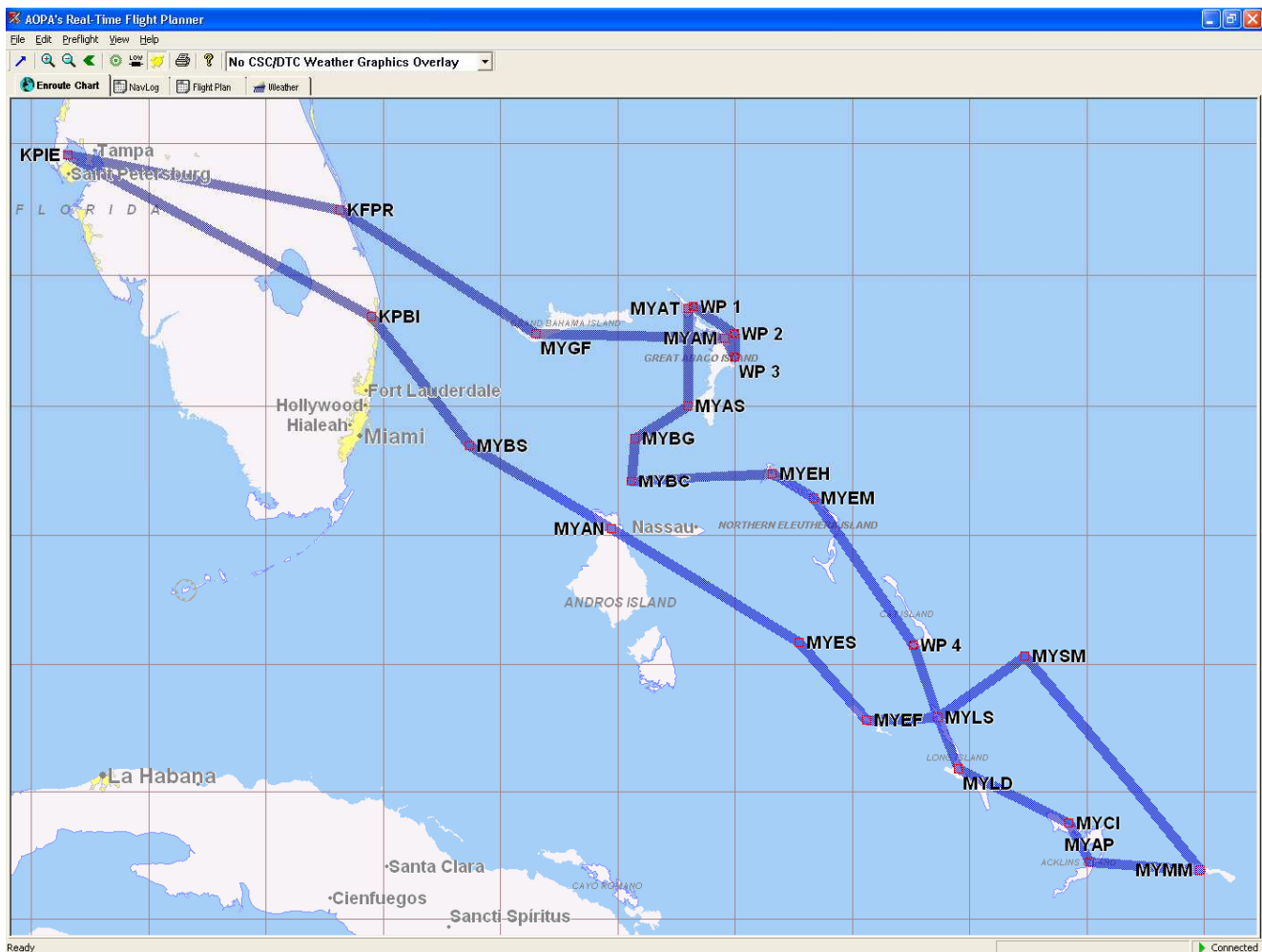


## Bahamas Adventure

My good friend and pilot Mark Tatham came up with this crazy idea that we should spend three days flying to as many airports as possible in the Bahamas. We were going to be three pilots, but the third, who will remain nameless to protect the guilty (you know who you are!) decided he couldn't come along. We e-mailed back and forth to each other, adding airports of interest and planning out our route. The two things we really wanted to work on during this flight was Mark's radio work and my fuel conservation.

We decided to be very analytical in our fuel consumption and see how well we could lean and conserve fuel. We tried running at 2300 RPM and lean to around 1350 degrees EGT. She seemed to be happiest at those settings.



### Friday

We both packed a backpack with enough cloths and toothpaste for three days, along with a bathing suit and towel, we brought along some water, chips, beef jerky, two life jackets and tie downs for the plane. Mark had a couple of hundred dollars in his pocket and decided we should stop and get more, expecting cash to be king. So we stopped and I

picked up a hundred and Mark picked up a couple hundred more. I was betting on credit cards.

Mark had ordered charts from Sporty's Pilot shop the previous weekend and we expected them to be out the house before today, but no luck. So we headed out to the bookstore at the airport to get the charts before we went. We needed a Miami sectional along with VFR charts for the Bahamas. Unfortunately the bookstore didn't have it, nor did Signature, where we keep the plane, or National aviation, my old flight school. So the plan was to get them at West Palm Beach. On the way, we called FSS to see about weather and presidential TFRs that were supposed to be popping up. All clear and no TFRs.

### **KPIE (St. Pete/Clearwater, FL) – KPBI (West Palm Beach, FL)**

*10:30 - 12:15 (Hobbs 1.75) 157 NM.*

*Fuel stop; Jet Aviation: 13 gallons @ \$4.19/gal. (7.43 gal/hour)*

After a thorough pre-flight, Mark got on the radio and called for our clearance through class B airspace. For never doing it, he did great. We took off north and then turned east to cross over Tampa International's East/West runway, then climbed out to 4500' for a nice flight over to West Palm. Nothing unusual, until we got within 15 miles of the airport. Two storms were passing through the area and we got vectored around IFR traffic and then finally on to final behind a 737. West Palm is not a small airport. On short final I noticed there were three commercial jets waiting for me to land. Seems strange to have the big boys waiting for little me, but that's flying. We taxied down to Jet Aviation past Kerry's airplane and were greeted by the line man who showed us where to park. We ordered fuel and headed in to the FBO to see about charts and lunch. No luck with charts and the guy getting the subs just left. The people at the FBO tried to get him on the radio, but no luck either. The gentlemen suggested that we take the courtesy car to Lantana airport where there is an FBO with charts and along the way we could pick up some subs for lunch. The only cost for the car would be getting the guy behind the counter a sub. Sounded like a good deal, so off to Lantana airport we went. Got the charts we needed, along with special stuff for the windshield and a nice t-shirt for Mark which was the motto for the trip "Forget the maps, lower the flaps, take long naps". We got back to Jet Aviation, had our lunch and called FSS for weather and to file out international flight plan to the Bahamas.

### **KPBI – MYBS (South Bimini, Bimini)**

*14:34 – 15:15 (Hobbs 0.95) 74 NM.*

After pre-flight, we climbed in and started our radio calls. I was aware that Clearance Delivery was NOT combined with Ground Control. So, in my most professional radio voice, I called Clearance Delivery to get clearance east bound to Bimini. I must have said something wrong because Clearance Delivery told me to call Ground Control. Mark said I called for permission to taxi along with the rest of what I wanted, which is what I normally do at St. Pete, so I probably did without even knowing it. So over to Ground frequency I went. Once I told them what I wanted, they said I needed to go to Clearance Delivery first. Now I knew if I kept this up I was never going to get to the Bahamas, so I flipped back to Clearance Delivery and in my most humble of voices declared I had never

done Clearance Delivery before and needed to be talked through it. It work and in no time where got our clearance, flipped back to Ground Control and got permission to taxi to the active runway. We got cleared for an eastbound departure. Got cleared to switch frequencies to open our flight plan with FSS, then back to West Palm departure. We then got handed off to Miami center for the rest of the trip. It was a welcoming sight to see Bimini from the air. It is a beautiful gateway to the Bahamas. Once we had Bimini in sight, we got cleared from Miami for a frequency change to Nassau to close the flight plan. No luck closing it in the air no matter what frequency we tried (Nassau direct or Bimini remote). We landed and taxied up to the small terminal. Cleared customs and immigration and got our C7A cruising permit, then closed our flight plan via a phone in the terminal. No fuel here, but no fee for anything. It's a good place to get a hold of Nassau to open or close a flight plan along with FSS if needed.

### **MYBS – MYAN (San Andros, Andros)**

*15:30 – 16:40 (Hobbs 1.15) 76 NM.*

We took off north to over fly Bimini one more time, then headed south, along the island chains and I showed Mark where I had used to come by sailboat during my college days. Then up to 2000 ft to get across to San Andros. (Don't remember much on this airport). Had a guy too busy to do radio calls when he was landing and I was taking off. No fuel

### **MYAN – MYES (Staniel Cay, Exuma)**

*17:00 – 18:25 (Hobbs 1.25) 102 NM.*

Quick stop and we were off. It was getting late and we knew we weren't allowed to be flying after sun set. We headed down the east coast of the Andros, then headed across to Exuma. When we came in site of the runway, it was getting dark, the town looked small and quiet. We didn't have a place to stay, and hoped at least there was something to eat. When we landed and locked up the plane, we grabbed our stuff and started walking to where we saw buildings. A guy named Stephen and his son came along and picked us up in their golf cart. We told him what we were looking for were basic food and shelter. He brought us to the owner of some of the local cottages and we arranged a room for the night. It was called Shipwreck cottage and sat up on stilts, overlooking the bay to the east. It was a nice little efficiency room that had hot water and air conditioning. We were in heaven. The room was \$120 per night with a 10% discount for pilots. Since we were leaving before the owners were getting up, they suggested we just leave the cash on the cottage table when we leave. We also decided, with the help of the owner, that we really didn't need a key for the one night, so we dropped our stuff off and headed back our waiting limousine (golf cart), Stephen took us up to the yacht club, and then recommended some places for drinks in the evening. He wouldn't take money for the ride, not even a few dollars for a tip. I offered to buy him a drink later, but he refused that saying he didn't drink. We agreed that fruit punch would make good payment and off we went in search of food. We met up with a few other tourists that were in for the weekend. They said they came often and really enjoyed the atmosphere. I can see why. We went in to the yacht club, which is more like a small bar and restaurant, and tried to order dinner. Seems you need to place your order by 5 in order to eat the "formal" dinner. So, we got the lunch menu and ordered a couple of burgers and a few rum drinks. Life is good. Stephen showed up and we delivered the fruit punch we promised. Closed

out the tab with a credit card for \$65, called it an early night and headed back to the room. Woke up early after a restless night's sleep. Mark wanted to go for a swim, so we donned our suits and headed out. When I got to the beach, Mark was enjoying the cool, clear water. It was refreshing. We then cleaned up with a nice hot shower and headed out to the plane after leaving the cash on the table. When we had landed the night before, we had noticed a small twin that resembled a Piper Aztec, so we took a few pictures before heading to the plane. All in all, I would highly recommend Staniel Cay as a great place to say.

## **Saturday**

### **MYES to MYEF (Exuma Int, Exuma)**

*9:05 - 9:40 (Hobbs: 0.65) 48 NM.*

*Fuel stop; 28 gallons @ \$4.19/gal, cash only (7 gal/hour)*

It was a beautiful early morning flight down the islands of the Exumas and the plane is purring like a kitten at 2300 RPM and a nice 1350 on the EGT. Looking out the window, I think these have got to be some of the nicest islands of the Bahamas. Most of them were small, with nice beaches around them. I could buy one and retire and be a very happy man. The island that Exuma International is on is a very popular looking island with a 9 hole golf resort (that is being expanded) that sits in a nice little cove with beautiful white sand. I bet it's a vacation paradise. The airport is big, but only one runway so you are probably always with a cross wind landing, like we had today. The airport was big for the Bahamas, it had three fire trucks, a terminal building and a customs building. We stopped and asked the fuel man to fill her up and he told us we needed to head over to customs to get our cruising permit stamped. We did, and then we headed out for breakfast across the street from the airport. It seems we were not early enough. It opens early for breakfast, not sure how early, but then closes from 9 to 11 to get ready for lunch. The only other option was a hot dog out of the microwave in the gift shop. So much for gourmet food on this trip. To get to the gift shop, security had to turn on the metal detector and x-ray machine for us. Security in this terminal were two nice ladies that probably spent more time chatting with each other, then actually protecting anything, but they were nice enough. After breakfast, we met a couple with their kid that were flying a Citation around. I felt sorry for them, they fly too high and fast to really enjoy the beauty of the islands as we are seeing them. Back out to the plane, stopping to pay the fuel man, who only takes credit cards for Jet-A fuel. I think that's discrimination against the small plane pilots, and I plan on putting together a small uprising when I get time. So, seems Mark was right and cash is king, at least here. Before leaving, we visited the far end of the ramp where there were some old planes sitting in their final resting spot. Looks to be another small twin, along with a low wing looking Piper as well. I don't blame these planes for coming here to live out their final years and then pass on, this place is beautiful.

### **MYEF to MYLS (Stella Maris, Long Island)**

*10:45 to 11:15 (Hobbs: 0.8) 33 NM.*

*Fuel stop; 4.4 gallons @ \$3.75/gal. (5.5 gal/hour) doesn't sound right,*

Fueled up and ready to go, I did my uncontrolled airfield radio calls and taxied out to the runway. I'm getting better at those, but Mark is still coaching me. After a short back taxi, we were off, heading east now for a short flight to Stella Maris again at 2000 ft. Coming in, I started my Unicom radio calls, and someone called back. That was a surprise since none of the others said anything, not even other planes. So they were asking where we were coming from and what we needed. We told them we had come for lunch and were coming from Exuma International. When we landed, the main thing you notice is the tail of a Beach 18 about mid field. We back taxied and headed to the ramp, where we had the owner direct us to a parking spot. We talked for a while and asked him to top us off, since you never know when you can get fuel in the Bahamas. While we were landing, his wife was nice enough to call the Stella Moris Hotel for a shuttle since it's the closest place to eat. We asked to be topped off even though we were almost full, but we figured we should take on fuel whenever we can just to be safe. The shuttle was waiting and it didn't take long before we were at the hotel, eating a little lunch. Seems we were too early for the regular lunch. That's OK, we were too late for breakfast, so being too early for lunch seems appropriate. We met a professional pilot who brought in some land developers for a few hours. He was catching lunch as well, then going to find the beach for a little R&R. After lunch, our trusty shuttle driver took us back to the FBO at the airport where we talked to the owners about the rest of our trip and our next fuel stop, which was Inagua. They told us that Inagua was a salt mining operation that wasn't open on the weekend and when they are open, fuel isn't a guarantee. We even referred to a copy of the 2003 Pilots' guide to the Caribbean that said not to depend on fuel in Inagua. So we decided it wasn't worth the risk. We decided to change plans and now we would head south to Acklins, then over to Mayaguana and up to San Salvador for fuel. If they didn't have fuel, we would still have enough, plus reserves to get back to here for fuel. We found out that this is probably one the more reliable places in the Bahamas to buy fuel. While paying for fuel, we talked to the owners and found out they were a husband and wife that came from New Jersey 9 years ago when they saw this airport for sale in Trade-a-Plane (I think). Now they are ready to sell it and retire in a house they had built on the island. I asked for their e-mail address so I could keep in touch and possible buy it from them. With a smile they said, "We don't have an e-mail address, or a cell phone, we left all that in New Jersey." Boy would that be nice.

Lunch \$15.00.

### **MYLS – MYLD (Deadmans Cay)**

*12:25 - ?? 26 NM.*

Well, we had a lot of flying to do and we weren't positive on where we were getting fuel next, but we knew we could always come back here. A good pre-flight and off we went heading south to Deadman's Cay. Beautiful flight down. The island appears to be named for the airplane that is about 300 feet short of runway 31. It's sitting in a hole with its tail broken off. There was also another plane part off the end of the runway, but I didn't get a good look at it, I was a little busy landing the plane with a nice little cross wind. Once down, we taxied to the tie down area, but with nothing there so we decided not to stop.

## **MYLD to MYAP (Spring Point, Acklins)**

?? - 13:35 (Hobbs: 1.1 from MYEF) 79 NM.

So we turned around and took off on runway 14. I figured it was cross wind landing and was going to be a cross wind take-off no matter which way we took off. Up we went with another view of the broken planes around the area. Still not used to the beauty of all the islands and beaches we were looking at, but we're trying. On the way down, we had Colonel Hill airport as a waypoint, as we approached, we noticed an airport that didn't seem to be on the GPS (either one). When we got to where the GPS's said the airport was, we were in the middle of the bay. We decided the "unknown" airport must have been Colonel Hill and the database in the GPS was wrong. A little further and we saw Spring Point, after circling the airport, looking for a wind sock, which we couldn't find, we figured we were in for yet another cross wind landing. I'm getting good at these, but it helps having runways that are wide and long. The first thing you notice as you taxi to the tie down is a very big twin engine airplane with US Air Force printed on the side. Once we shut down, we were greeted by a guy on a scooter, dressed as we were, that claimed to be a police officer. He was checking where we came from and where we were headed. We told him and then asked about the story behind the airplane. Rumor has it it was originally used for drug running and has been parked here as long as this guy has been alive (which I make out to be only about 30 years). After it's drug running years, it housed Hatian refugees. After the brief history lesson, we went across the, umm street (I guess) and over to the bar and restaurant for a quick drink, non-alcohol of course. It was a nice and cold and exactly what was needed. Nice little place but you wonder what keeps it afloat financially.

## **MYAP - MYMM (Mayaguana, Mayaguana)**

52 NM.

After investigating the last resting place of the big old plane and taking some pictures, we did a quick pre-flight and taxied for east departure to Mayaguana. Once we circled looking for the windsock, we realized that there was nothing anywhere near this airport except two roads leading in and out of the runway. We landed and taxied to the tiedown for a quick look. Our welcoming committee was four dead airplanes; DC3, Aztech or two and a Cherokee. The weeds were so tall growing out of the cracks in the tie down area that I needed to avoid them while taxiing.

Took the plane from Mark on the landing, felt really bad.

## **MYMM to MYSM (Cockburn Town, San Salvador)**

14:01 - 16:10 (Hobbs: 2.2) 130 NM.

Since there was nothing here, not even a place for a drink, we taxied back out and took off for our biggest water crossing to date. Once we get north of Mayaguana, we won't be seeing land for over 1 hour. You really get to know the sound of your engine while you are crossing for that long, it was also very hard to keep a straight course. I would be flying along and Mark would say, "Watch your heading", so I would adjust, and try to aim for a cloud or something, but there wasn't much for a reference point. After zig-

zaging for a while, I decided to ask the auto-pilot for a little help, which he was happy to oblige. It made life a lot easier and we were back to leaning and listening to that engine. Land was a welcome site and it also meant that I could get back to hand flying again. The runway at San Salvador was big and I think my cross-wind landings are getting better. We went through the terminal and found it was set up for the little commercial jets that Continental and people like that would use. We found the people who worked there, the gas guy was playing checkers out back. We found out the only fuel here was Jet-A, seems they are prejudice. Not really, they were very nice and friendly and when we asked them to call ahead to our next airport to see if they had fuel, they did. Found out they didn't have fuel at all, so we went with our plan B, back to Stella Maris for our "sure thing".

### **MYSM to MYLS (Stella Maris, Long Island)**

*16:25 – 17:00 (Hobbs: 0.45) 50 NM.*

*Fuel stop; 29 gallons @\$3.75/gal. Credit OK (7.73 gal/hour)*

Well, now we new what we had to do, a quick trip over to Stella Moris, then up to Eleuthera before sunset. We checked the fuel and knew we had plenty to get back to Stella Moris. We took off and headed west out over the water back to Stella Moris, along the way, we heard a plane landing at Rum Cay, which is half way between San Salvador and Stella Moris, so I decided to call on the radio and see if they had fuel. After I made my call, the guy came back and asked me to repeat myself, when I did, he claimed that he did not have any fuel and even claimed "we've never been asked that before", we thanked him and flew on to Stella Moris. On our call to Stella, we reminded them who we were and that we were coming in for fuel. They were waiting when we got there to fuel us up. As we fueled, Mark and I talked about what to do next. We were running out of daylight and you can't fly at night here in the Bahamas. In order to make Governor's Harbour, we would have to skip landing at anymore airports today and we had a few lined up in the GPS. I wasn't sure we would find lodging at any of them, and most of the airports we landed at today had nothing but abandoned planes. Not a nice place to sleep.

### **MYLS to MYEM (Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera)**

*17:10 – 18:35 (Hobbs: 1.35) 119 NM.*

Got here at sunset after pushing as fast as we could. Nice officer called a cab, Author Nixon was the driver who made a bunch of phone calls to find us a nice place to stay, which ended up being the Quality inn \$105 per night. Not what we expected, it was more quaint and cottage like, it had a bar and restaurant where we had a nice burger, conch chowder, and a few rum drinks. Author is scheduled to pick us up at 8 tomorrow morning when we will also pay him for tonight's trip, \$40 cash. Dinner and drinks \$50. Tough cross wind landing.

## ***Sunday***

### **MYEM to MYEH (North Eleuthera, Eleuthera)**

*8:40 – 9:00 (Hobbs: 0.45) 23 NM.*

*Fuel Stop; White Crown Aviation; 13.6 gallons @ \$3.65/gal Credit OK. (7.6 gal/hour)*  
North Eluethra: Excellent, clean FBO, fuel, breakfast across the street,  
And Internet kiosk. Next time it would be nice to catch the ferry over to Harbor Island for lunch or  
just to look around.

### **MYEH to MYAT (Treasure Cay, Abaco)**

*9:45 – 12:20 (Hobbs: 2.3) 159 NM.*  
Berry's; didn't land, but could have at Chub cay?  
<MT>Should have landed here will do next time.</MT>

Sandy Point; Two landings, possible due to being down wind, back taxi and took off, no FBO, not  
close to town.  
<MT>Looked like a nice town. It would be a worthwhile taxi ride to town to look around and grab a  
lunch. Another one for next time.</MT>

Treasure Cay; Nice people, Hot Dog in terminal, sat outside to eat. Customs stamp. Almost took  
off in to the "Yellow Taxi" airplane.  
<MT>Next time it would be nice to catch the ferry over to Green Turtle Island for lunch or just to  
look around.</MT>

### **MYAT to MYAM (Marsh Harbour, Abaco)**

*13:00 – 13:40 (Hobbs: 0.7) 44 NM.*  
*Fuel stop; ZigZag; 22 gallons @ \$3.50/gal. Credit OK (7.33 gal/hour)*  
Very high on final, I think I landed down wind. Nice people, easy cheap fuel. Met  
"Yellow Taxi" again and let him take off ahead of me. Very busy.  
<MT>Holler for ZigZag on 122.8 for fuel.</MT>

### **MYAM to MYGF (Freeport, Grand Bahama)**

*14:00 – 15:00 (Hobbs: 1) 87 NM.*  
*Landing fee; \$10, Cash*  
*Customs departing fee; \$30, Cash*  
Freeport; Hard to get a hold of, VOR out, NBD out, couldn't call to file flight plan, had to  
do it from the air. That was a challenge.  
<MT>Customs lady put our clearance fee in her pocket. Next time check out of Marsh  
rather than FGP unless Pier One is back in business. 8000ft runway don't land on the  
numbers. Not a good stop.</MT>

### **MYGF to KFPR (Fort Pierce, Port St. Lucie, FL)**

*15:30 – 16:45 (Hobbs: 1.4) 106 NM.*  
Port St. Lucie; Don't have radar on site and if you are coming from the south east, it is  
kind of a blind spot for them. A lot of damage from the Hurricanes, including a  
Albatross under a collapsed hanger. Customs was easy, tower nice.

### **KFPR to KPIE (St. Pete/Clearwater, FL)**

*17:05 – 18:26 (Hobbs: 1.5) 126 NM.*



*Checked tanks; 3 gallons on right, 7 gallons on left. (7.2 gal/hour)*

Saint Pete; Back home, Tampa approach sent us south instead of over TPA, nothing unusual.

**Totals:**

Gallons of fuel: 139

Total Hobbs time: 19.1 (7.3 gal/hour)

Total Miles: Approx 1491

Furthest Northern Point: Treasure Cay, Abacos (MYAT) N 26 45.0' W 77 24.0'

Furthest Southern Point: Mayaguana, Mayaguana (MYMM) N 22 23.0' W 73.02.0'

Furthest Eastern Point: Mayaguana, Mayaguana (MYMM) N 22 23.0' W 73.02.0'

Furthest Western Point: South Bimini, Bimini (MYBS) N 25 41.0' W 80 05.7'

General wisdom. In radio calls try to fit in what you want eg fuel / food / hotel . We called food and the hotel sent a fetcher guy. I tipped him and he was offended. Had we called fuel in Marsh ZigZag woulda come right over. Also call where you are coming in from. On departure call where you are going to. This helps the customs guy and the policeman guy that greets your flight. Generally resturants at airports are scarce. Don't plan on fine quisine. This is not a gastronomical journey but more of a spiritual Chitaqua. </MT>

General; People don't always use radio calls. Overfly the field to check, Fuel management is your biggest challenge for the entire voyage. Everyone seems interested in where you came from, even on the radio, so it might be best to name you point of departure when making your arrival radio calls. Cash is king, not many places take credit card, and when they do, it's a 5% surcharge.