



Enchanting Cayman!

By Dr Srividhya Jayant Iyer

It was that time of the year again! Time to go on an escapade somewhere far, far away from the daily hustle and bustle at home and work! Somehow, I never seem to tire of holidays, but then again, who does? And here was the opportunity to plan a vacation around *dear* hubby's Ophthalmology conference in Florida – whoever said one *shouldn't* mix business with pleasure?! That's right – business for the husband and pleasure for yours truly! And mind you, it wasn't as if I didn't deserve it –after all, planning a trip isn't quite the walk in the park, right? Right.

The Cayman Islands

We chanced upon the Cayman Islands while scouring the web for ideas on places near Florida for a quick getaway before the conference started. Affectionately referred to as just "Cayman" and known as "the islands that time forgot", the Cayman Islands (comprising of three islands, Grand Cayman,

Cayman Brac and Little Cayman) are tucked away under Cuba, in the western Caribbean Sea. They are coral outcrops and part of an underwater mountain range stretching towards Belize.

Cayman, a British Overseas Territory, is a tiny country. Of the three islands, Grand Cayman, about 35 km long, is the most developed and has an international airport with daily flights to and from several countries in the Caribbean, Mexico, Canada, the US, and even the UK. The other islands, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, are only 19 and 16 km long respectively. Put together, the Cayman coastline stretches over 160 km, gently caressed by crystalline blue waters. Needless to say, Cayman offers countless vantage points to take in the beautiful scenery, and plenty of opportunities for variety of water activities.

Most Caymanians are of British or African heritage. Cayman is also proudly cosmopolitan and people from all over the world, including the UK, the US, Canada, Central America and

Jamaica, make up its population of 50,000. The official language is English, which is spoken in a rather, shall we say, interesting mix of Jamaican, South American, Scottish and Irish accents all rolled into one. If you'd like a demo, feel free to grab hold of my husband (he mimics it well)!

With no taxes levied on foreign investments, it should be of no surprise that Cayman is an offshore financial haven, like Liechtenstein, and is currently the fifth largest banking centre in the world. The other major industry and important source of income in Cayman is tourism.

Oh, and one more thing about Cayman – the weather! It's a tropical paradise, much like Singapore. That meant that we could pack really light, leaving lots of room for shopping, which, naturally, is an integral part of every holiday, yes?

Cotton Tree Grand Cayman

This heavenly place happened to be our accommodation for the three nights that we spent in Cayman. A member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World™ and the only boutique cottage hotel in the islands, Cotton Tree comprises of four beautiful, plantation-styled cottages and is situated on the northwestern tip of the island, replete with a private beach on the Caribbean Sea. Each pastel-hued cottage is beautifully furnished with a living room, dining area, fully equipped gourmet kitchen, two bedrooms (with the most comfortable beds I've ever slept in!), a spacious walk-in wardrobe, a jacuzzi, a rain shower, and full amenities including three TVs, iPod docking station, Apple TV, and lots of books on food and travel. And the best part – you get to watch breathtaking sunrises and sunsets from the comfort of your cottage's private beach patio. As the Jamaicans would say, "Ya maan!"

The hotel grounds consist of lush, tropical gardens, which are immaculately maintained by the very kind and hospitable staff. There is also a small gym and a nice pool with an outdoor jacuzzi, where one can chill early in the mornings or late in the evenings (afternoons, however, proved too hot to chill...). The gourmet kitchen we had inspired me to cook, so we bought groceries from a nearby supermarket before I subjected my darling husband to some of my kitchen experiments. Fret not, he came away unscathed, and dare I say, content, even!

Things to do

Cayman offers plenty of activities to keep any type of visitor busy, be they scuba diving enthusiasts, couples looking to spice up their relationships, or business travellers just looking to unwind. Holidays here can be as adventurous as one chooses (or just as tranquil). The pristine waters offer opportunities for world class scuba diving, snorkelling, kayaking, sailing and many other water activities. Even for the inexperienced novice, there are several companies on the island offering one- or two-day diving lessons.



Our little cottage!



The world famous Seven Mile Beach



A majestic stingray glides past

We spent a lovely afternoon snorkelling in the crystal clear waters and looking at colourful corals and exotic fishes. We also visited Stingray City where you get to play with, feed, take photos of and give good luck kisses to these friendly sea creatures. This goes to show that you don't have to be a scuba diver to experience the underwater world. We took a submarine tour that brought us to the depths of the ocean floor (to almost 150 ft, or 46 m) and enjoyed views of coral reefs, plunging coral canyons and tropical fish in the Cayman National Marine Park, all from the comforts of an air-conditioned glass-walled chamber.

For those who prefer to stay on land, there are equally exciting activities. These include visits to the museums, turtle farm, or botanic gardens to see the endangered blue iguana, and hiking through unspoiled forests and exploring caves – you can be assured that you'll never run out of things to do! For a more tranquil experience, one can just sunbathe along the world famous Seven Mile Beach, a crescent of coral sand beach on the western shore. Alternatively, simply indulge and pamper yourself with world class duty free shopping in the capital, George Town.

Cayman is a food paradise too. There are many award-winning restaurants that offer everything from local Caribbean fare to a variety of Asian cuisines, with great ambience and waterfront dining options for a romantic night out. If simpler options are desired, there is no lack of seaside cafes, takeaways and fast food outlets to choose from. If all this doesn't catch your fancy, one can feel free to explore one's own culinary skills like I did!

With the unparalleled beauty of its waters and beaches, and an extensive range of activities to keep everyone entertained, Cayman is one of the most exciting and exotic vacation spots in the Caribbean. Our trip left us feeling relaxed,



A "stinging" back massage!

rejuvenated and revitalised, so I'm pretty sure another visit will soon be necessary. *Dearie, get cracking on your next research paper stat!*

Two useful websites to help plan your retreat

1. <http://www.caymanislands.ky> – complete information on things to do, recommended accommodation in Cayman, as well as flight schedules and information on getting there.
2. <http://www.caymancottontree.com> – the official website for the resort we stayed. **SMA**



Dr Srividhya and Dr Jayant Iyer's stay at the Cotton Tree Grand Cayman was made possible by Small Luxury Hotels of the World. SMA has partnered Small Luxury Hotels of the World to offer a special rate exclusive to all SMA members. Visit <http://slh.com/sma> to find out how you can indulge in an unforgettable experience.