

# Absolutely

## Abaco

The Bahamas was everything Alison Root expected it to be, and the Club on Great Abaco Island has so much more to offer visitors than just golf

Since I was a teenager (sadly that's a long time ago now) I have wanted to visit the Bahamas. I don't know why, probably because the word 'Bahamas' sounds so far-flung and exotic, and now I realise that indeed it is.

Flying from London, an overnight stay in Fort Lauderdale was followed by an exhilarating transfer on a seaplane plane to Marsh Harbour Airport. From here it was just a short journey to The Abaco Club on Winding Bay, formerly a Ritz Carlton managed property, but since 2014, owned by the Boston-based company, Southworth Development.

Situated on 453 acres, The Abaco Club is a private international sporting club and residential community, although it's not so private that guests aren't welcome. There is no hotel, but instead a choice of accommodation ranging from comfortable cabanas and cottage villas to magnificent oceanfront homes.

The octagonal-shaped cabanas are charming, painted in different soothing

pastel colours and individually accessed across a zigzagging wooden slat pathway. Each has an outdoor porch that overlooks the 1st fairway of the acclaimed golf course and they are well appointed with necessities like a fridge, toaster, tea/coffee making facilities and a microwave, so when combined with the spacious living area and king-size bed, you're guaranteed a relaxing home from home experience. For convenience, residents are allocated a four-seater golf cart for the duration of their stay and should you park the cart in your bay overnight facing inwards, by the next morning, as if by magic, it's facing outwards so you're all set to go – a simple yet nice touch.

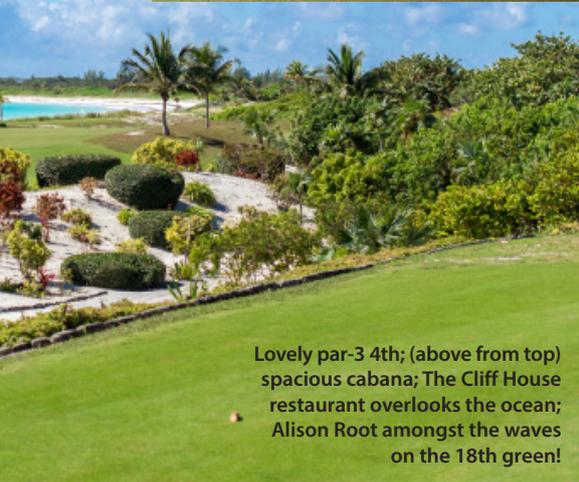
My first night's sleep was disturbed, not by the Abaco parrots (the club's mascot), but through jet lag. I therefore had the perfect opportunity to take advantage of a very early morning stroll, admiring an abundance of lush foliage before stepping onto the soft, white sandy beach that runs adjacent to the row of cabanas, on the opposite side to the golf course. The beach



stretches for two and a half miles, and as the sun began to rise, hitting the turquoise-blue water of the crescent-shaped bay, that's when I realised I'd woken up in paradise! My only word of caution is the biting insects, no-see-ums, as they certainly saw me coming, so take repellent.

The 18-hole golf course, designed by Brits Donald Steel and Tom Mackenzie is The Abaco Club's centrepiece, and it's ranked as the No1 course in The Bahamas.

It's a Scottish styled links course with



Lovely par-3 4th; (above from top) spacious cabana; The Cliff House restaurant overlooks the ocean; Alison Root amongst the waves on the 18th green!



and with so many swales and sand-filled bale out areas, if you miss on the wrong side of the fairways or greens, the game becomes a real struggle. The secret is to learn quickly where to place the ball off the tee and try to use the contours to your advantage.

In such a beautiful setting, the majority of holes cannot help but be anything other than visually attractive, especially the handful that are influenced by the sight and sound of the Atlantic. The closing stretch, 15-18, is dramatic and memorable. A natural quarry segments the tight par-4 15th and the dogleg par-5 16th, these holes are followed by a downhill par-3 that slopes to the sea and could be described as Abaco's signature hole, and the finale is a thrilling par-5 to an elevated green from which the crashing waves almost feel in touching distance.

The Abaco Club is a lifestyle; there are so many activities on offer aside from golf including an array of water sports, tennis, an outdoor infinity pool and a spa. In fact I didn't play golf until two days into the trip.

My first lesson was how to cast a fly-fishing rod which I got the hang of ... eventually! Deep sea fishing is a very popular pastime off the shores of Abaco, as you don't have to travel far off shore for deep waters. Professional golfer and keen fisherman, Darren Clarke, owns a house here.

It's little wonder that days often revolve around the water, and a boat trip from Little Harbour to Man-O-War Cay, a small island known as the boat-building capital of the Bahamas, is worth adding to your itinerary. This place is a step back in time and at Albury's Sail Shop, you can watch the third generation of this family owned business plying their trade, making colourful items from sturdy canvas.

If you spend a day on the water, a great stop off for lunch is the Firefly Bar & Grill

at Elbow Cay. Corn fritters, jerk chicken and blackened shrimp are just some of the traditional Bahamian dishes on the menu that can be accompanied by the restaurant's home produced liqueurs.

On return to Little Harbour, a must-visit is Pete's pub, a casual, sand-between-your-toes outdoor pub that is popular with locals and visitors alike. If you're unable to relax here then you've got a problem, although the pub's signature cocktail, the Blaster, including five different rums and three fruit juices, does help! Pete (full name Peter Johnston) is a celebrated Bahamian artist, and just a few steps away from the pub there is an art gallery that features his work.

At The Abaco Club there are two dining options; either the informal Flippers Beach Bar that's open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, or for gourmet fare, The Cliff House, which as the name suggests, is perched on the club's highest elevation. Here you can enjoy delicious dishes such as stone crab and lobster with a coconut sauce and squid linguini, so it's just as well that you can burn calories by dancing the night away to some live Bahamian Rake 'n' Scrape music!

I unwound on Winding Bay, the Bahamas lived up to my expectations and The Abaco Club is definitely an exclusive yet inclusive hideaway that's a real treat. 

firm and fast rolling undulating fairways, large greens, gruelling pot bunkers, but sunshine, palm trees, stunning ocean views and conch shells as tee markers, impart a tropical flavour to this testing course that's by no means an easy walk in the Caribbean!

Admittedly I played and scored better after venturing out on the course for a second time, which always makes for a more pleasurable round, but it's definitely a layout worth knowing. Like any links course, the strength of the wind is a factor,

## You Need to Know

### ● How to get there

From the UK, fly to Marsh Harbour via Florida, Miami or Fort Lauderdale

### ● Where to stay

The Abaco Club

**W: [theabacoclub.com](http://theabacoclub.com)**

One-bedroom Cabana costs from \$495 low season to \$795 high season, per room per night.