

CUBA DISCOVERY

KATHY'S MANIC CUBA

MARCH 7 - 17, 2024



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Journey through Viñales, Cienfuegos, Trinidad, Matanzas and Havana to meet friendly Cubans who share with you their way of life, their talents and their ingenuity. Immerse yourself in the extraordinary tapestry of cultural and natural treasures; the vibrant sights, sounds and flavors as you discover Cuba.

ITINERARY SUMMARY

- Arrivals at Jose Marti International Airport, Havana
- 2 Nights in Viñales, privately owned B&B
- 1 Night in Playa Larga, privately owned B&B
- 2 Nights in Trinidad, privately owned B&B
- 2 Nights in Matanzas, Hotel Rio San Juan
- 3 Nights in Havana, Grand Aston Hotel
- Departures from Jose Marti International Airport, Havana

HIGHLIGHTS

- In Vinales, a tobacco farmer takes you through the process of growing tobacco and turning it into Cuba's famous cigars and an exclusive pairing experience highlight the unique characteristics of Cuba's finest cigars
- Walk through the main square of Cienfuegos and enjoy a special private performance of the Guitar Orchestra Ensemble
- Stroll the cobblestone streets while meeting artists and artisans in Colonial
- Trinidad de Cuba and learn the history and evolution of the sugar industry in the Valley of the Sugar Mills
- Learn about permaculture, explore one of the most extensive cave systems in the Caribbean, and meet renowned artists in Matanzas
- Discover the best of Havana while meeting and supporting Habaneros – Cuban people from all walks of life: musicians, artists, entrepreneurs
- Learn about the history of Cuban music during a private presentation with composer and musician Alberto Faya
- Cruise along the Havana Malecon in a classic convertible





DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 1: ARRIVAL IN HAVANA / TRANSFER TO VIÑALES

Thursday, March 7

Independent arrivals on early morning flights to Havana José Martí International Airport by 10:00 am. Once you've cleared immigration, collected your baggage and cleared Customs, you'll be met at the airport exit by your self-employed Cuban guide. We depart the airport to head west. Your Cuban Guide will lead introductions and provide a welcome briefing with important information for our time in Cuba.

First, we'll stop at Las Terrazas, a pioneering ecovillage that began in 1968 as a reforestation project, and is now a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Here, we will meet with independent business owners and have lunch in a paladar.

Continue to Pinar del Río, the tobacco-growing province in western Cuba. Our destination is the fertile Viñales Valley, dotted with striking limestone hills. In Viñales village, meet your hosts at your *casa particular* – privately owned bed & breakfast accommodation.

Walk to the main street to meet your Cuban guide for an introduction to Viñales, and then head to a *paladar* – privately owned restaurant, for our Welcome Dinner. One of the most enjoyable aspects of dining in a paladar is the personal connection you'll make with the owner and staff, as they share their personal stories. Learn how private enterprise in Cuba functions on an individual level, as well as how the paladar's ingredients are sourced and the chef's inspiration for the food they serve. *Meals Included: L, D*

DAY 2: VIÑALES Friday, March 8

After a delicious home-cooked breakfast prepared by your B&B host, begin a full day of delightful encounters with the people of the Viñales Valley. We'll begin at the home of a local family who have created an enchanting botanical garden, an oasis practically in

the middle of town. The garden has been under continuous care by the same family for three generations.

Next, we'll head to a tobacco farm, where we'll meet a family that has been growing some of Cuba's finest tobacco for more than one hundred years. We'll walk through the entire process of planting, growing and drying tobacco leaf. We'll also learn about the fruits and vegetables that they grow, and enjoy lunch prepared from the farm's own organic produce.

This afternoon, we'll meet the people who prepare tobacco for cigar production and self-employed local business owners. We'll get in the "spirit" of our Cuba experience in Havana with a special rum tasting, paired with a locally-produced cigar.

Dinner is on your own this evening. Your Cuban host will recommend local favorites among the many privately owned paladars in town. Each paladar has its own unique story and twist on interpreting Cuban cuisine today. *Meals Included: B, L*





DAY 3: PLAYA LARGA **Saturday, March 9**

After an early breakfast, we'll depart on our journey (4-hour drive) to Playa Larga, where we'll stay in a privately owned B&B.

After a delicious home-cooked lunch, we'll check in to our rooms, then have a presentation by a local Cuban naturalist on La Ciénega de Zapata. Known for its size, as well as for being the best-preserved wetlands in the Antilles, the area is designated as a "Wetland of International Importance" by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 2001. The wetlands are home to 258 bird species, 28 of them endemic, including the endangered Cuban Parrot.

Dinner this evening is on the rooftop terrace of the paladar. We've invited local musicians, who will perform especially for you.
Meals Included: B, L, D

DAY 4: PLAYA GIRON / CIENFUEGO / TRINIDAD **Sunday, March 10**

After breakfast we'll depart Playa Larga to drive along Playa Giron, also known as the Bay of Pigs, a small coastal village and the site of the historical 1961 clash between CIA-trained Cuban exiles and Cuban rebel forces. Our Cuban guide discusses the Cuban perspective of the incident.

Continue to the city of Cienfuegos, founded by the French who came to Cuba after the Haitian revolution. The city offers outstanding architecture and is home to a large artistic community. We'll walk around the main square, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, stop in at the independent artists' gallery and have lunch in a paladar. **Special Highlight:** *Private Performance by the Guitar Orchestra Ensemble.*

Continue to Trinidad and check in at your B&B. After time to settle in and freshen up, we'll reconvene for a buffet dinner in Casa El Moro. *Meals Included: B, L, D*

DAY 5: TRINIDAD **Monday, March 11**

After breakfast, we'll take a guided walk, through Trinidad's historic center - one of Cuba's original Spanish Settlements and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The small city is a pristine example of Spanish colonial Caribbean architecture and celebrated its 500-year anniversary in 2014. As we stroll the picturesque cobblestone streets, we'll meet independent business owners, local artists and artisans and support a handcrafts community project that provides income for women. We'll have lunch in paladar La Ceiba, under the expansive arms of an ancient baobab tree, considered sacred in African tradition.





This afternoon, drive into the UNESCO World Heritage Sugar Mill Valley to the *San Isidro de los Destiladeros* archaeological site. On a guided visit through the ruins of the sugar mill, learn about the sugar extraction process and the lives of the slaves who operated the machinery and lived on the site. Return to Trinidad in the late afternoon. There are many options to dine at paladars throughout the town. You may wish to head to Casa de la Musica this evening, for live music (at your own expense.)
Meals Included: B, L

DAY 6: MATANZAS Tuesday, March 12

Depart Trinidad, on the south coast of the island, to drive to Matanzas, on the north coast of Cuba. We'll stop for lunch and a visit at La Coincidencia, a unique farm that combines art and organic, sustainable farming practices, then continue to the city of Matanzas for two nights. Located along the northern coast of Cuba, the city of Matanzas is known for its fascinating blend of history, natural beauty, and artistic allure. Known as the "Athens of Cuba," Matanzas exudes a captivating intellectual charm. The city's cultural scene is brought to life by its prominent role in the birth of Afro-Cuban music and dance, particularly the vibrant rhythms of rumba.

Arriving in Matanzas, we'll explore the city's architecture that showcases a mix of neoclassical, colonial, and art deco styles, take in the views of the Yumuri Valley and visit an intriguing historic pharmacy museum. Check in at the hotel Rio San Juan. We'll make a reservation in a paladar, where dinner will be on your own account so that you may order what you like.
Meals Included: B, L

DAY 7: MATANZAS Wednesday, March 13

This morning we'll visit the permaculture project of Fundacion Antonio Nunez Jimenez at Bellamar Caves. The project, Bellamar Gardens, utilizes permaculture principles to establish self-sustaining food systems, biodiversity conservation and educational programs. Through the implementation of agroecological techniques such as organic farming, composting and water management, the project aims to minimize environmental impact while maximizing productivity. Local communities actively participate in the project, receiving training and support to adopt sustainable farming practices and improve their livelihoods.

Next, we'll explore Bellamar Caves, one of the most impressive and extensive cave systems in the Caribbean region. Stretching over a mile and plunging 200 feet deep, the extensive network of passages reveals geological marvels at every turn. Marvel at the breathtaking stalagmites and stalactites, formed over millennia from the slow drip of calcium carbonate-rich water. We'll encounter the "River of Miracles," an underground river that creates enchanting pools and waterfalls, and the awe-inspiring "Salón de la Bella," a chamber with magnificent formations that epitomize the cave's splendor. (Note: There are 150 steps to access the cave, if anyone wishes to sit out the cave visit, they may wait at the reception area.)

Returning to Matanzas, we'll head to the waterfront promenade, lined with galleries. Lunch is included at the Gruta de San Juan gallery, an artistic projection of the Bellamar Caves. Spend the afternoon on artists' row, where we'll meet some of Cuba's most well-known sculptors, ceramicists and painters in their galleries.

We'll make a reservation in a paladar, where dinner will be on your own account so that you may order what you like. *Meals Included: B, L*

DAY 8: HAVANA Thursday, March 14

After breakfast, we'll depart Matanzas and head towards Havana, an approximately 2-hour drive. We'll stop first in Cojimar, the small seaside town that served as backdrop in Ernest Hemingway's award-winning novel, "The Old Man and The Sea". We'll stroll the waterfront with our Cuban Guide and learn how locals earn a living today.

After lunch in a paladar, head to Hemingway's former home, Finca Vigia. Here, we'll meet a Cuban who works as a private interpreter and will provide insights to the interesting memorabilia and stories of the famed writer's life in Cuba.

We arrive in Havana and drive along the Malecon (the main thoroughfare in Havana running along the coast) passing the American Embassy in the Vedado neighborhood. Your Cuban guide will orient you to the neighborhood and point out possibilities for dinner on your own, then we'll check in at the hotel.

Special Highlight: 6pm Lecture in a hotel meeting room. Enjoy a private presentation on Cuban music with Cuban singer, researcher, composer, and professor of music, Alberto Faya. Through words and song, Faya demonstrates how the diverse African, European, and American traditions merge harmoniously together to create Cuban music. Dinner at leisure. *Meals Included: B, L*



DAY 9: HAVANA Friday, March 15

After breakfast we begin our exploration of Havana and meetings with Habaneros - the people of Havana. Heading towards *Habana Viejo* - Old Havana, we'll leave our vehicle and explore the historic area on foot.

Explore Old Havana's four main plazas and meet the self-employed entrepreneurs in business along the winding streets. We begin *Plaza de Armas*, Havana's oldest square. Learn about the history and rich heritage of the buildings in this charming plaza - the site where Havana was founded. Continue to *Plaza de San Francisco* which faces Havana harbor. This plaza came to importance in Havana in the 16th century when Spanish galleons stopped by at the quayside on their passage through the Indies to Spain. The Plaza is anchored by the Basilica San Francisco de Asis and Cuba's first 'Wall Street.'



We'll interact with small business owners along Calle Obispo and San Ignacio. As we meet and support Havana's *cuentalpropistas* who sell handmade crafts, books and art, we'll learn about Cuba's dual-sector economy, in which private and government-owned businesses operate. Continue to *Plaza Vieja*. Originally laid out in 1559, this plaza is Havana's most architecturally eclectic square, where Cuban Baroque nestles seamlessly next to Gaudí-inspired art nouveau. We finish our walk in *Plaza de la Catedral*. Notice here the traditional Baroque style in the anchoring Cathedral de la Habana, as we step into the boutiques of Cuban entrepreneurs. Outside in the Plaza, local *Habaneros* dressed in traditional costumes are eager to earn their living by posing for photos. You'll have time for lunch on your own in one of the many paladars.

We'll depart Old Havana aboard classic American cars that have been in constant use by individual Cubans since the 1950s and 60s. Drive along the Malecon, passing the US Embassy and Revolution Square. We'll finish our ride at a privately owned classic car workshop, and hear from the owner how the cars are repaired and maintained with necessary ingenuity.

Continue through the western neighborhood of Miramar, passing along Fifth Avenue, lined with old mansions. Some are still private houses, but many are now embassies or ambassadors' residences. We stop in for a visit at the headquarters of the non-government organization, the Antonio Nunez Jimenez Foundation, to learn about its many conservation initiatives in Cuba and view the extensive collections and memorabilia of the founder. FANJ is the host organization of your trip.

For dinner this evening, we've made a reservation in a paladar, but have left the meal on your own account, so that you can choose what you like to eat. *Meals Included: B*

DAY 10: HAVANA **Saturday, March 16**

This morning we'll focus on private enterprise and businesses that cater to the local community. We return to Old Havana, to the residential area that, although situated only footsteps from the grand plazas, is a different world. First, we'll stop in at the neighborhood farmers market, to see what is in season and how city folk find and purchase fresh produce. Then we'll have privileged-access visits with female private business owners - to learn how their locally sourced and sustainably produced products fulfill needs in the local community. We'll end the visit at a creperie owned by a woman who coaches other women on entrepreneurship, that focuses on sustainably grown produce, craft cocktails, local artisan crafts and organic home gardens. A refreshing cocktail is included, and you'll have time for lunch on your own.

Head to Jaminitas neighborhood, to Jose Fuster's Fusterlandia. Dubbed the "Picasso of the Caribbean", this local artist created an entire neighborhood of ornately decorated homes during thirty years of continuous work. Its humble growth is an inspiring example of the Cuban sense of community and how a neighborhood unites to benefit together. Many of the neighborhood have set up businesses in front of their homes. We'll engage with them one-on-one and have an opportunity to support individual Cubans selling their wares.

Next, we explore Havana's iconic Hotel Nacional, a symbol of 1940s-50s Cuba and its ties with America's elite, as our Cuban guide unravels its history and its lasting impact on Cuban-American relations. Discover the hotel's glamorous past and its role during the Cuban Missile Crisis while taking in stunning views of the city from its lush grounds overlooking the Malecon.

Return to the hotel with time to prepare for departure and freshen up before our farewell dinner in a paladar.

It's Saturday night in Havana, and there are ample opportunities to engage with, and support local musicians at venues around Havana. If you still have the energy for a late night, take in an optional Live Music Pub Crawl. The action starts late, after 10 p.m. and going until 2 or 3 a.m. Choose one venue or sample several. Your guide will know what's hot and help you plan your evening. Support live music and musicians directly: Transportation, Cover charges, refreshments and tips to musicians are at your own expense. *Meals Included: B, D*

DAY 7: DEPARTURE **Sunday, March 17**

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for check-in and return flight home. *Meals Included: B*

Please Note: *This itinerary is preliminary and may be adjusted according to conditions on the day of operation.*

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\$3,987 per person sharing a double room

\$4,507 per person in a single room

Deposit: \$600 per person

Full Payment / Balance Due by December 7, 2023

Register online at

www.conservancytravel.org/ManicsCuba24



INCLUSIONS:

- ✓ Accommodations and activities as described in the itinerary
- ✓ Expert private Cuban guide and vehicle as per itinerary
- ✓ Certification of participation in a pre-planned, fully scheduled program of support for the Cuban People travel to Cuba, as required by the U.S. Department of the Treasury general license
- ✓ Meals as per noted in the itinerary (B, L, D)
- ✓ 2 drinks per each included lunch and dinner (local beer, bottled water, soft drinks, house wine if offered by the restaurant)
- ✓ Bottled water while touring with the guide/motorcoach
- ✓ Gratuities for included meals and luggage handling

EXCLUSIONS:

- Meals not mentioned in the program as included
- Optional activities, if any, that are not already included in the itinerary
- Tips for hotel housekeeping and live music
- Other expenses of a personal nature
- Gratuities for your Cuban Guide, US \$20 per day/per guest recommended
- Gratuities for your Driver, US\$10 per day/per guest recommended
- Cuban tourist visa, required for entry and departure, \$100 when purchased through the Conservancy Travel registration page.



REGISTER ONLINE:

www.conservancytravel.org/ManicsCuba24



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