Bahamas

Overview

Despite some crime and infrastructural concerns, AIG Travel rates the Bahamas as a LOW threat location due to its stable political environment and overall favorable security conditions.

The Bahamas is a politically stable archipelago made up of more than 700 Caribbean islands. There are more than 300,000 people living in the country, 90 percent of whom are of African heritage. The economy relies heavily on the tourism industry, with the service sector accounting for an estimated 90 percent of the country’s GDP.

The main security concerns stem from crime, which occurs more frequently on the larger islands. Violent crime is found mostly in the residential communities on the larger New Providence and Grand Bahama islands. Due to its many uninhabited islands and porous borders, the country is a transshipment point of drugs such as cocaine and marijuana bound for the U.S., and most violent crime offenses are attributed to drug trafficking and smuggling. There is a low risk of terrorism, and there are no major conflicts or terrorist groups active in the region.

The Bahamas has relatively well-developed infrastructure in large cities, but conditions can significantly deteriorate in more remote areas of the country. There are ongoing efforts to improve roads and communications as well as medical infrastructure on the larger islands, such as New Providence and Grand Bahama islands. On the smaller, more rural islands, however, infrastructure and medical care can pose some concern.

The Bahamas is frequently affected by the North Atlantic hurricane season, which generally runs from June to November, and flooding can impact the country during this time. Earthquakes and subsequent tsunamis can also affect the country, which is located in an active seismic zone.

Political conditions

The political environment in the Bahamas is secure, making political stability concerns a MINOR threat to individuals.

The Bahamas is a parliamentary democracy modeled on the Westminster system with a unitary parliamentary system of government. The reigning British monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II, is represented in the
Bahamas by an appointed governor general who serves as the head of state; this is mostly a symbolic role, as executive power is largely assigned to the prime minister. The current governor general, Marguerite Pindling, has been in office since July 2014. The head of government is the prime minister, currently Hubert Minnis of the conservative Free National Movement Party (FNM). The CPI measures levels of perceived corruption, ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (extremely transparent).

Since election to office, Minnis has focused on greater ownership of a national economy that has seen significant foreign investment under the previous government. FNM soundly defeated the leftist Progressive Leftist Party (PLP) in May 2017 elections after alleging that the PLP had governed without proper transparency and was unable to address rising unemployment and poor economic growth. The FNM government has pledged to end the corruption it claims was present in the PLP government. Despite concerns raised by allegations of electoral irregularities, such as incorrectly marked ballot materials and other forms of fraud during early voting, transition of power occurred without major incident.

Though ideologies vary between the FNM and PLP, there are no ongoing tensions between these two parties that could threaten political stability in the foreseeable future. The current government faces a number of challenges in terms of developing socio-economic policies. These include reforming the healthcare system, combating social inequality, diversifying tax revenues to focus less heavily on import tariffs and license fees, encouraging international trade agreements, and the privatization of state-owned corporations.

Economy

The economy of the Bahamas is one of the most advanced and stable economies in the Caribbean. It derives much of its success from its tourism sector as well as from offshore banking. The service industry is dominant, comprising an estimated 90 percent of the economy.

Corruption

- LOW concerns of corruption exist in country though these rarely disrupt daily, localized operations.

The Bahamas does not have significant levels of corruption. Though some instances of corruption are apparent among public and private officials, these do not notably affect residents or travelers. Top-ranking officials have occasionally faced accusations of graft, from both domestic and international sources. Additionally, the judicial process is notably slow, and some cases are even dismissed as a result of stagnant progress. However, the most likely form of corruption to impact individuals would be dishonest policemen; however, the country’s security forces are considered to be generally honest.

Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that monitors global corruption, gave the Bahamas a score of 65 in the 2017 edition of its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), indicating the country has relatively low levels of perceived corruption. The CPI measures levels of perceived corruption, ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (extremely transparent). This score marks a significant increase in perceived levels of corruption since the country was last evaluated in 2014, when it received a score of 71. The Bahamas was rated 28 out of 180 countries assessed in 2017.

Security issues

General crime

- Crime poses a MODERATE concern in the Bahamas. While petty crime is most common, rates of violent crime have grown in recent years.
The crime rate in the Bahamas is considered moderate. The outlying islands of the Bahamian archipelago (known as the Family Islands or Out Islands) have fewer occurrences of crime compared to the main islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama, which encompass the cities of Nassau and Freeport, respectively. Property theft, bag-snatching and general theft of personal property are the most commonly committed crimes throughout the country, both in urban centers and in more remote locations. Theft of passports and other personal documents is also a concern. These crimes are largely opportunistic and target individuals that appear to be affluent. Crowded public areas – including marketplaces, beaches, bus terminals and entertainment establishments – are frequent sites of petty crime. It should be noted that most criminals carry a weapon and will use them if met with resistance. The U.S. Embassy also noted such criminal activity in a Security Alert issued in April 2018 regarding an incident where a single gunman robbed restaurant employees of cash in the Cable Beach area northwest of central Nassau.

New Providence Island, specifically, has experienced growing rates of violent crime, including home break-ins, robbery and mass indiscriminate shootings, such as drive-by shootings. Armed robberies are also common at fast food restaurants, gas stations, convenience stores, banks and residences. These crimes usually occur in areas outside of resort or tourist-friendly areas. While violent crime typically targets locals who are affiliated with street gangs or high profile individuals, the evolving nature of violence has begun to put innocent bystanders at risk.

Sexual assault remains a concern, especially at residences, hotel rooms and areas surrounding hotels, casinos and on cruise ships. In some cases, criminals spike victims’ drinks in order to commit the crime. It should also be noted that, while not a prevalent concern, there have been instances of hate crimes perpetrated against homosexuals in recent years. Bahamian security forces have increased patrols in high-crime areas, particularly on New Providence Island. This entails an increase in the number and frequency of random security checkpoints as well as a crime reduction plan in tourist areas, specifically Cable Beach and the Prince George Wharf cruise ship port where violent crime has grown in recent years.

Organized crime is fairly common and is typically related to the international drug trade. Some prominent street gangs that operate in large cities in the Bahamas are Rebellion, Fire and Theft, One Order and Zoe Pound. These gangs play a prominent role in the transportation of narcotics into and through the Bahamas. Due to its many islands and porous borders, the Bahamas has become an attractive and easily accessible drug smuggling route into the U.S. and Europe in recent years, aiding the increase in violent crime rates throughout the country.

Terrorism

- **Terrorism is a MINOR threat to the Bahamas as there are no known domestic terrorist groups and the country’s risk profile for international attack is minimal.**

Terrorism is a minor concern in the Bahamas as no domestic or transnational terrorist groups operate in the islands.

Conflicts

- **The threat of conflict in the Bahamas is MINOR as the country is not engaged in any domestic or foreign disputes.**

Conflicts pose a minor concern in country as the country is not engaged in domestic or foreign disputes.

Civil unrest
While protests and strikes pose a MINOR concern, they have the potential to create localized disruptions.

Protests, demonstrations and strikes are rare in the Bahamas, due largely to the country’s stable political and economic climates. Demonstrations which do occur are usually linked to socio-economic issues; these are typically organized by civic organizations. Nassau, as the capital city, experiences periodic protest gatherings in Parliament Square in the city center. Nearly all demonstrations are peaceful, but it should be noted that as a result of limited law enforcement resources, response time to these events is often slow, which in turn heightens the potential for violence. Localized traffic disruptions sometimes accompany protest actions, which can affect public transportation.

Strikes are similarly rare, but have the potential to impact public and private services. These events are usually well organized and announced far in advance, allowing companies to enact contingency plans to reduce related disruptions. The most common type of strike in the Bahamas is a slowdown or a go-slow, which further aids in minimizing disruptions.

Travel logistics

Entering the country

Entry Requirements

- All foreign travelers require a passport that is valid for three months beyond the intended departure date to enter the Bahamas. It is also required to have proof of accommodation as well as sufficient funds to support the length of stay. If traveling by air, individuals are required to possess a return or onward ticket.
- Residents of some countries, including the U.S., Canada and many in Latin America, do not require a visa for short stays. Because the length of stay varies by country, individuals should consult with their nearest Bahamian embassy or consulate for more specific information. Citizens of countries other than the above-mentioned usually require a visa to enter the Bahamas.
- All individuals are required to obtain an immigration form upon arrival in the Bahamas, which they must present when leaving the country.
- There are restrictions against individuals with HIV/AIDS in the Bahamas. Although HIV testing is not required for short stays of less than 30 days, HIV-positive individuals face the risk of deportation upon discovery of their status.
- As entry requirements are subject to change, travelers are advised to contact their nearest Bahamian embassy or consulate for further information.

Political/Security Risks

AIG Travel rates the Bahamas as an overall LOW threat location due to stable political and security conditions. However, crime and infrastructure pose areas of some concern.

- Political stability concerns are MINOR in the Bahamas. There are no known concerns that could threaten government stability.
- Corruption is a LOW concern in the Bahamas and does not generally affect day-to-day lives of visitors or residents.
- Crime is a MODERATE concern, especially for tourists. Petty crime is the chief area of concern, although violent crime rates have risen in recent years.
- Terrorism is a MINOR threat to the Bahamas as there are no known domestic terrorist groups and the country’s risk profile for international attack is minimal.
- The threat of conflict in the Bahamas is MINOR as the country is not engaged in any domestic or foreign disputes.
• Civil unrest is a MINOR concern to those in the Bahamas. Strikes, protests and demonstrations are rare and generally peaceful.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is an area of MODERATE concern for the Bahamas. While facilities in large cities, including Nassau and Freeport, as well as in popular tourist areas are advanced and of good quality, conditions outside such zones may be more basic, especially on remote outlying islands.

• Roadways and thoroughfares have adequate signage and an extensive roadway network connects all metropolitan areas. Road conditions can degrade outside of urban areas and may be unpaved.
• Telecommunications infrastructure – including high-speed internet, satellite television, mobile cellular service and power networks – are well-maintained and efficient in urban areas. However, provision of service may be limited or sporadic in remote or lightly populated areas.
• A majority of the country has access to clean drinking water, proper sewage treatment amenities, electricity and other basic services.

Air travel

There are several international airports in the country. The two main facilities are Lynden Pindling International Airport (MYNN/NAS) in the capital Nassau and Grand Bahama International Airport (MYGF/FPO) in Freeport. Both accommodate commercial and private aircraft. Both airports have modern facilities offering services such as currency exchange, restaurants, banks and stores. Buses and taxis run from these facilities to Nassau and Freeport, respectively, and vehicle rental agencies operate at both locations.

Getting around

Overland travel is the primary means of transport throughout the Bahamas. Bus and taxi services as well as ferry services are available in the country. While there is no domestic rail service, domestic flights operate between regional airports, and both charter flights and helicopters are available. Pre-arranged transportation services through a vetted service provider is the most convenient and reliable form of transport for visitors to the country. Be aware that airports and seaports invariably cease operations well before a predicted storm actually arrives, and that seats on most commercial transportation are sold out far in advance.

• Road – A network connects major locations and minor towns. Conditions in cities are adequate; however, intercity road conditions may be in need of repair and in remote areas roadways are often unpaved.
  • Self-Driving - Rental cars are available from rental car facilities located at the airport and some major hotels. Individuals seeking to rent a vehicle must be 21 years old and possess a valid driver's license; a national license may be used for up to three months. Individuals may also apply for an international driver's license. Local drivers can have erratic driving habits and visitors are advised to always drive defensively. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road.
  • Bus - Buses, called jitneys, run from downtown Cable Beach in Nassau/Paradise Island and from several depots at Freeport/Lucaya on Grand Bahama Island at ten-minute intervals. The use of these buses is not recommended as incidents of crime and assault are commonly reported. Motorcycles (mopeds), bicycles and surreys (horse and carriage rides used in conducting short tours around Nassau) are also available in the Bahamas; however, individuals should exercise caution when using these modes of transport due to the above-mentioned security concerns.
  • Taxi - Taxis are considered a fairly good method of transportation in the Bahamas and are generally without outstanding safety concerns. Taxis are abundant in the Nassau/Cable Beach/Paradise areas, as well as in the Freeport/Lucaya areas on Grand Bahama Island, though they are somewhat harder to find on the Out Islands. Taxis are usually stationed outside major ports, hotels and airports. On the Family Islands, taxis may have to be requested by telephone or
It is illegal for children under the age of five to travel in a taxi without a car or booster seat, and taxis will not provide them for passengers with small children.

- **Water** – Individuals can journey to the Bahamas by sea, either on a private boat or commercial cruise on one of the many cruise liners readily available. Ferry services are available for inter-island transport primarily between Nassau and Paradise Island as well.

**Culture**

- Approximately 90 percent of the Bahamian population is of African heritage.
- The legal age for drinking alcohol and gambling is 18 years of age.
- There is a distinct and unique culture in the Bahamas that takes influences from Africa and North America. The residents of Bermuda also come from a variety of backgrounds; approximately 90 percent of the population is of African descent, while the remaining portion is of mixed races. The official language is English, although Creole is also spoken among the Haitian immigrant community.
- While the Bahamas has certain tones of a more laid back island style of life, Bermuda is generally conservative and adheres to modest dress codes, such as only wearing bathing suits in beach areas.

**Important Dates 2018**

- 1 January – New Year’s Day
- 2 January – New Year’s Day observed
- 10 January – Majority Rule Day
- 30 March – Good Friday
- 2 April – Easter Monday
- 2 June – Randol Fawkes Labor Day
- 5 June – Whit Monday
- 10 July – Independence Day
- 6 August – Emancipation Day
- 8 October – National Heroes Day
- 25 December – Christmas Day
- 26 December – Boxing Day

**Health concerns**

Dengue fever, a flu-like illness which may be complicated by hemorrhage or shock, occurs occasionally in the Bahamas. The last significant outbreak occurred between July and October 2011 and resulted in 7,000 confirmed cases. No cases were reported on Grand Bahama. Dengue fever is transmitted by *Aedes* mosquitoes, which bite primarily in the daytime and favor densely populated areas, though they also inhabit rural environments. No vaccine is available at this time. When dengue fever outbreaks occur, insect protection measures are advised.

In the 2012 Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic the UNAIDS/WHO Working Group estimated that around 7,000 adults aged 15 or over in the Bahamas were living with HIV; the prevalence rate was estimated at around 3.3 percent of the adult population. Higher prevalence rates are found only in sub-Saharan Africa, making the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, the second-most affected region in the world. Half of the adults living with the virus are women. Individuals should exercise normal precautions to avoid exposure to HIV/AIDS, which is transmitted through exchange of bodily fluids.

Tap water is not necessarily safe for drinking, but can be used for daily regimes that do not involve ingestion, such as bathing. Brushing teeth with tap water is not advised; bottled or filtered water is preferred.

**Natural hazards**
The Bahamas is vulnerable to hurricanes and other tropical storms, which have the propensity to cause extensive flooding and wind damage. The North Atlantic hurricane season typically runs from June to November, although hurricanes have been known to occur outside that time period.

The country is located in a seismic zone and therefore experiences earthquakes on a periodic basis; most of these seismic events are small but larger tremors are felt on occasion and can cause severe infrastructural damage. There is also a threat from tsunamis as a result of seismic activity in the region.

Money

- **Currency** - The official currency is the Bahamian dollar (BSD) and it is divided into 100 cents. Bahamian dollar banknotes come in six denominations; these include 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 BSD. Several coins are in circulation, valued at 1, 5, 10 and 25 cents.
- **Foreign exchange** - Foreign currency may be exchanged at currency exchange offices, main hotels, banks, airports and major travel agencies.
- **ATMs / Credit Cards** - ATMs are widely available in large cities and towns in the Bahamas. Most credit cards, including American Express, Diners Club, Visa and MasterCard, are accepted. Stores in rural areas are not guaranteed to have card facilities.
- **Tipping** - Most establishments in the Bahamas add a 15 percent service charge to the bill. This is usually adequate, but it is customary to add additional tips if the service was exceptionally good.
- **Business hours** - Businesses typically operate from 09:00 – 17:00 on Monday through Friday.

Contact Information

International dialing code: +242
International dialing prefix: 011
Police: 919/911
Ambulance: 919
Fire: 919

Cultural factors

General

Approximately 90 percent of the Bahamian population is of African heritage. About two-thirds of the population resides on New Providence Island, where the capital Nassau is located. Many ancestors arrived in the Bahamas when the islands served as a staging area for the slave trade in the early 1800s. Others accompanied thousands of British loyalists who fled the American colonies during the Revolutionary War.

Haitians form the largest immigrant community in the Bahamas. Between 30,000 and 50,000 are estimated to be residents legally or illegally, concentrated on New Providence, Abaco and Eleuthera islands.

Etiquette and norms

- The legal age for drinking alcohol and gambling is 18 years of age.
- Formal greetings are commonplace, especially in business settings. Men typically shake hands while women are more likely to kiss one another’s cheeks.
- Individual greetings are valued when one enters the room even if there are multiple people present.
- Eye contact should be maintained during conversation, failure to do so is considered rude.
- It is considered rude not to use greetings – good morning, afternoon and evening – when entering a room or arriving as well as expressing a similar greeting when departing.
• While punctuality is not strictly enforced, most people are prompt and tardiness over 15 minutes normally requires a valid excuse.
• Personal contact/touching during conversations is not common, particularly in professional settings. A distance of about an arm’s length is customary during conversation.
• In business, it is inappropriate to wear jeans, shorts or non-business apparel despite the warm weather.
• The use of Mr. and Mrs. followed by the individuals name is imperative in professional environments.

Useful information

• Public holidays

• Weather forecast

• Maps

• Official Bahamas website

• Electricity: 120 volts, 60 Hz; for the most commonly used plug types, please click here.

Contact details

Important contact details

• International dialing code: +242
• International dialing prefix: 011

Emergency numbers

• Police: 919
• Ambulance: 919
• Fire: 919

Embassies

There is no Australian diplomatic representation in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the Australian Consulate for services.

Australian Honorary Consulate
Lyford Manor, Lyford Cay
Nassau
Tel: +1 242 327 8301
Fax: +1 242 326 0389

There is no British diplomatic representation in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the British High Commission in Jamaica for services.

British High Commission in Jamaica
28 Trafalgar Road
Kingston
Jamaica
Tel: +1 876 936 0700
Fax: +1 876 936 0737
Email: Kingston.Consular@gco.gov.uk

There is no French diplomatic representation in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the French Embassy in Jamaica for services.

French Embassy in Jamaica
13 Hillcrest Avenue
Kingston
Jamaica
Tel: +1 876 946 4000
Fax: +1 876 946 4022
Email: frenchembassyjamaica@gmail.com

There is no German diplomatic representation in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the German Embassy in Jamaica for services.

German Embassy in Jamaica
10 Waterloo Road
Kingston
Jamaica
Tel: +1 876 926 6728
Fax: +1 876 929 8282
Email: info@kingston.diplo.de

There is no Mexican Embassy in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the Mexican Consulate for services.

Mexican Honorary Consulate
c/o Bristol Group
Gladstone Road
P.O. Box N 131
Nassau
Tel: +1 242 601 9325
Fax: +1 242 362 5045
Email: mexicanconsulate.bah@bristol.bs

U.S. Embassy
42 Queen Street
Nassau
Health advisory

Health infrastructure

Medical treatment is of a good standard but can be expensive. Emergency medical facilities are limited on all the Family Islands and serious cases will require transfer by air ambulance to Nassau or Freeport in the Bahamas or to Miami in the U.S. Some medical facilities accept U.S. provided health insurance for emergency care; however, all medical facilities require immediate payment to the facility.

Pre-travel recommendations

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to the Bahamas:

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Typhoid (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended)
- Yellow fever (required for individuals arriving from a country where yellow fever is present)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases, including influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

Individuals are advised to visit a doctor or clinic that specializes in travel-related medicine at least four to six weeks prior to their intended departure. This should allow the necessary time for any vaccinations prescribed by the doctor to take effect. If travel is to be undertaken in less than four weeks, a visit to a medical professional is still recommended.

Comprehensive medical insurance, including provision for medical repatriation or evacuation, is strongly recommended. Individuals are also advised to take an appropriate supply of any prescription medication; this should be accompanied by a written doctor's instruction, explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities required.

Significant diseases

- There are no recent significant diseases as this time

Recent outbreaks

- There are no recent outbreaks at this time.

Emergency response

The number for an ambulance in the Bahamas is 919.
of the date this product is time stamped but all such information, given its nature, shall be subject to change or alteration at any time and the use of such information is at the sole discretion of the intended recipient(s). AIG Global Security assumes no liability or responsibility for the use, interpretation or application of any of the information contained herein. For reprints or digital reproduction rights, please contact: worldwidemarketing@aig.com

For further information or security support, please contact AIG Global Security – AIG Global Security at HoustonGSOC@aig.com