



**SIMPLY CUBA TOURS**



# **BIRDING CUBA**

## **Essential Birding Guide**

Cartacuba/Cuban tody  
*Todus multicolor*

Photo by Yonís Blanco Santos

[www.simplycubatours.com](http://www.simplycubatours.com)



# WELCOME

Welcome to your Essential Birding Photography Guide.

The aim of this guide is to provide you an insight to the amazing avifauna that exists in Cuba and all you need to know to make the most out of your birding photography tour.

We hope to inspire your travel dreams, helping you learn more about your destination and prepare for your trip with ease so you can get the most out of your visit. In here you will find information about the birds of Cuba, where to go, when to go what to bring, what to wear, what you cannot bring among other tips.

Birdwatching trip success comes down to being prepared and having a local guide with intimate on the ground knowledge and a photography expert to assist you in capturing the best bird shots.

Booking your tour through Simply Cuba means that you will receive personalized, expert advice as well as local knowledge all the way. Our guides are local birders themselves, and our photography experts are carefully selected for each trip from around the world.

We have outlined a birding tour itinerary within this guide to give you an insight into a trip with us. When you choose to travel with Simply Cuba Tours, we take care of everything from your arrival at Havana airport till you conclude your 10-day tour. All you have to do is decide on the date to join us!

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to our experts who are a wealth of knowledge about all things Cuba!

We look forward not only booking your holiday for you but making it the most memorable experience of your lifetime!

See you soon,  
**Yoanis & Orsolya**

Zunzun/Cuban Emerald  
*Chlorostilbon ricordii*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos



Flamenco/Greater Flamingo  
*Phoenicopterus Ruber*

## Cuba – Paradise for birds

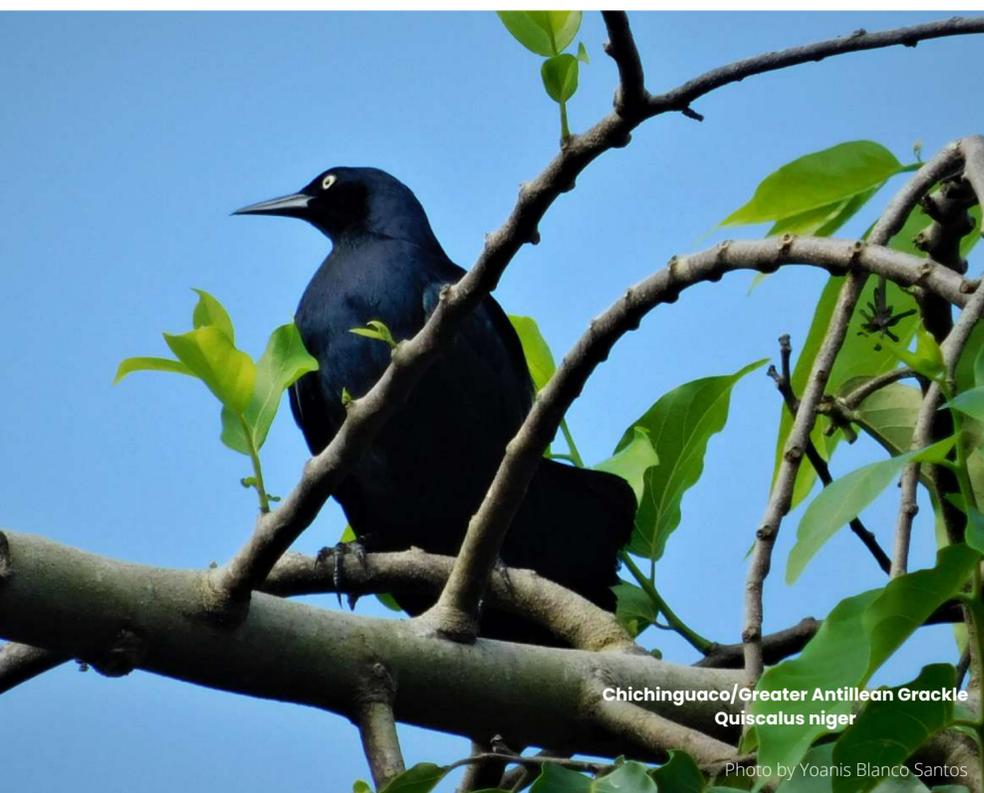
Cuba is quickly becoming a popular tourist destination. With its rich history, lush tropical landscape, incredible birdlife, and warm hospitality the country has a lot to offer. It is a remarkably beautiful island; it's a country that has maintained its character and authenticity throughout the years. If you want to experience some of Cuba's unspoiled sights, there are nine UNESCO World Heritage sites in the country – areas of cultural or physical significance that are protected as a result it has the most diverse environment of any Caribbean island.



Carpintero Jabao/West Indian Woodpecker  
*Melanerpes superciliosus*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

Deciduous forests, xeric landscapes, grasslands, rivers, high mountain peaks, marshes, mangroves, and even pastures and plantations provide much-needed habitat for Cuba's birdlife. Cuba has created an exceptional network of protected areas conserving ecosystems across the country. There are six internationally recognised Ramsar sites and six UNESCO Biosphere Reserves that protect more than 12% of the total land surface.



Chichinguaco/Greater Antillean Grackle  
*Quiscalus niger*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

One of the most fascinating aspects of Cuba is its high level of endemism, particularly in birds. There are seven general endemic to Cuba and 28 endemic species. Sadly, over 80% of the country's endemic birds are of conservation concern. Some, such as the Cuban Macaw, have been lost to us forever. This incredibly colourful bird was last seen over 150 years ago and is known to be extinct. Others, such as the Cuban Kite, have only been reliably documented a handful of times in the early 2000s. Despite these losses, Cuba offers much to celebrate, to discover, and to observe.

### Cuba's Avifauna

There are 407 species described of which there are 28 endemic species currently recognized. The island's position, oriented west-east across avian flyways, means that a large proportion of its species are migratory,



Cartacuba/Cuban tody  
*Todus multicolor*

Photo by Yonnis Blanco Santos

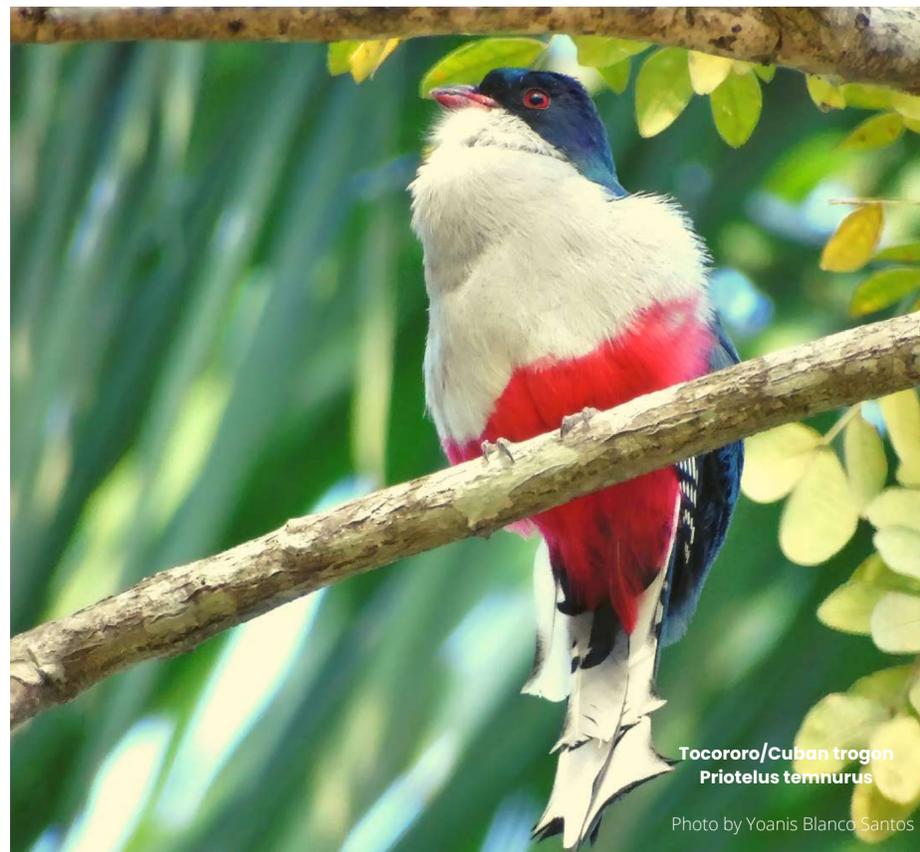
two-thirds of which primarily winter visitors, one-third being transients. These are various birds like ducks, gulls, warblers, sparrows, and shorebirds.

This means that visiting birders will encounter a much greater variety of birds during Northern Hemisphere winter.

## Cuban Endemics

The most well-known Cuban endemic is the **Cuban Trogon** aka Trocororo as it is Cuba's national bird.

Why you may ask? Because its colors represent the Cuban flag. It also has a strong sense of freedom, like the Cuban people. It does not take to being trapped in a cage at all.



Tocororo/Cuban trogon  
*Priotelus temnurus*

Photo by Yonnis Blanco Santos

It is adorned with a fancy layered tail that looks like the tail of a jacket reserved for royalty. You will see this bird all around the island, although their preference is forests. It loves taking over the woodpecker nests and feed on flowers, insects, and fruits.

Unfortunately, there are a couple of species, notably the critically endangered, near-flightless Zapata Rail, and the Cuban Kite, which have not been reliably seen in recent times.

And then there is the cutest little thing that you have ever seen, the Cuban Tody. It's tiny, no bigger than 2 inches long, with an abnormally big head, long bill, and short tail creating its unique look. In fact, there are no others like this one!



Mayito de Cienaga/Red shouldered black bird  
*Agelaius assimilis*

They tend to travel in pairs. And would you believe that this baby is a hunter? Yup, it usually hunts from low-to-middle level perches, sitting nearly still before leaping upwards to snatch prey from twigs and leaves. Its claim for fame is eating 40% of its body weight each and every day! Fruits, insects, spiders, and even small reptiles are on the menu.

Its bright emerald-colored head and back, deep pink throat, and pale belly make this species unmistakable. This species is also relatively easy to see, since it perches often at eye level or below, and is widespread across the island.



Pelicano Blanco/American White Pelican  
*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

The Zapata Wren is perhaps one of Cuba's most sought-after birds. This species has one of the most limited ranges of any bird in the world. A visit to the Zapata Swamp is a must if you hope to catch a glimpse of this lovely, cryptically colored wren. We can find it vocalizing or flitting about in grassy marsh areas among the cattails and shrubs. It has a similar diet to the Cuban Tody – feeding on fruits, insects, and small reptiles.

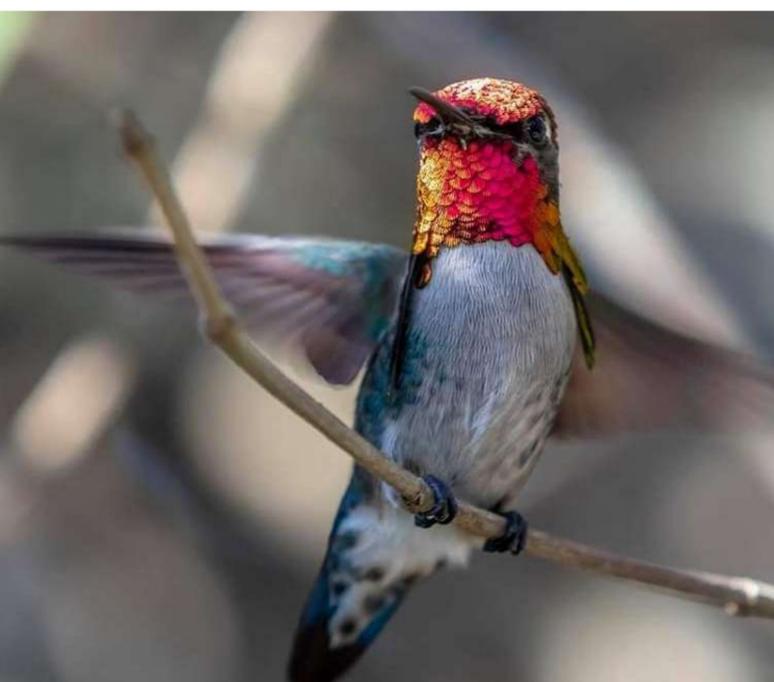
For wildlife-watchers, a vast, virtually uninhabited swampy wilderness spanning the entirety of southern Matanzas, the 4520-sq-km Península de Zapata quickens the pulses with the country's most important bird species in its humid embrace. Most of the peninsula is a protected zone, safeguarded nationally as the Gran Parque Natural Montemar, and internationally as the Ciénaga de Zapata Unesco Biosphere Reserve.

Of course, any list of the endemic birds of Cuba wouldn't be complete without mentioning the Bee Hummingbird. Its claim to fame is being the smallest bird in the world.

It is tiny! So if you ask me, just like bees, this baby defies the odds every day with its size being about as big as a 10 cent piece. Or in metrics – Females weigh 2.6 g (0.092 oz) and are 6.1 cm (2.4 in) long, and are slightly larger than males, with an average weight of 1.95 g (0.069 oz) and length of 5.5 cm (2.2 in) They come in amazing colors, makes them look like a flying jewel. Although they are tiny, they tend to steal the limelight, and one of the main reasons why birdwatchers visit Cuba!



Catey/Cuban Parakeet  
*Psittacara eoups*



They come in amazing colors, makes them look like a flying jewel. And although they are tiny, they tend to steal the limelight and one of the main reasons why birdwatchers visit Cuba!

Other notable endemics include the **Bare-legged Owl**, a secondary cavity nester, and the **Cuban Parakeet** – the only endemic Psittacidae on the island. You'll also find the **Gundlach's Hawk**, **Blue-headed Quail-Dove**, and Cuba's only two endemic woodpeckers, **Fernandina's Flicker** and **Cuban Green Woodpecker**.



Bijirita Trepadora/Black and White Warbler  
*Mniotilta varia*

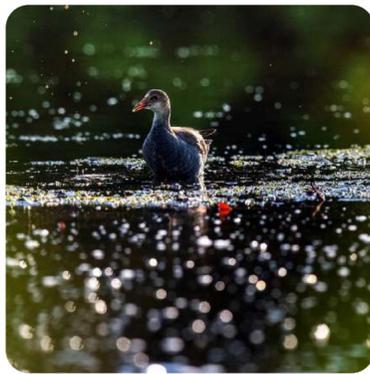
Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

Other endemics include the Cuban Gnatcatcher, the stunning Cuban Grassquit, the Cuban Pygmy-Owl - who can look ferocious or sweet, and many more. All extant endemics and other specialties can be seen in the western two-thirds of the country.

## Meet the endemics



1. Gavilán Caguararero – Cuban kite – *Chondrohierax wilsonii* - (CE)



2. Gallinuela de Santo Tomás – Zapata rail – *Cyanolimnas cerverai* - (CE)



3. Gavilán colilargo – Gundlach's hawk – *Accipiter gundlachi* - (EN)



4. Paloma perdiz – Blue-headed quail dove – *Starnoenas cyanocephala* - (EN)



5. Ferminia – Zapata wren – *Ferminia cerverai* - (EN)



6. Cabrerito de cienaga – (Cuban) Zapata sparrow – *Torreornis inexpectata* - (EN)



7. Camao – Gray-fronted quail dove – *Geotrygon caniceps* - (V)



8. Catey – Cuban parakeet – *Psittacara euops* - (V)



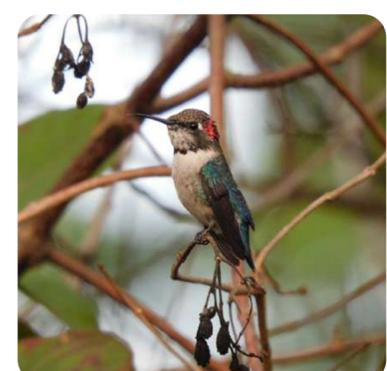
9. Carpintero churroso – Frenandina's flicker – *Colaptes fernandinae* - (V)



10. Mayito de cienaga – Red-shouldered blackbird – *Agelaius assimilis* - (V)



11. Gavilán batista – Cuban black hawk – *Buteogallus gundlachi* (NT)



12. Zunzuncito – bee hummingbird – *Mellisuga helenae* - (NT)



13. Ruiseñor – Cuban solitaire – *Myadestes elisabeth*- (NT)



14. Sijú cotunto – bare-legged owl – *Margorobyas lawrencii*- (C)



15. Sijú platanero – Cuban pigmy owl – *Glaucidium siju*- (C)



16. Guabairo – cuban nightjar – *Antrostomus cubanensis*- (C) but difficult to observe



17. Toco-ro-ro – cuban trogon – *Priotelus temnurus*- (C)



18. Cartacuba – Cuban tody – *Todus multicolor*- (C)



19. Carpintero verde – Cuban green woodpecker – *Xiphidiopicus percussus*- (C)



20. Juan chiví Ojón – cuban vireo – *Vireo gunladchii*- (C)



21. Sinsontillo – cuban gnatcatcher – *Poliophtila lembeyi*- (LC)



22. Chillina – yellow headed warbler – *Teretistris fernandinae*- (C)



23. Macao – Cuban macaw – *Ara tricolor*(EX)



24. Tomeguin del pinar – Cuban grassquit – *Tiaris canorus*- (C)



25. Solibio – cuban oriole – *Icterus melanopsis*- (C)



26. Totí – Cuban black bird – *Dives atrovioleaceus*- (C)



27. Bijirita pechero – oriente warbler – *Teretistris fornsi*- (C) restricted to zones in the central and Eastern provinces



28. Carpintero real – ivory-billed woodpecker (controversial, considered almost extinct)

**EX** – extinct **V** – vulnerable **CE** – critically endangered **EN** – endangered **NT** – nearly threatened **C** – common **LC** – locally common



Bijirita Trepadora/Black and White Warbler  
*Mniotilta varia*

Photo by Yonnis Blanco Santos

## Other Specialities

The Caribbean boasts a large number of bird species in its number of islands, cays, and inlets. Cuba welcomes several species that only live in this area. Iconic species are the **Cuban Parrot**, aka Cuban Amazon, which's also found in the Bahamas and the Grand Cayman. Thankfully the conservation efforts worked with this one and their numbers have increased in recent times.

The **Red-legged Thrush** can also be found in Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and the Cayman Islands, around forests, farmlands, and even the cities.



Other regional endemics that you can find in Cuba are the **Cuban Emerald, West Indian Woodpecker, Loggerhead Kingbird, Antillean Palm-Swift, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Palm Crow, and West Indian Whistling-Duck.**

We mentioned that there are a large number of migratory birds that visit Cuba also. Some like the **Black-whiskered Vireo and Greater Antillean Nighthawk**, along with about a dozen neotropical species come to Cuba from southern regions to breed. Others like the **American Redstart, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Cape May Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Black throated blue warbler** are winter residents.



Carpintero churrasco/Fernandina's Flicker  
*Colaptes fernandinae*

Photo by Yonnis Blanco Santos

Among the most important bird habitats are natural wetlands. Shorebirds, herons, and ducks make up the largest percentage of migrants in these aquatic ecosystems, which in Cuba include beach and coastline, mangroves, marshes, lakes, and reservoirs.

As a bonus we have included a copy of Nils Navarro's Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Cuba. The latest revision includes all the new birds Nils discovered in 2023 when visiting Baracoa's region.



Torcaza cabeciblanca/White crowned pigeon  
*Patagioenas leucocephala*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

## Birding Sites

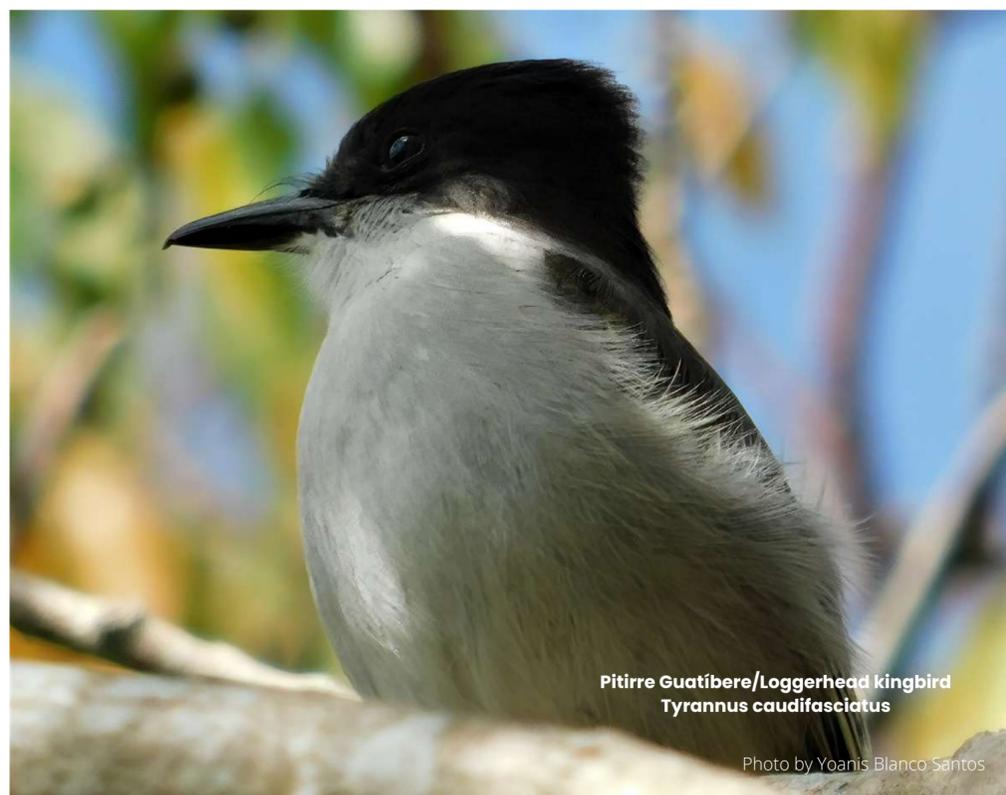
I have mentioned the **Zapata Peninsula** before, within that, there are a few sites to see. **La Turba**, located on the Northern edge of Zapata Swamp, It's a great area for spotting the Zapata Wren and other specialties.

South of Playa Larga, you'll find the **Salinas**, which offers some spectacular Caribbean coastal birding. Raised viewing platforms allow the enjoyment of flocks of American Flamingo and large numbers of herons, ducks, and shorebirds. An afternoon birding here is unforgettable.

On the East of the Bay of Pigs, the town of **Soplillar** gives access to various tracks and trails for an easy walk in search of birds of semideciduous forest and palm forests. Local guides are a must, as the trails are like a labyrinthine. The guides also know which palm trunk hides the Bare-legged Owl, where the Greater Antillean Nightjars are roosting, and where the Fernandina's Flicker pair is nesting.

Further east still, is the **Bermejas** boasts a list of 200 species of amazing birds. The western outskirts provide roosting sites for the Cuban Parakeet. At first light here, all four species of quail-doves. The Bee Hummingbird also loves this area.

Biosphere Reserve of **Sierra del Rosario** in Pinar del Rio, the first Biosphere reserve of Cuba, established in 1985.

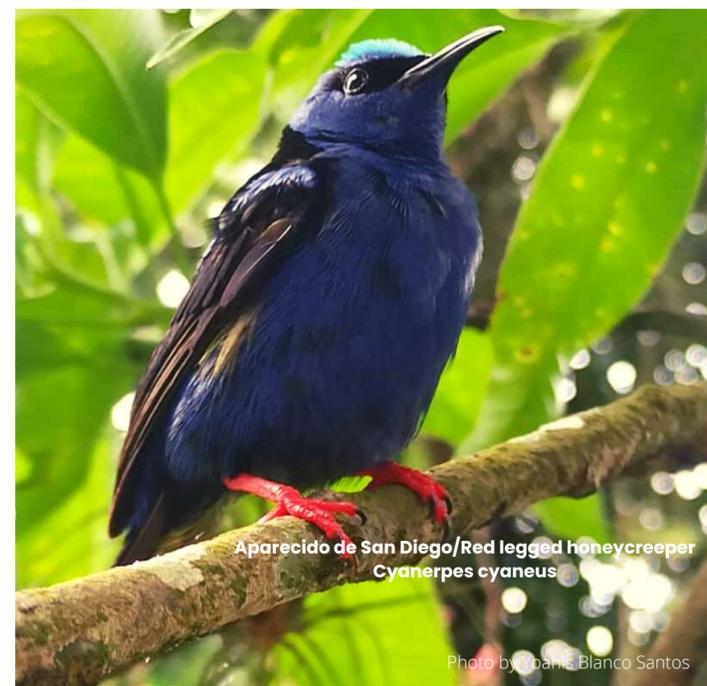


Pitirre Guatíbere/Loggerhead kingbird  
*Tyrannus caudifasciatus*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

Over 100 bird species find shelter in these forests. Such a place, bathed by lakes and rivers, supports plenty of tocororos (national bird), nightingales, woodpeckers, Cuban tody, ducks, hummingbirds, mockingbirds, and the Cuban grassquit, with a peculiar yellow neck and endemic of the region, some of which can only be seen in this region.

The vast bird population includes 16 out of the 28 endemics of Cuba and 10 globally threatened birds. These threatened species include the Endangered Blue-headed Quail-dove, Giant Kingbird, and Gundlach's Hawk, the vulnerable Fernandina's Flicker and the near-threatened Northern Bobwhite, and White-crowned Pigeon.



Aparecido de San Diego/Red legged honeycreeper  
*Cyanerpes cyaneus*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos



Tomeguín del pinar/Cuban grassquit  
*Phonipara canora*

**Las Terrazas** area is also a local gem. The name refers to the 1,360 km of terraces constructed when over 6 million trees were re-planted in this area. Some beautiful endemics, the Fernandina's Flicker and Gundlach's Hawk can be seen here, and the small farms within the reserve are perfect for spotting the stunning Cuban Grassquit.

At the **Cayos**, being the areas of Cayo Coco, Cayo Paredon Grande, and Cayo Guillermo, you'll find the Cuban Sparrow, the Cuban Gnatcatcher, the Thick-billed Vireo, and the Bahama Mockingbird.

If you keep venturing East to Sierra de Najasa, Sierra de Cubitas, or Rio Maximo in Camaguey, you can admire the Cuban Parakeet, the Giant Kingbird, the

Palm Crow, the Plain Pigeon, and the largest nesting ground of Flamingos, which is spectacular.

And if you make your way to the most Eastern part of the island, you must visit the **Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt** to try to find the Cuban Kite. Whilst you here, you may as well take your time and truly discover the natural wonders in the area!

## Do I need a Guide?

Definitely! One of the reasons is that local guides are highly trained, know their area and birds exhaustively – not just their visual characteristics, but their songs and calls, their habits and most importantly where to find them!



Pechero/Oriente warbler  
*Troglodytes forsteri*

Also, the protected areas must be accessed with a guide to ensure that the established protocols are followed; this applies especially to areas at the Zapata Swamp, the Cays, and any national parks.

Finally, guide fees are an important source of income to the guides themselves and their communities. So see your local guides as friends and allies in both birding and conservation; a reputable guide is well worth the investment and will not disappoint.



Siju Platanero/Cuban pigmy owl  
*Glaucidium siju*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos



Flamenco/Greater Flamingo  
*Phoenicopterus Ruber*

When you travel with Simply Cuba Tours, our founder, and bird enthusiast, Yoanis is your tour guide. He has over 15 years of experience running nature tours and a lifetime of experience in spotting birds. It is one of his true loves in life! He personally designed our birding photography tour itinerary to provide you the best experience and most spectacular sightings on your Cuba trip.

## Best Time for Birding

Let's face it there are always amazing birds around. Weather-wise January to April is absolutely beautiful. If you also wish to see most of the migratory birds, October and November are fantastic months, mind you these months are still quite wet.

Just like different seasons will have different birds, different time of the day also has different birds. So it is well worth going with a guide who knows the places and best times to visit to capture sight of more birds.

## What to Bring

Because you will be venturing out into untouched landscapes, that have lots of water – thus mosquitoes – it is best to wear lightweight long-sleeve shirts and long pants to keep you

from mozy bites. Also make sure you wear a hat, and waterproof boots, especially in the wetter months. Color-wise green/grey/tan is the best to help you blend into the surroundings.

We also recommend bringing a guidebook, our go-to is the Endemic Birds of Cuba by Nils Navarro. Definitely bring your binoculars, notebook, waterproof pen, mosquito repellent, and sunscreen. And whilst it is not essential equipment, it is nice to have a camera handy for capturing a moment with these wonderful creatures.

Definitely no birdcalls. We do not want to create any stress for the birds, so we ask you to refrain from the use of these. For more details see the checklist at the end of this guide.



Zunzun/Cuban Emerald  
*Chlorostilbon ricordii*



Cotorra/Cuban parrot  
*Amazona leucocephala*



Flamenco/Greater Flamingo  
Phoenicopterus Ruber

## Birding etiquette

At Simply Cuba, we are constantly striving to provide birding tours of the highest quality and would hope that every birder would familiarise themselves with these general guidelines in order to ensure a more enjoyable tour for everyone on board.

Many of our travellers are avid birders/bird photographers and often have similar goals to many of the other group participants; however, people are different and although the common denominator on our trips is seeing birds, we do find that general group interests, personalities, behaviour etc. can differ markedly from person to person and from group to group. We at Simply Cuba Tours take dynamics very seriously and understand that healthy group dynamics lead to successful, homogenous tours that can be enjoyed to their full potential.

Trail Rotation – Rotating on a narrow trail every three or so minutes allows everyone an opportunity to be at the front of the trail for a period of time. The front person will step aside after three minutes and, allowing the rest of the group to pass, join up again with the group at the rear of the line. The guide will always be at the front of the line;

We would also like to point out that it is inappropriate to walk in front of the leader whilst birding. It is important for the leader to have as unobstructed a view as possible, so they can find and identify birds. Once the bird is viewable, the leader will move out of the way as much as possible to ensure all our participants can see the bird and on a photography tour, capture them through their lens.



Talking on Trails – Please keep noise levels to a minimum while we are birding, this includes roads and trails. High noise levels make it difficult for the leader to pick out those critical calls and are also likely to have a negative impact on the number of birds and general wildlife you are likely to encounter, as generally, these animals prefer a quiet, natural environment. Constant chatter on trails can also be rather annoying to those who are also trying to appreciate the tranquility of the surroundings.

However, at the same time, we do want our participants to enjoy themselves and we understand that tours are a social event; therefore, use your discretion in deciding when it's appropriate to engage in a conversation with your leader/s or fellow participants.



Zunzun/Cuban Emerald  
Chlorostilbon ricordii



Zunzun/Cuban Emerald  
*Chlorostilbon ricordii*

## The Camera

You are the artist! Choose the equipment you feel most comfortable with.

Food for thought, SLR cameras allow you to take full control over all aspects of photography with almost endless creative freedom. Their larger image sensors offer a broader dynamic range, color tone, saturation, contrast, and exposure levels, and much less 'noise' in dimly-lit situations. They offer one or other RAW capture mode, which

is perfectly suited to image editing with the likes of AdobePhotoshop and Lightroom. SLR cameras offer you a wide range of lenses to choose from, each suited to a specific task.

An SLR is what you want if you are fanatical about photography. Learn and understand the technical parameters of your camera until they are second nature. Apply the technical opportunities to get the best out of what photography is all about.



Pechero/Oriente warbler  
*Teretistris fornsi*

## The Photography Expert

If you choose to make your Birding photography trip to Cuba a reality with Simply Cuba Tours, then you will enjoy the expertise of one of our Birding Photography Experts. We select our experts carefully! They have developed exceptional portfolios over the years and have even been featured in various publications like BBC Wildlife and the National Geographic. They also support nature conservation causes around the world and select photographers combine their biology and bird watching expertise.

Our experts are there to provide you hands-on guidance to create an amazing birding portfolio. Anything you want to know from setting yourself up, your camera up to editing post-production, they are there to teach and impart their knowledge.

They will also be taking some happy snaps of you creating lifetime memories on your trip. Where else can you get expert advice and someone capturing your perfect moments at once?

**Are you intrigued? Check out our sample itinerary!**



Bobito chico/Cuban pewee  
*Contopus caribaeus*

Photo by Yonais Blanco Santos

# 10 DAY SAMPLE BIRDING PHOTOGRAPHY ITINERARY

## WHY JOIN US?

- Over 300 bird species to be discovered around Cuba in 10 days
- Discover the varied ecosystem of wetlands, mangrove forests
- Local Guides with intimate knowledge
- Have Award Winning Photographers assist you to capture the amazing birdlife through your lens
- All entries, instructor, guide fees, transport, meals, and accommodation included

Bijirita Trepadora/Black and White Warbler  
*Mniotilta varia*

## Day 1 - Havana

### Welcome to Cuba!

A complimentary transfer from the airport to the guesthouse is included with your trip to ease you into the life in Cuba. You can check in at any time, your casa hosts will be waiting for you. If you arrive early, enjoy your free time till your welcome meeting at 6pm.

Depending on your arrival into the country and how you feel there are some options for you to discover Havana.

May be even get your supply of Wi-fi cards sorted for your stay...

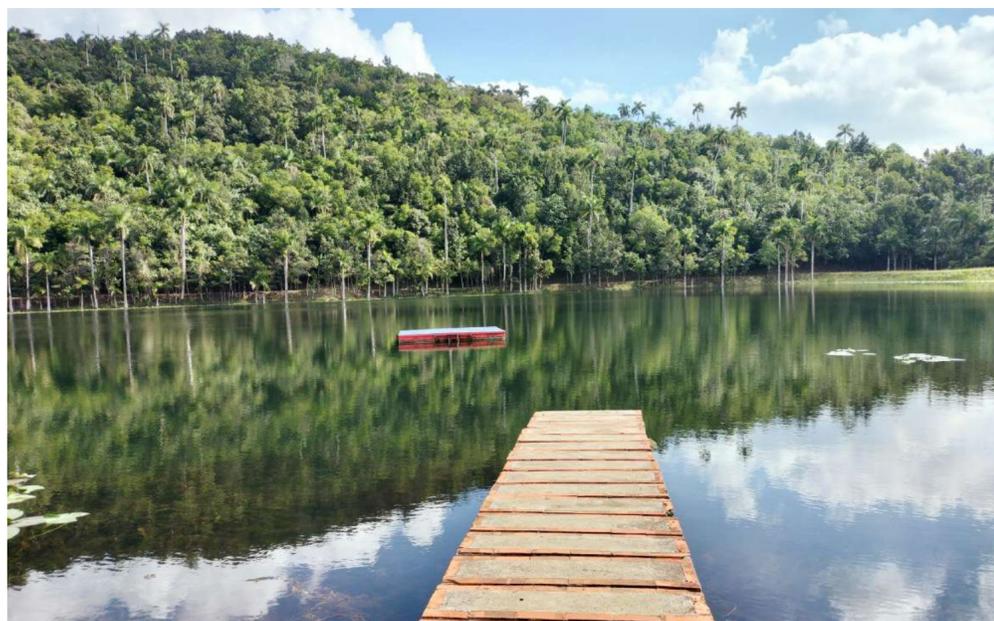
## Day 2 - Las Terrazas/Soroa

Depart early to the Biosphere Reserve of Sierra del Rosario in Pinar del Rio, the first Biosphere reserve of Cuba, established in 1985. Over 100 bird species find shelter in these forests. Such a place, bathed by lakes and rivers, supports plenty of tocororos (national bird), nightingales, woodpeckers, Cuban tody, ducks, hummingbirds, mockingbirds, and the Cuban grassquit, with a peculiar yellow neck and endemic of the region, some of which can only be seen in this region.

The vast bird population includes 16 out of the 28 endemics of Cuba and 10 globally threatened birds. These threatened species include the Endangered Blue-headed Quail-dove, Giant Kingbird and Gundlach's Hawk, Fernandina's Flicker, and the near-threatened Northern Bobwhite and White-crowned Pigeon.

After lunch we will visit the Community of Las Terrazas, an eco-village built around a creek that is part of the Biosphere Reserve. It is the country's best-kept secret!

The goal in this village is to integrate tourism into an existing community rather than create artificial tourist experiences. It succeeds by using local farming, energy efficiency, and a focus on the greater good of the community. You'll have a chance to take a dip in the water before we head to Soroa, where you will have some free time before dinner



## Included Activities

- Birding Photography session at Sierra Del Rosario
- Entrance to Las Terrazas community with birding photography session
- Dinner at a traditional Paladar

## Day 3 – Soroa

The Soroa Region is perfect for nature lovers. There are more than 50 bird species in the tropical forests, so get your binoculars ready as you fuel a passion for the birdlife of Cuba or simply embrace the beauty of the crystal clear river waters. With the sun glistening off of the beautiful flowing waters, you will be amazed to see the rainbow rays shining off of the surface – thus awarding the region with the affectionate nickname ‘The Rainbow of Cuba’.

In the morning we will head out for a 3-hour birdwatching session in the mountains of Soroa. This is natural habitat for forest birds, including both migratory and resident birds. Also we can see some of the most charismatic species, among them endemic birds such as the Cuban Tody, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Blackbird and several neotropical american warblers on migration such as yellow throated Warbler, Northern Parula, common yellow throat, Black and White Warbler among some others. We will return to Soroa for lunch before our afternoon visit to the Soroa Orchid Garden, set among 7 acres of luscious green oasis of flora featuring 250 native Cuban species and amazing birdlife to match.

### Included Activities

- Birding Photography session at the mountains of Soroa
- Soroa Orchid Garden visit with Camera
- Dinner at a traditional Paladar



## Day 5 – Viñales

Get ready for a massive day! We will meet Nils Navarro at the crack of dawn to head out to a birding expedition around the valley. Nils has dedicated his life to the study and conservation of the biodiversity of Cuba and has curated and illustrated the book, Endemic Birds of Cuba – make sure you bring a copy!

Nils has a passion for his work and has been using art to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats in Cuba and throughout the Caribbean region. He knows the area like the back of his hand and has a profound understanding of the biodiversity of the Caribbean Region.

### Included Activities

- Sunrise Photography Session (optional)
- Bird watching session



Toco-ro/Cuban trogon  
*Priotelus temnurus*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

## Day 4 – Viñales

Viñales Valley is a World Heritage site. It is a fascinating “living landscape” of traditional farms and 300 meter high mogotes. It boasts an abundance of birdlife. What's even better, is our local expert here – Nils Navarro, who'll spend a day with you showing you his backyard. Imagine, having the person who catalogued all birds in Cuba at your disposal to introduce you to the beautiful endemics and migratory birds in the area.

The valley also offers some great opportunities for stunning nature shots and meeting the local tobacco farmers.

To close the day, you'll enjoy a fantastic farm-to-plate dining experience at the local organic farm with delicious food and a stunning sunset showcasing the mogotes

### Included Activities

- Valley walk and farm house visit –portrait opportunities
- Sunset Photography session



## Day 6 – Playa Larga

Today we make our way to the National Biosphere Reserve that houses the Cienaga de Zapata National Park. The park forms a fundamental region of the Biosphere reserve and Ramsar site that share its name. The ecological fragility of the ecosystems has led to an intense effort toward conserving biodiversity and natural resources. The region was established as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2001, and it remains one of the Caribbean’s most untamed, least inhabited regions.

We will stay at Playa Larga, a small fishing village on the southern Cuban coast, it’s the best base for exploring the Zapata peninsula. Today you can have the afternoon off to discover the beach here. The clear Caribbean waters with its rich marine fauna, full of corals and exotic fish, makes it a diving paradise. Even if you don’t have your diver’s certificate, snorkeling can be an interesting thing to do, or just enjoy the beach and recharge for tomorrow.

### Included Activities

- Beach orientation and photo opportunities

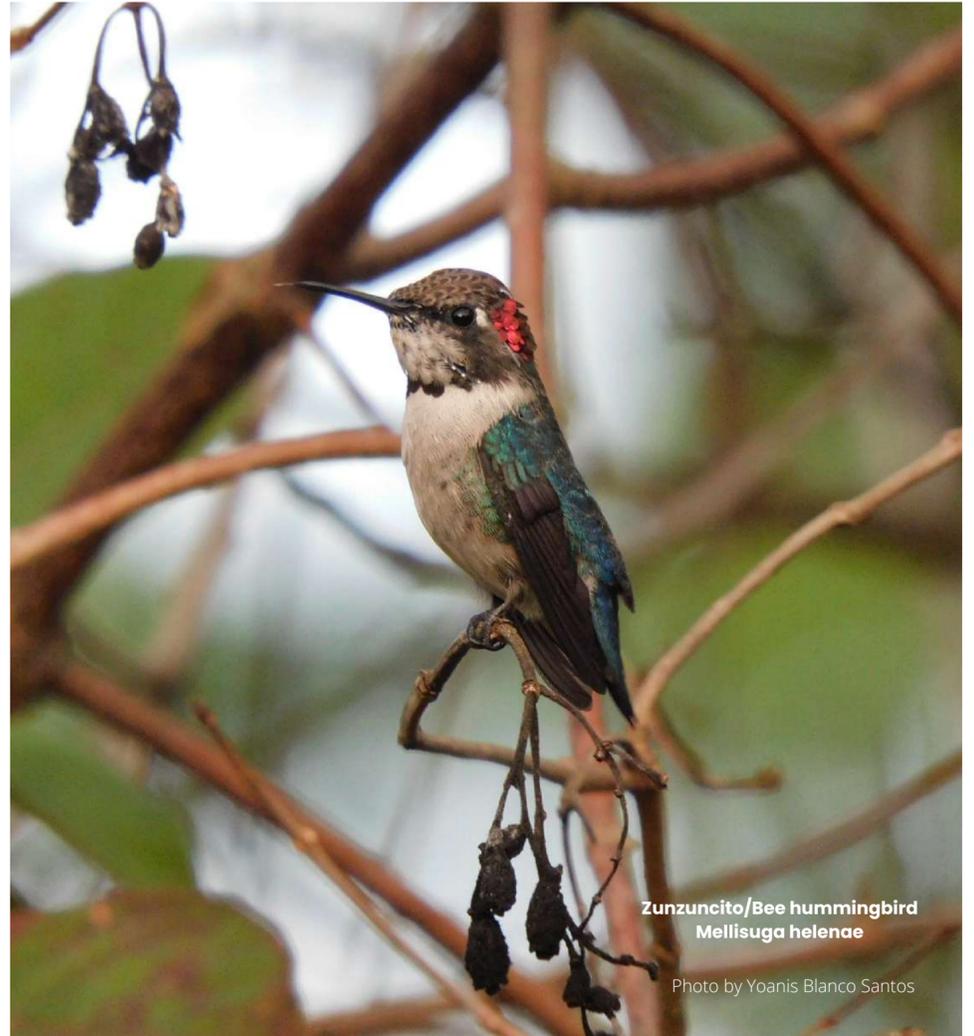
## Day 7 – Zapata Peninsula

We will venture to Las Bermejas this morning, 40km from Playa Larga, a forested area with nice trails, yields such highlights as the beautiful Cuban Trogon (Cuba’s national bird), Cuban Crocs, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Parakeet, Great Lizard Cuckoo, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Cuban Vireo, and the adorable Cuban Tody, a favorite of everyone. The endangered Fernandina’s flickers are often seen in the deciduous forests near Bermejas. We may even see some doves, like the Gray-fronted Quail-dove, Scaly-naped pigeon, Zenaida Dove, Key West Dove, or Blue-head Quail dove in the area.

We will return for lunch before driving to our next destination at Soplillar, for our afternoon session. This area is the largest swamp in the Caribbean and is a perfect place to search for the Zapata wren, the Zapata rail, and other endemic species.

### Included Activities

- Birding photography session at Las Bremejias and Soplillar



Zunzuncito/Bee hummingbird  
*Mellisuga helenae*

Photo by Yoanis Blanco Santos

## Day 8 – Zapata Peninsula

This morning we will make our way to Santo Tomas, a grassy vegetated track between tree-lined canals, where the Zapata Sparrow and the Zapata Wren are hiding. The Zapata Wren is rather illusive and is critically endangered endemic, so spotting it is an exciting moment! We may also be able to see the Cuban Nightjar, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Woodpecker and Zapata Sparrow in this area.

This afternoon we will discover Las Salinas, an area of shallow tidal flats, wetlands, and mangrove-islets, that often showcases hundreds of American Flamingos and a wide variety of herons, egrets, ibis, seabirds and shorebirds, including American White Pelicans, Roseate Spoonbills, Neotropic Cormorants, Wood Stork, White Ibis, Black Skimmer, Clapper Rail, Royal Tern, Caspian Tern, Blackbellied Plover and Shorty-billed Dowitcher.

### Included Activities

- Birding photography session at Santo Tomas and Las Salinas



Tomeguín del pinar/Cuban grassquit  
*Phonipara canora*

## Day 9 - Havana

This morning we will take an approximately 2 1/2 hours drive back to Havana. Upon settling into our casas we will head out to discover Old Havana, a World Heritage site since 1982.

See the glorious grandeur of this dynamic area, one of the Caribbean's most impressive historical cities. Wonder through the narrow streets and spacious plazas, admiring the Spanish architecture as you discover the birth place of Havana - Plaza de Armas, and other iconic sites like Plaza San Francisco de Asis, Plaza Vieja, Plaza de la Catedral, and hear about the love story of Havana. After which you can enjoy some free time in Havana.

### Included Activities

- Old Havana Walking Tour and Photo Session



## Day 10 - Havana

It's time to say good bye to this amazing island. We have not planned any activity for you today.

You have the morning at leisure before your 12pm check out.

We hope you enjoyed it as much as we loved showing it to you!

This is where we depart, yet would strongly recommend that you stay a few more days to explore this unique city. If you would like to take this opportunity, please let us know and we can arrange extended accommodation for you for an additional fee.

## What's Included



Local Tour Guide Services  
Expert Photography and bird  
watching Guidance



### Meals

9 Breakfasts  
8 Lunches  
9 Dinners



### Accommodation

Standard Guesthouse (9 Nights)



### Transport

Private Vehicle

## Included Activities

- Havana - Old Havana Walking Tour
- Las Terrazas - Eco-Community and Birdwatching Photo session
- Soroa - Birdwatching Photo Session
- Soroa - Soroa Orchid Garden Photo Session
- Vinales - Valley walk and Tobacco Farm visit and Photo Opportunities
- Playa Larga - Beach Visit and Photo Opportunities
- Las Bremejas - Birdwatching Photo Session
- Solillar - Birdwatching Photo Session
- La Turba - Birdwatching Photo Session
- Las Salinas - Birdwatching Photo Session

# General Information

Cuba's subtropical climate is ideal for exploration, with most places catching the cool trade winds that blow in from the coast, providing pleasant year-round temperatures. June, July, and August are usually the hottest months – the dry season runs from November to April and the wet season from May to October. Even in the rainy season, downpours are short and shouldn't impede travel plans. Tropical storms and hurricanes are more prevalent in September and October but rarely cause problems for travellers.

## Capital City

Havana

## Language

Spanish

## Currency

CUP

## Time Zone

GMT -4

## Electricity

110V



### Do we require a visa for this trip?

You will require a visa to enter Cuba, however the type of visa available to you depends on your nationality. We recommend you contact your local travel advisor or embassy.

### I am a solo traveler, is there a single surcharge?

Tour prices are based on a twin share basis. If you are traveling on your own, you will be sharing a room with someone of the same gender. If you wish to have your own room, not a problem, you can do so by paying a supplement.

### Are tips included in the cost?

Tipping is not included in the price and it is at your discretion. Tips are greatly appreciated in Cuba, the amount you tip is based on your satisfaction. We provide guidance on tipping in our Essential Information document.

### Are there vaccines required for this tour?

Potentially. It is best to check with your GP prior to travel for the most accurate information.

### Is travel insurance included?

Travel insurance is not included in your tour cost, however it is required for to travel to Cuba. We require a copy of your insurance prior the commencement of your tour.

### Can you organise additional accommodation?

Yes, we can book additional accommodation for before or after your trip. Please let us know your requirements at time of booking your tour, and we will make the arrangements for you.

### What is the best luggage to take to Cuba?

A backpack and day pack, or small travel case with wheels and a day pack. Whatever you choose, just remember that generally you will have to carry your own luggage.

### Are flights included?

As we have travellers from all around the world flights are not included in your tour price. Please contact your travel agent for the best flight deals.

### Point to Point Travel Times

Havana to Las Terrazas	1 hour
Las Terrazas to Soroa	40 mins
Soroa to Playa Larga	4 hours
Playa Larga to Havana	3 hours

**Will you join us?**

Spots are limited. Be an early bird and secure yours!

**[www.simplycubatours.com](http://www.simplycubatours.com)**



Tocororo/Cuban trogon  
*Priotelus temnurus*



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Contact your travel agent for more information