

Live-Aboard Scuba Dives

Dive for More Than a Day

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If a single-tank dive off the coast of the Bahamas isn't enough to satisfy your scuba craving, you're in luck. Scuba companies and tour operators have taken note of the growing number of diving fanatics and, accordingly, now offer an abundance of live-aboard dive trips for the hard-core fish out of water.

As any diver will admit, much of the underwater ecosystem near land is often destroyed by fishing and tourism. So, to really get divers out to find Nemo, dive operators are taking folks to faraway locales not even accessible via a day's journey. Read on for Travel Channel's picks for the best multiday dive trips.

Galapagos Islands, Ecuador

This archipelago off the western coast of Ecuador is home to a stunning diversity of wildlife, and its remote nature leaves it relatively untouched by tourism. Divers will reap these benefits should they opt to dive in the region's chilly waters. Thanks to a little-known lad named Charles Darwin, many of the visitors to the Galapagos are historians and other academics, leaving the waters open for divers' delight. Penguins, tropical fish, seals, manta rays, hammerhead sharks, sea lions and more mingle below the surface. Tour operator [Ecoventura](#) arranges 7-day-long dive trips aboard the M/Y Sky Dancer. The air-conditioned vessel houses eight private en-suite cabins with two twin beds or a king in each. You'll cruise from San Cristobal, visit Wolf and Darwin islands, enjoy up to four dives a day, and fill your stomach with gourmet local and international cuisine on the ship.

Coco Island, Costa Rica

Roughly 300 miles off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, Coco Island teems with hordes of hammerhead and white-tipped sharks. Manta rays, sea lions and schools of snappers also stop by the many dive sites off the island's shore, while the rocky pinnacles surrounding the isle mean you'll be coming face to face with bigger sea creatures. Visitors should also plan for ample time to explore the verdant island itself and bathe in its cascading waterfalls when they're not busy diving. The [Okeanos Aggressor](#) offers 8- and 10-day charters, with five and seven days of diving, respectively, departing from Punteranas.

The Solomon Islands

If you haven't even heard of this tiny South Pacific nation, you're probably not alone, but its remote location ensures extraordinary underwater offerings. Fifteen hundred miles west of Fiji and 1,200 miles northeast of Australia, the Solomon Islands' marine scene is an explosion of color, an amalgamation of coral gardens, reefs and jagged walls. You'll encounter angel, anemone, humphead parrot and butterfly fish, and don't be too alarmed if a barracuda swims your way: He's just as scared of you as you are of him. Two ships from North American operator [Bilikiki](#)-- the MV Bilikiki and MV Spirit of Solomons, both nearly identical -- operate out of Guadalcanal Island and visit dive sites in the Florida Islands, the Russell Islands, Mborokua Island and Marovo Lagoon in the New Georgia Islands. Bilikiki offers some of the most flexible dive schedules on the market, with trips that span 7, 9, 12 and 14 nights.

Big Island, Hawaii

US divers don't even have to leave the states to participate in a live-aboard dive: Hawaii has excellent dive offerings. A Saturday-to-Saturday trip on the [Kona Aggressor II](#) leaves little to be desired: Spanish dancers, manta rays, turtles and many creatures endemic to Hawaii swim alongside divers who make the plunge. If traveling during the winter, you'll likely see humpback whales pass the ship, as it's prime mating season. Dive highlights around this volcanic island can include lava formations, as well as typical coves, lagoons and cliffs. Six staterooms aboard the relatively small ship offer a passenger capacity of 14. After returning to land, you'll be dropped off at Kailua-Kona, the heart of the Big Island's west coast, where you can spend the day enjoying the quaint town and sampling its world-renowned coffee before attending a cocktail party hosted by the crew that evening.

Great Barrier Reef, Australia

The world's largest coral reef system is guaranteed to give visitors a glimpse of aquatic life they didn't even know existed. But an overwhelming tourism industry means having to venture far offshore to find it. In Cairns -- the jump-off point for the Great Barrier Reef and the epicenter of northeastern Queensland - you'll find [Cairns Dive Centre](#). The company offers 2- and 3-day trips on the M.V. Kangaroo Explorer, with day, night and pre-dawn dives. The ship visits three spots in the Outer Reef, where you'll be dazzled by the underwater activity. Insider Tip: Ask for the "locals only" price and you might just find yourself receiving a 20% discount. Although there are other longer and more serious programs in the area, the M.V. Kangaroo Explorer is the perfect opportunity to get your feet wet (literally) without shelling out an unreasonable sum of money.