



# TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

**CUBAN ODYSSEY**

**21 days**



## Tour Highlights

- Explore colonial history of Old Havana
- Visit the historically significant Plaza de la Revolución
- Coffee plantations in Las Terrazas
- Rolling tobacco fields in the Viñales valley
- Visit museum commemorating the Bay of Pigs invasion
- Eclectic architecture in Cienfuegos
- Beautiful scenery and nature of the Sierra del Escambray
- Cobbled colonial streets of Trinidad
- Camagüey's labyrinth of winding alleys
- Afro-Caribbean culture of Santiago de Cuba
- Rugged coastal scenery of Baracoa
- Visit Ché Guevara's mausoleum in Santa Clara

## Places visited

Havana • Las Terrazas • Viñales • Bay of Pigs • Playa Girón • Cienfuegos • Sierra del Escambray • Trinidad • Ciego de Ávila • Camagüey • Bayamo • Santiago de Cuba • Guantanamo • Baracoa • Playa Guardalavaca • Santa Clara

## What's included

- Arrival & departure transfers
- Ground transport with driver
- Accommodation
- Meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
- Escorted English-speaking guide
- Entrance fees to sites & parks

## What's not included

- Meals not mentioned in itinerary
- Drinks
- Visa fees
- Tipping
- Camera / video camera fees
- Personal items (laundry, telephone, etc.)
- Medical expenses
- Any services not mentioned in itinerary

*All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.*



## Your Itinerary Explained

Date	Place visited	Meals
	<p>The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>The part of the day's text in italics (and comes after the three dashes "---") is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.</i></p>	<p>B: Breakfast</p> <p>L: Lunch</p> <p>D: Dinner</p>

## Tour Itinerary

Day 1	Havana	Meals
 <p>Flight</p>	<p>Arrive in Havana airport where you will be greeted by a Travel The Unknown representative and transferred by classic car to your casa. Overnight in Havana.</p> <p>---</p>	<p>N/A</p>
Day 2	Havana	Meals
 <p>El Capitolio</p>	<p>In the morning, take a walking tour of the Old Havana district, known for its pastel-coloured colonial buildings and its elegantly crumbling facades. Visit the some its enchanting plazas, including the beautiful neoclassical buildings in the Plaza de Armas and the baroque cathedral in the Plaza de la Catedral. After lunch, the rest of the day is free to explore Havana at your leisure. Stroll through its cobbled streets, visit the imposing Capitolio building, shop for revolutionary literature or stop off for a cocktail in a local bar. Overnight in Havana.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Founded in the 16th century by the Spanish, Cuba's capital <b>Havana</b> became the springboard for the Spanish conquest of the Americas because of its strategic location. It is often seen as being three cities in one with Old Havana, Vedado and modern suburban districts. <b>Old Havana</b> boasts a variety of different Western architectural styles such as Baroque and Neo-Classical and different features such as palaces, fortresses and squares. Its buildings and fortress walls were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982 and sit comfortably next to art deco and more modern styles.</i></p>	<p>B</p>

## Day 3

## Havana

## Meals



Vedado

In the morning, take a walking tour of Vedado, the new part of Havana. Visit the Plaza de la Revolucion where some of Cuba's most important political speeches have taken place. The afternoon is free for you to explore Havana and stroll along the Malecon which faces out to Florida (only 90 miles away) or have cocktails at the famous Hotel de Nacional where you may see musicians reminiscent of Buena Vista Social Club perform. Overnight in Havana.

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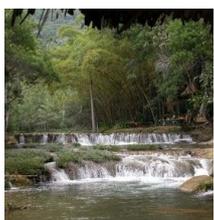
**Vedado** developed in the 19th century, funded by the wealth generated from the sugar industry. The now crumbling houses were once a sign of wealth and opulence. In the district lies the Plaza de la Revolución where Castro made some of his most rousing speeches and the Malecón, which offers fantastic views over the sea. The famous Hotel Nacional, which was a favourite of mafia bosses and Hollywood stars alike in the 1940s and '50s, is found here and worth a visit.

B

## Day 4

## Havana - Las Terrazas - Viñales

## Meals



Las Terrazas

Early start from Havana to Las Terrazas, the verdant coffee region of Cuba. On arrival take a gentle walk around the lake and visit the community. There is the option to do ziplining, cycling or take a boat ride on the lake (not included). Have lunch at one of the small restaurants followed by a cup of locally sourced coffee. Afterwards, continue the journey to Viñales. On arrival, enjoy marvellous views of the Viñales valley from the viewpoint at Los Jasmines Hotel. Check in to your casa and overnight in Viñales.

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Designated as a bio-reserve by UNESCO, the small community and nature reserve of **Las Terrazas** is nestled in the Sierra La Rosario Mountains. The reserve covers 5000 hectares of forest which was planted on the deforested hills by building terraces to avoid erosion. The forest includes lakes, rivers and waterfalls and is rich in a wide variety of flora and is home to 117 bird species. It was part of a reforestation project thought up by Castro to help improve the life of the impoverished residents in the area.

Surrounded by limestone hills known as mogotes, the picturesque **Viñales** valley is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The local farmers still use traditional agricultural techniques to grow tobacco and the area has its own unique culture that is preserved through its architecture, crafts and music. Caves are nestled within the slopes of the mogotes, which were inhabited before the Spanish arrived, and the valley is home to endemic flora and fauna such as the Mountain Palm, the bee hummingbird and the Cuban tocororo.

B

## Day 5

## Viñales

## Meals



Viñales -  
tobacco  
production

Walk through the tobacco fields and watch the sunrise. Stop off at a local tobacco farmer's home to learn how they grow the tobacco and how the cigars are made, before returning to the casa for breakfast. After breakfast, proceed to the Cueva del Indio, the largest cave system in Cuba. Take a boat ride through the cave and observe some fascinating rock formations close up. The rest of the day is free to spend relaxing or visiting the small town square. You can also go horse riding, which can be arranged through your guide (not included). Overnight in Viñales.

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B

## Day 6

## Viñales - Soroa

## Meals



Viñales

Depart early from Viñales and drive to Soroa, a beautiful National Biosphere Reserve located in Sierra del Rosario. After checking in at your casa, visit the Orchid Nursery botanical garden of Soroa with more than 25,000 orchid species from different parts of the world, including around 100 Cuban species. Afterwards, there is time to bathe at the Soroa Waterfall, known as the Cuban Rainbow, which stands at more than 22 metres high. The afternoon is free to walk around the area or visit the Soroa viewpoint. Overnight in Soroa.

B

## Day 7

## Soroa - Bay of Pigs - Playa Girón

## Meals



Bay of Pigs

Depart Soroa and drive to Playa Girón on Cuba's south coast. On the way, visit Cuba's largest crocodile conservation centre in Guama. After lunch, visit the museum dedicated to Cuba's victory at the infamous Bay of Pigs Invasion. The rest of the day is at leisure to relax by the beach at Playa Girón. Our guide will take you to a picturesque area of the beach where you can swim surrounded by dozens of fish. Overnight stay in Playa Girón.

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***The Bay of Pigs Invasion*** was a botched attempt to overthrow the Cuban Communist government. Since the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Castro became increasingly antagonistic towards the US who saw his close relationship with the Soviet Union as a threat to their interests. After many failed attempts to usurp Castro, on 17th April 1961, CIA trained Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs armed with American weapons. It was hoped that the exiled force would act as a rallying point for Cuban Citizenry. However, the plan quickly fell apart as the exile force was met with an unexpected Cuban counter-attack and the small Cuban air force sank their supply ships. As a result, 100 soldiers were killed, over 1,100 captured and the uprising never happened. This failure cost the US dearly as Castro used the attack to solidify his power and requested Soviet aid which eventually sparked the Cuban Missile Crisis. It also affected US relations with other countries in Latin America as Castro was now considered a hero for standing up to US interference and imperialism.

**Playa Girón** is a beach and village on the east bank of the Bay of Pigs. Playa Girón is located in one of the largest wetlands in the world, Zapata Swamp.

## Day 8

### Playa Girón - Cienfuegos

Meals



Cueva de los  
Peces

In the morning, leave for Cienfuegos, driving through many citrus fruit and sugar plantations on the Zapata Peninsula. On the way, stop at Cueva de los Peces, a large sinkhole containing hundreds of multi-coloured fish. Drive on to Cienfuegos and check into a casa close to the Punta Gorda. Evening is free to spend as you wish. Overnight in Cienfuegos.

B

## Day 9

### Cienfuegos

Meals



Cienfuegos

Spend the day sightseeing in Cienfuegos. The focus of this tour is the city's main square Parque Marti, recently declared a UNESCO heritage site, which is surrounded by the impressive Palacio del Ayuntamiento, the elegant Italian style Teatro Tomas Terry and the neo-classical cathedral. Stroll through the bustling Paseo del Prado, which is lined with colonial buildings and shops. You may also hear music from Benny Moré, Cienfuegos' most famous musician, being played on the public speakers. Overnight stay in Cienfuegos.

B

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*Cuba's 'Perla del Sur' (Pearl of the South), **Cienfuegos** was officially founded in 1819 by Frenchman Don Louis de Clouet and the influence the European settlers had on the city is still clearly evident to this day. The historic old town, cited as an outstanding example of 19th century urban planning, is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.*

## Day 10

### Cienfuegos - Sierra del Escambray - Trinidad

Meals



Sierra del  
Escambray

Leave Cienfuegos for the tropical mountains of Sierra del Escambray, just 30 mins from Cienfuegos. Have lunch there and then take a soft trek (2-3 hours) around El Nicho, which has waterfalls and natural lagoons. Pack your bathing costumes and towel should you decide to take a dip in one of the lagoons (note, water is cold). Look out for endemic birds and enjoy panoramic views of the lush green mountains. Late afternoon leave for Trinidad. Evening free to stroll around the cobbled plaza in Trinidad. Overnight in Trinidad.

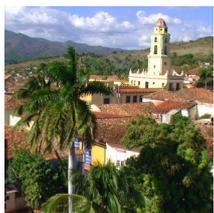
B

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*The **Sierra del Escambray** is a mountain range located in central Cuba. Pico San Juan, the range's highest peak, stands at 960 metres above sea level. Popular sites include the stunning El Nicho waterfall, the Topes de Collantes Natural Park with waterfalls, caves, rivers and canyons and the Valle de los Ingenios, which formed the epicentre of Cuba's sugar trade in the 19th century. From 1960-62, the mountains provided the backdrop to the War against Bandits and were the planned refuge during the Bay of Pigs Invasion.*

## Day 11

## Trinidad

Meals



Trinidad

Morning walking tour around Trinidad, a justifiable UNESCO heritage site, with a charming colonial central plaza, cathedral, pastille-coloured buildings that line the cobbled street. Afternoon, visit the Valle de los Ingenios, or Sugar Valley as it's known. Climb the watch tower for panoramic views of the stunning landscape. Stop off at other vantage points and at the local pottery making workshop where you can buy handicrafts. Return to the centre of Trinidad. Evening free. Overnight in Trinidad.

B

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*Founded in 1514, **Trinidad** prospered from the sugar trade in the 19th Century. Set between the Escambray Mountains and the beautiful Caribbean coastline, the city was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982. Its architecture is a mix of 18th Century Moorish and Andalusian influences and 19th Century European neoclassical forms. The irregular pattern of the city's squares and cobbled streets make it a great city to explore. It is a perfectly preserved example of a Spanish colonial settlement with its illustrious colonial style mansions full of Italian frescoes, wedgewood china and French chandeliers which hark back to the city's heyday.*

## Day 12

## Trinidad - Ciego de Ávila - Camagüey

Meals



Ciego de Ávila

After breakfast, leave for Camagüey. Stop en-route at Ciego de Ávila for lunch, arriving early afternoon in Camagüey. The evening is free to rest. Overnight in Camagüey.

B

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*Founded in 1840, the city of **Ciego de Ávila** is in the central part of Cuba. It is a major centre for commerce and transportation for the surrounding agricultural lands. Sugarcane is the main commodity although tropical fruits, beeswax, honey and molasses are also produced. It is regarded as the most modern of Cuba's provincial capitals and the famous pop-artist Raúl Martínez was born there. Much of the city's neoclassical architecture was commissioned by the widowed socialite Angela Hernández, viuda de Jiménez, who fought to create a cultural hub in her hometown.*

## Day 13

## Camagüey

Meals



Camagüey

Enjoy a half-day walking tour in Camagüey where you will explore its maze-like streets, around the corners of which lie hidden churches and squares. The rest of the day is free. Overnight in Camagüey.

B

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***Camagüey** is the third largest city in Cuba. It's a labyrinth of winding alleys and forked streets which, according to local legend, was to defend the city against pirates and raiders. A more practical, and far less exotic, reason is that the city developed without proper planning. Camagüey's historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage site.*

## Day 14

## Camagüey - Bayamo - Santiago de Cuba

## Meals



Santiago de Cuba

Drive to Santiago de Cuba, stopping en route for lunch in the city of Bayamo (not included). On arrival in Santiago, the rest of the day is at your leisure. Overnight in Santiago de Cuba.

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*The easterly city of **Bayamo** is considered the Cradle of Cuban Nationality; the first sparks of the Cuban revolution against Spain were ignited here in the 19th century. The capital of the Granma province, Bayamo pre-dates both Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and the sense of history here is palpable; a large number of residents still use a horse and cart as their principal mode of transport.*

***Santiago de Cuba** was founded by the Spanish in 1514 and experienced an influx of French immigrants coming from Haiti in the late 18th Century. This French influence added to the eclectic mix of African and Spanish cultures already thriving in the city. The city was the launch pad of Fidel Castro's nationalist Revolution. Santiago de Cuba was the hometown of the poet Jose Maria Heredia and is a major hub for culture and the arts. Its famous for its traditional dances such as guaguanco and son, from which salsa is derived. The citadel is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for being the best example of Spanish-American military architecture.*

B

## Day 15

## Santiago de Cuba

## Meals



Santiago de Cuba - bric-a-brac shop

Enjoy a free day in Santiago de Cuba, relax and explore the city at your leisure. Overnight stay in Santiago de Cuba.

B

## Day 16

## Santiago de Cuba - Guantánamo - Baracoa

## Meals



Guantanamo

After breakfast, set off for Baracoa, a wild rugged town set on Cuba's eastern tip. Stop in Guantánamo en route, now more famous for the controversial US Naval Base. After a short tour of Guantánamo, continue the journey to Baracoa and check in at the casa. The evening is free at your leisure. Overnight in Baracoa.

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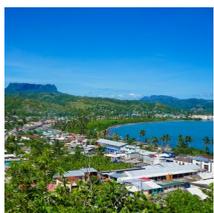
B

Although it is famous for its US navy base, **Guantanamo's** landscape is one of contrasts; thick rainforests in the north, and dry arid land in the south. The Nipe-Sagua-Baracoa Mountains dominate the region, dividing the climate. The north coast is battered by winds and is the wettest part of the country whilst the south is dry and sheltered and the hottest. The province is 80 kilometres away from Haiti at its closest point and is close enough to see the lights of Haiti on a clear night. The province receives a high number of Jamaican immigrants and much of the architecture is comparable to the French Quarter of New Orleans making Guantanamo a place unlike any other in Cuba.

## Day 17

### Baracoa

### Meals



Baracoa

In the morning, go on a walking tour of the city. The rest of the day is free to spend the day by the coast or explore more of the town and sample some of the best cuisine in Cuba. The guide can provide suggestions based on your interests. Overnight in Baracoa.

B

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**Baracoa** is the oldest Spanish settlement in Cuba and was the country's first capital. It is located on the spot where Christopher Columbus first landed on his first voyage to Cuba and is the only place where the descendents of the indigenous Taino still live. The table-topped hill, El Yunque, looms over the city and the cobbled streets are lined with carnival-coloured one story buildings. Cocoa is grown in the surrounding region and the city is famous for its white chocolate. The geographical isolation makes it an ideal destination for those looking to get away from the busier places that are typically popular with tourists.

## Day 18

### Baracoa - Playa Guardalavaca - Holguín

### Meals



Playa Guardalavaca

Early morning departure to visit the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt on the way to Holguín. Stop for lunch at Playa Guardalavaca, where you will have some time to relax and enjoy one of the most beautiful beaches in Cuba. Arrival to Holguín in the afternoon. Overnight in Holguín.

B

Note: You may choose between beach time at Guardalavaca or visit some of the attractions in Holguín.

## Day 19

### Holguín - Santa Clara

### Meals



Santa Clara

Early departure from Holguín to arrive in Camagüey in time for lunch. Arrive in Santa Clara in the late afternoon, where the rest of the day is free for you to explore at leisure. Overnight in Santa Clara.

B

Located in the heart of Cuba, **Santa Clara** was founded in 1689 by citizens of the coastal city of Remedios, who wanted to escape regular pirate attacks. One of the city's famous former inhabitants was the philanthropist, Marta Abreu de Estévez, also known as the Benefactress of the city. Wishing to improve the lives of Santa Clara's citizens, Marta Abreu donated large sums of money to the city, and her influence can still be seen throughout Santa Clara today; an asylum, several schools and a theatre still stand. The city is most well-known as the final resting place of Ché Guevara, who captured Santa Clara during the final battle of the Cuban Revolution in 1958, toppling Batista's regime.

## Day 20

### Santa Clara - Havana

## Meals



Ché Guevara's Mausoleum

After breakfast, visit the main sites of Santa Clara, including Vidal Park and Ché Guevara's Mausoleum, where the Latin American hero was re-buried. Learn about his influence on Cuba and why he is so revered. After lunch, depart for Havana for your final night in Cuba.

B

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**Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara** was a revered and controversial historical figure. Born in Argentina, he became radicalised when, as a medical student, he witnessed the terrible poverty, hunger and disease during his travels around South America. This fused with his interest in Marxism and he realised that the only way to solve South and Central America's problems was through armed revolution. In 1954, he travelled to Mexico, met Fidel Castro and joined his 26th July Movement. He played a key role in the guerrilla war against the Cuban dictator Batista, capturing Santa Clara in the final battle of the revolution and toppling the dictator's regime. He guided the country towards a friendship with the Soviet Union which, thanks to US sanctions, damaged Cuba's economy and, along with some unsuccessful reforms, caused him to fall out with Cuba's leaders. He left the country in 1965 to spread revolution to parts of the developing world. After an unsuccessful guerrilla campaign in the Congo, Guevara travelled to Bolivia to lead forces fighting against the government. He was captured with the help of the CIA and executed on 9th October 1967. His remains were exhumed in 1997 and reburied in Santa Clara. During his life, Ché Guevara was a prolific writer and wrote a manual on guerrilla warfare as well as a memoir of his time travelling as a student. Today, he is still a hero in Cuba and has become a worldwide symbol of anti-imperialism and revolution. His image has become a commodity over the years and is found on an endless array of items that contribute to the consumer culture that he hated.

## Day 21

### Departure from Havana

## Meals



Flight

Transfer to the airport for your departure flight and onward journey.

B