



**SIMPLY CUBA TOURS**

# The Ultimate Cuba Travel Guide



## WELCOME

We are Yoanis, a Cuban born and bred tour guide, and Orsolya, an Australian traveller. Our passion is to showcase Cuba, provide immersive experiences and give back to the Cuban people through our small group tours. It's a win-win for all!

We love nothing more than to show you our backyard, introduce you to the people and the way of life in this mesmerising island. We feel that it'll capture your heart too!

It's a place like no other, a time capsule in the Caribbean, and whilst we love that aspect about it, it can make preparation a little tricky, as many things about Cuba aren't yet on the internet. What is, may not be what it seems, especially if you are considering to travel in a manner that gives back to the people and communities, whilst enriches your experiences and provides you an immersive experience.

Cuba is also the place where things cannot be found easily, so your packing list may need to be altered for this trip... intricacies like that make having a local in your corner very handy to have!

So we decided to prepare this guide for you to give you an insight and help you prepare for a trip of a life time. Who knows, maybe even inspire you to join us on one of our small group tour in Cuba!

See you soon,  
**Yoanis & Orsolya**



## Let the fun begin...

Forget about the white sand beaches, cigars and 1950's classic cars – whilst these are the usual suspects that entice people to visit Cuba, there is so much more to this magical island.

In Cuba, you can wander bustling city streets, go hiking in the mountains, swimming in the azure waters of hidden waterfalls, learn about the art of cultivating tobacco and rolling the perfect cigar, simply soak up the country's 1950's time-warp appeal and get a taste of a slower pace of life. It offers a complicated, yet fascinating history. For years, the trade embargo prevented US citizens from visiting the Caribbean island. Whilst the rules changed for US travellers in 2016, and then again in 2019 and in 2022 visiting the mysterious island is simpler than you may have thought. (Before you plan a visit, make sure to check on [regulations and restrictions](#) in place, as things are subject to change.)

## Planning a trip to Cuba

Less than a hundred miles away from the United States, yet the minute you arrive, you feel as if you've been transported back to the 1950s. With classic convertibles lining the streets, crumbling Spanish facades, and live street music on every corner, the charm of Havana will lure you in straight away.

Cuba trip can be confusing and challenging to try to arrange yourself, which is why it is great to have a sustainable small group tour operator in your corner. Just make sure that you check them first and support those who directly support the community, your choices can make a real difference to the quality of life of those providing a service to you, like guides, casa owners, private restaurateurs. What you'll find when you venture past the Havana boundary line with the locals will be a magical experience, so I invite you to experience some Cuban magic for yourself.

## Quick Facts at a glance

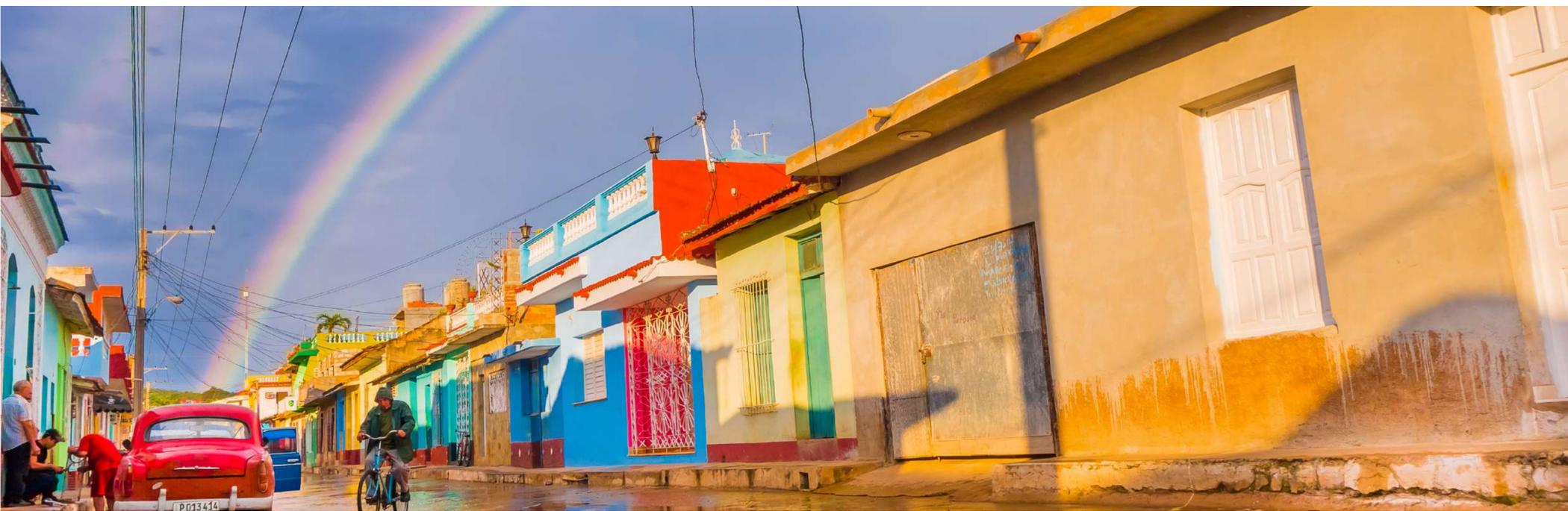
- OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Cuba.
- FORM OF GOVERNMENT: Socialist republic.
- CAPITAL: Havana.
- POPULATION: 11,116,396.
- OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: Spanish, although have to say that the dialect will make you sharpen your ears.
- MONEY: Peso.
- AREA: 42,802 square miles (110,860 square kilometers)
- Power sockets: In Cuba, the power plugs are type A, B, C, and L, the standard voltage is 110 / 220 V, and the standard frequency is 60 Hz. I recommend buying a universal adapter (make sure it has surge protection)

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean Sea. Cuba and its neighbours form the Greater Antilles, a chain of islands created millions of years ago when two of Earth's tectonic plates collided.

Cuba is a long and narrow island. It stretches 1,200 kilometers from east to west, but is only 100 kilometers wide in most places.

While some places may have one or two UNESCO World Heritage sites, Cuba has nine of them! Starting with Old Havana, moving over to the west, you'll find Vinales Valley – the land of cigars. Over to the east, Cienfuegos town centre providing an exquisitely kept French Colonist buildings. Further on The town of Trinidad and the Sugar Mill Valley is regarded as the best preserved outdoor museum. Just to name a few.





## The climate

Cuba is a warm tropical climate, so if you ask us when to visit, we are always going to say that now is good! But it really comes down to the activities and experience you are seeking as some things may not be available at certain time of the year – i.e. birding or diving.

Cuba has two seasons. The dry season runs from November to April. Coolest months being January and February. This time of the year, as the name suggests, majority of the days are sunny. Temperature is around 26–28 Max and the evening cool is around 14 degrees. So it is quite lovely, perfect for hiking, walking around cities. This is also the time of the year when you can expect most migratory birds to visit the island. You'll also have great visibility under water for snorkelling and diving. (the waterholes are a tad bit chilli tho!)

The wet season runs from May to October. You guessed it, this means that the weather heats up a little, to around 30 degrees max, along with it, it becomes muggy as the humidity rises and you can expect rain. In August and September, nearly daily. It is also the time of year where you can expect a hurricane or two to come by. Even if it doesn't rain, it is quite often cloudy, that can affect your visibility under water.

## Getting there

Where is Cuba? Cuba is located in the northern Caribbean where the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean meet.

For a small island, it has lots of international airports... 16 of them in fact – although most are not available from some countries, like Australia, the main one is Havana. Slowly most of them are coming back into full swing, especially with more and more airline routes being available. When you are traveling on a tour, you'd likely to start and finish in Havana.

We are glad to see Canadian routes now including Havana again, not just Varadero and also great to see that US citizens can utilise all airports, not just Havana. Unfortunately for UK travellers, direct flights to the island are currently not available. But it could just mean that you may choose to link your visit to Madrid, with your Cuba getaway.



## Yes, US Travellers can travel to Cuba!

And it is easier than you think. Travel to Cuba from USA is regulated by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. There are 12 licenses for US citizens to travel under, the easiest being “support for Cuban people”.

Good news is, a sustainable small group tour with Simply Cuba Tours, perfectly fits this category.

This category simply means that you vow to support privately-run companies (not Government-run), like staying in casas (privately run accommodation), eat at paladares (private restaurants), use the services of guides and local drivers. You'll have to be able to show this on your itinerary and also you will need to keep the information handy for 5 years. Find some more info [here](#).

What you cannot do is sit on the beach at an all-inclusive hotel. If you think about it, where's the fun in that anyway?

# Cuba Tourist Card (Visa)

All visitors must have a Cuban visa or Tourist Card to enter the country. It's valid for 90 days.

If you are coming from Canada or the US, your airline may have already included this in your ticket. So check with them at the time of booking also to find out how you will receive it, whether they issue it prior to flying or on the plane?

If you are coming via Latin American countries such as Mexico or Panama, then you can purchase this at the airport prior to boarding.

Alternately you can choose to apply with a Cuban Embassy – they will require your flights, travel insurance, confirmation of funds for your holidays and payment. Processing takes around 4 weeks through them.

Alternately, you can use our online processing facility to get your visa delivered to your door. Just click on this [link](#).

With the latter two options you need to ensure that you obtain the correct Tourist card. The 'Pink' card is for those travelling directly from the US, and the 'Green' card are for people traveling via a non-US airport.

Your passport must have at least six months left on it. This is a recent increase as people got caught out in the pandemic.

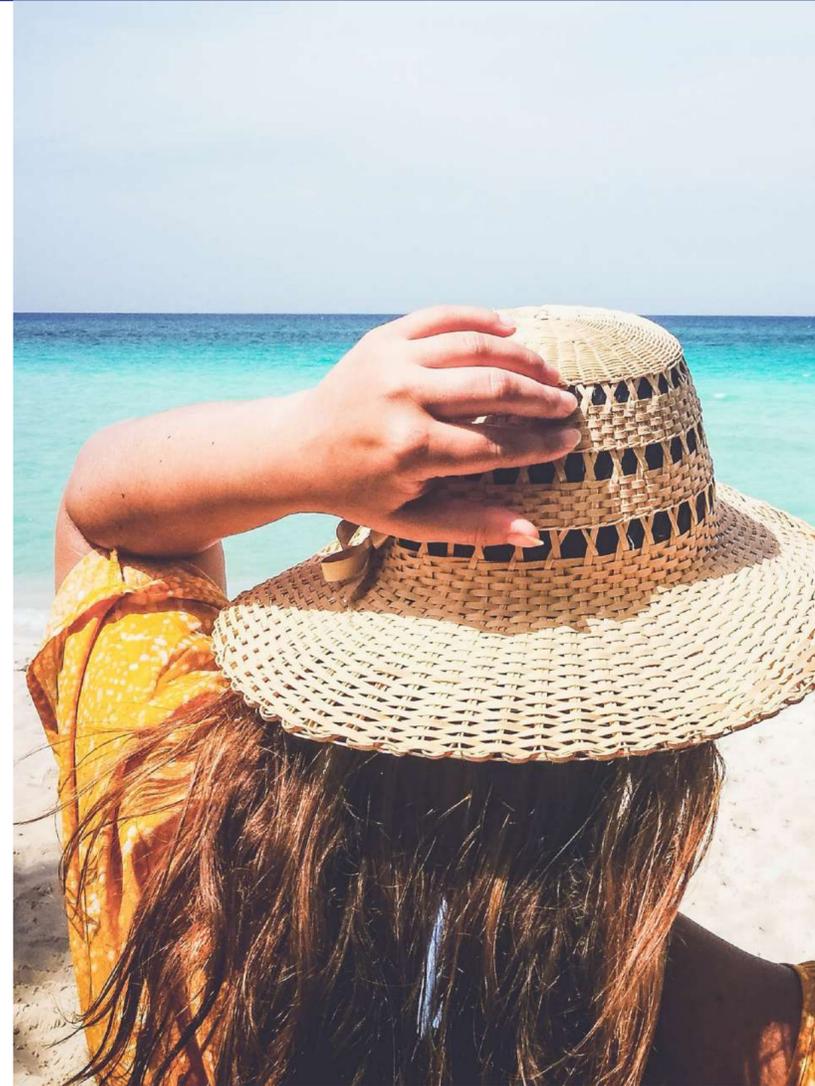
## Cuba Travel Vaccinations

Cuba doesn't require a COVID-19 vaccination certificate for entry.

It is advised to speak to your medical professional before your trip to discuss vaccinations for Cuba.

You may want to consider, Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid Fever, Hepatitis B, Rabies and Cholera. But best to seek professional advice.

Medicines may not be available in Cuba so pack a sufficient supply of prescribed drugs. Always carry a copy of the prescription and a letter from your doctor explaining your condition, treatment, medication and dosage.



## Travel Insurance

It is a requirement of entry to hold travel insurance. Your policy will be checked upon arrival, repatriation costs are an absolute must, and if it is deemed that you do not have enough coverage, you may be asked to purchase additional cover through Asistur.

You'll have to check whether your provider covers Cuba (US insurers won't). [World Nomads](#) may be an option.

Insurance for US travellers may be covered in the price of the airline ticket. So it's worth checking with your airline before you purchase your insurance.

## Entry Requirements

You will have to complete an online personal information form via the D'Viajeros portal within 72 hours before departing for Cuba. Once you provide it, you will receive a QR code by email. You must show an electronic or printed version of the QR code to authorities upon arrival.

[D'Viajeros](#) traveller information portal – Government of Cuba

## Money in Cuba

Even with the inflation that Cuba experienced over the pandemic, it is generally pretty affordable compared to other Caribbean islands, yet it is more expensive than Mexico, Central America or your South East Asian countries.

The official currency of Cuba is the Cuban Peso (CUP) though in most instances you are better off using EUR or USD. As at December 2022, the official exchange rate is 120 CUP to 1 USD. You'll always get better prices in the street market, but it is best to exchange money with the help of a local to ensure a good deal and no counterfeit.

US citizens can legally use credit and debit cards in Cuba as long as you are there authorised to be there by the OFAC. However, at the moment, no US credit or debit card can be used in Cuba. This also includes using a US debit card to try to get cash out of a Cuban ATM.

If you are coming from another part of the world, you need to check with your bank that they aren't relying on a global ATM alliance that is linked with Bank of America or that they aren't an American owned bank as if that is the case, it doesn't matter where you come from, your ATM card will not work. (for Australians that means that Westpac, BankSA, Bank of Melbourne and CitiBank cards will definitely not work. NAB and ING Direct cards work)

Expect to pay a 3% fee on debit ATM withdrawals in addition to your bank transaction charges.



## Safety in Cuba

There's a false misconception about Cuba being unsafe, that deters many travellers back from escaping to this amazing island. The misinformation in the media about the political history between Cuba and the US, the lack of access to travel information on the internet and some outright inaccuracies have stopped many a dreams of travellers from experiencing this once unreachable destination. To Read more on Cuba safety, [click here](#).

## Accommodation in Cuba

Sure, there are all inclusive hotels. But staying in them would make your Cuban holiday just like any other beach side all-inclusive in Asia, Mexico or any other country in the world.

If you want to have a truly authentic travel experience, you need to stay in a casa.

In case you were wondering what a casa is it is basically Cuba's version on a bed and breakfast style accommodation. Also known as homestays because of the fact that initially they meant staying at a local's home and sharing living space and facilities with the hosts or hosting families (not always the case anymore) – mi casa, su casa, as you know!

This style of accommodation has been legal in Cuba since 1997 and a lot has changed since, to the point that some function as home rentals where you book the entire property. Not only that, but as the owners of these homes were given more freedom, some areas were able to evolve to meet world-class standards, other's may still be a little more traditional. In any instance we always ensure that you have air conditioning, hot water, in-room TV, fridge as a minimum. Others may even have a kitchenette – but eating out is much more fun! And your casas in Havana are better than the local hotels if you ask me.

We feel that staying with locals is part of the authentic Cuba travel experience. Not only that, but doing so you are helping the local community!

Ps, yes the photos here are of the casa's we use in Cuba! See the advantage of using a tour company like ours is that – our founder is Cuban, our guides are Cuban, we have scoured through the island from West to east to hand pick the best accommodation options for you. So you don't have to try to book online (which for Cuban accommodation is very limited and can be a challenge) and you don't have to try to find places as you go.



# Water in Cuba

Avoid water from the tap unless you are using a purifying and filtering bottle.

When you travel with us, we provide you with drinking water every day, but ask you to bring your own bottle that we can refill each day. And no, it is not tap water. Bringing a bottle with you is one of the ways we hope we can assist toward preventing the plastic tide.

# Food in Cuba

Fresh, organic, seasonal and local is the best ways to describe it.

A unique blend of African, Spanish, French and Caribbean influences create a unique blend of deliciousness. The only place in the world, where I am constantly feeling full (food coma is a given most days) and walk away lighter at the end of the trip.

Imagine ultra-fresh seafood, sweet fruits straight off the vine, biggest avocados you have ever seen.... If you venture out of a hotel, you can find a mix of modern infusions, traditional paladares, home cooked meals and street food.

Where can you try the local cuisine?

When you join Simply Cuba tours, we will ensure you have a variety experiences, our guides know the hidden local places and the best restaurants in town. They have been travelling around Cuba for the past 20+ years. Trying, testing, finding new spots and connections.

One of the biggest things that ring true in Cuba, 'it's not what you know, it's who you know' – connections are gold in this part of the world. Networks are the key to life, the way to finding things from essentials to services. It is something that is worth its weight in gold.

So where can you have culinary experiences in Cuba?

## Paladares

Paladares are privately owned restaurants. Some have inspiring stories and the highest quality dining experience and food, others are a little more down to earth and closer to a home style cooking. Prices for these will also vary depending the kind of experience they offer.

## Casas Particulares

Casas particulares will deliver the most amazing breakfasts with fresh juices, coffee, fruits, eggs, bread and other varying items. They can also do your dinner. If you want to try authentic home cooking, they are the place to experience them at.



## Street Food

Whenever I travel I look for the places where the locals are at. Why? Because it means tasty local flavours at a great price. So when you find a street vendor that has people lining up for it, I encourage you to try. Otherwise, it's best to ask your guide if they know of any hidden little places where tourists don't normally go to.

What are foods that you should try?

## Ropa Vieja

Its name literally translates to 'old clothes' and legend has it that a penniless old man once shredded and cooked his own clothes because he could not afford food for his family. He prayed over the bubbling concoction and a miracle occurred, turning the mixture into a tasty, rich meat stew. It's a must try.

## Tamales

There are a couple of versions of this around, not sure which one to recommend more... Los Mercaderes serve tamales as a kind of creamy soup with a rich meaty topping, whilst a home cooked version may mean corn stuffed into corn leaves with some meat, turned into delicious little parcels. If you can try both!

## Caramel Flan

The Spanish brought this dish to the New World and it's been a hit since day one. You might have tried this one before, we certainly been spoiled with it at Filipino parties in Australia, but you'll definitely want to try it again in Cuba! It's super rich and creamy!

## Cuban Black Bean Soup

There's nothing like good old comfort food! This rich vegetarian dish is seasoned with bay leaves, garlic, cumin, and capsicum. Personally, I can just eat it as it is, and given it's full of protein, I need nothing else. But traditionally you put it on top of rice and it suddenly becomes part of your side dish.

## ARoast Pork

Various versions around the country, but whether you get to try a pot roast, one over the coals or otherwise, they are always absolutely delicious. The sour orange, cumin, onion, garlic makes a delicious marinade to start off with, follow that with slow cooking and you have a match made in heaven.

## Bonus

You already know mojitos, and they are certainly ones to try in Cuba. One of Yoanis' favourites is the Caipirissima.



# Transport in Cuba

Cuba is pretty difficult to get around if you are short on time or tight on budget. Which is one of the other reasons why a small group tour can be a great way to get around and see more of the country. You'll know that you will get to places.

## Viazul buses

The most popular local bus service for tourists is, [Viazul](#) which has a website. It is advised to book buses for the journeys you know you want to take. Currently many of these services have been booked out months in advance.

Screenshot the bus times too as you won't have 4G/WiFi all the time. Be aware that businesses run on Cuba time which is not always the most efficient. Tranquilo!

## Hire car

Hiring a car is an option, but, you have to book this online prior to your arrival. Which can be a challenge as they are also booked out months in advance, and even if you have a booking the car may just not be available when you arrive.

On top there are fuel shortages and limitations, so you may find that you cannot fill up at a service station as they are out of gas, or they have a quota of only 10 liters per car.

Also be prepared that driving on Cuban roads is a bit more like driving on an obstacle course with all the potholes around. So can be rather tiring.

## Taxi Colectivos

Taxi Colectivos are shared taxi cars which can be prearranged on the street, via your casa owner and outside of the bus stations. When it comes to price they tend to match the bus prices and it won't always get you there quicker.

The cute vintage cars you see in the Havana guidebooks are genuinely the cars that Cubans use and while they are very good at fixing them, breakdowns do happen. Tranquilo!

It is not uncommon to switch cars halfway so don't be alarmed if you choose this type of transport.



Personally I prefer to have my routes sorted and know that I will get there, so our pre-booked, experienced drivers, with impeccable safety record give me great peace of mind that I will be able to relax, enjoy the journey and get where I want to go.

Not to mention, if you use a tour service, this cost is already pre-paid for prior to your arrival. Which means, given cash is king in Cuba as we mentioned, it's a lot less cash to carry.

There will still be other interesting modes of transport in towns that you can experience, from horsing carts to the coco taxi. When you have a local guide on hand, they can give you the full run down how to negotiate the price, having the correct change and other bits and bobs to watch out for.

## Connecting to the world

One of the positive changes that came out of the pandemic is that tourists can now obtain a tourist sim card. You can pre-order this online and pick it up at the airport. They are valid for 30 days. This is especially handy for Australian travellers, who's phones don't roam in Cuba.

We have [prepared an article](#) on how to arrange this, that we'd recommend you read if you wish to connect your phone in Cuba. Having this phone makes it easier to call local restaurants, casas if you have Spanish skills. Or if you are on a tour, gives an easier access to your tour guide in case you need to get in touch.

The next good thing about having a sim is that it gives you an additional way to connect to the internet! Because you can obtain a data pack for your phone. But be prepared to some interesting things, like your data pack being split between 3G and 4G coverage, which can be tricky with network availability around the island.

Another way to connect to the internet is to purchase a card from an [ETECSA telecommunications centre](#), hotel, or casa owner. Use the card to log on and use the internet at any of the WiFi points around the country. Remember to log off again to save your credit.

You'll know the points as you'll see lots of locals looking at their phones.

## What to pack?

Most travellers prefer to take a small to medium wheeled suitcase, which is a great size for the packing capacity in our private vehicles. Whatever you take, be mindful that you will need to be able to carry your own luggage, handle it at airports, take in/out of accommodation and perhaps even walk short distances. Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible. You'll also need a day pack/bag for activities and day trips.



Other than the items and clothing you always need on a trip, below we have listed packing suggestions specific for this trip:

### ESSENTIAL

Warm as well as light clothing. Central America is often assumed to have hot weather, but it can get cold in the countryside, mountains and at night in the winter so we suggest you check the expected temperatures en route and bring clothing that you can layer

Closed-in shoes will help to protect your feet from cuts and scratches when walking through cities as well as bush/grass-lands, and will also act as a barrier protection in rare cases against bites or stings  
Sun protection – hat, sunscreen, sunglasses

Water bottle. We recommend at least a 1.5 litre capacity. The sale of bottled water contributes to an enormous environmental problem around the world. In addition to the water in bottles, the production of a 1 litre plastic bottle takes 2 litres of water and 200ml of oil. A large proportion end up in limited landfill or discarded in waterways and natural environments



## RECOMMENDED

Soft and/or hard copies of all important documents e.g. air tickets, passport, vaccination certificate, travel insurance etc. and keep the hard copies separate from the originals. While not valid, a copy makes it very much easier to obtain replacements if necessary

Reusable straw can be handy

Electrical adapter plug

Personal medical kit. Your guide will carry a large kit but we recommend you carry items such as mild pain killers, electrolytes and Band-Aids

Insect repellent

Watch/Alarm clock or phone that can be used for both

Swimwear

Travel beach towel

Tissues &/or toilet paper &/or wet wipes

Insect repellent

Toiletries. We recommend you to take your own supply of shampoo, soap and toilet paper to use in the guesthouses and public toilets. We also encourage women to take their own supply of sanitary items as these items are not widely available for purchase in Cuba

For going out in the evenings, casual dress is acceptable everywhere although one collared shirt for males is recommended, otherwise there's no need to bring clothes or footwear especially for this.

## OPTIONAL

Ear plugs to guard against a potential snoring room-mate and maybe a phrasebook when you are out and about. Please try to avoid bringing unnecessary valuables, and use your safe if available. It's also a good idea to purchase a money belt or pouch that is easily hidden.

## LAUNDRY

A laundry service is offered at some guesthouses when you are travelling in Cuba. You might need to wait for a two-night stop to make sure you get the clean clothes back in time. Ask for your tour leader to help you arrange this or you can talk directly to your casa owner and request the service. Prices vary from place to place, but you can expect to be charged around EUR 5-10 per kilo.



## CAMERA GEAR

Camera - would recommend to pick your favourite and bring just that with a lens or two. Nothing too big, telescopic and definitely NO DRONES! Also, we do a lot of walking, so you probably don't want to lug a tripod around.

Spare battery, Memory cards, Battery packs, charger let's hope go without saying.

Camera bag and daypack.

We included a packing list at the end to make it easier to plan.

## Gifts

Given the difficulty of securing basic goods in Cuba, surplus items that you have at home such as soap, shampoo, perfumes, sewing kits, toothbrushes and pens or pencils are warmly accepted. We do encourage you to discuss gift giving with your leader so that items can be distributed to organisations or people in need.

If you decide to hand out gifts without the leader's guidance, we suggest you distribute as a sign of appreciation after a genuine interaction, whether that be a conversation or offered help, rather than a means to create engagement. Please always refrain from handing items directly to children. It is not necessary to bring gifts for the guesthouse owners in Cuba; these are not a homestay experience and as they are a business they are most-likely run by some of the more well-off families who will be happy enough with just your good-natured presence.

## Tipping

One of the reasons tourism industry is chosen by many is due to the ability to get tips and as such actually end up making enough money to live. So expect that you'd be paying tips.

If you're happy with the service you receive, providing a tip – though not compulsory – is appropriate. While it may not be customary to you, it's of great significance to the people who will take care of you during your travels, inspires excellent service, and is an entrenched feature of the tourism industry across many destinations. Due to the low Government-set wages in Cuba, tipping is relied upon heavily so expect to tip for just about everything. Please note we recommend that any tips are given directly to the intended recipient by a member of your group.



## Places to visit in Cuba

Oh there are so many, I am not even sure where to start this list. One thing is for certain, you have get to go past the [Havana boundary line](#) to see and experience what Cuba is about. The magic doesn't happen behind hotel doors and resorts area, it happens in the thick of where the Cubans live.

If you choose an immersive experience, I can promise you, you will not be disappointed. In fact many travellers have found a huge transformation in the way they look at life once they have learnt from the Cuban people and many report a newly found, deeper gratitude.

There are many places to visit, and each offers something a little different. From the hustle and bustle in Havana to the farm life in Vinales, to the colonial feel of Trinidad, to the 'lost city' of Baracoa, where to go will come down to the amount of time you have and your interest.

I've linked some extra detail to each of the cities, for further discovery.



### Havana

Havana has plenty to look at. Old Havana is offering great history and architectural wonders. You can also go on a historical yet boozy discovery of Hemingway's favourite spots around town, or try one of the new funky bars and restaurants in Havana. This is also the place for the unforgettable and iconic Classic Car tours, and there are plenty of museums and sights to check out to learn more about Cuba's History.

### Soroa

Soroa is the perfect place to regroup yourself whilst rediscovering the beauties of nature through visiting the local Orchid Garden, trekking to Salto de Soroa for a dip at the waterfall or discovering the endemic birds on one of the other walking treks. And when you are done reconnecting, you can enjoy a delicious home made meal and Cuban hospitality at one of the local paladares, they will make you feel like a long lost relative returning home rather than a restaurant patron, it's a truly amazing experience.

## Vinales

If you are looking for peace and quiet away from the hustle and bustle of the big city, Vinales sure is your place. This magnificent natural rural setting with traditional agricultural fields of mainly tobacco, mesmerising mogotes and plenty of bush tracks is a perfect place for a Cuban adventure.

It is hard to put in words the beauty of this place, with the natural flora and fauna being characterised by many local endemic species. Whilst during the day you can enjoy a slow pace, peace and quite, the night life here is a buzz, offering plenty of venues to enjoy a drink and a dance.

## Cienfuegos

Known as the Paris of the Caribbean, given it was occupied by French settlers, thus they left a mark on the local architecture and city scape. It is a perfect place to meet, and collect, some authentic, vibrant and truly local paintings.

If you join us, we'll take you to one of the local artists studio so you can see him at work, enjoy his stunning creations and learn more about what it is like to be an artist in Cuba.

## Playa Larga

This little town off the beaten trek is hidden in the Bay of Pigs, which is the site of the botched CIA invasion attempt to take over Cuba. It not only an important part of Cuban history, but is also a greatly important area ecologically. Which is why it is a Biosphere reserve and Ramsar site. Home to the Cuban crocodile, which is an endangered species and also to some stunning birdlife.

When you travel with us, we take you to our local birding guide's place where you can admire the Bee Hummingbird, smallest bird in the world, that only calls Cuba home.

## Trinidad

Trinidad just has so much to offer that you definitely want to stay more than a day here to discover it all! From walking around the cobblestone streets discovering local history, craft markets and art galleries, to some of the best dance and music venues (gotta love the cave disco!) to a choice between an amazing Caribbean beach or beautiful National Parks. Trinidad just has it all.

My favourite place ever.

## Camaguey

The art and culture shine bright in Camaguey. It is home to famous poets, artists, and musicians, as well as several highly regarded art and dance schools. It is also the home to the National Ballet of Camaguey, the second most important ballet company in Cuba, you can watch their performance if you come at the right time.

Camagüey has a healthy and vibrant nightlife. There is a scattering of rum bars dotted around the winding streets, as well as cinemas, cafes, theatres, clubs, jazz bars, cabaret shows and more.



## Santiago de Cuba

Santiago de Cuba is an amazing historical centre with Afro-Cuban culture as well as many firsts... Don Facundo Bacardí based his first-ever rum factory here, much of Cuba's traditional music was birthed here, and the energy level is high despite the often debilitating heat. The oldest building in Cuba, El Morro Castle, is here, plus the graves of national hero José Martí and Fidel Castro. Also, Cuba's hottest carnival is held here each July.

## Baracoa

Columbus was the first Westerner to be seduced by Baracoa. No wonder! The hills are covered with royal palms, chocolate trees and coffee bushes, and the wildlife wins world records (for being the smallest, but nevertheless), you can climb mountains, swim in cool, pristine rivers, bathe on beaches, and explore Indian remains. There are also caves, waterfalls and coconut groves, making this destination a hidden gem for travellers and a veritable paradise nature lovers.



If you can spare a few weeks to truly discover the island, Baracoa is most definitely the place to visit.

These are just a few spots we highlighted here, there are plenty to see at each area and in between. Whilst you can try to do it alone, and get so far, Cuba is certainly a place where having a local by your side is worth its weight in gold.

They know the place, its history, its traditions, the way of life, the intricacies and have the connections of family, friends, other guides who can help them tap into things that may be missed by an unassuming tourist's eyes. Cuba is not the place where you can just lob up at a supermarket and get whatever you want, shops, markets. You can't easily find and tap into activities that are available on offer. You have to know where to go. Some of the best experiences come from getting involved in the way of life, where things can run on 'Cuban time!'

It's a place you must visit with an open heart and mind, leave your preconceived ideas behind, let go of the limitation of time tables and dive in to what is on offer. If you are ready for a unique blend of adventures and venturing past Havana, I encourage to [join us!](#)

## Travelling on a group tour

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. Your fellow travelers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group – patience with your fellow travelers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well – this takes just a little effort on your part. Due to privacy reasons we are unable to provide you with contact details and any personal information about your fellow travelers booked on your trip prior to departure.

### SOLO TRAVELERS

Our group trips are designed for shared. Single travellers share with people of the same gender in accommodation ranging from twin to multishare. Some of our itineraries have accommodation booked on a mixed gender share basis and where applicable this will be specified in our Essential Trip Information. On a selection of our trips, you have the option to pay a single surcharge to ensure that you have your own accommodation (where available). Please note that this only applies to accommodation during the tour – pre-trip and post-trip accommodation will be booked on a single room basis.



## Being a responsible traveler

Responsible travel is an attitude that guides the choices that you take around choosing to respect and benefit the local people, their cultures, economies and the environment. We aim to provide experiences that help us reduce carbon footprints, invest your travel dollars in local communities, shows respect to nature, culture and local traditions, and most importantly helps create genuine connections with the people you meet along the way.

You have already started making amazing choices by joining us, what else can you do to be a responsible traveler?

1. Before leaving home learn as much as possible about Cuba – we share many tips on our [Facebook Page!](#)
2. Learn what's appropriate behaviour and body language.
3. Consider picking up your keep sakes from traditional artisans along your trip.
4. Consider the dress code and don't go and buy a whole new wardrobe for your trip.
5. Always ask first before photographing or videoing people. Send them back copies of photos to help make it a two-way exchange.
6. Be wary of giving gifts or money to beggars, children and people you have just met.
7. Leave only footprints...take care of the environment as you would your own home. Wherever you can say no to plastic and ensure you dispose your rubbish in a proper manner.
8. After returning home think how you can support programs and organisations that are working to protect the welfare, culture and environment of where you've been lucky to visit.
9. And share the word about amazing responsible travel experiences! So together we can make a difference!

# YOUR 10-DAY TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY ITINERARY

## WHY JOIN US?

- Discover hidden paladares, unique city locations, beautiful countryside of Cuba to give you a mixture of opportunities to capture the perfect shot of people, architecture, and nature.
- Local Guides with intimate knowledge
- Award Winning Photographers assist you to capture the amazing birdlife through your lens
- All entries, guide fees, transport, meals, and accommodation included

### 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.

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

### Day 2 - Havana

Today you'll have the opportunity to capture the lively street theatre of Havana Vieja (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 cathedral. Through this part of the day you will have the opportunity to photograph colorful street markets, courtyards and terraces.

In the afternoon you have a choice either to visit the Morro Castle - The Morro was constructed to guard the entrance to Havana against pirates and other colonists eager to gain control of this strategic transit hub between Europe and the rest of the Americas. The castle's unusual shape hugs the

rocky cliffs of the bay, with thick, imposing walls, a moat, and a stoic lighthouse that can be seen from the city. It provides the perfect photo opportunity.

Alternatively enjoy the sunset with the roof down in a 1950's classic car! Visit revolution square and Lenon Park among other things, and finish the day with a well deserved cocktail at the Hotel National, the most iconic Hotel in Havana.



### Included Activities

- Old Havana Walking Tour

## Day 3 – Cayo Jutias/Viñales

Today we making our way to beautifully the most undiscovered beach at Cayo Jutias to capture the white sand beaches and the large sea stars. After which we continue to Viñales, that is endowed in mogotes, covered with amazing greenery. It's one of the cooler areas of Cuba, so it's also a nice escape from the hotter parts of the country.

Here we will start with an orientation walk, before your salsa lesson in the evening. A relaxed evening after the hard day of photographing, giving you a fantastic opportunity to enjoy the local music of Viñales amongst the warm and friendly locals. Don't be surprised if you find yourself dancing all night!

### Included Activities

- Vinales Orientation Walk and Photo Session
- 1 Hour Salsa Lesson

## Day 4 – Viñales

Viñales Valley is a World Heritage site. It is a fascinating site, with it's amazing "living landscape" of traditional farms and untouched nature. It boasts an abundance of local seasonal fruit and vegetables, such as enormous avocados, mangoes and pineapples. It is a fascinating scene to see when oxen are working the fields and the scent of tobacco fills the air. In the morning we'll take a guided walk through this rich country side, to discover the life of Cuba's farmers and learn the secret methods of rolling a Cuban cigar directly from those who grow it. Not only will you get to try one, you get to learn how to roll them yourself!

Today you will have the chance to visit a hidden community of farmers, capture the traditional wooden houses with exterior porches and visit the valley itself to shoot the landscapes and its people as well as their relationship with tobacco, their animals and the land.

In the evening we will head to an organic farm on the hilltop, providing the perfect opportunity of sunset shots of the valley and the farm. After the sun goes down we will enjoy an amazing farm-to-plate feast at their restaurant.



### Included Activities

- Valley Walk and cigar rolling and photo session
- Organic Farm Dinner – Valley sunset opportunities

## Day 5 – Soroa/Las Terrazas

This morning will head to Las Terrazas community and nature reserve in the Sierra del Rosario mountains. It is an eco-village built around a creek that has been a UNESCO Biosphere reserve since 1985. 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.

There are several photo opportunities here of nature, art galleries, coffee plantations and the like. In the afternoon we will make our way back to Soroa. A tiny little village hidden in the mountains. Here we will visit the orchid garden, which is not only in a beautiful natural setting, but has hundreds of amazingly colorful orchids to photograph.

You may also have time to able to take a stroll among the marvelous tall trees to discover the pristine waters of the local water fall or climb up to see the Castle in the clouds. And did I mention it is also a perfect spot for birdwatching? You just never know what you will see!

### Included Activities

- Sunrise and Sunset Photography Session
- Valley Walk and Farmhouse visit – Portrait opportunities



## Day 6 – Trinidad

From Soroa we will drive to Trinidad and once we settle into our casas here, you will be taken on an orientation tour around the city. It is the perfect spot to master your street photography, offering cobble stone streets, bright colored colonial buildings, markets, art galleries, museums, people, various modes of transport from horse carts to classic cars. If you are up for a discovery, you can walk up the hill to take in the views of Trinidad.

This is also a great opportunity to view and buy Cuban art direct from the artists themselves, while also offering the chance to identify the many photographic opportunities that mix paintings with people.

### Included Activities

- Leader Lead Orientation Walk and photo session

## Day 7 & 8 – Trinidad

We start the day with light trekking in El Cubano National Park in the Topes de Collantes. We will discover the Salto de Javira 6 km round trail that delivers you to the heart of el Cubano's beautiful waterfall and natural pool. Swimming in its icy pool is the perfect break from the heat. The trail begins with a small rope bridge, on the other side, follow the path that gently rises beside the river. Find shade among the canopy of the trees and enjoy colorful birds overhead. It's an easy and well-trod path that allows the mind to wonder.

You can get amazing shots of nature, birds, the waterfall and the creek and if you are lucky some beautiful and large butterflies. And if you have a color overload – which is possible in Cuba – you can experiment capturing this amazing place in black and white.

In the afternoon we will head out to Playa Ancon. This white sandy beach with palm tree umbrellas is a great site during the day and a perfect spot for beach sunset shots! With the pinks, oranges, and purples in the sky most evenings it is bound to be a delight.

On Day 8 you will have free time to discover the streetscapes of Trinidad itself. Capture the colorful buildings, horse carts and cobblestone streets, the artists at work and more...

### Included Activities

- Topes de Collantes Excursion and photo session
- Playa Ancon Excursion and photo session



## Day 9 & 10 – Havana

We will head back to Havana today. On the way through we will visit Manaca Iznaga, an 18th century sugar plantation. It offers a great opportunity to photograph steam trains, a massive bronze bell, an ornamental garden among other things or admire the sweeping views of a picturesque countryside made up of farmland, patchwork fields and the distant Escambray Mountains.

Next stop is at Santa Clara. Famous for the Battle of Santa Clara, when it was taken over by a revolutionary battalion led by Che Guevara by the afternoon on New Years Eve 1958. As such this city is a mini pilgrimage destination for Che Guevara worshippers.

We should be back in Havana on time for capturing amazing sunset shots over the Malecon and farewell dinner.

Checkout is at Mid-day on day 10.

### Included Activities

- Manaca Iznaga Expedition
- Che Guevara Mausoleum

## What's Included



Local Tour Guide Services  
Photography Expert Guidance

### Meals



9 Breakfasts  
8 Lunches  
9 Dinners

### Accommodation



Standard Guesthouse (9 nights)

### Transport



Private Vehicle

## Included Activities

- Viñales valley walk with cigar rolling
- Walking tour to El Cubano National Park
- Visit to Las Terrazas Community
- Orchid Garden
- Visit to Che Guevara's mausoleum
- Organic Farm Dinner
- 1 hour Salsa Lesson
- Old Havana Walking Tour
- Ancon Beach Expedition
- Airport transfers

## 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.

Drones are all the craze these days, and they can create some amazing images of your travels. They can come in all shapes and sizes, and because many got excited about them, there are now rules, regulations and even licenses in some places for their use.

When we discuss visiting Cuba, especially on a photography tour, many excited travellers bring up the question about their drones. Imagine capturing the perfect sunset moment from a rooftop bar, or a fleet of 1950s classic cars down the streets of Havana? I'm sorry to disappoint you, but drones are not allowed in Cuba at all.

### 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, there is a single surcharge payable.

### Are there vaccines required for this tour?

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

### 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 that you contact your local embassy to discuss requirements prior to travel.

### 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.

### 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.

**Check out our itineraries  
&  
Join us!**



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