

Little Cayman Island

A young hawksbill sea turtle



The walls on this island are among the finest in the world, which is why divers endure the boat ride from Cayman Brac. Those who like wall diving are in heaven at most of this island's sites. The awe-inspiring walls can start as shallow at 20ft and fall vertically into oblivion.

Concern about overuse of the best wall sites, due to their popularity, has seen the marine park authority establish weekly dive quotas for dive shops visiting here. Only about 14 dives per Brac and Little Cayman shop are allowed per week, and live aboards also have similar limitations.

With over 50 dive sites and a tiny population base, you'll be able to do some – if not all – of the dives you want during the course of a week.

If the marina is blown-out by weather, the south side of the island also offers dives similar to those of Brac, with walls starting at around 50ft to 80ft.

Little Cayman Island's marine park designation has meant the fish and invertebrate life is quite plentiful and approachable. The island's reefs are known for stunning rope, barrel and tube sponge formations and healthy hard corals.

<i>Little Cayman Island</i>		GOOD SNORKELING	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
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A hovering fairy basslet

60 EAGLE RAY ROUNDUP

Location: West of Jackson's Bay, Little Cayman

Depth: 29-100ft

Access: Boat

Range: Intermediate



Located in Jackson's Bay, this site is known for its deepwater sea fans, lacey gorgonians and vase sponges, and frequent eagle ray and southern stingray sightings. The sandy upper reef, starting in only 29ft of water by the mooring, is a hunting area for the rays.

The wall here starts in just 40ft and drops off with sand chutes trailing down.

The wall isn't sheer and there are lots of places to explore. Divers can stay between 60ft and 80ft and see a lot. Tube sponges come in hues of purple and yellow, while blue chromis give life and color to the wall. Big bluehead parrotfish, jacks and yellowtail snapper are all here. The sand holds a good community of jawfish – look at each to see if any are incubating eggs. The sand is also home to a good-sized garden eel colony.

Spotted eagle rays circling



Poke around the wall for a while and then head back up shallow to see if any eagle rays are doing their thing in the sandy upper shelf.

61 CUMBER'S CAVES

Location: West of Jackson Bay, Little Cayman

Depth: 13-130ft (4-40m)

Access: Shore & boat

Range: All levels



Everyone from snorkelers, novices, advanced and even experienced deep divers can enjoy this dive – night dives are also very good at this site. Most divers arrive here by boat, but this site is also a good shore dive if you happen to have transport.

The reason Cumber's Caves is so much fun is that there are a number of cuts, crevices, coral arches and swim-throughs, providing lots of habitat and making the reef a real maze for divers to explore. Many tunnels and passages pop right out on the outer wall.

Fin out over the 45ft-deep sand plain and stingrays. One favorite spot is at the 45ft reef crest, where a cut has an old anchor wedged into the sand. A cave here allows the diver to descend through the sponge encrusted shaft from 40ft to an exit at 85ft. Look for shrimps and corals along the walls and perhaps a resting nurse shark. Be careful not to kick and stir up sand.

Experienced divers will like this wall section, with its beautiful rope sponges and big basket sponges. Head back up to the shallows and check the sand for jawfish, garden eels, conch and some anemones.

For shore divers, it's a healthy swim out to the mooring and an equally healthy swim and walk back in, so keep enough air to do it comfortably.





A friendly snapper gets a kiss from a divemaster



62

**MIXING BOWL
(THREE FATHOM WALL)**

Location: *The Jackson Bay & Bloody Bay Border, Little Cayman*

Depth: *18-130ft (5-40m)*

Access: *Boat*

Range: *All (deep-intermediate)*



This site is pretty much where Jackson's Bay stops and Bloody Bay and its famous wall starts. The Jackson's Bay area dog-legs out to a sandy channel 18ft-deep that parallels the shore. Snorkelers and those wanting a shallow dive will enjoy this area. The site's secondary moniker, 'Three Fathom Wall,' is due to the wall top being at 18ft (three fathoms).

Photographers will want to make a couple of dives here to take advantage of the very good macro life and excellent wide angle possibilities. Most dives descend the sand corridor down the

Bloody Bay side to see the steep drop-off area and its marine life. A sandy slope running through the area can be followed to 100ft. The wall here is brilliant in a mind-boggling kaleidoscope of colors and shapes.

Sponge colors seem to run the gamut from reds to yellows, oranges and even white. Great habitat is everywhere, as the wall is cut and gouged with all kinds of overhangs, holes, swim-throughs and arches. Big yellowfin grouper, Nassau grouper and coney all gather here, while the sponges also attract very good macro life. Keep an eye out for longlure frogfish and even seahorses.

Head back up the wall to the reef top, where the hard corals and sea fans give shelter to schoolmasters, striped snappers and grunts. Look also for the large pillar coral stand that is often surrounded by flitting blue chromis.

A deco stop can be done in the sand above, where macro shooters can look for yellowhead jawfish and also southern stingrays.

Photogenic Nassau grouper
photo: J. Dietz



63 MARILYN'S CUT

Location: Bloody Bay, Little Cayman
Depth: 35-100ft (10-30m)
Access: Boat
Range: All levels



Sometimes called Hole in the Wall, Marilyn's Cut is a good dive to follow the guide on as it can have some currents and the wall does some strange things. But the amazing sponges here, combined with the chance to see pelagic fish, make this deep little dive worth it. This is a good wide angle dive for photographers.

Descend into a steep canyon off the wall from 30ft. Soon a range of sponges will come into view, including brilliant rope, yellow tube, rose-colored barrel, trumpet and cup sponges. Look for trumpetfish, scrawled filefish and groupers hanging out in the confines of this colorful maze.

The hole in the wall is to the right of a large coral mound and is really a large tunnel that runs parallel to the wall. It's a fun exploration – just keep track of your bottom time.

This site has a very friendly and photogenic grouper that has taken to divers – one can even pet it.

64 RANDY'S GAZEBO (CHIMNEY)

Location: Bloody Bay, Little Cayman
Depth: 30-100ft (9-30m)
Access: Boat
Range: Intermediate



Yee-haw. Step off the top of this wall and descend into the abyss. Known for its vertical face, this dive site is full of massive barrel sponges with cleaning stations full of shrimp and yellowhead wrasse. Yellow tip anemones thrive in the environment, while schooling fish course along the wall and others hide in the confines of the drop-off. This is a sponge dive more than a big-time fish dive – big barrel sponges are the norm.

Start the dive by descending into a chimney at 40ft which opens out to the sheer wall at 75ft. Once on the wall, look at what the fish are doing. If there's a strong current, they'll be facing into it. If they are just milling around, the current is pretty slack. The current can also pick up where the wall forms some points and vertical canyons. The wall also leads to a natural coral arch, which divers often use as a frame to pose in front of.

The upper reef can have spotted rums, black durgon in the water column, butterflyfish and green sea turtles.



Rope sponges along the sheer wall

A diver looks at some sea plumes



65 GREAT WALL EAST/WEST

Location: North of Salt Pier, SW Coast, Cayman Islands
Depth: 35-100ft (10-30m)
Access: Boat
Range: Intermediate



At the west end of Bloody Bay Marine Park, this is one of the main diving attractions in the Caymans and the Caribbean. The drop-off here is at 90 degrees and the heavily overgrown wall is undercut in some areas. Although you can go as deep as Davey Jones' locker here, the wall is so rich that depth isn't really necessary.

Diving can be done in the 50ft to 90ft range and you'll see black coral trees, huge plating coral formations, barrel sponges and stunning tube sponge growths. Look for black durgon, groupers, eagle rays out in the blue, and many types of jacks – including horse-eyes and yellow jacks. Sea turtles and even Caribbean reef sharks have been seen with some regularity here.

The reetop at 35ft to 40ft is also nice, so even novice divers can experience the sight. Look for brown sponges, coral clusters and trumpetfish. This is a premier dive site and wide angle photographer's dream.

66 BARRACUDA BIGHT

Location: Bloody Bay, Little Cayman
Depth: 30-100ft (9-30m)
Access: Boat
Range: Intermediate



At Bloody Bay Wall's western end, Barracuda Bight has nice outcrops of hard corals that extend off the wall and are covered in rope and vase sponges. Look for the mountainlike formations of star corals that attract clouds of blue chromis. They are quite the eye-popping sight.

At 30ft, take the swim-through out to the wall's edge, a rich area where anything can show up. Big moray eels live here and are often seen free-swimming as they look for food or roam from their dens. Big sea turtles also come into the wall to rest and munch on sponges.

The fish schools here are healthy and thick. Yellowtail snapper and blue-striped grunts are well-represented.

Christmas tree worm





Tube sponges get a nibble from a four-eye butterflyfish

Divers descend to the reef



67 PATTY'S PLACE

Location: Preston Bay, Little Cayman
Depth: 65-120ft (20-40m)
Access: Boat
Range: Intermediate



Similar to The Brac or sites off Cobalt Coast on Grand Cayman, this site has some nice stands of elkhorn coral which attract a variety of schooling fish, including striped snapper, grunts and schoolmasters. But most divers head deeper to the deep spur-and-groove system. Follow the groove down deep to where it bottoms out at a cut at 120ft (near limit of sport diving). Get an eyeful of the plate corals and nice sponge life in this stunning cut, which make it worth a short trip, then make your way back up.

Up at 60ft there are nice tube sponge formations, some jawfish in the rubble bottom and flitting schools of chromis. Look around here until its time to move up the mooring and give yourself at least five minutes deco time to off-gas.

68 WINDSOCK REEF

Location: Preston Bay, Little Cayman
Depth: 30-60ft
Access: Boat
Range: All levels



Windsock Reef is made for underwater photographers. It is shallow enough for a nice long dive and has plenty of photo subjects – especially fish life, macro critters and invertebrates, such as shrimp and shells. The site can even surprise with something big like a sleeping nurse shark.

The airport's windsock is visible from here, hence the name. Underwater, the reef is a series of patch reefs with sponge growth, corals, soft corals and sandy patches in-between.

Fish life includes whitespotted filefish, southern stingrays, bigeyes, spiny puffers, coneys and soldierfish peering out from the corals. At night, the red fish like bigeyes and soldierfish can be seen away from the reef. Macro buffs will find the 105mm lens handy for all the goby life.

Look for an old cannon near the mooring.



Stoplight parrotfish

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