



The Best of the BAHAMAS

One trip, two stops: Nassau and Long Island

The 48-foot *Chubasco III* gargled its way up to the dock behind Nassau's colorful straw market. The captain, Mike Russell, backed up the yacht and we boarded, off in minutes into the azure waters of the Atlantic Ocean, towing lines rigged with 6-inch baitfish in hopes of mahi, tuna and perhaps, marlin. Russell is seventh-generation Bahamian and heads a 4-boat fleet ranging from 28 to 48 feet.

By Brian Irwin

He's the premiere billfish guide in Nassau, offering a guarantee to his clients that they'll hook up.

Within fifteen minutes of leaving Nassau, our port of entry via an easy flight from Ft. Lauderdale, we eased into 1,000-foot-deep water. Nassau is known for glitz and glamour, with an abundance of post resorts and sizzling casinos. But by the time we were four miles out, we were deep into the fishing grounds. The water sounded at over a mile in depth. We motored our way along swirls of birds, waiting for a pull. It came quickly, first a skipjack tuna, then a blackfin, then more skipjacks. Fish ranged from 5 to 10 pounds, but when it was my turn at the chair, the line pulled like no tuna in the box.

The flash of green under the surface meant

a sizable tuna. However a 10-foot shark in pursuit had other plans for my catch, flossing gashes in the water with its fin until it nipped my fish—and again—until it took it entirely.

Mahi followed our tuna eventually yielding a wheelbarrow full of fish. Although no bills touched the boat, the fish we caught provided a bounty for many, including the homeless man at the slip who cleans fish for nothing more than a few fillets for his family. We took our portion to Nassau's venerable fish fry, a must-visit string of colorful shacks where our catch was served up family-style in a few different preparations. The best tasting catch is your own.

However, The Bahamas is best known not for bills, but for bonefish. We hopped to Long Island which, at over 80 miles in length and only a few in width, is a remote stretch of paradise where ATMs are absent and Columbus set his second set of footprints in the New World. Long Island can be easily accessed from Nassau via a short hop on Bahamas Air, which flies into Stella Maris airport, literally a stone's throw from the flats. We stayed at Stella Maris Resort, a seaside paradise of quiet bungalows amidst infinity pools and draping palms. With food fit for review, it caters to a fishing and diving clientele, many of

whom are celebrities or repeat visitors.

Delbert Smith, again a native Bahamian, was our bonefish guide. In lieu of diesel twins, Smith propels his 17-foot skiff with a pole. Instead of trolling weed lines, we sight casted to cruising bones, chasing the falling and rising tide just as the fish do.

A long day on the flats led to swarms of bones that, like fireflies evading the catch, waited until sunset to return to the flooding mangroves. Lemon sharks floated in and out of chalky lagoons. Just as the day's light dropped into the sea, Smith pressed me a forced whisper: "Bones. Ten o' clock."

A grey shadow poked in the mud, stirring up smoke. I fired my line to the edge of the cloud. Strip. Pause. Strip. Strip. Pause. Bump.

My line went tight, cable peeled from my reel and slashed into the turquoise water of the cove. Then my rod went limp, gyrating to a standstill as it pointed directly into the setting sun.

The Bahamas are the Caribbean's crown jewel for bones, and Long Island, one of the fabled out islands, is infested with them. Tack on some of the most reliable offshore fishing in the tropics, sitting dead center in the middle of the migration path for big bills, and you've got the best of both worlds. **FS**

Hotels & Guides:

» Sheraton Nassau Beach Resort
(242) 327-6000;
www.sheratonnassau.com

» Stella Maris Resort, Long Island
(242) 338-2051;
www.stellamarisresort.com

» Chubasco Deep Sea Fishing,
Capt. Mike Russell, Nassau;
www.chubascocharters.com.

» Capt. Delbert Smith, Flats,
Long Island; (242) 338-6001

» Capt. Maurice Rahming, Flats,
Long Island; (242) 338-5077

Visit Long Island and you might stalk across shallow flats for bonefish with guide Delbert Smith, left. In Nassau, you might box dolphin with Chubasco charters, right.



Tools of the trade for best of both Bahamas worlds—flats skiff poling, right, bluewater trolling rods, left. Below, the shrimp fly for bonefish and rigged ballyhoo for pelagics.

