

Irish Daily Mail **weekend**

TRAVEL

*Beyoncé and Jay Z have
a holiday home here...
So if you're in Florida,
hop over and catch them*

Bahamian

Rhapsody

MY Bahamian driver is in no hurry. 'We lead such an easy-going lifestyle over here, we often forget the time.'

And nor am I. We are cruising through the vibrant, vibrant streets of Nassau and all I can think of are four days of

BY REBECCA LEE

sunshine, conch and cocktails. A mere thirty-five-minute flight from Miami and a one hour fourteen-minute plane journey from Orlando, it was a no-brainer for me to make a sunshine pitstop while in the States.

Nassau is at the heart of New Provi-

dence, a 21-mile-long Island, the 11th largest Island out of 700 in the Bahamas.

Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey, Beyoncé and Jay Z all boast holiday homes in Nassau while Sean Connery, not wanting to give up his James Bond lifestyle, lives there permanently.

Famous for its weather and powder-white beaches, temperatures sizzle at

an average of 32 degrees in summer and 27 degrees in winter making it the perfect spot for sunseekers.

I stayed in The Royal Atlantis on Paradise Island, a tourist haven to the north of Nassau. As a solo female visiting a resort renowned for families and romance, I wondered if it

TURN TO NEXT PAGE

MORE: LISBON ● CATHERINE MURPHY ● MAL ROGERS

Spend the day relaxing on the beach and the night talking as Gaeilge to the locals in the bar

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

was the right choice. I need not have worried however as like the Irish, everyone is ridiculously friendly and I was never short of company.

Tourism is the main economic driver in The Bahamas, accounting for over 60% GDP. They mainly use US dollars though the Bahamian dollar remains in existence.

Pastel-coloured British colonial buildings line the tasteful tropical streets on a hilly landscape which is swamped with beaches, coconut trees and coral reef. It really is just like it is in the brochures.

While the Bahamas are a safe place for solo travellers during the day, I was advised by to be careful at night. I found the hustle died down most evenings anyway, with entertainment provided in many hotel resorts.

A hotspot for day trippers and cruise ship passengers, most of the action can be seen in downtown Nassau which consists of attractions such as the pirate museum, Nassau straw market, Fort Charlotte and Awark Cay.

Nassau is also a great base for visiting quieter Rose Island, Exuma (an area comprising of over 365 Islands) and Andros Island. All of which you can get a taxi or a water ferry to.

THE best time to visit the Bahamas is mid-December to mid-April due to the throngs of tourists who come ashore.

I went in November, apparently the quiet season, and spent four days relaxing, and enjoying the beach, during the day, and by night teaching the locals my mother tongue in Senor Frogs and Shenanigans Irish bar.

And I ate, and ate. I signed up with the Tru Bahamian Food Tours, and was very glad I did.

Tru will give you a true insight into Nassau life.

We visited several restaurants, and may I especially recommend the Bahamian Cookin' Restaurant, where we gorged on macaroni cheese and chicken.

And Conch!

Come again...

Conch (a mollusc shell fish) is one of the dishes the Bahamas is best known for.

It is almost everywhere with restaurants featuring curried conch, conch salad and conch fritters.

I have never taken to seafood but after being egged on to try it from my food tour group I took a bite.

As they say in the Lion King, it tastes like chicken!

When in the Bahamas it is compulsory to imbibe the signature



rum-based 'Bahama Mama' cocktails... and this I did with great gusto at the Towne Hotel. You really do need to like rum to

everything.

Luckily, I love it. And cake.

So you can imagine how good the delicacies at the Tortuga Rum

Cake Company are.



Bahama Mama: Make sure you stock up on cocktails

THE ATLANTIS... A DISNEYLAND FOR ADULTS AND KIDS

SWORDSFISH, sharks, turtles, manta rays and more swim both around this ocean themed resort which dominates Paradise Island. Connected to Nassau Island by bridge, eye-catching Atlantis consists of five different properties catering to people from all walks of life. I stayed in The Royal, the two-tower hotel that has recently undergone refurbishment. The Atlantis Royal which was constructed around the myth is a

property that is based on being risen from the sea with its design featuring arches, domes and spires. It features 2,317 rooms and boasts the world's largest open air marine habitat; waterpark 'Aquaventure' which has 18 waterslides and 11 swimming pools, a fitness centre, movie theatre numerous bars and restaurants and Dolphin Cay, a cove that features over 40 dolphins. It also prides itself on the Atlantis Casino which is a must visit for

anyone staying in the Bahamas. The Atlantis casino provides additional life to the hotel at night attracting throngs of people and is connected to Caesar's Palace in Vegas, making it well worth a visit gambler or not. A Disneyland for adults and kids, the Atlantis resort provides fascinating underwater features such as aquariums and walk through tunnels. It also features designer boutiques, golf courses and fine

dining restaurants. The property is worth a visit alone with many tourists spending a day at the waterpark or visiting the casino to view it in all its glory. Bear in mind tourists are not allowed walk around all parts of the hotel as some of it is restricted for guests only. ■ Rebecca flew to the Bahamas from Miami with www.bahamasair.com flights cost on average \$300 return. The food tour was with Tru

Bahamian. See www.trubahamianfoodtours.com adults cost \$69 children cost \$49 Prices for The Atlantis Royal vary depending on the season. Rebecca's room in the Royal started from \$211 per night. You can also avail of dining plans during your stay. See www.atlantisbahamas.com Rebecca swam with the dolphins in Dolphin Cay in the Atlantis resort. Programmes and prices vary. For more see the Atlantis website.

get the most out of a Bahamian night... it's in

All this overeating is well and good but you probably should do some exercise while you're here.

The Bahamas has wonderful snorkelling while a real treat is the chance to swim with dolphins.

While on Paradise Island I visited Dolphin Cay situated within The Atlantis resort.

You don't even have to be a guest of the hotel to swim with the dolphins.

It is pricey, but when you've come all this way then you really should push the boat out.

I had an hour long session with two dolphins in a 10-metre pool alongside a group.

We swam with them, got them to do tricks and were allowed to pet them to our hearts' content.

As a true animal lover I was delighted to hear though that the tricks were optional.

I'm not going to lie... nothing comes cheap in the Bahamas due to import charges.

For example a bottle of Head & Shoulders that would be €4 in Ireland retails at €10 in many supermarkets there.

Equally food and drink can prove pricey depending on where you go.

Nassau is also extremely commercial however the surrounding islands provide opportunity to go

off the beaten track.

I'm pleased to say you can believe what you see in the brochures and television ads, the beaches are that sandy and the water is that crystal clear.

So, if you want to live like an A-lister for a few days, this is where it's at.

DEATH in Paradise alert! It's taken me a couple of years to get over Camille leaving and now Florence is off too. Ruby's the new girl in Saint Marie, which is really Guadeloupe. And she's got small shorts to fill! Travelrepublic.ie has the Karibea Beach Resort, Le Gosier, Grand Terre from €49pp a night. Fly from London. And maybe ask for Florence for me?

IT'S cold in Scotland... they even take to burning ships to stay warm, which is the Up Helly Aa fire festival on the last Tuesday of this month. But that's because the Shellanders are of Viking stock. This, and more, you can learn on a G Adventures

IT went down like a lead balloon when I told Daddy's Little Girl a couple of years ago I was off to see Harry Potter at Universal in Orlando. If she'd looked hard enough she'd have seen a plethora of 2+2 deals. Tour America has seven nights in Loews Portofino Bay from €969pp, return flights. Travel May. Visit www.touramerica.ie.

14-day trip from Edinburgh to Tromsø. G Adventures offers savings of up to 15% on departures between 1 and 31 May. So that's €5,864, down from €6,899. There are also 25% savings on multiple other destinations, before April 30. Book before 11.59pm on 31 January. www.gadventures.com.

DARN the clouds that rob me of a balloon ride. Maybe this time? Penina Hotel and Golf Resort in Portimão, the Algarve, offers a balloon ride and picnic in its two-night package €367pp twin room pool view with brekkie. www.penina.com. Visit www.aerlingus.com and www.ryanair.com.

WOW! Pt ?? (we lost count). The Icelandic airline has flights here from €29.99 one-way. The deal runs out tomorrow at midnight. Visit www.wowair.ie. And also Aer Lingus has up to 50% off summer flights to Europe. Or fly to North America from €189 each way, as part of a return trip.



2019 with the extra option this year of a Cork to Naples route.

Knowing, of course, that we're a sophisticated bunch, Topflight has a seven-night escorted tour to see Andrea Bocelli in Tuscany, staying half-board in the 4* Hotel Ariston in Montecatini Terme.

You'll get a full-day excursion to Pisa and Pietrasanta with a tour guide, a ticket to see Andrea perform at the Teatro del Silenzio. And a full-day excursion to Lucca with a cooking class and lunch.

There will also be train tickets to Florence with a guided walking tour. Prices from €1,349pp with a single supp from €199. Return flights included.

Call (01) 240 1700 or visit www.topflight.ie.

Oro zecchino... which is pure gold, I think.

I prefer to keep my feet on the ground but e-fat bikes look fun

LES Portes du Soleil is famous for many things - vast amounts of skiing between France and Switzerland in the winter and great mountain-biking in summer - especially in Les Gets and Morzine on the French side.

For mountain bike fanatics who want to indulge their passion all year long, fat bikes (mountain bikes with fat tyres which you can ride on snow) have been popping up all over the Alps in

CATHERINE MURPHY'S Ski Report

SKI WRITER OF THE YEAR



recent times.

But in the mountaintop resort of Avoriaz - just above Morzine - there's a new bike on the block, the electronic fat bike.

I have to admit, the only type of

machinery I'm comfortable driving is a pair of skis.

I've enjoyed a couple of e-bike tours in Europe during the summer and (timidly) ridden a fat bike in Ireland.

But electronic fat biking on the slopes of Avoriaz - sounds mad right? Well, perhaps not.

Avoriaz Alpine Ski School and Rustine Mountain Biking have introduced the activity this season. It's such a new idea that I had to go and find out what it's all about.

I was based at one of my favourite Alpine boltholes, the gorgeous Ferme du Lac Vert in nearby Montriond, for a few days.

Worried that conditions were too icy for two wheels (it was before snow arrived this week), I entrusted La Ferme manager Tadhg Ryan and his assistant Zita

to try it while I looked on from the back of a skidoo (equally great fun).

My biggest fear had been that I would be expected to bike down long slopes with skiers and snowboarders all around but as guide Laurent Calvet explained, during the day, the bikes are used on a dedicated route - a quiet cross-country ski trail from Avoriaz to Super Morzine.

Between 5 and 7pm, the bikes can be used all over the mountain, including the snow park where more advanced bikers get to perfect tricks.

Like regular e-bikes, these weigh

around 25kg each and have a number of settings - from eco to sport and turbo, which blasts you uphill with ease.

I felt a tinge of envy as I watched Tadhg and Zita glide effortlessly up slopes and successfully negotiate downhill sections.

After a one-and-a-half-hour session, it was easy to see why e-fat biking is an attractive mountain activity.

Like snow-showing, it's not difficult and offers a way of seeing the mountains without clicking into skis.

It's also a great alternative to traditional après ski.

Whilst many skiers were living it up at the new La Folie Douce venue in Avoriaz, Tadhg and Zita were treated to a beautiful sunset as they cycled the trail.

A one-and-a-half hour e-fat biking session costs €60 (€65 between 5-7pm) and is suitable for teens upwards (depending on height). Private tours for up to five people can also be arranged.

Free taster sessions are held each Sunday at 5.15pm and women's camps will also run during the season.

For more information, go to avoriaz.com and avoriazalpine-skischool.com



Wheely good: Our Catherine on her e-fat bike