



Cuba
Trinidad ~ Bay of Pigs ~ Havana
Friends of Steve & Jan
January 21 – 28, 2024

Immerse yourself in the vibrant rhythms, colors and tastes of Havana and Trinidad. Engage in meaningful exchanges with individual Cubans and community groups as you explore all that Cuba's most famous cities have to offer.

ITINERARY SUMMARY

Arrivals in Havana
2 Nights in Trinidad, Hotel Mystique
1 Night in Playa Larga, privately owned B&B Casa Enrique's
4 Nights in Havana, Grand Aston Hotel
Departures from Jose Marti International Airport, Havana

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 January 21

Sunday: Arrival in Havana - Trinidad

12:00PM Arrivals in Havana's Jose Marti International Airport (HAV)

Once you've cleared immigration, collected your baggage and cleared Customs, you'll be met at the airport exit by your Cuban Host.

Depart from the airport, which is south of town and travel by motorcoach for our drive (3 hours, with stops) to Trinidad de Cuba, where we'll check in to our hotel. After time to settle and freshen up, we'll reconvene for a welcome dinner in a paladar, featuring as a welcome the local specialty cocktail *canchanchara*, made of Cuban Aguardiente, honey, and freshly squeezed lime juice.

Meals Included: D

Day 2 January 22

Monday: Trinidad

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 a paladar.

This afternoon, drive into the UNESCO World Heritage Sugar Mill Valley and visit artisans at the San Isidro de los Destiladeros archaeological site. Return to Trinidad in the late afternoon.

We've made a reservation at El Ojo del Toro, in Playa la Boca, where you can enjoy sunset views over the bay and dinner at your own expense.

Meals Included: B, L

Day 3 January 23

Tuesday: Cienfuegos - Playa Giron – Playa Larga

After breakfast, we'll depart Trinidad and drive 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. Take a walk around the main square then we'll stop in at the independent artists' guild.

Special Highlight: Private Performance by the Guitar Orchestra Ensemble.

We'll enjoy lunch in a paladar then depart Cienfuegos. Our drive takes us 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. We'll discuss the Cuban perspective of the incident.

We'll drive to Playa Larga and check in at Casa Enrique's.

This evening, enjoy a delicious home-cooked meal, served on the rooftop terrace.

Meals Included: B, L, D

Day 4 January 24

Wednesday: Havana

After breakfast, depart to Havana. Traveling from the south coast to the north, we arrive in time for lunch in a paladar. Then we visit 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. . Then lunch in a private restaurant known as a paladar and join the group in a cooking lesson. Then we finish the afternoon 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. We return to Havana at the end of the afternoon and check in at the Grand Aston Hotel. Take some time to freshen up before we go to dinner in a paladar.

Meals Included: B,L,D

Day 5 January 25

Thursday: Exploring Old Havana & Meeting the People

After breakfast we begin our exploration of Havana. Heading towards *Habana Vieja* – Old Havana, we'll leave our vehicle and explore the historic area on foot with our guide. Explore Old Havana's four main plazas. We begin at 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. Havana's *cuentalpropistas* sell handmade crafts, books and art in small shops. Cuba has a 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 will suggest some of the best as Havana has now become a foodie destination.

We'll depart Old Havana aboard classic American cars. Drive along the Malecon, passing the US Embassy and Revolution Square. We'll finish our ride at a workshop and hear from the owner how the cars are repaired and maintained with necessary ingenuity of what are known as Cuban magicians.

Return to the hotel to freshen up before a special treat.

Early this evening we have a special invitation to join **Vivian Melendez** in her Central Havana home. As the former manager of the largest cigar store in Cuba, her expertise was honed over more than twenty years in the business. We're introduced to a master cigar roller, who explains and demonstrates the art of rolling a fine cigar. Stogie in hand, Viviana leads us through an exclusive **cigar experience**, pairing your cigar with a fine, aged Cuban rum....all accompanied by live traditional Cuban music.

For dinner this evening, we have a reservation at the iconic **La Guarida Paladar**, located in a former sugar barons' home. This paladar is one of the oldest and most known to the outside world and where the Oscar-nominated Cuban movie *Strawberry and Chocolate* was filmed. The chefs here are considered the fathers of "nouvelle Cuban cuisine," preparing local ingredients with creative flare. This dinner is left on your own expense, so that you may choose what you like from the menu.

Meals Included: B

Day 6 January 26

Friday: Vinales Day Trip West from Havana

This will be a rewarding but relatively long day. After an early breakfast, we depart west into the countryside of Pinar del Rio, Cuba's western most province, with its breathtaking landscapes and the best tobacco growing areas in the world, along the national autopista to the town of Viñales, almost a three-hour drive. In store for us today is Viñales Valley, with it's the rugged mogotes, limestone karst outcroppings with caves and rivers running through, but first we take in the views from Los Jazmines lookout. The mogotes, the red soil, and the lush vegetation in perfect harmony create a magical landscape that images fail to replicate. Here we visit a tobacco farmer and his family who takes us through the process of growing tobacco and turning it into Cuba's famous cigars, be sure to try a cigar here as they are mild and fresh. Next visit a family-owned botanical garden and enjoy a farm-to-table lunch at an organic farm.

Later we return to Havana and the hotel for time to freshen up before dinner at a paladar. We have made reservations, but to maintain maximum flexibility your meal is at your own expense. Afterwards, an optional visit to the Tropiciana. It is the world-known cabaret club launched in 1939 at Villa Mina suburban estate with lush tropical gardens in the Marianao neighborhood. Starting at 10 pm, this iconic show, which Las Vegas copied and was the catalyst for Cuban culture to spread internationally, is set in a unique stage surrounded by towering Banyan trees. This vibrant show has captivated audience members with lavish costumes, exceptional dancers and a rhythm and energy which only exist in Cuba. The show has been replicated in cities around the world, but never duplicated. Ricky Ricardo, a character of I Love Lucy fame, was portrayed to be a cast member of the New York version of the show. This further brought the show to prominence with American households, even after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Let us know in advance if you want to go. The tickets are \$125 usd per person and must be purchased well in advance.

Meals Included B, L

Day 7 January 27

Saturday: Havana

After a late night, we will start a bit later this morning for a visit to a neighborhood farmers market, to see what is in season and how city folk find and purchase fresh produce.

Depending on the time, we will have lunch before discovering what art lovers enjoy, a visit to Centro Cultural Antiguo; Almacenes de Deposito San José (the central handi-craft market) in Old Havana. Located in a refurbished 1800's port side warehouse, this mecca of paintings and sculptures offer any type of Cuban-made handi-craft you can imagine include paintings, guayabera shirts, woodwork, leather items, jewelry and numerous apparitions of the highly marketable El Che. San Jose gives you an idea of affordable art pieces.

Later, on our way back to our hotel, a visit to the historic Hotel Nacional with our Cuban Guide. One of the most important historic locations in Havana, the hotel is an illustration of America's history with Cuba in the 1940s and 50s, when Havana was the playground of America's most privileged personalities. Designed and constructed by American firms in 1930, the Nacional has hosted world leaders, royalty and movie stars for nearly a hundred years. Walk through the Hall of History and imagine Havana in late December 1946, when the Cosa Nostra (the Sicilian Mafia) and the American Mob converged here for the 'Havana Conference' to negotiate agreements that would lead the mafia for decades. American mobsters, led by Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano turned their interests toward Cuba to avoid the intensified government crackdown back in the USA. Walk through the extensive grounds that overlook the Malecon with impressive views of the city - not only a lush tropical setting but the location of anti-aircraft gun emplacements during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Afterwards, return to the hotel with time to relax and freshen up before our farewell dinner, another special treat!

The elite Miramar neighborhood is where dinner is served tonight at another private restaurant. A celebratory dinner is in store at about 7pm. It is a traditional Cuban Lechón Asado Festivity (back yard BBQ) – the ultimate Cuban experience! Enjoy a famed roasted Piro Pig, as seen on Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations* and *Eat the World* with Emeril Lagasse, with traditional Cuban accompaniments (such as congrí rice, cassava with mojo and salad). Note that while the typical centerpiece for this experience is the roasted pig, other dietary selections will be provided. A small band will play while you dine and a professional salsa couple will entertain and teach you a few moves. Enjoy the mojitos and hit the dance floor!

For more fun.....It's Saturday night in Havana, and there are ample opportunities to enjoy local musicians at venues around Havana. If you still have the energy for a late night, take in an optional performance at a club or a live music pub crawl. The action starts late, after 10 p.m. Choose one venue or sample several. Your guide will know what's hot and help you plan your evening. Transportation, cover charges, refreshments and tips to musicians are at your own expense.

Meals Included: B, D

Day 8 January 28

Sunday; Departure

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for check-in and return flight home. Your transfer time will be confirmed in Havana by your Cuban guide and will be scheduled to arrive at the airport approximately three hours prior to flight departure.

Meals Included: B

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

The trip will begin on your arrival into Havana where you will be met by our representative and connected to the group. **We suggest your flight from Miami be on American Airlines AA2705 arriving into HAV at 12 noon on the 21st.**

Inclusions:

- Accommodations and activities as described in the itinerary
- Expert private Cuban guide and vehicle as per itinerary
- Pre-planned travel consistent with the U.S. Department of the Treasury general license
- Meals as per noted in the itinerary as 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
- Gratuities for included meals and luggage handling

Exclusions:

- International Airfare to Havana
- Airline baggage fees
- Meals not mentioned in the program as included
- Optional activities such as the Tropicana or nightclubs, that are not already included in the itinerary
- Tips for hotel housekeeping and live music during meals
- 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 per person when purchased through Conservancy Travel.

Deposits and Payments: The rate for this trip is \$3642 per person based on double occupancy. For single travelers in a single room the rate is \$4067 per person. Please add \$100 per person for your Cuban entry permit (visa). At this time, payment in full is due at registration and booking.