

# A NON-SWIMMER'S SWIMMING HOLIDAY



Donna

**Donna Linder** joined her husband for a week's swimming in The Bahamas



**I** admit, it was a strange sight to see, our group emerging from the water in their jolly coloured hats, swimming up to a beautiful white beach only to be greeted by a drift of snuffling, swimming pigs. Yes – these pigs, large and small, excitedly approached Troy for a treat. The braver vacationers among us quickly realised what Troy meant. It seems that swimming pigs, unlike fish, dolphins or rays, are not graceful nor adept at quick manoeuvres or stopping. Swimmers beware!

This was our first swimming holiday, and in fact for me it was more of a ‘non-swimming holiday’. Let me confess that my husband is the swimmer. He learned about SwimQuest Holidays online and, we were surprised to hear that I would be very welcome to join the athletes. It was an easy sell to have me accompany him – we were enthused about the prospect of heading to the Caribbean in the dead of a harsh February winter, and liked the idea of being hosted in an enchanting villa on the sun-drenched island of Great Guana Cay in The Bahamas, with swim-loving folks from around the world.

We landed in Marsh Harbour, one of the islands in The Abacos chain, bedazzled by the warm sunshine and excited about the crystal blue waters we had seen from the air. The vacation package included a warm greeting

at the airport, a shuttle by ferry, and transportation to our nearby island-based home for the week. Public ferries in The Bahamas are an adventure in themselves. The trip from Marsh Harbour to Great Guana Cay took place in an open-air water taxi filled with locals and tourists with groceries and luggage in equally abundant amounts! Instead of feeling crowded or jostled, the circumstance sparked instant humour and cooperation among the passengers. No doubt the amazing blue sky, delightful sunshine and occasional sea-spray helped facilitate the holiday spirit. It seems this camaraderie would be a theme for the week – we would quickly come to learn that our enthusiastic, eclectic swim group consisted of a mother and daughter from The Netherlands, a business owner from Italy, a British computer expert currently living in Scotland and from the US a gentleman from New England and a Mid-Western young lady.

#### LUXURY RETREAT

Alice and Mia were our SwimQuest guides. They met us at the harbour side with one of the island’s many golf buggies (cars are a rarity on Great Guana Cay) and drove us up to our lodgings to show us round and outline our upcoming days. The villa itself was

“Now it’s best to stand to the side otherwise they’ll be right at you in no time, and they only know how to swim in a straight line!”

**bellowed Troy, our cheeky boatman as he held out a piece of coconut.**



## WE SLIPPED INTO THE WATER AND WERE TREATED TO A SWIM WITH GIGANTIC SEA TURTLES, FRIENDLY NURSE SHARKS AND SMALL VELVETY RAYS



Swimming with turtles

waves Alice motioning with her arms as another guest approaches, “post the letter!”

### SEA YARNS

All the while, it was clear the swimmers were having a ball encouraging and enjoying each other’s new-found friendship. As the non-swimmer in the group, I never felt like a fifth wheel. I was always welcomed into the water to cool off or join the group when they discovered colourful fish or an interesting reef formation. Never at a loss for yet another sea yarn, Captain Troy kept those aboard entertained with his island tales, quips and gossip as we went from swim site to site.

Knowing the islands like the back of his hand, he shared the best places to swim the reefs, pull in for lunch or go ashore to stretch our legs.

An additional benefit to the swimmers was a swim stroke clinic, filming participants in the lap pool after an afternoon’s adventure. This was invaluable to my husband as he was prepping for two long-distance swim events later in the summer.

This trip was truly a holiday adventure! Down times were filled with options for exploration of the island villages. Nights gave way to music, local food, beach bonfires and an incredible star-filled sky. One of the villas’ upper decks quickly became the gathering place for those who wanted a glorious view of the sunset. Pleasantly tired after the daily swims, it became customary to grab a glass of wine or a beer and share the events of the day as Mother Nature put on a heavenly colour fest each evening.

As in the finest of holiday form, the best swim was saved for last. On our final day, Captain Troy was telling of what we were sure to be another fish-



Not a bad view!

became clear he was integral to the island’s water safety – running the fire and rescue service and always on his radio, checking in on other boats and letting the locals know what we were up to. As the week progressed, Alice, Mia and Troy led us in a two-boat caravan across colourful reefs, clear open water and along crushed-sand shores, perfectly negotiating the changing currents and tides of the small islands we cruised.

### TIPS AND HINTS

Keeping in mind the participants level of expertise, swim excursions were planned twice daily of up to three miles per session, allowing each swimmer a challenging, well-supervised adventure. Being aboard the watercraft most of the time, I was impressed with the teamwork and co-operation of the staff as they kept an eagle eye on the swimmers for both safety and stroke form – giving us little tips and hints along the way. “That’s it!” shouts Mia, “watch your hand entry – nice and flat!”. “Think about those tramlines!”

← worth the price of admission! Situated on an island hill, this multi-storied retreat housed each of us in our own private suite with bath, furnished sun-decks, patios, a 360-degree breathtaking view of the island and sea, hot tub and lap pool. We gathered daily for each meal and quickly developed a relaxed camaraderie.

On our first morning, Alice and Mia introduced us to our boat pilot for the week. Troy was a larger-than-life island local, with a no-nonsense attitude and a mischievous sense of humour. It soon

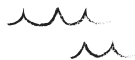


View from  
Hope Town  
Lighthouse

tale. Leaving us full of expectations, he pulled into a quiet, clear lagoon that would be every island-lover's dream. We slipped into the water and were treated to a swim with gigantic sea turtles, friendly nurse sharks and small velvety rays! Imagine my surprise (and a bit of a shock!) as after admiring one of the rays, it turned around and admired me back, with a gentle sweep of its velvety wings.

Not to be outdone, the evening's dinner at the villa was a feast of local delicacies and the day's catch all served tableside on the patio.

We were charmed by the idea of combining a holiday with beautiful and challenging swims. For the swimmer and non-swimmer alike, this is truly a bucket list vacation 🌴



### More info

SwimQuest run trips to The Bahamas in November, December, February and March

max group size: 12

Water temp: 22 to 27 degrees

Swim distances: between 1 and 5km

Swims per day:

Two

[swimquest.uk.com](http://swimquest.uk.com)

[bahamas.com/uk](http://bahamas.com/uk)



Life is good!