

Two Weeks in Grand Cayman

All Ashore Who's Going Ashore – Not...

Quarantine – It's better on a boat!

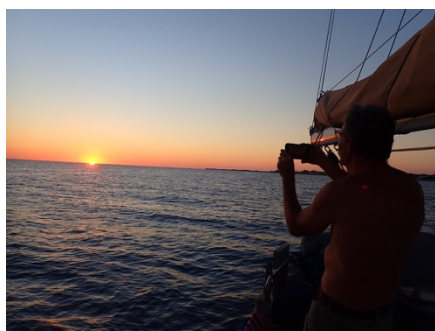


George Town Harbour patrol checked on us every day while we were at Spotts Anchorage. They also advised when it was safe for us to move to West Bay.

As we mentioned in our last post, we had a smooth check-in with Cayman Island authorities, with the only glitch being that Vicki tested (+) for COVID on arrival. That bought us a mandatory period of 10 days in isolation. Had we been tourists staying in a hotel, public health officials would have placed bracelets on our ankles giving them real-time updates of our location to verify that we were following isolation protocols. However, since we were isolating on our boat, they waived the bracelet requirement, and we were instructed to inform Port Security on the VHF radio any time we changed

anchorage, which we did.

We spent the first few days on the south side, at Spotts Bay, moored in 35' of the clearest powder bluer water we've seen anywhere. During the morning swims, we saw all kinds of marine life, such as colorful tangs, triggerfish, and even a barracuda. And we were treated to glorious sunrises and sunsets, including several elusive *green flashes* with one lasting several seconds. It was an idyllic anchorage, really, until the wind and swell shifted from the NE to the SE, and then Spotts became like a mixing bowl. We were moving, sometimes violently, in all three axes. Regrettably and expensively, we took a wave in through the open engine room portlight one morning, and the gush of saltwater damaged our solar power charge controller, putting it out of commission.



(L) Retrieving a bed sheet that blew overboard on a windy day at Spotts. The water is 35' deep at this location, but it looks like you can reach down and touch the bottom.
(R) One of several *green flash* sunsets we saw while anchored at Spotts.

For sure, it will cost close to a *boat buck* (~\$1000) to replace the damaged controller; and wouldn't you know it, there are no suitable replacements here in Grand Cayman (where prices are ~20% higher than in the USA), and we would likely have to pay an additional 21% import duty if we have a replacement shipped in. Beyond the time and money, our solar panels are useless without a functioning controller, which means we have had to run the generator for 2-4 hours almost every day to keep the batteries topped up.

Seeking refuge from the southeasterly swell, we spent the next two nights moored in West Bay, just off of George Town, the capital of Cayman Islands. The water was just as pristine there as it had been at Spotts, even if the ambiance wasn't as *naturale*, located as we were within sight and sound of George Town's hustle and bustle. We made an initial attempt to circle around to the expansive North Sound, center of cruising life in Grand Cayman, but the wind freshened to 20kts as we rounded Boatswain's Point at the northwest corner and we elected to return to West Bay and wait for conditions to improve.



The view from our mooring at West Bay. There wasn't much here to hold our attention after several days at Spotts. That said, local guidebooks say there is great diving here, and we saw quite a few charter dive boats stop here for dives with their clients.

Entering North Sound is not for the faint of heart, and local cruising guides advise to NEVER enter at night or when the weather is rough. It is a shallow, shoal-ridden but sheltered 5 square mile bay, of sorts, formed by a barrier reef that extends from the northwest tip of Grand Cayman to Rum Point on the northeast side. There are no charts for safe passages into and around North Sound because the coral is constantly growing and changing, and storms shift the bottom contours over time. However, there are three small gaps in the reef through which vessels can enter, the safest of which, Main Channel, has an average depth of just 7' (*AFS draws 6'!*), and once inside the reef you have to use visual coral-sighting skills to zig and zag around the many coral heads near the cut.



Vicki on the bow using her *visual coral-sighting* skills to help us zig and zag our way through the coral heads guarding the entrance to North Sound.

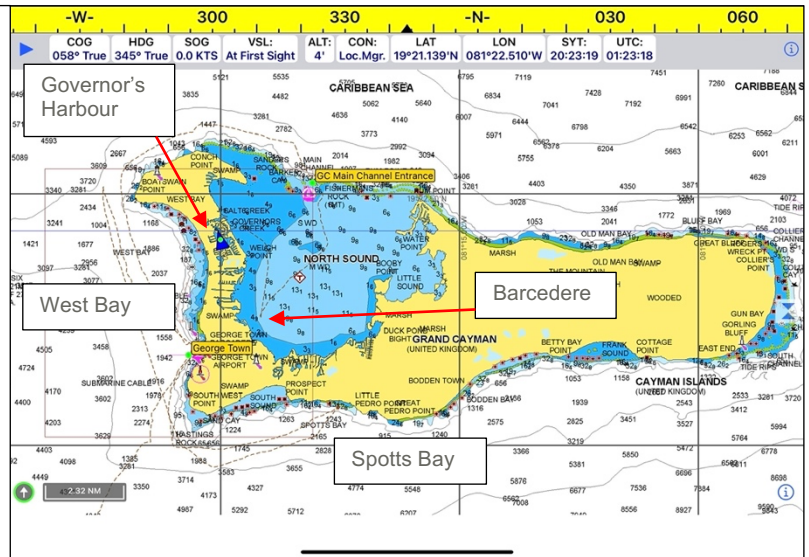


We did just that when we entered after our first week in isolation, on a beautifully calm day with the sun high overhead making the coral heads all around us stand out and look ominously closer to the water's surface than they actually are. And it is definitely spooky having waves break a boat length or less on either side as you slowly and carefully transition from the sea side to the sound side of the barrier reef. Vicki did a great job on the bow, however, signaling for us to turn left or right to avoid hitting the jagged corals. I don't think either of us took a normal breath until we were well south of an imaginary line between Morgan's Harbour to the west and Kaibo Yacht Club to the southeast, a point where one cruising guide said that "as a general rule" there are no more coral heads.

During our two weeks in isolation, we spent five days on a mooring at Spotts Bay on the south side followed by two nights in West Bay. From there, we sailed and motored around Boatswain's Point to enter the Main Channel cut into North Sound, spending one night anchored in the Barcedere section on the back side of George Town, and then two weeks anchored in Governor's Harbour.

We were tested three times for COVID – Spotts x1 and Governor's Harbour x2 – and each time public health officials rendezvoused with us near to where we were moored or anchored.

The waters on the south side of Grand Cayman are some of the clearest we've seen anywhere, and the marine life below the surface is teeming. The same with the entire west coast; in fact, there are many dive centers that advertise beach entry dives. We found the North Sound waters variable – dull green with lots of floating Turtle Grass in the southwest corner, brilliant crystal blue near the barrier reef, and clear green in Governor's Harbour, but unimpressive compared to other spots on the island.



We spent the first night in North Sound anchored ~1/2nm off George Town Barcedere, as the back side of George Town is called. But for all of its hype, this part of North Sound wasn't to our liking. The water was a dull green color and there was quite a bit of grass and weed drifting by making it yucky for swimming – so much grass, in fact, it clogged the raw water intake strainers for several of our cooling systems.

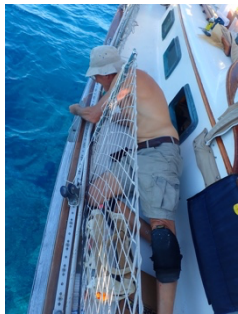


The next day we moved to Governor's Harbour, a semi-manmade lagoon on the back side of West Bay. The dregs from this former swamp were used to build up the surrounding lands, upon which developers constructed resort compounds, canal-front housing projects, shopping centers, and the Cayman Islands Yacht Club. We anchored in



the center of Governor's Harbour, and it served as our home for the last week of isolation.

Head Down, Butt Up, and More



As anyone who's spent time with boats knows, they are a lot of work. With no place to go while in isolation, we

turned to tackling as many maintenance and repair items as we could using the tools and supplies we had aboard. Our first project was to diagnose the problem with the autopilot and try to fix it.

We discovered the vintage 1996 12-volt motor that drives the hydraulic pump had failed – the motor we had rebuilt in St. Lucia less than a year ago. We have been carrying a spare motor and pump on board ever since, and we hoped we could swap them out. Unfortunately, however, they were not plug-n-play, and we were missing several critical adapter fittings. More about that later.

Next, we turned our attention to the leaks we discovered in two deck fittings on the passage from Panamá. Removing, cleaning, and re-bedding the midship chock on the port side took two half-days, as did re-bedding the middle shroud chainplate. We went aloft and fixed a faulty connection that caused our steaming light to blink while underway giving us both flicker vertigo at night. Vicki also did corrosion control and polishing of all the stainless steel. And the list goes on...

Oddly enough the main reason our replacement pump was not plug-n-play has to do with international units of measurement. Our new Raymarine pump was made in the UK (for international distribution), and its fittings are milled with ¼" British Standard Pipe (BSP) threads; however, every other hydraulic fitting in our American-built boat is threaded with ¼" National Pipe Standard (NPT) threads, the American standard, or 3/8" flare fittings, which is common for high pressure systems. Raymarine was thoughtful enough to include 3 BSP-to-NPT adapters with the pump, but they did not include any adapters for the peripheral bypass valve that must be used with the pump in sailboats (but not necessarily for powerboats with hydraulic steering systems). And, of course, even though the Cayman Islands are in the British Commonwealth, there wasn't a BSP-to-NPT adapter to found on the island. So, we had to order 4 more adapters from Raymarine, which meant another 5-10 days delay in fixing our autopilot.

None of the above is meant to sound like complaining. It's just the way it is when living on a boat. And a few days later, slowly but surely, everything started to come together. The parts we ordered from Raymarine arrived in just 5 days's time. We were able to get new hydraulic hoses made to order while we waited. From that point on, it was just a lot of *head-down-butt-up* time installing the new kit and then testing it.

Neighborly Neighbors

Meanwhile, we remained peacefully at anchor in Governor's Harbour. Exercising on deck or in the water every morning. No contact delivery of food and an occasional restaurant meal. Taking Saylor, who is not permitted ashore by the Cayman Department of Agriculture, on a dinghy ride about the harbour every day. In addition, upon learning of our quarantine status and extended delay waiting for parts, one kindhearted gentleman whose home overlooks the anchorage and who paddled close by us on his stand-up paddleboard (aka "SUP") every evening, brought us fresh-baked bread from his home, and a bottle of chilled wine – twice! And a second gentleman, a kayaker, brought us two fresh conchs that we made a delicious salad with. And, even as I write this, Chip in S/V ORION passed close by to say we are welcome to tie our dinghy at his dock whenever go ashore for groceries and supplies. And if all that's not enough, almost every morning



brings us another brilliant sunrise and every evening brings another dazzling sunset.



One of many spectacular sunsets we saw while quarantined at anchor in Governor's Harbour, Grand Cayman Island.