



Matanzas Province

📍 45 / POP 692,536

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Best Outdoor Adventures

- ➔ Wildlife-watching on Río Hatiguanico (p237)
- ➔ Diving in the Bahía de Cochinos (p239)
- ➔ Boat trip on Río Cañímar (p210)

Best Casas Particulares

- ➔ Hostal Azul (p212)
- ➔ Hostal Luis (p240)
- ➔ Hostal Ida (p231)
- ➔ El Caribeño (p238)

Why Go?

With a name translating as ‘massacres,’ Matanzas province conceals an appropriately tumultuous past beneath its modern-day reputation for glam all-inclusive holidays. In the 17th century pillaging pirates ravaged the region’s prized north coast, while three centuries later, more invaders grappled ashore in the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) under the dreamy notion that they were about to liberate the nation.

The Bahía de Cochinos attracts more divers than mercenaries these days, while sunbathers rather than pirates invade the northern beaches of Varadero, the vast Caribbean resort and lucrative economic ‘cash cow’ that stretches 20km along the sandy Península de Hicacos.

Providing a weird juxtaposition is the scruffy city of Matanzas, the mildewed but music-rich provincial capital that has gifted the world with rumba, *danzón* and countless grand neoclassical buildings. Santería is rife both here and in other nearby cities where tourists are scant but soulful, only-in-Cuba experiences are surprisingly abundant.

When to Go

- ➔ December through April the all-inclusive hotels in the province’s tourist set-piece, Varadero, hike prices for the *temporada alta* (high season).
- ➔ High season is the best time for beach-basking; the hurricane season is over and the weather is hot without being unbearable.
- ➔ Hit Matanzas city around October 10 for the annual rumba festival.

NORTHERN MATANZAS

Home to Cuba's largest resort area (Varadero) and one of its biggest ports (Matanzas), the northern coastline is also the province's main population center and a hub for industry and commerce. Despite this, the overriding feel is distinctly green, and most of the region is undulating farmland – think a cross between North American prairie and

the UK's Norfolk Broads – occasionally rupturing into lush, dramatic valleys like the Valle de Yumurí.

Matanzas

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Once radiant and beautiful, Matanzas has aged terribly since the Revolution; now its



Matanzas Province Highlights

- 1 Unlock the buried secrets of dusty **Matanzas**, the 'Athens of Cuba' (p206).
- 2 Check out a performance at Matanzas' resplendent **Teatro Sauto** (p213).
- 3 Immerse yourself in the crystalline waters of **Playa**

Coral (p211) for a spot of snorkeling.

4 Go tandem skydiving over diamond-dusted **Varadero** (p215).

5 Admire forgotten grandeur in **San Miguel de los Baños** (p233).

6 Explore the vast, varied vegetation zones of the **Ciénaga de Zapata** (p236).

7 Discover the plunging drop-offs and colorful coral walls while diving off **Playa Larga** (p237).