

# Making a Good Business Better (in the Bahamas)

By Basil Smith

Between the moments of hurly-burly generated by the thousands of tourists who visit Freeport/Lucaya each year, a growing group of hospitality industry workers has been making an effort to upgrade their level of service and skills.

They are part of Bahamahost, an ongoing self-improvement programme conducted by the Ministry of Tourism. Since the programme was introduced in Grand Bahama in January, 1979, over 440 people have become qualified Bahamahosts. They graduated with a new understanding of the value of tourism to the economy of the Bahamas and an abiding awareness of their individual role within that industry.

The course was originally designed to standardise and upgrade the information given to visitors by tour guides and taxi drivers. Like all better courses of personal development, however, Bahamahost has proven to be flexible enough to meet the needs of a variety of students. The programme coordinator for Grand Bahama, Hadassah Guillaume, is pleased with the programme Bahamahost has made in less than two years.

Courses offered in Freeport and West End cover areas like Bahamian history and geography; the development of Freeport/Lucaya sociology; ecology; the structure of the tourism industry; economics; general knowledge and personal appearance. Audio-visual training modules and transactional analysis are among the instructional methods used in each class. Field trips and visiting lecturers add interest and first-hand experience.

Ms Guillaume says that, given the wide range of occupations, ages and social backgrounds of the students, their achievement level is impressive. Ages in a

typical class range from 16 to 65, including taxi drivers, sales clerks, students, airline staff, Ministry of Tourism staff, straw vendors and hotel employees.

Some students may never have left the Bahamas, while others have travelled extensively. Some may have a stilted view of the outside world — others may have an equally stilted view of their homeland. The common ground seems to be personal motivation and this has proven the catalyst which accounts for the course's success at improving attitudes and knowledge.

More and more businesses in Grand Bahama are making a Bahamahost certificate a mandatory qualification for employment, either as a prerequisite or as on-the-job training. One employer put it this way: "I'm impressed with the improved

grasp which Bahamahost graduates have of how the tourism industry works. I have found that this leads employees to a greater appreciation of their role as individuals. The result is greater rapport between visitor and industry staff — which means good business."

Perhaps the most eloquent testament is the case of a taxi driver, a member of the group which sacrifices the most, in terms of lost earnings, to attend classes. He had already graduated and received his certificate and identification badge when his home was burglarised. Among the stolen items were his Bahamahost records and although they could have been replaced, he opted instead to repeat the course and earn another certificate.



**UPDATE '80**, a series of familiarization tours for US travel agents sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism, brought a group of 150 to Freeport/Lucaya recently. The agents —from Dallas, Detroit, Miami, Atlanta and Los Angeles— spent three days touring hotels and visitor attractions in Grand Bahama's resort centre. One of the functions was held at the 500-room Holiday Inn where Linda Murray (pictured), an employee at Trans Island Airways kicked up her heels in a traditional Bahamian ring dance. The number is a standard item at local parties and is performed to the Bahamian tune "There's a Brown Girl in the Ring." The Update '80 visit was arranged by the Ministry of Tourism, the Grand Bahama Promotion Board and the Freeport/Lucaya Hotel Association. (Bahamas News Bureau photo by Basil Smith)