

The New Queen  
of Honky-Tonk

Flip Pallot's  
Wild Wisdom

West Palm Beach's  
Antique Row

# GARDEN & GUN

SOUL *of the* SOUTH

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THE SOUTH'S

## 10 Best Food Towns

Where to Eat Now in Charleston, New Orleans, Nashville, and More

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*The*  
World's Most  
Surprising  
Gundog



**TASTY TRIO**  
Biscuits with shaved ham  
and pepper jelly

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# Bahamian Beauty

Even amid the pink-sand beaches, pastel colonial homes, and easy elegance of Harbour Island, the Bahama House turns heads *by* NIC BROWN

ALTHOUGH THE BAHAMA HOUSE OCCUPIES an immaculately restored circa-1800 compound on picturesque Harbour Island, the most remarkable part of this newly opened hotel has nothing to do with the “house.”

“The hook?” says the general manager, Anne Ward. “It’s the people.”

Two days into my visit, I’m catching on. I’m on a boat, zipping along the Devil’s Backbone, a shallow coral reef off the northern coast of Eleuthera—separated from Harbour Island by a narrow channel. At the helm is the Bahama House boat captain, Kristano Davis, and beside me two of the hotel’s “experience managers”—island native Richard Bullard and Italian marine biologist Giorgia Ravilli. Ebulient, kind, and funny, the pair are on top of everything before you even know you want it.

They’ve just taken me snorkeling with loggerhead turtles, hoisted me into a coastline cave, and jumped off a bridge with me in nearby Spanish Wells (an islet just off Eleuthera’s northwest coast), and now we’re pulling up to a remote pink-sand beach where a Bahamian wedding is taking place. As we swim ashore, Bullard calls out to friends.

“You know where the blue hole is?” he asks a man. “We catch a ride?”

The man, who like everyone here seems to know Bullard, invites us into the back of his pickup truck, and then at high speed—*while in reverse*—flies down a remote dirt road. At one point I dive into the bed to avoid being whacked by a limb.

“You Google what to do around here,” Bullard says under his breath as we climb out, “and this isn’t going to come up.”

At the end of a narrow path appears Sapphire Hole, a limestone cavern that drops twenty feet off a cliff into one of the Bahamas’ storied “blue holes.” Crystal clear and more than a hundred feet deep, the water glows as if lit from within. I tremble at the edge for a minute before mustering the courage to jump; then Bullard does a backflip in behind me. After we pull ourselves out on a rope, he plucks a mango from a tree, slices off a piece, and says, “I try to show you how I grew up.”

Bullard isn’t the only one who gives me a glimpse of a life lived on the island. As I’m out bonefishing in the red mangroves off North Eleuthera one morning with Captain Patrick Roberts, a native who’s been fishing the flats his whole life, he spots fish that, even ten feet away, I still can’t manage to see for myself. “I’ve got the eyes,” he says, citing his years of practice, and laughing as I squint.

Operated by Eleven Experience, an adventure-based lodging company, the Bahama House prides itself on arranging personalized itineraries for each guest, leaning heavily on the skills of people like Bullard, Ravilli, and Roberts to make the experience more than just a few nights at a luxury hotel. That’s not to say the hotel itself doesn’t have its charms.

Only one block from the harbor, in the heart of colonial Dunmore Town, the Bahama House hides behind wide plantation shutters and a pale pink wall. The main house, which has three suites, was originally a mercantile shop for schooner builders in the 1800s. Around it are clustered two two-bedroom cottages and a four-room annex, centered around a coral stone swimming pool out of a Slim Aarons

dream. Semisecluded outdoor lounge areas are tucked into surrounding terraces, all enveloped by bougainvillea and Confederate jasmine beneath a canopy of palms and frangipani heavy with blood orange blossoms and foot-long seedpods.

Furnished in bamboo and rattan, the interiors have a vintage feel with modern touches. Unique notes such as a pair of 1960s peacock chairs, a rum bar stocked with dozens of small-batch Caribbean varieties, an antique shell-encrusted lamp, and a cabinet filled with

coral make the space feel more like the home of a stylish friend than a hotel. Designed by Blake Pike of the London-based studio No. 12 Interiors, the Bahama House’s decor incorporates a good deal of work from island craftsmen and women. “Alice made the straw baskets, those paintings came from Princess Street Gallery,” Ward says, looking around. “Patrice made the mirrors, local carpenters made the orchid boxes...”

The most local touch of all, though, might be Bob the cat. “He was part of the property before we even came here,” Ward says as the orange tabby eats breakfast on the terrace. “Now he’s Garfield.”

I’m not left wanting at mealtime either. In-house chef Nikoya Lightbourne, a Bahamian native, draws on local fishermen as well as her grandmother’s recipes to craft creative dishes such as lobster eggs Benedict and stone crab avocado mousse.

Later on our boat ride that afternoon, Captain Davis is motoring north through the harbor in his skiff, Bullard beside him at the helm. The stereo is turned up all the way, and out pumps “(I’ve Had)

The Time of My Life,” the theme song from *Dirty Dancing*. Together, the two men sing along at the top of their lungs. Incredulous, I start to laugh at this ridiculous scene. Then I consider the turquoise waters around me, the cold Kalik in hand, and the good company. These guys, I think, just might be singing the truth. ☺



#### ISLAND SALUTE

Clear Bahamian surf laps Harbour Island’s pink sand; the Commonwealth flag flutters in the breeze.



**SUPPORTING CAST**  
From top, left to right:  
A shady spot on a  
Bahama House veranda;  
the compound's central  
courtyard and pool;  
hunting for bonefish;  
the hotel's interior Rhum Bar,  
stocked with small-batch  
Caribbean labels; a  
rooster roams free.



Elleven Experience (top left, bottom left and center)