

CUBA- GENERAL INFORMATION

Country's Profile

"It is the most beautiful island that eyes ever beheld" Christopher Columbus.

Situated 90 miles south of the Florida Keys, Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean, and the most westerly of the Greater Antilles Group. With miles of golden beaches, rich, colorful scenery and a proud cultural heritage this stunningly beautiful and exceptionally diverse country has been enticing visitors since Columbus landed here in 1492. There are few more fascinating destinations in the Caribbean than Cuba – not least because it has been a socialist republic since the 1959 revolution, when Fidel Castro seized power. This last remaining vestige of state socialism was also once the last stronghold of Spanish power in the region.

Cuba's rich artistic heritage ranges from pre-Columbian cultures to the splendors of Spanish colonialism and the internationally-acclaimed art of today. It is a place of great natural beauty, with three magnificent mountain ranges and fertile plains where sugar cane and tobacco grow, not to mention some of the best beaches in the world.

A quarter of Cuba's 11.2 million people live in and around Havana, which claims to being the most beautiful city in the Caribbean.

Old Havana, with its square mile of colonial palaces, handsome plazas and charming cobbled alleys was, along with Mexico City and Lima, one of the three richest Spanish cities outside Spain. It has been designated by UNESCO as a city of world heritage and was recently awarded one of the "Seven City Wonders of the World".

Cuba has an easy-going, multicultural population whose greatest enthusiasm is reserved for music. It is the home of the modern rumba, actually of African origin, the mamba, the cha-cha-cha and the salsa. Cuban jazz is also excellent. Wherever you go on the island, music will go with you.

Cuba's official language is Spanish though English has always been taught in schools. The country has a socialist political and economic system and it is now in its 53rd year of its revolution.

Social, political and economic life

Fidel Castro relinquished his presidency in 2006 due to ill health and his brother Raul Castro has been the new President ever since. The U.S. and Cuba reestablished political relations in July 2016 but the US still maintains its embargo on the Caribbean Island. Education and Health Care is free for Cubans and housing and home energy costs are low.

The economy is now headed by international tourism, nickel, and pharmaceutical products, although traditional exports such as sugar, cigars and citrus fruits are still important. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the European Socialist countries, Cuba has been redesigning its economy, providing an increasing space to foreign investment and local private entrepreneurship.

Weather

Cuba is an all-year-round sunny Caribbean tropical island with an average yearly temperature of 25 C. The region can be subject to tropical storms and hurricanes, which can occur anytime between June and November

In the event of such natural occurrences Cuba is well organized to move travelers from the area where they are staying to another area to avoid the prevailing conditions. As Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean, some 1200 Km in length, such occurrences can be limited to a small part of the island and not affect all areas.

Visas, insurance, money and shopping -

There are two local currencies in Cuba: the Cuban Peso (CUP), which is the official one, which was highly devaluated during the economic crises of the 90's used mainly by locals, and the Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC's), which is 87 cents CUC = 1 US\$ and used by foreign visitors to pay for most of their services in Cuba. Foreign currency can be exchanged to CUC at airports, hotels, exchange bureaus and ATM's. Credit cards are accepted at some hotels, shops and restaurants providing the credit cards are not issued by U.S. banks. There is, however, a surcharge of around 3%. As products are in limited supply travelers should bring high factor sun screen, any medication they need and personal care products.

Accommodation, food and transport

Accommodation is available throughout the island from budget to 5 * hotels and luxury apartments and villas (the star ratings are prescribed by the Cuban Ministry of Tourism and not Cuba Select Travel). Food in Cuba is quite limited in choice but most international chain hotels and some restaurants offer quality cuisine. A simple hamburger can cost around 3 -5 CUC's and a 3 course meal from 15 - 40 CUC's. Beer, sodas, mineral water and juices cost from 1 - 3 CUC's. Travelers have the choice of using tour coaches, taxis, car rentals and domestic flights. Special transport includes classic 50's American cars, Coco taxis and horse drawn carriages.

Cities and resorts

Havana City - The capital of Cuba since 1607, Havana (La Habana) is one of the largest and most vibrant cities in the Caribbean, and one of the most enchanting and fascinating cities in the world. With a population of over two million it has been through major upheavals since it was founded in 1519, with revolutions and uprisings leading to a large number of its beautiful buildings being left to decay over the years. Now many of these buildings are being restored and the city is alive with music, dancing and fine museums. Old Havana, the historic center of the city, preserves a wealth of Spanish Colonial architecture and has become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. American novelist Ernest Hemingway, who lived there for the last 22 years of his life, said in terms of beauty, only Venice and Paris surpassed Havana's charm. During the Prohibition era of the 1920's, Havana became a very popular holiday center for Americans with nightclubs and gambling rampant up until 1959 and the revolution.

Havana East Beaches - Playa Santa Maria del Mar, Playa Boca and Playa Guanabo, collectively known as Playas del Este, are the beaches closest to Havana, which are most popular for Cubans from Havana. There are several 3* hotels and villas. Overland transfer time around ½ hour.

Varadero - is famous for its powder white sandy beaches and azure waters. A two-hour drive traveling east of Havana will take you through the tropical countryside to this north coast holiday resort. The resort has many excellent all inclusive hotels overlooking the Gulf of Mexico where you can choose to stay at a family, adult-only or couples-only hotels. Here one can experience some glorious sunsets while enjoying a chilled Mojito or Daiquirí cocktail. Many of the hotels offer water sports, beach games, day and evening entertainment as well as various international a la carte restaurants. Outside of the hotels there are a few good restaurants and local nightclubs. Some of the excursions available in the area include catamaran cruises, jeep and boat safaris, sky diving, dolphin shows and golf. Self-drive car and motor scooter rental is available. If you fly directly into Varadero and want to see Havana there are day excursions to this historic city.

Las Terrazas (West Inland) - Las Terrazas is a small community and Nature reserve in Pinar del Río province. Located in the Sierra del Rosario mountain range (designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1984), it has a number of hotels and restaurants and a large area of secondary forest. The secondary forest was planted on the deforested hills by building terraces to avoid erosion; hence the name (in Spanish, Terrazas, means terraces). No domestic flights. Overland transfer from Havana around 1 hour. The only hotel, La Moka, has 26 rooms and bookings need to be made well in advance.

Viñales (West Inland) - Viñales Valley (Spanish: *Valle de Viñales*) is a karstic depression in Cuba. The valley has an area of 132 km² and is located in the *Sierra de los Organos*, just north of Viñales in the Pinar del Río Province. Tobacco and other crops are cultivated on the bottom of the valley, mostly by traditional agriculture techniques. Many caves dot the surrounding hill faces (Cueva del Indio, Cueva de José Miguel). The conspicuous cliffs rising like islands from the bottom of the valley are limestone formations called Mogotes. Viñales is a major tourist destination offering mainly hiking and rock climbing. The local climbing scene has started to take off in the last few years with many new routes being discovered resulting in an increase in local tourism. No domestic flights from Havana. Overland transfer from Havana around 2 ½ hours.

Maria la Gorda & Cabo San Antonio (West Coast) - Located in the Guanahacabibes Biosphere Reserve, at the western most end of Cuba, is María la Gorda (Mary the Fat) and Cabo San Antonio where divers can enjoy crystal-clear and warm waters at many dive sites. Visitors can admire the largest black coral reserve in the waters surrounding Cuba. Many experts consider that the most special characteristic is the fact that divers can see black corals at a depth of 14 meters, as well as marine species such as barracudas and red snappers. Experts also consider that the seabed is among the top ten places in Latin America, due to its abundant marine life and extraordinarily beautiful corals. No domestic flights. Overland transfer time Havana Maria la Gorda 5 hours. / Cabo San Antonio 6 hours

Trinidad (Central South Coast) - The compact colonial center of Trinidad is one of the most sublime in Latin America, and the city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988. The cobbled streets, terracotta rooftops and pastel colored houses are easily explored in a morning when the light is good for photography and the temperature is still comfortable.

Much of this city can be seen on a walking tour a private guide. Typically you will take in the *Palacio Cantero*, an impressive neo-classical palace owned by a wealthy doctor who used to treat the sugar barons. The building is now the *Museo Historico Municipal* and has a beautiful courtyard. If you climb the rickety steps to the tower you will be rewarded with beautiful views of the city and the *Escambray* mountain range, which provides a stunning backdrop to the city. The city is situated between the mountains and the Caribbean Sea. The *Canchanchara* is an 18th century town house with lively music and a bar serving a traditional drink of the same name which is made from lime, water, honey and a healthy portion of rum.

The *Palacio Brunet* overlooks the tranquil main square, the *Plaza Mayor*, with its distinctive wrought iron railings, towering royal palms and colorful buildings. The palace now houses the *Museo Romantico* which displays a fine collection of antique furniture from the colonial period. If you pay the 3 convertible pesos (CUC) to get to the 2nd floor you can take a beautiful picture of terracotta rooftops stretching away to the tower of the church, which is framed by the mountains in the background. No domestic flights. Overland transfer from Havana 5 hours.

Camaguey (Central Inland) - Camaguey is a city and municipality in central Cuba and is the nation's third largest city. It is the capital of the Camaguey Province. After almost continuous attacks from pirates the original city (founded as Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe around 1515 on the northern coast) was moved inland in 1528. The new city was built with a confusing lay-out of winding alleys that made it easier to defend it from any raiders and dubbed the labyrinth city. There are many blind alleys and forked streets that lead to squares of different sizes. There is only one exit from the city; should pirates ever return and succeed in entering the city, the hope was that the local inhabitants would be able to entrap and kill them. In July 2008, the old town was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but in September it suffered damage as colonial columns were toppled and the ornate sculptures on the roofs of centuries-old buildings were smashed by Hurricane Ike. Domestic flights from Havana. Overland transfer from Havana around 8 hours.

Bayamo (East Inland) - The capital of Granma Province. The city has a rich tradition of Cuban national pride and is often referred to as "the Birthplace of Cuban Nationality" and "the Cradle of Cuban" Revolution." Additionally, Bayamo has always been a center of philosophy and maintains a rich intellectual and artistic tradition. With a population of 130,000 people, Bayamo has experienced considerable growth since it was founded by the Spanish in 1513 as one of the original seven Spanish cities in Cuba. Today, its major commercial importance is in sugar refining. Bayamo was a valuable hub in the Spanish slave trade, especially as sugarcane crops became the areas predominant economic asset. As a result, there is a strong base of Afro Cuban culture in the area. During the 1800's, the emerging upper-middle class of sugarcane farm owners began to be dissatisfied from their lack of representation and influence in the Spanish colonial government. They resented the governors' tactics of continually ensuring that most power, and therefore economic benefit, remained in the

hands of European-born Spaniards. Bayamo was the stronghold of early revolutionary Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who freed his slaves and declared war against colonialist Spain.

During the ensuing battles, Bayamo exchanged hands several times and was once burned to the ground by Cuban rebels as the city was being sacked by the Spanish. *Domestic flights from Havana. Overland transfers from Havana around 12 hours.*

Las Tunas (East Inland) - For a tourist this is a province and a city with not much interest from a historical or cultural point of view. The capital city Las Tunas has 100.000 inhabitants. Sugar is the most important engine of Las Tunas Province. The only need to visit this province for most tourists is while traveling from West to East, but it can be very special because Las Tunas still has beaches without tourists and you will be a witness of the real Cuban life. *Domestic flights from Havana. Overland transfers from Havana around 10 hours.*

Holguin (North East Inland) - Holguin Province is Cuba's fourth largest. The mountains of the region are home to deposits of nickel and cobalt which have been, and still are being, extensively mined. These industries play an important role in the productivity and wealth of the area, the main nickel mines and processing plants are situated around the town of Moa on the north coast, east of the city of Holguin. Sugar plantations and citrus orchards also play a prominent role in the local economy, and the fishing industry, although small, complements the provinces impressive role as a key producer in the Cuban economy. The north coast has been a substantial amount of development over the last 10 to 15 years and the beaches of Playa Guardalavaca are now firmly established with foreign tour operators. *Regular domestic flights from Havana and international charter flights. Overland transfers from Havana around 10 hours.*

Santiago de Cuba (East South East Coast) - Santiago de Cuba is the capital city of Santiago de Cuba Province in the south-eastern area of the island nation of Cuba, some 869 km (540 miles) east south-east of the Cuban capital of Havana. The municipality extends over 1,023.8 square kilometers (395 sq. miles), and contains the communities of El Caney, Guilera, Antonio Maceo, Bravo, Castillo Duany, Leyte Vidal and Moncada. Historically Santiago de Cuba has long been the second most important city on the island after Havana, and still remains the second largest. It is on a bay connected to the Caribbean Sea and is an important sea port. In 2004 the city of Santiago de Cuba had a population of about 494,337 people. *Regular domestic flights from Havana and limited international flights. Overland transfers from Havana around 12 hours.*

Baracoa (East Coast) - The remote location at the eastern end of the Cuban island has kept the influence of mass tourism quite low, despite the idyllic location. Baracoa can be reached by bus from Santiago de Cuba (4 hours) or by plane from Havana (2 hours). To the east the Fuerte Matachín (built in 1802) houses a museum (with lots of colorful Polimita snail shells among other things) and further east is a beach at the mouth of the River Miel. To the west the Fuerte La Punta (built in 1803) houses a restaurant, with a smaller beach next to it. And the third fort, El Castillo, on a steep hill with a commanding view of the town and both bays, is now Hotel El Castillo. The other hotels in Baracoa are Hotel Porto Santo, Hotel La Rusa, Hostal La Habanera and Villa Maguana. The Cathedral Nuestra Señora de la Asunción houses the earrings of the Cruz de la Parra, a cross that Cali is supposed to have brought from Spain. Although it has been carbon dated to approximately that period, it is made from a local wood type, which means at least part of the story is not correct. There are two music venues near the central Parque Independencia, the touristy Flan de Queso and the more traditional Casa de la Flana. Nearby are the rivers Miel and Toa, the latter of which has many waterfalls, the best known of which is 'el Saltadero', which is 17 m high. The 575 m high table mountain el Yunque (the anvil) is 10 km to the west of Baracoa. It is a remnant of a plateau and because of its isolation it houses several unique species of ferns and palms. The only official and easiest approach to climb it starts at campismo El Yunque (simple lodgings for Cubans only), where a guide is obligatory (about 15 euro). From Baracoa, it is possible to visit the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt located about 20 kilometers north. Salto Fino is the highest waterfall in the Caribbean, located in this municipality, is produced by a sudden drop in the Arroyo del Infierno (Hell's stream), a tributary of the Quibijan River. The river, along with 71 others, flows into the Toa River which is the largest in Cuba. The 305-meter-high Salto Fino waterfall is recorded as the 20th highest water chute in the world. *Two flights a week from Havana (Thursdays & Sundays). Overland transfers from Havana around 14 hours.*

Guardalavaca (North East Coast) - One of the main beach resort places in Cuba located in the Eastern province of Holguin, Guardalavaca keeps all the charm and purity of unique places; fine sand, a tranquil and beautiful sea and a small cluster of hotels. An ideal place for diving as the corals and reefs are so close to the beach.

Apart from a small number of excursions that can be arranged, Guardalavaca is moderately remote. There is some picturesque countryside that can be explored; however it would appear that the antidote for the day would be to relax on the beach. *Regular flights to Holguin from Havana and then overland transfer around 40 minutes. Also direct international charter flights into Holguin. Overland transfers from Havana around 10 hours.*

Islands & Cays

Isle of Youth (South Coast) - The Isle of Youth (Isla de la Juventud) at 2200 sq. km. is Cuba's second largest island, next to only the main island. With only 75,000 people, it is Cuba's least populated area. Once a haven for pirates such as Francis Drake and Henry Morgan, it was then called Parrot Island and became the basis for Robert Lewis Stevenson's "Treasure Island". In a 1902 unilateral move, the U.S. Platt Amendment mandated the Isle of Pines, as it was then known, as outside Cuban boundaries and led to an infusion of over 300 U.S. colonists moving to the island. Only in 1925 did the U.S. recognize the isle as Cuban territory. In 1955 Batista declared the island a "free zone" which facilitated the construction of many hotels and casinos. However, the Revolution brought an end to the high rollers and returned the island to its inhabitants. During the 1960's, Castro launched a settlement campaign and began planting citrus trees, now amounting to 25,000 hectares, while thousands of young Cubans took shifts working the fields as a duty to their country. In the early 1970s, schools were set up for foreign students with the hope of helping to educate underdeveloped countries. At the height of this program, 150,000 foreign students resided on the island. The government footed the bill for the foreign students while the foreign students joined the Cuban youth harvesting the citrus crop between September and December each year. In honor of this very successful and worthwhile endeavor, Cuba renamed the island the "Isle of Youth" in 1978. *Regular domestic flights from Havana, as well as daily catamaran sailings from Batabanó from mainland south coast (sailing time 2 ½ hrs) (Havana to Batabanó 1 hour).*

Cayo Largo (South Coast) - If sun, sand and sea are what you want from an all-inclusive tropical; island Cuban vacation, Cayo Largo has them all. The boomerang-shaped cay is the second largest and easternmost island in the Archipelago de los Canarreos. Just 38 square kilometers in size, it's a delightful sliver of coral and sugar-white beaches, surrounded by calm turquoise seas and completely divorced from the real world and every-day Cuban life. The hotels may be just 5 to 10 minutes from the airport but they're light years from the hassles of modern living. The only people you'll meet are hotel employees and vacationers enjoying all-inclusive packages at the island's resorts and beaches. Playa Sirena, the westernmost beach, is the most spectacular and the best swimming beach, with white sand that always remains cool to the feet. Playa Paraiso is so secluded that it has become the only nude beach in Cuba. And Playa Tortuga, at the eastern end of the island, is home to a seasonal colony of sea turtles. The sun, the sea and nature are everything here. The calm shallow waters make it terrific for kids. Tiny nearby isles provide wonderful nature excursions. Cayo Iguana, home to those harmless creatures, can seem like a miniature Jurassic Park. Cayo Pajaros is a birders paradise. Cayo Cantilles has monkeys, along with other wildlife. There are 32 scuba sites to fascinate divers with coral formations, tunnels, steep walls and lots of colorful marine life. There are more than 200 sunken ships dating from the 16th to 18th centuries and some say Sir Henry Morgan's treasure is still buried in the area. Maybe, maybe not, but nature provides the real treasure: A tropical escape from everyday life. Because of Cayo Largo's seclusion, things like dining and nightlife are limited to the resorts, although the airport does have a popular disco, so visitors should choose one of the newer four-or five-star resorts. *Daily domestic flights from Havana, 1 ½ hour flight.*

Cayo Levisa (North West Coast) - Three kilometers of excellent beaches and 23 diving sites turn Cayo Levisa into an excellent destination for diving enthusiasts, who can enjoy crystal-clear waters and one of the world's largest coral reefs. The coral reef is inhabited by 500 species of fish, 200 species of sponges and large populations of mollusks, crustaceans and other marine animals. Many kinds of corals, gorgonias, sea fans, and several species of fish, including stone bass and red snapper, as well as crustaceans like lobsters, also live in the region. A particular attraction in the area is the existence of trigonias, which are considered the oldest living fossils in Cuba. Diving is the main option among vacationers who stay on Cayo Levisa, where expert divers bearing international certificates on Reef Monitoring guarantee the safety of diving enthusiasts. In addition, the islet hosts several international courses for expert divers from all over the world, thus contributing to promoting the regions attractions for the tourism industry. For those who want to spend their leisure time surrounded by quietness and silence, Cayo Levisa offers air-conditioned cabins equipped with

private bathroom and satellite TV, as well as a restaurant, bar, barbeque and a commercial center, in addition to the possibility of taking a refreshing swim at the beach. Cayo Levisa, with its comfortable cabins, coconut trees and white-sand beaches, keeps a natural treasure in its surrounding sea, including the Mégano de Casiguas key. There is just one hotel on the cay located on the north facing beach. Accommodation is in cabanas. *No domestic flights. Overland transfer from Havana around 2 ½ hours. Twice daily boat to the cay, sailing time 40 minutes, to Cay 1000 hrs. and 1800 hrs. From Cay 0900 hrs. and 1700 hrs.*

Cayo Santa Maria (North East Coast) - Cayo Santa Maria lies at the western end of the Archipiélago de Sabana-Camaguey, 25 km west of Cayo Guillermo. Between 1989 and 1996, a massive 48km causeway called "El Pedraplen" was constructed across the Bahía Buena Vista from the port of Caibarien at a cost of 100 million pesos. Included in the design were 45 bridges to allow an exchange of tidal waters, an improvement over the earlier Cayo Coco causeway. Paving was completed in 1999, just as Las Brujas Airport was being built on Cayo Las Brujas, 45km northwest of Caibarien. The massive development is part of a plan to build 28 beach hotels with a total of 10.000 rooms in this previously inaccessible realm of low coral cays. Enjoy Cayo Santa Maria 14km of sandy white beaches. *Regular domestic flights from Havana and international charter flights. Overland transfer from Havana around 5 hours.*

Cayo Coco (North East Coast) - Cayo Coco is the fourth island in terms of size forming the Cuban archipelago. It is linked to the main land by a stone road, 17 km long. Today, Cayo Coco is a paradisiacal place relevant for the balance and degree of preservation of the ecosystem it has attained, by protecting its virgin atmosphere isolated from modern world. Its beach is 10 Km long, of fine sand and warm and crystal-clear waters. A privileged reserve for flora and fauna, this key hosts species such as the wading birds, particularly the coconut the island was named after, the gray heron, and the pink flamingo which total over 30 000 and is among the biggest herds in the world. It is also favorite habitat for other bird species such as the cormorant, woodpecker, mockingbird, pelicans and many duck species. A 10-30 Mt. coral reef, over 10 Km long, adds more attraction to the place; the diversity and abundance of marine species make divers feel in a real aquarium. Very few places in the world can compete with such beauty; one may find the Mega lops Atlantica, the Trachinotus, as well as big snappers, meros, sharks and barracudas, adding more attractive to diving at the places "Coco Diving Center" may offer. *Regular domestic flights from Havana and international charter flights. Overland transfer from Havana around 6 hours.*

Havana Highlights

Private Guided Walking Tour of Old Havana - In the morning your tour guide will meet travelers at their hotel to start the tour. The tour will be a guided walking tour through the lanes and over the squares of colonial Old Havana, with the most important sightseeing points: Plaza de Armas, El Templete, Palace of the Captain General, Plaza Vieja, Plaza de Armas, Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza San Francisco de Asis and Hemingway's "Bodeguita del Medio", among others. *(Duration 2 hours).*

Private Panoramic tour of Modern Havana in Classic American cars- This tour can either be taken in the morning or afternoon. The tour will include the passing the Capitol Building, the Gran Teatro and the Bacardi Building and go via the Prado Boulevard to the famous Malecon, passing the legendary Hotel Nacional and via the Avenida de los Presidentes to the Revolution Square with the portrait of Che Guevara and the monument of national hero José Martí. The tour will include 1950s former upper class residential and diplomatic quarter of Miramar with its former American clubs and beautiful mansions along the Quinta Avenida. *(Duration 2 – 2 ½ hours).*

Cigar Factory visit - A guided tour to see the processes involved with hand rolled Havana cigars at one of the famous cigar factories in Havana with a visit of one of the brand name cigar factories, such as H. Upmann, La Corona, Romeo & Julieta or Partagas. You will see the whole production from the preparation of the tobacco leaves and sorting according to the different leaves required to make up a cigar right through to the final labeling and packing in the cigar boxes.

Note: Cigar factories are closed on Saturdays, Sundays, National Holidays and the Cigar Festival. They can also be closed on other dates without prior notification. Therefore it cannot be guaranteed that the factories are always open.

The Hemingway Trail - Ernest Hemingway is one of the icons of Cuba having lived here for some 20 years and where it got the inspiration to write some of his famous novels. The trail will take you to the house where he lived, now a museum, and to Cojimar, the village he used to go fishing from.

Arts and Photography tours –These specialist guided tours will take you to renowned Cuban photographers and artists' studios in Havana so that you can not only admire the work of these artists but also speak with them and learn more about Cuba's past and present through their inquisitive eyes.

Cuban National Ballet -This world famous ballet company headed by Alicia Alonso, performs in Havana and other cities in Cuba as well in other countries around the world. The company produces some of the world's finest ballet dancers who are hotly sought by international ballet companies.

Havana Nightlife

Cuba excels in its music where one can still be entertained by live bands, dance troupes and fashion shows at its many nightclubs, restaurants, street cafes and bars. The following are only a sample of the more popular nightlife activities. We will be happy to provide you with other nightlife possibilities and tailor-make to order on request.

Buena Vista Social Club Dinner & Show - The famous group performs at different venues in Havana. Dining and show.

Tropicana Cabaret Enjoy a nostalgic journey of music and dancing over the years with this spectacular show under the stars from Cha-Cha-Cha to Mambo from Son to Salsa and Afro-Cuban to opera. More than 200 artists, dancers and musicians, including a big 1950s style live orchestra that will entertain you in a beautiful garden ambience with a big open air stage (includes ¼ bottle of rum, 1 Cola, 1 glass of Cava, 1 mini snack). Show starts at 22h00 hours and ends at 23h45 hrs. In the case of inclement weather condition the venue has an indoor auditorium where you can see the show. Dinner available prior to start of show at extra cost.

Havana Café - A popular nightclub at the Melia Cohiba Hotel with dining, music, cabaret and dancing. The place is decorated with real classic cars, motorbikes and an aeroplane. Is considered to be the most expensive place in Havana together with Tropicana. Usually many of the best Salsa groups play here. Usually very crowded, full with tourists. Open: From Wednesday to Sunday 21h00 -02h30.

Jazz Café - For lovers of Latin jazz this is the place to be. Located opposite the Melia Cohiba Hotel. Mellow, sophisticated and freezing due to extreme air conditioning, the Jazz Café is not only an excellent place to hear some of Cuba's top jazz musicians including Chucho Valdés but the open plan design also provides for a good bar atmosphere if you want to chat. Food and drinks available. Bands normally start performing from 2300 hrs.

El Mesón de la Flota - Although it might not seem so at first glance, flamenco is very popular in Cuba. This place has a tablao flamenco (wooden stage), where dancers and musicians, such as the Havana Flamenco Company and Ecos, perform daily. Food and drinks available. Open noon to midnight.

Casa de la Musica - Be on time, there's always a crowd particularly when a famous music band is announced. Be aware at night the Casa de la Musica can be expensive, but the ambience is great, a highly recommended experience with nonstop dancing and music from midnight till 3 o'clock in the morning. The cover charge is between 10 -25 CUC per person, and a bottle of Havana Club rum sells for 25 -50 CUC. Like some other dance venues, the Casa de la Musica has matinees late afternoon to early evening which cost 5 CUC per person.

Café Cantante - A favorite nightclub featuring many top Cuban bands. Teatro Nacional de Cuba, Paseo esquina 39 Plaza de la Revolución, Vedado. Open: 17h00 -21h00 / 22h00 – 03h00

Chan Chan - Open air night venue with live bands, small cabaret and DJ. Residencial Marina Hemingway Marina. Playa. Open: 22h00 – 03h00

El Gato Tuerto - A more intimate smaller bar & nightclub near the Nacional Hotel. O Street, between 17 & 19 Street, Vedado. Open: 23h30 -04h00

Macumba - The nightclub is located in the suburbs of Havana. It can be worth the trip when they have some big bands appearing there. 222nd Street between 37th street & Autopista, La Coronela neighbor. La Lisa. Check with us for updated information on bands and times.

Salon Turquino [Habana Libre hotel] - One of Havana top classy nightclubs literally at the top of the Havana Libre Hotel 25th floor. The roof of the nightclub opens to expose the night sky. 23rd Street and L Street. Vedado.

La Zorra y el Cuervo Jazz Club - Havana's best jazz hangout at the La Rampa area. 23 Street between N & O Street, Vedado. Open: 22h00 – 02h00.

Salon Rojo [Capri hotel] - One of the biggest nightclubs especially full with Cubans when the popular PMM Sound performs on Wed & Sun nights. 21st Street # 8. Vedado. Open: Daily from 22h00 to 03h00.

Museums in Havana

Havana houses many of the fine museums and cigar factories and can be included in itineraries according to traveler's interests. A fee is required to gain entrance to these establishments.

Museum of the City - [History and art of the colony and of the first years of the Republic] Tacón Street between Obispo Street and O'Reilly Street, Arms Square. Old Havana. Open: Daily from 09h30 to 18h30.

Museum of Colonial Art - [An important representation of decoration and furniture of the biggest colonial mansions of Havana from the 17th to the 19th centuries]. San Ignacio Street #61 between Empedrado & O'Reilly, Plaza de la Catedral, Old Havana. Open: From Tuesday to Sunday 09h30 -17h00.

National Museum of Fine Arts - (Collections of Cuban and European paintings). Trocadero Street between Zulueta & Moserrate. Open: Tuesday to Saturday 10h00 18h00 Universal Art Building. 10h00 – 16h00 Cuban Art Building.

Jose Marti Memorial Museum - [Permanent and transitory expositions of Jose Marti prolific life]. Street Paseo y Ave & Independence Avenue. Open: Monday to Saturday.

Museum of Cigar - Street Mercaderes No. 120 between Obispo y Obrapía. Open: Tuesday to Saturday from 09h30 -17h00 Sunday from 09h30 to 13h00.

Maqueta de la Habana - [Model details of monuments, streets, buildings and parks of Havana]. 28th Street between 1ª Street and 3ª Street, Miramar district. Open: Tuesday to Saturday from 10h00 to 17h30.

Museum of the Revolution - [A detailed panorama of the struggles of the Cuban people]. Street Refugio No. 1 between Monserrate y Zulueta. Havana City. Open: Daily from 10h00 to 18h00.

Parque Histórico Militar Morro-Cabaña - (Historical and military park). La Cabaña Road, Eastern Havana. Open: Daily from 10h00 to 22h00.

Varadero Highlights

Catamaran Cruise - Varadero's most exiting tour, full-day, half-day or sunset sail cruises from Mariana Gaviota located at the end of the peninsula. The one day trip on a modern catamaran goes to the magnificent Cayo Blanco with its beautiful beach, a truly magnificent unspoiled Caribbean wilderness, enjoy coral reef snorkeling, interacting with dolphins and dancing. On board open bar with traditional Cuban cocktails, cold beer and delicious lobster, shrimp or chicken lunch served on all full-day cruises at Cayo Blanco.

Varadero to Havana – Day Excursion - Early morning departure from your hotel in Varadero by private transfer to Havana. Met by tour guide in Havana on arrival. The tour will include a summarized version of the Guided Walking Tour of Old Havana and the Panoramic Tour of Havana. Lunch will be included in Havana. Return transfer to Varadero.

Jeep 4 x 4 Safari' & 'Discovery Challenge – Day Excursion - The excursion departs from Varadero to experience the beauty of a journey through the Cuban countryside. The tour includes self-drive jeeps and speed boats on the Canimar River and later Creole lunch and activities in a forest reserve. For individuals or groups. Collective coach transfers from hotels in Varadero around 0830 hrs to collect jeeps. Return collective transfer in coach to hotels at around 1700 hrs.

West Cuba Highlights

Viñales Valley & Las Terrazas -Day Excursion - An excellent day excursion with tour guide to see some of the Cuba's beautiful nature. In the early morning a drive West of Havana to Las Terrazas, a unique biosphere mountain community. Lunch at a farmer's house which specializes in charcoal grilled chicken and pork. Continue on the 'Ruta del Tabaco' in the province of Pinar del Rio and onto experience the panoramic views from the Mirador Los Jazmines overlooking the Viñales Valley with its spectacular limestone Mogotes rock formations. Later visit the Prehistoric Wall and enjoy a boat tour on a river through the cave Cueva del Indio before you return to Havana.

Central Cuba Highlights

Guama & The Bay of Pigs - A nature reserve of Zapata located near the central south coast. Here you visit a crocodile farm and take a boat ride through a river surrounded by mangroves with water lilies and cross a lake to an old Taino Indian village. The excursion continues onto Playa Giron (The Bay of Pigs) where the Cuba American and U.S. backed invasion took place.

East Cuba Highlights

Bayamo (East Inland) - The capital of Granma Province. The city has a rich tradition of Cuban national pride and is often referred to as "the Birthplace of Cuban Nationality" and "the Cradle of Cuban Revolution." Additionally, Bayamo has always been a center of philosophy and maintains a rich intellectual and artistic tradition. With a population of 130,000 people, Bayamo has experienced considerable growth since it was founded by the Spanish in 1513 as one of the original seven Spanish cities in Cuba. Today, its major commercial importance is in sugar refining. Bayamo was a valuable hub in the Spanish slave trade, especially as sugarcane crops became the areas predominant economic asset. As a result, there is a strong base of Afro Cuban culture in the area. During the 1800's, the emerging upper-middle class of sugarcane farm owners began to be dissatisfied from their lack of representation and influence in the Spanish colonial government. They resented the governors' tactics of continually ensuring that most power, and therefore economic benefit, remained in the hands of European-born Spaniards. Bayamo was the stronghold of early revolutionary Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who freed his slaves and declared war against colonialist Spain.

During the ensuing battles, Bayamo exchanged hands several times and was once burned to the ground by Cuban rebels as the city was being sacked by the Spanish.

Las Tunas (East Inland) - For a tourist this is a province and a city with not much interest from a historical or cultural point of view. The capital city Las Tunas has 100.000 inhabitants. Sugar is the most important engine of Las Tunas Province. The only need to visit this province for most tourists is while traveling from West to East, but it can be very special because Las Tunas still has beaches without tourists and you will be a witness of the real Cuban life.

Holguin (North East Inland) - Holguin Province is Cuba's fourth largest. The mountains of the region are home to deposits of nickel and cobalt which have been, and still are being, extensively mined. These industries play an important role in the productivity and wealth of the area, the main nickel mines and processing plants are situated around the town of Moa on the north coast, east of the city of Holguin. Sugar plantations and citrus orchards also play a prominent role in the local economy, and the fishing industry, although small, complements the provinces impressive role as a key producer in the Cuban economy. The north coast has been a substantial amount of development over the last 10 to 15 years and the beaches of Playa Guardalavaca are now firmly established with foreign tour operators.

Santiago de Cuba (East South East Coast) - Santiago de Cuba is the capital city of Santiago de Cuba Province in the south-eastern area of the island nation of Cuba, some 869 km (540 miles) east south-east of the Cuban capital of Havana. The municipality extends over 1,023.8 square kilometers (395 sq miles), and contains the communities of El Caney, Guilera, Antonio Maceo, Bravo, Castillo Duany, Leyte Vidal and Moncada. Historically Santiago de Cuba has long been the second most important city on the island after Havana, and still remains the second largest. It is on a bay connected to the Caribbean Sea and is an important sea port. In 2004 the city of Santiago de Cuba had a population of about 494,337 people.

Baracoa (East Coast) - The remote location at the eastern end of the Cuban island has kept the influence of mass tourism quite low, despite the idyllic location. Baracoa can be reached by bus from Santiago de Cuba (4 hours) or by plane from Havana (2 hours). To the east the Fuerte Matachín (built in 1802) houses a museum (with lots of colourful Polimita snail shells among other things) and further east is a beach at the mouth of the River Miel. To the west the Fuerte La Punta (built in 1803) houses a restaurant, with a smaller beach next to it.

And the third fort, El Castillo, on a steep hill with a commanding view of the town and both bays, is now Hotel El Castillo. The other hotels in Baracoa are Hotel Porto Santo, Hotel La Rusa, Hostal La Habanera and Villa Maguana. The Catedral Nuestra Señora de la Asunción houses the earrings of the Cruz de la Parra, a cross that Cali is supposed to have brought from Spain. Although it has been carbon dated to approximately that period, it is made from a local wood type, which means at least part of the story is not correct. There are two music venues near the central Parque Independencia, the touristy Flan de Queso and the more traditional Casa de la Flana. Nearby are the rivers Miel and Toa, the latter of which has many waterfalls, the best known of which is 'el Saltadero', which is 17 m high. The 575 m high table mountain el Yunque (the anvil) is 10 km to the west of Baracoa. It is a remnant of a plateau and because of its isolation it houses several unique species of ferns and palms. The only official and easiest approach to climb it starts at campismo El Yunque (simple lodgings for Cubans only), where a guide is obligatory (about 15 euro). From Baracoa, it is possible to visit the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt located about 20 kilometers north. Salto Fino is the highest waterfall in the Caribbean, located in this municipality, is produced by a sudden drop in the Arroyo del Infierno (Hell's stream), a tributary of the Quibijan River. The river, along with 71 others, flows into the Toa River which is the largest in Cuba. The 305-meter-high Salto Fino waterfall is recorded as the 20th highest water chute in the world.

Guardalavaca (North East Coast) - One of the main beach resort places in Cuba located in the Eastern province of Holguin, Guardalavaca keeps all the charm and purity of unique places; fine sand, a tranquil and beautiful sea and a small cluster of hotels. An ideal place for diving as the corals and reefs are so close to the beach.

Apart from a small number of excursions that can be arranged, Guardalavaca is moderately remote. There is some picturesque countryside that can be explored; however it would appear that the antidote for the day would be to relax on the beach.