

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING

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The Dominican Republic's (DR) underwater world offers exceptional reef diving and snorkeling, incredibly clear waters and a variety of colorful marine life. In fact, the country is often listed as one of the top diving locations in the Caribbean. Visitors can explore centuries-old shipwrecks on the country's north coast, or take advantage of the warm, protected waters of the south.

The DR is a haven for experienced divers and operators can be found either at or through its hotels and resorts. In addition, most all-inclusive hotels offer lessons and certification for those interested in learning more about the activity.

North Coast:

Sosua

Located near Puerto Plata, Sosua offers some of the north coast's best diving. Not only are these sites home to countless varieties of tropical fish and marine life, but whale sharks, manta rays, and dolphins have also been known to make an appearance in these waters. Shallow reefs allow beginners to get comfortable with diving and the underwater world, while more advanced dive sites are only minutes away. Among the most popular sites are Las Palmitas, the Airport Wall, Five Rocks, and La Pirámide.

Puerto Plata

Heading west from Sosúa along the north coast are interesting wrecks off the shores of Cofresí and Monte Cristi. In 1563, the three Spanish ships Santa Catalina, San Jorge and Santa Maria were caught in a storm and crashed into a reef in the Monte Cristi area. While the Santa Maria has been salvaged, the other two ships drifted off the reef and sank between 60 and 90 feet.

***Insider's Tip:**

One particularly interesting dive trip is to Punta Rucia near Monte Cristi. There, a circular coral reef called Cayo Arena (Sand Island) has incredible coral diving. Cayo Arena is sometimes covered completely by the ocean, and at other times is extremely visible for topside exploring.

The best months for diving in the north are June to September when the water is calm and visibility is at its very best.

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Northeast Coast:

Samana

Off the peninsula of Samana, visitors can take advantage of what has been called some of the region's best dive spots. A wealth of caves, tunnels, walls and remarkable reef fronts make up the 23 named sites of the area. From mid-January to the end of March, thousands of Samana's well-known humpback whales return to the waters.

East Coast:

La Romana

Just a boat ride away from La Romana sits the impressive Saona Island. A protected sanctuary within a national park, the island boasts abundant wildlife and marine life, such as turtles, whales, and sharks and is considered to have some of the best coral formations in the country. Divers should check with the dive operator for the current marine life conditions. Also near La Romana, the large schools of fish at Bayahibe are accustomed to interacting with divers. Bayahibe also has its share of man-made wrecks for divers to explore. Two of these wrecks, "Saint George" and "Embassy," are over 240 feet long each. In addition to the well-known wrecks, Bayahibe has one of the largest marine parks, Parque Nacional de Este.

Punta Cana

Located on the east coast of the Dominican Republic, Punta Cana features the longest coral reef on the island. Due to the convergence of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, the diving conditions at Punta Cana can be rough and is not a recommended area for beginners. If the ocean is not favorable for diving during a stay, a fresh water dive inland can be arranged and will provide a different type of underwater experience.

South Central Coast:

Boca Chica

Just east of Santo Domingo near Boca Chica, divers can visit the well-known wrecks "Hickory" and "Limon" at La Caleta Underwater National Park. Cave diving can be done at Cueva Taina, a system of long, winding caves stretching 300 feet. Night dives and fresh water diving are also offered.

Juan Dolio

The house reefs in Juan Dolio offer great range in depths as well and visibility between up to 100 feet. Another draw to the area is "Tanya V," a more recent wreck from 1999. Just an hour away from Juan Dolio lay some of the best diving and snorkeling sites off Catalina Island. The black coral and marine life is exceptional in the area with the possibility of seeing black tip sharks, hammerheads and big rays.

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Ocoa Bay

Just a two-hour drive west from Santo Domingo, Los Bajos in Ocoa Bay is an isolated area with large populations of fish. While a less traveled area by tourists, the bay is a weekend haven for Dominicans with its gray-sand beaches. Dive operators in the area have options for more advanced divers who are seeking historical ships and aircraft wrecks.

Particulars:

In almost all cases, scuba diving and snorkeling equipment and instruction are provided by DR dive centers. In general, if a person is over the age of 10 and in good health, he or she can dive, according to the training agencies' standards and procedures. Complete scuba diving certification typically consists of five to six lessons, followed by open water dives and can be done before or during one's trip to the DR.

PADI CERTIFIED DIVE OPERATORS IN THE DR:

East Coast

Casa Daniel Swiss Diving School
Casa Daniel
Bayahibe
(809) 833-0010

Dressel Divers Club
Bayahibe – Iberostar Hacienda, PADI Gold Palm Resort & National Geographic Dive Center
Punta Cana/Bavaro – Iberostar Bavaro Resort, PADI Gold Palm Resort & National Geographic Dive Center
Dresseldivers.com

Fun Dive Caribe
Punta Cana – Hotel Catalonia Bavaro Beach Golf
(809) 412-0000

Mariana Caribbean Sports Diving World SA
Punta Cana – Breezes Punta Cana
(809) 476-7777

Neptuno Bavaro
Punta Cana – Hotel IFA Villas Bavaro
(809) 582-6025

Pelicano Sporta
Punta Cana – Hotel LTI Punta Cana
(809) 688-6820

Pelicano Watersport
Punta Cana – Hotel Ocean Blue
(809) 729-4242

Punta Cana Dive Center
Punta Cana – Punta Cana Beach Resort, PADI Gold Palm Resort
(809) 959-2262

Punta Cana Scuba Diving
Punta Cana – Club Med
(809)-299-3182

Scubacaribe
Bayahibe – Casa del Mar, PADI Gold Palm Resort
National Geographic Dive Center
Punta Cana – Melia Tropical, Natura Park, Sunscape Resort, Bahia Principe, Bavaro Beach Resort and Paradisus Hotel, all PADI Gold Palm Resorts
Scubacaribe.com

Scubafun S.A.
Bayahibe
Scubafun.info

Ventadiving Grandominicus
Bayahibe
Grandominicus.com.do

Viva Diving
Bayahibe – Club Dominicus, PADI Gold Palm Resort
(809) 686-5658

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Northeast Coast

Stellina Diving,
Las Terrenas
StellinaDiving.com

North Coast

Aqua Center
Sosua – Hotel Casa Marina
Aqua-center.com

Dolphin Dive Center
Cabarete/Sosua, PADI 5 Star IDC
Dolphindivecenter.com

Dressel Divers Club
Puerto Plata – Iberostar Costa Dorada,
PADI Gold Palm Resort & National
Geographic Dive Center
Dresseldivers.com

Fat Cat
Sosua
(809) 586-1392

First Class Divers
Confresi – Sun Village Resort and
Hacienda, PADI Gold Palm Resorts
(809) 970-7622

Gri-Gri Divers
Rio San Juan
(809) 589-2367

South Central Coast

Golden Arrow Technical Diving Center
Santo Domingo
CaveDiving.com.do

Neptuno Dive Center
Juan Dolio – Hotel Colonia Tropical, PADI
5 Star IDC
Neptunodive.com

Pirates Cove Dive Center
Juan Dolio
PiratesCoveDiveCenter.com

Hippocampo Dive Centre
Sosua
(809) 571-4437

Iguana Mama
Cabarete
IguanaMama.com

Northern Coast Aquasports, SA
Sosua, Puerto Plata – PADI Gold Palm
Resort, PADI 5 Star IDC and National
Geographic Dive Center
Northerncoastdiving.com

Scubacaribe
Puerto Plata – Riu Hotel, PADI Gold Palm
Resort & National Geographic Dive Center
Scubacaribe.com

Sea Pro, SA
Puerto Plata – Playa Dorada Hotel
(809) 523-4611

ProAqua Diving & Adventures
Juan Dolio – Hotel Melia
Proaquadiving.com

Sea Pro, SA
Boca Chica – Hotel Hamaca
(809) 523-4611

Treasure Divers
Boca Chica – Don Juan Beach Resort
(809) 523-5320