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Out Island Odyssey:
The Southern Bahamas
By Captain Steve Bay, M/Y LADY J
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COMPASS
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Scattered like pearls in the ocean to the southeast of Nassau, the Southern Bahamas islands have some of the prettiest and most pristine scenery in this country composed of more than 700 cays. But, like Columbus, the first European to lay eyes on this archipelago more than five centuries ago, you need a seaworthy vessel to get there. That poses no problem for the 142-foot Palmer Johnson LADY J. Here is a sample itinerary for a charter cruise through these far-flung Out Islands provided by her master, Captain Steve Bay.

Day 1

Fly to Cat Island (not to be confused with Cat Cay), located south of Eleuthera. Sky Bahamas and Bahamas Air both service Hawks Nest Marina, which has a 4,600-foot airstrip but is not a port of entry. New Bight, at 5,065 feet long, is a port of entry. (Alternatively, you can fly into Georgetown, Great Exuma.)

Cat Island offers outstanding scuba diving and big game fishing, in very close proximity to the marina and the anchorages on its southern end. Hawks Nest Marina has 28 slips for yachts up to 80 feet, fuel, electric, and shore-side accommodations.

Day 2

Cruise to Conception Island, a Bahamas National Park, just 30 miles from Cat Island. It has two good anchorages offering protection from the east and west/northwest. Spend the day enjoying the excellent scuba diving or visit the mangrove marine sanctuary, which is accessible by small tender or kayak. See turtles, juvenile sharks, bonefish, and stingrays in their habitat.

Day 3

It's just a short 12-mile run from Conception Island to the top of Long Island. Living up to its name, Long Island is 76 miles long but just 4 miles wide at its greatest breadth. Once again there is excellent fishing and diving here, along with a few hotel facilities. Flying Fish Marina at Clarence Town accommodates 130- to 140-foot yachts. Take an excursion to dive the blue holes, including Dean's Blue Hole, known as the world's deepest. If you are expecting more guests, there are daily flights from Nassau to Deadman's Cay.

Day 4

Enjoy lunch aboard the yacht while cruising to Water Cay in the Ragged Islands, 60 miles from the southern tip of Long Island. There is good diving in the two blue holes located just two miles west of the anchorage – one has a bottom depth of 145 feet. Non-scuba divers will find good snorkeling here. Water Cay also has excellent fishing. In fact, local fishermen are most likely to be your neighbors.



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Day 5

It's 12 miles to the next stop, Flamingo Cay in the Ragged Islands. Here, there are good anchorages on the north and west sides. This uninhabited cay is a great place for a beach BBQ. The crew sets a table and chairs up on the sand while the chef shows his skill with the grill. A lone coconut tree stands on the western beach, and a shipwreck lies close to shore. After the picnic, spend the afternoon exploring the caves and ruins ashore.

Day 6

Buenavista Cay, Ragged Islands. This island, 30 miles from Flamingo Cay, has possibly the prettiest beach in the Ragged Islands. There's a great anchorage that is a mile and a half in length. You will find good bird watching here – sometimes flamingos can be spotted ashore.

Day 7

A short 8-mile run takes you from Buenavista Cay to Johnson Cay and Hog Cay, Ragged Islands. There is a daytime-only anchorage close to the beach, with enough room for just one boat, stern-to. This cay is very isolated, and has another excellent beach. There are ruins ashore at Hog Cay plus a tiki hut owned by a local Ragged Islander, which is available for special events.

Your last stop is Ragged Island, the southernmost cay in the chain and the only inhabited island. Take the tender ashore where there are 100 inhabitants but very few facilities. Meet your aircraft at Duncan Town, which has a 3,800-foot runway for charter plane landing only.