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WORLD'S BEST GOLF DESTINATIONS



| A Love Song About The Abaco Club at Winding Bay



BY KATIE KEARNEY |

Abaco's allure reels before the plane touches down at Marsh Harbour Airport. The 50 shades of blue views on the descent serve notice - this is one of the most beautiful destinations in the world. Passengers press their foreheads against the windows to get a closer look at the thousands of little islands that dot the Atlantic Ocean. It's a tropical screensaver in real-life - stunning. Off the plane and on the tarmac is an exotic touch that never gets old. An aquamarine, gold and black Bahamas flag waves next to the terminal which is about the size of a food court at O'Hare. I haven't left the airport and I love this place.



The Abaco Club at Winding Bay

The Abaco Club at Winding Bay is home for the week. Abaco's a 45-minute flight from Miami, the resort is a 25-minute drive south of the airport. The entrance is marked with lovely purple and pink Bougainvillea, they're shaped to perfection. Four nights isn't enough at The Abaco Club; there's an 18-hole golf course, spa, beach, scuba diving, snorkeling, standup paddle boarding, some of the best fishing in the world, tennis courts, two bars and two restaurants. Guests get their own golf cart for getting around the property. United Kingdom rule ended in the Bahamas in 1973, but their influence lingers – carts and cars are driven on the left side of the road here. Some guests visit The Abaco Club and never leave – there are homes for sale and annual memberships available.



Beautiful and delicious drinks at Flippers Beach Bar

It's raining on day one – no problem. Bad weather for golf, but perfect to hang at the resort for lunch and drinks at Flippers Beach Bar. The open-air tiki hut is perfect for watching the rain, sipping Goombay Smash cocktails and feasting on fresh fish tacos. Max is behind the bar; he's part bartender, part psychic. Without my consult, after a short conversation he makes a "Bitter Gin," it's gin, lemonade and soda served with a slice of coconut on the side. He had just whacked open the coconut with a machete. Max was right, the "Bitter Gin" is perfect.

Lunch was amazing, dinner's even better. Also, within the resort confines is Cliff House, an upscale restaurant and central hub of The Abaco Club. This is where members and guests meet for dinner and drinks. Perhaps a few fishing and golf fibs are told there. Perhaps. Dinner starts with famous Abaco stone crab claws. Main course is a shrimp linguine in a lemon white wine sauce. Cliff house is known for their fresh seafood – I will never forget it.

Rains stops on day two and it's time to tee it up on the Donald Steele and Tom Mackenzie design. Waves crash near the par three fourth hole – it's one of the most stunning golf courses I've ever seen. The finishing hole is a lengthy par five with surf crashing against the rocks near the green. Painted conch shell tee markers are a nice touch. Tropical climate and palm trees aside – this is this is a links golf course like in Ireland and Scotland. Tees, fairways and greens are plush. After the round is a spa visit – the Coral Reef's Stone Crop Facial is heaven-sent. My golfer's sunburned skin is smooth and glowing post treatment.

On the third day we sail the crystal-clear Sea of Abaco on a stunning private yacht stocked with chilled rosé, ice-cold Sands brand Bahamian beer and a delectable cheese board. Our first stop is near the reef of Elbow Cay. We snorkel off the back of the boat — it's like swimming in an aquarium. There are brilliant blue parrotfish, yellowtail snapper and an adorable baby blacktip shark. Next is Hope Town and we walk the 101 steps to the top of the Elbow Reef Lighthouse. Visibility is 17 miles/27 kilometers, the long-range views are the payoff for the climb. Our final stop is at three-time European Tour winner Thomas Aikens's house. Abaco is home for Aiken and his wife Kate. **They discuss how they fell in love with the island and sing its praises.** They were married in Abaco – one of the many cherished memories they share.

My time at Abaco Club at Winding Bay is a perfectly written story that gets better each day. Alas it has a sad ending, I must leave.

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Cruising the Abaco Sea with an amazing cheese board and rosé