



THE BAHAMAS – SOUTHERN EXUMA CAYS

GUEST HANDBOOK





TOUR OVERVIEW

Sun, sand and fun! These tours have been designed to provide the perfect balance between kayaking and time spent lounging under a palm tree, snorkeling and enjoying all that the Bahamas has to offer.

The Southern Exuma Cays Expedition takes us into many places too shallow for larger boats, including a mix of mangrove and beach habitats, by an impressive blowhole, islands inhabited by iguanas and to areas formerly used as sea salt collecting flats. This is a well-rounded and approachable expedition-style tour for those with a sense of adventure with some kayaking experience. This tour starts and ends in George Town (GGT) on Great Exuma Island.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE	Sea kayak expedition & rustic beach camping (camp to camp style)
LENGTH	6 days, 5 nights
GROUP SIZE	Maximum 10 guests and 2 guides
ACTIVITY LEVEL	Easy to moderate (depends on the winds), suitable for most paddlers with some kayaking experience through experienced kayakers
HIGHLIGHTS	Paddling among sandy cays, Bahamian culture, wildlife, warm water snorkeling, beachcombing, small group travel
WILDLIFE	Opportunities to view iguanas, stingrays, sea turtles, reef fish and more
INCLUDES	All kayaking & safety equipment, camping equipment, qualified and personable guides, delicious food and non-alcoholic drinks from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 6
NOT INCLUDED	Flights, airport transfers, hotel accommodation, insurance or gratuities

MEETING LOCATIONS

PRE TRIP MEETING - DAY PRIOR

We will meet you at 6 pm at Splashes Bar and Grill located inside Hideaways at Palm Bay Hotel in George Town for our welcome orientation.

TOUR START (DAY ONE)

If staying in or north of George Town, we can pick you up at your hotel. Times will be arranged at the pre-trip meeting the night prior - likely between 8:30 - 9 am. For locations south of George Town, please contact us and we can discuss further.

ITINERARY

We are so glad that you will be joining us for this incredible adventure. This route will take us into the stunning Exuma Cays.

DAY PRIOR

There are direct flights to George Town from several hubs including Toronto, Dallas, Miami and a few other places. Alternatively, you can fly into Nassau first and catch a short regional flight to George Town (GGT). Grab a taxi to your choice of accommodation and settle in. We will meet you at Splashes Bar and Grill for our welcome orientation at 6 pm. Here we will discuss our plans for the next few days and get to know the others in the group. Please note expenses on this day are your responsibility.

DAY 1

We will pick you up at your hotel if it is in George Town or north (other locations south of George Town to be discussed - please note it is a big island!) Times will be arranged at the meeting the night prior, likely between 8:30 and 9 am. We will then take all our equipment and kayaks and transfer to the north end of Great Exuma to the village of Barraterre. After some kayaking instruction, we will pack our kayaks and get ready to start paddling. Once launched, we will kayak towards the Brigantine Cays. These mostly uninhabited Cays are surrounded by very shallow sandy areas which dry out at low tide. This makes it a great place for exploring by kayak as most boats cannot access this shallow area. Our destination for tonight is either Long Cay (apx 7 miles) or Brigantine Cay (apx 9 miles). Once there we will set up camp, snorkel and relax.

DAY 2

After breakfast we will pack up camp and continue exploring the Brigantine Cays. The Cays are home to several different types of mangrove forests. If the tides are right we will paddle through some of these incredibly important and diverse ecosystems which are often nursery habitat for all sorts of fish species, small sharks, turtles and many different types of birds. Our destination for this evening is either Norman's Pond Cay (apx 7 miles) or Leaf Cay (apx 9 miles).

DAY 3

Today there are many options including exploring an old salt collecting pond and protected mangrove forests on Norman's Pond Cay, kayaking through some of the more exposed islands if the weather permits, snorkeling at a great reef, and exploring a Cay that is home to iguanas. These iguanas are friendly and curious and really quite interesting to watch. Tonight we will either

camp in the same spot again or depending on the group desires and weather, move campsites.

DAY 4

Today we will move campsites and head towards Rat Cay, apx 7 miles (don't worry the island doesn't live up to it's name!) Along the way, we will stop at an absolutely picture perfect beach for a stretch break as this is also the trailhead for a short walk to the highest point in the Exuma Cays (123ft or 37m). From here we enjoy a great view out over the Southern Exuma Cays and usually a nice cooling breeze. We will arrive at camp in time for snorkeling or lounging on the beach with a book.

DAY 5

Today we will likely keep our camp on Rat Cay and use it as a base for exploring several of the nearby Cays. If tides and weather permit, we will head to Square Rock Cay and try some snorkeling from our kayaks or a nearby beach. Then to Boysie Cay to check out a blow-hole and watch the power of the ocean on the exposed side of this perfect little piece of sand. The afternoon will be leisurely enjoying more snorkeling here or a nap on the beach. Then back to our campsite on Rat Cay for our final evening in the cays.

DAY 6

After breakfast we will pack up our kayaks one last time and paddle from Rat Cay back to Barraterre on Great Exuma Island. Here we will be met by our transportation and will transfer back to Georgetown to the accommodation of your choice. This brings the tour to an official close.

Often groups like to share one last meal and few cold drinks together to celebrate the completion of an excellent trip at one of the local restaurants. Meals (other than breakfast and lunch) and accommodation this day are NOT included in the tour price. Airport transfers are not included in the tour cost, but can be easily arranged with your hotel.

PLEASE NOTE

The itinerary is weather and group dependent. While weather in the Bahamas is generally lovely, occasionally weather systems can pass through producing rain and strong winds which may require us to alter our initially intended route. As with travel to any international destination, logistics are vulnerable to weather and delays, so please plan your arrival to George Town with plenty of time for delays, and plan onward travel and post-trip obligations accordingly.



GETTING TO AND FROM THE BAHAMAS

For this trip, you need to get to George Town (there are a number of George Towns in the world - the airport code you are looking for is GGT). There are some direct flights from various locations, but most connect through Nassau and then fly onwards to George Town. We highly recommend arriving at least one day in advance of your tour start and spending the night on the island on the day your tour ends. Flights can be a little unpredictable (another reason to have travel insurance!) and this takes some of the stress out of travel days.

When you arrive in Georgetown there are taxis that meet each flight and have set rates for various destinations. No bartering is needed in the Bahamas.

WHERE TO STAY

Below are a list of options we think would be suitable for our kayaking guests. There are also a fair number of vacation rentals and upscale resorts on the islands if you would like an alternative to a hotel style room. The following have been chosen because they are simple, clean and in convenient locations to access the downtown areas as well as our pre-tour meeting location (6 pm the night before your tour at Splashes Bar and Grill at Hideaways). Accommodation in the Bahamas can be expensive, so please plan for this.

HIDEAWAYS AT PALM BAY HOTEL AND RESORT
hideawayspalmbay.com | Convenient location only a 5-minute taxi from downtown and the location of our pre-tour meeting the night before your tour. On the ocean with 2 pools and many amenities. Has a variety of rooms including suites with kitchens. Also offers a free shuttle for guests several times a day into the town center.

BLUE HARBOUR VILLA

blueharbourvilla.com | Marina has a 2 bedroom villa and studio suite available for rent at Hideaways. She offers a 15% discount to Spirit of the West guests. When inquiring, let her know you are visiting with Spirit of the West and she will apply discount. She also offers a 2-night minimum stay by request (typically 3-night).

Airbnb links: [2 Bedroom Villa](#) and [Studio Suite](#)

SAPPHIRE GARDENS TOWNHOMES

booking.com | One to three-bedroom villas with private kitchens and close beach access. Convenient location just across the street from Hideaways.

EXUMA YACHT CLUB

exumayachtclub.wixsite.com | A few rooms available in a convenient location right in downtown George Town. There is a great restaurant and bar on site, so it's not the quietest option.

REGATTA POINT

regattapointbahamas.com | A home with several suites, located in the middle of the harbour in George Town. Not an overly private location, but convenient for access to the downtown shops and is located on the ocean. Free use of kayaks and small sailboats.

PEACE AND PLENTY HOTEL

peaceandplenty.com | A classic hotel in downtown George Town on the ocean with pool.

MARSHALLS GUEST HOUSE

No website available. Book by email or phone: marshallsguesthouse@gmail.com / 242-336-2328 | For the budget conscious traveller, this is one of the cheapest options we have found. Very simple, hostel style accommodation.

AIRBNB / VRBO

airbnb.com / vrbo.com

Various options are available through these vacation rental websites.



TRAVEL TIPS FOR THE BAHAMAS

Travel to the Bahamas is fairly simple, quick and straightforward. At Spirit of the West Adventures we aim to make your travel experience as relaxed and comfortable as possible, and below we have outlined a few of the tips and tricks we've learned over the years as well as the basic information to help you plan your journey and get the most out of your time in the Bahamas.

BEFORE YOU GO

It is important to take a few easy precautions that will help to make your trip run smoothly and help you get over any obstacles you may face. Do the following before leaving and your trip will be that much more relaxing knowing that you're prepared:

- Ensure your passport is current and will remain valid for 6 months after your return date.
- Visitors from most countries including Canada, the USA, the EU and Australia do not require a visa for entry, just a valid passport and return air ticket. For entry requirements for specific countries visit bahamas.com/travelupdates. Please check this website periodically to stay up to date on any changes.
- Spirit of the West Adventures requires you to purchase travel and medical insurance. This will cover you in the event of needing medical help while abroad and will cover any expenses incurred from unexpected changes in travel plans or circumstances out of your control (i.e. missed flights because of weather, lost baggage, family illness, or illness or injury). There are various levels of travel insurance for sale and it is often worth reading the fine print to ensure it is the right coverage for you. Caution: often the coverage provided by credit card companies is minimal. Ensuring adequate coverage is your responsibility.
- Make sure your inoculations are current and carry a copy of your vaccination record with you when traveling.
- Check in with your credit / debit card provider to ensure your cards can be used internationally.
- Cash can be very helpful to have on hand as credit card purchases will be charged a surcharge.
- Foreigners leaving the Bahamas pay a \$20 USD departure fee which is often included in your ticket price.
- Send yourself an email with a scanned copy of your passport, immunization record, flight details, and important numbers including travel insurance policy numbers, credit card numbers (make sure you leave out a few numbers you will easily remember in case someone else accesses your email) as well as contact details for the company in case of loss or theft. This way if you happened to lose your bags you can go to the internet and have all the information handy. It is also a good idea to leave all of the above with a trusted friend or relative at home who could help you out in a pinch.
- Invest in some good sunglasses complete with a strap as well as a sunhat with strap that will help you enjoy each day on the water and protect you from overexposure to the sun.
- Please do not bring any fresh fruit or veggies or animal products. You can bring most packaged foods (your favourite granola bar etc.) just remember to tell customs that you have them.
- Please don't travel if you are experiencing any symptoms of illness as medical facilities are limited in this remote area.



THE BASICS

TIME

The Bahamas is on GMT -5 from December to April and GMT -4 from March until November.

LANGUAGE

The official language is English. Patois can be found around the islands and Creole is sometimes spoken amongst Haitian immigrants.

ELECTRICITY

The electrical current is 120 volts and 60 Mhz. The pin shape is the same as North America: 2 flat and a rounded ground. Once on tour, there will be no electricity available, so please plan accordingly with a battery pack if you'd like to charge your phone.

TIPPING

Generally 15% is standard in restaurants, tourist facilities and generally for most services. Most restaurants include a 15% charge in your bill, so double check to ensure it isn't already included. Tip taxi drivers 15%, bellhops minimum of \$1 per bag and housekeepers \$2/day minimum. If you would like to express your appreciation to the guides through a gratuity, such recognition would be enthusiastically received. The industry standard for tipping is approximately 10% per person of the trip cost.

INTERNET AND PHONE

Wi-Fi is plentiful, but often at a charge. The country code for The Bahamas is +242. You also need to dial this code when making inter-island calls. There are no local area codes. If calling within an island, you only need to dial the 7 digit local number. To make calls to outside the country from The Bahamas you need to dial 011, then the applicable country code, and then the number. The mobile (cellular) coverage is also quite good, but beware of high roaming charges. You can purchase local SIM cards if you have an unlocked phone or an eSIM in advance.

CURRENCY/MONEY

The Bahamian Dollar (BS\$) is linked one to one with the US dollar. You can use US cash most places and change will be given in either currency.

Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) are common in the larger centers. They are more scarce in the smaller Out Islands or if island hopping. There is an ATM in George Town, but also bring cash in case it's down.

If you have a bank card from a major network such as Cirrus or Plus and a 4-digit pin code it should work in the ATM's here.

Visa, MasterCard and to a lesser extent American Express credit cards are accepted at most hotels, larger restaurants and shops. There is however often a 5% credit card fee charged for using your credit card to pay for things in the Bahamas. Credit cards can also come in handy for cash advances from ATMs in case you have any problems with your debit/ bank card. This being said, cash can be very helpful to avoid any credit card surcharges.

TRANSPORTATION

Keep in mind that this is a big island and if you plan on doing much exploring, a rental car can be really helpful. Most companies will bring a car to you at your accommodation if you only want it after your kayak trip. Taxis can be called, but can be expensive. Thompson's Car Rentals seems to be the most economical and they have an office next to the airport.

SAFETY

The Bahamas is a relatively safe and enjoyable place to travel. However, the usual petty crime of any city in the world can be found in the major centers including Nassau, but if using common sense and keeping your wits about you, you are unlikely to have any problems. Where we will be kayaking and exploring in the Out

Islands crime is almost unheard of. Being discreet about your wealth will go a long way in keeping you out of trouble – minimize your risks by not wearing flashy jewelry, carrying a wallet full of cash or having a giant camera dangling around your neck at night. A money wallet for carrying your passport and valuables close to your body helps give you a sense of comfort when transiting in busy places (and makes it virtually impossible for pickpockets to take your important documents). Carrying only the money you will need for the day in your wallet or pocket helps make you a less desirable target for theft.

After dark, when in doubt take a cab. Most restaurants etc. can call you a cab or they are readily found on most streets. Rates are set by the government.

To reach the police, fire or ambulances dial 911 or 919 from any phone, mobile or payphone. Never try to bribe the police in the Bahamas.

MEDICAL INSURANCE

Ensure you have adequate travel medical insurance (mandatory for this trip). No one ever plans to get sick, but it sometimes happens and having good coverage including the option of returning to your home country for continued treatment is comforting to say the least. Credit cards often offer some coverage, but often have low limits or only partial coverage for a limited number of days. Health care in Nassau is quite good, but expensive so come well covered.

HEALTH

We ask that if you are feeling ill that you don't travel and/or tell your guide immediately so steps can be taken to ensure your safety and that of the group. Please ensure you have adequate travel coverage in case you have to cancel, quarantine, have your tour interrupted or need medical assistance.

Entry requirements to the Bahamas are evolving over time, so be sure to check the [Bahamas Travel website](#) for more details.

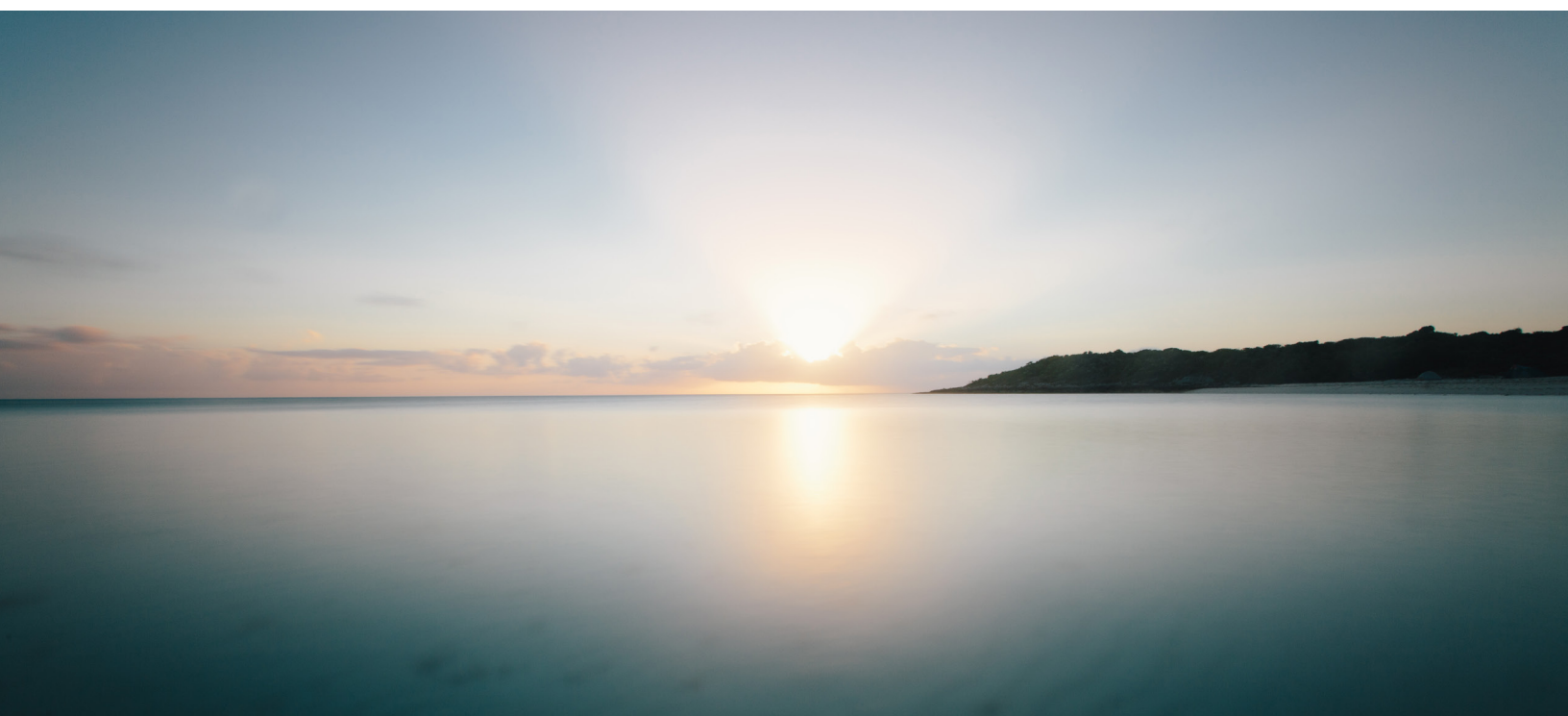
While not required, we strongly recommend vaccination for COVID, measles, rubella, polio, hepatitis A & B and tetanus (you need a tetanus booster ever 10 years). Spirit of the West asks all guests to have a current tetanus/polio/diphtheria shot.

SANITATION

We will be using a portable toilet set up in a private place on this tour to pack out our waste for safe disposal. Your guides will carry a toiletry bag, and will designate a private area for you to answer nature's calling.

Our guides will go over these details before the tour and if you have any concerns while on tour please do not be shy to ask your guide. All paper and sanitary products will be taken out with us.

Once on the kayaking portion of the tour there will be no shower facilities, however, the ocean temperatures are quite inviting and make it easy to stay feeling fresh.





THE FINE PRINT

The degree of difficulty of each tour depends a great deal on the wind and weather conditions presented. This of course cannot be determined in advance, so please be prepared for anything including wind.

If you are concerned about your paddling ability, please contact us to discuss the conditions you might encounter. The Southern Exuma Cays tour provides flexibility with route and offers sheltered paddling among the Cays.

All tours may involve some open crossings, which can present waves and swell. We of course only kayak when we determine the conditions are deemed appropriate, but please be advised that we may encounter some larger water during several short crossings.

As an expedition-style tour, we will be packing everything into the kayaks each day and sleeping in tents on beaches with no infrastructure. We work together as a team: while the guides will help, each person is responsible for setting up and packing up their gear each day.

Our tours are all designed to provide opportunities for relaxing, including time for snorkeling, beach-combing as well as kayaking.

Our ability to provide fresh options for food on this trip are limited because it is hot and we are unable to bring ice. We try our best, but if you have experienced one of our BC tours, the fresh food options are more limited on this trip.

Spirit of the West Adventures does not provide any alcohol as part of the tours, but you are more than welcome to bring your own. This can be purchased upon arrival to George Town.

If you have dietary restrictions or allergies, please check in with us to see if we can accommodate this on our tour. A dietary accommodation fee will apply to many substitutions as supplies can be limited in the Bahamas. You may be asked to bring some items with you if not easily available in the Bahamas. Please contact us in the office to discuss any dietary requirements.

Meals outside of the kayaking portion of the tour are at your own expense. All accommodation before and after your tour is at your own expense. Airport transfers are NOT included in the tour price. All flights and baggage charges are at your own expense.

If you leave the tour after departure there are no refunds. Any expenses associated with the departure or additional accommodation are at your own expense.

We require all guests to purchase trip cancellation, interruption and medical insurance to cover any unexpected costs that may be incurred due to circumstances beyond our control. This is your own responsibility and it is up to you to ensure you have proper coverage. Please see our Terms and Conditions for more details.

If you show signs of illness on your tour, you may be isolated and removed from the trip. If you are unable to participate in the tour or need to be removed from the tour due to sickness, you will be responsible any costs associated with not attending the tour or leaving the tour (eg: hotel rooms, meals, car rentals, etc.)



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

- Reserve your trip & pay deposit
- Read our full [Terms & Conditions](#).
- Discuss any dietary or medical requirements with Spirit of the West
- Provide contact details for other members of your group
- Purchase trip cancellation, interruption and medical insurance
- Review entry requirements for travel to the Bahamas
- Make sure your vaccinations are current and you have copies of that paperwork
- Ensure your passport is current and valid for 6 months past your return date
- Book flights to George Town (GGT)
- Book your accommodation for the night before & night after your trip
- If you are planning to rent a vehicle, reserve your rental car
- Complete all Spirit of the West paperwork

Follow the instructions in your reservation email or click on the big blue 'Complete Guest Details' button on your invoice

- Make final payment
- Review the packing list (below)
- Embrace the excitement for your adventure!



WHAT TO BRING

TEMPERATURES

During an average March day in the Bahamas the temperature will reach somewhere around 24 degrees Celsius (76F) by early afternoon. Evening temperatures are generally in the vicinity of 21 degrees Celsius (70F). Please bring protective clothing and a hat for the sun.

Rainfall during this time is rare, but also possible, with an average monthly accumulation of 4.8 cm (1.9 inches). Ocean temperatures are between 22-24 degrees Celsius (72-75F). However we always find it best to come prepared for any type of weather. Remember there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad gear!

On evenings without wind, no-see-ums and mosquitoes are often present. Please be prepared with bug spray and long sleeves for the evenings.

WHAT WE PROVIDE

- Tents, Therma-Rest sleeping pads, small pillow
- Camping chairs
- All cooking materials and meals
- Non-alcoholic beverages – water, juice, coffee & tea
- Dry bags – 2-3 per person
- All kayaking equipment – including kayak, PFD, spray skirt, paddle, spare paddle, charts, pump, rope etc.
- A natural history library including books for learning about local flora, fauna, landscape and history
- Fleece sleep sac and cotton sleep sheet (temperatures are generally quite warm so you will not need a sleeping bag - this will be enough)
- Mask, fins and snorkel

If you have some of your own gear and would prefer to use it on your tour, please call our office in advance of the tour to let us know, to ensure it is appropriate. The following is a list of suggested items to bring along. If you have any questions about the list, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We recommend ensuring your key items are packed in your carry on luggage in case there are issues with checked baggage. Some travellers have also used luggage tracking tags for checked baggage.

GENERAL ITEMS

- ❑ Passport & money belt – Ensure your passport is valid for at least 6 months after your return flight. A money belt helps to keep your important documents and money close to your body and takes away the worry of travel.
- ❑ Copies of all your important documents – A simple photocopy of your passport and travel insurance details can save you a lot of hassle if you ever lose the originals.
- ❑ Shoes that can get wet - we highly recommend crocs or similar as you can rinse the sand out of them easily, the strap protects your heels from chafing against the sand on the bottom of your kayak, and they dry quickly so you can wear socks in them at night / around camp or if you get blisters. Neoprene booties are not recommended because of the sand.
- ❑ Hat – A wide brimmed sun hat and/or baseball cap or visor is essential in the sun of the Bahamas.
- ❑ High SPF sunscreen & lip balm with sunscreen – A must for protection from sun and glare off of the water.
- ❑ Sunglasses – A safety cord on your glasses is a good idea.
- ❑ Bathing suit – For snorkeling and enjoying the warm water!
- ❑ Bath towel – Quick drying towels and or a sarong are handy and less bulky to pack.

- ❑ Medication – If you are bringing medication, please pack in water proof container/bags and bring extra in case of unexpected travel delays. **Please put medications in your carry-on luggage.**
- ❑ Personal items – Toothbrush, toothpaste, biodegradable and saltwater friendly soap, washcloth, feminine hygiene products, hairbrush, etc.
- ❑ Wet wipes and hand sanitizer – Good for sanitizing or a quick wash.
- ❑ Bug repellent – For mosquitoes and no-see-ums (usually just around dusk if there is no wind)
- ❑ Ziploc bags – These and a large garbage bag are always handy when traveling.
- ❑ Small flashlight or headlamp – Don't forget spare batteries. Headlamps are preferable as they allow for hands free use.
- ❑ Camera – Waterproof is best (great for snorkeling) or packed in waterproof bag or case.
- ❑ Book and/or journal – For enjoying on the beach under a palm tree.
- ❑ Cash for souvenirs, drinks, gratuities (tips) – US dollars are accepted on par with local currency.
- ❑ Water bottle with a clip such as a carabiner- this will help with securing your water bottle to the deck of your kayak. We recommend a bottle of at least 1 litre in size as we tend to drink lots in the heat.

CLOTHING

- ❑ Lightweight pants – Quick-drying, non-cotton- light colours are nice in the sun.
- ❑ Lightweight long sleeved shirt – Quick drying, non-cotton.
- ❑ T-shirts and or tank tops (2) – Can be a combination of cotton and non-cotton. Synthetic material dries quickly.
- ❑ One set of clothes to keep dry for wearing around camp. Lightweight cotton is nice to put on at the end of the day and to sleep in.
- ❑ Undergarments – As you see fit. A couple pairs of synthetic underwear for paddling can be comfortable even when wet. Cotton underwear is good for evenings.
- ❑ Shorts – One quick dry nylon pair.

- ❑ Fleece or similar socks – one pair to keep dry and one pair you don't mind getting wet if needed
- ❑ Raincoat – something lightweight and breathable will make you a happy camper on cooler days or if we see some rain or wind. It is unlikely that you will need this coat but better safe than sorry!

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- ❑ Ear plugs – Just in case your friends snore!
- ❑ Binoculars
- ❑ Personal snacks – Snacks will be provided, but if you have a favourite that you just can't live without please feel free to bring it.
- ❑ Mask, snorkel, and fins – We provide a basic option for snorkelling, but if you have your own set, you are welcome to bring.
- ❑ Shorty wetsuit – For snorkeling. We found the water plenty warm for shorter snorkeling trips, but you are welcome to bring it if you have one.
- ❑ Splash jacket – For paddling
- ❑ Bandana – To cover your neck from the sun. Doubles well as a face cloth.
- ❑ Gloves – For kayaking. Biking gloves or light neoprene gloves work well to protect your hands from blisters and sunburn.
- ❑ Fishing gear
- ❑ Alcohol, beer, wine etc. – No alcohol is provided with the tour, but you are welcome to bring your own. You can purchase upon arrival in the Bahamas in the Nassau airport or in George Town as long as you are not arriving on a Sunday.

CLOTHING FOR BEFORE / AFTER TOUR

Any clothing you want for before or after the tour can be stored with your hotel or us while you are paddling. For your time off the water, long pants or a skirt and a button up shirt are about as fancy as most of the Exumas gets!

