

ITINERARY

11 DAY/ 10 NIGHT PRIVATE CUBA TOUR
SPIRITED CUBA



**LOCALLY
SOURCED
CUBA TOURS**
Your Cuba tour specialists

INTRODUCTION

Our 11 Day Private Cuba Tour will give you an authentic Cuban experience that will undoubtedly live long in your memory. How could you forget the heavy revving of the vintage American cars that tour its cities touting for business, the revolutionary artwork, the rich sweet scent of cigar smoke as it fills the air, the salsa beat drifting from bars, the cocktails, or the bright Cuban sunlight bouncing off the country's historic relics?

INCLUDED ACTIVITIES

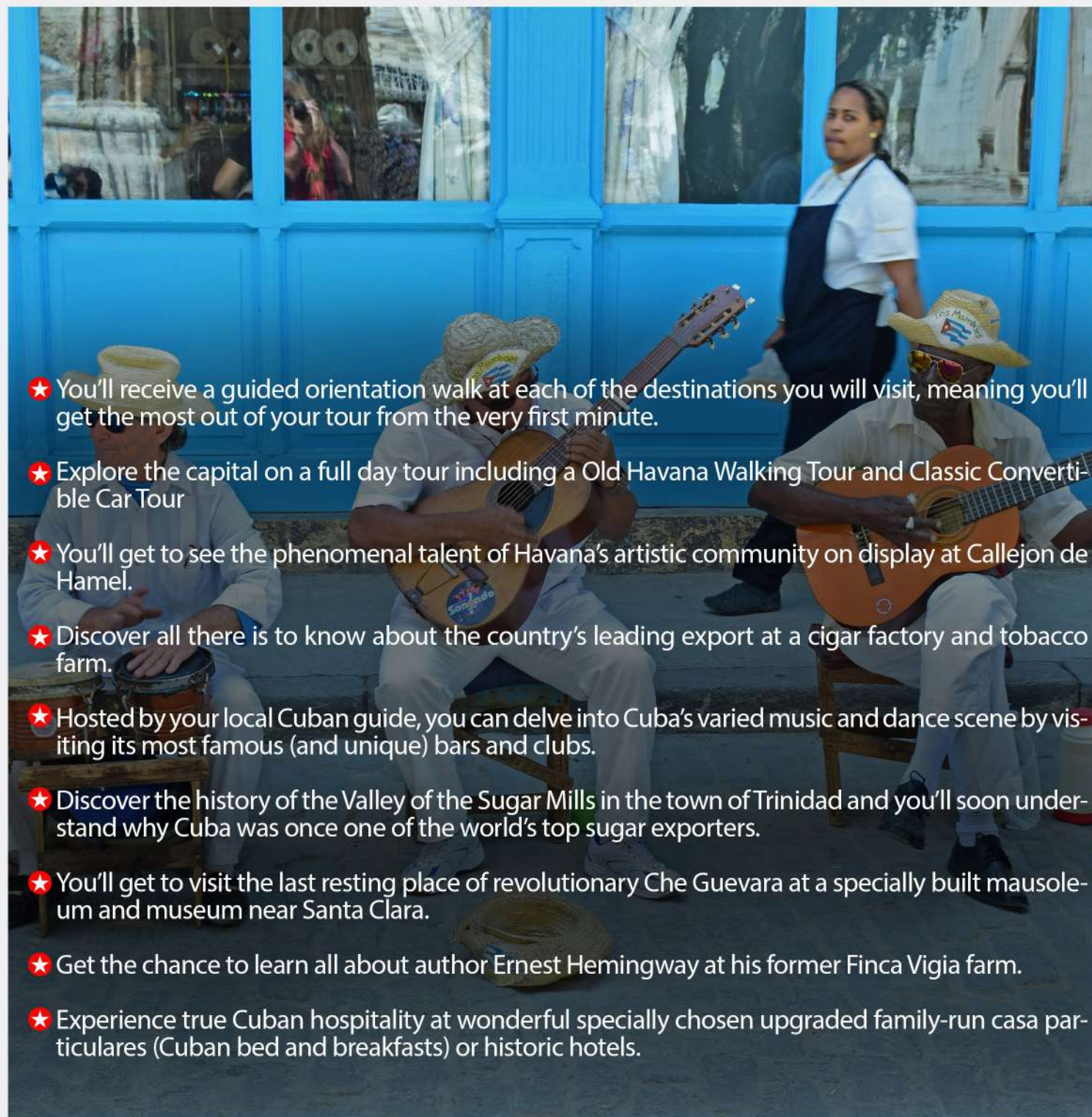


- ★ Havana Orientation Walk (depending on arrival time).
- ★ Convertible Classic Car Trip to El Morro Fort and El Cristo de La Habana
- ★ Old Havana Walking Tour.
- ★ Classic Convertible Car Tour.
- ★ 1 x drink at Hotel Nacional OR Mojito making class OR salsa lesson.
- ★ Visit Cigar Factory and Rum Museum OR Farm to Table cooking experience.
- ★ Museum of the Revolution OR Museum of Fine Arts or Finca Vigia.
- ★ Callejon de Hamel.
- ★ Fusterlandia.
- ★ Soroa Waterfall and Orchid Garden.
- ★ Buena Vista Coffee Plantation.
- ★ Las Terrazas Township.
- ★ Los Jasmines Look-out point.
- ★ Organic Farm Lunch.
- ★ Farmland walk or cycle.
- ★ Mural de la Prehistoria.
- ★ Swim/ Snorkel at Bay of Pigs and visit local museum there.
- ★ 1 x drink at Palacio de Valle.
- ★ Guided City Walk of Cienfuegos.
- ★ Guided Township walk of Trinidad.
- ★ Casa de la Musica.
- ★ Two options from Visit Playa Ancon Beach/ Valley of the Sugar Mills excursion/ Salto del Caburní waterfall trek.
- ★ Palenque de los Congos Reales.
- ★ Che Guevara Memorial.
- ★ Armoured Train Museum

IS THIS TRIP RIGHT FOR YOU?

Our 11 Day Spirited Cuba Private tour is specially designed to show you as much of the island as is possible in the time without an exhaustive list of destinations and activities becoming exhausting and overbearing. It is also designed to be flexible enough to fit into your own interests, with plenty of opportunity to choose from a range of hand-selected activities and excursions that suit you and you alone. What's more, our local guides will be eager to share as much of their wondrous country as possible with you.

WHY WE LOVE THIS TRIP



- ★ You'll receive a guided orientation walk at each of the destinations you will visit, meaning you'll get the most out of your tour from the very first minute.
- ★ Explore the capital on a full day tour including a Old Havana Walking Tour and Classic Convertible Car Tour
- ★ You'll get to see the phenomenal talent of Havana's artistic community on display at Callejon de Hamel.
- ★ Discover all there is to know about the country's leading export at a cigar factory and tobacco farm.
- ★ Hosted by your local Cuban guide, you can delve into Cuba's varied music and dance scene by visiting its most famous (and unique) bars and clubs.
- ★ Discover the history of the Valley of the Sugar Mills in the town of Trinidad and you'll soon understand why Cuba was once one of the world's top sugar exporters.
- ★ You'll get to visit the last resting place of revolutionary Che Guevara at a specially built mausoleum and museum near Santa Clara.
- ★ Get the chance to learn all about author Ernest Hemingway at his former Finca Vigia farm.
- ★ Experience true Cuban hospitality at wonderful specially chosen upgraded family-run casa particulares (Cuban bed and breakfasts) or historic hotels.



*B,L,D denotes breakfasts, lunches and dinners included.
 *Please note that the map is for illustration purposes only and does not indicate the path you will follow across Cuba or the type of transportation included.

TRANSPORTATION

All private transportation is included between destinations and for any activities/ excursions included in your itinerary that require transportation to and from the activity. Any extra transportation requirements can be organised through your Cuban guide and paid for locally in Cuba.

Your transport between destinations on the tour will be by comfortable, private vehicles with air conditioning, giving you more time to see the sights and less time queuing for buses.

SPENDING MONEY ON TOUR

Since many potential expenses are already covered as part of your tour, including transportation between destinations, airport transfers, 2 lunches, breakfasts and accommodation, other expenses will be limited. You'll need enough spending money for other meals, drinks, souvenirs, and any tips you may be inclined to give. You might also consider bringing a few extra dollars in case you decide to go on an optional extra excursion or activity. We would recommend bringing approximately 50.00 to 60.00 CUC (Cuban convertible pesos, equivalent to US\$) per person, per day. The CUC (Cuban Convertible Peso) is valued 1:1 with the US\$ (not taking into consideration exchange fees and penalties).

ITINERARY OVERVIEW



ESTIMATED TRAVEL TIMES

Cuba is a large island – the largest in the Caribbean, and travel times can be long. However, we intersperse longer journeys with lunch stops or time to stretch your legs and take photographs at various points of interest. As examples, the approximate travel times you'll experience are:

- Havana to Viñales (via Soroa):** 4 hours
- Viñales to Cienfuegos (via Bay of Pigs):** 6 hours
- Cienfuegos to Trinidad:** 1.5 hours
- Trinidad to Havana (via Santa Clara):** 5 hours

TOUR ITINERARY

DAY 1: HAVANA

Your first contact with us on Cuban soil will be at Havana's José Martí International Airport where you will be met by one of our representatives before being whisked away to your joining accommodation in the capital.

At your accommodation you'll meet your English-speaking local Cuban guide. They will run through the tour itinerary with you in detail. Being locals, they'll be able to answer any burning questions about the itinerary or the country that you may have thought up on the flight over.

If your arrival time allows, your guide will lead you on a guided orientation walk of the local area so that you can feel comfortable and confident of your surroundings from the very beginning. If you have arrived early enough, your guide will also arrange a classic convertible car to take you to El Morro Fort and El Cristo de La Habana. This is the perfect opportunity to learn a little more about Havana's turbulent history and to take some impressive photos of the city and iconic Malecon as the sun sets. If you arrive too late to do this activity on Day One, it can easily be incorporated into Day Two's schedule.

In the evening you can opt to accompany your guide to dinner at a nearby family-run paladar restaurant. Should you still feel fresh after your flight and time allows, you can later choose to get a first glimpse of Cuba's legendary nightlife.

'B' denotes breakfast, and 'L' lunch throughout the following itinerary.



DAY 2: HAVANA (B,L)

The morning sees you explore the sights of the UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site Old Town on a walking tour, so we recommend wearing some comfortable shoes! Your guide will show you highlights including the Catedral San Cristobal de la Habana, Palacio de los Marqueses de Aguas Claras (now a restaurant) and the Plaza de Armas, complete with a statue of Manuel de Cespedes, one of the leaders of the Cuban independence movement. You'll take in the facades of the Museo de la Revolución and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (or Museum of Fine Arts), and also stop at various squares that give the city its life-blood (Saint Francis of Assisi Square, Arms Square, the Old Square and Cathedral Square.)

Your tour continues at a leisurely pace with a walk past Central Park, the Opera House, the Capitol Building, the former Bacardi Building, and the former Presidential Palace, with plenty of opportunities to rest with a cool drink in hand.

Your lunch today is included, and your guide will take you to one of our favourite traditional Cuban paladares, a family run restaurant serving tasty and freshly-prepared Cuban cuisine. When you are ready from lunch you will take to the streets once more, but this time in one of the capital's world renowned classic cars, as the driver directs you around the most famous areas of Havana including Havana Vedado, the Malecon, Revolution Square, the stunning neighbourhood of Miramar and the famous cemetery of Colon. They became iconic when a US trade embargo against the island in the early 1960s prevented modern vehicles being imported. To keep Cuba on the move, drivers had to maintain the vehicles they had as best they could, and did rather a good job when you consider many of these vehicles are now 50 years old!

You next have a choice of activities. You can opt to enjoy a drink at the monolithic Hotel Nacional, overlooking the Malecón. Alternatively, you can head for an informal salsa lesson, or head for a mojito cocktail making class on a rooftop in Old Havana.

The rest of the evening is your own to enjoy. You might want to have dinner at one of our favourite paladares – such as Café Laurent in Havana Vedado. Or if you're in the mood for a late night, head to The Vixen and the Crow – a smoky jazz club that feels like it belongs in a movie. Your guide can help with any arrangements you might require and will be available to host you if requested.

DAY 3: HAVANA (B)

More options await you on day 3. In the morning you have the option of visiting the Partagas cigar factory and Havana Rum Museum, or of taking part in a Farm to Table cooking experience.

The workers of the Partagas Cigar Factory have been rolling cigars from tobacco leaves since 1845, making it one of the oldest in the country. In visiting you'll learn all about the cultural significance of Cuba's cigars, and their importance as one of the country's most famous exports. It's a fascinating visit to the hidden world of Cuban factories whether you enjoy smoking or not. You'll then visit the Havana Rum Museum, housed in a grand former palace, to experience Cuba's other most famous export. There are plenty of tastings for the curious, and you can even buy some to take away with you, but if you don't fancy a drink, you'll still get a lot out of this visit.

If you'd prefer, you can take the opportunity to go to the Ajiaco Cafe for a Farm to Table cooking class. The exuberant and friendly chef will teach you a little about what makes Cuba's cuisine special, and show you how to make the most out of the freshest of ingredients – grown here on the island in small allotment plots by people walking the streets around you.

The afternoon offers you even more choice. You can visit the Museum of the Revolution, the Museum of Fine Arts, or should you be a fan of literature you can visit Finca Vigia, Ernest Hemingway's farm on the outskirts of the capital.

The Museum of the Revolution is worth the visit if only to explore its home, the former Presidential Palace before Castro's success in the 1959 revolution. As well as exhibits dedicated to the revolution, including the yacht Granma which brought Che Guevara and the Castro brothers (Fidel and current president Raul) to Cuba, it also has displays relating to Cuba's earlier War of Independence against Spain.

The Museum of Fine Arts now extends across two separate buildings and contains landscapes and religious iconography dating back as early as the seventeenth century, stretching all the way to the most modern of contemporary art.

Finally, you might prefer to visit Hemingway's former residence, Finca Vigia. The farm was the Nobel Prize winning American author's home for three decades, and was recently extensively renovated by the Cuban government which now owns the property. A key location in Hemingway's life, it was here that the author wrote both *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, two of his best regarded works.

You'll top the day off with an exploration of Havana's art scene with a visit to Callejon de Hamel. A brightly coloured alleyway in central Havana where many of the city's established and emerging artists have settled, this was once an unloved area of the capital. But then self-taught local artist Salvador Gonzales began embellishing the street outside his apartment with surrealist and abstract artworks until it grew into the mural and sculpture clad tourist attraction it is today.

DAY 4: VIÑALES VIA SOROA AND LAS TERRAZAS (B)

On leaving the capital your first scheduled stop will be at Soroa, around 85 km southwest of Havana. Often called the 'rainbow of Cuba' the tiny settlement is surrounded by mountains of stunning natural beauty.

First however you'll visit Fusterlandia, a surreal, Gaudi-like art project and neighbourhood. Created by Cuban artist Jose Fuster, who has exhibited across the world, Fusterlandia is decorated with fantastical mosaic artworks that bring colour to an otherwise drab area of outer Havana.

You'll then travel on to Soroa. An internationally recognised biosphere reserve, the area is known for its lush greenery, waterfalls, and orchids. Soroa's orchid garden, or orquideario, is the largest in Cuba and the second largest anywhere in the world, with 130 indigenous and 700 other orchid species from around the world in beautiful gardens. The Cascadas El Salto waterfall drops 35 metres through an equally attractive landscape. A trail runs to the top of the falls and back down to its base, where it's also possible to swim.

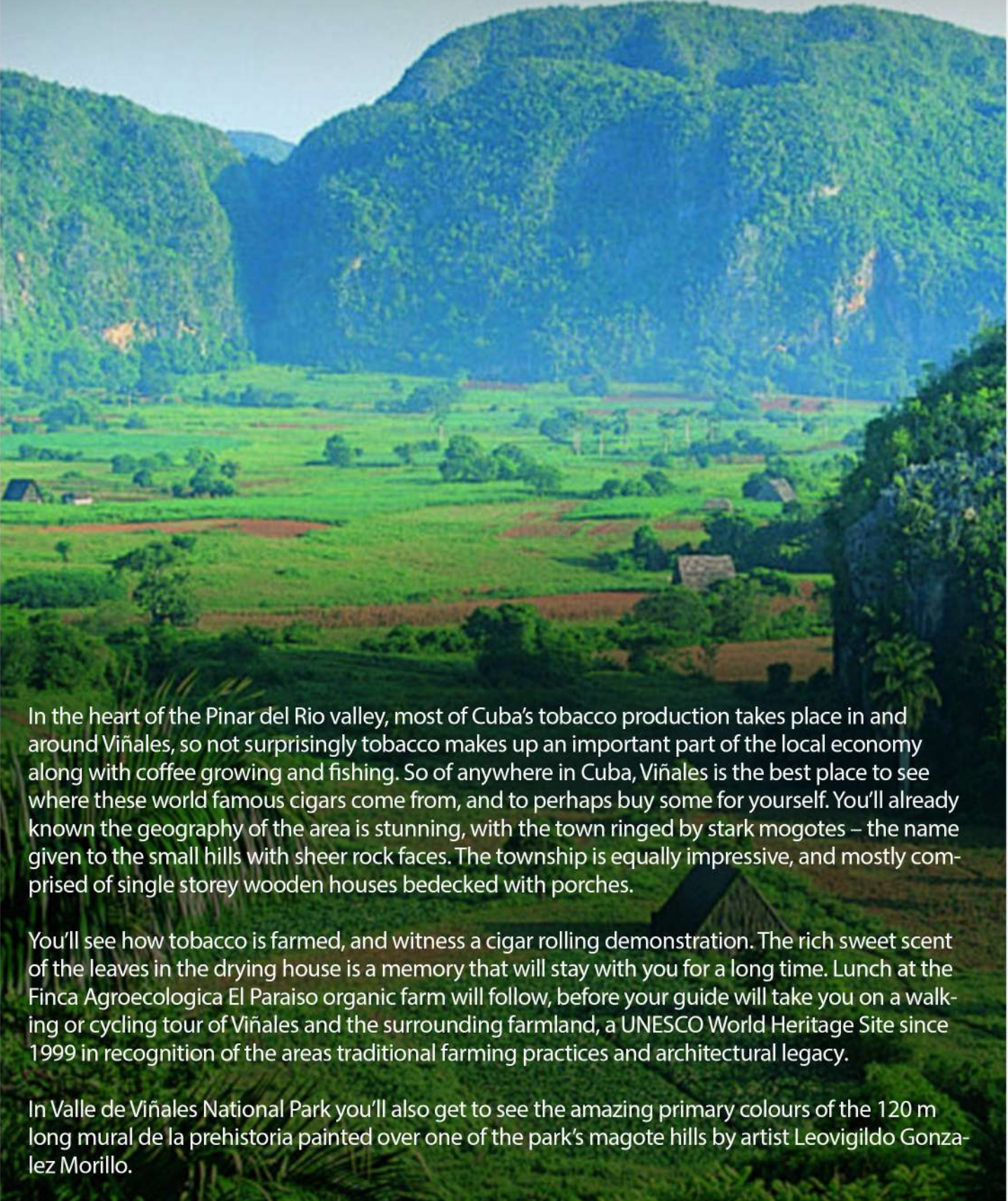
From there you'll move on to the Las Terrazas ecovillage. A pioneering attempt to reverse years of deforestation in the late 1960s, it is now a biosphere reserve like Soroa. You'll be able to explore Las Terrazas township with a guided tour, and discover more about the art of coffee growing in one of Cuba's first plantations. The Buena Vista Coffee Plantation was founded two centuries ago by the French, and originally worked by slaves from its location overlooking the San Juan River.

Should you be of an adventurous mind, you can choose to take the optional canopy tour, a 1.6 km long zip line from where you can get even better views of the surrounding area (at additional cost).

To end the day you'll continue on to Viñales where you'll spend the night, stopping off at a lookout point and photographic opportunity at Los Jasmines first.



DAY 5: VIÑALES (B,L)

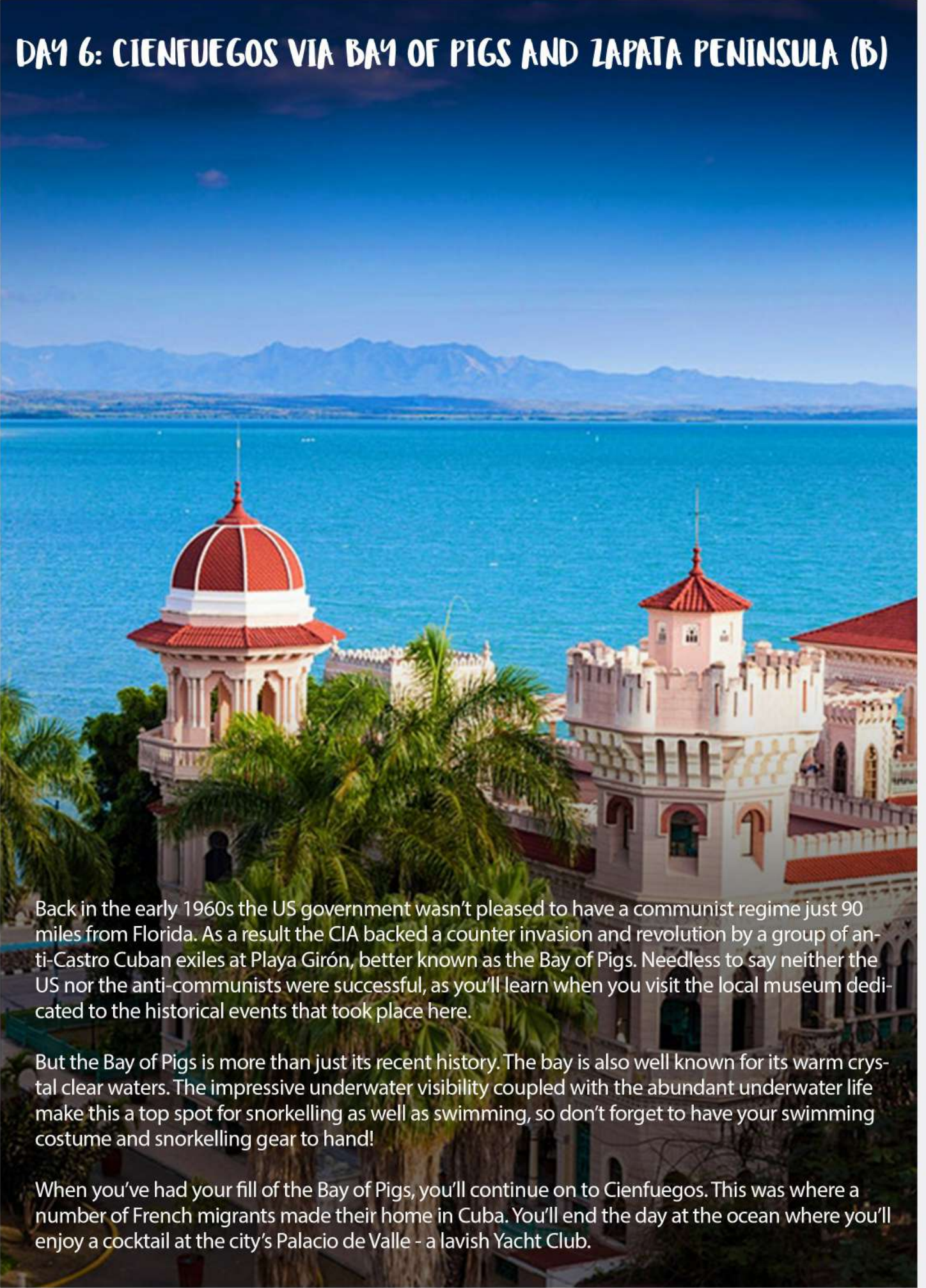


In the heart of the Pinar del Rio valley, most of Cuba's tobacco production takes place in and around Viñales, so not surprisingly tobacco makes up an important part of the local economy along with coffee growing and fishing. So of anywhere in Cuba, Viñales is the best place to see where these world famous cigars come from, and to perhaps buy some for yourself. You'll already know the geography of the area is stunning, with the town ringed by stark mogotes – the name given to the small hills with sheer rock faces. The township is equally impressive, and mostly comprised of single storey wooden houses bedecked with porches.

You'll see how tobacco is farmed, and witness a cigar rolling demonstration. The rich sweet scent of the leaves in the drying house is a memory that will stay with you for a long time. Lunch at the Finca Agroecologica El Paraiso organic farm will follow, before your guide will take you on a walking or cycling tour of Viñales and the surrounding farmland, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1999 in recognition of the areas traditional farming practices and architectural legacy.

In Valle de Viñales National Park you'll also get to see the amazing primary colours of the 120 m long mural de la prehistoria painted over one of the park's magote hills by artist Leovigildo Gonzalez Morillo.

DAY 6: CIENFUEGOS VIA BAY OF PIGS AND ZAPATA PENINSULA (B)




Back in the early 1960s the US government wasn't pleased to have a communist regime just 90 miles from Florida. As a result the CIA backed a counter invasion and revolution by a group of anti-Castro Cuban exiles at Playa Girón, better known as the Bay of Pigs. Needless to say neither the US nor the anti-communists were successful, as you'll learn when you visit the local museum dedicated to the historical events that took place here.

But the Bay of Pigs is more than just its recent history. The bay is also well known for its warm crystal clear waters. The impressive underwater visibility coupled with the abundant underwater life make this a top spot for snorkelling as well as swimming, so don't forget to have your swimming costume and snorkelling gear to hand!

When you've had your fill of the Bay of Pigs, you'll continue on to Cienfuegos. This was where a number of French migrants made their home in Cuba. You'll end the day at the ocean where you'll enjoy a cocktail at the city's Palacio de Valle - a lavish Yacht Club.

DAY 7: TRINIDAD (B)



Even if you didn't know about the French (rather than Spanish) influence in the city it would soon become obvious. Some parts of the city bear a striking resemblance to Paris, and many street names still hark back to the French period. The city is also wonderfully well-preserved compared to other Cuban cities, since it was generally bypassed by pirates in favour of larger and more important targets further along the coast.

This morning you'll get to explore the wide streets and promenades with a guided city tour. Your guide will show you the Terry Theater, Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, Ferrer Palace, former City Hall, Marti Park and the triumphal arch.

You'll then leave Cienfuegos for the sun-drenched streets of Trinidad, a living museum stuck in the time of Cuba's first War of Independence when local sugar plantations were devastated by fire. Modern intrusions are a rare sight and it's possible to imagine yourself transported back to that time.

Taking part in a guided walking tour of the township, you will see the Cantero, Canchanchara, Palacio Brunet, Plaza Mayor, Museo Romantico, and a pottery workshop among other sights. You'll return to Plaza Mayor later, since this is where you'll find Trinidad's Casa de la Musica, somewhere to keep salsa dancing until your feet hurt. If you're a bit shy to give salsa a go at first in front of the locals, then consider enjoying a reasonably priced mojito (or maybe two) to give you some much needed courage!

DAY 8 & 9: TRINIDAD (B)

With almost two full days in Trinidad in total you have the opportunity to truly get to know the area. There is perhaps no better way to start than by spending some time on the beach. The beautiful ribbon of white sand on the Sancti Spiritus iridescent Caribbean shoreline at Playa Ancon beach is often considered the finest arc of beach on Cuba's southern coast. It is a fantastic place to slip into your swimming costume and take to the azure blue waters.

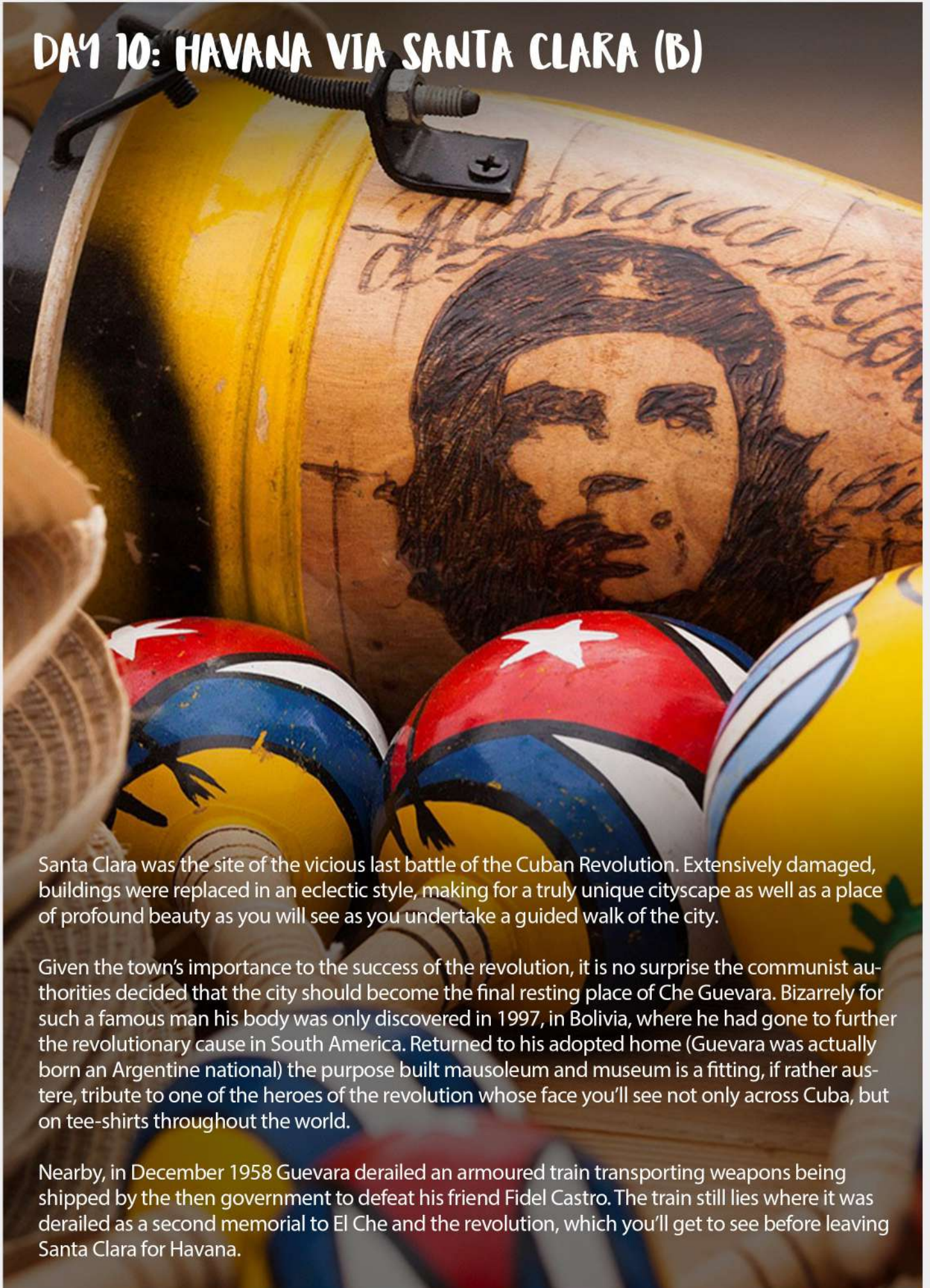
Then head for a cultural exploration of the Valley of the Sugar Mills, a valley near Trinidad that was once the focal point of Cuba's sugar production. The panoramic views of the Valle de Los Ingenios, as it is known in Spanish, lead to dozens of disused sugar mills in the area, including plantation houses, slave quarters and even wonderful towers. It's an eerie experience to walk amongst the remains and imagine what life was like here when Cuba was the world's largest producer of the sweet stuff, powered almost entirely by slave labour brought across the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa.

As slavery was made illegal and the former slave workers freed, many spread out across Cuba, giving the country its distinctive Afro-Caribbean culture which has been mixed with the country's Spanish heritage to create the Cuba as we know and love it today.

You'll then head to the Salto del Caburni waterfall for a trek, one of Cuba's most popular outdoor excursions. At a relatively easy 7 km round trip, it will get you up close and personal with the amazing scenery of Parque Natural Topes de Collantes. It winds its way downhill through lush tropical forest, rock outcrops and canyon-like cliff faces for 3.5 km. There you'll come across the fantastic meandering path of the 70m high waterfall complete with a natural swimming pool at its base where you can relax and cool off before the return trip. There are also other waterfall and nature options in the area, depending on your fitness and mobility levels.

You will also get the chance to spend one evening in Trinidad at the Palenque de los Congos Reales bar and nightclub for an evening of fantastic Cuban entertainment. A must for music and dance fans, Congos Reales is formed from an open patio in Trinidad's 'music alley'. It has a lively range of arts on show that include salsa, son (Cuban pop music), and trova (a traditional form of poetical singing), and that's before the rumba drumming for which the club is best known begins at 10 pm!

DAY 10: HAVANA VIA SANTA CLARA (B)

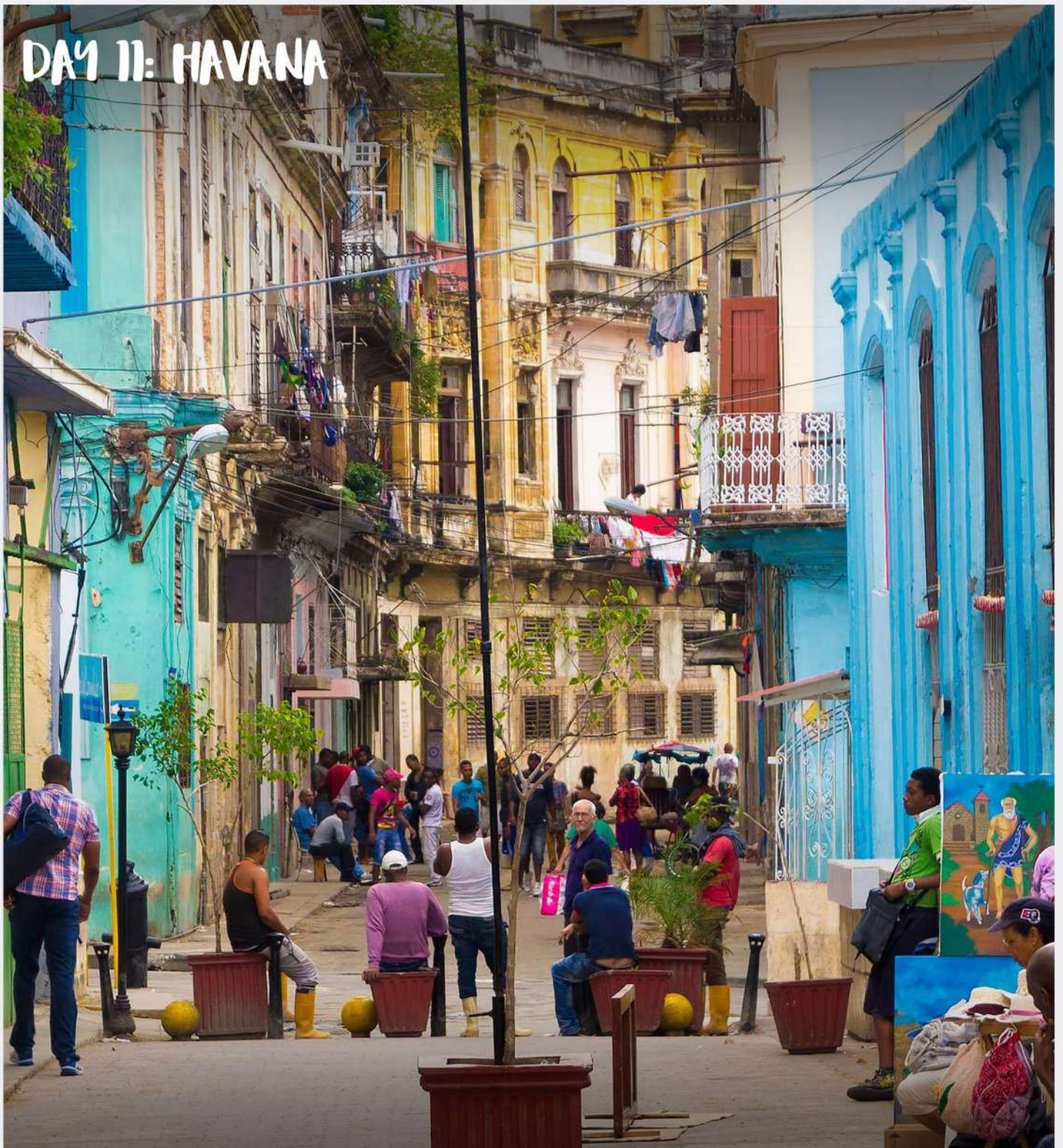


Santa Clara was the site of the vicious last battle of the Cuban Revolution. Extensively damaged, buildings were replaced in an eclectic style, making for a truly unique cityscape as well as a place of profound beauty as you will see as you undertake a guided walk of the city.

Given the town's importance to the success of the revolution, it is no surprise the communist authorities decided that the city should become the final resting place of Che Guevara. Bizarrely for such a famous man his body was only discovered in 1997, in Bolivia, where he had gone to further the revolutionary cause in South America. Returned to his adopted home (Guevara was actually born an Argentine national) the purpose built mausoleum and museum is a fitting, if rather austere, tribute to one of the heroes of the revolution whose face you'll see not only across Cuba, but on tee-shirts throughout the world.

Nearby, in December 1958 Guevara derailed an armoured train transporting weapons being shipped by the then government to defeat his friend Fidel Castro. The train still lies where it was derailed as a second memorial to El Che and the revolution, which you'll get to see before leaving Santa Clara for Havana.

DAY 11: HAVANA



Since this is scheduled as your departure day from Havana there are no planned activities. However, you may well have a few hours before you need to depart for the airport. In this case, speak to your guide about possible final optional tours. For more information about what you might like to do in Havana now or during other free hours on your tour you can also download our 'To do in Havana' brochure here .You will say goodbye to your guide and receive your transfer to the airport.

* Please note that some activities are not available on certain days of the week or times of the year. For example, the Che Guevara Memorial in Santa Clara is closed on Mondays. Where this occurs, your guide will offer a selection of alternatives for your consideration or might re-arrange the order of the activities.



YOUR EVENINGS IN HAVANA

For your evenings, we leave the itinerary flexible. Your guide will be able to organise you transfers and tickets to the best of Havana's nightlife including the Tropicana Cabaret, world-famous Buena Vista Social Club at La Taberna, Parisien Cabaret at Hotel Nacional, Cannon Shooting Ceremony, Gran Teatro Habana, and Vixen and Crow Jazz Café to name just a few.

A NOTE ABOUT OUR RESTAURANT CHOICES FOR YOUR TOUR

We like to include a range of different restaurants (paladares) that showcase the best of Havana's burgeoning private restaurant scene. Your guide will also help select the best restaurants for the tour based on consultation about your tastes and dietary requirements. Some of our favourite restaurants include Mercaderes, Café Laurent, O'Reilly 304, Alta Habana, Vista Mar, El Cocinero and El Atelier.

NOT QUITE WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR?

Please note that it is possible to modify the activities and excursions included as part of this tour. Take a look at our 'To do in Havana' brochure for more ideas before the trip begins, or talk to your guide at any point during the tour.

AIRPORT TRANSFERS:

Your 11 Day Private Cuba Tour includes being picked up at Havana's José Martí International Airport and delivered to your accommodation in the city. Your transfer back to the airport on your departure is also included.

ACCOMMODATION ON TOUR

Choose from historic hotels, beautiful resorts and authentic Casa Particulares .

This tour is priced to stay in upgraded Casa's/ B&B's. The superior Casa's we have hand selected are more expensive than the standard Casa's you will find in Cuba. They are run more like your traditional B&B's but still offer a unique cultural experience. While they shouldn't be compared to modern Western hotels, the rooms will have air-conditioning, private en suite facilities, hot and cold water and have generally been recently renovated to a beautiful standard.

Cuba's accommodation is very special. Until recent regulatory changes, it wasn't possible to stay anywhere but a government owned and run hotel. But all that has now changed and a growing number of casas particulares, bed and breakfasts owned and run by ordinary families rather than the government, are opening up.

This change allows visitors to stay in a more welcoming environment than most hotels are able to offer. You'll have privacy while still being able to interact with the locals as much as you want. You will truly be made to feel welcome, and might just forget that you're a paying guest and not a long lost member of the family.

You can learn more about staying in upgraded boutique Casa's/ B&B's/ Guesthouses here.

Not sold on staying at a Casa?

That's OK, we can certainly look to upgrade your accommodation to a 4* or 5* property, depending on your budget.

It is worth noting some accommodation providers are to be found in older buildings without elevators. If you believe that your physical capabilities will make it difficult to climb stairs, simply let us know. We will be able to find you a suitable alternative.

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