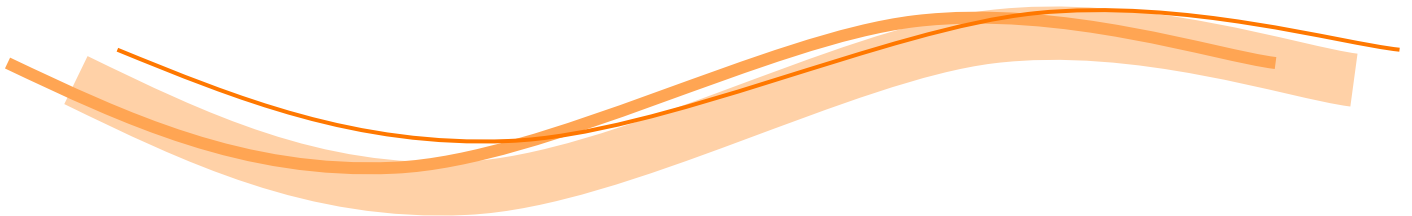




CUBA & TRANSAT





CUBA	<p>Cuba is the largest and most colourful island in the Caribbean. Known for its endless tropical white sand beaches, Cuba offers first class all-inclusive resorts, a vibrant culture, natural treasures ...and a warm and friendly people. It's welcoming for families, perfect for weddings and honeymoons, and is widely regarded as a safe destination for travelers.</p> <p>You can do as much or as little as you want in Cuba. But beyond the beach there is so much more for all ages and interests! Take to the water for a snorkelling or catamaran tour – or enjoy an unforgettable swim with the dolphins. Get out and about by boat or go on an adventure through the countryside on a Jeep safari. Travel in one of Cuba's famous vintage cars, or on a steam train from the last century! Meet the Cuban people as you tour a cigar factory - or visit a nightclub for a show and to enjoy the ever present Cuban music.</p> <p>Cuba has some of the best preserved colonial architecture in the Northern hemisphere. It boasts 5 cities that are UNESCO World heritage sites and its capital city, Havana, has also been named one of the New7Wonders cities of 2015. Romantic, resilient and revolutionary – Havana is brimming with life, music and nightlife, such as the famous “Tropicana” show. You can also retrace the steps of author Ernest Hemmingway as you find out all that Havana has to offer.</p> <p>Founded in 1514 and dubbed “the jewel of the Spanish colonies”, Havana is a UNESCO world Heritage Site thanks to its fabulous architecture, rich history, fascinating culture and energetic people.</p> <p>25% of the entire of Cuba is under environmental protection and its stunning nature includes no less than 6 UNESCO recognized Biospheres. If you are looking for R&R in a quiet and unspoiled location - then head to the “Cayos” of Cuba. These are small keys, often connected to the north of the island by causeways, and famous for their large population of beautiful pink flamingos.</p> <p>With so much to see and do, and with so many diverse resort destinations – one trip to Cuba cannot possibly be enough! Choose the nature lover's paradise of Cayo Santa Maria; popular and lively Varadero; the soft white sands of Cayo Coco, Cayo Coco and Cayo Largo; or beautiful Holguin. And then be sure to return again to sample more “authentic Cuba”.</p>
Location	<p>Cuba is the largest Caribbean island, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. It lies 145 km south of Key West, Florida, between the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas, to the west of Haiti, and northwest of Jamaica.</p>

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	<p>Formed by over 4,000 keys, islets and islands, Cuba covers 110,922 square kilometers of terrain, encompassing luxuriant vegetation with a huge variety of flora and fauna, virgin islands, grottoes, caves, mountains, forests and over 280 beaches.</p> <p>Havana, the capital, was declared a World Heritage City by UNESCO in 1982 in recognition of its concentration of historic buildings.</p>
Geography	<p>The island is 111,000 square km, with 4,200 coral cays and isles. It is 1,250 km long, 30 to 100 km wide, and has 7,000 km coastline.</p> <p>Pico Turquino is the highest mountain at 1974 meters.</p>
Name	<p>Columbus named it Juana, the first of several names he successively applied to the island. It eventually became known as Cuba, from its aboriginal name, Cubanascnan.</p>
Population	<p>Nationally 11.2 million, with Havana having more than 2 million</p>
Language	<p>Spanish; English is widely spoken in the resorts.</p>
Currency	<p>There are two currencies circulating in Cuba, Cuban Pesos (CUP) and Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC).</p> <p>One Canadian Dollar = 18 CUP or Cuban Pesos (Feb 2016)</p> <p>One Canadian Dollar = 0.69 CUC or Cuban Convertible Pesos (Feb 2016)</p> <p>CUC is the currency most tourists will use in Cuba. It is how you will pay for hotels, official taxis, entry into museums, meals at restaurants, cigars, rum, etc. Conversion into CUC can be done at exchange houses (casa de cambio, or cadeca). These are located in many hotels and in other places throughout the cities.</p> <p>CUP are also known as local Pesos and Moneda Nacional (National money). There is a limited range of goods that can be bought for local pesos, and these are transactions carried out in agricultural markets or from street vendors. Fruits, vegetables, fresh juices and snacks from street vendors are among the things CUP can buy. Because the products that can be purchased with CUP are limited, it is not a good idea to change more than CUC 5-10 into CUP at a time, as the CUP will last for a good while.</p>
Tipping	<p>American dollar notes are always appreciated if you receive good service and it's a good idea to bring a stash of one dollar notes with you.</p>
Government	<p>Socialist republic, but Fidel Castro has created his own brand of more pragmatic Socialism which is now led by his brother Raúl Castro</p>
Documentation	<p>Passport and tourist card (included in package tours)</p> <p>Departure tax is 25 CUCs</p> <p>Cuba requires all travelers to have valid Travel Health Insurance. Those who do not have proof of insurance coverage may be required to obtain health insurance from a Cuban insurance company when they arrive.</p>
Time zone	<p>Eastern Standard Time</p>

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Health	Cuba's health and education facilities are more accessible to the average citizen than those of many richer countries, including the U.S. Life expectancy is 76 years and literacy is 96%.
Safety tips	Cuba is generally a very safe country; strict and prominent policing, combined with neighborhood watch style-programs keep the streets safe from violent crime. Nonetheless, a certain degree of common-sense and caution is advisable, especially in major cities. In my personal opinion and experience, Cuba is one of the safest destinations in the Caribbean today.

CLIMATE	
General climate	The wet season is May to Oct; temperatures average 26 degrees in Jan and temperatures are sub-tropical year-round.
Today's weather	25 degrees Centigrade and sunny in Havana (20 Feb 2016)
Best time to visit	November to April

GETTING THERE	
Flying time	3.5 to 4 hours from Montreal and Toronto on direct charter flights with all the major Canadian tour operators.
Cities	<p>Havana: One of the most unique and memorable cities anywhere in the world with 2.5 million people, faded glory, 1950's cars, swinging nightlife; "a rhythm all of its own: halfway between the easy tempo of a sleepy tropical resort and the feverish pace of a metropolis"</p> <p>Founded 1514: "the jewel of the Spanish colonies";</p> <p>UNESCO world Heritage Site;</p> <p>1898-1902 ruled by US;</p> <p>Old Havana is a walkers' paradise and here are just some of the treasures awaiting you:</p> <p>Cathedral de la Havana with its stunning baroque façade</p> <p>Plaza de la Cathedral - perhaps the most beautiful square in the Caribbean which is surrounded by examples of the finest baroque architecture in the country</p> <p>Castillo de la Real Fuerza – the oldest colonial fortress in the Americas</p> <p>Museo de la Ciudad – former Palace of the Captains General</p> <p>The Malecon – Havana's seawall and meeting place</p> <p>Echoes of Hemmingway – go to the El Floridita bar, which is 180 years old and the birthplace of daiquiris. Have a 'papa especial': double 3 year rum, lemon, crushed ice</p> <p>And no less than 247 museums!</p> <p>Other stunning UNESCO cities are Trinidad, Cienfuegos, Santiago de Cuba and Camagüey and Transat offers excursions to give you the chance to explore these historic and cultural treasures.</p> <p>Varadero: Varadero is Cuba's most popular beach destination for fun in</p>

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the sun, thanks to its warm waters and superb resorts. Varadero is part of a narrow peninsula that stretches far out into the calm waters of the Atlantic, and this location ensures that it is constantly cooled by tropical breezes. The 21-kilometre strip of fine white sand is an ideal vacation spot for sun-lovers, water babies and golfers. Plus lively Varadero is one of the best cities in Cuba for nightclubs. Well used to catering to tourists, Varadero's nightlife offers a wide variety of music and atmospheres.

Of all the destinations on Cuba's northern coast, Varadero is closest to the unique and fascinating city of Havana – so choose this resort if you want to visit Cuba's capital city. Some vacation companies also offer “duos” where you can split your vacation, for instance 4 nights in Varadero and 3 nights in Havana.

History: Siboney Indians, Cubanacan nation, Cueva de San Ambrosio: 50 drawings at tip of peninsula, only discovered in 1961;

1928: Mansion Xanadu – Cary Grant, Ava Gardner;

Museo Municipal – Varadero history with English captions;

Establecimiento Tabaquero – cigar factory, 20 tobacco craftsmen;

Parque Josone – flamingos, macaws and rowboats; ;

Horse-riding – Casa del Valle, Valle Yumuri near Matanzas;

Cardenas – 15km from Varadero, architectural jewel, Museo Oscar

Maria de Rojas – eclectic: shrunken heads and snails;

Shopping: cigars, ceramics, art;

Cuevas de Bellamar – discovered in 1861, 45 mins, La Fuente del Amor

Sailing ship to Cayo Blanco from Marina Chapelin \$65 seafood lunch, snorkeling

Santa Clara: Santa Clara is a pretty city set amid green hills. The capital of the province of Villa Clara; it was founded in 1689 as San Juan de los Remedios.

Overlooking the Parque Leoncio Vidal, the Museo de Artes Decorativas occupies a magnificent colonial house built around 1740. Transformed over the centuries, it was restored in 1820 and again in 1980. The museum has some extraordinary items, including an armoire built entirely without nails and a washbasin from the days when there was no running water.

The memory of Che Guevara permeates the town of Santa Clara.

Located a little over 2 kilometres west of Parque Leoncio Vidal, the Plaza de la Revolución is dedicated to the famous Argentine guerrilla who fought fiercely alongside Fidel Castro to overthrow Batista in the late 1950s. A gigantic statue of Che Guevara dominates this plaza, the site of major political and cultural rallies in Santa Clara. Built in 1988 to commemorate the Guevara-led Battle of Santa Clara, this 7-metre high bronze sculpture is the work of Cuban artist Delana; the gigantic stone

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pedestal upon which it rests is more than 10 metres high. Below this monument, anyone interested in this almost mythical Argentine revolutionary will not want to miss the Museo Memorial Nacional Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara. Inaugurated on December 28, 1988, it traces Che's life from his childhood up to his death, including his trips through Latin America, his stay in Mexico during which he met an exiled Fidel Castro, the landing of the Granma on the coast of Cuba, and his revolutionary experience in the Sierra Maestra. The museum is well documented, and displays a number of Che's personal items, including his uniforms, hand-written letters as well as many photos.

The door that faces the entrance to the museum leads to the **Mausoleo del Che**, where lie the remains of Che and the 13 Cubans who were killed with him in Bolivia. An eternal flame shines in this solemn and touching shrine.

Following Che Guevara's footsteps in Santa Clara also requires a visit to the **Monumento del Descarrilamiento**, Acción y Toma del Tren Blindado, which recounts the decisive battle led by Che Guevara against an armoured train carrying Batista's forces on December 28, 1958. Four of the train's 22 cars can be viewed at the monument.

The Museo de Artes Decorativas also offers classical music concerts. The museum is recognized as Santa Clara's most important centre for classical music.

The Casa de la Cultura Juan Marinero is Santa Clara's community cultural centre. At the entrance, a small art gallery exhibits works by contemporary artists from the region. This beautiful house, built in 1927, is the site of many cultural activities. Shows and concerts are held here regularly.

Shopping is a rare diversion in this region of the country, but you can still head to Calle Independencia, open only to pedestrians starting at Calle Maceo. Most of the shops are intended for local residents, including Santa Clara's biggest bookshop.

Santiago de Cuba:
One of the most interesting and historically significant places in Cuba is Santiago de Cuba. Founded by Spanish conquistador Diego Velazquez de Cuellar in 1514, Santiago was the capital of the Spanish colony of Cuba from 1522 until 1589. Today, Santiago remains the most important urban area outside of Havana, and is home to the birth of most forms of Cuba's long-lasting and globally renowned music. Visitors from around the world come to enjoy the music originating in Santiago. Of more political importance, Santiago is known for being the Cradle of the Revolution.

It was here, in 1953, Fidel Castro led an ill-prepared attack on Batistas

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	<p>Barracks at Moncada. And finally, a few years later after successfully toppling Batista and his dictatorship, Castro gave his victory speech in Parque Cespedes in Santiago.</p> <p>The region is well known for many other things. There are the ruins of French coffee plantations to the east of the city in the mountains that are recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage site. The famed Cuban cigar has deep-rooted tradition in Santiago, as does the production of rum. Both a cigar factory and rum distillery can be found in Santiago.</p> <p>This region has the largest concentration of Afro-Cubans and is the center for Afro-Cuban culture. No doubt this has influenced the proliferation of music from the area over the centuries. Several music venues are to be found here, showcasing the diverse range and forms of Cuban music. There is even an outlet of the Tropicana night club.</p>
Distances	<p>Varadero to Havana: 144 km</p> <p>Santa Clara to Havana: 270 km</p>
Buses	<p>There are 30,000km of paved road. Probably the nicest way to get around Cuba is on the Víazul buses. These are well-staffed and luxurious air-conditioned buses with toilets, big comfy seats, and lots of leg room. Refreshments are provided. Víazul buses are mostly used by foreigners and rich locals. You'll need to book your ticket a day before departure to secure your seat; you may not get a ticket if you just show up right before departure.</p>
Trains	<p>Standard gauge: 4,226 km of which 140 km is electrified</p>
Car Rental, Taxis	<p>Car rental starts from CUC 70 per day (including insurance) plus the cost of a full tank of gasoline. The refundable deposits start around CUC 200. Rental cars are for the most part fairly new, imported European or Asian models.</p> <p>Collective taxis often use pre-1959 US cars.</p>
Regions	<p>Central Cuba is an area rich in both historical and natural attractions. It is home to several wonderful colonial-era cities, as well as isolated and pristine beaches. Heading east from Matanzas into Cuba's central heartland you first hit Villa Clara province, which is devoted largely to sugar cane, citrus, and tobacco farming and cattle ranching. The provincial capital, Santa Clara, a lively university town, is often called "Che Guevara's City" and features an impressive monument and plaza dedicated to the fallen revolutionary. To the north of Santa Clara lie the tiny and well-preserved colonial-era city of Remedios, and the jaw-droppingly beautiful beach resort destination of la Cayería del Norte.</p> <p>Abutting Villa Clara to the south is Cienfuegos province. The city of Cienfuegos is affectionately known as La Perla del Sur (The Southern Pearl). Cienfuegos is a busy port city with a pretty, colonial-era center and the country's second-longest seaside promenade, or Malecón.</p>

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	<p>Cienfuegos is connected to Trinidad by a pretty coastal highway, and is definitely worth a visit on a loop trip around the region.</p> <p>The province of Sancti Spíritus is the only one in Cuba to count two of the original seven villas (towns) in Cuba among its offerings. The colonial gem Trinidad, tucked in the southwest corner of the province, is the highlight of a visit to the central section of the country, or all of Cuba for that matter. The provincial capital, Sancti Spíritus, isn't a great deal larger than Trinidad, and though it is more ramshackle and rough around the edges, lacking Trinidad's remarkable collection of perfectly preserved architecture, it is still worth a visit to see its couple of colonial highlights.</p> <p>Cuba's Northeast Coast: The extraordinary, powdery beaches of Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo, the cays that lie off the mainland and jut into the deep blue of the Atlantic Ocean, are the primary attractions of Ciego de Avila province. It is a remote area, but one with the infrastructure and natural gifts that make it perfect for idyllic sun, sand, and sea holidays. The namesake provincial capital Ciego de Avila and other towns and cities in this province hold few attractions for visitors. A little farther east, predominantly flat low-lying Camagüey province, southeast of Ciego de Avila, is the largest in the country, though it is also the least densely populated. It occupies the widest swath on the island, 120km from the Atlantic coast to the Caribbean coast. Camagüey, the provincial capital, is Cuba's third-largest city, after Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and is a relatively undiscovered colonial gem of a city that is worth exploring.</p> <p>El Oriente: Prior to the 1959 Revolution, the eastern half of Cuba was a single province, straightforwardly called "El Oriente," or the East. Most Cubans still refer to everything east of Camagüey - a region much more scenically and historically interesting than most of central Cuba - as El Oriente, even though it is now composed of the distinct provinces of Holguín, Granma, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo. The region is less known and visited than the west, but every bit as rewarding for travelers (and perhaps more so). The farther east you go, the more emphatically Caribbean it feels. The region's remarkable landscapes include the north coast's exuberant banana and coconut groves, densely wooded peaks of the Sierra Maestra, and tropical rainforest on the east coast.</p>
ACCOMMODATION TYPES	<p>Everything from five star international resorts to the B&B equivalent in Cuba called casas particulares. In general, the rooms and homes are kept very clean, while the furnishings and amenities are quite simple. The rates average between \$20 and \$30 per person, and meals are</p>

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often available at very reasonable prices.

TARGET GROUPS	
Kids	<p>If you've got kids in Varadero, you might want to head to the Parque de Diversiones, a small amusement park in Varadero that has the types of rides and booths you might find at a county fair.</p> <p>Near the Marina Chapelín, on the ocean side of the road, you'll find the Delfinario. Open daily from 8am to 5pm, this attraction offers a 40-minute show by trained dolphins about four times daily.</p>
Teens	<p>If all the activities at the resorts in Varadero are not enough, there is a large swath of the eastern end of the Varadero peninsula is protected as the Parque Ecológico Varahicacos. There are some gentle paths through the scrub forests here, and you can visit a series of small caves, some of which contain ancient indigenous pictographs.</p> <p>If your family is adventurous, try the Jungle Tour, which is a fast and furious trip through the mangroves aboard sit-on-top motorized watercraft.</p> <p>Sign up for a day-cruise on one of the many sailboats operating out of Varadero. These cruises head out to nearby cays, and include some snorkeling time, as well as lunch either on the boat or on some private little island beach.</p>
Romance	Old Havana has to be one of the most romantic cities on earth...
Honeymoons & Weddings	<p>Your travel agent and Cuban wedding planners can help you design a perfect day. Here are a few pointers to help you get started.</p> <p>1- If you have never been married before, all you need is a passport that is valid throughout your stay in Cuba, and a tourist card (available from a travel agent, airline or the Cuban consulate).</p> <p>2- If either the bride or groom has been married before, the previously married person must, in addition to the valid passport and tourist card, also produce the following documents: if divorced: his/her birth certificate and Certificate of Divorce; if widowed: his/her birth certificate, Certificate of Marriage and Certificate of Spouse's Death.</p> <p>Have your birth certificate and any divorce/marriage/death documents translated into Spanish and certified by a notary public and legalized by the Cuban consul in Canada (service fee applies).</p> <p>3- In addition, you need to: Create a sheet that lists your names, home address, occupations, level of education, nationality and the full names of your parents, living or deceased. Attach the photo page of your passport to this sheet. Fax copies of all documentation in both English and Spanish to your hotel in Cuba at least three weeks before your arrival there. Bring all your original documents with you.</p> <p>Your marriage will be formalized in the name stated on your passport.</p>

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	<p>Your passport must therefore be correct, and the name on your passport must match that on all your other documents.</p> <p>After your wedding, your Marriage Certificate will be prepared as quickly as possible and either given to you before you leave (time permitting) or couriered at the hotel's expense to the home address on your documents. Your marriage is legalized by the Canadian Embassy in Havana and the Cuban Foreign Affairs department.</p>
Zoomers	<p>The old colonial city of Trinidad is a perfect day excursion from many of the island resorts.</p> <p>The nicest spot to visit in "downtown" Varadero is the Parque Josone, a beautifully maintained little city park with cool shady grounds and gardens. There are paths winding around and over little lakes with fountains, several restaurants and food stands, and the park is dotted with gazebos and park benches.</p>

UNIQUES	<p>Fábrica de Tabaco Partagas, Havana: Founded in 1845, this is Cuba's largest and perhaps most renowned cigar factory, producing around 5 million cigars a year.</p>
Surprising	<p>Santeria is a folk religion of African deities combined with Catholic saints; Cubans are open about it and happy to tell you more.</p> <p>Guantanamo Bay: the US forced Cuba to accept a US lease in 1903 which can be ended only by abandonment or mutual agreement.</p>
History	<p>History is important in Cuba, so I have expanded this section for a fuller account of Cuba's intriguing past...</p> <p>In 1492 Columbus said of Cuba “ I have never seen a more beautiful country...”</p> <p>It's thought that humans first cruised from South America to Cuba around 3500 BC. Primarily fishers and hunter-gatherers, these original inhabitants were later joined by the agriculturalist Taino, a branch of the Arawak Indians. Christopher Columbus sighted Cuba on 27 October 1492, and by 1514, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar had conquered the island for the Spanish crown and founded seven settlements. When captured Taino chief and resistance fighter Hatuey was condemned to die at the stake, he refused baptism, saying that he never wanted to see another Spaniard again, not even in heaven.</p> <p>Cattle ranching quickly became the mainstay of the Cuban economy. Large estates were established on the island under the encomienda system, enslaving the Indians under the pretext of offering instruction in Christianity. By 1542, when the system was abolished, only around 5000 Indians (of an estimated 100,000 half a century before) survived. Undaunted, the Spanish imported African slaves as replacements. British troops invaded Cuba in June 1762 and occupied Havana for 11 months, importing more slaves and vastly expanding Cuba's trade links. In 1817, Spain's long-standing monopoly on tobacco ended, which</p>

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raised prices, encouraging the crop's expansion. Tobacco quickly became one of the islands most important products. Sugar had also become a major industry, as American independence in 1783 created new markets, and the 1791 slave uprising in Haiti eliminated Cuba's biggest sugar-producing competitor. By 1820 Cuba was the world's largest sugar producer.

After the great liberator, **Simón Bolívar**, led Mexico and South America to independence, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only remaining Spanish holdings in the Western Hemisphere. Spanish loyalists fled the former colonies and arrived in Cuba in droves. Even they, however, began demanding home rule for the island, albeit under the Spanish flag.

In October 1868, planter **Carlos Manuel de Céspedes** launched Cuba's First War of Independence. After 10 years and 200,000 deaths, the rebels were spent and a pact was signed granting them amnesty. Meanwhile, a group of Cuban rebels exiled to the USA began plotting the overthrow of the Spanish colonial government. Among their ranks was **José Martí**, a respected journalist and critic of US policy, as well as an important poet and the author of the best-known Cuban song of all time, Guajira guantanamera. Martí and his military commander, General Máximo Gómez, landed on eastern Cuba in 1895; within days Martí, conspicuous on his white horse, was shot and killed in a skirmish with Spanish soldiers. His martyrdom earned him the permanent position of Cuba's national hero.

Gómez and rebel leader Antonio Maceo pushed westward, burning everything in their path. Spain came down hard, forcing civilians into reconcentración camps and publicly executing rebel sympathizers. These methods effectively reestablished Spanish control, but Cuba's agriculture-based economy was in ruins. The Spaniards adopted a more conciliatory approach, offering Cuba home rule, but the embittered populace would agree to nothing short of full independence. José Martí had long warned of US interest in Cuba, and in 1898 he was proved right. After years of reading lurid (and often inaccurate) tabloids tales about Cuba's Second War for Independence, the American public was fascinated with the island. Although everything was quiet, newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst told his illustrator not to come home just yet: 'You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.' In January 1898 the US warship Maine, anchored outside Havana harbor, exploded mysteriously. All but two of its officers were off the ship at the time. The **Spanish-American war** had begun.

Spain, weakened by conflict elsewhere, limped to battle, trying to preserve some dignity in the Caribbean. They nearly beat future US president Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders (though they'd had to leave their horses on the mainland) in the Battle of San Juan Hill. The

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USA's vastly superior forces eventually prevailed, however, and on December 12, 1898, a peace treaty ending the war was signed. The Cubans, including General Calixto García, whose largely black army had inflicted dozens of defeats on the Spanish, were not invited. The USA, hobbled by a law requiring its own government to respect Cuban self-determination, could not annex Cuba outright, as it did Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. In 1903, the USA built a naval base at Guantánamo Bay that is still in operation today.

By the 1920s US companies owned two-thirds of Cuba's farmland, imposing tariffs that crippled Cuba's own manufacturing industries. Discrimination against blacks was institutionalised. Tourism based on drinking, gambling and prostitution flourished. In 1933 Morales was overthrown in a coup, and army sergeant **Fulgencio Batista** seized power. Over the next 20 years Cuba crumbled, and its assets were increasingly placed into foreign hands.

On January 1, 1959, Batista's dictatorship was overthrown after a three-year guerilla campaign led by young lawyer **Fidel Castro**. Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic, taking with him US\$40 million of government funds.

Castro was named prime minister and began reforming the nation's economy, cutting rents and nationalizing landholdings larger than 400 hectares. Relations with the USA, already shaky, deteriorated when he nationalized US-owned petroleum refineries that had refused to process Venezuelan oil. The Americans retaliated by cutting Cuban sugar imports, crippling the Cuban economy, and the CIA began plotting devious ways to overthrow the revolutionary government.

In 1961, 1400 CIA-trained Cuban expats, mainly upper-middle-class Batista supporters who had fled to Miami after the revolution, attacked the island at the **Bay of Pigs**. They were promptly captured and ransomed back to the US for medical supplies. The following week, Castro announced the 'socialist nature' of the revolutionary government, and its relationship with the Soviet Union flourished, who provided food, technical support and, of course, nuclear weapons. The October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis is said to be the closest the world has ever come to nuclear conflict.

The missiles were shipped back to the USSR, and the USA declared an embargo on Cuba. Castro and his Minister of Economics, **Che Guevara**, began actively supporting guerilla groups in South America and Africa, sending troops and advisers to assist socialist insurgencies in Zaire, Angola, Mozambique, Bolivia (where Guevara was killed) and Ethiopia. The US response was to support dictators in many of those countries.

In December 1991, the Cuban Constitution was amended to remove all references to Marxism-Leninism, and economic reforms began. In

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	<p>1993, laws passed allowing Cubans to own and use US dollars, be self-employed and open farmers' markets. Taxes on dollar incomes and profits were levied in 1994, and in September 1996 foreign companies were allowed to wholly own and operate businesses and purchase real estate. These measures gradually brought the economy out of its post-Soviet tailspin. The US responded by stiffening its embargo with the Helms-Burton Act, ironically solidifying Castro's position.</p> <p>In July of 2006, Fidel Castro handed off the reins of government for the first time in 47 years. The reins were not passed far. In fact, Fidel turned over the day-to-day chores of governing to his younger brother Raúl Castro, who was already the head of the Cuban armed forces and the head of Cuba's Communist party.</p> <p>President Obama has begun the process of normalizing relations between the US and Cuba. This may be a slow process but will eventually be of great benefit to ordinary Cubans.</p>
Books	Lonely Planet's Cuba – a comprehensive guide to the country which is updated regularly.
1000 Places to see before you die	<p>Cuba's Jazz Festival – December in Havana http://www.jazzcuba.com</p> <p>La Habana Vieja – Havana's Old Quarter</p> <p>Hemingway's Hangouts – La Floridita and La Bodeguita del Medio</p>
UNESCO World Heritage Sites	<p>There are no less than nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Cuba:</p> <p>Old Havana and its Fortifications – simply the finest Spanish complex anywhere in the Americas</p> <p>Trinidad and the Valley de los Ingenios – wonderful Spanish colonial city and sugar mills</p> <p>Cienfuegos – magnificent urban historic centre</p> <p>Santiago de Cuba: San Pedro de la Roca Castle – the largest example of Renaissance military engineering in the Caribbean</p> <p>Vinales Valley – traditional tobacco farms encircled by mountains.</p> <p>Desembarco del Granma National Park</p> <p>Archaeological Landscape of the First Coffee Plantations in the Southeast of Cuba</p> <p>Alejandro de Humboldt National Park</p> <p>Historic Centre of Camagüey</p>

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SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Baseball is the national sport. Cuba's amateur players are considered some of the best in the world, and the premier players are aggressively scouted and courted by Major League Baseball. The regular season runs November through March, and playoffs and the final championship usually carry the season on into May. Most major towns and cities have a local team. Some of the consistently better teams include Pinar del Río, Sancti Spíritus, Santiago de Cuba, Santa Clara, and of course Havana's Industriales. It's usually easy to buy tickets at the box office for less than 5 Cuban pesos, or ask at your hotel and perhaps they can get you tickets in advance.</p> <p>If you want to bring presents for the locals, you can't go wrong with any baseball equipment!</p>
Golf	<p>The country's only regulation 18-hole golf course is the Varadero Golf Club (www.varaderogolfclub.com). The course is a relatively flat resort course, with lots of water, plenty of sand, great views, and almost no rough. Greens fees are \$70 for 18 holes (Feb 2014)</p> <p>Three golfing architectures have been combined here:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Classic design, broad roads bordered by trees, wide and scarcely protected greens. 2. Challenging or Target Golf design, modern style with narrow roads and heavily protected greens surrounded by sand traps and lakes. The Varadero Golf Course has several salt water lakes that connect directly with the sea, a feature that makes it almost unique worldwide. 3. Links design, with holes located alongside the sea following the shoreline, introducing the ocean as another obstacle in the game.
Fishing	<p>There's fabulous deep-sea sport-fishing for marlin, sailfish, tuna, dorado, and more off of most of Cuba's extensive coastline, while the Zapata Peninsula and Cayo Largo del Sur may just be some of the best and least exploited bone-fishing spots left in the hemisphere. The mountain lake and resort of Hanabanilla is getting good grades as a freshwater ground for widemouth and black bass.</p> <p>A half-day of fishing should cost between CUC\$150 and CUC\$400, while a full day can run between CUC\$300 and CUC\$1,400, including gear and lunch, depending on the size of the boat and number of fishermen. There's a broad network of state-run marinas all around Cuba; all offer sport fishing charters.</p>
Hiking	<p>Walking along Havana's Malecón: your best bet is to start in Habana Vieja and work your way toward the Hotel Nacional in Vedado. Take your time to stop and sit on the sea wall for a spell, and be sure to talk to some of the locals on your way. If you time it right, you will reach the Hotel Nacional in the late afternoon - a good time to grab a cool drink and enjoy the setting sun from their "Compass Card" outdoor terrace.</p>

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	<p>Hiking Pico Turquino: Pico Turquino, tucked within the celebrated Sierra Maestra National Park, is the highest peak in Cuba at just under 2,000m. The trail to the summit is swathed in cloud forest and tropical flora. Hikers in good physical condition can do the 15km round-trip journey in a day, but most camp overnight below the summit. The panoramic views of the coast and Caribbean Sea are breathtaking.</p>
Cycling	<p>With a local reliance on bicycles for everyday transportation and a relatively well-maintained road network serving a small motor vehicular fleet, Cuba is a great country to tour by bicycle. There are very few operations renting decent bikes in Cuba, so it may be best to bring your own. There are also specialist tour companies who organize biking holidays in Cuba: try Holiday-n-Adventure (1877-415-4329)</p> <p>Jeff Reid operates a small humanitarian program sending donated bicycles to Cuba – see http://bikesforcuba.wordpress.com or www.bikesforcuba.com for full details. He sends bikes every month and depends on tourists from Ontario to take them.</p>
Diving	<p>There are fabulous scuba diving and snorkeling opportunities on the coral reefs, ocean walls, and ancient wrecks that lie just off Cuba's coasts. María la Gorda, Isla de la Juventud, Playa Girón, and Los Jardines de la Reina are widely considered the absolute top scuba-diving destinations. You will also find perfectly acceptable dive opportunities and operations in Varadero, Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo, Guardalavaca, and Cayo Largo del Sur.</p>

CULTURE	
Music	<p>Buena Vista Social Club; rumba; jazz; salsa; son</p> <p>Cuba has a strong tradition in the performing arts. Cuban musicians, playing in a range of styles, are world-renowned. The Cuban National Ballet (tel. 7/855-3084; www.balletcuba.cu) has been garnering international accolades for decades, under the seemingly eternal direction of Alicia Alonso.</p> <p>The Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (Cuban National Folklore Group) hosts the weekly Sábado de la Rumba, a mesmerizing show of Afro-Cuban religious and secular dance and drumming. The 2-hour shows are presented every Saturday at 3pm, at El Gran Palenque, Calle 4, between Calzada and Avenida 5 in Vedado.</p>
Museums	<p>Museo de la Ciudad, Havana: Old Havana's preeminent museum displays colonial-era art and artifacts. It's worth the price of admission alone to stroll the rooms, outdoor courtyards, and interior veranda of the former Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (Palace of the Captain Generals), which houses the museum.</p> <p>The National Fine Arts Museum fills three floors of this square-city-block building, and the design - with a central courtyard and</p>

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	<p>zigzagging ramped stairwell - can make navigating the upper floors confusing, so allow yourself plenty of time, and be prepared to get mildly lost inside. An extensive collection of Cuban art and sculpture is on display at the newly renovated main building here. Modern masters like Wifredo Lam, Raúl Martínez, Amelia Peláez, and Rene Portocarrero are well represented. The international collection is now housed in a recently restored early-20th-century gem of a building.</p>
Festivals	<p>Cuba's Jazz Festival – Dec in Havana http://www.jazzcuba.com This is an internationally renowned event that consistently attracts an excellent line-up, with performances at venues around the city. Cuban music enjoyed a worldwide boost in popularity due to the success of the Buena Vista Social Club, and rightly so. Cuban son was a precursor to salsa and much excellent Latin jazz emanates from this sunny Caribbean island. What better place for a jazz festival than Havana, with its rich musical heritage and unique atmosphere? The Hotel Rivera acts as the festival headquarters, while the Casa de la Cultura Plaza, Teatro Nacional de Cuba, Teatro Amadeo Roldán, Teatro Mella and Teatro Karl Marx also host performances</p> <p>Carnival Santiago de Cuba July/Aug: in the intense heat of summer, Santiago de Cuba explodes with the island's best carnival, an evocative celebration of the city's Afro-Caribbean roots. Ripe with rumba music, conga processions, booming percussion, fanciful floats, and wild costumes, it's a participatory party.</p>
ATTRACTIONS	<p>Trinidad - The best-preserved colonial city in Cuba, in the shadow of the Escambray mountains, Trinidad was not even linked by road to the rest of the country until the 1950s. Declared a national monument by the Cuban government this city is very much as it was four centuries ago, the beauty of its baroque architecture and cobblestones squares harking back to a bygone era when Trinidad was a key player in the Caribbean slave trade. There are many interesting things to see, such as the Guamuhaia Archaeological Museum, Plaza Mayor, Church of Santa Ana, and Calle Simon Bolivar, but the most impressive of all Trinidad's many museums is Trinidad Municipal Museum and a visit to the Taller Alfarero, a large ceramics workshop where traditional techniques are still used is also worthwhile.</p>
Beaches	<p>Varadero Varadero is Cuba's premier beach resort destination, and it ranks right up there with the best in the Caribbean. If you're looking for a well-run all-inclusive resort loaded with amenities and activity options, Varadero is a good choice, with a 21km stretch of nearly uninterrupted beach.</p>

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	<p>If you prefer less commercialized beach destinations, consider the various Cayo destinations along the north coast.</p> <p>Cayo Coco / Guillermo The powdery beaches of Cayo Coco are found on the cays that lie off the mainland of the North East coast and which jut out into the Atlantic Ocean. A spectacular 17-km stretch of road runs on a causeway through the marshes to reach Cayo Coco, contributing to its more isolated and natural feel. Along the way, visitors can take in the region's abundant flora and fauna. Cayo Coco boasts beautiful coral reefs, lagoons and marshes with abundant bird life - including the largest native colony of Pink Flamingos in the Americas. If you like to fish – there is great fishing off the cays and also in the deeper waters off the coast.</p> <p>Cayo Santa Maria The white sand beaches of Cayo Santa Maria are known for great snorkelling and diving and the exotic flora and fauna of the area. Cayo Santa Maria is close to the city of Santa Clara Remedios - best known as the place where the Cuban president Fulgencio Batista surrendered to Che Guevara in 1958. The Che Guevara Museum and Memorial Centre provides a good historical background, and displays a number of Che Guevara's personal items, including his uniforms, hand-written letters as well as many photos.</p> <p>Holguin When Christopher Columbus discovered Cuba in 1492 he described the rugged mountainous region of Holguin as “the most beautiful land that man has laid eyes upon.” The beaches on the coast near Holguin offer snowy white beaches and many excellent dive sites. If you exhaust the entertainment available at the excellent all-inclusive resorts in nearby Guardalavaca you'll find at least two good night spots: lively La Dulce Vida, which is a hotel nightclub, and La Roca, an outdoor nightclub on Playa Esmeralda where you can dance under the stars!</p> <p>Cayo Largo Cayo Largo is a small island that is benefiting from several decades of development for tourists. Situated in the Canarreos Archipelago, off the south coast of Cuba, Cayo Largo is 25 km long and 3 km wide. Renowned for its white-sand beaches, gorgeous landscapes, pleasant weather and excellent scuba diving, this lush island has much to offer travellers seeking crystal-clear waters and local flavour.</p>
Wildlife	<p>Bird-Watching in the Zapata Peninsula: A dedicated bird-watcher might be able to spot 18 of Cuba's 22 endemic species in the swamps,</p>

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	<p>mangroves, and wetlands of the Zapata Peninsula. In addition to the endemics, ornithologists and lay bird-watchers can spot over 100 other varieties of shore birds, transients, and waterfowl in this rich, wild region. Other top bird-watching destinations include La Güira National Park, as well as the areas around Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo and Baracoa.</p>
Parks	<p>There are seven UNESCO Biosphere Reserves found in Cuba.</p> <p>Baracoa Cuchillas de Toa Spend an afternoon at this UNESCO biosphere reserve. As one of the world's last untouched rainforests, it boasts a large number of endangered plant and animal species, including the Cuban land snail, which is about two inches in diameter with striking spirals of colour.</p> <p>Peninsula de Zapata Zapata Ciénaga Biosphere Reserve One of Cuba's seven UNESCO biospheres, the Zapata reserve contains the largest wetlands in the Caribbean, and one of its most diverse ecosystems. Bring your binoculars: the world's smallest bird, the bee hummingbird, makes its home here.</p> <p>Pinar del Río Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve Take a guided hike through the tropical forests in Cuba's first biosphere reserve, recognized in 1985. Watch out for one of the world's smallest frogs and the colourful, pocket-sized reptile, the chipoyo.</p> <p>Península de Guanahacabibes Biosphere Reserve This sprawling reserve covers 121,572 hectares, including the Guanahacabibes National Park. Its diverse vegetation comprises mangroves, marsh grasslands, coastal scrublands and forests. Wildlife includes 40 bird species, as well as an abundance of local jutía and iguanas.</p> <p>Santiago de Cuba Baconao Biosphere Reserve This expansive 84,985-hectare UNESCO-recognized biosphere is home to 1,800 plant species that are of interest for their medicinal, industrial and religious properties. There are a reported 939 indigenous species of wildlife living here, too, including butterflies, mammals, reptiles and the endangered hot-cave bat. The rugged Sierra Maestra mountain range is protected within the Baconao biosphere, as is the Archeological Landscape of the First Coffee Plantations in the</p>

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	<p>Southeast of Cuba – a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p> <p>Varadero Zapata Peninsula Biosphere Reserve One of Cuba's UNESCO biospheres, the Zapata reserve contains the largest wetlands in the Caribbean, and not surprisingly, one of its most diverse ecosystems. Bring your binoculars: the world's smallest bird, the bee hummingbird, makes its home here.</p> <p>Villa Clara Buenavista Biosphere Reserve Encompassing 11 core areas, spanning across 313,502 hectares, this UNESCO-recognized biosphere protects ecosystems including mangroves, coral reefs, active dune zones, keys and vital reproductive zones for aquatic birds. Caves within the reserve hold historically significant paintings.</p>
Gardens	<p>Jardín Botánico de Cienfuegos Cienfuegos Province Botanical Garden, officially, Jardín Botánico de Cienfuegos, is located 14 kilometers from Cienfuegos city centre. With 97 hectares it's one of the oldest institutions of its kind on the island, founded in 1901 by Edwin F. Atkins and his wife. They arrived in Cuba in 1899 in search of the island's most precious commodity; sugarcane.</p> <p>Atkins built the "Soledad" sugar mill and soon after a research centre dedicated to investigation and enhancement of sugar cane under the name: "Harvard Botanical Station for Tropical Research and Sugar Cane Investigation". Mr. and Mrs. Atkins were also fond of plant collecting and soon afterwards started a tropical and rare species garden in the backyard of their estate where plants from as far as India and China were grown in tropical Cuba.</p> <p>Today the garden has a large collection of tropical exotic plants (2000+ species) clustered in 670 genera and 125 botanical families. Among the most complete collections are orchids (400+), palms (230+), ficuses (65+) and bamboos (29).</p>
Castles/Forts	<p>Castillo de la Real Fuerza, Havana: a well-preserved 16th-century fort sits within a broad cloverleaf moat. This is the oldest fort in Havana, and the oldest surviving fort in the hemisphere. It was a failure, built too small and too far from the harbour entrance to be of much use, but crossing over the old drawbridge and walking around the ancient stone battlements gives a great sense of history.</p> <p>The Castillo de San Pedro de la Roca (also known by the less formal title of Castillo del Morro) is a fortress on the coast of the city of Santiago de Cuba. About 10 km southwest of the city centre, it</p>

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	<p>overlooks the bay and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was designed in 1637 by Giovanni Battista Antonelli, a member of a Milanese family of military engineers, on behalf of the governor of the city, Pedro de la Roca de Borja, as a defense against raiding pirates, although an earlier, smaller, fortification had been built between 1590 and 1610. Antonelli's design was adapted to the situation of the fortress on the steep sides of the promontory (the morro from which the fortress gets its name) reaching into the bay. It was constructed on a series of terraces; there were four main levels and three large bulwarks to house the artillery. Supplies would be delivered by sea and then stored in the large warehouse, which was cut directly into the rock, or transported up to the top level which housed the citadel. Construction of the citadel took 62 years, starting in 1638 and finally being completed in 1700.</p>
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>Highlights of Cuban craftsmanship include articles made from leather, vegetable fibers, wood, stone, metal and coal as well as traditional clothing such as Cuban hats and "guayaberas", beautifully cool, comfortable shirts made from pure linen, and select Cuban tobacco products such as Havana cigars.</p> <p>There are nine shopping centres in Varadero where beautiful examples of Cuban craftsmanship can be found as well as delicious local produce. They are generally open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m</p>
Markets	<p>Havana: The biggest and best street market in Havana features three narrow rows of stalls stretching over a full city block. It's open daily from 10am to 6pm in Habana Vieja on Calle Tacón, between Calles Empedrado and Chacón. In addition to the typical arts and crafts and souvenir T-shirts, you'll find scores of local painters selling their wares.</p> <p>Varadero: There are several outdoor arts and craft markets around Varadero; the best, Artesanía, is at Avenida 1 and Calle 12. The Plaza de los Artesanos is also good. ARTex has stores at each of these sites, as well as at Avenida 1 and Calle 35. At each you will find a broad collection of trinkets, T-shirts, musical instruments, posters, and CDs.</p>
Nightlife	<p>Tropicana, Havana: This is the original and still reigning cabaret show in Cuba. The Tropicana has been at it for over 60 years and it shows no signs of slowing down. The sea of lithe dancers, the exuberance of their costumes, and the sheer excess of it all is worth the trip. It all occurs under the stars in the shadow of tall overhanging trees. There's a second Tropicana in Matanzas for visitors to Varadero, and another in Santiago.</p> <p>El Gato Tuerto, Havana: The mood is dark and bohemian, although the decor mixes Art Deco and kitsch in equal measure. The nightly show usually features three or four distinct acts, which can range from sultry boleros to up-tempo jazz. A storyteller, poet, or comedian might perform</p>

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	<p>between sets.</p> <p>La Zorra y El Cuervo, Havana: This is Havana's best jazz club, and that's saying a lot. The vibe is mellow and unpretentious in this compact basement club, but the music and acts are usually culled from the best Cuba has to offer.</p> <p>Habana Café, Havana and Varadero: Mix the Tropicana with a Hard Rock Cafe, and Habana Café is more or less what you'd get. The floor show is a mix of cabaret-style dance numbers and slightly burlesque comedic bits, all anchored by a top-notch big band. After the show, the dance floor swings and writhes for hours</p>
Casinos	None in Cuba – unlike pre-Castro days!

CUISINE	
Food	<p>Cuban cuisine is influenced by Spanish, African, indigenous and other cultures. The national dish is ajiaco, a stew of assorted root vegetables cooked with pork, poultry or beef. Other typical dishes are lechón (roast pork), fried green plantains (tachinos, chatinos or tostones), black beans, congrí (rice with red beans), moros y cristianos (rice with black beans), picadillo a la habanera (ground beef in tomato sauce), roast chicken and tamales among others.</p> <p>The Cuban sweet tooth ensures that each meal includes dessert.</p>
Wine	<p>Cuban national cocktails include the Cuba Libre (rum and cola) and the Mojito (rum, lime, sugar, mint leaves, club soda and ice).</p> <p>If you request rum in a small country restaurant do not be surprised if it is only available by the bottle. Havana Club is the national brand and the most popular. Expect to pay \$4 for three year old white rum or \$8 for seven year old dark rum.</p> <p>Cristal is a light beer and is available in "dollar" stores where Cubans with CUCs and visitors may shop. Cubans prefer the Bucanero Fuerte, which at 5.5% alcohol is a strong (hence the "fuerte") darker beer. Both Cristal and Bucanero are brewed by a joint venture with Labatts of Canada, whose beer is the only Cuban beer sold in CUC.</p> <p>In nearby Cardenas is the Arrechabala Rum Factory, where the brand Havana Club was born and where present-day Varadero and Buccanero rums are made. Tours of the factory are given daily between 9am and 4pm</p>
Restaurants	<p>The best restaurants are within the major resorts, but good food will also be found in paladares (locally owned restaurants in private homes).</p> <p>Restaurants in Varadero: Mi Casita – Cuban style seafood; El Bodegon – Creole cooking; La Casa de Antiguiedades – best in town; Nightlife: La Cueva de Pirata – Latin music; Casa du Pont – quiet piano bar and gorgeous views</p>

MORE INFO	
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Website	www.gocuba.ca https://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/cuba/
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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	<p>Several trips to Cuba including visits to: Havana, Santiago, Varadero, Holguin, Cayo Largo, Cayo Coco, Cienfuegos, Isla Juventud and Trinidad.</p> <p>And a circumnavigation of the island with Cuba Cruise.</p> <p>Check out the Pinterest board for Cuba which has a selection of photographs from my trips to the island:</p> <p>https://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/cuba/</p>
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TRANSAT AND CUBA	<p>Transat offers frequent direct flights to Cuba from airports across Canada. This frequency of flying means that, as well as the traditional 7 and 14 week package vacations, they can also offer 3, 4 or 10 day stays. Plus they offer an unbeatable choice of fabulous resorts, fascinating destinations – together with excursions to help you explore the culture, landscapes, soft adventure and beautiful beaches of Cuba.</p> <p>All-inclusive packages are always a great buy – but particularly when the Canadian dollar is weak, you will appreciate being able to pay up front in your own currency and not having to worry while you are on vacation. In addition, Cuba is a great choice when the Loonie is lower than the US dollar because prices in Cuba aren't linked to US currency in the same way as at some other destinations.</p> <p>Fly to Cuba with Air Transat – offering frequent flights from Toronto and Montreal. If there is only one flight per week then you can only go to your chosen destination for 7 or 14 days. But with Cuba, where there are multiple flights per week, it opens up the chance to go to for different durations such as 3, 5, 10 or 12 days.</p> <p>Air Transat also have flights to Cuba from airports such as London, Ottawa, Vancouver and Halifax. So if, for example, you are gathering a group from across Canada, Transat have it covered from East to West.</p> <p>The flight time is just over 4 hours, made all the more comfortable by travelling Air Transat who have been voted No 1 Leisure Airline in North America (3yrs in a row) and 2nd best in the World!</p> <p>You can buy a package with Transat that includes flights on Air Transat plus transfers to and from the airport in Cuba, all-inclusive accommodation, and the services of a Transat representative in</p>
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	<p>destination. Transat also offer excursions to help you explore Cuba.</p> <p>Check out the Transat “Collections” that help you pick the right resort for you. Resorts in the “Luxury Collection” are 5-star resorts designed to provide the ultimate in pampering, elegant accommodation, picture-perfect beaches and gourmet food. The Distinction Collection properties feature extra services like additional guaranteed a la carte meals, free wifi and international brand drinks. R&R resorts are typically adults only and feature spacious rooms and excellent spa facilities. And the Family Collection are family-friendly resorts with great kid’s facilities.</p>
Transat Background	<p>For nearly 30 years, Transat has been offering a large selection of vacation options in Europe, Florida and the South, as well as cruises sailing the seven seas. In addition to hundreds of south hotels available in the form of all-inclusive packages, Transat also offers a wide range of flights, packages, tours and à la carte holidays. Their packages are flexible and tailored to stays of varying lengths.</p> <p>Transat Tours Canada is the leader in Canada’s holiday travel industry. The group includes Transat Holidays, Nolitours, Tours Mont Royal, Transat Discoveries, Air Transat and many travel agencies across the country, including Marlin Travel. This integration enables Transat to offer vacationers the best possible service, from the airport all the way to their travel destination, where a team of more than 250 destination representatives offer onsite assistance on a 24/7 basis.</p> <p>Air Transat, the group’s airline, offers a vast selection of flights to nearly 60 destinations in 25 countries aboard its fleet of Airbus wide-body jets. Families benefit from numerous privileges, such as a dedicated check-in counter and Kids Club advantages. Upgrade to Club Class for a touch of luxury or choose Option Plus and obtain an additional baggage allowance of 10 kg, among other perks.</p>
What Transat is All About	<p>Transat offers quality vacation packages to a wide variety of destinations. Each season, the company presents a wide selection of quality products, in order to meet the diversified needs of Canadian travellers. In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers’ expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader. They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.</p>
Vacation Types	<p>Transat has it all: packages, cruises, hotels, flights, tours, car rentals & train travel. With a choice of over 300 hotels located in more than 50 destinations and a complete line of itineraries offered in partnership with the most prestigious cruise lines, all products offered by Transat are subject to a rigorous standard review.</p>

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Transat Collections	<p>Choosing the right resort for your vacation needs is all important and to help you select the right hotel Transat have created 6 different Collections: Luxury, Distinction, Adults, Family, Solo and Sun Savvy.</p> <p>What defines a Collection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The vacation packages in a Collection match the type of experience you are looking for. Everything from the details of the Air Transat flights to the resort and its facilities suit the needs of a specific type of traveller. <p>Luxury Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designed to cater to your every whim, our prestigious Luxury Collection is the gold standard in upscale travel... with VIP inclusions for a dream vacation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Free access to VIP Lounge at airports o Free upgrade to OPTION PLUS on board Air Transat o Private roundtrip transfers o Unlimited À La Carte gourmet dining o Free WIFI in room and public area <p>Solo Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With this new collection Transat put together a group of resorts that people who like to travel alone will enjoy thanks to advantages such as a communal table for sharing meals and no single supplement. And the big news is – no Single Supplement! - Solo Collection Advantages include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o No Single Supplement o Communal table for sharing meals o Weekly Happy Hour welcoming all Transat clients o Free room service and free WI-FI <p>Sun Savvy Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transat thinks everyone should be able to enjoy the sun, and they pride themselves on providing you with the quality you want at the prices you love. Hence their new Sun Savvy Collection. <p>Adults Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 18+ crowd will have access to top of the line accommodations, unlimited à la carte dining and free WiFi. <p>Family Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their Family Collection delivers a safe, exciting time for kids - and a relaxing holiday for parents. There are a variety of activities, facilities and promotions that suit the needs of different types of family. These
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	<p>range from resorts perfect for families with very young children to resorts perfect for teens and big families. And then there are also Transat's new Multigenerational and Single Parent categories.</p> <p>And lastly – there is the Distinction Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinction Collection offers exclusive perks that range from direct transfers, additional à la carte dinner reservations and complimentary WiFi access - Distinction inclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Direct roundtrip transfers between the airport and the resort o Additional guaranteed à la carte restaurant reservations o Free WIFI in the lobby o Mini-bar restocked daily o Unlimited select international drinks o Free in-room safe <p>You will also enjoy, for example, bottle of wine or local specialty in the room upon arrival, turn-down service plus lots more.</p>
Awards	<p>Agent's Choice Awards: For the fifth consecutive year, Transat Holidays was named Wholesaler of the Year by travel agents. Air Transat was voted -#1 Leisure Airline in North America for three years in a row and 2nd in the World! They were also voted best Family Airline.</p>
Current Brochures	<p>Transat Cruise brochures are available at your local travel agent and cover vacations through to October 2016.</p>
Air Transat's New Comfort Zone	<p>With so many new comfort features, you're on vacation the minute you take your seat. Air Transat has given their fleet a full makeover. For a glimpse of what it looks like: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBse6WOCd70</p>
Air Transat Kids Club	<p>To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from beginning to end, Air Transat has created Kids Club so that young passengers can really enjoy themselves whilst onboard an Air Transat flight. It is designed to make air travel a fun experience for young travellers (and for their parents!). Even before the doors of the plane are closed following boarding, every child receives a small bag containing all sorts of surprises and games. The more fun they have, the easier the flight. Furthermore, children who are members of Air Transat Kids Club enjoy certain exclusive privileges.</p> <p>Members of the Air Transat Kids Club will enjoy several benefits that the whole family can share. You can check in at a special "Air Transat Kids Club Members" counter. Thanks to these special counters located in major Canadian airports where Air Transat flies, checking-in is quicker than before. At check-in, special tags will be placed on your baggage; as a result, your baggage gets priority treatment.</p>
Transat Club Class	<p>Enjoy exclusive privileges such as complimentary seat selection, wider,</p>

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	<p>more comfortable leather seats, a choice of gourmet meals and fine wines, priority check-in, baggage service and boarding.</p> <p>Club Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Club attendants • Attentive, personalized service • Exclusive, spacious Club cabin <p>Drinks & Snacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome cocktails • Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks, snacks and bar service <p>Club Privileges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased baggage allowance • 40 kg checked/15 kg carry-on • Exclusive, rapid check-in counter in most airports • Priority boarding • Practical travel items (on Europe flights) • Free headsets • Canadian newspapers <p>Comfort & Refinement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider, more comfortable leather seats • More leg room • Complimentary Seat Selection: call 1-877-872-6728 • Choice of gourmet meals • Choice of wine and more
Option Plus	<p>This Economy class option includes many priority privileges and services including priority check-in, priority baggage handling, an extra 10kg baggage allowance and even champagne. Here's what you get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance seat selection on roundtrip flights • Priority check-in at a dedicated counter • Priority baggage handling • Priority boarding • Complete Air Transat travel kit on flights to European destinations • Snacks from the On Board Bistro selection • Alcoholic beverages during drinks service 200ml bottle of champagne (Sun and Europe) • Supplementary baggage allowance up to 10 kg per flight segment • Wine or beer with the meal • Headsets <p>The cost is \$79-\$119 for southbound destinations and \$99-\$209 for European destinations as at December 2015.</p>
Option Flex	<p>Life doesn't always go exactly according to plan. When you book your dream vacation, you want to make sure you enjoy the ultimate level of flexibility should something unexpected happen.</p> <p>Option Flex with Transat gives you just that.</p> <p>Option Flex lets you:-</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - change your departure date, destination or hotel, up to 3 hours before departure - transfer your vacation package to a friend or family member, up to 7 days before departure - cancel your trip and get a full refund - and you won't be charged any additional fuel or currency surcharges once you've booked. <p>Benefit from these advantages for only \$49 + taxes at time of booking.</p>
Transat and Sustainable Tourism	<p>Transat recognizes the prime importance of the environment, host communities, cultural diversity, and their relationships with their employees, customers and partners. Tourism has become one of the world's leading industries. Society and communities reap the benefits, and, each year, hundreds of millions of travellers discover new countries and cultures. Transat is firmly committed to the responsible development of the tourism industry, and has adopted the following definition of sustainable tourism:</p> <p><i>"Sustainable tourism entails respect for nature, as well as for host communities and their values; it combines positive socio-economic benefits for local populations with an enriching experience for travellers."</i></p> <p>The issue of the environment, as far as Transat's own facilities are concerned, is a clear and basic target. Their environment committees have implemented concrete initiatives with regard to recycling, conservation of resources, the disposal of obsolete electronic equipment, and raising employee awareness.</p> <p>Air Transat has begun developing an environmental management system that could lead to an ISO 14001 certification in the future. To find out more, consult the Transat and the Environment sections at their website:</p> <p>http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&ContentType=voyageur</p> <p>Eco-responsible certified hotels</p> <p>Transat urges its hotelier partners to excel in social and environmental responsibility, and formally recognizes the efforts of accommodations that commit to certification in this area. Certified establishments must maintain performance levels to continue using such labels. The indicators used vary depending on the certification scheme, but many certification organizations have begun aligning their benchmarks with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.</p> <p>To help you make an informed choice when you take your next vacation, Transat list six certifications for hotels and beaches. You can also find certified hotels by searching by destination.</p> <p>Certifications for hotels</p> <p>Biosphere Responsible Tourism</p>

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	<p>Green Globe Green Key ISO 14001 Travelife Certification for beaches Blue Flag</p>
Gift Certificates	<p>Here's your chance to make a loved one's dream come true. With Transat gift certificates you can offer the beauty, excitement, and wonders of the world: the South with its heavenly beaches and endless sunshine, or just a rental car. Transat gift certificates are valid on all Air Transat, Nolitours, or Transat Holidays products in their brochures. They can be redeemed at a travel agent's office at the time of reservation. To order your gift certificates call 1-800-322-6649.</p>
Groups	<p>Group rates are available – as few as 10 adults make up a group. Talk to your travel agent to check the current details of Transat's group deals.</p>
Hurricane Policy	<p>Nolitours and Transat Holidays provide you with true peace of mind. Vacationers can travel secure in the knowledge that you will be protected should a hurricane affect your destination city in Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean or Central America. This Nolotours/Transat Holidays policy covers reservations for departures between June 1 and November 30 each year and is likely to be renewed in 2016 – check the website. If the conditions stipulated in the policy are met, you may choose one of these four options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Travel at a later date 2. Travel to another destination city 3. Travel to the booked destination city 4. Cancel with a full refund
Websites & Social Media	<p>Website: www.Transat.com Connect with Transat on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/AirTransatCanada?brand_redir=1 Follow Transat on Twitter: https://twitter.com/AirTransat See Transat on You Tube: https://www.youtube.com/user/AirTransatEng</p>

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