



# Camagüey Province

32 / POP 780,600

## Includes ➔

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Casa Austria (p324)
- ➔ El Paso (p324)
- ➔ Mesón del Príncipe (p324)
- ➔ El Bucanero (p333)

## Best Places for Bird-Watching

- ➔ Sierra del Chorrillo (p328)
- ➔ Reserva Ecológica Limones Tuabaquey (p331)
- ➔ Refugio de Fauna Silvestre Río Máximo (p333)
- ➔ Playa los Cocos (p332)

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

## When to Go

- ➔ In February Camagüeyans celebrate Jornada de la Cultura Camagüeyana (Days of Camagüeyan Culture) to mark the city's founding in 1514.
- ➔ 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 Retire into the verdant hills of **Sierra del Chorrillo** (p328), harboring rare birdlife and petrified forests.
- 2 Watch dive instructors fearlessly feed sharks off **Playa Santa Lucía** (p331).
- 3 Discover huge flamingo nesting sites on the **Refugio**

**de Fauna Silvestre Río Máximo** (p333).

- 4 Say your penance in Camagüey and sally forth to find Cuba's Catholic soul in a stash of **colonial churches** (p323).
- 5 Stop in **Guáimaro** (p329), where Cuba's first constitution was signed.

- 6 Go fly-fishing for tarpon and bonefish in the shallow flats off **Cayo Cruz** (p330).

- 7 Tuck into one of the most sophisticated restaurant scenes outside Havana in a colonial **Camagüey eatery** (p324).