

NASHVILLE

LIFESTYLES

The
**MUSIC
ISSUE**

EXCLUSIVE

*Charles
Kelley*

On His Upcoming
Solo Album

25 Artists to
Watch in 2016



**FIVE FITNESS CHAMPS
IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**GET AWAY
BONEFISHING IN
THE BAHAMAS**

**GO INSIDE
A MUSIC MOGUL'S MANSION**

*All your life you
were only waiting
for someone to come*

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Among the more developed areas of the Bahamas lies Deep Water Cay, an off-the-radar slice of paradise.

ON THE COVER

Charles Kelley. Photo by Cameron Powell at White Avenue Studio



Deep Blue Sea

Among the more developed areas of the Bahamas lies Deep Water Cay, an off-the-radar slice of paradise.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **KRISTIN LUNA**





Like many Southerners, my first glimpse of the Bahamas was from the bow of the “Big Red Boat,” the once-licensed official cruise ship of Disney World. Back then, I was a kid and much more interested in the on-board offerings—games, dinners with characters, water slides galore—than exploring the islands.

Nearly two decades later, the Bahamas started to creep onto my radar again—particularly once I made the plunge to get certified as an open water diver. After finishing my coursework in the United States, I flew to the Bahamas to do my checkout dives, only this time I was exploring the islands’ thriving underwater universe rather than the sugar sands and beachside cafes that drive the area’s tourism. It turns out that beneath the surface, the Bahamas is every bit as spectacular.

Though the diverse Atlantic nation comprises more than 700 islands, the average tourist is often familiar with only Nassau and Paradise Island, home to the Atlantis resort. But the string of isles on the fringe of the Caribbean Sea offers so much more—from large resorts to boutique hotels, luxury vacations to budget-friendly experiences. As I

recently discovered, there are also private island escapes, like the fishing resort Deep Water Cay, located just off of Grand Bahama Island.

My husband and I arrived at Grand Bahama’s Freeport airport at dusk, then made the hour-long drive to McLean’s Town under the inky cloak of darkness. From there, a boat captain ferried us across a narrow channel to the resort, where husband-and-wife general managers Buzz and Rose Cox greeted us at the Deep Water Cay dock before immediately ushering us to our first meal of the trip—the chef and our fellow guests were waiting to break bread with us.

Dinnertime on Deep Water Cay is no casual affair. On weekends, lavish spreads are served family-style in the lodge with three flavor-packed courses and a full bar. On nights when the resort isn’t at full capacity, meals might be made-to-order and delivered straight to your en-suite dining room.

We made friends with our dinner companions, sharing a couple bottles of wine and filling up on conch ceviche, red snapper, and lamb, before retreating to our home for the next four nights. This laid-back luxury resort hosts an average of 20 guests

at any given time, spread out across seven cottage rooms and four private houses. There are also a handful of houses under private ownership.

We were assigned the Drake House, a two-bedroom, two-bathroom rental that overlooks the shallow, emerald lagoon on Deep Water Cay’s north coast. Recently remodeled, the house breathes white light and pops of color, lightly decorated with sport-fishing abstracts and ocean-themed bric-a-brac. For larger groups, the Royal Poinciana is a smart pick: The beautifully appointed, bi-level house boasts sweeping waterfront views from a two-story window bank and is outfitted with a huge kitchen and open common area.

DEEP WATER CAY IS BEST KNOWN

for its world-class bonefishing, so while it may be a curious spot for a non-angler (which I was before this trip), that’s not all there is to do on this secluded spit of pristine sand. Snorkeling, scuba diving, and shelling are popular pastimes, and in addition to a shimmering infinity pool, the resort offers complimentary paddleboards, kayaks, and bikes.

But first and foremost, it is an Orvis-endorsed fishing resort, so my husband and I booked a full-day excursion. Since the island development was originally born thanks to its easy access to 250 square miles of “flats” that bonefish, permit, and tarpon are drawn to, the core of its offerings revolve around shallow ocean fishing. I learned quickly that tracking bonefish is akin to hunting—i.e., it’s not easy. Bonefish, which range in weight from four to ten pounds, are elusive, skittish suckers, and you have to approach them as if you were sneaking up on a turbocharged rabbit. Your best equipment is often a keen-eyed spotter to locate their sleek, camouflaged bodies among the glistening turquoise waters.

After narrowly escaping threatening morning showers, we motored out to a series of flats a few miles from the resort to begin our training with Howard, a native Bahamian and our guide for the day. He taught us how to cast, look for movement in the waters, and adjust for the winds—and following a few practice runs, I snatched up a ringer of my own. Even for those not overly enthusiastic about fishing, it’s a nice, relaxing way to spend an afternoon and see the area’s wildlife, like the curious sea turtles who periodically popped their heads out of the water. We also spied graceful stingrays, stealthy sharks, a barracuda or two, and some razor-teethed needlefish prowling the waters. After four hours, though, the winds picked up even more and black clouds started to roll in, so we called it a day.

IF THE ENTIRE 2.5-MILE-LONG

island of Deep Water Cay appears to cater to a quality guest experience, that’s because it does. During our stay, there were 61 staffers for 10 guests, and there wasn’t a moment that we felt unattended to.

We had set aside the next day for diving, and the resort’s resident divemaster, Phillip Rus-

sell, took us out to explore the many limestone swim-throughs and reefs, flooding our senses with hallucinogenic swarms of silversides and bait fish, bright orange starfish, and massive stingrays. The Out Islands, which Deep Water Cay is a part of, are famed for their blue holes and gaping caverns that seem to disappear into nothingness; they’re also prime breeding grounds for aquatic life, and the reefs are incredibly healthy.

We finished our dive day with a catered picnic on the aptly named Lunch Beach, a sandbar in the middle of an azure landscape. After we’d digested, we masked up once more for a “drift snorkel” between two small islands during a tidal shift, which makes exploring a huge amount of ocean floor a breeze—the rushing water provides all the thrust necessary. Steering over the thick sea grass with gentle fin flips, we navigated the shallow waters as the boat followed closely behind us before returning to the resort for one last evening.

Vacation is a funny concept: You spend months planning, saving, and anticipating, only for it to pass by in the blink of an eye and return home with just photographs and fading memories. Luckily for us, Nashville’s central location and easy Caribbean access mean Deep Water Cay will stay fresh in our minds.

GETTING THERE

Delta and American Airlines operate several flights daily to Grand Bahama International Airport (FPO) that connect through Atlanta or Miami. (Total flight time: four hours.) The ferry dock of Deep Water Cay is an hour’s drive from Freeport.

RESOURCES

deepwatercay.com
bahamas.com



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