



PINARES DE MAYARÍ BY M VAN REE

EASTERN CUBA | Gardens, National Parks, Culture, & History

12 DAYS from \$5,295 | Choose your dates | Best season to travel: OCT-NOV, JAN-MAY

EXPLORE Cuba's diverse and endemic flora on this 12-day expedition through Eastern Cuba's public gardens, national parks, research stations, and Biosphere Reserves. See the ecosystems of Pinares de Mayarí and Alejandro de Humboldt National Park, where high levels of endemism translate to unique species found nowhere else. Discover Baracoa, Cuba's oldest city, and Santiago de Cuba, the country's first capital and the birthplace of the Revolution. You'll also have the chance to explore the region's breathtaking forests, beaches, waterfalls, and mountains.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the unique flora of Humboldt National Park, home to some of the highest levels of endemism on the island.
- See some of the 36 species of orchids, 33 species of ferns and 21 endemic species in Parque Nacional La Mensura, also home to Salto del Guayabo, the highest waterfall in Cuba.
- Meet with a researcher at the Cuban Academy of Sciences Integral Mountain Research Station.
- Visit Jardín de los Helechos, home to an internationally important collection of tropical ferns, bromeliads and orchids.
- Examine the history, cultural influences, and modern day life of vibrant cities such as Holguín, Baracoa, and Santiago de Cuba.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Specialist guide
- Private transportation
- Accommodations
- Activities
- Meals
- Beverages with meals
- Bottled water on the bus
- Carbon offsetting



PAINTED SNAIL BY JULIO LARRAMENDI



ITINERARY

BLD = BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

Day 1 | **Holguín**

Early this afternoon, welcome to Holguín, the fourth largest city in Cuba, which was founded in the 1500s. After clearing customs and collecting your luggage, you will be met by your guide and transferred to your hotel situated with an outstanding view of the Cristal Mountain range. Check in and have time to explore the hotel grounds taking in the views, landscape, and birds abundant here. This evening will be a welcome dinner and program briefing at the hotel with your specialist guide. *Overnight at Mirador Mayabe (D)*

Day 2 | **Pinares de Mayarí**

This morning meet at the pool for sunrise over the mountains; have an early breakfast and then transfer to Silla de Gibara, an approximately one hour drive conveniently located close to the historic sight of Cayo Bariay, where Christopher Columbus first landed in 1492. Enjoy a hike along the trail to learn about the flora and fauna of the area. Continue to the picturesque, seaside town of Gibara to have lunch and a short walking exploration. Continue the day with drive to Hotel Pinares de Mayarí. Appreciate views of the Sierra de Cristal, the altiplano (plateau) of the Parque Nacional La Mensura, where the mists drift through the pine forests en route. This evening check in to the quaint mountain cabins and have dinner. After dinner, your specialist guide will offer an optional walk around the hotel in search of nocturnal creatures. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayarí (BLD)*

Day 3 | **Pinares de Mayarí**

After breakfast, drive midway down the mountain to the entrance of the beautiful Salto del Guayabo, the highest waterfall in Cuba situated within Parque Nacional La

Mensura. Situated at an altitude of 1,800 feet, El Salto del Guayabo is a twin waterfall formed by two falls of 278 and 416 feet. There are 36 species of orchids, 33 species of ferns and 21 endemic species recorded. The site has two trails; one is an easy hike to the top of the falls with a stunning view of the valley below. The second is a hike down to the pool of crystal clear waters, where the river Guayabo has plunged precipitously between the mountains. Spend the day enjoying the nature of the park. Return to the hotel for lunch and then this afternoon visit the Cuban Academy of Sciences Integral Mountain Research Station which includes an Orchid garden. You will receive an informal discussion by a station researcher on the flora of La Mensura and the work being done at the station. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayarí (BLD)*

Day 4 | **Maguana**

This morning travel back down the mountain and then begin the interesting and scenic drive to Villa Maguana, situated near the entrance of the Alejandro Humboldt National Park. Along the way pass through a variety of towering, tropical palms, mountains, river, rural villages, and even mineral ore industries. Arrive at the eastern jewel of Maguana and check in at the small hotel nestled along a white sand beach with a coral reef 200 yards off shore. Have lunch at the hotel and then enjoy free time at the beach. We recommend bringing along a snorkel and mask for a view of Cuba below the surface! *Overnight at Hotel Villa Maguana (BLD)*

Day 5 | **Maguana**

Today visit Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt. The park is located within a larger reserve system called the Cuchillas de Toa Biosphere Reserve. Encompassing diverse ecosystems and climate types, it protects the richest flora and fauna in Cuba, including more endemic species than anywhere else on the island. Also found here are the amazingly colorful land snails known as polymites. The

Iberian Balcony trail leads inland to waterfalls and natural pools. Return to the hotel for lunch and enjoy free time this afternoon to enjoy the beach. *Overnight at Hotel Villa Maguana (BLD)*

Day 6 | **Baracoa**

This morning, you will travel east toward Baracoa, Cuba's oldest city. Known for its old fashioned way of life and its individuality, Baracoa is nestled between the Bahía de Miel (Honey Bay) and El Yunque, the table mountain that looms above the city. This afternoon become acquainted with the town and stop in to visit the city historian's office. A highlight is a visit to Paradise Cave Archaeological Museum, which features aboriginal artifacts, carvings, and jewelry nestled in between crevices between dripstone formations. This evening walking exploration of the main square and dinner at a local restaurant, El Portal. *Overnight at Hotel Castillo (BLD)*

Day 7 | **Baracoa**

This morning visit Baracoa Chocolate to learn about the process of making chocolate in the tropics. The fun begins on an interpretive hike to see examples of Cacao tree in various life stages. Also learn about the harvesting of chocolate from bean to bar and the way the beans are processed. End on a sweet note sipping some of the best hot cocoa in the Americas. There is the opportunity to purchase Baracoa chocolate bars and freshly made cocoa butter as well. Next, drive approximately 15 minutes to the Toa River for an exciting time exploring the river and ocean. Welcome cocktail on arrival and then board wooden boats with your local guide who will paddle along the river out to a beach that is situated in front of the ocean. En route enjoy the scenic flora and the abundance of bird life as well as ocean and mountain views. The Toa River is the largest by volume in Cuba and a very important water source in the country. Explore the riverside and then walk along the beach for fantastic photo opportunities before boarding boats and paddling back. Have a typical lunch on site consisting of local dishes and usually including a hog freshly roasted on a spit. After lunch, free time to explore Baracoa town. Dinner on own this evening. *Overnight at Hotel Castillo (BL)*

Day 8 | **Santiago**

Depart this morning for Santiago de Cuba via one of the most scenic routes in Cuba, featuring steep ascents through pine forests and breathtaking views. After check in at your hotel, you will have time to freshen up before dinner (at the hotel). *Overnight at Meliá Santiago (BLD)*

Day 9 | **Santiago**

After breakfast you will start the day with a visit to Jardín de los Helechos. This unique setting is home to an internationally important collection of tropical ferns, bromeliads, and orchids. This outstanding collection of over 3000 ferns and more than 300 orchids is the most complete in the Americas and is the life work of the Director, who is acknowledged around the world for his contributions to the world of ferns and gardens, and has discovered several indigenous species. As well as being a marvelous garden, Jardín de los Helechos is a research establishment that carries out research on ferns; specifically their preservation and propagation. After lunch in the garden, you will return to the city square for a history lesson of Cuba. Santiago de Cuba was the first capital of Cuba; founded by Diego de Velázquez in 1514, and remained the capital until 1553. Its first Capitan General was Hernán Cortés, who later conquered Mexico. Santiago was also home to Francisco Pizarro (conqueror of Peru), among other leading Spanish political figures. The prosperity and strength of the city lay in the nearby copper mines, the splendidly protected harbor, and because of the massive importation of slaves from West Africa. Additionally, Santiago is the birthplace of the Revolution. After the failed attempt in 1953, Fidel and the Rebel Army arrived in Santiago in 1959 to accept the resignation of Batista's general and begin the victory parade towards Havana. In 2015 Santiago celebrated the cities' 500 year Anniversary. After the Hurricane Sandy repair, and the recent visit of Pope Francis in 2015, Santiago is in



CASTILLO DE SAN PEDRO DE LA ROCA BY ADAM JONES

fine form. This evening enjoy a paladar dinner and music at the Casa de la Trova. *Overnight at Meliá Santiago (BLD)*

Day 10 | **Santiago**

Today you will visit a rare site on the island – Gran Piedra. Formed most likely from a volcanic rupture, the Gran Piedra (the Grand Stone) is an enormous rock measuring 51 yards long and 25-30 yards wide. With a calculated weight of 63,000 tons, this boulder is situated on the summit of a mountain rising 1,225 meters above sea level. The legends of its origin include everything from it having formed with the impact of a meteorite that fell to the earth millions of years ago to what are believed more accurate versions that consider its birth due to the explosion of an underwater volcano. This unique site is now registered as a national monument. The gigantic stone mass was perhaps a witness to the volcanism of the Paleocene, just like all of the geology of the Sierra Maestra Mountains. This mass is famous not only within the frontiers of the island, but also all across the Caribbean,

since it is the largest such stone in the entire region. In its surroundings one can enjoy unique flora consisting of 222 varieties of ferns, as well as a total of 352 species of orchids, *Eucalyptus* spp., *Pinus cubenses*, cypresses, and a variety of fruit bearing trees. The fauna of the Gran Piedra is also one of its strongest attractions. Around the great mass flutter carpenter birds, royal thrushes, cartacubas, sparrow hawks, torcazas, and mayas, all led by the national bird: the tocororo. Only a half mile away, one can find the area's Botanical Garden, home to species such as the bird of paradise, dahlias, and magnolias. Finish your time on the mountain with a visit to a restored French Haitian style cafetal. Established in the early 19th century, this house and grounds are now a UNESCO museum including some of the exotic plants which the settlers brought with them. Return to Santiago with the remainder of late afternoon at leisure. *Overnight at Meliá Santiago (BLD)*

Day 11 | **Holguín**

You will have some free time this morning to explore Santiago on own. After lunch, you will travel back to Holguín and check in at centrally located hotel. This evening, enjoy a farewell dinner in a local paladar. *Overnight at Hotel Pernik (BLD)*

Day 12 | **Departure**

This morning you will be transferred to the Holguín International Airport for your flight back to the U.S. (B)



LAND PRICING

\$5,295 per person, double occupancy, based on 18 participants (plus 1 complimentary from New York City, single occupancy). *Single supplement: \$950.*

Cost includes: Accommodations, meals as indicated, specialist guide, National guide, local guides, transportation, gratuities for guides, driver, porters, wait staff, activities per itinerary, carbon offset, bottled water on bus.

Cost does not include: International airfare, items of personal nature, optional activities, gratuities to housekeeping and musicians, visa fee.

Price valid until Dec. 2018.

THE FINE PRINT

A \$200 per person deposit and enrollment form is due to secure your reservation. This deposit is refundable until 95 days prior to departure excluding a \$100 cancellation fee. Final payments are due no later than 95 days prior to departure. Non-refundable final payment is due at 95 days prior to departure. Travel/trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. For more information call Travel Insured at 800-243-3174 or visit travelinsured.com. Holbrook Travel's agency number is 15849.

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