



Cuba



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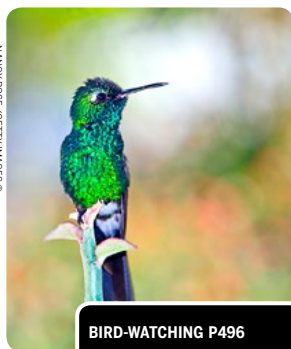
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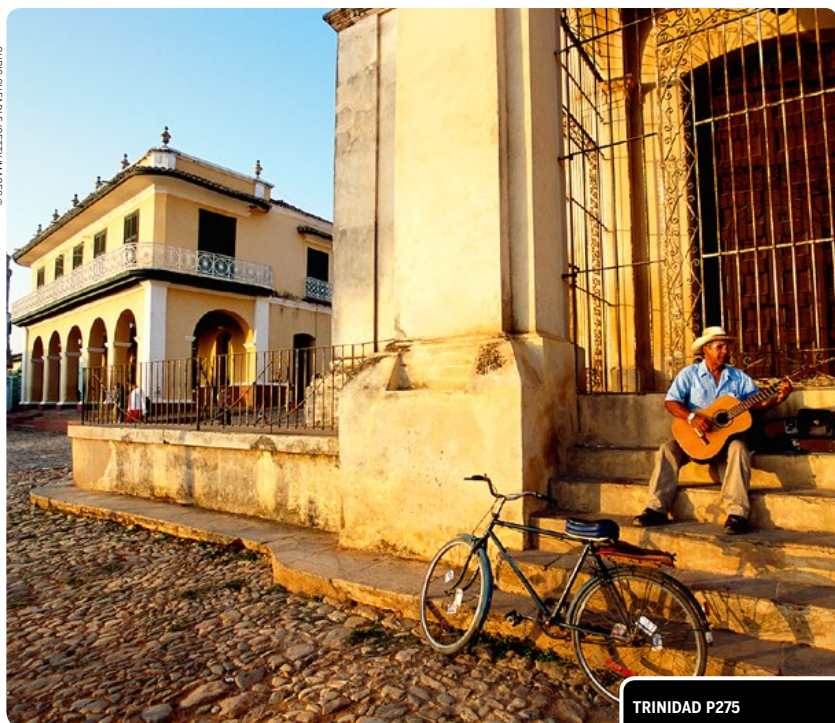
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Plan Your Trip

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 the bare minimum here to get

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

Head west next to the bucolic bliss of **Viñales** for a couple of days of hiking, caving and relaxing on a rocking chair on a sun-kissed colonial-era porch. Daily buses connect Viñales with French-flavored **Cienfuegos**, an architectural monument to 19th-century neoclassicism. 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



Valle de Viñales (p175)

historical monuments here, so 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 it's 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).

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.



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. Viazul or Conectando buses link the following places.

Take a bus west, stopping off for lunch in **Matanzas**, where Cuban reality will hit you like a sharp slap to the face. Investigate the Museo Farmacéutico, take a peep inside the Teatro Sauto and buy a unique handmade book in Ediciones Vigía. For a slow approach to Havana get on the Hershey train and watch as the lush fields of Mayabeque province glide by. Book a night in a fine colonial-era 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 night in the Hotel Moka. An optional two-day extension of this itinerary lies further west in **Viñales**, a stunningly picturesque Unesco World Heritage Site where you can decamp to a casa particular, eat some of the best roast pork in Cuba (the world?), go for a hike and then 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 or two of accommodation at **Playa Larga**, where you can either dive or plan wildlife forays into the **Ciénaga de Zapata**. A couple of hours' drive east lies the city of **Cienfuegos**, an elegant last stopover with fine boutique hotels and 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 Cuba in half-ruined **San Miguel de los Baños**, an erstwhile spa. Last stop before returning to your Varadero sunbed is **Cárdenas**, home to three superb museums.



BUENA VISTA IMAGES / GETTY IMAGES ©



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Top: Plaza de la Catedral, Havana (p64)

Bottom: Cueva de los Peces (p232) near Playa Larga

12
DAYS

Around the Oriente

PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

The Oriente is like another country; they do things differently here, 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 rental car is useful here.

Make your base in **Santiago de Cuba**, city of revolutionaries, culture and *folklórico* (Afro-Cuban folk 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 the *changüí* music before climbing the spectacular road La Farola into **Baracoa**, where three days will bag you the highlights – beach time at Playa Maguana, a sortie into the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt and a day absorbing the psychedelic rhythms of the town itself.

Heading north via Moa is a tough jaunt, with taxis or rental cars required to get you to **Cayo Saetia**, a wonderful key with an on-site 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 farming 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 night 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 uplifted marine terraces and aboriginal remains. Linger 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: Parque Céspedes (p395), Santiago de Cuba
Bottom left: *Bohío* (traditional Cuban hut) in Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt (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. (p216)

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. (p298)

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. (p172)

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. (p161)

THE BAHAMAS

ATLANTIC OCEAN

SIERRA DEL CHORRILLO

Reconnoiter Camagüey province's surprise swath of serene upland with a stay in a sumptuous old hacienda, a ride on one of Cuba's finest steeds and an excursion to find rare birds or rarer-yet petrified trees. (p328)

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 such as Playa los Bajos or Playa Caletones, where there are also cave systems to explore. (p358)



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. (p306)

BARACOA TO HOLGUÍN – THE BACK ROAD

Ever wondered what Cuba's most pristine and biodiverse 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 to find out. (p445)

JAMAICA

CARIBBEAN SEA



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Brendan Sainsbury

Coordinating Author, Havana, Trinidad & Sancti Spiritus, Camagüey, Las Tunas, Holguín, Granma, Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo Born and bred in Hampshire, England, Brendan first visited Cuba in 1997 as a curious traveler aided by the first edition of this guidebook. He has been back 18 times in the years since, both as a travel guide and a writer, but never again as a tourist. This is his sixth Cuba-related guidebook, though he has covered numerous other countries for Lonely Planet, including Angola, Italy and Jamaica. Cuba remains a favorite haunt and he lists

Havana (along with London, and Granada in Spain) as one of his top world cities. When not writing or traveling, Brendan enjoys following the fortunes of Southampton football club, listening to old Clash records and running ridiculous distances across deserts.

Read more about Brendan at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/brendansainsbury>



Luke Waterson

Artemisa & Mayabeque, Isla de la Juventud, Valle de Viñales & Pinar del Río, Varadero & Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Ciego de Ávila, Strong coffee, stronger rum, still-stronger cigars and the prospect of watching sunrise over his beloved Viñales mogotes: Luke was easily persuaded into returning for his third edition of Lonely Planet *Cuba* on the tenth anniversary of his initial visit. A writer specialising in Latin America for over a decade, Luke also writes for the BBC,

the *Telegraph* and Insight Guides, and is author/contributor to 30 travel and fiction books. He lives in Bratislava, Slovakia, where he runs quirky travel/culture blog englishmaninslovakia.com. Luke also wrote the Literature & the Arts and Landscape & Wildlife chapters.

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