



Trekking Highlights of Cuba (2017)

Trip Code: TAC
Edition No: AR 1 2017
Valid from: 01 Jan 2017 - 31 Dec 2017
Amended: Aug 2017

15 DAYS

AT A GLANCE

- 7 walks of varying lengths
- Moderate fitness required
- Altitude maximum 950m, average 350m
- Group normally 5 to 16, plus leader. Min. age 16yrs
- 10 nights hotels (2 nights in Old Havana) and 4 nights Casas Particulares
- All breakfasts, 7 lunches and 5 dinners included

HIGHLIGHTS

- Walking amongst the limestone karsts of Vinales Valley
- Trek around picturesque Hanabaniilla lake
- Topes de Collantes National Park: jungle clad mountains and plenty of birdlife
- Two nights in a hotel in Old Havana, with its colonial grandeur and lively
- Learn about Cuba's revolutionary history and visit Che Guevara's Mausoleum
- Cuban Tourist Cards included for all UK residents (with UK or EU passports)

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SUMMARY

Cuba is divided into three distinct mountain ranges. To the west, we walk through tobacco fields and rustic farmlands in Vinales, a mountainous area full of limestone karsts. On the pine-covered slopes of the Sierra del Escambray we might spot hummingbirds or hear the call of the Toco-ro. Travelling east we reach the Sierra Maestra and trek to Fidel's jungle hide-out. Images of Cuba's iconic heroes are everywhere and we learn about the dramatic events which enabled Fidel Castro and his companions to start the revolution and completely transform Cuban society.



FACT BOX CUBA

Currency	Peso (CUP) & Convertible Peso (CUC)
Language	Spanish
Capital City	Havana
Population	11,200,000+
Dialing code	+53
Time zone	GMT/UTC -05:00hr
National Flag	

IS THIS TRIP FOR YOU?

This is a trekking itinerary which we have graded as Moderate difficulty. This takes into account the terrain and weather conditions encountered on the walks in addition to the distances covered. Please contact us if you have any queries relating to your suitability for the tour.

This trip has a busy and active itinerary, although we have also tried to factor in some free time to relax. As Cuba is prone to weather complications (rain and/or humidity particularly in the summer months), you should note that some hikes can become more of a challenge than usual and therefore some previous trekking experience is required. Walking hours stated are given as approximates only. Timings stated include lunch and photo stops and will vary depending on the pace of your group.

Walking conditions: Dirt roads or single-track paths, some are rocky and slippery when wet. The use of two walking poles will distribute shock to the upper body and reduce damage to the knees when on the stepped paths. Some of the paths are exposed but others are shaded by jungle vegetation and trees.

IMPORTANT: If travelling in the months of May - August then please be prepared for very hot and humid conditions! Please remember to drink lots of water when walking.

Please be aware that mobile networks don't make or receive calls particularly well in Cuba, and coverage may not be available in many locations. Not all networks work in Cuba, so please check with your service provider. Also, please note that few hotels have Wi-Fi. Some will have internet available in the lobby, or you will also find some Wi-Fi spots in the main plazas in towns. Using the internet in Cuba is relatively expensive, up to 2-3 CUC per hour when purchasing Wi-Fi cards at official shops, but these will always have long queues. Wi-Fi can be very slow, so it's best to assume that you won't be able to find a reliable internet connection whilst travelling.

The number of people travelling to Cuba has been growing considerably in recent years and this has put a strain on the country's tourism sector. A limited infrastructure on the island and lack of investment means that some hotels and other service providers are struggling to honour their agreements with tour operators. Last minute overbookings and price increases are becoming commonplace.

Fortunately, over the years Cubania have built strong working relationships with suppliers and we have managed to prevent any major problems from affecting our groups. Nevertheless, all travellers should be aware that last minute hotel cancellations are a possibility and could affect your trip, especially during the high season in Havana (Oct to March). In the event of any necessary changes we will endeavour to ensure a property of the same standard and similar location is used. On some occasions, an overnight hotel stay may be replaced with a night in a casa, or vice versa.

In addition to being prepared for potential last-minute hotel changes, it is possible that you will be confronted by other minor frustrations whilst travelling in Cuba. We encourage all travellers to go with an open mind, and with realistic expectations as to what a visit to Cuba entails. If your guide announces a change of plans then please be assured that everything possible has been done behind the scenes in order to make satisfactory alternative arrangements.

ITINERARY

The entries in bold at the end of each day indicate the type of accommodation normally used and any meals included. Please see the Accommodation section below for further information.

DAY 1

Start Havana

The group flight arrives in the afternoon and we transfer to our hotel. Land only clients will meet the group at the start hotel in Havana.

Standard Hotel

DAY 2

To Vinales

This morning we drive to Vinales, nestled in the west of Cuba in the Pinar del Rio province. Vinales Valley is filled with palm trees, tobacco plantations and some of the most impressive scenery in Cuba. Huge limestone karsts (sheer-sided, flat-topped hills) rise from the valley floor, riddled with caves and covered in forest.

Traditional farming methods are used in this area and it's common to see farmers ploughing their fields with an ox and cart. Upon arrival we'll have a warm up walk along the 'Sendero de Maravillas' trail through farm land where locals grow yucca, maize and the world famous Cuban tobacco. Lunch will be taken in a typical Cuban restaurant either before or after the walk (depending on our arrival time in Vinales).

This evening we head for sunset and dinner in an organic farm overlooking the Valle del Silencio. We stay overnight in casa homestays within Vinales town for the next 2 nights.

Walking approx. 6km.

Casa (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 3

Vinales

We leave this morning with a picnic lunch and head off to the San Vicente area of Vinales. We will stretch our legs on a long walk that takes us along the Fogon de los Negros valley and through the Minas de Constanca mogote. The walk is reasonably challenging but we are rewarded throughout the day with beautiful views of the forests, valleys and a unique landscape of karsts. Then we visit the Cueva del Indio, a cave with an underground river running through it. In the evening the bus is available to take you from the accommodation into the charming town of Vinales, as you may want to try out one of the local paladares for dinner.

Walking approx. 13km.

Casa (Breakfast, Lunch)

DAY 4

To Sierra del Escambray via Santa Clara

Today we depart early, as it is a travel day. We leave the Western part of the Island, and head to The Sierra del Escambray, the second highest mountain range in Cuba, dominating the central part of the island and spanning across three different provinces; Cienfuegos, Villa Clara and Sancti Spiritus. On the way we stop in Santa Clara and visit Che Guevara's Mausoleum and museum. This is the site of the last battle of the Cuban Revolution in December 1958, just before Fidel Castro took Havana. Che Guevara and his troops ambushed an armoured train carrying arms to Santiago de Cuba and this was the final battle before Batista fled and the Revolution triumphed. We have time for lunch downtown and visit the armoured train monument before heading for our mountain hotel for two nights.

(approx. 6-7 hrs driving time)

Standard Hotel (Breakfast)

DAY 5

Hanabanilla

After breakfast, we set off from the hotel by boat for our trek around Hanabanilla Reservoir. The hotel and reservoir are set high in the Escambray Mountains and this was formerly a favourite spot for high level Cuban leaders to come to rest, walk and fish. The hotel is basic but the surroundings are spectacular and provide a wonderful introduction to Cuban endemic flora and fauna. Expect to see the Cuban National Bird, the Toco-ro, and many others who make their habitat in the lush tropical vegetation. We will have lunch included today at a restaurant, and the evening is free to relax at the hotel pool.

Walking approx. 12km.

Standard Hotel (Breakfast, Lunch)

DAY 6

Topes de Collantes

This morning we start the day with a boat ride across Lake Hanabanilla (approx. 30 minutes) to reach the start of our trek. We walk along the banks of the lake using a dirt track and reach Guanayara in time for lunch. After a light lunch in the farm house we continue towards El Rocio waterfall for a dip in the beautiful natural pools close by. Return to Guanayara for dinner and then transfer (approx. 35 minutes) to our hotel for the night.

Walking approx. 14km.

Standard Hotel (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 7

Escambray Mountains

Today we transfer by truck to the starting point of the Caburni trail, which takes us to some magnificent waterfalls and a lovely swimming spot. We continue on a steep path to visit the Vegas Grandes waterfalls where we can also enjoy a swim. We finish the trek at the village of the El Chorrillo community and go for a typical country lunch at 'Mi Retiro' restaurant. After lunch, we descend by bus towards the Caribbean coast and our destination – the World Heritage Site town of Trinidad. We'll be having another homestay for the next 2 nights in the heart of the old town. Dinner tonight will be a lovely experience as we all get together in one of the casas that has a restaurant/bar on its premises.

Walking approx. 12km.

Casa (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)



ITINERARY

DAY 8 Trinidad

Trinidad is beautiful; a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1988 and perhaps the best-preserved colonial town on the island. Exploring Trinidad can feel like entering a time warp, its colourful, cobbled streets and horse drawn transportation whisking us back to Colonial Times. There are many interesting museums housed in old colonial buildings and music drifts through the streets and plazas. Today is free to soak up the atmosphere of Trinidad, simply relax, or join an optional excursion to explore the surrounding areas. This evening we recommend a visit to Trinidad's Casa de la Trova (the House of Music) for traditional Cuban music and dancing. **Casa (Breakfast)**

DAY 9 Drive to Sierra Maestra

Today we have a long drive to the Gran Parque Nacional Sierra Maestra, a spectacular national park within Cuba's highest mountain range. This region is well known as Fidel Castro's base of operations during the Cuban Revolutionary War. High in the Sierra is Comandancia La Plata, the secret mountain hideout of Castro and Che Guevara used for planning the war in the 1950's and as the base of Radio Rebelde, which provided information for the revolutionaries.

Our first choice is to stay in a hotel in the Sierra Maestra, however due to the popularity of the area we may stay in Bayamo, a charming colonial city with a recently renovated boulevard where the locals love to congregate in the evenings.

(approx. 8-9 hrs driving time)
Standard Hotel (Breakfast)

DAY 10 Santo Domingo

Today we will depart on foot towards the south of the Sierra Maestra to commence the Maravillas de Santo Domingo trail. (approx. 4-6 hrs walking). Along the trail you will be able to enjoy the spectacular mountain scenery and see some of the different species that inhabit the area. There will be an opportunity to stop for a refreshing swim in the Yara River and maybe some free time in the afternoon.

Walking approx. 12km.

Standard Hotel (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 11 To Camaguey

After breakfast in the hotel we will begin our walk up to Comandancia de La Plata, Fidel's mountain headquarters within the Sierra Maestra. We are able to visit the revolutionary army hideout and learn how Fidel Castro orchestrated guerilla warfare on the Batista dictatorship, including the 'Radio Rebelde' site. At the end of the trail we descend to Santo Domingo in time for lunch. We then head from Santo Domingo to Camaguey (approx. 3 hrs), arriving late afternoon or early evening to our hotel.

Walking approx. 7.5km.

Standard Hotel (Breakfast, Dinner)

DAY 12 To Santa Clara

We visit Camaguey and have time to explore the historic city, characterised by tinajones - large, earthen jugs, found in the squares, churches and gardens, originally used to store water during the drought periods. This provincial capital was recently awarded World Heritage Site status. After sightseeing we have the long drive to Santa Clara.

(approx. 4-5 hrs driving time)

Standard Hotel (Breakfast)

DAY 13 To Havana

This morning we set off for Cuba's Capital city, arriving in time for a city tour of old and new Havana, Cuba's capital and the largest city in the Caribbean. This is a busy and bustling, energetic capital. Old Havana is described as a living museum with its marvellous monuments, cathedrals and palaces; this is the finest surviving Spanish colonial complex in the Americas. Preserved by a combination of minimal war damage, post revolution restoration work and the millions of dollars invested since

it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982. We also visit the Plaza de la Revolucion with its images of the Cuban Revolution. In the afternoon, we check into our hotel in the Old town.

Standard Hotel (Breakfast)

DAY 14 Havana

Today is free for you to discover the charms of Havana at your own pace, or join an optional excursion to Las Terrazas community.

Standard Hotel (Breakfast)

DAY 15 End Havana

Free morning for further sightseeing in Havana and before we meet for lunch in a paladar. Those on group flights will be taken to the airport for their return journey to London.

(Breakfast, Lunch)

For those on the Virgin Atlantic flight to London, this departs in the evening and will arrive in the UK the following day.



ACCOMMODATION

For the majority of the trip we will stay in standard hotels, with en suite bathrooms. We also stay in some basic accommodation in order to access some of the more remote areas that are visited on this trip, so you should be prepared for this.

We use 'tourist class' hotels that range from 3 star equivalents, to simple rural hotels. Rooms are on a twin-share basis, with air-conditioning and en suite bathrooms. Some of the hotels will have swimming pools. You should be aware that occasional power cuts occur and hot water supplies are not always guaranteed.

HAVANA

We stay in the Miramar district of Playa, in the outskirts of Havana. The hotel is reliable and of an international standard with comfortable beds and a good swimming pool. From here it is a 15-20 minute taxi ride to the Old town.

CASAS PARTICULARES

All of our itineraries in Cuba include staying in privately-run 'Casas Particulares' in at least one destination as an alternative to staying in standard hotels. These are traditional/normal Cuban properties that have been transformed into guesthouses.

All rooms have en suite bathrooms, hot and cold water, either a fan or air-conditioning, and breakfast is included. Water pressure can be temperamental, and decor is variable! The houses that we use will be on the same street or in close vicinity whenever possible, and we do our best to ensure that those in single room accommodation are always within a house where other group members are staying. However this cannot be guaranteed in all cases.

All properties that we use have been inspected and assessed by our local operator in Cuba. Some are large multi-room houses that are home to entire families, others are run by individuals, and in some cases the owners live elsewhere.

SINGLE ACCOMMODATION

We can arrange single rooms throughout the trip for a supplement (subject to availability). Please ask one of our sales staff for details.

EXTRA ACCOMMODATION

Pre and Post tour accommodation is available in Havana. Please contact us for a quote. We can also arrange beach extensions in a variety of destinations.



FOOD AND TRANSPORT

FOOD

Cuba is not renowned for its culinary excellence and some ingredients are just not possible to get hold of (due in no small part to the long trade embargo implemented by the US). As such, flavours tend to be relatively simple, with most mealtimes consisting of meat or fish accompanied by rice and salad/vegetables. Seafood is widely available on the coast, including cheap and abundant lobster! Vegetarians will probably find they have the most limited choice. Snack food is not freely available in Cuba so you may wish to consider taking some with you.

Paladares are likely to be a highlight of any visit to Cuba – they are one of the few types of private enterprise allowed (although still heavily regulated), where Cubans can set up a restaurant selling authentic, Cuban cuisine, usually with a better level of service.

We recommend that you allow CUC 30-40 per person per day for the lunches and evening meals on the days where food is not included. You may also spend money on bottled water, which will normally cost about CUC 1.50 per bottle.

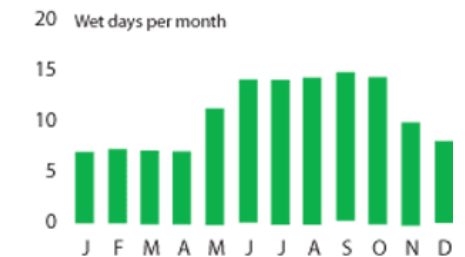
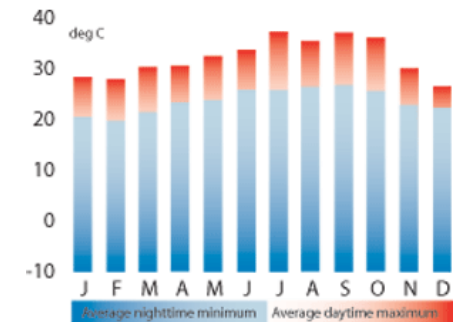
Please note that meal times can be different to what you may be used to. Breakfast will usually be served between 7 - 8am, lunch is usually served between 12 - 3pm and evening meals are generally taken around 7 - 9pm.

TRANSPORT

We use a private, air-conditioned coach throughout the tour.

WEATHER

The dry season runs from November through to April (with December to March being the peak holiday months for traditional tourism). It can be very humid between May and October, with heavy afternoon rains at times and the possibility of hurricanes. July and August are some of the most popular months to visit Cuba by sun-seekers from Europe and Canada but can be hot (average 28°C) and wet. Cuba has an average of 6 hours sunshine per day with a more or less constant humidity of 62%. Water temperature normally ranges from 24 to 28°C.



TRIP EXTENSIONS

Please call us for current prices.

CAYO LEVISA BEACH EXTENSION

Extend your time in Cuba by travelling just a few hours from Havana to the idyllic island of Cayo Levisa. Stay in an en-suite beach cabin and wake up each day to a beautiful 4km stretch of golden sand beach and inviting turquoise waters. There are no roads or other buildings on the small island just off the north west coast of Cuba, only the hotel and its bar and restaurant. All meals are included and for those who don't just want to relax in the sun, there are plenty of opportunities for water sports such as snorkelling and diving.

Extensions can be arranged for any length of stay. Transfers are not included but can also be arranged. Prices are available on request.

VARADERO BEACH EXTENSION

If it is a bit of indulgence and some more mojitos that you crave, then you may want to extend your stay with a few nights in an all-inclusive resort on the famous stretch of pristine beach at Varadero.

Extensions can be arranged for any length of stay. Transfers are not included but can also be arranged. Prices are available on request.

HAVANA PRE & POST TOUR NIGHTS

Why not spend some extra time in Havana before or after your tour? You can either choose to stay in the standard group hotel, alternatives in the Old Town and Miramar districts, or a casa particular. Book as many extra nights as you would like, depending on flight schedules this may restrict your choice of airline and flight route. Prices available on request.

JOINING: HAVANA

15 days, normally start Havana Thursday, end Havana Thursday

ITINERARY START

Your trip normally starts at our accommodation in Havana in the evening of Day 1 of the itinerary, however you won't necessarily meet up with the whole group and leader until the morning of Day 2. Details of how to reach the start point are provided in the Final Joining Instructions - sent approximately two weeks before departure.

AIRPORT TRANSFERS

We offer to include airport arrival and departure transfers on any flight for this trip, so no matter which flight you choose to arrive on you will be met and transferred to your hotel.

IMPORTANT: All those taking advantage of the included airport transfers must provide full flight details for both arrival and departure in advance; unless specified otherwise, the transfer will be to the start (or pre-tour) hotel; transfers to other hotels in the same city may attract an extra charge; transfers may be shared with other travellers on the same flight, or on a flight with similar arrival times.

If you arrive on the group flight then you will be met in the arrivals area by a Cubanía Travel representative who will be clearly visible with a sign.

For those arriving on alternative flights, the transfer service (if requested with Cubanía Travel and flight details provided) includes a pre-paid taxi from the airport. On arrival you need to go to the Cubanacan office at the airport and give your name (as there won't be someone waiting for you in arrivals).

It can take a little time as there is often a queue. The Cubanacan office is located outside of Terminal 3 – you need to cross the road directly in front of the main terminal exit and enter the 'Boulevard' row of shops and offices, the Cubanacan office is on the left hand side. Most transfers are shared so please wait for your fellow travellers before departing.

The cost of a taxi is likely to be about £25 (30 - 35 CUC) should you decide to make your way independently.

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers will be sent to you as part of our Final Joining Instructions. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact us.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Tourism can be of real benefit to local communities, providing income, positive cultural exchanges and a financial incentive to protect their natural environment. Ours is a 'total approach' to responsible tourism, covering everything from the way we plan and operate our trips to the practices of Cubanía Travel as a company.

LOCAL CRAFT AND CULTURE

We visit several important cultural and historical sites on this tour, where our entrance fees contribute towards the preservation of artefacts and monuments that commemorate events integral to Cuban heritage. We encounter small handicraft stalls in most towns, so guests are able to purchase local crafts. Trinidad is famous for ceramic and lacework and Havana's Almacenes de San Juan for art, crafts, shoes, clothes, hats, instruments and food. A huge part of Cuban culture is music and dance and there will be ample opportunity to experience this in local bars and clubs.

ACTIVITY

We aim to benefit Cuban communities as much as possible by frequently stopping to use local restaurants, cafes and services. For example, we encourage clients to take optional excursions where we hire local transfers, boats and guides. We operate on a strict 'leave no trace' policy and local guides enforce this through responsible tourism briefings. These should help visitors to better understand the living situation for many and the environmental issues in the area.

CHARITY

We sponsor two schools in the Matanzas Province. The first is the local Primary School in Playa Giron, where they have repainted the school and provided educational supplies such as notepads, pens and sporting equipment. The second school is the Special Needs School in Matanzas City. Here, we have made a number of donations- from school materials and clothes to fans and sheets. We discourage giving to beggars on the trip as we don't want to encourage this. Instead, our guides will help visitors to donate presents and supplies where the goods can really be utilised.

RECYCLING

Whenever possible we source large water containers and ask clients to refill one bottle rather than purchasing/using multiple plastic bottles. At the time of writing it is still difficult to reliably obtain large water containers in most destinations across Cuba. We support the small-scale recycling culture that exists on the island by storing empty plastic bottles on the tour bus to then be distributed at a series of locations/homes/small businesses across the country where our staff know that the bottles will be put to good use. At the moment there aren't any official centralised recycling schemes for hotels or companies to use.

For details of our Responsible Tourism Policy please visit: <http://cubaniatravel.com/about-cubania/responsible-travel/>

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information below is primarily for UK passport holders, and other nationalities should check with their travel agent or the relevant embassies. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

British and most Western European passport holders do not require a visa but do require a tourist card. Your Cuban tourist card (valid for 30 days) is included and we will post it to you approximately 4 weeks before travel. Please make sure you have provided us with accurate details at the time of booking as any mistakes on the visa will result in you having to purchase a new card at a cost of £20.00 per person + postage.

We will send a tourist card free of charge as long as you live at a UK or Ireland address and are national of an EU country. If you are not national of one of these countries or are not resident in the UK or Eire you must contact your nearest Cuban Consulate to check what visa is required – we cannot provide a tourist card for you.

Passing through Cuban Immigration is a time consuming process and most visitors encounter delays when queuing for entry into the country.

All tourists visiting Cuba must have travel insurance to cover medical costs. You are likely to be asked to provide proof of your travel insurance policy when you arrive at Havana airport, so please ensure your documents are easily accessible.

Whilst we hope that things will change in the near future, due to present US policy, we cannot take US citizens on our trips to Cuba.

Visa regulations can change without notice: please check the current regulations in good time to obtain a visa if one is required.

VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for this trip.

Recommended vaccinations for this trip are: Tetanus, Hepatitis A.

We are advised that there is no risk of malaria on this trip.

Dengue fever, Zika and/or Chikungunya are known risks in places visited on this trip. Both are tropical viral diseases spread by daytime biting mosquitoes. There is currently no vaccine or prophylaxis available for them, and therefore the best form of prevention is to avoid being bitten. We recommend you take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

The above information can change at short notice; as we are not qualified to answer all your questions about travel health we strongly recommend you contact your Medical Professional or a Travel Health Clinic at least 8 weeks prior to departure for up-to-date information.

INSURANCE – are you adequately covered?

You must have adequate travel insurance, and if you are joining a trip which goes to high altitude, you must check that you are covered up to the maximum altitude of the trip. If you are resident in the UK we recommend Nomadic Travels as an insurance provider, they have coverage designed to cover all activities on your trip.

BAGGAGE AND BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE

At time of writing the standard weight limit for hold baggage on Virgin Atlantic is 23kg. We recommend packing only one piece of checked baggage.

As advice about luggage allowances for both hand and hold luggage is subject to change, we suggest you check the airline's website for the latest information prior to your departure.

LOCAL TIME

GMT -5 hrs.

GROUP, STAFF AND SUPPORT

The group will generally be between 5 and 18 people. There will be an English-speaking Cuban leader and a driver. We also use local guides as well for some activities or tours.

The minimum age of clients on this trip is 16 years. Please note that anyone aged under 18 must be accompanied by (and share accommodation with) a parent or legal guardian.

CURRENCY INFORMATION

The national currency of Cuba is the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC), with an exchange rate at the time of publication of approximately 1.23 to the UK£ and 0.9 to the US\$.

Please note this is the official exchange rate, however in practice, the exchange rate on the ground at official 'cadecas', is roughly £1.13 - £1.18, this changes every day.

We strongly advise that you take all spending money in Euros or Sterling cash, which can be easily exchanged into local currency upon arrival in Cuba. Scottish currency is not accepted in Cuba. Travellers cheques are difficult to exchange and there is limited time to stop for this purpose. In addition, credit/debit cards drawn on US banks are not accepted anywhere in Cuba. The hotel in which we spend the first night in Havana has an exchange bureau situated in the back left of the lobby, around behind the main reception desk. Otherwise you can exchange money at the airport.

ATM AVAILABILITY

CREDIT CARD ACCEPTANCE

ATMs are increasingly available in Cuba, but are not yet widespread. They are presently confined to the larger cities and resorts and should not be relied on, hence why we suggest that you take cash with you. Credit cards may be accepted for expensive purchases in tourist shops, but acceptance is not widespread and like ATMs should not be relied upon.

IMPORTANT: Using cards for banks which are fully or partially US owned is not possible in Cuba. Australian and Canadian travellers in particular should check with their banks prior to travel if they intend to withdraw cash.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

EXTRA EXPENSES AND SPENDING MONEY

Drinks are generally around CUC 1-5. Supplies and shopping is very limited. Please note that most travellers find Cuba more expensive than they expect and we recommend that you bring more spending money rather than less!

TIPPING (LEADER AND LOCAL STAFF)

If you are happy with the services of the guide and driver, we recommend a tip of 40-50 CUC per person, which you can divide in favour of the guide.

Tipping is at your own discretion but is very much part of the culture in Cuba and is usually expected. Your tour leader will offer to arrange and look after a group tipping kitty which will be used to tip local guides at individual museums and attractions, musicians and waiting staff for included meals etc. throughout the holiday. The guide will collect 30 CUC from each group member at the start of the trip to cover this. Tipping is also expected in restaurants – normally add about 10% to the bill.

DONATIONS

If you would like to bring items to Cuba in order to donate, then items that are welcomed include: good condition second hand clothes and children's shoes, second hand mobile phones with chargers, school stationary such as pens/pencils/notebooks, toiletries, and small gifts such as toys or balls. Rather than spending lots of money, it is a good opportunity to find new homes for unused goods. We cannot guarantee that every departure will feature a scheduled stop at a school or community project, but if you bring items with you then the group leader will assist you by offering advice on where to take your donation.

Sanitary items, known locally as 'intimas', are on the ration list for Cubans and are often very hard to come by. If you would like to pack some sanitary towels in your luggage these will be hugely appreciated and can be left in your hotel room so that the cleaners/room attendants can benefit from these.

OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

(approximate costs, depending on group sizes)

Note that all prices are correct at the time of writing but prices in Cuba can increase at short notice. All optional excursions are also dependent upon availability.

EL CUBANO EXCURSION

CUC 35

'El Cubano' Nature Park is a reserve nestled in countryside on the outskirts of Trinidad. We'll walk through tropical forest to reach a waterfall where we can stop to take a refreshing dip.

CATAMARAN TRIP IN TRINIDAD

CUC 55 (incl lunch)

Departing from Playa Ancon, this is a full day trip on a Catamaran, sailing out to the Caribbean island of Cayo Macho or Cayo Blanco. A fresh seafood lunch is included.

LAS TERRAZAS COMMUNITY (min 5)

CUC 65

Offered on day 14 after arriving back in to Havana at the end of the trip, this optional excursion requires a minimum of 5 people participating in order to run.

After breakfast we meet our guide and van and head off to Las Terrazas Community, a biosphere reserve tucked away in the Sierra del Rosario Mountains. The community is a natural area of around 5,000 hectares which is being developed as a sustainable rural economy for eco-tourism. Created after the Revolution to replant the area which had suffered badly from over-forestry, it is now a haven for migrating birds from the North. It's a perfect place to spend the day, walking in the hills or swimming in crystal-clear waters of the San Juan River. After lunch and a visit to the community, there will be time to have a go at zip-lining through the forest canopy. An 800m course with 3 wires takes you right across the Las Terrazas community. We then head down to Rio San Juan for a chance to swim before heading back to Havana.

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

Comfortable walking clothes suitable for hot conditions are all that is required, and there is very little in the way of special equipment that you need to bring.

The following items are recommended:

Comfortable waterproof walking boots

Small rucksack (about 30 litres)

Waterproof jacket

Swimming gear

Sunglasses and sunhat (wide-brimmed hats are best)

Towel

Hand sanitiser

Camera

Small personal first-aid kit

High factor sun cream and lip salve

OPTIONAL ITEMS

Walking sticks/Trekking poles

(due to the slippery and uneven nature of some of the trails).

Torch

Folding umbrella

Binoculars

Waterproof trousers

READING LIST

Cuba Handbook

Christopher P. Baker, Moon Publication

The best and most comprehensive guidebook available. Recommended reading.

Insight Guide to Cuba

APA Publications

Good photography, with a profile of Fidel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

In Focus: Cuba

Published by Latin America Bureau

A guide to the people, politics and culture by Emily Hatchwell & Simon Calder.

Guide to Cuba

Stephen Fallon, Bradt Publications

Good general guidebook – but not as useful as the Cuba Handbook.

The Rough Guide to Cuba

Good general guidebook

Travellers Survival Kit: Cuba

Simon Calder & Emily Hatchwell

Probably the most popular guidebook used by independent travellers in Cuba. Strong on practical advice for independent travellers.

Land of Miracles

Stephen Smith

Recently published account of travels in Cuba by a British journalist. Highly recommended.

Enduring Cuba

Zoe Bran, Lonely Planet Publications 2002

For novels based in or about Cuba try

The Old Man and the Sea

To Have and Have Not

Islands in the Stream

All by Ernest Hemingway

Our Man in Havana

Graham Greene

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL CLIENTS

In booking this trip you should be confident in your ability to participate in all activities described in these Trip Notes. If you have any doubt about your suitability you should call us up so that we can talk through the itinerary together.

Although our leaders are well trained to deal with different capabilities, if they have any concerns about someone's ability to safely partake in an activity, or their impact on other people's enjoyment, we authorise them to take necessary action which, in some circumstances, may involve asking someone to miss that activity.

Although rarely enforced, by booking this trip you agree to our leaders having the authority to do this. In these circumstances we will ensure anyone sitting out is safely provided for and offered alternative options where possible. Refunds will not be provided for activities missed and customers may be liable for additional costs incurred.

In an emergency, please contact our 24 hour out-of-hours service on +53 5 287 0805

Please take the time to read the information sections of our website
<http://cubaniatravel.com/travel-information/useful-info/>

Full joining instructions including local telephone numbers, and details of how to reach the start point, will be sent to you approximately 2 to 3 weeks prior to departure. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact us.

The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; in order to enjoy them you should be prepared to be flexible where necessary. Occasionally, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons – climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements that maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Travel Advice Service advises British tourists on the potential dangers they might experience when travelling overseas. We liaise closely with them and adhere to their travel advice. For up-to-date advice on all countries, please visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. Should there be any change to advice prior to or during travel, we may have to cancel or curtail a tour at short notice, or re-route an itinerary part way through.

