

The Dallas Morning News

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SPAIN: RV-tripping the coast offers a view like no other **4K**



BAHAMAS

Section K



Find out why Bimini cast its spell on King, Hemingway

By BRIAN IRWIN Special Contributor

imini is difficult to leave.
The idyllic spit of sand just east of Florida may only be a 20-minute flight from Miami, but in character it's a world away. Glass-clear water replete with marine life, elephantine yachts and a deep history make Bimini an inspiring place.

So inspiring in fact, that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. used to visit and write famous speeches aboard a tiny boat deep in the mangroves. Ernest Hemingway used to hole up here too, penning alcohol-driven musings at the then-bustling Big Game Club.

It's a special place, one where you can imagine stepping back in time to an era that was less complicated in some ways, more so in others.

We came to Bimini, the closest Bahamian island to the United States, to fly-fish and explore, but also to understand the island and its past, present and future.

Things are changing on Bimini, and as the island balances the scales of its

genuine persona and history with the need to expand tourism and add more luxurious offerings, we realized that this special place may have struck a healthy balance.

Searching for bonefish

Bonefish Ebbie David is an animated character. He's a tenured fly-fishing guide and Bimini native who took us angling for bonefish, a laser-fast, missile-shaped fish that roams the shallow "flats" that surround Bimini.

As he pushed his skiff in the skinny

water, his voice resonated in the salty air as he bellowed "Amazing Grace" in an attempt to entice the higher deity of all things fishy to present bonefish to our water. It worked.

A few minutes later, knees shaking from the pressure, I laid a fly onto the dinner plate of a hungry bonefish. And in a flash, my line tugged and began to run off toward the horizon.

Although fishing is a major facet of life on Bimini, this island is not all things piscatorial. Bimini boasts world-

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OREGON

'World-class' region awaits south of Portland



Jenny Graham

The antics of Pyrate Technics entertain guests at the Green Show, which is offered six days a week during the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Wine, arts and culture mingle with area's natural beauty

By KATHY CHIN LEONG Special Contributor

Have you heard of Ashland, Medford, Jacksonville and Grants Pass? Perhaps overshadowed by Portland, this affordable, seven-county region in southern Oregon just above the California border beckons to wine geeks, culture mavens and nature lovers everywhere.

Wine time

Robert Trottman, business development manager at 2Hawk Vineyards in Medford, doesn't like to boast, but when asked about the area's vino reputation, he can't help himself. "This is a world-class wine region. When people come, they are super impressed," he says. "You can see the true Oregonian at work [in the wineries] because here are survivalists who are entrepreneurial

in every way."

The more than 150 wineries are winning awards left and right. Where to start a visit? The Southern Oregon Winery Association website matches consumers with winery preferences such as family-friendliness, wheelchair accessibility, food availability and more.

The success of over 70 varietals is credited to the European-like growing season, mountainous topography and wide range of microclimates. In one afternoon, visitors can sample the glories of pinot noir, riesling, chardonnay and lesser-known grapes such as albarino and bastardo (trousseau).

(trousseau).

The growing regions include
Umpqua, Rogue, Illinois, Elkton,
Jacksonville and Applegate. Highway arteries empty into small batch
enterprises tucked between fruit
trees and quiet orchards. Countryside wine rooms run on the smallish
side compared to Napa's fortresses,
but these spaces brandish a Pacific
Northwest aesthetic, an updated

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Fly-fish in water as clear as glass

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class diving and snorkeling, in both open water and amid shipwrecks.

The half-submerged SS Sapona, for example, is a concrete-hulled cargo steamer that ran aground off Bimini during a hurricane in 1926. Today it's a popular dive destination with vibrant reef fish and sharks.

Bimini holds a healthy population of sharks. So many that a tour operator offers a hammerhead dive, where hammerheads are fed and photographed by clients. Likewise, there is a population of somewhat habituated porpoises with which you can dive.

Then there's the Bimini Road, a series of submerged structures that some believe may be a link to the Lost City of Atlantis.

Road to Alicetown

Getting around on Bimini is part of the fun. Golf carts are the primary form of transportation. Within 10 minutes you can drive one from a new, refined resort to the sleepy streets of Alicetown.

Here, tiny colorful homes dot the avenue abutting the lagoon. Small restaurants stand on stilts in the water; guests dine on conch ceviche, made fresh to order.

On the other side of the street the ocean laps at soft, flour-like sand beaches. These beaches stretch for miles along the coast and in some sections are so deserted that you'd think you were on an island all your own.

Bimini is comprised of two main islands, north and south. On the tip of North Bi-



Photos by Brian Irwin /Special Contributor

A day of fishing costs \$600.

mini an expansive resort rests, rich in amenities, beaches and restaurants. Once a landfill, this section of Bimini has been excavated and converted into a luxurious vacation spot with private homes and cabanas, infinity pools and even a small casino.

We enjoyed outstanding gastronomy at a unique sushi restaurant, a raw bar and harborside restaurant. After a day of fishing in Bimini's blazing sun, the opulent spa was a welcome offering.

Separating North Bimini and South Bimini is a broad estuary, a lagoon with clear, clean water and miles of hard sand flats. Through this estuary slices a channel that allows for gigantic yachts to enter and tie up at the marinas that flank our resort,

Resorts World Bimini, and other private marinas including those alongside the Bimini Big Game Club.

'Look at all this life'

It was in this estuary that Ansil Saunders toured us around. Saunders is 84 and has been bonefishing since age 18. He's been fly fishing for more than 50 years.

As we idled through the water, he spoke. "There, just off those mangroves," he said and pointed. "That's where it happened."

He was referring to the day in 1971 that his client caught the world record bonefish, a record that stands today: 16 pounds, 3 ounces.

He powered up his boat, a $15^{1/2}$ -foot wooden piece of



Bonefish Ebbie David is a tenured fly-fishing guide and Bimini native.

art that he built by hand. He's been building and selling fishing boats his entire adult life. He slowly motored into a narrow causeway that wound through the mangrove trees

until we came upon a statue of King that rests upon a pillar driven into the mud.

lar driven into the mud.

"This is where the doctor wrote [his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech] in 1964.

If you go

Getting there: Fly from Dallas to Miami or Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Silver Airlines provides service daily to South Bimini; a ferry will take you to the marina of your choice. Or take a seaplane from Miami on Tropic Ocean Airways. Book through Resorts World Bimini at rwbimini.com.

Lodging: The Hilton, on the property of Resorts World Bimini, puts you closest to the comforts of contemporary resort life. Rates from \$249 per night. From here, rent a golf cart and explore the entire island. Carts cost \$60 per day.

Stay busy: For fishing, snorkeling and other activities, Resorts World Bimini can arrange any tour.

I sat and waited," he said.
"When he was done, he spoke
to me. He said, looking at the
snappers in the water and
birds on the branches, 'Look
at all this life. How can there
be so much life and some still
do not believe in God?"

King returned four years later and again, aboard Sauders' boat, wrote a speech in support of the sanitation workers' strike. "He was getting death threats. He knew he was going to die. So he closed his speech with his own eulogy," Saunders said.

On April 3, 1968, three days after leaving Saunders, King gave the famous speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop." The next day, he was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn.

But in Bimini, where his ghost haunts the flats and the mangroves, and where the birds sing his song, King is still very much alive.

Brian Irwin is a freelance travel writer and photographer in New Hampshire.

