

## Cuba Travel Guide

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# Cuba Tour Operators

The latest easing of travel restrictions, independent leisure travel to Cuba is now possible for Americans. Travelers wishing to visit Cuba may do so under an educational category called people-to-people. However, self-organizing such trips—and proving (should you be asked) that your trip met the educational requirements—is not easy. Visitors must maintain a full-time schedule of activities that produce meaningful interaction between the traveler and individuals in Cuba.” For now, a tour operator is still the best option for travelers seeking all-access, in-depth exploration of Cuba. Tour operators can arrange visits to music venues, artists’ residences, and historic sights that would be very difficult to arrange individually. Their multiday excursions are jam-packed with cultural activities led by guides with extensive historical knowledge. Itineraries may include history, culture, art, athletics, cuisine, dance, ecology, education, faith, folklore, language, literacy, music, politics, sociology, and theater. Some tours focus on a single subject; others mix and match topics in a single tour. We list the best tour operators in alphabetical order below.

**Access** has two distinct specialties in its tours around the world: culinary arts and sports and cuisine. Since the culinary aspect meshes better with the people-to-people requirements, that’s the focus of its excursions to Cuba. Bring back more than memories by learning how to whip up some Cuban food and beverage recipes for your friends and family. Ropa vieja, grilled fish, and ceviche are among the signature Cuban dishes on the menu. Small group sizes—a maximum of 10—mean that everybody gets a hands-on experience in helping to prepare meals. (You don’t need to do all the work; some of the meals are prepared for you as well.) Learning to make daiquiris Hemingway-style is also on the week’s syllabus, as are visits to cigar and sugarcane plantations.

**Destinations:** Havana, Trinidad, Valle de Viñales. **Popular packages:** Cuba Culinary Tour, 8 days, from \$3,590. **What they do best:** Fun and learning with food and drink, Cuban style. 650/492-4778; [www.accesstrips.com](http://www.accesstrips.com) (<http://www.accesstrips.com>).

**Cultural Explorations Cuba.** This operator offers an array of weeklong tours of the island with general themes. However, Cultural Explorations Cuba truly shines in its specialty tours that delve into Cuban art, churches, Judaism, cuisine, or LGBT issues. They’ve also entered the nascent meetings-and-incentives market in Cuba and can organize conferences and seminars for U.S.-based businesses



and organizations. Standard cultural-exchange activities must be incorporated into such stays to satisfy people-to-people requirements. **Destinations:** Havana, Cayo Santa María, Cienfuegos, Playa Girón, Santa Clara, Trinidad. **Popular packages:** Journey Cuba, 7 days, from \$3,599; Havana Art, 5 days, from \$3,995. **What they do best:** Terrific selection of entertainment. 800/561-921-2425 ; [www.cultural-explorations.com](http://www.cultural-explorations.com) (<http://www.cultural-explorations.com>)

**Drod Culinary Adventures.** Second-generation Cuban-American chef Douglas Rodriguez, award-winning master of Air Passports Cuba restaurant in Philadelphia, has been leading culinary-themed tours to Cuba multiple times a year since 2014. Rodriguez takes you to markets, Your weekly travel wrap-up Today's Departure Your Daily dose of travel inspiration you participate in the selection of the best fruits and vegetables and catches of the day. Tours include stays at some of Cuba's finest hotels and meals at some of its most distinctive *paladares*—private homes licensed to open their doors to the public for dining. Standard sightseeing rounds out the tours' itineraries.

**Destinations:** Havana, Camaguey, Cienfuegos, Trinidad, Varadero. **Popular packages:** Art, Food, & Culture of Cuba, 7 days, from \$4,995. **What they do best:** In-depth look at Cuban cuisine, through the guidance of a master chef. 954/693-6562 ; [www.chefdouglasrodriguez.com](http://www.chefdouglasrodriguez.com) (<http://www.chefdouglasrodriguez.com>).

**Insight Cuba.** The Insight folks pioneered the people-to-people concept—they've been leading trips since 2000—and are one of the few tour operators in the world that focus strictly on Cuba. Insight really mixes it up in its itinerary offerings: a half-dozen general tours—one to two weeks in length—take in the entire island or sectors of it and give a terrific overview of the country. Alternatively, an impressive array of specialty excursions, often shorter, explore single themes such as Cuban jazz, baseball, or vintage cars. Insight can even set you up to run in the annual Havana Marathon. For a quick trip, the Weekend in Havana tour takes you on a short visit to the country's intriguing capital. Insight also customizes tours for groups, within the bounds of the people-to-people requirements, of course. **Destinations:** Havana, Baracoa, Bayamo, Camagüey, Cayo Santa María, Cienfuegos, Holguín, Las Terrazas, Pinar del Río, Remedios, Santa Clara, Santiago de Cuba, Trinidad, Valle de Viñales. **Popular packages:** Classic Cuba, 9 days, from \$4,695; Undiscovered Cuba, 13 days, from \$5,595. **What they do best:** Top-notch guides with experience in a country they know like the back of their hand. 800/450-2822; [www.insightcuba.com](http://www.insightcuba.com) (<http://www.insightcuba.com>).

**Road Scholar.** Although the not-for-profit Road Scholar began life under the name Elderhostel, people of all ages participate in its highly regarded tours that focus on travel as part of lifelong learning. The company has been leading people-to-people trips to Cuba since 2011, and they come complete with the company's expert lectures and panel discussions. Road Scholar offers the standard island-wide tours, some as long as three weeks, but also in the mix are shorter tours that focus on photography, family activities, and homestays in *casas particulares*. New to its offerings is a study cruise that circles the island and calls at several Cuban ports. Like most such tours, the majority of Road's excursions depart from Miami, but a couple of its itineraries offer New York departures instead. **Destinations:** Havana, Camagüey, Cienfuegos, Holguín, María La Gorda, Santa Clara, Santiago de Cuba, Trinidad. **Popular packages:** The People of Cuba, 9 days, from \$3,495; Cuba Today, 9 days, from \$3,395. **What they do best:** Expert instructors who provide valuable background on what you're seeing. 800/454-5768 ; [www.roadscholar.org](http://www.roadscholar.org) (<http://www.roadscholar.org>).

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Local Customs

Top Reasons to Go to Cuba



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