving
Regional stability	Good

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1647 The Bahamas (from the Spanish *Baja Mar* – meaning low tide), originally inhabited by Arawak Indians were occupied by British settlers in 1647.

1729 A parliamentary system of government was introduced.

1783 Recognised as a colony.

1834 Britain emancipated its slaves.

1964 Internal self-government was granted.

1967 In the first elections under full universal adult suffrage, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), led by Lynden (later Sir Lynden) Pindling won with the support of the United Bahamian Party (UBP).

1972 The PLP won a landslide victory and began independence talks with the UK.

1973 The Bahamas gained full independence on 10 July as a member of the Commonwealth.

1992 Sir Lynden Pindling and the PLP lost power to the Free National Movement (FNM).

1997 The FNM were re-elected.

2000 Sir Lynden Pindling died. The Bahamas was removed from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Financial Action Task Force (FATF) list of Non-Co-operative Countries and Territories (NCCT), on money laundering and terrorist financing.

2001 The US awarded the Bahamas certification as being one of 20 countries fully co-operating with anti-drug efforts.

Dame Ivy Dumont became the first female governor general.

2002 The PLP won the parliamentary elections. Perry Christie became prime minister.

2004 Hurricane Frances caused widespread damage.

2005 Dame Ivy Dumont retired; Paul Adderley, became acting governor general. The Bahamas banking system was removed from the FATF list of NCCT.

2006 Arthur Dion Hanna was inaugurated as governor general.

2007 In parliamentary elections the FNM won 23 out of 41 seats, defeating the

incumbent PLP, which won 18 seats. The FNM leader, Hubert Ingraham, was sworn in as prime minister.

2009 Cuba and the Bahamas signed a bilateral co-operation agreement to promote trade and investment, as well as technical information exchange and joint programmes, particularly in the education and health sectors. The Bahamas Financial Services Board (BFSB), a regulatory body, was launched.

2010 Sir Arthur Foulkes became as governor general, on the retirement of Arthur Dion Hanna.

2011 The UK-based Privy Council overturned a death penalty on a convicted killer (Maxo Tido) in June, sparking controversy concerning the sovereignty of the Bahamian justice system and the role of the Privy Council. Prime Minister

Ingraham told parliament that he intended to bring forward legislation to deal with 'the question of the imposition of the death penalty in The Bahamas'. This legislation would prescribe specific categories for which the death penalty may be applied. The Bahamas Bar Association warned that abandoning the Privy Council could be 'treading in very dangerous water' and that a court of final appeal was essential to ensure justice for all. On 29 June legislation was introduced to amend the Parliamentary Elections Act, including lifting the need to re-register for voters who have not moved home for over a year and limiting the circumstances for a recount following an election. A law banning shark fishing in Bahamian waters was signed in July. It also prohibits the sale, import and export of shark products. During the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit in October, the 16 countries in which the British monarch is Head of State unanimously agreed to change the royal line of succession from that of first born son to the first born child (regardless of its gender). The change will be enacted after the succession of Prince William (currently second in line to the throne, after his father Prince Charles).

2012 Parliamentary elections were held on 7 May, in which the opposition PLP won 29 seats out of 38 and the FNM nine. Perry Gladstone Christie was sworn into office as prime minister on 8 May. On 25 September, the credit ratings agency Standard and Poor's, downgraded the Bahamas' economic outlook from 'stable' to 'negative', and could be downgraded further if the government failed to develop a credible 'medium-term plan' to deal with the country's fiscal deficit and sharp growth in debt-to-GDP. However the Bahamas' sovereign credit rating remained unchanged at BBB/A2.

2013 A two-part referendum was held on 28 January, first on whether or not to

KEY INDICATORS

Bahamas

	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	0.34	0.34	0.35	*0.35	*0.35
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	7.50	7.30	7.70	8.10	*8.04
GDP per capita	US\$	22,156	24,459	22,350	23,175	*22,833
GDP real growth	%	-1.3	-5.4	1.0	2.0	*2.5
Inflation	%	4.5	2.1	1.0	2.5	*2.3
Unemployment	%	8.7	14.2	15.1	15.9	*11.0
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	997.2	710.7	702.4	834.9	–
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	3,131.0	2,536.7	2,590.6	2,965.7	–
Balance of trade	US\$m	-2,133.9	-1,826.1	-1,888.2	-2,130.7	–
Current account	US\$m	-1,001.0	-863.6	-899.9	-1,090.8	-1,135.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	567.9	1,009.8	1,044.2	1,271.2	–
Foreign exchange	US\$m	558.2	821.0	858.7	1,078.7	–
Exchange rate	per US\$	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

* estimated figure

legalise 'web shops' so that citizens could gamble alongside tourist in the hotel's casinos, and secondly whether the government should create a national lottery. On a low turnout, voters rejected both proposals and after a delay the government moved to close the illegal web shops. However, within hours, an injunction prevented the government from shutting down these operations pending the outcome of all substantive matters relative to the legality of web shops. A referendum on reforming the constitution, originally set for March and later for June, was delayed until late November. By September preparations for educating the voters had still not got underway and it was suggested the referendum would be further delayed until 2014.

Political structure

Constitution

The 1973 constitution was enacted to validate independence. Rights of citizenship and freedom of the individual were guaranteed. The composition of parliament, with a senate and house of assembly, was mandated and the function and authority of the executive were set forth.

Voting eligibility is for citizens of the Bahamas who are 18 years or older.

Independence date

10 July 1973

Form of state

Constitutional multi-party parliamentary democracy; it is a member of the Commonwealth.

The executive

The British monarch is the nominal head of state, represented by the governor general. Executive power is exercised by the prime minister and cabinet, which advises the governor general on appointments and ratifies laws.

National legislature

The bicameral legislature consists of a House of Assembly (lower house) with 41 members elected for five-year terms in single-seat constituencies, and the Senate (upper house) with 16 members appointed by the governor general – nine members are appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister, four members are appointed on the recommendation of the leader of the opposition and three members are appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister and leader of the opposition together. The leader of the largest political party in the House of Assembly is made prime minister. The senate always reflects the political make-up of the House of Assembly. The government may dissolve parliament at any time up to the parliament's five-year term.

Legal system

The Bahamian legal system is based on British common law with elements of former colonial legislation. Much of the business legislation enacted since independence is based on the US system. The Privy Council in London is the highest court of appeal.

Last elections

7 May 2012 (parliamentary)

Results: Parliamentary: Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) won 29 seats out of 38, the Free National Movement (FNM) nine.

Next elections

2017 (parliamentary)

Political parties

Ruling party

Progressive Liberal Party (from 8 May 2012)

Main opposition party

Free National Movement (FNM)

Political situation

The establishment of a Financial Services Authority was announced in June 2009, following the collapse in February of the insurance company CLICO Bahamas with liabilities in excess of US\$9 million. This was the most tangible result of the downturn in the global economy in 2008–09. The Bahamas also had to contend with an unemployment rate of 12.1 per cent in New Providence and 14.6 per cent in Grand Bahama, with employment in the hotel and restaurant sector declining by 10 per cent and in the construction industry by 9 per cent. In May the five-star Four Seasons Resort, which had opened in December 2003, closed due to insolvency. Prime Minister, Hubert Ingraham, when he presented the 2009/10 budget, said that the economy had suffered but that the government would resume 'the path of social and economic progress temporarily interrupted by the global financial crisis' when the situation improved.

Population

352,000 (2012)* (353,658; 2010, census figure)

Approximately 32 per cent of the total population is under 15 years of age.

Nearly 67 per cent of the population lives on New Providence, with 15 per cent on Grand Bahama, and the remainder on the various Family Islands.

Last census: 3 May 2010: 353,658

Population density: 30 inhabitants per square km. Urban population 84 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 1.5 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

African (85 per cent), European and mixed race (12 per cent), other (3 per cent).

Religions

Baptist (32 per cent), Anglican (20 per cent), Roman Catholic (19 per cent), Evangelical Protestant (12 per cent), Methodist (6 per cent), Church of God (6 per cent).

Education

There is an extensive primary and secondary school system, and education is free. There are numerous options for tertiary education, including the College of the Bahamas, which is affiliated with the University of the West Indies (UWI). Local post-secondary vocational and technical training is available in mechanical, electrical and automotive engineering, television and radio, technology, computer science, electronics, construction, carpentry, secretarial services, bookkeeping, printing, photography, straw craft and dressmaking. A scholarship programme provides university training abroad in medicine, agriculture, engineering, science, education and other subjects considered necessary for national development but not available locally.

Literacy rate: 96 per cent of adults (2003)

Compulsory years: Five to 16

Enrolment rate: 98 per cent, gross primary enrolment (World Bank).

Health

There are three main hospitals in the Bahamas: Princess Margaret in Nassau and Rand Memorial in Freeport, both government owned, and the privately owned Doctors Hospital in Nassau. Lyford Cay Hospital is a smaller private establishment offering specialised treatment.

HIV/Aids

Deaths by Aids, had in the early 2000s become a leading cause of death. However through government backed health policies and education, the number of people living with HIV was reduced to an estimated 7,000 in 2009 (Unicef 2012).

HIV prevalence: 3.1 per cent aged 15–49 in 2009 (Unicef 2012)

Life expectancy: 75 years, 2010 (Unicef 2012)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 1.9 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef 2012)

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 17 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

Welfare

Welfare conditions in the Bahamas are among the best in the Caribbean and the government is working towards ensuring that economic growth is accompanied by improvements in the social sector. The National Insurance Act of 1972 set out the law governing social security. It provides for contributions from employers

and employees to be paid to the National Insurance Fund. Anyone who is employed or self-employed is insured under the act, including non-Bahamians with work permits. Benefits include sickness and maternity payments, retirement and widows' pensions and social assistance payments.

Main cities

Nassau (capital and seat of government, on New Providence Island, estimated population 255,789 in 2012) and Freeport (on Grand Bahama Island, 45,945), West End (13,577), Coopers Town (9,948).

Languages spoken

English, Creole (among Haitian immigrants).

Official language/s

English

Media

Press

Dailies: Newspapers include the *Nassau Guardian* (www.thenassauguardian.com), *The Tribune* and the intellectual *Bahama Journal* (www.jonesbahamas.com); *Freeport News* (<http://freeport.nassauguardian.net>) is published on Grand Bahama.

Weeklies: Tabloid newspapers include *Punch* published twice weekly and has the largest circulation of all newspapers; *The Abaconian* is published once fortnightly, on Abaco.

Business: A quarterly magazine *The Bahamas Financial Digest* (www.bfsb-bahamas.com) is a government publication that reports on financial services and investments.

Broadcasting

The national public broadcaster is ZNS (www.znsbahamas.com), (the name is derived from its call sign: Zephyr Nassau Sunshine).

Radio: ZNS operates three commercial radio stations; ZNS 1 and 2 from Nassau and ZNS3 from Freeport. There are around a dozen private stations include Splash FM (www.splash899fm.com), Radio Abaco (www.radioabaco.com) and 100 Jamz (www.100jamz.com).

Television: ZNS operates the only domestic TV station on the islands. Cable TV is available to around 96 per cent of the population offering a wide choice of imported TV programmes, sporting events and films.

Other news agencies: Caribbean Net News: www.caribbeanetnews.com

Economy

The economy is dominated by the tourism industry (over 60 per cent of GDP) and offshore financial services.

GDP growth was -5.4 per cent in 2009, caused by the global economic crisis that cut both tourist numbers and financial

activity. However, as tourism began to recover so did the economy, to a modest growth of 1.0 per cent in 2010, rising to 2.0 per cent in 2011 and a forecast 2.5 per cent growth in 2011. During the worst of the recession, the annual unemployment rate was 14.6 per cent (almost double the typical annual rate as seen in years of growth), with workers in the tourist and construction sectors hit hardest. GDP per capita fell from US\$24,459 in 2008 to US\$22,350 in 2010, before recovering to US\$23,175 in 2011. Annual foreign direct investment (FDI) rose from US\$663 million in 2009 to US\$871 million in 2010, but fell back to US\$594 million in 2011.

Although the balance of payments in 2009 was in deficit, by around 12.5 per cent of GDP, external borrowing and a one-off Special Drawing Rights (SDR) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of US\$179 million was more than adequate to cover the shortfall before the economy recovered in 2010. However, government debt by June 2010 was around 47 per cent of GDP, which affected Bahamas' sovereign rating, which was downgraded to BBB+/stable. On 25 September 2012, the credit ratings agency Standard and Poor's, downgraded the Bahamas' economic outlook from 'stable' to 'negative', and could be downgraded further if the government failed to develop a credible 'medium-term plan' to deal with the country's fiscal deficit and sharp growth in debt-to-GDP. However the Bahamas' sovereign credit rating remained unchanged at BBB/A2.

The high incidence of hurricanes hitting the islands affects the economy, although due to the islands' general preparedness, the economic impact is kept to a minimum.

The World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that tourism contributed 46.1 per cent to GDP in 2011, while attracting investment constituting 16.1 per cent of total investment. Direct employment in the industry was forecast to be around 48,000 jobs (29.4 per cent of total employment) and provide employment to 53.7 per cent of the workforce (90,200 jobs). Foreign revenues from tourism was expected to be US\$2.2 billion. (copy into tourism)

In 2011, the state-owned Bahamas Petroleum Company (BPC) was seeking investors for rights to explore oil-sands deposits beneath the islands, with an offer of 25 per cent of well-head revenue returned in royalties to the government (less than the 33 per cent as contracted in the US).

External trade

Although the Bahamas was a founder member of the Caribbean Community

(Caricom), it did not adopt the single market and economy (CSME), which was ratified by 12 other member states in 2006.

Imports

Principal imports include crude oil for refining, fuel oil, machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods, livestock and foodstuffs, and chemicals.

Main sources: US (88.9 per cent of total in 2011), Trinidad & Tobago (4.7 per cent), Japan (0.6 per cent).

Exports

Exports include chemicals, pharmaceuticals, rum, crawfish, agricultural products, salt, aragonite, sponges, cosmetics and perfume.

Main destinations: US (78.3 per cent of total in 2011), UK (4.3 per cent), France (3.7 per cent).

Re-exports

Petroleum products

The agricultural and fisheries sector contributes approximately 3 per cent to annual GDP and employs about 5 per cent of the labour force.

Agriculture

Although only about 1 per cent of land area is cultivated, near self-sufficiency has been achieved in poultry, pork, eggs, fruit and vegetables. The expansion of export crops such as limes, pineapples, papayas, avocados, cucumbers and mangoes is being promoted.

The government has provided marketing facilities through the Product Exchange in Nassau for small-scale producers, and also supplies seed and fertilisers. There are special incentives to foreign investors in food production and processing.

The chicken industry accounts for 40 per cent of agricultural production.

The sector employs around 9,000 Bahamians. The commercial harvesting of pearls and shells has seen a dramatic rise the annual harvest is typically 13,000 units. The harvest of sponges averages 70,000 per annum.

Total forest cover is estimated at 842,000 hectares, equivalent of 15 per cent of the total land area. Most forests are concentrated on the four islands of the north-western Bahamas including Abaco, Andros, Grand Bahamas and New Providence.

Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector is small-scale, contributing around 10 per cent to annual GDP and employing 10 per cent of the labour force.

The largest contributor to the industrial sector is the crude oil transshipment terminal operated by Burmah Oil. Re-exports of crude and refined oil (mainly to the US) are estimated to account for around 16 per cent of GDP.

Other activity is centred on the production of rum, chemicals and pharmaceuticals for export. The companies manufacturing these products are largely foreign-owned and located in the Freeport trade area on Grand Bahama.

Other light industries include rum production, food processing, confectionery, garments, small boat building and furniture making.

The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC) is encouraging light manufacturing, furniture, toiletries, cosmetics, jewellery, linens, beachwear and the assembly of air conditioners and refrigerators.

The construction industry is also important, fuelled by the tourist trade and financial institutions requiring offices.

Tourism

The economy is dominated by the tourism industry, constituting over 60 per cent of GDP. Tourists from the US and Canada are the greatest in number, followed by Europeans and other Caribbean residents. Recording a rise of 15 per cent on the 2009 figures, over five million tourists visited the islands in 2010; cruise arrivals had grown by 18 per cent, with growth through the expanded docks at the newly enlarged cruise-liner port on Grand Bahama. The islands also offer luxury Caribbean holidays and conference locations

The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism and Aviation (BMOTA) co-ordinates and regulates the industry. The successful 2010 'Free Companion Airfare' promotion encouraged more US citizens to either return to the Bahamas or visit for the first time accounted for around 300,000 room occupancy. The reopening the Bimini Big Game Club resort for game-fishing, plus newly opened conference facilities and luxury resorts all added to a re-marketing of the Bahamas after the global economic crisis had cut visitor numbers dramatically. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that tourism contributed 46.1 per cent to GDP in 2011, while attracting investment constituting 16.1 per cent of total investment. Direct employment in the industry was forecast to be around 48,000 jobs (29.4 per cent of total employment) and provide employment to 53.7 per cent of the workforce (90,200 jobs). Foreign revenues from tourism was expected to be US\$2.2 billion.

In April 2012, the joint Spanish Baleária and US Capo Group established the first ferry service between Grand Bahama and Fort Lauderdale (US). The high-speed catamaran *Pinar del Rio* sails daily (Thursday–Tuesday) with a two and half hour journey time. The ferry accommodates

463 passengers, in either the VIP or economy lounges.

Mining

Mining contributes approximately 1 per cent to annual GDP and employs around 1 per cent of the labour force.

Crude salt is produced by solar evaporation in Great Inagua and Long Island and aragonite deposits are found near Bimini Island.

Hydrocarbons

There are no significant oil reserves; however, Bahamas is an important re-exporter of oil and transshipment earns the islands a significant amount of foreign exchange. Consumption of oil was 34,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2008. The state-owned Bahamas Oil Refining Company (Borco) is the principal commercial entity in the petroleum market and has been involved in several joint ventures with larger international oil companies. In 2005, the Bahamas, plus a number of other Caribbean states, signed an agreement with Venezuela to establish PetroCaribe, a multi-national oil company, owned by the participating states. PetroCaribe buys low-priced Venezuelan crude oil under long-term payment plans.

Although the Bahamas was poised to increase its hydrocarbons re-export sector with the construction of two new liquefied natural gas (LNG) re-gasification terminals, one at Ocean Cay, processing LNG from Qatar.

Energy

Total installed generating capacity was 455MW in 2007, producing over 1.9 billion kilowatt hours. Conventional thermal power stations produce the Bahamas' domestic energy.

Financial markets

Stock exchange

Bahamas International Securities Exchange (BISX)

Banking and insurance

Central bank

Central Bank of the Bahamas

Main financial centre

Nassau

Offshore facilities

The Bahamas is one of the largest offshore financial centres in the world. It was taken off the OECD's blacklist of countries that did not meet international requirements on taxation and transparency after it enacted new legislation which eliminated banking operations that did not have a physical presence in the Bahamas, and allowed for the exchange of tax information and the establishment of a comprehensive anti-money laundering regime. It resulted in the number of banks

and trust companies licenced in the offshore sector declining.

Time

GMT minus five hours (daylight saving, April–October, minus four hours)

Geography

The Bahamas archipelago, which consists of 700 islands and nearly 2,500 small islets or cays sprawled across roughly 259,000 square km, stretches south-east from the southern coast of Florida (US). Virtually all the islands are surrounded by coral reefs and sandbanks, and nearly all are low lying.

Hemisphere

Northern.

Climate

The Bahamas is said to have one of the finest climates in the world. There are two seasons: winter (November–April), which is cool and dry, and summer (May–October), which is warm and wet. The climate is semi-tropical with temperatures ranging from 20 degrees Celsius (C) in winter to 30 degrees C in summer. Hurricanes can occur between June–November.

Dress codes

Business dress is more formal in the Bahamas than elsewhere in the Caribbean or in Florida; a business suit and tie is recommended for men and conservative business dress for women.

Visitors should bring lightweight or tropical clothing and, during the wet season, rainwear.

If invited to a Bahamian's home for dinner, dress should be business attire for men and conservative evening wear for women. Formal attire is worn when attending church.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all, except nationals of the US and Canada with evidence of citizenship (all US and Canadian nationals require a passport for re-entry to their country). All passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival and visitors must show proof of a return/onward ticket and sufficient funds to provide for maintenance during their stay.

Visa

Required, but nationals of various countries are exempt for periods ranging from two weeks to eight months. For details contact nearest consulate or embassy or consult www.bahamas.com.

From May 2009 EU citizens may make a short-stay visit, for up to three months, without a visa.

Currency advice/regulations

Permission is required from the Central Bank of the Bahamas to import local currency, which may be exported up to a

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maximum of B\$70. The import and export of foreign currency is unlimited. US dollars are accepted as legal tender. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US dollars.

Prohibited imports

Illegal drugs, firearms and other offensive weapons, animals.

Health (for visitors)

Medical facilities are on a par with the US, but can be costly and therefore medical insurance is recommended.

Mandatory precautions

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required if arriving from an infected area.

Advisable precautions

Recommended immunisations are typhoid, diphtheria, hepatitis A and B, and tetanus. Malaria prophylaxis is recommended for Great Exuma. Tap water is safe to drink, although it can often be salty in taste. Food precautions should be observed.

Hotels

Wide variety available. Bills usually include a service charge and a hotel room tax.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 10 Jul (Independence Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day), 26 Dec (Boxing Day).

Holidays which fall on a Saturday or Sunday are observed on the following Monday.

Variable dates

Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, Labour Day (first Mon in Jun), Emancipation Day (first Mon in Aug), National Heroes Day (second Mon in Oct).

Working hours

Banking

Mon–Thu: 0930–1500; Friday: 0930–1700.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0900–1700.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0900–1730.

Shops

Mon–Sat: 0900–1700. Sunday closing laws are generally strictly observed, except for some grocers open for a few hours, as well as the tourist shops on Bay Street in Nassau if cruise ships are docked.

Telecommunications

Mobile/cell phones

A GSM 1900 service is available.

Electricity supply

120V AC, 60 cycles

Social customs/useful tips

Bahamians shake hands upon meeting and business cards may be exchanged.

Address first-time business acquaintances by their last names – conversations generally move to a first-name basis more slowly than in most Western countries. Appointments for business meetings should be made in advance.

Business lunches are often held. If invited to dinner at home, it is customary to take a small gift for the hostess and send a thank-you card afterwards.

Security

Visits to the Bahamas are generally trouble-free. Crime exists in the main cities of Nassau and Freeport, including incidents of murder and armed robbery. Much of this is within the local community, but tourists are often perceived as wealthy and have been the victims of robbery, particularly when alone or in isolated locations. Passports are a particular target for theft.

Visitors should take sensible precautions and be vigilant at all times. It is advisable not to carry large amounts of cash or jewellery. Do not offer resistance in the event of an attempted robbery as the assailant may be armed.

The outlying Family Islands are relatively free of crime, but sensible precautions should still be taken.

Penalties for possession or trafficking of drugs are severe. Pack all luggage yourself and do not carry anything through customs for anyone else unless you are aware of the contents.

Getting there

Air

National airline: Bahamasair

International airport/s: Nassau International (NAS), 16km west of city, shop, restaurant, bank, post office, car hire; Grand Bahama International (FPO), 5km north of Freeport, shop, bar, restaurant, buffet, shops, car hire.

Other airport/s: Paradise Island (PID), 5km from Nassau; George Town (GGT), 6km from city.

Airport tax: Departure tax: US\$18.

Surface

Water: All the major cruise lines operating out of Florida and liners from New York and Florida make calls in the Bahamas, either in Nassau or Freeport. In April 2012, the joint Spanish Baleária and US Capo Group established the first ferry service between Grand Bahama and Fort Lauderdale (US). The high-speed catamaran *Pinar del Rio* sails daily (Thursday–Tuesday) with a two and half hour journey time. The ferry accommodates 463 passengers, in either the VIP or economy lounges.

Main port/s: Freeport Container Port on Grand Bahama, Nassau on New Providence and Matthew Town on Inagua.

There are modern berthing facilities for cruise ships at Potters Cay on New Providence, Governor's Harbour on Eleuthera, Morgan's Bluff on North Andros and George Town on Exuma.

Getting about

National transport

Air: An extensive air charter network covers the islands, serving over 50 landing sites. Local enquiries should be made for particular requirements.

Road: The main centres are well served by 1,535km of surfaced roads.

Buses: There are few conventional buses, which serve only in the main towns. Mini-buses (*jitneys*) operate in the Nassau and Freeport areas.

Rail: There is no passenger rail service.

Water: Ferry and mail-boat services are operated between the various islands in the archipelago, but for business travellers the length and frequency of journeys may prove a major drawback. Two catamarans operated by Bahamas Ferries run schedule journeys daily between the islands.

City transport

Taxis: Taxis are often metered and use a fixed-rate system, but the rate should be agreed before setting off. A 15 per cent tip is usual.

Car hire

A national or international licence valid for three months is required. Rates vary according to the season. Traffic drives on the left.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international direct dialling code (IDD) for Bahamas is +1 242, followed by subscriber's number

Chambers of Commerce

Bahamas Chamber of Commerce, Shirley Street and Collins Avenue, PO Box N-665, Nassau (tel: 322-2145; fax: 322-4649; e-mail: bahamaschamber@coralwave.com).

Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce, The Mall and Pioneer Way, PO Box F-40808, Freeport (tel: 352-8329; fax: 352-3280; e-mail: info@thegrandbahamachamberofcommerce.com).

Banking

Bahamas Development Bank, West Bay Street, PO Box N-3034, Nassau (tel: 327-5780; fax: 322-6457).

Bank of the Bahamas Ltd, PO Box N-7118, Nassau (tel: 326-2560).

Bank of Nova Scotia, PO Box N-7518, Nassau (tel: 356-1400).

Banque Privée Edmond de Rothschild Ltd, 51 Frederick Street, PO Box N-1136, Nassau (tel: 328-8121; fax: 328-8115).

Barclays Bank, PO Box N-8350, Nassau (tel: 322-4921).

British-American Bank, PO Box N-7502, Nassau (tel: 327-5170).

Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), PO Box N-7125, Nassau (tel: 322-8455).

Citibank, PO Box N-8158, Nassau (tel: 322-4240).

Commonwealth Bank, PO Box SS-6263, Nassau (tel: 328-1854).

Finance Corporation of Bahamas Ltd, PO Box N-3038, Nassau (tel: 322-4822).

Handelsfinanz-CCF Bank International Ltd, Maritime House, Frederick Street, PO Box N-10441, Nassau (tel: 328-8644, 328-1737; fax: 328-8600).

Inter-American Development Bank, PO Box N-3743, Nassau (tel: 393-7159).

Royal Bank of Canada, PO Box N-7537, Nassau (tel: 322-8700).

Central bank

Central Bank of the Bahamas, Frederick Street, PO Box N-4868, Nassau (tel: 322-2193; fax: 356-4307; e-mail: queries@centralbankbahamas.com).

Stock exchange

Bahamas International Securities Exchange (BISX), www.bisxbahamas.com

Travel information

Bahamasair, Windsor Field, PO Box N-4881, Nassau (tel: 327-8451; fax: 327-7409).

Bahamas Ferries, Potters Cay West, Nassau (tel: 323-2166, 394-9700; fax: 393-7451; internet: www.bahamasferries.com).

Bahamas Hotel Association, Dele West Bay Street, sub Dean's Lane, PO Box N-7799, Nassau (tel: 322-8381; fax: 326-5346).

Nassau/Cable Beach/Paradise Island Promotion Board, Dean's Lane, Fort Charlotte, PO Box N-7799, Nassau (tel: 322-8381; fax: 326-5346).

Baleária Bahamas Express, Terminal 1, Freeport Harbour, Queen Highway, Grand Bahama (tel: (+1 954) 278-3791; email: info@ferryexpress.com; internet: www.ferryexpress.com).

Ministry of tourism

Ministry of Tourism, PO Box N-3701, Nassau (tel: 302-2000; fax: 302-2098; e-mail: tourism@bahamas.com).

Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture and Industry, Levy Building, East Bay Street, Nassau (tel: 325-7502; fax: 322-1767).

Ministry of Economic Development, Manx Building, West Bay Street, Nassau.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Shirley Street, Nassau (tel: 322-5495; fax: 322-3267).

Ministry of Financial Services and Investment, Sir Cecil V Wallace Whitfield Centre, Cable Beach, PO Bx N-10980, Nassau (tel: 327-5826; fax: 327-5006).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Post Office Building, East Hill Street, Nassau (tel: 322-7624; fax: 328-8212).

Ministry of Health, Ministry of Health Building, Royal Victoria Gardens, Nassau (tel: 322-7425; fax: 322-7788).

Ministry of Housing and Social Development, Frederick House, Frederick Street, Nassau (tel: 356-0765; fax: 323-3883).

Ministry of Justice, Post Office Building, East Hill Street, Nassau.

Ministry of Labour and Immigration, Post Office Building, East Hill Street, Nassau (tel: 323-7240; fax: 326-7344).

Ministry of Public Works, John F Kennedy Drive, Nassau (tel: 323-7814; fax: 325-2016).

Ministry of Tourism, PO Box N-3701, Bolam House, George Street, Nassau (tel: 302-2000; fax: 302-2098; e-mail: tourism@bahamas.com).

Ministry of Transport, Aviation and Local Government, Pilot House Complex, Nassau (tel: 394-0451; fax: 394-5023).

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Churchill Building, Bay Street, Nassau (tel: 356-6792; fax: 356-6087).

Office of the Prime Minister, Cecil V Wallace Whitfield Centre, West Bay Street, Nassau (tel: 322-2805; fax: 328-8294).

Other useful addresses

Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation, PO Box N-4940, Levy Building, East Bay Street, Nassau (tel: 322-3740; fax: 322-2133).

Bahamas Economic Development Corporation, Bahamas Development Bank, Adderley Building, Bay Street/Rawson Square, PO Box N-3034, Nassau (tel: 327-5780; fax: 327-5907).

Bahamas Electricity Corporation, Big Pond and Tucker Road, PO Box N-7509, Nassau (tel: 328-7700).

Bahamas Employers' Confederation, PO Box N-166, Nassau (tel: 328-1757, 326-6644; fax: 328-1346).

Bahamas Financial Services Board, PO Box N-1764, West Bay Street, Goodman's Bay Corporate Centre, Nassau (tel: 326-7001; fax: 326-7007; e-mail: info@bfsb-bahamas.com).

Bahamas Information Services, Nassau Court, PO Box N-8172 (tel: 325-6028).

Bahamas Investment Authority, Cecil Wallace Whitfield Centre, PO Box CB-10980, Nassau (tel: 327-5970/4; fax: 327-5907; e-mail: investbahama@batelnet.bs; internet site: http://www.opm.gov.bs).

Bahamas Telecommunications Corporation, J F Kennedy Drive, PO Box N-3048, Nassau (tel: 323-4911).

Bahamas Water and Sewerage Corporation, J F Kennedy Drive, PO Box N-3905, Nassau (tel: 323-3944).

British High Commission, Bitco Building, 3rd Floor, East Street, PO Box N-7516, Nassau (tel: 325-7471/2/3; fax: 323-3871).

Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas, PO Box N-1347, Nassau (tel: 32-4623, 322-4480).

Cabinet Office, Churchill Bldg, Rawson Square, PO Box N-7147, Nassau (tel: 322-2805; fax: 328-8294).

The Comptroller of Customs, Seaban Building, Oakes Field, PO Box N-155, Nassau (tel: 326-4401).

Gaming Board of the Bahamas, West Bay Street, PO Box N-4565, Nassau (tel: 327-7478).

Government Publications Office (import regulations), East Bay Street, PO Box N-7147, Nassau (tel: 322-2410).

Hotel Corporation of the Bahamas, PO Box N-9520, Nassau (tel: 327-8395; fax: 327-6978).

Port Department, East Hill Street, PO Box N-8173 Nassau (tel: 326-7354).

Securities Commission of the Bahamas, PO Box N-8347, Nassau (tel: 356-6271/2; fax: 356-7530; e-mail: secbd@batelnet.bs).

US Embassy, Mosmar Building, Queen Street, PO Box N-8197, Nassau (tel: 322-1181; fax: 328-3495; e-mail: embnas@state.gov).

Other news agencies: Caribbean Net News: www.caribbeanetnews.com

Internet sites

Bahamas International Securities Exchange: www.bisxbahamas.com

Ministry of Tourism: www.bahamas.com