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ARTISTS TO
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THE MUSIC ISSUE

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NEW YEAR
WELLNESS
& WORKOUTS

GO INSIDE
A CELEBRITY
ROCKER'S
MANSION

TRAVEL
GRAND
CAYMAN
ISLAND



FEATURES

{JANUARY 2015}



53

THE NEW NASHVILLE SOUND

Featuring Carrie Underwood, Brothers Osborne, Kate York, Will Hoge, and many, many more.

Edited by Katy Lindenmuth

66

HEAD FIRST

Dive into the fun on Grand Cayman Island.

By Kristin Luna

73

TIME OUT

Three ways to commit to better wellness in the New Year.

By Brettan Hawkins

ON THE COVER

Photo by
Jeremy Cowart

HEAD FIRST

DIVE INTO THE FUN ON GRAND CAYMAN ISLAND.

BY KRISTIN LUNA



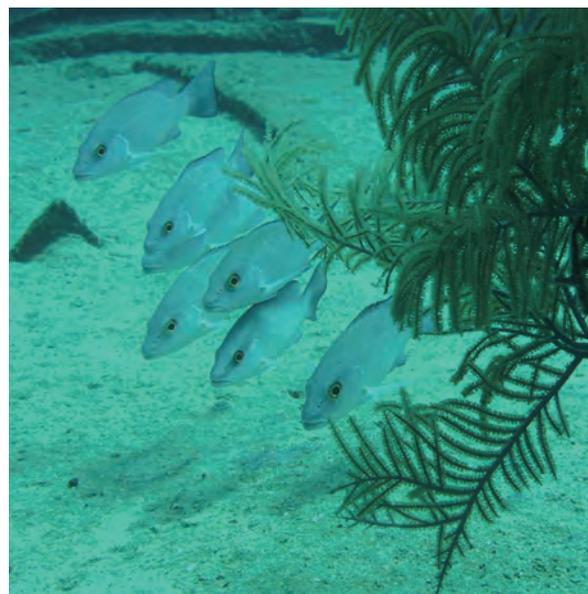


CAYMAN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM, KRISTIN LUNA

Shades of aqua and turquoise swirl together below, like colors in a Pollock painting. My flight attendant serves me another complimentary rum punch—part for the course on **Cayman Airways**—as we glide high above the Caribbean Sea, the placid water glittering like glass 40,000 feet below us. It’s just a 70-minute flight from Miami, yet I already feel worlds away from the frenetic energy of Nashville. It sinks in: For the next five days, the **Cayman Islands** are my reality.

I’m in town for the British territory’s inaugural **International Dive Week**, slated to be held each October, though in truth any week of the year could be classified as such in what is widely considered to be the Caribbean’s birthplace of recreational diving. The theme for the first festival is “**Legends and Lionfish**,” intended to shed light on the lionfish occupation that has overtaken much of the Atlantic Coast and the Caribbean in the past two decades. Lionfish culling is even a course option at the festival, enabling interested divers to take a short class on the environmental dangers this invasive species brings to the waters, as well as to learn proper removal techniques, which involve spearing the predator and safely bagging then tagging it with the Department of Environment.

I complete the classwork through **Cobalt Coast’s Divetech** shop and take to the sea to hunt for the garish species. I end up never wielding a spear, though, as I am more comfortable taking photos, spotting the stealthy fish among the craggy rocks, and pointing them out to my dive companions. (And, okay, I’ve never hunted anything in my life, so I find the culling part much harder than expected.) Our group returns to shore with a dozen in tow; the shop cleans the fish and cooks them up for dinner in the resort’s restaurant. In George Town, the territory’s capital, you’ll find lionfish assuming many different forms on restaurant menus, from battered and fried to ceviche. >>>



GET A HEAD START

If you want to cut back on time spent indoors while in paradise, you can complete the classroom portion of the course at one of Nashville’s many dive shops, such as **Dive Below H2O Scuba** (divebelowh2o.com), where the four-session classwork and four-session pool part of the certification process is \$275; add another \$200 if you opt to do your four checkout dives with Dive Below (or you can wait and tackle the requisite dives with any certified shop in the Caribbean). Another option for newbies is **Discover Scuba Diving** (padi.com), which serves as a three-hour crash course for those who want to test out the sport before financially committing to a full certification.



EAT HERE

Abacus

Atmosphere: Trendy
Cuisine:
Contemporary
Caribbean/Seafood
deckers.ky

Guy Harvey's Restaurant

Atmosphere: Casual
Cuisine: French
Caribbean/Seafood
guyharveysgrill.com

LUCA Restaurant

Atmosphere: Trendy
Cuisine: Italian
luca.ky

Michael's Genuine Food & Drink

Atmosphere: Trendy
Cuisine: New
American
michaelsgenuine.com

Mizu Asian Bistro & Bar

Atmosphere: Trendy
Cuisine: Sushi/
Asian fusion
mizucayman.com

Ragazzi

Atmosphere: Casual
Cuisine: Italian
ragazzi.ky



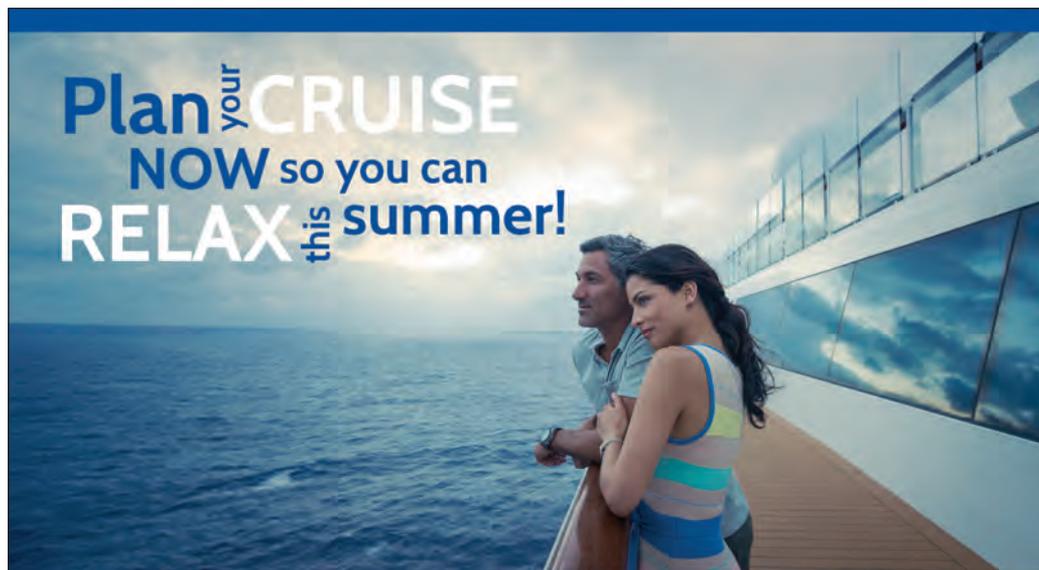
My other diving days in Grand Cayman are spent sampling the 365 sites scattered around the three isles. "A dive site for every day of the year"—that's the Cayman Islands' motto, as part of its **Dive 365** initiative. Perhaps the most famed of all, **USS Kittiwake** is a U.S. Navy submarine rescue vessel that was decommissioned in 1994 and later sunk to create an artificial reef, though there are a handful of other notable wrecks, as well as coral reefs and wall dives aplenty.

If you've never gone diving, there's no better place to get your fins wet. Cayman boasts 100-foot underwater visibility, balmy sea temps that average 86 degrees—no wetsuit needed, though I still advise one—and a healthy reef awash in coral and marine life. There are more than a dozen or so operators on the island, with **Red Sail Sports** being one of the biggest.

Vacationers with no interest in diving have plenty to do, too. There are watersports—from sailing to stand-up paddleboarding—off of **Seven Mile Beach**, and a day trip out to **Stingray City**, one of the island's most popular attractions, is a must. Snorkel with the phantoms of the sea or simply head out to the shallow sandbar by boat with **Captain Marvin's**, one of Grand Cayman's longest-running tour operators. Once there, a member of the crew will join you in the water, as dozens of docile rays surround you. You'll have the opportunity to pet or even kiss the creatures, as well as receive a free backrub from the graceful giants. Or you can simply stand back and take it all in—you won't be judged if you prefer to keep your distance!

There's only one road that rings Grand Cayman, and in under two hours—the island is just 22 miles long and an average of four miles wide, after all—you can take it to the other end of the island, **Rum Point**, where there's an outdoor bar and plenty of hammocks and loungers available for complimentary use. If you time it right, on your way back through town you can park at the port in George Town and climb aboard the island's lone pirate ship, the **Jolly Roger**, for an adults-only sunset cruise where the buccaneers are friendly and the rum punch flows freely.

Those who travel for the food will be dazzled by the culinary options here; many of the restaurants are scattered along the pedestrian ways of the 600-acre, mixed-use "town" >>>



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WINTER HIGHLIGHTS

It may be brisk here in Nashville right about now, but things are just starting to heat up down in the islands.

From January 15 to 18, **Cayman Cookout** (from \$100 an event) features celebrity chefs in a three-day culinary fest full of demonstrations, tastings, talks, and special meals.

National Heroes Day (free admission) comes to town on January 28 in commemoration of Grand Cayman's maritime history and culture, featuring a performance by the children's choir, uniform parades, and music from the Brass Band of Battle Creek.

On February 7, **Taste of Cayman** (\$35 a ticket) celebrates the diversity of the islands' food scene as dozens of local restaurants compete to be named "Cayman's Favourite Restaurant" and attendees taste the fruits of their labor.

Cayman Arts Festival (from \$30 a show) showcases classic performance arts and cross-cultural explorations via a host of events held from March 18 to 21.



called **Camana Bay**, which also boasts a few swanky lounges and upscale boutiques. For a sampling of the crème de la crème, nab a spot on **The Flavour Tour**, held every Wednesday night. This progressive dinner starts with a glass of bubbly at **West Indies Wine Company** and highlights Caymanian cuisine via four courses at four different stops. Arrive early and peruse the wares of the artists who set up shop at the weekly **Farmer and Artisan Market**, also taking place at Camana Bay each Wednesday afternoon.

Heading out from George Town the following Saturday, I see flights to the other islands the territory comprises—**Little Cayman** and **Cayman Brac**—come up on the airport monitor, while marveling at the fact that one small piece of land just 76 square miles in size could keep me so satisfied for five solid days. Maybe on my next visit, I'll have time to explore the island's more remote parts in depth, but for now Grand Cayman has given me everything I wanted in a destination: photogenic landscapes, underwater excitement, culinary adventures, and a longing to return—soon.

WHERE TO STAY

Divers tend to gravitate toward **Sunset House** (three-day, two-night dive packages from \$664 a night), one of the premier dive resorts in the Caribbean. For those seeking more luxurious digs, the **Westin Grand Cayman** (from \$383 a night) occupies prime real estate on Seven Mile Beach.

GETTING THERE

The easiest, most direct route to Grand Cayman is to fly through Miami. From there, **Cayman Airways** offers two direct flights to George Town daily. **American Airlines** also services the island several times each week.



CAYMAN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM, KRISTIN LUNA, JADE BROADS

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