



Cuba: A Cruising Guide

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Caution

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this supplement. However, it contains selected information and thus is not definitive and does not include all known information on the subject in hand. The authors, the RCC Pilotage Foundation and Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson Ltd believe this supplement to be a useful aid to prudent navigation, but the safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgement of the navigator, who should assess all information, published or unpublished, available to him/her.

With the increasing precision of modern position fixing methods, allowance must be made for inaccuracies in latitude and longitude on many charts, inevitably perpetuated on some harbour plans. Modern surveys specify which datum is used together with correction figures if required, but older editions should be used with caution, particularly in restricted visibility.

This supplement contains amendments and corrections sent in by a number of cruising yachtsmen and women, in addition to those culled from official sources such as *Notices to Mariners*.

Note where lights have been modified in this text do please remember to alter them on the appropriate plan.

Author's Caution

It must be emphasised that none of the charts, plans or sketch plans shown in this guide should be used for navigation, nor should they be in any way considered as substitutes for the official charts and other nautical reference materials which every vessel is obliged by international law to have on board.

Page 108 Cayo Largo

Once past Maltiempo (Fl.R.4s.3M), the next reef to the north is now marked by a large green buoy. Thereafter, a set of large green and red posts mark the actual channel towards the marina. These can be a bit confusing as there are lots of them and picking the correct next one is a bit tricky, particularly at night. The marked channel leads to the 'dredged channel' into the marina, having now the choice of taking the southern one (I estimate 3m depth in the channel, but the shallowest is before getting into the channel), or the northern one (2.3m min, but eyeballing necessary as there are sandy shoals on each side). The tail (NW) end of the northern channel is quite narrow and shallowest (OK in the middle).

The marina has a concrete dock, and two floating docks, from which fingers extend (about a dozen in all). These fingers are very weak (two already have been half ripped off), and too short for any boat more than 50' in length (we tried to tie up there in 15 knots of wind and it was quite ugly, we had to let go and go on anchor). In a northwesterly (as we had), it is outright dangerous to attempt tying up.

For a larger boat, the option is to come in by dinghy, ask for the tourist boats to move, and tie up on the concrete dock. The marina is severely mosquito infested... and they are hungry!

Services in the marina do not include any real provisioning any more (the main shop has lots of booze, water and stuff, but little food). As usual, things can be arranged by asking the locals, but it can get very expensive. Internet available at the marina hotel at 10CUC/h (no need to go to the hotel strip, despite what the locals say). A bank in the marina area will provide cash with a credit card and passport. It is also possible to exchange back CUC into USD if Cayo Largo is the international exit point. Shower and toilet facilities basic.

Outside the southern channel there are three coral patches, all east and southeast of the last red channel marker to the northern channel. One of them quite large and very shallow (1m at the top of the bummy, good snorkeling but a definite hazard!) For any boat with more than 1.8m draft, anchoring too close inshore is a risk, as the northern side of the southern channel is quite shallow (we measured 1.7m and made our mark in the (thankfully) grassy bottom. Further out, in about 3m, the hold is not very good in grass, somewhat better in sand patches.

Page 111 Cayo de Dios

Very good anchorage in SE to S winds (when Cayo Guano del Este is not...), and what a pretty place!

Page 112 Cayo Guano del Este

Untenable in anything south of SE. We tried both locations shown on the guide but both were very rocky and we continued to Cayo de Dios.

Page 114 Cienfuegos

Upon entry in the bay, there is no more garda issue, and no pilot requirement. The best is to follow the well marked channel and drop the anchor in front of the marina. Plenty of anchorage room in 2-4m of water, and very good hold. We went to land with the dinghy, and did the formalities there (full range, but friendly).

The marina is excellent, but indeed it is important to have breast lines against the afternoon westerly and northwesterly. Notably, the most southern dock is very rocky and the most westerly one can be dangerous in a strong westerly, unless a breast anchor is laid. We tried unsuccessfully for three weeks to get propane filled by the marina, and ended up having the service performed by a local horse cart driver (Pedro). Water gets cut once in a while, but electricity supply surprisingly reliable (two short power cuts in two weeks). As indicated in your guide, it is important to check the voltage: on our first attempt, the said to be 220V proved upon testing to be 110V. Shower and toilet facilities are basic.

Internet at the hotel La Union in town (6CUC/h). Town is about 1.5 miles and can be done by foot or using a bicy-taxi (2CUC one way).

Page 118 Casilda

No longer necessary to clear at the fisherman's dock. We anchored just outside, southwest of beacon 37 (not a good place to anchor, rocky and surrounded by shallows), and dinghied to the marina for a 'one stop chop' i.e. in and out at the same time, in order to go on anchor in Ensenada Caballones.

The marina entrance is really only passable for shallow draft vessels. I checked it in detail with the dinghy, and it's not only winding badly, but there is no more than 1.5m in various places. A friend of ours on his (1.5m draft) catamaran made long trail in the sandy bottom. Inside there are now two piers and space to anchor for no more than two boats at best.

Ensenada Caballones a very nice alternative, well sheltered from all directions, excellent hold and very pretty.

Page 130 Cayos Cuervo

Excellent anchorage, but quite busy with shrimpers. They are on anchor in daytime, but move out in the evening and return mornings. Important to stay out of their way, i.e. anchor a bit further south in the lagoon. Excellent hold.

Page 138 La Ceiba

We were caught in a Norther after leaving Canal del Pingue, and found a good shelter just South of Cabo La Ceiba in about 3m depth. A lot of fishing boats were sheltering there as well. To get away from the swell, it's important to get close to shore, as the 'cabo' doesn't make a real crescent towards the SE. It shoals slowly and it's safe to get close to land.

Page 143 Canal del Pingue

Channel very well marked. It looks harder on the charts than in reality. Also, there is a good anchorage just NW of Cayo Orihuela in about 3m, well sheltered from all directions, except SW.

Page 145 Canal de Cuatro Reales

Easy, well marked channel, and indeed the lagoon just passed the channel on the SE side is an excellent anchorage. Easy to find in good light, good hold but in about 12m depth.

Page 159 Cabo Cruz

The garda does not allow anyone to land there any more, and anchoring has to be outside (east) of the narrow part of the channel... and certainly not the most friendly garda by far...

Once past the last two channel markers, beware not to venture directly east of the last green marker, as it gets quite shallow (less than 1.7m). The southern side is better. Excellent hold.

Page 164 Ensenada Tiburcio

I cannot recommend too much to stop in Cayo Blanco after Marea del Portillo, visit the small island, have a drink there, and then go to Ensenada Tiburcio for the night. It's altogether a very nice day, and makes the next leg (Marea del Portillo to Cabo Cruz) just that bit shorter. Tiburcio itself is a small piece of paradise...

Marea del Portillo

Easy entrance by day, but tricky at night as there are no lights whatsoever. Gardá will come on board, rowed in by a local fisherman (woman in our case). Once cleared in, visiting the village is well worth it (we did not attempt the

hotels on the other side) as the locals are particularly friendly, and one can get eggs, fish, octopus, lobster and various vegetables. Besides, this is a really pretty, safe and calm anchorage.

Page 166 Chivirico

We attempted entry in 20+ knots northerly, and ended up turning back as the last stretch of the channel (going due west) is hazardous in a strong reach.

Page 168 Santiago de Cuba

No need to notify anyone any more upon entry. As we passed the corner of Punta Morillo, the marina called us in English to advise they were waiting for us. No more garda in sight upon entry.

Upon arrival at the marina, the marina staff will direct you to the northernmost dock, where entry formalities are swift and friendly, but extensive (includes sniffer dog). As this is the first entry port for many boats, the officials here have clearly developed a habit of asking for gifts (soap, skin cream, computer items, etc...). It is OK to refuse, although a small gift goes a long way (we gave sweets for the kids and soap...). The marina was quite full when we arrived, so we anchored just outside the marina after clearing in, lots of space on the western side, but beware of the waters immediately near the closest beacon, between the beacon and the 'fuel' dock, which is at 1.7m depth, and make sure to stay out of the main channel.

The harbour is not that filthy any more, we spent two weeks on anchor and did not show any major sign of muck.

The marina itself has obviously improved since the writing of this guide: The jetties are OK, and a new one is almost finished (the northernmost one). Water is available most of the time (but there are cuts once in a while). We did not try the electricity, but other boats had no complaints. The shower and toilet facilities are much improved, and the personnel are very friendly.

General

Some updated price levels

(all prices in CUC, 1 CUC = 1.1 USD):

Officialdom: Upon entry: Customs: 20; sanitary: 5; Entrance fee: 10; Visa: 15/pax (valid 30 days); Visa renewal (another 30 days): 25/pax; Cruising permit: 15. Upon exit: 10

Marinas: Santiago: On anchor: 0.25/foot/day; 0.47–0.60/foot/day on dock (depends on length of stay). Marina in Cienfuegos: On anchor: 0.20/foot/day, On dock, same as Santiago. Cayo Largo: 0.55/foot/day (less if longer stay), no anchorage fees.

Foodstuff: Mineral water: varies a bit from place to place, but basically 0.6/litre. Vegetables are extremely cheap in the agromercado, typically 5 peso/lb for most items, i.e. 50 cents/US per kilo. Good choice of tomatoes, onions, garlic, salad, bell pepper, chilli, cabbage, but potatoes hard to find. Eggs: about 1 CUC/10 eggs, sometimes plentiful, sometimes hard to find (double that in Cayo Largo). Meat: cheap at agromercado, but better in the morning as the flies will be busy. Beef harder to find than pork and chicken. Lobster: cheap in season (2–4 CUC for a big one). Fish: best bought from passing fishermen, and can very often be bartered for soap, fishing hooks or a drink.

Restaurants and private dining: Official restaurants are usually bad, and private dining is a much better option. Typically, a private dinner including shrimp, lobster or

various meats is 10 CUC/pax. Hamburger or fried chicken in 'Rapido' (local 'McDonalds') is 1.5 CUC. Pizza in Peso outlet about 10 Peso (0.5 CUC).

Booze, cigars and cigarettes: Beer: 1CUC/can local beer, Rum: white: 3.60, Dark: 5.90, Mojito in a bar: 2–4. Local cigarettes (Upmann's): 0.6–0.9/pack. Cigars: official prices are the same as overseas. 'Black market' prices, available in all cities are low, but beware of fakes, which have banana leaves inside (if the ash turns black, it is a fake, try first!). Typically, a 25 Cohiba box is about 40–50 CUC, Romeo & Juliet about 35. Worth negotiating, but test first! Noteworthy are the non branded cigars sold in Vinales, made the 'natural way', good quality but without brand: 20 to 25/box of 25.

Transportation: Marina to town: Santiago: Official: 10, private 5–8, negotiable. Cienfuegos: 2. Cienfuegos to Havana: Taxi: 50–120 (negotiable), bus: 20/pax – about four hours. Havana to Vinales: Taxi: 60 – about three hours, Vinales to Havana: Taxi: 100, bus: 18/pax – about five hours. Car rental: 65/day + 50 CUC compulsory for gasoline (return the car empty of gasoline).

Accommodation: Hotels are very expensive and not worth it (my opinion). Casa Particular (sort of B&B but without breakfast) is 20–35 CUC/night depending on the size, location and quality. Breakfast, lunch and dinner can be arranged in these Casa Particular for usually 3–8 CUC/pax.

Communication: Internet in most cities: 6–10 CUC/hour, is mostly very slow. Telephone very expensive (a 10' call overseas can put you back 30–50 USD!). DHL out a total rip-off (we sent a letter via DHL to Malaysia for 54 CUC).

Diesel, gasoline and propane: Diesel 1 CUC/l, gasoline 1.0–1.4l depending on octane level, propane: 7/kg! (and hard to get).

Entertainment: Museum entrance: usually 2/pax. Casa de la Musica in Havana: 10/pax+drinks (watch out, this is now mostly very loud ron, reggeaton and rap, only few nights with traditional salsa). Buena Vista Club (new one, the old one is closed): 50/pax, including three drinks and a nice dinner – an expensive proposition, but well worth it. Jazz bar in Havana: 10/pax, including two drinks, additional drinks at 2.5CUC. Local guide in Havana: 35/day. Local CD: 1 to 2 CUC.

Health: Many drugs hard to find, but when available cheap if bought by a local. Dentist consultation in Santiago: 25 + treatment (scaling 50! and very poorly done). Generally, medical cost for foreigners is relatively expensive.

Hard to find/sought after items: Ropes and lines (polyester, nylon, fishing lines), fishing hooks, branded sneakers, computers and peripherals, electronic gadgets, T-shirts, branded perfumes and toiletries, branded soap, shaving stuff, sweets and lollipops, stainless steel fittings, screws bolts and nuts. Additionally, in the countryside, cooking oil, toilet paper, tooth brushes and old clothes are very expensive for locals.