

# The Best of the Cayman Islands

In the Cayman Islands, you can hike through untouched woodland, pay a visit to colorful reefs and fish on a scuba-diving or snorkeling trip, or plunk yourself down on the islands' white sands with a frosted drink in hand. You can rent an isolated West Indian cottage or stay in a luxurious resort. You can chow down on fresh fried fish at a waterside shack or indulge in a world-class five-course meal. Whatever your tastes and budget, in this chapter we'll guide you to the best that the Cayman Islands have to offer.

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## 1 FROMMER'S FAVORITE CAYMAN EXPERIENCES

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- **“Petting” the Stingrays:** Called the “world’s best 4m (13-ft.) dive site,” Stingray City lies in Grand Cayman’s North Sound. Adventurous snorkelers and divers can swim among, pet, and feed 30 to 50 graceful, “tame” Atlantic Southern stingrays. Stingray City is a phenomenon unique to the Cayman Islands, but don’t expect to find us there. See “Scuba Diving & Snorkeling” in chapter 5.
- **Scuba Diving in the Cayman Islands:** Rainbow-hued marine life and an incredible variety of dive sites, including shipwrecks and dramatic “wall dives,” combine to make the Cayman Islands perhaps the single most popular spot for scuba diving in the Western Hemisphere. Many sites lie offshore of Grand Cayman, but the archipelago’s smaller islands, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, are also filled with pristine reefs and dramatic drop-offs, including Little Cayman’s Bloody Bay Wall, hailed as the most sensational wall dive in the Caribbean. See “Scuba Diving & Snorkeling” in chapter 5, “Scuba Diving” in chapter 9, and “Scuba Diving & Snorkeling” in chapter 10.
- **Exploring Deep into the Wild Interior:** On Grand Cayman, you can walk back in time on the 3.2km (2-mile) Mastic Trail, which runs through the Caribbean’s best example of a dry subtropical forest. A wide variety of plants and animals unique to the Cayman Islands live in this area, where the woodland has evolved undisturbed for 2 million years. See p. 124.

- **Down into the Deep in a Submarine:** Atlantis Adventures and its competitor, Nautilus, will take you under the sea to explore the vivid, colorful life of one of the most incredible marine habitats on the planet, all without getting wet. The companies cover the full spectrum of submarine experiences, from trips to the teeming shallow reefs and shipwrecks of George Town Harbour, to voyages to coral canyons at 30m (98 ft.). You can even take a trip to the Cayman Wall at 300m (984 ft.). See p. 114.
- **Spending the Day on Seven Mile Beach:** This strip of golden sand, running the length of the western side of Grand Cayman, is what makes this island a year-round destination. Soft sands, roped-off swimming sections, and casuarina shade trees make for perfect Caribbean beachfront charm. For jogging, sunning, swimming, windsurfing, kayaking, water-skiing, parasailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, or just plain walking, this is one of the greatest beachfronts in the Western Hemisphere, complemented by a string of hotels, restaurants, and shops along the entire length of the beach. See p. 106.
- **Visiting the World's Only Green Sea Turtle Farm:** The Cayman Turtle Farm was created to provide a safe habitat for the endangered green sea turtle. Thousands of these magnificent creatures are hatched and raised here. See p. 119.
- **Going Fishin':** Fishing is the "national sport" of the Cayman Islands—a tremendously popular pastime for locals and visitors alike. The catches (which can turn up as close as .4km/a quarter-mile offshore on all three islands) include such prizes as blue marlin, wahoo, dolphin (mahimahi), tuna, and other species. Bonefishermen will be lured to the flats off Little Cayman. See p. 116 for fishing off Grand Cayman, p. 182 for Little Cayman fishing, and p. 167 for Cayman Brac fishing.
- **Snorkeling in an Underwater Paradise:** Great snorkeling, which can be fun for the entire family, is found close to the shore of all three islands. From encounters with the rays of Stingray City to explorations of shipwrecks, underwater thrills galore await you. See "The Best Snorkeling Sites," later in this chapter, for our favorite sites.
- **Escaping to Little Cayman:** As much as we like to visit Grand Cayman, we also like to escape from it sometimes. If you want a place where the only footprints in the sand will be yours, head for Little Cayman, a tiny, cigar-shaped island only 16km (10 miles) long. Once here, you'll enjoy deserted, pearl-white-sand beaches; spectacular bonefishing; barbecue cookouts under the stars; and some of the best scuba diving and snorkeling in the world. See chapter 10.

- **Boating Over to Owen Island for a Picnic:** Our favorite picnic spot in all of the Caribbean is Owen Island, 180m (590 ft.) off the shores of Little Cayman. Easily accessible by rowboat, these 4.4 hectares (11 acres) are pure bliss. You'll find a white sand beach and a blue lagoon. See p. 181.

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## 2 THE BEST BEACHES

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- **Seven Mile Beach:** Did we already mention that Caribbean beaches don't get much better than Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman? The powdery sands here are free of litter and souvenir hawkers, and they're set against a backdrop of resorts, beach bars, restaurants, and shops. This is the Miami Beach of the Caribbean. See p. 106.
- **Rum Point:** This secluded white sand beach is 40km (25 miles) north of George Town, on Grand Cayman. Although it cannot compare to spectacular Seven Mile Beach, this excellent tree-shaded beach has tranquil, clear waters that teem with rainbow-hued fish, making it great for snorkeling. See p. 107.
- **Southwest Coast of Cayman Brac:** A series of nearly deserted white sand beaches on Cayman Brac is anchored on the southwest coast. These are small and relatively undiscovered beaches that remind many visitors of the Caribbean "the way it used to be." Book into the Brac Reef Beach Resort and you'll be able to walk straight from your room to the sands. See p. 165.
- **Point of Sand:** At the southeastern tip of Little Cayman is the best beach on the island, with a strip of luminescent pink sand. Point of Sand is also ideal for snorkeling. On many weekdays, you'll have much of the beach to yourself. See p. 181.

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## 3 THE BEST SCUBA-DIVING SITES

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The Cayman Islands are an ideal destination for scuba divers of all experience and skill levels. We've listed our favorite dive sites below, but as the Caymans are surrounded by corals reefs, the options are nearly boundless. Throughout this book, you'll find listings of recommended dive operators who will be able to advise on which sites are right for you.

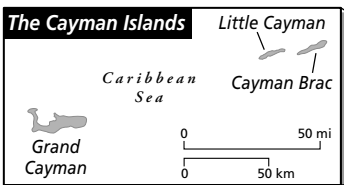
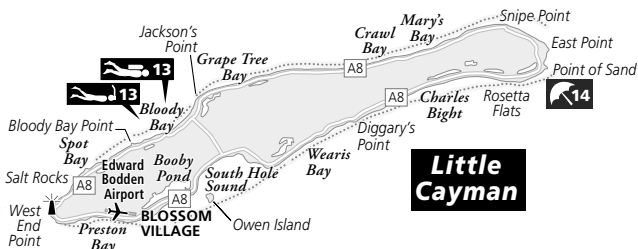
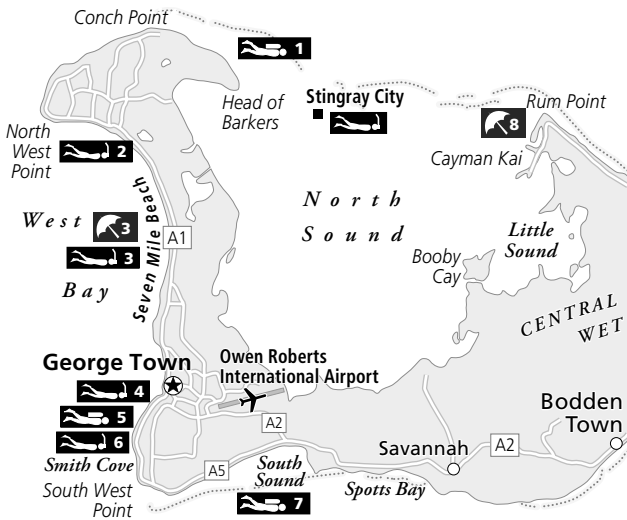
- **Eden Rock Dive Center:** One of Grand Cayman's most popular dive sites, this area has two alluring reefs, Eden Rock and Devil's Grotto, that are close to shore at a depth of 14m (46 ft.). You'll find

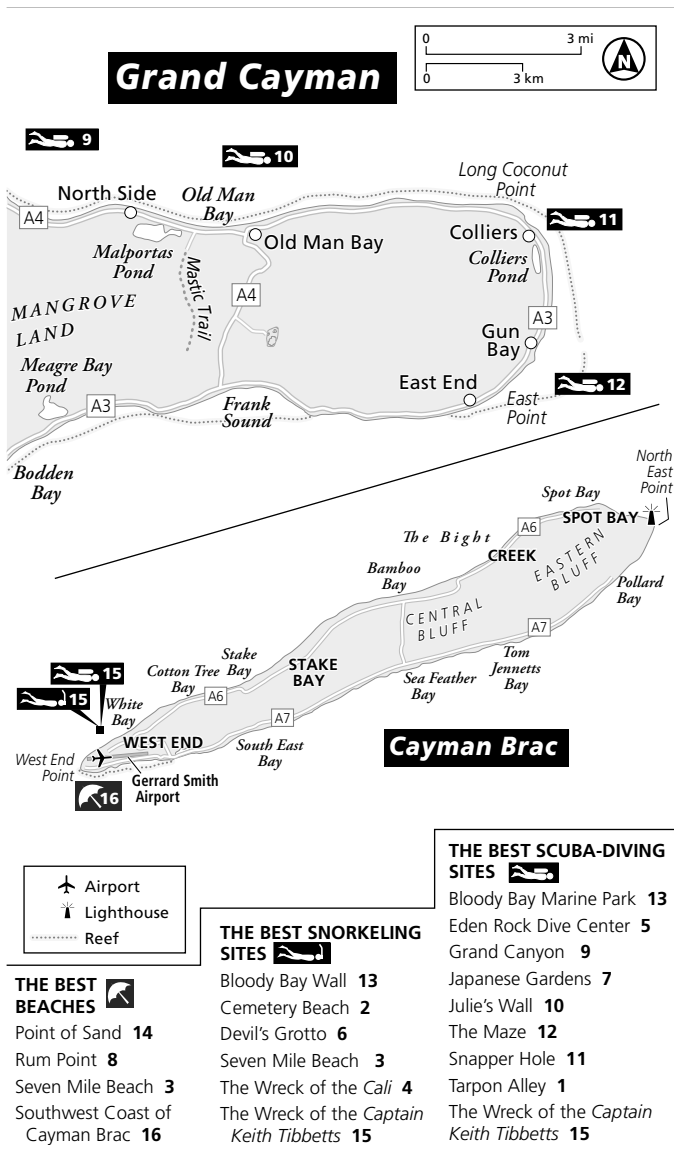
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THE BEST SCUBA-DIVING SITES





caves, grottos, and a miniwall, plus tunnels that rise up 12m (39 ft.) from the sand. Divers and snorkelers are treated to an array of colorful fish, sea fans, and sponges, along with an “in-residence” family of tarpon.

- **The Maze:** Located in Grand Cayman’s South Channel, close to the famous Wreck of the Ten Sails, is this honeycomb of deep, narrow coral ravines that evoke a maze. Sponges and soft corals greet you at every turn, along with such creatures as Caribbean reef sharks, green turtles, and spotted eagle rays. Depths reach from 17 to 30m (56–98 ft.).
- **Snapper Hole:** A favorite with beginners and one of the top dive sites in the islands, this network of chutes, tunnels, and caverns at a depth of 20m (66 ft.) is located off Grand Cayman, southeast of Morritt’s Tortuga Club. Tarpon occupy many of the caverns and tunnels, and schools of snapper swim by, sharing the water with nurse or black-tip sharks, eagle rays, and other denizens of the deep. Visibility is in excess of 24m (79 ft.).
- **Tarpon Alley:** Near Stingray City, this Grand Cayman wall is at a depth of 15 to 24m (49–79 ft.). It’s named for the many (at least 100) tarpon who find food and refuge in the reef. Many of these “silver kings” are 1m (3¼ ft.) long, and some can reach a length of 1.2m (4 ft.). Hawksbill turtles also inhabit the site, as do barracuda, stingrays, yellowtail snapper, and other creatures. Because of its drop-offs and canyons, Tarpon Alley is a favorite with underwater photographers.
- **Julie’s Wall:** Opposite the town of Old Man Bay on Grand Cayman, this exposed and rather windy, intermediate-level dive site has excellent underwater visibility at depths ranging from 20 to 30m (66–98 ft.). The wall here is home to stunning black coral formations, as well as stingrays and other marine life.
- **Grand Canyon** (also called White Stroke Canyon and 3-Bs Wall): Along the North Wall, off Grand Cayman, lies this undersea canyon. At a depth of 15 to 30m (49–98 ft.), two mammoth coral buttresses form a wide recess, which is filled with a variety of sponges and soft corals. Visibility is usually some 30m (98 ft.). Bermuda chub, purple Creole wrasse, spotted eagle rays, and green sea turtles inhabit the site.
- **Japanese Gardens:** This site is located inside Grand Cayman’s South Wall drop-off, with depths of 9 to 15m (30–49 ft.). It has a maze of passageways and is known for its schools of Bermuda chub and the tiny, bright blue “juvenile fish” that hide in its dramatic strands of elkhorn coral.
- **The Wreck of the *Captain Keith Tibbetts*:** A 5- to 20-minute boat ride from most resorts on Cayman Brac, the *Captain Keith*

*Tibbetts* is one of the most famous wreck dives in the Caribbean. A Russian frigate sent over from Cuba, it was deliberately sunk in 1996 on the north side of Cayman Brac at a depth ranging from 17 to 34m (55–110 ft.). The wreck is home to barracudas, green moray eels, big groupers, scorpionfish, and an array of other tropical species. The coral formations, including beautiful yellow tube sponges, are stunning. See p. 166.

- **Bloody Bay Marine Park:** This dive site, located off Little Cayman, is one of the best in the Caribbean. It roughly covers the area between Jackson Point in the east and Spot Bay to the west, and encompasses 22 of this little island's dive sites. Many of the dives here are deep, as the reef plummets to 1,800m (5,904 ft.). However, the reef starts at 6m (20 ft.), so shallower dives are possible. Grouper, horse-eye jacks, triggerfish, and many small tropical fish call this area home. See p. 181.

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## 4 THE BEST SNORKELING SITES

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Several of the beaches and dive sites around the Cayman Islands also happen to be great spots for snorkeling. Below is a list of our favorites, including sites not listed elsewhere in this guide.

- **The Wreck of the *Cali*:** Wreck sites aren't just for scuba divers. Just a short swim from George Town's shores you will find the wreck of the *Cali*, sitting in shallow water and an easy snorkeling adventure. The wreck rests in 6m (20 ft.) of calm waters about 30m (98 ft.) offshore. Built in 1944, the *Cali* was a 66m (217-ft.) masted schooner that was labeled as a shipping hazard in 1957. It was blown up by the British Corps of Army Engineers and has since been a popular snorkeling site.
- **Seven Mile Beach & Cemetery Beach:** Many snorkelers staying on Grand Cayman snorkel off Seven Mile Beach because it's so convenient to many of the resorts and rented villas and condos, and colorful reefs lie right offshore. The snorkeling near the Marriott and Westin resorts is excellent. To the north, Cemetery Reef and its public beach are good spots for underwater exploration. At Cemetery Reef we've seen shoals of parrotfish and sergeant majors and even the elusive reef shark. See p. 106.
- **Devil's Grotto:** Just south of Eden Rock, this popular Grand Cayman snorkeling site is a mere 45m (148 ft.) off Parrot's Landing Rock. You can wind through a series of long and intricate tunnels here. The fun begins at a depth of 3m (10 ft.). Tarpon are often seen at rest during daylight hours.

- **The Wreck of the *Captain Keith Tibbetts*:** Cayman Brac's celebrated diving site, a Russian frigate wreck, is also loved by snorkelers. See p. 166.
- **Bloody Bay Wall:** Little Cayman's fantastic diving attraction boasts some excellent spots for snorkelers who frequent many of the island's shallower dive sites. The best snorkel site is Jackson Point. Other interesting sites include the amusingly named Nancy's Cup of Tea, lying just west of Jackson Point. For more details, see p. 181.

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## 5 THE BEST HONEYMOON & WEDDING ACCOMMODATIONS

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- **The Westin Casuarina Resort & Spa**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/503-7800 Honeymoon Concierge or 800/937-8461; [www.westincasuarina.com](http://www.westincasuarina.com)), on Seven Mile Beach, with landscaped grounds and romantic suites, offers one of the best honeymoon packages on Grand Cayman. The deal is for a 4-night minimum stay and includes a bottle of champagne, a 1-day jeep rental, a couples massage, and a sunset cruise on a ferry to Rum Point. This package costs from US\$2,132 to US\$2,939 per couple year-round. See p. 64.
- The **Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort**, Grand Cayman (☎ 888/236-2427; [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)), with its enviable location on Seven Mile Beach, doesn't offer honeymoon packages, but it caters to honeymooners nonetheless. The hotel can make all wedding arrangements for you if given sufficient notice. The price depends on your requirements. See p. 66.
- **Grand Cayman Beach Suites**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/949-1234; [www.grand-cayman-beach-suites.com](http://www.grand-cayman-beach-suites.com)), is the place to go if you're looking to spend your honeymoon in the most posh, luxurious hotel on Grand Cayman (complete with a first-rate golf course). The hotel staff is experienced at making wedding plans. See p. 62.

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## 6 THE BEST PLACES TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL

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- **Cobalt Coast Resort and Suites**, Grand Cayman (☎ 888/946-5656; [www.cobaltcoast.com](http://www.cobaltcoast.com) or [www.divetech.com](http://www.divetech.com)), is the best resort for divers on Grand Cayman (and great for nondivers as



well). Opening onto Boatswains Bay, in the residential community of West Bay, it is a charming, self-contained community that houses its guests in a series of well-furnished accommodations, including oceanfront suites. See p. 67.

- **The Retreat at Rum Point**, Grand Cayman (☎ 866/947-9135; [www.theretreat.com.ky](http://www.theretreat.com.ky)), opens onto a white sand beach located on an isolated, tranquil point. Although this condo complex is only 35 minutes by car from the bustle of George Town, it seems worlds away. See p. 76.
- **Morritt's Tortuga Club and Grand Resort**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/447-0309; [www.morritts.com](http://www.morritts.com)), is located on 3 hectares (7½ acres) bordering a beach at the eastern end of the island. The area around the condos offers some of Grand Cayman's best diving, but you need not be a diver to enjoy this secluded resort. See p. 75.
- **The Reef Resort**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/232-0541; [www.royalreef.com](http://www.royalreef.com)), a timeshare/condo complex, is situated on the remote East End, a 32km (20-mile) drive from the airport and a 45-minute trip from George Town. The large, luxurious beachfront units, each boasting a balcony, overlook serene Colliers Bay. See p. 76.
- **Walton's Mango Manor**, Cayman Brac (☎ 345/948-0518; [www.waltonsmangomanor.com](http://www.waltonsmangomanor.com)), set within a lush garden on 1.2 hectares (3 acres) of land on Cayman Brac's remote north shore, is an excellent B&B. See p. 160.
- **Almond Beach Hideaways**, Cayman Brac (☎ 866/222-8528; [www.almondbeachhideaways.com](http://www.almondbeachhideaways.com)), features two-bedroom villas that open onto a beachfront of white sand and coconut palms, guaranteeing tranquillity and privacy. See p. 160.
- **Little Cayman Cottage**, Little Cayman (☎ 800/235-5888; [www.caymanvillas.com](http://www.caymanvillas.com)), is a two-bedroom cottage set on a white sandy beach—the perfect hideaway. You'll have an instant home here, with room enough for six of your closest friends and family (or whomever you choose), plus a fully equipped kitchen. The only sound you'll hear is the pounding surf. See p. 176.

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## 7 THE BEST LUXURY HOTELS

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- **The Ritz-Carlton**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/241-3333; [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com)). At long last, and after many delays, Grand Cayman has a Ritz-Carlton worthy of its plush name. Set on both sides of a boulevard next to Seven Mile Beach, it feels like Europe in the tropics with a golf course. Only problem is, it's very expensive. See p. 62.

- **Grand Cayman Beach Suites**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/949-1234; [www.grand-cayman-beach-suites.com](http://www.grand-cayman-beach-suites.com)). This luxurious and stylish retreat opens onto one of the most beautiful stretches of Seven Mile Beach, 3km (2 miles) north of George Town. For golfers, the excellent golf course makes this the obvious lodging choice. See p. 62.
- **The Westin Casuarina Resort & Spa**, Grand Cayman (☎ 800/937-8461; [www.westincasuarina.com](http://www.westincasuarina.com)), also opens onto the sands of Seven Mile Beach and is set on its own luxurious grounds. This resort is so complete that some visitors virtually never leave the complex until it's time to catch their plane back home. With excellent facilities for watersports, golf, diving, and dining, it is among the top three resorts in the entire Cayman archipelago. See p. 64.
- **The Club at Little Cayman**, Little Cayman (☎ 345/948-1033; [www.theclubatlittlecayman.com](http://www.theclubatlittlecayman.com)), stands on lush grounds and affords the most luxurious living on this sparsely populated island. The private villas here open onto a beach, and the complex has the island's finest pool. See p. 175.

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## 8 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

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- **The Cracked Conch**, Grand Cayman (☎ 345/945-5217), is a longtime favorite and now better than ever after its post-Hurricane Ivan reincarnation, with vastly improved seafood and international cuisine. Of course, conch is the specialty, but you can also order the elusive turtle steak, served here because the endangered turtles are commercially raised on the island and not harvested at sea. See p. 84.
- **Kaibo Beach Bar & Grill**, Grand Cayman (☎ 345/947-9975), located at the Kaibo Yacht Club, serves superb international cuisine, often focusing on recipes from Louisiana. The fun, exciting Kaibo Beach Bar has a Polynesian setting that features flaming torches and multilevel terraces. The "Upstairs" restaurant is the gem here for dining and evokes a cross between a pagan temple and a tree house. See p. 88.
- **Grand Old House**, Grand Cayman (☎ 345/949-9333), is set in a converted plantation house south of George Town. The restaurant combines American, Caribbean, and Pacific Rim cuisine. Each dish is prepared exceedingly well, especially the fresh seafood and lobster. See p. 86.

- **Hemingway's**, Grand Cayman ((☎ 345/949-1234), is known for serving the finest seafood on the island, along with first-rate international cuisine. It features one of the most imaginative menus on Grand Cayman. Don't miss the catch of the day. See p. 87.
- **The Reef Grill at Royal Palms**, Grand Cayman ((☎ 345/945-6358), nestled in the Royal Palms at the heart of Seven Mile Beach, is one of our favorites for seafood. From the memorable chowder to the lobster-filled ravioli, the dishes here are prepared with fresh, top-quality ingredients and plenty of skill. See p. 91.
- **Captain's Table**, Cayman Brac ((☎ 345/948-1418), at the Brac Caribbean Beach Resort, is the most exquisite place to eat on Cayman Brac. It serves the finest quality American cuisine on the island, prepared with a deft hand. Enjoy your conch fritters and catch of the day outside by the pool. See p. 164.
- **Pirates Point Resort Restaurant**, Little Cayman ((☎ 345/948-1010; [www.piratespointresort.com/Food.html](http://www.piratespointresort.com/Food.html)). The best restaurant on Little Cayman, it serves international cuisine created by the restaurant's owner and manager, Gladys Howard, a graduate of Cordon Bleu in Paris. Try the smoked salmon cheesecake; you won't regret it. See p. 180.