

**From Date: Fri, 31 January 2014**

**To Date: Wed, 12 February 2014**

**Santiago, Bayamo, Santa Lucia, Camaguey, Santa Clara, Trinidad, Havana**

### **ITINERARY**



**[1] Fri, 31 January 2014**

**- Santiago de Cuba City**

Meet tour leader Nancy Covey, and a Cuba Tours & Travel agent at Miami airport for our early morning flight direct to Santiago de Cuba. After clearing customs and immigration we will be met by our Cuban based guide as well as Festival Tours Spanish assistant, Alba Aponte.

Before entering the city of Santiago we will visit the impressive UNESCO world heritage site, Castillo de



San Pedro de la Roca del Morro Fort for an architectural tour of this historic 15th Century fortification. Aside from a magnificent view of Santiago's Caribbean coastline and the Sierra Maestra mountains, the fort also houses the only Piracy Museum in Cuba.

Our first taste of Cuban food is lunch overlooking the sea at the Colonial style El Morro Restaurant.

In the late afternoon we check into our hotel, Casa Granda, the inspiration for Graham Greene's "Our Man in Havana". Not much has changed at this hotel since the 50's (which is a good and bad thing). However the location of the Casa Granda can't be beat! With its Parisian style terrace bar (perfect for sipping mojitos) overlooking Santiago's lively main square (perfect for people watching) the hotel is literally across the street from Cuba's best Trova House for traditional music.

Tonight we'll meet on the rooftop of the Casa Granda for a welcome drink and view of the city before walking to the Paladar, Casa Micaela.

Today (and every other time you dine at a Paladar on the trip) you will experience Cuba's nascent experiment with free enterprise and entrepreneurial pursuits by dining at one of these emerging "Paladares". These restaurants are actually in Cuban's homes and, along with other types of small businesses, they were established to allow Cubans to create their own economic futures. By far some of the best food is found in these unassuming places. Casa Micaela is a newly opened Paladar run by young Cubans with rich musical connections. A great way to start the trip!

**[2] Sat, 1 February 2014**  
**- Santiago de Cuba City**

This morning we'll meet professionals here in Santiago for an interactive workshop demonstration to discuss the roots of Cuban music and dance- son!

Lunch on your own

This afternoon we visit the Museo de Carnaval which is dedicated to the history of the Carnaval, a deeply rooted cultural tradition in Cuba that was established in the 17th Century right here in Santiago! Whether they are called carnavales, charangas or parrandas, these large public celebrations are common throughout the island. However, among Cubans, the Carnaval of Santiago de Cuba enjoys a special status because it was where the form was invented. Although most would think that this is a direct expression of Africans living in Cuba as slaves at the time, many of the practices and events within carnival culture are a result of over one hundred years of multicultural Cuban history.



Dinner on your own (We will give you suggestions)

Music tonight! Lively Santiago has a rhythm all it's own and is truly the thriving center of traditional music in Cuba- rhumba, son and trova. This is precisely the reason we chose to start our tour here. Adjacent to our hotel are two great music venues - Café Artex and the wonderful Casa de la Trova



Casa de la Trova, was originally a musician's guesthouse where the roving musicians ("trovadores") came to finish a day of playing and drinking with yet more music and rum in a familiar environment. In that tradition, the current Trova House was founded in the early 60's in order to bring together these musicians, and better establish this form of music known as Traditional Trova. Still going strong, every day trovadores continue to take the stage solo and in groups to play old traditional songs or try out something new. Famous characters such as Compay Segundo and Eliades Ochoa have graced this famous Trova stage.

During the day Casa de Trova has either free music (or a minimum charge), which means that locals can attend. They drop in to hear a few songs- and so can you! In the evenings things heat up with a low (to us) cover charge that pays for some of Santiago's best bands. That is where we will be most nights (and days)! Because of our personal connection with the directors of the Casa de Trova you can expect extra special nights of music.

**[3] Sun, 2 February 2014**  
**- Santiago de Cuba City**

Morning we explore the historic core of Santiago.

This afternoon we drive to the outskirts of town to take a short 10 minute boat trip to Cayo Granma. This



key is located in the middle of the bay of Santiago de Cuba, less than a kilometer offshore and is home to a picturesque fishing village containing red-tiled waterfront houses and wooden huts many of them on stilts above the water. This is an off the beaten track experience!

After strolling through the village we'll have an have a wonderful meal at the family run El Marino Paladar which specializes in fresh, locally caught seafood. We will meet some of the local villagers-fishermen and musicians - to find out about life on this small island. During this visit we will be bringing some of the fishing supplies we have brought as donations to the community and we will engage in conversation with everyday Cubans about how they live.

Tonight is for music !

**[4] Mon, 3 February 2014**  
**- Santiago de Cuba City**

Morning free for visiting the Trova House

Lunch on your own

From Santiago we drive 20 miles outside of the city to El Cobre, Cuba's most revered religious site and shrine of the patron saint of Cuba- La Virgen de la Caridad. In fact El Cobre has been visited by two Popes over the last 15 years, which is quite significant for Cuba. Here you will find thousands of offerings for this most famous Virgin including clumps of hair, poems, hats, baseballs, trinkets as well as Hemingway's Nobel Prize and a small figurine from Fidel and Raul's mom.



After visiting the church we have been invited to the El Cobre Cultural Center to meet young artists, actors and musicians- in particular a fantastic steel drum band that was started 25 years ago in this village, originally known for copper mining. The band rehearses on the rooftop of the Center- which used to be a covered structure until Hurricane Sandy came along. Steel drumming is important in the annual Carnivale in Santiago and it represents the strong Caribbean influence of this part of Cuba which is actually closer to Haiti than Havana. During our visit we will be bringing some of the art, music and office supplies we have brought as donations to the Center . We'll spend time talking with the artists, students and other visitors about our own culture in comparison with Cuban cultural practices.

We return in the early evening for dinner (on own) and music!

**[5] Tue, 4 February 2014**

**- Santiago de Cuba City**

**- Camagüey City**

Our overland adventure begins today! Traveling by land across the island gives us a firsthand look at rural life in Cuba allowing us to observe several small and medium sized country towns and Cuban folkways which is a unique perspective that most people don't see.



We stop for an early riverside lunch at Paladar La Bodega, in the town of Bayamo the second of the seven cities founded in the 16th century by the Spaniard Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar. Bayamo has a colorful history- originally an important agricultural and commercial settlement, then a thriving contraband trade surrounded by plantations,, to being an insurgent stronghold of the war of 1868-98.



We arrive late this afternoon in Santa Lucia Camaguey

Dinner at the hotel

**[6] Wed, 5 February 2014**

**- Camagüey City**

**- Santa Clara City**

Lunch at the hotel or box lunch to take along the way

We drive from Camaguey to the lively city of Santa Clara, with it's strong connections with Che Guevara and a cultural scene like no other in Cuba largely due to a huge university population. We'll meet one of Cuba's most interesting musicians, Jesus Bello, formerly with the great band Sierra Maestra. Jesus is also a teacher and the leader of an incredibly exciting young band, Los Charangeros del Son. They have arranged a special concert for our group that will be





performed for us and the local community this evening. Afterwards we are invited to Jesus's home for dinner and a chance to meet the band and their families.

Tonight we will give Los Charangeros the musical donations that we brought (strings, repair parts for instruments)

**[7] Thu, 6 February 2014**

**- Santa Clara City**

**- Trinidad de Cuba**

We travel to Trinidad via the magnificent Natural Topes de Collantes in the mountains known as Sierra del Escambray. Visit the El Cubano nature walk as well as a country house to try the coffee or natural juices. Hike along a river to a beautiful waterfall where you can take a quick swim.

Arrive into the gem of Cuba, Trinidad, a perfectly preserved mid 19th century Spanish Colonial sugar town which is why it was declared a UNESCO site in 1988. While in Trinidad you will stay in private homes (B&B's) known as "Casa Particulares". This is a wonderful chance to meet and get to know the local, friendly Cubans. Dinner is on your own either in town or in your casa particular prepared by arrangement with your Cuban host family (highly recommended)!



Tonight enjoy live Cuban music (and salsa dancing) at the Casa de la Musica, where the whole town gathers outside on a large terrace to enjoy the evening. Everyone is welcome to join in! Trinidad also has a Casa de Trova for more traditional sounds.

**[8] Fri, 7 February 2014**

**- Trinidad de Cuba**

Breakfast in your casa particular

Morning visit to Trinidad's historic Core to learn about the history of this colonial city, as you walk through cobbled, picturesque streets.



We visit El Alfarero and the potter at Casa Chichi. This family, originally from Santander, Spain, has been creating ceramics in the city of Trinidad for generations. Watch the artisans at their craft – which is also for sale! On the same street are many women who display their beautiful handmade linens and jewelry.

Lunch and dinner are on your own .

Enjoy a night of music in the center of Trinidad. Listen to traditional Cuban music at Casa de Trova, watch a Afro-Cuban folkloric show at El Palenque or live “son” at Casa de la Musica.

**[9] Sat, 8 February 2014**

**- Trinidad de Cuba**

**- Havana City**

Check In: Hotel Palacio del Marqués de San Felipe y Santiago de Bejucal

Breakfast at your casa particular

Travel to Havana with a quick stop en route for restrooms and something to eat (on your own).

We check into our hand picked Havana hotel with the longest name, Hotel Palacio del Marques de San Felipe y Santiago de Bejucal! The “San Felipe” has absolutely the best location in the city - right on Plaza San Francisco de Asis in Habana Vieja, the Old City, amongst newly restored colonial buildings and atmospheric, cobbled streets. This is one side of Havana and over the course of the next few days we will also discover the grittier side of this capital city.



Tonight’s dinner is at another newly opened and very lovely Paladar, Los Mercaderes ,

After dinner we’ll hear some fantastic Cuban music by one of Cuba’s most famous bands, Sierra Maestra.

**[10] Sun, 9 February 2014**

**- Havana City**

This morning enjoy a walking tour of Old Havana with our expert guide and discover the four main plazas that comprise Cuba’s first World Heritage Site . We start right in front of our perfectly situated hotel, at the Plaza San Francisco. This plaza is one of the most important centers of city life and commerce when it was established in the Sixteenth Century owing to the Maritime supremacy of the Spanish and its location at the Port of Havana. The plaza’s most historic building, the Basilica de San Francisco de Assis, was a church and monastery that is now museum and one of the leading centers for Classical music in Cuba. We then wind down the cobblestone streets towards Plaza Vieja, the site of executions, processions, bullfights, and fiestas - all witnessed by Havana's wealthiest citizens, who looked on from their balconies. While in Plaza Vieja, we stop in at Fototeca de Cuba, the island’s premier photography center.



At Cathedral plaza we see the Taller Experimental de Grafica. The Taller was established in 1962 by a small group of artists lead by Orlando Suárez, a muralist whose initiative also helped found the Superior Art Institute. Mr. Suarez was supported in this effort by the Chilean Poet Pablo Neruda and by Che Guevara who applauded his efforts to create a center where all artists of the City of Havana can go to produce prints. The Taller is a studio, school and most of all, an art institution that preserves and develops the sophisticated art of printmaking with relative freedom of spirit and form. While at the center you will see artworks produced there and have a conversation with the artists present about their works, and about life as an artist in Havana.

On the Western end of Havana, in the Flores district , we visit the Gaudi- like whimsical park residence /studio of renowned Cuban painter, printmaker, and ceramist, Jose Fuster to see how his works and community projects have transformed the neighborhood. Enjoy lunch with the artist or his son in Fuster's unique and elaborately tiled home.

Afterwards we are invited to the home of Pablo Menendez, founding member of the well known Cuban band Mezcla. The son of jazz / blues musician Barbara Dane, Pablo was born in Oakland, California but went to Cuba at the age of 14 to study music. Instead of returning to the USA he stayed - and has been a part of the musical soundtrack of Cuba since the late 60's. Because of his background, Pablo has a very unique perspective. For our visit, Pablo will talk about the music culture of Cuba followed by a short performance with his trio. This is a great time to ask an expert about anything relating to Cuban music !



Dinner on your own. We will recommend restaurants and paladars – including those you might want to reserve ahead of time.

Tonight is music in Havana- at one of the clubs, shows or the Rumba Palace. Closer to the trip we will let you know some great music options- as some of the best things happen at the very last minute in Cuba!

**[11] Mon, 10 February 2014**

**- Havana City**

**Breakfast at the hotel**

Today we visit Egrem Studios, where the Buena Vista Social Club recordings were made. These are friends of ours so we will have a special, private tour with the engineers who made this very famous and extremely influential record. Afterwards we'll hear music in the newly refurbished courtyard of the studio.



Tonight we have the special privilege of being invited into the home of Carlos Varela, Cuba's most well known singer songwriter ("The Bob Dylan of Cuba"). Carlos was introduced to us by Jackson Browne as they share similar views on music and the world. We will have dinner with Carlos and his family followed by a private, intimate concert

**[12] Tue, 11 February 2014**

**- Havana City**

We take a ferry ride across Havana Bay to Guanabaco to the historic City of Rega to visit the Guanabacoa / Santeria Museum.

Continuing onto to Finca La Vigia, we arrive at Ernest Hemingway's hilltop estate, where he lived and worked for over 20 years . As you gaze into the windows of this remarkably well preserved home, you can imagine this as the inspiration for "The Old Man and the Sea" which was written here. La Vigia is now a museum containing the author's original furniture, artwork and personal memorabilia . Also at his farm you will see his sport-fishing boat, the Pilar as well as the pool where Ava Gardner famously once swam naked!



Lunch on your own



Tonight's Farewell dinner is at Kadir Lopez Studio .

Kadir Lopez, and his brother Kelvin Lopez are graduates of the Instituto Superior de Arte. Their expansive studio and exhibit spaces are located in a 1930's Havana mansion that has been re-purposed by the artists for their home-workspace. Here you will enjoy a delicious traditional Cuban home-made dinner cooked by the family of the artist. You will have a chance to talk with Kadir, Kelvin and other artists who will join us and beyond having a fabulous dinner and seeing some fabulous art, you will enjoy warm conversation about everything Cuban.

**[13] Wed, 12 February 2014**

**- Havana City**

Early morning check out of our hotel for our flight to Miami. We plan to arrive into Miami by noon so you can schedule either an overnight in Miami or a connecting flight back home that same afternoon.





Your tour leaders, Nancy & Alba, on the boat to Cayo Granma!