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GRAND CAYMAN



Guide to Fish Species and Sea Creatures in Grand Cayman

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Grand Cayman is a world-class diving destination for many reasons. There are numerous famous shipwrecks and countless stunning geological formations to explore.

Then there's the famous visibility of our waters, which can reach as far as 100ft (30m). And the water is warm too, with an average temperature of between 78 and 82°F (26 and 28°C).

But our focus in this guide is on another incredible factor that draws divers to Grand Cayman from all over the world: the dazzling array of fish species and other marine life.

If you want to learn more about the stunning fish and other sea creatures you can see when [scuba diving in Grand Cayman](#), scroll down to find out more!

Do you have any questions for the Red Sail Sports team? Please don't hesitate to [get in touch](#) for the all answers you need!



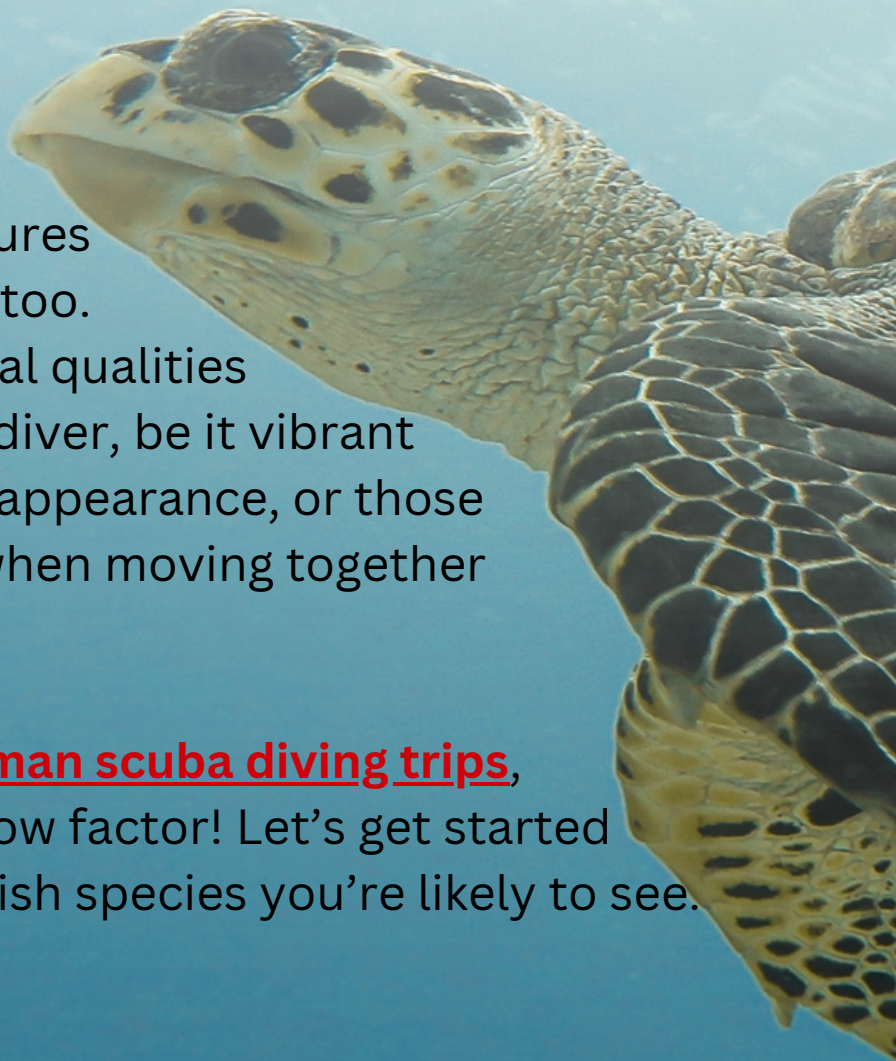
Fish Species in the Cayman Islands: What to Expect

The sea surrounding the three Cayman Islands is a haven for hundreds of fish species. Current records show that our country's waters are home to a little under 500 different species of fish.

Of course, we can't cover them all in the guide! Instead, we have picked some of the favorites we love to see on diving excursions around our island. And these choices aren't limited to fish—they include all kinds of marine life.

Our team has chosen the following sea creatures for all kinds of reasons too. Some have unique visual qualities that will captivate any diver, be it vibrant colours, an interesting appearance, or those that look spectacular when moving together in large numbers.

As with our [Grand Cayman scuba diving trips](#), we've prioritized the wow factor! Let's get started with some of the best fish species you're likely to see.





**Some of Our Favourite Fish
Species in Grand Cayman...**



Juvenile Spotted Drum

Eques punctatus

Among our favorites, these little daredevils are often found beneath overhangs, twirling in mesmerising, tight circles.

Picture a black-and-white 'C' with long, elegant fins on the top and bottom, all wrapped up in a tiny body.



Puffer Fish

Tetraodontiformes

Normally quite shy, puffer fish tend to hide under ledges, except during mating season when they rise two or three feet above the reef.

These charming creatures come in various sizes, from a few inches to an impressive two feet. They tend to have gray skin and striking black eyes.



Lionfish

Pterois

An exquisite sight, Lionfish have vivid orange and red stripes to complement their ornate fins.

However, they're an invasive predatory species, devouring small fish at an alarming rate. As such, local divers work diligently to control their population.



Blue Tang

Paracanthurus hepatus

These stunning dark blue fish, sometimes resembling deep purple, graze over the reefs like a herd of sheep.

They play a crucial role in maintaining reef health by feasting on algae that grow on the coral.



Jawfish

Opistognathidae

Picture a small white fish with a sunny yellow face, dwelling in the sandy seabed. These friendly fish live in pairs in separate burrows.

Jawfish sit outside their burrow waiting for food to pass. But if they feel danger, like an approaching diver, they possess the ability to swim backwards. In fact, they're one of only a few fish species that can do this.

They're aptly named for their habit of guarding developing eggs in their mouths.



Black Durgon

Melichthys niger

Part of the Triggerfish family, the Black Durgon has a striking black body with subtle white stripes.

But if you take a closer look, they also boast hidden splashes of purple, blue, and brown. Try and see if you can pick out their vibrant colors as they hover above the reef.



Silversides

Atheriniformes

Schools of these small silver fish appear on Grand Cayman's walls, shallow reefs, and wrecks every summer, creating a truly mesmerizing spectacle.

Silversides gather in massive schools, creating a protective mass against their many predators.

But these schools also create a stunning underwater event, the 'silver rush', which attracts divers from all around the world.

Eden Rock, on Grand Cayman's west coast, is one of the favorite dive sites for these small, shimmering fish to gather.

Looking for more dive site recommendations? Check out our blog [The Best Scuba Diving in the Cayman Islands](#) to find out some of our favorite spots.

Other Reef Creatures in Grand Cayman

Grand Cayman's waters are teeming with a diverse range of marine life that extends far beyond fish species.

We included this diversity of animals in our list of [reasons to dive in the Cayman Islands](#).

Below, we've picked out a handful of our favourite reef creatures that we regularly encounter while diving.



A close-up photograph of a Reef Squid (Sepioteuthis sepioidea or Sepioteuthis lessoniana) showing its head and mantle with iridescent colors. The squid's skin is covered in a shimmering pattern of blue, green, and yellow, with a prominent vertical band of iridescence. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some greenish structures.

Reef Squid

Sepioteuthis sepioidea/Sepioteuthis lessoniana

Prepare to be amazed by these mesmerizing creatures! Reef squid communicates through a spellbinding, ever-changing ripple of colours. Ordinarily, however, they are brown.

They usually float above shallow reef sites in an orderly, flying formation.



Green Moray Eel

Gymnothorax funebris

These eels may seem green, but it's their blue hue combined with a yellow mucus covering their bodies that creates the illusion. Some can grow up to four to five feet long.

You can find these creatures at sites through Grand Cayman's waters, usually under overhangs and ledges or gracefully swimming in search of food or companionship.

Green Moray Eels breathe with their mouths open, showing off rows of razor-sharp teeth. But despite their size and fearsome appearance, they're gentle and docile.



Eagle Ray

Myliobatidae

Witness the sheer elegance of arguably the most beautiful ray in Grand Cayman's waters.

You'll often spot them feeding in sandy areas between reefs or exploring wall sites in groups of fours and fives.

You may also see Eagle rays around the world-famous USS Kittiwake wreck. If this kind of site interests you, we think you'll love reading our [**Guide to Shipwreck Dives in the Cayman Islands**](#).

Admire their navy blue or black upper bodies adorned with distinctive white markings that resemble circles or dashes. Their underside is a more uniform creamy white.

Eagle rays have a distinctive shovel-shaped nose that they use to forage for food in the sand, typically small crustaceans or garden eels.

Sea Turtles

Chelonia mydas (Green)/*Eretmochelys imbricata* (Hawksbill)/*Caretta caretta* (Loggerhead)

Grand Cayman is renowned for its turtles. Did you know that the Spanish name for the Cayman Islands is 'Las Tortugas'? This translates into English as 'the Turtles'.

Unsurprisingly, then, you can find an abundance of turtles on dive sites, walls, and shallow reefs all around Grand Cayman.



You're most likely to encounter Green or Hawksbill turtles. These creatures vary in size but tend to grow to two or three feet long.

During the early summer mating season, you can also see massive Loggerhead Turtles cruising the reefs.

These wonderful animals can grow as long as five feet and weigh more than 500 pounds. Some even show signs of their long, adventurous lives — which can span decades — with barnacles clinging to their shells.

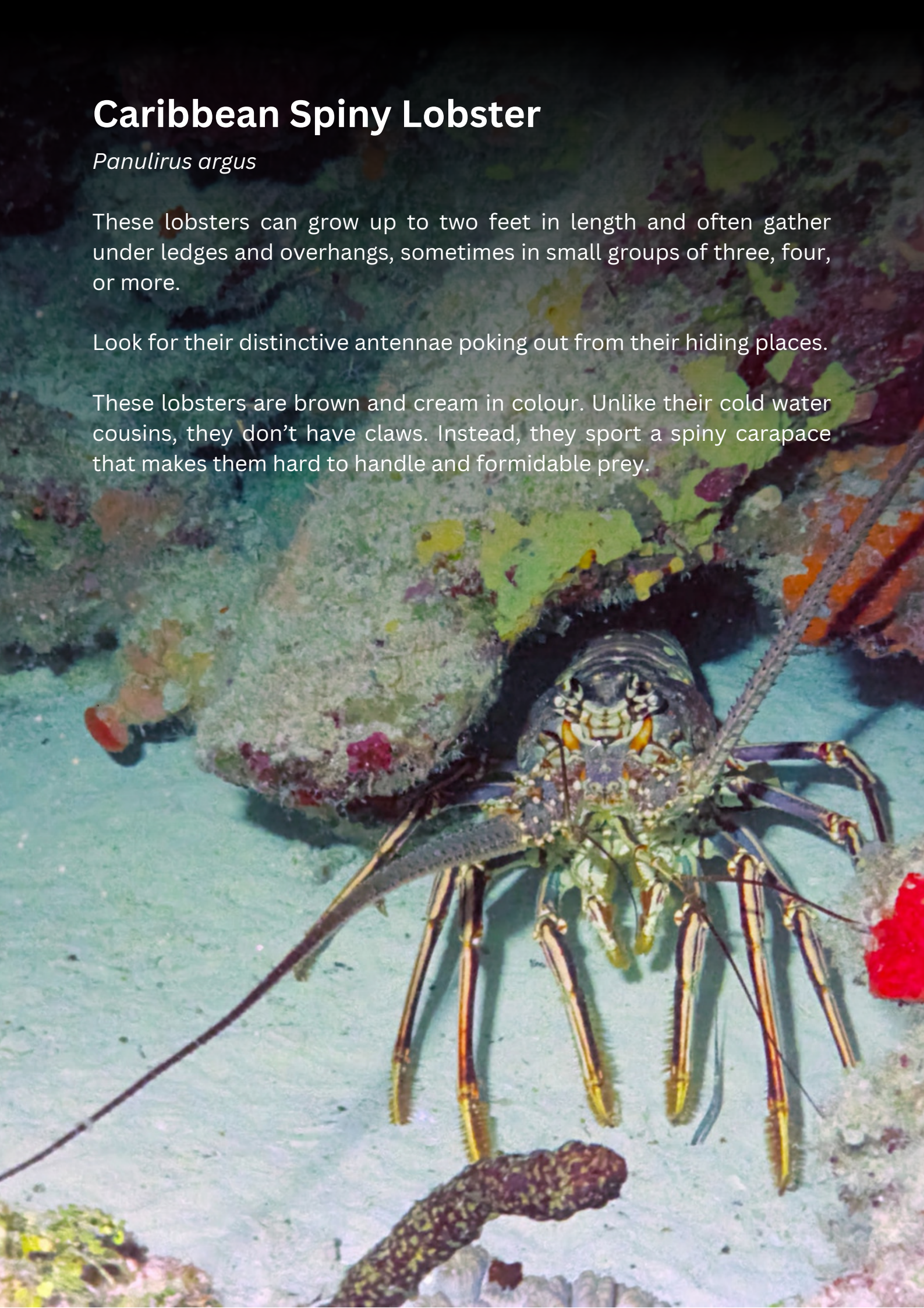
Caribbean Spiny Lobster

Panulirus argus

These lobsters can grow up to two feet in length and often gather under ledges and overhangs, sometimes in small groups of three, four, or more.

Look for their distinctive antennae poking out from their hiding places.

These lobsters are brown and cream in colour. Unlike their cold water cousins, they don't have claws. Instead, they sport a spiny carapace that makes them hard to handle and formidable prey.



Sharks

Various species

While diving in the Cayman Islands, keep your eyes peeled for various shark species, including Black Tip, Caribbean Reef, Hammerhead, and Nurse sharks.

Reef sharks are a common sight on many Cayman sites, especially on the East End and some North Wall locations, where they join Hammerheads.



If you're interested in exploring the renowned North Wall, check out our [2-Tank AM Grand Cayman North Wall Dive](#) and learn more about the adventures waiting for you.

Nurse sharks, known for their close encounters with divers, frequent the West side, particularly on shallow sites. Some may approach divers as they have unfortunately been fed lionfish by others in the past.

Did You Know that Coral Reefs are Animals?

You read that right! While they may look like plants, corals are actually animals.

While they are sessile, which means they 'take root' by attaching themselves to the ocean floor, they also don't produce their own food as plants do.

So despite not having faces or distinctive body parts, corals are part of the animal kingdom.

These varying formations have tiny arms like tentacles that capture food floating by, sweeping it into their microscopic mouths.

We'll stop the science lesson there! Let's focus on our top picks for the coral formations you can find in Grand Cayman!

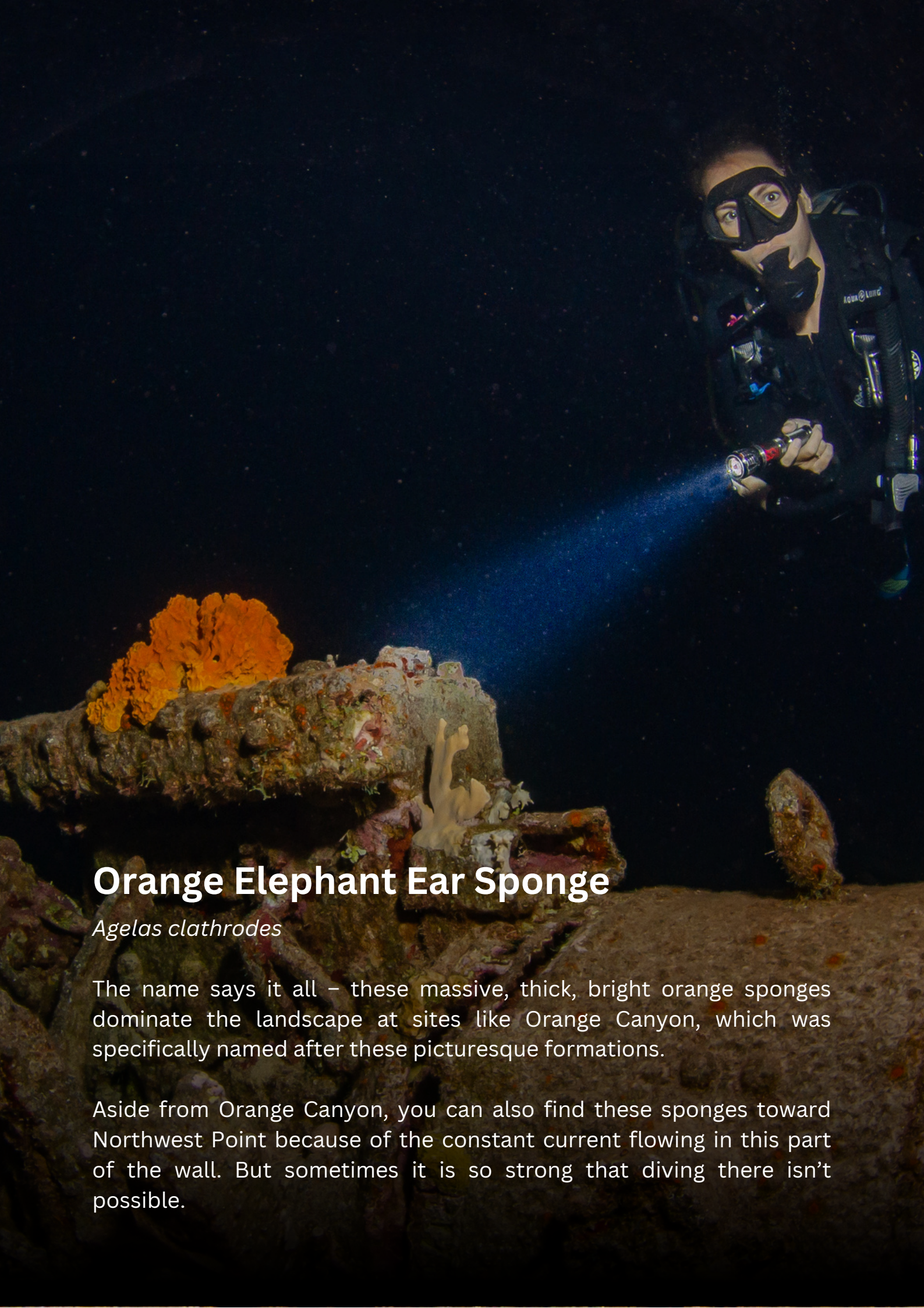
Corals and Sponges in Grand Cayman

An underwater photograph of a coral reef. In the foreground, a large, light-colored, porous sponge dominates the view. Behind it, several tall, branching corals rise from the seabed. The water is clear and blue, with some small fish visible in the distance.

Our beautiful underwater world is adorned with a breathtaking array of corals and sponges. The Cayman Department of Environment has established 'coral trees' to nurture fresh coral for future transplantation.

These consist of frames suspended from the sand with a float holding the 'tree' upright. You can find these on sites like Aquarium, Lone Star Ledges, Paradise Reef, and Killer Puffer.

Read our [Guide to Coral Reef Diving in Grand Cayman](#) to find out more about exploring our island's breathtaking reefs.



Orange Elephant Ear Sponge

Agelas clathrodes

The name says it all – these massive, thick, bright orange sponges dominate the landscape at sites like Orange Canyon, which was specifically named after these picturesque formations.

Aside from Orange Canyon, you can also find these sponges toward Northwest Point because of the constant current flowing in this part of the wall. But sometimes it is so strong that diving there isn't possible.



Black Gorgonia Fans

Iciligorgia schrammi

These striking fans decorate the top edge of wall sites, particularly where currents flow.

They're abundant on sites such as Orange Canyon and Big Tunnels on the West side, and plenty more on the North Wall and East End.

Black gorgonia fans are favourite subjects for underwater photographers, particularly as they often hide juvenile fish in their branches.

Our [1-Tank PM East Grand Cayman Dive](#) includes shallow reef dives in the East End. Read the itinerary and see if this excursion is the perfect fit for you.



Elkhorn Coral

Acropora palmata

Again, the name says it all with Elkhorn Coral! The coral head resembles the antlers of elks and they grow to impressive sizes.

Light brown in colour, they're predominantly found on the south side of the island, but you can also spot them at other dive sites around Grand Cayman.



Staghorn Coral

Acropora cervicornis

True to their name, these corals sport branches that resemble stag horns. Divers can encounter this coral on all sides of the island.

They are among the corals being cultivated on the previously mentioned 'coral trees'.



Barrel Sponge

Xestospongia muta

This is another coral with a helpfully descriptive name. Imagine a large, dark brown, open-top barrel, with a textured outer surface.

These giant sponges serve as natural filters. Water passes through the outside of the sponge, allowing it to feed. This process creates a 'dusty' appearance as particles adhere to the exterior.

On night dives, when there's no other source of light, you can witness bioluminescence like green sparks when water is gently wafted over them — a truly magical experience.



We Cover All Your Grand Cayman Diving Needs!

We hope you've found this Guide to Fish Species and Sea Creatures in Grand Cayman informative and inspirational.

We think you'll love reading our [Ultimate Guide to Diving in the Cayman Islands](#) next. It's just as packed with essential information that you can only find from local experts on Grand Cayman!

Are you ready to start planning your adventure in our underwater world? Browse our [scuba diving trips in Grand Cayman](#) and find out more about our range of excursions.

Remember, you can [contact us](#) with any questions you may have. We're here to help you have the kind of Grand Cayman diving experience you've always wanted!

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