



Isla de la Juventud (Special Municipality)

POP 86,420

Includes ➔

Isla de la Juventud...	161
Nueva Gerona.....	161
East of Nueva Gerona	167
South of Nueva Gerona	167
The Southern Military Zone.....	168
Cayo Largo del Sur ..	169

Best Beaches

- ➔ Playa Sirena (p169)
- ➔ Cayo Rico (p170)
- ➔ Playa Larga (p169)
- ➔ Punta Francés (p165)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Sol Cayo Largo (p171)
- ➔ Villa Choli – Ramberto Pena Silva (p164)
- ➔ Hotel Colony (p167)
- ➔ Villa Marinera (p171)

Why Go?

Historic refuge from the law for everyone from 16th-century pirates to 20th-century gangsters, La Isla is perhaps the quirkiest castaway destination you ever will see. Dumped like a crumpled apostrophe 100km off mainland Cuba, this pine-tree-clad island is the Caribbean's sixth largest. But the Cayman Islands this isn't. Other tourists? Uh-uh. And if you thought other Cuban towns were time-warped, try blowing the dust off island capital Nueva Gerona, where the main street doubles as a baseball diamond and the food 'scene' is stuck in the Special Period. Yet, if you make it here, you're in for a true adventure. The main lure is diving some of the Caribbean's most pristine reefs but otherwise, get used to being becalmed – as locals have – with the coral, the odd crocodile and a colorful history that reads like an excerpt from *Treasure Island*.

Further east, Cayo Largo del Sur is La Isla's polar opposite, a manufactured tourist enclave renowned for its wide, white-sand beaches.

When to Go

- ➔ The beach life, diving and snorkeling are highlights of La Isla. Cayo Largo or any of the other mini-paradises in the Archipiélago de los Canarreos. The hottest times are the best: July to August along with the cooler-but-balmy high season in December to April.
- ➔ Always-spirited Nueva Gerona ups the ante for its biggest party, Carnaval, in March.

Isla de la Juventud Highlights

- 1 Getting the lowdown on local life in petite, sleepy **Nueva Gerona** (p161).
- 2 Lolling away the scorching afternoons at the tranquil reservoir of **Presa El Abra** (p163).
- 3 Exploring the ominous prison where Fidel Castro was once incarcerated at **Presidio Modelo** (p167).
- 4 Gawking at ancient cave paintings at **Cueva de Punta del Este** (p169).
- 5 Diving amid wrecks, walls, coral gardens and caves at **Punta Francés** (p165), the best place to dive in Cuba.
- 6 Watching turtles nesting on the moonlit beaches of **Cayo Largo del Sur** (p169).
- 7 Trekking along the wide, white (sometimes nudist) beaches to Cayo Largo del Sur's **Playa Sirena** (p169).

