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flying high

 Beautiful Bahamas by mail boat
Queenstown uncovered – all the action off the slopes

CRUISING THE

The colourful island lifestyle is best appreciated at sea level from a slow boat.

BAHAMAS

PHOTOGRAPHY WILLIAM MEPPEN WORDS ANDY HARRIS



CATCH OF THE DAY
Brendal Stevens's son
and a friend proudly
display their trophies
after a day's fishing.



QUAINT

Left: wooden chapel is part of the Sea Shell Club which offers simple accommodation at Nettie's Different of Abaco, an eco-tourism resort. Below left: simple fare served on the mail boat includes fresh lobster.



IN MEMORIAM
Statues of notable Green Turtle Cay residents decorate the town square. Above: beach basketball is open to all comers on Little Exuma Island.



almost as an afterthought. Room service at dawn consisted of a loud cry of "Come and get your bacon and grits" from Stick.

An hour later, we arrived at Great Abaco's Marsh Harbour. The captain of the mail boat, Dean Roscoe, was goading the sleepy crew into action. As they began winching a creaking car onto the quiet dock, we left to visit Nettie's Different of Abaco, a fascinating eco-tourism resort at Casurina Point.

Nettie Symonette, the enterprising local owner, has created a 120-hectare wildlife enclave out of wasteland and swamp that attracts endangered flamingos, herons and kingfishers. Iguanas, wild boar and peacocks also lurk in the undergrowth,

Islands blessed with legendary beaches and coral reefs.

and a lake close to the sea is home to darting tarpon and fierce mosquitoes. Along the pristine beach, the Sea Shell Beach Club offers simple accommodation decorated with driftwood and seashell furniture. Nettie is a talented cook and herbalist, and her extensive garden is filled with tropical trees and shrubs such as pigeon plum, allspice, and sugar apple, which she uses for food sources and her legendary cure-all bush teas. She makes a mean pumpkin rice, johnnycake [a skillet-fried flat bread] and chicken souse spiked with limes and peppers.

The next day we left for Great Guana Cay and Green Turtle Cay. At Great Guana Cay, most of the mail boat's provisions were unloaded. It was great fun watching the local store owner stack cases of Californian strawberries, Dole lettuce, Moody Creek potatoes, frozen pizza bases and Kellogg's Froot Loops into his tiny truck. The island has a population of only 150 people and most of this familiar supermarket produce seemed destined for the holiday homes of US citizens.

Porpoises raced the mail boat through the shallow straits between Whale and No Name Cays as we neared New Plymouth on Turtle Green Cay. Once famous for its shipbuilding, the town is famed today for its pastel-painted New England-style wooden saltbox houses and the memorable Albert Lowe Museum, which reveals life as it was for the original Loyalist settlers who fled the US in the 1780s as a result of the Revolutionary War. At the Green Turtle Club, Canadian chef Michael Howell manages to incorporate delicious local seafood such as stone crab, mahi mahi, and conch into his daily changing menu, served in a stunning location beside a marina.

Brendal Stevens, who operates Brendal's Dive Centre next to this resort, runs some exciting boat trips to nearby cays. Even if you find the incessant reggae music too loud, the sea life is impressive. Reef sharks and southern stingrays, hogfish and black grouper hide in the thick coral as Brendal and his athletic son dive overboard to spear lobster and snapper for lunch. On the beach at Manjack Cay, where the boat moors for a picnic lunch, everyone gathers firewood to cook the seafood, which is briefly marinated in lime