

Cuba: Nature and Adventure for Students

8 days and 7 nights in the safest and most cultured country in the Americas!

VISIT HAVANA, VINALES, PINAR DEL RIO, CAYO LEVISA | SEE WWW.HELLOCUBA.CA

DAY 1 – SATURDAY – HELLO CUBA

- Arrival at Havana's José Martí International Airport.
- Group welcomed by your CubaNatura Guide and Bus Driver.
- Transfer to **Hotel Saint Johns**, located in Havana's cultural center: Vedado near the Malecón seawall.
- Private group check-in with assistance from your guide.
- Take a refreshing swim in one of two hotel pools.

DAY 2 – SUNDAY – DISCOVERING HAVANA

Guided walking tour of Old Havana, an UNESCO **World Heritage Site** to experience four of its five historic plazas.

Cathedral Square, the most beautiful and private 18th century colonial plaza on the island. Named after the masterpiece of Cuban baroque architecture: the **Cathedral of Havana** built by the Jesuit order.

Square of Arms, an ancient military parade ground for Spanish soldiers, surrounded by impressive buildings such as:

- **Palacio de los Capitanes Generales**, former seat of colonial government. Today the building houses the Museum of the City.
- **Palacio del Segundo Cabo**, seat of the second authority of the island. Today it houses important publishing concerns.
- **Museo de Artesania** at **Castillo de la Real Fuerza**, the second oldest fortress built by the Spaniards in the West Indies. Today it displays treasures of artistic ceramics by the most prestigious Cuban artists

from the middle of the last century to present. The institution is host to the Ceramic Biennial.

We continue onto **San Francisco Square**, one of the oldest in the historical quarter.

And later to **Plaza Vieja**, the only civic square of colonial times. Absent are churches and government buildings. Here we'll visit an important center for the visual arts.

Visit to the **Museum of Natural Sciences**.

We spend time in Rumba performance at **Callejón de Hammel**, an alley in which the façades of all the buildings display murals inspired by AfroCuban religions themes. We'll meet alley artist **Salvador Gonzales** and visit his studio.

Tonight we have a Cuban band playing for us! We learn how to perform and dance to Salsa, Son, Rumba and other popular Cuban rhythms from **Grupo Dulce María**.

DAY 3 – MONDAY – NATURE IN LAS TERRAZAS

Morning departure to **Las Terrazas**, in **Sierra del Rosario Mountains** where we'll start our morning tour in the rural town of **Rancho Curujey** for an explanation of the area.

From our mountain vantage point we can view village that lies above the shores of **San Juan Lake**.

We visit the rural school **Republica Oriental del Uruguay** for primary and secondary children and talk with teachers and students from the community.

We'll also visit the home studios of local artists and artisans.

Later we'll explore the ruins of a **French Coffee Plantation** built in 1801.

Continue to **La Moka**, an ecological hotel with trees growing up through its balconies and ceiling.

You can take a swim in the warm cascading waters of the San Juan River.

Trekking adventure to **Hotel Villa Soroa**, where we'll spend the night.

DAY 4 – TUESDAY – SOROA IN PINAR DEL RIO

Exploration of Soroa, a region in the Province of Pinar del Río famed for the diversity of its natural beauty, lush woods, waterfalls, rare orchids and ferns.

We'll visit the **Soroa Orchid Garden** housing a collection of over 600 different types, 200 of which are endemic to Cuba.

Hiking up to Soroa lookout point. Along the way we'll have good chances to observe unique and interesting species of flora and fauna.

Visit Soroa's waterfall for an opportunity to take a refreshing swim in the pool below the falls.

Free night in Villa Soroa.

DAY 5 – WEDNESDAY – PINAR DEL RIO

In the morning we will meet with students at the **Federico Engels High School** in Pinar del Rio. One of only fourteen of its kind in Cuba, this vocational boarding school recruits Cuba's brightest young minds. The students that attend show great promise in the fields of mathematics and science, but are encouraged to pursue a range of academic studies. Ninety-five percent of the graduates from these high schools go on to attend university.

Lunch in the high school cafeteria or at a local eatery.

After lunch we will participate in a friendly sports game, volunteer experience and cultural activities with our new friends.

After lunch we will continue to **Vinales**.

Check-in at **Los Jasmines Resort**.

DAY 6 – THURSDAY – HIKING THE MOGOTES

Trekking excursion to Vinales Valley and its **Sierra de Los Organos** area, containing the most spectacular scenery in Cuba and some of the most interesting and varied geological formations on the island. The valley is particularly famous for its great freestanding rock formations called mogotes.

Visit local agricultural cooperative called **Moncada** for a discussion and a chance to work with youth in the area.

After lunch we'll visit the **Cueva del Indio** believed to have been used by the local Guanahatabey Amerindians as a burial site and as refuge from the Spaniards. We'll take a short boat ride on a subterranean river flowing through the cave and its dramatic stalactites and stalagmites.

Visit to **Mural de la Prehistoria** a huge painting made in the side of a mogote.

Free time in the village of Viñales to explore at your leisure its open-air craft market, central Parque Marti, town Church, and other interesting sites of this charming colonial town.

Visit to Carmen and Caridad Miranda's botanical and herb garden, called the **Viñales Botanical Garden**. The two widows maintain a garden full of fruits, orchids and medicinal plants.

Evening free.

DAY 7 – FRIDAY – CAYO LEVISA AND VINALES VALLEY

Early morning departure to Palma Rubia Pier on the northern coast of Pinar del Río province for a boat ride to the tropical islet of **Cayo Levisa**.

You'll enjoy a day on the beach, snorkeling, a ride on a catamaran, and other low level water sports.

Seafood Lunch.

Late afternoon transfer to Vinales Valley to check in to the beautiful **Los Jasmines Resort**.

DAY 8 – SATURDAY – GOODBYE CUBA

Check out of hotel for transfer to Havana's José Martí International Airport.

SERVICES INCLUDED

- All breakfasts included and served from 7:00 am to 10:00 am daily.
- Some lunches and dinners as noted in this program's itinerary.
- Clean comfortable safe hotels. Two double beds, daily maid service. Showers and toilet en suite and many enjoyable amenities.
- Modern luxury air-conditioned coach and professional driver for all activities in the program.
- Group in and out airport transfers in Cuba.

