

# BIRDING IN WESTERN CUBA

MARCH 16-23, 2025



ALABAMA  
AUDUBON





Cuban Green Woodpecker



Immerse yourself in the vibrant nature and birdlife in La Guira National Park, Soroa, Zapata Nature Reserve, Playa Larga, and Havana. Engage with and support Cuban naturalists, birders and private entrepreneurs as you search for endemic bird species and experience the colorful culture of Cuba.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Immerse yourself in the vibrant nature and birdlife in La Guira National Park, Soroa, Zapata Nature Reserve in the company of expert Cuban naturalists.
- Search for endemic bird species such as the Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Vireo and more.
- Discover the best of Havana while meeting and supporting Cuban people from all walks of life.
- Learn about conservation and the ecology of the Zapata Wetlands with a Cuban Naturalist.
- Search for endemics in a variety of habitats: mixed forest, dense forest, mangrove, marsh and open wetlands.
- Possible sightings include Cuban Parrot, Cuban Bullfinch, Bare-legged Owl, the threatened Cuban Parakeet, Fernandina's Flicker and Blue-headed Quail-Dove.

## ITINERARY SUMMARY

- Independent arrivals at Jose Marti International Airport, Havana
- 2 Nights in Soroa, TBD
- 3 Nights in Playa Larga, Privately Owned B&B
- 2 Nights in Havana, Grand Aston Hotel
- Independent departures from Jose Marti International Airport, Havana
- Group Size and guides: 1 bird guide; 8-12 passengers + 1 Alabama Audubon Host



## DETAILED ITINERARY

### DAY 1 - MARCH 16

#### ARRIVAL IN HAVANA / TRANSFER TO SOROA

Independent arrivals on flights to Havana José Martí International Airport by 12:00 p.m. Once you've cleared immigration, collected your baggage and cleared Customs, you'll be met at the airport exit by your 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. Your Cuban birding expert will provide an overview briefing on Cuba's birdlife.

We will have lunch in a *paladar* (privately owned restaurant) and begin observing birdlife. Continue to the town of Soroa, and check in at our accommodations. This evening we'll have our Welcome Dinner in a *paladar*. *Meals: L, D*

**About meals:** 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. Several meals are not included in the price so that you can choose from the menu.

### DAY 2 - MARCH 17 BIRDING IN LA GÜIRA NATIONAL PARK

We're up and out early this morning, to drive one hour to La Guira National. Following forest trails on foot, we'll cover about a mile. This will be our only opportunity to see the Cuban Solitaire. We'll also look for the Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Warbler.



Cuban Parrot



After lunch in a local *paladar*, we'll return to Soroa in the afternoon, stopping at **Soroa Orchid Garden** where we may find the Great Lizard-Cuckoo, Cuban Emerald, Antillean Palm-Swift, Loggerhead Kingbird, Greater Antillean Grackle and Cuban Oriole. Dinner is included in a *paladar*. *Meals: B, L, D*

### DAY 3 - MARCH 18 FROM SOROA TO PLAYA LARGA

After an early breakfast, we'll depart on our journey (3.5 hour drive) to Playa Larga, where we'll stay in privately owned B&B accommodations. We'll have lunch at a restaurant on the way to Playa Larga.

In Playa Larga, we begin with a presentation by a local Cuban naturalist on La Ciénega de Zapata (*ciénega* = wetland). Known for its size, as well as for being the best-preserved wetlands in the Caribbean, 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.

In the afternoon we'll explore one of the several locations we'll visit during our time at Playa Larga. Dinner this evening is on the rooftop terrace of the *paladar*. *Meals: B, L, D*

### DAYS 4 & 5 - MARCH 19 & 20 ZAPATA WETLANDS

Over the next two days we'll explore the different areas of La Ciénega de Zapata. Depending on the conditions on each day, we'll have different areas to focus our time:

**Bermeja Wildlife Refuge**, for birding in mixed forest habitat. Here we'll search for Bee Hummingbird, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Bullfinch, Loggerhead Kingbird, Bare-legged Owl and Cuban Pygmy Owl. The threatened Cuban Parakeet, Fernandina's Flicker and Blue-headed Quail-Dove are often seen here.

**Santo Tomas**. Up and out with a very early departure, we'll head to Santo Tomas where we board small boats to explore the freshwater wetlands to look for Zapata Sparrow and Zapata Wren and Red-shouldered Blackbird just after sunrise.

**Las Sabanas de Soplillar** (Savannas of Soplillar) for Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy Owl, Fernandina's Flicker, Cuban Parakeets, Cuban Parrots, and – just after sundown - Cuban Nightjar.





Cuban Pygmy Owl



Grey-headed Quail Dove

**Exclusive visit to private properties** to learn how a local builds artificial nest cavities for Cuban Parrots and parakeets and attract birds with feeding stations. We'll have a good chance of finding Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Zenaida Dove, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, West-Indian Woodpecker, Yellow-faced Grassquit.

In **Cueva de los Peces**, our goals are views of the colorful Blue-headed Quail Dove and other endemics. The site is named for one of Cuba's largest underwater saltwater caves, where we'll cool off with a swim after birding, with an opportunity to snorkel over offshore reefs close to shore (Snorkeling gear available to rent at your own cost).

**Las Salinas road**, a varied ecosystem including low, dense forest, mangrove, marsh and open wetlands. Here we are looking for the endemic Cuban Black Hawk as well as shorebirds, terns and waders that often includes American Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbills, and Reddish Egret.

**Nighttime birding (optional):** One evening after dinner we may head out for some evening birding to look for species we might not have seen yet including Stygian Owl, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy Owl and the Greater Antillean (Cuban) Nightjar. **Meals: B, L, D**

#### **DAY 6 - MARCH 21** **DRIVE TO HAVANA, HEMINGWAY'S FINCA VIGIA**

If we've missed the Zapata Wren or Zapata Sparrow, we'll head out early and try again, then head to Havana. Alternatively, we'll depart directly to Havana. 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. Continue to Havana and check in at the hotel. After we freshen up, we'll depart to dinner. We've made a reservation, but this dinner is left at your own expense so that you may choose what you like from the menu. **Meals: B, L**

#### **DAY 7 - MARCH 22 HAVANA**

We begin our exploration of Havana and meetings with Habaneros - the people of Havana. We will walk with our Cuban Guide to explore Old Havana's four main plazas and meet the self-employed entrepreneurs in business along the winding streets.

Our first is 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 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. There are many choices of paladars nearby where you have time on your own for lunch.

Continuing our stroll through Old Havana, we arrive at Plaza de la Catedral. Notice here the traditional Baroque style in the anchoring Cathedral de la Habana. Outside in the Plaza, local Habaneros dressed in traditional costumes are eager to earn their living by posing for photos in exchange for a few dollars. 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.

Finish the day at Almacenes de San Jose Artisan, an artisan market situated along the Havana harbor. This reclaimed 1800s warehouse is home to self-employed vendors and artisans. One can find almost any type of handicraft made in Cuba at this market. From paintings and sculptures to hats and clothing, San Jose has it all.



Oriente Warbler

At the end of our exploration of Old Havana, climb aboard classic cars for an exhilarating drive around 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. 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. Stop at Revolution Square, where crowds have gathered to hear speeches by Fidel, the Pope and more.

Return to the hotel with time to refresh before dinner. We'll cap off our stay with an included special Farewell Dinner.

Finally, step inside the Hotel Nacional to view the memorabilia and take in the view from the gardens, before returning to our hotel for the night. *Meals: B, D*

#### **DAY 8 - SATURDAY, MARCH 23 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. Please ensure your passport and Cuban visa are in hand for check-in procedures. *Meals: B*

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

**March 16–23, 2025**

**\$3,754** per person in a double room  
**\$3,945** per person in a single room

**Deposit:** \$600 per person

**Deadline to register:** January 5, 2025

**Final Payment Due:** January 5, 2025

**Cancellation Fees:** All cancellations are effective from the date that written notification is confirmed as received by Conservancy Travel

- Reservation - 70 days prior to tour start date: \$600 per person
- 69 - 40 days prior to tour start date: 50% of total order
- 39 - 0 days prior to tour start date: 100% of total order

Register online at

[www.conservancytravel.org/ALA25Cuba0316](http://www.conservancytravel.org/ALA25Cuba0316)



#### **INCLUSIONS:**

- ✓ Accommodations and activities as described in the itinerary
- ✓ Expert private Cuban cultural guide and vehicle as per itinerary
- ✓ Expert Cuban specialist birding guide
- ✓ Certification of participation in a pre-planned, fully scheduled program of support for the Cuban people travel to Cuba under 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
- ✓ Gratuities for included meals and luggage handling

#### **EXCLUSIONS:**

- International airfare
- Transfers within the USA
- Passport/visa fees
- Meals not mentioned in the program as included
- Coffee with included meals unless offered by the venue; alcohol other than welcome drinks, live music venue entrance fees, unless specifically noted as included in the itinerary
- Optional activities that are not stated as included in the itinerary
- Tips for hotel housekeeping and live music during meals
- Other expenses of a personal nature
- Cuban tourist visa, required for entry and departure – \$130 per person additional when issued by Conservancy Travel
- Airline Baggage fees
- Travel insurance
- Any other items not specifically mentioned as included
- Gratuity for Cuban Cultural Guide, suggested at \$5-\$10/per guest, per day; Birding Guide, suggested at \$10-\$20 / per guest, per day; Driver, \$5-\$10 per guest, per day.



## WHAT TO EXPECT ON A CUBA JOURNEY

This itinerary has stays in multiple locations, with fully scheduled days. It is an active journey, involving walking and standing for up to 2 hours at a time and covering up to 2 miles unassisted during half-day tours. Expect 6-7 hours of physical activities daily, embarking and disembarking the motorcoach multiple times. A majority of your time will be spent outdoors. Birding includes walking on paved and unpaved terrain. On birding days, we start early while the birds are active and to avoid the hottest part of the day. On at least one day we will begin travelling well before dawn to reach our destination at or just after sunrise. Some activities, lodgings, and meals will be in historic buildings without elevators, requiring climbing 2-4 flights of stairs.

While bedrooms and private vehicles are air-conditioned, most public places are not. Transportation is by private motorcoach, without a toilet, and involves drives of 2-6 hours between locations, at times on poorly maintained roads. Rest stops occur every 1.5-2 hours on longer drives. Accommodations in Cuba are in the best available hotels, privately-owned inns, or bed & breakfasts, selected based on legal use according to US Department of Treasury OFAC restrictions. In Cuba, flexibility is essential, as itineraries may change based on the day's conditions. Your expert Cuban guide will manage any adjustments needed.

- Cuba has a tropical climate and temperatures during the day can be relatively hot by midday.
- Cuba is prone to power outages that may persist for several hours.
- Hot water is usually available in your rooms for bathing, but on rare occasions availability may be disrupted.
- Bottled drinking water will be provided by your guides.
- You may opt out of some outings when staying at Playa Larga to rest or enjoy some beach or personal time. Be sure to inform your host or guide.

## 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 nongovernmental 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.



West Indian Woodpecker



Hemingway's Finca Vigia



Cuban Emerald





## ACCOMMODATIONS

**Best available inn or B&B in Soroa**

**Privately owned Bed & Breakfast in Playa Larga**

**Havana**

### **Grand Aston Hotel**

The Grand Aston La Habana Hotel is a new hotel located in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. Situated on the Malecón – Havana’s famous waterfront promenade, the hotel combines modern design in an urban oasis of lush gardens.

The hotel offers an outdoor terrace and garden; swimming pool, restaurant, bar, fitness center, 24-hour front desk and room service. WiFi is available in public areas and costs US\$5 per 24 hours. Spa services at the Ubud Spa are available at additional cost.

Check-In: 4:00 p.m.

Check-Out: 12:00 p.m.





**A L A B A M A**  
**A U D U B O N**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

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**REGISTER ONLINE:**

[www.conservancytravel.org/ALA25Cuba0316](http://www.conservancytravel.org/ALA25Cuba0316)

