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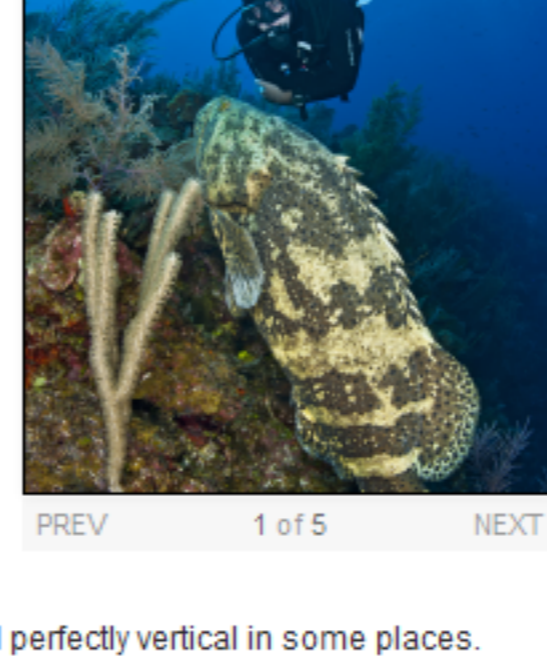
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## Blue World - Diving and Accommodations in the Cayman Islands

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There is a Cayman that, tragically, some visitors never see. The Cayman Islands is full of beautiful white sand beaches and luxury resorts, but if you leave the sparkling coastline and venture beneath the warm, azure waters, you will encounter a vast, breathtaking landscape of color and motion. Pull on your snorkeling mask or wetsuit, and explore the wondrous, undersea realm of the Cayman Islands.



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Article by Jennifer Wilkins; photos courtesy Southern Cross Club

The three Cayman Islands (Grand Cayman, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac) are the exposed top of an underwater mountain, known as the Cayman Ridge. Underwater, the sides of this mountain are quite steep and perfectly vertical in some places. Visibility is exceptionally good due to the island's geography. There is very little runoff of silt or fertilizers from the land, and the steep walls result in the reefs being unusually close to deep ocean water.

At approximately 76 square miles, cosmopolitan Grand Cayman Island is the largest of the three islands. With sand stretching as far as the eye can see, Seven Mile Beach on the west side of Grand Cayman is rated as one of the most beautiful beaches in all the Caribbean, as well as the least populated of the three islands. With more registered businesses than people, Grand Cayman is a Mecca of luxury resorts, exquisite dining, an exciting nightlife, tranquil beaches, and of course, the awesome underwater sights of the nearby reefs.

The diving on Grand Cayman is divided roughly into four areas: Seven Mile Beach and the Northwest Point, the North Wall, the South Side, and the East End. Due to the myriad dive sites available, there are opportunities for virtually all levels of divers to explore this stunning underwater world. With 365 dive sites, there is something for everyone each day of the year.

"I love the island—I fell in love with Cayman during my travels," says Duncan Heard, owner of Stingray Watersports. "The shore diving here [in Coconut Bay] is the best on the island; this is where the Alto Reef comes closest to shore and it's the shortest swim."

"There are over 55 dive sites out on the East End and they're all pristine and pretty gorgeous," says Sarah-Jane Whitehill of Red Sail Sports, "This is partly because there are only two diving operations out there: ourselves and Ocean Frontiers. Rum Point, on the north side of the island - with its warm and shallower water - is a prime destination for families to chill out and relax."

Only 10 miles long and one mile wide, Little Cayman is a rare combination of sun-drenched solitude, glistening beaches and miles of untouched tropical wilderness. With a population of less than 170, most of Little Cayman remains uninhabited. The smallest and least developed of the islands, Little Cayman epitomizes the definition of an "Island getaway". Much of the island's beauty lies beneath the waves. Bloody Bay Wall Marine Park is one of the most popular dive areas, beckoning adventurers from the world over. Full of life and vibrant color, it is famous for its dramatic drop-offs and swim-throughs.

"Every dive is a wall dive," says Neil van Niekerk, General Manager of Southern Cross Club. "That's what Little Cayman is known for. We have no current to speak of and warm, clear water everyday - just a truly beautiful place."

"The Bloody Bay Wall Marine Park is the oldest marine park in the Caribbean that is diveable to the U.S. and is extremely healthy," he adds.

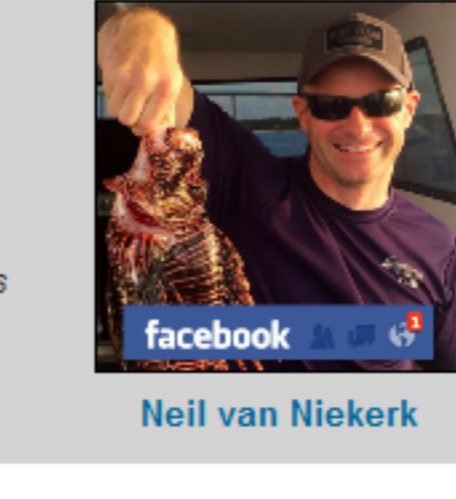
Only a 30 minute plane ride from Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac feels worlds apart. Named for its breathtaking 150 foot bluff, the "Brac" is a rugged and serene 14 square mile expanse of dramatic scenery and exotic flora and fauna. Some of the island's most memorable, not-to-be-missed features include the breathtaking view from the lighthouse on the Bluff, or the intriguing limestone caves and sinkholes. For an underwater odyssey, Cayman Brac's crystal clear waters provide awe-inspiring wall dives, shallow diving, and wreck diving at all levels and interests.

Whether seeking a diving adventure in the deep blue or a quiet sojourn at a posh resort, the following dive operations and accommodations are favored by our readership and correspondents, and will not disappoint.

### Southern Cross Club

If you're searching for a private, luxurious island experience, the Southern Cross Club delivers. Private rooms and beachfront bungalows painted in vibrant and cheery hues are prettily situated along 900 feet of white coral sand beach.

*"The Southern Cross Club is the Cayman Islands' original resort. It began as a private fishing club until diving became the main focus back in the '60s. We have also just been launched as a Guy Harvey Outpost Resort; Guy Harvey is a good friend to the island and to the resort. We're a very small property with only 14 units, and can accommodate about 28 people. This is ideal because we like to focus on service and intimacy."*



Neil van Niekerk

The Club's dedicated dive operation provides an ideal opportunity to explore the best Little Cayman has to offer, whether venturing out to the reefs in a small party or on one of their professionally guided tours to Bloody Bay Marine Park and Preston Bay Marine Park, as well as periodically visiting the wreck of the M.V. Keith Tibbets in Cayman Brac.

### Sunset House

Sunset House is Grand Cayman's premiere hotel "for divers, by divers." Comfortably situated on a rocky shoreline renowned for its shore diving, and only 15 minutes from downtown, the highly-recommended Sunset House is sure to please even the most avid diver. While there is no beach access, the pool with waterfall, jacuzzi, and sea pool with direct ladder access to the Caribbean provides all of the water-based activities snorkelers and divers could ask for. Accommodations are simple, no-nonsense and comfortable, and are favored by divers and snorkelers who appreciate the jagged, mostly rock shoreline and the extensive diving programs.

### Brac Reef Beach Resort

Located on a private beach on Cayman Brac's south shore - just a quick two and half miles from the airport - is the deluxe, beachfront dive resort of Brac Reef Beach Resort. The on-site Palms Restaurant offers buffet-style dining in a casual atmosphere - either in the comfort of the indoor air-conditioned seating, or outside in an alfresco setting. The resort is a superb location for hosting events with its conference center and the Grand Palm Room complete with an on-site event coordinator and wedding planner. The resort also offers an on-site fitness center, though we recommend some outdoor water excursions for keeping fit!

With 1,000 feet of beautiful white sand beach, resort guests can partake in a plethora of recreational activities, including snorkeling, scuba, kayaking, swimming, tennis, beach volleyball, bicycles, hiking, pool facilities, and of course, diving. Reef Divers is the in-house dive operation at the Brac Reef Beach Resort. Featuring a dive shop, five custom-designed dive boats, and excellent service and professionalism, Reef Divers sets a new standard on Cayman Brac for world-class diving facilities and service.

### Indepth Watersports

When it comes to Cayman Islands diving, there is no boat like the Peaceful Warrior. This former Navy Seals RIB (rigid inflatable boat) has been expertly transformed into a custom-built dive boat that can take divers to any dive site—fast. This small watersports company based on Grand Cayman provides exceptional customer service and flexibility. Overnight diving excursions to the Sister Islands, North Wall dive-lunch-dive trips to Kaibo, and East End safaris are only a few of the possibilities open to guests. A staff of highly qualified instructors and instructor trainers are available to assist divers of all levels and interests, ranging from resort course to Closed Circuit Rebreathers and anything in between.

### Stingray Watersports

Stingray is a first-rate, watersports operator on Grand Cayman. Whether looking for a private charter on Cayman's largest private day cruiser or a private dive lesson conducted in your own pool, Stingray Watersports promises a memorable experience.

*"Our boat can handle up to 32 people but I only ever take a maximum of 25. Our smaller boats cater to the regular two tank divers and operates morning and afternoon departures at the lowest rate in Cayman. I look after large school groups that come down from America and even West Point military cadets. I also host several events throughout the year, including a freediving event at the end of April."*



Stingray Watersports

—Duncan Heard, Owner of Stingray Watersports

### Little Cayman Beach Resort

This award-winning dive resort is located on the South Shore of the unspoiled island of Little Cayman. A professional staff experienced in dive resort operations ensures a memorable vacation for all guests. Amenities include a first-class restaurant serving international and local cuisine; a Nature Spa to relax and rejuvenate; 1,000 square feet of meeting space ideal for hosting conferences, seminars and workshops; and 40 newly renovated guest rooms, including 12 luxury oceanfront rooms with views of the turquoise water and reefs.

Reef Divers is the in-house dive operation at the Little Cayman Beach Resort and is based on the beachfront next to the dock. Guests can partake of three daily boat dives to over 50 dive sites around Little Cayman, including the Bloody Bay Marine Park. The staff takes care of transporting gear from your room to the boat and assists with donning your equipment, making for a pleasant and effortless trip.

### Cobalt Coast Dive Resort

Cobalt Coast Dive Resort is located on the tranquil Northwest shore of Boatswains Bay, just a few miles north of the hustle and bustle of Seven Mile Beach. Built in the style of a Caribbean Great House, the resort has a reputation for laid back luxury, offering a cozy and restful experience to its guests since first opening its doors in December 2000. The owner-operated resort offers 18 suites, ranging from one and two bedroom suites to detached villas and garden view rooms.

"Cobalt Coast is just a great West Indian house," says Nancy Easterbrook, co-owner of Divetech. "It's a little off the beaten path, not on the main stretch like many of the larger hotels. It's personal, owner operated, with an incredible host who truly cares about his guests."

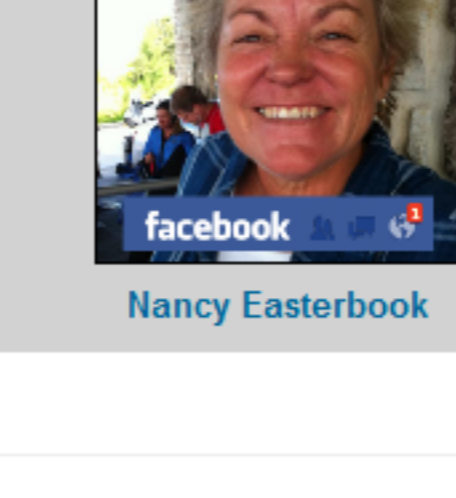
Divetech and Cobalt Coast Dive Resort offer fantastic dive and room packages that are attractive to both divers and non-divers. Enjoy unlimited diving, premium drinks, and delicious meals cooked fresh, all accompanied with breathtaking views.

### Divetech

Located on stunning Grand Cayman, Divetech is the on-site full-service dive center operating out of the beautiful Cobalt Coast Dive Resort. Divetech is celebrating their 20th Anniversary this May and is excited to be sharing the event with the people of Grand Cayman. "We offer training for multiple agencies as well as kids. We try to foster ocean awareness and encourage certification," says Easterbrook. "We're also a big supporter of free diving and offer clinics and courses for all skill levels - anyone wanting to become more confident and capable in free diving."

"Our boats run primarily to Northwest Point," says Easterbrook. "There's awesome shallow water diving on Northwest Point, great for photography. Then of course you can just swim out to the deeper water, or take an underwater scooter tour, which is a neat experience we offer."

*"The people on this island are just incredible. From the Department of Tourism, the watersports association, manufacturers, people of the media... We're a small community and we all come together. We've received a lot of support over the years. And the wealth of customers that come through the doors is amazing. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people and resources."*



Nancy Easterbrook

—Divetech Co-Owner Nancy Easterbrook

### Red Sail Sports

Red Sail Sports opened in 1987, its beginnings as simple and unassuming as the islands themselves. What began with only two dive boats, a handful of beach toys and a highly enthusiastic and intrepid staff eventually grew to a fleet of eight dive boats, four luxurious catamarans, dive shop locations at all major beach resorts on Grand Cayman, and an impressive range of resort retail boutiques.

"Red Sail is the largest dive and watersports operator on the Cayman Islands," says Jane. "We have five dive shops located throughout the island." Red Sail Sports is the only premier company delivering full-service dive and watersports services island-wide, including snorkeling, wakeboarding, windsurfing, kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, sailing, glass bottom boat tours, and waverunner rentals.

### Don Foster's Dive Cayman

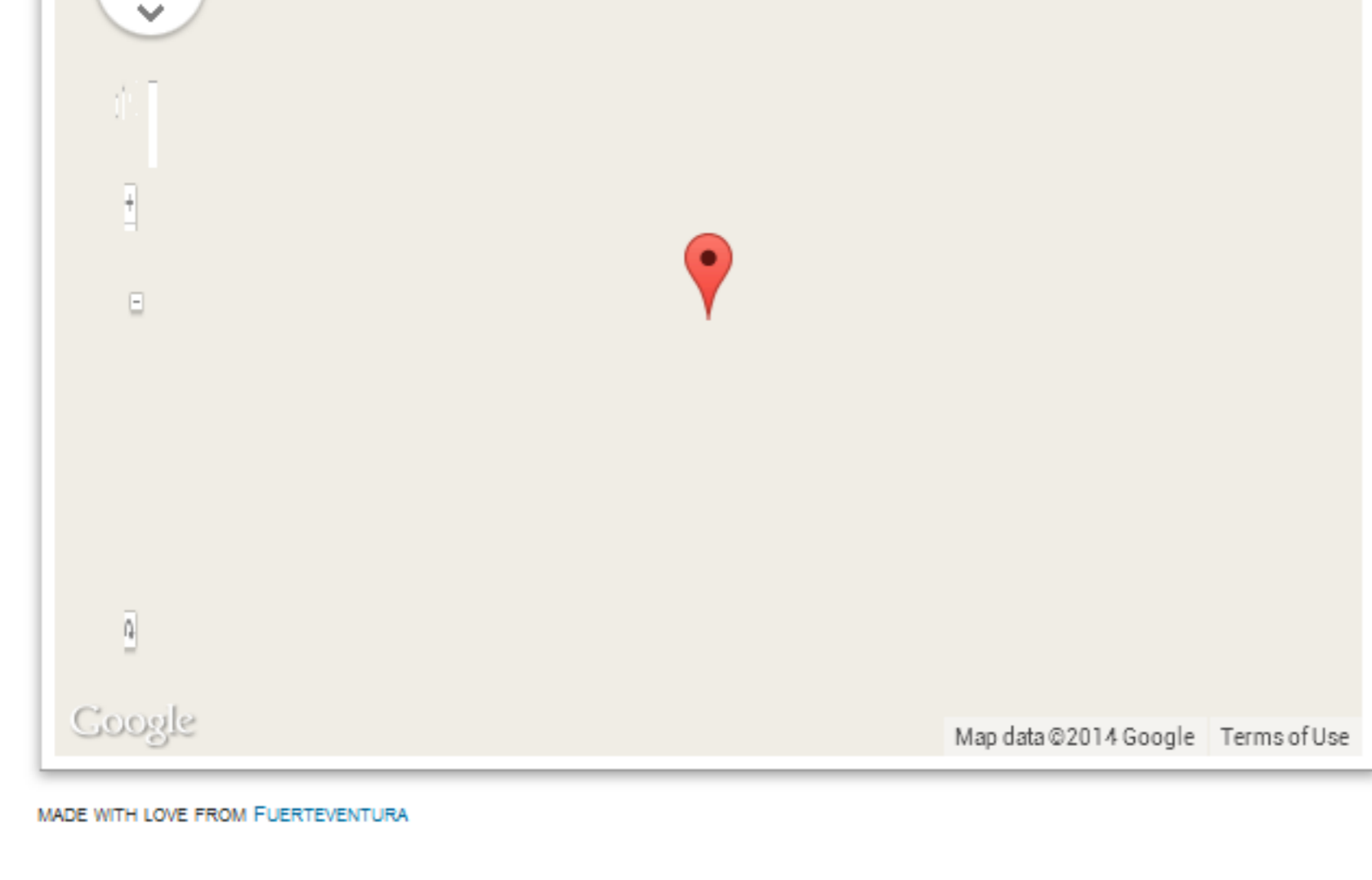
Don Foster's was established in 1982 and is one of the island's most respected dive operations. "We are one of the longest running dive shops in the Cayman Islands," says Cally Clark, Office Manager of Don Foster's. "We have a lot of return customers - some gentlemen who are in their 80s have been diving with us since the first days. Our Operations Manager, Sergio Coni, has been with the company since shortly after its inception, which is somewhat unusual in the diving industry. This gives us a good foundation of service, knowledge and safety, which contributes to our phenomenal customer service and sets us over and above other companies."

With a fleet of six spacious boats, divers have their choice of two-tank wall/reef dives Kittiwake wreck dives, Stingray City dives, and spectacular guided night dives from shore to their house reef, Casuarina Point. Their waterfront location features spectacular shore diving and snorkeling opportunities and is adjacent to Devils Grotto, one of Grand Cayman's most famous shore dives. Courses are offered in everything from Introductory Scuba to full Open Water Dive and up to Divemaster certification.

### Ocean Frontiers

Ocean Frontiers Dive Shop specializes in scuba diving Grand Cayman's East End with small personal groups, providing its clientele with friendly service, first-rate equipment, and dive boats. Ocean Frontiers prides itself on being a modern diving operation and dive shop with old style Caymanian hospitality. Ocean Frontiers Dive Shop is located at Compass Point Dive Resort on the East End of Grand Cayman. They offer scuba diving boat trips, diver certification classes and introduction beginner dive classes, as well as unguided computer diving for experienced scuba divers. Ocean Frontiers also offers complete dive vacation packages with accommodations, diving, and car rentals.

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