

# Cycle Cuba!

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## The Cycling

Cycling is the most enjoyable way to explore the island of Cuba and meet the local people as you travel. This holiday has been planned to keep vehicle transfers to a minimum, ensuring that you have plenty of time to soak up the culture and countryside at a relaxing pace.

This holiday also allows you some flexibility on all cycling days, thanks to our two guides and vehicle support (see below). This is helped by staying in some places for 2 or 3 nights – it lets everyone explore with the guides on our carefully planned rides, but you also have the option of not cycling. So if you want to relax, explore the streets and cafes of on foot, or have a lazy morning after a big night of salsa and mohitos the night before, it's easy enough to arrange.

**Usual daily distances:** 36km to 66km (with flexible options)

**Days of cycling:** 11

**Terrain:** Quiet backroads with some options to cycle on dirt tracks and easy trails. There are hills and rolling countryside on this tour so a reasonable basic level of fitness is recommended.

**Support vehicle:** 100%

**Tour staff:** 2 cycle guides, 1 driver

## Two Guides & Vehicle Support

This holiday is a two-guide tour, with a third member of the tour team acting as the support vehicle driver and assistant bike mechanic. Choosing a cycle tour with two guides has a huge range of benefits, including:

- **Flexible ride choices**, with easy options and challenging options on the same day (great if you fancy a lazy day, or for groups/couples of differing abilities)
- **Greater knowledge**, thanks to the blend of experiences and skills that two guides can bring to the trip
- **Greater freedom**, if you want to try something that's different from the main itinerary, two guides can help make it happen
- **Smoother service**, as everything flows more easily, from loading bikes, to moving bags to everyday tour management

If you want to find out more about the cycling, the guiding or anything else about Cuba – please just give us a call. Our office team is always ready to help with enquiries, and if they don't know the answer they'll get one of the guides to ring you back.

## Holiday Facts

**Price:** £1460 per person

**Approx flight price:** £500 - £600 (Virgin airlines)

**Duration (inc flights):**  
16 days, Sunday to Monday

### The cycling:

11 days

Two cycle guide

Vehicle support

Fitness grade 1-3 (Easy cycling with more challenging options)

Skill grade A (You just need to be able to ride a bicycle!)

Group size 8 - 16

### What's included:

14 nights good hotel accommodation

All breakfasts

8 lunches and 6 dinners

Professional UK cycle guide

Expert local cycle guide

Tour support vehicle and driver

Airport transfers (from specific flights)

Visit to Cayo Levisa

Entry to Santo Thomas caves

All national park entry fees

### Trip dates:

6 to 21 November 2011

4 to 19 December 2011

19 Feb to 5 March 2012

18 March to 2 April 2012

4 to 19 November 2012

2 to 17 December 2012

### Optional extras:

Single room guarantee £140

(There is no supplement for single travellers who are willing to share)

Bike rental £120

Extra transfers or nights in Havana can be arranged on request.

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### Day 1 – Arrival

If you are flying to Cuba from the UK or mainland Europe the flights generally leave in the morning and, with the 5 hour time difference, arrive late afternoon into Havana. It's a short 30 minute transfer to our hotel, which is right on the waterfront in the Miramar district of the city.

The hotel has plenty of space for you to relax in, a good bar and café, and a full size sea-water swimming pool with views across the bay. For those people who are renting bikes, we may have time to set them up this afternoon, otherwise we'll do it in the morning. For those on their own bikes, our guides are expert mechanics and will help you to get everything together after your flight. This evening we stay in the hotel to rest and recover from the journey.

**Cycling:** 0km  
**Meals included:** Dinner

### Day 2 – Exploring Havana

A relaxed start lets us get bikes set up correctly, ready for a spin along the historic waterfront and into the city. If you'd prefer to miss the cycling today then the support vehicle can take you and our expert local guide right into the old town to explore some of the markets, squares and cafes at an easy pace. Havana is renowned for its architecture, influenced by the colonial Spanish. Some places are beautifully restored while others enjoy more of a faded grandeur. Our local guide is an expert on the history of the city and can bring to life its culture and heritage.

For those on bikes we pedal along the waterfront – The Malecon - then cut across into the labyrinth of streets and crumbling Spanish haciendas to wind our way into the old town. This is a great chance to experience the life, colour, noise and excitement of Havana life, right up close. With most streets being one way, and narrow, it is safe cycling and a really enjoyable way to explore.

We all get together in the Old Town for lunch at a great restaurant on the corner of one of the old plazas. After the meal, and a chance to relax to the sounds of the house band over a good local coffee, we set off again to the vast Plaza de la Revolucion. Again, we can cycle or travel in our support vehicle, as we wind through the city and high onto the square above the old university.

The exploration ends back at our hotel, with plenty of time for a swim, freshen up and then a change before dinner. Near to the hotel are some of the best private restaurants in the city and we'll head to one of these for supper this evening. This is your chance to try some great Cuban dishes, including superb sea food and even venison from the central mountains, barbeque grilled to perfection.

**Cycling:** Any distance up to 40km  
**Meals included:** Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 3 – Coastal Ride to Trinidad

Setting out from our hotel in the comfortable, air-conditioned support vehicle we travel across this narrow island to the south and east. The mostly flat journey passes through farmlands on quiet roads, then brings us to the south coast.

After lunch at a local restaurant we saddle up for a flowing ride along the edge of beaches, palm groves, coastal forests and rocky coves, all the way to our hotel in Trinidad. Those who are feeling fit have the option to extend their ride with a circuit that takes in the sleepy fishing village of La Boca and the

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mangrove swamps of the Ancon peninsula. This is also the perfect ride to watch a stunning sunset over the sea.

This evening we head into the heart of Trinidad to enjoy dinner at either one of the private restaurants or even a “paladar” – local houses that are set up to cater for group meals, with some advanced notice! The experience of eating in someone’s home, usually dining on fantastic fresh product caught / picked / prepared just for you, is a fabulous part of any Cuban experience. After supper we can wander through town to the “Casa de la Musica” (house of music) to enjoy live Cuban bands, while we sit under the stars with a cool drink or two.

Trinidad is a beautiful town, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, with its tiled roofs and cobbled streets. It is also very hospitable and safe – at night you can see everyone on the streets, doors wide open, neighbours chatting and music, conversation and laughter pouring from every window.

**Cycling:** 36km or 56km

**Meals included:** Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 4 - Valle de los Ingenios and Trinidad

This morning we roll down through the edge of Trinidad to the road that takes us into the Valle de los Ingenios. There are amazing views from the impressive Mirador en-route, looking out across the lush plantation lands that were once the second most important sugar cane growing areas of Cuba.

We ride on through the valley past the restored hacienda of Manaca Iznaga and on to a lovely old farmstead down a quiet backroad. This sleepy spot is deep in the valley with the old steam railway running past it. We can enjoy fresh, home ground coffee from the farm, or fresh lemonade, as we relax on the veranda. The cycle ride back winds through sugar cane plantations before lunch at a traditional restaurant.

You can then choose whether to cycle back to Trinidad or go by bus, to give you more time to explore the town. You could also choose to pedal out to one of the quiet beach areas for a swim and relax before returning to our hotel. Followed, of course, by a great night out in Trinidad.

**Cycling:** 36km with the option to cycle further, up to a total of 60km

**Meals included:** Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 5 – Topes de Collantes National Park

Today we leave the coast and head into the mountains, with each person having the choice of travelling up in the bus or going for the early start option and the challenge of climbing the twisting road on your bike. Journeying up we get fabulous views back across the rolling foothills and out to the Ancon peninsula and sea beyond, especially from the lookout point, perched high in the hills (from where semi-keen cyclists can also begin their ride).

Once at the village of Topes de Collantes we check in to our hotel, have lunch, then meet our local nature guide for a walk through the national park. There are several routes to choose from, each giving the chance to discover the wild beauty, waterfalls, bird life and peace that Topes has to offer. If you prefer to relax instead of walk there’s a lovely coffee house that’s run by a local co-operative, with views across palm fringed ridges and forests.

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This region is known as a “Grand National Park” in Cuba because it covers a vast region of the Escambray Mountains, an area of great scientific importance for its mountain flora and fauna. The main National Park office is in the centre of Topes de Collantes village and acts as a training centre for all of the region’s qualified nature guides.

**Cycling:** An optional challenge ride of up to 25km into the mountains

**Meals included:** Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 6 –Escambray to Santa Clara

This morning we ride straight out from our hotel and onto a beautiful ridge line that offers views across pristine wilderness, as far as the eye can see. This rolling road is one of the most beautiful routes on the island, as we descend head through coffee plantation lands where the pickers often relax at the roadside, eager to chat with passing cyclists!

This cycle ride is quite easy going with miles of winding descents on almost unused roads. The combination of lush palm trees and citrus fruit groves start to take over from the montane forests as we reach the plains and pedal towards the little town of Manicaragua. This is where we load up the bikes for the short drive to the city of Santa Clara and the Che Guevara Memorial – one of the most important cultural sights in Cuba. We drive from here to our hotel, where you can relax by the pool, enjoy a drink and get ready for supper.

**Cycling:** 42km

**Meals included:** Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

### Day 7 – Soroa

Today we transfer westwards to the ecological reserve of Las Terrazas and the lovely hotel at Soroa, set in the heart of a dense tropical forest. Once here we check in to our hotel, with its beautiful grounds and large swimming pool. You can then choose whether you wish to relax or be active, with choices including the walk alongside the Manantiales River to the high waterfall (which you can swim under), a visit to the Orchid Gardens, or heading out for a hike to a small summit nearby, with panoramic views.

The Soroa Orchid Gardens are home to one of the largest collections of Orchids in the world and a favourite spot of Hemmingway’s during his time in Cuba. The gardens contain over 700 species of orchid, of which 250 are endemic to Cuba. The park is a national monument, and covers an area of 35,000 hectares, although the main gardens can be visited in an afternoon with advice and endless stories and facts from one of the local guides.

**Cycling:** 0km

**Meals included:** Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 8 – Across the Sierra del Rosario

This is one of the standout rides in Cuba as we first climb the ridge of the Cordillera de Guaniguanico range then wind down through the biosphere reserve of Sierra del Rosario. As vultures soar overhead and forests of palm trees spread out towards the coast you’ll be sailing down the quiet road all the way to San Diego de Nuñez village. The locals here see few visitors, let alone cyclists, so it’s a great place for a break, a drink and a chance to see more of village life.

Here we join the coast road and spin along to the tiny port of Palma Rubia, where the main 66km ride ends as we load up the bikes and drive on to the Viñales Valley. However, keen cyclists might decide to pick up the pace in the afternoon and ride all the way to the hotel with one of the guides – spinning

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through the tobacco fields and orange groves in the cool hours (with the support vehicle ready to return and collect us if we're running late!)

Once at Viñales we check in to our hotel and freshen up, before heading in to the centre of town to explore the night life. For those people who are interested in salsa we can usually organise lessons for either tomorrow or the next day at the Viñales Cultural Centre. This is the hub for local music, dance and entertainment – a great place to head for in the evening as the best local dancers hit the floor to the sound of bands from all over western Cuba.

**Cycling:** 66km with a challenge ride option to extend up to 110km!

**Meals included:** Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 9 – The Viñales Valley

Riding out from the hotel we spend today on a leisurely journey through the Viñales region. This valley is another UNESCO World Heritage Site, famed for its lush valley floors scattered with farms, with giant limestone karsts, called Mogotes, rising up everywhere. We'll visit the botanical gardens, the Prehistoric Mural (painted on a mountain side) and the Palenque Caves on our circular route.

If you prefer not to ride, or have a salsa lesson booked for the afternoon, then we can help you to organise your own day out in Viñales, or leave you free to explore at your leisure. By this stage in a tour it is good to have a few days in one place, so you can unpack, relax and set your own pace. Viñales is the perfect place to do this, staying in a lovely hotel with a wide range of things to do by day and night. Your guides will have an itinerary to follow, to ensure that you get the most out of your time here, but if you prefer to do your own thing then that is also fine.

**Cycling:** Up to 36km, with options to do more or less, including dawn and dusk photographic rides

**Meals included:** Breakfast

### Day 10 – Cayo Levisa

Today is your chance to relax on the beach, swim in the warm sea, or take a stroll along the shore as you explore the small, pristine island of Cayo Levisa.

After breakfast we drive to a small port (just 45 minutes away) to catch the boat to Cayo Levisa. Once there you have the day to yourself. The beach itself is lovely and you can walk a couple of kilometres along the forested shore to the far end of the island. There's a small bar and restaurant on the island and this is where we have lunch, usually oven baked fresh fish, as you might expect.

After the cycling of the past few days this is a great chance to completely unwind. The boat back to the mainland leaves an hour or so before sunset, allowing us to get back to our hotel then head into Viñales for dinner, drinks and dancing.

For those who are hooked on cycling and enjoy watching the sun come up on an early morning bike ride, today is the perfect chance to do just that. It's 42km from hotel to port and if we leave early there's time to do this at a steady pace as the boat to the island leaves at 10am. The support bus will come along with the group and pick up any riders who are running out of time, or who simply prefer to take photos in the lovely morning light as they cruise through the villages, fields and plantations.

**Cycling:** Optional dawn ride to the beach, up to 42km

**Meals included:** Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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### Day 12 – Grande Caverne Santo Tomas and Rancho La Guabina

Today we ride out through Viñales to the largest cave network in all of Latin America, with 18km of galleries over 5 levels. This is an awesome sight and a knowledgeable cave guide will lead us through the cave system for up to 2 hours of exploration.

For those who want a more challenging wilderness ride we have an exciting option that uses the old Santo Thomas road that heads across from the southern tip of the Viñales National Park. Following the ridge westwards we spin out through the villages then roll up and down on rough dirt tracks, before joining the backroad to the caves.

After exploring the caverns we cycle on to our overnight stay at Rancho La Guabina. This is a traditional ranch where they still breed beautiful Cuban Pintos and Appaloosas, and you can plan this evening for a horse trek tomorrow after breakfast.

**Cycling:** 49km for the main route or 54km for the ridge ride off-road option to the caves

**Meals included:** Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

### Day 12 – Rancho La Guabina and Vega Robaina

This morning you can enjoy a relaxing start and then explore the ranch and surrounding countryside on a guided horse trek. This is a great way to see this part of Cuba, from the saddle of a well-cared for ranch horse in the safe hands of an expert ranch hand and guide. If you prefer to relax and enjoy the peace, sunshine and holiday feeling, or take a gentle walk or bike ride into the countryside instead, our guides will help make it happen. If you'd like to cycle, we have some great routes available that take you through the foothills of Viñales.

After lunch at the Ranch we cycle through the tobacco plantations that make Pinar del Rio the most important province in the world for cigars. Our ride winds its way to Vega Robaina, a famous tobacco farm where we can learn about the crop and the process of farming and harvesting that hasn't changed for generations. The day ends with a short drive to Soroa for another night at the hotel here.

**Cycling:** Optional cycle ride in the morning (up to 40km) then afternoon group cycle, 25km

**Meals included:** Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

### Day 13 – Las Terrazas then Old Town Havana

After breakfast we cycle out for the final time, on the backroad through the Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve. This protected nature reserve is filled with palm forests, rushing streams and a huge array of bird and plant life. It is also the home to a community that works to preserve and protect the important environmental heritage of Cuba.

The cycle ride ends at the old hill top hacienda of Cafetal Buenavista for a superb lunch, where they even serve Soroa wines if you want to try the local produce! For the last time your support crew will load up the bikes while you drink in the views, before the short drive back to Havana. Here we check in to our hotel in the historic Old Town, with plenty of time to freshen up before meeting up for drinks and dinner in one of the great restaurants in this area.

**Cycling:** 22km

**Meals included:** Breakfast and Lunch

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### Day 14 – Exploring Havana

From the hours before sunrise to the small hours of the morning, Havana is a city that deserves to be discovered and explored. Your two guides will help you to figure out what to do, where to go and how to get the most out of your time here – unless of course you prefer to just head out and explore, or find a great roof top terrace to relax on!

There are many things to see in Havana, but favourites include a dawn photographic tour with our CycleActive guide (check out the feature in Outdoor Enthusiast magazine written by our own Chris Ford, all about Cuba as the sun comes up), the Partagas cigar factory tour and the Museum of the Revolution. However, you may just prefer to wander the bustling streets and open squares of the old town, looking for bargains in the old prints and books stores or market stalls.

This evening we'll book a good restaurant for supper, so everyone can get together for one last time before heading their separate ways tomorrow. We'll also check out the Opera and Ballet – the Havana Opera House is truly impressive and if you enjoy this kind of entertainment it is something not to be missed.

**Cycling:** 0km

**Meals included:** Breakfast

### Day 15 – Havana then home

From our hotel in the old town you can easily head out and explore some more before we transfer to the airport. This is usually the time to head for cigar and rum shops to buy those last minute “cultural souvenirs!” If you have brought your own bike then this morning our guides will help you to pack it away, ready for flying, if you have not already boxed it up with their help.

We will transfer you to the airport in the afternoon, to tie in with the Virgin airlines flight to the UK. If you are using other flights then we can either adapt the transfer to fit, or organise an additional minibus for you.

**Cycling:** 0km

**Meals included:** Breakfast

### Day 16 – Arrive home

Generally flights from Cuba to the UK and Europe go through the night. With the deduction of 5 hours due to the time difference it means arriving back in the UK in the morning.

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### Tour Guidebook and Packing Advice

On booking you will be sent detailed information on a wide range of topics including health advice, recommended clothing, money, visas and so on, to help you prepare for your holiday. If you have questions on these topics either now or after you have read this information, please contact us.

### Geography & Climate

Cuba is a tropical island in the Northern hemisphere. It is 1250km long and covered with a variety of mountains, jungles, forests, rich farmland and golden beaches. Cuba has a warm and dry season from November to April, with average daily temperatures between 20 and 25 degrees. May to October is the rainy season, which is hotter and also prone to hurricanes.

### Cycling Terrain

This tour explores Cuba on its back roads, which are almost traffic free and ideal for cycling. Some are in good condition, some are potholed and slightly rougher. There are also options to cycle on well maintained dirt roads or rougher tracks in a few locations. A touring bike, hybrid or mountain bike would all be suitable for this tour and the bike we provide for you, if you choose to rent from us, will be a mountain bike with slimmer, easy rolling touring tyres.

### Accommodation & Food

We use a combination of 3 and 5 star hotels with en-suite rooms, and one night at an historic farmstead. All places provide good food and most have swimming pools and spacious grounds. We visit many local cafes, restaurants and bars so you get a full flavour of local culture and cuisine. For meals not included there are many places to eat with prices ranging from £5-£6 in a decent café up to £15 or £20 in a very good restaurant (depending on the food you order), with drinks costing approximately £1.50 to £2.00 for water, beer and cocktails (rum is cheap, so a mojito won't cost much more than a bottle of water!)

### Cycle Rental

We can provide high quality, well maintained rental bikes in Cuba for this tour. These will be mountain bikes from Trek or Specialized, fitted with slimmer, faster rolling tyres to allow them to run more quickly and easily on the backroads. Most bikes are provided in the country, and will be ready for you when you arrive. Our UK tour leaders are experts at cycle mechanics and setup so will ensure that your bike is correctly adjusted for you. This extra care has made a big difference to many clients over the years – ensuring that they remain comfortable on the bike and get the most out of their cycling.

### Passports' & Visas

A full passport with a Cuban tourist card is required for entry in to Cuba, by UK citizens. The tourist card is obtained by sending copies of travel documents and a fee of £15 to the Cuban Embassy in London. The turnaround is very quick – usually the tourist card is sent back to you within 1 or 2 days. You can also get tourist cards issued by visiting the Embassy in person. Full details and a link to the application form are included in the Tour Guidebook that we send to you on booking.

### Flight Options

This trip is timed to fit with the most popular flights to Cuba – on Virgin Airlines. We provide our tours at a flight exclusive price to allow you to select your own travel arrangements, if you prefer. However, we do work in partnership with a flight agent who has taken care of our clients for over 10 years, and is an expert at ensuring that cycles travel with you smoothly (if you want to take your own). If you book your own flights you should arrive in Havana on either day 1 or day 2 of the tour – full hotel details and directions will be provided. The tour ends on day 15 in Havana. If you would like some extra nights either pre or post tour we'd be happy to arrange these for you.

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