

A stingray sculpture highlights the downtown area



Travel Facts

Tour ship daytrippers fill the George Town streets



GETTING THERE

Many international airlines have daily services to the Cayman Islands, which are located in the Western Caribbean, 480 miles south of Miami, Florida; 150 miles south of Cuba; and 180 miles northwest of Jamaica. By air, the Cayman Islands are only a 70-minute flight from Miami.

Most international passengers arrive at Owen Roberts International Airport a couple miles from George Town on Grand Cayman. Some flights also serve Cayman Brac's Gerrard Smith International Airport. The best access to the islands is from the US, and numerous carriers have regular flights between Grand Cayman and Florida's Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa and Orlando. Airlines also offer direct services from Houston, Atlanta, Memphis, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Chicago, Boston, Newark and other US cities. Cayman Airways has a few flights between US cities and Cayman Brac. Air Canada flies direct from Toronto, and British Airways flies direct from London-Heathrow. There are also flights between George Town and Jamaica on Air Jamaica.

Cruise ships regularly dock at George Town on Grand Cayman and at Creek on Cayman Brac.

GETTING AROUND

Cayman Airways has daily flights to the Sisters Islands.

Grand Cayman Island has well-maintained roads and highways that allow divers to explore the entire island. Rental cars are recommended and your hotel can usually arrange for a week-long package with your hotel accommodation. Do reserve a car in advance as they are in demand. You have to be at least 21 years old to rent a car.

Traffic flow is to the left side of the road, as in Great Britain (Americans take note!). Local driving standards, the risk of accidents, the availability of emergency roadside service, quality and frequency of signage, and enforcement of traffic laws, generally meet or exceed the standards of the United States. Visitors must obtain a temporary driver's license, easily granted upon presentation of a valid state driver's license and payment of a small fee, at a car rental agency or police station.

Be aware that laws against driving while intoxicated are strictly enforced. Don't drink and drive. Take a taxi instead. Seatbelt laws are also enforced and require the driver and all passengers to be fastened in while in motion.



From bikes to buses, there are many ways to get around

If you are diving through your hotel dive shop, they will provide transportation between the hotel and boat dock and back again. If you like to hang around the hotel, no car is needed.

Traffic and parking in downtown George Town can be very bad – especially when the cruise ships are depositing people. The beach road changes names frequently, but is the same strip of asphalt and runs along the beach and shoreline as South Church Street, Harbour Drive, North Church Street, West Bay Road and Northwest Point Road. There is a new central road that bypasses much of the Seven Mile Beach strip road and also connects to many through streets that run off the beach road. Take this highway to get to the East End access and central shopping areas quickly.

Taxis are available at Owen Roberts International Airport on Grand Cayman and offer a fixed rate per vehicle or per person to all points on Grand Cayman. Information is available from the taxi dispatcher at the curb. Oddly, hotel vans can not and do not provide courtesy arrival pickup at the airport. Taxis are also

available from all resorts and from the taxi stand at the cruise ship dock in George Town. A sign with current rates is posted at the dock.

There are several private limousine services on Grand Cayman, for special events and airport transfers.

Grand Cayman also has a public bus transportation system. The new bus terminal is located adjacent the Public Library on Edward St in downtown George Town and serves as the dispatch point for buses to all districts. There are 38 mini-buses operated by 24 licensed operators, serving eight routes. Daily service starts at 6am and runs to between 9pm and 11pm depending on the route.

Many local people also ride bikes, particularly on the Sisters islands.

If you really want to have fun, take a scheduled charter or charter your own Cayman Islands helicopter flight. It will soar over **Stingray City** and the blue waters of North Sound and fly over the West Bay so you can see the spurs and grooves you dive daily. Bring your polaroids and put the polarizer on your camera lens.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Citizens of the US, Canada, EU, the UK or the Commonwealth, Israel and Japan do not require visas. Travelers from elsewhere may need visas prior to entry. Contact the nearest British Consulate, Embassy or High Commission to obtain visa applications.

The Cayman Islands aims to ensure that visitors are able to proceed through customs and immigration in an efficient and hassle-free manner. Visitors that deplane in Grand Cayman are welcomed by the sweet sound of live music as they proceed into the arrivals lounge. Professional immigration and custom service agents process visitor documentation and get you on your way to enjoy your vacation. Even upon leaving, personal baggage inspection is done randomly and courteously. It is a refreshing and civil way to ensure security while maintaining the peace of mind that visitors no doubt head home with after a week of Cayman relaxation.

All US citizens traveling by air between the United States and the Caribbean, Canada, Mexico, Central and South American and Bermuda are required to present a valid passport. Keep the immigration card that is given to you upon arrival as you must present this when departing.

For further information on entry into the Cayman Islands, contact the Cayman Islands Department of Immigration (☎ (345) 949-8052).

There is a CI\$20.00 or US\$25.00 departure tax for the Cayman Islands that is almost always included in the price of your airline ticket.

TIME

The Cayman Islands are on Atlantic Standard Time that is the same as the US east coast during Daylight Saving Time (mid-Spring to mid-Fall).

The Cayman Islands does not change time for Daylight Saving. When it's noon in Cayman Islands it is 3pm (next day) in Sydney, Australia; 9pm in San Francisco, California; and 5am in London, England.

MONEY

The Cayman dollar, first issued in 1972, is the official currency and is sometimes referred to as the CD. It has a basic dollar unit, issued in notes with denominations of CI\$1, CI\$5, CI\$10, CI\$25, CI\$50 and CI\$100, and coins valued at 1, 5, 10 and 25 cent/s. The CI dollar has a fixed exchange rate with the US dollar of CI\$1 to US\$1.25. Or, the US dollar equals CI\$.80.



A shoreside restaurant along the rugged northeast coast

A sailboat cruises the northern reefs



There is no need for visitors to exchange their US dollars into local currency. There are so many American tourists that the dollar is widely accepted, but expect your change to be in Cayman bills and coins.

Canadian dollars, Euro dollars and pounds sterling can be exchanged for CI dollars at local banks, which are open 10am to 3pm Monday to Friday. ATMs accepting VISA and MasterCard with Cirrus affiliation are located at Cayman National Bank and other banks, at Owen Roberts International Airport, all over the touristy part of Georgetown, and a few other locations, such as the grocery stores.

All of the major credits cards (with the exception of the Discover Card) and travelers checks are widely accepted at hotels, restaurants, taverns and auto rental agencies. Be sure to have your passport or positive ID when changing traveler's checks at banks (which, by the way, do not give a better rate of exchange!).

ELECTRICITY

All electricity in the Cayman Islands is 110V, 60Hz. A two-pronged wall socket similar to the US plug is used. Some sockets do not have a third ground hole so it is advisable to bring an adapter to make your cord plug two-pronged. Many chargers, like the Ikelite super charger, come equipped to handle 100/240 volts and are fine. Most laptop computer power sources, like the Mac iBook, also have these. These are the handiest way to get your equipment charged up and staying that way.

Most US appliances, like your electric toothbrush, will work. Some of the dive shops and resorts have stations for guest use for charging camera batteries and strobes. This may be a viable way to prevent problems with charging.

The Cayman Islands does occasionally have surges and brownouts. If you plug anything electronically delicate into a wall outlet, consider bringing a small surge protector to place in-between.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

The Imperial system of weights and measures is used. Depths are usually registered in feet and weights in pounds. All sale and rental dive gear is oriented this way. See our quick conversion scale on the back inside cover.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Email outlets and Internet cafes are becoming increasingly prevalent all over the Caymans. Many hotels have computers centers, business centers and wireless weeklong packages. Some have free wireless in their café areas and even throughout the hotel. Email and Internet providers normally feature fast DSL Internet. Some public places offer wireless hotspots which you can tap into by buying a local network card.

Calls from Cayman Islands to the US are easily made through your hotel switchboard or direct dial from your room. To tell your jealous friends how

Shell & Black Coral Products

The taking of shells and other natural artifacts is strictly prohibited in the Cayman Islands. Still, items using shells and marine creatures can be found. These are normally shipped in from places like Indonesia and the Philippines and can often be seen in the form of products like bracelets and earrings. Please discourage the creation of these products by not purchasing such items and letting store-owners know that you disapprove of seeing these items on the shelves.

There are also some amazing black coral sculptures available at galleries. The galleries that sell these items are often vague about where the black coral actually comes from. Demand a firm answer or maybe just walk away from these items as well.

If you are offered a wildlife product or natural item for sale, ask questions about the product's origin. If the vendor seems poorly informed, think twice about your actions. Otherwise, your purchase could encourage continued illegal trade in wildlife and be confiscated either before you leave the Cayman Islands or on your return home.

When in doubt, don't buy and don't take. Leave it in the sea or at the store. Officials are quick to point out that anyone violating Cayman Island's marine environment ordinance is subject to prosecution and heavy fines.

good the diving is, a phone call can also be made from public phones using a Cable & Wireless prepaid phone card. You can also use a credit card (☎ 1-800-CALL-USA) but it costs a bundle.

You can rent a phone for the week at the Cable & Wireless retail store in George Town. Cell phones compatible with 800Mhz or TMDA networks can roam in the islands.

The Cayman country code is 345.

Accommodation runs from scenic inns like this to 5-star hotels



POSTAL

Mail leaves the islands regularly and gets delivered in a reasonable amount of time. For post cards, the local post office is just fine – you can even post a postcard from Hell, with a Hell postmark. Air Parcel Post may be the most reasonable, but not fastest, way to send things. Express Mail Service (EMS) provides a fast (though not overnight), efficient, reliable and fully documented service to over 140 countries.

Local mail posted on Grand Cayman by 10am Monday to Friday will be delivered to any Grand Cayman postal destination the next day. Mail posted in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman by 10am Monday to Friday will be delivered to any Cayman Islands postal destination within three days. But this may be influenced by factors affecting air travel.

Rely on FedEx or DHL if you are sending anything valuable or requiring timely delivery.

ACCOMMODATION

There are hotels for every budget and desire, but since most divers have equipment and often-pricy photo gear, it is best to seek out the more upscale hotels to avoid problems. Since this island is not a cheap place to stay, that's pretty easy to do. The best deals come in the form of dive packages that provide reasonable weekly room rates or condominiums. Backpacker hostels are also available.

The dive hotels closest to the nightlife are right on the western shoreline at the famous Seven Mile Beach. There are also many other options, including seaside hotels like Boatswain's Bay's Cobalt Coast or East End's Compass Point, which have their own charm set away from the main drag. Guesthouses, time-shares, villas, condos and even personal homes can be rented by those staying for a while or wanting extra comforts. Dining out isn't cheap in the Caymans, so renting a place with self-catering facilities can be economical. The stores are well-stocked.

Cayman Brac also has a diverse selection of resorts, hotels and condominiums. The quieter Little Cayman isn't quite as built up but has options for visitors seeking a relaxing getaway or an adventurous dive vacation.

Celebrating Big Blue

The Blue Dragon Trail on Grand Cayman is an interesting outdoor art exhibit that features Komodo dragon-sized Grand Cayman blue iguanas. The Grand Cayman blue iguana is the most endangered iguana in the world and artists from around the Caymans have taken to painting larger-than-life replicas of it to celebrate the lizard's struggle. The fun and colorful art pieces, 15 in all, are found in just about every corner of Grand Cayman.

Blue Dragon Trail iguana art in George Town



Diners can watch divers enter the water from tableside while enjoying island cuisine



The Cayman Islands Department of Tourism ensures that hotels comply with all standards set out in the Tourism Accommodations Law, including ongoing inspections.

DINING & FOOD

The Cayman Islands are blessed with a great variety of restaurants that offer everything from fresh sushi to Jamaican jerk. Seafood is high on the menu of many eateries and since there is a turtle farm on the island, you may find turtle and conch on some menus and in small local restaurants like those along the north shore. Local foods include dishes like Cayman-style fish in spicy tomato and onion sauce, Jamaican beef patties, red-bean soup, jerk pork, conch chowder, conch fritters and rum cakes. There is also a local beer called, what else, Stingray Beer.

The restaurants of Grand Cayman are, on the whole, not cheap. But the food quality is generally excellent. The island does have a bunch of fast food joints but also has the fine cuisines of the world. Delis like Azzurro are top notch, Café de Sol has nice coffees, Ragazzi Ristorante is a real touch of class, and the Cobalt Coast and Rum Point Club offer nice food and a great sunset venue. Eats and Treats are both good options, with Treats having an adjacent and happening sports bar. The list is endless and you'd have to stay a month to sample every cuisine.

Self-caterers will find that the supermarkets, bakeries and liquor stores on Grand Cayman provide an extremely wide range of items. They usually have a good selection of cheeses, sliced meats, fresh baked goods and other munchies that you can stash in the room for between dive snacks. Wines come from all over the world.

SHOPPING

The gift shops around George Town and hotel dive shops have a colorful selection of goods ranging from the usual Caribbean fare of Cayman pirate T-shirts and some attractive local art, mostly in the form of paintings and photography. Island Glassblowing Studio is a great little glass-blowing shop on the waterfront just north of the cruise ship terminal. Stephen and son Victor Zawistowski turn out one-of-a-kind art pieces of conchs, dolphins, rays and turtles that make excellent Christmas ornaments.

There is a market open almost every day across from the Port Authority that caters to cruise ship visitors and offers carvings, local crafts, clothes and T-shirts and some great sea salt. The downtown stores have beautiful porcelain products and all manner of Duty Free goods, including the famed Tortuga rums. Rum

cakes are also a big thing here and come in more flavors than rum. There's a Jimmy Buffet bar and gift shop to buy CDs and have a 'rita in Margueritaville.

Many hotels have high-end Duty Free goods and clothes from well-known designers. Even if you've been diving all week you can go home smelling like Chanel. The 24K-Mon Art Gallery and jewelry shop on Seven Mile Beach has some innovative marine life sculptures.

Pretty much everything you want is here (there's no Apple Store yet, however) if you look at the tourist and local shopping centers. For a small place, there's a lot going on and a lot to buy.

Divers will find a number of large and extremely well-equipped dive supply stores along West Bay Road.

ACTIVITIES & ATTRACTIONS

There are plenty of things to do in Cayman Islands besides diving. The islands offer action and casual sports, including road biking and mountain biking, hiking, rappelling at Cayman Brac, fishing charters, historic tours, bird watching, parasailing, water skiing, body boarding and many combinations of these activities.

Celebrated on all three islands is Pirate's Week, a 10-day party at the end of October that features fireworks, mock battles and assorted skullduggery, and gives bankers, bar workers and locals the chance to break out the gold earrings, eye patches and stuffed parrots.



Kite surfing is gaining popularity in the Caymans

Deep Sub

This plunge along Cayman's famous wall into the abyss was on hold at the time of research due to the tourism hiatus following Hurricane Ivan. Enquire about deep sub dives close to your time of departure.

Grand Cayman's answer to Carnivale is Batabano, a weekend of costumed hedonism and hangovers held around Easter. The local equivalent on Cayman Brac is known as Brachanal, held a week after Batabano.

The hip little National Gallery of the Cayman Islands (Ground fl, waterfront, Harbor Place; www.nationalgallery.org.ky; open 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat), established in 1996, gives the Caymans' fledgling visual art scene room to breathe. Small, but creative in its use of space, the exhibits include electronic, audio and visual presentations in a relaxed atmosphere. Avant-garde displays make this little place worth a stop. There's always some local art on display and there's a tiny gift shop with some tasteful offerings. It is opposite the beachside Paradise Bar & Grill and snorkel site.

Also be sure to check out Pedro St. James Castle museum (www.pedrostjames.ky; open 9:30am-5pm daily). This imposing Caribbean great house dates from 1780, making it the oldest building in the Caymans, and it's been everything from a jail to a courthouse to parliament before recent refurbishments turned it into a museum. The Castle is touted as the islands' 'birthplace of democracy': in 1831 the decision was made here to vote for elected representatives. Just as momentously, this is the place where the Slavery Abolition Act was read in 1835. It now houses a museum featuring a multimedia presentation evoking 18th century Cayman, while the grounds showcase native flora.

WILDLIFE

Grand Cayman's botanic park is hard to beat and absolutely the best place to experience the island's indigenous fauna. A well-marked mile-long trail winds through lush, easy terrain, featuring about 300 native species. You'll see buttonwood swamps, mahogany forests and an excellent collection of native palms. The park is home to orchids (in bloom from late May through June) and the Floral Color Garden, which bursts with tropical flowers. You'll see turtles, lizards and parrots.

The Cayman blue iguana is an impressive lizard and a highly endangered species that's being studied at a captive breeding and reintroduction facility here (it's not open to the public, but you can occasionally see a couple of iguanas loitering near the entrance to the woodland trail). A full grown male can reach over 7ft from head to tail and move like the wind. Large older animals are a pale green to gray, while younger ones are a stunning lime blue. Some people think male iguanas have a sexual magic as they have two penises. They also know how to choose food with the highest nutrition and eat only fruits and greens. How did they reach the endangered point? Well, they are also a favorite ingredient in local stews.



Pods from the annatto tree



The rare wild blue iguana of the Caymans



A diver greets French angelfish

The Sisters islands have five seabird colonies – red-footed booby, brown booby, magnificent frigate bird, white-tailed tropicbird and least tern. There are also 115 species of migrant land birds. These come mainly from North America, although some South and Central American migrants can also be found. Even flamingos have been seen. Over 70 species of non-breeding wetland migrants have also been observed.

On Grand Cayman, the mangroves hold many of the same birds and are a great place to see birdlife.

SAFETY

The Cayman Islands are considered politically stable and enjoy a high standard of living. The streets are also generally safe and even hotels report few incidents of break-ins or any such petty crime. It is one of the safer places to dive and visit anywhere in the world.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Reef Fish Identification: Florida Caribbean Bahamas by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach (New World Publications).

Reef Coral Identification and Reef Creature Identification by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach (New World Publications).
Hurricane Book by Courtney Platt.

My Underwater Photo Journey by Cathy Church.

TOURIST OFFICES

Cayman Islands

Tourism Corporation
PO Box 67
Grand Cayman KY1-1102
☎ (345) 949-0623
www.caymanislands.ky

United States

☎ 1-877-4 CAYMAN

Canada

234 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 306
Toronto, ON Canada M4P 1K5
☎ (416) 485-1550 or (800) 263-5808

UK

Arlington Street
London SW1A 1RE, United Kingdom
☎ +44 (0) 20 7491 7771
www.caymanislands.co.uk

Listings



A snorkeler observes a sea star in the grasses of the North Sound



Net floats along the East Side

SELECTING A DIVE OPERATOR

Question everything when looking for the dive operation with which you're going to spend your hard-earned holiday time and money. Get satisfactory answers about the operation you are planning to dive with, the type of equipment, boat and its maintenance, divemasters, insurance coverage, cost of diving, the knowledge of the travel agent you are booking with. Check the Internet, and send plenty of emails.

There are many reputable operators in the Cayman Islands. The dive operators have a close-knit and pro-active

association, the Cayman Islands Tourism Association (CITA). It has high safety standards and members must comply with the rules and regulations of this association. These regulations insure reasonable equipment, staff training and guest ratios, and the association ensures that guests are looked after well. Make sure your dive shop or tour boat belongs to it. It will insure the shop is adhering to certain high standards the association created for itself. For your own safety, peace of mind, value for money and quality of holiday, it pays to be a wise consumer in the Cayman Islands and anywhere else in the diving world.

Catching some rays in the Caymans!



GRAND CAYMAN

Cayman Aggressor IV

PO Box 1440, Morgan City, LA 70381
Toll Free:800-348-2628
☎ 985-385-2628
www.aggressor.com

Cayman Diving School

PO Box 31064 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-949-4729
www.caymandivingschool.com

Divers Down

PO Box 1706 GT, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-945-1611
www.diversdown.net

Diver's Supply

PO Box 31013 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-949-7621
Email: diversup@candw.ky

DiveTech

PO Box 31435 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-946-5658
www.divetech.com

Eden Rock Diving Centre, Ltd.

PO Box 1907 GT, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-949-7243
www.edenrockdive.com

Indigo Divers

PO Box 30445 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-525-3932
www.indigodivers.com

Kirk Sea Tours

PO Box 30268, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-949-7278
www.kirkseatours.com

Neptune's Divers

PO Box 30520 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-945-3990
www.neptunesdivers.com

Ocean Frontiers

PO Box 200 EE, Grand Cayman
Toll Free:800-348-6096
☎ 345-947-7500 or 345-947-0000
www.oceanfrontiers.com

Off The Wall Divers

PO Box 30176 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-945-7525
www.otwdivers.com

Peter Milburn's Dive Cayman, Ltd.

PO Box 596, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-945-5770
www.petermilburndivecayman.com

Deep Blue Divers (formerly Red Baron Diving)

PO Box 11369 APO, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-949-9116
www.redbarondivers.com

Red Sail Sports

PO Box 31473 SMB, Grand Cayman
Toll Free: 877-RED-SAIL (877-733-7245)
☎ 345-945-5965
www.redsailcayman.com

Seasports

PO Box 431 WB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-949-3965
www.bestdivinggrandcayman.com

Sunset Divers

PO Box 479 GT, Grand Cayman
Toll Free:800-854-4767
☎ 345-949-7111
www.sunsethouse.com

Wall to Wall Diving

PO Box 31412 SMB, Grand Cayman
☎ 345-945-6608
www.walltowalldiving.com

LITTLE CAYMAN

Conch Club Divers

PO Box 42, Little Cayman
Toll Free: 800-327-3835
☎ 345-948-1026
www.conchclub.com

Sam McCoy's Diving & Fishing Lodge

PO Box 12, Little Cayman
Toll Free:800-626-0496
☎ 345-948-0026
www.mccoyslodge.com.ky

Pirates Point Resort

PO Box 43 LC, Little Cayman
☎ 345-948-1010
piratespointresort.com

Reef Divers - Little Cayman Beach Resort

4127 5th Ave., St. Petersburg
Toll Free: 800-327-3835
☎ 345-948-1070
www.littlecayman.com

Southern Cross Club

PO Box 44 LC, Little Cayman
☎ 345-948-1099
www.southerncrossclub.com

CAYMAN BRAC

Reef Divers – Brac Reef Beach Resort

PO Box 56, West End, Cayman Brac
Toll Free:800-327-3835
☎ 345-948-1642
www.bracreef.com

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