



BARACOA PHOTO BY PIVISO



# CUBA

THE NATURAL & CULTURAL WONDERS OF EASTERN CUBA

*Pacific Horticulture Society*

*Escorted by Richie Steffen*

February 18 - March 1, 2018



*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.
- 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.
- Take an interpretive hike to see cacao trees at various life stages and sample chocolate at different steps of production.
- Examine the history, cultural influences, and modern day life of some of Cuba's vibrant cities, including Holguín, Baracoa, and Santiago de Cuba.

## ITINERARY

### FEBRUARY 18 - HOLGUIN

Early afternoon arrival into Holguín, the fourth largest city in Cuba which was founded in the 1500's. Today, it is well known for its vibrant cultural scene and as the gateway to the beaches and resorts of Guardalavaca. After your arrival into Holguín, transfer to the 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 have a welcome dinner and program briefing at the hotel. *Overnight at Mirador Mayabe or similar. (D)*

### FEBRUARY 19 - PINARES DE MAYARI

This morning, meet at the pool for sunrise over the mountains; have an early breakfast and then transfer to Silla de Gibara, approximately 1 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 Mayari. Appreciate views of the Sierra de Cristal, the altiplano (plateau) of the La Mensura National Park, where the mists drift through the pine forests en route. This evening, check in to the quaint mountain cabins and have dinner. Optional evening walk around the hotel in search of nocturnal creatures. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayari or similar. (BLD)*

### FEBRUARY 20 - PINARES DE MAYARI

This morning, have breakfast and then drive midway down the mountain to the entrance of the beautiful Salto El Guayabo, the highest waterfall in Cuba, situated within the Parque Nacional La Mensura. 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 the pool of crystal clear waters of the river Guayabo plunges 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. Talk by researcher on the flora of La Mensura and the work being done at the station. *Overnight at Villa Pinares de Mayari or similar. (BLD)*

### FEBRUARY 21 - MAGUANA

In the morning, travel back down the mountain and begin the interesting and scenic drive to Villa Maguana, located 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 Managua 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 or similar. (BLD)*

### FEBRUARY 22 - 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 have free time this afternoon to enjoy the beach. *Overnight at Hotel Villa Maguana or similar. (BD)*

### FEBRUARY 23 - 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 in crevices between dripstone formations. This evening, walking exploration of the main square and dinner at a local restaurant, El Portal. *Overnight at Hotel Castillo or similar. (BLD)*

### FEBRUARY 24 - 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 exciting day exploring the river and ocean. Welcome cocktail on arrival and then board wooden boats with 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 or similar. (BL)*

### FEBRUARY 25 - 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.  
*Overnight at Melia Santiago or similar. (BLD)*

## **FEBRUARY 26 - SANTA CLARA**

After breakfast you will start the day with a visit to Jardin de los Helechos. This unique setting is home to an internationally important collection of tropical ferns, bromeliads and orchids. This outstanding collection of over 3,000 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, Jardin 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. Fresh from the post Hurricane Sandy repair, and the recent visit of Pope Francis in 2015, Santiago is in fine form. This afternoon will be dedicated to visiting the important sites of the city center. In the evening, enjoy a paladar dinner and music at the Casa de la Trova. *Overnight at Hotel Los Caneyes. (BLD)*

## **FEBRUARY 27 - 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 to 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, where strata of this type of rock are present composed of layers of volcanic lava. 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 types of orchids, eucalyptuses, maestrense pines, cubenses, cypresses, and a variety of fruit bearing trees, among them peaches, as odd as that might seem. 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 our national bird: the tocororo. Only a half mile away, is the area's Botanical Garden, where species such as the bird of the paradise, dahlias, magnolias and other flowers are raised in a singular manner as they take advantage of the microclimate that prevails in the area. 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 day at leisure. *Overnight at Melia Santiago or similar. (BLD)*

## **FEBRUARY 28 - HOLGUIN**

This morning you will visit one of the organoponic gardens in Santiago. After lunch, transfer back to Holguin and check in at Hotel Pernik. This evening, enjoy a farewell dinner at a local paladar. *Overnight at Hotel Pernik or similar. (BLD)*

## **MARCH 1 - DEPARTURE**

Transfers to the airport for flights back to the U.S. (B)

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## **LAND COST**

**\$5,320** (PHS members)

**\$5,420** (Non-members)

Based on a group of 14

Includes all meals, accommodations, and activities as mentioned in itinerary, in-country transportation, full-time National guide and Specialist guide, tips/gratuities for guides & driver, bottled water on the bus and carbon offset.

Does not include International Airfare, Cuban Visa and items of personal nature.

## **THE FINE PRINT**

*Cost is based on double occupancy. Single occupancy is available at \$600 per person. A \$200 per person deposit and enrollment form are required to hold your space on the trip no later than November 22, 2017. This deposit is refundable, minus a \$100 cancellation fee, until November 30, 2017, at which time non-refundable final payment is due. Travel/trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. For more information call Travel Insured at 800-243-3174 or visit [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com). Holbrook Travel's agency number is 15849.*

**Please note:** Accommodations listed have been confirmed but situations beyond our control may require us to move to a similar lodging. Also, please expect that there will be a lack of internet service as we travel. While we expect no safety concerns, remember that Cuba's infrastructure is adapting to an influx of new travelers and your flexibility and patience may be needed at times. Of course the pioneering nature of this experience is what makes it so attractive to our groups of adventure travelers.



Tour Escort RICHIE STEFFEN

## ABOUT PACIFIC HORTICULTURE

Inspiring West Coast gardeners since 1968, Pacific Horticulture believes in beautiful gardens connected to the world at large. Find out more at [www.pacifichorticulture.org](http://www.pacifichorticulture.org).

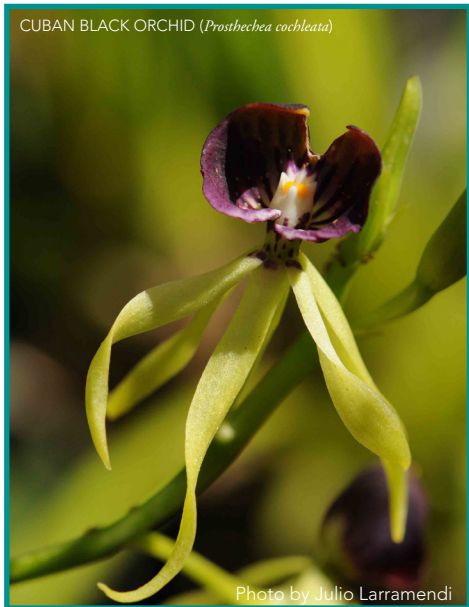
Richie Steffen is the Director/Curator of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden in Seattle, where he oversees the plant record database, general horticulture, and manages the garden's special collections, including rare plants, ferns, hepaticas, woodland plants, rare bulbs, and alpine bulbs.



ROYAL PALM (*Roystonea regia*)



WATER LILY (*Nymphaea capensis*) Photo by Prenn

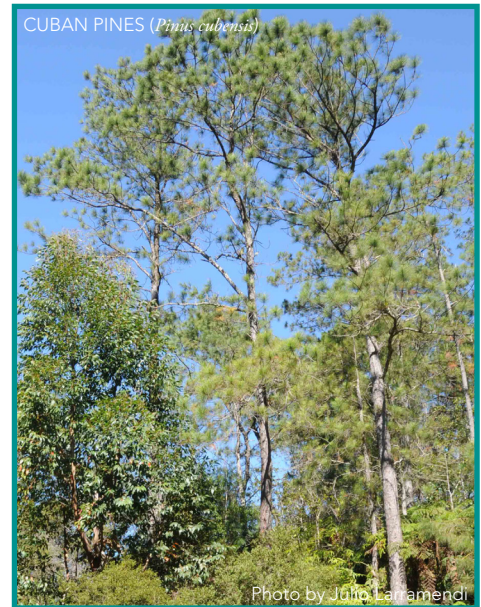


CUBAN BLACK ORCHID (*Prosthechea cochleata*)

Photo by Julio Larramendi



MAGUANA Photo by Julio Larramendi



CUBAN PINES (*Pinus cubensis*)

Photo by Julio Larramendi

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ENROLL

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