CUBANIA

TRIP NOTES (edited: 29.03.2021)

ROAD CYCLING

WESTERN & CENTRAL CUBA

A blockbuster cycling tour that showcases the very best of Cuba for road cyclists, designed for maximum time spent in the saddle.

DURATION
13 DAYS

ACTIVITY LEVEL
CHALLENGING

CARBON EMISSIONS
19.8 kg CO2e per day

INCLUDED

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cycle on Cuba's uncrowded highways and backroads, meeting locals along the way.
- Discover areas of natural beauty such as Topes de Collantes National Park, and Pinar del Rio Province.
- Visit 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Havana, Trinidad, Valle de los Ingenios, Cienfuegos, Viñales Valley.
- Swim at the Bay of Pigs and remote Cayo Jutias.
- Learn all about this unique country, it's history and way of life.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Individual transfers from airport to start accommodation (in micro/van). Confirmation of flight details required.
- Transfer of luggage from hotel to hotel.
- Accommodation: 5 nights in standard hotels & 7 nights in *casas particulares*.
- Meals: all breakfasts, 10 lunches and 1 dinner Lunches will be in restaurants or picnics depending on the day.
- Staff: Local English–speaking Cuban guide to accompany group throughout. Driver. Professional mechanic for bike fitting on Day 2.
- 9 x cycle rides of varying length and duration.
- Transport: All transport in air–conditioned vehicle with professional driver, used as group transport and as support vehicle during rides.
- Support: 100% vehicle support during rides.
- Drinking water provided on cycling days (bring your own refillable bottle).
- Local snacks for riding days (fruit, biscuits, peanut bars).
- Cubania Travel office support.
- 24–hour emergency contact in Cuba.

WHAT ISN'T INCLUDED?

- Flights to and from Cuba.
- Bike transport fees with airline.
- Bike hire.
- Travel/medical insurance (compulsory to provide proof of cover for entry into Cuba).
- Personal expenses (drinks, laundry, phone calls etc).
- Vaccinations.
- Visas (Tourist Cards).
- Cycling Helmet (compulsory) and water bottle.
- Tips for guide, Cuban Masters cyclists, driver and local staff. We recommend that each participant contributes a minimum of CUP 1000 – CUP 1250 to be shared between the local staff.

IS THIS TOUR RIGHT FOR ME?

- Group Size 4 – 18 people of mixed nationalities and cycling ability. Minimum age 16 years (accompanied by an adult).
- Predominantly paved roads, small sections of unpaved, with some potholes. Some long bus transfers involved in order to cover large travel distances.
- A good level of fitness is required.

DAY 1

Hotel in Havana

ARRIVAL IN HAVANA

Welcome to Cuba! A Cubania representative will meet you upon arrival in Havana before transferring to the start hotel. 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. If your flight arrives early, you can request access to the workshop today (subject to confirmation) so that you can build your bike. Your guide will meet you in the hotel lobby in the evening for a welcome briefing and to suggest some nearby places for eating out.

DAY 2

Hotel in Havana Breakfast, Lunch

CYCLE IN HAVANA (24 KM)

This morning we'll have access to the Cubania workshop (located next door to the hotel) to build and fit your bike. We'll start off with a safety briefing and get acquainted with some of the particulars of cycling on Cuban roads. Once everyone is ready, we'll set off on a leisurely ride getting to know some of the interesting neighbourhoods of Havana. As today's ride is short and more of a sightseeing ride you may wish to wear casual sports clothing.

We'll visit the well–to–do 1950s Miramar district, home to some of Havana's most striking 20th century architecture. Keep an eye out for the imposing Russian embassy and the elegant neoclassical homes, many of which are now embassies. We'll then cycle through Parque Metropolitano de la Habana and Nuevo Vedado (home to Havana's middle classes), before stopping at Plaza de la Revolución. From here we wheel through young and vibrant Vedado towards the famous Hotel Nacional, which has offered shelter to many a celebrity over the years, including Winston Churchill and members of the Mafia. Now we whizz through bustling Centro Habana to the Capitolio building, a mirror–image of Washington's Capitol Building. With the Capitolio behind us we veer left down the elegant Prado promenade, a favourite with street artists and skateboarders alike. We finish the city cycle in the Old Town next to the Bay of Havana.

Here we'll load the bikes up on to our vehicle and continue on foot, exploring the rich cultural heritage of Havana's Old Town. Lunch will be in a 'paladar' private restaurant in the Old Town followed by free time in the afternoon to either keep exploring Havana or relax back at the hotel and make the most of the big outdoor swimming pool.

24 km ↓↑ +163m –169m

DAY 3

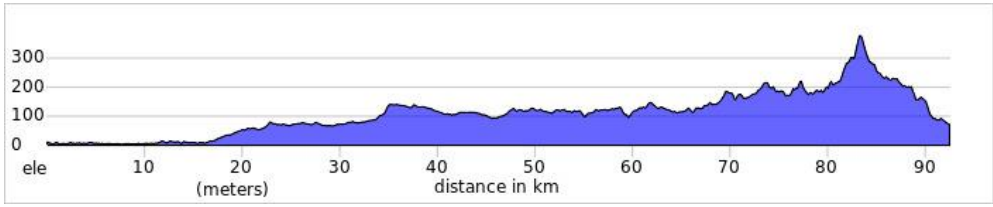
Casas Particulares in Soroa Breakfast, Packed Lunch, Dinner

CYCLE HAVANA TO SOROA (93KM);

Today we'll jump straight on our bikes and stretch our legs heading out of the city to the west. In almost no time at all we'll have left the city and transitioned into the rural countryside of Artemisa Province. You'll notice that once you leave the cities, there is very little traffic in Cuba compared to most ~~other~~ countries, a breath of fresh air for cyclists! Keep an eye out for potholes, however, as the road surface conditions are varied and can be poor in some sections, especially if there have been extremes of hot and wet weather.

Arriving at Las Terrazas in the UNESCO Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve we'll stop for a short visit to this unique community and eco–tourism destination. Back on the bikes it is just a short distance and long downhill to the small village of Soroa where we'll check in to our private homestays known as 'casas particulares'. This evening we'll gather together at one of the properties to have a home cooked meal.

93 km ↓↑ +831m –771m



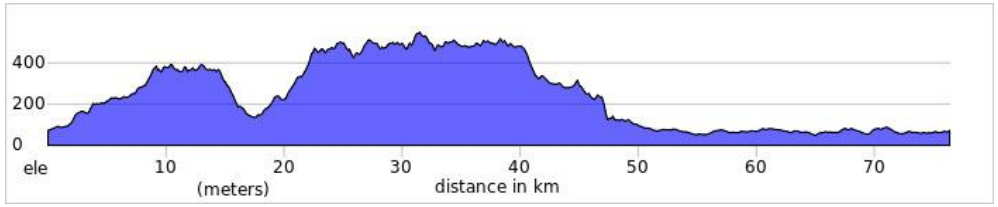
DAY 4

Hotel in Pinar del Rio Breakfast, Packed Lunch

CYCLE SOROA TO SAN DIEGO DE LOS BANOS (73KM); TRANSFER TO PINAR DEL RIO

Today's ride is one of our most challenging and represents a trip highlight in terms of the scenery and cycling. We'll ride along what is known as the 'skyline route', a mountain road that climbs and undulates through a spectacular natural setting before descending back down to the valley floor. The ride ends in the spa town of San Diego de los Baños. From here we'll jump on the support vehicle and drive the short remaining distance along the main highway to the town and provincial capital of Pinar del Rio. Here we'll check in to hotel accommodation for the night.

76 km ↓↑ +1348m –1350m



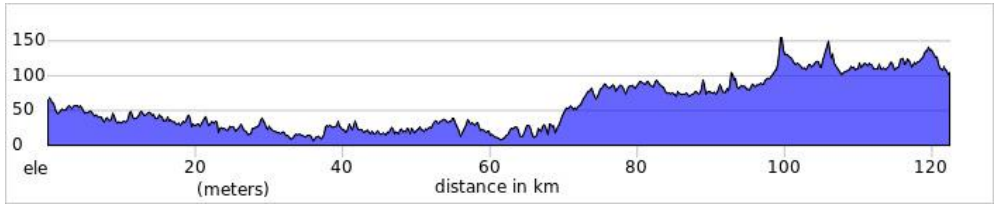
DAY 5

Casas Particulares in Viñales Breakfast, Packed Lunch

CYCLE FROM PINAR DEL RIO TO PONS (122KM); TRANSFER TO VINALES

Another wonderful day of cycling today as we embark on a ride in to tobacco country and through some beautiful lesser–visited routes of rural western Cuba. The second half of today's ride in particular features very pretty roads and landscapes, with some rickety bridge crossings where cyclists will need to stop and walk across. Note that depending on the bridge conditions it may not be possible for the support vehicle to follow the group throughout the entirety of the ride today. The ride ends in Pons from where we transfer the final leg in to the town of Viñales. The town is nestled in Viñales Valley and surrounded by lush green tobacco and agricultural lands in the shadow of large limestone karst mountains. An outdoor adventure hub for the region, there is no shortage of bars and restaurants to choose from in the town centre.

122km +824m –788m



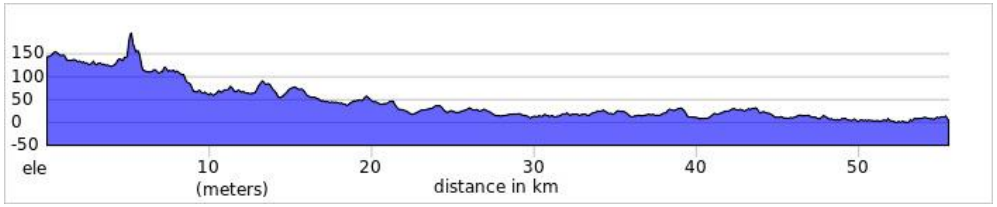
DAY 6

Casas Particulares in Viñales Breakfast, Lunch

CYCLE VINALES TO CAYO JUTIAS (55KM)

Back on our bikes again, we start by retracing the route out westwards to Pons and from here turn northwards in the direction of the northern coastline. The final section of the route involves a flat sea road connecting the mainland with Cayo Jutias, and this section is peppered with potholes so we'll have to take it very slowly. It is worth it in the end though as we arrive to the pristine golden beach at Cayo Jutias where we'll spend a few hours for lunch, swimming and relaxing. We'll transfer back to Viñales and the rest of the evening will be at leisure.

55 km +422m –560m



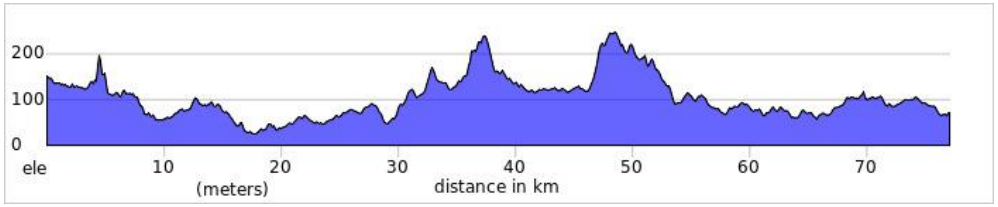
DAY 7

Casas Particulares in Cienfuegos Breakfast, Packed Lunch

CYCLE FROM VINALES TO SAN DIEGO DE LOS BANOS (77KM); TRANSFER TO CIENFUEGOS

Today is our one long travel day as we leave the West and head for the Centre of the Island. We start off with a final ride in Viñales Valley, departing the town towards the north, enjoying some wonderful views of the mountain ranges of Viñales and finishing once more in San Diego de los Baños. The most challenging section passes through the range of hills between La Palma and Entronque de Herradura but the views more than make up for it! With a packed lunch we'll embark on our road transfer of approx. 6 hours to take us to the southern coast of central Cuba, and our destination of Cienfuegos. A coastal city, Cienfuegos has a delightful layout with a beautiful bay and wide boulevard as defining features. There are some good restaurants and bars to choose from, and the 'mini–malecon' makes a good outdoor spot to sign off the day with a rum.

77 km +912m –991m



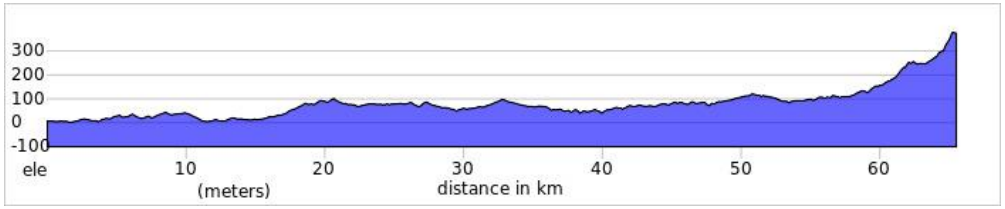
DAY 8

Hotel Hanabanilla Breakfast, Packed Lunch

CYCLE FROM CIENFUEGOS TO HANABANILLA (65KM)

Our ride today takes us from Cienfuegos up in to the foothills of the Escambray Mountain Range, ending with a gradual climb up to Hanabanilla Lake where we'll stay for the night. Although we start the ride at sea level and climb into the mountains this is a fast and fun route as we undulate our way through mango groves dripping with epiphytes and past small agricultural villages. Once past Cumanayagua we head into the hills and climb slowly up to Hanabanilla, our destination for the night. Our accommodation is in a soviet–era hotel that won't win any awards for luxury however it is spectacularly situated with great views! There are some short walks from the hotel and also a big swimming pool good for doing laps. We recommend eating out at the nearby paladar 'El Principal' tonight as the best culinary option.

65km ↓↑ +730m –362m



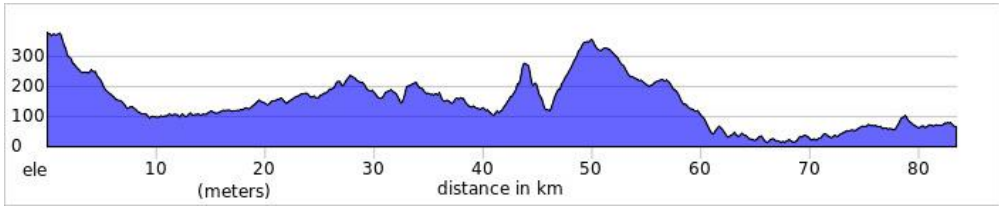
DAY 9

Casas Particulares in Trinidad Breakfast, Packed Lunch

CYCLE HANABANILLA TO TRINIDAD VIA GUINIA DE MIRANDA (83KM)

Another great ride today as we circuit clockwise around the Escambray mountains on a rewarding route that passes through several small towns and cuts through foothills on an undulating road offering some short and sharp climbs as well as fast downhill sections. The ride has a bit of everything, starting with a wonderful 7km descent from Hanabanilla as we head towards Manicaragua and its tobacco fields. From here it's back into the hills of the Escambray, passing monuments to Che Guevara who is commemorated in Guinia de Miranda village. The road surface is surprisingly good quality and takes us to the Valle de Ingenios (Valley of Sugar Mills) where we can still see the ruins of Cuba's colonial past. A final steady climb brings us into Trinidad and our ride ends at the door of our casa accommodation in the charismatic town of Trinidad. We'll check in to our homestays which are all situated in the vicinity of our central property with communal courtyard and bar, and the rest of the evening is at leisure to explore the bustling nightlife and live music scene.

83km ↓↑ +1016m –1328m



DAY 10

Casas Particulares in Trinidad Breakfast

FREE DAY IN TRINIDAD

A day to recuperate off the saddle and indulge in some cultural sightseeing in central Trinidad. Our tour guide will give a short walking tour in the morning and provide information and ideas for any optional activities that anyone may be interested in. For those who wish to go for a swim at the beach, nearby Playa Ancon is located just 7km away, and salsa classes can be arranged for anyone who fancies a dance. Enjoy the day at leisure.

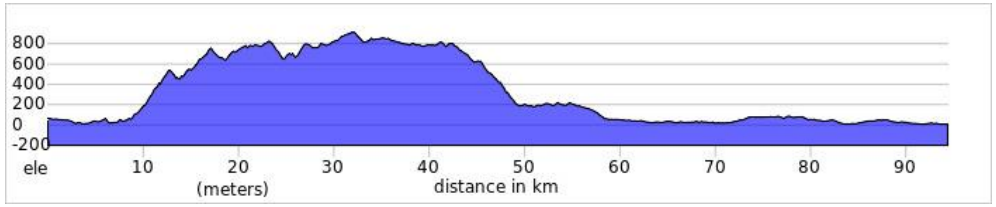
DAY 11

Casas Particulares in Playa Larga Breakfast, Packed Lunch

CYCLE FROM TRINIDAD TO CIENFUEGOS VIA TOPES (94KM)

Our final ride of the cycling tour and we saved the biggest challenge until last! Shortly after setting off from Trinidad the road turns inland and climbs up in to Topes de Collantes National Park. This is the most challenging climb of the tour and our guide will brief us before we set off to attack the hills. A rest stop at the Mirador before a steep descent and the final ascent towards Topes de Collante, formerly a mountain health retreat and now a National Park with stunning forests, waterfalls and trails. Taking a left hand turn we veer off on to a lesser–taken mountain route that undulates past pine forests, mountain rivers and isolated communities. Expect some sections with potholes and poor road conditions. Enjoy a long downhill section out of the Escambray foothills as you descend towards the coastal town of Cienfuegos, to end a wonderful day in the saddle. From here we'll transfer westwards in the support vehicle to spend the night at the quaint beachfront town of Playa Larga. Hopefully we'll arrive in time for a sunset swim! The casa has a restaurant with tables set out on the sandy beach from which to enjoy the evening with some good food and cocktails.

94km ↓↑ +1,862 m –1,922 m



DAY 12

Hotel in Havana Breakfast

TO HAVANA

There will be a short optional warm down ride this morning on the flat stretch northwards from Playa Larga. For those who want to warm down their muscles after yesterday's exertions this is a good easy ride through the low–lying swampland of the Zapata Peninsula. There is also the option to stay on the bus! We'll continue onwards back to Havana, arriving just before lunchtime. The rest of the afternoon is at leisure.

DAY 13

Breakfast

DEPART HAVANA

For the final morning of the tour there will be access to our bike workshop as required and after checking out of the accommodation we'll provide a group departure transfer to Havana Airport. Trip extensions in Havana, or mini–adventure extensions can be arranged in advance through Cubania Travel. We hope you've had a memorable time cycling in Cuba!

THE CYCLING

- Mostly on paved, quiet rural roads, with some potholes.
- Some challenging climb sections (see daily ride profiles in itinerary).
- No. of days cycling: 9.
- Total Distance: 688 km.
- Average Daily Distance: 76 km.
- Moderate Pace: approx. 20–25 kmph depending on terrain.
- 100% vehicle support throughout rides—jump on the bus whenever you like!

WHAT TO BRING?

ESSENTIAL PACKING LIST

- Your own bike.
- Cycling helmet compulsory.
- Water bottle.
- Cycle gear.
- Lightweight waterproof /windproof top or jacket.
- Breathable clothing.
- High factor sun cream (50+), sunglasses and sun hat.
- Hand sanitizer.

- Insect repellent – tropical strength.
- Long sleeved shirts and light trousers for the evenings.
- A sense of humour and patience are useful in Cuba!

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Most people bring a small back pack which they keep on the bus for easy access during the day. Typically they will carry a spare T shirt, their valuables, snacks and a camera.
- Cycle shoes and cleats.
- Cycling gloves.
- Comfortable trainers for walking.
- Torch.

YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

Cubania has made responsible travel part of everything we do since we first started organizing trips to Cuba; from the local ground staff we employ to the family–run restaurants and B&Bs we use, **we aim to ensure that your money stays in Cuba and supports local businesses.**

We're now going one step further by making a commitment to further reducing our carbon footprint by **measuring the CO2 emissions on each and every trip we offer.**
We teamed up with ecollective , a carbon consultancy specialising in the travel industry to accurately measure the footprint of our trips and our business operations. To do this we looked into the carbon footprint of our entire supply chain from hotels, activities, guide accommodation, included meals and we even included the footprint of our website to name a few. It not only enables our clients to see the carbon footprint of every tour that we run, but it will also show us what we can change in order to further reduce trip based emissions year on year.

Read more about our commitment to sustainability on our website;
cubaniatravel.com/sustainability

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. As it's a tropical country, the lack of hot water is not a major problem!

Most of the hotels we use are 3 star with en suite bathrooms and air conditioning. Depending on the location they are relatively modern International style hotels or traditional colonial hotels.

We use *Casas Particulares* in various locations throughout this tour. 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 an 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.

On cycling days you will have a packed lunch (sandwich, fruit, juice etc) Cuban packed lunches are relatively basic but we supplement them with local snacks and fresh fruit. However, some people bring their usual gels, hydration mixes and snacks such as protein bars from home since these are not available to buy in Cuba.

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.

We are especially proud of the training that we have given our bike guides. We are the first travel company in Cuba to take cycling safety seriously and all our bike guides have received Bike Leader certification from British Cycling. Their staff travel to Cuba annually to deliver the training exclusively to our guides. These high standards have been maintained for more than a decade meaning that we are recognised as the most experienced and well–respected cycling company on the island.

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, followed by 4G in 2019, and is only accessible through buying and Etecsa Prepaid Internet Card. The cards come in 1 hour and 5–hour denominations and cost CUP25/ hour (so that's CUP25 for 1–hour card and CUP125 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.

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

CUBANIA TRAVEL CONTACT DETAILS

sales@cubaniatravel.com
or visit our website cubaniatravel.com

LONDON OFFICE

Office hours: 10.00 – 18.00 (GMT)
Telephone: +44 (0) 208 355 7608

HAVANA OFFICE

Office hours: 09.00 – 17.00 (GMT–5)
Telephone: +53 7 206 9966

CUBANIA TRAVEL,
Oficina 502, Ed. Santa Clara,
Miramar Trade Center,
Calle 3ra, e/ 76 y 78,
Miramar,
Ciudad de la Habana,
Cuba
24–hour emergency
Telephone in Cuba: +53 5 287 0805

Caribbean Biking Company Ltd (Cubania Travel)
UK Registered Company Address: 2 Minton Place, Victoria Road, Bicester, OXON, OX26 6QB
Company Registration No: 08205075 (England and Wales)

VAT Registration Number: 161 2552 34
ABTA: Caribbean Biking Company Ltd is a Member of ABTA with membership numbers

Y6409 (UK Office) and Y6408 (Cuba Office)