

**The Bahamas High Commission
London**

FACT SHEET # 4

THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

CULTURE

The Bahamas has a distinctive culture which has evolved over generations. The culture is often told in the colourful brush strokes of traditional art, in a unique rhythmic music in long held traditions as told in popular folklore in an enduring oral tradition. It is a culture that has evolved from a mixture of mostly African, combined with some British colonial and American influences, to a unique and colourful style of Bahamian self-expression. English is the official language of The Bahamas.

The People

Bahamians are best described as an easy-going, friendly and hospitable people. The racial composition in The Bahamas is approximately 85% of African origin and the remaining 15% of European and other origins. The 2000 national census in The Bahamas showed a population of 303,611 persons with over 32% of the population under 15 years old and the average life expectancy at 72 years. The adult literacy rate is over 90% with a rapidly growing professional class and university educated workforce.

Religion

The Bahamas is a religious country claiming to have the greatest number of churches per capita in the world. Christianity predominates, and the church is influential in Bahamian society, including government affairs. Church news and events are prominently positioned in newspapers. The Bible is preached at face value and biblical references and quotations are common in all aspects of daily living. Events and celebrations often include a church service as part of the festivities.

Denominations include Anglican, Assembly of God, Baha'I Faith, Baptist, Brethern, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Science, Church of God of Prophecy, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, Latter-Day Saints (Mormon), Lutheran, Methodist, Muslim/Islamic, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist, The Salvation Army and other smaller denominations.

In New Providence, the three largest denominations are Baptist (35%) , Anglican/Episcopalian (15%) and Roman Catholic (14%). Figures are based on the 2000 census.

Music and Dance

Regional Caribbean music has a strong influence in The Bahamas. Reggae, Calypso and Merengue have long traditions in The Bahamas and are widely enjoyed alongside the new sound of Socca out of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. In recent years American soul music, popular Dance and Rock music have had a strong impact on the younger generation of Bahamians however, The Bahamas has a music and dance all its own. The official music of the islands is "Goombay" but the makeshift sound of "Rake and Scrape" is the most popular among Family Islanders.

Junkanoo

No expression is more indigenously and genuinely unique to Bahamian culture than Junkanoo. Junkanoo is a music and dance form that originated in The Bahamas during the days of slavery. It is perhaps the closest link its African heritage and remains remarkably unchanged over the years.

Junkanoo is the quintessential Bahamian celebration, a parade –or rush-out – characterized by colourful costumes, goatskin drums, cowbells, horns and a brass section.

Junkanoo is one of the few examples of uniquely Bahamian culture. The stunning crepe-paper and cardboard costumes of Caribbean colours are worked on most of the year. When the celebrations are over, most of them – some of them art masterpieces – are thrown away, although the Junkanoo Expo now preserves the best pieces for exhibit.

Junkanoo, which has been compared to Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Carnival in Rio, is staged in the early hours of December 26, Boxing Day, and again in the early hours of Jan 1, New Year's Day. If either falls on a Sunday, the celebrations are held Mon morning. The parade moves clockwise downtown through Bay St, Elizabeth Ave, Shirley St, Frederick St, King St and George St.

The annual Junkanoo in June Heritage Festival also features rush-outs and celebrations every Saturday in June at Arawak Cay. This month-long festival includes craft demonstrations, story telling, children's activities, live music and authentic Bahamian food.

Teamed with hypnotic music conducive to uninhibited dancing, Junkanoo is a never-to-be-forgotten festival of fun and frivolity.

No one knows for certain where it came from or how its name came to be. Some credit it to John Canoe, a legendary West African chieftain. Others say it comes from the French phrase gens inconnus, unknown, or masked, people.

Regular groups in Nassau Junkanoo contests include the Valley Boys, Saxons, One Faily, Music Makers, Roots, Fancy Dancers, Z-Bandits, Colours, The Prodigal Sons and the PIGS (Progress through Integrity, Guts and Strength).

There is a mini Junkanoo rush-out staged somewhere in New Providence and the Out Islands every week.

Art

There are definitely Bahamian art styles, distinctive, defined and unique. The vibrant colours and dramatic themes of Junkanoo form the basis of this artistic expression but the lifestyle, social struggles, strong religious influences and the breathtaking beauty of the natural surroundings have a clear presence in the brush strokes and dramatic expressions of Bahamian art. The work of several Bahamian artists has attracted international attention.

Population

A census was taken in 2000. Results record The Bahamas population at 303,611. Provisional projected estimate for 2007 is 338,800.

In 2000, population density (per sq mile) for The Bahamas was 56. For New Providence and Grand Bahama, population density was 2,653 and 89, respectively. The percentage of population under 15 was estimated at 29.4%; 15-59, 62.7%; and 60 and over, 7.9%.

Results from the Annual Vital Statistics Report 2000 indicate that there were 17.4 births per 1,000 people and 5.3 deaths per 1,000 people in The Bahamas, making the average annual estimated population growth 1.8%.

POPULATION OF THE BAHAMAS OFFICIAL CENSUS – 2000

<u>ISLAND</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>
Abaco	13,170
Acklins	428
Andros	7,686
Berry Islands	709
Bimini	1,717
Cat Island	1,647
Crooked Island (including Long Cay)	350
Eleuthera, Harbour Island and Spanish Wells	11,165
The Exumas	3,571
Grand Bahama	46,994
Inagua	969
Long Island	2,992

Mayaguana	259
New Providence	210,832
Ragged Island	72
Rum Cay and San Salvador	<u>1,050</u>
TOTAL	303,611

NATIONAL SYMBOLS

Coat of Arms

By royal warrant dated Dec 7, 1971, The Bahamas was granted a new coat of arms, the description of which, in heraldic terms, is as follows:

“Argent a representation of the Santa Maria on a base barry wavy of four Azure on a Chief Azure a demi Sun Or And for the Crest upon a representation of Our Royal Helmet mantled Azure doubled Argent on a Wreath Or and Azure a Conch Shell proper in front of a Panache of Palm Fronds proper And for Supporters On the dexter a Marlin proper on the Sinister a Flamingo proper; And upon a Compartment Per pale Waves of the Sea and Swampland proper together with the motto: FORWARD, UPWARD, ONWARD, TOGETHER.”

The coat of arms was developed from drawings submitted by artist Rev Dr Hervis L Bain, Jr, who also contributed to the design of The Bahamas flag.

Flag

The design of The Bahamas flag is a black equilateral triangle on a background of three equal horizontal stripes of aquamarine, gold and aquamarine. Its design is based on a composite of ideas and suggestions collected from Bahamians in a national competition to design the flag, held two years before independence.

The official symbolism of the flag’s colours and design is as follows: Black represents the vigour and force of a united people, the triangle pointing towards the body of the flag represents the enterprise and determination of Bahamians to develop and possess the rich resources of land and sea symbolized by gold and aquamarine respectively; the colours of the flag are symbolic of our bright tropical land of sea and sun.

National Anthem

The National Anthem of The Bahamas was written by Mr Timothy Gibson, MBE in 1969. The words are as follows:

"Lift up your head to the rising sun, Bahamaland,
 March on to glory, your bright banners waving high,
 See how the world marks the manner of your bearing
 Pledge to excel through love and unity.
 Pressing onward, march together, to a common loftier goal,
 Steady sunward, tho' the weather hide the wide and treacherous shoal.
 Lift up your head to the rising sun Bahamaland,

Til the road you've trod lead unto your God,
March on Bahamaland."

Pledge of allegiance

I pledge my allegiance to the flag,
And to The Commonwealth of The
Bahamas for which it stands,
One people united in love and service.

Rev Dr Philip A Rahming, JP

National bird

The national bird is the flamingo, a pink long-legged wader of the genus *Phoenicopterus*. Inagua is the site of the world's largest breeding colony of West Indian flamingos.

National Fish

The blue marlin, of the genus *Makaira*, is the national fish. It is the sharp-billed aristocrat of Atlantic game fish.

National Flower

The Yellow Elder (*Tecoma stans* or *Stenolobium stans*), a tubular-shaped yellow flower with delicate red stripes, is the national flower of The Bahamas.

The National Tree

The Lignum Vitae, or Tree of life (*Guaiacum sanctum*), is the national tree. It is the heaviest of all woods with clusters of small blue flowers at the branch tips.

NATURE CENTRES

The Bahamas government is committed to enhancing the country's status as a centre for ecotourism. Various projects have been undertaken to reclaim and restore areas of natural beauty and ecological importance. In New Providence, the Adelaide Creek wetlands, near Adelaide village were restored and mangroves and marine life regenerated. Causeways and bridges were built. Since completion of the project, a wide variety of marine wildlife has moved in – including barracuda, shrimp, grey snapper, lobster, bonefish, egrets, ducks and crabs.

Ardastra Gardens, Zoo and Conservation Centre is at the forefront of conservation efforts in The Bahamas. In 1995, three Bahama parrots were successfully bred and plans are ongoing to establish a full breeding programme to prevent the extinction of this endangered species. This 5 ½-acre exotic garden is home to some 300 mammals, birds and reptiles, and has the largest collection of Bahamian species in the world. The Bahamian boa constrictor is bred here and other rare species such as the rock iguana are on exhibit. The centre also houses a large flock of flamingos, The Bahamas' national bird. A breeding programme was established in the mid-1990's for the Caribbean flamingo and has been successful for the past five years. Visitors may feed lorry parrots and watch marching flamingos perform three times daily. Open daily 9am-5pm. Last admission 4:30pm Admission: adult residents, \$6, non-residents, \$12; children 4-12, residents \$3, non-residents \$6; under four, free. Closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Located off West Bay St, one mile west of town, tel 323-5806.

The **Botanical Gardens** contains 18 acres of tropical flora. More than 600 species are featured.

The Bahamas National Herbarium was established in 1996. The main branch is housed in the Conservation Unit of the Botanical Gardens with four annex locations, two in New Providence, one in Grand Bahama and one in San Salvador. The collection of more than 7,000 specimens of botanicals comprises more than 129 families collected from all over The Bahamas. The collection is used mainly for research and teaching.

WORDS AND SAYINGS

WORDS

BIG EYE	Wanting largest piece of anything
GRAVELICIOUS	Wanting everything
BELLY BUS'	Diving
ROCK	Stones - Bahamians throw rocks
YUK	Jerk/Pull - "Yuk muh arm fer muh" (pull my arm for me)
WEX	Mad, angry
COUSINS	Hair rolled up on the nape of a woman's neck
CUTE	Someone who thinks they are better than anyone else or their feet are too good to touch the ground
STOKE	To insult someone
NIGGERITIS	Drowsiness - a disease common to The Bahamas. Race does not matter. It strikes after a good heavy lunch.
TWO BY FOUR	A type of house or dwelling

SAYINGS

When the sun is shining and it's raining at the same time - *The Devil beating his wife for potcake*

"If I plant yer, yer'll grow?" - *When wanting a child to do a favour or run an errand*

Hard head bird don't make good soup

Don't miss the water 'til the well run dry

God don't like ugly

Every dog have he day

MUSIC AND DANCE

Bahamian music and dance are divided into three distinct areas. Below is a listing of those areas with brief descriptions of the types of music and dance presented in those areas.

Religious Music

Under this heading comes Church Anthems, Rushing Songs, Wake and Setting Up Songs. These songs are sung mainly without instruments but are accompanied with foot stomping and hand clapping. There are the Rhyming Spirituals which are sung again without instruments in most cases.

Combination of Music and Dance

Our second category of Bahamian music is mainly a combination of music and dance.

Ring Dances

These include Jump in Dance, Ring Play and Fire Dance. These dances are accompanied by singing, chanting, drums and clapping. Some of these dances school children participate in such as: "Blue Hill Water Dry" and "Oh Josie Put He Hand in He Pocket Josie Lick".

Set Dances

The origin of the Quadrille can be traced back to Europe in the early 19th Century. The Quadrille is actually an off shoot from the European Whites and the social elite White Bahamian Class. Bahamian Blacks found the equivalent. In this category we have the most famous Quadrille dance which is accompanied by Rake-n-Scrape Band using the concertina, saw and drum as musical instruments.

Recreational Music

Known as Sea Songs, Launching Songs, Songs of Derision and Commentary Songs on contemporary life in the country. They are accompanied by guitar, banjo, piano or a small combo. Examples - The Mail, Mr. Alcohol, Race Track Song.

Bahamian dance music is called Calypso or Goombay.

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

COMMUNITY FESTIVALS

FOX HILL FESTIVAL	From Emancipation Day - first Monday in August - to Fox Hill Day - second Tuesday in August.
HILLTOP FESTIVAL	August. Activities include a Church Service, picnic and exhibition. This is the first community to hold a neighbourhood reunion - the forerunner of Community Festivals.
OVER THE HILL FESTIVAL	August/September. Cookouts, concerts, exhibitions, lectures, etc.
JOE BILLY FESTIVAL	December. Basketball games, concerts, dances with juk-rake and scrape music, cookouts, junkanoo performances.
SAX-O-RAMA	Organised by the Saxons junkanoo group. Activities include church services, cookouts, junkanoo exhibition, junkanoo performances and competition.
CENTREVILLE IN OCTOBER	Church services, photo and art exhibitions, road race, Sperets Ball, mini fair, junkanoo performance.
POND FESTIVAL WEEK	Easter Sunday for one week. Activities include Ecumenical Service, picnic and cookouts, luncheon for aged, basketball game, mini fair, dinner cruise.

NATIONAL FESTIVALS

JUNKANOO PARADES	Boxing Day and New Year's Day - 3.00am to 9.00am.
DISCOVERY SEASON	September to October held in Nassau, Freeport, Andros and Eleuthera. Gospel concerts, school choirs, art exhibitions, essay competitions, tea parties, cooking demonstrations, flea markets, concerts, shopping specials, cookouts, discovery cruises, walking tours.
PINEAPPLE FESTIVAL	June. Held in Eleuthera.

ELEUTHERA HOMECOMING June.

FAMILY ISLAND REGATTAS April - Exuma. August - Cat Island. October - North Eleuthera. Regattas are also held in Abaco, Andros and Long Island.

FAIRS

RED CROSS March.

Various Church and other civic organisations and schools throughout the year.

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