



## Cayman Brac



Queen angelfish

After glitzy Grand Cayman, the pace of life changes dramatically once one gets to the laid-back island of Cayman Brac. Although small, the island has the most varied topography above land of the three Cayman isles. The normally calm northwest side is where the bulk of the diving is done.

The Brac has a fringing reef that surrounds the better part of the island. The north and south sides have different diving terrain, while the island's tips on the east and west get the most current and are the best bets for pelagic sightings. The west end also seems to get the most protection and has the bulk of dive sites, but with over 45 moored sites there is no shortage of places to dive.

Snorkeling is also very good, with lots of shallow inshore sites plus many large corals heads that come to within 10ft to 20ft of the surface. This, combined with superb water clarity, make a great spot for snorkelers and novice divers alike.

Dive boats and dive sites are primarily based on the south shore of the west end, so divers normally suit up once they get on board, as sites are close by. East end dives take a while longer and the Little Cayman Bloody Bay Marine

Park dives take about 45 minutes to get to on a good day.

On the north, the mini-wall starts at 20ft to 30ft, dropping to 50ft. The main wall then takes over and drops to 4,000ft, give or take a foot. Sponge life reigns here.

In the south, the spur and groove is the norm, running perpendicular to the shore it's easy to navigate but deeper, with the main wall at 60ft to 70ft. They don't quite have the sponge growth of the north, but the reef is pocked like a honeycomb with more tunnels, arches and swim-throughs.

Cayman Brac		GOOD SNORKELING	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
52	AIRPORT REEF & WALL	•	•		
53	MV CAPTAIN KEITH TIBBETTS	•	•		
54	LOST CITY OF ATLANTIS	•	•		
55	CEMETERY WALL	•	•		
56	THE CHUTES	•	•		
57	SERGEANT MAJOR REEF	•	•		
58	WILDERNESS WALL			•	
59	ROCK MONSTER CHIMNEY			•	



Upper deck of the Tibbets



## 52 AIRPORT REEF & WALL

**Location:** North of West End Point, Cayman Brac

**Depth:** 32-100ft (9-30m)

**Access:** Boat

**Range:** Novice to intermediate



Off the island's west tip, obviously near the airport runway, are a couple of dives that offer the best of both worlds. Airport Reef is a shallow dive with a buoy in about 32ft of water, which divers and snorkelers can enjoy from depths of 15ft to about 50ft.

The shallow spur-and-groove system is punctuated by sea fans and sea plumes on the reeftop. There's good fish life here, including schools of grunts and angelfish. The site is also used for

night dives and divers report seeing octopi roaming looking for shells and other prey. Reef crabs can also be found at night.

The wall dive buoy sits in deeper water. The dive starts at 65ft, marked by beautiful yellow and orange tube sponges, and steeply slopes down to 100ft, before dropping into the abyss.

The wall has some deep, large crevices with very nice marine growth, including rope sponges. Look for schools of big-eye jacks down deep and also grunts up at the 60ft level. It is not unusual to see gray angelfish and French angelfish. Cones and groupers also seem to like this reef. Be careful, as one can have a tendency to go deep off the deep wall here.

Nearby, a site has been identified as an older wreck where ship ballast has been found. Locals think it could be the wreck of a pirate ship.

## 53 MV CAPTAIN KEITH TIBBETTS

**Location:** West of White Bay, Cayman Brac

**Depth:** 40-90ft (13-27m)

**Access:** Boat

**Range:** All levels



This wreck is one of the main attractions of The Sisters. It is where famous underwater explorer Jean Michel Cousteau literally went down with the ship. Sunk intentionally in 1996, the 300ft-long Brigadier Type Class II Frigate sits at a strong list to port in-between 50ft and 100ft of water.

The wreck's original name was *Patrol Vessel 356* and it was part of a Russian support group stationed in the Caribbean until the early 1990s. Before it

was sunk, it was renamed *MV Captain Keith Tibbetts* in honor of a local Cayman pioneer seaman. The ship was made diver-safe by removing wires and doors before being flooded with water. Cousteau videotaped the sinking of the ship from his perspective in the bridge and now shows it to astonished dive groups when he lectures around the world.

Marine life now grows on the ship, which sits in a sandy basin and has attracted fish life as well. Three buoys are on the ship. The ship is cracked in the middle and the gun section at the stern is the place most divers, especially photographers, first visit. The stern guns are only slightly encrusted and very distinguishable. They make for great props and can be photographed with a diver model or stand-alone. Start deep and work your way up.

Shifting sands have covered a good portion of the wreck. The bridge is open and penetrable, but due to the wreck's breaking up some of the metal is sharp and jagged, so dive around it cautiously. Fish life includes great barracuda, queen angels and yellow tang. If you get tired of the wreck, there is also a nice reef about 50ft off starboard (the right side). Look also for garden eels in the sand around the ship.

Not too far from this ship is another wreck, the tugboat *Kissimmee*. It is somewhat shallower and can be dived by wreck buffs as a second dive. The *Cayman Mariner* in East Chute is also a similarly good wreck dive that's close by, but it is deeper and probably not suitable for a second dive as bottom time would be short.



Guns on the Tibbets





Juvenile queen angel in transition to adulthood

## 54 LOST CITY OF ATLANTIS

**Location:** North of White Bay, Cayman Brac

**Depth:** 30-50ft (9-16m)

**Access:** Boat

**Range:** All levels



One of the greatest mythological cities in history, the lost city of Atlantis is now the newest dive site in the Cayman Islands. Just off Cayman Brac, a local artist is creating a new dive at Brac Reef Beach Resort by assembling the city first spoken of by Plato in 40ft to 50ft of water. It will eventually have more than 100 pieces of original sculpture cast from molds by local artist Foots. Using a blend of materials, crushed rock, sand and cement, ancient mythology meets with modern day in this vision of the ruins of Atlantis.

Phase one consists of the Archway of Atlantis and the Elders' Way, which is a pathway lined with eleven 5ft temple columns leading to the Inner Circle of Light, which is an enormous sundial and base weighing nearly 10,000lbs. And there's also the 18ft-tall Pyramid of Atlantis that weighs in excess of 40,000lbs.

Encrusting marine life has already taken to the structure, which is hoped to be a magnet for fish that will continually add to the look and mystique of the place. It is certainly a great prop for wide angle photography, and is good for macro as well with cleaning stations already established. Cleaner shrimp bring other forms of life to the site, and stingrays and eagle rays are in the area.

The dive sits off the north shore of Cayman Brac in a large sandy area at a dive site called Radar Reef. This is home to parrotfish, lots of friendly yellowtail snappers and some angels. Nearby is a nice spur-and-groove reef which has some nice fans and sea plumes.

## 55 CEMETERY WALL

**Location:** Cotton Tree Bay, Cayman Brac

**Depth:** 50-130ft (15-130m)

**Access:** Shore & boat

**Range:** All levels



This is one of the island's more beautiful walls with a good selection of hard corals and marine life. The dive starts in about 45ft where the upper reef crest is adorned in corals, such as healthy star and brain corals, then heads down a deep canyon that is adorned with thick and healthy plate coral, sponges and even black coral trees.

The main wall drop starts at around 65ft and falls into the abyss. The habitat here is good for all manner of smaller marine life. Look for cleaning stations with banded cleaner shrimp and wrasse, fairy basslets hovering just off the corals and even a few morays all in the protection of the rich coral growth. The sandy bottom is a favorite spot for southern stingrays which may be rooting about in the sand.

Along the wall look for large deep-water gorgonians, beautiful basket sponges and long tube sponges. Turtles and eagle rays are seen here on a regular basis. Occasionally look out into the blue, as Caribbean reef sharks have also been reported.

Divemasters sometimes bring divers up through a tunnel that starts at 90ft and comes back up to the upper wall.



Rope sponges along The Great Wall  
photo: J. Dietz



A saddled blenny poses for a photo



## 56 THE CHUTES

**Location:** North of Airport, Cayman Brac

**Depth:** 55-130ft (17-40m)

**Access:** Boat

**Range:** All levels



There are three chute dives at Cayman Brac: west, middle and east chutes. All have similar profiles and hold nice marine life and some unusual surprises. The upper part of the reef is sandy with roaming stingrays that may be accom-

panied by opportunistic bar jacks who may try to grab a morsel of food the rays may scare up. Each basin leads to a sand chute that is flanked by high coral spurs.

In some areas, jawfish have their holes and may be seen incubating eggs in their jaws. Dive down the chute, checking the sides of the spurs for hard corals which often hide arrowcrabs and also vase sponges. The chute eventually spills out to the wall and down to the depths.

Dive along the wall and look for the huge barrel sponges that sometimes serve as cleaning stations. Big tube sponges have small blennies that scurry

about their surfaces. The reef crests at and below 100ft here, so your time exploring this luxuriant area may be short.

East chute probably holds the most interest of the three, as it seems to attract a greater variety of marine life. A shipwreck here, the *Cayman Mariner*, is a natural magnet for fish. At around 90ft is an old Spanish anchor that is embedded in the coral. It can be hard to see so ask your guide to point out this bit of Cayman history.

Make your way back up the wall and look around the reeftop for schoolmasters hovering near the fans and other such natural cover.

57

## SERGEANT MAJOR REEF

**Location:** South of Channel Bay, Cayman Brac

**Depth:** 32-50ft (10-15m)

**Access:** Boat

**Range:** Novice



This dive can be done at many levels by day or by night. Sergeant Major Reef and nearby Butterfly Reef have a beautiful spur-and-groove system that starts in just 30ft and has lots going on. As most dives here are Point A to Point A, divers can wander over the reeftop looking for schoolmasters in the sea fans and healthy stands of golden elkhorn coral, trumpetfish lurking behind sea plumes and groupers waiting for a meal to swim by. Butterflyfish and parrotfish are also common here.

Deeper are growths of staghorns with their damsels. The site runs deeper down the grooves and there are some fun swim-throughs to be found, small tunnels and windows, and interesting reef formations.

Moray eels and spiny lobsters can be found in the cracks and crevices as this structure gives them good habitat and protection. The bigger ledges and overhangs also attract nurse sharks. Sea turtles, commonly hawksbills, like to sleep on the ledges if not foraging for hydroids.

All over the reef, look for cleaning stations that attract blue tangs, triggerfish, butterflyfish and groupers. Little spiny puffers also come here, and the white sand fingers also attract eagle rays and southern stingrays. Keep an eye out into the grooves for these beautiful rays. This is a very nice reef that can be dived many times without getting old. And at night, don't be surprised if you run into a big tarpon or three – they may follow you to see what your lights turn up.





Bluestriped grunt

## 58 WILDERNESS WALL

**Location:** South of Beach Point, Cayman Brac  
**Depth:** 46-100ft (14-30m)  
**Access:** Boat  
**Range:** Intermediate



Snowy, white sand shallows starts in only 45ft of water here and are home to rays and peacock flounders. Follow any of these chutes and you will find tunnels and passages that head out the slope to the wall at 80ft to 100ft before dropping into the abyss.

The big attraction here is a pinnacle just off the wall at 100ft that is a current creator. This brings in big groupers, schooling horse-eye and yellow jacks and bug snappers. Eagle rays also come around this promontory.

The deep formations also create sponge-covered arches and all sorts of fascinating features. Look for azure vase sponges growing to nice sizes. Fish life includes Nassau grouper, which aren't overly common in the Caymans, angelfish and snapper. Also keep an eye out for scavenging sea turtles.



Diamond blenny

## 59 ROCK MONSTER CHIMNEY

**Location:** South of Pollard's Bay, Cayman Brac  
**Depth:** 55-100ft (17-30m)  
**Access:** Boat  
**Range:** Intermediate to advanced

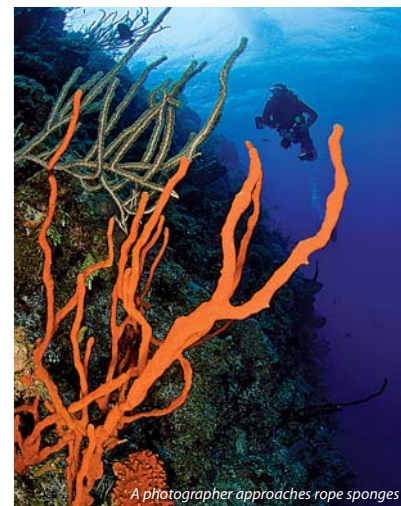


Rock Monster Chimney is off one of the Brac's scenic bluff spots at Pollard's Bay. The bluff, rising 160ft, is a beautiful scenic backdrop for a dive. Below the sea, the reef is alive and the terrain unusual. The site is on the island's windward side and isn't always accessible, but it is worth a try when conditions are good.

Patch reefs, which hold several shrimp species and can be good for macro photography, cover the top of the site which starts at 50ft to 60ft. The sandy patches between the reef are haunts of southern stingrays.

The dive has a vertical swim-through coral chimney just east of the mooring. This feature can dwarf the diver and is well worth the swim.

On the deep and very sheer outer wall at Rock Monster Chimney, look for queen angelfish as well as large trumpetfish. Beautiful soft corals and big sponges highlight this depth change, while large scalloped plate corals create overhangs for lurkers. Enjoy this foray into the abyss and then head back up to the mooring.



A photographer approaches rope sponges

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'