

CUBA

Eastern Cuba: Crossroads of Culture, History, and Politics

10 DAYS | Choose your dates | Best season to travel: **OCT - JUL**

Study a cross-section of Cuba's fascinating history, vibrant culture, and natural wonders during this in-depth journey across the eastern end of the island. See the ecosystems of Alejandro de Humboldt National Park and Pinares de Mayarí before continuing to Santiago de Cuba, the country's first capital and the birthplace of the Revolution. In Santiago, explore the city's rich history and culture, including what is considered Cuba's oldest building. You'll also have the chance to explore the region's forests, beaches, waterfalls, and breathtaking landscapes.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Look for some of the many endemic species at Alejandro de Humboldt National Park, such as the brightly colored Cuban land snails known as polymitas or painted snails.
- Learn about the process of making chocolate in the tropics, beginning with an interpretive walk to see cacao trees and ending with a cup of some of the best hot cocoa in the Americas.
- Explore the Toa River, first by paddling on wooden boats with a local guide, then walking along the picturesque beaches.
- Visit the historical sites of Santiago, Cuba's original capital and birthplace of the Revolution.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Bilingual local guide & specialty naturalist guide
- Driver
- Accommodations
- Activities
- Private transportation
- Meals
- Beverages with meals
- Carbon offsetting



FROG BY JULIO LARRAMENDI



PINARES DE MAYARÍ BY M. VAN REE

ITINERARY

BLD = BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

DAY 1 - HOLGUÍN-GIBARA

Upon arrival at the airport in Holguín, meet your local guide and travel about an hour to Silla de Gibara, conveniently located close to the historical 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, check in at the hotel, and then walk around the town. Before dinner, you'll have the opportunity to meet officials from the national park to discuss both the economic importance and conservation of eastern Cuba's primary rainforest and reefs. This evening have dinner in a paladar. *Overnight at Hotel Arsenita. (D)*

DAY 2 - PINARES DE MAYARÍ

This morning have breakfast and then transfer to Hotel Pinares de Mayarí. En route appreciate views of the Sierra de Cristal, the altiplano (plateau) of La Mensura National Park, where the mists drift through the pine forests. This evening check in to the quaint mountain cabins, have dinner, and take part in an optional walk around the hotel in search of nocturnal creatures. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayarí.*

DAY 3 - PINARES DE MAYARÍ

This morning have breakfast and then drive midway down the mountain to the entrance of the beautiful Salto del Guayabo, the highest waterfall in Cuba. Situated within La Mensura National Park 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 of the river Guayabo. Spend the day enjoying the nature of the park and later this afternoon return to the hotel. This evening have dinner at the hotel joined by a researcher from the nearby Cuban Academy of Sciences Integral Mountain Research Station. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayarí. (BLD)*

DAY 4 - MAGUANA

This morning travel back down the mountain and begin the interesting and scenic drive to Villa Maguana, situated near the entrance of Alejandro de Humboldt National Park. Stop to enjoy a talk from the director of the national park and view the last remaining stand of virgin rainforest in Cuba before continuing your journey. Along the way pass through a variety of towering tropical palms, mountains, rivers, 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 offshore. Have lunch at the hotel and then free time to enjoy the beach.



PLAYA MAGUANA BY JULIO LARRAMENDI

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 Alejandro de Humboldt National Park. 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 polymitas. The Iberian Balcony trail leads inland to waterfalls and natural pools. Return to the hotel for lunch and then there is free time this afternoon to enjoy the beach. *Overnight at Hotel Villa Maguana. (BLD)*

DAY 6 - BARACOA

This morning, head further 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 crevices and between dripstone formations. This evening explore the main square on foot and have 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 trees in various life stages. You will 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 will be an 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 day exploring the river and ocean. Upon arrival enjoy a welcome cocktail and then board wooden boats with your local guide, who will paddle along the river out to the ocean. During the journey, enjoy the scenic flora and abundance of bird life as well as the 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 walk along the beach for fantastic photo opportunities before paddling back along the river. Have a typical lunch on site consisting

of local dishes—usually including a hog freshly roasted on a spit. After lunch, you'll have 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. As you approach Santiago de Cuba, the final resting place of Fidel Castro, you will be entering the city via the route that he and his group of 122 followers took in 1953 during the first (and failed) attempt to capture the Moncada Barrack and overthrow Fulgencio Batista to start the Revolution. All along the route are monuments to the fallen fighters. Along the same road, the Granja Siboney, or Siboney farm, was a staging place for the revolutionaries. The 1953 Buick that Fidel rode to

Moncada can be seen gleaming under a protective roof covering. After lunch, visit El Morro fortress, a 17th century seaside fort providing chilling insight into the Spanish era and the Spanish-American War. Check in to the hotel and have dinner. *Overnight at Hotel Meliá Santiago. (BLD)*

DAY 9 - SANTIAGO

Founded by Diego de Velázquez in 1514, Santiago was the first capital of the country and remained so until 1553. Its first *Capitán general* was Hernán Cortés, who later conquered Mexico. Santiago was also home to Francisco

Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru, and other leading Spanish political figures. The prosperity and strength of the city was a result of the nearby copper mines and the well-protected harbor, but also the mass importation of slaves from West Africa. In the last century, Santiago was the birthplace of the Revolution. In 1959, six years after the first failed attempt, Fidel Castro and the Rebel Army arrived in Santiago to accept the resignation of Fulgencio Batista's general and begin the victory parade towards Havana. In 2015, Santiago celebrated the city's 500-year anniversary. Today will be dedicated to visiting the important sites of the city, like the home of Don Diego Velázquez (reputedly the oldest building in Cuba) and the Cuartel Moncada (the barracks that saw the martyrdom of the Cuban Revolutionary heroes in 1953). This evening enjoy a *paladar* dinner and perhaps some music at the Casa de la Trova, a fine example of the beautiful historical center of Santiago. *Overnight at Hotel Meliá Santiago. (BLD)*

DAY 10 - DEPART

This morning, transfer to the airport in Holguín for flights back to the U.S. (B)



CUBAN PAINTED SNAILS BY JULIO LARRAMENDI

LAND PRICING

\$4,055 (20 participants + 2 leaders)

\$4,765 (10 participants + 1 leader)

Price includes accommodations, meals, entrance fees, and activities as indicated in the itinerary, private transportation unless otherwise noted in itinerary, non-alcoholic beverages with meals, national guide and naturalist specialty guide for duration of program, and carbon offset.

International airfare, gratuities, items of a personal nature, and alcoholic beverages are not included.

Rate is based on double occupancy for participants; single accommodations may be available at an additional cost.

Valid for travel in 2019.

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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BEE HUMMINGBIRD BY JONATAS CUNHA



BARACOA BY PIVISO



CUBAN MAN BY MARSHALL WISEHEART