



# CUBA'S SOUTHERN ROLLERCOASTER

*Pounded by surf, overshadowed by mountains and deeply imbued with revolutionary history, this lonely ride along Cuba's Caribbean coast pulsates with natural and historical drama.*

Cuba is full of dichotomies and its roads are no exception. Take Carretera N20 for instance, the 106 miles (170km) of potholed asphalt that runs along the south coast between Santiago de Cuba and the rustic village of Marea del Portillo, a spectacularly battered thoroughfare that could quite conceivably be described as the nation's best and worst highway. Shielded by purple-hued mountains that tumble down to meet the iridescent Caribbean, it scores ten-out-of-ten for craggy magnificence. But, lashed by hurricanes and beset by a severe lack of maintenance, it can be purgatory for aspiring drivers. Not surprisingly, few cars attempt it, leaving the road the

preserve of goats, *vaqueros* (cowboys) and the odd two-wheeled adventurer on a bicycle.

During nearly 20 years of travel in Cuba, I have traversed this epic highway in numerous ways, most notoriously on a protracted hitchhiking trip involving at least a dozen changes of vehicle, from a terminally ill Fiat Uno to a truck where the only other passenger was a dead pig. But my preference, if time and weather allows, is to tackle it on a bicycle. As visceral experiences go, this is Cuba as its most candid. The salty air, hidden coves, and erstwhile revolutionary history conspire to form a proverbial Colombian voyage of discovery that becomes more magical the further you pedal.



