CUBA
Havana and the Caribbean Coast
DAY 1
Havana / La Muraleando

- Meet artists and musicians in the colorful La Muraleando neighborhood
- Enjoy a guided stroll in Old Havana
- Go bar hopping, Hemingway style

After thinking about it for so long, you’re finally in Havana! Starting immediately, you’ll be immersed in the maze of streets, the history, culture, neighborhoods, and people. And all of your thoughts, ideas, and images will begin to crystallize to give you a true sense of this fascinating city and country. Your first stop is La Muraleando, a neighborhood covered in bright murals, wall paintings and art installations. Friends and local Habaneros Manuel and Victor invite you to a lunch where you hang out with local artists and musicians. And when those musicians start playing, remember this: Cubans love to dance..and nothing makes them happier than when you join in. They don’t care if you have the moves; they just want you to let the beat take over!

After lunch at a paladar owned by Cuban musicians, there’s time to get a closer look at sites such as the capital building on Prado de Marti or to go people-watching along the Malecón — the famed seawall and promenade overlooking Havana Bay. Later, you’ll go for a stroll in Habana Vieja (Old Havana) with a local historian for their personal take on Cuban history. This 500-year-old UNESCO World Heritage Site is the original heart of Havana, built by the Spanish, burned to the ground by pirates, and still a fine district of baroque and neoclassic buildings. While many of the buildings are well preserved, you also get a sense of the challenges that lie ahead as you see a number of buildings that fell into ruin over the past half-century and await restoration.

Not long ago, the government of Cuba finally allowed entrepreneurs to start their own privately owned and operated restaurants known as paladares. Your evening begins with dinner at one of our favorites. An economist who is one of our local Cuban friends will join you for an engaging no-holds-barred conversation that will help to make sense of so many of the economic contradictions you see during your time here. Afterward, you can retire for the evening, or you can join your guide to retrace Hemingway’s footsteps on a nighttime walk that ends up at El Floridita, a small bar Hemingway loved, where you can catch some live music and sip a daiquiri.

OVERNIGHT: HAVANA
MEALS: L, D

DAY 2
Havana

- Shop with locals in an organic food market
- Cook and compare recipes with a local chef
- Meet classic car restoration experts

For an inside look at the lives of everyday Cubans, your morning starts with a visit to an organic market where the produce comes from nearby farmers who tend their own fields. Here you can chat directly with the locals who are shopping and the farmers tending their stalls. Armed with cooking supplies, you walk from the market to a personal residence where a chef invites you to help prepare some popular Cuban dishes in a cooking instruction. Midday, enjoy the results of your time in the kitchen as you share lunch with your host in the dining room at their private home.

Later, you get a terrific inside look at Cuba’s car culture at a privately-owned workshop where artisans restore the classic cars (and paint them in just about every color you can imagine). You’ll have time to talk with our friends, husband and wife Julio and Nidialys, about the cars they treasure and the challenges of being small-business owners. They’ve hosted famous visitors from Michelle Obama to Mark Zuckerburg. Today it’s your turn, as the craftsmen who work on the cars take you for a tail-finned cruise to the Malecón, 5th Avenue and Revolution Square.

OVERNIGHT: HAVANA
MEALS: B, L

DAY 3
Havana

- Engage with cigar rollers at their work desks
- Experience the lively arts scenes firsthand

This morning, you have one of those experiences you can only get in Havana, as you visit a traditional, working, cigar-making factory. As you’ll see, there’s nothing automated about the process. Our aficionado-friend Augustine walks you through the rows of small stations where workers listen to the ‘reader’ recap the day’s events from the pages of the local newspaper, while they select leaves and roll each cigar by hand. It’s a fascinating process and you’ll have a chance to light up a cigar if you’re so inclined.

You’ve gotten the picture by now that the Cubans have an infectious enthusiasm for the arts. One of the best examples is the local private dance company that’s excited to give you a performance of Afro-Caribbean dance music. These young dancers have an energetic, percussive style that really captures the Cuban tempo, and it’s a treat to see them in action.

Did you ever meet Castro in person? No? Well, the good news for you is that the photojournalist you meet this afternoon had virtually unfettered access to him. So, you’ll have the chance to hear stories of the last half-century as well as to learn the backstories behind some iconic photos. Later, join an independent art curator with a Finger on the pulse of the graphic and fine arts scene in Havana for a cocktail and to hear about what’s inspiring artists nowadays in the capital. You’ll also meet some of the artists personally. If you find a piece that appeals to you, you can purchase it directly from the artist who created it.

Some of the best signs of economic change in Havana are the privately run paladares. The owners of tonight’s paladar greet you personally for your festive dinner in a grand colonial-style building.

OVERNIGHT: HAVANA
MEALS: B, L, D

DAY 4
Finca Vigia / Bay of Pigs

- Visit Hemingway’s home
- Snorkel in the clear waters of the Bag of Pigs

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This morning, you’ll pay a fascinating visit to Finca Vigía, Ernest Hemingway’s Cuban home. With a local friend who is an expert on “Papa,” you learn about the author’s love of Cuba. You also get a fascinating look into rooms that are furnished as they were from 1939 to 1960, the period when he lived here and wrote works including “For Whom the Bell Tolls.”

Afterward, you head for the Caribbean coast and its most famous bay. Linguists say that the name “Bay of Pigs” is actually a mistranslation of a word that means “triggerfish.” When you look down into the bay’s coral reef through a snorkel mask, you’ll agree that the real name makes more sense. In the company of a private Cuban naturalist-guide, you might spot striped goatfish, peacock flounder, or Creole wrasse among countless others. Your guide will help you grasp the richness of the ecosystem that is one of the best-preserved anywhere on the island.

The failed 1961 attempt to invade Cuba fixed this otherwise quiet bay in our collective memory. For the Cuban government, it was seen as a great victory—a fact you can discuss candidly over a picnic lunch with your Cuban hosts. It’s an eye-opening experience to view those events through a Cuban lens.

After settling into your accommodations, tonight you enjoy dinner in the World Heritage City of Trinidad. The historic paladar is called Casa de los Conspiradores (The House of the Conspirators) because it was where rebels famously plotted against Spain in 1848.

**OVERNIGHT: TRINIDAD / CIENFUEGOS**

**MEALS: B, L**

### DAY 5

**COFFEE PLANTATION / TRINIDAD**

- Taste the coffee on a mountainous, family-owned plantation
- Explore Trinidad with a local journalist
- Meet a white-magic priest in a Santeria temple

In the nearby Escambray Mountains, a longtime Cuban tradition continues at a family-run coffee plantation where you are welcomed this morning. The young couple who are the next generation of coffee-growers lead you on a rainforest path to the family home where you learn about their agricultural heritage—and have a chance to help with harvesting, sun-drying, roasting, and grinding the beans. Of course, you also get to taste the ultimate cup of homegrown, homemade coffee.

The city of Trinidad has a vibe all its own as you’ll instantly realize as you explore with Luis, a local journalist who is your insider guide. It can feel like time has stood still since the mid-19th century when Trinidad was the unofficial capital of the sugar industry. The sense is made even stronger as you move through the streets in a traditional carriage and learn about the forces of business, colonialism and politics that gave birth to this city.

Slaves were key to the sugar trade, and they brought with them the roots of the Santeria religion. This afternoon, you’ll visit the Yemaya Temple. There, you’ll meet our friend Israel, a white-magic priest, and get respectful insight into the religious practices that are deeply embedded in Cuban culture.

Then, get ready to rumba. You’re off to a privately-owned studio for a dance lesson that will have everybody swiveling and smiling and getting a real feel for the native Cuban spirit. After working up an appetite, your guide will be glad to recommend one of the city’s great paladares for dinner on your own.

**OVERNIGHT: TRINIDAD / CIENFUEGOS**

**MEALS: B, L**

### DAY 6

**SUGAR HISTORY / SNORKELING**

- Explore sugar cane plantations on horseback
- Help protect a coral reef on an educational snorkeling expedition

The masters of sugar cane plantations managed their lands from horseback. This morning, you get the same perspective as you saddle up with a private horse rancher to visit El Valle de los Ingenios – the Valley of the Sugar Mills. The scenic vistas are spectacular, but this historic area is also the best place to look into the history of sugar. In the first half of the 19th century, this was the world’s most important source of sugar. San Isidro de los Destiladeros was once typical of the local plantations. With your expert local guide, you’ll learn about the tremendous scale of the enterprise, the dependence on slavery, and why the ruins of the hacienda, bell tower and slave quarters are an archeological site today. At another of the old plantations, Manaca Iznaga, a soaring tower offers sweeping views and you have a chance to sip guarapo, the classic sugarcane juice drink.

As you’ve already seen, Cuba’s Caribbean coast has terrific reefs, and today you get a unique chance to explore and help tend to the reef. With an expert private guide, you slip into the warm, clear waters to observe the aquatic life, see sea fans and various kinds of coral, and even learn about local fishing customs. Like many private citizens, your guide helps clean and preserve the reef, and you will all have the chance to join them.

Back on land, you’ll have dinner tonight in one of Trinidad’s fine paladares. The streets are especially evocative at dusk so you may want to go for a stroll after dessert.

**OVERNIGHT: TRINIDAD / CIENFUEGOS**

**MEALS: B, D**

### DAY 7

**CIENFUEGOS**

- Stroll Cienfuegos with a local historian
- Visit with artists in a graphics workshop

A brief morning drive takes you to Cienfuegos, a seaside UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the “Pearl of the South.” Its story is unique, as you’ll discover on a walk led by a local historian. Founded in 1819, the city was settled by immigrants from France and Louisiana. Even now, you see clear hints of Paris and New Orleans in the architecture. It’s also very well preserved thanks to its role as a prosperous center of shrimping and industry. Your exploration ends at a graphic arts workshop owned by a collective of Cuban artists. They love to talk with you about their work, and if you like, you can support their craft by making purchases directly from the creators.
After a final paladar lunch, you drive to Santa Clara airport for flights home.

**Special thanks to the Cuban people.**
Thanks to the personal hospitality and generous spirit of the individual Cubans who have become our friends over many years and repeated visits to the island, all of the interactions and activities you enjoy during your time in Cuba are fully compliant with the U.S. government’s “Support for the Cuban People” general license guidelines. Count on Classic Journeys to make sure your trip is 100% legal and to do all of the record-keeping for the Treasury Department and OFAC on your behalf. It's just another reason why National Geographic Traveler named our Cuban trips on of their “50 Tours of a Lifetime”.

**MEALS:** B, L