



CONSERVANCY TRAVEL

Exploring Cuba

NOVEMBER 8-15, 2024



EXPLORING CUBA WITH CONSERVANCY TRAVEL

Conservancy Travel operates OFAC-compliant educational tours in partnership with the Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre.

The Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity (FANJ) is a Cuban cultural and scientific non-governmental institution, dedicated to research and promotion of programs and projects for the protection of the environment as it relates to culture and society. Its main focuses are on stakeholder engagement, poverty reduction and land restoration.

Support For the Cuban People Travel to Cuba

Cuba, an island that has existed in its own microcosm for more than 60 years is an enigma to Americans. Explore the vibrant cities and small towns with Conservancy Travel's exclusive inside access to people and places the average tourist rarely sees. We'll take you beyond the facades of colorful buildings into the heart of what makes Cuba so fascinating – the Cuban people.

Your OFAC-compliant Cuba program engages with individual Cubans who directly benefit from interacting with our groups. Travelers gain a first-hand understanding of how Cubans live today, through personal initiative, entrepreneurial spirit and strong sense of community.





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BEST OF CUBA: HAVANA, TRINIDAD, CIENFUEGOS

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.

Day 1, Friday, November 8: Arrival in Santa Clara - Trinidad

Arrivals in Santa Clara, Cuba at Abel Santamaría Cuadrado International Airport. Once you've cleared immigration, collected your baggage and cleared Customs, you'll be met at the airport exit by your Cuban Host.

First, we'll head to a privately owned restaurant – *paladar* – for lunch. Included meals typically feature three courses, with a limited selection from which to choose. Meals typically include two beverages: House welcome cocktail then a choice of one additional beverage: bottled water, Cuban soft drinks or beer, or a glass of house wine. Coffee (espresso) is not included but may be purchased individually. 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.

After lunch, we'll walk around the main square of Santa Clara, the beautiful provincial capital of the region Villa Clara, before our drive (2 hours) to Trinidad de Cuba, where we'll check in to our B&B accommodations. After time to settle and freshen up, we'll reconvene for a welcome dinner in a privately owned paladar,

featuring as a welcome the local specialty cocktail *canchancha-ra*, made of Cuban Aguardiente, honey, and freshly squeezed lime juice. **Meals Included: L, D**

Day 2, Saturday, November 9: Trinidad

After breakfast prepared by your B&B hosts, 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.

There are many options to dine at paladars throughout the town. **Meals Included: B, L**

ITINERARY SUMMARY

- Arrivals in Santa Clara Abel Santamaría Cuadrado International Airport
- 3 Nights in Trinidad in privately owned B&Bs
- 1 Night in Playa Larga at a privately owned B&B
- 3 Nights in Havana, Grand Aston Hotel
- Departures from Jose Marti International Airport, Havana

HIGHLIGHTS

- Meet Artists and Artisans in Colonial Trinidad de Cuba
- Meet Farmers to learn how climate change impacts coffee production in the Escambray Mountains
- Discover the best of Havana while meeting and supporting Habaneros – Cuban people from all walks of life: musicians, artists, dancers, entrepreneurs
- Cruise along the Havana Malecon in a classic convertible and meet a mechanic who maintains them



Day 3, Sunday, November 10: Trinidad

After an early breakfast, we head to Topes de Collantes Nature Reserve, that stretches across the southeastern Escambray Mountain range of central Cuba. this jungle-shrouded natural area is packed with rivers, waterfalls, canyons and caves. The region is dotted with farms producing Cassava, avocado, potato, annatto citrus and coffee.

Our destination is El Nicho park, approximately a 1.5 hour drive from Trinidad. The drive over mountainous terrain rewards us with the easiest hiking access to one of the area's most beautiful trails. Here, our self-employed guide will discuss geography, ecology and point out the many features of the area.

We'll hike a one-mile round-trip trail with some steep uphill and downhill terrain, to a beautiful natural pool with a very inviting waterfall. The pool is surrounded by large rocks, ferns and banana trees. It's one of the most beautiful swimming spots in Topes de Collantes.

After our hike, we'll drive to a farm to meet a coffee farmer and have a home-cooked lunch prepared at the farm.

The Escambray Mountains are one of Cuba's three coffee-producing regions. In our conversation with the farmer, we'll learn how his family's business has evolved since the fall of the Soviet bloc, when Cuba lost eighty percent of its coffee export trade. We'll discuss how the lack of infrastructure in this remote mountainous area, climate and communication challenges contribute to the difficulties that small-scale farmers face in having a successful coffee production business.

We return to Trinidad at the end of the afternoon. Dinner is on your own at one of the many paladars in the town.

Meals Included: B, L

Day 4, Monday, November 11: Cienfuegos and Playa Larga

After an early breakfast in our B&Bs, we'll depart Trinidad and depart for 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, and stop in at the independent artists' guild. Here, we'll meet an independent music group for a private performance.

After lunch in a paladar, we 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.

At the end of the afternoon, we reach our destination, Playa Larga, situated on the coast in the heart of the Zapata Wetlands conservation area. We'll check in at our privately owned B&B, that is located just across the road from the beach.

This evening we'll enjoy a delicious home-cooked meal on the rooftop terrace of our B&B. **Meals Included: B, L, D**





Day 5, Tuesday, November 12: Havana

After a deliciously prepared breakfast, depart the coast and head north to Havana. The drive through the countryside is a unique and interesting experience as you observe the forms of transportation available to Cubans, including an abundance of horse drawn carriages. Our drive will be approximately 3 hours, and we'll arrive on the outskirts of the city in time for lunch in a paladar.

After lunch, continue to San Francisco de Paula 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.

Continue to Havana and check in at the hotel.

Late afternoon, we head 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. Ariel recounts this history and opens the discussion on Cuban-American relations that are still impacted by this era, today. Examine Havana's glamorized past, whose remnants are still an integral part of Havana's landscape today, and delve beyond the romanticized images to gain an understanding of history. 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 depart for dinner in a paladar, followed by a unique experience with Vivian Melendez in her Central Havana home with its lofty ceilings filled with a breeze from the sea. Vivian is an expert in cigars having been the manager of the largest cigar store in Cuba for over twenty years. Always with a stogie in hand, Viviana leads you (parents) through this cigar experience while paring your cigar specifically with coveted Cuban rum. Also, enjoy the opportunity to visit with a master cigar roller as you see up close and personal how cigars are made.

Return to the hotel. **Meals Included: B, L, D**



Day 6, Wednesday, November 13: Meet the People of Havana

After breakfast we begin our exploration of Havana and meetings with Habaneros - the people of Havana. We'll drive 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. A bit further yields the neighborhood of Jaminitas, where we find 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. Learn of how 80 homes in this ornate neighborhood now make up an incredible work of art created by one man's vision to enhance an impoverished block of houses in one of Havana's many urban neighborhoods. 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'll visit a privately-owned dance company and attend their daily rehearsal. The director shares her vision and relates the stories they interpret through dance. We'll chat with the dancers to hear their individual stories to learn about their daily lives, how they train, perform and earn a living outside of state-sponsored employment.

Heading towards Old Havana, we'll drive along the *Malecon* (the main thoroughfare in Havana running along the coast) passing the American Embassy in the neighborhood of Vedado, on to La Rampa, past Havana University, the Capitolio, the Grand Theater, and Central Park along Paseo Prado (the wide avenue separating Old Havana from Centro Havana) and into *Habana Viejo* - Old Havana. We'll leave our motorcoach, to spend the rest of the day walking the winding quarters and tiny streets. First, we'll stop for an included lunch in a paladar.

After a delicious lunch, we'll set off on a walk with our Cuban Guide, to explore two of Old Havana's four main plazas and meet the self-employed entrepreneurs in business along the winding streets. We begin 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. We'll interact with small business owners along Calle Obispo. As we meet and support Havana's *cuentapropistas* 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 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.

Our program for the day is complete, and you'll be on your own for dinner. Your Cuban Guide will recommend some favorite paladars in Old Havana as well as nearby the hotel. **Meals Included: B, L**





Day 7, Thursday, November 14: Havana

After an early breakfast we begin continue our exploration of Havana and meetings with Habaneros - the people of Havana. We'll begin in Old Havana at a fresh produce and meat market, where we converse with the market vendors and learn about their products. We continue our walk with our Cuban Guide, to explore the remaining two of Old Havana's four main plazas and meet the self-employed entrepreneurs in business along the winding streets.

We begin in *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. 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 meet the individual entrepreneurs at a unique community project, *Arte Corte* – or the Street of Barbers.

For lunch today, we'll sit on the patio at Bistrot La Bearnese for a delicious meal. Perhaps you'd like to end your meal with an optional coffee and cigar?

Climb aboard a classic car, cruisin' the town in a classic convertible. The driver shares his story of how he acquired and maintains his marvelously preserved American automobile from the 1950's. On an overview of Havana, pass the recently renovated Capitol Building, the Grand Theater, and Central Park along Paseo Prado (the wide avenue separating Old Havana from Centro Havana) and continue along the Malecon, passing the reopened U.S. Embassy. Stop at Revolution Square, where crowds have gathered to hear speeches by Fidel, the Pope and more.

If time allows, we arrive at the private home and mechanic shop of Fernando Bayerites. We're invited in to visit his home as he explains the ingenuity needed to maintain American classic cars without access to parts.

We'll head to the Miramar neighborhood, to the residence of Liliana Nunez Velis, president of non-government organization Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre, who is also the host organization of your tour.

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Here, we'll enjoy a celebratory reception with snacks, rum, cigars and live music.

Return to the hotel with time to relax before a farewell dinner in a paladar.

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. Support live music and musicians directly: Cover charges, refreshments and tips to musicians are at your own expense. **Meals Included: B, L, D**

Day 8, Friday, November 15: 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 is preliminary and may be adjusted according to conditions on the day of operation.



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\$3,999 per person sharing a double room **\$4,442 per person** in a single room

WHAT TO EXPECT: One must be in good physical and mental condition for travel to Cuba. You can expect a full, active daily sightseeing schedule in a warm, humid climate with little free time and lots of adventure! Excellent English Speaking Cuban Guide to accompany you throughout the tour. You may experience some long drives via air conditioned van or bus traveling on some poor road conditions. Walking on cobblestone or uneven paths. Stairs of up to 4 flights in some historic buildings. Limited or no internet or cell service. Good food and drink options and friendly people. You should possess the ability to be flexible with changes and have a spirit of adventure. Accommodations will be the best available to US Citizens whether in a hotel or private casa and may vary in their services and amenities. Cuba is a unique destination, unlike any others. Past travelers are always happy with their experience and eager to return for more!

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 (7B, 7L, 4D)
- ✓ 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:

- International Airfare to Havana
- Airline baggage fees
- 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 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 - \$125 per person additional when issued by Conservancy Travel

DEPOSITS AND PAYMENTS: A \$600 deposit per person is required to confirm your reservation for the trip. The deadline for registration is 90 days prior to trip start date. After that date, any requests for additional registrations will be accepted based on availability. Final payment of the balance due by 90 days prior to trip start date.

REGISTER ONLINE:

www.conservancytravel.org/cubafall2024



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