



# Camagüey Province

📍 32 / POP 780,600

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Café Ciudad (p332)
- ➔ Restaurante 1800 (p332)
- ➔ El Bucanero (p341)
- ➔ Restaurante Italiano Santa Teresa (p332)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Gran Hotel (p332)
- ➔ Casa de Magalis (p337)
- ➔ Los Vitrales (p330)
- ➔ Motel la Belén (p336)

## Why Go?

Neither Occidente nor Oriente, Camagüey is Cuba's provincial contrarian, a region that likes to go its own way in political and cultural matters – and usually does – much to the chagrin of folks in Havana and Santiago.

Seeds were sown in the colonial era, when Camagüey's preference for cattle ranching over sugarcane meant less reliance on slave labor and more enthusiasm to get rid of a system that bred misery.

Today Cuba's largest province is a mostly pancake-flat pastoral mix of grazing cattle, lazy old sugar mill towns and, in the south, a few low-but-lovely hill ranges. It's flanked by Cuba's two largest archipelagos: the Sabana-Camagüey in the north and the Jardines de la Reina in the south, both underdeveloped and almost virgin in places.

Staunchly Catholic capital Camagüey is, with its alluring architecture and cosmopolitan charm surpassed in Cuba only by Havana, pin-up for the province. It's a fiercely independent city that nurtured revolutionary poet Nicolás Guillén, groundbreaking scientist Carlos J Finlay and an internationally famous ballet company.

## When to Go

- ➔ There's debate about the actual year of Camagüey's founding (the 500th anniversary is being celebrated in 2014 with innumerable parties) – everyone, however, hits the streets in February to celebrate Jornada de la Cultura Camagüeyana (Days of Camagüeyan Culture).
- ➔ For outdoor enthusiasts, March is prime time for viewing migratory birds on the northern keys.
- ➔ In Playa Santa Lucía, the amazing underwater shark-feeding show is held when sharks are in the area between June and January.
- ➔ In September, Camagüey showcases some more of its cultural prowess with the Festival Nacional de Teatro (National Theater Festival).



## Camagüey Province Highlights

- 1 Retreat into the **Sierra del Chorrillo**, harboring rare birds and petrified forests (p336).
- 2 Watch dive instructors fearlessly feed sharks off **Playa Santa Lucía** (p339).
- 3 Discover huge flamingo nesting sites on the **Refugio de Fauna Silvestre Río Máximo** (p339).
- 4 Save your penance in Camagüey and find Cuba's Catholic soul in a stash of colonial **churches** (p328).
- 5 Stop in **Guáimaro**, where Cuba's first constitution was signed (p337).
- 6 Go fly-fishing for tarpon and bonefish in the shallow flats off **Cayo Cruz** (p338).
- 7 Explore the most sophisticated restaurant scene at one of Camagüey's delectable eateries, like **Restaurante 1800** (p332).
- 8 Go shopping for fresh produce with the locals at Camagüey's **Mercado Agropecuario Hatibonico** (p330).