

EXPLORE!

Book with confidence

The Best of Western Cuba

CUBA - TRIP CODE CN

DISCOVERY

Why book this trip?

A superb introduction to this fascinating island nation. Explore the twisting alleyways of Trinidad, visit the resting place of Che Guevara, watch classic cars pass by Havana's stunning colonial buildings and dance the night away to live salsa bands

- **Havana** - Experience the classic cars and infectious music that fill the streets
- **Casas Particulares** - Stay in private homestays throughout your trip, and get a deeper experience of local life
- **Vinales** - Admire the bizarre, steep-walled limestone 'mogotes' rising from the valley floor



INCLUDED MEALS
Breakfast: 7



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



TRANSPORT
Bus



ACCOMMODATION
7 nights simple
casas particulares



TRIP PACE:
Moderate



GROUP SIZE:
12 - 18

Itinerary

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

DAY 1 - Join trip in Havana

Arrive in Havana. Built around a deep natural harbour, Havana is one of the most impressive cities in the Americas. It's also one of the most exciting: the modern city is a fascinating mix of old and new, with crumbling tenement blocks and 1950s American Cadillacs rubbing shoulders with grand colonial buildings and monuments to the revolution.

Due to the number of evening flights into Havana, our local Leader plans to do the welcome briefing in the morning of day two, and will leave a message for us with details on timings and everything else that we'll need for the day. There are no other activities planned today, so you are free to arrive in Havana at any time. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you'll need to arrive into Havana's Jose Marti International Airport (airport code HAV) which is 23km, around 45 minutes from the airport. A representative from our local partners in Cuba will meet you at Havana Airport and assist you with the transfer formalities.

During this trip we stay in 'casas particulares', or local Cuban guesthouses. Our airport transfer will take us to a 'reception' casa in Havana (details of which will be in your final Joining Instructions), where 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 interact with your hosts.

If your flight arrives earlier in the day, perhaps you might choose to head out to explore Old Havana, or take a walk down the scenic Malecon esplanade with fine views of the city. There are several restaurants and bars within walking distance of our casas in Vedado, or a short taxi ride away in Old Havana.



ACCOMMODATION:
Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Grade: 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'll notice the lack of advertising - in its place there are many hyperbolic political slogans and references to the revolution. Passing by the famous Capitolio building, modelled on the White House, we'll notice the lines of amazing brightly-painted vintage cars - the result of legislation enforced until 2011 ruling that only cars built before the 1959 revolution could be sold.

During your free hours this afternoon, you may choose to visit the fascinating Museum of the Revolution, housed in the impressive former Presidential Palace. The Museum of Artes Decorativas is also worth a visit, a stunning collection of furniture, porcelain and art pieces from the 16th to 20th centuries, housed in one of Vedado's grandest mansions. 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 one of the famous cigar factories.

Later this afternoon, we will get into Cuba's quintessential culture with a rum and tobacco pairing. We follow this with a salsa class, where you can learn some steps to Cuba's classic dance.

This evening, we have the option to sample some of the capital's famous nightlife, where you might like to try those newly learnt salsa moves! The Hotel Ambos Mundos is a 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. Likewise, there are a number of excellent bars in both Old Havana and Vedado where live music is played and the cocktails flow freely.



ACCOMMODATION:
Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Grade: Simple Casas Particulares



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 a two-hour walk 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, and during our walk we'll learn a lot more about Cuba's prolific cigar-making industry, which really stems from the plants growing in this region.



ACCOMMODATION:

Casa Particulares - Havana (or similar)



Grade: 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, where we will enjoy local hospitality staying in casas particulares once again.



ACCOMMODATION:

Casa Particulares - Trinidad (or similar)

Grade: 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. It's worth climbing the stairs of the bell tower at the small Museo de la Lucha contra Bandidos, purely for the views across the roofs of Trinidad out to the Caribbean at one side and the Escambray mountains at the other. In the evening, you may wish to head to the open-air Casa de la Musica, just off the main square, where live bands and salsa dancing locals do their thing until late.



ACCOMMODATION:
Casa Particulares - Trinidad (or similar)

Grade: Simple Casas Particulares



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 6 - Free day; optional trip to the Topes rainforest or boat trip to Cayo Blanco

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 journey out to the Sugar Mills Valley to Manaca Iznaga where you will have the opportunity to visit the old plantation home of the Family Iznaga, one of the richest in Trinidad during colonial times, climbing their bell tower for views across the valley. Another option is to

head into the Escambray Mountains to the Topes de Collantes Nature Reserve Park. With its acres of unspoilt forest, this area is famous for its many endemic species of flora and fauna, particularly birdlife. 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 creole 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 Blanco. 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)

Grade: 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)

Grade: Simple Casas Particulares



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 8 - Trip ends Havana

The trip ends after breakfast at our casa particular in Havana.

There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Havana at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you need to depart from Havana's Jose Marti International Airport (airport code: HAV) which is 23km, around 45 minutes from the hotel.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Climate and country information

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	Plugs	Religion	Language
-5	2 Pin Flat and 2 Pin Round	60% Catholic	Spanish

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated

costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

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 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 a warmer layer for the evenings 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 trainersandals 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 over load 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

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. However, you might want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline

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, your leader may organise a group's tips kitty for included activities and meals and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow CUC25 for group tipping

For all non-included services and meals on your trip please tip independently at your discretion.

Please note tipping is also customary for musicians and for public conveniences so small notes and coins

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	Beer price	Water price
£12.00-15.00	£2	£1.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC)

Recommended Currency For Exchange

The CUC is a closed currency so you will not be able to change your money in advance. You will be able to change at the airport on arrival. When changing money, just change a small amount for your first few days and cross-check the amount that you're given with the receipt. The exchange rate with the CUC is approximately CUC 1.26 to the British Pound. US dollars are not accepted in shops and other businesses, exchanging dollars you 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. Please check on line for up to date information The departure lounge Havana airport only accept US\$, Euros or CAN\$. Any spare CUC need to be spent or exchanged before entering the departure lounge.

Where To Exchange

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Please note ATM are not widely available

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 some places, but may be subject to a service charge

Travellers Cheques

We do not recommend Travellers Cheques.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus

Accommodation notes

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.

Cuba

Food and drink

Food supplies to Cuba are sometimes in short supply as a result of their economic situation as well as the restrictions due to the US embargo. For this reason it is not uncommon for some restaurants and hotels to run short of ingredients. In addition, Cubans tend not to use much spice in their cooking and there can be a lack of variety resulting in the same meals being repeatedly offered. That said, local produce is usually very fresh and often organic.

Essential Information

Government Travel Safety 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, Commonwealth & Development 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.

Price Guarantee

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 and Passport 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 be able to apply 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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

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 receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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.

Ability to swim

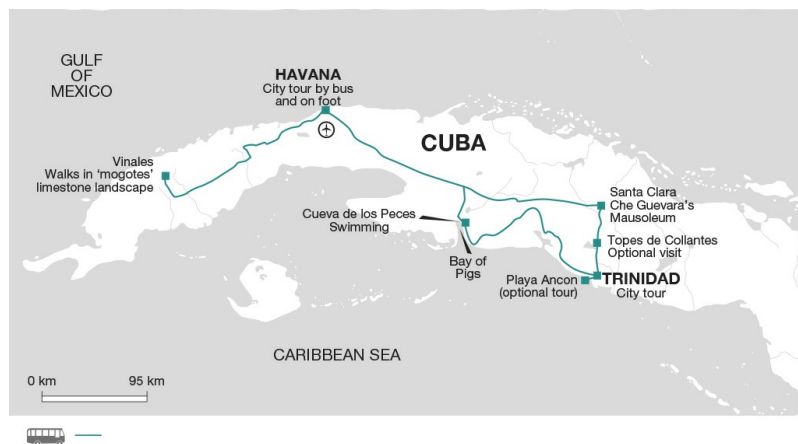
An ability to swim is essential for your safe enjoyment of the water based activities on this trip. If you wish to participate in these activities then we insist that you are able to swim.

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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Additional Information





Extend your trip on Playa Jibacoa

Extend your trip

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

Alternatively, before arriving into Cuba you could tag on 8 nights in Mexico and combine these two fascinating and diverse countries into a two-week trip. With an easy connecting flight from Cancun to Havana, booked by Explore, this combination is simple and stress-free. [Click here](#) for more details.

Explore staff love Cuba!

[Read about their experiences](#) and what you can expect from your trip.

Why book this trip

This short tour of Western Cuba's highlights is designed for those have limited time, but 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.

Reviews



**AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS**



**PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE**



**AIRPORT
TRANSFERS**