

ESCAPE TO THE BAHAMAS

BY MORTIMER H. COBB

THE Out Islands of the Bahamas — that litter of some 3000 rocks, cays, islets and islands now presided over by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor — are almost the last haven for successful escapists. In this survey of what they have to offer, we shall ignore those truffled islets, Cat and Walker Cays, which lie too close to the stockbrokers' translux for real island refugees; cold roast turkey and out-of-season asparagus are not in the frame of this picture. But neither are we concerned with the other extreme. Practically no small islands where climate prevails over weather offer possibilities for making a living. Prospective escapists to our Bahamas must have a small regular income, let's say \$1800 annually, and the capital for a house and a lot. Our attention is narrowed down to what we might call respectable beachcombing, offering comfort, peace, recreation and a carefree life at an outlay that cannot buy these things elsewhere.

Even those with the financial situation well in hand must submit

to further weeding out. Many of the nicest people are psychologically unfit for comparative solitude. There are nostalgics who could not view a clean-sanded jetsam and shell-trimmed strand without wistful memories of Jones Beach or Santa Monica. Islanders must have achieved emancipation from crowds. For most American businessmen and their department-store-minded wives, the sudden cultivation of the fine art of leisure is almost as difficult as teaching a well-trained loafer to work. Nor is simply being a sportsman or adventurer enough. Here are no lions to be chivvied out of protecting bush, nor lost White Goddesses to rescue. It's far better that today's islanders be just good sports.

Almost no one, nowadays, is engineer enough to cope with a late Victorian kerosene lamp without a smoky aftermath or an actual fire. Even the most modern coal cooking stove whose efficiency is based on a knowledge of dampers, banking a fire, and the handling of a forty-pound coal hod is a bugbear.

to our generation. Moreover, there is little peace, physically or mentally, when living resembles a continuous picnic. Home, particularly for a sensible escapist, is home because it's comfortable and surrounded with the essential accessories of leisure.

Thus living on a semi-tropical island calls for an electric lighting plant, kerosene or bottled-gas stove, refrigerator, and a tank and pumping system for hot and cold water. Today's escapists aren't planters either by nature or experience. They thrive *at* the beach — not *on* it.

The teeming islands and sandspits comprising the British-owned Bahamas begin about sixty miles to the east of Palm Beach, Florida, extend about 600 miles southeast, and peter out at Great Inagua, just north of Haiti. With a land area of almost 4500 square miles, many of these little landfalls have seaside villages with superbly sheltered harbors. Excepting Nassau and the private cays, and working from northwest to southeast, the most promising Out Island towns for a homesteader's investigation are: Settlement Point on Grand Bahama; Hope Town, Hole-in-the-Wall, and New Plymouth Town on Abaco; Williams Town on Stirrup Cay, Berry Islands; Alice

Town on North Bimini; Nicholls Town and Fresh Creek on the west coast of Andros; Spanish Wells, north of North Eleuthera; Dunmore Town, Harbour Island, east of North Eleuthera; Gregory Town, Hatchet Bay, Governors Harbour, and Glenelg on the west coast of South Eleuthera; Arthurs Town on Cat Island; George Town on Great Exuma; Cockburn Town, on San Salvador (Watling Island); Clarence Town on Long Island; and Matthewtown, Great Inagua.

Even to world-girdling Americans, these names may be unfamiliar, but in spite of their strange handles the most remote lies within easy reach of Miami, Florida, by way of Nassau. The Bahamas Airways, Ltd. maintains a regular service from Nassau to some of these islands, but the pleasantest and most inexpensive way to get around is aboard one of the weekly or fortnightly freight and mail boats that sail from Nassau. Each trip is a cruise. For example, a new motorship leaves on alternate Wednesdays for Abaco and makes calls at Cherokee Sound, Hope Town, Marsh Harbour, Man O'War Cay, Guano Cay, and Green Turtle Cay. The round trip takes eight days, costs \$10.

Faced with all this unknown

geography, the problem of an adequate map becomes important. Few family atlases are capable guides to the Out Islands of the Bahamas. The proper thing to do is to get U. S. Government Hydrographic chart No. 1002, 75¢. Besides being detailed and very accurate, such a navigation chart gives coastal elevations as well as the depth of adjacent waters. To supplement charts, the U. S. Hydrographic Bureau publishes two volumes of Sailing Directions for the West Indies. Volume I, Section A (75¢) describes the Out Island ports of the Bahamas. As earnest Islanders will use boats, they need facts rather than the promotional hokum of brochures prepared for real estate holding syndicates.

II

The climate is excellent. The temperature variation ranges from a mean low of 65° F. to a July or August high of 85° F. However, the temperature really depends on just where in the archipelago you locate. Rainfall is never excessive, as in the South Seas. Actually nearly every island has its local climate. But every Eden has its serpent and the big winds are the curse of the Bahamas. Like the

cyclones of the Indian Ocean, the typhoons of the Pacific, the *pamperas* of the South Atlantic, or the *Tehuantepecers* of the Mexican isthmus, the West Indian hurricanes can be counted on to make an occasional visit to the Bahamas on their way north. Luckily, this huffing and puffing confines itself to a four months period, with August and September leading with 92 per cent of the blows. But even during these months of hurricanes and rain, the sought-after Bahama sun will shine, on the average, half of each day.

Then there are the bugs. We might as well face them in advance. Except for the Arctic and Antarctic regions, there will always be bugs. Florida has chiggers, Central America has redbugs, and Polynesia, among other things, contributes the dhobi itch. The Bahamas' specialty is the sandfly. These are smaller than temperate zone gnats, persistent as Jersey mosquitoes, and have a bite that shames Canadian blackflies. If Bahama sandflies did not restrict their activities to sheltered spots and rare windless days, the islands would be deserted. Houses should be screened with No. 24 mesh and flit guns are as necessary in these islands as elsewhere in the tropics.

Americans in increasing numbers

have sought refuge in the Bahamas, where they can live eight months a year without losing their American citizenship. According to present U. S. standards, real estate taxes in the Bahaman Out Islands just don't exist. Outside of a 2 per cent inheritance tax upon the decease of an owner, the total real estate tax is based on 5 per cent of the assessed rental value of a home. Throughout the Bahamas, including fashionable sections of Nassau, houses costing between \$6000 and \$30,000 would be taxed from \$10 to \$35 yearly. For those of the escapist group with incomes of \$1800, the taxes on a \$3000-\$4000 house would be negligible — from five to ten dollars. Unless a radical upheaval in British colonial policies takes place or the United States is forced to take over the Bahamas to uphold the Monroe Doctrine, it is extremely unlikely that the present system of taxation will be changed to any marked degree.

Too often the love of a bargain leads Americans in the islands to buy blindly from native owners who are living on and farming lands with questionable title. A few years ago a trusting soul bought a few acres for "next to nothing" from a native family on North Bimini. When the title was

about to be transferred, it was discovered that there were no less than twenty-five absentee landlords scattered from Spanish Wells to Great Inagua. The search of that title took two years and cost more than a really good piece of land was worth. Land purchases should therefore be made through the most reliable local real estate broker and titles should be examined in the offices of the nearest British Commissioner. And here's a tip to prospective Bahama escapists: a deal commenced and consummated just before the hurricane season favors the buyer.

At this writing, escapists can pick up an acre or so near Settlement Point, Grand Bahama, for a price ranging from \$75 to \$125. While the harbor facilities along Grand Bahama's sixty-five-mile coast line leave much to be desired, the heavily wooded terrain has elevations up to fifty feet, plenty of fresh water, and seasonally offshore enjoys some of the hottest white marlin fishing in the Bahamas. On Abaco, where 250-pound boars root in the shade of the pitch pine forests of the "hills," sites in the environs of Hope Town and Hole-in-the-Wall cost from \$50 to \$150 per acre. Bimini real estate is high. From that Spring day when Mr. Louis

R. Wasey, now owner of luxurious Cat Cay, boated a giant blue marlin weighing 502 pounds, Bimini plots skyrocketed. And with the subsequent discovery by Captain Tommy Gifford of the enormous late May run of giant bluefin tuna, prices of ocean-to-bay sites severed their last connection with logic and now sell by the front foot.

Great Harbour and Williams Town in the Berry Islands have excellent hurricane protection for their harbors and desirable parcels run from \$40 up. Andros, largest of the Bahamas, has its towns along the east coast facing the steady trade winds that are cooled as they blow across that extraordinary and almost landlocked deep, the Tongue of the Ocean. Nicholls Town and Fresh Creek, the two principal coastal villages, have natural harbors protected by a barrier reef that extends forty miles southward from Nicholls Town to the Middle Bight, locale of the world's finest bonefishing. Acreage, \$45.

III

Fifty miles to the east of Nassau, seat of the Bahaman Government, lies the lightly timbered and fertile island of Eleuthera. Here is real farming land noted for alligator pears, tomatoes, string beans, and

other truck produce. Villages dot the west coast. Hatchet Bay is where a Providence, Rhode Island, philanthropist has constructed a model dairy of Jersey cattle. At Governors Harbour, Comtesse de Marigny and other prominent social register refugees have solved their financial problems with inexpensive long-season homes. Way down South in the Rock Sound District of the sixty-mile-long island, Anthony Drexel, Philadelphia and Nassau socialite, is heading a syndicate to develop a fashionable resort. In spite of this dizzy whirl, Eleutheran home sites still range from \$40 to \$100 per acre.

In the South Bahamas, Cat Island rises to the comparatively mountainous height of 400 feet and actually averages about 200 feet in altitude. Despite a population of nearly 4000, the forty-three-mile island is pretty rural. Sisal and coconuts are the chief exports. Near Arthurs Town, acreage averages about \$30. Another lofty island is San Salvador (Watling Island), the real landing place of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Cockburn Town is developing rapidly under the guidance of Nassau promoters who have sold acres for \$100 up. West of San Salvador lies Exuma where little ranges of

low hills form a gorgeous background for palm-fringed lagoons that are dead ringers for those in the Pacific South Seas. Exuma has thriving farms that export immense yams, melons, and grapefruit. Good plots near George Town start at \$30. On Long Island, \$25 will buy an acre in Clarence Town, and way down South at Great Inagua, Matthewtown sites can be had for five dollars.

Architect-planned and craftsmen-built Bahama houses of all sizes, such as those found in Nassau, cost from \$5000 up, and vary in luxury and taste from Cable Beach cottages to Hog Island magnificence. On the Out Islands, Bimini for instance, escapist and sportmen's *pied-à-terres* run the gamut from Van Campen Heilner's appropriate \$1500 lodge at Paradise Point to Michael Lerner's Alice Town home whose two-storied gables provide navigation markers for native bottom fishermen en route to the best grunt holes.

To tell a man how big a house he should have would be about as successful as ordering him a pair of shoes by guesswork. Disregarding any question of expense, one thing is certain: the escape value of any establishment diminishes as it becomes larger. Bailiwicks of outstanding get-away-from-it-alls are

bungalow type and consist of one or two double bedrooms, bath, large and airy living-dining room, well screened porch, kitchen, kitchen porch with large storeroom. In addition to the main building, many islanders have a catch-all "office" where they can write a book, repair an outboard motor, or just sit and think about what they're going to do *if* they do it. Equipping hideaways outside suburban districts would be far less difficult and expensive, if climate-seekers were thoroughly familiar with a Sears, Roebuck mail order catalogue. The cost of standard plumbing, power plants, iceboxes, and all the comforts of home that appear in the pages of the 1046-page book would be less than \$2000, including freight charges and 20 per cent import duty.

Since fresh spring water is not always plentiful through the Out Islands, rain water piped from the roof by gutters to cisterns constitutes the main supply for drinking and bathing. A small household can get along with a 12 x 12 x 5 foot cistern (5386 gallons).

Bahaman Negroes, with British accents as colorful as their hats and bandannas, cannot be classed with the high-combed Cinghalese and efficient Sikhs who top the list of His Majesty's colonial domestics.

Out Island natives, as household servants, would get testimonials reading "Slow but not lazy" or "Willing but not able." Except on those islands that have felt the power of the United States dollar for some years, Bahaman domestics will hire out as cooks, valets, gardeners, boat boys, fishing guides, or a combination of everything for \$15 to \$20 a month. Female cooks and laundresses get from eight to twelve dollars monthly.

Along with the original capital investment in a house and lot, sporting equipment will cost another \$800. The primary requisite of an island escapist is a boat. The Bahamas, almost encircled by the Great and Little Banks where soundings vary suddenly from twelve feet to twelve inches, need a special type of skiff that will sail in a "heavy dew" yet cope with the bucking of a three to nine horsepower outboard motor. Native Bahamans are masterly boatwrights who can build anything from a four-masted schooner to a Thames punt. Naturally enough, the outstanding and favorite pastime is fishing. Big game fish rods, reels, and lines are expensive, but anyone who can't pay for 500-pounders at an average cost of \$500 per fish, can get the thrill of his life more moderately. Smooth

windless days are ideal for trolling the reefs for barracuda, mackerel, kingfish, or bluerunners from a skiff with a sail and outboard motor. Best of all is the hunt over the shallow banks for the greatest of all sporting salt-water game, the bonefish (world record: 13¾ lbs.).

For wing shots, the Out Islands offer virgin possibilities. At Andros there is unrivaled dove shooting, but lesser morning and evening flights occur throughout the islands. A large concentration of ducks gather in the lakes of San Salvador and Cat Island lagoons. Everywhere shore birds abound. Although the Bahaman Government discourages the use of firearms, permits for their use can be got from the nearest "King," as natives call the British Commissioners. Since the Out Islands break the British colonial custom of having a tennis or golf club in every settlement, these sports are limited. Those who must have their hour of hard exercise can solve that problem by laying a cement or wooden paddle tennis court — 60 x 30 feet. On islands, paddle courts have advantages: low first cost with local labor; no upkeep and quick drying surface; bats without gut; and the right size for an acre "estate."

Too much has already been

written about the swimming off the pink beaches of the Bahamas. Everything can be taken for granted except the sharks. As tropic waters go, those of the Out Islands rank high in safety.

Since living *on* the country requires hard work and living *off* it is vagrancy, wise islanders allow plenty of leeway in making up their yearly budgets. On the better Out Islands, Abaco, Harbour, San Salvador, or Spanish Wells, a comfortable eight months season for two persons will average \$1000. The principal expenses will be \$350 for food, \$250 for power and fuel, \$120 for a full-time maid, \$40 for a part-time gardener-handyman, and under \$10 for the yearly rental tax on a house. That leaves \$240 for Nassau trips and incidentals. Omission of such items as amusements, clothing, doctors' bills, and travelling expenses to the United States for the summer is no oversight. These items are the reason why prospective islanders should have fixed incomes of at least \$1800 per annum.

In the Out Islands of the Bahamas where days have no tempo Nature — the tides, rainfall, and sunshine — governs breakfast hours, cuts out luncheons, and delays dinners. Only experience

can suggest the variations of an eight months season. There will always be potluck meals of canned meats, peas and rice, and local vegetables when meat supply boats from Nassau are overdue. There will be those important letters that don't get opened or answered for weeks because of more pressing "conferences" with local fishermen or the "boy" who's building the new rock garden. Swimming and paddle tennis will vie for a spot on a day's sporting agenda that might also include fishing and shooting. The rare rainy days may be spent in writing pieces that don't sell. Keeping up with the world through current magazines or reading detective stories at bedtime is made more exciting through the absence of newsstands and rental libraries. Fighting a ten-pound bonefish is always an event but it becomes an epic while a portable radio blares excerpts from *Die Götterdämmerung*. Then there's battenning down for the out-of-season hurricanes that never come and the arrival of Spring with money left in the bank to pay the U. S. income taxes. Finally, and best of all, there are those many incredibly wonderful days when, instead of passing the time, you just sit and let time pass you.

SLOT MACHINE KING

BY SAMUEL LUBELL

ONCE upon a time there was a Chicago newsboy who was smart, worked hard, and made millions of dollars. Not satisfied with selling tea and coffee for \$12 a week, he toiled nights in his room and invented a tricky sort of machine. When he died forty years later he left \$400,000 in property and the largest business of its kind in the world, today reported to be worth \$10,000,000. The lowly beginnings are there, and the obstacles overcome, but actually this is a Horatio Alger story in reverse. The morals are all cockeyed. For our hero is Herbert S. Mills and the machine that brought him from rags to riches was the notorious One Armed Bandit slot machine.

You know the Bandit, of course. Outwardly it resembles a cash register. On its right side is an arm-shaped lever. Near the top are three spinning reels with brightly-colored symbols of fruits, bars, and bells. You put a nickel into the slot, yank the lever, and set the reels whirling. If three bar symbols line up you get the jack-

pot. Through three generations the Bandit has remained basically unchanged, unequalled in separating players from their money. For the privilege of operating Bandits, innumerable slot-machine wars have been waged, dozens of men killed.

Mills really didn't invent the Bandit. That laurel belongs to Charlie Fey, a German-born mechanic, now seventy-eight, who lives in San Francisco. But Mills made the Bandit an international menace, and in doing so changed the pattern of American social, political, and business life.

Seeking a legitimate front for his gambling machines, Mills pioneered in all sorts of coin-operated equipment. He set the pace for the penny arcades, the profits from which helped launch the motion picture industry. More than any other single person, he made possible this century's advances in automatic merchandising, the changes in methods of selling hundreds of items from candy bars to handkerchiefs. Today the Mills