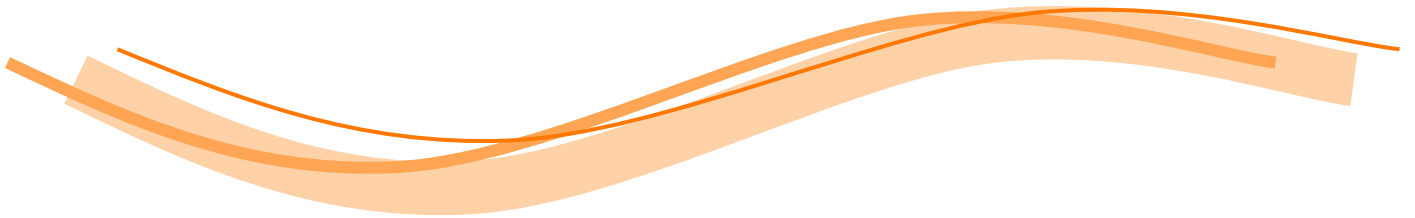




TRANSAT HOLIDAYS - COLLECTIONS





TRANSAT AND NOLITOURS

Everyone has slightly different priorities when choosing their holiday resort. If you are travelling with young kids, for instance, you will be looking for different facilities to a couple looking for a luxurious escape.....The experts at Transat Holidays have made it easy for you to find the perfect vacation that's right for you by creating the Transat "Collections".

Each Collection is made up of resorts in different destinations across the Transat program – but all the resorts have features in common that make them a great choice for, for example, families or golfers. Here is an overview of what each Transat Collection* has to offer.

Distinction Collection

Resorts in the Transat Holidays "Distinction Collection" offer extra inclusions and privileges. So you know this is going to be a bit more of a special vacation. Resorts are chosen for this Collection that are on stunning beaches with beautiful surroundings and that offer attentive service, superb facilities and spacious accommodation. Distinction Collection resorts come with a long list of inclusions:

- Direct transfers between the airport and the hotel (no stopping at other hotels on the way)
- Free WiFi in the lobby
- Welcome cocktail and cold towel in the lobby upon arrival
- Beach towels, bathrobes and slippers in room upon arrival
- Bottle of wine or local specialty in room upon arrival
- Unlimited select international brand drinks
- Mini-bar, restocked daily
- Concierge service
- Turn-down service
- A minimum of 3 guaranteed reservations for à la carte dinners
- Golf or Spa discounts
- Free safety deposit box

Here are just two examples of Distinction Collection Resorts:
Grand Bahia Principe La Romana Royal Garden, La Romana, Dominican Republic
Grand Bahia Principe Punta Cana Royal Golden, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Experience Collection

The "Experience Collection" brings unique ways to immerse yourself in the local culture. An Experience Collection "Duo" combines two different destinations in one vacation – for instance you could spend part of your

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vacation soaking up the sun on a beautiful beach, paired with exploring the cultural and historic attractions of a town or city.

Or book an Experience Collection “Escapade” for a two day adventure with one night away from your resort. Stay in authentic accommodation such as a traditional hotel, a hacienda or an ecolodge and explore the local towns, restaurants, wildlife and scenery.

Here are just two examples of Experience Collection Resorts:
Bahia Principe San Juan Club Golden, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic
Grand Bahia Principe Akumal Royal Garden, Riviera Maya, Mexico

Luxury Collection

For the ultimate pampering and indulgence - check out the “Luxury Collection”. Transat’s Luxury Collection represents a world of upscale 5 star resorts offering tranquility and privilege in intimate settings. Expect elegant accommodations, picture-perfect beaches, outstanding service, gourmet cuisine and world class spas. Luxury Collection resorts come with all these inclusions:

- Free access to VIP airport lounge (where available)
- Private transfers between the airport and the hotel
- Free WiFi
- Luxurious accommodation with whirlpool or hydromassage bathtub
- Welcome bottle of champagne and fruit platter in room upon arrival
- Beach towels, bathrobes and slippers in room upon arrival
- Coffee maker with quality local coffee
- VIP room amenities
- 24 hr room service
- Concierge or butler service
- Waiter service at pool and beach
- Unlimited à la carte gourmet dining with fine wines
- Unlimited premium brand drinks
- Access to the spa facilities
- Complimentary upgrade to Option Plus (Air Transat) and CanJet Select (CanJet)

Here are just two examples of Luxury Collection Resorts:
Luxury Bahia Principe Cayo Levantado Don Pablo Collection, Samana, Dominican Republic
Paradisus Princesa del Mar Royal Service, Varadero, Cuba

Family Collection

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	<p>“Family Collection” resorts are perfect for kids. These resorts are carefully chosen by the experts at Transat Holidays because they have extensive family-friendly facilities, lots of activities for young and old – plus they are great value and offer kid’s discounts. With a Family Collection Resort you can expect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Children stay and eat free (up to 2 children/family)- Most resorts are less than 1hr from the airport, so no long transfers- Spacious resorts with several pools, including one for kids- Double, triple and quad adjoining rooms- Priority check in at the hotel- Children’s’ entertainment- Kid’s Club and Mini Disco- Kid’s Menu- Free excursion for 1 child under 12 in every family per stay- Plus enjoy Family air services on your flight with dedicated check in, family pre boarding, priority baggage handling, free seat selection for kids, priority meal service, stroller service at Canadian airports and onboard kid’s surprises <p>Here are just two examples of Family Collection Resorts: Ocean Turquesa, Riviera Maya, Mexico Iberostar Playa Alameda, Varadero, Cuba</p> <p>Golf Collection</p> <p>If golf is a big part of your vacation experience – look no further than the Transat Golf Collection for golf friendly resorts offering accessible golf and everything from golf packages to discounts and green fees. Plus your golf clubs travel for free when you book a Transat Holidays package!</p> <p>Here are just two examples of Golf Collection resorts: Grand Bahia Principe Coba Royal Garden, Riviera Maya, Mexico Sandals Grande Riviera Beach and Villa Golf Resort, Jamaica</p> <p>Ask your travel agent for the Transat Holidays Sun Collection 2013-2014 and Nolitours Sun 2013-2014 brochure and go to www.transatholidays.com and www.Nolitours.com</p>
Option Flex	<p>For even more peace of mind – consider Option Flex from Transat Holidays and Nolitours. For only \$49 at the time of booking, should anything unexpected happen, Option Flex has you covered. You can change your departure date, destination or hotel up to 3 hours before departure. You can transfer your vacation package to a friend or family member up to 7 days before departure. Or you can cancel your trip and get a full refund.</p>

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Transat Background	<p>For over 25 years, Transat Holidays has been offering a large selection of vacation options in Europe, Florida and the south, as well as cruises. In addition to more than 200 south hotels available in the form of all-inclusive packages, Transat also offers a wide range of flights, packages, tours and à la carte products in some 30 European destinations. Their packages are flexible and tailored to stays of varying lengths. Their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader here in Canada. They see their role as turning holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience of their guests one of the most memorable ever. Transat offer flights from East to West and all in between, such as Hamilton, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and from the West Coast.</p>
Awards	<p>Agent's Choice Awards: For the fifth consecutive year, Transat Holidays was named Wholesaler of the Year by travel agents in 2012.</p>
New Brochures	<p>Transat Holidays Sun 2013-2014 and Nolitours Sun 2013-2014 brochures are available at your local travel agent and cover vacations through to October 2014. Also newly released are: Transat Holidays Florida Transat Holidays Cruise Transat Discoveries</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 is giving their fleet a full makeover. Starting in 2012, one by one, the planes and passengers are soaring to new heights in design and comfort. They are rolling out the new cabins over the next two years. For a glimpse of what it all looks like: http://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. 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>
Air Transat Upgrades	<p>Air Transat has added more legroom on all their aircraft, making the journey to and from your destination even more comfortable. They have</p>

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	<p>also introduced a new Economy Class meal service on sun destination flights. Passengers flying south will now be welcomed onboard with a glass of champagne, while early morning passengers will be greeted with a mimosa.</p> <p>The meal service has also been improved. The airline will now offer passengers a more complete meal tray, including a choice of two hot meals, a complimentary glass of wine and dessert.</p>
<p>Best Leisure Airline</p>	<p>Air Transat was named World's Best Leisure Airline at the Skytrax annual World Airline Awards, held at the 2012 Farnborough International Airshow, near London in the UK.</p> <p>Distinctions were based on a survey measuring the satisfaction of more than 18 million customers. Conducted over a 10-month period, this survey included over 200 airlines that were rated on 38 different aspects of the passenger experience. The study analyzed customer satisfaction for the Airline Passenger Experience, from check-in to boarding, onboard seat comfort, cabin cleanliness, food and beverages, onboard entertainment, and service of staff.</p> <p>In the past five years, Air Transat has gained other recognitions as a result of its numerous environmental initiatives. In 2011, the Company ranked first worldwide in the Atmosfair Airline Index environmental performance indicator, in the long-haul category. Air Transat also obtained the Platinum LEED-EB (existing building) certification for its headquarters, located within the Montreal–Trudeau airport site.</p> <p>Air Transat was recognized as the Best Charter Airline for the fifth consecutive year at the Agents' Choice Awards, which represents the largest sampling of travel agents in Canada. The airline also received the Family Friendly Airline Award, which acknowledges carriers that provide additional services and extra comfort to children & parents.</p>
<p>Transat Compensation Plan</p>	<p>Transat has introduced a new compensation plan for clients affected by an advanced flight schedule change on all South, Florida and Europe flights, packages and cruises. This new policy applies to all bookings made with Transat Holidays.</p> <p>Applicable to schedule changes within 45 days of departure.</p> <p>Schedule change of 3 to 12 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$50 voucher for future travel. <p>Schedule change of 12 to 24 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$75 voucher for future travel. <p>Schedule change of 24 hours or more and cancelled flights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients can cancel their flight and are entitled to a full refund in the event of a schedule change of 24 hours or more.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$50 voucher for future travel to clients who cancel. • Transat will offer a \$100 voucher for future travel to clients who accept the date change. • Clients who choose a product at a lower fare will be refunded the price difference, whereas clients who select a product at a higher fare will be required to pay the balance. <p>Schedule change of 3 hours or less</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No compensation will be offered to clients experiencing a schedule change that is delayed or advanced by 3 hours or less.
<p>Transat Club Class</p>	<p>Enjoy exclusive privileges such as complimentary seat selection, wider, 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
<p>Option Plus</p>	<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

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	<p>(Sun and Europe)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 November 2013</p>
<p>Transat and Sustainable Tourism</p>	<p>Transat recognizes the prime importance of the environment, host communities, cultural diversity, and their relationships with their employees, customers and partners. 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: 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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biosphere Responsible Tourism 2. Green Globe 3. Green Key 4. ISO 14001 5. Travelife

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	<p>Certification for beaches</p> <p>6. 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 gift of travel from packages to car rental. 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>
2013 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 Nolitours/Transat Holidays policy covers reservations for departures between June 1 and November 30, 2013. 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 in credit vouchers
Nolizone	<p>Nolitours' lively noliZONE was specifically created for travellers who would like to step outside their resort, meet new people and really get to know their destination. With tons of fun activities throughout the day and night, your biggest dilemma will be deciding what to do next. Introduced in 2011, the It Zone in Puerto Plata was so successful that this concept has been launched in other destinations.</p> <p>Their noliZONE representative will always keep you informed on upcoming activities and events, and you can also visit www.nolizone.nolitours.com to get the latest news and updates on what is going on in the noliZONE.</p>
Social Media	<p>Stay in touch with Transat and Nolitours at their two Facebook sites:</p> <p>http://www.facebook.com/airtransat http://www.facebook.com/nolitours</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>
Transat Discoveries	<p>This is Transat's program to the exotic destination of your dreams! It features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - international flights on scheduled airlines like Cathay Pacific, Air France, KLM, South African Airways, Air Canada and LAN - 4 star accommodation (some 3 and 5 star) and transfers - Small-group tour with English-speaking guide - Unique experiences with most meals and excursions included <p>For more information contact your travel agent and view the tour itineraries in the brochure or at www.transatdiscoveries.com</p>

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	<p>Here are some of their destinations they offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beach stays in Thailand and Vietnam - Health retreats in Tunisia and Morocco - Diving in the Red Sea and Galapagos Islands - Overland safaris in Kenya and Tanzania - More options in over 40 countries.
<p>Current Deals Nov 2013</p>	<p>Experience Collection Duo Havana and Varadero: 3nts Havana, 4 nts Varadero in 4* Melia Hotels departing Toronto Dec 6 or 7 for just \$559 + \$280 taxes = \$839</p> <p>Experience Collection Escapade Cuban Medley, Holguin: 6nts Holguin at Blau Costa Verde and 1nt Bayamo, true Cuba, departing Toronto Nov 30 for just \$659 + \$280 taxes = \$939</p>

<p>Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort Crystal Club, Riviera Maya, Mexico</p>	<p>The Moon Palace Golf and Spa Resort Crystal Club in the Riviera Maya, Mexico is part of the Transat Distinction Collection. This completely renovated, modern resort is set on beautiful beach overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Transat Holidays guests stay in the Sunrise section of the hotel – exclusively available from Transat and enjoy all the Distinction Collection inclusions that make a vacation special.</p> <p>You have unlimited à la carte lunch and dinner options at 8 à la carte restaurants (Mexican, Seafood, Caribbean, Italian, Brazilian, 2 Asian & Steakhouse) with no reservations required. The spa is truly world class and offers a relaxing hydrotherapy experience together with massages, bath therapies, facials and body scrubs. The Moon Spa & Golf Club is home to one of two Jack Nicklaus signature golf courses in Cancun. And when you book this resort you receive a \$1500US resort credit that can be used towards spa treatments, golf, selected tours, an upgraded wine list, wedding packages and more.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>On Cancun's south shore approximately 10 km from the Cancun airport</p>
<p>Accommodation</p>	<p>This resort has 2,446 rooms and suites in two sections (Moon Grand and Sunrise):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 king-size or 2 double beds Air-conditioning In-room double whirlpool Bathrobes, slippers, hairdryer & flat iron LCD television and WiFi Coffee-maker, In-room wine and Mini-bar Balcony Occupancy up to 4 persons (max. adults: 4 / max. children: 2)
<p>Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Pools and 6 Whirlpools 24-hour room service

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	<p>Access to all services and facilities of all Palace Resorts</p> <p>Beauty salon</p> <p>Disco</p> <p>Gym</p> <p>Sauna/steam room</p> <p>Spa</p> <p>Shop</p> <p>Scheduled transportation to Wet'n Wild park, Beach Palace and Sun Palace</p> <p>Turn-down service</p>
Dining	There are 10 Buffet Restaurants and 8 A La Carte restaurants to choose from!
Activities	<p>Daily activities program and variety of daily sports</p> <p>Dolphinarium</p> <p>FlowRider</p> <p>Giant chess and Mini-golf</p> <p>Nightly entertainment</p> <p>Yoga and Pilates</p> <p>Bicycles</p> <p>Basketball</p> <p>Beach volleyball</p> <p>Golf</p> <p>Sailing</p> <p>Selected non-motorized water sports</p> <p>Tennis</p>
Kids	<p>Two children under 4 stay and eat free</p> <p>Kids' Club (ages 4 to 12)</p> <p>Teens lounge (ages 13-18)</p> <p>Children's pool and playground</p>
Deals with Transat Holidays for 2013-2014	<p>Transat Distinction Collection Crystal Club inclusions:</p> <p>Direct transfer between the airport and the hotel (offered with the vacation package only)</p> <p>Distinct identification bracelet</p> <p>Welcome cocktail and cold towel upon arrival</p> <p>Beach towels, bathrobes and slippers in room</p> <p>In-room liquor dispenser</p> <p>Welcome bottle of wine</p> <p>Snacks</p> <p>Unlimited à la carte lunch and dinner (no reservations required)</p> <p>Unlimited domestic, select international and premium brand drinks (house wine included)</p> <p>Mini-bar restocked daily (water, soft drinks and beer)</p> <p>24-hour room, Concierge and Turn-down service</p> <p>Complimentary WiFi</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited phone calls to Canada • Access to all services and facilities of all Palace Resorts
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<p>Sol Rio de Luna Y Mares Resort, Holguin, Cuba</p>	<p>The Sol Rio de Luna y Mares Resort is on Playa Esmeralda Beach in Holguin. Transat guests stay in the Mares section of the hotel – exclusively available from Transat. Your all inclusive package includes two guaranteed à la carte dinners and one private beach dinner per week. There are 4 à la carte restaurants (French, Italian, Mexican and Mediterranean).</p> <p>When you book this hotel you can also book the Cuban Medley Escapade for a taste of the “Real Cuba”. Day 1 of this two day adventure takes you to Bayamo for a panoramic tour of the town. Check in to your hotel and enjoy a traditional lunch at La Bodega restaurant. Spend the afternoon and evening at leisure exploring your surroundings visiting the town and the museums. Bayamo is known for its bars, restaurants and local musicians. On Day 2 drive to the Finca de Mayabe restaurant for lunch and later stop in the city of Loma de la Cruz for some stunning views of the city.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>On Playa Esmeralda beach, approximately 5 km from Guardalavaca and 70 km from the Holguin airport</p>
<p>Accommodation</p>	<p>The resort has 242 rooms in 3 and 4-storey buildings. Rooms feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air-conditioning 1 king-size or 2 3/4 beds Full bathroom with hairdryer TV and CD player Coffee-maker Mini-fridge In-room safe Iron <p>Maximum occupancy 3 adults (or 2 adults and 1 child)</p>
<p>Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beauty salon Boutiques Disco Gym Internet Massage Sauna Scuba diving centre
<p>Dining</p>	<p>Two buffet restaurants: Colón and Santa María Four À la carte restaurants: La Carabela (International) Galileo (Italian)</p>

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	La Pinta (Mediterranean) Le Bistro (French)
Activities	Basketball Kayaking Sailing Selected non-motorized water sports Snorkeling Tennis Volleyball Windsurfing Aerobics Daily activities program Introduction to scuba diving in pool Mini-golf Nightly entertainment Pedal boat Shuffleboard
Kids	One child under 13 stays and eats free from Nov. 1 to Dec. 26, 2013 and Apr. 1 to Oct. 31, 2014. Kids' Club (ages 5 to 12): 3 pm to 5 pm Children's pools Babysitting
Deals with Nolitours for 2013-2014	Free honeymoon package

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CUBA	Cuba is unlike any other place on earth. What draws people to this fascinating Caribbean island is much more than beaches, sun, and cheap drinks, though there are plenty of all three for those who want them. One of the last Communist nations left, it doesn't suffer from the drab and desultory demeanor of its disappeared peers. Cuba's rich culture, unique political history, and continued survival through ongoing economic hardship make it one of the most eye-opening countries that travellers can still discover.
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. Havana, the capital, was declared a World Heritage City by UNESCO in 1982 in recognition of its concentration of historic buildings.
Geography	111,000 square km, 4,200 coral cays and isles, 1,250 km long, 30-100 km wide, with 7,000 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 11.2 million, with Havana having more than 2 million
Language	Spanish; English is widely spoken in the resorts and in Varadero
Currency	One Canadian Dollar = 25 CUP or Cuban Pesos (Nov 2013) One Canadian Dollar = 0.96 CUC or Cuban Convertible Pesos (Nov 2013) There are two currencies circulating in Cuba, Cuban Pesos (CUP) and Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC). Prior to 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. CUP are also known as local Pesos and Moneda Nacional (National

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	<p>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> <p>Note that Amex, MasterCard MBNA and Visa Citibank credit cards are not accepted in Cuba and US dollars are not accepted for exchange in official outlets.</p>
Tipping	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.
Government	Socialist republic, but Fidel Castro has created his own brand of more pragmatic Socialism which is now led by his brother Raúl Castro
Documentation	Passport and tourist card (included in package tours) Departure tax is 25 CUCs
Time zone	Eastern Standard Time
Health	<p>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%.</p> <p>Since May 2010, travellers must present proof of health insurance in order to enter the country. Upon arrival, travellers may be required to present an insurance policy, insurance certificate, or medical assistance card valid for the period of their stay in Cuba. 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>
Safety tips	<p>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.</p> <p>In my personal opinion and experience, Cuba is one of the safest destinations in the Caribbean today.</p>

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	30 degrees Centigrade and sunny in Havana (2 nd November 2013)
Best time to visit	November to April

GETTING THERE	
Flying time	3.5 to 4 hours from Montreal and Toronto
Cities	Havana: 2.5 million people, faded glory, 1950's cars, swinging nightlife;

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“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;
Highlights:
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 – the oldest colonial fortress in the Americas;
Museo de la Ciudad – former Palace of the Captains General;
Malecon – seawall meeting place;
In search of echoes of Hemmingway – go to El Floridita 180 yrs old, birthplace of daiquiris, ‘papa especial’: double 3year rum, lemon, crushed ice;
And no less than 247 museums!

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.
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, snorkeling

Santa Clara: Santa Clara is a pretty city set amid green hills. The

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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 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.

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	<p>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.</p> <p>Santiago de Cuba: Set on the seaside, near the island's eastern tip, Santiago de Cuba is the country's second-largest city. Vibrant, tropical, and often sweltering, Santiago is the country's liveliest cultural showpiece, outside of Havana. With a population just under a half-million people, Santiago is a world apart, with a unique history and rhythms all its own.</p>
Distances	<p>Varadero to Havana: 144 km 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 Viazul buses. These are well-staffed and luxurious air-conditioned buses with toilets, big comfy seats, and lots of leg room. Refreshments are provided. Viazul 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 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.</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. 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 Spiritus is the only one in Cuba to count two of</p>

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	<p>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>
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<p>ACCOMMODATION TYPES</p>	<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 \$10 and \$20 per person, and meals are often available at very reasonable prices.</p>
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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. Admission is \$10 per person; it's \$5 extra to take photos, and 55 CUC for a 15-minute swimming session with the dolphins.</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>
Seniors	<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>The old colonial city of Trinidad is a perfect day excursion from many of the island resorts.</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 1993, laws passed allowing Cubans to own and use US dollars, be

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	<p>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>
Books	Frommer'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>
Must Sees	Here are my tips for the things not to miss: Havana, Trinidad, the countryside and 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> <p>If you want to bring presents for the locals, you can't go wrong with any baseball equipment!</p>
Golf	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 (March 2013)
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</p>

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	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; the greatest number are run by Cubanacán (tel. 7/208-6044; www.cubanacan.cu) and Gaviota (tel. 7/66-9668; www.gaviota-grupo.com). All offer sport fishing charters
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> <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	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 Larga, 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.

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>

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	<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>
<p>Museums</p>	<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 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>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Cuba's Jazz Festival – Dec in Havana http://www.jazzcuba.com</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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>
<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</p>

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	<p>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 Guamuhaya 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 21km stretch of nearly uninterrupted beach. If you prefer less commercialized beach destinations, consider the various Cayo destinations along the north coast.</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 in their 10,000's</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>Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve: (100 km west of Havana) The mountainous region between Havana and Pinar del Río is another prime destination in the country's budding eco-tourism industry. With both the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve and La Güira National Park, as well as eco-tourism projects in Soroa and at Las Terrazas, the area offers a wealth of opportunities to explore the flora and fauna of Cuba's inland mountain forests. Add the sulfurous mineral springs of San Diego de los Baños into the mix, and you've got the perfect recipe</p>

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	for some nature-based rest and relaxation. Declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1985, the 25,000-hectare (nearly 62,000-acre) Sierra del Rosario encompasses a mountainous area of rapidly recovering secondary tropical deciduous forests, cut with numerous rivers and waterfalls. Nearly 100 species of birds can be spotted here, including over half of Cuba's 22 endemic species.
Gardens	Parque Josone in Varadero is a beautifully maintained little city park with cool shady grounds and gardens.
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 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.

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 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
Markets	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. 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.
Nightlife	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. 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

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	<p>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> <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). 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 \$2 (2013).</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). 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>

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MORE INFO	
Brochures	Transat Holidays Sun Collection 2013/2014 Nolitours Sun 2013/2014 Both of these brochures are available at your local travel agent.
Websites	www.transatholidays.com www.gocuba.ca

AIRLINE PRIZE PARTNER	Air Transat
Flight details	Transat has many flights from across Canada to all the major destinations in Cuba. Flight times are 3 to 4 hours.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	Several trips to Cuba including visits to: Havana, Varadero, Holguin, Cayo Largo, Cayo Coco and Trinidad
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