

WEDDING CELEBRATIONS



For her first ever foray into Caribbean diving, MELISSA HOBSON would have preferred to have free rein over her diving schedule. However, being forced to find other activities than the renowned, *Kittiwake* wreck opened up a range of breath-taking alternatives... not all of them diving!

Above: A big Caymans turtle.

Above centre: In a kayak ready to paddle to Bioluminescence Bay.

Far right: Enjoying the Cayman Islands' famously clear water.

Right: Sting ray snogged for luck – really?

HALFWAY ACROSS THE WORLD and well out of my price range, I have to say that the Cayman Islands was not my first choice of destination for a week in the sun.

But because a family wedding was taking me to the largest of the islands, Grand Cayman, I had to make the most of what it had to offer – both above and below the ocean's surface.

A little research quickly enabled me to narrow down the unmissable dives around Grand Cayman, but I was equally quickly disappointed by diary clashes between my other organised activities and my dive-shop's schedule.

Apparently, being bridesmaid at my brother's wedding took priority over diving the renowned *Kittiwake* wreck

(Tuesday) and I couldn't miss my flight home (Thursday), even if it was to experience Ocean Frontier's X-Dive – a one-of-a-kind dive along the Cayman Trench which, reportedly, gives you the greatest chances of seeing sharks and "the big stuff".

Although disappointing, with 365 officially named dive sites in the Cayman Islands (240 of those around Grand Cayman), I hoped I'd find plenty of other dives worthy of note.

FOR OUR FIRST DAY on the island we had chartered a boat to take the wedding party to famed Stingray City. This is supposedly "the world's best 12ft dive" but, rather than donning tanks, we were there to meet these gentle creatures on

foot, standing waist-deep in the water.

The area of shallow sandbars that is now a legendary tourist attraction was once just a place where fishermen cleaned their catch. The usually shy sting rays began gathering to feed on the fish-guts, and were soon associating the sound of a boat-engine with food.

Decades later, tourists can experience not merely seeing but getting up close to these impressive creatures.

As we waded through the water, large rays began gathering around us, clearly aware that they might be in for a feed.

They circled us and brushed against our legs, and we were encouraged to hold them and, rather bizarrely, to give them a kiss in return for seven years' good luck.

Despite being someone who usually