

TRIP NOTES

CENTRAL CUBA TREK

An easy to medium intensity trekking holiday through the stunning natural parks of the Zapata Peninsula, Topes de Collantes and the Escambray mountains.

 DURATION	 ACTIVITY LEVEL	 INCLUDED
8 DAYS	MODERATE	

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the world's smallest bee hummingbird at the Zapata Peninsula.
- Visit three UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Havana, Cienfuegos and Trinidad.
- Hike through the Escambray Mountains and Topes de Collantes Park.
- Experience the vibrant energy of Havana city.



WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Transfers from airport upon arrival and departure.
- Transfer of luggage throughout but not hotel portage.
- Accommodation: 2 nights in hotel, 5 nights in *casas particulares* on B&B basis
- Meals: all breakfasts, 6 lunches and 1 dinner. Lunches will be in restaurants or picnics depending on the day.
- Entrances to Cienaga de Zapata National Park, Topes de Collantes National Park, Che Guevara's Mausoleum and museum.
- Staff: English-speaking Cuban active guide throughout, trek guides (with specialist knowledge of terrain, and local flora and fauna), driver.
- Transport: all bus transfers in private air-conditioned bus.
- Mineral water included on trekking days.

WHAT ISN'T INCLUDED?

- Flights to and from Cuba.
- Travel/medical insurance (compulsory to provide proof of cover for entry into Cuba).
- Personal expenses (drinks, laundry, phone calls etc).
- Vaccinations.
- Visas (Tourist Cards).
- Tips for guide, driver and local staff. We recommend that each participant contributes a minimum of CUC 25 – CUC 30 to be shared between the local staff.

IS THIS TOUR RIGHT FOR ME?

- Group Style: Small
4 – 18 people of mixed nationalities and walking ability. Minimum age 16 years (accompanied by an adult).
- The trekking is on dirt roads or single-track paths, some are rocky and slippery when wet. Some of the paths are exposed but others are shaded by jungle vegetation and trees. Hot and humid conditions during summer months.
- On most days you will be walking for a minimum of three hours. Participants should be used to exercising and active.



DAY 1

🏠 Casa Particular, Havana

ARRIVAL IN HAVANA

Welcome to Cuba! A Cuban representative will meet you upon arrival at the airport and transfer you to your accommodation in the heart of Havana. The largest island in the Caribbean, Hemingway's much-loved abode and one of the last planned economies in the world. You're soon to discover that Cuba is all that and much, much more, but first relax and enjoy your first night in enchanting Havana.

DAY 2

🏠 Casa particular, Cienfuegos 🍳 Breakfast, Lunch

SPEND THE DAY AT CIÉNAGA DE ZAPATA NATURAL PARK AND VISIT PLAYA GIRÓN

Today we transfer to the Ciénaga de Zapata Natural Park. This area is a protected nature reserve and one of the most important birdwatching sites in Cuba. It's the natural habitat of the smallest bird in the world, the bee hummingbird (*Zunzuncito*), and there's a good chance you'll see one of these as well as Cuba's national bird, the Cuban Trogon (*Tocororo*) which has red, white and blue plumage. We take a gentle warm-up walk in Bermejas to observe local flora and fauna, particularly birds such as the bee hummingbird and the Cuban pygmy owl. We also make a short stop at the museum in Playa Girón which explains events surrounding the CIA-backed 'Bay of Pigs' invasion of Castro's Cuba in April 1961. We have lunch in Caleta Buena where we can also swim in the beautiful natural sea pools. Afterwards we transfer to Cienfuegos for a brief orientation tour and overnight. Tonight dinner isn't included so you'll be able to try out a local *paladar* – a privately owned restaurant.

🚶 4 km

DAY 3

🏠 Hotel Hanabanilla, Hanabanilla 🍳 Breakfast, Lunch

TREK THE LA ATALAYA TRAIL ALONG LAKE HANABANILLA AND THROUGH THE ESCAMBRAY MOUNTAINS

A short transfer from Cienfuegos takes us to the Escambray mountains, Cuba's central mountain range that dominates the landscape. We leave our bags at the Hotel Hanabanilla, collect a packed lunch and head for the La Atalaya trail. This trail takes us along the banks of the Lake Hanabanilla through the Escambray Mountains with a steep climb to the top of La Atalaya hill where you'll have amazing views of the surrounding countryside. The trail ends on the banks of Lake Hanabanilla, where a boat will pick us up and take us for refreshments at the *Rio Negro Café*. At Rio Negro there's an opportunity to climb to another *mirador* (lookout point) for those who still have the energy! We return to Hotel Hanabanilla for check in and overnight. Dinner isn't included this evening so you're free to eat out locally or at the hotel.

🚶 12 km

DAY 4

🏠 Hotel Los Helechos 🍳 Breakfast, Lunch

TREK FROM LAKE HANABANILLA TO THE EL ROCIO WATERFALL AT TOPES DE COLLANTES

Today we leave the hotel by boat and cross Lake Hanabanilla to the Cortina de Jibacoa. From here we trek for an easy 13 km on jeep tracks along a finger of the lake and upstream above the Rio Guanayara, stopping halfway at Tito's Farm for a water break. The route today is low-medium intensity on a good surface. It's also very pretty, skirting between forested hillside and the lake. We arrive at *Casa de la Gallega* for lunch and some time to relax. We then continue upstream on a 3 km trek to the beautiful El Rocio waterfall where there is a natural swimming pool close by for you to enjoy a refreshing dip and enjoy the views. From here we continue across a coffee plantation to reach the local transport which takes us to our accommodation for the night.

🚶 16 km

DAY 5

🏠 Casa particular, Trinidad 🍳 Breakfast, Lunch

TREK THE CODINA TRAIL IN TOPES DE COLLANTES NATURAL PARK

This morning we set off from our hotel on foot heading first for *la Casa del Café* where we enjoy a cup of local coffee and hear about its history and production in Cuba. We then continue our trek through the Topes Arboretum, a wooded area planted in the 1930s with over 300 varieties of trees. We keep moving until we reach La Batata, a point where the river pushes through a crack in the limestone; here there's time for a swim before continuing on to Codina for a traditional Cuban lunch of roast pork. After lunch we take the *Alfombra Magica* trail, a trek of approximately 1 hour at a height of 1100 metres, taking in a visit to an orchid plantation and exploring a cave to see the rich natural fauna where we complete the walk at the arboretum. There's time to enjoy a swim before we head down to Trinidad and check into our *casa particular* for the night.

🚶 10 km

DAY 6

🏠 Casa particular, Trinidad 🍳 Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

SET OFF FROM MANGOS PELONES TO TREK THE EL CUBANO TRAIL AND VISIT THE COLONIAL TOWN OF TRINIDAD

A transfer this morning takes us to the beginning of our trail at the lookout point where we stop for pictures of the spectacular views across the mountains and down to the Caribbean Sea. From here we cross the road and take the jungle trails back towards Trinidad cutting through the gorgeous tropical forest. After a 6 km descent we have an opportunity for a refreshing swim in a natural pool before trekking the last 2-3 km to the *El Cubano* restaurant for a drink. We then return to Trinidad for lunch and an afternoon sightseeing tour of the town.



Trinidad is probably Cuba's most famous provincial town and rightly so. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1988 and is perhaps the best-preserved colonial town on the island. Exploring Trinidad is like stepping back in time; the pastel coloured houses, cobbled streets and horse drawn transportation whisk you back to colonial times. There are a number of interesting museums housed in old colonial buildings to visit during the day, but it is as the sun sets that Trinidad really comes alive with music and dance. It's a great opportunity to meet the locals and have a go at practising your salsa moves to those catchy Cuban salsa rhythms. Dinner will be at one of the local *paladars* in town.

🚶 10 km

DAY 7

🏠 Casa particular, Havana 🍴 Breakfast

RETURN TO HAVANA, VISITING THE CHE GUEVARA MAUSOLEUM IN SANTA CLARA ON THE WAY

We leave Trinidad early this morning and head east to the city of Santa Clara, the site of the last battle of the Cuban Revolution. In December 1958, Che Guevara and his troops ambushed an armoured train carrying arms to Santiago de Cuba and this was a major turning point in the Revolution. We visit the Mausoleum of Che Guevara and his comrades who died in Bolivia. The museum attached to the Mausoleum has many of his former belongings and is a fascinating insight into one of the 20th Century's most revered icons. We then continue our journey, stopping for lunch (not included) before reaching the capital. This evening you are free to explore on your own and dine out locally (dinner not included).

DAY 8

🍴 Breakfast, Lunch

GUIDED TOUR OF OLD HAVANA AND DEPARTURE DAY

After breakfast your guide will take you on a walking tour of Old Havana which is the finest surviving Spanish colonial city in the Americas. Since it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site millions of dollars have been invested in its restoration. The many marvellous monuments, cathedrals and palaces of the city's historical centre are brought to life by a constant hustle and bustle and the unmistakable sound of Cuban Son. We'll also take time to have a mojito and lunch (included) at one of Hemingway's favourite haunts, *La Bodeguita del Medio*. It will then be time to part ways and say *Adiós*, or, as we prefer to say *hasta luego*, see you later! Afternoon transfer (30–40 minutes approx.) to Havana airport.

🚶 City Tour

THE TREKKING

- 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.
- No. of days trekking: 5 (+Havana city walking tour).
- Total Distance: approx. 55 km.
- Moderate Pace.

WHAT TO BRING?

ESSENTIAL PACKING LIST

- Comfortable waterproof walking boots.
- Water bottle or Camelback.
- Light trousers/shorts.
- Small rucksack (about 30 litres).
- Waterproof jacket.
- Sunglasses and cap or sunhat (wide-brimmed hats are best).
- High factor sun cream (SPF 50+) lip salve and mosquito repellent.
- Lightweight cotton/linen clothes suitable for tropical climates, and full-length clothes and a jacket or fleece for the cooler evenings from November to March. Avoid bringing expensive or flashy jewellery.
- Swimming gear.



- Towel.
- Hand sanitiser.
- Camera.
- Small personal first-aid kit and some antihistamines in case of insect bites.
- A sense of humour and patience are useful in Cuba!

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Walking sticks/trekking poles (due to the slippery and uneven nature of some of the trails).
- Torch.
- Binoculars.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Please see our Destination Guide or [website](#) for all Cuba-related practical advice and travel information on our [need to know](#) section. Check with your doctor prior to travel & also your government's official advice.

ACCOMMODATION

Throughout the tour we stay in a range of accommodation typical to any trip to Cuba, with a mixture of hotels and private accommodation (*casas particulares*). It's fair to say that the standard of Cuban accommodation is not always comparable to that which you would expect in other countries owing to years of isolation, under-investment in the country's infrastructure and effect of the US trade Embargo. Anyone travelling to the island should be prepared to rough it a bit at times! Décor tends to be a little dated, there might be the occasional power cut, and you may find that your water pressure isn't all it could be. Fortunately, it's warm enough most days that the lack of hot water is not a major problem!

The two hotels in the mountains above Trinidad are 3 star with en suite bathrooms and air

conditioning. In Havana, Trinidad and Cienfuegos we use *casas particulares* – Cuban homestays. Most people love the opportunity this gives to stay in a relatively normal Cuban home and see how Cubans live. These homes are simple compared to ours but the welcome is warm and rooms clean. All the *casas* also have air conditioning and en suite bathrooms. You'll be spoilt at breakfast in the mornings.

FOOD & DRINK

Cuba doesn't have the same variety of international cuisine we might be used to although in recent years lots of privately run restaurants (*paladars*) have opened (particularly in Havana) offering a wider choice and better quality food than the government run establishments. Think soul food – rice, black beans, slow roast pork and chicken, fresh fish, lobster and plenty of tropical fruit.

For those with special dietary requirements, be prepared for a very limited menu while you are in Cuba. There are very few vegetarians and vegans in Cuba so there are sometimes misperceptions as to what you can eat. Vegetarians often bring snacks and spreads to liven up their meals.

It can also be difficult to find a decent sandwich in Cuba so please don't give your guide a hard time if he recommends a proper sit-down meal for lunch! Cubans generally eat two full meals a day and don't have many places that cater for snack lunches yet, so the sandwiches tend to be pretty basic.

Cuba is the land of the Mojito, Daiquiri and Cuba Libre. You'll find that plenty of rum-based drinks all over the country with prices ranging from 2-6 CUC for most cocktails. But beware, they don't use measuring glasses, so they might be stronger than the ones you have tried at home!

GUIDES



All our guides at Cubania are Cuban nationals who are registered with and trained by Cuba's Ministry of Tourism. They come from all kinds of different personal and professional backgrounds. They've been teachers, I.T. professionals, bakers, vets, army officers and even underwear salesmen! What they have in common is that they are all highly educated graduates who are passionate about guiding and proud of their beautiful country. They all speak excellent English and receive annual training in First Aid.

All our guides receive annual Tour Leader training which focuses on enhancing the enjoyment of your stay. Your guide will not simply give you the historical facts; he or she will also show you the best places to eat, share personal stories with you, teach you how to dance salsa and help you make the most of your time in Cuba.

In line with our Responsible Tourism policy we employ local guides from remote rural communities to show us the way as most of the trails in Cuba are unmarked and unmapped. They have a wealth of knowledge about the local fauna and flora and can share insights into rural life.





INTERNET ACCESS

Cuba is one of the last countries on Earth to join the mobile internet so be prepared for a digital detox! 3G Wifi was only introduced in December 2018 and is only accessible through buying and ETECSA Prepaid Internet Card. The cards come in 1 hour and 5-hour denominations and cost CUC1.5/hour (so that's CUC1.5 for 1-hour card and CUC7.5 for a 5-hour card) and are sold at ETECSA offices and hotels across the country. Each ETECSA card has a unique Username (*Usuario*) and Password (*Contraseña*), which you need to log into the ETECSA internet service. You can use the cards on your laptop and your phone.

Make sure you check roaming costs with your service provider before travelling to Cuba. It can be very expensive to connect via roaming.

Since internet access is slow and expensive we recommend you download the following apps before travelling to Cuba:

MAPS.ME

Offline map of Cuba which uses phone grid to pinpoint your location. Great for finding your way round Havana and for navigating your way round the rest of Cuba.

A LA MESA

Offline restaurant and food delivery app. Reviews and contact details of the best places to eat in Havana and other cities throughout Cuba.

SHAZAM

Name that song! Next time you hear that reggaetón hit that's become the soundtrack to your holiday, play it to Shazam and find out what it's called and who sang it.

WHATSAPP/FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM

Cubans are as in love with these apps as you were 15 years ago! They all have them and love using them.

cubaniatravel.com

TRIP EXTENSIONS

PRE OR POST TOUR NIGHTS IN HAVANA

- Choose between hotels in Old Town, Vedado, or Playa district.
- Range of hotels or boutique *Casas Particulares*.

VARADERO BEACH EXTENSION

- Transfers to and from Havana (2 hours) to your choice of all-inclusive hotel at Varadero beach.

CAYO LEVISA BEACH EXTENSION

- Transfers to and from Havana (3 hours) to quiet island retreat in the western Pinar del Rio province.

Please contact us for prices & availability:
sales@cubaniatravel.com

DESTINATION GUIDES

We have created a separate destination guide full of general and practical information relating to visiting Cuba. You can find this in your confirmation email, or ask a member of our staff to send you a copy via email.

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Please refer to our website for a full transcript of Cubania Travel Booking Conditions:
cubaniatravel.com/need-to-know/booking-conditions

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