



TRIP NOTES

BELIEVE ACHIEVE INSPIRE

CUBAN MOUNTAIN TREK
CUBA

Thu 07 Nov - Sat 16 Nov 2013





In aid of Teenage Cancer Trust

07 Nov - 16 Nov 2013



10 DAYS | CUBA | CHALLENGING

Your trek starts in the vibrant capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site of Havana. Much of Havana's old quarter remains untouched despite wars and revolution that have taken place over the last 200 years. Once out of Havana, things are generally quieter and more relaxed. But for you, this is where the hard work starts. You will be trekking for five days, passing farms, coffee plantations and fruit plantations along the way. The terrain is undulating and can be tough in parts, but with amazing views and tropical waterfalls to bathe in, it is well worth the effort. You will also visit the charming and colourful city of Trinidad, staying at a hotel on the beach nearby.

- World Heritage sites of Havana and Trinidad
- Trek through citrus groves and sugar plantations
- Explore Old Havana
- Optional beach or Havana city extension

YOUR CHALLENGE DAY BY DAY

DAY 1 Thu 07 Nov

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International departure from London

Meet at the airport for our flight to Havana, the capital of Cuba and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A Charity Challenge representative will be there to assist with check-in. On arrival, we will be met at the airport by our Charity Challenge local expedition leader who will transfer us to a three-star hotel, where we will spend the night and be briefed about the adventure ahead.

DAY 2 Fri 08 Nov

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Discover Havana and transfer to Hanabanilla Lake (approximately 5 hours)

Founded in 1519, Havana is the Caribbean's largest city and we will have plenty of time to explore it. Among other attractions in the Cuban capital, we will visit Old Havana, Plaza de Armas and Cathedral Square street markets. After lunch, we will leave the city for our transfer (four to five hours) to Hanabanilla Lake, where we will overnight in a hotel.

DAY 3 Sat 09 Nov

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From Lake Hanabanilla to Salto de Rocio (approximately 7-8 hours)

Lake Hanabanilla is Cuba's largest man-made reservoir, surrounded by tropical vegetation and small farmsteads. We will take a boat across the lake and continue trekking to Casa de la Gallega, an old hacienda. A further hour's walk brings us to the Salto de Rocio, a 25m high waterfall where you can swim. You will spend the night under the eaves of the Casa de la Gallega hacienda.

DAY 4 Sun 10 Nov

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Casa de la Gallega to Codina (approximately 7-8 hours)

The next four days will be spent trekking across the awe-inspiring Escambray Mountains. The highest peak of Cuba's second largest mountain range is Pico San Juan at 1,140m. The slopes are swathed in pine, ancient tree-ferns, bamboo and eucalyptus. From the Casa de la Gallega we hike mostly uphill, reaching a second hacienda in the late afternoon. Spend the night either in the hacienda or camping.

DAY 5 Mon 11 Nov

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Codina to Topes de Collantes (approximately 6-7 hours)

The day starts on the hacienda's educational trail. The route traverses a cave through the mountains, as we head for Topes de Collantes. Topes is renowned as a medical centre due to its clean and pure air. From here it's a steep descent to Salto Caburni for a swim in a crystal clear pool, before completing the day's hike at a small hotel back in Topes de Collantes.

DAY 6 Tue 12 Nov

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Topes de Collantes to Vega Grande (approximately 8 hours)

After breakfast it's an arduous – mostly uphill trek – along the Vega Grande, meaning large fertile plain. This trail takes us through dense vegetation deep into the heart of the Escambray Mountains. We will reach Mi Retiro hacienda for a late lunch, before returning for an overnight stay in the hotel in Topes de Collantes.

DAY 7 *Wed 13 Nov*

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Topes de Collantes to El Cubano (approximately 7 hours)

The last day of your trek is through dry scrub with occasional views of the turquoise Caribbean. As the hours pass, we visit our third and final waterfall before celebrating our achievements with lunch and cocktails at a local restaurant. From here we drive to the coast of the Ancon Peninsula, just outside Trinidad. The night is spent in a hotel on southern Cuba's best beach.

DAY 8 *Thu 14 Nov*

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Relaxation and transfer back to Havana

Chill out at the beach or in the hotel pool. Alternatively, you can explore the charming town of Trinidad. With its cobbled streets and colonial housing, this UNESCO World Heritage Site has hardly changed in more than 150 years. Later we transfer back to Havana for a celebratory dinner and the chance to sample some of Cuba's finest exports – rum and cigars! Overnight in centrally located hotel.

DAY 9 *Fri 15 Nov*

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Free day in Havana

Spend more time sight-seeing or perhaps take part in a salsa or rumba lesson. And if you're feeling hungry you could grab a bite at one of Havana's many paladares (local Cuban houses that cater for paying guests). Supper is provided in a restaurant close to the airport, before your evening flight back to the UK. (Please note lunch is not included today).

DAY 10 *Sat 16 Nov*

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International departure

We will arrive back in the UK at London Heathrow airport in the afternoon.

NB

The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, 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.

HOW TO FUND YOUR CHALLENGE

MINIMUM SPONSORSHIP

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Registration fee of £475.00 when you book

Raise a minimum of £2995.00 for your charity.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Before you go

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- Access to your own password protected account including support materials and training schedules
- Risk assessment and emergency management planning
- Public liability insurance
- Discount on personal equipment from The Outdoor Shop, Outdoorhire, Cotswold Outdoor and Nomad & MASTA
- Access to "ask the expert" re your kit requirements
- Access to training weekends (optional and at additional expense)
- Warm up exercise routines
- 16 and 20 week trek/bike training schedule
- Fitness training notes
- Sponsorship forms (online and hard copy)
- Template press release
- A-Z of fundraising ideas
- Support materials (itinerary, kit list, fact file, Q&As, health notes, travel tips, responsible travel policy and guidance)
- Fundraising advice

On your challenge

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- International flights to and from the UK (including all known UK air taxes, and fuel surcharges, at the time of costing)
- Internal road and air transfers as per the itinerary
- Accommodation during the challenge (usually in twin share)
- Three meals a day (unless otherwise stated in the itinerary)
- Drinking water on challenge days
- Entrance fees to national parks or other places of interest visited on the itinerary
- All ground staff including English speaking guide, drivers, cooks, and porters
- Full back-up support including first-aid qualified staff and first-aid supplies
- Activity equipment such as bikes, tents and rafts as per the challenge activity
- A donation to a community project in one of the countries in which we operate
- A contribution towards funding the reduction of carbon emissions through Climate Care's portfolio of award winning projects
- A Charity Challenge T-Shirt
- All challenge management before, during and post event

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Before you go

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- Travel to and from the UK airport of departure
- Vaccinations (please check Trip Notes for requirements)
- Travel Insurance (you can buy at time of booking or in your Account Area, or provide your own policy details)

On your challenge

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- Tips
- Departure Tax (if applicable)
- Personal spending money
- Any other specific items listed as not included in your Trip Notes

- Clothing and equipment listed on your Kit List

THE DETAILS

Fundraising deadlines

You will need to send your sponsorship money to the charity as you raise it. At least 80% of the minimum sponsorship required must be sent to the charity 10 weeks before departure (by 29/08/2013), and the remaining 20% within 4 weeks of completing the challenge (by 14/12/2013). If you have raised the necessary funds, the charity will then pay the balance of your challenge costs. The charity benefits by keeping the remaining sponsorship money and every pound over and above that you raise.

Prices include all known air taxes

We include ALL known air taxes (including fuel) at the time of costing. Many companies do not include air taxes at all, and clients are therefore hit with a surcharge of three or four hundreds of pounds just before departure. Our aim is to provide you with transparent pricing and clear instructions as to what is included in our prices and if applicable what isn't.

Typical group size

The typical group size is 16 - 30 participants

Small group supplement

The costs and sponsorship levels on our website are based on a minimum of 16 participants. We can run this trip with 11-15 people, but there will be a small group supplement of £125. This is payable by your charity if you have raised the necessary minimum fundraising target. We will notify you 12 weeks before departure if this is necessary.

Optional extras

Business class upgrades*
 Travel insurance
 Single room supplements*
 Extensions at end of trip*
 Trek/bike training weekends*
 (*subject to availability)

Travel insurance

Your safety when travelling with Charity Challenge is our main concern, which is why it is a booking condition that you have a suitable travel insurance policy, which covers you for the adventurous nature of your challenge, the activities you are undertaking, and the altitudes. Charity Challenge has chosen to partner with specialist travel insurance providers Campbell Irvine (for UK residents) and Rise & Shield* (for non-UK residents). Both companies can arrange cover for an extensive number of activities, such as high-altitude trekking and cycling events, which include emergency medical treatment and repatriation expenses. Please note that Charity Challenge is not able to advise on matters relating to individual travel insurance policies and does not accept any liability for policy matters or claims.

Full details including costs may be found at <https://www.campbellirvine.com/charitychallenge> and <https://riseandshield.com/partners/charity-challenge/>

* Rise and Shield do not provide cover to Cuba.

Level of Difficulty

The Cuban Mountain Trek is graded as Challenging. This is the perfect challenge for participants who are of an adventurous spirit and an open mind, but perhaps haven't taken on a strenuous challenge event before and are hoping to push themselves out of their comfort zone. You can tell your supporters that on your Cuban Mountain Trek, you will be:

- Trekking between 5-6 hours a day
- Battling through muddy, slippery, hilly and undulating jungle terrain
- Experiencing high temperatures and humid conditions
- Sleeping under the stars for two nights at local haciendas, with very basic facilities

Money

Currency: Cuba has a dual currency system, and the currency that tourists use is the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC). The Convertible Peso is a closed currency, which means it cannot be purchased outside of Cuba. You can change your money at the Cadeca (Money Exchange Bureau) at the Airport on landing in Cuba, or at your hotel. For up to date currency exchange, go to www.xe.com.

Credit Cards: Credit cards issued by US companies such as American Express, Citibank and Diners Club, are not valid in Cuba. It is good to take a credit card in case of emergencies, but in the Escambray Mountains it is unlikely that they will be accepted by retailers so you should have adequate cash with you.

ATMs: ATMs are not accessible outside of Havana, so ensure that you take enough cash for the trek and your stay in Trinidad – although the beach hotel in Trinidad is all inclusive, you may choose to go into the city by taxi and spend money there on food etc.

How much to bring: All accommodation, activities and meals are included in the cost of your challenge. We recommend approximately £250 in CUC, for which you should try to request small denominations.

Tipping: Tipping is at your sole discretion and all staff members are paid a fair wage. However, tourism is a tipping culture, and Cuban guides will generally receive a tip at the end of a job well done. If you choose to tip, we would suggest an amount of £6-£10 per participant per challenge day. Your leader will divide this amongst the local staff.

Visa

A full passport valid for a further 6 months is required and also a tourist card. This allows a stay of up to 30 days and one entry only. Charity Challenge will supply your tourist card with your flight tickets. If you are booking your own flights, please check that your Cuban tourist card is included within the price of your ticket.

Vaccinations

For up to date vaccination information please check the NHS 'Fit for Travel' website:

<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home.aspx>. Although the Charity Challenge team are travel professionals, they are not medical experts and we would encourage you to visit your GP or travel nurse to discuss vaccination requirements.

Your GP may ask questions about the specific locations that you are visiting in Cuba and as such it may be useful to take a copy of your itinerary with you.

Flights

You will be flying from London to Havana and returning via the same route. You will either fly from Gatwick or Heathrow, and this will be confirmed in your account as soon as the flight details are confirmed. The flight will take approx. 10hrs without any connection times. Your flight tickets will be issued to you at the airport. If you choose to book your own flights you must confirm this via email with the Charity Challenge office at the time of your initial challenge booking, otherwise you may be liable for your included group flights (please contact flights@charitychallenge.com for further assistance). Please be aware if your flight is routed via Madrid you will not be able to bring back any duty free alcohol or liquids from Cuba, due to restrictions in place in Madrid. For more general flights questions, please refer to our main [FAQs page](#).

Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have a suitable travel insurance policy whilst participating on the challenge. We have a special policy which covers among other things, medical (emergency, evacuation and repatriation) arrangements, cancellation and curtailment of the challenge, and more specifically for the adventurous activities undertaken on this challenge. If you have your own travel insurance policy, you must ensure that it provides at least the same level of cover as our recommended policy, including protecting the charity in the event of your cancellation 56 days or less prior to departure. If you choose not to purchase our recommended policy when you book we will send you a disclaimer which you should complete and return.

For more general travel insurance questions, please refer to our main [FAQs page](#).

Group Size

Each group is intended to be a minimum of 16 people in order to run and a maximum of approximately 30 people due to the wilderness environment in which the challenge takes place. We will be able to run this challenge for 10 to 15 people by charging a small group supplement of £75, which will be added to your final balance invoice (self-funders) or charged to your charity (minimum sponsorship or flexi).

Leadership

There will be an English-speaking challenge leader who will be responsible for the logistics and co-ordination of your challenge. There will also be numerous local support staff to assist them. The challenge leader will be ultimately responsible for the running of the itinerary and the safety of your group.

Climate

Cuba is generally hot and sunny. But it is a tropical climate and you may therefore experience tropical rain and very

occasionally storms. During the wet season it may be very humid. The hurricane season generally runs from May through to October.

Like the UK, the weather is changeable, and you should be prepared for anything.

Terrain

The terrain is a typical jungle terrain, with many undulations, occasionally muddy and slippery trails, and steep downhill sections. You will often be trekking down towards waterfalls, where the path is rocky and slippery underfoot. You should wear river shoes when swimming in the waterfalls to protect your feet. Generally speaking the paths are clear, well trodden and easy to navigate but steep and physically exerting.

Luggage allowance and valuables

The luggage allowance will depend on the airline we are using for your challenge, but in general it will be one piece of checked baggage at around 23kg. However, we suggest that for our Cuban Trek you should only need around 15kg-17kg. If you don't need it, don't bring it, is a good rule. Carry any valuable with you at all times. There is a safe deposit box at the hotel in Trinidad, where you can place your valuables. Carry your passport with you and make sure you have a photocopy of your documents (travel insurance etc.) in case they get lost or damaged.

Responsible Tourism

At Charity Challenge we are committed to sustainable and responsible tourism, and work closely with bodies such as the International Porter Protection Group and Climate Care to ensure that our challenges benefit the local environments and communities in which they take place. We ensure that all rubbish is disposed of responsibly, and following local guidelines on cultural and environmental protection and respect, we aim to limit our impact on the natural environment. In addition to taking these practical steps to ensure that our challenges are sustainable, we also make a contribution each year to a number of local community projects, so as to give something back directly to the communities that we visit. Since 2000 we have donated almost £200,000 to such projects, supporting a range of initiatives, including schooling for children in Africa, shelter for street children in Brazil, and Orang-utan conservation in Indonesia. We recommend that any gifts brought over for children are given to the UK challenge leader and distributed where needed by them and our local Ground Agent. If you wish to do more, you should consider buying drinks, postcards and souvenirs from the local vendors. For many, it is their sole source of income. For more information, please visit our Responsible Tourism pages, where you will be able to view a list of the projects that we currently support.

Typical day

During the trekking days you will rise early and pack after breakfast, then trek for 4 - 8 hours. There will be a mid-morning water and snack stop, and later a picnic lunch on route to try and avoid the midday sun. Accommodation will include basic facilities. Dinner and the day's debriefing are generally after sundown. Specific hours of activity for each day are given in the itinerary.

Accommodation

The accommodation, except in Havana and Trinidad, will be quite basic. On two of the trekking nights you will be sleeping on mattresses under the stars (with shelter under the eaves of the Hacienda, or in tents if necessary). There may not be electricity so remember your torch, and other facilities will be basic. In the hotels, you will be sharing in rooms of two. Please let Charity Challenge know if you are travelling with a friend or relative who you wish to share with. If you are travelling with a friend or partner who you wish to share with please ensure that you note this where appropriate when booking or email challenges@charitychallenge.com.

Food & Drink

Cuba has suffered from the American embargo, and there are shortages in most sectors of the economy. Often food is repetitive, with a heavy reliance on eggs and chicken. Rice or rice and beans accompany the main meat dish, along with a green salad and fried banana chips. Cerdo Asado; roasted pork, especially spit roasted, is famous in the countryside and is delicious! Please let Charity Challenge know if you have any dietary requirements or allergies.

Clothing and equipment

Good quality, durable kit could mean the difference between a fantastic challenge experience and an uncomfortable one. For this challenge, waterproof, well-worn in boots will be indispensable, particularly coupled with some really good quality walking socks. The benefits of a comfortable day sack cannot be underestimated, so make sure that you train with this. Other essentials are a high quality Gore-Tex waterproof jacket and technical/wicking t-shirts rather than cotton shirts. Walking poles are also highly recommended, as the steps on this challenge are very tough on even the fittest knees, and descents can be tricky. A full kit list for this challenge can be found [here](#), and once you book you will have access to kit discounts with our partners The Outdoor Shop, Outdoorhire and Cotswold Outdoor.

Toilets

While staying at hotel you will have private toilet facilities in your twin room. While staying in the haciendas facilities are very basic, with no showers and squat toilets.

Phone and WiFi

Throughout the challenge the phone and WIFI signal will be limited. At Havana and Hanabanilla, you will have phone signal and WIFI access, but during the trek you will be outside of WIFI signal. This is your opportunity to escape the daily routine!

Safety

Charity Challenge considers the safety of all of our participants and staff to be a top priority, and as such we have set up Challenge Safe, one of the most advanced and thorough safety management systems in the industry. Challenge Safe formalises our ethos when it comes to safety, and brings together the procedures and risk management strategies

that we use to audit all aspects of our challenges, from vehicles to accommodation to the challenge activity itself. Your welfare is absolutely paramount!

In terms of your Cuba Mountain Trek challenge, there are a couple of important points that you should be aware of:

- The weather conditions are hot and humid, and as such you should be drinking over 2L of water every day.
- Smoke alarms are not a legal requirement in Cuba, and as such most of the accommodations don't have these security features. Your leader will explain the emergency procedures to you.
- It is common to see 'jineteros' working the streets in Havana - whether in prostitution or street hustling. A polite 'no thanks' will suffice and you do not need to feel worried for your safety, but as always in a strange city do go out in pairs/groups.

Emergencies

The event is not run as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's walking abilities. This is allowed for. There will be a staff member at the back of the group at all times to ensure that you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace.

Training

Training and fitness are definitely required. Anyone who leads a fairly active and moderately healthy lifestyle should be OK 'as long as they train regularly over a period of at least three months' leading up to the expedition. Don't forget that the temperature and the altitudes are different from the UK. While strength is important, endurance training should be your primary focus. Walking up hills and climbing stairs are both ways to condition your lower body. Begin slowly, without the weight of a pack, eventually adding weight as you increase your training pace. Take a long hike (6-8 hours) several times with a weighted pack, up and down hills or on small mountains (weigh your pack with water containers and pour out the water before your descent to minimise knee stress).

Challenge Training

If you would like to get a feel for our challenges ahead of your departure, why not consider booking on a 1 or 2 day UK Challenge?

We have a variety of challenges, covering all levels of difficulty, taking place in stunning National Parks across the UK that are led by highly qualified and experienced expedition and mountain leaders. These challenges will give you the perfect opportunity to monitor fitness levels, test out your kit, meet people in the great outdoors, share fundraising stories and gain valuable advice and support for the challenge ahead. We encourage participants to make use of our highly knowledgeable leaders and ask them any questions you may have about clothing and equipment, expedition health and wellbeing, trekking skills, walking techniques and teamwork!

We are offering all participants **50% off** the registration fee when you book on one of the UK challenges listed via the link below. Just use the code **TRAINING** when booking. T&C's – you must have an active booking on a challenge to avail of this offer. Discount cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Find out more [here](#)



The challenge was one of the best experiences of my life. I made friends with some very special people whom I hope will remain friends forever.

Elaine Nicholas



A once in a lifetime chance to experience the real Cuba! As well as seeing two contrasting cities you will get to stay in rural haciendas and visit local farmers and spend time in their homes. The walking is tough, but it's meant to be!

Jo Berridge



This challenge allowed me to experience Cuban history, culture, landscape, wildlife and tourism all in one trip! A fantastic trip for exploring those less travelled routes!

Sarah Tester

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Any more questions?

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