



# VAMOS A CUBA!

It is a place that we have dreamed of visiting. We are offering you an opportunity to visit Havana and be among the first to explore the lush underwater depths of Cuba's first-rate Marine Protected Area Jardines de la Reina or Gardens of the Queen.







**“ In every BigAnimals destination, it's the locals who make the difference in our journey. ”**

San Cristóbal de la Habana or Havana, Cuba's capital city, is only a short 90 miles away from the southern tip of Florida.

Havana is a beautiful, bustling city comparable to Paris, Rome, Oslo, London or Shanghai. Although there is still an embargo, recent changes have made Cuba a more easily-accessible destination for Americans, and the largest island in the Caribbean is becoming a diving and cultural hotspot.

In every BigAnimals destination, it's the locals who make the difference in our journey. Observing Cubanos' colorful, robust and up beat tempo overshadows the limitations imposed on their lives.

Their city and countryside is frozen in time and makes you feel as if you've been transported back 50 years to an era when taxicabs were Chevy Delrays and Buick Centuries, and the aromatic scent of thick cigar smoke lingered around every corner.



Havana is a striking city. Its dramatic hilltop landscape includes Parque Histórica Militar Morro-Cabaña fortress, the Castillo de los Tres Santos Reyes Magnos del Morro. Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña includes several missiles that remind us of the Cuban missile crisis, a towering status of Christ, and a museum dedicated to Che Guevara.



Across the Bay, locals stroll or jog its five-mile seawall or Malécon. Built by the United States in 1901, the oceanfront boardwalk spans from Castillo de la Punta in Habana Vieja to Castillo de Santa Dorotea de Luna de Chorrera, a castle at the mouth of the Río Almendares.

Havana's colonial history dating back to the 1500s, is captured by the area of Vedado with 50s-era hotels and casinos once linked to Mafia figures, and well preserved vintage cars gracing the streets.

Enjoy exploring Habana Vieja (Old Havana), a beautifully restored collection of colonial buildings complete with winding cobblestone streets merging into central plazas. Locals, outrageously dressed and many toting cigars, pose eagerly for camera laden tourists.

Havana is undergoing a fast transformation catalyzed by tourism from all over the world. While U.S. tourist travel is still prohibited, the opportunity to visit under a people-to-people educational license allows U.S. citizens to experience this amazing country. During my visit of a few short days, I met Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Europeans of all nationalities, Canadians, Mexicans, Argentines and Brazilians. In spite of the tourist influx, a day in Old Havana rivals a city anywhere in the world. It is colorful and entertaining to wander the narrow streets bustling with people, some colorfully dressed and walking on stilts, through antique, unique building architecture lined with small shops.

El Floridita, Ernest Hemingway's historic fish restaurant and cocktail bar hangout, is famous for its daiquiris and mojitos.

You can feel the tempo of the salsa music.



In Havana "eye candy" is seeing a rainbow of lime green, pink, yellow, blue, plus black and white convertibles and sedans dating back to the 1940s and 50s. Evening adds another flavor. It is time to eat well and there are great places to find fresh seafood and a variety of excellent paradors.

The Cigars as we all know are just superb and available in many of the hotels but better at the wholesale places, in town, all taxi drivers know where and when this best cigars places open. Fifteen, 20, 30-year old Santiago rum—a superb shot costs only a dollar for each year.



After four visits since 1980, we can tell you that traveling to Cuba does not age like its amenities. But hold on! We have saved the best information for last.





## “ Would you believe us if I mentioned the presence of saltwater American crocodiles? ”

They even appear amazingly friendly...yes friendly! Our weather was superb. We enjoyed sunny days with a water temperature rising to 82F (28C). A 3mm or 1/8 wetsuit provided plenty of warmth. The underwater visibility varied between sixty feet (20 meters) to 100 feet (30 meters) from low to high tide.

Gardens of the Queen or Jardines de la Reina is a 600 cay archipelago in the provinces of Camagüey and Ciego de Ávila. Located 48 miles southeast of the coast, this large coral reef is lined with mangroves. For many years, fly fishermen kept the place a secret. Avalon was the only government-licensed operator.

Just recently they have begun to explore the underwater magic of Cuba, after first securing and placing moorings on its numerous excellent dive sites.

Reefs appear untouched, and the corals are in excellent condition. Not used to divers, the fish are not shy, with schools of tarpon, and many sharks, primarily Silkies and Caribbean reefs sharks.



One divesite, a garden of over five dozen Elkhorn coral, beautifully situated in shallow water no more than five meter deep against sandy bottom, with the polyps of the hard coral reflecting the sunlight, glowing in ochre surrounded by thousands of fish.

After one visit to Havana to experience the culture, music, dance, architecture and city vibes, you too will fall in love with this country. This was my fifth visit and I'm planning to go back again. Diving La Reina, there is only room for a few of you.



## Would you like to explore Cuba?

Don't think for too long.  
Contact the studio  
immediately at  
[info@biganimals.com](mailto:info@biganimals.com)

## The Avalon II

The new Avalon II is a one year old, 110' long vessel that can accommodate 16 people in eight ensuite double cabins. Fully air conditioned, the boat has a large diving deck, good rental diving gear, Nitrox, a parlor, dining room, and bar. Even a Jacuzzi is waiting for us on the top deck.

Meals are superb with pasta, lobster, shrimp, and salads combined with plentiful fresh tropical fruit like guava, pineapple and papaya. English speaking guides, as well as some of the crew are very experienced and accommodating.





## AMOS NACHOUM Expedition Leader

Amos has won numerous awards, his photos and essays have appeared in hundreds of publications around the globe, and his work has also been included in many books. His favorite way to raise awareness and stimulate passion for the ocean is to take guests out to experience it first-hand. Amos is uniquely qualified in his expansive experience photographing our planet's large animals, predators in particular, making him the perfect trip leader to explore Cuba's shark-rich reefs and crocodile-filled mangroves.

Amos uses his leadership and photography skills to artfully capture the lives of Ocean Giants whose existence is under threat, but whose hope of survival is linked to us communicating the truth.

BigAnimals Expeditions are designed to add value to your life experience, to generate attention for endangered species, to aid in their preservation and to provoke public awareness and opinion.

BigAnimals' Unique Services – Raising the bar of services in every adventure we operate around the world is our policy. We lead by example with an immaculate safety record for 35 years. Each expedition is carefully scouted before offered to the public and we schedule departures only during peak season for diving and photography. For Cuba, we offer legal & hassle free travel in and out from the USA to Cuba and return, leading a people to people and cultural exchange. For maximum comfort onboard the vessel we accommodate only 12 guests while the vessel has space for 20. For a casual, relaxed and enjoyable dive pattern, we provide three skiffs with only four divers per team. With a nightly presentation about photography and expeditions around the world.

## Traveling Legally in Cuba

President Obama opened the door wider to reestablishing diplomatic relations with his visit Cuba on March, 2016. While there is still few limitations, tourist travel is becoming easier, Americans who wish to experience the culture and dive in Cuba may do so on a people-to-people trip where they will have a full-time schedule of educational exchange activities and experience meaningful interaction with the Cuban people.



## AMANDA COTTON Expedition Leader

Amanda is a professional underwater photographer, an avid scuba diver and ocean enthusiast. Her goal is to help the general public embrace the beauty below the waves, in hopes that with awareness comes concern. Amanda runs a design /media company, A COTTON PHOTO Creative Works LLC, and also enjoys working with like-minded organizations that genuinely care about the planet and its inhabitants. Amanda is a member of many prestigious organizations and has received numerous photography awards with her images being featured in major publications and news sources worldwide. Amanda is a wide-angle specialist with many years of experience photographing sharks and other big marine animals, making her an ideal trip leader for the kind of diving available in Cuba.

## Havana Culture Exchange and Diving in the Gardens of the Queen Dec. 29, '16 - Jan. 7, '17

**Travel Permit– New OFAC License:  
Educational Activities (515.567b)**

CUBA EXPERIENCE: 5 years

WHERE: Havana and Jardines de la Reina,  
Gardens of the Queen (Marine Protected Area)

DATES: 29'16 - Jan. 7, '17

DURATION: 10 Days in Cuba

MAX NO. OF GUESTS: 16

AVAILABILITY: 6 spaces available

PRICING: \$7,200 p.p. based on double  
occupancy. Single accommodation in  
Havana + \$750 extra

REGISTRATION: Deposit of \$2,400

VESSEL: 110' Avalon II

ACTIVITIES: Educational exchange  
activities including diving, snorkeling  
and photography

TEMPERATURE: Air (60-85F/15-29C)  
Water (75-82F/24-28C)

DIVING CONDITIONS: Fairly easy diving,  
little current, 60ft (20m)+ visibility

### TRIP PRICE INCLUDES:

- 3 nights in Havana, double occupancy
- 2 days of Havana cultural activities
- 6 nights onboard the Avalon II, double occupancy
- 5 days of diving, 3 dives per day
- 3 diving skiffs, only 6 divers per vessel
- Only 16 guests,
- All meals on board the boat
- All licensing for legal travel from the USA
- All group transfers
- Amos or Amanda leadership

### TRIP PRICE EXCLUDES:

- Domestic and international airfare to Cuba
- Meals which are not specified
- Independent transfers and touring
- Gratuities to crew. Gratuities to driver/guide/restaurant/hotel bellhop/maid and some venues
- Single occupancy
- Alcoholic and soft drink





## CUBA 2017 › Trip Itinerary › Dec. 29 - Jan. 7 '17

### DEPARTURE

- 12/28 (MIAMI OR FROM YOUR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN IF NOT USA)
- Travel (on your own) from your home city to Miami (or directly to Havana from your country) because charter times are subject to change. Flights are typically early in the morning so it is wise to arrive in Miami the night before and be ready to leave first thing the next day. There is a convenient and reasonably priced hotel ideal for this purpose located at the Miami airport.

### DAY 1

- 12/29 (MIAMI TO HAVANA) (HOTEL PARQUE CENTRAL)
- Depart for Miami Airport (5am)
- Check-in for 9am departure, 3 hrs. before (6am)
- Depart Miami to Havana – Havana Air (9am)
- Plans for the rest of the day are subject to arrival times of all guests
- Lunch at Cafe del Oriente
- Official Presentation of the City of Old Havana – Journey through Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and interact with the locals as you visit the four historic plazas that make Havana one of the most unique architectural places in the western hemisphere.
- Hotel Parque Central check-in (4:30pm)

### DAY 2

- 12/30 (HAVANA – PARQUE CENTRAL)
- Breakfast (8am)
- Official Presentation of the City of Modern Havana – Exchange ideas with the local people about the history of these architectural gems as you see the Capitolio, the University of Havana, the Plaza de Revolution and other historic landmarks (9am)
- Cigar Factory – Meet the workers and watch how they continue a centuries old tradition (11am)
- Lunch at El Litoral (included) (12:30pm)
- Morro Castle, La Cabaña Fortress – Dialogue with the locals as you see this famous fortress that guards the entrance to Havana Bay (2pm)
- Dinner group coordinated (7pm)

### DAY 3

- 12/31 (GARDENS OF THE QUEEN – BOAT)
- Early Breakfast on your own at the hotel Parque Central, with 24-hour room service. Hotel check-out. (3:30am)
- Travel to Jucaro by bus – 7 hrs. including time for lunch (4am)
- Stop at vegetable stands and meet the local farmers (9am)
- Boat check-in, lunch on board and travel to Gardens (5 hrs) (12pm)
- Exchange ideas with marine experts about Cuba's intricate ecosystem and how this can be applied to other oceans in the world
- Dinner on the boat (included) (5pm)

### DAY 4 - 8

- 01/ 01 - 06, '17 (GARDENS OF THE QUEEN – BOAT)
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner (included) AND 15 dives (6am to 9pm)
- Meet with marine experts to gain insight into the conservation measures that Cuba is taking to preserve their delicate aquatic ecosystem in the Gardens of the Queen. "Jardines de la Reina was declared a Marine Park in 1996 – and with the support and management of Avalon, along with the Research Center for Coastal Ecosystems in Ciego de Avila and the Fisheries Control Department, this area has been preserved for future generations as an intricate network of untouched marine ecosystems that have been regarded by many knowledgeable scientists and organizations as a benchmark of the original status of coral reefs as found by Christopher Columbus in the early years of his discovery."

### DAY 9

- 01/06 DEPART THE GARDEN
- Breakfast (included) (6am)
- Travel by boat from Gardens to Jucaro (5 hrs) (7am)
- Travel to Havana (5-7 hrs) (12pm)
- Hotel Parque Central Check-in (7pm)
- Suggested Dinner at La Florentina (Capri) (8pm)

### RETURN - Day 10

- 01/07, '17 (FLY TO MIAMI OR TO YOUR NEXT DESTINATION)
- Breakfast on your own (4am)
- Check out of the hotel (5am)
- Leave 5am for airport for 9am departure to Miami (5am)
- Depart Havana to Miami - Havana Air (9am)

Prices and dates are subject to change without prior notice. Effective May 2016.

**PAYMENT POLICY AND DEPOSIT:**  
When we receive your deposit, we will send you a comprehensive and detailed Trip Preparation Bulletin about the experience and the destination. All trip costs are subject to change without prior notice until your reservation is confirmed. A deposit of 33% of the total trip price is required to secure space on the trip. Full payment is due no later than 90 days before departure. We reserve the right to sell any space that is not paid in full by 60 days before departure.

#### CANCELLATION POLICY

- Must be made in writing.
- More than 90 days before trip: Deposit will be refunded in full.
- 90 days or less before trip: Deposit will be refunded if space is sold, less unrecoverable costs of sales, and administration costs.
- No refund is made for unused part of the itinerary.
- Cost of services not included in the expedition price, flight time and schedule, weather, water temperature, and animal behavior are all subject to change



# APPLICATION FORM

Expedition CUBA – Culture and Diving | Expeditions Date: December 28 '16 - Jan. 7, '17

## PERSONAL INFORMATION

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Citizen of \_\_\_\_\_ Passport # \_\_\_\_\_ Place Issued & Date \_\_\_\_\_

Trip price \$7,200 per person, Based on double occupancy on board the boat & in Havana.

Deposit of 1/3 of trip price is required to secure space = \$2,400 Non-Refundable.

Final payment due 90 days before departure, September 9/10 or before. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Single supplement in Havana + \$750

☐ Single supplement onboard + \$5,500

Please make your check payment to BigAnimals Expeditions, 189 Evans Ave #A, Pacific Grove, CA 93950.

Overseas payment can be done via bank wire, instructions will be sent to you upon receipt of this application.

Promotional code \_\_\_\_\_

Travel insurance: ☐ YES ☐ NO Provider \_\_\_\_\_ Policy # \_\_\_\_\_

Travel insurance is **prerequisite and mandatory** on BigAnimals adventures. We need to have your policy number.

Do you carry diving insurance? ☐ YES ☐ NO Provider \_\_\_\_\_ Policy # \_\_\_\_\_

Diving Experience/Years in Diving \_\_\_\_\_

Where & When Last 3 Dive Experiences? 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

How do you rate your Diving Skills? ☐ Beginner ☐ Inter ☐ Advanced ☐ Expert

How do you rate your Photography and/or Video skills?

☐ No interest

☐ Beginner

☐ Inter

☐ Advanced

☐ Expert