

MY HOLIDAY IN THE SUN — The Bahamas, in October 1994.

WE LEFT HOME on a very foggy Sunday morning at the beginning of October. My son-in-law, my daughter and I, all heading for the Caribbean. Twenty four hours later we reach Nassau in a balmy 70°-80° — all this at 10.00pm. The hotel was a twenty minute drive from the airport, not on the tour operator's bus, but our own private guide, my youngest daughter.

We rose the next morning and had our breakfast on the hotel restaurant's balcony, watching the boats and busy day-to-day life in Nassau Harbour. We spent time by the pool on the first day and took what seemed like forty mile trek to the post office in 90°, even though it was less than a mile, to post the statutory post cards.

The Bahamas are a collection of 700 islands, mostly uninhabited, that nestle between Cuba in the north, Miami to the west and the Cayman Islands to the south in the "wild Atlantic". The weather is based upon hot in the summer and cold in the winter, according to the natives, although it rarely goes higher than 90° in the summer and lower than 60° in the winter. Hurricanes are a regular occurrence that hit the Bahamas, like Hurricane Andrew that battered the eastern coast of Every Island two years ago.

Hurricane Andrew actually divided Blue Lagoon and it is now joined by a bridge.

We spent the day on Blue Lagoon, travelling on a boat called "Calypso" where we were entertained by a band on the way there and back. We had lunch of either chicken or ribs with rice and peas (a local dish) with tons of salad of every description. Whilst there, we watched hermit crabs and lizards run around with gay abandon. The eastern side of the island has rough seas but beauty beyond belief.

Paradise Island which is joined by a bridge built in 1965 to Nassau, is basically a holiday orientated island with Club Med as the major tour operator. Here we spent a most enjoyable evening drinking wine, dining, dancing and watching the show. Their Cabbage Beach is as wild and as natural as you can get any where on earth. We also spent an evening as guests of my daughter's housemaid, to celebrate Columbus Day.

The housemaid lives in what is called "over the hill". It is hidden from the tourists and it reminds you of South Africa, although we were made very welcome. Our host was a young man of nine years of age who was more attentive and polite than any hero in the movies.

We enjoyed steak, salad and music and so much laughter rang out until quite late in the evening, but alas all good things come to an end as everyone had to work the next day, all except for us.

Fourteen days went by with just a touch of sunburn (me). The sun had come through gaps in the trees whilst I was sitting in the shade!

We spent our evenings by the harbour or at a complex called Crystal Palace. It was built by Mafia barons from drug money, but it is now a respectable hotel housing a casino and a theatre frequented by passengers from the numerous cruise ships from U.S.A.

The hotel hosts a show that could quite easily come from the West End. There were illusions involving a helicopter on stage, real white tigers and a finale of Junkanoo, a local festival. The locals have a parade, on Boxing Day starting at 4.00 am. and also on New Years Day, a bit like Rio Carnival. Several groups have their own theme and make costumes from cardboard and crepe paper, all fringed and stuck on.

We have had a private preview of this year's theme from the "Valley Boys". The colonial days are still there. On Nassau (Capital of the Bahamas Islands but by no means the largest) there are cannons in the city square alongside plaques of who lived there and policemen in their crisp white jackets and black trousers with a red stripe down the side.

The economy is like that of a third world country. Its only industry is tourism and salt. There isn't the usual "will you buy" harassment that you get in say, Jamaica or Turkey. The tourists are mainly American or Japanese with only a handful of Brits. There were only seventeen of us on our flight from Miami to the Bahamas.

New Providence Island, which houses Nassau, is only twenty two miles by seven miles. Coconuts grow in abundance along side bananas, tangerines, grapefruit, lemons and avocado pears, all of which grow in my daughter's garden. Perhaps with the crop diseases in the Windward Islands, they could start exporting bananas; perhaps not — they are not big enough for Tesco's high consumption.

All too soon it was time to board our 747 Virgin flight home, but only after an eight hour delay in Miami. Whilst we were waiting, we had the opportunity to sample the Cordon Bleu menu at Miami's Sheraton Hotel.

And at home the leaves were all sorts of golden browns and it was cold.

It was lovely to be home.

A. Birnie

MY TEARS ARE DILUTING MY BEER!

Reading the above article took me back over fifty years to when I was fortunate enough to live in Nassau for some months during conversion training to the Mitchell and Liberator bombers. At that time the mosquitoes had not been eradicated, nevertheless we enjoyed the wonderful white sands of Paradise Island and beautifully clear warm water swimming — (no Club Med). It was then reached by glass-bottomed boat (no bridge), enabling us to see with amazing clarity the beautiful life beneath the surface. It was this which started my involvement with 'free' and 'Scuba' diving. Oh for a return to those far off dreamy days (without the War).

Don Salter.