

Little Cayman is widely considered as good as the diving gets in the Caribbean. So why hadn't we been there? It came down to getting over the hump of picking a resort (which sounds silly because they're probably all fine). There are lots of reviews of Pirates Point Resort on Undercurrent and the various SCUBA boards and the reviews are almost 100% strongly positive. But two issues held us back: 1) they only do two dives a day (possible optional night diving) – what's up with that? Doesn't fit our usual dive, dive, dive ... schedule. And 2) it's fixed price all-inclusive including an open bar. We don't drink much while diving and I didn't like the idea of subsidizing the heavy drinkers nor dealing with folks who got out of hand. But we liked some of their other features: 1) they offer great food (by all accounts); 2) they are sensitive to food issues (as in food allergies); 3) they do not cater to large dive groups so you are not likely to be the tag alongs on the boat or in the water.

So we took the plunge and reserved an ocean-front room (ocean-front rooms are un-air conditioned; other rooms and office/dining room/bar area are air conditioned) for a week and off we went. Here is what we found:

- 1) American Airlines had issues with getting us to/from Grand Cayman. First our flight from Miami was postponed for three hours and then it wasn't and left on time. Our flight back to Miami was cancelled but they put us on the earlier flight; we really had just enough time to make it (we found out when we checked in with American at the Grand Cayman airport).
- 2) The Grand Cayman airport leaves a lot to be desired. Very slow immigration. Security confiscated my small Phillips screwdriver (camera repair kit; US TSA had no issues with it). Very crowded waiting area with very few food options. Free wifi in the waiting room. Very confusing flight announcements/signs. It's hard to gauge how long to allow due to variables, but it's not a great place to spend time.
- 3) Cayman Airways flights were fine with nice Twin Otters that are in good shape with working ventilation systems. We were asked to send luggage back to Grand Cayman the afternoon before we departed to help them with load. Our luggage was next to the carousel the day we flew back; no idea if it was stored securely overnight or not. Some flights go via way of Cayman Brac so take longer.
- 4) The resort has a pool (which we did not use), a rocky beach (not a great strolling beach) and a shallow ocean for snorkeling (which others did but we did not).
- 5) The pace at Pirates Point is leisurely. Breakfast at 8 am. Gong rings about 9 am telling you to come to the vans for the drive (about 5 minutes) to the boat. The whole operation is not about rigid schedules. There is no limit on dive times; people were anywhere from under an hour to well over an hour. There are snacks on board (peanut butter and crackers, granola bars, potato chips, sodas and fruit juices).
- 6) You load the van with your dive bag. Gear may be left on the boat except for neoprene which is taken back for rinsing each day. They move your gear bag from the van to the boat and back. You handle your gear onboard; they are ready to help those who forget which way to line things up. You take your gear bag from the van and rinse your wet suit.
- 7) The boat has sufficient shade and a head. The head pump went out one day and was fixed by the next.

- 8) Safety is taken very seriously. There is always a captain on the boat during dives and at least one dive master in the water until all divers are out. Role call ensured everyone was on board.
- 9) Improving diver skills is taken very seriously. The dive masters had no hesitation in pointing out how you could improve your buoyancy, be safer, etc. No question that this can irritate those with lots of dives, particularly when coming from someone a fraction of your age. But (at least in my case), they were always right!
- 10) The dive guides are solicitous of your interests and quick to respond to questions.
- 11) Divers were divided into from two to three groups each lead by a dive master/guide.
- 12) Differing dive guides have differing critter finding and fish identifying skills. We dove mostly with Gay and she was great; but others also showed us fish and critters that we would not have found on our own.
- 13) The topography of the wall and reef was very interesting with loads of swim throughs. The reefs are in great shape. We didn't see the clouds of fish we were used to from Bonaire but we did see lots of fish, particularly lots of groupers.
- 14) We saw some big stuff – spotted eagle rays, including a pair, and a leatherback turtle complete with barnacles on its back.
- 15) Lionfish culling seems to be working reasonably well. Dive masters go out Wednesday night to hunt. And lionfish sushi tastes pretty good.
- 16) Lunch was ready when we returned around 2:30. Then hors d'oeuvres at 6:30 and dinner at 7:30. Seating is family style and food is buffet. If you have a food issue, they have separately cooked items for you. Yes, the desserts are amazing. As are Diane's sticky buns.
- 17) Back to our issues. While two dives a day is not a heavy schedule, this was the most relaxing dive vacation we've ever taken. Yes, some of the folks clearly drank a lot but we were so relaxed, it was never an issue.

Some of this would obviously apply to any of the resorts. We are very happy we went with Pirates Point. Two days after we returned, we reserved for next year.