

CUBA - GRAND CUBA, 20 DAY



INTRODUCTION

Discover the old and new faces of Cuba on an adventure through the country’s vibrant towns, vast plantations, myriad waterfalls and idyllic beaches. From the elegant streets of Havana to the colourful clubs of Trinidad, sip rum with the locals, practice your best salsa moves and discover the welcoming spirit of this island nation. With opportunities to explore the twisting colonial streets of Camaguey, immerse yourself in the legend of Che Guevara, and experience local life on a farm in Vinales, this adventure is sure to leave you captivated by Cuba’s beauty, rhythm and spirit.

ITINERARY

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DEPARTURE
Departs select Sundays
DURATION
20 Days
LOCATIONS
Havana, Vincales, Camaguey, Cienfuegos, Soroa


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DAY 1: Havana

Bienvenido a Cuba! Welcome to Cuba! Set to the soundtrack and backdrop of the 1950s, tumbledown Havana is a capital unlike any other. A complimentary arrival transfer is included with your trip. There will be a welcome meeting at approximately 6pm this evening. Please expect a letter from your leader in the afternoon of Day 1 to confirm the place of your meeting (if by 5pm you cannot locate this letter then please ask your guesthouse owner if one has been delivered, or ask to call our assistance line listed in the "Problems and emergency contact information" section of this document). We'll be collecting your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting, so ensure you have all these details to provide to your leader. The tour briefing is generally followed by an optional group dinner. 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

Havana's history is as colourful as it's cars and buildings. Today, you will be taken on a guided tour of the Havana vieja. Havana remains one of the great colonial cities of the Americas. An air of faded glory comes through in the peeling paint of some of its grand old buildings. Narrow streets, spacious plazas and Spanish architecture make it a charm to explore on foot. Visit La Catedral San Cristobal de la Habana, the Palacio de los Marqueses de Aguas Claras and the Plaza de Armas. Also visit the Museo de la Revolucion, to learn about the history of the Cuban Revolution. Afterwards, enjoy some free time to further explore on your own. Ask your leader to help you book one of the many optional activities such as a Cigar factory tour, the Ernest Hemingway tour, or a cruise around Outer-Havana in a vintage American car. Alternatively you could simply stroll along the Malecon or join the hundreds of locals lining up to eat a Coppelia ice-cream. Heavily subsidised by the government, a whole bowl will set you back about 10 cents.

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DAY 3: Cienfuegos

On the way to Cienfuegos today, pick up some Spanish during an informal Spanish lesson from your leader. First, stop at the peaceful sandy arc of Playa Giron (approximately 2.5 hours), which sits on the eastern side of the Bahia de Cochinos, better known as the Bay of Pigs. It was famously here that the CIA sponsored a failed invasion by exile forces in 1961. It's not just the history that's the attraction here - with crystal clear Caribbean waters, a deep underwater wall, and an outstanding variety of coral and fish, it's a haven for snorkelers. If there's time, strap on a hired mask and some flippers and take a dive into sapphire-coloured water teeming with tropical marine life. Afterwards, travel on to Cienfuegos (approximately 1.5 hours), known affectionately as 'The Pearl of the South'. Part of the city's appeal lies in its colonial centre, which features wide Parisian-style boulevards and elegant colonnades. Drive along the peninsula to see Cienfuegos' architectural pride and joy, the Moroccan-influenced Palacio del Valle.

DAY 4: Trinidad

Leave Cienfuegos and head north to the final resting place of Cuba's most famous son. In Santa Clara (approximately 1 hour), you'll visit the Che Guevara mausoleum and memorial. Che's remains were brought here after they were found in a remote corner of Bolivia in 1997, where he was assassinated by the CIA-backed Bolivian army. Check out the impressive bronze statue of Che bearing his rifle and learn about his incredible life. Then it's a short drive south, through the Topes de Collantes National Park to Trinidad, which sits on the scenic Caribbean coast (approximately 1.5 hours). For many visitors to Cuba, Trinidad is a standout destination. No other colonial city in Cuba is as well preserved, and the local residents are extremely friendly and festive. Trinidad is steeped in religion, including the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria, which has connections to Voodoo. On an orientation walk today, see the former wealth generated by the sugar industry in the town's once-grand mansions, colourful public buildings, wrought iron grill-work and cobblestoned streets. Party the night away at one of the town's live music venues or why not take in a folklore show at one of the town's numerous open-air venues.

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DAY 5: Trinidad

Today is a good opportunity to visit the Museo Nacional de la Lucha Contra los Bandidos and the Casa de los Mártires de Trinidad; both chronicle the struggles of the revolutionary period in the town's history. At some point while you're here you'll undertake an informal salsa class. Cuba has a hugely rich and varied dance and musical tradition that draws its roots from Africa and France. Many styles that have greatly influenced music worldwide originated in Cuba, such as Mambo, Cha-cha-cha, son and rumba. There's also a chance to get a hands-on lesson with the musical instruments themselves in a percussion workshop. By now, hopefully you've learnt enough of the local rhythms to join in with the locals - maybe at a certain venue hidden within a cave!

DAY 6: Trinidad

Trinidad is a standout destination in its own right, but it's also the gateway to the Valle de los Ingenios, and a bike is a great way to explore the local area. Be warned however: Cuba's bicycles, like its cars, are vintage, which means a little bit of practicality may be sacrificed for the romantic element! There are also some great treks to be made in the nearby Sierra del Escambray mountains; maybe drive along the legendary twists and turns of the road to El Nicho, then hike to its beautiful waterfall. Playa Ancon is also close by - there's plenty of opportunity for relaxing on its long, unspoilt beaches or snorkelling through the clear waters (just watch carefully for sea urchins, which can be a problem here).

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DAY 7: Camaguey

Travel through the centre of the country to Camaguey (approximately 5-6 hours). Despite its size, Cuba's third largest city has managed to retain much of its colonial heritage. Exploring the city's winding streets is half the fun. The city was planned in a deliberately confusing pattern to disorient any would-be assailants. As you walk through the city you may still see tinajones - large clay pots used for collecting water. On your explorations, stop by the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de la Soledad to see its baroque frescoes. Camaguey has a rich tradition of cultural and technological leadership within Cuba. It is the birthplace of poet laureate Nicolas Guillen and home of the Ballet de Camaguey. Cuba's first radio and television emissions were broadcast from Camaguey, and the country's first airport and commercial flights were planned and executed here.

DAY 8: Camaguey

Enjoy a tour of Camaguey by bicycle taxi. Cycling is a popular form of transport in Cuba, and bicycle taxis are very common. In the confusing streets of Camaguey, it's a particularly good way to get around. On the tour, you'll visit a local market, parks, plazas and an art gallery. Each taxi carries two passengers and the tour is led by an English-speaking local guide. Your leader may suggest visiting a local farmers' market, where you'll get a fascinating insight into daily Cuban life and the local economy. This is where farmers can sell their produce after meeting the quota they have to sell to the state. Camaguey's is a particularly busy and colourful market. There are separate areas for produce sold by the state and produce sold by farmers directly to the public. There are plenty of interesting tropical fruits, vegetables and herbs available. This is where the locals come to buy their food once their monthly food ration runs out. Later, your leader will take you to a local bar where you'll get compare a white rum to an aged rum. Cuba specifically is known as the origin of some of the smoothest and most sought-after rums on the entire planet. Havana Club is likely to be showcased as this brand was created in Cuba in 1934 and is now one of the best-selling rum brands in the world.

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DAY 9: Santiago de Cuba

Head west along the Carretera Central to Santiago de Cuba with a stop in Bayamo. Today is the longest travel day of the trip. Depending on how many stops are made, this usually takes six to seven hours. Santiago is the hottest place in Cuba - in terms of both temperature and the vibe of the city! Set between the indomitable Sierra Maestra mountain range and the azure Caribbean, this city's historical centre and colonial architecture retain a timeworn air ideal for photographers.

DAY 10: Santiago de Cuba

Set off on a three-hour city tour of Santiago. You'll visit El Morro Castle, Ifigenia cemetery and the Moncada barracks and learn about the city's rich history. For nearly a century, the city was the island's seat of power and it also played a vital role in the Revolution. The people of Santiago were the first to rise up in arms against government troops in 1956, and it was in Santiago on January 1st 1959, that Fidel Castro declared the triumph of the Revolution. With a strong Afro-Cuban heritage it's no surprise that Santiago has a vibrant music scene, and is seen as Cuba's capital of music. It's the home of son music, which is a mix of Spanish guitar and African percussion. Santiago's half million residents are proud of their cultural traditions, so you'll find many museums and cultural clubs around the city. The city is also famous for its energetic Carnaval celebrations and its lively Festival of Caribbean Culture. All this will entice the shyest, most left-footed dancer and the non-musically inclined to learn some salsa moves or take a lesson in local music.

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DAY 11: Baracoa

A spectacular five-hour journey to Baracoa will take you through the dry region surrounding Guantanamo, dotted with cacti and wiry goats, and then along the dramatic Atlantic coastline, before winding through verdant mountains to Baracoa. On the way, if running to time you will get the chance to visit the Mirador de Malones for a pretty good view of the Guantanamo Naval Base and surrounding bay. At present the base is not open to the public. If you are keen to see this, please ask your leader, and they will tell you if visits are currently allowed. Baracoa is set on a beautiful bay, this was the first colonial town, and it's one of the most beautiful in Cuba. You'll have a couple of days here to explore and relax. Take a walk around the town to get your bearings, then maybe head to a lovely black sand beach an easy walk from town. As one of Cuba's major agricultural zones, Baracoa is a great place to try local foods. It's one of the best places for chocolate, and street vendors and small restaurants offer local specialties like prawns in coconut sauce and banana-stuffed tamales. One particularly sought-after Baracoa specialty is the cucurucho, a sweet treat of coconut, sugar, and fruit wrapped in dried cone-shaped palm leaves.

DAY 12: Baracoa

Today is a free day to explore Baracoa. The town was only accessible by sea until 1960, and even after a road linking Baracoa to Guantanamo was built, the settlement maintained a small-town colonial feel. Uncover its individuality as you wander along its beautiful malecon or ramble over various forts that were built to withstand pirate attacks. The Catedral de Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion boasts a bust of the indigenous leader Hatuey, who was burned at the stake for refusing to accept the Spanish and their Catholicism. You might prefer to chill on a beach or get active with a hike to El Yunke, the famous table-top mountain sighted by Columbus during his first voyage to the island.

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DAY 13: Baracoa

Today you have another free day in Baracoa. Why not set out on a hike through the rainforest to explore nearby caves and waterfalls. Perhaps pay a visit to Humboldt Nation Park, looking out for colourful parrots, lizards and hummingbirds. Take a boat tour down a nearby river, spotting wildlife along the way, or maybe stop in at a working farm to learn about life on the land. After the sun goes down, enjoy a cocktail near the beach or check out the town's nightlife.

DAY 14: Havana

Today take a one-and-a-half hour flight from Baracoa to Havana arriving approximately 4pm. Please note that it is not uncommon for these flights to be delayed. After arriving back into the capital, head to Plaza de la Revolución for your final taste of Cuban revolutionary history, watched over by the memorials of Ernesto “Che” Guevara, José Martí and Camilo Cienfuegos. In the evening Perhaps take a stroll along the malecon (ocean walkway) or soak up the atmospheric vibes of the Old Town. At the end of a long day, it's time for a mojito or cuba libre and final night of salsa in Habana Vieja's bars. Hit the streets and celebrate the end of a fantastic adventure.

DAY 15: Havana

Today is a free day in Havana. Your leader can assist you to book any optional activities.

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DAY 16: Soroa

Spend the morning enjoying a short tour around Old Havana. This well-preserved part of the city was designated a World Heritage Site in 1982. The streets are lined with colonial architecture, 16th-century fortresses and many beautiful churches. Next head to Callejon de Hamel, an alley located in Havana's working class Cayo Hueso quarter. Adorned with the evocative Santeria murals of local artist Salvador Gonzalez, this lively street is Havana's centre of Afro-Cuban culture. Every Sunday afternoon it plays host to famous Afro-Cuban rumbas. Continue on to the community of Las Terrazas, the pioneering ecovillage dates back to a reforestation project in 1968. Meet some of the residents and learn how they work together to support their neighbours, as well as showcasing their open studios, woodwork and pottery workshops. Utilise some of the Spanish phrases to interact with the locals that your leader has taught you on the bus. Finally head to Soroa, heavily forested Sierra del Rosario to check in to your guesthouse for the night.

DAY 17: Vinales

In the morning, enjoy a tour of a Soroa orchid garden, which boasts over 700 species of orchid. You'll also have the option to take a steep 1-kilometre climb up a mountain path to a lookout. Next, travel to the community of Las Terrazas, a pioneering ecovillage that dates back to a reforestation project in 1968. Meet some of the residents and learn how they work together to support their neighbours, as well as how they showcase their open studios, woodwork and pottery workshops. Head towards Vinales, stopping by Finca de Plantas Medicinales (a herb farm) to learn about local herbs and their medicinal properties. Because of historical sanctions against Cuba, the country has had to find ways to be self-sufficient, with a prime example being to develop its own medicines, many of which are herbal. You'll see how herbs are grown, dried and crushed before being sent to a factory to be processed into medicines. Afterwards, drive a short distance to the small town of Vinales in Pinar del Rio Province. On arrival, your leader will take you on a short orientation walk of the town.

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DAY 18: Vinales

This morning, take an early guided walking tour of surrounding farmlands and the Vinales valley. Surrounded by limestone cliffs and interspersed with small farms, the scenery around Vinales is some of the most picturesque in Cuba. The valley receives some of the highest amounts of rainfall in the country, and so, you'll see the limestone karts and valley floor covered in vegetation. Visit a local farm where you'll have the opportunity to experience the guajiro (agricultural worker) way of life. Depending on the season, you can choose to help out with daily farm activities, such as toasting and grinding coffee or harvesting yuca, corn or tobacco. This is also your opportunity to marvel at the speed and skill of the local's cigar rolling technique. In the afternoon, perhaps book in for a cave tour or a beach excursion to Cayo Jutias but be sure to get back in time for a relaxed salsa lesson with your group. After dancing your heart out, you would've worked up an appetite, so an optional dinner at one of Vinales' farm-to-table restaurants is highly recommended. Eat organic like the locals at an eco-friendly ranch and learn how Cubans have lived off their land for decades.

DAY 19: Vinales / Cayo Jutias / Vinales

Today travel back to Havana by private vehicle (approximately 3 hours). You'll have a free afternoon to explore the city's Old Town and wander the harbourside esplanade called the Malecon. This esplanade also acts as a seawall and roadway, diving the historic French and Spanish-inspired architecture from the Straits of Florida. In the evening, head out on the town. Havana's nightlife is varied and lively, full of bars, clubs and places to see a cabaret show. Why not put your new salsa skills into practice on one of the city's many dancefloors?

DAY 20: Havana

Today marks the last day of your incredible tour through Cuba. With no activities planned for the day, you are free to spend the day at your leisure and depart your accommodation at any time. perhaps you will continue your journey through the other incredible corners of South America, or you may wish to board a departure flight homebound to share your experiences wioth family and friends

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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS

Accommodation	Standard
Inclusions	<p>Meals 11 breakfasts, 1 lunch</p> <p>Transport Private vehicle, Plane, Local transport</p> <p>Accommodation Standard guesthouse (19nights)</p>
Difficulty Rating	1 (easy)
Single Surcharge	Available upon request, contact us for more details.
Notes	Contact us for more details.
Price Dependent upon	Departure date, seasonality and availability

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SUSTAINABILITY

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 structures 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

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bicycle. Currently almost half of our office based staff commute to work via bicycle.

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