

Cayman Islands

Three tiny islands make up the British Overseas Territory of the Cayman Islands, balanced precariously one side of the enormous Cayman Trench, the deepest part of the Caribbean. While synonymous worldwide with banking, tax havens and beach holidays, there's much more to this tiny, proud nation, even if you do need to look quite hard to find it.

What's so surprising about the Caymans at first is how un-British they are – it would be hard to design a more Americanized place than Grand Cayman, where the ubiquitous SUVs jostle for space in the parking lots of large malls and US dollars change hands as if they were the national currency. Only the occasional portrait of the Queen or a fluttering Union Jack ever begs to differ. This contradiction is just the first of many you'll discover while getting to know these islands.

The key to understanding what makes the Caymans tick is getting away from the crowded commercialism of Grand Cayman's long western coastline and exploring the rest of the island. Better still, leave Grand Cayman altogether and visit the charming 'sister islands' of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Here life runs at a slower pace and the natural delights that see people coming back again and again – from bird-watching and hiking to diving and snorkeling – are never far away.

The Caymans may lack the dramatic scenery and steamy nightlife of much of the rest of the Caribbean, but in their place you'll find a charming, independent and deeply warm people spread over three islands boasting many of life's quieter charms.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 100 sq miles
- **Capital** George Town, Grand Cayman
- **Country code** ☎ 1345
- **Departure tax** CI\$20 (usually included in the price of your air ticket)
- **Famous for** Diving, banking and iguanas
- **Language** English
- **Money** Cayman Islands dollar (CI\$); US dollars accepted everywhere; CI\$1 = US\$1.25 = €0.78 = UK£0.62
- **Official name** Cayman Islands
- **People** Caymanians
- **Population** 52,000
- **Visa** Not required for nationals of the USA, Canada, UK, EU members prior to 2004 and most Commonwealth countries; see p213.



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Diving** (p199) Explore some of the very best diving in the Caribbean, with sites such as legendary Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman and the *Captain Keith Tibbets* wreck dive on Cayman Brac
- **Seven Mile Beach** (p196) Enjoy swimming, sunbathing and water sports galore on Grand Cayman's superb stretch of white sand, which is backed onto by glitzy hotels, smart restaurants and laid-back beach bars
- **Snorkeling at Stingray City** (p199) Have the amazing experience of huge, fearless stingrays eating squid directly from your hands as you snorkel in so-called Stingray City – the most famous attraction of this tiny island nation
- **Cayman Brac** (p206) Discover the Brac, the least visited of the Cayman Islands and by far the most dramatic, with great walking, bird-watching and diving
- **Little Cayman** (p208) Take life at a slower pace on the smallest of the three Cayman islands, which is packed with quiet charm, some great beaches and the best diving in the country

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Join the crowds on wonderful Seven Mile Beach, shop yourself into oblivion in George Town and experience the extraordinary Stingray City.
- **One Week** After several days in and around George Town, explore some of Grand Cayman's lesser-known attractions. Try the Botanic Park and Rum Point, and get some diving in.
- **Two Weeks** Add on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman for some nature hikes, superb diving, secluded beaches and a wonderful taste of the traditional Caribbean.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit is from December to April, when the temperature averages a pleasant 75°F (23.9°C) and humidity is at its lowest. During the off-season, temperatures average 83°F (28.3°C) with July and August usually being uncomfortably hot. During these times crowds dissipate, particularly on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, bringing lodging rates down by as much as 40%. Rainfall is

HOW MUCH?

- **Taxi from Owen Roberts International Airport to George Town** US\$15
- **Guided snorkeling trip** US\$35
- **Stingray City dive/snorkel trip** US\$50/30
- **Meal of fresh fish in a touristy restaurant** US\$30
- **Meal of fresh fish in a local restaurant** US\$15

highest from mid-May through to October, with frequent afternoon showers that clear as quickly as they arrive.

HISTORY

For the first century after Christopher Columbus happened upon the Caymans in 1503, the islands remained uninhabited by people – which may explain why multitudes of sea turtles were happy to call the place home, giving the islands their original Spanish name, Las Tortugas. The sun-bleached landscape languished in a near-pristine state, undisturbed but for the occasional intrusion of sailors stopping in to swipe some turtles and fill up on fresh water.

No permanent settlers set up house until well after the 1670 acquisition of the islands – and its turtles – by the British Crown, which has held dominion over the three islands ever since. Once settlers started trickling in from Jamaica in the early 18th century, Caymanians quickly established their reputation as world-class seafarers. From the 1780s the Caymanian shipbuilding industry produced schooners and other seacraft used for interisland trade and turtling.

By 1800 the population numbered less than 1000 – of whom half were slaves. After the Slavery Abolition Act was read at Pedro St James (near Bodden Town on Grand Cayman) in 1835, most freed slaves remained, and by 1900 the Caymans' population had quintupled.

Until the mid-20th century, the economy remained tied to the sea with fishing, turtling and shipbuilding as the main industries. Divers put the Cayman Islands on the international tourist map as early as the 1950s; islanders were understandably protective of

their little slice of paradise and were slow to relinquish their isolation. By the next decade, however, Caymanians had begun fashioning the tax structure that's made Grand Cayman an economic powerhouse – and designing an infrastructure that's made it a capital of Caribbean tourism.

In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan gave Grand Cayman a body blow, causing such widespread destruction that tourism was halted and a curfew enforced for several months to prevent looting. Fortunately, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman did not receive a direct hit and damage to the smaller islands was limited. Repairs are largely complete now and the future looks bright for the Caymans, where tourism is making ever greater steps into even the remote 'sister islands.' At the time of writing an international airport was being built on Little Cayman, the smallest of the Caymans – a controversial move that has divided the local population and even the country at large.

THE CULTURE

For centuries, the Caymans had been left to simmer undisturbed in their own juices as the rest of the world rushed headlong into modernity. As recently as 40 years ago (aside from a few adventurers and fishing nuts) there were few tourists. Electric power was provided solely by noisy generators, and most islanders did without it. What has occurred between then and now constitutes a Caymanian cultural revolution. With the advent of large-scale tourism and big business banking, life on the islands has changed so rapidly that cultural discourse has turned to measuring what's been gained and lost.

Historically, the population is an amalgamation with Jamaican, North American, European and African roots, but contemporary Cayman has become even more multifaceted. For better or worse, a large influx of expatriate workers – representing 78 countries and growing ever greater in number in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan – has caused Caymanians to become a minority in their own country. The upside is that the Cayman Islands have a remarkably rich social fabric that truly celebrates diversity. At stake, however, is the cultural legacy of this religious, seafaring nation. Borrowing a theme from the islands' traditional folk songs, which regularly feature the laments of sailors longing to return

home, many islanders speak with nostalgia of the old ways.

ARTS

While the art scene in the Caymans may fail to scintillate visiting urbanites, it is gathering steam. The National Gallery in George Town, Grand Cayman, was opened in 1996 to promote and encourage the embryonic art scene of the islands. An art collective known as Native Son, comprising homegrown artists Wray Banker, Al Ebanks, Luelan Bodden and Horatio Estaban has exhibited locally and internationally, while late-blooming visionary artist 'Miss Lassie' has become well known abroad in 'outsider art' circles. (Her death in 2003 was cause for spontaneous national mourning.) Unsurprisingly, underwater photography is widely practiced in the Caymans, most notably by Cathy Church, whose Underwater Photo Centre & Gallery at Sunset House (p202) provides a focal point.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Located approximately 150 miles south of Cuba and 180 miles west of Jamaica, the Cayman Islands consist of Grand Cayman and two smaller islands – Cayman Brac and Little Cayman – 75 miles to the northeast and 5 miles apart. All three islands are low-lying, flat-topped landmasses, although Cayman Brac does have a 140ft cliff, by far the most dramatic scenery in the country. In fact, the Caymans are the tips of massive submarine mountains that just barely emerge from the awesome Cayman Trench, an area with the deepest water in the Caribbean.

Encircling all three of the islands are shallow waters and a reef system harboring one of the world's richest accumulations of marine life. At Bloody Bay Wall, on the north shore of Little Cayman, the seafloor ends abruptly at a depth of only 18ft to 25ft, dropping off into a 6000ft vertical cliff. Along its sheer face grows an astonishing variety of corals, sponges and sea fans and thousands of mobile creatures going about their daily business as the occasional diver looks on, agog.

Wildlife

The Caymans' dry land is not quite as exciting as its waters, but it still gives nature lovers plenty to do and see. With nearly 200 native winged species, the islands offer outstand-

CAYMAN CRUISING: SOME MORE WELCOME THAN OTHERS?

In one of the most homophobic regions of the world it's hard to pinpoint which country is a worse offender and why, although in terms of sheer violence Jamaica usually leads the way. Yet the Caymanians have also made a pretty good case for themselves in recent years. The controversy started back in 1998 when a gay cruise ship was told it was not welcome to weigh anchor here. This rather sad piece of discrimination discredited the Cayman Islands massively in the eyes of tourists around the world, and as a result the Caymans saw a drop off in cruise ships of all kinds.

With a change of administration came a change of heart, though, and – ever sensitive to the tourist dollar – in 2001 the Cayman government reversed the policy when it introduced antidiscrimination legislation.

Five years passed before another gay cruise attempted to land in the Caymans, but in 2006 the *Navigator of the Seas* made a one-day visit without incident. Despite the move being very unpopular with much of the Caymanian population, it seems as if the Cayman Islands have finally – officially, at least – embraced diversity, although the detainment of one young American in 2008 for embracing his partner in a nightclub caused more embarrassment for the tourism department. Despite progressive intentions, there's still a long way to go.

ing bird-watching. Keep your eyes open and you'll spot parrots, boobies, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, herons and egrets. Reptiles include celebrities such as green sea turtles and blue iguanas, and plenty of common geckos and lizards (the latter sometimes making an appearance in the baths of luxury hotels). The islands have a remarkably well protected ecology – driving on beaches is against the law due to the harm this can do to turtle habitats, iguanas have the right of way and there are plentiful marine replenishment zones where fishing is not permitted. For more about the fascinating and still endangered blue iguanas, see the website of the **Blue Iguana Recovery Program** (www.blueiguana.ky).

The Caymans aren't lush, but they do support a fair swag of plant life. Mahogany was once abundant but has been mostly logged. Poisonous species include maiden plum (a weed with rash-causing sap), lady's hair or cowitch (a vine with fiberglass-like barbs) and the vicious manchineel tree, which produces a skin-blistering sap. Take care not to shelter under a manchineel in the rain! Other indigenous plants are cochineel, used as a shampoo as well as eaten, and pingwing, whose barbed branches were once fashioned into a natural fence.

FOOD & DRINK

You'll eat superbly almost anywhere in the Caymans – the combination of a large international community and plenty of cash sloshing about means that no effort is spared

to import excellent fresh food and specialties from around the world. Just don't be horrified to see turtle on the menu – it remains the national dish and any restaurant serving it will be using ecologically sound farm-raised turtles to make your steak, stew or soup. It's surprisingly delicious.

As in the Bahamas, conch is a popular item on restaurant menus. This large pink mollusk is cooked with onion and spices in a stew, fried up as fritters, or sliced raw and served with a lime marinade. **Cayman Sea Sense** (www.nationaltrust.org.ky/seasense.html) is a fantastic program designed to let diners know when restaurants are sourcing all their fish and seafood sustainably. See the website for a full list of restaurants that have met the exacting standards. Sadly it's as yet only a small number of eateries that reach the required standard, but among them are some of the very best.

For dessert, try 'heavy cake,' a dense confection made from starchy ingredients such as grated cassava, cornmeal, yam and liberal quantities of brown sugar, or the classic Tortuga Rum Cake, which is available in a number of flavors and makes a great gift to take home.

Wash it all down with a 'jelly ice,' chilled coconut water sucked from the shell, or perhaps a bottle of Stingray Beer, the local brew. Or, if you can handle a thousand extra calories, slurp a mudslide, the creamy cocktail – a potent concoction of Kahlua, Baileys and vodka – invented on Rum Point. Alcohol is generally expensive and can only be bought from liquor stores.

GRAND CAYMAN

pop 37,000

To most of the world, Grand Cayman is the Cayman Islands, a glitzy shopping mecca and global financial centre where five-star hotels line the fabulous white-sand Seven Mile Beach and the wealthy from around the world spend time sipping cocktails and discretely playing with their millions.

Yet beyond George Town and Seven Mile Beach the island does have its own quiet charm and Caribbean life still leaves its mark on what, in many places, could otherwise be mistaken for suburban Florida – whether it's the island-wide cockerels crowing at dawn or the impromptu parties that take place at a moment's notice. The island is crowded, no doubt, and it's far from being an idyllic Caribbean hideaway, but with its excellent restaurants, shopping, activities and things to see and do, Grand Cayman is certainly not a place to be bored.

Getting There & Away

For information on getting to (and from) Grand Cayman, see p213.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There's a taxi queue just outside the airport building. Fares are set by the government, based on one to three people sharing a ride.

Sample fares from the airport:

East End US\$60

George Town, Southern Seven Mile Beach US\$12.50

Northern Seven Mile Beach US\$25

Rum Point/Cayman Kai US\$70

All of the major car-rental agencies have offices across the road from the terminal. Unfortunately, there is no bus service to the airport, and hotels are not permitted to collect guests on arrival.

BICYCLE & SCOOTER

With its flat terrain and always stunning views of the sea, Grand Cayman is a pleasure for cyclists (many hotels make bikes available to guests). Renting a scooter will enable you to easily access the far reaches of the island.

Cayman Cycle Rentals (☎ 945-4021; Coconut Place Shopping Center, West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; per day mountain bikes/scooters US\$15/30) rents both bicycles and scooters.

BUS

The public **bus terminal** (☎ 916-1293), located adjacent to the public library on Edward St in downtown George Town, serves as the dispatch point for buses to all districts of Grand Cayman. The system uses color-coded logos on the buses to indicate routes.

The main routes:

West Bay (fare US\$2.50; ☎ 6am-11pm Sun-Thu, 6am-midnight Fri & Sat) Every 15 minutes. Served by Route 1 (yellow) and Route 2 (lime green) buses.

Bodden Town (fare US\$2.50; ☎ 6am-11pm Sun-Thu, 6am-midnight Fri & Sat) Every 30 minutes. Served by Route 3 (blue) buses.

East End (fare US\$2.50; ☎ 6am-9pm Sun-Thu, 6am-midnight Fri & Sat) Hourly. Served by Route 4 (purple) and Route 5 (red) buses. Via Bodden Town.

North Side (fare US\$2.50; ☎ 6am-9pm Sun-Thu & Sat, 6am-midnight Fri) Hourly. Served by Route 5 (red) buses. Passes the entrance to Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park.

CAR

During the peak season, rates for a compact car start at around US\$40 per day; rentals during the low season may be 25% less. The following are the main rental suppliers.

Andy's Rent-a-Car (☎ 949-8111; www.andys.ky; Owen Roberts International Airport; ☎ 6am-10pm)

Avis (☎ 949-2468; www.aviscayman.com; Owen Roberts International Airport) Other branches are at the Ritz Carlton, Marriott Hotel and Westin.

Budget (☎ 949-5605; www.budgetcayman.com; Owen Roberts International Airport)

Cayman Auto Rentals (☎ 949-1013; www.caymanautorentals.net; West Bay Rd)

Coconut Car Rentals (☎ 949-4037; www.coconutcarrentals.com) Offices at Owen Roberts International Airport and Coconut Place, Seven Mile Beach.

Economy Car Rental (☎ 949-9550; www.economycarrental.com.ky; Owen Roberts International Airport)

TAXI

Taxis are readily available at Owen Roberts International Airport, from all resorts and from the taxi stand at the cruise-ship dock in George Town. They offer a fixed rate per vehicle or per person to all points on Grand Cayman. A sign with current rates is posted at the dock.

GEORGE TOWN & SEVEN MILE BEACH

pop 21,000

George Town is the supremely wealthy but surprisingly modest capital of the Caymans. While no doubt cosmopolitan, with more than its fair share of excellent restaurants,

GRAND CAYMAN FOR CHILDREN

Most kids will love the Caymans (just try to stop them visiting the turtle farm, snorkeling at Stingray City or enjoying the beach at Rum Point!) but there's little better suited to intergenerational interaction than the fantastic **Kids Sea Camp** (☎ 1-803-419-2556, from within the USA 800-934-3483; www.kidseacamp.com). This inventive travel package is designed to bring families closer together, underwater. Organized excursions to a number of great dive and snorkeling sites, combined with access to age-appropriate instruction, make this a good option for families that want to push the active vacation envelope. Kids Sea Camp is hosted by Divetech at Cobalt Coast Resort & Suites (p204) in July and August each year.

bars and shopping, there's something terribly unassuming about the place as well – it's tiny, tidy and easy to walk around, and there's often little going on, especially at weekends when much of the worker population stays at home outside the town. The obvious flip side to this is when the cruise ships come into port and thousands of passengers descend en masse to buy anything in sight.

North of the harbor and town center is Seven Mile Beach, a gorgeous stretch of unbroken white sand where Grand Cayman's tourist industry is concentrated. Despite being very built up with condos, big hotels, malls and restaurants, the beach is stunning, and you'll usually find it busy with locals and visitors alike any day of the week.

Most of Grand Cayman's hotels, restaurants and shopping complexes line the island's busiest thoroughfare, West Bay Rd, which travels alongside Seven Mile Beach.

Information

BOOKSTORES

BookNook (☎ 949-7392; Anchorage Centre, Harbour Dr, George Town) Limited stock of general interest titles, including regional travel guides. Find it under Margaritaville.

Hobbies & Books (☎ 949-0707; Piccadilly Centre, Elgin Ave, George Town) Another book shop with a large selection of magazines and newspapers.

EMERGENCY

Police (RCIP; ☎ 949-4222; Elgin Ave, George Town)

INTERNET ACCESS

Café del Sol Internet Coffee House (☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-7pm Sun) George Town (☎ 946-3322; www.cafedelisol.ky; Aqua World Duty Free Mall, South Church St, George Town; 30min/1hr US\$3/5); Seven Mile Beach (☎ 946-2233; cnr West Bay Rd & Lawrence Blvd, Seven Mile Beach) The cheapest access in the most comfortable surroundings. The George Town branch has

wi-fi only, the Seven Mile Beach branch has both terminals and wi-fi.

Computer Geeks (☎ 949-4335; Queen's Court, Seven Mile Beach; 30min US\$2; ☎ 10am-3am Mon-Fri)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Cayman Islands Hospital (☎ 949-8600; Hospital Rd, George Town) Houses a state-of-the-art recompression chamber: phone ☎ 555 (24 hours).

MONEY

George Town, it seems, has nearly as many banks as people. Filling your wallet with the brightly colored currency is optional if you're flush with greenbacks: US currency is accepted everywhere at a standard island exchange rate of CI\$0.80 to US\$1.

POST

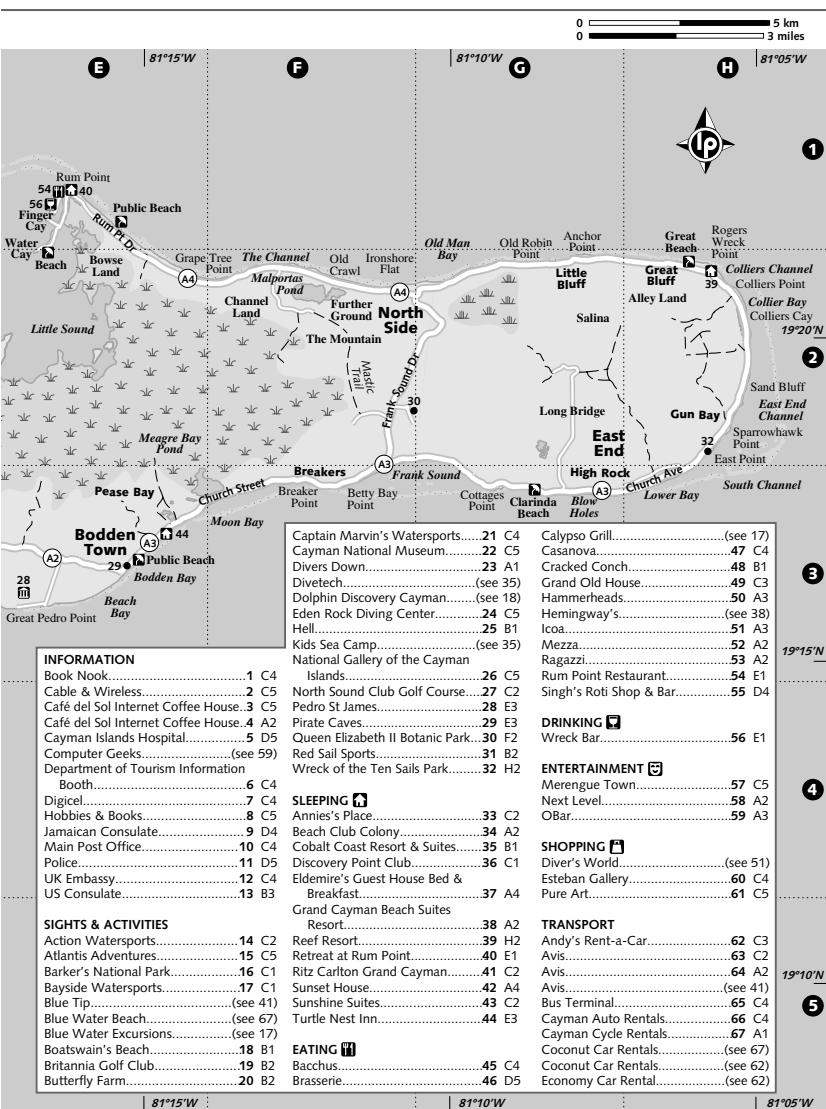
Main post office (☎ 949-2474; cnr Edward St & Cardinal Ave, George Town; ☎ 8:15am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9-12:30pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Department of Tourism (☎ 949-0623; www.caymanislands.ky) The Cayman Islands' tourism department operates information booths that are located at the Owen Roberts International Airport and at the North Terminal cruise-ship dock at George Town harbor. The booth at the airport is open when flights arrive; the booth at the dock is only open when cruise ships are in port.

Sights

There is nothing you can't miss in George Town – it's pleasant enough to stroll around, eat and shop in, but the sights are of negligible interest. The best of the lot is the **Cayman National Museum** (☎ 949-8368; www.museum.ky; cnr Harbour Dr & Sheddon Rd, George Town), which at the time of research was being restored after damage inflicted by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. When it reopens the museum collection – a variety of exhibits on the islands' cultural and natural



for visitors, who are taken around on a tour and introduced up close to many beautiful butterflies native to the Caymans.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELING

Many people coming to Grand Cayman are coming for one thing alone, the great diving.

While arguably better, more pristine sites are available on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, the diving around Grand Cayman should not be discounted. As well as over 160 dive sites there's the superb *Stingray City*, often considered to be one of the best shallow dives in the world and an undoubted highlight of any trip. This stretch of sandy seafloor in Grand

INSIDE KNOWLEDGE

Carol 'Tootie' Eldemire-Huddleston is a 64-year-old Georgetown resident, real-estate entrepreneur and owner of Eldemire's Guest House Bed & Breakfast.

Are you a local girl or a new arrival?

All of my ancestors were Caymanian. In fact they were some of the first settlers on the islands, although I myself was born in Jamaica. Like many Caymanians of his generation, my dad went to sea when he was 16 and the ship he worked on was based in Jamaica. Hence I was born and raised there but I came back to reside in Grand Cayman in 1987.

What's it like to live on Grand Cayman?

It's a delightful place to live with a slow, easy island pace. The beaches, sunsets and crystal clear azure colors of the ocean are what really makes it a very special place to be. All in all, it's a little piece of paradise on earth.

Do you have any insider tips for our readers?

Visit the Botanical Park where you see indigenous iguanas – some in the wild, beautiful tropical plants and flowering trees as well as an authentic old Caymanian home at the heart of it all.

How can you tell locals from travelers and business people?

Locals have that Caymanian 'sing-song' accent and a tan, and are usually in a relaxed mood, whereas business people and travelers who come here for financial reasons tend to be a bit more uptight and are not really interested in who we are. Their main focus is on the money they can make. Caymanians are extremely kind though – be friendly and respectful to them and initiate conversation and they're sure to respond.

What's your personal favorite thing about the Cayman Islands?

I have many favorite things I love about Cayman, but swimming and snorkeling off Seven Mile Beach and watching the sun setting over the striking colors of the ocean are my favorites...

Cayman's North Sound is the meeting place for southern stingrays hungry for a meal. As soon as you enter the water, several of the beautiful prehistoric-looking creatures will glide up to you to suck morsels of squid from your tentative fingers. Half- and full-day excursions are offered by nearly every dive operator, including **Divers Down** (☎ 949-6796; www.diversdown.net; Coconut Pl, West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; dive/snorkel trip US\$65/35) and **Off the Wall Divers** (☎ 945-7525; www.otwdivers.com; dive/snorkel trip US\$45/20).

From **Eden Rock Diving Center** (☎ 949-7243; www.edenrockdive.com; 124 South Church St, George Town; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$55/85), overlooking the George Town harbor, it's an easy matter to shore dive to the beautiful caves, tunnels and grottoes of two of the Caymans' most celebrated dive sites: Eden Rocks and Devil's Grotto. Guided shore dives begin at US\$55. You can snorkel from here for free, although there's a locker fee.

Red Sail Sports (☎ 949-8745; www.redsailcayman.com; Grand Cayman Beach Suites Resort, West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$70/110) is the largest and best-known of the diving providers, offering excursions island-wide and numerous outlets across Grand Cayman, including at Rum Point for access to the North Wall.

Some other well-established diving operations include the following:

Ambassador Divers (☎ 916-1046; www.ambassadordivers.com; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$65/95)

Deep Blue Divers (☎ 947-0116; www.deepbluediverscayman.com; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$65/90)

Divetech (☎ 946-5658; www.divetech.com; Cobalt Coast Resort & Suites, West Bay; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$60/110) Located near the awesome North Wall.

Sun Divers (☎ 916-0862; www.sundivers.ky; Boatswains Bay; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$60/90)

Wall to Wall Diving (☎ 916-6408; www.walltowalldiving.com; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$60/90)

WATER SPORTS

Independent paddlers will find rental kayaks (single/double US\$20/25 per hour) at the public beach at Seven Mile Beach. They are also available from **Action Watersports** (☎ 548-3147; www.ciactionmarine.com; Grand Caymanian Resort, Safe Haven), who also rent waverunners (US\$65 per 30 minutes) and can organize catamaran hire. Parasailing is possible at Seven Mile Beach through **Blue Water Beach** (☎ 525-5400; www.bwbacayman.com; Royal Palms Beach Club).

FISHING

The clear, warm waters of the Caymans are teeming with blue marlin, wahoo, tuna and

mahimahi. Charter a boat (half-day charters US\$500 to US\$600, full-day charters US\$700 to US\$1200) with an experienced Caymanian captain and hook some real action.

Bayside Watersports (☎ 949-3200; www.baysidewatersports.com; Batabano Rd, Morgan's Harbour) True Caymanian hospitality and fishing expertise.

Blue Water Excursions (☎ 925-8738; www.bluewaterexcursions.ky; Morgan's Harbour) Local fisherman Capt Richard Orr is at the helm of his 32ft vessel *Trouble Maker*.

Captain Marvin's Watersports (☎ 949-3200; www.captainmarvins.com; Waterfront Centre, North Church St, George Town) In business since 1951.

GOLF

Plenty of great sunshine and three world-class courses make the Caymans a prime destination for golf nuts.

Britannia Golf Club (☎ 949-8020; Grand Cayman Beach Suites Resort, West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach), designed by Jack Nicklaus, this course is reminiscent of legendary Scottish courses with its traditional 'links' layout.

The superb **North Sound Club Golf Course** (☎ 947-4653; www.northsoundclub.com; Safehaven Dr, Seven Mile Beach) closed after Ivan and has now reopened with new management. The new 18-hole course is championship level and in a stunning location, interwoven with the canals off the North Sound.

A Greg Norman-designed nine-hole course belonging to the new Ritz-Carlton hotel, **Blue Tip** (☎ 815-6500; www.ritzcarlton.com; West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach) is the latest addition to Grand Cayman's golf scene. Adjacent to the North Sound Club, many of the holes are over water.

HORSEBACK RIDING

While Grand Cayman lacks the dramatic scenery of much of the Caribbean, horseback riding is still very popular here. The following places are recommended.

Nikki's Beach Rides (☎ 916-3530, 945-5839). Well regarded for its engaging tours led by the amiable Caymanian owner. Small groups of up to six ride along the beach and through scenic inland wetlands.

Pampered Ponies (☎ 945-2262; www.ponies.ky) Offers dawn riding down deserted beaches for experienced riders, romantic sunset rides and awesome full moon ones as well. The small groups are all led by professionals.

Tours

It's possible to visit the underwater world without even mussing up your hair on an **Atlantis Adventures** (☎ 949-7700; www.atlantisadventures.com; 32 Goring Ave, George Town; adult/child/teen US\$79/59/69) submarine expedition. The *Atlantis XI* submarine takes groups to a depth of 100ft, for which tours leave every hour Monday through Sunday. Children under 3ft tall cannot join the fun. Other trips are available, including spooky nighttime descents.

Sleeping

Flying down Seven Mile Beach as you approach the airport, you could be forgiven for thinking that the whole of Grand Cayman is covered in luxury condos, guesthouses and sprawling hotel complexes. It isn't, but most of the coast is, and there's a huge choice here, as long as you're not looking for a youth hostel. Most hotels are mid-range and top end, although there are a few budget-friendly places.

Eldemire's Guest House Bed & Breakfast (☎ 916-8369; www.eldemire.com; Glen Eden Rd, George Town; r US\$110-135, 1-1/2-bedroom ste \$145/225; ☎ ☑) This guesthouse is the favorite of independent travelers and provides a large range of accommodations, from very basic rooms for seasonal workers to very smart and spacious suites. The suites have their own kitchens while room guests in the main block share a spacious and well-equipped common kitchen. All guests have access to laundry facilities. There's free wi-fi throughout the complex and rental bikes are available (per day US\$15). Take South Church St from downtown and the turn off is signposted.

Annie's Place (☎ 945-5505; www.anniesplace.ky; 282 Andrew Dr, Snug Harbour; s/d US\$110/140; ☎) Annie Multon has opened up her home as a charming B&B just a few blocks back from Seven Mile Beach. The well-decorated bungalow has a great garden, and all bedrooms have private bathrooms and cable TV. This is a great place to feel local – you'll rarely see tourists down here. Annie's has a three-night minimum stay during the summer (April to September), and a seven-night minimum stay during the winter season (October to March).

Sunshine Suites (☎ 949-3000; www.sunshinesuites.com; Peninsula Ave, Seven Mile Beach; r incl breakfast from US\$175; ☎ ☑ ☑) This complex of 131 studios and apartments offers a good half-way house between hotel and condo. Because

it's set back from the beach (though only a short walk away), rates are lower than for waterfront places. The smart, fully serviced accommodations come complete with a buzzing bar-restaurant and a good pool. Each unit is equipped with a full kitchen, making self-catering an easy option.

Discovery Point Club (☎ 945-4724; www.discoverypointclub.com; West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; r with/without sea view from US\$300/210, 2-bedroom ste US\$345-525; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This excellent condo complex has been totally renovated since Ivan and is recommended for a family beach holiday. Right on stunning Seven Mile Beach, all suites have superb views, balconies or patios and self-catering facilities. The smaller one-bed studios don't have kitchens but share the excellent hotel facilities including the tennis courts, pool, spa and wi-fi.

Sunset House (☎ 949-7111; www.sunsethouse.com; 390 South Church St, George Town; courtyard/ocean view/apt US\$200/250/345; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Just south of George Town, this divers' haven is a great spot, although the weekly packages work out far more economically than the higher per night rates. As you'd expect, the whole operation revolves around diving, with a dive school boasting specialized guides as well as a famed underwater photography center. The rooms are clean and comfortable.

Beach Club Colony (☎ 949-8100; bchclub@candw.ky; West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; s/d from US\$290/440; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This all-inclusive resort has 41 rooms right on the beach in the heart of Seven Mile Beach. Guest rooms are bright and cheerful, and interconnecting rooms are available on request. Weekly packages make a stay here work out much cheaper.

Grand Cayman Beach Suites Resort (☎ 949-1234, in the US 888-591-1234; www.grand-cayman-beach-ste.com; West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; r/ste from US\$499/849; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This former Hyatt, which lost its prestigious name in 2008 but retained its impressive \$80m refit following Hurricane Ivan, may now play second fiddle to the Ritz-Carlton, but it's still an excellent property. All rooms are large and beautifully set out, including kitchens, large bathrooms and balconies. The resort has a gym, golf course, three restaurants, a stunning beach and an excellent diving center.

Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman (☎ 943-9000; www.ritzcarlton.com; West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; r/ste from US\$879/2530; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The newest and certainly the largest luxury resort in Grand

Cayman is this vast 365-room property located on both sides of West Bay Rd, the two buildings connected by an enclosed pedestrian bridge. Given the incredible price tags these rooms attract, they tend to feel sterile and somewhat *nouveau riche*. Despite this, it's undeniably a great place to stay with two stunning pools, a beautiful stretch of beach, a magnificent spa, a nine-hole golf course (p201), tennis courts and a host of superb bars and restaurants.

Eating & Drinking

You'll eat extraordinarily good food on Grand Cayman. From super-smart restaurants catering to the leisurely rich to simpler cafés producing excellent fresh meals, it's hard to go wrong here, although there are very few bargains to be had! **Cayman Islands Restaurants** (www.caymanrestaurants.com) is a good resource for further listings.

GEORGE TOWN

Singh's Roti Shop & Bar (☎ 946-7684; cnr Doctor Roy's Dr & Shedden Rd; mains US\$7-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner, closed Sun) This is one of George Town's best bargains. In a city where dinner often means a three-figure check, this cheerful hole-in-the-wall is a great place for some tongue-searing roti (curry filling, often potatoes and chicken, rolled inside flat bread).

Hammerheads (☎ 949-3080; North Church St; mains US\$10-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This is a great spot to meet locals who come in droves for sun-downers and satisfying diner fare out on the large deck with great sea views. Burgers, fried chicken and some seriously good sandwiches are the main offerings – as well as killer cocktails. There's also tarpon feeding on the deck every evening at 9pm.

Casanova (☎ 949-7633; www.casanova.ky; 65 North Church St; mains US\$17-30; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) This relatively affordable Italian restaurant overlooking the sea is a great spot for a quality dinner. Reserve a table with a view out on the veranda. The pizzas are good, as are the fresh fish and seafood dishes.

Grand Old House (☎ 949-9333; South Church St; mains US\$20-36; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) This seriously establishment stunner is probably the island's best-known restaurant, housed in a beautiful white plantation house that, on a delightfully eccentric note, also serves as the honorary Austrian consulate each morning. The menu is traditional Caribbean,

including farm-raised turtle steaks and a superb wine list. Reservations and smart dress are recommended.

Brasserie (☎ 945-1815; www.brasseriecayman.com; Cricket Sq; mains US\$22-40) This excellent place enjoys the patronage of many of the political and business elite in George Town, and while there's a rarified air and not a cruise ship passenger in sight, there's nothing snooty or unwelcoming here. The beautifully attired dining rooms are great for a flash evening out. The international menu is impressive and beautifully realized.

Bacchus (☎ 949-5757; www.bacchus.ky; Fort St; mains US\$27-38; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Thu, 10am-2am Fri, 11am-midnight Sat) This cozy place is an award winner as much for being a great wine bar as for its sublime food. The sophisticated and interesting menu has something for everyone – there are plenty of vegetarian options as well as a host of more traditional dishes from lobster thermidor to yellowfin tuna steaks.

SEVEN MILE BEACH

Ragazzi (☎ 945-3484; Buckingham Sq, West Bay Rd; pizzas US\$10-17, mains US\$15-35; ☎ 11:30am-11pm) This much-loved Italian place is far more than the pizzeria it bills itself as. Even though the pizza here is excellent, there's plenty more of interest besides, with a rich list of antipasti, pasta and mains. Try *scaloppine limone* or Maryland crab ravioli for something different. The wine list is excellent and service charming.

our pick Icoa (☎ 945-1915; www.icoacayman.com; Seven Mile Shops, West Bay Rd; mains US\$12.50-20; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Thu, 7am-11pm Fri & Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) Located in an unprepossessing shopping mall, Icoa, a café, deli, takeaway and full restaurant, is perhaps our single favorite find in the Cayman Islands. Always busy with locals in the know, this fanatically run place has, quite simply, never served up a bad dish. The menu is deceptively simple – seared scallops or Moroccan lamb spiced stew, for example – but the resulting dish is always memorable. Great for breakfast, weekend brunch, takeout sandwiches and more – don't miss this slice of heaven.

Mezza (☎ 946-3992; West Bay Rd; mains US\$19-32; ☎ 11:30am-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Fri, 5-10pm Sat) This exclusive, buzzing bar-restaurant is the hangout of well-connected locals and is a top Seven Mile Beach pick. The menu is made up of simple American-led standards at lunchtime, but becomes markedly more

ambitious in the evenings, when specialties such as jerk chicken fettuccine, red snapper curry and black-tea-dusted yellowfin appear. Desserts are sublime. Reservations advised.

Hemingway's (☎ 945-5700; Grand Cayman Beach Suites Resort, West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; mains US\$26-38; ☎ lunch & dinner) This exceptional restaurant is far from being just another hotel eatery and so, while it's the flagship restaurant of the Grand Cayman Beach Suites Resort, it's also a favorite with Grand Cayman high society. Its menu's gimmick is that each dish relates to Papa somehow, and even if that sometimes feels a bit labored ('Hemingway feasted on fresh lobster regularly at his home in Key West'), the food is superb. Try paella Valencia, tenderloin of beef, or just brunch and coffee on the terrace overlooking the beach. Reservations advised.

Entertainment

People don't come to the Caymans for the nightlife, although there's a clutch of decent nightclubs around George Town and Seven Mile Beach – the only ones in the country.

The legal drinking age is 18. As a result of draconian laws, all clubs and bars close at midnight on Saturday. As a result Thursday and Friday are the big nights to go out.

OBar (☎ 943-6227; Queens Court Plaza, West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; ☎ 10pm-3am Mon-Fri) Still the best place in town, this unpretentious nightclub and lounge has great resident DJs, fantastic cocktails and occasional live performances.

Merengue Town (☎ 949-6833; Boilers Rd, George Town; ☎ 10pm-3am Mon-Fri) This steamy club has become a hugely popular dance place recently, playing a range of Caribbean rhythms from merengue to rumba and reggaeton. You'll meet a very local crowd determined to party here.

Next Level (☎ 946-6398; www.nextlevelcayman.com; West Bay Rd, Seven Mile Beach; ☎ 8pm-3am Mon-Fri) The smartest club on the island gets the best DJs and a young and friendly crowd as its regulars. Monday is 'All You Can Drink Monday,' Wednesday is for hip-hop and dancehall, while Friday is the biggest night on the island – R&B, hip-hop and retro music prevails. Ladies enter free before 11pm most nights.

Shopping

At the malls clustered around the waterfront, savings are significant for consumer goods

such as watches, jewelry, sunglasses, designer clothing, cameras, crystal, spirits and cosmetics as there are no sales taxes here. You will also encounter a plethora of local treasures, including shell jewelry, thatch work, wood carvings, crocheted items, pepper sauces, tropical fruit jams, honey and caymanite (Cayman's semiprecious stone) figurines. Most of it is tat.

Some of the better shops:

Diver's World (☎ 949-8128; Seven Mile Shops, Seven Mile Beach; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) This fantastic diving shop is the Cayman's biggest. Knowledgeable staff will help you get what you need.

Esteban Gallery (☎ 946-2787; ground fl, AAL Trust Bank Bldg, North Church St, George Town; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) The place for Caymanite sculptures by noted local artist Bracker Horacio Esteban.

Pure Art (☎ 949-9133; South Church St, George Town; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Head here for locally made arts and crafts.

WEST BAY

North of George Town, West Bay is quietly suburban and home to the excellent turtle farm, the quaint township of Hell and the more remote Barkers National Park – the first national park in the Caymans.

Sights

Boatswain's Beach (☎ 949-3894; www.boatswainsbeach.ky; North West Point Rd; general admission adult/child US\$55/25, turtle farm only adult/child US\$18/9; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm) is the closest thing the Caymans have to Disney Land – and a firm favorite with kids. If you balk at the exorbitant prices then the turtle farm remains the best part of the visit and is well worth coming for alone at a much lower price.

The **turtle farm** is a unique hatchery where green sea turtles are raised from hatchlings to behemoths averaging over 300lb. While protecting wild populations by meeting market demand for turtle products, the farm has, over the years, also released more than 31,000 hatchlings into the waters surrounding the Cayman Islands. Visitors can peer into tanks filled with specimens ranging from babies to massive adults moshing about in their breeding pond.

Elsewhere in the complex for those paying the full price you have a huge swimming pool, complete with two waterfalls, a shark and predator tank (feeding time is always fun), a bird aviary, a butterfly grove and

a 'Caymanian Street,' a ye olde Caribbean street where fishermen and craftsmen magically flown in from 'yesteryear' tell stories to anyone unable to run away fast enough.

Opposite Boatswain's Beach a rather controversial dolphinarium, **Dolphin Discovery Cayman**, is due to open in 2008, offering patrons the chance to swim with dolphins, a practice that is widely condemned by environmentalists. The local campaigning group, **Keep Dolphins Free** (<http://dolphinsfreecayman.org>) has bitterly opposed the development.

The tiny village of **Hell** attracts gawpers with very little to do indeed. Comprised primarily of a post office, a gift shop and, tellingly, an Esso Station, Hell is for the cruise ship crowd and anyone who wants to send a postcard from Hell.

A far better way to spend the afternoon is to have a ramble in the **Barkers National Park**. Dedicated in 2004, it's the first land in the Caymans to be set aside for such a purpose. Leave your car and wander along the isolated beaches. There was no visitor center nor any facilities here at the time of research.

Sleeping & Eating

Cobalt Coast Resort & Suites (☎ 946-5656; www.cobaltcoast.com; r US\$240, ste from US\$280; ☎ ☎ ☎) Over 80% of the guests at this resort, located on a pleasantly isolated strip beyond Boatswain's Bay, are here to dive. The setting is dramatic, with crashing waves and a small, ever growing white-sand beach that you have to clamber over rocks to get to. It's a friendly place with great rooms – very spacious and modern. Divetech (p200) is the in-house dive center.

Cracked Conch (☎ 945-5217; www.crackedconch.com; Northwest Point Rd; mains US\$12-48; ☎ lunch & dinner) This oceanfront stunner of a restaurant has been open for 25 years, and despite sounding like a beach bar, it's all white tablecloths and sublime service. Totally refitted since Hurricane Ivan, the Conch guarantees you a memorable meal. The lunch menu is simpler and less expensive – including a popular turtle burger, while dinner pulls out all the stops – try green plantain crusted grouper fillet or pink snapper with coconut shrimp.

Calypso Grill (☎ 949-3948; www.calypsogrillcayman.com; Morgan's Harbour, West Bay; mains US\$18-38; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Few restaurants on Grand Cayman come as warmly recommended by locals as the excellent Calypso Grill, tucked away on Morgan's Harbour away from the

crowds of Seven Mile Beach. Mains range from simple fresh fish cooked as you ask to more explorative and inventive dishes such as Wahoo Escoveitch (wahoo strips deep fried and served in Jamaican hot pepper and onion vinaigrette) and Crispy Mango Shrimp.

BODDEN TOWN

pop 5000

Historic Bodden Town (the surname Bodden will soon be a familiar one if you spend much time in the Caymans!) was the capital of the Cayman Islands until George Town scooped that honor in the mid-19th century. It's a bit of a backwater today, and took the brunt of Hurricane Ivan back in 2004, which destroyed many of the island's oldest buildings and wreaked havoc on the beach, where there's still a large number of fallen trees today.

The main draw for visitors is **Pedro St James** in nearby Savannah. An imposing Caribbean great house dating from 1780, 'Pedro's Castle' has served over the years as everything from jail to courthouse to parliament before making the transition to **museum** (☎ 947-3329; www.pedrostjames.ky; Pedro Rd, Savannah; adult/child US\$10/free; ☎ 9am-5pm), quite recently. Touted as the Caymans' 'birthplace of democracy,' it was here in 1831 that the decision was made in favor of a public vote for elected representatives. Just as momentarily, this is where the Slavery Abolition Act was read in 1835. The grounds showcase native flora, and there's a multimedia presentation evoking 18th-century Cayman.

Another family favorite is the **Pirate Caves** (☎ 947-3122; admission adult/child US\$8/5; ☎ 9am-6pm) on the coast in Bodden Town. This is a big hit with kids, as you can explore caves where pirates apparently hid their treasures in the past, along with a mini-zoo, a petting pool for freshwater sting rays and displays of various pirate ephemera. Some of the caves are eerily beautiful even if the treasure hidden here remains elusive!

Few people stay around here, but one place is worth considering.

our pick Turtle Nest Inn (☎ 947-8665; www.turtlenestinn.com; r from US\$99-179, ocean view apt US\$129-229, beachfront apt US\$159-279; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a breath of fresh air. Prices are low, and week-long packages work out even better and include a free rental car. Located right on the beach, the hotel has trouble keeping up with demands from repeat customers. Other thoughtful pluses are free wi-fi,

great phone rates, cable TV, free snorkeling equipment and self-catering facilities. The hotel is also leading local efforts to replant the hurricane-devastated beach.

EAST END

The East End is the place to head if you want a feel for traditional Caymanian life and don't have the time to visit the sister islands. Here, at the furthest point on the island from the commercial and tourism centers of George Town and Seven Mile Beach, open space, quiet hamlets and dramatic shoreline are the main features. To the east of the village itself is the **Wreck of the Ten Sails Park**, commemorating the spot where a legendary shipwreck occurred in 1794.

Away from the village itself the main attraction on this part of the island is the excellent **Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park** (☎ 947-3558; Frank Sound Dr; adult/child US\$10/6; ☎ 9am-5pm), a veritable treasure trove for anyone wanting to experience the island's native species. The park is home to orchids (in bloom late May through June), iguanas (elusive) and parrots, as well as other birds.

The nearby **Mastic Trail** meanders through the old-growth forest that once supplied early settlers with timber. The 2-mile-long trail gives hikers the chance to experience a fascinating exploration deep into the old-growth forest of Grand Cayman's wild interior. To get here, rent a car or take the North Side/East End bus from the George Town library (US\$2.50). Ask the driver to drop you at the visitors center, and arrange to be picked up.

One of the most remote yet more fun places to base yourself on the island is the **Reef Resort** (☎ 947-0100; www.thereef.com; Collier's Bay; studio/ste/villa from US\$220/385/390; ☎ ☎ ☎), which gets high praise from travelers. All the 110 rooms face the sea along the very long, gorgeous beach and the standard of accommodations is very high indeed, with large, attractive rooms complete with all comforts and in great condition. There's good snorkeling and diving nearby, and local musical hero Bare Foot Man performs his risqué set here a couple of times a week.

NORTH SIDE

pop 1100

Geographically isolated from the rest of the island, and the last district to be settled, North Side's earliest residents were

freed slaves in search of unclaimed land. Today, the district is windswept and uncrowded, providing a direct link to Grand Cayman's past.

The highlight of the area is beautiful **Rum Point**, where swinging in hammocks and snorkeling are the main activities. A ferry service here from Seven Mile Beach no longer runs, making this quite a quiet spot, although travelers still drive here from all over the island to spend a day on the beach. There's a shuttle bus service (p214) from Seven Mile Beach.

The **Retreat at Rum Point** (☎ 947-9135; www.theretreat.com.ky; North Side/Rum Point; 1-/2-bedroom condo US\$325/395, deluxe/oceanfront condo US\$495/630; 🚗 📺 📺) has a fantastic beach and an exclusive feel. The privately owned condos here are let out for their owners and each apartment (from one to three bedrooms) is fully equipped. Amenities include a tennis court, gym, sauna, racquetball court and laundry facilities.

Beach bars don't come much more friendly than the **Wreck Bar** (☎ 947-9412; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) despite the sarcastic list of questions 'not to ask' posted on the wall outside. Watched over by the cantankerous Alpha, a squawking, biting parrot, enjoy a famous mudslide cocktail with the sea views right on the beach. Good bar food and small meals are served here too (mains US\$9 to US\$12). The much loved Rum Point Restaurant next door had still not reopened at the time of writing following damage from Ivan but renovations were about to begin, so it should be back in service soon.

CAYMAN BRAC

pop 1822

Named after the 'brac' or 'bluff' that makes up much of this cheese wedge of an island, the most easterly of the Cayman Islands is markedly different from both Grand and Little Cayman. The simple reason is that, unlike their cousins, the majority of locals do not work in the tourism industry and life here goes on much as it always has. With just one hotel of any size here, head to the Brac to escape the crowds and to engage with nature – the Brac boasts by far the most varied landscapes in the entire country.

The 14 sq mile Brac is dominated by the Bluff, a dramatic limestone formation that rises gently from the flatlands of the west

end to a height of 140ft, traveling the length of the island before plunging into the sea. The road to the top passes through the National Trust Parrot Reserve, a nesting ground for the islands' endangered emerald green native species, and ends at a lighthouse at the blustery Northeast Point.

The island's four main settlements – West End, Stake Bay, Watering Place and Spot Bay – are on the western or northern ends. Resorts and beaches are clustered along the southern tip, including the peaceful expanses of the public beach.

HISTORY

Cayman Brac's first settlers were boat builders, turtlers and fishers who started arriving from Grand Cayman in 1833. Trading relations were established between the tiny island and Jamaica, Cuba and Central America; exports mainly comprised turtle shell, jute rope, coconut and cows. By 1932 the Brac sustained a population of 1200. That same year a hurricane brought death and much damage to the isolated island, and islanders took shelter in caves as many houses were washed out to sea. Electricity, along with the first wave of tourists, did not make it to Cayman Brac until the 1960s.

INFORMATION

Cayman National Bank (☎ 948-1551; West End Cross Rd; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4:30pm Fri) Has an ATM and currency exchange.

Faith Hospital (☎ 948-2243; Stake Bay) This modern hospital serves both the Brac and Little Cayman.

It's Yours To Explore (www.itsyourstoexplore.com) Excellent official website of the sister islands.

Nature Cayman (www.naturecayman.com) Website that covers both the Brac and Little Cayman. Packed with information on everything from bird to marine life.

Post office (☎ 948-1422; West End; 🕒 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Internet access is available in the lobby (per 30 minutes/hour US\$4/8).

Tourist office (☎ 948-1649; www.caymanislands.ky; North Bay Rd; 🕒 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Hidden away just east of the airport adjacent to the West End Community Park, this is a good resource for lodging and activities information. Free island tours can be given by the local government (☎ 948-2222) by arrangement. Ask for Chevala Burke.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Cayman Brac Museum** (☎ 948-2222; Stake Bay; admission free; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is housed in a pretty white-and-blue painted

colonial house on the coastal road to Stake Bay. It's not very clear that it's a museum from the road, but it's just in front of the island administration buildings. The charming collection details life for early settlers on the island during a time when it was largely cut off from the rest of the world.

The **Bluff** is a must. The best way to explore it is to walk along the trail that runs along the edge (don't get too close!) giving incredible views and allowing you to see the varied bird life such as brown boobies and frigate birds gliding in the updrafts. There's no circular trail, so you'll need to drive or cycle to the starting point at the **lighthouse** and then double back on yourself. Another trail crosses the Brac at the middle through the **National Trust Parrot Reserve**, where you should have no trouble spotting one of the 350 remaining Cayman Brac parrots who are slowly re-establishing themselves. Pick up the useful *Heritage Sites & Trails* leaflet, which includes a good map, from any hotel, the airport or the tourist office.

Bird-watchers should also head for the **Westerly Ponds** at the western tip of the island, where there are over 100 species of birds to be seen nesting around the wetlands and helpful viewing platforms have been built. Down the road beyond the airport runway there's also **Salt Water Pond**, where a large colony of least tern can be seen in residence from April to August.

With crystal waters affording superb visibility and 41 permanent dive moorings, Cayman Brac attracts its share of **diving** and **snorkeling** enthusiasts. Of particular interest is the wreck of a 315ft Russian frigate now named the *Captain Keith Tibbetts*. It was purchased from Cuba and intentionally sunk offshore off the northwest of the island to serve as a dive attraction.

Two well-run dive providers operate on the western end of the island:

In Depth (☎ 329-6348; www.indepthwatersports.com; West End; 2-tank dive US\$150, snorkeling trips US\$35) A new outfit based in the former Divi Tiara Resort; a two-tank dive goes out every day at 10am.

Reef Divers (☎ 948-1642; www.reefdivers.ky; West End; 1-/2-tank dive US\$55/120) Based at the Brac Reef Beach Resort, Reef Divers is the longest-established dive operator on the island. Priority is given to resort guests, but nonguests are welcome too.

The Brac is home to Caymanian fishing captains **Edmund Bodden** (☎ 948-1288) and **Lemuel Bodden** (☎ 948-1314), both of whom

offer bone, tarpon, reef and deep-sea fishing excursions.

SLEEPING

Accommodations range from casual Caymanian guest houses and private condos to the main resort, Brac Reef, which caters to diving enthusiasts. Lodging prices are cheaper here than elsewhere in the Caymans.

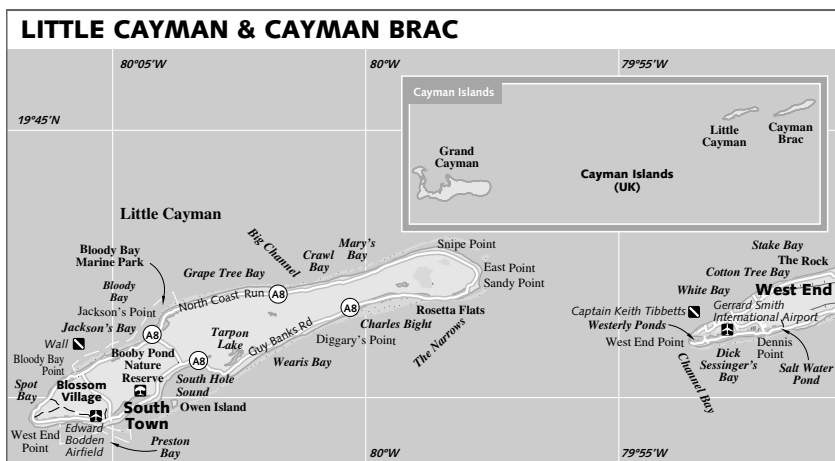
Walton's Mango Manor (☎ 948-0518; www.waltons-mangomanor.com; Stake Bay; d ind breakfast US\$105-130, villa US\$180-210; ☎) This whimsical place is one of the more unusual guesthouses in the Caymans. Guests are accommodated in the five-bedroom main house decorated with traditional antiques, including a banister made from the mast of an old sailing schooner. All rooms have private facilities and those upstairs have balconies. The lush garden runs down to the beach, where there's also a two-bedroom villa, as well as the only synagogue in the Caymans!

Brac Reef Beach Resort (☎ 948-1323; www.bracreef.com; West End; r US\$140; ☎) If this is as close to a resort as the Brac gets, then that's a great sign – Brac Reef is a supremely relaxed and friendly diving hotel on a charming stretch of beach. The 40 rooms are spread out around a pool and Jacuzzi, each with either a small patio or balcony. It offers free wi-fi in the lobby and there's a firm focus on diving through the excellent in-house operators Reef Divers. Bicycles and kayaks are available for guests. Meal and diving packages are offered but food is nothing special so you might be better off not taking a full-board package.

Carib Sands & Brac Caribbean (☎ 948-1121; www.caribsands.com; West End; 1-/2-/3-bedroom apt US\$185/245/305; ☎) These two condo complexes next to each other and right on the beach are managed by the same company. Both have great sea views and a pool, and offer a large choice of serviced, comfortably furnished apartments with balconies.

EATING & DRINKING

Our pick Aunt Sha's Kitchen (☎ 948-1581; West End Rd; mains US\$9-15; ☎ 8am-11pm) This Brac favorite (it seems that everybody on the island comes in for takeout lunch at least once a week) is now located on the north coast after Hurricane Ivan devastated the previous premises. The new place is charming and the famously good Caymanian home cooking as delicious as ever – fresh fish, goat curry, grilled tuna and chicken stew are all specialties.



Biggie's (☎ 948-2449; West End Rd; mains US\$10-35; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, 10:30am-2:30pm Sun) This newcomer to the island's eating scene is a winner. It has a fantastic lunch takeout deal for US\$8.50 and an all-you-can-eat buffet for US\$19. Caymanian cuisine is served up with an international slant. There's a great vegetarian selection, as well as burgers, Caribbean quesadillas and delicious fresh seafood and fish.

Captain's Table (☎ 948-1418; West End; mains US\$14-32; ☺ lunch & dinner) The restaurant of the small Brac Caribbean resort, this is good option, especially if you can get a table outside by the pool. The food is Caribbean and international. Try the conch fritters, supposedly the best on the island.

Edd's Place (West End; ☺ noon-1am Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) This dark and very loud bar is patronized by a largely male crowd. It's not the most inviting place, but it's definitely a good way to meet the locals.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Flights from Grand Cayman to Cayman Brac's **Gerard Smith International Airport** (☎ 948-1222) are offered daily by Cayman Airways Express.

There's no public transportation on Cayman Brac, but the negligible crime rate – and the amiability of the locals – makes hitchhiking safe and easy. The mere sight of a visitor marching down the roadway often results in ride offers by passing motorists. Bicycles may be rented or borrowed from the resorts and are available from many guest-

houses. Taxis are few; it's a good idea to book in advance for your ride from the airport. Lodging providers will pick you up by prior arrangement. Renting a car is the best way to enjoy the island.

B&S Motor Ventures Ltd (☎ 948-1646; www.bandsmv.com) Hires scooters, jeeps and bikes as well as cars.

Brac Rent-A-Car (☎ 948-1515; www.bracrentals.com; Stake Bay)

CB Rent-A-Car (☎ 948-2329; www.cbrentacar.com; Gerard Smith International Airport) Right outside the terminal.

Elo's Taxi (☎ 948-0220)

Four D's (☎ 948-1599, 948-0459) Free pick-up and drop-off at the airport offered.

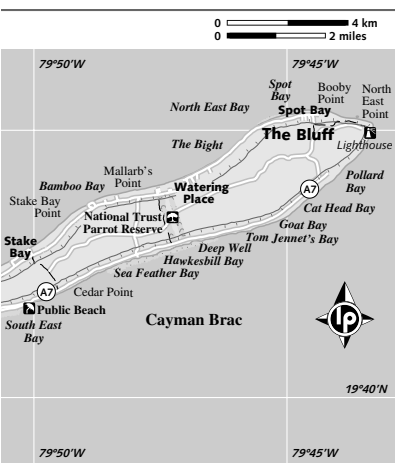
Hill's Taxi (☎ 948-0540)

LITTLE CAYMAN

pop 115

Tiny Little Cayman (the clue is indeed in the name) is a joy. With more iguanas resident than humans, this delightful island is the place to head for solitude, tranquility and the odd spot of extraordinary diving. Because, despite its small size, Little Cayman is firmly established on the world map of great diving sites for its extraordinary Bloody Bay Marine Park, where you'll find some of the best wall diving anywhere in the world.

As your twin-prop plane swoops down over the vivid turquoise sea and onto the grass landing strip of the tiny airport, you'll know that you have arrived at one of the Caribbean's most unspoiled and untrammelled destinations. Yet things are changing here. A new



airport that can receive large jets is being built and inevitably more development will follow, meaning that you should grab this chance to visit Little Cayman before it goes the way of Grand Cayman and the Brac. Until then, you should feel like you have the island pretty much to yourself.

INFORMATION

Public phones can be found at the airport, near the clinic and at the Hungry Iguana restaurant. Most hotels have wi-fi.

Cayman National Bank (☎ 948-0051; Guy Banks Rd, Blossom Village; ☎ 9am-2:30pm Mon & Thu) There is no ATM on Little Cayman, and this bank is only open two days each week, so plan accordingly.

Little Cayman Clinic (☎ 948-1051; Blossom Ave, Blossom Village; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 1-5pm Tue & Thu) The clinic is normally staffed by nurses, but a doctor visits on Wednesday afternoon.

McLaughlin Enterprises (☎ 948-1619; per 15min US\$6.50) Found next door to Village Square Store and the airport. You can get online here (albeit not cheaply).

Post office (☎ 948-0016; Blossom Village; ☎ 8-11am & 1-3pm Mon-Fri) This tiny post office is located next to the airfield.

Village Square Store (☎ 948-1069; Guy Banks Rd, Blossom Village; ☎ closed Sun) Phone cards can be purchased here. This is also the only shop of any size on the island.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The sights of Little Cayman are almost entirely natural, whether they be the birds that nest in the wetlands, the iguanas that bask by the road or the marine life on the reef.

A good place to start is the tiny **Little Cayman Museum** (☎ 948-1033; Guy Banks Rd, Blossom Village; admission free; ☎ 3-5pm Thu & Fri) containing local artifacts and beach treasures. The main reason to visit is to see the resident wild – yet remarkably fearless – iguanas that hatch out their young under the building. If you'd like to visit outside the rather restricted opening hours, call Nelvie Eldemire (☎ 948-2999) and she'll usually be happy to open it up for you.

Across the road is the **National Trust Visitors Centre** (☎ 948-1107; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat), which is a combination of shop, café with free wi-fi, information center and viewing platform. Backing onto the **Booby Pond Nature Reserve**, home to one of the hemisphere's largest breeding populations of red-footed boobies and a large colony of swooping frigate birds, the veranda also has telescopes available for visitors.

The main draw on the island is the excellent diving and snorkeling. The **Bloody Bay Marine Park** is legendary among divers, who come from all over the world for a truly exhilarating experience. Here, near the shore and at a depth of only 18ft, the Bloody Bay wall plummets vertically into aquamarine infinity as the divers hovering over the abyss wonder whether they are hallucinating (for more information on diving in this area, see p55).

Little Cayman has 57 dive sites marked with moorings. Snorkelers and shore divers find plenty of satisfaction at many well-known sites.

Recommended diving outfitters:

Conch Club Divers (☎ 948-1033; www.conchclub.com; Guy Banks Rd; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$55/85)

Pirates Point Resort (☎ 949-1010; www.piratespointresort.com; Guy Banks Rd; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$50/80)

Reef Divers (☎ 948-1040; www.reefdivers.ky; Little Cayman Beach Resort; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$65/95)

Sam McCoy's Diving & Fishing Lodge (☎ 948-0026; www.mccoyslodge.com.ky; North Coast Rd; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$45/75)

Southern Cross Club (☎ 948-1099; www.southernclub.com; Guy Banks Rd; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$65/95)

Little Cayman's shallow coastal waters and flats offer **fishing** action year-round. In the grassy flats and sandy bottoms are wily bonefish, and tarpon are frequently caught in the aptly named **Tarpon Lake**. A short distance offshore beyond the drop-off, anglers find action from blue marlin and other game fish. Southern Cross Club (p210) provides excursions.

Perfect for shipwreck fantasies, **Owen Island** is a short kayak ride or swim across a narrow channel from Southern Cross. The beach here is unspoiled and the vegetation thick and unexplored. Make a day of it with a picnic.

SLEEPING & EATING

For such a small island there's no shortage of resorts here. Most offer favorable diving packages when booked in advance. Most prefer week-long bookings.

Blue Lagoon (☎ 945-8096; Guy Banks Rd; r US\$100, apt US\$125; 🏠) This is the cheapest hotel on the island, and for your money you get spotless rooms in a couple of charming colonial-style buildings right on the beach. There's also a pleasant little restaurant on site for simple meals. The apartments come with small kitchens and use of a shared laundry room.

Little Cayman Beach Resort (☎ 948-1033; www.littlecayman.com; Guy Banks Rd; r per person half board from US\$175; 🏠 📺 📺) By far the largest resort on the island, this popular place is somewhat anomalous with the general Little Cayman vibe. Its 80 rooms are in the process of being renovated, but are all a good size and comfortable. The Beach Nuts bars hosts a very popular karaoke night each Friday, which brings folks from all over the island. The resort also manages two blocks of condos further down the road, both of which can be reserved through the website.

Paradise Villas (☎ 948-0001; www.paradisevillas.com; Blossom Village; s/d/tr US\$175/195/210; 🏠 📺 📺) You can practically step off the airplane and into your room here – but these smart and comfortable cottages are right on the beach and are idyllic with verandas and hammocks coming as standard. Free wi-fi is included.

Pirates Point Resort (☎ 948-1010; www.piratespointresort.com; Guy Banks Rd; r per person from US\$199-260; 🏠 📺) This friendly and quirky diving place seemingly casts spells on its guests, as 80% of guests are repeat visitors! Fantastically located on a pretty beach in a corner of the island, there are 10 rooms here, all different and strikingly individual, with mosquito nets, large bathrooms and plenty of books to read. There are no TVs, but there's a busy club house-style bar and restaurant (with the only all-inclusive alcohol deal on Little Cayman) and it never closes. Kids under five are not allowed.

our pick **Southern Cross Club** (☎ 948-1099; www.southerncrossclub.com; Guy Banks Rd; cottage US\$335-400; 🏠 📺 📺) Definitely the classiest place on the

island, Southern Cross is a gorgeous, boutique creation run with thought and care by an expat couple. Of the 12 bungalows, go for the newer ones built to replace the four destroyed by Hurricane Ivan – these are right on the beach, with outdoor showers and bright decor. The green credentials here are impressive – 'gray' water is recycled, solar panels provide power and biodiesel will soon be powering the dive boats. Free wi-fi, bikes and kayaks, excellent food, a top diving operator and friendly staff are other reasons to stay.

Hungry Iguana (☎ 948-0007; Blossom Village; lunch mains US\$10-15, dinner mains US\$24-37; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Just about the only restaurant on the island is a real winner. Housed in a charming old building just by the airstrip and looking over the beach, the main, dark wood room is divided between bar and restaurant. The lunch menu is based around burgers, sandwiches and pasta, while dinner is more elaborate: conch chowder, black bean soup, jerk chicken and pork combo are all delicious. This is also the best place to come for a drink.

Head to **Village Square Store** (☎ 948-1069; Guy Banks Rd, Blossom Village; 🍴 closed Sun) for groceries, beer and other basic necessities.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Flights from Grand Cayman to Little Cayman's **Edward Bodden Airfield** (☎ 948-0144) are offered several times a day by Cayman Airways Express. See p213 for more information. The controversial new airport will begin construction and possibly even operation during the lifetime of this book.

Cycling is the preferred mode of transportation on the island, and nearly every hotel makes bicycles available for guests. If you'd prefer to drive, **McLaughlin Rentals** (☎ 948-1000; Guy Banks Rd) provides jeeps and mopeds from its office next door to the Village Square Store in Blossom Village.

DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations aren't cheap in the Caymans, but are usually of a very high standard. Budget travelers should head for guesthouses where they exist, and try their best to travel outside of high season, when savings everywhere can be huge. A few resorts cater

specifically to divers and include excursions and equipment rentals in their prices, as well as food. Always see if there's a self-catering and non-diving option to get a lower rate. Those on a top-end budget can expect to shell out upwards of US\$350 per person each day for accommodations and basic meals, and then more on top of that for diving, water sports, car or boat hire.

The midrange for lodging is around US\$200 and if you hope to travel on a shoestring, you might want to sit down before reading further: the lowest-priced accommodations start at around US\$100. It's unrealistic to budget less than this per night.

Rates quoted are for walk-ins during the high season (mid-December through mid-April) and do not include the 10% government tax and 10% to 15% service tax. Many places will also expect a gratuity for staff. Low-season rates are as much as 40% cheaper.

ACTIVITIES

Bird-Watching

On Little Cayman, the Booby Pond Nature Reserve, which dominates the southwestern coast, is a big draw for bird-watching enthusiasts (p209). Over the three islands, some 200 winged species including boobies, frigate birds, and the endangered Cayman Brac parrot keep bird-watchers blissfully busy.

Diving & Snorkeling

The most popular activity in the Caymans is diving. An extensive marine-park system and endlessly fascinating dive sites make it perfect for all skill levels. With 265 moored sites, and plenty of shore diving and snorkeling possibilities, the only question is where to start. All three islands have fine-tuned dive operations ready to submerge you, although Little Cayman (p209) is the place to head for true world-class dives.

Fishing

Those who love fishing love the Caymans for the large numbers of bonefish, blue marlin, tuna and wahoo. Plenty of guides and charter companies can lead you to the best action, both from shore and in deep waters. Grand Cayman has a small fleet of modern, well-equipped sport fishing boats available, and smaller charter boats and excellent local captains are available in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** *Caymanian Compass, Cayman Observer, Cayman Net News, Cayman Activity Guide, What's Hot*
- **Radio** Radio Cayman – 89.9FM & 105.3FM
- **Video Systems** NTSC
- **Electricity** 110V, 60Hz; US-style three-pin plugs are used
- **Weights & Measures** Imperial

Hiking

Hiking is a very popular pursuit on Grand Cayman's Mastic Trail (p205) and on Cayman Brac's many well-marked trails (p207).

Other Activities

The reef-protected shorelines are ideal for sea kayaking, and the breezy east end of Grand Cayman offers excellent windsurfing.

On Grand Cayman, three excellent golf courses (p201) draw repeat visitors year after year. And if you've ever dreamed of horseback riding on the beach (p201), the Caymans are a great place to do this.

BUSINESS HOURS

The following are standard business hours across the islands. Exceptions are noted in specific listings.

Banks ☒ 9am to 3:30pm Monday to Friday

Restaurants ☒ noon to 11pm

Shops 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday

CHILDREN

Families with children couldn't hope for a better travel destination than the Cayman Islands. Kids of most ages will appreciate Boatswains Bay Turtle Farm (p204), the Bodden Town Pirate Caves (p205) and the Butterfly Farm (p198) in Seven Mile Beach.

Most hotels have plenty of rooms that sleep four people or more, and many offer babysitting services and activity programs. The gentle sandy beaches provide a very safe playground for kids of all ages, and older kids can accompany the adults and enjoy the many water sports activities. Kids of all ages can attend Kids Sea Camp (p197) on Grand Cayman. Most diving and water-sports operators offer programs for kids as well.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Jamaica (☎ 949-9526; Rankin Plaza, Eastern Ave, PO Box 431, George Town)

UK (☎ 244-2434; Governor's Office, 4th fl, AALL Bldg, North Church St, George Town)

US (☎ 945-8173; Mirco Center, 2nd fl, 222 North Sound Way, George Town) For after-hours emergencies US citizens should contact the embassy in Kingston, Jamaica (p254).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The following events all take place on Grand Cayman, with the exception of Pirates Week, which is celebrated on all three islands.

Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament (www.fishcayman.com) This high-stakes fishing tournament in mid-April is the premier angling event of the western Caribbean. There are other fishing tournaments organized March through October by the Cayman Islands Angling Club.

Batabano (www.caymancarnival.com) The Cayman Islands' Carnival is a colorful parade of costumes, music and dancing in early May.

Pirates Week (www.piratesweekfestival.com) A wildly popular family-friendly extravaganza is kicked off with a mock pirate invasion from the sea. For 10 days in late October, music, dances, costumes, games and controlled mayhem fill up the streets. However, just remember to book your transportation and lodgings well in advance.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Homosexuality is legal between two consenting adults in the Caymans. However, the islands remain extremely conservative and so discretion is key. Most hotels will happily accommodate same-sex couples, but it's a good idea to check in advance. There are no gay bars or clubs in the Cayman Islands; most local gay contacts are made through the internet. See also boxed text, p195.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day January 1

National Heroes' Day Fourth Monday in January

Ash Wednesday Late February

Easter (Good Friday to Easter Monday inclusive) March/April

Discovery Day Third Monday in May

Queen's Birthday Second Monday in June

Constitution Day First Monday in July

Remembrance Day Third Monday in November

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

INTERNET ACCESS

The Caymans has good web access. Most hotels will offer wi-fi, although in most cases it's still charged for some reason. Smaller,

more independent guesthouses tend to offer free wi-fi. There are web cafés in and around George Town and Seven Mile Beach, but they are few and far between elsewhere. Quite a few hotels offer terminals to access the web as well. Other than that, your best bets are the Cable & Wireless hotspots, which you have to pay for in advance. You'll find these at both Owen Roberts International Airport and Gerrard Smith Airport as well as at numerous hotels and many places in George Town.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are excellent medical facilities in the Cayman Islands. For minor illnesses, nearly all hotels will have a doctor on call or will be able to help you find assistance. In more serious cases there is a good hospital on Grand Cayman (p197), and a smaller one on Cayman Brac (p206); anyone who falls ill on Little Cayman will usually be flown to the latter hospital. All visitors to the Caymans should have comprehensive medical insurance as no reciprocal health-care agreements exist with other countries.

MONEY

The official currency is the Cayman Islands dollar (CI\$), permanently fixed at an exchange rate of CI\$0.80 to US\$1 (US\$1 equals CI\$1.25). Cayman dollars and US dollars are accepted throughout the islands, although you'll usually get change in CI\$ even if you pay with US\$. The local currency comes in CI\$1, 5, 10, 25, 50 and 100 notes. All major currencies can easily be changed at any bank. ATMs are easy to find across Grand Cayman. There's one on Cayman Brac and none on Little Cayman.

TELEPHONE

Cell Phones

Cell phones compatible with 800MHz or TDMA networks can roam in the islands.

Cable & Wireless (☎ 949-7800; www.cw.ky; Anderson Sq, George Town) and **Digicel** (☎ 945-3494; www.digicel.cayman.com; Royale Plaza, George Town) both sell local SIM cards (which can be put directly into any unlocked set) and a cheap pay-as-you-go service. They can also rent out handsets from their main offices.

Phone Cards

Cable & Wireless prepaid calling cards in denominations of CI\$5 and CI\$10 are available

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 555
- **Fire** ☎ 911
- **Police** ☎ 911

throughout the islands. Rates to the US, UK, Canada and Caribbean destinations (excluding Cuba) average US\$0.50 per minute; other destinations cost US\$1.25 per minute.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The tourism infrastructure of the Cayman Islands is second to none, with the entire country geared toward visitors. There is a very helpful desk at Owen Roberts International Airport where you can stock up on maps, as well as a booth in George Town that's open whenever cruise ships are visiting; see p197 for details. There is also a tourist office (p206) on Cayman Brac. The website for the **Department of Tourism** (www.caymanislands.ky) is a very useful place to start.

VISAS

Visas are not required by nationals of the UK, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and most Commonwealth and Western European countries. However, holders of passports from Ireland and most Eastern Europeans do require visas. Visas are not required by any cruise-ship passengers, regardless of nationality.

Tourist visas are valid for 30 days and can be extended for up to three months. They can be obtained from any British consulate or embassy for a varying fee.

TRANSPORTATION**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Entering the Cayman Islands**

All visitors are required to have a valid passport and a return ticket.

Air

The main passenger airport in the Cayman Islands, **Owen Roberts International Airport** (GCM; ☎ 949-8052), is located 1.5 miles east of George Town on the island of Grand Cayman. Cayman Brac is served by **Gerrard Smith International Airport** (CYB; ☎ 948-1222). On Little

Cayman, flights to **Edward Bodden Airfield** (LYB; ☎ 948-0144) land on a grass airstrip, although a new airport with a longer asphalt runway was being constructed at the time of writing.

The following airlines provide international services to the Cayman Islands:

Air Canada (☎ 949-8503; www.aircanada.com) Toronto

Air Jamaica (☎ 949-2300; www.airjamaica.com) Kingston, Montego Bay

American Airlines (☎ 949-0666; www.aa.com) Miami

British Airways (☎ 1-800-247-9297, 949-8200; www.ba.com) London, Nassau

Cayman Airways (☎ 949-8200; www.caymanairways.com)

Continental Airlines (www.continental.com) Houston, New York

Delta Airlines (www.delta.com) Atlanta

Northwest Airlines (☎ 949-2955; www.nwa.com) Detroit, Minneapolis

US Airways (☎ 949-7488; www.usairways.com) Boston, Charlotte, Philadelphia

Sea

Numerous cruise-ship lines drop anchor in George Town from Monday to Saturday, unloading passengers for a few hours of duty-free shopping, diving and snorkeling, or lounging on nearby Seven Mile Beach.

Most cruises from the US last one to two weeks and include other western Caribbean destinations such as Cozumel and Progreso, Mexico; Key West and Miami, Florida; and Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, Jamaica. See p830 for more information on cruises.

Those entering Cayman waters by private yacht should display the red ensign version of the Cayman flag and report to the port authority in George Town to clear customs and immigration.

GETTING AROUND**Air**

Flights from Grand Cayman to the 'sister islands,' Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, are offered daily by Cayman Airways Express. Island Air offers charter flights only and no longer has scheduled connections.

Cayman Airways Express (☎ 949-8200; www.caymanairways.com) This subsidiary of Caymans Airways provides the only scheduled services between Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac. There are several flights each day in both directions. All flights usually call in at both sister islands on their way to and from Grand Cayman.

Island Air (☎ 949-5252; www.islandair.ky) Offers charter flights and private hire to Grand Cayman, Cayman

Brac and Little Cayman via 19-passenger turboprop Twin Otter aircraft.

Bicycle

Bikes are readily available on all three islands and are often included as part of an accommodations package. Flat terrain, relatively light traffic and near-constant sea access make bicycling a pleasure on the 'sister islands,' although the heavy traffic in and around George Town and Seven Mile Beach makes this a less attractive mode of transportation on Grand Cayman.

Bus

A fleet of beige-and-white minibuses serves all districts of Grand Cayman. The **bus terminal** (☎ 945-5100) is next to the public library on Edward St in downtown George Town and serves as the dispatch point for all eight routes. Fares are from US\$2.50 to US\$5.00. There's a **shuttle bus** (☎ 928-1333) from the major Seven Mile Beach hotels (Ritz, Westin, the two Marriotts and the Grand Cayman Beach Suites) to Rum Point for those who fancy a day on a more isolated beach. On Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday the bus picks up around 9:30am and leaves Rum Point at 3:30pm.

There are no bus services available on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVER'S LICENSE

Visitors must obtain a temporary driver's license from the police station or, more normally, their car-rental agency (US\$5 to \$10 depending on who issues it); you'll need to show a valid international driver's license or one from your home country.

RENTAL

Driving is an essential part of life on the islands, with limited public transport and much of the island given over to parking. While traffic on the islands is light compared to big cities, it can still be surprisingly heavy in and around George Town and Seven Mile Beach, especially during rush hour. Driving on the sister islands is a joy as cars are very few and far between.

All rentals are automatics, although rental 4WDs and vans have left-hand stick shift. A variety of models at competitive rates are available in Grand Cayman. On Cayman Brac, there are a limited number of cars, with fewer still on Little Cayman.

You must be aged at least 21 to rent a car in the Cayman Islands, and some rental agencies' insurance will not cover renters under 25; check with your rental company in advance.

Scooter and motorcycle rentals are available on all three islands.

ROAD RULES

Driving is on the left-hand side of the road in the Cayman Islands, as in the UK – although you're just as likely to get a left-hand as a right-hand drive car. The wearing of seat belts is mandatory and speed limits are very low. The whole of Little Cayman has a 25mph limit, and much of Cayman Brac is the same. Traffic moves faster on Grand Cayman, but only marginally so. One quirk of the Caymans is the four-way – a crossroads where the right of way changes as each car turns. Basically wait until you have been waiting there the longest and then proceed with caution! On the sister islands iguanas have right of way.

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