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## The Cuban People and Their Treasures

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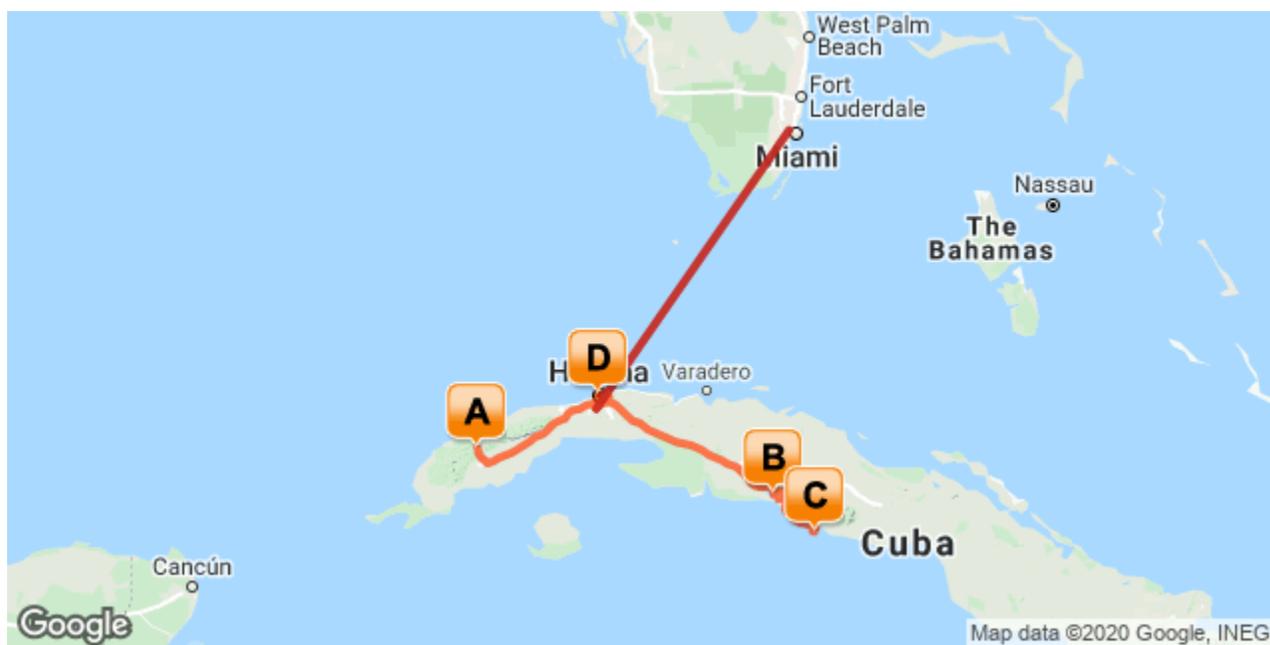




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**The Cuban People and Their Treasures**  
*Vinales - Cienfuegos - Trinidad - Havana*  
**9 Days / 8 Nights**

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## Introduction

**The Cuban People and Their Treasures** featuring visits to 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites & 5 Incredible Gardens

9 days, 8 nights

Enjoy an exceptional adventure with the Cuban People, that will include visiting the magical, World UNESCO Heritage sites (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) of Vinales Valley, Trinidad Valley des los Ingenios, Cienfuegos and old Havana. While there, you will learn about the people, their art and architecture, antiquities, agricultural, gardens, music, and the “day to day” lifestyles in these historical cities. Experience interfacing with the locals of this region. Visit the people who take care of Soroa Orchid, Vinales, Cienfuegos, Otero Medicinal and Havana gardens. Support the local families by bringing donations.

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## Price

- Pricing from \$3,995.00 per person, double occupancy (depending on the hotel selections) for the sample itinerary enclosed. Each person shall bring donations to the people as per the recommended list.

## Included

- Complimentary conference call briefing 4 weeks prior to the journey
- Special travel visa and documentation
- Round trip non-stop air service direct Miami/ Fort Lauderdale -Havana
- Private air-conditioned motor coach and transfers
- National medical insurance in Cuba
- hotel accommodations
- Luggage handling
- Permits & entry fees,
- English speaking guide
- Bottled water daily,
- Tips and meals for those stated on the itinerary. (8 breakfasts, 7 lunches, 5 dinners)
- All legal documentation and visas.

## Excluded

- Alcoholic drinks
- Tips for guides
- Extras at the hotel such as laundry and phone calls.

## Terms and Conditions

- This trip is being offered as a sample trip, so the actual terms and conditions will be finalized based on the dates you wish to travel. Holiday travel may be higher.
- Deposit of \$700.00 must be paid to reserve.
- Itinerary subject to change.
- **All participants must have a valid US passport with an expiration date no sooner than 6 months AFTER the RETURN DATE of the trip.**

## Expert Tips

- Wear good, comfortable walking shoes. The historical streets are old and can be uneven and have potholes.
- DO NOT wear open-toed shoes or flip flops.
- Apply plenty of sunscreen as the tropical sun is strong.

## Day 1:

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### Vinales

The naturally beautiful valley of Vinales is a popular UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Pinar del Río Province of Cuba known for its distinctive limestone hills, endless tobacco farms and traditional Cuban culture. The majority of the area's inhabitants live in the tiny eponymous agricultural village which, despite its small size, features a number of well-established tourist facilities including shops, restaurants, and hotels. The village is centred around a main plaza which is home to a lovely little art gallery, a charming church, a Saturday morning farmer's market and daily cultural events. The Vinales Valley offers a truly authentic experience of rural Cuba as well as an ideal natural environment for a range of outdoor activities including, among others: birdwatching, rock climbing, cycling, hiking, horse riding, and swimming in natural pools.

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### Day Itinerary

Check-in for flight and depart Miami or Fort Lauderdale for Jose Marti Airport.

Upon arrival, our bus will be waiting for our departure to the lush botanical province of Pinar del Rio and Vinales Valley.

Our first visit will be an extensive visit to the Soroa Orchid Garden, developed and nurtured by the University of Pinar del Rio. Hike to see orchids in the wild. The Soroa Garden is an excellent place to see the national bird of Cuba, the Cuban Trogon. This area is also a butterfly haven. Distribute donations.

Then we will stop in the mountain range of Las Terrazas to a private farm for lunch. Visit this unique area and learn about a reforestation community program amidst this beautiful landscape.

Then, we will head to Vinales Valley. Check into our hotel located on the canyon rim. After settling in, gather for a welcome cocktail reception, with introduction and information by our guide. Weather permitting, we will have a private dinner with luscious fruit and entertainment on the terrace.

Enjoy the spectacular scenery from our Vinales Valley hotel.

(L, D)

### Activities

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#### *Soroa*

Situated in Cuba's Artemisa Region southwest of Havana, Soroa is a mountain resort town known for its incredible natural beauty featuring lush landscapes, majestic mountains, and meandering rivers. Dubbed the 'Rainbow of Cuba', it is listed as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and is home to the El Salto del Arco Iris, a magnificent waterfall and the Soroa Orchidarium, a world famous orchid garden boasting the largest collection of orchids in the world. Visitors can look

forward to exploring this scenic area by bike, discovering the Castillo de las Nubes Medieval-style castle, visit the nearby town of La Rosita and view the coffee plantations.



### ***Las Terrazas***

Las Terrazas is a small community that was originally founded as an eco-village in 1968. Today it has evolved into a burgeoning and vibrant community with many artists, workshops and open studios, as well as a well-visited activity centre. Las Terrazas is now a protected Unesco Biosphere Reserve, located on the site of Cuba's earliest coffee plantation. Nestled in 5 000 hectares of forest nature reserve in the Sierra del Rosario Mountains, the area is rich in plant and animal life. Numerous footpaths and trails crisscrossing the lush area make the profusion of lakes and waterfalls accessible.



### ***Vinales Valley***

With its striking landscapes and an atmosphere of complete serenity, the Viñales Valley is one of the most visited locations in Pinar del Rio on the island of Cuba. The valley is encircled by the Sierra de los Órganos mountains.

On the floor of the valley, tobacco and other crops are cultivated, and the surrounding hills are dotted with caves.

The area's main attractions are the wide variety of hiking, horseback riding, and rock climbing opportunities that are available here.




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## Day 2:

### Day Itinerary

Early morning sunrise viewing from the hotel should not be missed.

After breakfast at the hotel, we depart for a full day excursion to this area of Pinar del Rio province, renowned for its scenic beauty, fertile tobacco plantations, and unusual mogotes (enormous flat-top limestone outcroppings) and mountains that contain huge caves and underground river networks. Our walk through Vinales National Park (designated as a UNESCO biosphere) boasts some of the most breathtaking scenery in the entire country.

Stop at typical tobacco farm to learn about the daily life of Cuban families in this region, as well as how they grow and harvest tobacco for the cigar industry. Our guides will be explaining the significance of the country's traditions in the development of these locations. Bring needed supplies to the families that live here.

Lunch will be held at El Palenque de los Cimarones with musical entertainment (nice location to be introduced to Santeria, the Afro-Cuban religion and its origins).

We will explore La Cueva del Indio, part of it by boat and will have a quick photo stop at the country's largest painted Mural.

Our next stop will be a visit to a private botanical garden owned by the same family for over 100 years.

Dinner will be at the private home of a young Cuban family. Learn about the changes that are happening for the people as they are now allowed to start their own enterprises.

Overnight Vinales Valley

(B, L, D)

## Activities

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### *Cueva del Indio*

Discovered by a villager in 1920, the Cueva Del Indio is an excellent option for a day trip. The cave is accessible by land or by motorboat by way of the San Vicente River. Tourists can view cave paintings and archaeological artefacts depicting pre-Columbian Cuban cultures. The cave boasts beautiful geological formations of stalactites and stalagmites.

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## Day 3:

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### Day Itinerary

After breakfast at the hotel and checkout and we will then head to the Biosphere called Zapata Swamp. Visit the Bay of Pigs to learn about the US/ Cuban History of this period.

Stop at a local village and have lunch with a local family. Distribute donations to support the people.

Visit la Cueva de los Peces. This is a natural wonder worth experiencing. The locale is beautiful, combined with the plants that spring from the volcanic rock; this is definitely a gift from nature. Described as Cuba's largest natural flooded saltwater cave that leads to the ocean. Make a stop to see if we can catch a glimpse of the Bee Hummingbird, the world's smallest bird known only to Cuba.

Check in to our hotel then dinner at a private Cuban home which is on your own. (B, L)

## Activities

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### *Bay of Pigs*

Located the southern coast of Cuba, the Bay of Pigs is best known for being the landing point for the failed invasion of Cuba by the CIA on April 17, 1961. Today, the bay is a popular holiday destination and a favourite with scuba divers and snorkelers. Dozens of shore dives are possible, negating the need for a boat and the bay is suitable for all levels of skill.

### *Cienfuegos*

Cienfuegos is a small city in the Central Cuban province of the same name. This attractive port city was founded in 1819 by French settlers and this French influence remains evident in the local architecture, a combination of art nouveau and art deco. The city overlooks a magnificent bay which features immaculate coral reefs and provides sun and sand along with plenty of opportunities for diving, sailing and even swimming with the dolphins. Other natural attractions include a number of hidden caves, waterfalls, natural pools and healing hot springs. The historic city centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site which is home to an impressive array of visitor sights including, among others: the Casa del Fundador (Founder's House); the Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción (Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception) Cathedral; the Tomás Terry Theater; and the Ferrer Palace.




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## Day 4:

### Day Itinerary

After breakfast at the hotel, we will then head to Cienfuegos City, a thriving port since Columbus landed in 1494. It was also declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Learn about the architecture, including the interior of the highly decorated Palacio, Terry Theatre, Cienfuegos Yacht Club, and the Arco de Triunfo - the only Arco de Triunfo in Cuba.

We will visit the important cultural center of this city. Lunch is on the bay, weather permitting. We will have some free time to explore the Cienfuegos artist printing house and the Cultural Center which houses all the named artists of Cienfuegos. Then the local people will share a special gift to the group.

Then visit the Botanical Garden of Soledad, which served as Harvard's Botanical Station for Tropical Research. Have lunch in the garden. It is now run by Cuba's Academy of Sciences and has more than 2,000 species of tropical plants and palm trees. Harvard University is an important part of the garden's rich history. Some of the oldest Palms in Cuba exist here. Harvard's name is still visibly carved into a palm tree entrance of what was once called the Harvard House. Bring needed supplies to the people. Some free time before gathering for Dinner.

(B, L, D)

### Activities

#### *Tomas Terry Theatre*

Cienfuegos, Cuba, the Tomas Terry Theater was completed in 1889 in honour of the Venezuelan industrialist Toms Terry. The horseshoe shaped 950-seat auditorium is decorated with hand-carved Cuban hardwoods, Carrara marble, and whimsical frescoes on the ceiling. The theatre has played host to performances by greats such as Anna Pavlova and Enrico Caruso, and musicals, concerts, and plays are still staged on a regular basis.

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## Day 5:

### Day Itinerary

After an early breakfast, board our motor coach to head to Trinidad.

On the way, we will venture to a private medicinal plant garden and center, not generally open to the public, where research is being done on Cuba's use of plants that benefit health. The Otero Medicinal research center and Museum help start natural pharmaceuticals in Cuba. Learn what is being done to validate their plants with the help of TREE. Check into our hotel. Dinner will be at a private paladar in a historic hacienda. Enjoy the nightlife of the newly renovated downtown Trinidad.

(D)

## Activities

Otero Medicinal research center and Museum

## Trinidad

On Cuba's spectacular Caribbean coast, sandwiched between the pristine white sand beaches of Playa Ancon and the towering Sierra Escambray mountain, lies the impossibly pretty town of Trinidad. This perfectly preserved Spanish colonial town is centred around the bustling Plaza Mayor, a historic plaza and an open-air museum of colonial architecture. The city's charming old town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring a glorious maze of narrow cobbled streets lined with pastel coloured houses and impressive colonial-era edifices such as the Santísima Trinidad Cathedral and Convento de San Francisco. Visitors can look forward to exploring the glittering Palacio Brunet which houses the impressive Museo Romantico; browsing the lovely artisan street markets; or discovering the breathtaking wildlife and waterfalls of Topes de Collantes, an enormous nature reserve just beyond the city.



## Day 6:

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### Day Itinerary

Breakfast at Hotel - This morning visit one of the two sections of Trinidad, the crown jewel of the Cuban colonial architecture declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Visit an old sugar mill plantation house decorated with local art. Climb the landmark tower for incredible vistas. Marvel at the vistas of the Sugar Valley, now a UNESCO Biosphere that has been preserved. Support the local artisans by buying some of their wares. Then break for lunch.

Return for a guided City historical presentation while strolling through the cobblestone streets of this fascinating town built by pirates. Visit more private artist's studios and homes. This City has many small art studios and cultural shops. Visit the beautiful Plaza Mayor and the art and antiques within their homes, churches and museums. There is an open-air market of crafts, linens and crochet material which support the people.

Dinner is at a private historic paladar. (B, L, D)

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## Day 7:

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### Day Itinerary

After early breakfast at the hotel, we will then head to Havana.

On this journey, transition from Caribbean to the Atlantic. The route will cross many sugarcane fields and agricultural farms. On our entry into Havana, stop at the historic National Hotel and gardens to learn about the Mafia's role in Cuba before checking into our hotel. Dinner in Old Havana (B, L D)

### Activities

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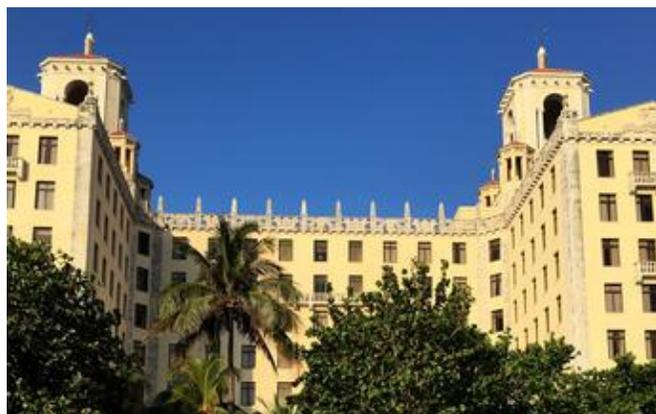
#### *Havana*

As the capital of Cuba, Havana is a remarkably vast, sprawling metropolis. The city's compelling history is reflected in the astonishing diversity of its architecture, its multicultural inhabitants, and its exotic and eclectic cuisine. The Old Town remains a remarkably well-preserved colonial centre. It is characterised by an exquisite hotchpotch of architectural styles, of opulence and decay, socialism and capitalism, the past and the present. Imperial mansions have been converted into modern tenement buildings, government agencies find homes in eighteenth-century convents and the nostalgic classic American cars for which the city is known share Havana's lively streets with the latest models of BMW and Mercedes. While the UNESCO-funded restoration programme has introduced a modicum of modernity into the city, Havana has managed to retain its wonderfully quirky cultural heritage, its unique character, and its undeniable charm.



### ***Hotel Nacional de Cuba***

The Hotel Nacional de Cuba is considered a symbol of history, culture, and Cuban identity. The guns that made up the old Santa Clara Battery are on exhibition at the garden, they were declared part of the World Heritage Site. The Hotel Nacional de Cuba was declared a National Monument and it was inscribed in the World Memory Register. With its privileged location in the middle of Vedado, the center of Havana, it stands on a hill just a few meters from the sea, and offers a great view of the Havana Harbor, the seawall and the city. The Hotel stands out due to its refined elegance and its ancient splendor, which since 1930 has attracted a large number of personalities from the arts, science and politics, such as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, artists Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner, Johnny Weismuller, Maria Félix, Jorge Negrete, and scientist Alexander Flemming.




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## **Day 8:**

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### **Day Itinerary**

After breakfast, head to UNESCO Heritage City of for a walking tour through cobblestone streets and famous Squares, including Cathedral and San Francisco Squares, Plaza des Armas and Plaza Vieja.

Break for lunch.

Then we will visit Hemingway House and Gardens.

Dine at one of the private paladars before surprise entertainment. Optional: Night at historic Tropicana. (B, L, D)

## Activities

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### *Old Havana*

Old Havana is the central area of the original city of Havana. The city walls of the original city are the modern boundaries of Old Havana. Founded in 1519 by the Spanish, Havana features superb architectural structures, with many treasures from the city's long and colorful history. The old center of the sprawling metropolis retains a fascinating mix of historic buildings, museums, galleries, churches and lively plazas.

### *Plaza de San Francisco*

Plaza de San Francisco is situated facing the harbor where the cruise ships dock. This is the second oldest square in the city and in the 16th century this area was the waterfront of the early colonial city. At the centre of this cobblestoned square stands Fuente de los Leones (Fountain of the Lions) built in 1836.

### *Plaza Vieja (Old Square)*

Originally named Plaza Nueva, Plaza Vieja was created in 1559. The square was originally use for military exercises and later as an open air market. Today Plaza Nueva features bars restaurants, a microbrewery, a beautiful fountain and more.

### *Finca Vigia*

Finca Vigía was the home of Ernest Hemingway in San Francisco de la Paula, in Cuba. Built in 1886, the house was acquired by Hemingway in 1939 and was where he lived until 1960. A tower was built next to the main house in 1950, overlooking the expansive landscape, and was where the author would retire to write. Finca Vigia now houses the Ernest Hemingway Museum, where the author's personal effects, books, clothes, desk, American furniture, typewriter and hunting trophies can be seen.

### *Tropicana Club (OPTIONAL, ADDITIONAL COST)*

Since the early years in the last century, at the entrance to the Marianao municipality in the province of Havana, next to the Zanja-Marianao railroad, was Villa Mina, the beautiful suburban property once owned by Regino Truffin, surrounded by a luxuriant tropical forest and now a fairy-tale dream for a nightclub that became a legend in the history of world musical and variety shows, the mythic Tropicana Nightclub. Tropicana Nightclub boasts the most spectacular cabarets to the open sky. it is a unique place to enjoy the music, Cuban folklore and the Caribbean in all its color, musicality and rhythm.

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## Day 9:

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### **Day Itinerary**

After breakfast, we will check out and then board our motor coach for a morning at the National Havana Botanical Gardens. Visit their spectacular greenhouse displays and experience the plant kingdoms of every continent in the world. We will also go behind the scenes and see what the Cuban people are doing to preserve some almost "extinct" endemic species.

Stop for lunch. Then, visit Fuster Mosaic City, known as the "Gaudi of Cuba. before heading to the airport.

We bid farewell to our amigos until next time! End of Itinerary B, L)

## Travel Information



Cuba's turbulent past and defiant political stance have imbued it with an undeniable mystique - but beyond its historical intrigue, there's plenty more to discover and enjoy about this unique travel destination. The island is like one of its ubiquitous vintage cars - shabby but chic, erratic and unpredictable, and ultimately loveable. Fine cigars, salsa dancing, Afro-Latin beats - all these things and many more contribute to Cuba's one-of-a-kind flavour. Highlights include the glittering capital city, Havana, where you can dance the night away in salsa clubs, or marvel at the crumbling beauty of colonial buildings on a stroll through town; the laid-back little town of Vinales, surrounded by tropical landscapes studded with bulbous limestone karsts; the terracotta buildings of historical Trinidad; and picture-perfect beaches at Varadero, and on the islets of Cayo Guillermo and Cayo Largo del Sur.

### *Entry Requirements*

**Visa:** A Cuban Visa is required and only for specific dates of the Tour, which will be provided as part of your package.  
**Passport:** A valid passport valid for 6 months after the end of the trip date is required. If you need to renew your passport in short order, it can be done through <http://www.rushmypassport.com/?gclid=CPq-sp6Z5LYCFYyi4AodZBgAvQ> (877) 503-9838. Information regarding getting passports and passport renewal expedited is also available at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) on the Internet. The process takes 2-4 weeks. Before leaving the U.S., make a copy of your passport's data page and put it in your checked luggage. Leave your passport in the hotel room safe deposit box and carry the photocopy.

### *Banking and Currency*

Currency:

- As of January 1, 2020, Cuba is only accepting dollars. Although most services are included in the program, there is some independent time to pursue individual activities.
- We recommend bringing small denomination of US dollars for incidentals and souvenirs. and gratuities
- CREDIT CARDS AND TRAVELER'S CHECKS DRAWN ON US BANKS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.

How much money should I bring with me?

How much money you choose to bring is an individual matter. Items made by the people are permissible to purchase and bring back under this license which includes, art, sculpture, jewellery, crafts, woven products, linens, books, CD's, etc. that are all made in Cuba. These will be an additional expense and you will want to purchase these items!

Please consider your purchasing habits and plan accordingly. The artwork ranges from \$10 - \$2,000 and more. Many good pieces of art are in the \$200- \$300 range. We cover the tips for baggage handling, meals that are provided, and local musicians at meals. We do not cover your guide, driver, or chambermaid gratuities, bar gratuities, meals and entertainment you purchase.

We recommend you bring a minimum of \$100.00 US per person per day. it is better to have more than less when there is no means to get more cash.

FYI - Cubans working in the tourism sector have the advantage of earning hard currency and often are economically better off than doctors, State scientists, engineers, and educators. It is not unusual for a bartender to be trained as one of these professionals.

Cubans expect a tip for services as this is often more valuable than their State salaries.

Gratuities are always your personal expression of appreciation for good service.

A tipping and cost guide is noted below:

- Chambermaid tip \$1 per day
- Tips for bartenders - wait staff 10%
- Public Restrooms (always staffed) .50
- Cost of Drinks \$3-7 average per drink
- Lunch on your own \$10 - 15
- Dinner on your own \$25 – 40.00
- Taxies \$7.00
- Tropicana Show \$85-95.00
- Other Shows\*\* \$10 – 30.00
- Guide tip \$10 per person/per day
- Driver tip \$5 per person/per day
- \*\* When available, other shows include baseball game, ballet, Buena Vista Social Club, and other famous entertainers.

## Banking

Banking hours: Mon-Fri 08h30-12h00 and 13h30-16h00, Sat 08h30-12h00. Hours may vary and banks may be open all day in larger cities.

MasterCard and Visa credit cards are increasingly accepted, provided they are **not issued by a US bank, or a bank with links to the USA**, but hefty fees are often added. ATMs are fairly common but not ubiquitous. However, cash can be obtained in banks and Cadeecas with non-US Visa credit and Visa debit cards.

Travellers cheques in US Dollar, Pounds Sterling and other major currencies are accepted; US Dollar cheques issued by US banks are not accepted but American Express travellers cheques issued by non-US banks can be exchanged, though not everywhere. It is recommended to take cheques in a currency other than US Dollars.

### ***Travel, Transport and Getting Around***

Perhaps one of the most important parts of planning a trip to Cuba involves figuring out exactly how you'll get around once you're there. TREE provides all transportation to and from scheduled itinerary activities. We cannot be responsible if you are late for our scheduled meeting time.

**Taxis** We suggest using taxis to get around if you have to travel independently. There are certainly plenty available for hire, but should you choose this particular mode of transportation, take into account the following so that you do so safely. First and foremost, avoid taking rides with unlicensed taxis. They are often driven by thieves who are out to pick up and rob passengers. Be particularly careful of fare amount when hiring a taxi, especially in Havana. If possible, ask someone who is native or at least familiar with the system how much the fare should be prior to heading to your destination. This way you will know beforehand how much the driver should be charging you and can avoid being scammed out of an exorbitant fee by a dishonest driver. If you can't confer with a local, insist that the meter be used to remove any doubt.

One of the more unique types of transportation in Cuba is the "Co-Co" taxi, a three-wheeled vehicle that is generally yellow in color and contains a flimsy hood. These are basically just glorified motorcycles that have been modified to carry passengers. Because they can reach speeds of up to 40 mph and lack any sort of safety features, including seatbelts, "Co-Co" taxis can be pretty dangerous. They are, nevertheless quite popular with tourists so if you choose to ride on one, be aware of the risk.

### ***Health and Medical Information***

Health, Inoculations, Medications, and Treatments:

As of this writing, no inoculations are required for entry into Cuba. To obtain a current listing of any further information, call the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) free at 1-888-232-3299. The CDC reports no risk of malaria in Cuba. We advise you to pack a kit with an ample supply of your medications and basic first aid items, insect repellent, sunscreen, etc. Replacing medications may be very difficult on the island as many items are in short supply or non-existent. These items along with travel shampoo and soaps can be donated to a needy organization when we leave Havana. In general, be aware of the general discomforts of travel – change in diet, sunburn, dehydration, etc.

Medical insurance is included for treatments while in the country. However, we are not responsible for any prior medical problems and/or conditions and nor can we be responsible for any treatment there. The requests for information regarding personal medications taken and pre-existing conditions is for the Cuban medical staff in the event of an emergency. We keep all records confidential.

The island is very unique and full of history, but not ADA compliant. Broken pavement, ground holes, old stairwells, and other potential walking hazards exist. Wear comfortable shoes and be aware of your surroundings. Participants are responsible for being in sufficient good health to undertake the trip. Travelers are expected to be able to climb 2 flights of stairs, walk a ¼ mile, and stand for 15-20 minutes at a time.

Visitors are sometimes susceptible to "traveler's diarrhea" caused by unfamiliar bacteria. Be sure to bring along medication for this, just in case. We strongly recommend you drink only bottled water. Packaged drinks are fine. Ice at most reputable places is filtered water. If there is any doubt as to your physical fitness to travel, a consultation should be sought with your doctor. While Cubans go out of their way to assist travelers, there are few allowances for handicapped access. In case you need medical treatment, hospitals and clinics are conveniently located. At the larger

hotels, medical staff is available on site.

### ***Safety Notices***

Security:

Cuba has less street crime than any world capital, but there is always one in the bunch! So, take your usual precautions. Undercover state police can be found anywhere there are foreigners. They are instructed to leave visitors in peace but will question any Cuban who seems to be in close contact with a visitor. It is best to avoid “jineteros” or street hustlers offering cheap cigars or anything else to sell you on the street. Many hotels have safety deposit boxes at the front desk or in the rooms for your valuables and documents. Be very careful with your passport, money, and camera, as you would in any foreign country.

### ***Food, Drink and Cuisine Advice***

Tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled water is ubiquitous, but boiling water is recommended to limit plastic waste. Milk is pasteurized and dairy products (with the exception of some cheap ice creams) are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood and fruit are generally considered safe to eat.

Surprisingly for an island so rich in marine life, fish and seafood rarely top the menu - most seafood is exported. The cuisine is a mix of Spanish and Afro-Caribbean, heavily reliant on rice, beans, chicken and pork. Depending on the season, fresh vegetables may be hard to come by - as a rule, the hotter the month, the more limited the selection. Furthermore, flavors are limited by the lack of available herbs and spices and many visitors are surprised that Cubans shun spicy food of all kinds. Food preparation relies heavily on the frying pan and deep fat fryer. Some of the best cooking, and often an illegal lobster or two, is found in *paladares* (small, private restaurants). In state-run establishments, service can be painfully slow and sometimes even surly.

A 10% tip on restaurant bills is common.

### ***Climate and Weather***

Climate and Clothing: The climate is generally warm and tropical. The rainy season lasts from May to November and the dry season from December to April. Midwinter can sometimes be cool in Havana resulting from cold fronts. Cuba lies within the hurricane belt, but the season is strongest between August and October. It is advisable to pack lightly and simply. Cuba has a very casual atmosphere. We require that you bring a pair of closed-toed, non-skid shoes. We suggest packing a light rain jacket, comfortable clothing, and sun hat. Remember to pack memory sticks and batteries for cameras. There will be soaps, shampoos, and hairdryers provided in most hotels. Cubans are informal in general. It is customary for men to wear long pants (jeans and chinos - ok) in the evening, and three quarter length slacks for the women are fine. Women should pack one casual dress/skirt and gentlemen bring one pair of long pants for the night. Jackets and ties are not necessary. Jeans are fine. In order to minimize risk, it is recommended that visitors avoid conspicuous displays of wealth and that they dress and behave conservatively. Don't bring any valuable jewelry. While it is safe, it is not appropriate to display wealth. Do not leave your belongings unattended. Weather forecasts are available on [weather.com](http://weather.com).

### ***Clothing and Dress Recommendations***

Cuba is a sub-tropical country so pack for summer. shorts, short-sleeved cotton dresses and shirts are the order of the day. But, bear in mind that Cuban men would never wear shorts in the City! A night out at *Tropicana* or *La Guarida* restaurant needs something smart if not overly formal.

If you are coming in the winter don't assume that it will be hot all the time, especially in the evenings. Bring some warm clothing (long sleeves, a sweater or fleece), since there is nothing more frustrating than being frozen to death in a tropical country! Lightweight rain gear is suggested.

### ***Electricity and Plug Standards***

Electric Current: The electric current in Cuba is 110 volts AC: 60Hz. Some of the newer hotels are 220 volts and would require a voltage adaptor and round prong Caribbean converter or plug. Plan to bring a transformer that converts 110 to 220 if you have special needs.

### ***General Guidance***

US Customs: You may bring back anything made by the people, which includes art, sculpture, jewelry, crafts, woven goods, linens, crochet, books, and CD's. Licensed travelers are now allowed to bring back up to \$100.00 cigars/rum and a total of \$300.00 of products made by the government (coffee, chocolates and perfumes). This was changed in January 2015.

For specific information on Cuba sanctions, visit the website: [www.treas.gov/ofac](http://www.treas.gov/ofac).

Packing NOT ALLOWED: Leisure drugs, walkie talkies, drones, GPS or satellite telephones. Possible prison sentences! Please do not pack the following items in your checked luggage: money, sunglasses, electronics, cameras, cigarettes, cigars, expensive sneakers, CD's, expensive jewelry, and watches. You can bring a backpack/large bag on board the plane. We recommend leaving the fashion show home! TSA locks are highly recommended.

Photography/Cameras: Cuba is a haven for photographers. Do not expect to be able to purchase batteries, memory cards, or film in Cuba - Come prepared! Have your photographic equipment in good working order, extra batteries along with the charger, and have extra photo cards. Some museums require an additional fee for taking pictures that you will be required to pay upon entry if you wish to take pictures. It is forbidden in Cuba to photograph military or police installations, personnel, ports, rail, or airport facilities. When photographing local residents, be courteous and ask permission. Never leave your camera equipment unattended.

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