

don't enjoy sleeping in warm humid conditions ask for a room with A/C — a limited number are available.

**Southern Cross Club, October 1999, Sue and Jay Hopper, Woodinville, WA.** Vis: 70 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 83 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. From our first email with Peter @ Southern Cross the whole experience was wonderful. Very small operation but rooms, diving and friendly staff is the best I have encountered. It was very laid-back, no phones, no decisions, great rooms, very nicely decorated. Meals were varied and very good. Staff was above great. Storms affected diving, but that is typical in all of the Caymans. Still, the best for the Caribbean. For anyone who likes to dive, stay in nice places but knows how to be entertained by simple things like conversation and meeting new people; loved it. We were always the first in the water and the last out. Our last dive of the trip was 1 hour and none of those back on the boat complained. Dive staff was very respectful of our experience. They were aware but never rushed us. (Ph: 345-948-1099, Fax: 345-948-1098)

**Southern Cross Club, December 1999, Bob Greaves, Bonita, CA.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: with reasonable limits, back with 500 #. Stayed and dove with Southern Cross in '92. The rooms and facilities are much improved. An enjoyable place to stay. In December air and water were both 80 degrees. Vis at max was 80 degrees.

Corals, sea fans, some black coral are in good condition. During my week max of six divers on boat. One day only two divers were taken to dive-masters special location (outstanding!). Dive facilities and personnel first class. San Diego to Little Cayman is a 2-day trip. One day made the trip to the Brac and the Russian wreck. Rather broken up and only so-so.

**Southern Cross Club, May 2000, no name.** Vis: 100 to 30 ft. Water: 81 to 83 degrees, calm and flat, choppy, surge. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: nothing past 100. Lots of bugs, (they were out of Avon's Skin So Soft); was told island fogger truck was broken; dining room way too hot; sweating at every meal. Not comfortable at all; such a shame.

## CUBA

While American citizens can visit Cuba, passport warnings advise that it's "not recommended," and American companies cannot legally do business with Cuba because of a U.S. trade embargo. Most trips, therefore, are booked through Canadian or Mexican tour operators. Street signs in Cancun and Playa del Carmen offer four-day trips to Cuba for as little as \$300 U.S. . . . Dive operations are generally well-run, causing resorts on Cayman and Cozumel to shake in their fins at the thought of Cuba opening up to the U.S. dive market. . . .

**Faro Luna Diving/Faro Luna , Cuba, June 1999, Sandy & Jan Easton (jockweiler@cwcom.net), Sandbach, Cheshire.** Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 Fahrenheit, choppy no Currents. I'm a dive instructor and my wife is a divemaster. We arrived into Varadero Airport and had organised thru Scuba Cuba, a Taxi to meet us. To my eternal surprise it was there and ready to go ! On this trip we encountered nothing to prevent the smooth flow of our journey. The taxi to Faro Luna on the South Coast took over 3 hrs. (with a pee stop included) through some very interesting country including sugar and tobacco crops and various small agricultural towns. We were struck by the friendliness of the people who would positively go out of their way to help. Rural Cuba still has cowboys who ride to work along the road and some of the oldest 'working' vehicles I have ever seen ! The buildings of the towns are very dilapidated having had little or no upkeep since the Russians took their money away some years ago. Altho' that said, investment from Canada and Spain is beginning to make a difference in the bigger towns/cities, particularly Habana itself (Havana). Everything is very reasonably priced at the moment, but you must not expect to get 5 star cuisine . Food in Cuba is very much a necessity rather than a pleasure, though nothing was inedible and they try hard with what's available. If you really want, you can seek out a posh restaurant or two in Habana, but you will pay thro' the nose for that pleasure ! English is spoken, but the further away from

Habana you get the less fluent it becomes. Faro Luna Hotel is a small operation but has everything there and they try hard to get you what you want. The meals are at set times and are basic.

The dive operation is just next door and is well run. They have a small boat which will take up to 8 divers comfortably and since the trips only take 5 mins, and you suit up on the dock, you could probably put up with more aboard. There is a wall with chimneys and chutes just off-shore, not much fish life (mostly on your plate) but lots of corals and small beasties. We were in the hands of a very able guy called, yes you've guessed it, Fidel. A very fit ex-military diver who liked to stay that way and could be seen out running morning and evening . He was efficient, friendly, and above all able, yet not overbearing. He covered all local safety aspects during a 'stilted' conversation in the 2 languages and made sure that we understood. There were some French and Argentinean divers there at the same time. He led most dives in the beginning but after making sure of the divers' various abilities he concentrated his services where they were really required — a most amenable character. The wall dives are spectacular but deep and may involve a short decompression, so not for beginners, but if you like coral caves and such then this place will feed your imagination. The coast at that point is rocky so no shore diving . If you decide to give them a try, then make sure you take some time off to visit the town of Trinidad and do

spend a couple of days in Habana itself. **(Scuba Cuba: e-mail [divecuba@aol.com](mailto:divecuba@aol.com); website [www.scuba-cuba.com](http://www.scuba-cuba.com))**

**Hotel Ancon (Trinidad), December 1999, no name, San Francisco, CA.** Vis: 60 to 90 ft. Water: 78 to 79 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: limits. The food in Cuba is bad; never eat at Hotel Ancon. A Communist all-inclusive is a bad idea. Gulag-Ancon type of food; stay at private residence. **(Regent Holidays, 6205 Airport Road, Bldg. A, Suite 1200, Mississauga, Ontario Canada L4V 1E1)**

**Scubacan, September 1999, George Milna, Summerville, SC.** Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 85 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 150 ft. **(888-799-CUBA (2822), 416-927-1257; Fax 416-927-85951; [info@scubacan.com](mailto:info@scubacan.com); website [www.scubacan.com](http://www.scubacan.com))**

**Scubacan, Hotel Colony, January 2000, Kathleen and Richard Rankhorn, Crystal Lake, IL.** Vis: up to 100' most days. Water: 75-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: Time and depth limits but relaxed as week went

on. Wish we had known the unpredictability of Cubana Air. Arrived in Toronto to find out flight was 4 hours later than planned. That seemed to be the theme throughout the week. Scubacan very helpful, most of the flight arrangements were beyond their control. Nine people in a really cool biplane from Havana to Isle of Youth. Great way to see the countryside. Hotel Colony was probably in its heyday pre-revolution. Not many upgrades since. Service was friendly and accommodating. All food buffet style, plentiful, repetitive, basic fare a meat choice, chicken or pork, and a fish as main entrees. Lots of fruit and salads. Package deal included meals except for the last night in Havana. Bring medical supplies for the hotel doctor as she also services the surrounding area, and they are desperate, aspirin, first aid creams, bandaids, anything to spare. Make sure they give it directly to the doctor otherwise, it ends up on the black market. One dive operation on the island. Very accommodating. Larry and Roman were great divemasters and their English was pretty good. Bring your own gear as the shop has limited supplies, and they are well used. Boat rides were about an hour on the fastest boat (Triton). Divemasters gave depths and bottom times. The same group stayed together all week. Permanent moorings at each site. Blue cave the best site, up to 140 ft. Abundant fish, beautiful corals that were undamaged. Great walls with chimneys. Lots of lobsters, crabs, barracuda. Occasionally a spotted eagle ray, sea turtle, sting ray, juvenile

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drum, and even a scorpion fish. Divemaster accommodating to places we wanted to dive and night dives. 2-3 dives/day. Rio Jibacoa and Sparta, two wreck dives — Russian freighters given to Cuba far target practice sunken in 20-30 feet of water. Great for exploring and long bottom time, many fish. Lunch either on the boat or at a restaurant near the sites run by the dive operation, buffet style and similar to food at hotel. Lunch included in package, pop or bottled water in US dollars, beer on boat for the end of the day. Opted for additional dives versus tour of island and ended up on cattle boats which adds about 30-45 minutes to the same sites as the faster boats. Strong military presence, they are always on the docks when the boats leave and arrive. One day in Havana to explore. People are very friendly and very poor. Most everything can be bought in US dollars. A place to visit before it opens to tourism by America.

**Scubacan, Cuba Hotel Colony (Isle of Youth), January 2000, Kathleen and Richard Rankhorn, Crystal Lake, IL.** Vis: to 100' most days. Water: 75-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: Time and depth limits but relaxed as week went on. Wish we had known the unpredictability of Cubana Air. Arrived in Toronto to find out flight was 4 hours late. That seemed to be the theme through the week — they flew when they felt like it. Scubacan was very helpful, most of the flight arrangements were beyond their control. Nine people in a really cool biplane from Havana to Isle of Youth. Great way to see the countryside.

Hotel Colony was probably in its heyday pre-revolution. Not many upgrades since. Service was friendly and accommodating. All food buffet style, plentiful, repetitive, basic fare: meat, chicken, pork and fish as entrees. Lots of fruit and salads. Package deal included meals except for the last night in Havana. Bring medical supplies for the hotel doctor as she services the surrounding area, and they are desperate, aspirin, first aid creams, bandaids, anything. Given directly to the doctor otherwise it ends up on the black market. One dive operation on the island, very accommodating. Larry and Roman were great divemasters and their English was pretty good. Bring your own gear as the dive shop has limited supplies. Boat rides to the sites were about an hour and that was on the fastest boat (Triton). Dive masters gave depths and bottoms times. The same group stayed together all week so they became more relaxed about letting people go on their own, all the divers on the boat were experienced. Permanent moorings at each site. Blue cave the best site, up to 140 ft. Abundant fish, beautiful undamaged coral. Great walls with chimneys. Lots of lobsters, crabs, barracuda. Occasionally a spotted eagle ray, turtle, sting ray, juvenile drum, even a scorpion fish. Divemaster accommodating to places we wanted to dive and night dives. 2 or 3 days per day. Rio Jibacoa and Sparta, two wreck dives, Russian freighters given to Cuba far target practice, in 20-30 feet of water. Great for exploring and long bottom time, many fish. Lunch was either on the

boat or at a restaurant near the sites run by the dive operation, buffet style and similar to food at hotel. Lunch included in package, pop or bottled water in US dollars sold on the boat as well as beer for the end of the day. Opted for additional dives v tour of island and ended up on one of the cattle boats which makes for a very long ride adds 30-45 minutes to the same sites as the faster boats. Strong military presence, they are always on the docks when the boats leave and arrive. One day in Havana to explore. People are friendly and very poor. Most everything can be bought in US dollars.

## CURAÇAO

A short hop from Bonaire, Curaçao's colorful, historic, cosmopolitan Dutch city of Willemstad offers something for the non-diver, making it popular with diver/non-diver couples and as an extension to a Bonaire sojourn. . . . There's good diving, international shopping for high-rollers, night life, hiking (bring boots), an orchid-filled forest, beautiful rural villages and country homes, windsurfing, half-naked Europeans, and horseback riding. Excellent Indonesian restaurants offer all-you-can-eat rijstafels (rice tables). Tours of the Amstel Brewery are also available. . . . Marine Park, southeast of the public aquarium ("Seaquarium"), offers rough boat rides in exchange for the best wall dives on the island. There's outstanding beach diving from

protected coves on the north-western side of the island, which is usually calmest and has easy access by car. The windward side is almost always too rough to dive, but the diving's good if the wind shifts from its prevailing pattern. . . . Expect water temperatures in the low 80s most of the time. . . .

**Caribbean Sea Sports, Marriott, April 2000, Dennis Dukes, Fort Wayne, IN.** Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 80 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile? Dive restrictions: 110 feet. The Marriott was recently purchased from Sonesta Resorts. The accommodations are what you expect from Marriott; food and the service was excellent. The dive operation was very good. The dive personnel were very accommodating and knowledgeable of the dive sites. The dive shop provided rinse tank and lockers for your gear with ample hanging area to dry the gear. Water clarity and temperature compare favorably to Cayman and the coral is outstanding. Do not miss this location.

**Habitat Curaçao, September 1999, Tari Hanneman (thanneman@peoplepc.com) Los Angeles, CA.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-85 degrees. Calm, rainy. A great place to stay if you love to dive. They lived up to their "diving freedom" motto with tanks available for unlimited shore diving and no restrictions on the diving. The house reef is great. During the first part of our stay, the boat was not very