



**CUBA!**

**MUSIC, ART & CULTURE TOUR**

**Santiago de Cuba \* Baracoa \* Camaguey \* Trinidad \* Havana**

**November 4-18, 2016**



#### **TENTATIVE ITINERARY**

*Following is the tentative itinerary for our trip to Cuba to give you a general idea of the highlights of our exciting in depth tour. As with any great adventure we will be open to spontaneous events and encounters in this fascinating country!*

#### **FRIDAY NOVEMBER 4**

**- Miami / Santiago de Cuba**



Meet tour leader Nancy Covey at Miami airport for our flight to the easternmost Caribbean city on the island, Santiago de Cuba, the cultural center of Cuba's art, music and dance scene! Your hotel for the next 4 nights is the Casa Granda, the inspiration for Graham Greene's novel "Our Man in Havana". Not much has changed since the 50's and the location

of the Casa Granda absolutely can't be beat! With its Parisian style terrace cafe bar you can sip a lemonade or mojito and people watch to your hearts content. The hotel overlooks Parque Cespedes, Santiago's lively main square, and you are literally across the street from Cuba's oldest and most famous Trova House where you can hear authentic traditional Cuban music from morning til night!

Tonight meet on the rooftop bar of the Casa Granda for a sunset drink and spectacular view of the city before walking to a local Paladar for dinner

Today (and every other time you dine at a Paladar on the trip) you will experience Cuba's experiment with free enterprise and entrepreneurial pursuits by dining at one of these emerging "Paladares" which are often times in Cuban's homes. By far some of the best food is found in these unassuming places. We'll enjoy local music and Cuban food - a great way to begin the trip!

## **SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5**

### **- Santiago de Cuba**

The best way to immerse ourselves in Cuban culture is by learning the most popular form of dance in Cuba -Salsa! Everyone will get their own private teacher from the very best Salsa school in Santiago and you will learn to sway the way they do every day! This is a super fun way to begin your sultry Cuban morning!



After learning some dance steps ourselves, we're invited to a rehearsal of one of Cuba's most famous Ballet Folklórico companies, Cutumba - an amazing Afro Cuban group that dance entirely barefoot.

Cuban Lunch at a local Paladar.

This afternoon tour Revolution Square to see the impressive sculptures of Santiago's premier sculptor, Alberto Lescaj, followed by a private visit to his studio to discuss the fascinating story of how Lescaj's Foundation, one of the first of its kind, was formed. After an arty afternoon, you'll meet the traditional drum band, Conga Las Hoyas, a carnival horn and percussion group that is the closest thing Cuba has to the New Orleans Brass Band tradition.

Dinner on your own. Music tonight! Lively Santiago has a rhythm all its own and the city is truly the beating heart 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.

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 small cover charge that pays for some of Santiago's best bands. That is where we will be most nights (and days)! You will meet the directors of the Casa De Trova and because of our personal connection with them you can expect extra special nights of music.

## **SUNDAY NOVEMBER 6**

### **- Santiago de Cuba**

Morning is for Salsa!



Midday we drive to the outskirts of town for a short boat trip to Cayo Granma. This key, located in the middle of the Bay of Santiago de Cuba, is home to a picturesque fishing village containing red-tiled waterfront houses and wooden huts, many of them on stilts above the water.

After strolling the village you'll enjoy a wonderful lunch at the family run El Marino Paladar which specializes in fresh, locally caught seafood. You'll meet local villagers, fishermen and musicians to find out about life on this small island. During our visit we'll bring some of the fishing supplies we've all brought as donations to the community and will engage in conversation with everyday Cubans about how they live.

Tonight is free for dinner and music !



## **MONDAY NOVEMBER 7**

### **- Santiago de Cuba**

Last morning of Salsa!

Today you get to see Tumba Francesa, a dance troupe that is completely unique and unlike any other dance you will see in Cuba. With driving rhythms of African style drumming combined with 18th Century traditional French dances, Tumba Francesa is the oldest and most tangible link to the Afro- Haitian heritage of this Eastern province of Cuba.

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. 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're invited to the El Cobre Cultural Center to meet the kids of El Cobre- young artists, actors and musicians to see first hand how important this institution of

cultural centers is to Cuba. Ours is the only American group to have ever visited the El Cobre Cultural Center and our meager gifts of art supplies funded an entire summer school last year.

We'll also see a rooftop performance of the fantastic steel drum band that was started 25 years ago in this village. Steel drumming is very important in the annual Carnivale in Santiago as it represents the strong Caribbean influence of this part of the island which is actually closer to Haiti than Havana! We'll spend time talking with the musicians, artists and students about our own culture in comparison with Cuban cultural practices.

Evening free for dinner and music

## **TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8**

**- Santiago de Cuba / Baracoa**



Traveling by land gives you a firsthand look at rural life in Cuba which is a unique perspective that most people don't see.

Leaving the city behind we stop for a riverside lunch at Villa La Lupe just outside Guantanamo.

Driving along the Caribbean coast we head up the famous La Farola mountain road that drops us onto the Atlantic side of the island and Cuba's most unique town, Baracoa.

Windswept, tropical and lush this area of Cuba is like nowhere else on the island and many people have never traveled outside of the province.



Baracoa has its own music, culture and a special cuisine based on its abundance of coconuts, coffee and chocolate. Funky lively Baracoa is Cuba's oldest city and was the country's capitol until they figured out how remote it is. This compact town is surrounded by the greenest mountains and the most beautifully wild beaches and countryside in Cuba. You are now at the opposite end of the island from Havana and it couldn't be more different from the rest of the country. These people know how to relax and enjoy themselves! This is our chance to slow down a bit too and enjoy the natural surroundings just outside of town. We have chosen to stay at Casa Particulares (family run Bed & Breakfasts) so that you can get to know the warm people of Cuba.

Dinner tonight we will feast on the specialty foods of Baracoa including its famously delicious coconut sauce.

## **WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 9**

### **- BARACOA**

This morning we travel northwest of Baracoa past palm groves and rustic farmsteads where we visit a local family of fishermen to understand their simple lifestyle living on the beach. You'll also learn about some of the natural healing practices in this unique area of Cuba.

Lunch will be at a Ranchon overlooking the Rio Toa, an important bird and plant habitat. After our feast we take a relaxing river boat trip up the river to explore this protected area, the Cuchillas del Toa Unesco Biosphere Reserve.



Before driving back to town we have the option of swimming at one of the Cuba's most secluded beaches, the palm lined Playa Managua.

Evening is free for Trova music or just a long leisurely dinner!

## **THURSDAY NOVEMBER 10**

### **- BARACOA**

Start the morning off right....with chocolate! We visit a woman whose life has been spent making chocolate that grows on trees just outside her door! You will learn (and taste) the preparation of chocolate in many unique ways.





Just outside Baracoa we meet the band Nengon & Kiriba, who are indigenous to this area and the first native people of Cuba who will share with us their local music and dances that are completely unique to this area of Cuba. We will enjoy a traditional lunch at this farm collective which will be some of the most unique and delicious food that is found nowhere else in Cuba. In the afternoon we take a short boat ride up the Yumuri river for a leisurely hike or refreshing swim.

Dinner is on your own either in town or in your casa particular prepared by arrangement with your Cuban host family (highly recommended)!

## **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11**

### **- BARACOA / CAMAGUEY**

We depart Baracoa en route to Colonial Camaguey, stopping for lunch along the way. With its warren of narrow, winding streets and alleyways, Camaguey is home to some of Cuba's finest artistic and literary traditions.



Dinner tonight outdoor is in one Camaguey's delightful, cobbled plazas.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12-  
**CAMAGUEY / TRINIDAD**



Today we travel to Trinidad, a perfectly preserved mid 19th century Spanish Colonial sugar town which is why it was declared a UNESCO site in 1988. Trinidad is a picturesque cobblestone town that is colorful, charming and absolutely delightful.

While in Trinidad you will stay in Casa Particulares that we have hand picked for you and are some of the nicest casas in Cuba.

This evening we meet one of Cuba's most interesting, accomplished and charismatic musicians, Jesus Bello, formerly with the great Cuban band Sierra Maestra (the "other" Buena Vista). He is also a teacher and the leader of an incredibly exciting young band in Santa Clara called Los Charangueros. Jesus is the most enthusiastic and inspiring friend I know in Cuba and he will be hosting a fantastic evening of music for us in Trinidad.



## **SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13**

### **- TRINIDAD**

Breakfast in your casa particular

Morning visit to Trinidad's historic centre led by historian Nancy Benitez who is responsible for much of Trinidad's restoration.

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 is on your own

The afternoon is free for shopping for art, relaxing or swimming in the pristine waters of nearby Playa Ancon.



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.



## **MONDAY NOVEMBER 14**

### **- TRINIDAD / HAVANA**

Check out of your casa for our drive to Havana!

Our first stop is lunch at an Organic Farm just outside of Havana to meet the local farmers.

After our midday feast we visit Finca La Vigia, 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", "For Whom the Bell Tolls", and other classics which were written here. La Vigia is now a museum containing the author's original furniture, artwork and personal memorabilia. You'll also see Hemingway's sport-fishing boat, the Pilar, as well as the pool where Ava Gardner famously once swam naked!

Welcome to Havana!





Our Colonial style hotel in Havana is the Parque Central, rated #1 on Trip Advisor. There are virtually no good hotels in the city so it was extremely hard to get a reservation! Named after the park directly in front of it, the Parque Central is conveniently located to so many things you will want to visit including the Capitol, the Floridita (birthplace of the Daiquiri) and the lovingly restored, cobbled Habana Vieja. The hotel also has a rooftop swimming pool with great views and the only reliable and fast WIFI in the entire country!

Tonight we take bici taxis to one of our favorite paladars in Havana.

## **TUESDAY NOVEMBER 15**

### **- HAVANA**

In Havana there is a lot to do and it is the part of Cuba that is rapidly changing! Therefore we have not only allowed for these changes but also given you space in the itinerary to explore Havana according to your personal interests.



This morning we meet the important architect Miguel Coyula to have a discussion about the changes in architecture in Havana.

Afterwards we'll tour Old Havana with our expert guide to discover the main plazas that comprise Cuba's first World Heritage Site. Starting with the Plaza San Francisco, established in the 16th Century, it features the Basilica de San Francisco de Assis, formerly a church and monastery that is now a museum and one of the leading centers for Classical music in Cuba.

Winding through cobblestone streets brings us to Plaza Vieja, the site of executions, processions, bullfights, and fiestas - all witnessed by Havana's wealthiest citizens, who looked on from their balconies.

At Cathedral Plaza you'll visit the Taller Experimental de Grafica which 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.

Lunch is at one of my very favorite new restaurants, Esto No Es Un Cafe, located on a narrow cobbled street next to Cathedral Plaza .

Late afternoon enjoy cocktails and tapas at Cafe Madrigal, in the exciting Vedado area of Havana, with renowned singer and songwriter Frank Delgado who will discuss the Nueva Trova movement in Cuba. He'll also talk about another very important topic- music and censorship in Cuba.

Evening is free for dinner at one of Havana's great restaurants. One of the benefits of the recent changes in Cuba is that there are now many good paladars to choose from which did not exist a couple of years ago.

Later hit one of Havana's clubs for a night of music!



**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16**

**- HAVANA**

Today we are invited to the rural home of one of the leading Afro-Cuban artists to emerge from the revolutionary period, Manuel Mendive, who is considered by many to be the most important Cuban artist living today.



This afternoon visit the Egrem Studios, where the Buena Vista Social Club recordings were made! Egrem is run by friends of ours so you 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. Evening is free for dinner or great music.



**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17**

**- HAVANA**

Your last day in Havana is free! You have the option of touring a cigar factory, spending the day sightseeing, hearing music or just relaxing.

As the grand finale to our tour we have the privilege of being treated to a private dinner and concert with Cuba's most well known singer songwriter, "The Bob Dylan of Cuba", Carlos Varela. Frequently censored by the Cuban government Carlos chronicled everyday life in Cuba and in the process became a powerful artistic leader for a younger generation of Cubans. Normally he plays stadium size concerts but tonight we will share dinner and music with Carlos and his incredible band at the home of the great Cuban artist, Kadir Lopez. This will be an inspiring and fitting end to our tour.





**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18**

**- HAVANA / MIAMI**

Depart for Havana Airport and our flight back to Miami



Nancy Covey on Rio Toa