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Villa Clara Province

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Why Go?

He wasn't born here, never lived here and died in the distant Bolivian mountains, yet Che Guevara is synonymous with Villa Clara, for liberating its capital Santa Clara from the Batista dictatorship. Yet the land wedged between the Sierra del Escambray (Escambray Mountains) and Cuba's northern keys, a pastiche of misty tobacco fields and placid lakes, has reasons aplenty to drop by.

Cool Santa Clara, an important junction for cross-country travelers, hides a cutting-edge nightlife behind its Che monuments, while nearby the Escambray peaks glimmer with adventure possibilities, including mirror-like Embalse de Hanabanilla, Cuba's largest upland lake.

Picturesque Remedios is the region's oldest settlement, and its somnolence is annually shattered by a frenzied firework party, Las Parrandas. Northeastward, on Villa Clara's coveted coast, beach life revolves around the archipelago of the Cayerías del Norte, Cuba's fastest-growing resort. The presence of an adjacent Unesco Biosphere Reserve has meant development has been relatively sustainable – so far.

When to Go

It's hard to conceive of a better time to take a trip to Villa Clara than December. The 24th, specifically. That's right. Swap your cold Christmas for one of the Caribbean's hottest street parties in Remedios and then head over to the Cayerías del Norte for the start of the high season, when the chances of the skies raining on your beach parade are as low as they get.

Villa Clara Province Highlights

1. Trace the Che legend at Santa Clara's **Monumento Ernesto Che Guevara** (p252) and **Monumento a la Toma del Tren Blindado** (p252)
2. Get your tobacco and caffeine fix at Santa Clara's cigar factory, **Fábrica de Tabacos Constantino Pérez Carrodegua** (p250), and the neighboring, coffee-concocting **La Veguita** (p251)
3. Plug into the electric (sometimes downright shocking!) nightlife in Santa Clara's **Club Mejunje** (p256)
4. Hike the trails, bathe in the pools and soak up the solitude of **Embalse Hanabanilla** (p258)
5. People-watch from the plaza's cafes in the unspoiled colonial pocket of **Remedios** (p259)
6. See the Villa Clara the tourist board forgot at ramshackle yet heart-warming **Caibarién** (p261)
7. Bask on the balmy beaches of the **Cayo Santa María** (p262)