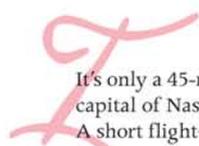
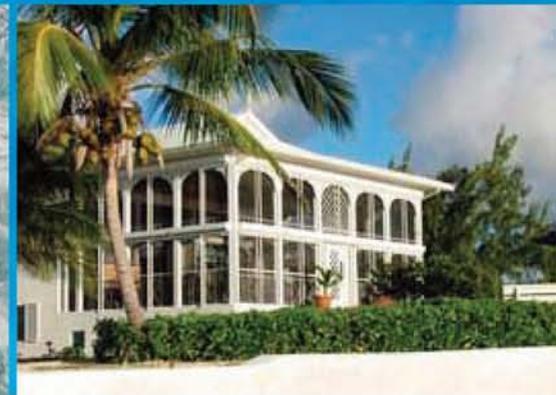
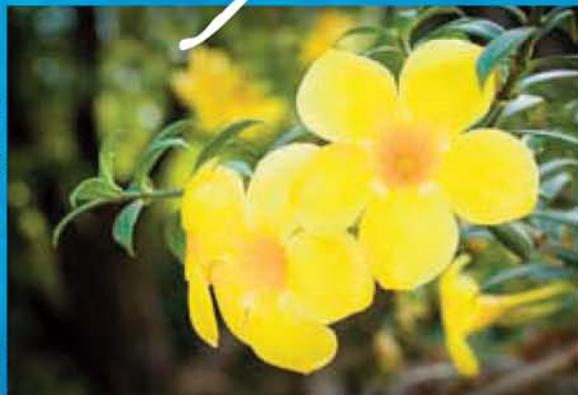


Long Island, Bahamas

An Unspoiled Paradise

By Wendy & Rob Lindsay



It's only a 45-minute flight from the bustling capital of Nassau, Bahamas, to Long Island. A short flight—but it's a world away. For us, Long Island is the most enchanting, laid-back and unforgettable of all the Out Islands.

Its western coast has inviting beaches, tranquil bays and some of the longest uninhabited stretches of silky sand that remain in the Bahamas. By contrast, the eastern side features dramatic rocky cliffs that descend to meet the crashing waves of the Atlantic.

Running more or less down the centre of the island is the Queen's Highway, a paved road of approximately 120 kilometres that links the 35 settlements scattered along the length of the island.

The 4,000 islanders are some of the friendliest, most relaxed folks you'll ever meet. And we were surprised to even find a few North

Americans counting themselves among the locals in this Bahamian paradise.

The first was our host, Robert Wright, an entrepreneur from Victoria, B.C., and the owner of Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort & Villas on the north end of the island. An avid fisherman, he fell in love with the island on his first fishing trip in 1991. Returning, he transformed what had been an abandoned private club into a charming, low-key beachfront resort with 20 single-storey villas and 16 two-bedroom luxury villas a stone's throw from the sapphire sea. Wright is justifiably proud of the spectacular four-mile beach, rated one of the top 10 beaches in the world. "Other folks say they have a sugary beach," he confides. "But, confidentially, we think sugary is fairly coarse — ours is like talcum powder."

Photography, Lindsay Editorial

The two-storey clubhouse is the centre of activity, with the resort office and a shop selling local crafts and vibrant Andros batiks. During sunset cocktail hour, the clubhouse bar overlooking the sea is a swirl of European, North American and Bahamian accents as yet another sensational sunset paints the sky. Over dinner in the upstairs restaurant, Wright is continually greeted by guests — not surprising since upward of 50 per cent are repeat visitors or have heard of the resort through word of mouth. They, too, love this place and the fishing, snorkelling, scuba diving, nature cruises, sailing and island tours, as well as the chance to spend a few relaxing moments with a good book on "Bob's beach."

The resort takes its name from Christopher Columbus's flagship. An impressive mural, by B.C. artist Harry Heine, depicts Columbus's

three ships crashing through the waves, the warm sun on their sails. The mural inspired us to do some exploring of our own, so the staff arranged for us to rent a car. A 15-minute drive and a 10-minute hike brought us to the high cliffs on the northern tip of the island — an awesome view. The rocky cliffs drop sharply to the north coast and to the inner bay where Columbus is said to have landed. This was his second landfall in the New World, after San Salvador, and became a regular stopping point for "sweet water." In days gone by, there was a spring the islanders called Columbus Well.

Then the island dozed in the sun until its second wave of migration — Loyalist plantation owners fleeing the American Revolution. For a short time, cotton and pineapples flourished. Then, the soil depleted, the plantations

Cape Santa Maria clubhouse/dining room. (Left) A starfish from this diver's paradise. (Far left) Intricate straw weaving, an island speciality. Yellow alder (*Tecoma stans*) is the national flower.