Bahamas

Overview

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 75-80 percent of the country’s GDP.

The main security concerns on the island stem from crime, which poses a MODERATE risk to travelers and 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 United States. As a result, most violent crime offenses are attributed to drug trafficking and smuggling. Civil unrest poses a MINOR concern to individuals traveling to the Bahamas as occurrences are both infrequent and generally peaceful. The political environment in the Bahamas is generally secure, and risks of political instability are MINOR. Additionally, there are LOW risks of travelers being impacted by corruption as reports of corruption rarely impact daily operations.

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 concerns.

The Bahamas is frequently affected by the North Atlantic hurricane season, which generally runs from June to November, as 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 stable and presents MINOR risks.
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).

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. Since election to office, Minnis has focused on independent development of a national economy that saw significant foreign investment under the previous government. 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, the government’s most recent transition of power occurred without major incident.

Though ideologies vary between the FNM and PLP, there are no significant ongoing tensions between these two parties that threaten political stability in the near to medium term. The current government faces a number of challenges in terms of developing socioeconomic policies, and included some of these policies in the nation’s 2018 fiscal strategy plan. These included 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 75-80 percent of the economy.

**Corruption**

- **Corruption concerns are LOW and rarely affect travelers.**

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. The most likely form of corruption to affect travelers is within the police force in the form of soliciting bribes.

Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that monitors global corruption, gave the Bahamas a score of 65 out of 100 in its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The CPI measures levels of perceived corruption, ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (extremely transparent). The Bahamas’ score suggests low levels of corruption, and the country was perceived as the 29th least corrupt out of 180 surveyed.

**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 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 are home to 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 in nature, and criminals are known to target individuals that appear to be affluent. Crowded public areas – including marketplaces, beaches, bus terminals and entertainment establishments – are frequent sites of petty crime. Many criminals carry a weapon and will use them if met with resistance.

New Providence island specifically has experienced growing rates of violent crime, including home break-ins, robbery and 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 resorts or tourist-friendly areas. While violent crime typically targets high-profile individuals or locals affiliated with street gangs, 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 are known to spike victims’ drinks. In addition, there have been instances of hate crimes perpetrated against LGBTQ individuals in recent years. Bahamian security forces have increased patrols in high-crime areas, particularly on New Providence island. This has resulted in 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. 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. Drug trading is generally carried out by gangs in the area that play a prominent role in the transportation of narcotics into and through the Bahamas.

**Civil unrest**

- Civil unrest is a MINOR concern in the Bahamas. Strikes, protests and demonstrations are rare and generally peaceful.

Protests, demonstrations and strikes are rare in the Bahamas, due largely to the country’s stable political and economic climates. Demonstrations that do occur are usually linked to socioeconomic issues and are typically organized by civic organizations. The capital Nassau experiences periodic protest gatherings in Parliament Square in the city center. Nearly all demonstrations are peaceful; however, as a result of limited law enforcement resources, response time to these events is often slow. 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 ample time to enact contingency plans to reduce related disruptions. The most common type of strike in the Bahamas is a slowdown or a go-slow, in which employees perform their job functions with intentional reductions in productivity, minimizing disruptions.

**Travel logistics**

**Entering the country**

**Entry Requirements**
• All foreign travelers require a passport valid for three months beyond the intended departure date to enter the Bahamas. It is also required to have proof of accommodation and 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 Latin American countries, do not require a visa for short stays. Citizens of other countries 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.
• As entry requirements are subject to change, travelers are advised to contact their nearest Bahamian diplomatic representation for further information.

**Political/Security Risks**
AIG Travel rates the Bahamas as a LOW threat location due to its stable political environment and overall favorable security conditions.

• The political environment in the Bahamas is stable and presents MINOR risks.
• Corruption concerns are LOW and rarely affect travelers.
• Crime poses a MODERATE concern in the Bahamas. While petty crime is most common, rates of violent crime have grown in recent years.
• Civil unrest is a MINOR concern in the Bahamas. Strikes, protests and demonstrations are rare and generally peaceful.

**Infrastructure**
Infrastructure is a MODERATE concern in the Bahamas. While facilities in large cities, including Nassau and Freeport, and 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.
• The telecommunications infrastructure – including high-speed internet, satellite television, cellular service and power networks – is well-maintained and efficient in urban areas. However, provision of service may be limited or sporadic in remote or sparsely populated areas.
• The majority of the country has access to water, proper sewage treatment, 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**
Bus and taxi services as well as ferry services are available in the country. Domestic flights operate between regional airports, and both charter flights and helicopters are available. Airports and seaports invariably cease operations well before a predicted storm actually arrives, and seats on most commercial transportation are sold out far in advance. Private, pre-arranged transportation services through a vetted service provider are recommended for all travel in the Bahamas.
• **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 roadways in remote areas 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 need an international driver's permit (IDP). Local drivers can have erratic driving habits that may pose hazards to those unfamiliar with the area. 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 security concerns.
  - **Taxi** - 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 Family Islands/Out Islands. Taxis are usually stationed outside major ports, hotels and airports. On the Family Islands/Out Islands, taxis may need to be requested by telephone or radio. 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. While metered taxis can be found in Nassau and Paradise island, most taxis in the Bahamas operate on fixed fares.
  - **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. Several companies and individuals also offer boat tours around the islands, though caution should be taken if electing to use these services. In July 2018 a boat explosion resulted in the death of one tourist and the injury of 11 other individuals. Travelers are advised to ensure the availability of adequate safety equipment including life vests and flotation devices.

**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 the Bahamas also come from a variety of backgrounds. 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, the island dress culture is generally conservative and adheres to conservative dress codes, such as only wearing bathing suits in beach areas.

**Important Dates in 2019**

- 1 January – New Year’s Day
- 10 January – Majority Rule Day
- 19 April – Good Friday
- 22 April – Easter Monday
- 7 June – Randol Fawkes Labor Day
- 10 June – Whit Monday
- 10 July – Independence Day
- 5 August – Emancipation Day
- 7 October – National Heroes Day
- 25 December – Christmas Day
- 26 December – Boxing Day
Health concerns

Medical treatment in the Bahamas is generally of an adequate 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 a larger city or to a nearby country. Some medical facilities accept U.S.-provided health insurance for emergency care; however, all medical facilities require immediate payment.

Dengue fever, a flu-like illness which may be complicated by hemorrhage or shock, occurs occasionally in the Bahamas. 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. When dengue fever outbreaks occur, protection measures against mosquito bites are advised.

Tap water is not safe to drink in the Bahamas. Individuals should consume only purified or bottled water. This applies to water used for brushing teeth or washing food.

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), which is divided into 100 cents. Bahamian dollar banknotes are issued in denominations of 0.5, 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 dollars. Coins are issued in denominations of 1, 5, 10 and 25 cents.
- **Foreign exchange** - Foreign currency can 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 Visa and MasterCard, are accepted. Stores in rural areas may only accept cash.
- **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 an additional tip if the service was exceptionally good.
- **Business hours** - Businesses are typically open Monday to Friday from 09:00 – 17:00.

Contact Information

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

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. Haitians form the largest
immigrant community in the Bahamas. Between 30,000 and 50,000 are estimated to be residents in country, 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, good afternoon and good evening – when entering or departing a room.
- 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 Ms. followed by the individual’s name is imperative in professional environments.

**Useful information**

**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**

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**Emergency numbers**

- Police: 919, 911
- Ambulance: 919, 911
- Fire: 919, 911

**Embassies**

**Australian Consulate**
Lyford Manor
Lyford Cay
Nassau
Tel: +1 242 327 8301
Email: caroline.moncur@3connectbahamas.com

*The United Kingdom does not maintain a diplomatic representation in the Bahamas. Individuals should*
contact the British High Commission in Jamaica for assistance.

British High Commission in Jamaica  
28 Trafalgar Road  
Kingston 10, Jamaica  
Tel: +1 876 936 0700

Chinese Embassy  
Shirley Street East  
Nassau  
Tel: +1 242 393 1415  
Fax: +1 242 393 0733  
Email: chinaemb_bhs@mfa.gov.cn

France does not maintain a diplomatic presence in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the French Embassy in Jamaica for assistance.

French Embassy in Jamaica  
13 Hillcrest Avenue  
Kingston, Jamaica  
Tel: +1 876 619 7812

German Honorary Consulate  
Sandyport Office Center  
Lagoon Court Building, Suite 115  
Nassau  
Tel: +1 242 327 1163  
Fax: +1 242 327 1173  
Email: nassau@hk-diplo.de

Japan does not maintain a diplomatic presence in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the Japanese Embassy in Jamaica for assistance.

Japanese Embassy in Jamaica  
6th Floor, NCB Towers, North Tower  
2 Oxford Road  
Kingston 5, Jamaica  
Tel: +1 876 929 3338  
Fax: +1 876 968 1373  
Email: info@kg.mofa.go.jp

Mexican Honorary Consulate  
Bristol Group  
Gladstone Road  
Nassau  
Tel: +1 242 601 9325  
Email: mexicanconsulate.bah@bristol.bs

Saudi Arabia does not maintain a diplomatic presence in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Cuba for assistance.

Saudi Arabian Embassy in Cuba  
5th Ave. (4605), between 46 & 60
South Africa does not maintain a diplomatic presence in the Bahamas. Individuals should contact the South African High Commission in Jamaica for assistance.

South African High Commission in Jamaica
15 Hillcrest Avenue
Kingston 6, Jamaica
Tel: +1 876 620 4840
Fax: +1 876 9270 0339
Email: kingston@dirco.gov.za

United States Embassy
42 Queen Street
Nassau
Tel: +1 242 322 1181
Fax: +1 242 356 7174
Email: acsnassau@state.gov

Health advisory

Health infrastructure

Medical treatment in the Bahamas is generally of an adequate 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 a larger city or to a nearby country. Some medical facilities accept U.S.-provided health insurance for emergency care; however, all medical facilities require immediate payment.

Pre-travel recommendations

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

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Measles (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended)
- Typhoid (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

These are some of the more significant diseases that could affect individuals traveling to the Bahamas:

- Dengue fever, a flu-like illness that may be complicated by hemorrhage or shock, occurs occasionally in the Bahamas. Dengue fever is transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes, which bite primarily in the daytime and favor densely populated areas, though they also inhabit rural environments.

Recent outbreaks

- There have been no outbreaks reported in recent years.

Emergency response

The emergency response number for an ambulance in the Bahamas is 919 or 911. Response times on more rural islands may be slower than on more populated islands.