JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



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SELF-DRIVE CUBA: EXPLORE THE EAST

13 days from **£2,280pp**

CUBA / HAVANA / CIENFUEGOS, SANTA CLARA AND BAY OF PIGS / TRINIDAD AND THE ESCAMBRAY MOUNTAINS / SANTIAGO DE CUBA



WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

- A passion for the region runs through all we do
- All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America
- Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

- Fully bonded and licensed
- ATOL-protected
- On your side when it matters
- Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

- Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks
- We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions
- Let us show you the Latin America we know and love

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

Relish the flexibility and decide how quickly you travel in a self-drive hire car, visiting less-visited but historically significant eastern side of Cuba. Hotels and some city tours are pre-booked. The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office currently advises against travel to Cuba. The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office currently advises against travel to Cuba.

DAY 1	**Transfer from the airport to your hotel in Havana.**
DAY 2	**Guided walking tour of Old Havana. Collect hire car.**
DAY 3	**Drive to Cienfuegos port, and on to colonial Trinidad.**
DAY 4	**Walking tour of Trinidad and optional trips out into surrounding countryside.**
DAY 5	**Drive to Camagüey via Sancti Spíritus.**
DAY 6	**Guided walking tour of Camagüey.**
DAY 7	**Drive from Camaguey to Santiago de Cuba**
DAY 8	**Guided walking tour of Santiago.**
DAY 9	**Drive from Santiago to Gibara.**
DAY 10	**At leisure in Gibara.**
DAY 11	**Drive back west to Santa Clara.**
DAY 12	**Drive from Santa Clara back to Havana.**
DAY 13	**Drop off your car and transfer to the airport.**

ITINERARY

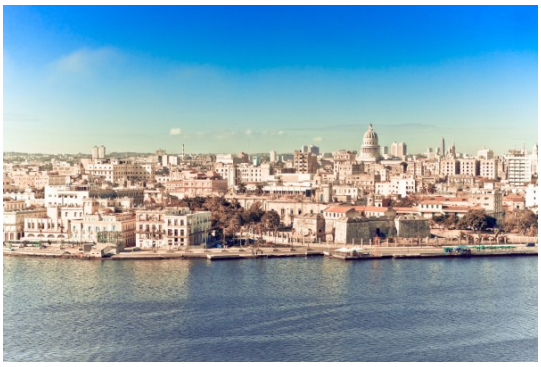
This holiday takes you not only to Cuba's highlights but also to areas less visited by tourists in the eastern half of the country. If you are adventurous in spirit, the most rewarding way to travel around Cuba is to drive your own hire-car. You will relish the flexibility, and the ability to choose how fast and how far you travel before stopping to enjoy a sight or chat to the locals. Your hotels are all pre-booked for you.

Cuba is unique and inspiring; a socialist stronghold, with a rebellious history, colonial splendour in many of the towns, spectacular countryside and a Caribbean heart. Its vibrancy and friendly people will make a lasting impression. Walk round Havana's historic centre; then drive on to eastern region of the country and back, visiting Cuba's other historic cities: Cienfuegos, Trinidad, Sancti Spíritus, Camagüey, Santiago and Santa Clara. Drive through the wild mountains of Sierra Maestra, Castro's pre-revolution hiding place, and continue to the Caribbean coast, basing yourself at the unassuming little fishing port Gibara to explore the attractive wooded bays and glittering beaches of the unspoilt northeastern littoral.

DAY 1

Transfer from the airport to your hotel in Havana.

Your accommodation is in the very heart of historic Havana just a quick stroll from the city's principal squares.



DAY 2

Guided walking tour of Old Havana. Collect hire car.

Your introduction to the city is a guided walking tour of Old Havana. The streets of La Habana Vieja were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982, and the subsequent restoration of this part of town has transformed it into arguably Latin America's finest colonial quarter, in marked contrast to the rambling, potholed streets and crumbling façades around it.



Stroll along the cobbles, between grand, pastel-hued mansions and bustling street life. Music seeps out of every doorway and the narrow streets are clogged with classic 1950s American cars, which you will have the option of hopping into and cruising down the Malecón. You'll have trouble keeping your camera by your side as iconic images flash before you round each and every corner.

Collect your hire car, a Seat Althea or equivalent.

DAY 3

Drive to Cienfuegos port, and on to colonial Trinidad.



Drive on to the city of Trinidad through the central heartland of Cuba – a transition between the pre-Revolutionary prosperous western plantations and the cattle pasture of the poorer east. Maybe stop off in the elegant city of Cienfuegos, an important port town founded by French settlers from Louisiana in 1819. Its French founders left their mark in broad neoclassical boulevards, art deco façades and blond inhabitants but there's also a strong Afro-Caribbean presence.

This is a seafaring city with salt in the air; it's the world's primary sugar port. The ambience and architectural style is distinct from that of the rest of the island. Continue by car to Trinidad, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988. Its popularity has not affected its colonial charm and unhurried atmosphere. You'll be staying in a family home here for 2 nights.

There's a feast of terracotta-tiled roofs, cobbled streets and pastel-coloured buildings. Founded in 1514, the town was originally used as a base for expeditions into the 'New World'; its squares and churches date from the 18th and 19th centuries. The town has hardly changed in a century, no suburbs creep out from its historic centre and no high-rise buildings obscure the view to the sea. Home-grown talent fills the squares and music venues in the evenings, when the town comes alive with dancing and the sound of salsa. Evening entertainment continues into the early hours with dancing and music each night.

DAY 4

Walking tour of Trinidad and optional trips out into surrounding countryside.



On your guided tour you will wander through Trinidad's cobbled streets and elegantly crumbling town houses which lead to vibrant plazas frequently filled with music and salsa dancing. As you visit the Plaza Mayor and Museo Romántico, you'll be introduced to the history of this UNESCO World Heritage Site, which seems barely touched by the modern world. Stop at an authentic Cuban bar to sample a traditional cocktail, before heading off to one of Trinidad's ceramics workshops.

Before or after the tour you may venture into the surrounding countryside, the Valle de los Ingenios (valley of sugar mills). In the 18th and 19th centuries, this region was one of the wealthiest as a result of its participation in the sugar boom. The Manaca-Iznaga tower has some of the best views in Cuba. From there, the plantation owner kept a watchful eye on the slaves working in the fields below. Or you might drive up to Topes de Collantes National Park. The park is in the Escambray mountains which are a backdrop to Trinidad and have an exquisite landscape of forests, waterfalls, deep valleys and lakes, perfect for car touring or hiking along visible trails.

DAY 5

Drive to Camagüey via Sancti Spíritus.

Drive to Sancti Spíritus. This city sits right slap bang in the centre of Cuba. It was one of the original 7 Cuban cities founded by the Spanish in 1514. Its colonial origins are evident in its buildings and layout, although it is not as exquisite and well preserved as the Trinidad to the south, which as a result attracts more visitors. Its neglect by governments through the ages in certain areas have led to many of the buildings taking on an authentic faded charm.

Highlights include the green-towered Parroquial Mayor, the country's oldest (founded in the early 16th century). It's close to town's main square. Another top attraction in this central area is the Museo de Arte Colonial (Colonial Art Museum), occupying one of Sancti Spíritus's loveliest colonial homes. The luxurious mansion belonged to one of one of Cuba's old aristocratic families. Following their flight from Cuba after the Castro Revolution, it became the property of the state in 1961. Most of what you see inside, from furniture to paintings, is original. The town also hosts one of Cuba's older river bridges. Graced with five arches, this short bridge was constructed in 1815 from clay bricks, designed for pedestrians and carriages during colonial times, and it remains closed to modern traffic.

Continue to Camagüey.

DAY 6

Guided walking tour of Camagüey.



Founded by Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century, the city, with its winding streets, is in marked contrast to the grid system which characterises the majority of Cuban towns. Stately colonial houses facing onto streets; huge windows protected by wrought-iron grilles; lush green gardens tucked behind the walls. It's a vibrant place bursting with culture – national poet Nicolás Guillén was born here and the Camagüey Ballet is internationally renowned. On Saturday nights, there is a lively street party along its main thoroughfare, Avenida República.

On your guided walking tour you will discover its irregular, intricate street network while admiring public and private buildings of great colonial architectural beauty, including Plaza San Juan de Dios.

DAY 7

Drive from Camaguey to Santiago de Cuba



Take the Carratera Central to Autopista Nacional (A1). We recommend a short stop at Bayamo, a gem featuring pastel painted houses and marking the spot where the mountains of the Sierra Maestra begin. (If you are interested in trekking we can arrange an additional night or two so you can visit the Comandancia de la Plata. This was Fidel's mountain hideout, where his revolutionary strategy was organised). Alternatively, just have a leisurely stroll around the streets and square before continuing via Juiguani to Santiago de Cuba. With a stop planned, leave early and allow a full day.

Santiago de Cuba, the island's most Caribbean city and a melting pot of Haitian, African and Spanish influences, reflected in both its architecture and people. Cuba's second largest metropolis sits in a valley surrounded by mountains huddled around a natural harbour.

DAY 8

Guided walking tour of Santiago.

Despite being a bustling hive of activity, Santiago retains an intimate and friendly air, more associated with a smaller provincial city. What's more, the city is jam-packed with culture and tradition, from the deep-rooted African religion of Santería to its conveyor belt of great contemporary musicians.

Also known as the Heroic City, Santiago played an important role at the beginning of the wars for independence. This guided tour takes you to the major places of interest, including the Moncada Barracks, famed for the unsuccessful pre-revolution attack by a handful of rebels led by Castro. This failed attack nevertheless was the springboard which launched the revolution. Cementerio Santa Ifigenia, Barrita de Ron Caney, the Casa del Habano and the San Pedro de la Roca colonial fortress. You'll have a seafood lunch at the quay.

DAY 9

Drive from Santiago to Gibara.



Head north cross country towards the Caribbean coast. You will arrive at the region's major town Holguin (3-4 hours) from where it's a drive of a further hour to Gibara. Holguin is Cuba's fourth largest metropolis but for visitors is primarily a transit point for those heading to the island's increasingly popular north-east coast beaches such as the resort of Guardalavaca, 50km away. Despite its size, Holguín is an easy-going and friendly city. The centre is quite dilapidated but its several parks and squares are dominated by statues to national heroes.

The off-the-beaten-track community Gibara, a little port situated on a bay on the scalloped north east coast has been spruced up after earthquake damage, is delightful and worth the detour. The fishing port is situated in rugged, hilly landscape dotted with royal palms and interspersed with sugar cane plantations in the valleys.

DAY 10

At leisure in Gibara.



The crinkly coastline, with secret coves which once sheltered buccaneers, is gradually being opened up to tourism, but the port Gibara retains its off-beat, remote ambiance. The town is named after the lumpy hill which composes its backdrop. There's a grand view of the town from the ruined fort El Cuartelon. The main square, dominated by a 19th century cathedral built in eclectic mix of styles, is shaded by African oak trees imported from Angola in the 1970s. The calm little streets and waterside malecón are lined with sedate old houses with porches and stained glass windows, gradually being done up.

You may decide to drive or walk further afield to visit the Cavernas de Panadernos, a chain of underground limestone caves – you are advised to take a local guide if planning to enter them; you can hire one in town. The presence of fluttering bats ads to the eerie atmosphere. Alternatively drive along the craggy coast to one of the gorgeous beaches, many of which now feature hotels and facilities. Guardalavaca is the best established of these.

DAY 11

Drive back west to Santa Clara.

Head back to the Carretera Central via Holguin and westward to Santa Clara. (The northern route – the Circuito Norte – is not currently recommended, as the road surface is poor in places and facilities such as petrol stations and eateries are rudimentary). This is a very long day so we suggest an early departure, allowing a good couple of hours during daylight for stops and lunch.



DAY 12

Drive from Santa Clara back to Havana.

We suggest you take the route A1 straight back to Havana as this will allow you time to look around Santa Clara before you leave. Santa Clara, founded on agriculture and mining, gained importance when a railway was built to connect the city with Havana. This track provided for one of the most momentous events in Castro's revolutionary campaign: the hijacking of a train carrying government guns and soldiers. A few of the carriages are on display in what is this lively university city's most important monument.



If you enjoy life on the road you can opt to travel via Matanzas, a city dating back to the 17th century which founded its prosperity on the commerce from its sugar mills and from the accessibility provided by the 19trh century railway connecting it with Havana. Indeed, for a while it was second only to Havana in importance. Matanzas became known as the Athens of Cuba, referring to its intellectual and artistic prowess, with flourishing theatres and libraries. Even more important to its identity is its role as the place where the famous rumba dance was invented, and music permeates every comer of this otherwise quiet city.

DAY 13

Drop off your car and transfer to the airport.

Drop off your hire car at the car rental agency and proceed to the airport for your international flight, or continue with any tailor-made extension you have booked with us.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- Guided walking tour of Old Havana
- Guided walking tour of colonial Trinidad
- Guided walking tour of Camaguey
- Guided panoramic tour of Santiago
- 11 days of self-drive around Cuba

ESSENTIALS

A minimum of 6 scenic road journeys in your self-drive car.

Accommodation on this trip is of a superior quality for Cuba where standards of amenities and service, though constantly improving, can be erratic. You'll find well-equipped rooms, private bathroom and air-conditioning in most and some local colour and special features.

Breakfast daily and Lunch on day 4.

We carefully select our local partners; their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their return.

13 days, 12 nights: Havana 2; Trinidad 2; Camagüey 2; Santiago 2; Gibara 2; Santa Clara 1; Havana 1.

The unit of currency in Cuba is the Cuban peso.

The Cuban National Peso (CUP) is the only official cash currency in Cuba, however many outlets will accept US dollars and some may also accept Euros. We recommend you bring your funds in US$ cash and exchange a small amount into CUPs when in Cuba. You can also exchange Euros but we don't recommend Sterling. Your bank notes should not be damaged in any way. As a foreign tourist you should receive a considerably better exchange rate than the 'official' rate used for commercial transactions.

A limited number of ATM's are available around Cuba, but queues can be large, charges can be high, and the official rate of exchange is given which makes them much less attractive.

Changing small amounts at a time into CUPs will help to avoid having leftover currency when you leave Cuba (it is not always easy to exchange CUPs back to other currencies). It is worth noting that CUPs are not accepted at Havana Airport.

Private hotels, bars and restaurants often accept payments directly in US$ cash. For these transactions, bring small denominations if possible, and note that coins will not be accepted. Change may sometimes be given in CUPs.

Euros may also be accepted, but locals often see them as interchangeable with US$, meaning you will pay the same amount in Euros that you would in US$.

You'll generally need to use a credit/debit card to cover transactions in government shops and hotels, as well as car-rental extras such as petrol and local fees. However, some clients have issues using cards in Cuba so don't rely on them as your only source of funding. Be sure to check with your bank that your cards are accepted in Cuba (cards linked to US banks are not accepted locally). At Cadeca exchange offices it is now possible to purchase a prepaid card (Tarjeta Clasica) which can be bought in cash with US Dollars/Euros. These can be used to obtain petrol. Clasica credit cannot be applied to any other purchases.

Using money changers in the street is not recommended as it is illegal and you are more likely to receive forgeries.

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around £35 per day should cover the cost of meals not included in the holiday itinerary, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants and you will pay considerably more.

Tips are welcomed and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income.

Most service industry workers will expect a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

Many Cubans lack what we consider to be daily necessities, such as soap, plasters, bras, aspirin and stationery.
If you have room in your case for some such things, they will be hugely appreciated by the islanders.

Tipping guidelines can be found in our Briefing Dossier.

Travel insurance is essential. Cuban authorities require visitors to have travel insurance, and specifically for the medical and repatriation element of cover to be from an approved provider. Please check with your insurance company that their provider is similarly approved.

Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

Fully comprehensive car insurance is included, though there is an excess. Please enquire if you wish to purchase Total Damage Waiver.

The minimum age for hiring a car in Cuba is 21 years. Insurance and supplements for additional drivers can be paid locally, in Cuban Convertible Pesos. There is a CUC20 fee for picking up your car at the airport (payable locally) and additional fees for dropping off your car in towns where there is no car rental office – please ask us for details. Unlimited mileage is included, but not fuel.

If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

Departure tax from Cuba is included in the price of your ticket.

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. A completed Cuban tourist card is essential for all UK citizens travelling to Cuba, we will organise this for you. Clients with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the Cuban consulate.

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Generally this holiday is suitable for all able, reasonably fit visitors, including families. You should have in your party a confident driver, preferably with some mechanical knowledge.

Road maps and signage are poor, but roads are lined with local people who are happy to help, most speak a little English, though if you speak a bit of Spanish it certainly helps. With a Silva compass and a decent map (we'll give you one), you can find you'll get to your destination safely (NB: satnavs don't work properly in Cuba). Main roads are in a relatively decent condition; venture off the beaten track and you will encounter potholes and other barriers requiring caution.

In Cuba there are often delays and occasionally cancellations – patience and a flexible attitude will be a virtue in these situations.

As Cuba lies in the Caribbean, it has a tropical climate that is split into two seasons, one wet and one dry.

However, Cuba is generally hot throughout the year (18-32°C) with regular rainfall and high humidity. The rainy season runs from May to October and from July to September, humidity can be very high. The east of the island is hotter and more humid that the west. Hurricanes and tropical storms are possible from July to October.

No special clothing or equipment is required although comfortable walking shoes or trainers, and sandals would be useful. Light, summer clothing will be adequate for these hot temperatures, and the dress code is very casual everywhere. Thin, long-sleeved garments may be useful for evenings, and a lightweight raincoat is the best protection against tropical downpours. We also recommend that you pack a torch as lighting can be poor at night.

Protection against the sun (sunblock, sun hat) and mosquito repellant are essential and you should bring swimwear. A daypack is useful for carrying sunblock, guidebook, water and any extra layers.

We suggest that you provide your own reflective jackets for all passengers, and a first aid kit. Sometimes power cuts and closures mean that usable petrol stations are far apart, so fill up whenever you have the chance.

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts. Good equipment is very important and hard to come by in Cuba.

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. For specific

requirements you must consult your GP.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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