

EXPLORE!

BEST SELLER

The Best of Western Cuba
8 days

Cuba - Trip code CN



The Best of Western Cuba

On this exciting introduction to Cuba, we explore the captivating capital of Havana and wander through the twisting alleyways of colonial Trinidad. Throughout the tour, we will be staying in Casas Particulares, a local term for homestay, which gives us a unique opportunity to experience local hospitality. Often full of history, family photos and memorabilia, these casas give us a deeper insight into Cuban life. Along the way, we absorb the country's lively culture by learning salsa dancing and how to make Cuban cocktails. We also discover Cuba's spectacular natural beauty, taking in its pristine beaches, unspoilt forests and the dramatic landscape of Vinales. Learning about Cuba's fascinating history, we visit Che Guevara's Mausoleum and the infamous Bay of Pigs.

Trip highlights

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:**12 - 18**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in Havana

We arrive in Havana and journey to our centrally located 'casa particular', or local guesthouse. On arrival to the main 'reception' casa in Havana (as detailed in the Joining Instructions), you will be met by the host and shown to your room in one of the other casas located nearby. Each casa can only accommodate a handful of guests, giving you a great opportunity to immerse yourself in the local culture. Havana is a fascinating city. In 'Old Havana' Spanish grand colonial buildings rub shoulders with those of glorious art deco style, as the ubiquitous old American cars and taxis cruise past. After years of neglect some of these magnificent buildings are being restored, and it is not hard to imagine back to Havana's glamorous heyday when it was a popular haunt of the rich and famous. One of the first to be restored was the impressive art deco style Bacardi Building. Today Havana has something for everyone including museums, shopping and street cafes. At night the city's legendary music and cocktails bars come into their own.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Tour of Havana's highlights, free afternoon

Today, we explore modern-day Havana, with its mixture of restored and crumbling architectural marvels. Walking through the Vieja (old) district, we will discover the baroque cathedral, beautiful neoclassical buildings and the Plaza de Armas (main square). On our travels, we will doubtless see many brightly-painted vintage cars - the result of legislation enforced until 2011 ruling that only cars built before the 1959 revolution could be sold. We may also notice the lack of advertising - nothing but political exhortations are allowed. Passing by the famous Capitolio building, modelled on the White House, we are likely to see kids playing the hugely popular game of baseball in its grounds. During your free afternoon, you may choose to visit the fascinating Museum of the Revolution, housed in the impressive former Presidential Palace. The City Museum is also worth a visit, exhibiting art and historical artefacts in rooms preserved with their original Colonial decoration. In the late afternoon, once the freshening cool breeze blows in from the Caribbean, you may be tempted to enjoy a lively sunset stroll along the Malecon. Alternatively, you may prefer to visit the famous cigar factory. Later this afternoon, we will enjoy a cocktail making class where we can learn to make some of Cuba's famous drinks including mojitos and pina colodas followed by a salsa dancing class where you can learn some basic steps. This evening, we have the option to sample some of the capital's famous nightlife. El Floridita is as celebrated for its daiquiris as it is for having been a favourite hangout for Ernest Hemingway. Likewise, the Hotel Ambos Mundos is another Hemingway landmark where the 1954 Nobel Prize winner and author of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' lived for several years. Its roof terrace serves up exceptional mojitos - the traditional Cuban cocktail.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Full day trip to the picturesque Vinales countryside

After travelling a couple of hours west, we reach what is arguably the most picturesque part of Cuba - the Vinales region. Here, surreal mountains jut out of the landscape, formed by the erosion of limestone over millions of years. These 'mogotes' translate as 'haystacks' - a good word for them considering their steep sides and rounded, jungly tops. Around them, the iron-rich, red soil creates a patchwork of fields growing some of the best tobacco in the world - the raw material for Cuba's celebrated cigars. Before our return to Havana for the night, we have the option of a two-hour trek through the valleys of this remarkable landscape to the village of El Palmarito. Mogotes tower above us as we pass through tobacco fields and past drying barns.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Drive to Trinidad via the Bay of Pigs Museum

Today, we head east across Cuba, driving through giant citrus and sugar plantations and out on to the Zapata Peninsula. Our journey is broken up with a wonderful swimming opportunity in a 'cenote' (pool) where the ceiling of an underground river has collapsed. We plan to arrive in Playa Giron by mid-afternoon. Here we will visit the museum dedicated to the infamous 'Bay of Pigs' invasion - a US-supported attack by Cuban exiles which failed to overthrow the Communist regime in 1961. Our journey continues, past the wooded Escambray Mountains and hugging the coastline, with views over the sparkling turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea. By early evening, we will arrive at our hotel just outside the beautiful Spanish colonial town of Trinidad - our base for the next three nights.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Trinidad (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - In Trinidad; tour of this pretty colonial town

This morning, we wander through the cobbled streets of the old centre of Trinidad, discovering its fine palaces, churches and cafes. A paradise for photographers, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a perfectly preserved colonial settlement unlike any other. In the early 19th century, French settlers fleeing a slave revolt in Haiti, landed here and started to grow sugar cane in the Valle de Los Ingenios. This crop generated considerable wealth and consequently the town had to be regularly defended from pirates. Subject to opening hours, we will visit a local museum before some free time where you may wish to wander for longer through Trinidad's streets to soak up more of the unique atmosphere. This evening you can may wish to practice some of those new salsa steps at the open-air Casa de la Musica, just off the main square.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Trinidad (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Free day; optional trip to Topes or boat trip to Cayo Las Iguanas

Today is free for you to enjoy more of Cuba's beautiful landscapes and fascinating culture at your own pace. You may wish to take the short train journey out to the Sugar Mills Valley to Manaca Iznaga where you will have the opportunity to visit the Hacienda of the Family Iznaga, one of the richest in Trinidad during Colonial Times. Another option is to head into the Escambray Mountains to the Topes de Collantes Nature Reserve Park. With its unspoilt forests and water-eroded valleys, this area is famous for its many endemic species of flora and fauna. There are several different options involving short walks through the coffee growing area and rainforest. Most trips will drive up to some incredible viewpoints and several of the options offer an opportunity of a refreshing swim in one of its waterfalls finished off with a traditional lunch in one of the local haciendas. Your leader will run through these different options with you. Alternatively, you may wish to visit the deserted island of Cayo Las Iguanas. Here you can eat fresh paella, relax on the beach and snorkel in the coral wilderness. Snorkelling equipment is not always available, so keen snorkelers might prefer to bring their own.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Trinidad (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Return to Havana via Santa Clara

Today we bid farewell to Trinidad and make our way back to Havana, via Santa Clara. This pleasant university town was originally a prosperous agricultural area, well-placed on the island's trading route. Now, it is most famous as the site of the last battle of the Revolution, in which Che Guevara's troops took the city, causing the Cuban dictator, Batista, to flee into exile. After visiting the Tren Blindado Memorial commemorating this historic event, we move on to Che's Mausoleum. Guevara was buried here with full military honours in 1997 after his exhumed remains were discovered in Bolivia and returned to Cuba. A flame lit by Fidel Castro burns eternally to honour a national hero who played a key role in Cuba's revolution and whose image is routinely displayed throughout the country. We will also visit the museum dedicated to Guevara's life, containing many interesting letters and artefacts. This evening, we return to Havana to enjoy a final dinner and probably a dance.



Accommodation: Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Simple Casas Particulares



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Tour ends Havana

Our tour ends in Havana after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Tourism in Cuba



Now is undoubtedly a fantastic time to visit Cuba to see and experience the island. Little has changed over the past 50 years, and a visit is like stepping back in time. Although general service levels have been improving recently, travel in Cuba can sometimes be frustrating with limited tourism infrastructure. To fully enjoy the Cuban experience you should travel with a willingness to expect the unexpected and, above all, an adventurous spirit. In our opinion go now and experience this unique destination before it changes.

Extend your trip

Why not extend your holiday with some time on the beach at Playa Jibacoa. [Click here](#) for details.

Why book this trip

This short tour covers most of Western Cuba's highlights and is designed for those who want to discover one of the most unique countries in the world. You will stay in locally-owned and run private homestays throughout. Staying with local families and experiencing the Cuban way of life will be a highlight of the tour. This tour also includes a salsa dancing class and a lesson on how to make Cuba's famous cocktails.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

7 nights simple casas
particulares

Trip information

Country information

Holidays to Cuba

Climate

The dry season is from November to April. Average temperatures are 22-26C. Though the sky is often cloudless during the dry season, cold wet snaps do come in from North America especially in Dec and Jan, when the temperatures can drop to as low as 5C at night. From May to October there are normally fine mornings and clear evenings, afternoon rains tend to be short & heavy. Temperatures are hot and humid.

Time difference to GMT

-5

Plugs

2 Pin Flat and 2 Pin Round

Religion

60% Catholic

Language

Spanish

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Havana - Museo de la Ciudad CUC 4; Museo de la Revolucion and Arte Colonial CUC 8 each, CUC 10 with guide. Rum museum CUC 7, CUC 10 with guide; American Car excursion CUC25 per hour Trinidad - Cayo Las Iguanas or Cayo Blanco boat excursion CUC 60 plus CUC10 per taxi (upt to 4); Salsa classes CUC10 per hour; Half day visit to Playa Ancon - CUC 10 per taxi each way; Half day Train journey to Manaca Iznaga CUC10 (min 2 pers.) Topes de Collantes - Trinicubano Half day trip to El Cubano (swim/ hanging bridges) CUC25 (min. 2 pers.) ; Full day on truck to El Nicho inc. lunch CUC50 (min 4 pers); Full day Jeep Safari to El Nicho CUC59 (min. 2 pers.); Trinitopes (3km moderate trail) inc. lunch CUC30 (min 8 pers.); Half day Jeep safari Trip to Hacienda La Gallega inc. lunch CUC55 (min 2 pers.) Please note - most museums in Cuba charge for use of cameras and camcorders, this can be up to CUC 7 per usage.

Clothing

Include light cotton clothing plus something warmer for the evenings in the hills when it can get cool. A light fleece and waterproof would be useful except December-January when a heavier fleece and waterproof are recommended. An umbrella is useful in the rainy season.

Footwear

Comfortable trail boots, plus trainers/sandals for the evening. Water sandals may be useful.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of luggage and a small rucksack for day use. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage - don't overload yourself.

Equipment

Water bottle, towel, torch, sunblock, insect repellent, sunglasses, sun hat and swimwear. You may wish to bring your own snorkelling equipment (see days 6 and 7) (usually available locally to rent).

Tipping

Explore leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive. Please note tipping is also customary for musicians and for public conveniences so small notes and coins are always handy

Local crew

Local Crew: Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow approx. CUC25 for gratuities for local staff. 10% is expected in restaurants.

Holidays to Cuba

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£12.00-15.00

Beer price

£2

Water price

£1.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC).

Recommended Currency For Exchange

US dollars are no longer accepted in shops and other businesses, tourists and Cubans exchanging dollars will have to pay a 20% commission. We recommend you take clean Euro, Canadian dollars or Sterling cash as these are easier to exchange. Please note that Scottish Pounds are not accepted in Cuba.

Where To Exchange

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Available in major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

Credit Card Acceptance

Please note credit and debit cards associated with American Banks are not accepted. Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

Travellers Cheques

We do not recommend Travellers Cheques. Amex Travellers Cheques are not accepted.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Throughout this trip you will be staying in *casas particulares* - this is a Spanish term meaning private accommodation or homestay in Cuba. Staying in a *casa* offers the visitor a unique opportunity to experience Cuban hospitality in local accommodation adapted for tourism. The number of rooms, quality, facilities and access to other areas of the house such as the living room varies massively but as a general rule the majority of *Casas* are clean, basic, centrally located and can host only a handful of guests. *Casas* are generally run by the owner and members of the family that live there and the standard of English spoken will vary from zero to fluent, which is a good opportunity for you to practice your Spanish. They are often full of history, family photos and memorabilia, providing you with a deeper insight to Cuban life than a hotel stay. Virtually all of the rooms have private facilities but on rare occasions it may be necessary to share. Your Explore Leader will coordinate accommodation arrangements on tour.

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Cuba: Visas or Tourist cards are required by all nationalities travelling to Cuba. Explore can only supply the Cuban Tourist Cards to citizens of the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who are resident in the UK. This currently costs £15. Please contact Explore or your Travel Agent to arrange this service and we will send your tourist card with your final documentation. Alternatively they can be obtained directly through Cuban embassies and consulates. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate. Due to US Treasury Department Regulations we are unable to accept bookings from US passport holders. These Regulations set out different categories under which it is possible for US citizens to travel to Cuba; our trips do not fall under any of the permissible categories. As a tour operator we have an obligation to follow legal procedures, and as such we are unable to sell our trips to US passport holders. Travelling for tourism reasons directly from the USA to Cuba isn't allowed under US law. The law applies to US nationals and all foreign nationals who are either resident in the USA, or travelling through the USA en route to Cuba. Those travelling on direct flights between the UK and Cuba, or via other countries excluding the USA, are unaffected by this US legislation. Canada: An electronic travel authorisation (ETA) is required by British citizens transiting via Canada. For more information see the official Canadian government website: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp> Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange

appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Non refundable permits

Holidays to Cuba

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, tetanus, TB, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended.. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.
