



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

## SELF-DRIVE CUBA: BEST OF THE WEST

13 days from **£2,130pp**

**CUBA / HAVANA / VIÑALES AND THE SIERRA DE LOS ORGANOS / LAS TERRAZAS / CIENFUEGOS, SANTA CLARA AND BAY OF PIGS / TRINIDAD AND THE ESCAMBRAY MOUNTAINS**



## 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

Travel around Cuba by self-drive hire car. Your accommodation is pre-booked. From Havana, drive through limestone landscapes in the Viñales valley and forested Las Terrazas. Move on to historic Cienfuegos and colonial Trinidad.

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|------------------|---|
| <b>DAY 1</b>     | Arrive in Havana. Transfer to hotel on the waterfront close to the historic centre. |
| <b>DAY 2</b>     | Guided walking tour of Old Havana.  |
| <b>DAY 3</b>     | Collect hire car.   |
| <b>DAY 4</b>     | Drive to Viñales, western Cuba. 2 nights.   |
| <b>DAY 5</b>     | At leisure to explore the Viñales Valley.   |
| <b>DAY 6</b>     | Drive to rural Las Terrazas. 2 nights.  |
| <b>DAY 7</b>     | At leisure in forested countryside.   |
| <b>DAY 8</b>     | Drive to Cienfuegos port, Pearl of the South. Overnight.                            |
| <b>DAY 9</b>     | Drive to Trinidad. 3 nights   |
| <b>DAY 10-11</b> | Explore the area by road and/or on foot.  |
| <b>DAY 12</b>    | Drive back to Havana; drop off car. Overnight                                       |
| <b>DAY 13</b>    | Transfer to airport for international flight home.                                  |

## ITINERARY

If you are adventurous in spirit, a Cuba self-drive is the most rewarding way to explore this unique country. This two-week tour of Cuba's highlights is an explorer's delight. Ideal for a Cuba family holiday or adventure with friends, driving your own hire car gives you the freedom and flexibility to delve deeper into Cuban culture, meet the locals and escape to quieter corners, choosing how fast and how far you travel.

Your hotels are all pre-booked for you. Walk around Havana's historic centre; drive through limestone landscapes in the Viñales valley and forests around Las Terrazas. Move on to Cuba's historic cities, Cienfuegos and colonial gem Trinidad.

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### DAY 1

**Arrive in Havana. Transfer to hotel on the waterfront close to the historic centre.**

Private transport to your modern hotel close to the seafront promenade (Malecón) in to the lively historic centre of Havana.

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### DAY 2

**Guided walking tour of Old Havana.**

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 gargantuan, crumbling 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.

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### DAY 3

#### Collect hire car.

Collect your hire car, a Seat Althea or equivalent. Rest of the day at leisure.

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### DAY 4

#### Drive to Viñales, western Cuba. 2 nights.

Drive to Viñales, a small, bucolic town tucked away in the Sierra de los Órganos. The shady high street is lined with trees, wooden colonnades and one-storey, red-roofed houses. Horse and carts clatter along the main road and local children play baseball with sticks and stones outside the dilapidated whitewashed church in the main square. There is a splendid old chemist's shop and a few other bare-shelved stores, as well as a couple of salsa bars that attract a lively crowd in the evening.

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### DAY 5

#### At leisure to explore the Viñales Valley.

The valley has a distinctive landscape, with dramatic limestone mountains, known as mogotes, which jut into the sky from a lush, fertile plain. Using oxen and carts, local farmers cultivate the red soil of the valley floor for fruit, vegetables and tobacco, and the countryside is peppered with thatched curing barns for drying the tobacco leaves.

If you don't want to drive around, you might take an optional guided walk through this beautiful valley; the trail passes alongside fields being tilled by straw-hatted farmers driving their oxen, and you may have the opportunity to visit members of a campesino family in their home, where they'll brew you up a coffee, roll a cigar and talk to you about life on the land.

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### DAY 6

#### Drive to rural Las Terrazas. 2 nights.

Drive to the community project of Las Terrazas in the Sierra del Rosario UNESCO biosphere reserve. This is Cuba's premier centre for ecotourism, which offers the opportunity to get close to the local community, who coexist harmoniously with their surroundings.

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## DAY 7

### At leisure in forested countryside.

At leisure at Las Terrazas. Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve sits on an impressive mountain range of tropical and semi-deciduous forest within the coffee-producing region of Pinar del Rio. The reserve is rich in flora and fauna and offers some the island's best bird-watching. Other notable wildlife includes bats, frogs and lizards. You have time to choose between optional activities such as hiking the trails, admiring the waterfalls, bird watching or visiting an orchid farm or old coffee plantation.

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## DAY 8

### Drive to Cienfuegos port, Pearl of the South. Overnight.

Today you head to Cienfuegos through the central heartland of Cuba, a transition between the pre-Revolutionary prosperous western plantations and the cattle pasture of the poorer east. The elegant city of Cienfuegos is 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.

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## DAY 9

### Drive to Trinidad. 3 nights

Drive on to the city of Trinidad. Trinidad was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988. Its popularity has not affected its colonial charm and unhurried atmosphere.

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 5 main squares and 4 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.

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## DAY 10-11

### Explore the area by road and/or on foot.

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## DAY 12

### Drive back to Havana; drop off car. Overnight

Drive back to Havana and drop off your car.

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### DAY 13

Transfer to airport for international flight home.

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## WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office

Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides

All land and air transport within Latin America

Accommodation as specified

Meals as specified

Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

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## INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

Half day guided walking tour of Old Havana

Activities at Las Terrazas

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## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities

Meals other than specified

International flights to Latin America

Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket

Optional excursions

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## ESSENTIALS

### TRANSPORT

5 scenic road journeys in your self-drive car.

### ACCOMMODATION

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

### MEALS

Breakfast daily.

### GUIDES

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 clients on their return.

### SUMMARY OF NIGHTS

13 days, 12 nights: Havana 3; Viñales 2; Las Terrazas 2; Cienfuegos 1; Trinidad 3; Havana 1.

### CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Cuba is the Cuban peso.

### HOW TO TAKE IT

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.

### DAILY SPEND

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around £25 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.

### TIPPING

Tips are expected 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.

## INSURANCE AND DOCUMENTS

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. For example, Journey Latin America's recommended insurance company is Campbell Irvine, and their medical and repatriation cover is handled by International Medical Assistance, who are approved by Cuba. 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 (CUC) 20 Cuban pesos 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 for details. Unlimited mileage is included, but not fuel.

## AIRPORT TAXES

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.

## VISAS

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.

## TRIP SUITABILITY

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

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.

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

## CLIMATE

As Cuba lies in the Caribbean Sea, 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 than the west. Hurricanes and tropical storms are possible from July to October.

## CLOTHING AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

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 repellent 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 can.

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.

## VACCINATIONS

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...

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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.

#### GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

**0208 747 8315**

#### OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm

Saturday & Sunday: Closed

#### SEND US AN EMAIL

[tours@journeylatinamerica.com](mailto:tours@journeylatinamerica.com)