

escambray encounter, cuba



Your trek starts in the vibrant capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site of Havana. Much of Havana's old quarter remains untouched despite the various wars and revolutions that have taken place over the last 200 years.

Once out of Havana, things are generally quieter and more easygoing. But for you, this is where your challenge begins. You will be trekking for five days, for between 6 to 7 hours a day, passing farms, coffee plantations and fruit plantations.

The terrain is undulating, and in parts tough going, but with amazing views and tropical waterfalls to bathe in, it is well worth the effort.

You will visit the Sierra del Escambray and finally the beautiful city of Trinidad.

Day 1: London to Havana

Meet at the airport, for your flight to Cuba, the world's 15th largest island, landing at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Havana - Cuba's capital. Our Charity Challenge representative will be there to assist you with the check-in and any last minute questions. On arrival in Havana, you will be met at the airport by your Charity Challenge local expedition leader who will transfer you to a three star hotel for a welcome Mojito (Cuban cocktail pronounced Mo-hi-to) and a briefing for the week's challenge ahead.

Day 2: Havana

Havana, founded in 1519, is now the Caribbean's largest city. The week's challenge takes place in Cuba's countryside, trekking through rural villages, so today; you will get the chance to experience city life in Havana before the hard work begins. Exploring frenetic Havana gives the feeling of being transported back in time by 50 years, or walking onto a huge film set. You will visit the most outstanding places such as Old Havana, Plaza de Armas and Cathedral Square street markets, amongst other locations. Lunch will take place in a typical Cuban

restaurant in Habana Vieja. In the afternoon you will be transferred to Hanabanilla Lake, where you will stay overnight in a hotel.



Day 3: Hiking from Lake Hanabanilla – 15 kms

Lake Hanabanilla is Cuba's largest man-made reservoir, surrounded by tropical vegetation and small farmsteads growing coffee, bananas and citrus fruits. You will take a boat across the lake and continue trekking to Casa de la Gallega, an old hacienda. A further hour's walk brings you to the Salto de Rocio a 25m high waterfall, perfect for a late afternoon swim. This trail is a great place to see Cuban trogons, hummingbirds and woodpeckers. Depending on your viewpoint you may be lucky/unlucky enough to see the Santa Maria Cuban Boa, which grows to four meters and is very occasionally seen here. Overnight is at the Casa de la Gallega, sleeping under the eaves of the hacienda on foam mattresses.

Day 4: Casa de la Gallega to Codina – 18kms

Over the next four days you will trek across the awe inspiring Escambray Mountains, Cuba's second largest range. The highest peak is Pico San Juan at 1,140m. After the revolution opponents of Fidel Castro used these hills to hide and attack the new government's officials. The slopes are swathed in Caribbean pines and an abundance of ancient tree-ferns, bamboo and eucalyptus. From the Casa de la Gallega you spend the following day hiking mostly uphill, reaching a second Hacienda, in the late afternoon.

Accommodation is again on in a hacienda, tents or under the stars!

Day 5: Codina to Topes de Collantes – 12 kms

After walking around the hacienda's educational trail, passing orchids and medicinal plants and traversing a cave through the mountains you head for Topes de Collantes. Topes has been used as a medicinal centre due to its clean mountain air and was once a favoured destination for the world's communist leaders. From here you drop down a steep descent to Salto Caburni for a swim in a crystal clear pool before continuing to the end of today's hike. You sleep tonight at a small hotel in Topes de Collantes – the disco provides some real Cuban entertainment!



Day 6: Topes de Collantes to Vega Grande - 15kms

After breakfast you will have an arduous, mostly uphill trek along the trail known as the 'Vega Grande Trail' meaning large fertile plain. This trail takes you through dense vegetation deep into the heart of the Escambray Mountains. You will reach 'Mi Retiro' hacienda for a late lunch before returning for an overnight stay in hotel.

Day 7: Topes de Collantes to El Cubano - 15kms

The last day of your trek is through dry scrub with occasional views of the turquoise Caribbean. Towards the end of the day you visit your third and final waterfall before celebrating the completion of the challenge with a few Cuban cocktails and lunch at a local restaurant. From here we transfer by road to our hotel nestling along the beaches of the Ancon Peninsula just outside Trinidad. You sleep tonight in a hotel on southern Cuba's best beach.

Day 8: Trinidad - Relaxation!

A full day of relaxation during which you can simply lie on the beach or by the pool and rest weary limbs, or visit the charming town of Trinidad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The town is a living museum, with cobbled streets and colonial housing. It has changed little in the last 150 years, and is a wonderful place to wander around and soak up the atmosphere of Cuba.

Day 9: "Ciao"

The morning is free for further exploration or recovery after a night's celebrations! In the afternoon you drive direct to Havana's airport for your flight back to the UK.



Day 10: Arrive UK

Arrive back in the UK.

N.B. The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, wildlife movements, the strength of the group and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your expedition leader will have the final say.

optional city extension

Day 9: Havana

After an early breakfast, you will depart by road to Havana. Your accommodation for the night is in a centrally located hotel in the heart of Old Havana close to museums, plazas, art galleries and prominent buildings dating back to the 18th century. In the afternoon, you will visit Revolution Square the place where most of the political rallies take place in Cuba and where Pope John Paul II gave his main mass during his visit to Cuba in 1999.

Day 10: Havana

A full-day tour of Havana awaits including a stroll along the Paseo de Marti (el Prado), a pedestrian promenade lined with examples of Moorish-influenced architecture. You will get the chance to visit to the Capitolio Nacional, a fabulous monumental building, obsequiously similar to the US Capitol Building, and crowned by a 300ft high dome. You will get to see the former Centro Gallego. It was built in 1915 by Belgium architect Paul Belau, and currently houses the Gran Teatro de La Habana, home of Alicia Alonso's Ballet Nacional del Cuba. In the evening, we have arranged some salsa dancing and typical Cuban music, provided by Dulce Maria, who leads a cultural project for the community and today she will open her home to your group.

Day 11: Relax / Depart

Most of the day is free to stroll around and stumble across some of Havana's many hidden cultural, historical and political treasures. After dinner, you will check in at Havana Airport for your return flight to London.

Day 12: Arrive UK

You will arrive back in the UK.

Cost: £195 - per person sharing
Single supp: £35 (NB: there must be a minimum of 2 persons for this extension to run)

Includes:

- Accommodation in a 3 star centrally located Havana hotel w/ breakfast
- Salsa lessons on Day 9
- Guided sightseeing on day 10
- Transportation for sightseeing
- Transfer to the airport
- Bilingual guide service
- Entrance fee to Capitol building and Garcia Lorca Theatre

Includes:

- Accommodation at Ancon hotel All Inclusive
- Viazul bus transfer to Havana
- Evening transfer out to the airport

If you would like to book the above extension or have any extension enquiries please call the Charity Challenge office on 020 8557 0000 or email flights@charitychallenge.com. All bookings are subject to availability and group booking limitations. We therefore ask you to consider your travel plans as soon as possible and if you want to extend your challenge, please put in your request immediately.

optional beach extension

Days 9 & 10: Ancon Beach

A full 2 days of relaxation during which you can simply lie on the beach or by the pool and rest weary limbs, or visit the charming town of Trinidad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Trinidad was founded in 1514, but remained a backwater haven for smugglers until the late 18th century. This changed in the early 19th century when a slave revolt in Haiti caused French planters to flee to Trinidad, where they re-established their mini-empires. Trinidad boomed until the Wars of Independence devastated the region's sugar plantations and the town again fell into obscurity. The legacy of this short-lived sugar-boom wealth can be seen in the town's baroque church towers, Carrara marble floors, wrought-iron grills and run-down mansions. Alternatively catamaran trips to deserted islands, snorkelling, scuba diving and deep-sea fishing can be arranged through the hotel.



Day 11: Relax / Depart

You transfer to Havana. You still have few hours free to stroll around some of Havana's many hidden cultural, historical and political treasures. You will take a local taxi & check in at Havana Airport for your return flight to London.

Day 12: Arrive UK

You will arrive back in the UK.

Cost: £190 - per person sharing
Single supp: £35 (NB: there must be a minimum of 2 persons for this extension to run)