



DIVE SITES IN GRAND CAYMAN

Grand Cayman is the best-known dive destination in the Caribbean, if not the world. The water is warm and crystal clear year round. There are stretches of magnificent, unspoiled coral reefs, schools of colorful and friendly fish, spectacular shipwrecks, vertical walls and dramatic underwater drop-offs. Cayman's marine life is legendary with an abundance of friendly stingrays, tarpon and eels. The Cayman Islands Government has implemented an extensive Marine Conservation Program to safeguard the natural beauty of its waters.

The island is probably best known for its drop-offs, which are considered deep dives. The upper edge of the wall begins anywhere from 55-85 feet, with each dive site having its own personality and marine growth. Inshore from the drop-offs are medium and shallow coral reefs, with diving depths ranging from 20-55 feet. Because these spots are close to shore, visibility is slightly less, but there is often more fish life. The Island has over 160 charted dive sites. Red Sail Sports professional and experienced instructors will show guests as many sites as vacation time and experience level permit.

TYPES OF DIVES

Grand Cayman boasts almost 365 days of diving every year because of the way the island is situated. If the weather is rough on one side of the island, it is generally calm on another side. Most dive sites are 10 minutes away with the furthest sites at 20 minutes away by boat.

Walls

Grand Cayman is surrounded by a wall, which generally starts at about 60 feet deep and slopes off to over 2,000 feet in some places. There are hundreds of wall diving sites situated all around the island. Red Sail Sports dives daily on West and North Walls. In rough weather, we also dive on the south side. The East Wall is really too far for us to travel to on a daily basis, unless you are diving with our East End operation at Tortuga Divers.

Reefs and Wrecks

All reefs and wreck dives are generally 50-60 feet maximum depth. Most reef formations are in coral fingers that stretch from half a mile out from shore towards the deeper water. Many tropical fish are found here and are very friendly because people feed them. The dive sites are protected areas where fishing is not allowed.

Stingray City

This is said to be the best 12-foot dive in the world! There are approximately 30 friendly Southern

Stingrays in this area that are fed and petted by divers daily.

DIVE SITE AVAILABILITY

There are literally hundreds of dive sites in Grand Cayman and divers will not be taken to the same dive sites more than once unless they specifically request to return to that site. If a particular dive site has been requested, the dive boat captain will make an effort to go to that dive site mooring, however, there is a "first come, first serve" policy for the moorings and the site may already be taken. Sites cannot be pre-booked, so there is not a set site schedule and sites cannot be guaranteed.

DIVE PROFILES

Morning Two-Tanks

First Dive = Wall dive (guided)

100' / 20 minutes OR 100' / up to 35 minutes on computer/Nitrox

Second Dive (buddy dive) = Reef or Wreck

50' or 60' profile of up to 50 minutes on computer/Nitrox

We require divers to make their first wall dive on the west side of the island, prior to diving north. The West Wall is slightly easier because it is a sloping wall. The North Wall is a sheer drop and we want to make sure that people are comfortable with buoyancy control prior to making the more adventurous dive.

Afternoon One-Tank

(Buddy dive) Reef, wreck or Stingray City = *50' for up to 50 minutes

*Stingray City, however, is only 12' deep.

Night Dive

(Buddy dive) 50' / 40 minutes

Training Dives

An instructor always accompanies any training dives and we follow stringent PADI training specifications.

WATER TEMPERATURE

April – October ranges 80F to 84F

Protection - Swimsuits, diveskins & lightweight wetsuits

October – March ranges 78F to 80F

Protection - Full and "Shortie" wetsuits and lightweight wetsuits

VISIBILITY

Generally 100' plus, year round.

SAFETY CODES

There is a recompression chamber at the hospital on the island. The dive operations belong to the CIWOA (Cayman Islands Watersports Operators Association) who govern safe diving practices.

DIVE BOAT AMENITIES

Red Sail Sports custom built dive boats are all equipped with the following:

- Steps and/or ramps for easy loading on and off the boat
- Marine head (restroom)
- Fresh water showers
- Rinse tanks for equipment
- Large dive platform and ladders for easy entries and exits
- Camera table
- Fresh cold water
- Fresh fruit served between dives

NORTH WALL DIVE SITES

Eagle Ray Pass

...is a deep coral chasm leading to the wall. It is an awesome formation with towering coral heads, coral archways and narrow crevices-filled with magnificent sponges, gorgonian fans and black coral. This magical spot is also a regular gathering place for spotted eagle rays that cruise along the face of the wall. Divers frequently encounter groups or up to six rays on a single formation.

Tarpon Alley

... is where more than 100 tarpon school together in a narrow coral canyon near the edge of the drop-off. Divers can swim through the canyon almost touching the tarpon that are slowly cruising back and forth. Most of these silvery fish measure 3-4 feet long, but there are some giants that reach five feet in length and must weigh 150 pounds.

No Name Wall

...is straight out from Rum Point Channel, at the eastern end of the North Sound. The top of the drop-off begins in 55 feet of water with a wall. The upper edge is marked by a series of four parallel coral ravines. They begin at 55 feet and slope to 90 feet where they go over the edge of the wall. One of the main attractions of No Name is a large, crimson red sponge growing out from the face of the drop-off at a depth of 100 feet. This sponge is shaped like a basket, 18 inches in diameter and two feet tall, and grows out from the wall almost horizontally.

Gail's Mountain

...is an extraordinary coral formation perched on the edge of the drop-off. In fact, it is the only formation of its kind known to exist off Cayman. It is around 250' across at the base, rises to within 40' of the surface and is flat on the top. This formation is flanked by two coral canyons that spill over the wall and give it an awe-inspiring appearance.

WEST DIVE SITES

Many of the best sites are right off Seven Mile Beach - 5 to 15 minutes from shore. It is no accident that Grand Cayman's hotels and condos are concentrated in this area, for Seven Mile Beach offers some of the calmest waters and some of the best visibility. It is not uncommon for the ocean's surface to be as flat as a millpond and for underwater visibility to be 100 feet or more. The north end of Seven Mile Beach is very popular and almost all of the dive operators run daily trips to this area.

Sand Chute

... is a 300 foot wide river of sand that slopes gradually to a depth of 120 feet, where the sand flow narrows. At this point, the slope becomes steeper, slanting on a 45 degree angle and continues to plunge more than 350 feet. The white sand slope looks like a snow ski run with mountains of coral formations boarding the sides.

Le Mesa

... is a small, flat topped coral reef loaded with more than a dozen separate schools of reef fish. Here divers can swim with and photograph groups of blue striped grunts, schoolmasters, sailor's choice, horse-eye jacks, Bermuda chubs and mahogany grunts.

Trinity Caves

... is a system of three coral canyons that converge on the face of a vertical wall. The canyon begins at approximately 60' and slopes gradually to 100, where they exist together. Just south of here is a slightly shorter and more meandering tunnel. It also leads to the drop-off but exists into a deep coral crevice directly in front of a towering pinnacle. Just to the right of this is a shorter tunnel that curves around a second pinnacle.

Aquarium Reef

...is a medium depth dive site consisting of grove coral formations. The fish are so tame you almost have to push them away from your face mask. Residents of this reef include a big school of yellowtail snappers, sergeant majors and an extremely friendly angelfish.

Oro Verde

...is Grand Cayman's most popular wreck dive. Lying on the white sand bottom is 50 feet of water; this 184-foot steel freighter has become a refuge for all types of marine life. It is a veritable fishbowl with yellowtail snappers, Nassau groupers, sergeant majors and a pair of friendly French angelfish swarming around divers, all hoping for a handout.

Royal Palm's Ledge

...is a long coral ridge, undercut at one end. The top has tightly clustered coral heads, providing protection for small fish, while the underside curves sharply back under the coral ridge and drops down to a sandy channel at 55'. This site is known for the abundance of tiny invertebrates and is regarded as one of Cayman's best night dives.

Cheeseburger Reef

...is a cluster of three small to medium depth coral reef systems that can be dived from shore. Coral heads are honeycombed with caves, tunnels and grottos that are often filled with schools of tiny silversides. A late afternoon dive has a cathedral like atmosphere as the sunlight streams through small openings in the high vaulted coral chambers.

Balboa

...is a 375', steel hulled freighter that sank during the great hurricane of 1932. Her dynamited remains are scattered over 7 acres of ocean bottom. A popular night dive, this wreck is loaded with life, including octopus, moray eels, red shrimp and parrot fish sleeping in cocoons.

Devil's Grotto

...is just south of Eden Rock and separated from it by a sand gully. This reef features a long tunnel that opens into a large grotto with a cathedral-shaped exit. At times this cave is inhabited by schools of silversides that open and close like curtains to allow divers to pass.

Eagle Ray Rock

...is a beautiful wall dive on the corner of the West side's southwest point. This location was named for the eagle rays frequently seen cruising along this section of the drop-off. The wall begins at 55' and drops vertically. There is an interesting I-shaped ravine formed by high coral promontory with vertical sides. The walls of this canyon are loaded with all types of colorful sponges, black coral trees and sea fans.

Big Tunnel

...is a drop off with a giant coral archway. The top is at 105 feet, the bottom at 120. This is sheer wall approximately 300 feet in length and etched by many winding channels and canyons. While there are many smaller tunnels, crevices and overhangs, the real thrill of this dive is the arch. In addition to the swim through opportunities, this site is frequented by a school of large tarpon that hangs out in the canyons.

Orange Canyon

...is so named because of the brilliant array of orange elephant ear sponges growing on the walls of this canyon. A giant coral head sits on the edge of the wall; two ravines form canyons on either side, trailing all the way back to 60'. Along both of these ravines are many different sized orange sponges, engulfed in gorgonians and sea fans.

Bonnie's Arch

...consists of a high profile coral reef, with lots of coral ridges and sand canyons. The site gets its name from a natural coral bridge that forms a 50' archway. This site is frequented by a school of tarpon.

Sunset Reef

...is a popular shore dive directly off Sunset House Resort. It's only a 200' swim from the hotel's pier and the reef profile slopes gradually from 17' - 55'. The reef is loaded with hard corals, small sponges, seawhips and other lovely gorgonians. There are all types of tropical fish including friendly Nassau and black groupers, yellowtail snappers, sergeant majors, moray eels and puffer fish. Farther out from the coral slop lies the LCM David Nicholson, a World War II vintage steel-hulled landing craft. New to this site is Amphitrite which is actually a 9 foot tall bronze mermaid created by Simon Morris of Canada and put underwater at Sunset House in their continuing effort to give the reef some damage relief. Today she sits in 55 FSW and keeps an ever present watch over the reef.

Sentinel Rock

...is a unique coral pinnacle jutting straight up from a steeply sloping drop-off at a depth of 90 feet. There is a horizontal tunnel piercing the center and filled with a collection of black coral and colorful sponges. The entire pinnacle is covered with a colorful tapestry of gorgonian fans, orange sponges, red encrusting sponges and marine life.

Round Rock East

...is a large coral rampart that juts out from the face of the wall and helps form a gigantic basket sponge found at 105 feet. The sponge is in the coral valley, surrounded by black gorgonian fans and many hard coral formations. The unusual basket sponge is at least six and a half feet tall.

EAST END DIVE SITES

The east end of the island is still relatively untouched by divers and offers pristine sites for the more experienced diver. The diving is typically around the inner fringing reef due to the wall being so far offshore and prevailing southeast winds. The spur and grove formations here are more gently sloping than other areas on the island. With a variety of sites from wrecks to caves and swim-throughs, coupled with superfluous marine life, the east end offers something special for the die-hard divers. Must provide own transportation for dives to the East End.

Grouper Grotto

... is a shallow 65 ft maximum dive. This site is full of Nassau grouper and several species of jacks. At the reef crest there are numerous caves, tunnels and coral blocks. Large formations of Elkhorn coral stand in amongst sea fans and plumes.

The Maze

...is a deep dive of up to 100 ft. and can be affected by inclement weather but is worth the effort. With many swim-throughs in the fissures and caves, these will lead the diver into semi-darkness and out into the beautiful blue wall. An abundant supply of brain coral, black coral fans and deep-water gorgonian fans just add to this impressive site.

RUM POINT DIVING

White Stroke Canyon

...is a coral wall that almost defies description. The immense formation literally dwarfs the diver and vividly portrays the grandeur of the North Wall drop-offs. Two giant coral ramparts jut outward from the vertical wall. With a gaping chasm of clear blue water in between, it is about 150 feet from one rampart to the other, and the rim of the wall curves sharply inward forming a u-shaped indentation.

Stingray City

...is regarded as the most unique shallow dive in the entire Caribbean. The site consists of a wide sand channel that runs parallel to the barrier reef and allows North Sound to empty on an outgoing tide. Diving depths range from 9 to 12 feet and the bottom is a combination of flat sandy areas and small, solitary coral heads. This site is a gathering place for the tame stingrays that can be handled by dive masters. These will come right up to a diver, bumping a facemask and rubbing up against the divers' legs. The stingrays have developed this peculiar behavior over several years.