



DISCOVER WEST/CENTRAL CUBA

Day 1

*Occidental Miramar Hotel *****

On arrival in Havana, the local guide and driver will meet you. Lunch will be at a local restaurant. Check-in is at the elegant Occidental Miramar Hotel in the upscale embassy section of Havana. Afternoon is at your leisure and dinner is at the hotel.

Day 2

*La Ermita or Jazmines Hotel ****

Breakfast is served at the hotel. Once aboard the comfortable air-conditioned coach, you will drive to Pinar del Rio Province, west of Havana, travelling through fertile farming areas that are dominated by Cuba's national tree, the Royal Palm. Sugar cane and market garden crops slowly give way to tobacco farms. The local tobacco grown here is used for the famous Cuban cigars and is said to be the best in the world. Visit the cigar-making factory in Pinar del Rio. In Vinales you will have lunch at Palenque de los Cimarrones Restaurant. In the afternoon you'll visit the town of Vinales and the private Caridad Tropical Garden (optional), which features diverse tropical fruits and exotic trees. You will have time to explore this bustling Cuban market town and perhaps meet with some of the locals. This will be a great introduction to the Cuban way of life that the beach tourists seldom see. The over night stay is at Ermita Hotel or Jazmines Hotel, depending on availability. Dinner is at the hotel. There is an optional night bird watching walk.

Day 3

*La Ermita or Jazmines Hotel ****



After breakfast explore Duaba River. Explore the rain forest of Humboldt Park, the best-preserved biosphere reserve in Cuba. Take a leisurely ride down the river in cayucas, local boats, used to transport goods to trade them in the village. Enjoy a picnic lunch and dinner at the hotel. Today, after your early optional bird watching walk and breakfast at the hotel, you will explore Viñales National Park. This park is located in the Sierra de los Organos, a limestone area with Jurassic period geomorphology. Surreal, conical limestone knolls with vertical walls and rounded tops dominate the region. Its several valleys make up a fertile plain known for extensive tobacco plantations and typical rural farms and houses. As you wander the rocky trails, you'll look for ancient tree ferns, endemic snails, feral pigs and large termite nests. This is also a good area to find the endemic Yellow-headed Warbler. You'll explore Maravillas de Viñales trail. Lunch is at Mural de la Prehistoric Restaurant, where nearby, local artists have painted a rock face with prehistoric creatures. At the end of a busy day you'll find the pool at your hotel very inviting. Cuban Green Woodpeckers add their voices to the

forest calls as they chase each other on the grounds of the hotel and Cuban Pygmy-Owls shatter the stillness of the evening with their shrill piping whistle. Dinner is served at the hotel.

Day 4

Soroa Hotel ***



Your destination for today is the Sierra del Rosario Mountains after you serve breakfast. Many species of orchids thrive in these warm, moist conditions. You will visit an Orchidarium, operated by the University of Pinar del Rio, to see some of these orchids in their natural surroundings. On the way you will stop at La Guira National Park where you will visit the ornamental gardens of the old Cortina Estate. Here, Great Lizard Cuckoos scuttle along the branches, looking for lizards and tree frogs, in the beautiful park-like setting. This former estate has some standing colonial buildings, and its woodland trails echo with the cooing song of the

beautiful Cuban Trogon. This is Cuba's national bird, so chosen because it has all the colours of the Cuban flag in its plumage. You'll also visit Cueva de los Portales. These limestone caves were the headquarters of Che Guevara during the Cuban missile crisis of the early 1960s. They have become somewhat of a national monument and are interesting from both a geological and an historical point of view. Lunch will be at Mirador de San Diego Hotel. Then you'll continue to Soroa Hotel for your over-night stay and dinner. After dinner you will be able to do some stargazing in the wonderfully clear mountain air, as you watch for possible Stygian Owls hunting overhead.

Day 5

Soroa Hotel ***

Text 5 Enjoy breakfast in the morning before make your way to Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city in Cuba. The transfer itself is very attractive. You will pass by small towns to climb La Farola road, quite famous because of the beautiful natural sceneries that will delight you. Then you'll be driven along the sea to Guantanamo City and stop at a look out called Los Malones. Here you have a very distant view of the American naval base. After lunch you will be taken to Versailles Hotel in the city where you will have dinner later.

Day 6

Playa Larga Hotel **

Today you'll take the Autopista from Soroa to Playa Larga, after breakfast. Although this entails several hours driving the journey is broken up with a number of stops. Your destination is the fabled Zapata Swamp. Your home for the next two nights will be at Playa Larga, beside the Bay of Pigs. Lunch stop is at La Boca Restaurant. Then you will visit the national park's interpretive centre, rehabilitation and breeding centre for the rare and endangered Cuban Parrot. Dinner will be enjoyed at the hotel.

Day 7

Playa Larga Hotel **



After breakfast you will explore Las Salinas, part of the Zapata Peninsula, renowned as the largest marsh in the insular Caribbean. To get to Las Salinas del Brito Fauna Reserve, on the peninsula, you'll travel along a road that makes its way through savannahs, mangrove thickets and sub-tropical forests. This 91 thousand-acre salt marsh is one of the most important flyways for migratory birds in the northern Caribbean. The mudflats support large numbers of Greater Flamingos, egrets, Whistling Ducks and shorebirds. You'll also hope to see the rare Cuban Black Hawk here. After lunch at La Cuevas

de los Peces, a quaint restaurant located next to a sea cave pool filled with multihued fish, you will visit the crocodile farm at La Boca. This breeding and research facility is sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund and is involved in rehabilitation efforts for the endangered Cuban sub-species of American crocodile. You will return to the hotel in time to relax around the pool or stroll along the beach and enjoy the sunset before dinner.

Day 8

Costasur Hotel **

This morning after breakfast you'll set off for Trinidad, stopping on the way at the Soledad Botanical Gardens, near Cienfuegos. During your visit to the gardens you'll be entertained by Cuban Emerald Hummingbirds fighting among themselves for the best flowers in the gardens amid Zebra-wing and Julia butterflies. Lunch is at the Colonial Restaurant in Trinidad. Explore the charming Spanish colonial port city of Trinidad, with its wonderful collection of restored single-story, primary-coloured buildings topped by curvaceous clay-tiled roofs and enclosed in cobblestone streets. Founded in 1514, it was the third settlement in Spanish Cuba. You'll also visit a local museum and your accommodation and dinner are at Costasur Hotel.

Day 9

Costasur Hotel **



Today you'll explore the area around Trinidad, called the Valle de Los Ingenios after breakfast. This area was home to many sugar mills and was the source of Cuba's prosperity in the early 1800s. Many of the old mills still dot the countryside and the entire area has been designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Lunch is at Valle de los Ingenios Restaurant. Enjoy the afternoon at your own pace, and dinner will be served at the hotel.

Day 10

Los Helechos Hotel ***

After breakfast at the hotel, you will be driven deeper into the Escambray Mountains. You'll explore this wild and beautiful mountain region that dominates this part of the central plains. In the fragrant pine and eucalyptus forests of the region, you will look for the Cuban Bullfinch and Stripe-headed Tanagers. Travel by army truck (the roads get steeper) to the beautiful coffee plantation of La Codina where you will walk the lush mountain trail. Enjoy lunch on the grounds of the old hacienda where clouds of butterflies flit among the Hibiscus and Lantana flowers. You will be staying over-night and dinner at the Los Helechos Hotel.

Day 11

Cayo Las Brujas Hotel ***

The AM is at your leisure at the beach. After lunch you'll reluctantly take leave of Sierra Mar-Los Galeones and make your way deep into the northern foothills of the Sierra Maestra. The drive will take you back through Santiago de Cuba and through some interesting farming communities. You'll stretch your legs in Contramaestre, a typical Cuban market town. This will give you a chance to mingle with the locals. El Salton Hotel is a beautiful country lodge carefully blended into the side of a wooded valley and is really a hidden gem. The grounds of the lodge are alive with birds, geckos, and anoles and in the evening, fruit bats take wing. The stream that runs through the grounds also has a very pleasant rock pool and waterfall where you can cool off after a full day's activities. The over-night stay and dinner will be at Salton Hotel.



Sierra Maestra Mountains

Day 12

Cayo Las Brujas Hotel ***

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel. For a change of pace, you will board a comfortable catamaran for a catamaran ride through the beautiful Jardines del Rey Archipelago, part of the Archipelago Sabana-Camaguey. The cruise will take you through a number of different habitats including sea caves, mangrove areas, beaches and rocky headlands. You will have lunch on one of the deserted cays. There will be free time to beach-comb and enjoy the ambience of warm sand and sea breezes. Bring your mask and snorkel, as there should be an opportunity to snorkel. The mangroves around the hotel are a treasure trove of birds with Cuban Green Woodpeckers and Cuban Bullfinches on the steps to the cabins. Hutias, an endemic Cuban mammal, are common around the boardwalk in the early morning and evening. After your day trip you will be able to enjoy dinner at the hotel.

Day 13

Cayo Las Brujas Hotel ***

After breakfast enjoy a nature walk along a new trail through the mangroves on Santamaria Cay. The bird life is amazing as the area is still unspoiled and is in its natural state. Along with Curly-tailed Lizards and Cuban Green Anole, you will look for Bahama Mockingbird and Thick-billed Vireo. Return to the hotel for lunch. In the afternoon you will have free time to sit on the beach, snorkel or explore more of Cayo Las Brujas. Dinner is served at the hotel.

Day 14

Occidental Miramar Hotel ****

This morning, after a leisurely breakfast and last beach walk, you will make your way to Santa Clara. While here, you'll visit the Che Guevara mausoleum, one of the more striking monuments in honour of the famous Cuban-Argentinean revolutionary. After lunch in Fiesta Campesina Restaurant, you'll head to Havana where we'll enjoy a tour of the old city. This is a fairly long drive so you can relax and enjoy the passing scenery. Old Havana has such a special place in the Caribbean that, in 1982, UNESCO recognized its superb colonial architecture and declared it a World Heritage Site. Visit some of these colonial sites including the Havana Museum, Cathedral Square and Arms Square, among others. In the evening you will have a farewell dinner at Café del Oriente Restaurant. After dinner you will drive over to the old fortress of San Carlos de la Cabana for the nine o'clock cannon firing ceremony. Here soldiers in period custom re-enact a ceremony held over from Spanish times when the firing of the cannon signified the closing of the gates at night. You will be staying again at the Occidental Miramar Hotel.

Day 15

Departure

After your breakfast you will be transferred to Havana International Airport where you will take your flight back to your country of origin.

Included:

- Transfer to/from airport to/from hotel
- English-speaking tour guide
- A/C coach for all transportation
- 2-nights accommodation at *Occidental Miramar Hotel* **** (1-night MAP & 1-night CP)(Day 1 & 14)
- 2-nights accommodation at *La Ermita* or *Los Jazminez Hotel* *** (MAP)
- 2-nights accommodation at *Soroa Hotel* *** (MAP)
- 2-nights accommodation at *Playa Larga Hotel* ** (MAP)
- 2-nights accommodation at *Costa Sur Hotel* ** (MAP)
- 1-night accommodation at *Los Helechos Hotel* *** (MAP)
- 3-nights accommodation at *Cayo Las Brujas Hotel* *** (MAP)
- Lunch as per itinerary
- 500ml bottle of water with each meal plus another 500ml bottle of water for day walk

- Excursion as per itinerary
- Visit to a cigar factory in *Pinar del Río*
- Visit to *Soroa's Orchidarium*
- Visit to crocodile farm
- Visit to botanical garden in *Cienfuegos*
- Visit to museum in *Trinidad*
- Boat ride in *Río Negro*
- Visit to *Che Guevara 's Mausoleum* in *Santa Clara*
- Farewell dinner at *Café del Oriente Restaurant*

Not Included:

- Air / Taxes
- Cuban Tourist Card (\$20CAD)
- Cuban Departure Exit Tax paid locally (25.00CUC Cash)
- Gratuities / Expenses / Personal Insurance

Pricing:

- E-mail at info@designtravel.ca or by phone at (416) 235-1212.

Note:

- Duration: 15-days / 14-nights

Meal Plan Coding:

- MAP – breakfast & dinner
- CP – continental breakfast

Links:

Optional Excursions

www.designtravel.ca/services/servicesworld/excursions/excursions.html

Terms and Conditions

www.designtravel.ca/termsandconditions/termsandconditions.html