



Cuba



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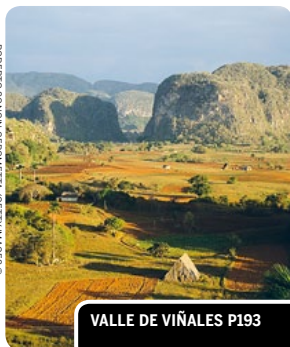
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MUSIC P482

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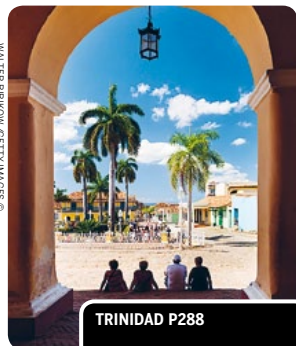
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ON THE ROAD



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Cuba



0 200 km
0 100 miles



Plan Your Trip

Itineraries



18
DAYS

The Classic

It's your first time in Cuba and you want to see as many eye-opening sights as possible countrywide. Even better, you don't mind a bit of road travel. This itinerary ferries you between the two rival cities of Havana and Santiago bagging most of the nation's historical highlights on the way. Viazul buses link all of the following destinations.

Fall in love with classic Cuba in **Havana**, with its museums, forts, theaters and rum. Three days is a bare minimum here to get

to grips with the three main neighborhoods of Havana Vieja, Centro Havana and Vedado.

Head southeast next, lingering in the **Bay of Pigs**, scene of an erstwhile Cold War battle, but these days better suited to scuba diving. French-flavored **Cienfuegos**, an architectural monument to 19th-century neoclassicism, deserves a layover. After a night of Gallic style and Cuban music, travel a couple of hours down the road to colonial **Trinidad** with more museums per head than anywhere else in Cuba. The *casas particulares* (homestays) resemble historical monuments here, so





Parque José Martí, Cienfuegos (p247)

stay three nights. On the second day you can break from the history and choose between the beach (Playa Ancón) or the natural world (Topes de Collantes).

Santa Clara is a rite of passage for Che Guevara pilgrims visiting his mausoleum but also a great place for luxurious private rooms and an upbeat nightlife. Check out Club Mejunje and have a drink in dive-bar La Marquesina. Further east, **Camagüey** invites further investigation with its maze of Catholic churches and giant *tinajones* (clay pots). Skip over Las Tunas, and hightail it to gritty **Holguín** for a slice of workaday Cuba and a salt-of-the-earth

bar scene. Laid-back **Bayamo** is where the Revolution was ignited, and it has an equally sparky street festival called Fiesta de la Cubanía, should you be lucky enough to be there on a Saturday. Allow plenty of time for the cultural nexus of **Santiago de Cuba**, where seditious plans for rebellion have been routinely hatched. The Cuartel Moncada, Cemeterio Ifigenia and Morro Castle will fill a busy two days. Save the best till last with a long, but by no means arduous, journey over the hills and far away to **Baracoa** for two days relaxing with the coconuts, chocolate and other tropical treats.



GULF OF
MEXICO



1
WEEK

Escape from Varadero

Varadero has some cheap packages and is a popular gateway into Cuba, but once you've pacified your partner/kids and had your fill of the beach, what else is there for a curious Cuban adventurer to do? Plenty.

Víazul or Conectando buses link all of the following places.

Take a bus west, stopping for lunch in **Matanzas**, where Cuban reality will hit you like a slap to the face. Investigate the Museo Farmacéutico, peek inside the Teatro Sauto and buy a handmade book in Ediciones Vigía. For a slow approach to Havana get on the Hershey train and watch the lush fields of Mayabeque province glide by. Book a night in a fine colonial hotel in **Havana** and spend the next day admiring the copious sights of the old quarter Habana Vieja. Essential stops include the cathedral, the Museo de la Revolución and a stroll along the Malecón.

The next day, head west to **Las Terrazas**, an eco-resort that seems a million miles from the clamorous capital (it's actually only 55km). You can bathe and bird-watch at the same time in the Baños del San Juan and recuperate with a stay over in the Hotel Moka.

Further west is **Viñales**, Cuba's primary tobacco-growing area and a stunningly picturesque Unesco World Heritage Site. Spend a couple of days in a casa particular, eat some of the best roast pork in Cuba, go for a hike or slump into a rocking chair on a rustic colonial porch.

Going back east, keep on the green theme in **Boca de Guamá**, a reconstructed Taíno village and crocodile farm with boat trips to and around a tranquil lake. Procure a night of accommodation at **Playa Larga**, where you can either dive or plan wildlife forays into the **Ciénaga de Zapata**. A couple of hours east lies the city of **Cienfuegos**, an elegant last night stopover with some fine boutique hotels and opportunities for sunset cruises on the bay.

On the leg back to Varadero you can uncover a more secretive Cuba in **Colón**, back in Matanzas province, and a dustier, time-warped one in half-ruined **San Miguel de los Baños**, an erstwhile spa. Last stop before returning to your Varadero sun-lounge is **Cárdenas**, home to three superb museums.



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Top: Playa Larga (p237)

Bottom: Tobacco plantation in Valle de Viñales (p195)

12
DAYS

Around the Oriente

PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

The Oriente is a different country; they do things differently there, or so they'll tell you in Havana. This circuit allows you to bypass the Cuban capital and focus exclusively on the culturally rich, fiercely independent eastern region. With poor transport links, a hire car could prove useful here.

Make your base in **Santiago de Cuba**, city of revolutionaries, culture and *folklórico* dance troupes. There's tons to do here pertaining to history (Morro castle), music (Cuba's original Casa de la Trova) and religion (Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Cobre). On the second day reserve time to explore east into the Parque Bacanao and the ruined coffee farms around **Gran Piedra**.

Regular buses travel east into the mountains of Guantánamo province. Pass a night in **Guantánamo** to suss out *changüí* music before climbing the spectacular 'Farola' road into **Baracoa** for three days – including beach time at Playa Maguana, a sortie into the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt and a day absorbing the rhythms of the town.

Heading north via Moa is tough, with taxis or rental cars required to get to **Cayo Saetia**, a wonderful key with a hotel where lonesome beaches embellish a former hunting reserve.

Pinares de Mayarí sits in the pine-clad mountains of the Sierra Crystal amid huge waterfalls and rare flora. Hiking married with some rural relaxation seal the deal at the region's eponymous hotel.

If you have half a day to spare, consider a side trip to **Sitio Histórico de Birán** to see the surprisingly affluent farm community that spawned Fidel Castro.

Take a day off in hassle-free **Bayamo** with its smattering of small-town museums before tackling **Manzanillo**, where Saturday nights in the main square can get feisty. More adventurous transport options will lead you down to Niquero and within striking distance of the largely deserted **Parque Nacional Desembarco del Granma** famous for its uplifted marine terraces and aboriginal remains. Spend your last two nights in one of **Marea del Portillo's** low-key resorts before attempting the spectacular but potholed coast road back to Santiago.

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Top: Street music in Santiago de Cuba (p401)
Bottom: Baracoa (p445)



Cuba: Off the Beaten Track

GULF OF
MEXICOFLORIDA
(USA)**CENTRAL MATANZAS**

The towns of central Matanzas province – most notably Colón and Jovellanos – are known for their strong Santería traditions and penchant for rumba. Forget the guidebook; this is a place for independent sleuthing. (p233)

SIERRA DE JATIBONICO

These little-explored hills in northern Sancti Spiritus province are accessible from the town of Mayajigua. There are paths and guided treks led by Ecotur among rivers, semi-deciduous forest and unusual karst topography. (p306)

Straits
of Florida**CAYOS DE SAN FELIPE**

A small uninhabited archipelago and national park that is home to birds, turtles, a rare type of tree rat and 22 dive sites. Visit in a diving package with Ecotur. (p176)

CAYMAN
ISLANDS
(UK)

★ GEORGE TOWN

THE SOUTHERN ISLA

Cave paintings, wild monkeys, deserted beaches and vast swamps characterize the southern half of La Isla de la Juventud, which is both a military zone and a national park. (p177)

THE BAHAMAS

ATLANTIC OCEAN

SIERRA DEL CHORRILLO

Reconnoiter Camagüey province's surprise swathe of serene upland with a stay in a sumptuous old hacienda, a ride on one of Cuba's finest steeds and a foray to find rare birds or rarer-yet petrified trees. (p336)

GIBARA BEACH-BAGGING

Starting in colorful, off-the-radar Gibara, things only get more wild as you voyage via boat or bumpy track to desolate beaches with names like Playa los Bajos or Playa Caletones, where there are also cavern systems to explore. (p365)



SANTA CRUZ DEL SUR

Known mainly for disappearing off the map completely after a 1932 hurricane, this end-of-the-road fishing port, sporting fascinating monuments and a lovely casa, could kick-start a trip to the tranquil cayos of the Jardines de la Reina. (p313)

BARACOA TO HOLGUÍN – THE BACK ROAD

Ever wondered what Cuba's most pristine and bio-diverse protected area (Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt) would look like were it juxtaposed with its ugliest industrial sight (Moa)? Hit this rarely traversed, pothole-ravaged back-road and find out. (p453)

JAMAICA

CARIBBEAN SEA

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