

CUBA & THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS - ESSENTIAL CUBA



INTRODUCTION

Whispers of change have surrounded Cuba for the past few years, elevating its status as a country to visit now. This small group itinerary will take you to Havana, Vinales, Cienfuegos, Trinidad and Santa Clara on a short but exciting 9-day adventure of exploration and cultural discovery. Your journey starts in glorious and tumbledown Havana before the pace is slowed a notch or two in the rural valleys of Vinales. Absorb the French atmosphere of coastal Cienfuegos and revel in the steamy heat and beats of colonial Trinidad. Trace the history of the Cuban Revolution and the iconic Che Guevara.

ITINERARY

TRIP CODE

CUTSECU

DEPARTURE

Saturdays

DURATION

9 Days

LOCATIONS

Cuba




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DAY 1: Havana

Bienvenido a Cuba! Welcome to Cuba! Arrive at Havana's Jose Marti International airport, where you'll be transferred to your hotel. Please ensure you provide your flight details to your booking agent at least 14 days prior to travel so the transfer can be organised. There will be a welcome meeting at approximately 6pm this evening. After checking in please ask at the reception for your welcome letter. The welcome letter will detail where the pre-tour briefing will take place. If by 5pm you cannot locate this letter then please ask reception, or ask to call our assistance line listed in the "Problems and emergency contact information" section of this document. Please come to this meeting with your passport, travel insurance and next of kin information. The briefing is usually followed by an optional group dinner. As there's a great deal to do in Havana, we recommend staying a few extra days to make the most of this exciting city. If you need help booking extra accommodation, our reservations team will be happy to assist. If you arrive early, please note most activities in Cuba can only be booked through the tourist desk in the lobbies of the larger hotels or direct with the venue. Otherwise, there are plenty of good museums to check out, including the Museo de la Revolucion and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

DAY 2: Havana

This morning at 9am you will be picked up from the infamous Hotel Nacional to see outer-Havana in a convoy of classic American vintage cars (1 hour urban adventure) that cruises via points of interest such as the Malecon, Revolucion Square, Vedado and ending in Old Havana. Next, your leader will take you on a walking tour of the lovely Old Havana (approximately 2.5 hours). Go to the cathedral, Plaza de Armas, San Francisco de Asis, Plaza Vieja and Central Park. Now that you are orientated in Old Havana you have the rest of the afternoon to lunch at leisure and explore further. Your leader can assist you to take a taxi if you wish to return to the hotel

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DAY 3: Vinales

This morning drive west to Soroa (1 hour) to tour the beautiful orchid garden. A local expert will take you on a private tour of the gardens to identify the bird and plant species of this diverse area (approximately 45 minutes). You will easily see why the valley is known as the rainbow of Cuba. There will be time for lunch before continuing on to Vinales (1.5 hours), where tobacco and sugarcane fields lie side by side and limestone outcrops dot the landscape. Use this bus time to take part in an informal Spanish lesson so you can converse with the friendly locals throughout the rest of your trip. Check in to the guesthouses, leaving enough time to undertake a quick orientation walk. Later, perhaps enjoy the porch rocking chair and soak up the slow, old-world pace of rural Cuba as oxen plod gracefully along the streets.

DAY 4: Vinales

At 9am go on a guided walk through the farm lands of Vinales (approximately 3 hours), which you'll soon see is home to some extraordinary scenery - some of Cuba's best. Learn more about the tobacco industry and see a farmer whip a world class cigar in seconds. Take some time to find a local place for lunch, then regroup around 4:30pm to embrace the rhythm and learn a few steps in a salsa dancing class. Next, head to the top of the valley for dinner at an Eco-Farm. Everything is grown organically on the farm itself so get ready for one of the freshest dinner experiences in Cuba!

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DAY 5: Vinales / Cienfuegos

Prepare for a long travel day as you board the comfortable bus at 8am towards Cienfuegos. Drive back through Havana before stopping in the Bay of Pigs for lunch (approximately 5 hours). After lunch, go for a dip in the crystal clear water or simply sit back and try to imagine the battle, that you will soon learn about, played out in this monumental bay. From here you aren't far from the Giron Museum for insight into the botched US Military counter-revolutionary invasion in the Bay of Pigs. Then it is just a short drive to Cienfuegos (approximately 1 hour), one of Cuba's prettiest coastal spots. Arrive some time after 5pm and take a short orientation walk before visiting the Palacio del Valle, Cienfuegos' architectural pride and joy. Its grandiose carvings in Venetian alabaster strike an impressive pose in this beautiful seaside city.

DAY 6: Trinidad

Enjoy a free morning to explore. Then complete the two hour drive to Trinidad. During a guided walk of the town (1 hour), take in its eye-catching combination of cobblestone streets, colourful houses and old-fashioned locals. It's a great town to explore on foot, and almost every scene offers superb photographic opportunities - from residents relaxing with huge cigars on their doorsteps to old Chevrolets cruising by. In the evening take a trip out of town to a local house for a homely and festive dinner. Be welcomed with the local drink; Canchanchara made from 'fire water', local honey and lime juice. There will even be a musician or two serenading you and your fellow travellers as you dine.

DAY 7: Trinidad

Today is a free day in Trinidad. For some beachside fun and perhaps a little snorkelling, head down to Playa Ancon. Just be careful you don't stand on a sea urchin. At some point while you're here, a great activity is to go to a folklore show at one of the town's numerous open-air venues. Cuba has a rich and varied music and dance tradition that draws roots from Spain, Africa and France, and this is your chance to experience it all first-hand, from the Mambo to the rumba.

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DAY 8: Trinidad / Santa Clara / Havana

Head inland to Santa Clara (approximately 1.5 hours) to lunch then visit the Che Guevara mausoleum. Here you'll see the statue of the iconic revolutionary leader looming. In the museum that accompanies the mausoleum, you'll find an intriguing spread of photos and other ephemera related to Che - letters, medical devices, firearms. Return to the capital (3 hours) for your final night to enjoy Havana.

DAY 9: Havana

Your trip comes to an end after breakfast this morning as there are no activities planned for today.

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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS

Accommodation	Standard
Inclusions	Accommodation in hotels and guesthouses Meals as specified in itinerary Transportation by private vehicle Arrival transfer on Day 1 only Sightseeing tours as specified in itinerary Services of local guide EXCLUSIONS: International flights Visas Travel Insurance Beverages Personal Expenses Gratuities for tour guides/drivers Any items not mentioned as included
Difficulty Rating	1 (easy)
Single Surcharge	Available upon request
Notes	Contact us for more details
Price Dependent upon	Season and availability

SUSTAINABILITY

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Chimu Adventures undertakes a number of sustainability measures within its operations including:

- 1) Only using local guides and office staff to both maximise local employment opportunities and minimise carbon footprints. Local guides also ensure you benefit from the intimate knowledge, passion and culture of the country you're visiting.
- 2) Where possible, using locally owned and operated boutique hotels to maximise the return to the local community.
- 3) Chimu's "Pass it on" programme has provided funding to hundreds of local community projects in Latin America. Our aim is to empower local communities, helping them to develop their own infrastructure for the future. Since 2006, we have been working with Kiva (a well-known Non-Governmental Organisation), providing hundreds of loans to local businesses all over South America.
- 4) In our pre tour information we provide a range of tips and advice on how to minimise your impact on both local environments and communities.
- 5) Chimu Adventures' offices also take a number of sustainability measures including carbon offsets for company vehicles and most staff travel. Chimu Adventure's internal processes are also structured to create a paperless office and to reduce waste. There are also internal programmes to help staff minimise their carbon footprint such as our staff bike purchase assistance plan which encourages office staff to commute to work via bicycle. Currently almost half of our office based staff commute to work via bicycle.

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