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Seven Miles to Paradise

Grand Cayman seventh heaven for families and other sun-lovers

Any country that has a turtle in pirate garb as its logo should be a fun place for families to play.

It's the same mixture of animals and adventure that Disney movies have weaned us on for generations (think *Pirates of the Caribbean* meets *The Little Mermaid*). But the Cayman Islands are the real thing.

Grand Cayman Island's Seven Mile Beach is famous for its crescent of pearly white sand blending into the almost blinding "Cayman Blue" water. The famous beach (which is 5.2 miles long) was recently named "the Caribbean's Best Beach" by *Caribbean Travel and Life Magazine*. And the little remaining shoreline land left is currently selling for over \$30,000 US per foot?

Cemetery Reef, among others, lies just offshore making the water calm, and excellent for snorkeling, swimming and lazing in the sun. The average temperature of the water is 80°F (27°C) in winter. At its south end, Georgetown, the capital of the Cayman Islands, is a charming community of 20,000.

Like shopping? Georgetown is a jewelry shopping Mecca and is lined with funky restaurants where you can sample some local Caymanian cuisine, such as lip-smacking barbecued jerk ribs and chicken. Not to be missed is the fish market right on the beach where charismatic locals spin sea-yarns and sell fresh-that-day mahi mahi, snapper, and wahoo.

It's fun meeting the overwhelmingly friendly locals and nothing will make you feel immersed in the culture quicker than shopping for, and making your own, culinary creation. A feast of shrimp and mahi mahi with Cayman lime butter, or honey rum snapper along with key lime or coconut pie will have you fantasizing about moving here. The easiest way to get this "home away from home" feeling, is to stay in one of the many fully equipped condos along Seven Mile Beach.

Home away from home

While Seven Mile Beach is home to some of the biggest hotel and resort chains in the world, there is another option that fits most families much better. The condo. Along with full sized fridges where you can stock snacks and drinks, most have washers and dryers, TVs and DVDs, as well as separate bedrooms where kids can be tucked in at night, letting their parents have some quiet time and a night cap out on their sun deck. With privacy, space and convenience, families can spread out and relax in their own little oasis in paradise. Couples can even share a unit and the cost.

One of the most well appointed and secluded examples of a condominium resort is the Aqua Bay Club, located on the western end of Seven Mile Beach. The resort has the feel of an isolated island setting, yet it's located just minutes away from all the services anyone could need. And the sea view, is spectacular - the name is certainly appropriate.

At Aqua Bay Club, it's the little things that make a vacation condo feel like home. They provide cell phones and free wireless internet access so their guests can stay in touch if they want. But before it starts looking a little too much like home, Aqua Bay provides something we all wish we could have at our own house – daily housekeeping services. It is a vacation after all.

Lovers and other loafers

Grand Cayman can also be a good place to start families. Many couples come to the Caymans to marry or honeymoon, often bringing their friends and relatives. The island has many exotic beach locations as well as quaint chapels and churches for weddings. One location, the Grand Old House Gazebo, is set up so that ceremonies can be transmitted back home via the Internet.

Aqua Bay also provides an on-site manager to help arrange many activities, including weddings, golfing, diving, and local tours. But down-time isn't forgotten here – hatched huts and palm trees on the beach provide shelter from the sun and a perfect place to read a book, relax or take a nap.

But don't be surprised if Jack Sparrow is looking a little green with envy in your dreams.

IF YOU GO:

Cayman Islands Department of Tourism

www.caymanislands.ky

Aqua Bay Club

Toll free (reservations only) 1-800-825-8703

Website: www.aquabayclub.com

Email: abc@candw.ky

The family package, based on 2 adults and 2 children (under 12) in a two bedroom oceanfront condo for seven nights, rental car and all activities: Stingray City, Boatswain Beach, Dinner at Rackams, Heart of Cayman Tour (Pedro's Castle, Old Style Caymanian House, Queen Elizabeth Botanical Gardens, Pirates Cave, CayBrew (Local Brewery), Exclusive Residential area) from as low as \$899 USD taxes included.

By Chris Higgins and Margo Malcolm