





TRIP NOTES (edited: 21.11.2023)

QUEER CUBA

Take the pulse of Cuba through its progressive LGBT Scene.

 DURATION
7 DAYS

 ACTIVITY LEVEL
LEISURELY

 CARBON EMISSIONS
15.3 kg CO2e per day

INCLUDED



HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit Las Terrazas Biosphere reserve.
- Zipline in the dramatic setting of Viñales Valley.
- Meet Cuba's LGBT rights activists.
- Spend a relaxing day on the beach.
- Learn to make cocktails and experience Havana's vibrant and open nightlife.



WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Transfer from airport upon arrival and departure.
- Transfer of luggage throughout but not hotel portorage.
- Accommodation in *casas particulares* on B&B basis.
- Meals: all breakfasts, 4 lunches and 5 dinners. Lunches will be in restaurants or picnics depending on the day.
- Entrances to Museo Nacional de las Bellas Artes, Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve. Zip-lining, Classic Car Tour and Las Vegas Drag Show.
- Staff: Local English-speaking Cuban active guide throughout, specialist local guides for some activities, driver.
- Transport: all transfers in private air-conditioned vehicle.
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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/local staff. We recommend that each participant contributes a minimum of 25 – 30 EURO to be shared between the local staff.

IS THIS TOUR RIGHT FOR ME?

- Group Style: Small, English speaking
2 - 18 people of mixed nationalities.
Minimum age 18 years.
- Open minded and curious to learn about Cuba's gay community.
- Busy days with a variety of activities, travel and exposure to contemporary Cuban and LGBT culture.

INTRODUCTION

In the last 10 years, Cuba has reinvented itself as a progressive nation when it comes to LGBT rights. The Malecón, a historic esplanade stretching along Havana's coast, comes alive at sunset. The whole city comes together to chat, drink and listen to music, as Soviet-era Ladas and Chevrolets rattle past, ferrying tourists from one side of the city to the other.

Along the boulevard, constructed in the 1900s for affluent middle-classes, a same-sex couple steal a kiss. A trans woman sits on the sea wall, chatting to friends. One man dances with another. In a country which incarcerated LGBT people for most of Fidel Castro's rule, the island's capital now has gay clubs and bars and celebrates Pride every year. LGBT rights in Cuba appears to have transformed. The country's constitution bans "any form of discrimination harmful to human dignity" and healthcare and visibility has improved. This is, in part, due to a campaign spearheaded by Mariela Castro, daughter Raul Castro and niece of Fidel, and director of the state-run National Centre for Sex Education (Cenesex). Cuba's new constitution formally legalizes same sex marriage. Since 2008, gender reassignment surgery and hormone replacement therapy have been available free of charge under Cuba's national healthcare system. The island has a comprehensive approach to healthcare when it comes to HIV; condoms are distributed, sex education has improved vastly and access to antiretroviral drugs has increased.

For visitors, it's easier than ever to take the pulse of queer Cuba—especially if you'll be here in the days leading up to and following IDAHO (International Day known as *Jornada Cubana Contra la Homofobia*), observed worldwide on May 17. Check out Playa Boca Ciega—between Santa María del Mar and Guanabo. This heavenly beach 25 minutes east of Havana is postcard perfect, with all the requisite palm trees, aquamarine water, and soft white sand. The action happens around Mi Cayito and though it's not exclusively gay, it's definitely a cruising hot spot. Even if you can't make it to town for IDAHO, there's always LGBT fun stuff to be found at various bars and clubs in the city and our itinerary aims to showcase the best of queer Cuba as well as showing you the more traditional sights and sounds of this unique country.

DAY 1

🏠 Casa particular, Havana 🍴 Dinner

ARRIVAL IN HAVANA

Welcome to Havana! You will be met at the airport and taken to your casa particular. This evening we'll have a group dinner and get to know each other. If we're up for it, we can take in some local nightlife afterwards.

DAY 2

🏠 Casa particular, Havana 🍴 Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

HAVANA

This morning we'll have a walking tour of Old Havana. Cuba's cosmopolitan capital was once one of the world's most prosperous ports and the third most populous city in the Americas. As La Llave del Mundo Nuevo (Key to the New World), Havana saw conquistador riches from Mexico, Peru, and

Colombia pass through her sheltered harbour, en route to Spain. The city shows evidence of long neglect but her intrinsic elegance and beauty shines through an amalgam of Spanish, African, colonial, communist, and capitalist influences. After our tour we'll stop for lunch at a cool new café, before meeting local lesbian graphic designers, Clandestina. This afternoon we'll visit the Museo de las Bellas Artes to see Cuba's finest contemporary art, guided by a young Cuban art curator. Later on, we head to one of Havana's newest restaurants where we'll learn to make Cuban cocktails before enjoying a delicious tapas-style meal. Afterwards we might like to catch some live music and visit a few LGBT-friendly bars in Havana's happening Vedado district.

DAY 3

🏠 Casa particular, Viñales 🍴 Breakfast, Lunch

HAVANA - VIÑALES VIA LAS TERRAZAS

Today transfer to Viñales, stopping to visit Las Terrazas Community, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve tucked away in the Sierra del Rosario mountains. Created after the Revolution to replant the area which had suffered badly from deforestation, it's now a self-sustaining community surrounded by forest and is once more a haven for migrating birds from the north. We visit the lakeside community, and some will want to take a ride on the zip-lining course which soars over the rooftops, through the forest and over the lake.

We have a typical Cuban country lunch in La Casa del Campesino and then continue our journey to Viñales. The valley is famous for its mogotes, or karsts - sheer mountains that seem to pop out of the ground creating a spectacular landscape, which also happens to be where the best tobacco in the world is lovingly grown. Enjoy the evening at leisure, your guide will be happy to suggest places to eat and try out some provincial nightlife.

DAY 4

🏠 Casa particular, Viñales 🍴 Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

VIÑALES


Today we will explore Viñales - UNESCO World Heritage site since 1999 - status awarded for it's outstanding landscape and traditional farming methods used for tobacco and other crops.

We'll start with a walk to a local tobacco farm, where we'll learn about tobacco cultivation and country life. We then clamber up the mountain and take a natural tunnel through the mogote to the valley on the other side. The views are spectacular, overlooking tobacco plantations and fields growing tropical fruits and vegetables. We finish our walk at a small restaurant run by a Cuban-Spanish chef who offers simple but mouth-watering dishes.

After lunch we head back towards town stopping at a zip-line for an adrenaline kick and awesome views over Viñales.

This evening we'll enjoy an atmospheric sunset cocktail and dinner at Wilfredo's Farm, an award-winning organic farm which has been serving home grown country food to its guests for the past few years. The restaurant is housed in a typical simple Cuban home with wonderful views over the valley.

DAY 5

 Casa particular, Havana  Breakfast, Dinner

HAVANA



Those who like early starts can take an optional sunrise walk to Los Acuaticos, a traditional community high up over the valley. We start walking in the dark to reach Los Acuaticos by sunrise. After breakfast we will say goodbye to gorgeous Viñales and head back to Havana.

Back in Havana we'll have time to freshen up and grab some lunch before visiting Cenesex, Cuba's national centre for Sex Education, the home of LGBT rights in Cuba. Set up by Mariela Castro, Raul's daughter and Fidel's niece, Cenesex has supported the LGBT community and helped create an atmosphere of tolerance towards difference. Cenesex has helped Cuba become one of the most liberal nations in Latin America on Gender issues.

In the evening we'll eat in a restaurant where we'll be able to hang out in the kitchen and learn about traditional Cuban cuisine.

Later on, it's time to hit Havana's iconic drag show at Las Vegas in Centro Habana.

DAY 6

 Casa particular, Havana  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

HAVANA

Today we head to Mi Cayito, a favourite spot on Havana's Playas del Este. At the weekend Habaneros flock to the beach to wind-down and have fun, and nowhere does fun quite like Mi Cayito! Traditionally this is where the gay community in Havana congregates to relax by the crystal-clear waters and the white sand beach. We'll take a picnic and some rum and enjoy beach time a lo cubano.

In the afternoon, we return to Havana to get ready for our last evening together. We'll be picked up by our rides and taken for a tour of the city in classic American cars.

We'll wind up on a rooftop bar where we can sip delicious cocktails as we watch the sun set over the city. Our last dinner together will be in La Guarida, a fabulous restaurant and the set of Cuba's most famous Queer film, Fresa y Chocolate. Later on, we can party long into the night at any of Havana's open-minded joints.

DAY 7

 Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY

Enjoy this morning at leisure to spend as you please. Then transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

And so it's *adiós*, or, as we prefer to think of it *hasta luego*, see you later! Have a safe onward journey and we very much hope to see you in Cuba again soon.

ACTIVITY

WALKING

- Light walking boots or trainers with good tread for walking in the Viñales valley.

ZIPLINING

- Wear comfortable clothes and trainers.
- Safety harness and helmets are included.

WHAT TO BRING?

ESSENTIAL PACKING LIST

- Swimming things and beach towel.
- Trainers for ziplining.
- Small day pack.
- High factor sun cream (50+), sunglasses and sun hat.
- Hand sanitizer.
- Insect repellent – tropical strength.
- Long sleeved shirts and light trousers for the evenings.
- Camera.
- A sense of humour and patience are useful in Cuba!

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- 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.

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

ACCOMMODATION

Throughout the tour we stay in private accommodation (*Casas particulares*) in Havana and Viñales.

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!

However, most people love the opportunity that staying in *casas particulares* 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.

We will be eating in some of our favourite paladars in Havana and Viñales during this trip, finishing the week in the renowned La Guarida paladar. 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.

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 150 - 450 CUP 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.

your holiday, play it to Shazam and find out what it's called and who sang it.

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 CUP 25/ hour (so that's CUP 25 for 1-hour card and CUP 125 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 sometimes 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

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.

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