

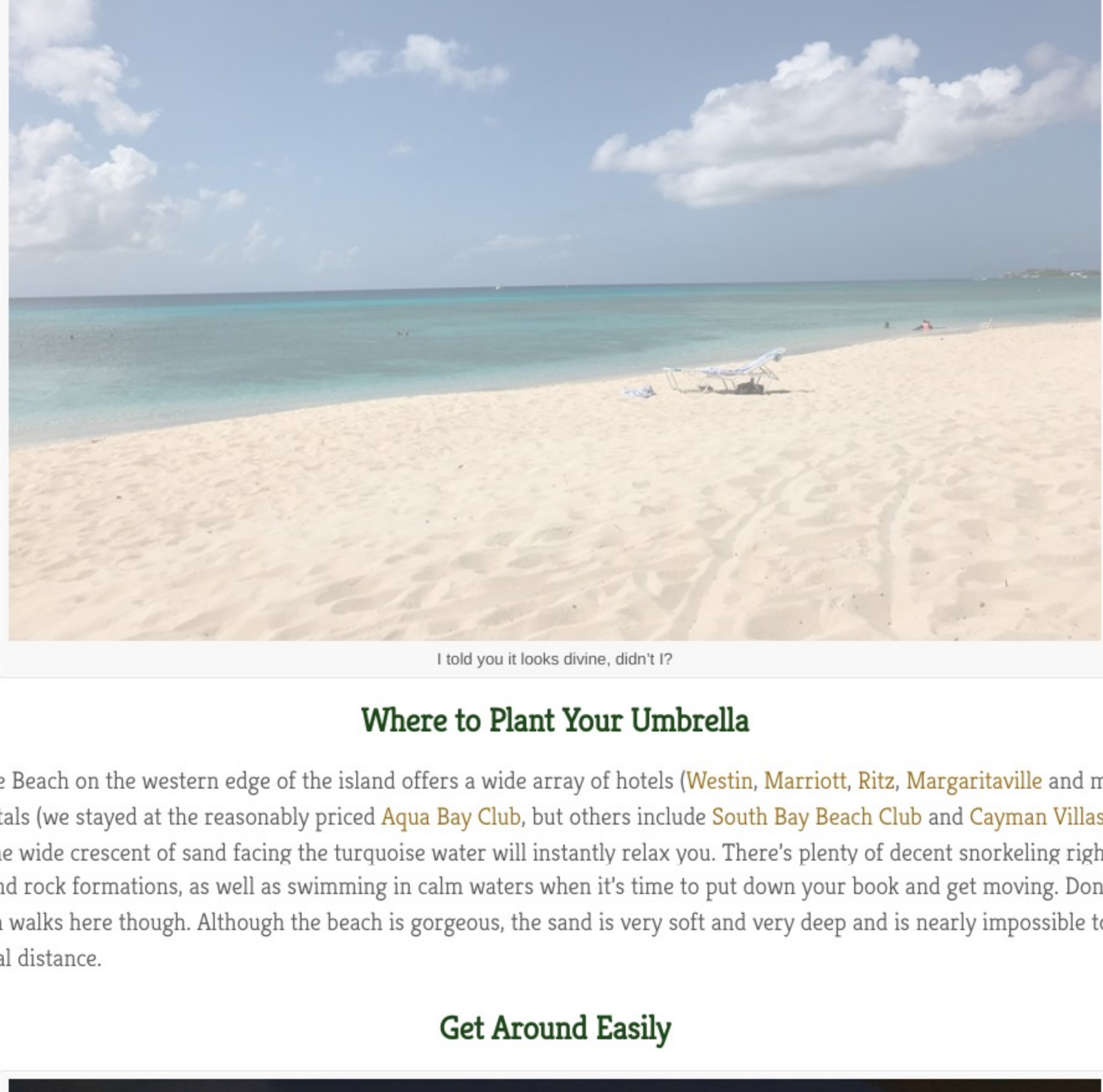
Tips for Active Travel in Grand Cayman

by A GUEST WRITER on 2019/02/05
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The **Caribbean** is world renowned for its beautiful crystal clear waters and laid-back atmosphere. However, in such a wonderful selection of islands and destinations to visit, how do you choose where to go? Well, if you're looking for some beautiful beaches where you can do more than just lie down all day (although that doesn't sound so bad), today's guest contributor, Brette Sember, is showing us how to enjoy active travel in Grand Cayman. Looks divine!

Active Travel in Grand Cayman

You've seen one Caribbean island, you've seen them all, right? Actually, each island has its own unique personality, charm, quirks, and speed. Grand Cayman manages to combine that laid back 'island time' feel with plenty of activities to get you off your beach longer, all while offering you the conveniences you would normally find in South Florida. It's perfect for boomer travel whether you stay for a week or a weekend.



I told you it looks divine, didn't I?

Where to Plant Your Umbrella

Seven Mile Beach on the western edge of the island offers a wide array of hotels (Westin, Marriott, Ritz, Margaritaville and more) and condo rentals (we stayed at the reasonably priced **Agua Bay Club**, but others include **South Bay Beach Club** and **Cayman Villas**), to fit any budget. The wide crescent of sand facing the turquoise water will instantly relax you. There's plenty of decent snorkeling right offshore here around rock formations, as well as swimming in calm waters when it's time to put down your book and get moving. Don't plan on long beach walks here though. Although the beach is gorgeous, the sand is very soft and very deep and is nearly impossible to walk on for any real distance.

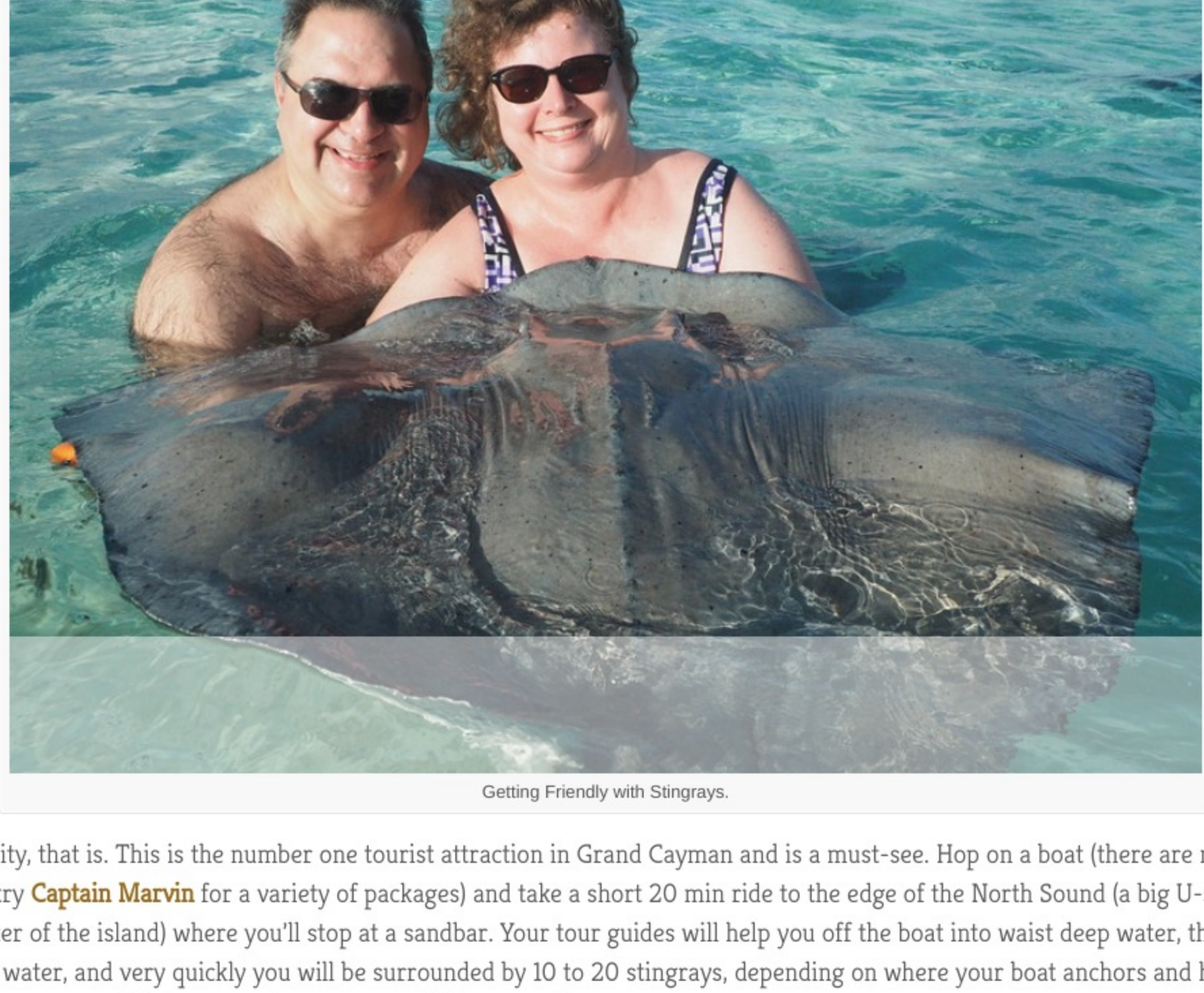
Get Around Easily



Dinner at the Lobster Pot is a must!

You need a car if you're staying on-island and you will be pleasantly surprised to find that Grand Cayman has used its wealth to build excellent roads and infrastructure: very little roughing it is required. The entire 7 Mile Beach and George Town areas feel like South Florida with smooth highways, bridges, and streetlights, unlike some of the bumper rides you've had if you've driven other islands. There are plenty of grocery stores of Whole Foods quality (go to **Kirk's** for large selections). Grand Cayman has its share of amazing seaside restaurants (don't miss the **Lobster Pot**, where the staff feeds tarpon just off the outside deck each night, and Paradise Seaside where you can have the entire place to yourself once the cruise ships leave for the night). You can also pick up delectable rotisserie chicken at the crazy busy **Chicken Chicken** to enjoy as a picnic or in your room.

Go to 'The City'

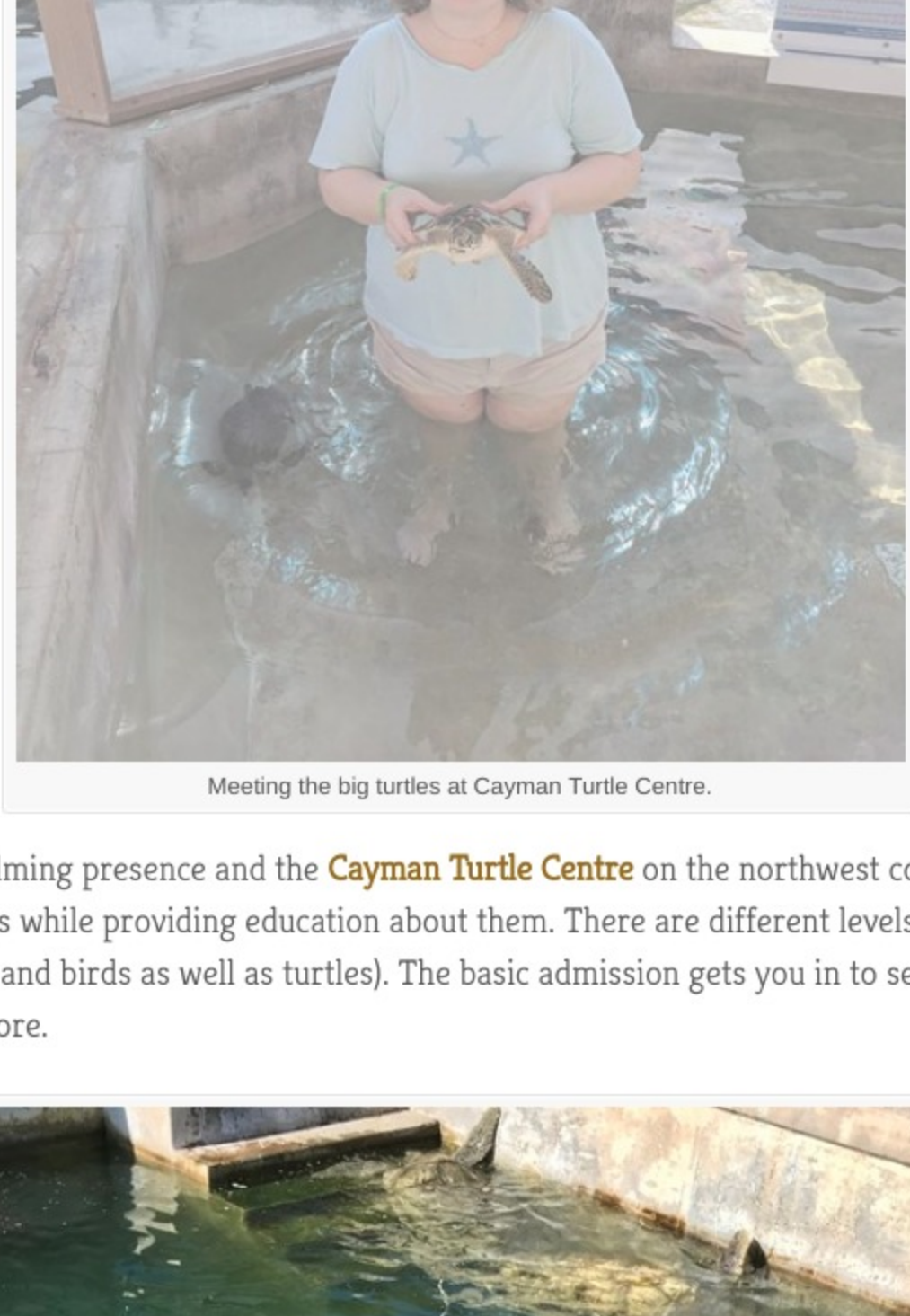


Getting Friendly with Stingrays.

Stingray City that is. This is the number one tourist attraction in Grand Cayman and is a must-see. Hop on a boat (there are many tours available, try **Captain Marvin** for a variety of packages) and take a short 20 min ride to the edge of the North Sound (a big U-shaped bay in the center of the island) where you'll stop at a sandbar. Your tour guides will help you off the boat into waist deep water, they'll put bait in the water, and very quickly you will be surrounded by 10 to 20 stingrays, depending on where your boat anchors and how many other boats are around (take a morning tour to avoid the crowds).

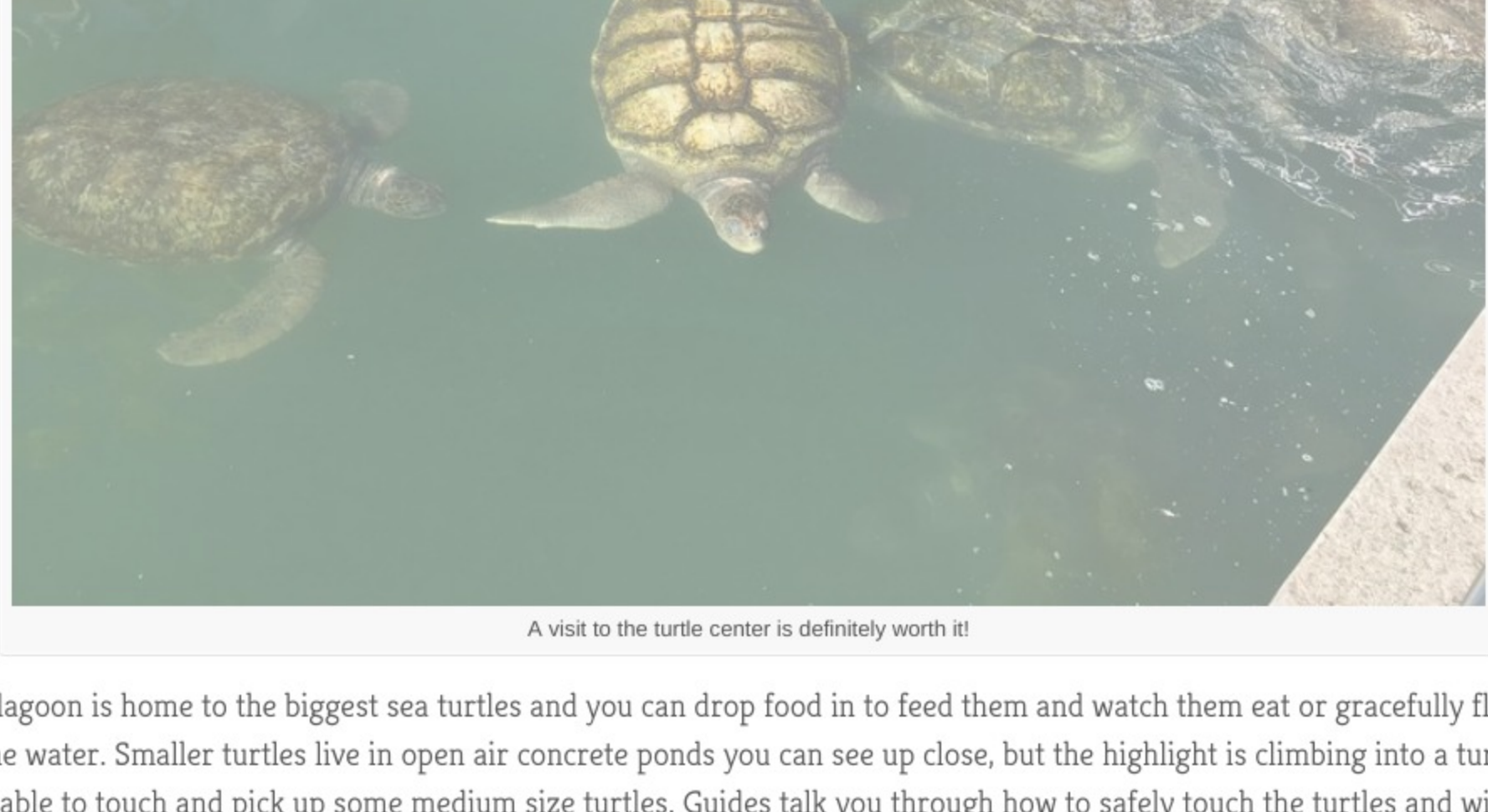
The rays are huge – almost as wide as a human arm span – but very gentle. Our guides knew them each by name and personality. Hold bait underwater in your flat palm and they will take it from you (and you'll feel their teeth brush harmlessly against you). Hold still and the rays will swim around, bumping against you, asking for food. They've also been trained to give photo opps. You can pose with them lifted out of the water against your back or propped up in the water in front of you. You're also told to kiss them and the crew may lift them out of the water and let them spray you. I was frankly terrified about their stingers with the poisonous barbs (all I could think about was Crocodile Man Steven Irwin being killed, but that was by another larger, more aggressive type of ray). If you move slowly, shuffling your feet in the sand as you walk (called the 'stingray shuffle'), and don't touch their tails, there is little danger, we were assured. You'll never forget how soft their skin feels, not scaly like you might imagine. They are otherworldly, but in a gentle kind of way. Make sure to buy the photos the tour takes so you can have proof you swam with stingrays.

Get in Some Turtle Time



Meeting the big turtles at Cayman Turtle Centre.

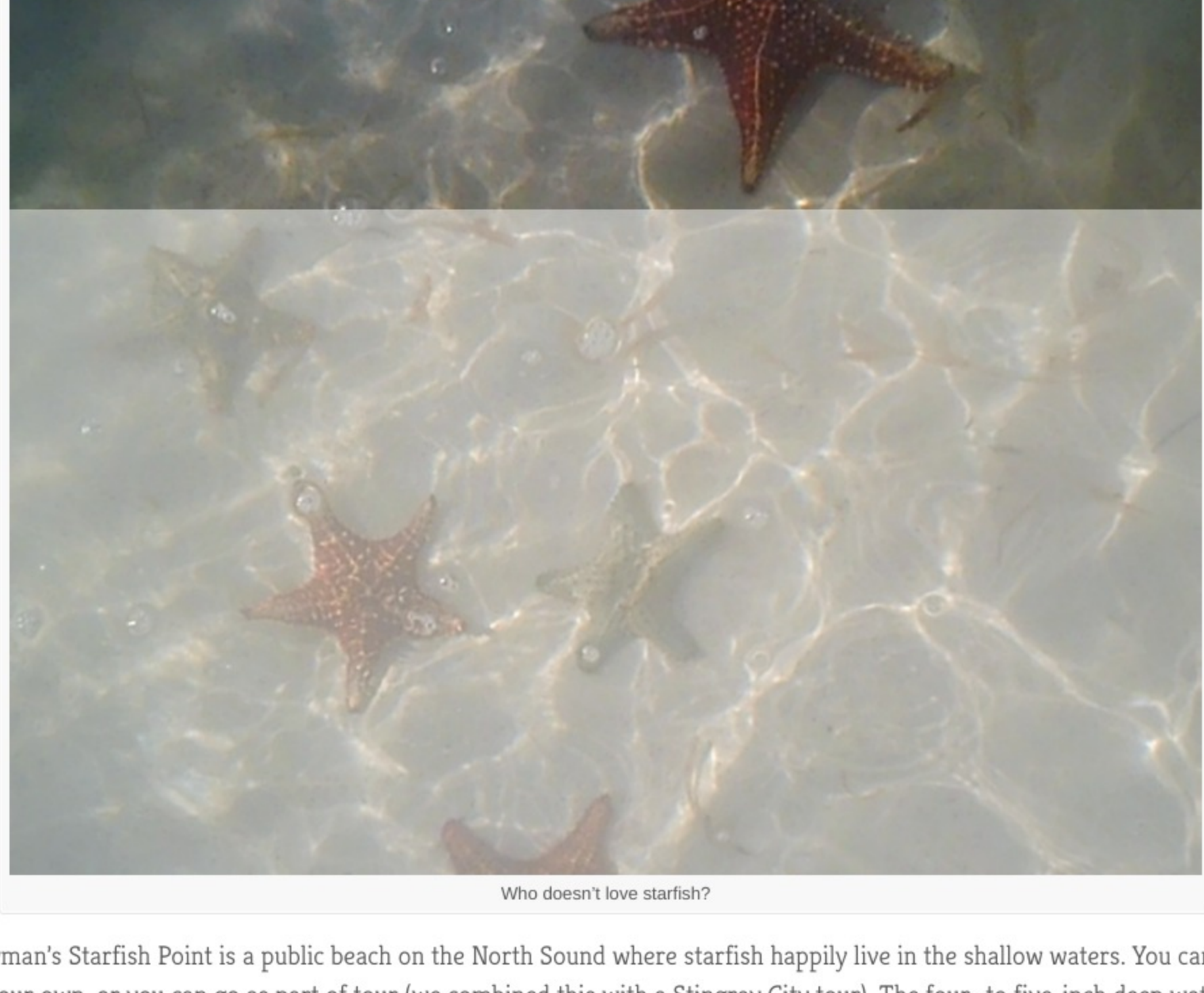
Sea turtles are another majestic calming presence and the **Cayman Turtle Centre** on the northwest corner of the island works to conserve and protect these beauties while providing education about them. There are different levels of admission (depending on whether you want to see alligators and birds as well as turtles). The basic admission gets you in to see all the turtles, ranging in size from a few inches to five feet or more.



A visit to the turtle center is definitely worth it!

The large lagoon is home to the biggest sea turtles and you can drop food in to feed them and watch them eat or gracefully float through the water. Smaller turtles live in open air concrete ponds you can see up close, but the highlight is climbing into a turtle pond and being able to touch and pick up some medium size turtles. Guides take you through how to safely touch the turtles and will snap pics for you. This is a popular spot with cruise ship passengers, so try to go when they first open to avoid the biggest crowds.

Count the Legs



Who doesn't love starfish?

Grand Cayman's Starfish Point is a public beach on the North Sound where starfish happily live in the shallow waters. You can drive there on your own, or you can go as part of tour (we combined this with a Stingray City tour). The four- to five-inch deep water is clear and calm, and the bottom is sandy, but the starfish can be tricky to spot. They like to hang out near pier pilings or clumps of seaweed. You've got to get in the water and wade to find them. Once you do, don't lift them out of the water, but feel free to gently pick them up under the water. You can feel them move across your hand as you experience how soft their legs get when they relax.

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Snorkeling in Grand Cayman

Although snorkeling is quite good from many Seven Mile Beach locations, there are several wrecks to visit (the Cali and Gamma) if you want to go offshore. Excellent snorkeling is also available at Eden Rock in the heart of George Town or at Cemetery Reef on Seven Mile Beach (there's parking on the street and you walk through the cemetery to get to the beach). If you're new to snorkeling (or want a better experience than you've had), stop in at a dive shop at one of the plazas in George Town and pick up a full-face snorkel mask – no more struggling with fogged up masks or worrying about keeping the snorkel in your mouth. You can breathe through your nose or mouth with ease and can focus on the fish and coral, not on whether you're going to suck in water.

Shopping in Grand Cayman

If you'd like to do a little shopping, skip the cruise ship madness in the heart of George Town (unless you actually need overpriced t-shirts, flip flops, and sunscreen) and instead head to **Pure Art Gallery and Gifts** just south of the George Town. This original Cayman cottage is family-owned and packed to the gills with handmade treasures made on the island. Jewelry, art, ornaments, sculpture, tchotchkes and more abound. Plan to spend some time here to really be able to see all the goods that are crammed in the four-room building. We went twice because there was so much to take in.

Take a Break from the Beach

If you're waterlogged, take a tour of the **Mastic Trail**, a four-mile round trip hike of old growth forest and mangrove swamp where you can bird watch and check out the local flora (it can be a bit humid though, away from the shore breezes). Another non-beach option is to tour **The Crystal Caves**. The hour and a half tour takes you under the island inside three caves to see stalactites and stalagmites as well as the plants and animals of the lake.



You little devil, you.

A truly quirky landlocked stop is a go to Hell in West Bay. This small area of black limestone rocks is surrounded by a boardwalk and kitschy photo ops, as well as a souvenir store and a Post Office where you can send mail postmarked from Hell.

Other Caymanian Sights



A trip to this part of the world won't be complete without seeing the shoe tree!

Be sure to take a drive on Sea View Road near East End to see the blow holes. All along the road at the shore are rocks that shoot water up in the air during high tides. There is plenty of parking on the roadside and lots of easy viewing from the sidewalk or by heading down short staircases. On your way there, stop and see the **Shoe Tree**, a seaside tree that people randomly adorn with shoes. Maybe you will want to leave one of your old shoes there to make your mark.

Grand Cayman offers the best of both worlds – idyllic Caribbean beach relaxation paired with fun activities that will connect you to the plants and animals of the island.

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Brette Sember is a dedicated travel shopper who blogs about her finds at Travel Shopper Expert. She is the author of *The Gluten-Free Guide to Travel*.

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