

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Logged dives: 250+. Dive restrictions: 130. Great ambiance, dive operation was outstanding except continual bitching about being back on the boat with 500 psi. The boat usually had one divemaster who spent his dive shooting video or fooling around underwater leaving divers to come back to the boat and get back on alone.

CUBA

To visit Cuba legally, American citizens must be licensed by the Treasury Department, and ordinary tourists don't get licensed. Big fines await those who are nabbed when passing through one of the gateway airports in Mexico and Canada. The U.S. government has been cracking down since mid 2001. . . . Street signs in Cancun and Playa del Carmen offer four-day trips to Cuba for as little as \$300 US and Scubacan in Canada also runs trips. . . . Dive operations are generally well-run, and the reefs are pristine.

Isle of Youth

Hotel Copacabana, February 2001, Phil & Nancy Hamilton
(glasstwn@bellatlantic.net) Sandwich, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 72 to 76 F, calm. We were scheduled to go to the Isle of Youth, however, problems with water at the hotel there required us to spend the week near Havana. Because of heavy fishing, the diving in this stretch of the Cuban coast is ok but not spectacular by

Caribbean standards. However, the day boat was more than adequate for our group, and the hotel's dive instructor, Octavio Rivero, was excellent. The boat departed from the Marina Hemingway — had to present passports and get permission from the military before each day's diving. One day, when we had planned to dive the wreck of a Spanish galleon, permission was denied to dive that part of the coast. A diving highlight was a day of beach diving at the Bay of Pigs. Just to dive such a well known location was a blast, and to see a whale shark as well was the icing on the cake. The arrangements made by ScubaCan were excellent and the guides were informative and helpful. Havana is a wonderful city — sipping coffee at the bar in one of the restored downtown hotels, you almost expect Papa Doc or a 50's movie star to stroll in! If you have know and love the Cuban cuisine in major US cities, be prepared to be disappointed. The best food is in the few private (and comparatively expensive) restaurants, but most places it is fairly bland with a preponderance of rice and beans (though still a feast for the average Cuban). The people were friendly, and it was safe to walk around many areas at night — the Cuban government seems very protective of its fledgling tourist industry. A supply of pens, toiletries and over-the-counter medical supplies come in useful as gifts. The boats had rinse tanks and the crew were careful with people's equipment.

International Dive Center, Hotel Colony, January 2001, Gabriel I.

Peñagaricano, San Juan, PR. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 72-73 F, calm, no currents. I have been there before and, if anything, the diving was better. The hotel is run down and is to be refurbished. The dive sites are spectacular. If you explain the type of dive you favor, they will accommodate you. Request that you be assigned to the boat to which Keka is assigned. The best destination in the Caribbean.

Playa Del Sol, Ancon Hotel, Costasur Hotel, Playa Maria Aguilar, August 2001, Richard Shaw (divein24@aol.com) Oshawa, ON. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Trinidad is a 400 year old town of 90,000 on the south coast of Cuba, 5 hours overland from Havana. I flew into Cienefuegos, a city of 200,000, 60 miles from the resorts on the Ancon Peninsula. Only one dive operator for the 3 resorts on the Peninsula. The dive shop is run by Cadena de Marinas Puertosol (www.diving-cuba.com) at the Grand Caribe Ancon. It is a large hotel, very nice but too busy. My favorite place was the Hotel Costasur 2 doors over (www.horizontes.cu). The dive masters stay there and I would ride with them to the Ancon. There are excellent bungalows on the beach. It is smaller and more relaxing. Diving is amazing. The fish can be hit and miss on the wall but are plentiful in the shallows, plenty of conch — they don't harvest them. The vis, except after a rain, was over 100'. The reef builds toward the wall for over 200' in 40' of water starting with canyons and

fissures 200' deep, tunnels and chutes leading to the wall. The sheer mass of coral is breathtaking. The wall dive in Cayman pales. There were a few wrecks as well. The guides knew their way on the wall like the back of their hand. Poor country but the warmth of the people and the beauty of the island more than make up.

Puerto Sol Isla de la Juventud, Coconut Hotel, April 2001, Bill Bone (BuenoBill@aol.com) Kila, MT. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 79-80 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 250+. It ain't Kansas, but it sure beats the "Coz Mobs". 56 anchored dive sites off of a beautiful 2 mile sand beach with 42 ft. steel hulled dive boats and only 12 to 15 divers per boat. Most days 8 to 10 divers split into two groups and no problem diving one's own profile. AM dive followed by a beach lunch and 2 hour siesta — then PM dive and back to the hotel for cervezas, cigars and dinner.

CURACAO

A short hop from Bonaire, Curacao's colorful, historic, cosmopolitan Dutch city of Willemstad offers plenty for the nondiver — 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). . . . Marine Park, south-east of the public aquarium ("Seaquarium"), offers rough boat