EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Cuba Libre! (CL 2015)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TOURDURAT
15
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Busy

Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Standard

tour Code: CL

Tour Highlights - Cuba Libre!

- ✓ Havana - Experience the faded colonial splendour and vibrancy of Cuba's capital
- ✓ Trinidad - Enjoy the laidback atmosphere of this colonial town. Dance at the Casa de la Musica or sip a rum cocktail under the stars
- ✓ Topes de Collantes - Walk through mountain forests, swim in fresh water pools and camp out in haciendas
- ✓ Casas Particulares - Stay in locally-owned and run private homestays in the heart of colonial Trinidad
- ✓ Comandancia de la Plata - Trek through the jungle to Fidel's 1950's rebel headquarters
- ✓ Vinales Valley - Admire the peculiar but spectacular landscape of steep limestone hills (mogotes) rising from the valley floor
- ✓ White-sand beaches - Enjoy Cuba's famous beaches, including those found on the spectacular Cayo Levisa Island
- ✓ Casas Particulares - Stay in locally-owned and run private homestays in the heart of colonial Trinidad

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	10 nights Standard Hotel 2 nights Simple Homestay 2 nights Basic Camping
Included Meals:	14 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 2 dinners
Start Point:	Join tour: Havana
End Point:	Tour ends: Havana
Transport:	Bus
Countries:	Cuba

Cuba Libre!

This remarkable journey through Cuba explores the island's revolutionary history and its modern, vibrant Caribbean culture. Travelling across the breadth of the country, we will discover colonial highlights and pass through glorious countryside, rich with exotic birds and flowers. The sea is never far away, with spectacular coastlines and tropical islands to enjoy. We also stay in privately run casas particulares.

Why Book this tour

This comprehensive tour of Cuba is one of our most popular. Visit Cuba now before it changes. You will stay in locally-owned and run private homestays in the heart of colonial Trinidad and sleep out under the stars in Topes de Collantes Nature Reserve Park.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Standard

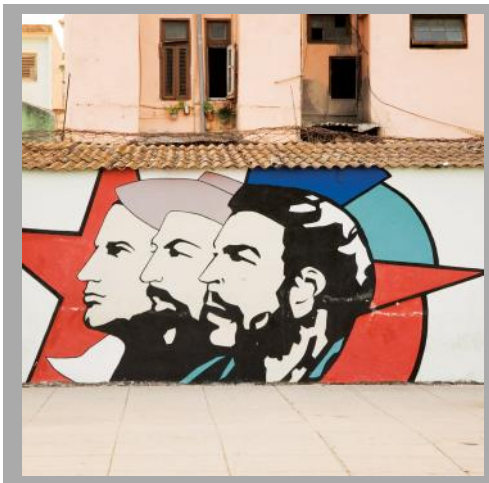
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Busy

There may be early starts, long journeys and tiring days along the way, but you'll return home feeling you've really experienced as much as you possibly could.



Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your Tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and

organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour in Havana

We arrive in Havana and check-in to our hotel. Situated in 'Old Havana', it is well-placed for exploring the historical centre on foot. Built around a deep natural harbour, the capital of Cuba is one of the most impressive surviving colonial cities in the Americas. Thankfully, wars and revolution have done little to damage 500 years of heritage. Founded during the Spanish Conquest of the 1500s, Havana proved a convenient stopping-off point for the transport of looted treasures from the New World. Future centuries saw its wealth increase further from the trade of sugar, rum, tobacco and coffee.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Tour of Havana's highlights, free afternoon

Modern-day Havana is a mixture of restored and crumbling architectural marvels. Our morning tour explores the city, driving past art deco style buildings along the coastal esplanade of the Malecon and through the Vedado and Miramar suburbs. On our travels, we will doubtless see many brightly-painted vintage cars - the result of legislation enforced until 2011 ruling that only cars built before the 1959 revolution could be sold. We may also notice the lack of advertising - nothing but political exhortations are allowed. On foot, we explore the Vieja (old) district, with its baroque cathedral,beautiful neoclassical buildings and the Plaza de Armas (main square). During your free afternoon you may choose to visit the fascinating Museum of the Revolution, housed in the impressive former Presidential Palace. The City Museum is also worth a visit, exhibiting art and historical artefacts in rooms preserved with their original Colonial decoration. Alternatively, you may prefer to visit the famous cigar factory or relax in one of the many vibrant bars of the city. El Floridita is as celebrated for its daiquiris as it is for having been a favourite hang-out for Ernest Hemingway. Likewise, the Hotel Ambos Mundos is another Hemingway landmark where the 1954 Nobel Prize winner and author of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' lived for several years. Its roof terrace serves up exceptional mojitos - the traditional Cuban cocktail. In the late afternoon, once the freshening cool breeze blows in from the Caribbean, you may be tempted to enjoy a lively sunset stroll along the Malecon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Travel to Trinidad via the Bay of Pigs Museum

Today, we head east across Cuba, driving through giant citrus and sugar plantations and out on to the Zapata Peninsula. Our journey is broken up with a wonderful swimming opportunity in a 'cenote' (pool) where the ceiling of an underground river has collapsed. We plan to arrive in Playa Giron by mid-afternoon. Here we will visit the museum dedicated to the infamous 'Bay of Pigs' invasion - a US-supported attack by Cuban exiles which failed to overthrow the Communist regime in 1961. We then travel to Cienfuegos, a colonial seaport, where we take a walking tour of the town, including the Marti Park overlooked by the grand Italian-style Tomas Terry Theatre. Our journey continues, past the wooded Escambray Mountains and hugging the coastline, with views over the sparkling turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea. By early evening, we will arrive at our homestay just outside the beautiful Spanish colonial town of Trinidad - our base for the next two nights.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Explore Trinidad, optional boat trip to Cayo Las Iguanas

This morning, we wander through the cobbled streets of the old centre of Trinidad, discovering its fine palaces, churches and cafes. A paradise for photographers, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a perfectly preserved colonial settlement unlike any other. In the early 19th century, French settlers fleeing a slave revolt in Haiti, landed here and started to grow sugar cane in the Valle de Los Ingenios. This crop generated considerable wealth and consequently the town had to be regularly defended from pirates. Subject to opening hours, we will visit a local museum before our free afternoon. You may choose to relax on the six kilometres of Playa Ancon's white stand beach nearby, or take a boat trip to the equally stunning beach on Cayo Las Iguanas (this is a full day excursion). There is also the opportunity to take a salsa lesson with a local teacher. Alternatively, you might prefer to wander for longer through Trinidad's streets to soak up more of the unique atmosphere. Later, those keen to sample some of Cuba's famed nightlife can visit the open-air Casa de la Musica, just off the main square.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5 Journey to Topes de Collantes, walk to waterfall

Today we travel inland to Topes de Collantes Nature Reserve Park, famous for its many endemic species of flora and fauna. We can look forward to a two-night stay here to explore this glorious area. After a ride in an old Russian military-style truck up a steep, switch-back road into the lush Escambray Mountains, we arrive at the park entrance. Here we meet our local guide who, along with our Tour Leader, will help us to explore the park. -There is an eight kilometre trek to our hacienda accommodation. Those who would prefer not to walk can continue with the truck to the hacienda. Our hike can vary slightly, depending on the weather and the group, but it is likely to take us into the coffee-growing valley of the Guayanara River. The paths are undulating and can be uneven underfoot, but the views and sense of remoteness are truly rewarding. Along our route, we see Cuba's highest lake, Embalse Hanabanilla, pass rural homes and watch shepherds minding their herds of goats. After about four hours' walking, we arrive at our hacienda, a small farmstead set in a rocky valley, for lunch. The afternoon is free. However, we recommend the five kilometre circular walk (approximately three hours) to the Salto de Rocio Waterfall - an area flush with trogons, hummingbirds and woodpeckers. To get to the waterfallwe follow a riverside track where we are likely to see impressive tree fern, bromeliad and orchid species. On arrival at the spectacular waterfalls and lakes, adventurous swimmers can enjoy a dip, while others may choose to relax on the banks. The accommodation at the hacienda is simple. After supper, we sleep out under the eaves of the hacienda's veranda or on covered sleeping platforms, with male and female washing facilities in a block nearby. Foam mattresses are provided, but you will benefit from bringing a sleeping bag. Tents may also be available for those who prefer camping. The fresh mountain air and the peace and quiet of the night, with its canopy of stars, is usually enough to ensure a good night's sleep.

Overnight: **Basic Camping**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 Walks in Topes de Collantes National Park

This morning, we start with a short drive in our Russian truck to the start of our four-hour trek (approximately eight kilometres). Again, anyone not wanting to make the walk can travel on to the night-stop with the truck. Today, we walk through an unspoilt land of forest, water-eroded valleys, rushing waterfalls and underground rivers. We trek through pine forest and along paths bordered by mahogany and hibiscus. If we're lucky, we may see brightly-coloured hummingbirds flash past, darting from flower to flower, searching for nectar. When we reach La Batata, there is an opportunity to swim in an open cave through which an underground river gently carves out rock pools. The water rarely exceeds 20°C, so it's exhilarating! We then trek on through the forest until we reach an isolated, century-old hacienda, set in a lush valley. This is our base for the night and where we will have lunch. In the afternoon, our local guide takes us on a circular interpretative trail (approximately one and a half kilometres), discussing the orchids and medicinal plants that we find en route. We are also taken down through a cave, La Cueva del Altar, emerging on the other side of the hill to beautiful views of the Caribbean. This evening, we are treated to more Cuban hospitality and we can expect our accommodation to be similar to the previous night.

Overnight: **Basic Camping**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7 Visit Sancti Spiritus en route to Camaguey

Leaving the Escambray Mountains behind, we stop at the Valle de los Ingenios, also known as the Valley of the Sugar Mills. This was the centre of sugar production for 100 years from the late 18th century. At its peak, it was home to 30,000 slaves working in the mills and surrounding plantations. Today, the ruined sugar mills and mansions lining the valley bear witness to the previous prosperity in the area. We stop at the infamous Torre de Manaca Iznaga, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This seven floor tower was built to watch over the slaves working in the fields and had two bells. One was rung when the slaves could stop working and take a meal, the other when a slave escaped. For a lunch stop, we visit Sancti Spiritus, one of the original seven settlements founded by Diego Velasquez when he claimed Cuba for Spain, before continuing our drive across the flattest province in Cuba - Ciego de Avila. We pass through land predominantly used for cattle ranching, sugar growing and citrus fruit production. Continuing up into the hills of the Sierra de Cubitas, by late afternoon we reach the provincial capital of Camaguey - Cuba's third largest city and a cultural centre for music, ballet and art. Our hotel is near to the 'Old Town,' allowing for easy exploration on foot.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Explore Camaguey before heading to Bartolome Maso

The morning is free to wander around Camaguey. What may strike you about this city is its labyrinth street layout - a fascinating by-product of pirate-fighting. With more similarities to a Moroccan medina than the geometric street planning you might expect, legend has it that it was designed to confuse pillaging invaders and provide cover for its residents. Those who would prefer not to walk may prefer to explore the city's hidden plazas and baroque churches by bicitaxi. However you choose to get around, we recommend a visit to the bustling farmer's market - one of the largest in Cuba. In the afternoon, we travel to Bayamo, another of the original seven Spanish settlements. However the inhabitants burned it to the ground in 1869 in an act of rebellion against the Spanish, so there is little colonial architecture left to see. Our journey continues east towards the Sierra Maestra Mountains - the highest mountain range in Cuba, where we spend the night in a small hotel either in Bartolome Maso or Santo Domingo.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Visit La Comandancia de la Plata, drive to Santiago

This morning, a convoy of 4WD vehicles carry us up a steep asphalted road to El Alto de Naranjo, 950 metres above sea level. We then trek for three kilometres through virgin rainforest to La Comandancia de La Plata. The path is uneven and can be muddy, helping us to understand the appeal of its remoteness. It was here that Fidel Castro and Che Guevara took refuge after an unsuccessful uprising against the Cuban dictator, Batista, in 1956. As you walk around this hideaway, which became the revolutionaries' headquarters until Batista fled Cuba in 1959, you gain a real sense of their two year residency here. Castro's simple camp bed and fridge (which someone impressively carted up the mountain for him) still remain, along with a trap door for a speedy exit if under attack. Also, the original broadcast hut for 'Radio Rebelde' still stands, as well as Che's hospital hut where he worked as a doctor. Previously forbidden, it is now possible to take photos around the site for a small fee. After lunch at Villa Santo Domingo, we drive inland towards the lively former Cuban capital of Santiago, where we check-in to our hotel on the outskirts of the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 10 See the sights of Santiago de Cuba, free afternoon

Surrounded by hills and looking-out over the Caribbean, Santiago is another of the original seven Spanish settlements, and has a wonderful architectural heritage from Spanish colonial, through to art deco influences. It has quite a different feel to Havana, but retains its own charm. Also known as the 'Heroic City', it has been the epicentre for revolutionary ideals since Cespedes made the declaration of Cuban independence in 1868, sparking the 10 Years' War. This morning, we will enjoy a guided tour of Cuba's second city, taking-in many of the colonial buildings which are painted in attractive, traditional pastel shades. We plan to stop-off at the Plaza de la Revolucion with its fine monument to the heroes of the Independence Wars, before visiting the remarkable cemetery where independence hero, Jose Marti, is buried. The Moncada Barracks are a particular highlight as you can still see the bullet holes on the outside of the building which Castro and 118 students unsuccessfully attacked in 1953. There may also be an opportunity to visit a rum factory. The afternoon is left free for you to explore in your own time. There are many museums, squares and churches to discover, or it may be possible to arrange dance lessons. Later, we recommend a visit to El Morro Fort. One of the best preserved forts in Cuba, it affords remarkable views over the harbour right across to the Sierra Maestra and there is a cannon firing ceremony at sunset. This evening, we have the opportunity to experience Santiago's lively nightlife.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11 Drive to Santa Clara, view the Che Guevara Memorial

Today we have our longest drive of the tour as we travel through lush agricultural land from Santiago to Santa Clara, a distance of 600km. We stop approximately every two hours to break up the journey. The pleasant university town of Santa Clara was originally a prosperous agricultural area, well-placed on the island's trading route. Now, it is most famous as the site of the last battle of the Revolution, , in which Che Guevara's troops took the city, causing the Cuban dictator, Batista, to flee into exile. Because of this, the town was chosen as the final resting place for the national hero.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 12 Visit Che's Mausoleum then continue to Vinales

This morning, we visit the centre of Santa Clara and the Tren Blindado Memorial, before moving on to Che's Mausoleum. Guevara was buried here with full military honours in 1997 after his exhumed remains were discovered in Bolivia and returned to Cuba. A flame lit by Fidel Castro burns eternally to honour a man who played a key role in Cuba's revolution and whose image is routinely displayed throughout the country. We will also visit the museum dedicated to Guevara's life, containing many interesting letters and artefacts. Back on the road, our journey is broken-up with a stop in the stunning Soroa Rainforest to take-in the orchids and waterfalls, before reaching what is arguably the most picturesque part of Cuba - the Vinales region. Here, surreal mountains jut out of the landscape, formed by the erosion of limestone over millions of years. These 'mogotes' translate as 'haystacks' - a good word for them considering their steep sides and rounded, jungly tops. Around them, the iron-rich, red soil creates a patchwork of fields growing some of the best tobacco in the world - the raw material for Cuba's celebrated cigars. We will get an opportunity to explore this fascinating landscape in more detail on our way back through the region on day 14 of our tour. Our hotel accommodation for the next two nights is situated just outside the town of Vinales.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 13 Boat trip to Cayo Levisa; time to relax or snorkel

A short hop on a ferry takes us to the spectacular Cayo Levisa, part of the Archipelago los Colorados on the north coast of Cuba. Here, mangroves and pristine white sand welcome us for a day's relaxation on the beach. The more active among us may choose to take an optional snorkelling trip to explore the colourful marine flora and fauna on the reef. Today's included lunch is provided by a small cafe on the island. Late in the afternoon, we head back to Vinales.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 14 Walk through Vinales countryside, return to Havana

This morning, we can look forward to an optional two-hour trek through the valleys of this remarkable landscape to the village of El Palmarito. Mogotes tower above us as we pass through tobacco fields and past drying barns. This afternoon has been left free to explore more of the area. You may wish to visit Cueva del Indio - one of the largest cave systems in the Americas. A beautiful walk to the Laguna del Piedra lake is another option, taking approximately two hours. Alternatively, you may choose to relax in the grounds of the hotel before our return to Havana later in the afternoon. This evening, we can look forward to a dinner, and probably a dance, together in old Havana as we reminisce over our highlights from the tour.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 15 Tour ends Havana

Our tour ends this morning, after breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Rating

Accommodation and service levels in Cuba have improved in recent years but there is an ongoing trade embargo and lack of investment in infrastructure. Accommodation can be basic, particularly in some rural areas, occasionally with unreliable water and electricity supply. Service levels in government hotels, shops and restaurants are generally poor as this is not a service-oriented western culture. Of course, this is all part of seeing the 'real Cuba' and whilst we think you'll be pleasantly surprised by most of the hotels we use, you should be prepared for simply furnished rooms, some out-dated furniture and varying levels of service. Most of the hotels do have air conditioning and en-suite facilities. Due to tourism demands and central government decision making in Cuba, occasionally there may be some last-minute changes to the accommodation which we are unable to foresee or prevent. We will endeavour to ensure it is of the same standard however sometimes this may be in an alternative location but this will not affect your included itinerary.

In Trinidad, you will stay in casas particulares. This is a Spanish term meaning private accommodation or homestay in Cuba. Staying in a casa offers the visitor a unique opportunity to experience Cuban hospitality in local accommodation adapted for tourism. The number of rooms, quality, facilities and access to other areas of the house such as the living room varies massively but as a general rule the majority of Casas are clean, basic, centrally located and can host only a handful of guests. Casas are generally run by the owner and members of the family that live there and the standard of English spoken will vary from zero to fluent. Virtually all of the rooms have private facilities but on rare occasions it may be necessary to share. Your Tour Leader will coordinate accommodation arrangements on tour.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 14 breakfasts, 4 lunches,2 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Cuba

Lunch £: 9.00

Dinner £: 15.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Cuba

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00

Water £: 1.00

International Departure Taxes

Airport departure tax is approximately CUC25 Convertible peso (approx. £20).

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Havana - Museo de la Ciudad CUC3; Museo de la Revolucion & Arte Colonial CUC8 each; Rum museum CUC7.
Trinidad - Cayo Las Iguanas Boat Excursion CUC50 (this is a full day so will shorten your time for Trinidad tour) plus transport 10CUC per taxi each way. Excursion to Playa Ancon - CUC10 per taxi each way Salsa classes CUC10 per hour.
Camaguey - Bicitaxi tour CUC5.
Santiago de Cuba - El Morro Fort CUC12 including transport CUC14.
Vinales - Cueva del Indio CUC8 plus transport; Laguna de la Piedra walk CUC8.
Soroa - Orchid Gardens CUC3, Waterfall CUC3.

Please note - most museums in Cuba charge for use of cameras and camcorders, this can be up to 7 CUC per usage.

Tipping - Tour Leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Please note tipping is also customary for musicians and for public conveniences so small notes and coins are always handy

Tipping - Local Crew

Local Crew: Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow CUC40 for group tipping. 10% is expected in restaurants

Foreign Exchange

Cuba

ATM Availability: Available in major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

Credit Card Acceptance: Please note credit cards drawn on American Banks are not accepted. Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

Travellers Cheques: We do not recommend Travellers Cheques. Amex Travellers Cheques are not accepted.

Local Currency: Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC).

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US dollars are no longer accepted in shops and other businesses, tourists and Cubans exchanging dollars will have to pay a 20% commission. We recommend you take clean Euro, Canadian dollars or Sterling cash as these are easier to exchange. Please note that Scottish Pounds are not accepted in Cuba.

Where to Exchange: Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable. You will also need to ensure your travel policy covers you for all activities you intend to do whilst on tour.

We are delighted to include FREE travel insurance **for all qualifying customers** who book an Explore trip from 01 January 2015.

For more information about Travel insurance and to check whether you are eligible to receive free cover, please visit www.explore.co.uk/insurance. Explore Worldwide Ltd are an Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Limited. who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. The registration number can be checked by visiting the the FCA's website www.fca.gov.uk or by contacting them on 0800 111 6768.

Visa Information

Cuba: Visas are required by all nationalities travelling to Cuba. Explore can arrange a Cuban visa for UK residents, this currently costs £15. Please contact Explore or your Travel Agent to arrange this service and we will send your tourist card with your final documentation. Alternatively they can be obtained through Cuban embassies and consulates.

Due to US Treasury Department Regulations we are unable to accept bookings from US passport holders.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Cuba

There are no compulsory vaccinations needed for Cuba, however we recommend vaccination against tetanus, infectious hepatitis, typhoid and polio. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour

Climate

Cuba

The dry season is from November to April. Average temperatures are 22-26C. Though the sky is often cloudless during the dry season, cold wet snaps do come in from North America especially in Dec and Jan, when the temperatures can drop to as low as 5C at night. From May to October there are normally fine mornings and clear evenings, afternoon rains tend to be short & heavy. Temperatures are hot and humid.

Clothing

Include light cotton clothing plus something warmer for the evenings in the hills when it can get cool. A light fleece and waterproof would be also be useful except December-January when a heavier fleece and waterproof are recommended. An umbrella may also be useful in the rainy season.

Equipment

A torch (with spare batteries and bulb), filter water bottle, travel pillow, towel, sunblock, pocket knife, insect repellent, sunglasses, sun hat and swimgear. You may wish to bring a walking pole.
A 2-season (temperature 0°C to 5°C) sleeping bag is recommended for the two night stay in the haciendas (mattresses are provided). Due to the limited availability of bedding (and other goods) in Cuba, the bedding provided in Topes may not be up to the standards you are used to. Accordingly, we strongly recommend you take your own sleeping bag for these night's stay.
You may also wish to bring your own mask and snorkel (see day 4). Camera equipment is not available to buy in Cuba.

Footwear

Trail boots are essential, plus trainers/ sandals for the evening.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of luggage and a small rucksack for day use.Remember you are expected to carry our own luggage between hotels and transport - don’t overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Cuba

Population: 11,241,894

Size of Country: 109,884 sq km

Major Language: Spanish

Religion: 60% Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: -5

Electric Supply & Plugs

Cuba

2 Pin Flat

Why Choose Explore

We’ve been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.

- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety andÂ security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. ForÂ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link atÂ http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2015 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2015. 2016/17 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2016.

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