

Traveling with Tots

By LIBBY CARTY MCNAMEE

Make a splash on a Cayman Islands adventure

With winter upon us, it's never too early to think about spring break — or even next summer's vacation. The Cayman Islands are a stunning family destination with fabulous off-season rates. A trip there is what I like to call international travel "light." You show your passport to enter a British territory but still enjoy American conveniences — along with spectacular rum cakes.

Discovered by Christopher Columbus, the Cayman Islands consist of three unique islands. Grand Cayman is the biggest and most visited as compared to its sister islands, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. The climate is warm and tropical throughout the year with an average winter temperature of 75 degrees and 85 degrees in the summer.

While families get the thrill of leaving the country on an adventurous trip, this Caribbean haven is extremely manageable, safe, and oh-so-relaxing. For gourmands, it is a foodie paradise with top-notch restaurants. The flight is only one hour from Miami, and they accept American currency as easily as their beautiful Cayman bills. However, they do drive on the opposite side of the road according to British protocol.

"Cayman," as the locals call their homeland, has the most exquisite turquoise water that alone is worth the trip. Crystal clear, you can even glance down to see a chip in your pedicure. Hotels tastefully line the flour-white sands of Seven Mile Beach with neither a rock nor a candy wrapper in sight. In addition, the Caymanians are incredibly friendly and helpful, a spirit described as "Caymankind."

Located on a peninsula on the north side of Grand Cayman, Rum Point is idyllic. The warm, calm water goes out at least 50 yards with just three feet of water. It's the perfect place for young kids to try snorkeling among the sea life. Pines trees with hammocks conveniently shade the spellbinding beach. The Wreck Bar and Grill provides a tasty island-style lunch and rum smoothies, perfect for a hot afternoon. Red Sail Sports offers the gamut of water



Stingray City (above) and Cayman Turtle Farm (below) offer unique experiences for the entire family. Photos by Libby Carty McNamee.



equipment including wave runners. In addition, there is a pier, nice bathrooms/showers, and a gift shop.

A visit to Stingray City is a truly once-in-a-lifetime excursion. Friendly and docile stingrays gather on a series of shallow sandbars a couple of miles offshore in the North Sound. They swish around your ankles like cats looking for treats, well trained by fishermen who used to dump fish remains there. If you are feeling daring, you can snorkel, feed them raw squid by hand, or give one a "hug" or a "kiss."

Another unique Cayman experience is meeting its native Blue Iguanas. Nicknamed the "Blue Dragons," this highly endangered lizard has thrived in its recovery program. Located within the lush Queen Eliz-

abeth II Botanic Park, the population of these prehistoric-looking creatures has grown remarkably. Kids love to watch them blend right into their surroundings.

The Cayman Turtle Farm houses 7,000 green sea turtles at all stages and sizes of life. You can observe tiny new hatchlings at the hatchery and also see mature ones weighing up to 500 pounds. At the touch tanks you can enter the wading pool and pick up one of the yearlings. As Grand Cayman's largest land attraction, the marine park includes an education center, an aviary, a fun restaurant serving turtle, as well as swimming lagoons with refreshing waterfalls and slides.

Just when you think you've seen it all, journey beneath the sea in the

Nautilus semi-submersible with the Cayman Sea School. From below decks in this glass-bottomed boat, you feel as if you're swimming with the tropical fish, all without getting wet. As part of the tour, you learn about Cayman's history and the destruction caused by Hurricane Ivan. You also view the remains of the Wreck of Balboa and the Wreck of the Cali. Upon arrival at Cheeseburger Reef, the ship's captain dives down to feed the fish, creating a frenzy of color at the windows. This excursion is free if booked with the Summer Splash Program. **RPM**

Libby Carty McNamee, writer, lawyer, and mommy, would love to be lounging in the warm and tranquil water at Rum Point right now.

WANT TO GO?

FOR A BROCHURE:

Cayman Islands Tourism
www.caymanislands.ky

TRAVEL TIPS

Direct flights depart from Dulles but not Richmond. Cayman does not follow Daylight Savings Time, so there may be a one-hour time change. The voltage is the same as North America, so bring your power cords and chargers. Most cell phone carriers have an international plan you can add while there.

HOTELS

The recently renovated Westin Casuarina Resort is a great option for families. Its location on Seven Mile Beach is spectacular. In addition, it offers Grand Cayman's largest swimming pool, a delicious breakfast buffet, and a Kids' Club. If you are with a large group, consider renting a condo or villa, which provides more space. Many offer daily housekeeping.

PASSPORTS

To avoid long lines, start early by making a local appointment at a designated U.S. Post Office. For children's passports, it's much easier to have both parents present.