

Cuba Birding & Nature: A People-to-People Tour With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



January 17 – 28, 2018

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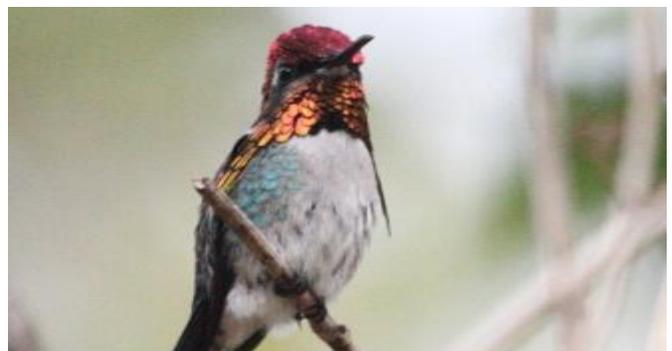
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC.



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Explore with Naturalist Journeys on a Cuba cultural tour, our popular people-to-people adventure in partnership with International Expeditions. This Cuba tour also features the fascinating birds and nature of this island nation. Travel through stunning geography as we make a wide loop through rural regions before spending time in Havana. Meet Cuban ornithologists, biologists, artists, dancers, teachers, and more.

Discover the countryside and historic sections of Trinidad and Havana. Explore the Zapata wetlands, Viñales Valley's mogotes, Sierra de Escambray, and Bay of Pigs. Meet locals, farmers and their families, and friends in different parts of the country. Learn first-hand how Cubans look to their future and how they interpret their past.

Explore a wonderful variety of habitats, from tropical and montane forests to mangroves that support 25+/- endemic bird species, plus a number of regional Caribbean specialties. This is a U.S. government-licensed tour and an opportunity to participate in educational people to people travel.



Tour Highlights

- Explore the wetlands of Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo with a Cuban bird specialist, searching for some of the island's 158 bird species, all while surrounded by stunning turquoise waters
- Explore Trinidad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and mingle with local artisans and musicians
- Walk into Topes de Collantes National Park with a local naturalist in search of birds like Red-legged Thrush, Stripe-headed Tanager, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, and West Indian Woodpecker
- Hike with a local farmer in search of the diminutive Bee Hummingbird near the Bay of Pigs
- Learn about Cuba's exciting Korimakao Project, home to some of Cuba's finest musicians, dancers, and artists who travel the country staging shows for rural residents
- Visit Hemingway's home, Finca Vigía, preserved to look as it did when he left in 1960
- Drive through the scenic Viñales Valley before enjoying lunch with a local family on their organic farm, and searching for endemics
- Walk the lush orchid gardens of Soroa with staff from the University of Pinar del Rio, famous for orchids and a birding hotspot
- Spend a full day exploring Old and New Havana

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Cuban People to People & Birding Tour with Dodie Logue

\$5290 from Miami

Airport is Miami International (MIA)

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Itinerary

Wed., Jan. 17 Arrivals / Santa Clara

Please plan to arrive at the Miami International Airport (MIA) no later than 1:00 PM today so that we can catch our 3:55 PM flight to Santa Clara, Cuba. This flight is only about an hour. Once we arrive in Santa Clara, we go through customs and are met by a representative of our operator, International Expeditions, who takes us to our hotel. We enjoy a welcome dinner and leisurely evening to meet and mingle with our travel companions and to learn more about the coming tour.

Accommodations in Santa Clara (D)

Thurs., Jan. 18 Santa Clara / Cayo Coco

We start our first full day in Cuba at the most notable site in Santa Clara, the Che Guevara memorial. Guevara captured the city on December 28, 1959, causing Batista to flee the country on New Year's Eve. This is an impressive site.

Lunch today is at the restaurant Los Caneyes; here we learn about Cuba's culinary training from individuals who are currently enrolled in the program, and who have hopes of opening a paladar (family-owned private restaurant) in the future. The grounds are lush and here we find our first Cuban endemic and Caribbean regional specialty species.

After lunch, we head east, and then turn north towards the Atlantic Coast where we cross a 17-mile-long causeway to the offshore island of Cayo Coco (named for the White Ibis, which is locally known as the Coco). Until recently, this island was largely uninhabited and, together with its neighbors Cayo Guillermo and Cayo Paredon Grande, the archipelago supports a wide variety of plant and animal life. The calcareous coastal deposits are blanketed with semi-deciduous forests, coastal scrub, and mangroves. The briny lagoons protected by the islands



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are home to flocks of flamingos and other waders. There are 158 bird species here, including Roseate Spoonbill, several endemics, Cuban Black Hawk, and Northern Caracara — wow!

Accommodations at the Hotel Villa Cojimar, Hotel Tryp Cayo Coco, or similar (B,L,D)

Fri., Jan. 19 Cayo Coco, Cayo Paredon Grande & Cayo Guillermo

Cayo Coco attracts many visitors for some of the finest beaches and jade-colored waters in all of Cuba. We start the day by joining a local bird specialist and head to a unique arid-brush habitat above subterranean caverns. A water-drip invites quail-doves and wintering warblers, and we get a cultural glimpse — in the evening the site doubles as a subterranean nightclub!



From here we head west to a protected area within El Baga National Park, where our Cuban naturalist guide explains local research and conservation efforts while sharing expertise as we explore Cayo Coco and neighboring islands.

In addition to finding Greater Flamingo, we search for Oriente Warbler, Cuban Gnatcatcher, and the only breeding population of Thick-billed Vireo on Cayo Paredon Grande. We also seek out other elusive species like Bahama Mockingbird on Cayo Guillermo before returning to our hotel, with time to visit local artists in their studios.

Our local contacts give us background information on the area, including current research projects as we experience the special nature of the region, first-hand.

Accommodations at the Hotel Villa Cojimar, Hotel Tryp Cayo Coco, or similar (B,L,D)



Sat., Jan. 20 Cayo Coco / Trinidad

This morning we drive southwest, crossing the island towards the Caribbean side and stopping at the historic city of Trinidad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our lunch is in a paladar, a privately owned, family-run restaurant.

In the architectural jewel of Trinidad, we experience the community like a local, visiting with shop owners as we walk through the colonial heart of the city. Our guide provides an in-depth look at the architecture and history of this lovely small city, the former bastion of the sugar cane industry. Enjoy time to meet local artists, or try a specialty local rum drink while musicians perform.



We finish the day with a steep drive up to Topas de Collantes in the scenic Sierra del Escambray and enjoy cooler temperatures. This is our

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base for the next two days.

Accommodations at Trinidad del Mar, Hotel Ancon, Hotel Los Helechos in the mountains of Topes de Collantes, or similar (B,L,D)

Sun., Jan. 21 Topes de Collantes / Trinidad

This morning we enjoy a short drive into the Sierra de Escambray, following a road with views into Topes de Collantes National Park. A local naturalist leads us on a walk to find both endemic and migratory birdlife, including Red-legged Thrush, Stripe-headed Tanager, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, and West Indian Woodpecker. Information about local plants and history is shared as we walk; we get a look at the rural architecture of the region.

Today we also make time to relax over a cup of coffee at a local coffee house, with time to chat with our guides and other Cubans. Coffee production is a big part of the local culture here. This is followed by a visit to a modern art museum, where we get to see pieces by important Cuban artists and then enjoy lunch at a hilltop restaurant. Our final stop of the day is to meet a family of local coffee farmers. For a number of folks, this interaction, learning about farming and family life with a multi-generational family, is a top highlight of our people-to-people tour.

This evening, dinner is at our hotel, with time to relax and tally up our growing Cuban bird list.

Accommodations at Hotel Los Helechos in the mountains of Topes de Collantes, or similar (B,L,D)



Mon., Jan. 22 Bay of Pigs / Los Bermejas / Zapata Wetlands

Today we travel to the Bay of Pigs, which is the eastern boundary of the Zapata Peninsula, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve encompassing Cuba's most important wetland area. Join Orlando Ramirez, a local farmer, for a walk to find and observe the world's smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird.

On a nature and birding walk with Orlando, we look for more endemic bird species, including Cuban Parakeet and Bare-legged Screech Owl. His knowledge and connection to residents of this rural village makes for a special visit. If time allows, we visit the impressive Bay of Pigs museum at nearby Playa Giron.

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A mid-afternoon arrival gives us time to enjoy a beach walk, lay in the shade of coconut palms or go birding. After dinner, from our hotel near the Bay of Pigs, we discuss the importance of the Zapata Wetlands with a local park manager.

Accommodations at Hotel Playa Larga or similar (B,L,D)

Tues., Jan. 23

Bay of Pigs / Korimakao Project / Hemingway's Finca Vigia / Soroa

There are around 900 species of plants, 171 species of birds (18 endemics), 31 species of reptiles, and different mammal species on the Zapata peninsula.

A Cuban park manager joins us on an early morning natural history walk and discussion while we search for more endemic bird species like the Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Crow, Cuban Pygmy Owl, and the beautiful Cuban Parrot. The national bird, the Cuban Trogon, is common here, as are Cuban Vireo, Cuban Emerald, and Cuban Tody.

Next is an exclusive stop for International Expeditions travelers; we continue our day at the Korimakao Project, where we meet one of the directors. The project houses some of Cuba's finest musicians, dancers, and artists, here to refine their skills before traveling to remote villages to perform and teach. We present art supplies to staff before having an open discussion on the transformative power of art in the lives of ordinary Cubans. Artists-in-residence have appreciated our gifts of leg-warmers for the dancers, guitar strings for musicians, and different mediums for drawing and painting for the artists. Depending on the schedule of the artistic residents, we meet these professionals to learn about their work to spread culture across rural areas of the country.

In the early afternoon we set out toward the western part of Cuba, stopping for lunch at a private restaurant where fresh ingredients are grown on the premises or at a nearby farm. The Cuban gardener shares his story. Then we head to Finca Vigia, Hemingway's residence during his stays in Cuba. An assistant director of this historic site leads us on a tour with stories of Ernest Hemingway's life while here and while abroad. It is an in-depth look at his years at Finca Vigia.

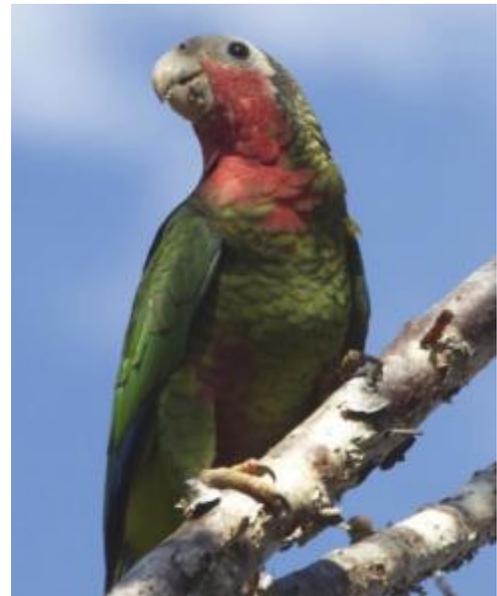
In the late afternoon, we set out towards the mountains of Soroa in Pinar del Río Province. Travel time gives us a glimpse into rural life, Cuban billboards, classic cars, and more.

Accommodations at Villa Soroa or similar (B,L,D)

Wed., Jan. 24

Soroa / The Spectacular Viñales Valley

This morning we drive west to the scenic Viñales Valley with its huge



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limestone karst outcroppings known as mogotes. While the entire drive is scenic, the valley is particularly photogenic. And it is on the walls of these massive outcroppings we look for the Cuban Solitaire, another endemic to this island. After hopefully finding the Solitaire, we head into town and then up and into a pine forest to look for a regional endemic, the Olive-capped Warbler.

Lunch is at a family owned and run organic farm where we sample their vegetables and meet the family responsible for the land. There are lots of food courses and this meal is always a favorite! Learn more about how they value the land and traditional farming, and how they preserve it for future generations. We also enjoy some time in the town of Viñales to browse artists' shops, visit tobacco sellers, and enjoy a lively town square.

Our final stop today is just outside Viñales, on our return to Soroa. We visit a local tobacco farmer and his family to learn more about the fine tobacco grown in this area, the economics associated with growing tobacco, and the many steps it takes to make the highest quality Cuban cigars. With the recent change in import regulations, Americans are now allowed to buy the farmer's cigars and bring a certain number of them back to the States.
Accommodations at Villa Soroa or similar (B,L,D)



Thurs., Jan. 25 Soroa / Havana

Today is a busy, but rewarding day. For those who are interested, and if the weather is cooperative, we rise before the sun and try to find one or both of the local Stygian Owl pairs. Huge, epiphyte-festooned trees play host to this owl and we quietly walk the grounds listening for its deep "hooo" call.

After breakfast, we visit the lush orchid gardens of Soroa, where a local botanist explains the history of the gardens and the plantings. Flowering trees help concentrate birds and we look for Great Lizard Cuckoo, Cuban Emerald, Cuban Oriole, and North American warblers. Hear some local music over delicious coffee at the top of the trail.

Also in these mountains of the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve, and not far from Soroa, is the very interesting planned eco-community of Las Terrazas. We visit the community and learn about life here from local residents, with our first stop being at the local school.

From here we continue on to Havana, where we drive through the different histories of the city before visiting Revolution Square. Our final destination for the day is our hotel that fronts the waterfront Malecón for the next two nights.

Accommodations at the Melia Cohiba or similar (B,L,D)

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Fri., Jan. 26 Havana Old & New

We begin our day with a walk through some of the city squares of Old Havana. Some parks and plazas are famous for book sellers lining the park, while others are known for art and music. Still other squares are for relaxing and visiting with new and old friends. Our walking tour leads us past the Hotel Ambos Mundos, where Hemingway kept a room for years. The hotel served as a refuge for writing such works as *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and as a base for frequenting his favorite bars.



Next, we continue our walk through the historic streets and squares of Old Havana, with stops and visits with local artists in their studios.

We visit Arte Corte, a social project unlike any other, with the original purpose of training people in the neighborhood to become hairdressers and barbers, but transformed into a masterpiece of community regeneration. The project has improved the neighborhood and is supporting social centers like a senior home and a children's park.

There is time to absorb the vibrant life of the city, see Hemingway's favorite bar, the Bacardi Rum headquarters, and more.

This evening dinner is at a cabaret that features music that was alive during the years of the Buena Vista Social Club era, along with an option to stay for a performance after dinner.

Accommodations at the Melia Cohiba or similar (B,L,D)



Sat., Jan. 27 Havana / Miami*

We have been fortunate to secure late-afternoon (5:35 PM) flights back from Cuba! This is our goal, to make the most of your time there. This morning we make a visit to a surprisingly fascinating site in Havana, the Colon Cemetery. Hundreds of years old, this cemetery plays host to generations who have called Havana home, or just a permanent stop-over point. The burial architecture here spans hundreds of years and you readily get a sense of time changes as our local historian explains how internment changed with cultural thinking. We should have time to ride in those classic Cuban cars back into the city, where you can enjoy lunch at leisure, and some free time to look around.



We need to be at the airport three hours prior to our flight, so after lunch we gather for our return. We include the final night in Miami, for convenience for flights out the following day.

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Nothing is planned for the evening; dinner is at your leisure but you are welcome to join your guide at dinner with others if you wish, or venture out to enjoy some local fare. If you find a red-eye flight back feel free to book it, but do allow plenty of time to clear customs in Miami, so not before 9:00 PM.

Accommodations at Crowne Plaza Miami International Airport (B,L)

Sun., Jan. 28 Departures

Depart at your leisure today; the hotel provides a complimentary airport shuttle. (B)

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. A handy link for travel insurance is in the footer of each of our emails. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017 Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$5290 per person, double occupancy, single occupancy \$5995. International Expeditions will book your flight to Cuba from Miami round-trip and this will be added to your Naturalist Journeys invoice with your Visa cost, estimates are \$350 – \$425 at this time (plus your Visa fee of \$90; subject to change). The tour price is based on a group of 12 travelers, with fewer participants a small group surcharge may apply. As in years past, the group is limited to 16 persons.

To join this journey, participants must apply (please request special application form by email), and once their application is accepted as part of the Cuba people-to-people program, we can confirm you. Two forms must be completed and will be sent upon request, one is your Visa form. Please send the registration form to Naturalist Journeys/Caligo Ventures, with your deposit of \$600 (send a check made out to Naturalist Journeys or phone with credit card information).

Important Travel Information

We have confirmed group air on an American Airlines flight from Miami. We will book a group flight to Cuba for you, but it is now on a commercial, rather than charter, flight.

Travel to Cuba requires flexibility. Although our program logistics are requested over a year in advance, activities and accommodations can change at the last minute due to government oversight or hotel management. The right mindset ahead of time helps to ensure your enjoyment. Remember, Cuba is not up to U.S. standards on many things, including quality of hotels, food, etc. In due time these things will improve, but until such time your expectations should be in line with current Cuban policy, standards, etc.



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This people to people Cuba educational tour itinerary follows the guidelines set forth by the United States Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control to engage, organize, and conduct people-to-people travel to Cuba. This is an opportunity to engage with the people of Cuba in the most authentic way possible — through the eyes of its people.

For years, legal travel to Cuba has been almost impossible for Americans, making this island of salsa, Colonial architecture, and Caribbean beauty a forbidden fruit for the adventurous. Regulations for travel to Cuba are evolving. Currently anyone traveling to Cuba must meet one of 12 stringent criteria (that does not include birdwatching) or adhere to an educational, people-to-people program. Your tour falls under the latter. The Cuban companies that manage travel for U.S. companies currently require that all members participate in all activities as a group. International Expeditions, our partner for this tour, has a general license by the U.S. Department of Treasury to provide people-to-people Cuba travel for U.S. citizens.

Due to permit requirements, special registration forms that include your Visa need to be completed, please request them from our office. Space on these tours is very competitive; it is important to apply as soon as you know you want to go. The Naturalist Journeys office can accept your application by fax, email scan, or mail. Prices should stay firm, but if Cuban authorities announce changes, our partner, International Expeditions, reserves that if there is an unexpected jump in price above 5%, you will have the option to forego travel if you so choose or that fee would be added. This has not happened to date, other than with the air travel portion of the journey.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.



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