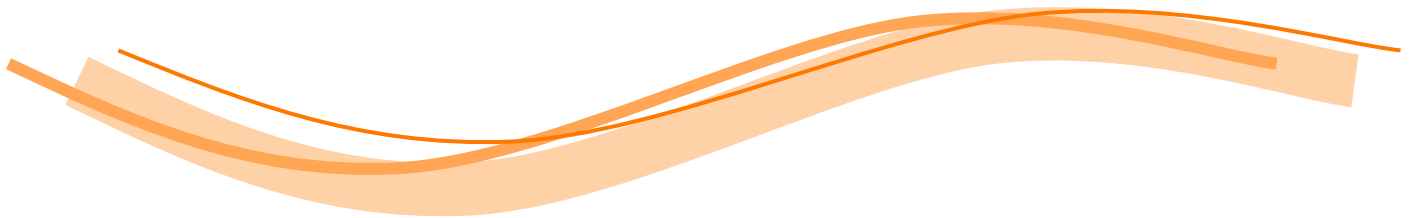




Transat Holidays & Barcelo Resorts





<p>BARCELO RESORTS</p>	<p>Barcelo Hotels and Resorts is one of the most respected names in the world for all-inclusive vacations. It operates 121 hotels with 31,000 rooms and 16,000 employees around the world. Their tag line says it all: “The best place, the best holiday.”</p>
<p>History of Barcelo</p>	<p>The name of Barceló, which began as a small transportation company, is today associated with one of the most prestigious holiday groups. Behind this lies the determination and hard work of three generations for seventy years.</p> <p>1931: Creation of Autocares Barceló (a transport company), founded by Simón Barceló in Felanitx (Majorca, Spain).</p> <p>1962: First hotel of the chain opened in Majorca, Spain. This stage culminates in 1965, with the development of a new concept of hotel: the Barceló Pueblo Palma.</p> <p>1985: The international hotel operations begin: opening of the first hotel in the Caribbean (Barceló Bávaro Beach Resort, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic). Thus, Barceló becomes the pioneer Spanish hotel company in the area.</p> <p>1999: Opening of the Barceló Maya Resort complex, in the Mayan Riviera in México, and purchase of two hotels (Ixtapa and Huatulco) on Mexico's Pacific coast.</p> <p>Barcelo believe that they have a great responsibility that includes social and environmental aspects, so Barceló Hotels & Resorts has explicitly confirmed its commitment to society and the environment by signing the United Nations Pact on Human Rights and the Environment.</p>

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<p>Barcelo Marina Palace Resort</p>	<p>The Barceló Marina Palace, an elegant five-star hotel, is a sun seeker's paradise in northwestern Cuba. Situated in front of the Marina Gaviota in Varadero, the Barceló Marina Palace lies amid stunning white beaches bathed in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. Offering an abundance of adventurous options, water sports enthusiasts can kayak, windsurf, or sail in the turquoise waters surrounding the hotel. After a day soaking up the sun, cool off in the tropical breezes as you watch a beautiful sunset while sipping a refreshing daiquiri.</p> <p>The Barceló Marina Palace welcomes families with numerous activities scheduled for all ages. The Baby Club and Children's Club entertain the little ones while their parents seek adventure or romance. Families can also take advantage of the children's pool, a safe swimming area for everyone. Guests looking for a more intimate setting choose the Barceló Cayo Libertad, 86 ultra-luxurious suites of the Barceló Marina Palace, located on Royal Island, a private island, perfect for an intimate honeymoon. Swim-up to the Aqua Bar or enjoy a freshly rolled cigar in the evening at the Cigar Bar, two of the many exclusive amenities for guests of the Royal Island. The Barceló Marina Palace boasts a convenient location, enabling its guests to take advantage of all that Varadero and the surrounding area have to offer. The concierge can arrange exhilarating excursions for guests so they may have a truly Cuban experience. Sail to Cayo Blanco for a diving excursion where unspoiled coral reefs lay beneath the aquamarine waters of the Caribbean. At the Bellamar Caves, famous for crystals, stalactites, and stalagmites, visitors can take a 3 kilometer trek deep into the caves to view spectacular formations.</p> <p>The Barceló Marina Palace has it all: adventure, romance, and breathtaking vistas.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>The Barceló Marina Palace is situated on the northwestern coast of Cuba in Varadero. This is a beachfront property with fine sand, white beaches, and crystal-blue waters. In close proximity to the area nightlife and commercial center, it is the ideal location for a family getaway or romantic retreat.</p> <p>Only 35 minutes from Juan Gualberto Gomez de Varadero International Airport.</p> <p>2.5 hrs away from the International Airport of Havana, the capital of Cuba.</p> <p>Situated in front of Marina Gaviota, the most important marine port in Cuba and close to the Punta Hicacos Ecology Park.</p>
<p>Accommodation</p>	<p>The Barceló Marina Palace has two appealing lodging options available to their guests. The Marina Palace has 548 luxurious suites available, while the exclusive Cayo Libertad, situated on a private island, has 85 suites available, one of which is the Grande Suite Palace.</p> <p>Handicapped accessible</p>

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<p>Services</p>	<p>2 tennis courts 3 swimming pools (2 with Jacuzzis) 24 hour room service Baby Club (0-2 years); Babysitter; Children's Mini club (2-12 years); Children's pool Beauty salon; Boutique; Spa services; Fitness facility Beginner diving course twice a week Business center; Car rental; Currency exchange; internet services Central safe service Daily activities and nightly entertainment; Cuban club "El Cobo"; Dance club Laundry services; Medical services; Souvenir shop Multi-sports area Theatre (seating 550)</p>
<p>Dining</p>	<p>La Marina, is an international buffet restaurant, serving breakfasts, lunches, and dinner. El Faro specializes in seafood, serves fresh fish and lobster daily. El Arlequino, the gourmet Italian restaurant, serves dinner in a fine-dining atmosphere. La Zarzuela serves tantalizing Spanish cuisine for a formal dinner option. La Duna, serving Cuban dinners, as well as light lunches (2:00pm-6pm) and snacks (11pm-6am) La Boya, poolside bar, serves refreshing beverages Club Hemingway, the lobby bar, is available 24 hours to serve you. Check out the poolside bars for your beverage needs. The theater and dance club bars provide your drinks during nightly entertainment.</p>
<p>All-Inclusive</p>	<p>Services Included in the "Barceló All Inclusive" Program: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner at La Marina Lunches (3pm-6pm) and snacks (11pm-6am) in La Duna Unlimited local beverages and select international beverages (bottled water, sodas, beer, cocktails, and coffee) at the pool-side bars, theatre bar, and lobby bar. For every seven-day stay, receive one complimentary dinner at either La Zarzuela or El Arlequino. Reservations and formal attire required. Access to live shows every night. Access to El Cobo, the Cuban club.</p>

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<p>Activities</p>	<p>Beach volleyball; Aerobics; Basketball; Billiards; Bicycles; Catamaran Dance lessons; Darts; Diving; Giant chess; Golf (off-site, fees apply) Gymnastics; French bowling; Kayaking; Sailing; Shuffle board; Table tennis; Tennis; Volleyball; Water aerobics; Windsurfing; Water basketball</p> <p>Guided Tours in the area are available through the Concierge: Bellamar Caves Helicopter tours to the Yumuri Valley Horse-drawn carriage rides at Josone Park. Jungle Tour on jet skis Sailing Cruise to Cayo Blanco from Chapelin Marina Submarine trips to the coral reefs.</p>
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<p>TRANSAT HOLIDAYS</p>	<p>Transat is now the largest tour operator in Canada, and is at the core of the vertical integration process developing and marketing vacation products as well as flights to destinations in the South and Europe. The company acts as a master craftsman in assembling different components of leisure travel: air transportation, passenger transfers from airport to hotel, accommodation, recreational and cultural activities, meals, cruises, and much more.</p> <p>As an industry leader, Transat Holidays offers departures from many Canadian cities including: St. John's, Halifax, Moncton, Fredericton, Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Brandon, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, Comox, Abbotsford, Prince George and Kelowna.</p>
<p>Mission</p>	<p>Transat Holidays 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.</p> <p>In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader.</p> <p>They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.</p>
<p>Products</p>	<p>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 Holidays are subject to a rigorous standard review.</p>

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<p>Awards</p>	<p>2005 Agents' Choice Awards: Transat Holidays ranked number one for a third year in a row by Canada's travel agents according to the results of the Agents' Choice Awards 2005, a survey carried out in February 2005 by Canadian Travel Press and Travel Courier. Transat Holidays is without a doubt the country's leader in the tour operator category, maintaining a sizeable lead over its closest competitor. In fact, since the survey began, it is the only tour operator to consistently finish first in its category for three consecutive years.</p>
<p>Current Brochure</p>	<p>Transat Holidays Cuba: Sun 2006-2007 Brochure 5 destinations, 23 hotels: Varadero(11), Cayo Coco(4), Holguin(5), Cayo Santa Maria (3); Havana Flights: all on Air Transat . Time: 3.5 to 4hrs</p>
<p>Air Transat Kids Club</p>	<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 while 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, check-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>
<p>Prestige Class at Barcelo Marina Palace, Varadero</p>	<p>This hotel is a Transat Distinction resort where guests can enjoy additional inclusions in "Prestige Class":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation in junior suites located closest to the beach • Concierge service • 3 guaranteed reservations per week for à la carte dining (see Concierge upon arrival) • Breakfast and lunch service at the beach grill • Separate check-in/check-out • Beach towels, bathrobes and slippers in room • Mini-bar restocked daily (water, soft drinks and beer) • VIP room amenities (soaps and lotions) • Turn-down service • Welcome gift, letter and distinct identification bracelet

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DESTINATION	CUBA Lonely Planet says of Cuba: “The Caribbean’s largest and least commercialised island”. “Clearly the time to go is now!”
Location	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. 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. A veritable paradise in the very heart of the Caribbean, whose capital, Havana, was declared a World Heritage City by UNESCO in 1982 in recognition of its concentration of historic buildings.
Geography	111,000 square km, 4200 coral cays and isles, 1250 km long, 30-100 km wide, 7000 km coastline Pico Turquino is the highest mountain at 1974 meters.
Name	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.
Population	Nationally 10.7 million, with Havana having more than 2 million.
Language	Spanish; English is widely spoken in the resorts and in Varadero.
Currency	There are two currencies circulating in Cuba, Cuban Pesos (CUP) and Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC). Prior to November 2004 US dollars were in wide circulation on par with the CUC, but the government discontinued that and they are no longer used. 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. CUC are valued at 24 times the value of CUP. Tourists are permitted to import or export a maximum of CUP 100 or CUC 200 at any one time.

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	<p>CUP are also known as local Pesos and Moneda Nacional (National money). As of May 2006, 1 CUC = 24 CUP. 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> <p>Note that Amex is not accepted in Cuba and as of January 2007, US dollars are not being accepted for exchange in official outlets.</p>
Tipping	American dollar notes are always appreciated if you receive good service.
Government	Socialist republic, but Fidel Castro has created his own brand of more pragmatic Socialism.
Documentation	Passport and tourist card (inc in package tours) Departure tax is 25 CUCs
Time zone	Eastern Standard Time
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: 76 years; literacy: 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.

CLIMATE	
General climate	Wet season is May to Oct; temp averages 26 degrees in Jan and temperatures are sub-tropical year-round.
Today’s weather	29 degrees Centigrade and sunny (March 15, 2007)
Best time to visit	November to April

GETTING THERE	
Flying time	3.5 to 4 hours

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Cities

Havana: 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"
Founded 1514: "the jewel of the Spanish colonies";
UNESCO world Heritage Site;
1898-1902 ruled by US;
rent a bike \$1/hr;
Old Havana is a walkers paradise;
Catedral de la Havana – baroque façade;
Plaza de la Cathedral - Is perhaps the most beautiful square in the Caribbean which is surrounded by examples of the finest baroque architecture in the country;
Castillo de la Real Fuerza – oldest colonial fortress in the Americas;
Museo de la Ciudad – former Palace of the Captains General;
Malecon – seawall meeting place;
Hemmingway – El Floridita 180 yrs old, birthplace of daiquiris, 'papa especial': double 3yr rum, lemon, crushed ice;
247 museums;
nightlife: Tropicana Cabaret;
restaurant: El Meson – on roof of Castillo, Cuban cuisine and cabaret

Varadero: Varadero is a privileged enclave on the west coast of Cuba, with over 20 kilometers of superlative beaches sheltering caves and virgin keys whose crystalline waters conceal more than 40 different kinds of coral, fish, lobsters, shrimp, crabs and turtles. This beautiful destination has excellent connections and a vast range of leisure and entertainment options, making it the ideal spot for a relaxing and enjoyable vacation in the heart of the Caribbean. Highlights:
History: Siboney Indians, Cubanacan nation, Cueva de San Ambrosio: 50 drawings at tip of peninsula, discovered in 1961;
1928: Mansion Xanadu – Cary Grant, Ava Gardner;
1900-1920: wooden houses;
Museo Municipal – Varadero history with English captions;
Establecimiento Tabaquero – cigar factory, 20 tobacco craftsmen;
Parque Josone – flamingos, macaws and rowboats;
Scuba – 3 clubs \$60 Playa Giron intro 2 hrs;
Horseriding – 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;
Delfinario – 8 dolphins, 5 born there, 3 shows;
Cuevas de Bellamar – discovered in 1861, 45 mins, La Fuente del Amor
Sailing ship to Cayo Blanco from Marina Chapelin \$65 seafood lunch, snorkelling

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Distances	Varadero to Havana: 144 km
Ferries	There are no regular ferries or boats to Cuba from foreign ports, although some cruise liners do visit.
Trains	Standard gauge: 4,226 km of which 140 km is electrified
Car Rental, Taxis	Car rental starts from CUC 65 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. Collective taxis often use pre-1959 US cars.
Buses	There are 30,000 km 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.

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	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 \$8 and \$20 per person, and meals are often available at very reasonable prices.
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TARGET GROUPS	
Kids	If you've got kids, 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. 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. Admission is \$10 per person; it's \$5 extra to take photos, and \$45 for a 15-minute swimming session with the dolphins.
Teens	If all the activities at the resorts are not enough, there is a large swath of the eastern end of the 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.
Romance	Old Havana has to be one of the most romantic cities on earth...
Honeymoons & Weddings	The major resorts are all able to create magical wedding events – involve your travel agent at the early planning stage.

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<p>Seniors</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>
<p>UNIQUES</p>	<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> <p>If you want a bird's-eye view of things, the Centro Internacional de Deportes Aéreos, off a little side road across from the Marina Dársena, offers parachute jumps and ultralight flights. Tandem parachuting costs \$150 per person. Ultralight flights run \$30 to \$300, depending on the length of time</p>
<p>Surprising</p>	<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 terminatable only by abandonment or mutual agreement.</p>
<p>History</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 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.</p>

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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.

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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 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.

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	<p>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 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>
Books	Frommer's Cuba
1000 Places to see before you die	<p>Cuba's Jazz Festival – mid Feb in Havana La Habana Vieja – Havana's Old Quarter Hemingway's Hangouts – La Floridita and La Bodeguita del Medio</p>
Must Sees	Havana, the countryside, the people

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>
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 \$60 for 18 holes.</p>
Fishing	<p>Landing a marlin or sailfish: If you really want to emulate Ernest Hemingway, you'll head out to sea to fish. The waters off Cuba's coast are excellent for sportfishing year-round. Big game fish are best sought off the northern coast, while bonefish and tarpon are better stalked off the southern coast. Marinas Puertosol (www.puertosol.net) runs a string of marinas with modern well-equipped sportfishing fleets all around Cuba's coastline.</p>

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Hiking	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. 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. Mountaineers 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.
Cycling	The Vinales Valley is perfect cycling country.
Diving	Scuba Diving at María la Gorda: Cuba has many excellent dive destinations, but María la Gorda probably edges out the rest by offering consistently excellent conditions, a variety of sites, an amazing setting, and an excellent dive operation. However, there's excellent diving off of much of Cuba's coast, and if you want to combine diving with other attractions you can do so from just about any destination on the island.

CULTURE	
Music	Buena Vista Social Club; rumba; jazz; salsa; son
Museums	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.
Festivals	Havana Carnival is in late Feb, early March 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.

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<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	<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 (e.g Guamuhaaya Archaeological Museum, Plaza Mayor, Church of Santa Ana, 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>
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>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 21 km stretch of nearly uninterrupted beach.</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>Bird-Watching in the Zapata Peninsula: A dedicated (and lucky) bird-watcher might be able to spot 18 of Cuba's 22 endemic species in the swamps, 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> <p>Cayo Largo: In the Archipiélago de los Canarreos, off the south coast, 177 km southeast of Havana; 38 sq km, 26 km long, 2 km wide; glittering white sands faced by turquoise waters; 200 shipwrecks in the area, shallow coral reefs; wildlife: turtles, iguanas, cranes, flamingos, bee hummingbirds; Playa Paraiso – nude beach; Cayo Iguana – home to 100's of friendly iguanas.</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>Gran Parque Natural Montemar – 4500 sq km, Peninsula de Zapata, vast wetland of mangroves, 160 birds species, 31 reptiles, 12 mammals, manatee sea-cows, hummingbirds, flamingos, parrots, Apr/May red land crabs swarm</p> <p>The Viñales Valley: This broad, flat valley is punctuated by a series of limestone karst hill formations, or mogotes. The views from the small mountains surrounding the valley are spectacular. The area offers great opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, bird-watching, and rock climbing, as well as caves to explore.</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Parque Josone is a beautifully maintained little city park with cool shady grounds and gardens.</p>

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Castles/Forts	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 harbor 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.
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	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. There are nine shopping centers 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.
Markets	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.
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 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>

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	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
Casinos	None in Cuba – unlike pre-Castro days!

CUISINE	
Food	<p>Cuban cuisine is a result of the Spanish and African influences on the country throughout its history. It is mainly based around pork, rice, legumes, vegetables and fruit and, thanks to the wealth of its coastline, fish and shellfish are never far from the table.</p> <p>Some of the most popular culinary specialties are "Moors and Christians" (Moros y Cristianos), a mixture of white rice and black beans, roast pork; "Ropa Vieja" (literally old clothes, actually shredded beef), yucca, "Vianda frita" (fried marinated beef) and lobster enchiladas.</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 a 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; admission is \$3.</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 Antiguadades – best in town; Nightlife: La Cueva de Pirata – Latin music; Casa du Pont – quiet piano bar and gorgeous views.</p>

MORE INFO	
Brochures	Transat Holidays Sun 2006-2007
Website	www.transatholidays.com

HOTEL PRIZE PARTNER	See above under Barcelo
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AIRLINE PRIZE PARTNER	Air Transat
Flight details	Four times per week from Toronto to Varadero; 3 hours 20 mins

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