

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

# Sustainable Travel & Ecotourism in Cayman Islands

The spectacular coral reefs that fringe the Cayman Islands are the islands' greatest natural resource. Strict laws prevent cruise ships from dropping anchor in the reefs near George Town and punish any entity caught tampering with underwater wildlife.

Grand Cayman has developed rapidly over the past 30 years, although new laws aim to curb large-scale development. Increasing emphasis is being put on low-rise construction of beachfront condos. The Ritz-Carlton, built in a series of multistory towers, required a special zoning permission and post-Ritz, these will be increasingly difficult to obtain. If you'd like to check into the "greenest" hotel on Grand Cayman, head for **Lighthouse Point**. The best eco-tours on Grand Cayman are offered by Geddes Hislop of **Earthfoot's Ecotours** ([www.earthfoot.org](http://www.earthfoot.org)). Geddes is a wildlife biologist, and he has a variety of mostly half-day walks and tours, including visits to the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park. His most popular jaunt is a nature walk tour, lasting nearly 5 hours and costing from US\$50 to US\$55 per person or US\$40 to US\$45 for ages 12 and under. A guided tour of the botanic park costs US\$55 or US\$45 per child age 12 and under. Customized tours can also be arranged.

All three of the Caymans are ideal for bike riding, and depending on your plans, you may not need to rent a car at all. Cayman Brac and Little Cayman are easily traversed by bike, and many hotels provide them free to their guests.

Each time you take a flight or drive a car, carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere. You can help neutralize this danger to our planet through "carbon offsetting" -- paying someone to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by the same amount you've augmented them. Carbon offsets can be purchased in the U.S. from companies such as **Carbonfund.org** and **TerraPass** ([www.terrapass.org](http://www.terrapass.org)), and from **Climate Care** ([www.jpmorganclimatecare.com](http://www.jpmorganclimatecare.com)) in the U.K.

Although one could argue that any vacation that includes an airplane flight can't be truly "green," you can travel internationally and still contribute positively to the environment. Patronize forward-looking hotels, restaurants, and businesses that embrace responsible development practices, helping preserve destinations for the future. An increasing number of sustainable tourism initiatives can help you plan a family trip and leave as small a "footprint" as possible on the places you visit.

### **General Resources for Green Travel**

The following websites provide valuable wide-ranging information on sustainable travel.

- **Responsible Travel** ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)) is a great source of sustainable travel ideas; the site is run by a travel industry spokesperson for ethical tourism.
- **Sustainable Travel International** ([www.sustainabletravelinternational.org](http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org)) promotes ethical tourism practices and manages an extensive directory of sustainable properties and tour operators around the world.
- **Carbonfund.org**, **TerraPass** ([www.terrapass.org](http://www.terrapass.org)), and the **CoolClimate Network** (<http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu>) provide info on "carbon offsetting," or offsetting the greenhouse gas emitted during flights.

**"Green" Hotels Association** ([www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com)) recommends green-rated member hotels around the world that fulfill the company's stringent environmental requirements. **Environmentally Friendly Hotels** ([www.environmentallyfriendlyhotels.com](http://www.environmentallyfriendlyhotels.com)) offers more green accommodations ratings.

- For information on animal-friendly issues throughout the world, visit **Tread Lightly** ([www.treadlightly.org](http://www.treadlightly.org)).
- **Volunteer International** ([www.volunteerinternational.org](http://www.volunteerinternational.org)) has a list of questions to help you determine the nature and intentions of a volunteer program. For general info on volunteer travel, visit [www.goabroad.com/volunteer-abroad](http://www.goabroad.com/volunteer-abroad) and [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org).