



# Valle de Viñales & Pinar del Río Province

48 / POP 595,000

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## Best Places to Eat

- ▶ Tres Jotas (p181)
- ▶ El Olivo (p180)
- ▶ Balcón del Valle (p181)
- ▶ Café Ortuzar (p192)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ▶ Casa Daniela (p178)
- ▶ Hotel los Jazmines (p180)
- ▶ Terra Mar 1910 (p192)
- ▶ Villa los Reyes (p178)

## Why Go?

Tobacco is still king on Cuba's western fingertip, a rolling canvas of rust-red oxen-furrowed fields, thatched tobacco-drying houses and sombrero-clad *guajiros* (country folk).

The crucible of this emerald land is the Valle de Viñales, a Unesco World Heritage Site framed by a backdrop of distinctive *mogotes* (limestone monoliths) that nigh-on beseech you to get hiking. Playing a tuneful second fiddle is the Península de Guanahacabibes, an uninhabited wilderness chock-a-block with fertile ecosystems that about a swath of 50-plus offshore dive sites.

People primarily come here to be close to nature, basing themselves in the serene hassle-free village of Viñales. From here, huge cave complexes call for torch-lit exploration, tobacco plantations offer expert fact-finding tours, beaches invite lazy contemplation, and every horizon seems to be filled with a host of quintessential 'come to the Cuban countryside' images. So follow the fragrant aroma of tobacco and come.

## When to Go

- ▶ Come from May through August to see prized wildlife, such as the Guanahacabibes turtles and thousands of red crabs.
- ▶ November through February is the tobacco-growing season and a good time to visit the plantations speckled with their deep-green plants.
- ▶ December through March is ideal beach weather. Calm seas also create good conditions for diving at María la Gorda.
- ▶ July through early November is the hurricane season. Beware, in the last decade several big storms have hit the province, usually in August or September.



GULF OF MEXICO



## Valle de Viñales & Pinar del Río Province Highlights

- 1 **Parque Nacional Viñales** (p183) Seeing, smelling and tasting the agricultural beauty of this wonderfully authentic Unesco World Heritage Site.
- 2 **Parque Nacional Península de Guanaha-**

- cabibes** (p195) Going turtle-watching on virgin beaches on the western fingertip of the Cuban mainland.
- 3 **Valle de Palmarito** (p185) Riding a horse or hiking up with the *guajiros* into this

pastoral valley in the Parque Nacional Viñales.

- 4 **Gran Caverna de Santo Tomás** (p183) Getting gobsmacked by the grottos of one of Latin America's largest subterranean cave systems.