



**SIMPLY CUBA TOURS**



# **SIMPLY CUBA SCUBA**

**Essential Dive Guide**

[www.simplycubatours.com](http://www.simplycubatours.com)



## Fun Fact

The images within this guide are representative of the places we visit. In fact, some of these photos were taken by Yunion, our lead tour guide and resident scuba expert, during one of his dives, if you want to learn more check out the sample itinerary on page 13.

# WELCOME

Welcome to our Simply Cuba's essential dive photography guide.

The aim of this guide is to provide you an insight to the amazing underwater world that exists in Cuba , and provide you with all you need to know about making the most of your dive photography holiday in this beautiful destination!

We hope to inspire your travel dreams, help you learn more about your destination and prepare you for your trip with ease so you can get the most out of your visit. Within this guide you will find information about the fascinating marine life of Cuba, where to go, when to go, what to bring, what to wear, what you cannot bring among other tips.

Diving, and especially a dive photography trip success comes down to being prepared and having a local guide with intimate on the ground knowledge and a photography expert to assist you in capturing the best shots.

Booking your tour through Simply Cuba means that you will receive personalized, expert advice as well as local knowledge all the way. Our guides are divers themselves, and our photography experts are carefully selected for each trip from around the world.

We have outlined a a dive itinerary within this guide to give you an insight into a trip with us. When you choose to travel with Simply Cuba Tours, we take care of everything from your arrival at Havana airport till you conclude your 10-day tour. All you have to do is decide on the date to join us!

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to our experts who are a wealth of knowledge about all things Cuba!

We look forward not only to booking your holiday for you but making it the most memorable experience of your lifetime!

See you soon,  
Yoanis & Orsolya



## Magical Underwater World

Cuba lures travelers each year for its abundance of stunning natural wonders. Its beaches look like an artist's palette, with a streak of light blue by the shore, followed by turquoise, then navy blue where the seafloor drops down to meet the deeper ocean. Beneath the surface, bright coral reefs, stunning sea creatures, and sunken shipwrecks are beckoning discovery...

The warmth of the Cuban people is matched by their warm, pristine waters that surround this archipelago country. The Cuban archipelago is situated in the northern Caribbean where the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean meet with a whopping 5,700km of coastline. The reefs are little explored and undisturbed giving a unique experience as sea life in particular grouper and sharks have never learned to fear humans. Their natural curiosity creates unbelievably close encounters.

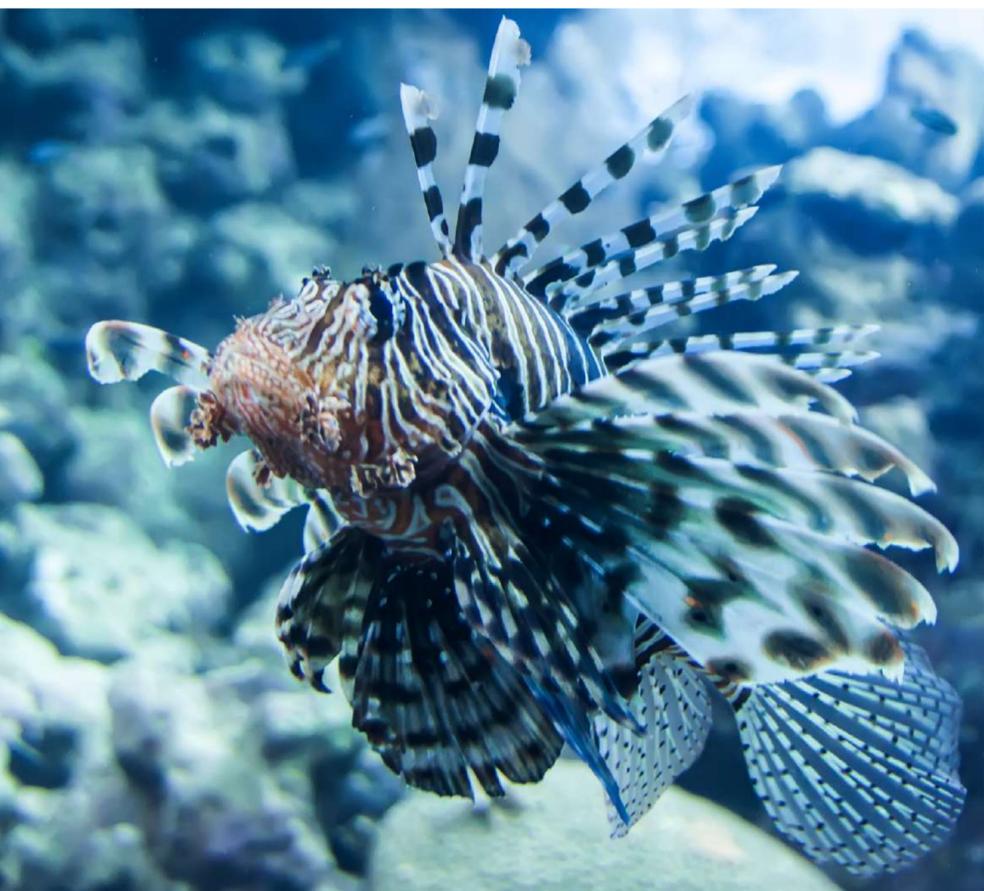


The Caribbean's largest island is home to the second-largest reef in the world behind the

Australian Great Barrier and, what's more, is that Cuban diving features long drop-offs or the Grand Canyon promises that dives are eventful and unforgettable.

Pristine, warm, balmy waters with temperatures around 24°C throughout the year, and great visibility of up to 40m, coupled with a lively and colorful exotic marine life provide the perfect underwater playground awaiting you to discover it.

This is a photographer's heaven, where at every turn there is a near-perfect shot to be taken.





## Diving in Cuba

Our motto to all our tours, especially the diving tours is 'Safety first'. This is why we have chosen diving centers that are certified by the American Canadian Underwater Association (ACUC) as well as Underwater Activities World Federation (CMAS) to international standards. Providing certified diving gear, so you don't have to bring your own.

Their qualified and well-experienced diving instructors provide for a safe and pleasant dive, as not only they know their area well, they also adjust the diving excursion to the skill levels of the divers to ensure you get an unforgettable experience.



## The Marine Life

Cuban reefs are little explored and undisturbed which gives a unique experience as sea life, in particular, grouper, snapper, angelfish, and many others are curious and will interact closely with divers.

You can expect to encounter 50 species of coral and 200 species of sponge. These in turn play host to a plethora of interesting marine life such as jewfish, stingrays, green morays, turtles, and Atlantic spadefish.



You'll also find Parrotfish in gorgeous colors, with their scales sparkling in the underwater sunlight.

Brightly colored Squirrelfish frolicking about at night hiding in coral formations. They are truly fascinating, with their large eyes and their ability to make clicking and grunting sounds by vibrating their swim bladders to ward off intruders.

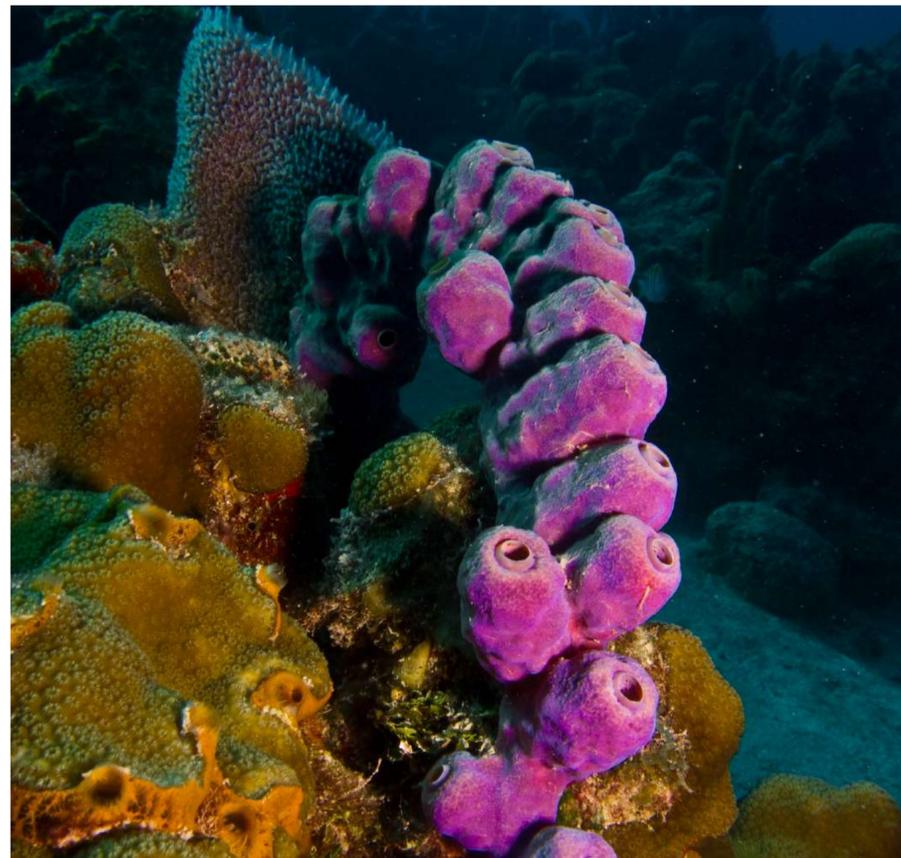
At deeper sites, you will find schools of jack, tuna, tarpon, and barracuda, as well as grunts, snappers, red hinds, parrotfish, squirrelfish, and triggerfish. There is also a surprising array of



critters, like lobsters, crabs, shrimps, and numerous other macro species hiding amongst the coral heads.

Cuba is known as a great shark destination, and the good visibility makes it easy to spot several species of reef shark patrolling the edges of the reef. Sightings of large Caribbean reef sharks and silky sharks are pretty much guaranteed, and you might see hammerhead, lemon, and blacktip sharks too, depending on the time of year.

And let's not forget the nurse shark. A joy to admire and swim with, the nurse shark is a very docile and passive species. It is a sluggish bottom feeder, and it uses its pavement-like teeth to crush shellfish.



On the seafloor, you may see shrimps, Caribbean spiny lobster, batwing, and channel clinging crabs crawling. And let's not leave out the cushion star, red heart urchin, and sea cucumbers either!

The waters of Cuba, unlike many other Caribbean islands, have been spared the fate that commercial fishing has wrought on these shores. This is due to strong environmental protection laws in Cuban territory thus Cuba has one of the most intact marine ecosystems in the region which ensure that divers are guaranteed a marine spectacular on their visit.



## Diving Sites

Cuba has some amazing beaches. On the north, you will find miles of white sand perfect for lazing in the sun, whilst on the south, you will have more beaches for water sports. No matter where you go the waters are pristine, warm, and calm which makes it perfect for visibility under water.

If you love scuba diving, we have the perfect weather, perfect waters, and some amazing fish and coral reefs to check out.

There are hundreds of dive sites on offer, so which ones are the most note worthy?



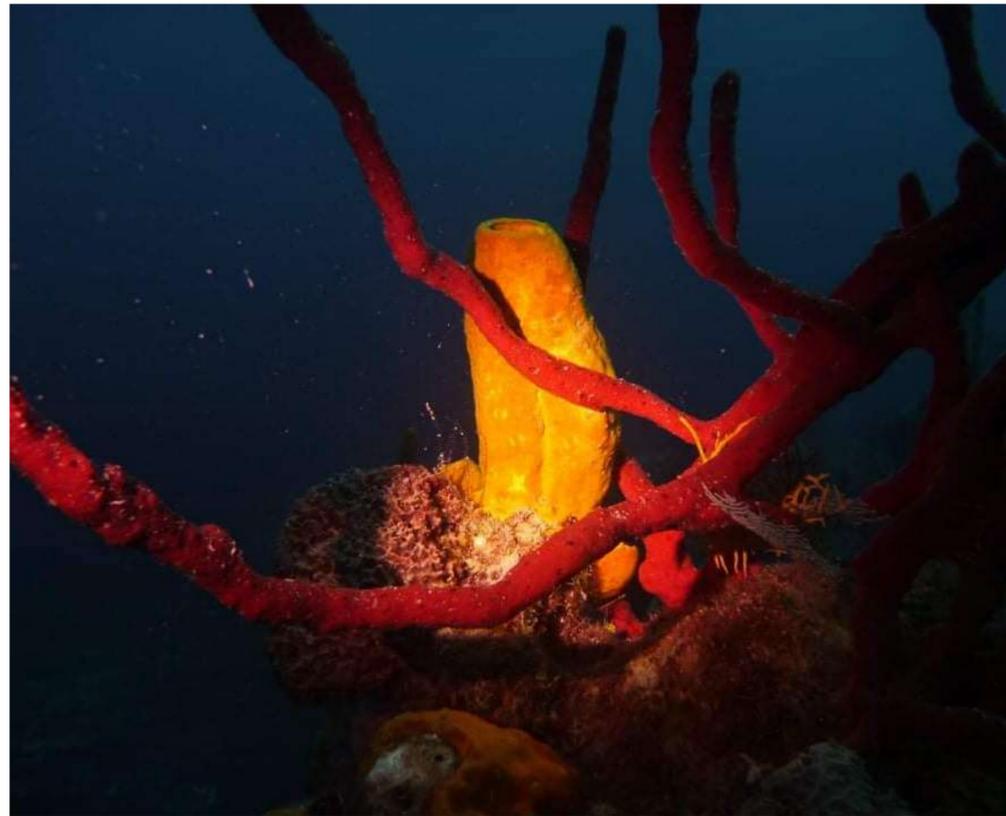
**Santa Lucia** is protected by one of the largest and best-preserved coral barriers in the tropics with flocks of pink flamingo making their home in nearby lagoons. And here we have the chance to dive with one of the most astonishing sharks in the world – bull sharks.

Apart from the bull shark, you can discover the wreck of Nuevo Mortera. Originally a small military steamer, built-in Havana in 1895, it was turned into a cargo ship after its military service. It sank in 1905, after crashing into an English cargo ship. Now the wreck provides a meeting point for the bull shark and home to many sea creatures, like the green moray, schools of snapper, long-spine porcupinefish, angelfish, trunkfish and others.

Nuevo Mortera is not the only wreck here either, you can discover a few others also and even remains of a Spanish fort from colonial times!

**Jardines de las Reina** is a complex ecosystem – one of the healthiest marine ecosystems on the planet – of small virgin islands and mangrove forests where you can find untouched reefs, curious sharks, and mighty crocodiles.

It is an archipelago, on the southern coast of Cuba. It has been a marine reserve since 1996



and became a national park in 2010, one of the largest protected areas.

Jardines de las Reina is a prime destination for shark diving. You can see sharks on most of the dives but there are specific spots where you can encounter up to 30 of them. The Caribbean reef sharks and silky sharks are rather friendly and will come pretty close to you. Get comfortable and still, and admire these sharks swimming around you. The reef here is filled with soft corals, sponges, and sea fans. Stunning landscapes like canyons and pinnacles complete the picturesque scene.



**Cayo Largo del Sur**, a beautiful island on the south coast of Cuba. A place of natural beauty and wonder. Whit shimmering white sand beaches on the surface, vibrant coral reefs, walls, caves, caverns, swim-throughs, and wreck diving is an incredible spot for scuba divers.

Cayo Largo is quiet, secluded, and unblemished, great for eco-tourists who want to explore nature both above and below the sea.

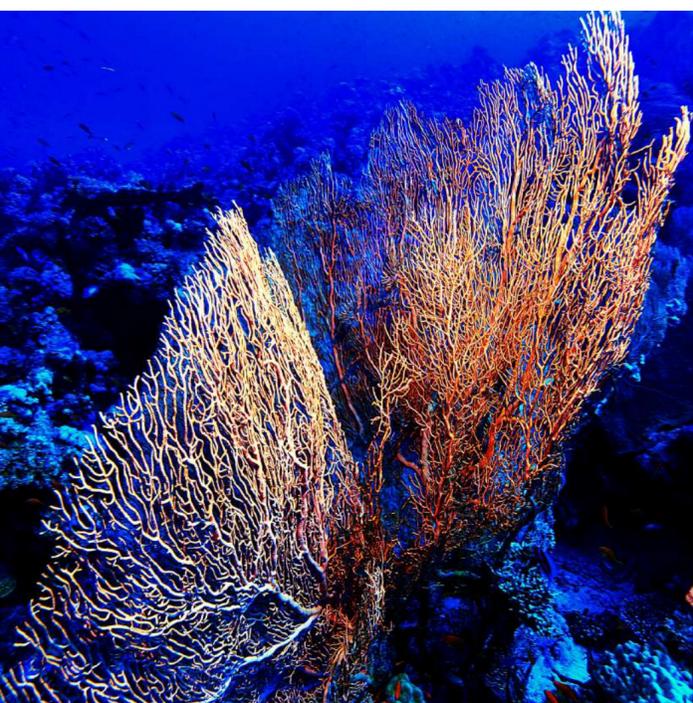
There are over 32 dive sites around the island, many of which are shallow and suitable for the entry-level divers. You'll see hundreds of coral species making the reefs colorful and alive.

You can see whale sharks, mantas, turtles, eagle rays and large schools of fish, such as jacks, grunts, snapper, and tarpons. Explore within the corals for lobsters, crabs, eels, and lots of macro critters. If diving is not your thing, then you can enjoy snorkeling or even swim with the dolphins.



Also on the south side is **Santiago de Cuba**, the former capital of Cuba. This place has it all, not just on land but in the water too! Not only do you find an amazing underwater landscape here with tunnels, caverns, walls, and spectacular sea life, the bottoms hold shipwrecks where you can hand-feed enormous groupers.

And the shipwrecks aren't just any shipwrecks, it's fleet of 5 Sunken Spanish and 2 US naval ships from the Spanish-Cuban-American War from 1898, they play large significance in the beginning of new and different relations between the three countries involved.



**Varadero** is the beach you see on most Cuban post cards, with its 20 km long powder white sandy beach area located on a northern peninsula outside of Havana.

Varadero's diving zone is more than 16 kms long between Matanzas Bay and to the western edge of Jardines del Rey Archipelago. It includes some superb dive sites. The Hicacos Peninsula, on which Varadero sits, is close to one of the most important coral reefs in the Caribbean.

You will find warm, clean water, great biodiversity, well conserves ecosystems, coral gardens, caves, meadows of gorgonians and



sponges, underwater escarpments, narrow channels, tunnels, fish of many sizes and colors, valuable remains of shipwrecked vessels, and many natural beaches. In the Parque Submarino Cayo Piedra del Norte you can also see a sunken war submarine covered in coral.

**Zapata peninsula** on the southern shores has so much to offer, being a biosphere reserve and Ramsar site, its unique swamp offers the perfect spot for birdwatching. Whilst off its coast there are high quality and clear waters with great visibility offering the perfect spot for diving and snorkelling. There is an infinite variety of corals and reef fish in the area. The main attraction is the impressive diving wall just 100 meters off the coast that can be enjoyed from shore dives.



There are several dive sites around the Zapata Peninsula. accessible from the shore it mostly without boat, and there are several sites that are natural pools on the reef as a result of unroofed caves flooded by the sea.

**Caleta Buena** features large colonies of varied coral, a variety of sponges in yellow or bright orange in various shapes, diverse marine flora, large sea fans and abundant tropical fish. Caleta Buena's wrecks and cave diving in sinkholes/40-meter vertical flooded caves make it unique.



**Punta Perdiz** is about half way between Playa Larga & Playa Giron. Diving here consists of tunnels and walls that descend in steps. It has an extensive sandy bottom filled with small coral formations that can be seen at a depth of 2 meters and extend to the edge of the slope. There are different species of coral, as well as sea fans, sponges, large fish, and schools of colorful tropical fish abound. Along the north side of the coral ridge at a depth of 6 meters, there's a small wreck which is often explored via its small engine room.

**Playa Larga & Playa Giron** is based at the Bay of Pigs, and are famous for the failed American CIA attack on Cuba in 1961 and you can still see the memorials on the drive down. The area is richly diverse with swampland mangroves,



coral reefs, underwater caves, and nice beaches.

You will find open water diving in sinkholes and a brackish water-flooded cave system linked to the Zapata Swamp. The multilevel diving makes diving in this area unique. Dives are made directly from the coast. You can expect to see various coral formations, sea fans, starfish, columns, bridal bouquets, and tube sponges, and multiple schools of multi-colored fish and crabs.

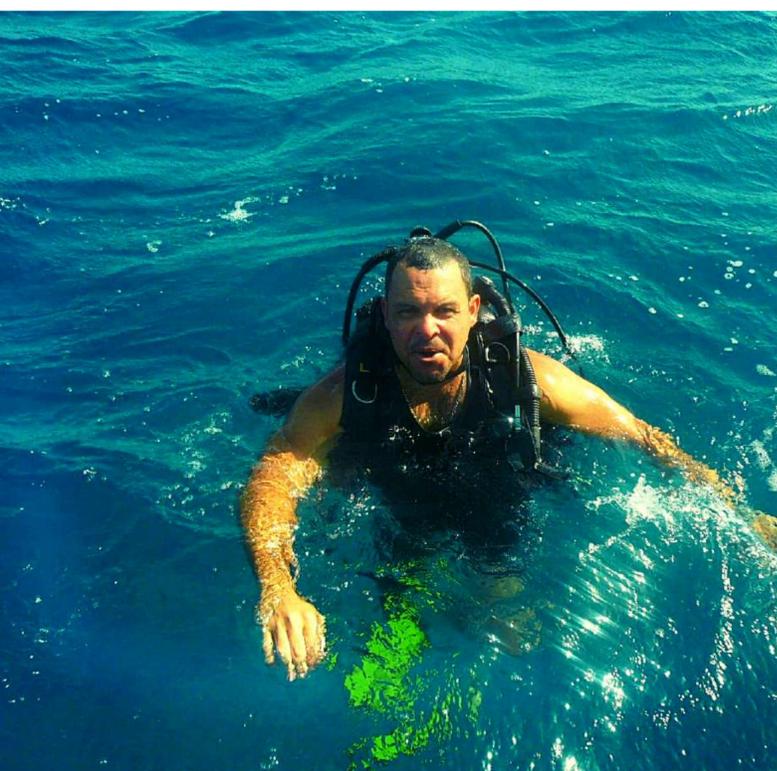
There is also a shipwreck – The Jaruco, which was sunk on purpose in 1994, near Playa Giron less than 50 meters off the coast now covered in large coral formations awaiting discovery.



In this area, there is also a Fish Cave to discover. In its deep blue waters are a thousand underwater nooks and crannies to explore. The fish cenote is a flooded tectonic fault located inland, midway between Playa Girón and Playa Larga. It's a natural clear crystal pool that is more than 70 meters deep and is connected to the ocean through an underground tunnel. You can snorkel inside the cave and enjoy the beauty of seaweed, corals and various fish.

## Do I need a Guide?

Definitely! One of the reasons is that local guides are, highly trained, know their area exhaustively – they know what dive experience you will have, what marine encounters you can expect at each diving spot and whether the weather is suitable for diving.



Also, the protected areas must be accessed with a guide to ensure that the established protocols are followed; this applies especially to areas at the Zapata Swamp, the Cays, and any national parks.

Finally, guide fees are an important source of income to the guides themselves and their communities. So see your local guides as friends and allies in both diving and conservation; a reputable guide is well worth the investment and will not disappoint.

When you travel with Simply Cuba Tours, Yunior is your main tour guide. He is local born and bred and has over 20 years experience running sustainable small group tours.



He loves diving, is a certified diver himself, so all locations and facilities have been tried and tested by him. It is one of his true loves in life! He personally designed our dive photography itinerary to provide you the best experience and most spectacular sightings on your Cuba trip.

## Best Time for Diving

Technically speaking you can dive in Cuba all year round. Weather-wise December to April is absolutely beautiful and and best dive experience.

Each season will bring with it different marine species to the region. So it is well worth going with a guide who knows the places and best times to visit to capture sight of most species.



## What to Bring

For over the water, it is best to wear lightweight long-sleeve shirts and long pants to keep you from moszy bites. Also make sure you wear a hat to avoid sunburn. It is also advisable to bring your own mosquito repellent as they are hard to come by.



If you must wear sunscreen, please ensure it's one that is safe for coral reefs.

As for things like wetsuits, rashies, masks - technically, you do not need to bring your own, however, we cannot always guarantee the perfect fit, if nothing else, please bring your own facemask.

Weights, tanks, flippers, and the likes are provided by the international dive centers we are visiting. They are well maintained and safety certified by the American Canadian Underwater Association (ACUC) as well as Underwater Activities World Federation (CMAS) to international standards, providing certified diving gear.



## The Camera

You are the artist! Choose the equipment you feel most comfortable with.

Food for thought, SLR cameras allow you to take full control over all aspects of photography with almost endless creative freedom. Their larger image sensors offer a broader dynamic range, color tone, saturation, contrast, and exposure levels, and much less 'noise' in dimly-lit situations. They offer one or other RAW capture mode, which is perfectly suited to image editing with the likes of Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom. SLR cameras offer you a wide range of lenses to choose from, each suited to a specific task.



An SLR is what you want if you are fanatical about photography. Learn and understand the technical parameters of your camera until they are second nature. Apply the technical opportunities to get the best out of what photography is all about.

## The Photography Expert

If you choose to make your dive photography trip to Cuba a reality, with Simply Cuba Tours, then you will benefit from the expertise of one of our underwater photography experts. We select our experts carefully! They have developed exceptional portfolios over the years and have even been featured in various publications like BBC Wildlife and the National Geographic. They also support nature conservation causes around the world and bring their marine expertise to our trips.



Our experts are there to provide you hands-on guidance to create an amazing underwater portfolio. Anything you want to know from setting yourself up, your camera up to editing post-production, they are there to teach and impart their knowledge.

They will also be taking some happy snaps of you creating lifetime memories on your trip. Where else can you get expert advice and someone capturing your perfect moments all at once?

Are you intrigued? Check out our sample itinerary!

# 10 DAY SAMPLE DIVING PHOTOGRAPHY ITINERARY

## WHY JOIN US?

- Dive the world's second-largest coral reef, shipwrecks, and more for 10 days
- Be mesmerized by corals, vibrant fish, and other critters under the sea
- Local Guides with intimate knowledge
- Award-Winning Photographers assist you to capture the amazing marine scenery through your lens
- All entries, instructor, guide fees, transport, meals, and accommodation included

## Day 1 - Havana

### Welcome to Cuba!

A complimentary transfer from the airport to your casa is included with your trip to ease you into the life in Cuba. You can check in at any time, your hosts will be waiting for you. If you arrive early, enjoy your free time till your welcome meeting at 6pm.

Depending on your arrival into the country and how you feel there are some options for you to discover Havana.

May be even get your supply of Wi-fi cards sorted for your stay...

## Day 2 - Havana

UNESCO sure does have great taste, they know a good thing when they see it. Today you'll start the day by discovering Old Havana, a World Heritage site since 1982. See the glorious grandeur of this dynamic area, one of the Caribbean's most impressive historical cities.

Wonder through the narrow streets and spacious plazas, admiring the Spanish architecture as you discover the birthplace of Havana – Plaza de Armas, and other iconic sites like Plaza San Francisco de Asis, Plaza Vieja, Plaza de la Catedral, and hear about the love story of Havana before setting out to Trinidad. About 6 hours south of Havana on the glittering Caribbean coastline, it is one of a kind, a perfectly preserved Spanish colonial settlement where the clocks stopped in 1850 and haven't yet started.

The cobblestone streets, horsing carts, well-kept colonial atmosphere with ornate buildings and garden terraces give this gorgeous city a romantic, old charm that is hard to beat. Once we settle in our casas in Trinidad you will receive a guided city tour to get your bearings before you have the evening at leisure to discover the buzzing nightlife in Trinidad.

### Included Activities

- Old Havana Walking Tour
- Trinidad Orientation Tour



## Day 3 to 5 – Trinidad

Get ready for your first dive photo session!

Each day, we will head out to the International Diving Centre at Peninsula Ancon, about a 15-minute drive from Trinidad, where you'll collect your diving gear and head out to sea by boat to your diving spot. There are about 20 sites to choose from, so each plunge will have something new on offer for you. There is an impressive cliff with corals, sponges, crabs, octopus, and various fish species to see. You may even get to discover some wrecks along the way. For your surface time between the plunges, you'll return to the center to rest, grab refreshments and for bathroom breaks.

Once your dive is over, we head back to our casas where you can have a nice afternoon siesta before enjoying the afternoon and evening at leisure to discover what Trinidad has to offer. There's plenty to do!

We can help you arrange anything from salsa lessons to rum tasting, to a visit to the various museums or even the Cave Disco to dance the night away at Trinidad's nightspots - where the local residents are more than willing participants. Feel free to ask your guide for recommendations

### Included Activities

- Daily diving sessions (2 plunges per day)



## Day 8 & 9 – Bay of Pigs

Playa Giron, a small fishing village on the southern Cuban coast, is part of the Ciénaga de Zapata National Park. It is located in the southern part of Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs). It was one of two beaches invaded by US-backed exiles on April 17, 1961. The invasion is famous because it culminated in a victory for the army and Cuban militias.

This area is also Cuba's largest wilderness area, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, with a varied ecosystem of wetlands, mangrove forests, coral reefs, and underwater canyons, it's home to a massive variety of colorful birds and tropical fish, which makes it a perfect diving spot for a few more fun days to come in the water!

There are a couple of International Dive Centers here 15-30 minutes drive from our base offering highly experienced Dive Masters making your experience all that better. Here, you won't have to take a boat to head out to the diving



## Day 6 & 7 – Cienfuegos

Cienfuegos, is a French colonist town. If Cuba had a Paris this place would be it. The elegance of the place combined with a feisty Caribbean spirit and lingering Spanish influence earned it not only the nickname 'Pearl of the South' but also a UNESCO Heritage Listing in 2005. We will spend the days diving at Faro Luna International Diving Centre. Each morning we head out by bus, which is about a 25-minute drive down the south coast of Central Cuba to the entrance of Cienfuegos Bay.

This place offers some of the most exciting diving spots, which is why it is the home of a yearly International Foto Sub Contest. The pristine waters offer an exotic underwater scenery of exuberant corals and fish species in vibrant colors.

This amazing diving center offers world-class gear and facilities as well as the most experienced dive masters in Cuba. Again your surface time between plunges will be back at the diving center.

Diving will be in the morning, so you can rest and relax in the afternoon. Remember your guide can offer you and help you arrange optional activities to add to your amazing experience thus far. Feel free to ask...

### Included Activities

- Diving at Faro Luna IDC (2 plunges each day)



spots as the center has a 200m platform leading you to an amazing coral reef – a perfect paradise underwater. It is also the perfect spot for a night dive, that we can arrange as an optional activity.

In the afternoon of Day 9, we make our way back to Havana for our final evening.

### Included Activities

- Diving at Playa Giron (2 plunges each day)

### Day 10 - Havana

It's time to say goodbye to this amazing island. You have the morning at leisure until your check-out at 12pm.

We hope you enjoyed it as much as we loved showing it to you!

This is where we depart, yet would strongly recommend that you stay a few more days to explore this unique city. If you would like to take this opportunity, please let us know at time of booking, and we can arrange extended accommodation for you for an additional fee.



## What's Included



Local & certified scuba guides  
Expert photography guide



### Meals

9 Breakfasts  
8 Lunches  
9 Dinners



### Accommodation

Standard Guesthouse (9 Nights)



### Transport

Private Vehicle

## Included Activities

- Old Havana Walking Tour
- Trinidad – the best preserved colonial city orientation tour
- Diving at Trinidad’s exuberant coral reefs (6 plunges)
- Cienfuegos – the Paris of the Caribbean orientation tour
- Diving at Faro Luna, enjoy the scenery like no other (4 plunges)
- Diving at Bay of Pigs, discover sunken shipwrecks (4 plunges)

# General Information

Cuba's subtropical climate is ideal for exploration, with most places catching the cool trade winds that blow in from the coast, providing pleasant year-round temperatures. June, July, and August are usually the hottest months – the dry season runs from November to April and the wet season from May to October. Even in the rainy season, downpours are short and shouldn't impede travel plans. Tropical storms and hurricanes are more prevalent in September and October but rarely cause problems for travellers.

## Capital City

Havana

## Language

Spanish

## Currency

CUP

## Time Zone

GMT -4

## Electricity

110V



### Do we require a visa for this trip?

You will require a visa to enter Cuba, however the type of visa available to you depends on your nationality. We recommend you contact your local travel advisor or embassy

### I am a solo traveler, is there a single surcharge?

Tour prices are based on a twin share basis. If you are traveling on your own, you will be sharing a room with someone of the same gender. If you wish to have your own room, not a problem, and you can do so by paying a supplement.

### Are tips included in the cost?

Tipping is not included in the price and it is at your discretion. Tips are greatly appreciated in Cuba, the amount you tip is based on your satisfaction. We provide guidance on tipping in our Essential Information document.

### Are there vaccines required for this tour?

Potentially. It is best to check with your GP prior to travel for the most accurate information.

### Is travel insurance included?

Travel insurance is not included in your tour cost, however it is required for travel to Cuba. We require a copy of your insurance prior the commencement of your tour.

### Can you organise additional accommodation?

Yes, we can book additional accommodation for before or after your trip. Please let us know your requirements at time of booking your tour, and we will make the arrangements for you.

### What is the best luggage to take to Cuba?

A backpack and day pack, or small travel case with wheels and a day pack. Whatever you choose, just remember that generally you will have to carry your own luggage.

### Are flights included?

As we have travellers from all around the world flights are not included in your tour price. Please contact your travel agent for the best flight deals.

### Point to Point Travel Times

Havana to Trinidad	6 hours
Trinidad to Cienfuegos	1.5 hours
Cienfuegos to Playa Larga	3.5 hours
Playa Larga to Havana	3 hours



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Contact your travel agent for more information