

Cayman special for flight attendant

01 July, 2011



Val Kegel, a flight attendant and creator of www.passengerpicks.com, was awarded by the Cayman Islands Tourism Association as an Honorary Ambassador. *PHOTO: Submitted*

by Hannah Reid, *Cayman Compass*

If you have ever flown into Grand Cayman from Atlanta on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday, then you know Val Kegel. She's the friendly blonde flight attendant handing out brochures of what to do, see and eat in Grand Cayman.

Mrs. Kegel, a flight attendant, has been flying to Grand Cayman for years, but it was only in 2008 that she actually left the airport.

"Because the stop is so brief before we turn around and fly back to Atlanta, I only get to see the airport," she said. "From interacting with my passengers, I had fallen in love with the Cayman people, but really didn't know the islands. But then one day, two years ago, my airplane spent the night here, so I did too." Even without ever leaving the airport, however, Mrs. Kegel got to know the islands through conversations with her passengers.

"I love talking with passengers on my airplane, and find myself asking questions about their experiences," she said. "One thing about passengers [is]

they'll always tell you 'what's hot and what's not.' After jotting notes about their favourites, I realized that many passengers would really appreciate knowing what previous passengers felt were their best experiences. So that birthed my Fun Fact Sheet that I hand out on the airplane."

Earlier this year, Mrs. Kegel started her own website, www.passengerpicks.com, so that she may spread both her own experiences and those of others to visitors who do not fly with her.

"My website goal is ... to give my Cayman Islands passengers a source to find what others recommend while planning out their vacation or business travel experience," she explained. "The response has been overwhelming."

As a result of her commitment to creating a positive experience to visitors, Mrs. Kegel recently was named an Honorary Ambassador by the Cayman Islands Tourism Association. "I am honoured and humbled to have the honorary

ambassador distinction," she said, "but to me the most rewarding part of my job is the interaction with my passengers and enhancing their experiences in the Cayman Islands."

Mrs. Kegel and her husband have themselves become regular vacationers to Grand Cayman, exploring all of the attractions and dining options her passengers have described over the years. "The truth is, there has been so much to do and so many wonderful people I've met on Grand Cayman that I haven't made it to Little Cayman or Cayman Brac yet," Mrs. Kegel admitted. So, should we ever worry about our high-flying ambassador changing to a different route?

"In the airline business you 'bid' each month for your schedule, and it's awarded based on seniority," Mrs. Kegel said. "Since I have 38 years seniority, I usually get my first choice. And I always choose Cayman first."