

## Good Sense

GETTING A FEEL FOR GRAND CAYMAN

**G**uy Harvey, renowned artist and marine biologist — and our captain for the day — looks out at the cerulean sea. “Here they come,” he says.

Just beneath the surface, some 20 southern stingrays sail toward our boat, bodies fluttering along the pale sandy bot-

tom like the skirts of ballroom dancers.

“Climb in,” says Harvey, with reassuring warmth. “Just don’t step on one.”

Harvey is the world’s preeminent expert on the stingrays at this site, so I trust him wholeheartedly. I slip into the cool water, its liquid fingers encircling my waist, and immediately become part of the dance.

Sandbar, one of Grand Cayman’s many iconic sites, is the last stop on our five-day

getaway. I’d popped down from Florida — Grand Cayman is only an hour and 20 minutes from Miami — with some friends who have filled their passports with stamps from this U.K. territory; this is my first trip to the island. I needed a quick dose of diving, and I wanted to discover why this stretch of the Caribbean brings back travelers for dozens of trips. To explore Cayman’s lure, I would sample both sides of the island and meet the stingrays in the North Sound as well.

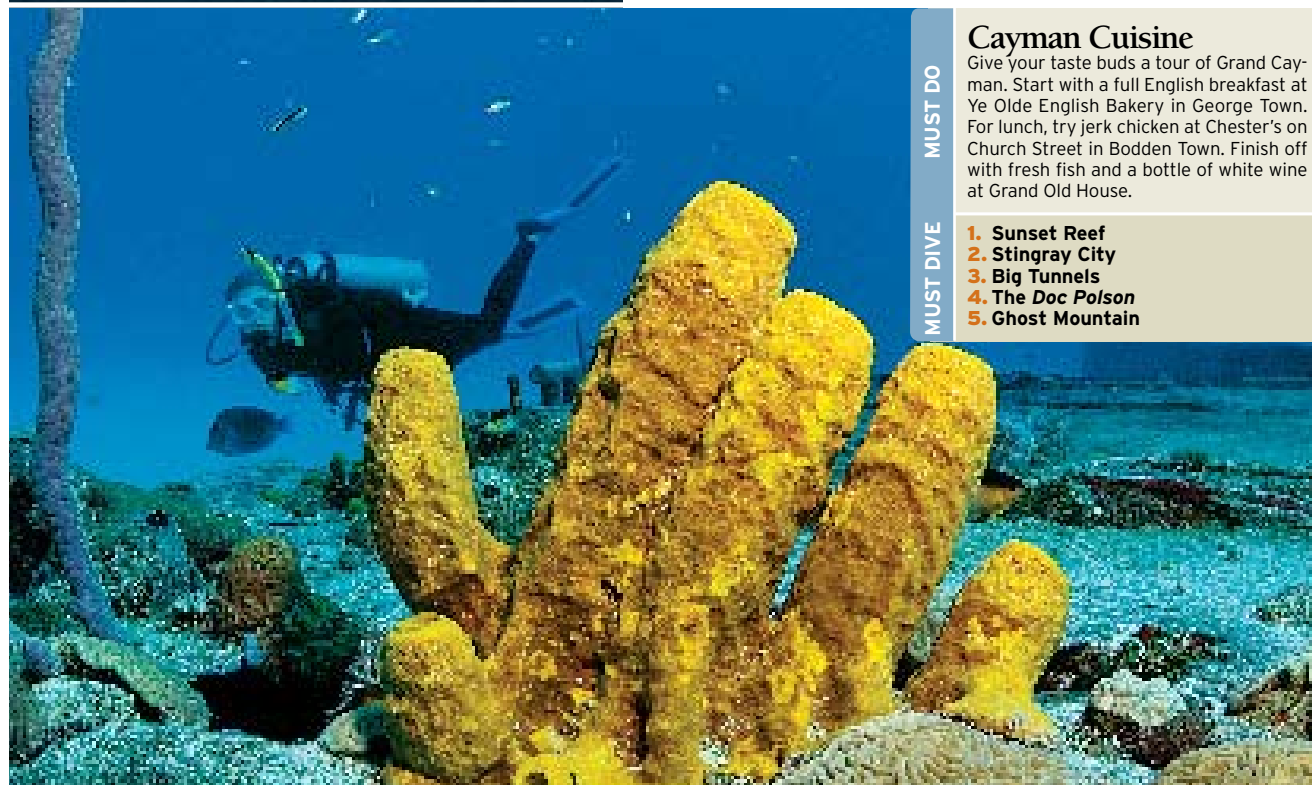
Sunset Reef, off the island’s western side and close to the vibrant capital, George Town, provided the perfect introduction to Grand Cayman’s underwater world. I geared up with the helpful crew at Sunset House, a PADI Gold Palm IDC, and climbed into the shallow Sea Pool directly in front of my room. Just offshore, the serpentine body of a green moray eel weaved through the coral, while gray angelfish turned figure-eights around the cast-bronze arms of Amphitrite, the reef’s resident mermaid. Nearby, a juvenile spotted drum flared its dashing black-and-white dorsal fin but didn’t budge from its safe spot in the reef.

I didn’t want to leave my spot either, but my Cayman-loving friends assured me that the east side of the island offered a different and equally alluring kind of beauty, one that few divers ever see. On the drive along the coastal string-bean road to the other side, I admired the color-infused houses — shades of coral, dawn-yellow and sea-cove blue. We stopped for jerk chicken and pork at Chester’s, a roadside eatery in Bodden Town. As I feasted on the spicy meat, I listened intently to the locals ordering their own meals, their words flowing like a rushing river over polished stones.

My fascination with the locals continued on my east-side dive at Kangaroo Gorge. There, a resident green sea turtle



**INTO THE SUNSET** A solitary tarpon makes a cameo appearance at Sunset Reef. Below: Exploring the wreck of the *Nicholson*, a few fin kicks off the beach at Sunset House.



MUST DO

MUST DIVE

### Cayman Cuisine

Give your taste buds a tour of Grand Cayman. Start with a full English breakfast at Ye Olde English Bakery in George Town. For lunch, try jerk chicken at Chester’s on Church Street in Bodden Town. Finish off with fresh fish and a bottle of white wine at Grand Old House.

1. Sunset Reef
2. Stingray City
3. Big Tunnels
4. The Doc Polson
5. Ghost Mountain

TY SAWYER (3)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

## Cayman Islands

**Fast Facts** The Cayman Islands are home to nearly 700 banks – that's one bank for every 63 people >> Caymanians enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world >> Cayman Islanders are actively working to save the rare blue iguana; fewer than 25 are left in the wild

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soared along the richly coral-jeweled wall. Light streamed through a rough-hewn swim-through, and yellow and fuchsia fairy basslets decorated its ridges. When I looked down into the seemingly endless drop below, the mystery of the ocean enveloped me.

Back at Sandbar on the North Sound, my Grand Cayman getaway nearing its end, the rays glide past my legs, just barely missing me. I put on my mask and look beneath the surface. Eyes like tiger's-eye marbles look back at me. I gently reach under the body of a ray as it swishes past and run my fingertips along its silken skin. At that moment, I understand why my friends never tire of Cayman: No matter how many times you return, the sensual journey will never be the same. — Jennica Peterson

## Cayman Your Way

My friends and I were out at My Bar sipping Stingray beers at the end of a long day of Cayman diving when we ran into Gordy Schmaltz and Brad Nelson, longtime friends of *Sport Diver*. These guys have lived on the island and

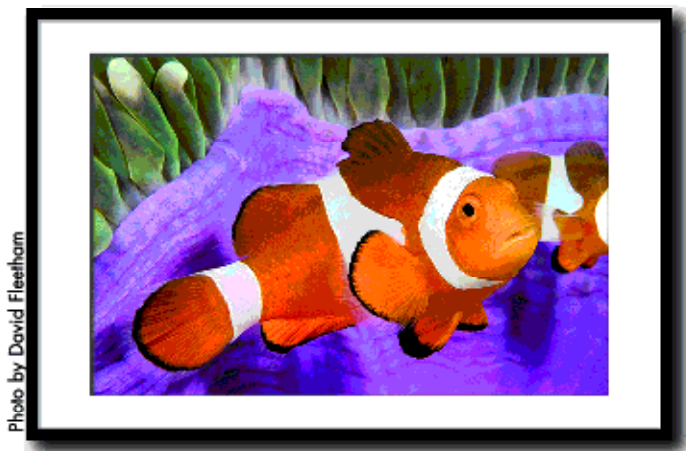


worked in the dive industry for some 26 years, and they'd recently purchased a sleek 43-foot cruiser, the *Aquasition*, in St. Augustine and cruised down past Cuba to put her to work in their new business, Aquazure Watersports.

Aquazure differs from other dive businesses in that their trips are specially catered to each group. It's like TiVo for your dive trip. You can dive wherever you want, whenever you want and with whomever you want – or you can bronze on the bow and eat salt-and-vinegar chips all day if you like.

The next day we gave Brad and Gordy a call for a last-minute trip to Bonnie's Arch. We dove through the coral-encrusted arch to our hearts' content, and then surfaced to chill out in the plush cabin. While the *Aquasition* was at our command, we had just one final wish: to return to My Bar to toast the sunset. Our wish was granted. For more information, call 345-925-8381 or visit aquazure.net. – JP

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