

HOMES  
YOU HAVE  
TO SEE P. 57

MOVE TO THE CARIBBEAN  
Where, How, When, How Much P. 87

MOST *INSANE*  
ISLAND TO  
LIVE ON  
P. 72

# Islands<sup>®</sup>

## 20 BEST ISLANDS TO LIVE ON

HIT THE  
RESET  
BUTTON

P. 26

START A  
BUSINESS

P. 42

RETIRE  
EARLY

P. 50

RAISE A  
FAMILY

P. 70

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SEE WHERE ROATAN RANKS

P. 40



**START A BUSINESS**  
[ BEST ISLANDS TO LIVE ON ]

# Bahamas on a *moving* scale

Stay put. Make the move. Not sure.  
The idea of living on a still-developing  
island in the Bahamas has its moments  
— good, bad and in between.

Story and Photos by Lori Barbely



Staying in a condo or villa (\$1,225+ weekly at [squiresestatebahamas.com](http://squiresestatebahamas.com)) might offer a glimpse into the future of Eleuthera.



It's no secret that someday I want to move to an island where I can be a full-time wedding photographer. It's also no secret that the Bahamas haven't been at the top of my list. Too flat. Too, well, not Hawaiian. But an opportunity has come up. Four days on the little-known island of Eleuthera. Blue skies. Sandy shores. It's a quick flight from Orlando. All leading into the perfect island test, with gloves off and flip-flops on.

WHERE IS ... ANYTHING?

No, I wasn't expecting a Target or Starbucks on Eleuthera. But after driving for 15 minutes I haven't seen any cute coffee shops or roadside markets either. This is nothing like Nassau. The place is still stripped down to its original core. My car, rented from a local since there's no Avis or Hertz, splits the narrow island as I follow the rental guy's advice to drive "down north."

There's a high-end clientele somewhere. I've been told Lenny Kravitz and Mariah Carey own homes here. They might want a coffee shop. Or a wedding photographer. Which is why I want to chat with a local entrepreneur, Captain Julius, who runs Fishbone Tours.

But I'm lost. My directions came from Captain Julius: "Make a left at the one-pump gas station."

I consider knocking on a door when my phone rings. It's Julius. "I bet you're lost."

He finds me with his own car and leads me to the dock where he runs his on-water adventures. I have a feeling this isn't the first time he's had to do this.

I NEED A SLASH

Captain Julius tells me he's a musician/painter/boat captain. "Everyone here has a slash on their resume," he says as

we harvest conch from a watery garden offshore. "It's how we make ends meet."

We talk about the opportunities the island presents (low competition, creating a niche) and the challenges (lack of street signs among them). I'm just not sure what my slash could be.

So I set up dinner plans with a woman named Mish, the owner of Boy Meets Girl Weddings, the only full-service wedding planner on the island. Over seafood platters at the Rainbow Inn, I learn that Mish handles about 25 weddings a year. Most couples hire photographers from Nassau or the U.S. To make a living without a slash, I'd have to shoot nearly every wedding Mish plans.

"French Leave resort will be opening soon," she says, sensing my shifting thoughts. "It should be a leading venue for destination weddings."

It could also be an opportunity for a "photographer/resort employee."

THUMB OR HYUNDAI

Eleuthera is so narrow I'm often within walking distance of both an east-coast beach and a west-coast beach. That's a plus. It's also 110 miles long, and a good hour from the south end of the island to the centrally located Governor's Harbor — assuming reliable transportation.

As I'm coming back from Lighthouse Beach, my car breaks down. It's late. There are no streetlights. The city girl in me starts to freak out because there's

Early-arriving expats call Buttonwood Reserve (far left) home. Most of the island, like Lighthouse Beach, is still in raw form.



WHAT IT TAKES TO MOVE HERE



**IF YOU'RE CURIOUS** The best route to Eleuthera is from Fort Lauderdale, with a stop in George Town. It takes 3 1/2 hours to cover 250 miles, and keeps the place under-traveled and under-populated (11,000 est.).

**IF YOU'RE SERIOUS** Business turf has been claimed in bonefishing, diving and eating. Unless you crush a superb mango mojito and can compete with local restaurateurs like Pammy, Lanny and Daddy Joe, then you'd better find another niche.



**GIANT STEP** Condos start around \$600K. "It's expensive to get materials here," says developer Matt Simon, "and there are few repairmen." That's either a warning or an invitation to start a business.



no AAA to come give me a tow. As I'm assessing my options, a local pulls over. "You need a ride?" he asks.

I've been told Eleuthera has a very low crime rate. I've seen lots of people hitchhiking, and not a single auto-repair shop. So I hop into the truck. The incident raises another question about how I'd get around if I lived here.

*Because of my camera gear, hitchhiking to weddings wouldn't be the best practice.*

Getting Around  
Stay  
Move



Because of the amount of camera gear I lug around and the necessity of being punctual, hitchhiking to weddings wouldn't be the best business practice.

"Nice truck," I say. It's a dual cab and clean, far different from the weathered cars I've seen around the island.

"Cars are expensive," the guy says. "Ya gotta pay to ship a car over from Nassau. And there's the 40 percent import duty."

As I get out at the Buttonwood condos, he adds one more thing: "You need to be your own mechanic too." I know how to put air in the tires. Beyond that I'd be lost ... and hitchhiking. The answer for me is to buy a newer car that wouldn't break down halfway to wherever.

THE PRICE OF ISLAND LIFE

Eating out is a nice indulgence on trips. But in real life, and on a real budget, it isn't exactly realistic. So, with detailed directions, I find a little market not far from the condo. Among the limited selections are items like Oreos and Fruity Pebbles. I stick to basics. A gallon of milk, \$4.65. A dozen eggs, \$2.60. A bunch of grapes, \$6.50. The prices are similar to those in Orlando. They'd almost balance out the \$600/month electric bill I've been told about. Almost.

Stay  
Cost of Living  
Move

RISK AND UNCERTAIN RETURN

By week's end I'm "mixed up like conch salad" — a local term that sums up my uncertainty. I arrived with skepticism, but now wonder if Eleuthera is Maui in 1960, with ripe opportunities for anyone willing to venture in first. The 37-cottage French Leave resort will create jobs. Condos like Buttonwood will demand infrastructure. The place will need markets, car dealers and cute coffee shops. But a wedding photographer/tire-pressure checker? Maybe not yet.

● 5 EASIEST MOVES: [islands.com/bitlo](http://islands.com/bitlo)

Tourism hasn't taken off, so even solid business owners like Fishbones Tours can't take employees off the "slash" way of life.

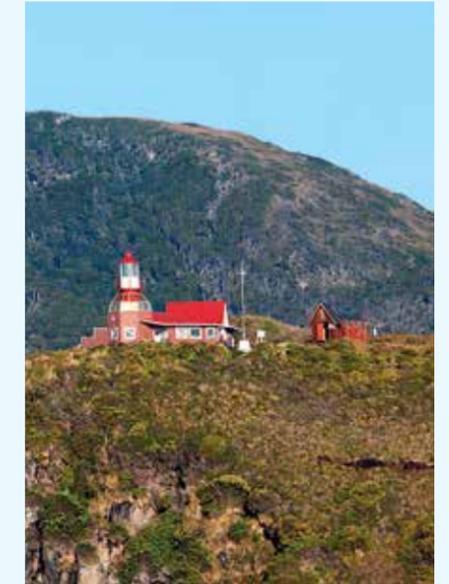
JOBS  
AROUND THE WORLD



CIGAR ROLLER/CUBA ➔ Not exclusive to Cuba certainly, but many of the best rollers still come from Cuba. It's an art to get the filling and wrapping leaves just right to allow the free flow of smoke.



MODEL BOAT BUILDER/BEQUIA ➔ Using old hand tools, it can take three months to turn tree limbs into detailed replicas of the island's famous whaling boats. Art at its finest pays less than you might think.



CARETAKER/ISLA HERSCHEL ➔ The Chilean Navy deploys sailors at the fabled southern tip of South America, aka the end of the world. Brace for extreme weather and loneliness. And bring a book.



PEARL DIVER/JAPAN ➔ They hold their breath two minutes at a time while scouring the deep for pearl-bearing oysters. Also, traditionally they did it naked, adding to the ... mystique. The art may be dying.



CORK EXTRACTOR/SARDINIA ➔ Not the guy who opens your wine bottle — that's a sommelier. This extractor uses an ax to cut the bark off cork-oak trees. Sardinia produces 80 percent of Italy's cork.



GAUGUIN HOSTESS/TAHITI ➔ Yes, she can dance and sing and make you happy to be on board the Paul Gauguin cruise ship. But beware, she can also crack coconuts with that same smile on her face.

FROM LEFT, TOP: CHARLES O. CECIL/ALAMY; JON WHITTLE; KIP EVANS/ALAMY; BOTTOM: CHRISTIAN GOUPI/AGE FOTOSTOCK; UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/DEAGOSTINI/ALAMY; COURTESY PAUL GAUGUIN CRUISES