Cuba: People to People Nature and Culture
A Shared Adventure with Andrew Haffenden and
NATURE TRAVEL SPECIALISTS
Feb. 18-27, 2016

Join us on one of our popular People to People birding adventures with Andrew Haffenden and Nature Travel Specialists. This is an exceptional visit to Cuba in partnership International Expeditions, a company licensed by the United States Treasury Department to organize and conduct authorized people-to-people travel to Cuba*. We have successfully run this combination of nature and culture over the last four years, designing a trip that engages participants with Cuba’s people but with a strong focus on nature and birding – quite unique among the mix of this type of tour being offered.

On this special tour explore the countryside and historic sections of the cities of Santa Clara, Trinidad and Havana. We travel to different geographic areas to explore mountains, the coast and the diverse wetlands area of Zapata. We visit some of the island’s most pristine and beautiful natural areas, from the lush Viñales Valley to the Sierra de Escambray to the Bay of Pigs and the wetlands of Zapata. As part of International Expeditions’ people-to-people program we interact with individuals and their families and friends in villages. We look forward to meeting naturalists, biologists, farmers, musicians, artists and others as we move about.

Cuba is known for having the world’s smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird. We’ll find many of the island’s specialty birds, from Great Lizard Cuckoos to the tiny green jewel, the Cuban Tody, during excursions with local birding enthusiasts and conservationists. The Cuban Trogon with its pagoda-shaped tail is widespread, bright and bold; less decorated but a real find is the elusive Cuban Solitaire, uttering its beautiful call.

Cuba is the largest island of the Caribbean, hosting a wonderful variety of habitats from tropical and montane forests to mangroves; this variety supports 28 endemic bird species, plus a number of regional Caribbean specialties.
*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. International Expeditions, the world leader in engaging and authentic nature travel, has been licensed by the U.S. Department of the Treasury CT-2013-299822-1 to provide people-to-people Cuba travel for U.S. citizens. Not only does this allow you to travel to Cuba legally, but you can experience Cuba in the most authentic way possible — through the eyes of its people.

*Please note that due to permit requirements despite the recent relaxation of visits to Cuba, SPECIAL REGISTRATION and PAYMENT procedures apply. Naturalist Journeys will take your application for the tour, but your payments including the deposit will be made to International Expeditions. Naturalist Journeys can accept and forward deposits with documents to International Expeditions, and they will then bill you for remaining payments on their schedule for payments, under their terms and conditions.

Note that space on these tours is very competitive, so 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. Please request that application form from our office. Our tour prices should stay firm, but if Cuban authorities announce changes, 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.

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**Thurs., Feb. 18**  CUBA TOUR BEGINS!  Miami / Santa Clara / Cayo Coco

Board our charter flight to Santa Clara early this morning. We have time to visit this historic city which dates from 1689. We see the city’s interesting squares en route to a stop at the most notable site in Santa Clara, the memorial to Che Guevara who captured the city on December 28, 1959 causing Batista to flee the country on New Year’s Eve. Lunch is at the Restaurant Los Caneyes and here we learn about culinary training in Cuba from individuals who are training to be chefs with hopes to open their own private restaurants in the future.

After lunch, we head east and then turn north to the Atlantic Coast where we cross a 17 mile-long causeway to the offshore island of Cayo Coco. Until recently this island was largely
uninhabited and together with its neighbors Cayo Guillermo and Cayo Paredon Grande 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 are home to tremendous flocks of flamingos and other waders. Cayo Coco is named for the White Ibis, known locally as the coco. There are 158 bird species here on a list that includes Roseate Spoonbill, and Northern Caracara.

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

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

Though Cayo Coco attracts many visitors for some of the finest beaches in all of Cuba and some of the most beautiful jade colored waters, our purpose is to interact with local environmentalists by learning and observing wildlife together.

We meet our new Cuban friends at the Cuban Center for Coastal Ecosystem Studies to discuss conservation efforts on these islands and to share our perspectives of similar conservation issues in the USA. Next we move west to a protected area within El Baga National Park where we join with other naturalists exploring Cayo Coco and neighboring islands.

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

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

Sat., Feb. 20  Cayo Coco / Trinidad

This morning we drive southwest crossing the island towards the Caribbean side, stopping at the historic city of Trinidad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Either lunch or dinner will be in a paladar, a privately owned, family run restaurant. Sit down with locals and their families to discuss daily life and enjoy a few laughs before being invited into their homes.

In the architectural jewel of Trinidad, experience the community like its residents, visiting with shop owners and sampling local fare as we walk through the colonial...
heart of the city. At Casa Del Alfarero Santander, an artisan workshop, meet local artists and learn about traditional pottery techniques. Stroll through town, with the chance to visit a music club to mingle with the locals and enjoy authentic Cuban music.

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

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**Sun., Feb. 21  Topes de Collantes / Trinidad**

Enjoy a spectacular morning drive into the Sierra de Escambray, boarding Russian trucks for this off-road journey in Topes de Collantes National Park. Join a local Cuban naturalist for a nature walk, finding prolific birdlife, including Red-legged Thrushes, Western Stripe-headed Tanagers, Cuban Bullfinches, Cuban Trogons, and West Indian Woodpeckers, as we share stories about our favorite sightings.

Afterwards meet a local farmer and join him for a lunch of traditional roast pig before stopping in at a local coffee house. Relax over a cup of coffee, where you are free to chat with your guide and other Cubans. Visit a modern art museum, seeing pieces by important Cuban artists.

This evening, dinner is at our hotel, with time to relax and tally up our growing Cuban bird list. *Accommodations at Trinidad Del Mar, Hotel Ancon, Hotel Los Helechos in the mountains of Topes de Collantes, or similar (B,L,D)*

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**Mon., Feb. 22  Bay Of Pigs / Zapata Wetlands**

We travel today to the Bay of Pigs which borders the Zapata Peninsula, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve encompassing Cuba’s most important wetland area. Join Orlando Ramirez, a local farmer, and his friends for a hike to observe the world’s smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird.

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On a nature and birding walk with Orlando we have the expectation of seeing more endemic bird species that are found here such as Cuban Screech Owl and the Cuban Pygmy Owl.

From our hotel located near the Bay of Pigs, we discuss the importance of the Zapata Wetlands with a local environmentalist.

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

Tues., Feb. 23 Bay of Pigs / Boca de Guama / Soroa

There are around 900 species of flora, 171 species of birds (18 endemics), 31 species of reptiles and many mammal species on the Zapata peninsula. Our new Cuban friends join us on an early morning natural history exchange and search for more endemic bird species such as the Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Crow, Cuban Tody, and the beautiful Cuban Parrot. Cuba’s national bird, the Cuban Trogon, is common here, as are Cuban Vireos, the Cuban Emerald and the Cuban Tody. Our birding takes in the beautiful highlights, and is paced to be fun for our non-birding travelers. Extra outings for those keen will occur as options.
Next is an exclusive stop for IE travelers as we continue our day at the Korimakao Project, where we meet one of the directors Hilda Tamayo. The project houses some of Cuba’s finest musicians, dancers and artists, who refine their skills before traveling to remote villages to perform and teach. We present art supplies to Ms. Tamayo and the project staff before an open discussion on the transformative power of art in the lives of ordinary Cubans. Dancers in residence have appreciated our gifts of leg-warmers on past journeys.

Set out toward the western part of Cuba, stopping for lunch at a private restaurant where fresh ingredients are grown at a farm or on premises. Pay homage to Earnest Hemingway at this former home, Finca Virgia, preserved as it was on the day he left, and discuss his life with Cuban Hemingway experts who work and do research here.

In the afternoon, we set out toward the western part of Cuba, traveling to the mountains of Sora in Pinar Del Rio Province. Travel time gives you a glimpse into rural life, Cuban billboards, classic cars, and more. Accommodations at Villa Sora or similar (B,L,D)

Wed., Feb. 24  Soroa and the Spectacular Vinales Valley

This morning, we drive west to the scenic Viñales Valley for a boating excursion into one of the huge limestone caves running

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through a mogote — limestone karst outcroppings. While the entire drive is scenic; the valley is particularly photogenic.

At lunch we sample the homegrown vegetables grown at an organic farm while meeting the family who is responsible for the land. On last year’s tour, this meal was a favorite for all!

Afterwards, we walk an easy trail with a local resident in hopes of seeing the Cuban Solitaire, an endemic species often hard to find. This species has beautiful vocalizations and likes the steep cliffs and lush vegetation of the region’s mogotes, a new landform type to many that you will marvel at today.

Viñales to browse a bodega, where locals shop with their ration books.

Our final stop is just outside of Viñales, on our return to Soroa, to visit a local tobacco farmer and his family to learn more about the fine tobacco grown in this area and the many steps it takes to make the highest quality Cuban cigars.

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

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**Thurs., Feb. 25**  
**Soroa / Havana**

This will be a very busy but rewarding day. Meet botanists from the University of Pinar Del Rio early this morning for a walk through a forest area surrounding our hotel that is located in the Sierra Del Rosario Biosphere Reserve.
Then, after breakfast, we visit the lush orchid gardens of Soroa with local gardeners and our new friends from the staff from the university. We look for Great Lizard Cuckoos, Cuban Emeralds, Cuban Orioles, and Cuban Grassquits here.

Also in the 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 there from local residents.

Once in Havana, we drive along the oceanfront Malecon Avenue, seeing Revolution Square before checking into our hotel.

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

**Fri., Feb. 26  Havana Old and New**

Begin our day in Old Havana with a walk through the squares of Old Havana. Some parks and plazas are famous for book sellers lining the park, while others are known for art and music. See 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, walk through the historic streets and squares of Old Havana with numerous stops and visits with local artists in their studios. Pay a visit to the librarian of the children’s section of the Havana library to present children’s books in Spanish.

Visit Arte Corte, a social project unlike any other with the original simple purpose of training people in the neighborhood to

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become hairdressers and barbers, but transformed into a masterpiece of community regeneration. The project has improved the neighborhood and is supporting social centers such as a senior home and a children’s park.

This evening dinner will be at the famed Buena Vista Social Club with an option to stay for a performance after dinner if you wish.

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

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**Sat., Feb. 27  Havana / Miami**

This day is a bit unpredictable, as the air company will not guarantee flight times very far in advance. So the advice has always been not too book flights out earlier than 6PM from Miami. As this is something we cannot affect, we try to use the day wisely, and have requested mid-afternoon flights back to best use the day. If we are successful we can enjoy another activity in Havana and then head to the airport mid-day to check in (lunch on your own this day).

Many simply plan to spend this night in Miami, and start fresh the next day for flights homeward. We have blocked a set of rooms if you wish you use them, at the cost given to use by the hotel. If you want to book flights homeward you may do so after 6PM, and if you get back to Miami earlier in the day you can always stand by on an earlier flight. Travel to Cuba takes a flexible attitude, but you’ll find it well worth that. *(B)*
Plan to arrive in Miami in time to get settled and be ready for a 7PM pre-tour meeting. We select a Miami hotel with shuttle service to and from the airport. This night, and dinner are not included in the tour price, you may use the rooms we have blocked at the Cambria Suites for a special group rate – just let us know if you plan to use them. Some plan to come in the 16th to enjoy a day trip to the Everglades with Andrew as a pre-tour outing – a good way to make sure you are here for the charter flight next day while enjoying time to get to know the group and do some birding or photography.

Don’t Miss the Bus!! You will need to arrive in Miami on February 17, 2016, one night ahead. The cost of your Miami hotel is not included this night, nor are meals – these are at your leisure, as some may have other plans while in Miami. You do need to be at the tour meeting that evening.

The hotel has a restaurant so those arriving in time for dinner can gather if they wish. There will be a pre-trip meeting at 7PM in our hotel conference room. There will be forms to fill out, luggage tags for the next day’s flight to Cuba and a question and answer session on what to expect. Due to snow conditions in previous years, numerous persons of our group encountered delays. Please note that while permits are being relaxed for flights, each flight is jammed, so rebooking is highly unlikely! It is prudent to get to Miami early with time to spare in case you face delays.

To get the most out of your trip, and to be sure to make the flight, we suggest you arrive in Miami no later than one night ahead of the tour, and for those that wish to explore the Everglades with Andrew for a day, arrive two nights early, the 16th, for a great extra day of exploring.

Pre-trip Option to Everglades National Park Feb. 17, 2016 (If desired, book your arrival day then to Feb. 16)
For those wanting to come in ahead of time, we will offer a one day birding trip to tropical hardwood hammocks and exciting wetlands of Everglades National Park for a nominal cost, so you can enjoy some time in nature and get to know your group and guides while insuring you arrive in time. We have blocked rooms at a special group rate, so you only need to tell us you are using them – we have the reservation and will bill you at the time of final payment.

We have blocked pre and post accommodations at a selected Miami hotel close to the airport, details with your registration.
**PLAN AHEAD!**

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Our office can help you with a quote.

Offset your carbon footprint using one of the many online programs. Show us the receipt and we’ll take 50% - up to $50.00 - of your carbon offset fee off your final payment.

**COST OF THE JOURNEY**

Cost of the journey is $4290.00 per person, double occupancy, single occupancy $4998.00. Plus Charter Air from Miami of $690.00, arranged and billed to you by International Expeditions. The tour price is based on a group of 12 travelers, with fewer participants a small group surcharge may apply. 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 they will be confirmed by International Expeditions. On completion, send the registration form to Naturalist Journeys, with your deposit of $600.00 made out to International Expeditions (check or credit card information).

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Pg. 2: Sunrise Vinales Valley, Melissa Lacroix; Cuban Screech Owl, Peg Abbott.
Pg. 3: Map, Santa Clara, Cayo Coco Beach scenic, Wikipedia; White Ibis, Rob Colyer.
Pg. 4: Greater Flamingo, Bud Ferguson; Trinidad scenic, Peg Abbott. Pg. 5: Topes de Collantes scenics, Peg Abbott: Red-legged Thrush, Bud Ferguson, West Indian Woodpecker, Lynn Feryus. Pg. 6: Playa Larga & group birding, Peg Abbott: Cuban Green Woodpecker & Cuban Screech Owl, Bud Ferguson; Cuban Emerald, Jonathan Sequeira; Cuban Tody, courtesy International Expeditions.