



Cuba's Western Mountains, Bay of Pigs (Zapata Peninsula), Northern Archipelago, Escambray Valley and Havana

Winter Warblers and Endemics February 19 – 28/ March 1, 2022

You are invited on an exclusive, U.S. led and managed birding program to Cuba! The program is managed by the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, which is based in Connecticut. In early 2021 CCT staff began their **25th** year of managing bird conservation and natural history programs in Cuba. Along with **CCT Ornithologist Michael Good**, our team will include a bilingual Cuban tour leader and local naturalists in 4 different birding regions. They will guide you through some of the best bird habitat in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation. In attendance for the entire trip will be Jim Wright, author of *The Real James Bond, A True Story of Identity Theft, Avian Intrigue, & Ian Fleming.*

CCT designed this itinerary to take you to Cuba's finest bird habitats, most beautiful national parks, diverse biosphere reserves, and unique natural areas. We will interact with local scientists and naturalists who work in research and conservation. In addition to birding, we will learn about the ecology and history of regions we visit. Finally, and especially given the ongoing changes in U.S. – Cuban relations, we can expect some degree of inquiry into fascinating aspects of Cuban culture, history, and daily living during our visit.

Cuba's Birds

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, "Over 380 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 26 which are endemic to the island and 29 considered globally threatened. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba represents one of the most important countries for Neotropical migratory birds – both birds passing through on their way south (75 species) and those spending the winter on the island (86 species)." More recently, **Nils Navarro, scientist, author/illustrator of Cuba's only illustrated field guide to endemic birds, has identified a total approaching 400 bird species recorded in Cuba.**

Our itinerary provides opportunities to see many of Cuba's endemic species and subspecies, as listed below. This trip will also focus on the many migrant species that migrate north to Cuba to breed (from the south), and from Cuba to the north in the spring (endemic species and endemic subspecies in italics):

Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Oriole, Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Cuban Black Hawk, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Fernandina's Flicker, Giant Kingbird, Gundlach's Hawk, Eastern Meadowlark, Cuban Nightjar, Red-shouldered Blackbird, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Oriente Warbler, Yellow-headed Warbler, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Cuban Crow, Palm Crow, Cuban Emerald, Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, & Western Spindalis.



Grey-fronted Quail Dove

Cuban Oriole

Smooth-billed Ani

Cuban Tody

Red-legged Thrush

Western Spindalis

<https://www.facebook.com/cubabirds/>

Other species of interest include:

Great Lizard-Cuckoo, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, *Olive-capped Warbler*, Key West Quail-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Zenaída Dove, *Stygian Owl*, West Indian Whistling Duck, American Flamingo, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, and a great variety of wading birds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

WHERE WE TRAVEL

Our **Cuba Bird Survey** begins in the forests surrounding Vinales Valley, among Cuba's most dramatic landscapes.

Cuba's Western Mountains include two of the country's most diverse and dramatic ranges: the **Sierra de la Rosario, & Sierra de los Organos**. We will explore an area common to both ranges in search of western range endemic species of birds and other fauna. The Western Mountains includes habitat unique to much of the world that is often captured in photos and paintings of rural Cuba. Here we will encounter submontane seasonal rain forest, pine forest, and tropical karstic forest. A highlight of the trip, we will visit the magical, unusually beautiful karstic landscape of mogotes-- the towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths that dominate the Organos Mountains. This is the only region in which we will likely see the *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Giant Kingbird*, & *Olive-capped Warbler*. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Vireo*, & *Yellow-headed Warbler*.

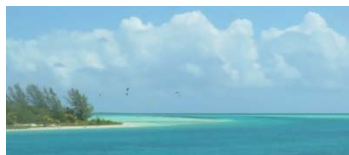
Vinales



We will also explore the diverse wetland region of the **Zapata Peninsula**, Cuba's richest and most important birding destination located in the historic **Bay of Pigs**. This peninsula is a Ramsar Convention (international conservation treaty) designated site, and is among the most important wetlands in the West Indies. Here, the best local guides will lead us through protected areas in Ciénaga de Zapata National Park and other natural sites off the beaten track. The Zapata Peninsula covers more than 2800 square miles and features easily accessible, everglades-like ecology and habitat. Framed by the pristine Caribbean coastal environment of the Bay of Pigs, the peninsula features vast open swamp land, low coastal forests, sparkling white sand beaches, healthy and accessible coral reefs, and refreshing natural limestone pools called cenotes. *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Black Hawk*, *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Tawny-shouldered* and *Blue-headed and Grey-fronted Quail Doves*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find (3 nights).



Cayo Coco and Cuba's Atlantic Archipelago provide excellent birding opportunities on Cuba's Atlantic coast.



These previously uninhabited and relatively unexplored islands were connected to the mainland by an 18+ mile causeway completed in 1989. Cuba's academy of sciences (CITMA) maintains a research facility here. **These barrier islands and keys provide unique opportunities for:** *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, *Thick-billed Vireo*, *Bahama Mockingbird*, *West Indian Whistling Duck*, as well as

numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. This region also provides additional opportunities to see rare endemics such as *Zapata Sparrow* & *Gundlach's Hawk*. Accommodations are in a modern beachfront resort (2 nights).

Sancti Spiritus, the Escambray Valley and Caribbean Coast

The outskirts of Sancti Spiritus in central Cuba provides a peaceful and welcome location as we move south and east from Cuba's Atlantic coast. This lovely region is surrounded by lush valleys and foothills of the Sierra de Escambray Mountains. From here we will bird the Escambray Valley, bordered on the north by dramatic vistas of Cuba's third largest mountain range, and to the south by the Caribbean Sea and its picturesque coastline. A lunch stop in historic Cienfuegos follows our search for *Palm Crow* and other resident birds.



Our program concludes in **HAVANA**, among the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas.

Upon our return to Havana at the end of the birding program, you will have the option of spending two evenings in Havana, one of Latin America's best preserved and most compelling colonial cities. Our full day **EXTENSION OPTION** in the city **will include all meals, a guided city tour, including a walking tour of Habana Vieja** (Old Havana) and the 4 original plazas, declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987. Old Havana is like a living museum, and is currently undergoing rapid, energetic change. As a special treat we will also visit the home and

private ornithological collection of **Orlando Garrido**, Cuba's most prolific living naturalist and senior author of the *Field Guide To the Birds of Cuba*.

THE CONSERVATION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Treasury has provided a license for conducting bird conservation work in Cuba to the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, a U.S. based organization committed to the conservation of endemic and migratory birds and their habitats in the greater Caribbean region. The primary objective of CCT is to enhance the ability of North American and Caribbean ornithologists, naturalists, resource managers, conservation organizations, institutions, and local citizens to conduct research and initiate programs to help conserve the birds of the Caribbean and their habitats. CCT is dedicated to bird and habitat conservation through education and relationship building and, is in compliance with U.S. Treasury licensure for travel to Cuba.

For a glimpse of our program in action, go to: <http://video.pbs.org/program/counting-birds/> for a link to the film **COUNTING ON BIRDS**, a 2013 Public Broadcasting System (www.pbs.org) production which describes the history of the Christmas Bird Count and features a segment on our program in Cuba as an example how birders can contribute to 'citizen science' based bird conservation efforts.

Program Leadership

Our program is designed and managed in the United States and is professionally staffed and field tested **over 20 years in Cuba**. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.

Full-time U.S. Field Leader - Michael Good has been involved with our Cuba programs since 2002, and is our U.S. leader for this program. Michael has over 30 years experience studying the birds of North America, and brings a wealth of knowledge and passion for neotropical migrants and the avifauna of the Eastern United States. Michael has traveled extensively in the US, Alaska, Europe, Australia, South America and Cuba. As a Registered Maine Guide, he has been guiding professionally for many years, focusing on avian ecology in the Gulf of Maine bioregion. Fields of expertise include wetland ecology, ornithology, environmental education and developmental biology. Michael spent many years studying numerous aspects of the Gulf of Maine while employed at the Marine Biological Laboratory and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. He currently holds a BA (Biology) from Earlham College and a MS (Developmental Biology) from the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. Michael is an outstanding ornithologist and naturalist, and is President of Down East Nature Tours in Bar Harbor, Maine and founder of the Acadia Birding Festival.



Nils Navarro Dayana (guide) Michael Good

Our Cuban Naturalists

We work with a very competent team of biologists and museum curators in Cuba. Our full time Cuban birding guide will be with us throughout the program in the field and will assist in finding and identifying birds, as well as providing a broad overview of Cuban natural history. He may share specific information relative to the flora, fauna, geology and other natural features of the environments we visit. Additionally, we will work with regional naturalists from the national parks and biosphere reserves that we visit around the country.

A Bilingual Cuban Guide will be at our service throughout the program. Along with a professional driver, he or she will be with the group each day to tell us about Cuban history, culture, arts and lifestyle. He/she will also deal with logistics, meals, translation, and other nuts-and-bolts aspects of the travel experience.

Accommodations

Accommodations feature privately owned, officially approved, homestays, and or hotels in Havana and 4 additional provinces. Our Cuban accommodations are staffed by friendly hosts and in the countryside represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit. These may include refurbished vintage hotels, modern resort hotels, and simple beach-front bungalows, or private estates. All accommodations are safe, clean, air conditioned tourist facilities with private bathrooms. It should be noted that standards in Cuba differ from those in the U.S. and other developed countries.

Additional Details

Following program registration, we will provide all participants with a bird list as well as details with regard to travel to Cuba, including all of the basics you need to know about travel documents, customs, facts about Cuba,

currency, health and safety, food, flights, and what to bring. U.S. Government authorization documents and bird checklist will be provided following receipt of your final balance.

Physical Demands and Expectations

This program offers opportunities for several days of ambitious birding, early departure times on birding days, and occasional evening sessions. Birding days may provide leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon birding sessions. Physical exertion will be light to moderate most days, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. Participants should be in reasonably good physical condition and prepared for strong sun, with temperatures in the mid 70s – 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in Cayo Coco and the Zapata Region. Although unlikely, rain may



occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Those with medical concerns should check with their physician before taking part in the program. Your health and well-being are very important to us!

Cuban Trogon



Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions

Land costs for the **10 day** program are **\$ 3,895.00** per person for shared accommodations, with an additional **\$ 550.00** for Single supplements. The 1 day/night Havana extension option is **\$ 225.00** per person sharing, and **\$ 275.00** per single traveler. Reservation forms are accepted on a first come, first served basis, and must be accompanied by a **\$ 700.00 deposit** payable to **Caribbean Conservation Trust**. Enrollment is limited to 12 travelers. Fewer participants may result in a reasonable small group supplement.

What is included:

CCT Cuba Bird Survey Programs include the following: all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, guide services, most tips (guides, drivers, naturalists and restaurant and bell staff), airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, some drinks, admission fees (itinerary only), U.S. Department of Treasury authorization documents, and program management services which include the provision of all pre- and post-program materials, a full-time Cuban bilingual guide, bilingual Cuban naturalists, and a fulltime driver. Program fees help support Caribbean Conservation Trust's bird conservation efforts in Cuba.

Not Included:

Travel to Havana, Cuba; Cuban Visa (\$75.00) and Cuban health insurance (required by law and approximately \$3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., U.S. passport fees, meals or accommodations outside Cuba, or other fees not listed in the program.

Flights

We suggest flying from south Florida to Havana with JetBlue, Southwest, or American Airlines. We aim for the earliest departures in each direction. We will provide all of the information necessary to make booking these flights simple & secure. Flight costs range from \$ 275.00 - \$ 350.00 round trip.



Caribbean Conservation Trust www.cubirds.com



203-733-1162 cubirds@aol.com



Payment

Regarding payment for the land portion of the tour, a **\$ 700.00** deposit is due as soon as possible to reserve space on these programs. This can be paid by wire transfer, check or money order payable to:



Caribbean Conservation Trust

353 West Todd Street
Hamden, CT 06518



Please do not write **Cuba** on the check memo or any electronic payment format.

Balance Payment and cancellation and refund policy *

Full payment is due 120 days prior to departure or by October 20, 2021. You will receive a detailed receipt/invoice following receipt of your deposit and reservation form. All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the CCT office. Should it become necessary for you to cancel, all payments will be refunded after a deduction of our cancellation fee outlined below:

More than 120 days prior to the tour	\$ 200.00 per person (land only)
Between 119 and 90 days prior to the tour	FULL DEPOSIT (unless we can fill your place)
Fewer than 90 days prior to the tour	NO REFUND (unless we can fill your place)

***Please be aware that the refund policies apply only to the land portion of the trip, and that airlines may have different policies that exist beyond our ability to control. Additional registration fees may apply. As with all international travel programs, we highly encourage trip cancellation and travel insurance policies.**

If for some reason we need to cancel or postpone the trip due to Covid 19 resurgence, we will refund your payment to date in full.

Caribbean Conservation Trust and its agents and constituents reserve the right to make changes to the itineraries. Land and air arrangements may be subject to price increases beyond our control.





Blue-headed Quail Dove



Cuban Parakeet



Cuban Blackhawk



Cuban Grassquit



Cuban Emerald

Cuba's Western Mountains, Bay of Pigs (Zapata Peninsula), Northern Archipelago, Escambray Valley and Havana

February 19 – 28/ March 1, 2022

Day 1 February 19, 2022 (Saturday)

arrive *Havana*, transfer to *Vinales National Park*

After arrival in Havana by early afternoon, we will transfer to **Vinales** (1 night). Vinales is a small town nestled in a stunning valley in the heart of Cuba's renowned tobacco growing region. This enchanting landscape is surrounded by lushly vegetated 'mogotes', or blunt, ragged limestone monoliths that dominate the region. Endemic birds such as *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Yellow-headed Warbler*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl* and *Cuban Solitaire* will be among the birds we pursue in this region. Our afternoon concludes with a visit to the private home and art studio of Nils Navarro – our co-leader, and Cuba's best natural artist. Optional evening visit to the mouth of a local cave to witness the exit of thousands of endemic and regionally endemic bats, and search for the endemic *Cuban Bare-legged Owl*. Dinner and accommodation at **Rancho San Vicente** (1 night).

Day 2 ~ February 20, 2022

Vinales to Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve

Morning birding nearby within the park. In addition to the birds mentioned above, we will look for *Cuban Blackbird*, *Tawny-shouldered Blackbird*, *Cuban Emerald*, *Loggerhead Kingbird*, and *Red-legged Honeycreeper*. Lunch will be at a successful farm to table restaurant run by a local family. After lunch we will motor east to **Las Terrazas** (1 night), nestled in the forest and foothills of the **Sierra de la Rosario mountains**. Accommodation is in a tranquil and comfortable small eco-hotel that is part of las Terrazas ecological community. After generations of deforestation and neglect, this beautiful natural area was nationalized in the 1960s, and a small, experimental ecological community was established. The region was the former site of over 50 coffee plantations in the late 18th and 19th centuries, was later heavily logged, and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985. The now reforested biosphere reserve helps protect close to 850 endemic plant species and 98 bird species, including 11 of Cuba's 26 endemic bird species, Optional evening excursion in search of 2 endemic owls (Cuban Pygmy & Bare-legged Owl) close to the lobby.

Day 3 ~ February 21, 2022

Las Terrazas to Bay of Pigs

Breakfast followed by a walk along forest paths to the nearby community *Cuban Grassquit* and *Olive-capped Warbler* are important target species. Along the way our local naturalist will point out birds and other fauna we encounter as we explore native pine forest and submontane seasonal rain forest habitat. Lunch is at **Cafetal Buena Vista**, offering sweeping views of the mountains, plains and coast. Departure east to the Zapata Peninsula (4 hours). Birding stops along the way as opportunity permits. Accommodation / dinner in private home stays in **Playa Larga** (3 nights) on the picturesque **Bay of Pigs**. This region contains the largest wetland complex in the West Indies, and is Cuba's most prolific birding region. Here we have access to excellent local guides, as well as to protected areas and birding locations off the beaten track.



Great Lizard Cuckoo

Day 4 ~ February 22, 2022

Bay of Pigs / Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and a morning of birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of **Bermejas**. Here is our best opportunity to see the endemic *Bee Hummingbird* (world's smallest bird), *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Cuban Parakeet*, Cuban Parrot, *Blue-headed* and *Gray-fronted Quail-Doves*, Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves. Lunch at Caleta

Buena, a beautiful limestone rimmed inlet abundant with fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities. The historic Bay of Pigs museum is nearby. Afternoon birding in Bermejás, dinner/accommodation in Playa Larga.

Day 5 ~ February 23, 2022

Bay of Pigs / Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and departure for birding within **Zapata National Park** and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at **La Turba**. This is our best opportunity for *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* and *Tawny-shouldered Blackbird* and a variety of warblers and other migrants. Lunch and a trip to **Las Salinas Wildlife Refuge**, with numerous shorebirds, Reddish Egrets, Wood Storks, Spoonbills, Flamingos and endemic *Cuban Black-Hawk*. All walking is on dry, flat terrain (less than 2 miles total). Dinner at a private restaurant in the village, accommodation in Playa Larga.

Day 6 ~ February 24, 2022

Zapata to Cayo Coco

Breakfast, check out, and birding options within the protected areas of the park, based on leader discretion. Late morning drive northeast to Cayo Coco (6 + hours) in Cuba's northern archipelago, the setting for Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. The 'keys' offer excellent birding, scenery, and accommodation. All-inclusive beachfront accommodation and meals at Sol Cayo Coco hotel. Birding on site or en route (or both), depending on timing of arrival.

Day 7 ~ February 25, 2022

Cayo Coco

Morning birding on Cayo Paredon Grande, the northeastern-most key in the Cayo Coco archipelago, which is one of Cuba's most important migratory landfalls. *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Thick-billed Vireo and possibly a subspecies of *Zapata Sparrow* and the Bahama Mockingbird are target birds for the day. Lunch at the hotel followed by afternoon birding on Cayo Guillermo in mixed habitat including coastal forest, mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline (roadside, flat walking). Dinner, accommodation in Cayo Coco.



Cuban Gnatcatcher

Day 8 ~ February 26, 2022

Cayo Coco to Sancti Spiritus

AM birding not far from our hotel for any species we may have missed. Late check out followed by lunch in Cayo Coco and drive to Sancti Spiritus (3 + hours) for dinner and accommodation at Rancho Hatuey in the peaceful countryside.

Day 9 ~ February 27, 2022

Sancti Spiritus – Cienfuegos Coast - Havana

Morning departure west through the scenic Escambray Valley in search of *Palm Crow*, a 'future' endemic recorded here recently by our groups. Other birding stops en route. Departure west along the striking coastline, with lunch in Cienfuegos Province on the coast. Late day arrival in Havana for accommodation and dinner.

Day 10 ~ February 28, 2022

Havana – U.S OR HAVANA EXTENSION *

The optional extended stay in Havana will include accommodation, breakfast, lunch, and a guided tour of Havana, including historic **Old Havana**, one of the best preserved colonial cities in the Americas. The walking tour will include a guided interpretive exploration of some of colonial Havana's most significant historical sites. This **UNESCO World Heritage site** is loaded with a variety of museums, a thriving arts scene, and a full range of architectural examples of both renovated and neglected structures, many opulent or otherwise unique, representing 5 centuries of human habitation. The extension also includes visit the home and private ornithological collection of *Orlando Garrido*, Cuba's greatest living naturalist. Sr. Garrido is a retired and venerable former Curator of Birds at the National Museum of Natural History in Havana, and senior author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba as well as hundreds of scientific publications. This visit is always mentioned as a trip highlight. Lunch is in Old Havana. Late afternoon is open for independent exploration of this fascinating and historic small city. Accommodation in Havana. Dinner at one of Havana's best 'paladares' (private restaurants).



Day 11 ~ *March 1, 2022

Havana – U.S.

Breakfast and morning transfer to Jose Marti International Airport for your return flight to Florida.



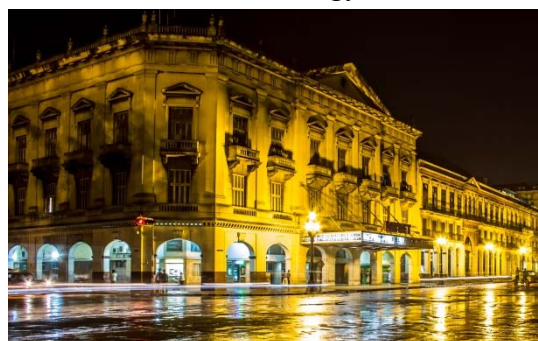
HAVANA EXTENSION OPTION

Our very popular one day/night Havana extension includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, guide services, ground transportation, accommodation (same accommodation as the previous night), and a guided walking exploration of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most unique destinations in the Caribbean. Havana is loaded with interesting historic sites, museums, art galleries, and now several excellent restaurants.



Due a half century of relative economic isolation, Havana avoided rapid development and the loss of scores of historic residential and commercial properties during the last half of the 20th century. Many buildings have been recently refurbished, some dating back to the 17th century. The harbor in Old Havana is presided over by Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabana, which is among the largest and best preserved Spanish Colonial fortresses in the world. The Malecon, Havana's historic and scenic ocean drive, winds several miles along the coast from the harbor in Old Havana to the mouth of the Almendares River, defining the northern limits of this once opulent and attractive city.

There is a new found energy, excitement, and sense of hope for a positive future among Cubans living here following historic improvements in U.S. and Cuban relations in 2015. A return to business following the global pandemic shut down, as well as a new political climate in the U.S. should result in a resumption of these positive trends. If Cuba is to change radically in the coming years, most changes will be evident in Havana. Our hope is that future development here focuses on historic preservation and renewal, but this outcome is not guaranteed. We hope you take this opportunity to enjoy historic Havana while you can!



Cost for the extension is \$ 225.00 per person in a shared room, and \$ 275.00 per single room. Currently, there are additional options for independent extensions beyond the extent of the tour.



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