



Cuba

Beyond Havana

Presentation by Paul Pacter

www.PaulVisits.com

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Cuba

Background and History

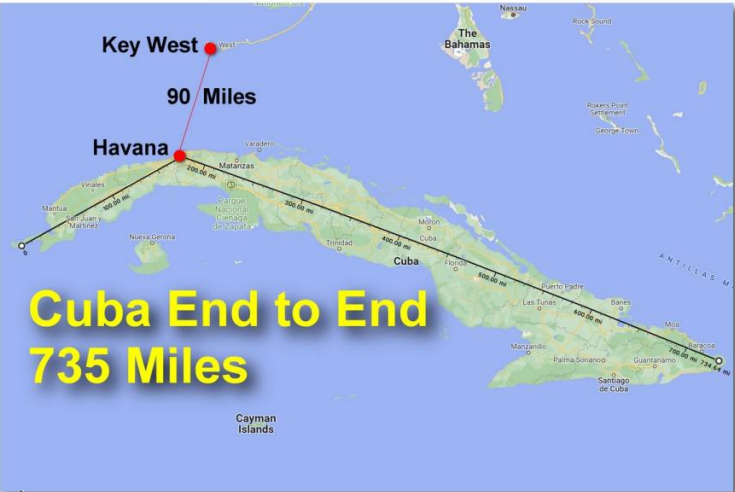


Naples

CUBA

Republica de Cuba

Largest and Westernmost Island in the Caribbean



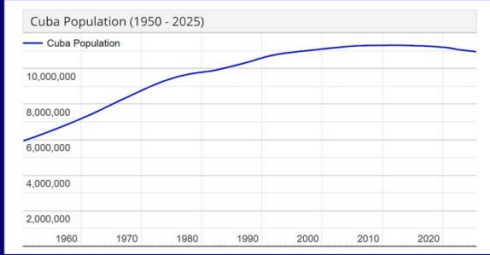
Key West

90 Miles

Havana

Cuba End to End 735 Miles

Cuba Population Sept 2025: 10,900,000



Cuba Population (1950 - 2025)

UN Data

Peak 2011: 11,300,000

Sept 2025: 10,900,000

Projection 2054: 9,100,000

UN World Population Prospects 2024
<https://population.un.org/wpp/>

Capital Havana *La Habana*

Havana pop: 2.4 million.

Havana Metro: 3.9 million.



Cuba land area: 41,097 sq. miles.

Slightly smaller than Pennsylvania.

Coastline: 2,321 miles.

Land Use in Cuba

Agriculture: 60%.

Forest: 27%.

Built-up Areas, Roadways, Other: 13%.

Climate: Tropical moderated by trade winds. Average temps:

January: High 80. Low 62.

July: High 90. Low 73.

Dry season: November to April.

Rainy season: May to October.

Time: UTC-5 (same US East Coast).

Daylight savings time: Yes.

Government: One-party communist state.

Head of State:
President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

Head of Gov't:
Prime Minister
Manuel Marrero Cruz.



Legislature

Unicameral: National Assembly of People's Power.

Seats: 474 (effective 2023).

Communist Party is the only party. Nominates candidates, who run unopposed.

Assembly elects President and Prime Minister. No public vote.

Citizenship

Citizenship by birth only:

Birth in Cuba or to Cuban parents living abroad.

Naturalization: Highly restricted.

Dual citizenship: No.

Cubans in USA

Est. 2 million. 60% in Florida.

Cuban-born: Around 57%.

Politics: Heavily Republican. Strongly anti-Communist.

Successful: In establishing businesses and developing political influence in US.

States with largest Cuban-American populations US Census Estimate 2021

United States Total	2,400,152
Florida	1,589,455
Texas	123,565
California	103,500
New Jersey	94,260
New York	83,771
Georgia	37,768
Nevada	36,041
North Carolina	33,258
Pennsylvania	26,316
Illinois	22,518



Mariposa
Cuba
National
Flower

Cuba Flag

Designed: 1849.

Adopted 1902.



Blue bands: Old divisions of island: Central, East, West.

White bands: Purity of independence.

Don't confuse the Cuba flag (adopted 1902)



with the Puerto Rico flag (adopted 1895). →



Ethnic Groups (2012 self-identification in census)

White: 64.1%.

Mulatto or mixed: 26.6%.

Black: 9.3%.

Voting: 16 years of age.

Official Language: Spanish.

Cuba Religions (2020 est.)

Christian: 59%.

Folk religion: 18%.

No Religion: 23%.

Christianity is mainly Roman Catholic modified by African folk customs.

Cuban Money

Cuban Peso:

CUP. Symbol \$.

Units: \$1, \$3, \$5,

\$10, \$20, \$50,

\$100, \$200, \$500

Some coins too.

Official Rate: Pegged with US dollar at 25 CUP = US\$1. **BUT...**



But market rate is very different!

Over 400 to US\$1 August 2025.

If you pay in US dollars cash in restaurants, hotels, stores, you will get close to this market rate.

US dollars cash accepted – preferred – by most merchants.

But NO credit cards. NO ATMs.

Cuba's Economy

State-run enterprises dominate.

72% of workers state employed.

Most others are self-employed.

Private property and foreign direct investment are allowed.

But economic activity is tightly controlled by the government.

Cuba Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Per capita nominal (NOT PPP):

\$7,156 (2020 est).

Per capita (PPP):

\$12,300 (2016 est).

Based on limited World Bank data.

Exports: \$2.6 bn (2017 est).

China 38%, Spain 11%,

Netherlands 5%, Germany 5%.

Imports: \$11.1 bn (2017 est).

Spain 19%, China 15%,

Italy 6%, Canada 5%, USA 5%,

Russia 5%, Brazil 5%.

Food rationing system since 1962.

Family ration books. Must buy certain low-price items at Bodegas.

Typical monthly rations per person:

5 eggs **6 lbs white rice**

1 liter cooking oil **20 oz beans**

1 lb spaghetti **2 bags coffee**

3 lb white sugar **Dinner rolls**

3 lb dark sugar **2 lbs chicken**

Problems: Availability. Long lines.

Power Blackouts

Starting 2022 rolling blackouts (mainly 6 hours, up to 12 hours) throughout Cuba, including Havana.

Electric grid collapsed totally Oct 18, 2024. Entire island blackout. But Cuba has had electric shortages long before.

Why?

- Insufficient capacity.
- Poor maintenance.
- Lack of fuel.
- Poor quality fuel (high sulfur) which damages electric plants.

After Jan, unprecedented anti-government protests throughout Cuba about electricity.



My Photo - Blackout, 2022

Havana - Oct 18, 2024

"Virtually all commerce in Havana ground to a halt. Many residents sat sweating on doorsteps. By nightfall, the city was almost completely enveloped in darkness."

<https://www.geo.tv/>

Cuba History – 1

1492 Navigator Christopher Columbus arrives. Claims Cuba for Spain.

1511 Spanish settlements.

1526 Importing slaves from Africa.

1762 British capture Cuba.

1763 Cuba returned to Spain.

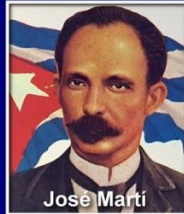


Cuba History – 2

1868-1878 Ten-Years War of Independence. Spain won. Promised reforms and autonomy – never happened.

1886 Slavery abolished.

1895-98 José Martí leads a second war of independence.



Cuba History – 3

1898 US Battleship Maine explodes in Havana harbor. US declares war on Spain.

1898 US defeats Spain. Spain cedes Cuba to the US.

1902 Cuba becomes independent. US ends military occupation.



Truth?

Cuba History – 4

1933 Government overthrown in coup led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. Batista led Cuba by dictatorship until overthrown by Fidel Castro in 1959.

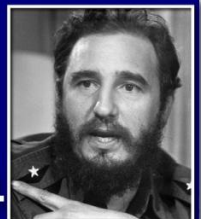
1953 Fidel Castro leads an unsuccessful revolt against the Batista regime.

Cuba History – 5

1956 Castro lands in Cuba. Leads guerilla war against government.

1958 US aid to Batista ends.

1959 Castro army takes Havana. Batista flees. Castro becomes prime minister; brother, Raul, becomes his deputy.



Cuba History – 6

1960 All US businesses in Cuba nationalised. No compensation.

1960 US trade embargo (except medicine and food). All business with Cuba prohibited. Continues to today.

1961 US breaks off all diplomatic relations with Havana.

Cuba History – 7

1961 US sponsors failed Bay of Pigs invasion by Cuban exiles.

1962 Cuban missile crisis.

1991 USSR collapses. Their aid to Cuba ends.

1993 Cuba introduces some market reforms to stem the deterioration of its economy.

Cuba History – 8

2008 Fidel retires. Raul takes over as president.



2008 Bans end on people owning mobile phones and computers.

2009 US President Barack Obama says he wants a new beginning with Cuba. Relaxes travel restrictions.

Cuba History – 9

2014-2016 Some US-Cuba trade and banking restrictions eased. Embassies reopened. Travel resumes. President Obama visits Cuba. Cuba allows small private businesses.

2016 Fidel Castro dies, age 90.

Cuba History - 10

2017-2020 President Trump overturns many Obama reforms. Declares Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism.

2021 Anti-government demonstrations protest lack of food, fuel, medicine and freedom.

Cuba History – 11



October 2022 US Customs and Border Protection reports that 224,607 unauthorized citizens of Cuba had been apprehended and/or expelled trying to enter the United States during fiscal year 2022 ending Sept 30, 2022.

Legal Travel to Cuba by Americans

Old “People to People” program ended 2019. Had required using government-owned tour companies, hotels, restaurants.

New “Support for Cuban People” program requires support for Cuban micro-entrepreneurs rather than government-run entities.

This means:

- Stay in casas particulares (private homes).
- Eat in paladares (small, private restaurants).
- Use private guides.
- Participate full-time (8h/day) in small cultural activities that directly benefit people.

Has Pres Trump tightened rules for Travel to Cuba? Yes, but...

- June 2025 presidential memorandum explicitly prohibits US citizens from traveling to Cuba for tourism (leisure).
- But limited humanitarian exceptions from before are still allowed.
- **Need careful documentation that you are going on a humanitarian project.**
- **Use US tour company. Not on your own.**

Best to use tour company. I used discovercorps.com.

Need Cuban visa.
Buy online. \$85+ship.



Book flight with visa number and state purpose of visit is “Support for Cuban People”.

Complete Traveler Info Form online.
Proof of medical insurance.

Non-stop flights to Havana from US:

- From Miami - AA and DL. **About**
- From Tampa - Southwest. **One Hour**

Vaccinations required? None.

US mobile phones: Won't work – maybe just text messages only.

Cannot use: ATMs or credit cards.

Can use: US\$ cash or Cuban Pesos.

Tips for guide/driver: US\$ cash best.

Flying into Havana from USA



José Martí International Airport International Terminal



East of Havana

First we will head east from Havana. Then back to Havana and go west.



Luis Miguel
Outstanding Guide!
Univ Grad English Lit.
Knowledgeable in
history, culture,
politics.
Honest. Candid.
Wants to emigrate to
Spain.
Mother in Miami.
Girlfriend in N.Y.



Our Wonderful Driver (Boris)
and His Car



We had two random police stops in
10 days. Examine Boris's papers.

Boris has 4 driver's licenses:

- License to drive a car.
- License to drive a taxi.
- License to drive tourists.
- License for vehicle with more than 2 rows of seats.

Also 2 insurance cards.

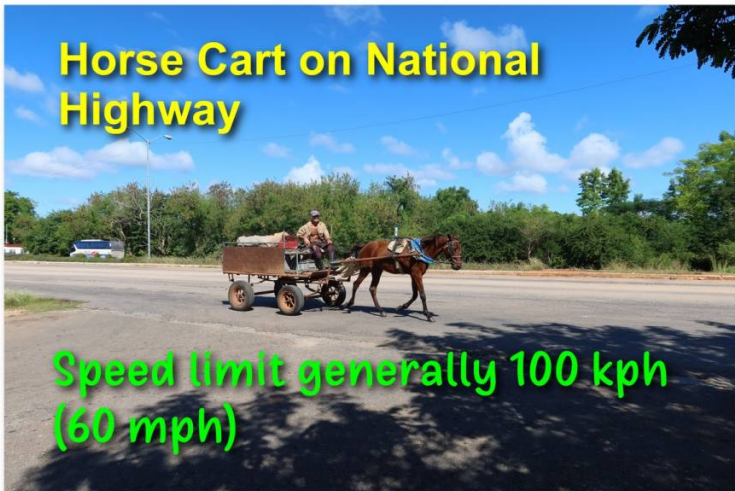
Paper, not electronic.

One National East-West Road
Used by Pony Carts, Ox Carts,
Bicycles, Pedestrians too.



Autopista A1 East of Havana
Autopista A4 West of Havana

Horse Cart on National
Highway



Speed limit generally 100 kph
(60 mph)

Most public toilets in Cuba have
an attendant. Should leave tip
20-50 CUP. Usually quite clean.



Rest Area on National Highway

Sections of National Highway can
be converted to runways if Cuba
is attacked.



Ciénaga de Zapata National Park
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve
Around 1,800 sq miles.
Largest protected area in Cuba
(and whole Caribbean).

Similar to the Florida
Everglades, with mangroves,
swamps, and marshes.

Ciénaga de Zapata National Park

- 900 species of plants.
- 171 species of birds.
- 31 species of reptiles.
- 1000 species of invertebrates.

Manatees, crocodiles, caimans.

Crocodile Sanctuary – more than 10,000 of them!

Ciénaga de Zapata National Park



Cuban crocodile (Cocodrilo) Endemic to Cuba.

Typicaly 7-8 feet, 150–200 lbs.
Can be 11 ft and weigh 500 lbs.
Highly aggressive.
Potentially dangerous to humans.



Cuban Crocs at Ciénaga de Zapata



Alligators and Crocodiles: Differences Big differences in:

- Physical appearance (snout, teeth).
- Location (US vs global).
- Quantity.
- Habitat.

Alligator

Crocodile



Alligator's Snout:
Rounded
U-Shaped

Alligator's Color:
Dark Grey

Crocodile's Snout:
Pointy
V-Shaped

Croc's Color:
Light Brownish Grey



Alligator Jaw Closed: Only Two Downward Teeth Protrude



Crocodile Jaw Closed: Many Teeth Protrude Both Upward and Downward



Locations ● **American Alligator**
○ **Caiman** ○ **Crocodile** ○ **Mix** Caiman + Crocs
○ **Gavialidae** ● **Chinese Alligator**



Playa Girón - Bay of Pigs

April 17, 1961

About 1,500 armed Cuban exiles invaded Cuba by sea to overthrow the new Cuban government of Fidel Castro.

Landed at Playa Girón.

Sponsored by US CIA.

72 hours of fighting in Cienaga de Zapata.

Invaders failed.

Cuba refers to them as mercenaries.

Has affected US relations with Cuba and Soviet Union ever since.



Cuba has placed a memorial to each Cuban soldier who died. Where the soldier died.



This is as far as the Bay of Pigs Invaders ("Mercenaries") Got!

Sign 20 miles inland from Playa Giron



Museo Playa Girón
Photos and relics of the
Bay of Pigs invasion.

Celebrates Cuba's success.
Details of weapons, tactics
etc.



Russian tank used by Cubans

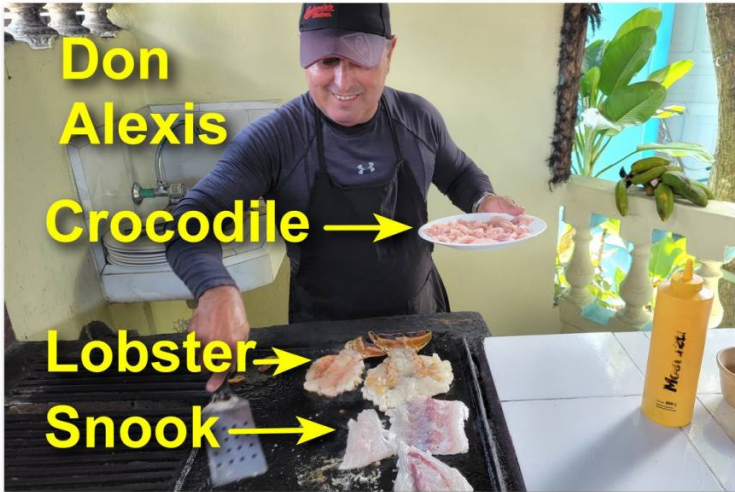


Victory for the People
and for Socialism



Our guide Luis Miguel
explained each exhibit

Signage in Spanish only

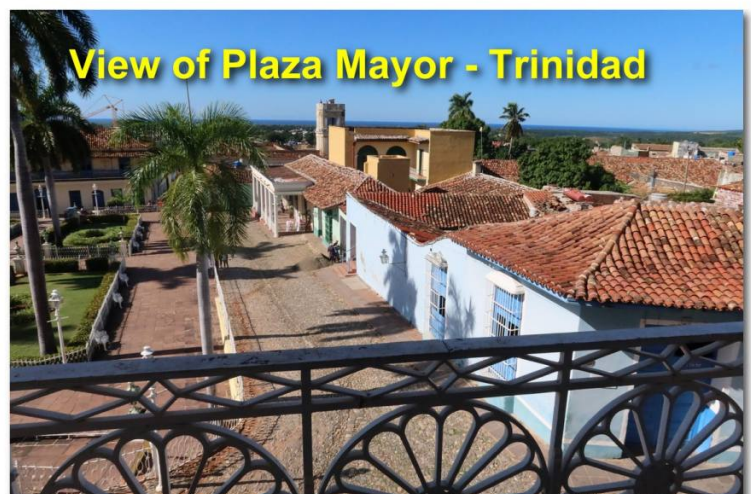


Cienfuegos
 160 mi southeast of Havana.
UNESCO Heritage Site.
 Settled by French immigrants
 starting 1819. *Sugar, Tobacco,*
Downtown: *Coffee*
 – 6 buildings from 1819–50.
 – 327 buildings from 1851–1900.



Trinidad
 200 miles S.E. of Havana.
 UNESCO World Heritage site.
 One of the most beautiful and authentic colonial cities in Cuba.
 Historical importance as a center of the sugar trade in the 18th and 19th centuries.

First settled by Spanish 1527.
 Prospered during the colonial era and for some time was Cuba's wealthiest city.
 50 historic mansions survive.
 Industries today include sugar refineries, dairies, sawmills, cigar and cigarette factories.





**Romantic Museum
Brunet Palace
1808**

**Romantic Museum
1808**

**Romantic period: 1Q of 19th c.
Palace of the Count of Brunet.
Still owned by the family today.
14 rooms of 19th century
decorative art works:
silverware, furniture, china, etc.**



**Romantic Museum
(Brunet Palace)**



**Palacio Cantero
1828
Museo Municipal de Historia.
Trinidad History Museum.**



**Trinidad Municipal Assembly
City Hall
1914**



**St Francis of Paola Church
Iglesia San Francisco de Paula
Plaza Carillo
Trinidad**



**St Francis de Paola Church
Trinidad**



**Trinidad
Historic Theatre
1936**

**Trinidad
Minibus
Taxi rutero**



Horse Cart Taxi



Water in Cuba: Univ of Miami Study
"Water scarcity affects Cuban citizens almost daily."
Corroded pipes contaminate water.
Running water a few hours a day.
Low pressure.
Trash gets into water system.
Many businesses and residents pay for delivered water.

Water Delivery Is Common



Water Delivery Is Common



Trinidad Elementary School



Privately-owned Shop



Government-operated Bodega
Need food ration coupons.
Inventory is spotty.





Because of nightly power blackouts, they put us up in a hotel, not a B&B

Power Blackouts

Starting 2022 rolling blackouts (mainly 6 hours, up to 12 hours) throughout Cuba, including Havana.

Electric grid collapsed totally

Oct 18, 2024. Entire island blackout.

But Cuba has had electric shortages long before.

Why?

- Insufficient capacity.
- Poor maintenance.
- Lack of fuel.
- Poor quality fuel (high sulfur) which damages electric plants.

After Jan, unprecedented anti-government protests throughout Cuba about electricity.



Blackout just as we were reading menus at this lovely restaurant in Trinidad. Result was only a handful of items could be prepared.

Hotels and restaurants have small generators. Generally cannot handle air con or electric appliances.



Trinidad - Cuban Sandwich

Ham, roast pork, swiss cheese, pickles, mustard. Sometimes salami. No lettuce, tomato, or mayo. Toasted and pressed.



Trinidad - Tres Leches Cake

Tres Leches: Whole milk, condensed milk, and evaporated milk. Topped with whipped cream.



Trinidad - Family-run Pottery Studio

Santería

African diasporic religion.

Developed in Cuba late 19th c.

Mix of traditional Yoruba West African religion, Roman Catholic, and Spiritism.

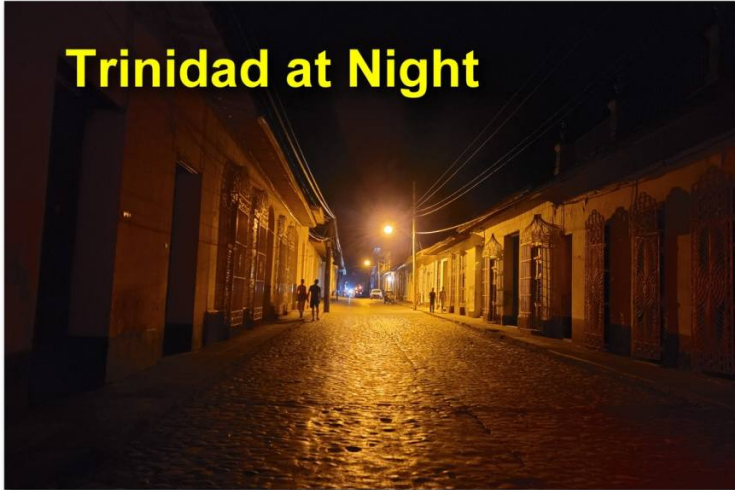
No central controlling authority.

Templo Yemaya Santería temple Trinidad



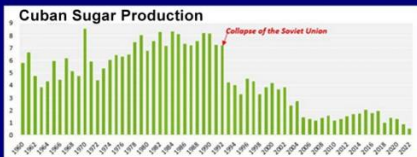
Yemaya Temple, Trinidad

Trinidad at Night



Cuba's sugar cane industry
Cuban economy relied heavily on sugar exports for 150 years.
From 19th c to 1960s, Cuba was world's largest sugar producer.
Then Soviet Union, Brazil, and India increased their own production, reducing demand for Cuban sugar.
And US purchases of Cuban sugar ended after 1959 Revolution.

After Castro, 2/3rds of Cuban sugar exported to Soviet Union. End with 1991 Soviet collapse.



<https://www.czapp.com/analyst-insights/ask-the-analyst-why-has-cubas-sugar-industry-declined/>

- Around 6 to 8 million tons a year 1960-1990.
- Dramatic decline after 1991 Soviet collapse.
- Now tanking: No diesel, herbicides, market.
 - 2022 400,000 tons.
 - 2024 150,000 tons.
 - 2023 295,000 tons.

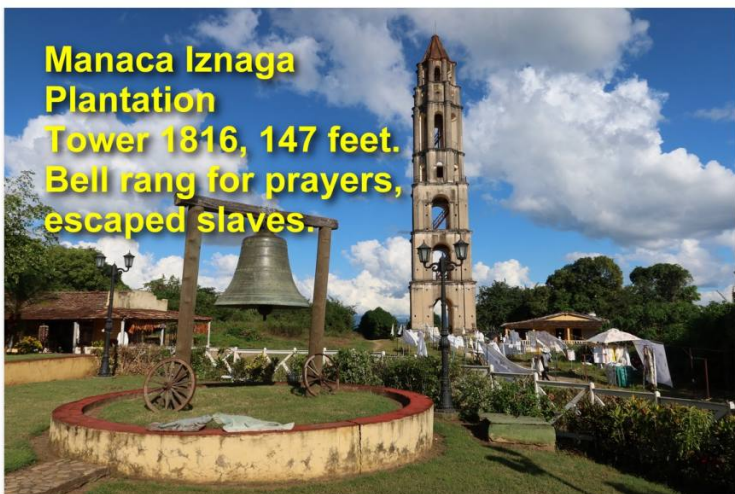
Valle de los Ingenios Valley of the Sugar Mills North of Trinidad

Center of Cuba's sugar industry 19th c.

- Over 70 sugar cane mills.
- 30,000 slaves working in the mills.
- Most mills in ruins today.

Two – including Manaca Iznaga – remain as tourist attractions.
UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Manaca Iznaga Plantation Tower 1816, 147 feet. Bell rang for prayers, escaped slaves.



Manaca Iznaga Plantation



Sugar Cane



**Valle de los Ingenios
Valley of the Sugar Mills**

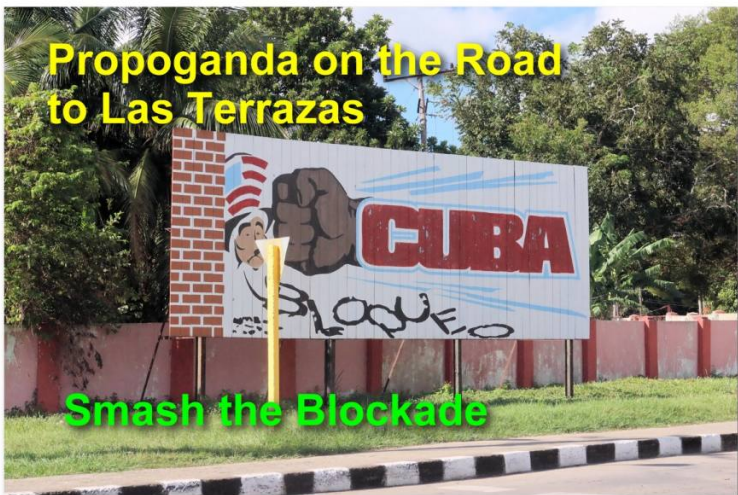


West of Havana

**Driving from Trinidad West
past Havana to Las Terrazas**



**Propoganda on the Road
to Las Terrazas**



Garlic Stand Along the Road



Onion Stand



**Las Terrazas Commune
Rural sustainable development
community.**

**Lush hills, exotic birds, fishing
lakes.**

**Area was 44 former coffee
plantations whose land was
ruined by overcultivation.**



Las Terrazas



Nature Hike Guide



**Tocororo
Cuba's
national
bird**

English: Trogon.



Las Terrazas - Palm Seeds



**Las Terrazas
Home of
Polo Montañez,
Cuban singer
and songwriter.**



Las Terrazas Commune Band

Father Daughter



Las Terrazas Artist's Studio



Las Terrazas Commune Bakery

**Throughout Cuba:
No toilet
seats on
public toilets
(and no T.P. either)**



Las Terrazas Lunch



**Crackers with Mayonnaise
Galletas con Mayonesa
Vegetable Soup
Ajiaco Cubano
Cassava - Manioc
Mandioca**

Las Terrazas Lunch



Yellow Rice Arroz Amarillo

Chicken Breast Pechuga de Pollo



Pork Ribs Costillas de Cerdo



Arroz con Leche Rice Pudding



**View from Our Las Terrazas
Lunch Table - Zip Line**

**Emerald
Humming-
bird**

Bee Hummingbird

**World's smallest bird
(about 2 inches)**

**Weigh 0.09 oz (F) and
0.07 oz (M).**

**Cuban Native
Birds**



www.cubabirds.org/birds-of-cuba/

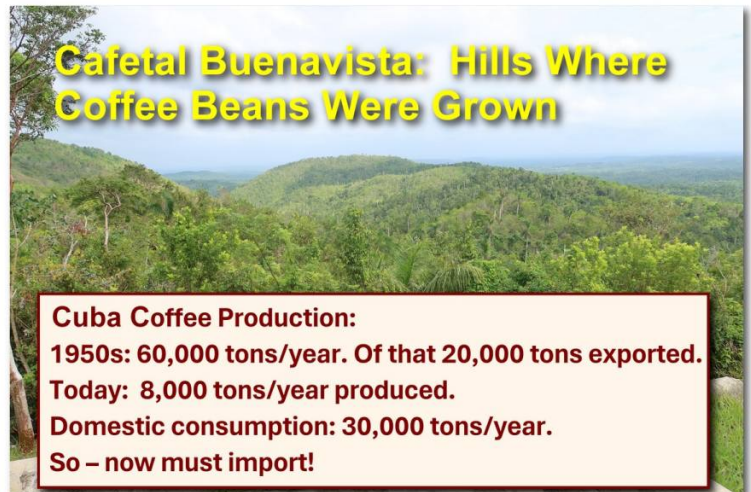
**Coffee has been grown in Cuba since
mid-18th century.
Boosted by French farmers fleeing the
revolution in Haiti 1791-1804.
1940s: Cuba was world's leading
exporter of coffee.
1960: Production peaked 60,000 tons.
But revolution nationalized farms, which
devastated the coffee industry.
Most plantations closed.
Still some production in eastern Cuba.**

**Former French coffee Plantation
Cafetal Buenavista West of Las
Terrazas.**

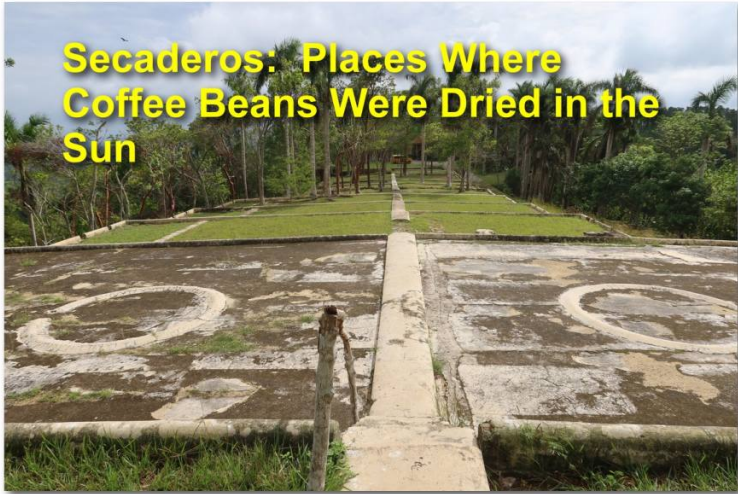


Now a tourist attraction.

**Cafetal Buenavista: Hills Where
Coffee Beans Were Grown**



Cuba Coffee Production:
1950s: 60,000 tons/year. Of that 20,000 tons exported.
Today: 8,000 tons/year produced.
Domestic consumption: 30,000 tons/year.
So – now must import!



Secaderos: Places Where Coffee Beans Were Dried in the Sun

Soroa
 "Support for Cuban People" visa program includes visiting (and staying at) farms. Farm meals are home-grown products. I stayed at a farm in Soroa – tiny rural farming town. Natural beauty. Waterfalls. Hiking. Of course, just as dinner was served, a blackout began. Lasted all night. Dinner was great anyway.
Plus I had a wonderful encounter...

I had the whole afternoon free. I went hiking (on roads) in the area. After a while I sat at a small concrete bus shelter. A group of local kids came over. I ended up spending 2.5 hours with them using my terrible Spanish. A rainstorm brought some adults into the bus shelter as well.



**Soroa, Province of Artemisa
 Sierra del Rosario Mountains**



Soroa

People were very friendly



Some of the kids at the Bus Shelter



Alejandro (center), His Sister, and a Friend



None had a computer, cell phone (though they knew how to use one), internet at home, or an email address. We looked at at least 100 photos on my phone.

Soróa



This symbol means Casa Particular (B&B). Tourist can rent a room for cash.



This is where I stayed



Small family farm with veggies, pigs, chickens

Soróa Vivo Hostel - Breakfast



Scrambled Eggs (Huevos Revueltos)
Fruit (Piña, Guayaba, Naranja)
Bread (Pan)

Soróa Vivo Hostel - Dinner



Pea Soup (Sopa de Chicharroa)



Salad Ensalada



Chicken, Taro (Pollo con Malanga)



Rice (Arroz Blanco)

Soróa Orchid Botanical Garden

Flowers, trees, ferns.

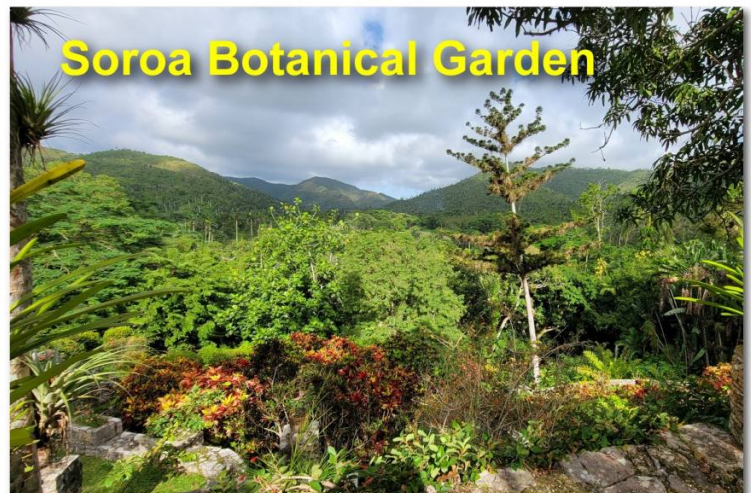
7.5 hilly acres.

Begun in 1943.

Home to over 20,000 plants and 700 species, including 250 species that are native to Cuba.

Also a botanic research center.

Soróa Botanical Garden



Guide Madeleina and Boom-Boom Tree



Hollow and sounds like a drum.

In Pinar del Rio province, Ian damaged 63,000 homes, thousands of which were destroyed.

16 inches of rain. Mudslides. Flash floods. Farm fields inundated by floodwater. Roofs blown away. Piled onto the hardship of people who had already been suffering through scarcity and shortages in recent years.

Driving from Soroa to Viñales



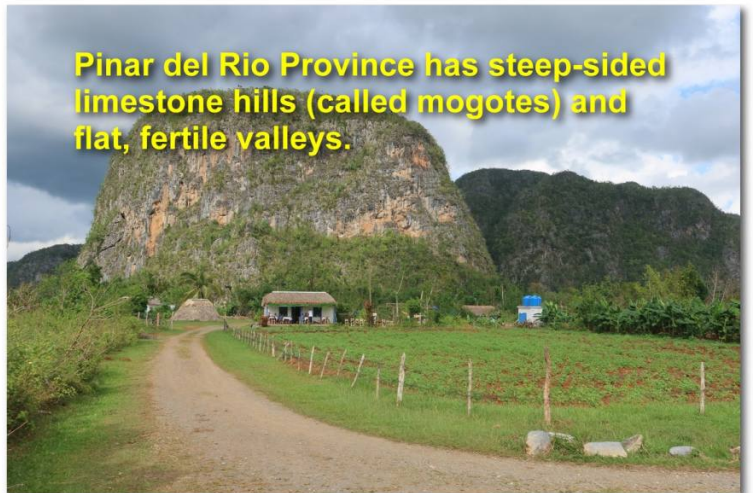
Driving from Soroa to Viñales



Driving from Soroa to Viñales



Pinar del Rio Province has steep-sided limestone hills (called mogotes) and flat, fertile valleys.



**Driving from Soroa to Viñales
Taro Farm**



**Horses and Oxen
In Use Everywhere**





Tree uprooted by Hurricane Ian



Tobacco drying barn destroyed by Ian



Barn destroyed by Ian



School (?) destroyed by Hurricane Ian



Thanks for a shirt that our driver gave to a child

Viñales Valley – UNESCO
Karst landscape circled by mountains and dome-like limestone outcrops (mogotes) up to 1,000 ft.
Fertile soil. Climate conducive to raising livestock and cultivating fodder and food crops.
Traditional methods of agriculture are used. Fertilizers and pesticides are not used.



Lunch Overlooking Viñales Valley



Viñales Valley



Pinar del Rio is the heart of Cuba's tobacco industry. \$500 million in exports.

Employs thousands.

Ian flattened nearly all of its tobacco drying barns and crops .



What I had hoped to see, but didn't.



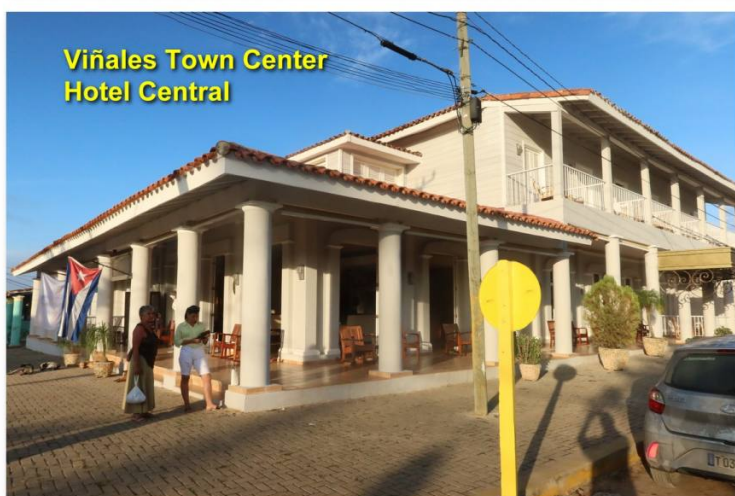
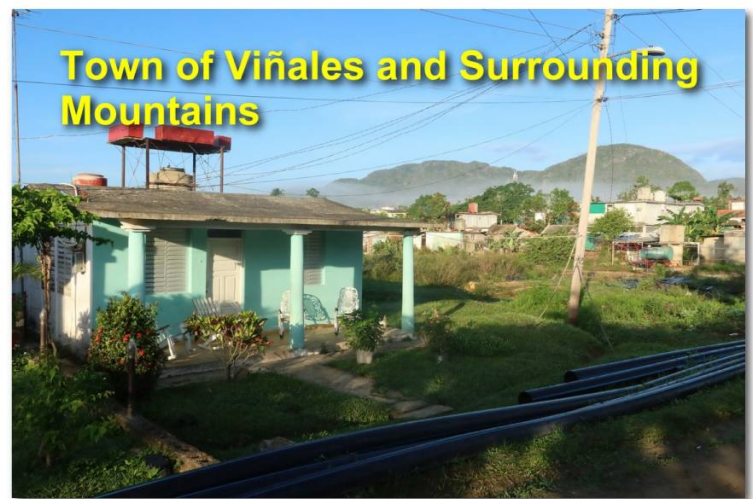
Town of Viñales

Mostly one-story wooden houses with porches.

Surrounded by low mountains.

Town and Valley became UNESCO World Heritage in 1999 for the karst landscape, traditional agriculture, as vernacular architecture, crafts, and music.





Classic Cars Not Just In Havana



1930s Chevrolet

Dodge



Airport Departure Area



THE END



I hope you enjoyed visiting
Cuba Beyond Havana
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www.paulvisits.com
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