



BARACOA BY PIVISO

CUBA

Island Endemism and Culture in Eastern Cuba

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

Study a cross-section of Cuba's fascinating flora and fauna, geology, landscapes, and history during this in-depth journey across the lesser-explored eastern end of the island. See the diverse ecosystems of La Mensura and Alejandro de Humboldt national parks, known for their high levels of endemism, before continuing to Baracoa, the country's oldest city. Meet with Cubans at the forefront of conservation efforts, including a national park director and a Cuban Academy of Sciences researcher. You'll have the chance to explore the region's forests, beaches, waterfalls, and caves before concluding your journey in Santiago de Cuba, the country's first capital and the birthplace of the Cuban Revolution.

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, including the Moncada Barracks, El Morro Fortress, and the historical city center, plus a musical performance at the Casa de la Trova.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

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



CUBAN PAINTED SNAILS BY JULIO LARRAMENDI



ITINERARY

BLD = BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

DAY 1 - HOLGUÍN-GIBARA

Upon arrival at the airport in Holguín, you will be met by Cuban group leaders who will accompany you during the entire journey and help facilitate meaningful connections with the Cuban people, share knowledge of Cuban culture, and help you maximize your experience supporting the conservation of Cuba's rich natural resources. After introductions, transfer to Holguín's Museum of Natural History to explore the collections with special focus on the *polymita* (snail) collection. Next, take an approximate one-hour drive to Silla de Gibara, 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, check in at the hotel, then spend the afternoon walking in the town interacting with locals. Before dinner, meet officials from the national park to discuss both the economic importance and conservation of eastern Cuba's primary rainforest and reefs. Then this evening, have dinner in a privately owned Cuban restaurant, known as a *paladar*. *Overnight at Hotel Ordoño. (D)*

DAY 2 - PINARES DE MAYARÍ

This morning have breakfast, then transfer to Pinares de Mayarí. Take in beautiful views of mist drifting through the pine forests of the Sierra de Cristal, the altiplano (plateau) of La Mensura National Park. During the drive, the Cuban group leader will provide interpretation along the way. Have lunch in a privately owned restaurant and engage with Cubans. On the way up the mountain, visit the Orchid Research Station. In the late afternoon, check in to the quaint mountain cabins of Villa Pinares de Mayarí and have dinner. This evening, go on an optional walk around the hotel in search of nocturnal creatures. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayarí. (BLD)*

DAY 3 - PINARES DE MAYARÍ

This morning have breakfast, then drive midway down the mountain to the entrance of the beautiful Salto El Guayabo, situated within the Parque Nacional La Mensura and the highest waterfall in Cuba. At an altitude of 1,800 feet, El Salto del Guayabo is a twin waterfall formed by two falls of 278 and 416 feet. The Cuban group leader will provide interpretation during the walk. There are 36 species of orchids, 33 species of ferns and 21 endemic species recorded here. 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 engaging with locals. This evening, enjoy 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 the coastal region near the entrance of the Alejandro de Humboldt National Park. During the journey, pass through a variety of towering, tropical palms, mountains, river, rural villages and even mineral ore industries. Continue to the park visitor station where there



will be a talk by the Director of the National Park. Learn about conservation efforts employed to save one of the last remaining virgin rainforests in Cuba. After the talk, continue to the eastern jewel of Maguana and check in at the small hotel, nestled along a white sand beach with a coral reef just 600 feet offshore. Have lunch at the hotel, then explore the coastal ecosystem with the Cuban group leader. *Overnight at Hotel Villa Maguana. (BLD)*

DAY 5 - MAGUANA

Today, spend the day exploring Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt. Start at the interpretation center where there will be a lecture by park officials. After the lecture, go hiking in the 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*, like the examples seen in Holguín's museum. Spend the full day immersed in an experiential learning experience, engaging with the local conservation team. *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. Have lunch at a privately owned Cuban restaurant. 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 between dripstone formations. Meet local host families for stays in privately owned Casa Particulares where you will engage with locals. This evening, go on a walking exploration of the main square, followed by dinner at a privately owned restaurant. *Overnight at Casa Particulares. (BLD)*

DAY 7 - BARACOA

This morning visit a local chocolate farm to learn about the process of making chocolate in the tropics. The visit starts with an interpretive hike with a local to see examples of the 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 chocolate bars and freshly made cocoa butter as well. Next, drive approximately 15 minutes to the Toa river for a day exploring the river and ocean. Upon arrival the locals will

welcome you with a special beverage and make introductions. Engage with local Cubans during a paddle boat excursion along the river out to the ocean and beach. While engaging with your Cuban boatman, 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 meet local women who produce a coconut specialty, *cucuruchos de coco*, or coconut cones. With the assistance of the Cuban group leader, engage with these women to learn about the history and process of producing these popular sweets. Paddle back to the starting point along the river and enjoy a freshly prepared typical lunch consisting of local dishes, usually including a hog freshly roasted on a spit. After lunch, engage with locals during an additional exploration of Baracoa town. Have dinner at a privately owned Cuban restaurant this evening. *Overnight at Casa Particulares. (BLD)*

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, overthrow President Fulgencio Batista, and thereby start the Revolution. All along the route are monuments to the fallen fighters. The Granja Siboney, or Siboney farm, along that same road, was a staging place for the revolutionaries. The 1953 Buick that Fidel rode to Moncada can be seen gleaming under a protective roof covering. Visit the



local market for an opportunity to engage with Cubans and learn about local handicrafts. Have lunch at the El Morro Fortress, an amazingly well-preserved 17th century seaside Spanish fort, which provides chilling insight into the Spanish colonial era and the Spanish-American War. Explore the fortress to learn about its role in Cuban history. This evening we will enjoy a talk on the history of Santiago and the figures that have shaped this city's history. Check in at the hotel and have dinner. *Overnight at Hotel Casa Grande. (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; six

years after the first failed attempt in 1953, 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. Fresh from repair after Hurricane Sandy and the recent visit of Pope Francis in 2015, Santiago is in fine form. Today will be dedicated to visiting the important sites of the city in the company of local specialists: the home of Don Diego Velázquez (reputedly the oldest building in Cuba), Cuartel Moncada (the barracks that saw the martyrdom of the Cuban Revolutionary heroes in 1953), and other sites in the city center. This evening have dinner in a privately owned restaurant. After dinner, engage with locals and experience Cuban music at the Casa de la Trova. *Overnight at Hotel Casa Grande.* (BLD)

DAY 10 - DEPART

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

PROGRAM PRICING

\$2,425 (15 participants + 1 leader)

\$2,675 (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, local guides in each region for duration of program, carbon offset, and Cuban visa.

International airfare, gratuities, and items of a personal nature are not included. Valid for travel in 2021.

TRAVEL PROTECTION

Holbrook Travel purchases Travel Protection on behalf of all participants. These plans help provide coverage once the trip has departed and offer benefits for Baggage/Personal Effects, Accident & Sickness Medical Expenses, Emergency Evacuation and more. Refer to the Plan Document for more details.

Optional additional coverage is available in the form of the Group Deluxe Plan, which offers benefits for Trip Cancellation/Interruption, in addition to many other insurance benefits and non-insurance assistance services. If interested in this optional plan, we can provide you with rates and plan details.

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. Non-refundable final payments are due no later than 95 days prior to departure.



VILLAGE IN BARACOA



This program includes optional carbon offsetting with ClimateSafe. Learn more at holbrooktravel.com/climatesafe



ACTIVITY LEVEL

3

MODERATE

WHAT TO EXPECT

This 10-day program combines natural, cultural, and historical discovery of the eastern portion of Cuba. You'll travel at a moderate pace through mountainous, coastal and urban landscapes through multiple Eastern cities (Holguín, Pinares de Mayarí, Maguana, Baracoa and Santiago) staying two nights in each location. Different daily activities include hikes, night walks, lectures, and city tours. Hikes may last up to 4 hours along uneven surface, with occasional steep inclines. A highlight will be your visit to Alejandro de Humboldt National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its profuse and unique flora and fauna. You'll also enjoy a visit to Baracoa Chocolate to learn about chocolate making in the tropics; as well as a boat ride on the Toa River; and visits to historical landmarks in Santiago. Expect high humidity with temperatures between 70–88 F. Pack lightweight, breathable clothing. There will be long scenic bus transfers on private, air-conditioned vehicles. The longest drive is 4 hours, featuring steep ascents through pine forests and impressive coastal views.

