

Cuba Itinerary

[Link: Cuba](#)

Tour Overview

Cuba is a wonderful tropical island that boasts golden beaches, extensive wetlands, subtropical rainforests and temperate mountains. It is home to 25 or more endemics, and on our Cuba birding tour, we have the chance to see all of them.

We visit lowland forests, rice fields, mangrove swamps, and the exciting Zapata swamp, where we encounter trogons and todies, lizard-cuckoos and parakeets, the world's smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird, and we look for Zapata Sparrow, Zapata Wren, Bare-legged Owl and Gundlach's Hawk.

The area around Camaguey and the delightful coastal area of Cayo Coco hold several endemics – Giant Kingbird, Cuban Gnatcatcher, and more. We also visit the cool mountains of west Cuba, where we search for Olive-capped Warblers, tanagers and honeycreepers whilst being serenaded by the beautiful flute-like song of the endemic Cuban Solitaire.

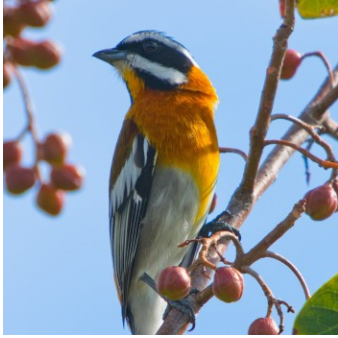
Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Cuba



We arrive today on the beautiful island of Cuba, and then transfer to our hotel in Havana for the beginning of our Cuba birding tour. Most people will arrive on a flight to Varadero and transfer to Havana, but you can also arrive at the Havana airport where we can arrange for you to be transferred. We meet for supper to get acquainted and discuss the upcoming adventure. Night in Havana.

Day 2: Havana to Viñales



After breakfast, we first drive to the Botanical Gardens for a leisurely walk in the grounds. Here we look for Red-legged Honeycreepers foraging on the flowers of trees, Western Spindalis, Cuban Emerald, Eastern Meadowlarks of the local resident race, and lots of migrants including Tennessee, Cape May, Prairie and Black-and-white Warblers and Northern Parula. We will also make a stop at a reliable location for the declining endemic Cuban Grassquit, a victim of the caged bird trade. We then drive west to the beautiful Viñales Valley, stopping for waterbirds and shorebirds at wetlands along the way. Night near Viñales.

Day 3: Viñales, La Guira National Park, and travel to Zapata Swamp



We will visit several areas in and near Viñales, and work our way towards La Guira National Park, and Cueva los Portales. We will look for the stunning Cuban Trogon, Cuba's national bird (so chosen because it has all the colours of the Cuban flag in its plumage) and the Cuban Solitaire, which has one of the bird world's most beautiful songs, variously described as flute-like or bell-like, with an ethereal quality matching its high pine woodland home. Other goodies we could find here are Cuban Emerald, West Indian Woodpecker, Red-legged Thrush, Western Spindalis, Loggerhead Kingbird and possibly Giant Kingbird. The near-endemic Olive-capped Warbler occurs in these pine woodlands, Great Lizard-Cuckoos scuttle along branches, and we may find the endemic Yellow-headed Warbler. We will travel in the afternoon and spend the night at Playa Larga.

Day 4: Zapata Swamp - Playa Larga



We will spend the next three days birding this famed area, a large lowland of mixed forests, flooded woods and wet prairies dominated by sawgrass. This area was declared a biosphere reserve in 2000 and a Ramsar site in 2001. It covers an area of 628,171 hectares and is the largest and best-conserved wetland in Cuba and the Caribbean. Our guides know the trails as we search for localized endemics such as Zapata Sparrow and the very rare Zapata Wren. While looking for these, we are likely to find several new species such as Cuban Parakeet and the gorgeous Cuban Parrot. We will spend the afternoon visiting one of the many natural attractions of the park, perhaps Salinas del Brito. Extensive lagoons and mudflats support huge numbers of wading birds – 2000 American Flamingos, Great Blue, Green, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons, Great, Snowy and Reddish (both white and dark morphs) Egrets, Roseate Spoonbill, White Ibis and Wood Stork. Shorebirds include Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Short-billed Dowitcher, Least and Spotted Sandpipers, and there should be dozens of Neotropic Cormorants, American White Pelicans, Royal Terns and Caspian Terns and if we are lucky some Black Skimmers. Passerines include “Mangrove” Yellow and Prairie Warblers, the endemic Yellow-headed Warbler, and Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds, and we might find our first Cuban Black Hawk. We will transfer a short distance to spend the following two nights in Playa Giron.

Day 5 & 6: Zapata Swamp - Playa Giron, Bermejas, and transfer to Trinidad



Known habitats for quail-doves will be visited early in the morning and with luck, endemic Gray-headed and Blue-headed Quail-Doves will be spotted moving silently in the dense undergrowth. We will place special emphasis on locating Red-shouldered Blackbird, which frequents the tall sawgrass. Time could be spent at the local museum, which commemorates the Bay of Pigs War. On one day, we leave the coast and visit deciduous forests near the village of Bermejas, in search of woodland species - Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove, Greater Antillean Grackle, Cuban Oriole, and Bee Hummingbird. The Soplillar palm savanna supports a population of the scarce and declining Fernandina's Flicker, as well as Cuban Lizard-Cuckoo, White-crowned Pigeon, Crested Caracara, Cuban Crow, and more North American migrants – perhaps Northern Waterthrush, Worm-eating and Swainson's Warblers, Gray Catbird and Tree Swallow. Soplillar is an area of deciduous woodland where we have a good chance of finding the endemic Bare-legged Owl and Cuban Green Woodpecker, so we inspect tree cavities and search likely spots. On the morning of Day 6, we may spend a little time in the national park, looking for species not yet found, after which we have a 3 ½ hour drive to our next destination, Trinidad. We will drive through the iconic city of Cienfuegos where we will stop for lunch. The scenic drive will be punctuated with birding stops at a few wetlands. Night in Trinidad.

Day 7: Transfer to Cayo Coco



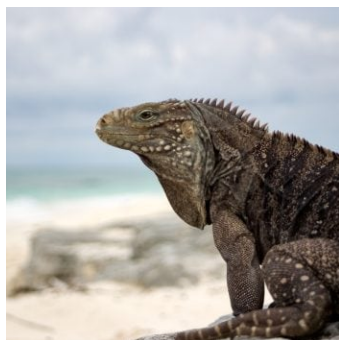
This morning we will bird the area between Trinidad and Sancti Spiritus, looking specially for the very local Palm Crow and also Gundlach's Hawk which has nested in the area recently. In the afternoon, we head to Cayo Coco for a three-night stay.

Days 8 & 9: Cayo Coco



There is a lot to see at this charming location. Woodlands and scrub forest have Key West and Ruddy Quail-Doves, Mangrove Cuckoo, Oriente Warbler, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Thick-billed Vireo, Bahama Mockingbird, and a different subspecies of the Zapata Sparrow. Local breeders that winter further south such as Gray Kingbird and Black-whiskered Vireo might be back and we have a chance to spot the rare and endangered Bahama Swallow. Wetlands, lagoons and scrub support Anhinga, Greater Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbill, the white morph of the Great Blue Heron, coots, ducks and grebes, Black-necked Stilt, and Clapper Rails, and interestingly the Bahama race of the Cuban Lizard-Cuckoo. We will search for tricky wetland species like West Indian Whistling-Duck, White-cheeked Pintail and Least Grebe. While there are no guarantees, migrant songbirds including Painted Bunting and Hooded Warbler should be moving through. Anything could show up; on our 2017 tour, a participant found Cuba's second or third record of Kirtland's Warbler! Evenings could produce Greater Antillean Nightjar. Nights in Cayo Coco.

Day 10: Departure



After a morning looking for species not yet located, we head to the airport at Cayo Coco for our flights home in the afternoon, drawing our incredible Cuba birding tour to a close.

What to Expect

Overview

The Cuba tour is a moderately paced birding tour. We usually bird in the morning before the heat of the day sets in, return to the lodge for lunch, followed by a siesta of an hour or so. Then we go out for an afternoon visit to another birding hot-spot. We may go out in the evening if we hear about a

Stygian Owl hunting at a favoured spot.

Cuba is currently facing widespread energy shortages, resulting in blackouts that may impact daily life and tourism services. We are staying informed of the situation through our trusted ground operator who will make decisions that prioritize your overall experience during the trip.

Important Notice for U.S. Citizens:

Due to current U.S. government regulations, travel to Cuba for tourism purposes is not permitted for U.S. citizens or residents. Travel is only allowed under specific approved categories and our tour does not meet the criteria required for U.S. citizens to travel legally to Cuba.

If you are a U.S. passport holder, we regret that we are unable to accept your booking for this tour at this time. Please feel free to explore our other tours, including our [Puerto Rico tour](#), which offers excellent birding without any travel restrictions.

Food

Breakfast is usually at the hotel, lunch is either a picnic in the field or at a local restaurant. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

Accommodation is basic hotels and lodges with most amenities. Note: we use the best accommodation available, but this may not be the same standard as the accommodation on our other tours.

Walking

The walking on this tour is mostly easy. Much of the birding will take place on wide trails, close to the vehicle, but there will also be a couple of steeper walks, which could be slippery in places. We will take any of the harder walking at a slow birding pace.

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving, apart from a few days with drives up to 4-5 hours, when we are transferring from one destination to another. We will be sure to take many rest stops and birding stops along the way.

Climate

It will be warm in the mornings and hot in mid-afternoon (siesta time!) with some humidity.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All meals
- All accommodations (simple to modern)
- Ground transportation (bus or van with driver)
- Guides - EET guide plus local guide with 6 - 12 participants
- Park, conservation and entry fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from start/end location
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Travel Insurance
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