



# Las Tunas Province

📍 31 / POP 538,000

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## Why Go?

Most travelers say hello and goodbye to Las Tunas province in the time that it takes to drive across it on the Carretera Central (one hour on a good day). But, hang on a sec! This so-laid-back-it's-nearly-falling-over collection of leather-skinned cowboys and poetry-spouting country singers is known for its daredevil rodeos and Saturday night street parties where barnstorming entertainment is served up at the drop of a sombrero.

Although historically associated with the Oriente, Las Tunas province shares many attributes with Camagüey in the west. The flat grassy fields of the interior are punctuated with sugar mills and cattle ranches, while the eco beaches on the north coast remain wild and lightly touristed, at least by Varadero standards.

In this low-key land of the understated and underrated, accidental visitors can enjoy the small-town charms of the provincial capital, or head north to the old mill town Puerto Padre where serenity rules.

## When to Go

- ➔ The wettest months are June and October, with over 160mm of average precipitation. July and August are the hottest months.
- ➔ Las Tunas has many festivals for a small city; the best is the Jornada Cucalameana in June.
- ➔ Festival Internacional de Magia (Magic Festival), held in the provincial capital in November, is another highlight.
- ➔ The National Sculpture Exhibition, an event befitting the so-called 'City of Sculptures,' happens in February.



## Las Tunas Province Highlights

**1** Hunt for the imaginative sculptures embellishing the sleepy cityscape of **Las Tunas** (below).

**2** Check out the dudes with lassos in **Parque 26 de Julio** (p340), Las Tunas' celebrated twice-annual rodeo.

**3** Enjoy the unkempt beaches of **Playa la Herradura** (343), before resort developers shatter the tranquility.

**4** Linger awhile in friendly, out-on-a-limb seaside town **Puerto Padre** (p341).

**5** Roll into El Cornito in June to experience some

country crooning at the **Jornada Cucalambeana** (p337) music festival.

**6** Enjoy some slick private enterprise in **Las Tunas**' new Italian restaurants (p337).

**7** Go diving in the largely undiscovered reefs off **Punta Covarrubias** (p342).

## History

The settlement of Las Tunas was founded in 1759 but wasn't given the title of 'city' until 1853. In 1876 Cuban General Vicente García briefly captured the city during the War of Independence, but repeated Spanish successes in the area soon led the colonizers to rename it La Victoria de Las Tunas. During the Spanish-Cuban-American War the Spanish burned Las Tunas to the ground, but the Mambís fought back, and in 1897 General Calixto García forced the local Spanish garrison to surrender in a pivotal Cuban victory.

Las Tunas became a provincial capital in 1976 during Cuba's post-revolutionary geographic reorganization.

## Las Tunas

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If it was down to sights and historical attractions alone, it's doubtful many people would

bother with La Victoria de Las Tunas (as it's officially known), a sleepy agricultural town that seems like it hasn't woken up to the fact it's been a provincial capital almost 40 years. Its sleazy reputation for being the Oriente's capital of sex tourism hardly helps. But, thanks to a handy location on Cuba's arterial Carretera Central, handfuls of road-weary travelers drop by.

Referred to as the 'city of sculptures,' Las Tunas is certainly no Florence. But what it lacks in grandiosity it makes up for in small-town quirks. You can see a thigh-slapping rodeo here, admire a statue of a two-headed Taíno chief, go wild at one of the city's riotous Saturday-night street parties or wax lyrical at the weird and witty Jornada Cucalambeana, Cuba's leading country-music festival. Go on, give it a whirl!