

Harbour Island: Back to Basics



Although Harbour Island has one of the most spectacular beaches you will ever find—three miles of soft pink sand, crystal-clear turquoise water and gentle waves—when people talk about the place, it is its character (and characters) that get prime air time. This tiny Bahamian island, a former British colony, has a cult following, and its fans brim with opinions and strongly worded advice for new initiates: there are personalities to meet, rituals to follow, dishes to taste. You *must* try the fresh conch ceviche at Queen Conch and go snorkeling with Valentine's and paddle boarding in the harbor to see the marine life. You can't miss the homemade croissants at Arthur's, ricotta pancakes at The Landing, lobster quesadillas at Sip Sip and the catch of the day at the Rock House. Blue Rooster has the best caftans, Sugar Mill the cutest sandals. And when you land, make sure you get Fine Threads as your cab driver to the dock. A much-beloved and dashing local handsome fixture for the last decade, FT earned his nickname by always being dressed to the nines in a suit and tie. Everyone considers him a personal friend. (He also has a fine farm that supplies local restaurants with tomatoes, avocados and arugula.)

What is so astonishing about the island is how, despite its natural beauty and high-profile following, it has managed to escape the twin curses of commercialism and luxury sameness. In most parts of the world, a beach like this would be chock-a-block with concrete high-rises, chain stores and corporate five-star resorts with all the bells and whistles. Instead, the island has stubbornly retained a rustic simplicity, offering a main town with a handful of delicious restaurants, a sprinkling of chic shops and a couple of low-key hotels. Nothing is too fancy or tricked out; it's all got an easy, preppy, laid-back vibe and strong sense of place.

It helps that it is so small. The island is only a half-mile wide, with the harbor on the west side and the pink-sand beach on the east. Most of the top hotels are on the beach; some (such as *Coral Sands*) offer accommodations where you can walk straight from your cottage onto the sand. On the harbor side is Dunmore Town, which is about ten blocks by three blocks. Its narrow streets are lined with palm trees and adorable gingerbread houses with white picket fences and shutters the color of sherbet: strawberry, lemon, lime. Most everyone gets everywhere by foot, bike or golf cart, and everyone you pass waves hi. Chickens, dogs and cats wander the streets. Local kids walk home from school in their proper navy uniforms. There's a warmth and friendliness to the island, and the British colonial style imparts a sense of going back in time. If you prize luxury trappings and five-star comforts, this is not the place for you, but if you seek authenticity and barefoot charm, you'll know you've found a very special hideaway.

— Eliza Harris on February 3, 2015

Share: [f](#) [t](#) [p](#) [e](#)

COLUMN

Just Back From

INTEREST

*Beach Getaways
Family*

DESTINATION

Harbour Island

QUOTABLE

“The island has stubbornly retained a rustic simplicity, offering a main town with a handful of delicious restaurants, a sprinkling of chic shops and a couple of low-key hotels. Nothing is too fancy or tricked out; it's all got an easy, preppy, laid-back vibe and strong sense of place.”

RELATED HOTELS

