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**EXPLORE WILD CUBA on special trip for the Peace River Butterfly Club & friends with  
Dr. Marc Minno!**

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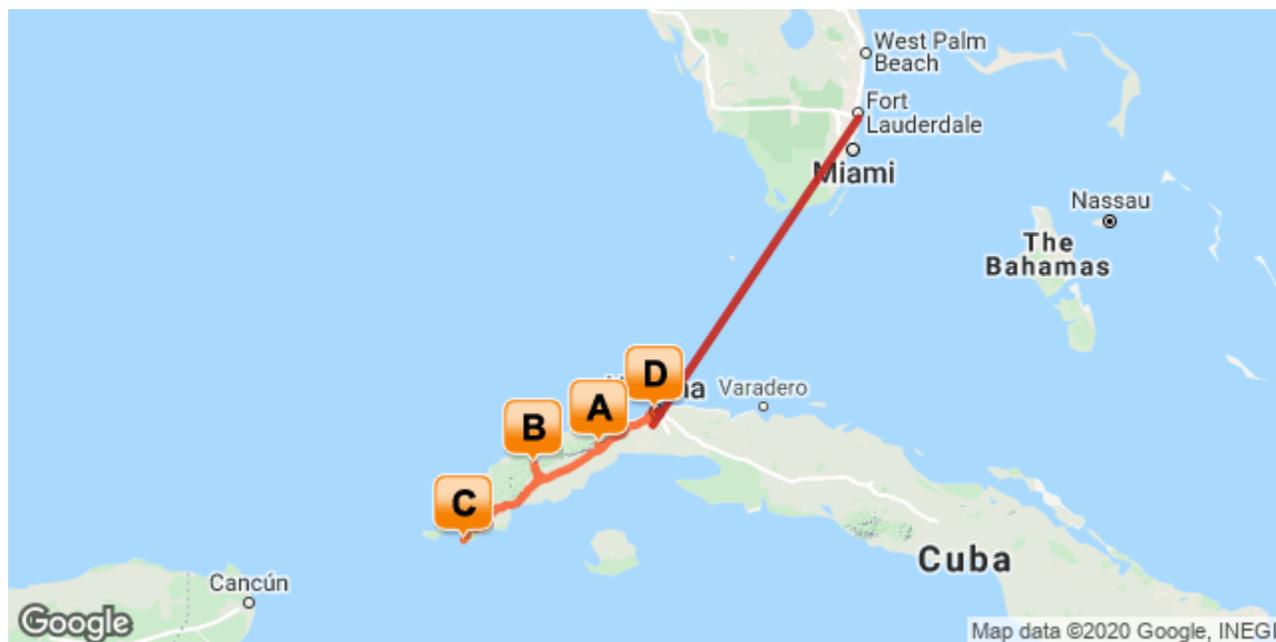
**EXPLORE WILD CUBA on special trip for the Peace River Butterfly Club & friends with**

**Dr. Marc Minno!**

*Soroa - Vinales - Maria la Gorda - Havana*

*10 Days / 9 Nights*

**November 6, 2020 - November 15, 2020**



[Click here to view your Digital Itinerary](#)

## Introduction

Experience Western Cuba ~ November 6-15, 2020 Led by Dr. Marc C. Minno and Douglas Fernández Hernández

Experience three National Parks and three UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Explore coastal and mountain habitats of western Cuba This region is notable for its karst topography and tropical forests that have many unusual plants and animals.

**We will fly from Fort Lauderdale or Miami \*)** to Havana and then travel by motor coach to Soroa, Viñales, and Guanacahabibes Peninsula over a 10-day period and visit 3 national parks. Our accommodations will be in hotels.

Meet Cuban scientists and see world class biodiversity areas. Locate and document rare and endemic species.

Accommodation	Destination	Start	End	Basis	Duration
Horizontes Villa Soroa	Soroa	Nov 6	Nov 8	B&B	<b>2 Nights</b>
Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines	Vinales	Nov 8	Nov 10	FB	<b>2 Nights</b>
Hotel Maria la Gorda	Maria la Gorda	Nov 10	Nov 12	FB	<b>2 Nights</b>
NH Capri La Habana	Havana	Nov 12	Nov 15	FB	<b>3 Nights</b>

## Price

- \$3199.00 per person double occupancy
- Add \$400 for single supplemental
- 700.00 deposit (350.00 non-refundable)

To sign up:

**Please complete and submit the application form in the DOCUMENT SECTION ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THIS ITINERARY.**

**If paying by check, mail to**

**TREE Institute  
1075 Duval Street Suite C-11  
Key West Fl. 33040**

**DO NOT WRITE CUBA IN THE CHECK MEMO AS THE BANK WILL HOLD YOUR CHECK. TREE WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR BLOCKED OR HELD PAYMENTS.**

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO USE A CREDIT for payment:**

**Call the TREE office: 866-355-8733**

**Credit/debit cards accepted for a 3% convenience fee which will be added to your final payment invoice.**

## Included

- Roundtrip air from MIA\* or FLL\* airport to Havana. \*The final airport for the included roundtrip flights will be determined by July 1, 2020.
- Visa & documents
- Toll-free, pre-trip conference call.
- Medical insurance (while In Cuba),
- Transportation
- 9 nights on hotels.
- All meals
- Surprises!

## Excluded

- Alcoholic drinks
- Tips for guides

Extras at the hotel such as laundry and phone calls. Trip cancellation/interruption insurance info for this trip. (We can recommend)

## Terms and Conditions

### Itinerary Terms and Conditions

- The final payment with completed registration is due July 30, 2020.
- Total trip cost Non-refundable as of July 30, 2020.
- Credit cards accepted with a 3% convenience fee.
- For substitutions/ changes to registration after July 30th, 2020 there is a \$100.00 expediting fee. No changes allowed after October 6, 2020.
- Passports must not expire before April 15, 2021. Now is the time to renew!
- \*Departure airport and flights will be finalized by July 1, 2020. We will notify you of the airport we will be flying in or out of.
- Limited to 20 participants
- Please keep in mind, TREE must pay advance deposits for hotel, tour and transportation on your behalf and for this reason, we cannot make exceptions to our cancellation policy.

## Day 1: Fri, November 6 Horizontes Villa Soroa, Soroa

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### Soroa

Situated in Cuba's Artemisa Region southwest of Havana, Soroa is a mountain resort town known for its incredible natural beauty featuring lush landscapes, majestic mountains, and meandering rivers. Dubbed the 'Rainbow of Cuba', it is listed as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and is home to the El Salto del Arco Iris, a magnificent waterfall and the Soroa Orchidarium, a world famous orchid garden boasting the largest collection of orchids in the world. Visitors can look forward to exploring this scenic area by bike, discovering the Castillo de las Nubes Medieval-style castle, visit the nearby town of La Rosita and view the coffee plantations.

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### Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Friday, November 6, 2020 (B, L, D)

Early Departure from either FLL or MIA airport to Havana.

After breakfast, we will travel by motor coach west to Soroa.

After lunch, we will walk to the Soroa Orchidarium which has the largest collection of orchids in Cuba with 130 species of native orchids plus almost 700 exotic orchid species as well as palms, cycads, and many other kinds of plants. Then we will explore the hills around Soroa. Sights here include a waterfall and the mirador (lookout) at the top of a mountain.

In the depths of the Sierra del Rosario, at Soroa area, emerges a jewel of Artemisa geography: the Botanical Garden of Soroa Orchid Garden, which guards untold treasures of biological and landscape wealth of the region.

The Garden was declared "National Heritage" in 1961. It is a scientific-production center of the University of Pinar del Río, for the preservation and enjoyment of nature and the conservation of Cuban orchids.

Its construction dates back to the 50s of the last century when the renowned lawyer Thomas Felipe Camacho from the Canary Islands decided to build a rest house, christened with the name of "Pinilla" in honor of Pilar, his dead little daughter.

Camacho moved to that place his extensive collection of orchids and his dwelling was becoming, gradually, on a site of considerable interest to naturalists and lovers of endemic and exotic flora.

In its 35 thousand square meters, the area has the largest variety of orchids in the country, with more than 20,000 specimens of 700 species, distributed on live plants and in nine greenhouses intended for reproduction. In the Orchigram, the tenth pavilion of the park, flowered orchids, delight visitors, because of its delicacy and elegance.

Among the main attractions of the landscape highlights the Vanda teres or purple orchid, the Prosthechea cochleata or black orchid and Encyclia phenicia or orchid of chocolate; to which the stream of crotons, begonias, anthuriums and other species of Cuban horticulture, all of great scientific and ornamental value is added.

The Orchid Garden is part of the national and Caribbean networks of Botanic Gardens, and has one of the main libraries specialized in orchids in the continent.

### Expert Tips

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

The gardens are situated on a steep hillside with uneven steps and sloped walkways.

### Activities

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#### *Soroa*

Situated in Cuba's Artemisa Region southwest of Havana, Soroa is a mountain resort town known for its incredible natural beauty featuring lush landscapes, majestic mountains, and meandering rivers. Dubbed the 'Rainbow of Cuba', it is listed as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and is home to the El Salto del Arco Iris, a magnificent waterfall and the Soroa Orchidarium, a world famous orchid garden boasting the largest collection of orchids in the world. Visitors can look forward to exploring this scenic area by bike, discovering the Castillo de las Nubes Medieval-style castle, visit the nearby town of La Rosita and view the coffee plantations.



#### *Sierra del Rosario*

Located in the provinces of Pinar del Río and Artemisa, Cuba, Sierra del Rosario is a mountain range that was declared a Reserve of the Biosphere, giving recognition to its ecological diversity and richness.

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#### **Overnight: Horizontes Villa Soroa**

Horizontes Villa Soroa is located in the western Sierra del Rosario Mountains over 600 feet above sea level. There are 49 standard two room bungalows at the Villa featuring: en suite bathrooms, minibars, satellite TV's double beds, air conditioning and terrace. Services and amenities offered by the hotel are swimming pools, ecological excursions, games room, garden, laundry and ironing service, lobby bar, restaurants and TV room.

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## Day 2: Sat, November 7 Horizontes Villa Soroa, Soroa

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### Day Itinerary

Day 2 – Saturday, November 7, 2020 (B, L, D)

We will travel to **Las Terrazas National Park** for lunch with stops to observe nature. Night walk on the hotel grounds to hear frog choruses and to look for owls.

Breakfast and Dinner at the Hotel

Lunch at Las Terrazas National Park

### Expert Tips

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

### Activities

Las Terrazas

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### *Las Terrazas*

Las Terrazas is a small community that was originally founded as an eco-village in 1968. Today it has evolved into a burgeoning and vibrant community with many artists, workshops and open studios, as well as a well-visited activity centre. Las Terrazas is now a protected **UNESCO** Biosphere Reserve, located on the site of Cuba's earliest coffee plantation. Nestled in 5 000 hectares of forest nature reserve in the Sierra del Rosario Mountains, the area is rich in plant and animal life. Numerous footpaths and trails crisscrossing the lush area make the profusion of lakes and waterfalls accessible.



## Day 3: Sun, November 8 Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines, Vinales

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### Vinales

The naturally beautiful valley of Vinales is a popular UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Pinar del Río Province of Cuba known for its distinctive limestone hills, endless tobacco farms and traditional Cuban culture. The majority of the area's inhabitants live in the tiny eponymous agricultural village which, despite its small size, features a number of well-established tourist facilities including shops, restaurants, and hotels. The village is centred around a main plaza which is home to a lovely little art gallery, a charming church, a Saturday morning farmer's market and daily cultural events. The Vinales Valley offers a truly authentic experience of rural Cuba as well as an ideal natural environment for a range of outdoor activities including, among others: birdwatching, rock climbing, cycling, hiking, horse riding, spelunking and swimming in natural pools.

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### Day Itinerary

Day 3 – Sunday, November 8, 2020 (B, L, D)

We will leave Soroa after breakfast and travel to Pinar del Rio for lunch with stops on the way to observe nature. After checking into our hotel we will visit a tobacco farm and other areas with views of the spectacular mogotes and a botanical garden.

Only a few sites in Cuba capture the visitor's attention as much as Viñales Valley does. This marvelous place is located in the western province of Pinar del Río, within the Sierra de los Órganos, one of the sections of the Guaniguanico mountain range, to be precise. Since 1999, Viñales is a World Heritage Site, and a National Park since 2001.

Breakfast at Hotel Villa Soroa

Lunch in Pinar de Rio

Dinner at Hotel

### Expert Tips

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

### Activities

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#### *Pinar del Rio*

Pinar del Rio city is the capital of Pinar del Rio province in western Cuba. It is named for the pine trees which originally flanked the Guamá river at the base of the Sierra de los Órganos mountains. A glimpse of the area's history, from its pre-Columbus, Spanish roots to its present, can be seen at the Provincial History Museum on Calle Martie. Other attractions include the fascinating Museum of Natural Sciences and the Teatro Milanés - one of Cuba's most attractive theatres, housed in a recently restored 19th century neo-classical building. One of the largest limestone cave systems in Cuba, the cavern of Santo Tomas, can be found nearby in the Mogote hills, near Vinales. The city also features colourful entertainment in the form of Afro-Cuban cabarets, vibrant bars and restaurants serving local delicacies.

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**Overnight: Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines**

Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines is located near the town of Viñales in Cuba. Accommodation consists of a variety of guest rooms and suites, each equipped with air conditioning, a telephone, a safety deposit box, a TV with satellite channels, an en-suite bathroom and a balcony. Guests can enjoy a variety of exquisite cuisines at the on-site restaurant. Other amenities offered are a bar, a swimming pool and internet access.



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**Day 4: Mon, November 9 Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines, Vinales**

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**Day Itinerary**

Day 4 – Monday, November 9, 2020 (B, L, D)

In the morning we will explore mountain habitats in Viñales National Park. After lunch, we will do a walk through Cueva de San Miguel and then a boat ride through Cueva del Indio.

Breakfast at the Hotel. Lunch at Cueva de San Miguel. Dinner at a Paladar (private restaurant).

**Expert Tips**

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

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**Day 5: Tue, November 10 Hotel Maria la Gorda, Maria la Gorda****Maria la Gorda**

Set on a sunny peninsula at the south western tip of Cuba, Maria la Gorda is a world-renowned pristine beach and dive site, on the Bahía de Corrientes. The entire settlement consists of little more than a hotel, a diving centre, a small shop, and two charming little seaside restaurants. Visitors can look forward to snorkelling through coral gardens, relaxing on the exquisite palm-lined beach or exploring the countless dive sites in the area. With bright coral canyons, whale sharks and even the sunken remains of a Spanish galleon, Maria la Gorda features an underwater wonderland complete with

an impressive array of exotic marine life. Exploring above the waterline is equally appealing with lush tropical jungles forming an ideal habitat for an astonishing range of birdlife including, among others: rainbow-coloured parakeets, trogons and hummingbirds.

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## Day Itinerary

Day 5 – Tuesday, November 10, 2020 (B, L, D)

We will leave Viñales after breakfast for Guanacabibes.

After lunch we will begin exploring beach and coastal habitats of Guanacabibes National Park. The Guanahacabibes National Park on the peninsula is one of the country's largest natural reserves and is separated from the rest of the island by white-sand plains where one of Cuba's largest lakeside areas lies. A relatively small area holds some 100 lakes, as well as the largest and purest fields of silica sand, which is 99.8% pure. Nature tourism is a major attraction in the 153.77 sq mile National Park. The area is inhabited by 172 species of birds belonging to 42 families, 11 of which are endemic and 84 are migratory. Experts also believe that 4 of the 7 species of marine turtles living on the planet have survived in the Guanahacabibes Peninsula.

The peninsula was one of the last refuges of aboriginals fleeing from the Spanish conquistadors and also holds some 140 archeological sites linked to the life of aborigines, who were known as Guanahatabeyes .

## Expert Tips

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

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## Overnight: Hotel Maria la Gorda

Situated within a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve on the Guanahacabibes Peninsula of Cuba, Hotel Maria la Gorda is located at one of the top diving sites in Cuba and is a great base from which to enjoy activities such as diving, snorkeling, and big game fishing. Accommodation is offered in air-conditioned cabanas, several of which are right on the beach and the rest of which are scattered around the property.

Guests can enjoy meals at the on-site restaurant and relax with a drink at the bar. The property also offers a garden, a TV room, parking space, and a shop. Hotel facilities and services include car rental, internet access in the lobby, 24-hour reception, and assistance with travel bookings.



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## Day 6: Wed, November 11 Hotel Maria la Gorda, Maria la Gorda

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### Day Itinerary

Day 6 – Wednesday, November 11, 2020 (B, L, D)

We will continue exploring the beach and coastal habitats of Guanacabibes National Park.

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner at the Hotel.

### Expert Tips

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

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## Day 7: NH Capri La Habana, Havana (Thu, November 12)

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### Day Itinerary

Day 7 – Thursday, November 12, 2020 (B, L, D)

We will leave Guanacabibes after breakfast for Havana.

After lunch, we will do a tour of Old Havana.

Breakfast at Hotel Maria la Gorda. Lunch and dinner in Havana.

### Expert Tips

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

### Activities

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#### *Havana*

As the capital of Cuba, Havana is a remarkably vast, sprawling metropolis. The city's compelling history is reflected in the astonishing diversity of its architecture, its multicultural inhabitants, and its exotic and eclectic cuisine. The Old Town remains a remarkably well-preserved colonial centre. It is characterised by an exquisite hotchpotch of architectural styles, of opulence and decay, socialism and capitalism, the past and the present. Imperial mansions have been converted into modern tenement buildings, government agencies find homes in eighteenth-century convents and the nostalgic classic American cars for which the city is known share Havana's lively streets with the latest models of BMW and Mercedes. While the UNESCO-funded restoration programme has introduced a modicum of modernity into the city, Havana has managed to retain its wonderfully quirky cultural heritage, its unique character, and its undeniable charm.



### ***Old Havana***

Old Havana is the central area of the original city of Havana. The city walls of the original city are the modern boundaries of Old Havana. Founded in 1519 by the Spanish, Havana features superb architectural structures, with many treasures from the city's long and colorful history. The old center of the sprawling metropolis retains a fascinating mix of historic buildings, museums, galleries, churches and lively plazas.

### **Overnight: NH Capri La Habana**

The NH Capri La Habana is located in Vedado, in downtown Havana. The hotel is close to popular nightclubs, the La Rampa art and craft market and the famed Malecon. It is also a short taxi ride away from some of the city's major attractions. Guests accommodations offer a choice of standard, superior and duplex rooms or suites, all featuring either city or sea views. Hotel facilities include bars with live music, large gym with sauna, choice of restaurants and swimming pool.



**Day 8: NH Capri La Habana, Havana (Fri, November 13)**

### **Day Itinerary**

Day 8 – Friday, November 13, 2020 (B, L, D)

After breakfast, visit the National Botanical Garden, home to flora from all continents including special collections from Cuba. After lunch, tour the Hemmingway House and Finca estate.

Breakfast at the Hotel. Lunch and dinner in Havana.

### **Expert Tips**

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

### **Activities**

#### ***Finca Vigia***

Finca Vigía was the home of Ernest Hemingway in San Francisco de la Paula, in Cuba. Built in 1886, the house was acquired by Hemingway in 1939 and was where he lived until 1960. A tower was built next to the main house in 1950, overlooking the expansive landscape, and was where the author would retire to write. Finca Vigia now houses the Ernest Hemingway Museum, where the author's personal effects, books, clothes, desk, American furniture, typewriter and hunting trophies can be seen.

## **Day 9: NH Capri La Habana, Havana (Sat, November 14)**

### **Day Itinerary**

Day 9 – Saturday, November 14, 2020 (B, L, D)

After breakfast we will travel to and explore Escaleras de Jaruco, an escarpment and valley east of Havana. With 18 square kilometers of thick vegetation, Escaleras de Jaruco is in the midst of the process of being listed as a Protected Area. In addition to its rich plant and animal life, the area is also known for its caves, which include Cueva del Águila, where Cuban sculptress Ana Mendieta carved in stone her work *Las Mujeres de Piedra* (Stone Women), Cueva del Cura, one of the deepest caves in western Cuba. Visitors can relax at the tourist center Parque Escaleras de Jaruco, which includes a hotel, coffee-shop, viewpoint, amusement park and several restaurants.

Breakfast at the Hotel. Lunch in Jarucu. Dinner in Havana.

### **Expert Tips**

Wear good, comfortable walking or hiking shoes. NO OPEN TOED SANDLES will be permitted.

## Day 10: End of Itinerary (Sun, November 15)

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### Day Itinerary

Day 10 – Sunday, November 15, 2020

Depart early from José Martí International Airport in Havana, Cuba home to Miami or Fort Lauderdale\*

Breakfast at the Hotel.

\*Departure and arrival airports will be determined by July 1, 2020

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### Transport

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#### Flight Information

Date	Flight	Airline	Departure Airport	Time	Arrival Airport	Time	Class	Ref
6 Nov	Scheduled		Fort Lauderdale – Hollywood International Airport [FLL] *OR Miami International Airport MIA		Jose Marti International Airport [HAV]			
15 Nov	Scheduled		Jose Marti International Airport [HAV]		Fort Lauderdale – Hollywood International Airport [FLL] *OR Miami International Airport MIA			

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#### Transfers

Date	Company	Pick Up	Drop Off	Time	Vehicle
6 Nov		Jose Marti International Airport [HAV]	Horizontes Villa Soroa		Transfer
8 Nov		Horizontes Villa Soroa	Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines		Transfer
10 Nov		Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines	Hotel Maria la Gorda		Transfer
12 Nov		Hotel Maria la Gorda	NH Capri La Habana		Transfer

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**Urgent Contact Numbers**

<b>Company Name</b>	<b>Telephone</b>	<b>Email Address</b>	<b>Contact Person</b>
Tree Institute International	866-355-8733	treeinstitutetravel@gmail.com	TREE Team

**Service Provider Directory**

<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>Ref. Number</b>	<b>Telephone</b>	<b>Address</b>
Horizontes Villa Soroa			Carretera de km. 8., Soroa, Cuba
Hotel Horizontes Los Jazmines		+53 48 796123	Km 23, Carretera Viñales, Pinar del Rio, Viñales, Cuba
Hotel Maria la Gorda			María la Gorda, Cuba
NH Capri La Habana		+53 7 8397200	

## Travel Information



Cuba's turbulent past and defiant political stance have imbued it with an undeniable mystique - but beyond its historical intrigue, there's plenty more to discover and enjoy about this unique travel destination. The island is like one of its ubiquitous vintage cars - shabby but chic, erratic and unpredictable, and ultimately loveable. Fine cigars, salsa dancing, Afro-Latin beats - all these things and many more contribute to Cuba's one-of-a-kind flavour. Highlights include the glittering capital city, Havana, where you can dance the night away in salsa clubs, or marvel at the crumbling beauty of colonial buildings on a stroll through town; the laid-back little town of Vinales, surrounded by tropical landscapes studded with bulbous limestone karsts; the terracotta buildings of historical Trinidad; and picture-perfect beaches at Varadero, and on the islets of Cayo Guillermo and Cayo Largo del Sur.

### *Entry Requirements*

**Visa:** A Cuban Visa is required and only for specific dates of the Tour, which will be provided as part of your package.

**Passport:** A valid passport valid for 6 months after the end of the trip date is required. Before leaving the U.S., make a copy of your passport's data page and put it in your checked luggage. Leave your passport in the hotel room safe deposit box and carry the photocopy.

### **Banking and Currency** **INSERT NEW INFO ON WORD DOC**

**Currency:** Although most services are included in the program, there is some independent time to pursue individual activities. It is now necessary to exchange US dollars for the local Convertible Universal Currency. The CUC'S can only be obtained on the island. A 13% commission is currently being charged for the exchange transaction. You can exchange US \$ at their local major hotels, banks, and at the airport. There is no penalty for exchanging back into US \$ at the Cuban Airport. **CREDIT CARDS AND TRAVELER'S CHECKS DRAWN ON US BANKS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.**

Notes are in denominations of CUC\$100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 3 and 1. Coins are in denominations of CUC\$1, and 50, 25, 10, 5, and 1 centavo.

**How much money should I bring with me? :** How much money you choose to bring is an individual matter. Items made by the people are permissible to purchase and bring back under this license which includes, art, sculpture, jewelry, crafts, woven products, linens, books, CD's, etc. that are all made in Cuba. These will be an additional expense and you will want to purchase these items! Please consider your purchasing habits and plan accordingly. The artwork ranges from \$10 - \$2,000 CUC. Many good pieces of art are in the \$200- \$300 CUC range. We cover the tips for baggage handling, meals that are provided, and local musicians at meals. We do not cover your guide, driver, or chambermaid gratuities, bar gratuities, meals and entertainment you purchase.

We recommend you bring a minimum of \$100.00 US per person per day. You do not have to change all your money at one time and certainly, it is better to have more than less, when there is no means to get more cash.

FYI - Cubans working in the tourism sector have the advantage of earning hard currency and often are economically better off than doctors, State scientists, engineers, and educators. It is not unusual for a bartender to be trained as one of these professionals. Cubans expect a tip for services as this is often more valuable than their State salaries.

Gratuities are always your personal expression of appreciation for good service. TIPS SHOULD NOW BE IN THE LOCAL CUC CURRENCY.

A tipping and cost guide is noted below (in CUC):

- Chambermaid tip 1 CUC per day
- Tips for bartenders - waitstaff 10%
- Public Restrooms (always staffed)
- .50 CUC Cost of Drinks
- 3-5 CUC average per drink Lunch on your own
- 10 - 15 CUC Dinner on your own 25 - 40 CUC
- Taxies 20 CUC per trip average
- Buena Vista Social Club 35 CUC
- Tropicana Show 85-95 CUC
- Other Shows\*\* 10 – 30 CUC\*\* When available, other shows include baseball game, ballet, Buena Vista Social Club, and other famous entertainers.
- Guide tip 10 CUC per person/per day
- Driver tip 5 CUC per person/per day

**Note:** US Dollars are no longer accepted in Cuba and visitors will be charged 13% commission on exchanging them. In the 1990s, Cuba decided to slowly get rid of its Dollar reserves, banning the currency from general use and introduced the replacement CUC as a convertible currency under its control. CUCs cannot be purchased or exchanged outside of Cuba. Cuban nationals continue to be paid in the Cuban Peso (CUP; symbol CUP\$ or \$). In some tourist areas, the Euro is also accepted. Hard currency (ie CUCs not CUPs) must be used in most transactions. As of March 2011, 1CUC=1USD.

The import and export of local currency is prohibited. The import of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration of funds exceeding US\$5,000 on arrival. Export is allowed up to the amount imported and declared.

Money should be exchanged at banks or state-run CADECAs. Dollars attract a 10% surcharge on top of the normal commission (US citizens should bring Euros or Sterling to exchange). All local currency must be exchanged again before leaving the country. Card transactions attract a surcharge (of up to 12.5%)

## Banking

Banking hours: Mon-Fri 08h30-12h00 and 13h30-16h00, Sat 08h30-12h00. Hours may vary and banks may be open all day in larger cities.

MasterCard and Visa credit cards are increasingly accepted, provided they are **not issued by a US bank, or a bank with links to the USA**, but hefty fees are often added. ATMs are fairly common but not ubiquitous. However, cash can be obtained in banks and Cadeecas with non-US Visa credit and Visa debit cards.

Travellers cheques in US Dollar, Pounds Sterling and other major currencies are accepted; US Dollar cheques issued by US banks are not accepted but American Express travellers cheques issued by non-US banks can be exchanged, though not everywhere. It is recommended to take cheques in a currency other than US Dollars.

## *Travel, Transport and Getting Around*

Perhaps one of the most important parts of planning a trip to Cuba involves figuring out exactly how you'll get around once you're there. TREE provides all transportation to and from scheduled itinerary activities. We cannot be responsible if you are late for our scheduled meeting time.

**Taxis** We suggest using taxis to get around if you have to travel independently. There are certainly plenty available for hire, but should you choose this particular mode of transportation, take into account the following so that you do so safely. First and foremost, avoid taking rides with unlicensed taxis. They are often driven by thieves who are out to pick up and rob passengers. Be particularly careful of fare amount when hiring a taxi, especially in Havana. If possible, ask someone who is native or at least familiar with the system how much the fare should be prior to heading to your destination. This way you will know beforehand how much the driver should be charging you and can avoid being scammed out of an exorbitant fee by a dishonest driver. If you can't confer with a local, insist that the meter be used to remove any doubt.

One of the more unique types of transportation in Cuba is the "Co-Co" taxi, a three-wheeled vehicle that is generally yellow in color and contains a flimsy hood. These are basically just glorified motorcycles that have been modified to carry passengers. Because they can reach speeds of up to 40 mph and lack any sort of safety features, including seatbelts, "Co-Co" taxis can be pretty dangerous. They are, nevertheless quite popular with tourists so if you choose to ride on one, be aware of the risk.

## *Health and Medical Information*

Health, Inoculations, Medications, and Treatments:

As of this writing, no inoculations are required for entry into Cuba. To obtain a current listing of any further information, call the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) free at 1-888-232-3299. The CDC reports no risk of malaria in Cuba. We advise you to pack a kit with an ample supply of your medications and basic first aid items, insect repellent, sunscreen, etc. Replacing medications may be very difficult on the island as many items are in short supply or non-existent. These items along with travel shampoo and soaps can be donated to a needy organization when we leave Havana. In general, be aware of the general discomforts of travel – change in diet, sunburn, dehydration, etc.

Medical insurance is included for treatments while in the country. However, we are not responsible for any prior medical problems and/or conditions and nor can we be responsible for any treatment there. The requests for

information regarding personal medications taken and pre-existing conditions is for the Cuban medical staff in the event of an emergency. We keep all records confidential.

The island is very unique and full of history, but not ADA compliant. Broken pavement, ground holes, old stairwells, and other potential walking hazards exist. Wear comfortable shoes and be aware of your surroundings. Participants are responsible for being insufficient good health to undertake the trip. Travelers are expected to be able to climb 2 flights of stairs, walk a ¼ mile, and stand for 15-20 minutes at a time.

Visitors are sometimes susceptible to “traveler’s diarrhea” caused by unfamiliar bacteria. Be sure to bring along medication for this, just in case. We strongly recommend you drink only bottled water. Packaged drinks are fine. Ice at most reputable places is filtered water. If there is any doubt as to your physical fitness to travel, a consultation should be sought with your doctor. While Cubans go out of their way to assist travelers, there are few allowances for handicapped access. In case you need medical treatment, hospitals and clinics are conveniently located. At the larger hotels, medical staff is available on site.

### ***Safety Notices***

#### **Security:**

Cuba has less street crime than any world capital, but there is always one in the bunch! So, take your usual precautions. Undercover state police can be found anywhere there are foreigners. They are instructed to leave visitors in peace but will question any Cuban who seems to be in close contact with a visitor. It is best to avoid “jineteros” or street hustlers offering cheap cigars or anything else to sell you on the street. Many hotels have safety deposit boxes at the front desk or in the rooms for your valuables and documents. Be very careful with your passport, money, and camera, as you would in any foreign country.

#### ***Food, Drink and Cuisine Advice***

Tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled water is ubiquitous, but boiling water is recommended to limit plastic waste. Milk is pasteurized and dairy products (with the exception of some cheap ice creams) are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood and fruit are generally considered safe to eat.

Surprisingly for an island so rich in marine life, fish and seafood rarely top the menu - most seafood is exported. The cuisine is a mix of Spanish and Afro-Caribbean, heavily reliant on rice, beans, chicken and pork. Depending on the season, fresh vegetables may be hard to come by - as a rule, the hotter the month, the more limited the selection. Furthermore, flavors are limited by the lack of available herbs and spices and many visitors are surprised that Cubans shun spicy food of all kinds. Food preparation relies heavily on the frying pan and deep fat fryer. Some of the best cooking, and often an illegal lobster or two, is found in *paladares* (small, private restaurants). In state-run establishments, service can be painfully slow and sometimes even surly.

A 10% tip on restaurant bills is common.

#### ***Climate and Weather***

**Climate and Clothing:** The climate is generally warm and tropical. The rainy season lasts from May to November and the dry season from December to April. Midwinter can sometimes be cool in Havana resulting from cold fronts. Cuba lies within the hurricane belt, but the season is strongest between August and October. It is advisable to pack lightly and

simply. Cuba has a very casual atmosphere. We require that you bring a pair of closed-toed, non-skid shoes. We suggest packing a light rain jacket, comfortable clothing, and sun hat. Remember to pack memory sticks and batteries for cameras. There will be soaps, shampoos, and hairdryers provided in most hotels. Cubans are informal in general. It is customary for men to wear long pants (jeans and chinos - ok) in the evening, and three quarter length slacks for the women are fine. Women should pack one casual dress/skirt and gentlemen bring one pair of long pants for the night. Jackets and ties are not necessary. Jeans are fine. In order to minimize risk, it is recommended that visitors avoid conspicuous displays of wealth and that they dress and behave conservatively. Don't bring any valuable jewelry. While it is safe, it is not appropriate to display wealth. Do not leave your belongings unattended. Weather forecasts are available on [weather.com](http://weather.com).

### ***Clothing and Dress Recommendations***

Cuba is a sub-tropical country so pack for summer. shorts, short-sleeved cotton dresses and shirts are the order of the day. But, bear in mind that Cuban men would never wear shorts in the City! A night out at *Tropicana* or *La Guarida* restaurant needs something smart if not overly formal.

If you are coming in the winter don't assume that it will be hot all the time, especially in the evenings. Bring some warm clothing (long sleeves, a sweater or fleece), since there is nothing more frustrating than being frozen to death in a tropical country! Lightweight rain gear is suggested.

### ***Electricity and Plug Standards***

Electric Current: The electric current in Cuba is 110 volts AC: 60Hz. Some of the newer hotels are 220 volts and would require a voltage adaptor and round prong Caribbean converter or plug. Plan to bring a transformer that converts 110 to 220 if you have special needs.

### ***General Guidance***

US Customs: You may bring back anything made by the people, which includes art, sculpture, jewelry, crafts, woven goods, linens, crochet, books, and CD's. Licensed travelers are now allowed to bring back up to \$100.00 cigars/rum and a total of \$300.00 of products made by the government (coffee, chocolates and perfumes). This was changed in January 2015.

For specific information on Cuba sanctions, visit the website: [www.treas.gov/ofac](http://www.treas.gov/ofac).

Packing NOT ALLOWED: Leisure drugs, walkie talkies, drones, GPS or satellite telephones. Possible prison sentences! Please do not pack the following items in your checked luggage: money, sunglasses, electronics, cameras, cigarettes, cigars, expensive sneakers, CD's, expensive jewelry, and watches. You can bring a backpack/large bag on board the plane. We recommend leaving the fashion show home! TSA locks are highly recommended.

Photography/Cameras: Cuba is a haven for photographers. Do not expect to be able to purchase batteries, memory cards, or film in Cuba - Come prepared! Have your photographic equipment in good working order, extra batteries along with the charger, and have extra photo cards. Some museums require an additional fee for taking pictures that you will be required to pay upon entry if you wish to take pictures. It is forbidden in Cuba to photograph military or police installations, personnel, ports, rail, or airport facilities. When photographing local residents, be courteous and ask permission. Never leave your camera equipment unattended.