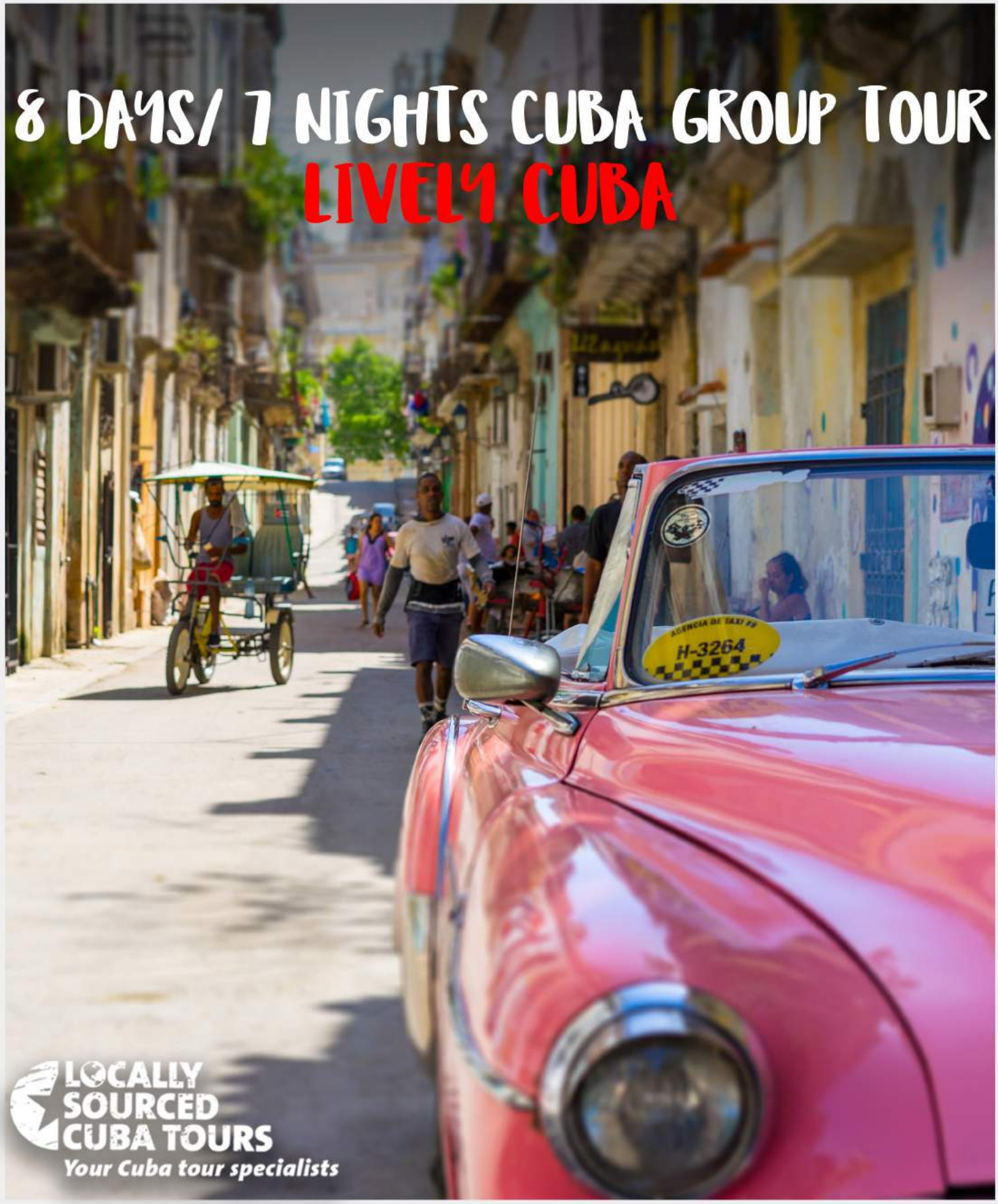
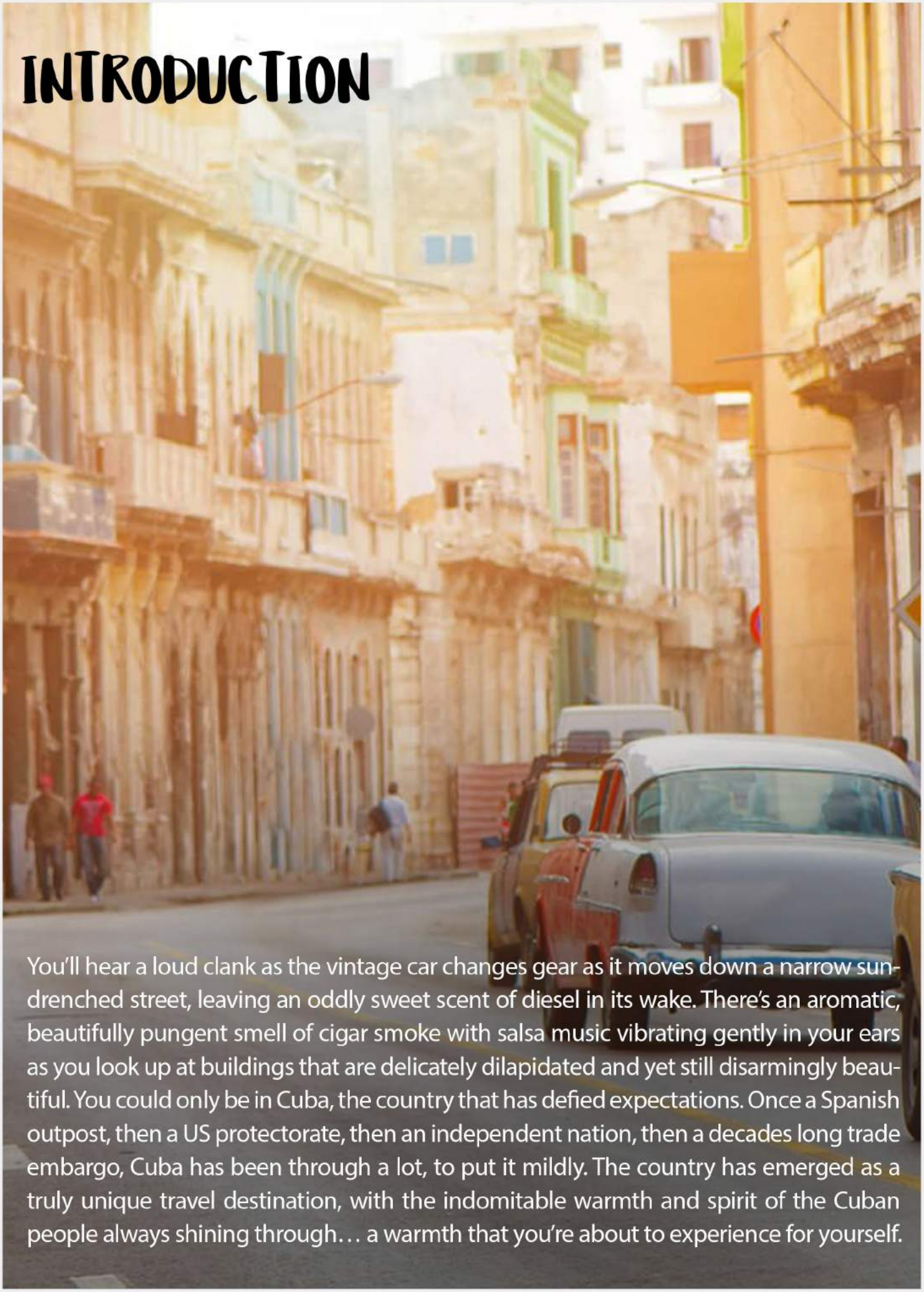
ITINERARY


8 DAYS/ 7 NIGHTS CUBA GROUP TOUR
LIVELY CUBA
H-3264
LOCALLY SOURCED CUBA TOURS
Your Cuba tour specialists

INTRODUCTION



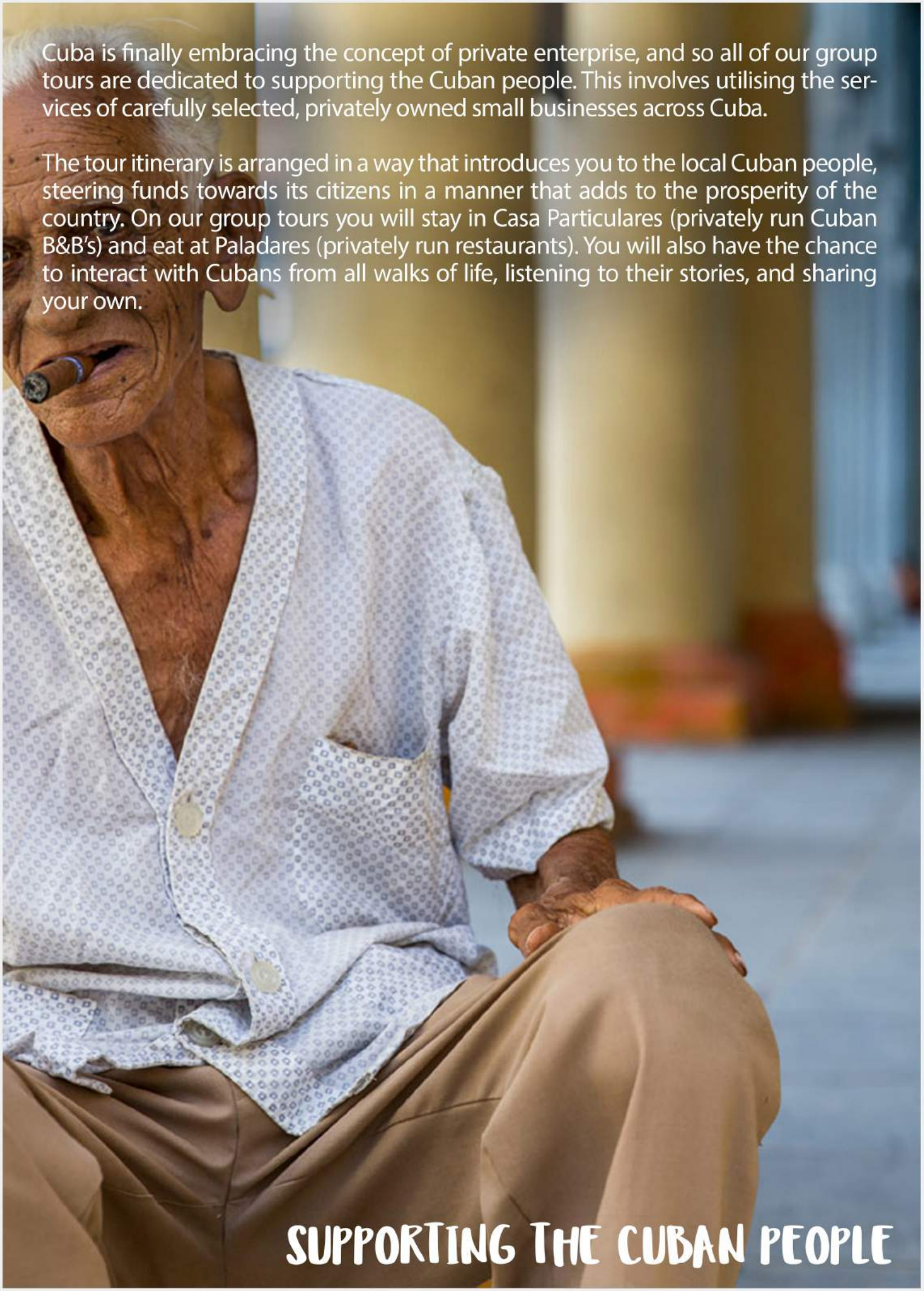
You'll hear a loud clank as the vintage car changes gear as it moves down a narrow sun-drenched street, leaving an oddly sweet scent of diesel in its wake. There's an aromatic, beautifully pungent smell of cigar smoke with salsa music vibrating gently in your ears as you look up at buildings that are delicately dilapidated and yet still disarmingly beautiful. You could only be in Cuba, the country that has defied expectations. Once a Spanish outpost, then a US protectorate, then an independent nation, then a decades long trade embargo, Cuba has been through a lot, to put it mildly. The country has emerged as a truly unique travel destination, with the indomitable warmth and spirit of the Cuban people always shining through… a warmth that you're about to experience for yourself.

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

The rich tapestry of cultures that is contemporary Cuba will come to life over 8 unforgettable days. Your senses will be stimulated as you gain a unique overview as to what makes Cuba so magical. The island nation is in a fascinating state of transition, simultaneously embracing its past while looking towards the future. You can look forward to ambling along the cobblestoned streets of gorgeous Trinidad and discovering the delights of Havana. Another highlight is the Karst Valley in the achingly beautiful town of Viñales. Get ready, because 8 days of pure joy are about to begin. Bienvenida!
Cuba welcomes you with open arms.

YOUR 8 DAY CUBA GROUP TOUR WILL UNFOLD AS FOLLOWS

- **Day One: Tour arrival day in Havana**
- **Day Two: Cienfuegos via Bay of Pigs**
- **Day Three: Trinidad via Santa Clara**
- **Day Four: Trinidad**
- **Days Five and Six: Viñales**
- **Day Seven: Havana**
- **Day Eight: Havana/Departure Day**



Cuba is finally embracing the concept of private enterprise, and so all of our group tours are dedicated to supporting the Cuban people. This involves utilising the services of carefully selected, privately owned small businesses across Cuba.

The tour itinerary is arranged in a way that introduces you to the local Cuban people, steering funds towards its citizens in a manner that adds to the prosperity of the country. On our group tours you will stay in Casa Particulares (privately run Cuban B&B's) and eat at Paladares (privately run restaurants). You will also have the chance to interact with Cubans from all walks of life, listening to their stories, and sharing your own.

SUPPORTING THE CUBAN PEOPLE

TOUR SUMMARY TABLE

Your Cuba group tour runs for 8 days and 7 nights, including 7 x breakfasts, 1 x lunch and a farewell dinner at the conclusion of the tour. There will also be an airport transfer upon arrival.

The group size can range from 2 to 15 participants, staying in Casa Particulares with no additional single supplement for those who are travelling alone.

There are a vast array of optional activities and excursions to be enjoyed on all our Cuba group tours, and this is in addition to the following inclusions. Your 8 day Cuba tour includes:

- GUIDED ORIENTATION WALKS AT EACH DESTINATION VISITED
- SWIM/ SNORKEL – BAY OF PIGS
- MUSEUM GIRON - PLAYA GIRON
- 1 x DRINK AT THE PALACIO DE VALLE - CIENFUEGOS
- CHE GUEVARA MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM - SANTA CLARA
- INFORMAL SALSA LESSON - TRINIDAD OR VINALES
- TOBACCO FARM AND DRYING HOUSE - VINALES
- LUNCH AT A ORGANIC FARM - VINALES
- CITY TOUR IN A CONVERTIBLE CLASSIC CAR - HAVANA
- MOJITO MAKING CLASS - HAVANA
- ROOF-TOP FAREWELL DINNER - HAVANA

Naturally, there are also a range of **optional activities** and excursions you can enjoy on your 8 day Cuba group tour which your local guide will recommend and help organise.

Meals included: Breakfasts, 1 x lunch, 1 x dinner

DURATION
8 Days with 7 Nights Accommodation Included

GROUP SIZE
2 - 15 people

NO SINGLE SUPPLEMENT
Your own room for no extra charge on our 8 day Cuba group tour.

GUARANTEED DEPARTURES
We only need two people booked on a group tour, to guarantee its departure

LOCAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING GUIDE
A passionate, local, English-speaking guide to show you the Cuba they love, and hope you fall in love with

PRIVATE TRANSPORTATION
Private air-conditioned transportation between destinations

B&B ACCOMMODATION
Casa Particulares/ B&B's/ Guesthouses - a cultural experience unique to Cuba. Ensuite facilities and air-conditioning whenever possible

AIRPORT TRANSFER
We include your airport transfer on arrival

STAYING IN CASA PARTICULARES

A mainstay in the Cuban accommodation industry, Casa Particulares (Casa's) are the Cuban equivalent of a bed and breakfast. Casa's offer a taste of authentic Cuban life as you are essentially staying in a family home, in specially designated guest rooms. You'll have privacy while still being able to interact with the locals as much as you want during your stay. Your classic Bed & Breakfast with a unique Cuban flavour.

*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.

IS THIS TOUR FOR ME?

OFFERING AN ABUNDANCE OF FREEDOM AND THE FLEXIBILITY TO TRAVEL AT YOUR OWN PACE, THIS INTIMATE TOUR COMES WITH A LOCAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING GUIDE WHO WILL BE WITH YOU AT EACH STAGE OF YOUR JOURNEY. SOME OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Casa Particulares are family-run businesses which ar set-up to provide B&B style accommodation to foreigners – a unique cultural experience. Casa Particulares are generally of a higher standard than normal Cuban dwellings but can be more basic than foreigners are used to. It is important to remember that each room at a Casa is unique in its size and set-up. Whether you stay in a hotel or Casa, sometimes power cuts and breaks in hot water are unavoidable in any developing country, although it's not a regular occurrence in Cuba. suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate

Part of the experience of traveling through Cuba is experiencing Cuban resourcefulness. Spare parts for vehicles and appliances are often difficult and cost-prohibitive to come by, so don't be surprised if your notice that Cuban ingenuity has been used to keep various things working.

Access to the internet in Cuba is rapidly expanding but can still be variable, slow and unreliable. It is also relatively expensive to get online at a hotel or one of the various Wifi zones that have been set-up across the country. Traveling through Cuba offers a great opportunity to take a break from your electronic devices and have a truly relaxing experience.

Cuba is a unique travel destination and this is one of the many things that make it so popular. It's part of the 'laid back Caribbean' and things don't always go to plan or schedule. A great sense of humour and patience are qualities that will go a long way in making your stay in Cuba an enjoyable one. Just go with the flow!

ESTIMATED TRAVEL TIMES

A relaxed pace of life is quintessentially Cuban, so while you will be taken from destination to destination at an efficient and safe pace, you will never feel rushed. On a longer journey we will of course stop for refreshments (and meals where necessary), a chance to stretch your legs, and to take a closer look at the beautiful countryside you'll be pacing through. The approximate travel times are as follows:

- **From Havana to Cienfuegos (via Bay of Pigs): 5 hours**
- **From Cienfuegos to Trinidad (via Santa Clara): 3 hours**
- **From Trinidad to Viñales: 7 to 8 hours**
- **From Viñales to Havana: 3 hours**

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT POLICY

Solo explorers won't be slugged with a supplement charge in order to have a single room while on our tours.It's not our style, so we proudly waive the single supplement on all our Cuba group tours. You still have the option of sharing a room if you so choose– it's entirely up to you.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

In order to fully enjoy your 8 day Cuba group tour, you will need an average level of fitness and mobility. Group travel can potentially be more demanding than a more conventional holiday. You should be able to walk without assistance from another person, climb flights of stairs in buildings without elevators, safely step on or off the tour bus (and other forms of transport), and carry your own luggage.

YOUR DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

DAY 1: HAVANA

It doesn't matter what time your flight touches down on day one, as there are no activities planned. You'll probably want to familiarise yourself with your joining accommodation and get to know the surrounding area. ATMs aren't always so easy to find in Cuba, so you might want to use the machine at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport (HAV). There's one in the arrivals terminal (along with a currency exchange office), and there's a second machine upstairs in the departures area.Your airport transfer on arrival is included and a Locally Sourced Cuba Tours representative will be waiting for you in the arrivals lounge.

Havana fizzes with life, her buoyant, joyous energy is infectious, and it's a stunning start to your 8 day Cuba group tour. After a rather turbulent several centuries, Havana has settled into a rhythm that just seems to work. After the collapse of the USSR, a lot of the international aid that Cuba relied upon simply disappeared, and this was the catalyst for the country to recognise its own attributes and open itself open to tourism in a way that hadn't been seen for decades. Upon arrival, you will want to get out and about to explore the city, and this bustling city never feels overwhelming.

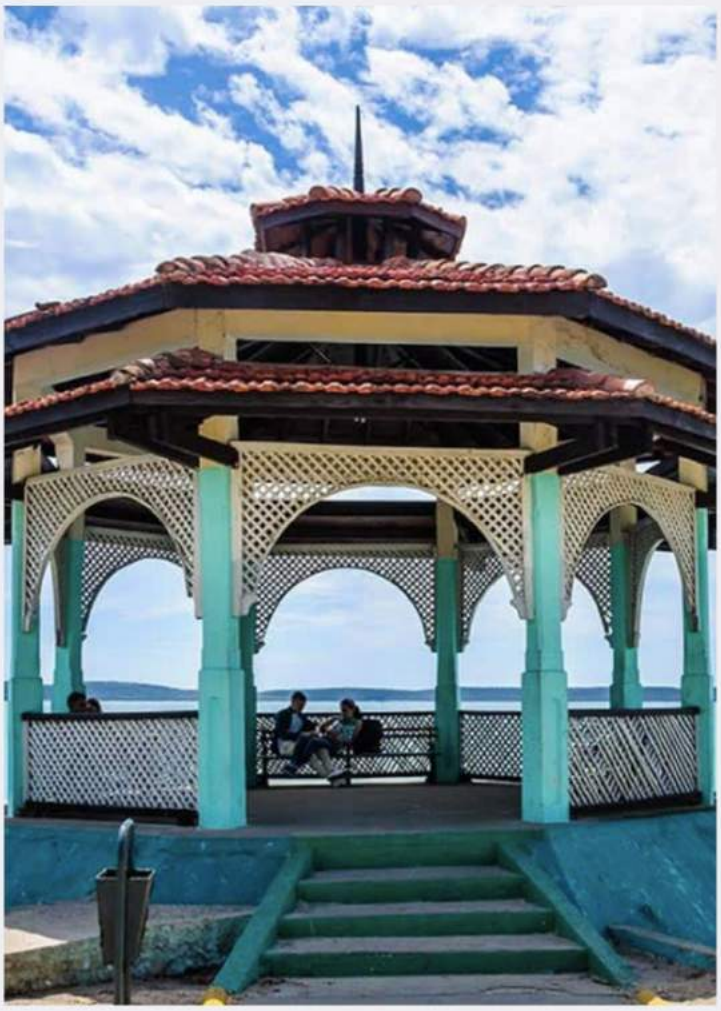
You'll probably want to start with a leisurely stroll through Havana's Old Town. This is where you can see a key impact of tourism, with funds generated going to the upkeep of these magnificent buildings, their beauty not faded with time. The area was also declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, which has helped with the upkeep of the old town. Much of the restoration was overseen by city architect Eusebio Lea (who coaxed many artisans out of retirement to assist him). The old town was painstakingly restored from a rather ramshackle state to its present glory, a firm nod towards the cultural and historical significance of the old town, not just for Havana, or even Cuba, but the whole world.

While a walk around Havana's Old Town will have your eyes bulging with excitement (it's said that daily life in the Cuban capital resembles street theatre), just to the west you will find the gritty working class district of Centro Habana (a picture of ruined, yet haunting beauty), and the well-heeled districts of Vedado and Miramar. All these pieces come together to form modern Havana in all her glory and contradictions. There's a true cultural wealth in the city, with realms of museums and cultural spaces. Havana is a city that literally dances, and you can enjoy virtuoso ballet, Afro Cuban dance, flamenco, jazz and timba. The Cuban dining scene was rather fairly reviled for many decades, but this is changing at a rate that is nothing less than astounding.

The government eased the once tight restrictions when it came to operating a private business, and new restaurants are expanding Havana's culinary borders with innovation and aplomb.Depending on your time of arrival, you can even join your guide and fellow tour group members for dinner in a gorgeous setting - an authentic Cuban Paladar (privately operated restaurant) close to your hotel or casa particular.

DAY 2: CIENFUEGOS VIA BAY OF PIGS

Your guide will meet you first thing in the morning, and then it's time to set off on your Cuban odyssey. Travelling in comfortable private transportation, you will arrive at your first destination in two to three hours. The Bay of Pigs/Playa Girón has a certain infamy due to its association with the USA's first military failure in Latin America. The military machinations that took place on this very spot are but a distant memory, far removed from the stunning natural beauty on display, with cave systems, coral formations and an abundance of sea life making it a must for snorkelers, divers and ocean lovers alike. You will enjoy a sumptuous lunch at a local Paladar (which is a family-operated Cuban restaurant), before setting off on the second stage of today's journey. It only takes approximately 1.5 hours before you arrive in Cienfuegos.

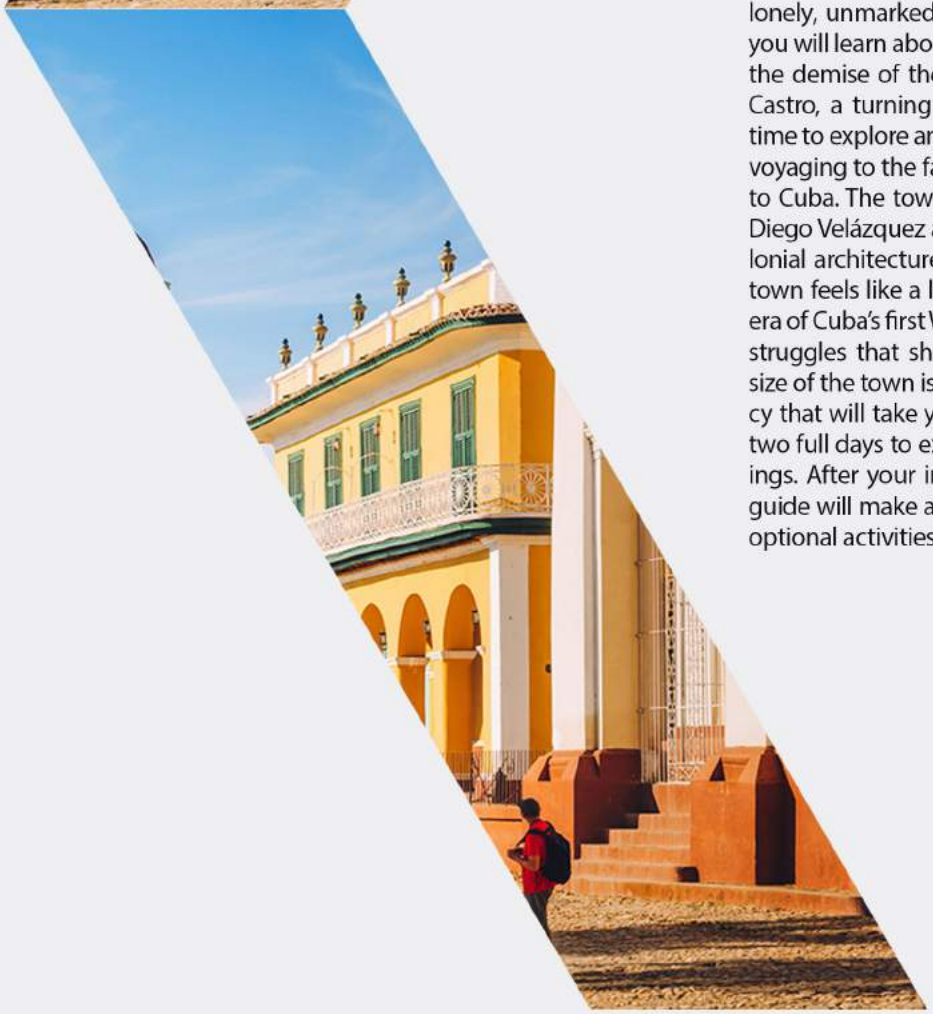


This pearl of a city (it has in fact been dubbed the Pearl of the Caribbean) demonstrates many of the cultural influences that have shaped contemporary Cuba. Many of the city's early settlers were French, generally coming from other French territories in the New World.

The French influences are undeniable, from the architecture to the wide streets and boulevards - all of which were never overly bothered by pirate attacks (a true rarity in this part of the world). Take a gentle stroll through Parque Jose Marti followed by an exploration of the oceanfront Malecón. It's not as well-known as the walkway of the same name in Havana, but the Malecón in Cienfuegos is in fact the longest on the island.

Of course your guide will take you on a detailed tour of the city with its grand, crumbling architecture, culminating in a relaxing cocktail. The grandness of Cienfuegos is fascinating contrasted by one of the city's more unexpected pleasures - the Palacio de Valle, which seems to have taken Arabian Nights as its inspiration. This upscale restaurant dates back to 1917, and it's a tremendous (and indeed, amusing) sight to behold.

Something to look forward to tonight - it's your first time staying at a Casa Particular outside of Havana. You might find this to be a truly memorable part of your Cuban experience. You are welcomed into a local Cuban's home and are made to feel like one of the family. It varies, but many of these authentic homestay experiences can accommodate between six and ten guests. Our carefully selected Casas are all conveniently located in a central location at each destination. The rooms are well cared for, and there's always a group area and/or veranda to relax in and meet other travellers. You can also take full advantage of the proprietor's insider knowledge and can help to arrange any activities or excursions in the area. It's a truly authentic experience, providing an unbeatable level of service and attention in a unique setting.



DAY 3: TRINIDAD VIA SANTA CLARA

You'll start the day with a hearty Cuban breakfast before setting off to a place that pays homage to Cuba's best-known adopted son - the Che Guevara Memorial and Mausoleum. This is where the remains of this hero of the Cuban Revolution are interred after decades in a lonely, unmarked grave in Bolivia where he died. Here you will learn about how Guevara played a pivotal role in the demise of the dictator Batista and the rise of Fidel Castro, a turning point in the Cuban revolution. After time to explore and reflect, it's time to hit the road again, voyaging to the favourite destination of many a traveler to Cuba. The town of Trinidad was founded in 1514 by Diego Velázquez and is considered a jewel in Cuban colonial architecture. Many people are struck by how the town feels like a living museum, seemingly stuck in the era of Cuba's first War of Independence (one of the many struggles that shaped the nation). The relatively small size of the town is deceptive, since Trinidad has a vibrancy that will take your breath away. You will have almost two full days to explore the town and its lush surroundings. After your induction walk around the town, your guide will make a number of suggestions as to the best optional activities to do at this time of year.

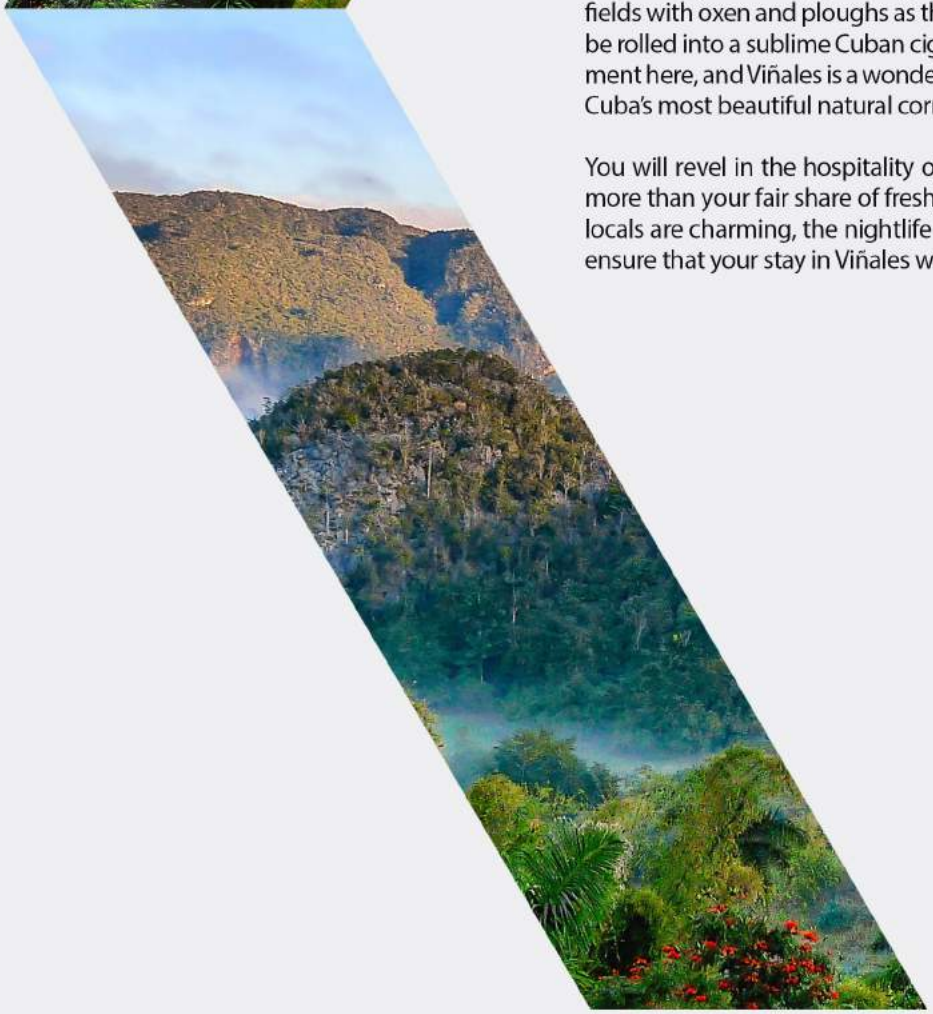
This first day in Trinidad is a perfect opportunity to do a city tour and visit some of the town's museums. Your time in Trinidad would not be complete without at least one evening sitting on the steps outside Casa de la Musica. Every night the area beside the Cathedral in Plaza Mayor (Trinidad's main square) come alive with a live 'Salsa' band. Entrance is free, the music and atmosphere is great, the mojitos are cheap, and what's more… you get one of the most beautiful starry skies thrown in for nothing!

DAY 4: TRINIDAD

Your second day in Trinidad allows you to take advantage of the many optional activities and excursions available to you and your guide will be best placed to make recommendations and bookings. The ghosts of the past are on full display in the Valle de los Ingenios. There are dozens of the namesake of the valley - the ingenios, small 19th century sugar mills in various states of decay. Along with the slave quarters (upon whose backs that sugar fortune was amassed) and manor homes, the valley is both beautiful and affecting. Dominating the landscape is Manaca Iznaga, an estate purchased in 1795 by the villainous Pedro Iznaga, who became rich by trafficking in slaves.

You'll have the opportnity to vist the rugged 90 km-long Sierra del Escambray mountain range, some 20km northwest of Trinidad. There's a convenient hike of 2.5 km to the Salto del Caburní, a 62m waterfall cascading into cool swimming holes. This is round trip of around two and a half hours, although if the mountains don't appeal, you might just want to spend time by the beach. Playa Ancon is a stunning ribbon of white beach on the shoreline of the luminous Sancti Spíritus region, considered (with good reason) to be the best beach on Cuba's southern coast. The beach is less than 15 minutes from Trinidad by car, or if you so desire, around 40 minutes on a bike. You should take the time to visit the old fishing port of Casilda, 6km to the south of Trinidad. On August 17 the Fiesta de Santa Elena engulfs the village of Casilda, with feasting, competitions, horse races and loads of rum (unsurprisingly). The road from Ancón to Casilda actually crosses a tidal flat, meaning a wide variety of birdlife is visible in the early morning.

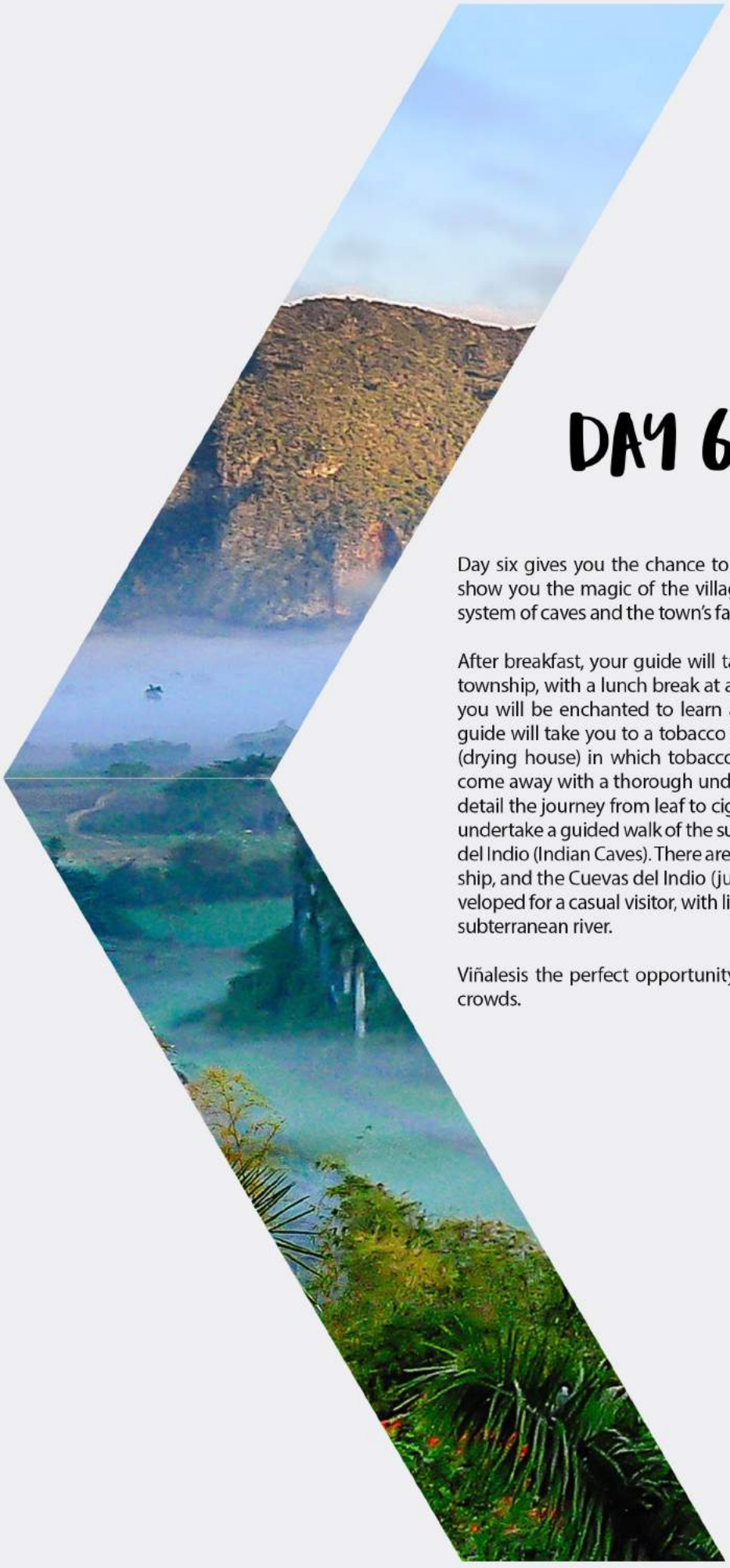
There's also the chance to pick up a skill to take home. We can arrange a informal salsa lesson for the group as part of your tour. These lessons are suitable for all skill levels and are a whole lot of fun! Back in Trinidad your guide will be able to recommend the very best restaurants and music venues to visit for an an evening of fantastic Cuban entertainment.



DAY 5: VIÑALES

The fifth day of your Cuba tour sees you hitting the road and making your way from Trinidad to the dramatic limestone pin-cushion hills of the Pinar del Rio province and the rural town of Viñales. This veritable definition of a sleepy village is set in a beautiful, lush valley, and it's arguably one of the most breathtaking locations in the entire country. The rare and dramatic pin-cushion hills that draw the eye are karst hill formations, also known as mogotes. The plains between the mogotes are rich and fertile, and Viñales sits in the heart of Cuba's prime tobacco growing region. Much like Trinidad, Viñales feels like a part of Cuba that has been untouched by modernity, and as you near the town you will see farmers working the fields with oxen and ploughs as they tend the tobacco crops whose destiny it is to be rolled into a sublime Cuban cigar. To call it a relaxed pace of life is an understaement here, and Viñales is a wonderfully traditional settlement that occupies one of Cuba's most beautiful natural corners.

You will revel in the hospitality on display, and chances are that you'll be eating more than your fair share of fresh, locally-grown fruit. The views are stunning, the locals are charming, the nightlife is surprising - all these things come together to ensure that your stay in Viñales will be a memorable one.



DAY 6: VIÑALES

Day six gives you the chance to fully get to know Viñales. Your local guide will show you the magic of the village, including visiting a Tobacco Farm, a nearby system of caves and the town's famous music venues and bars.

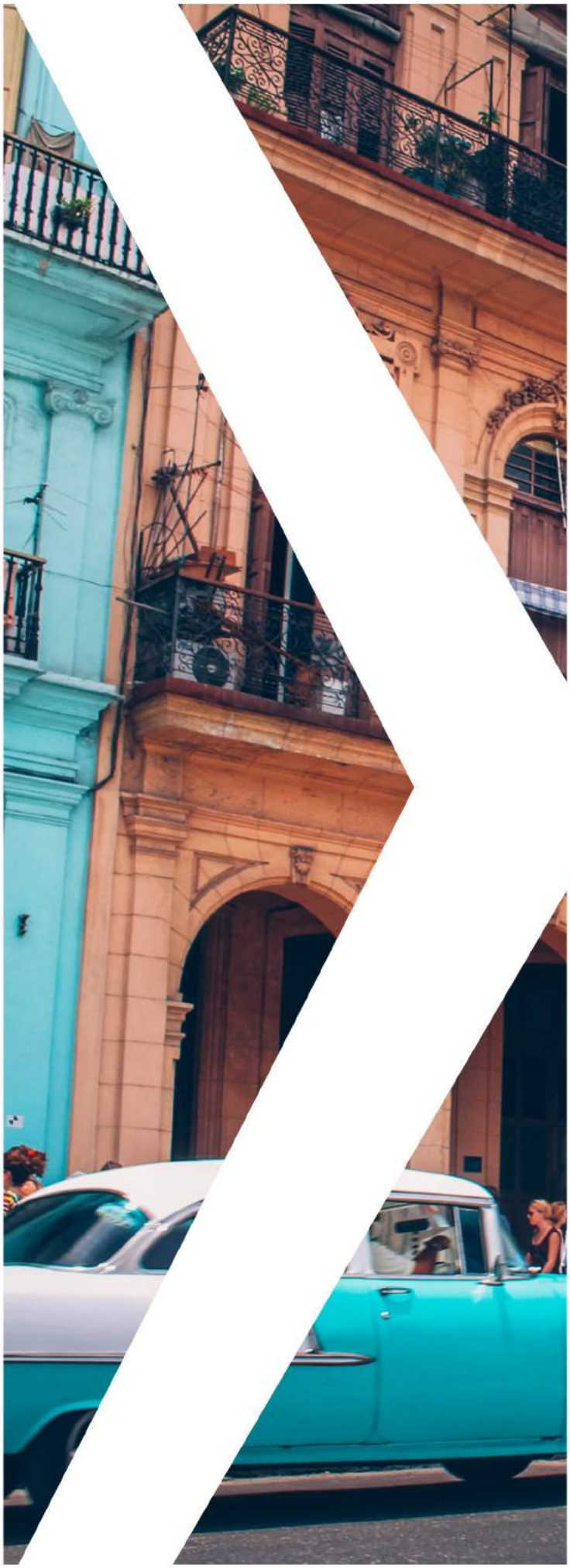
After breakfast, your guide will take you on orientation walk around the Viñales township, with a lunch break at a local organic farm. Even if you're not a smoker, you will be enchanted to learn about the local tobacco growing process. Your guide will take you to a tobacco plantation, including a fully operating secadero (drying house) in which tobacco leaves are cured from February to May. You'll come away with a thorough understanding of the process, with staff on hand to detail the journey from leaf to cigar. In your free time you will have the option to undertake a guided walk of the surrounding farmland, and/or a visit to the Cuevas del Indio (Indian Caves). There are an extensive network of caves around the township, and the Cuevas del Indio (just 5 km north of Viñales) is perhaps the best developed for a casual visitor, with lighting and even an underground boat tour on a subterranean river.

Viñalesis the perfect opportunity to experience the 'real' Cuba - away from the crowds.

DAY 7: HAVANA

Our schedule for day seven has you leaving Viñales in the morning, allowing you plenty of time to enjoy Havana in the afternoon.

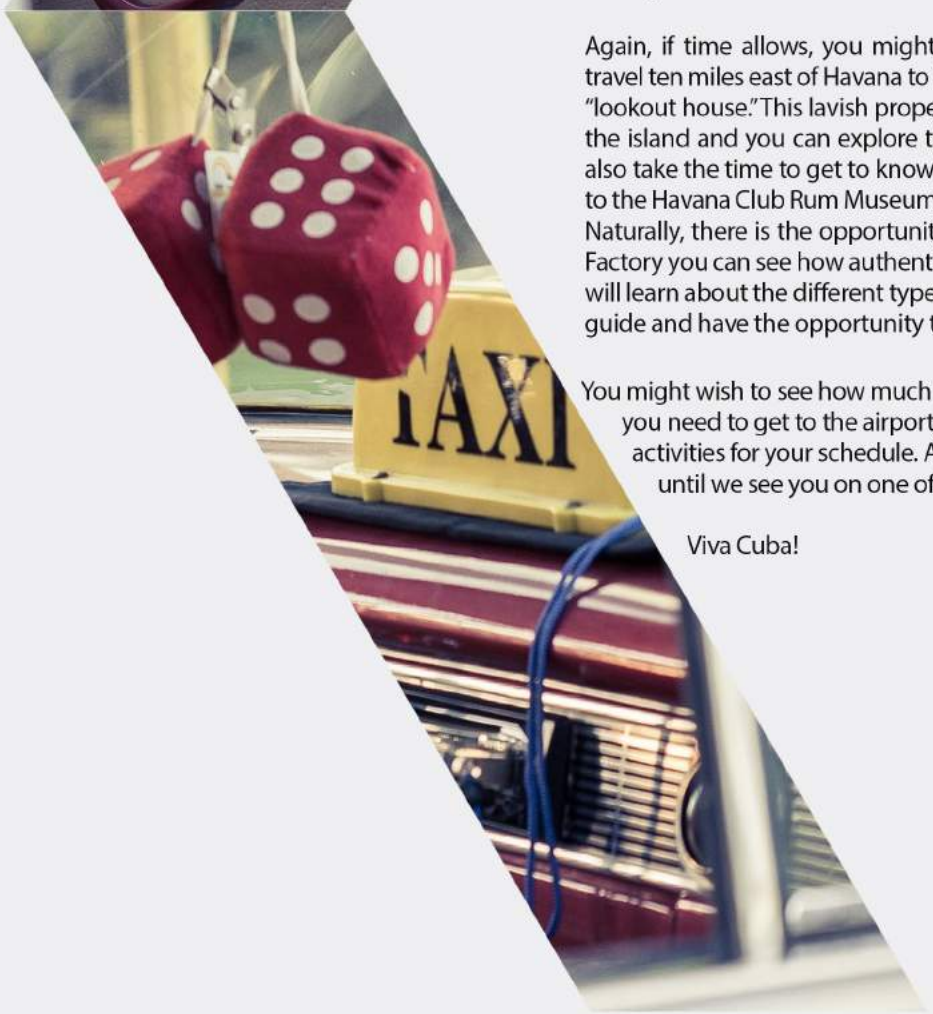
Once an obscure trading port in one of the many Spanish settlements in the New World, the city prospered when it became the key transit point for gold, silver and other pillaged riches taken here before being transported over the Atlantic back to Spain. Unsurprisingly, these riches were coveted by many, and as the settlement grew into a bustling city, it was attacked again and again by Dutch, British, and French pirates. Many of the city's robust fortifications date back to this time, when the city authorities attempted to protect their fledgling settlement from these marauders. The British eventually (albeit briefly) took control of Havana (and by extenstion, Cuba). An economic boom followed due to the English lifting the Spanish trade restrictions. Spain eventually exchanged the Florida territory for the island, but these years left an indelible mark on the city and the country, and Havana is slowly restoring its beautiful colonial buildings.



You might have had the chance to see it on your first day, but now is a chance to get to know the nooks and crannies of Havana's Old Town. As with all destinations, an orientation walk is included. One of the best-preserved old towns in the former New World, the streets are lined with colonial architecture, 16th century fortresses and countless churches. Your guide will be able to give you advice on what to see and do, but we think you'll want to see famous landmarks such as 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 independence movement. There are plenty of good museums to visit on the walking tour, including Museo de la Revolucion and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

This afternoon your guide will take you on a tour of greater Havana in a classic car. This allows you to see the different sides of the city, giving you a greater understanding of all the parts that combine to make Havana. The estimates vary, but there are around 60,000 pre-1960 vehicles still proudly prowling Cuba's streets (down from around 150,000 vehicles before the US slapped a trade embargo on Cuba). This iconic mode of transport is the perfect way to see wider Havana and a very different side of the city. Here you will be chauffeured around some of the most famous areas of Havana including New Havana, Old Havana, the affluent neighborhood of Miramar and the famous cemetery of Colon.

In the evening, you might wish to partake in Cuba's music scene with a visit to a particularly beloved Havana institution - The Vixen and the Crow. This jazz club can be found on La Rampa and is open each night, with entry through a red English phonebox before you climb down the stairs into a lively, though somewhat cramped and smoky basement. The freestyle jazz here is second to none, and in the past the club has hosted such big names as Chucho Valdés and George Benson. But before that, we'll take you to a special rooftop in Havana's Old Town that makes a sublime mojito (or a non-alcoholic alternative). You'll be taught how to make a classic Cuban cocktail before enjoying a farewell dinner with your group and guide, with an unbeatable view over the rooftops of the city.



DAY 8: HAVANA

Your schedule for the final day will depend on your departure flight, and it's important to arrive at the airport three hours before takeoff. The earlier parts of the day should be devoted to seeing as much of Havana as you can (or just sit in a plaza with a Cuban coffee and watch the world go by). Today if you have the time, we recommend visiting Callejon de Hammel in central Havana. Callejon de Hammel is where the Cuban artist fraternity congregate, and is a wonderful place to experience day-to-day Cuban life. Located in central Havana, the alley is brightly decorated in Cuban sculptures, art and paintings. It really is a riotous place. Just when you think Havana couldn't be anymore colourful, this city surprises you.

Again, if time allows, you might choose to follow Hemingway's footsteps and travel ten miles east of Havana to Hemingway's Cuba house - Finca Vigia, meaning "lookout house." This lavish property was Hemingway's home during his years on the island and you can explore the sprawling grounds and buildings. You could also take the time to get to know some of Cuba's best known exports, with a visit to the Havana Club Rum Museum, to see a recreation of a traditional rum distillery. Naturally, there is the opportunity to taste what's on offer. At the Partagas Cigar Factory you can see how authentic Cuban Cigars are made and packaged. Visitors will learn about the different types of cigars, leaves and treatments with an expert guide and have the opportunity to purchase cigars as well.

You might wish to see how much time you have to play with on this last day before you need to get to the airport, and then ask your guide about the best optional activities for your schedule. And then it will be time to bid Cuba a fond farewell, until we see you on one of our future tours.

Viva Cuba!

VIVA CUBA