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Fair Eleuthera

Island living with pink sands and turquoise waters **BY ROBYN A. FRIEDMAN**

Eleuthera is the understated Bahamian island, where the wealthy came to frolic in private on the pink-sand beaches. Today, despite a surge in tourism, an influx of out-of-town investors seeking beachfront property at reasonable prices and a host of new real estate developments, the island has not lost its quaint character and charm—yet.

"Eleuthera has always had a quiet following," says Jonathan Morris, an

estate agent with Damianos Sotheby's International Realty who was born on the island and has lived there for the past 10 years. "It sort of peaked in the late 1960s and then started to decline in the late '70s and '80s. Now it's coming back again in a big way."

It is easy to see why this out island of the Bahamas has become the new "in" spot. Eleuthera's 3.5 miles of pink- and white-sand beaches have been rated as

among the best in the world, and the diving is exceptional. Eleuthera offers serenity and relaxed elegance without the glitz and noise of the casinos on Nassau and Paradise Island. Just kick off your shoes, wander over to Tippy's for dinner, and you will fit right in with the locals.

Eleuthera may seem like a remote paradise, but the 103-mile-long crescent-shaped string of islands is just 60



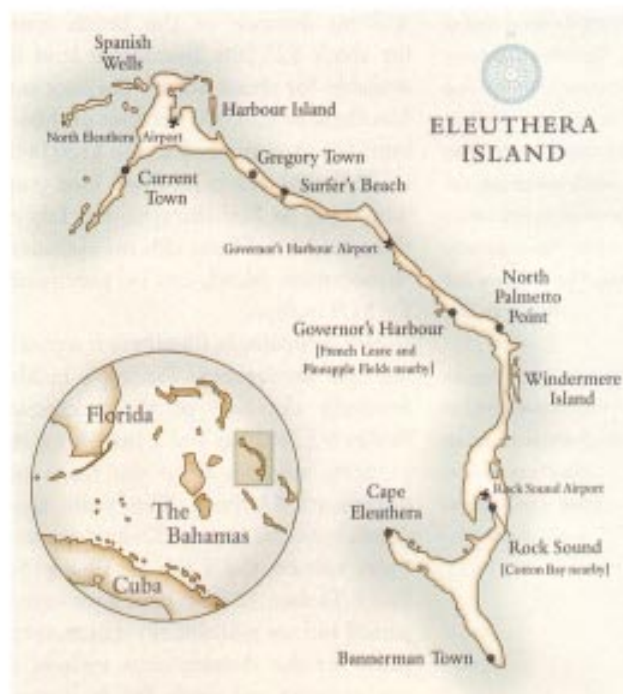


miles east of Nassau and an hour-long flight from Miami. Harbour Island (called "Briland" by residents) is the setting for cozy Victorian-style houses in pastel colors. It is also home to the famed Pink Sands Beach, which runs the entire eastern length of the island, as well as some of the best restaurants in the Bahamas. South of Harbour Island, on the mainland of Eleuthera, is Gregory Town and Surfer's Beach. Further south is Rock Sound, home to the famed Cotton Bay Club.

Founded in 1648 by British Puritans from Bermuda, Eleuthera was the first permanent European settlement in the Bahamas, making it sort of a Bahamian Plymouth Rock. Because the settlers arrived in search of religious freedom, they named their new haven Eleuthera from the Greek word for "freedom."

Lately, developers have rediscovered the island. Harbour Island, home to many celebrities, is largely built out, and what little land is still available is expensive. "It's kind of like St. Bart's," Morris says.

Parts of the island are still affordable. An oceanview quarter-acre lot within



Below: Just off the Bahamian island of Eleuthera is tiny Windermere Island, which holds Sea Lily cottage, made up of several freestanding pavilions on about three acres. Above left: Pergolas separate the structures. Left: Fronting Sea Lily, which is on the market for \$4.9 million, is a pool and Windermere's quiet coastline.



Right: An aerial shot of Governor's Harbour, minutes from the Club at Pineapple Fields, a new condo-hotel. Also nearby will be two developments with varied ownership opportunities, French Leave and Savannah Hill.

Below: Cotton Bay, on the southern end of Eleuthera, is the future site of estate lots, villas, a golf course and a clubhouse.

walking distance of the beach goes for about \$25,000. Beachfront land is available for about \$6,000 per foot on Eleuthera or \$20,000 per foot on Harbour Island, compared to the \$120,000 to \$175,000 per oceanfront foot you would pay in Key Biscayne. Sea Lily, a three-acre beachfront villa on exclusive Windermere Island, can be purchased for \$4.9 million.

Not surprisingly, Eleuthera is attracting new development. Pineapple Fields, formerly the site of the exclusive Potlatch Club, sits on a lush 80-acre property minutes from the town of Governor's Harbour. Two years ago, construction began on a 32-unit condo-hotel named the Club at Pineapple Fields. To date, 12 units have been completed and are available for rent. Future plans for the development include a spa, cottages and single-family homes as well as a 20-acre botanical garden.

Two new subdivisions on Eleuthera



have been garnering attention of late. Already under construction is Cotton Bay, nestled at the southern end of Eleuthera. The 1,500-acre project is being unveiled in two phases. Phase I includes Cotton Bay Estates, which features 114 estate lots and a spectacular

26,000-square-foot clubhouse, and Cotton Bay Villas, which consists of 73 two- and three-bedroom villas comprising a boutique hotel that will be a member of the Starwood Luxury Collection. Prices for the estate lots range from \$600,000 to \$1.2 million, depending





upon size and view. The villas start at \$1.6 million. Future phases at Cotton Bay include an 18-hole championship golf course, a wellness center and spa, additional residences and expansion of the marina.

Pennsylvania-based EIC Resorts recently announced plans to build French Leave Resort and Savannah Hill, which occupy a combined 356 acres at the site of the former Club Med. French Leave includes single-family oceanfront homesites and villas as well as 60 luxury condo-hotel and


penthouse units that will be managed by a major hotel operator. Savannah Hill consists of 24 estate lots and a private membership club. A new marina, Governor's Harbour, will be built on the Caribbean side to service luxury yachts and sport-fishing boats.

Prices at French Leave start at \$1.25 million for homesites, \$500,000 for condo-hotel units and \$1.95 million for penthouses. Prices at Savannah Hill range from \$495,000 for bungalow lots to \$795,000 for ridge lots.

"I traveled extensively throughout the Caribbean to look for a development project," says Eddie Lauth, managing general partner of EIC Resorts. "We were looking for a road less traveled, and we found it in Eleuthera, which also offers great elevation, foliage, gorgeous reefs and the best beaches I've seen." Lauth says he plans to break ground this summer and complete the project in 2009.

For vacation-home buyers from the U.S., Eleuthera offers easy access by boat or plane. It has two main airports,

North Eleuthera Airport and Governor's Harbour Airport, as well as flights from South Florida on major carriers.

However, the island may not appeal to all vacation-home seekers. "They sell a T-shirt on the island that says, 'Eleuthera: Not for Everyone,'" Lauth says. "That's the reality. If you need tons of nightlife and activities around the clock, this is probably not the place. But if you want the best beach in the world, it is, without question." 

RESOURCES

**Damianos Sotheby's
International Realty**
242.322.2305, www.damianos.com

Cotton Bay
800.255.4539
www.cottonbayeleuthera.com

French Leave and Savannah Hill
242.332.3616
www.frenchleaveresort.com

Above: Cotton Bay's two- and three-bedroom villas will fit in with the island vernacular and surround a central clubhouse.

Right: Just off Eleuthera's northern coast is Harbour Island, the site of Pink Sands Beach and many restaurants.



ABOVE: WALTER, ALISON SONG & COO ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN PLANNING AND CONSULTING; LEFT: THE BAHAMAS MINISTRY OF TOURISM