

*Iguanas, Stingrays, and Bloody Bay Wall*

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

## Greater Antilles

**C**ayman, a mostly flat British Crown Colony that consists of Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, and Cayman Brac, sits atop an ancient undersea mountain chain. On the surface, the translucent turquoise waters are serene, but just

below you'll find dramatic walls and drop-offs only feet from shore, like an underwater Grand Canyon. It's one of the world's best dive sites, with an astonishing diversity of underwater life residing among coral-encrusted reefs and walls. The finest site in the area, though, is the 6,000-foot plunging coral garden known since pirate days as Bloody Bay Wall, off Little Cayman's north shore. Snorkelers can experience the top of the wall, and divers who go deep can explore the gorge, which teems with sea fans, anemones, and tropical fish.

Twelve-square-mile Little Cayman is relatively undeveloped and reigns popular among naturalists. Iguanas far outnumber the 100 full-time human residents, and a colony of 20,000 red-footed boobies populates the Caribbean's largest bird sanctuary. Little Cayman is also famous for Texas-born Gladys Howard—a student of Julia Child's—who caters to guests' every diving and dining need at her beachside inn, Pirate's Point Resort. She also offers a custom-built dive boat with a staff of experienced instructors.

Grand Cayman is larger (though still just 22 by 8 miles) and more cosmopolitan. And while tourism is more developed here, it's still welcomingly mellow. Offshore attractions include diving (over 100 sites) and Stingray City, a spot where throngs of sociable large-winged marine creatures eat from your hand (the famous "stingray kiss"). Even though it's a 25-minute boat ride from shore, the transparent waters are shallow—3 to 12 feet—and perfect for both divers and snorkelers.

Grand Cayman's famous Seven Mile Beach on the west side of the island is a gorgeous stretch of white sand lined with condos and plush resorts. With swimming-pool calm waters, it's the perfect beach for nonswimmers. The most luxurious accommodations can be found at the family-friendly Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman—kids can learn about reef protection through Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ambassadors of the Environment program while parents indulge in the pleasures of a Greg Norman-designed golf course and a La Prairie spa. Blue by Eric Ripert (chef of Manhattan's Le Bernardin; see p. 848) serves caught-that-day yellowfin tuna and seafood specialties. Go in January to meet Ripert (and some fellow celebrity chefs), who hosts the Cayman Cookout, a celebration of Cayman and global cuisine on the beach.

When the sun goes down, Seven Mile Beach is where you want to be. The Reef Grill is fun and casual, serving fresh local seafood prepared with an innovative twist. Drift over to the cozy lounge when the soca and calypso music start to heat up the night.

**VISITOR INFO:** [www.caymanislands.ky](http://www.caymanislands.ky).  
**PIRATE'S POINT:** Tel 345-948-1010; [www.piratespointresort.com](http://www.piratespointresort.com). *Cost:* \$500, inclusive; diving extra. **RITZ-CARLTON:** Tel 800-542-8680 or 345-943-9000; [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com). *Cost:* from \$299 (off-peak), from \$569 (peak); prix-fixe dinner at Blue \$110. **REEF GRILL:** Tel 345-945-6360; [www.reefgrill.com](http://www.reefgrill.com). *Cost:* dinner \$50. **BEST TIMES:** early May for Carnival Batabano; Dec for Jazz Fest.