



CUBA MUSIC, ART & CULTURE TOUR!

Santiago de Cuba * Baracoa * Trinidad * Havana

MAY 26 - JUNE 8, 2015



TENTATIVE ITINERARY

Following is our "tentative" itinerary to give you a general idea of the highlights of our People to People tour to Cuba. As with any great adventure we will be open to spontaneous events and encounters in this fascinating country that will soon experience huge changes. This is an incredibly exciting, historic time to be in Cuba!

TUESDAY, MAY 26

- Miami / Santiago de Cuba

Meet tour leader Nancy Covey at Miami airport for our early morning flight direct to the Eastern end of Cuba and the city of Holguin. After clearing customs and immigration we will be met by our Cuban guide as well as Festival Tours Spanish assistant, Alba Aponte. Welcome to Cuba!

Our first taste of Cuba is lunch in Holguin, known as "the City of Parks".

After lunch we drive through the countryside to the easternmost Caribbean city on the island, Santiago de Cuba, the cultural center of Cuba's art, music and dance scene. Our hotel for the next 4 nights is the Casa Granda which was the inspiration for Graham Greene's novel "Our Man in Havana". Not much has changed here 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 Céspedes, Santiago's lively main square, and is 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 we'll meet on the rooftop bar of the Casa Granda for a welcome drink and sunset view of the city before walking to a local Paladar for our welcome dinner. Tonight (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". These restaurants are often times 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. We'll enjoy local music and Cuban food - a great way to start the trip!

WEDNESDAY , MAY 27
- Santiago de Cuba

This morning meet the directors of the Trova House who will share their insights on this most important music gathering spot. Afterwards, joined by the best teachers in Santiago, we explore the roots of the most popular form of dance in Cuba, Salsa!



After learning to dance ourselves, we visit one of Cuba's most famous Ballet Folklorico companies, Cutumba - an amazing Afro Cuban group that dance entirely barefoot. We are invited to their rehearsal where we will meet the entire ensemble.

This afternoon tour Revolution Square to see the impressive sculptures of Santiago's premier sculptor Alberto Leskay followed by a visit to his studio to see his sculptures in the making and discuss the fascinating story of how his Foundation, one of the first of it's kind, was formed..

Dinner on your own

Music tonight! Lively Santiago has a rhythm all it's 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. 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.

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 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.

THURSDAY , MAY 28
- 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. This is an off the beaten track experience!

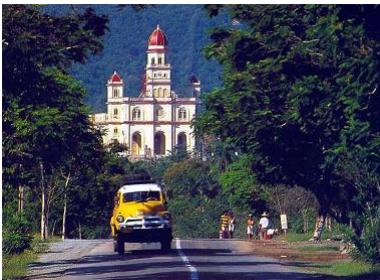
After strolling the village we'll enjoy a wonderful lunch at the family run El Marino. Paladar which specializes in fresh, locally caught seafood. We will meet some of the local villagers, fishermen and musicians to find out about life on this small island. During this visit we will be bringing some 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 !

FRIDAY , MAY 29
- Santiago de Cuba
Salsa!

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In late morning we join a rehearsal of the popular 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.

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 have been invited to the El Cobre Cultural Center to meet the kids of of El Cobre- young artists, actors and musicians to see first hand how important this institution of cultural centers is to Cuba. We'll also catch the rooftop rehearsal 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 artists and students about our own culture in comparison with Cuban cultural practices.



Evening free for dinner and music

SATURDAY, MAY 30

- Santiago de Cuba / Baracoa



Traveling by land gives us 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 an early riverside lunch at Villa La Lupe just outside Guantanamo. Driving along the sparse Caribbean coast we then 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. Baracoa has it's own music culture and a special cuisine based on it's 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 and 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 so that you can get to know the warm people of Cuba.

Dinner tonight is at La Poeta where we will feast on the specialty foods of Baracoa including it's famous and delicious coconut sauce.

SUNDAY JUNE 1 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 on the beach. We'll also learn about some of the natural healing practices in this unique area of Cuba.



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

Evening is free for Trova music and/ or a good dinner!

MONDAY JUNE 2

BARACOA

Just outside Baracoa to the south we meet an indigenous tribe of people who will share with us their local music and dances that are completely unique to this area.

This afternoon visit local artisans in Baracoa.

Dinner on your own



TUESDAY JUNE 2

BARACOA / HAVANA

Morning flight direct to Havana from the tiny Baracoa airport. Lunch will be at Havana's infamous art deco Hotel Nacional, located right in front of the popular Malecon





After lunch see the Morro Fort which is also one of the sites of Havana's incredible Art Biennial which features the largest gathering of artists in Latin America. Because of the recent policy changes in Cuba the 2015 Bienal is set to be the most exciting year ever for this international art festival! Closer to the time of the trip we will give you info on some of the important artists we will be visiting.

Check into our handpicked hotel, the San Felipe Y Santiago de Bejucal, located on one of the most beautiful squares in Habana Vieja - Plaza de San Francisco. This relatively small hotel is in the perfect location right in the heart of beautifully re-

stored "Old Havana" which is why getting a reservation is extremely difficult.

Dinner tonight is at one of our favourite paladares for food and ambiance, Los Mercaderes, located upstairs in an historic building with a staircase strewn with flower petals.

Tonight is free for 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- especially during the Biennial!

WEDNESDAY JUNE 3 HAVANA

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 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, established in the 16th Century. The plaza's most historic building, the Basilica de San Francisco de Assis, was 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. 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, established in 1962 by a small group of artists lead by Orlando Suárez, a muralist whose initiative also helped found the Superior Art Institute.

Just outside of Havana Vieja we visit the Gaudi- like whimsical park residence and studio of renowned Cuban painter, printmaker, and ceramist, José Fuster to see how his works and community projects have transformed the neighborhood. Enjoy lunch with the artist in Fuster's unique and elaborately tiled home.

Afternoon is free

Over cocktails and tapas we spend the early evening with Frank Delgado, renowned singer and songwriter, for a discussion about the nueva trova movement in Cuba. We will also talk about a very important topic - music and censorship in Cuba followed by a musical performance with Frank and Yriban Rivero, an up-and-coming master guitarist.

THURSDAY JUNE 4 HAVANA

Today we explore Centro Havana starting with a visit to the small community of Callejón de Hamel to learn about the mysterious Santería religion and meet dancers who will show us the roots of Rumba. Afterwards we are invited to the home of art curator, Milagros Borges.



Lunch today is at the wonderful San Cristobal whose exotic menu and decor share Cuban, African and Spanish influences.

This afternoon 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 after which we'll hear music in Egrem's newly refurbished courtyard.

FRIDAY JUNE 5 HAVANA

We take a ferry ride across Havana Bay to Guanabacoa to the historic City of Rega . 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!



Tonight we have the special privilege of being treated to a private dinner and concert with Cuba's most well known singer songwriter , Carlos Varela, "The Bob Dylan of Cuba". Carlos was introduced to us by Jackson Browne as they share similar views on music and the world. He normally plays huge stadium size concerts in Cuba so this is a rare treat.

SATURDAY JUNE 6 TRINIDAD

Saving the best for last we travel to 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. En route we will have a bayside lunch in Cienfuegos, the home of Cuba's most famous singer,



mambo king, Benny More.

While in Trinidad you will stay in "Casa Particulares". The Trinidad casas, that we have hand picked for you, are some of the best and most interesting homes in Cuba many filled with antiques. Staying in casas we feel is the best way to truly get to know how Cuba is.

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 with music and salsa. Everyone is welcome to join in! Trinidad also has a Casa de Trova for more traditional sounds.



We'll meet one of Cuba's most interesting, important and charismatic musicians, Jesús Bello, formerly with the great band Sierra Maestra. Jesús is also a teacher and the leader of an exciting young band called Los Charangueros.



SUNDAY JUNE 7 TRINIDAD

Breakfast in your casa particular

Morning visit Trinidad's historic Core led by historian Nancy Benitez who is responsible for much of Trinidad's incredible restoration. You'll learn about the history of this colonial city as you walk through its 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.

This afternoon visit one of Cuba's most stunning natural sights, Topes de Collantes, which has spectacular hiking and waterfalls.

Tonight is our special farewell dinner and concert where we will be treated to the music of Jesus Bello who will be joined by Cumanay, one of the best Trova bands in this lovely area of Cuba .

MONDAY JUNE 8 TRINIDAD / MIAMI

Morning is free for sleeping in or last minute exploring of Trinidad sights and art galleries before traveling to Santa Clara where we'll visit the Che Guevara monument and museum as our final farewell to Cuba.

Our American Airlines flight departs at 7:20 PM arriving in Miami at 8:30 PM where our tour officially ends. You can either book a very late night flight home or stay in Miami overnight and fly home the next day.

Your tour leaders, Nancy &
Granma!



Alba, on the boat to Cayo