

nursery. Established in 2014 and managed by the Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation, the site is home to environmentalist Jason deCaires Taylor's *Ocean Atlas*, a striking 16-foot statue of a young Bahamian girl carrying the weight of the ocean on her shoulders.

Donning a mask and snorkel, I plunged into the ocean and followed Musgrove as he swam toward the buoy marking the garden's location. A group of silvery needlefish glided gracefully just beneath the water's surface, which was so crystal clear I could see all the way to the white sandy bottom 30 feet below. Ahead, *Ocean Atlas* rose majestically from the seafloor surrounded by bright turquoise and yellow sergeant majors. At the base of the statue, tiny blue tang darted among concrete balls studded with spiny black sea urchins.

Over the past decade, the garden's structures have become encrusted with corals, creating a habitat for a variety of marine life and turning the site into a living classroom for both locals and visitors. Additionally, hundreds of fragments of fused staghorn coral—a hybrid of staghorn and elkhorn corals—have been successfully propagated in the on-site nursery and outplanted to adjacent reefs by PIMS. Elkhorn and staghorn are critically endangered, making it vital to preserve these genotypes before they disappear.

Back on the boat, Musgrove explained how important it is for people to understand the ways their activities on land can impact fragile island nations such as the Bahamas and the people who call those islands home. "The beauty of a place can only be sustained if we take care of it," Musgrove said. "The purpose of my work is to connect people to the ocean, so they fall in love with it—and take steps to protect it—the way I have."

# Coast Guard

An immersive Bahamian experience showcases the beauty and fragility of coral reefs

**A**s my boat skimmed along the western coastline of New Providence in the Bahamas, I watched, captivated, as the color of the ocean morphed from sapphire to emerald to a dazzling aquamarine. I was onboard for Rosewood Baha Mar's Ocean Guardian Experience, a snorkeling-meets-citizen-science adventure designed to immerse guests in the wonders of the Bahamas' coral reefs. Led by renowned Bahamian free diver and underwater filmmaker André Musgrove and a coral restoration specialist with the Perry Institute for Marine Science (PIMS) Reef Rescue Network, the event highlights the critical importance of protecting these vital marine ecosystems. Despite the beauty surrounding

me, I quickly learned of a sobering reality lying just beneath the surface. In the summer of 2023, the entire Caribbean region faced record-breaking temperatures. A dangerous heat wave ensued, causing corals to expel the single-celled algae that lives in their tissues—a phenomenon known as coral bleaching.

Our destination that morning was the Sir Nicholas Nuttall Coral Reef Sculpture Garden, an otherworldly underwater art gallery and coral

**FROM TOP**  
Jason deCaires Taylor's *Ocean Atlas* at the Sir Nicholas Nuttall Coral Reef Sculpture Garden, Bahamas; André Musgrove leading Rosewood Baha Mar's Ocean Guardian Experience



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