



West Indian Flamingo
Janice Sveta

Bird Tourism Market for the Bahamas

Economic and Market Snapshot of the Bird-Based Tourism Sector

Economics of Bird Tourism in Bahamas

The Bahamas, an archipelago of more than 700 islands sprinkled across 100,000 square miles of the Caribbean,¹ depends heavily on its natural environment and aggressively promotes birding tourism. Indeed tourism is by far the Bahamas' largest industry, accounting for over 40% of total GDP (US \$3.8 billion) and over 50% of employment (98,000 jobs) in 2014. Of the money generated by tourism, 91% is for leisure travel and only 9% for business. Out of 184 countries globally, the Bahamas ranks 93 in the absolute contribution of travel to GDP, but 10th based on its relative size.²

In 2014, the Bahamas received over 6.3 million international arrivals, of which 1.3 million were stayover visitors who spent about \$1.3 billion or an average of \$1000 per person. (In contrast, expenditures of the 4.8 million cruise passengers totaled US\$2.5 million or only US\$52 per person.)³ Nearly three quarters of the stayover visitors are from the U.S. Roughly 80% use the Internet when planning their vacation. In terms of activities, 84% enjoy beaches and 73% rest and relaxation, 34% go snorkeling, 5% go bone fishing or golfing, and 3% or approximately 39,000 go birding.⁴ **Independent birding tourists spend on average \$300 per day, while those using a guide spend an average of \$400 per day.⁵ This translates to \$39 million in expenditures by birding tourists.**

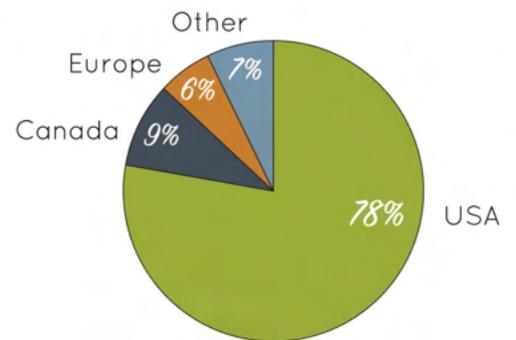
The Destination

The Bahamas has over 340 bird species, including 109 that breed on the islands, 169 migrant species and 45 are vagrants that occur only a few times each year.⁷ There are 28 species that are not seen in the U.S., Canada or Europe, including five species endemic to the country:⁸ Bahama Oriole, Bahama Yellowthroat, Bahama Warbler, Bahama Woodstar, Bahama Swallow; there's also a newly described subspecies of the Bahama Woodstar, *Calliphlox evelynae lyrura*. Neotropical migrants (that breed in North America) comprise 50% of the total land bird population in the northern islands from November through March. The Bahamas has 42 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs); however the majority do not have legal protection.¹¹ In the Bahamas, habitat destruction and degradation "is impacting on the birdlife and other biodiversity" and there is need for both a stronger environmental ethic and better enforcement of environmental legislation.¹²

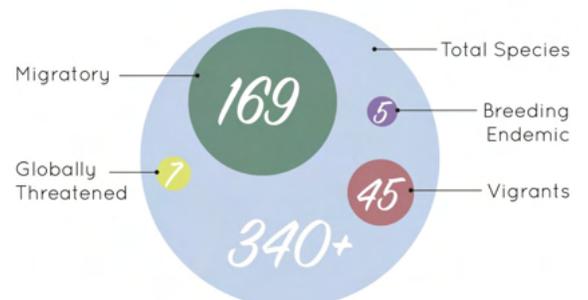
Birders to the Bahamas stay on average six days and see 84 different birds. Interestingly, 80% of these birders travel independently, with the rest divided roughly evenly between those using bird tour companies and local travel agents.⁶ Andros and Abaco islands are considered best for seeing most of the Bahama specialty birds. Inagua island is home to the world's largest breeding colony of West Indian flamingos.



Bahamas Stayover Tourist Arrivals



Bahamas Bird Snapshot





Profile of a U.S. Birder in the Bahamas

- Highly educated
- Higher annual income
- Middle-aged and elderly
- Equally men and women
- Travel independently
- Stay for an average of 6 days
- Sight an average of 84 birds
- Visit at least 2 islands

Competition

Internationally, The Bahamas' main Caribbean competitors for bird tourism include Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Lesser Antilles, and Trinidad & Tobago.¹³

The Future

Despite these challenges, the future of birding in The Bahamas is bright. The Bahamas is one of 13 countries in the recently created Caribbean Birding Trail (CBT).¹⁴ In addition, in 2012, the Bahamas' Sustainable Tourism Unit, together with the Bahamas National Trust, launched a birding tourism development plan which included a fully accredited birding tour guide course and new partnerships with international birding tour operators. These efforts are being strengthened by a National Audubon Society bird-based tourism initiative. Bird tourism experts in the Bahamas say they expect bird tourism to continue to grow. As one put it, **"People want more on a vacation than just sun, sand and sea. Birding offers an opportunity to learn more about The Bahamas, its geography, history, and wildlife. Birds are a great springboard for conservation: people conserve what has value; if there are economic benefits, they will want to protect it."**¹⁵ **Bird tourism is a niche market that offers growth for the Bahamas, especially on the family islands.**

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in the Bahamas

Lucayan National Park	Grand Bahama
Peterson Cay National Park	Grand Bahama
Grand Bahama Southern Shore	Grand Bahama
Cay Verde	Grand Bahama
Little Abaco	Abaco
North Atlantic Abaco Cays	Abaco
Southern Abaco	Abaco
Red Bays	Andros
San Andros Pond	Andros
Stafford Creek to Andros Town	Andros
Owenstown (abandoned)	Andros
Mangrove Cay	Andros
Driggs Hill to Mars Bay	Andros
Joulter Cays	Andros
Harrold and Wilson Ponds National Park	New Providence
South Beach Tidal Flats	New Providence
Booby Island	New Providence
Goulding Cay Wild Bird Reserve	New Providence
Salt Cay	New Providence
South Tarpum Bay	Eleuthera
Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park	Exumas
Lee Stocking Island	Exumas
Grog Pond	Exumas
Allan's Cays	Exumas
Tee Cay, Goat Cay and Long Rocks	Cat Island
Cat Island Wetlands	Cat Island
Cay Sal	Cay Sal Bank
Long Island and Hog Cay	Long Island
Conception Island	Conception Island
Southern Great Lake	San Salvador
Sandy Point	San Salvador
Graham's Harbour	San Salvador
Low Cay, High Cay and Sandy Hook	San Salvador
Samana Cay	Acklins
Guana Cays	Acklins
Mira Por Vos	Acklins
Cay Lobos	S. Great Bahama Bank
Booby Rocks and Pirates Bay	Mayaguana
Booby Cay	Mayaguana
Great Inagua	Inagua
Great Isaac Cay	Bimini
Kemp Cay to Pigeon Cay	Berry Islands

Endnotes

¹ Ministry of Tourism Bahamas (2015), "What Makes the Bahamas Unique." <http://www.bahamas.com/about-bahamas>.

² WTTC (2015). *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014 Bahamas*. <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/bahamas2014.pdf>.

³ "Foreign Arrivals to the Bahamas, January – December 2014" (2015). *Tourism Today*. <http://www.tourismtoday.com/home/statistics/visitor-arrivals/foreign-air-sea/2013/2012%20Expenditure%20Comparisons> (2013). *Tourism Today*. <http://www.tourismtoday.com/docs/stats/ExpenditureByQuarter2013and2012.pdf>

⁴ Islands of the Bahamas: Tour Operator & Media Survey (2013). Research and Statistics Department. Ministry of Tourism. <http://tourismtoday.com/docs/stats/Tour%20OperatorandMediaBrochure2013.pdf>

⁵ Janel Campbell, Sustainable Tourism, Ministry of Tourism (May 2015). Response to CREST's email survey.

⁶ Cloudbirders (2013). <http://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport>.

⁷ Predensa Moore and Lynn Gape (2015). *Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean – Bahamas*. Bahamas National Trust. <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/userfiles/file/IBAs/AmCntryPDFs/Bahamas.pdf>.

⁸ Judy Karwacki (October 31, 2012). The International Ecotourism Society, "Small Planet Consulting and the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism Announce Launch of Sustainable Birding Tourism Plan."

⁹ BirdLife International (2015). *Country profile: Bahamas*. <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/country/bahamas>.

¹⁰ Predensa Moore and Lynn Gape (2015). *Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean – Bahamas*. Bahamas National Trust. <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/userfiles/file/IBAs/AmCntryPDFs/Bahamas.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rockjumper (2015). <http://www.rockjumperbirding.com/tours/birding-tours-caribbean/>.

¹⁴ Caribbean Birding Trail (2014). <http://www.caribbeanbirdingtrail.org/>.

¹⁵ Tarran Smith, Small Hope Bay Lodge and Lynn Gape, Bahamas National Trust (May 2015). Responses to CREST's email surveys.

