Discover Cuba - a Caribbean gem, now less forbidden and naturally enticing for all who desire to find a cultural oasis of warm, generous people. Cuba's riches go beyond its vibrant culture and famous white sand beaches. It offers a rich natural landscape, which includes no less than 4 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and 2 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Be inspired by Cuba's soulful art, musical rhythms and vibrant dance. Reconnect with Havana's heyday of the 1950's with a performance at the Tropicana Cabaret.

Enjoy a walking tour through the streets of old Havana; visit a cigar factory; walk along paths in search of native bird life in the national parks; lay back on white sand beaches; attend the Tropicana Cabaret show; and most importantly, make contact with the Cuban people who are eager to talk to visitors. Our adventure maximizes our interaction with the local people so you can learn first-hand what life in Cuba is really like. Join us as we go in search of the exotic culture of Cuba.

Tour Highlights:
- Visit 4 UNESCO World Heritage sites - colonial Trinidad, Old Havana, Cienfuegos and Vinales Valley
- Visit 2 UNESCO Biosphere Reserve - Sierra del Rosario & Zapata Marshlands
- Escambray Mountains
- Attend the Tropicana Cabaret
- Vintage car tour
- Visits to a maternity home, seniors centre
- Cultural interactions and musical performances

Activity Highlights:
- Old Havana & Trinidad: exploration on foot is sometimes on uneven cobblestone.
- Sierra Del Rosario: The hike can be steep and on uneven terrain (35 minutes approx).
- Vinales Valley: Caves are humid, walkway may be wet. Stairs down to the boat are steep; passageways through the cave can be narrow and low. Passengers must be prepared to squeeze through a few spaces

Accommodations:
- Comfortable, well-located hotels with private bathrooms throughout.

December 20: Arrive in Havana
Upon arrival in Havana, you are transferred to Havana's famous Vedado where you can settle in and wander the lively and wide streets of one of the first aristocratic neighborhoods in the capital. Havana is bustling with museums, plazas, art galleries and prominent buildings dating from the 18th to the 20th century. Overnight in Havana.

December 21: Havana city sites and Afro Cuban Religion
This morning, we begin our Cuban adventure with a visit to a local farmer's market as an introduction to Cuba's dynamic culture. We then enjoy a walking tour of Habana Vieja (Old Havana). We will visit the open-air plazas of San Francisco, Plaza de Armas, Plaza Vieja and Plaza de la Cathedral. We walk by the old Palaces of Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (former office and home to Spanish governors) and "Palacio del Segundo Cabo". We will also visit other important sites including the Castillo de la Real Fuerza and the monument to Havana's foundation.

This area of Old Havana has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is now in the process of a magnificent restoration project, bringing back to life the graceful and elegant colonial
architecture of days gone by. Complete the scene with 1950's Chevrolets, Buicks and Oldsmobiles, and the old city comes alive as we explore on foot.

Later this afternoon, we explore the outer parts of the city including Callejon de Hamel, where we are invited to a cultural project held by the famous Cuban muralist Salvador Gonzales for an introduction to a prominent Cuban religion. 'Santeria' has emerged from a combination of African and Catholic faith. Here we will enjoy a traditional presentation before making our way to one of the most famous and important cultural open air venues in the heart of Havana "Plaza de la Revolucion" with Che Guevara's and Jose Marti's monuments.

After dinner we attend the traditional night cannon ceremony at Fortaleza de la Cabana; one of the magnificent fortresses that made Havana the most fortified city in the Americas in the XVIII century. Overnight in Havana.

**December 22: Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve**
We head off this morning for Western Cuba to visit the first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the country, known as Sierra del Rosario. A bird watching paradise, this area is famed for the diversity of its natural beauty, lush woods, waterfalls, rare orchids and ferns. We will learn about the environmental experiences and the role of the community with a hike through this fascinating reserve, rich in local flora and fauna. We also visit the ruins of the Buena Vista coffee plantation where hundreds of slaves worked for French landlords. Later we will stop at Las Terrazas, a self sustained community initiated in 1967 and where 5000 hectares of terraced trees were planted in a major reforestation project. This will be an amazing opportunity to learn about Cuba's education system and interact with the staff at the local school.

We will have lunch at a restaurant that serves wonderful Cuban food, which is grown and raised on site. We continue onward to Vinales in Pinar del Rio province where we stay for the next two nights. Overnight in Vinales.

**December 23: Vinales Valley, Indian’s Cave**
The Valley of Vinales is a picturesque, peaceful, lush area of Cuba, known for its fine tobacco fields and for its mogotes, the boulder-like hills that cover the valley floor. You will notice this impressive landscape as we make our way to Pinar del Rio city, the largest urban community in the western most part of the island. This is also the capital for the best tobacco in the world. We visit the "Francisco Donatien" cigar factory, which produces a range of fine Cuban cigars. Here we gain insight as to the process of making a fine cigar.

We make our way to a local farm where you will have a chance to see how rural Cuban families live and work, as well as have an informal question and answer session. Next we drive to the small town of Vinales, where we visit a state-run supply store to learn about the supply and distribution of goods in Cuba. We take in the Botanical Gardens of Caridad - a mini paradise which was nurtured lovingly by two widows who have created an Eden of tropical plants such as tamarinds, oranges, grapefruits, guava, starfruit, bananas, cocoa, lemons, cinnamon trees and a variety of decorative plants and ferns.

This area is riddled with caves and subterranean rivers. We explore Indian's Cave, one of the most beautiful caves in the Vinales Valley. A short hike will get us to the small skiffs that will take us on a journey that will amaze you. Our guide will point out rock formations as the rock sides tower over top of you. Overnight in Vinales.
December 24: To Cienfuegos via the Marshlands
This morning we will travel east four hours to visit another Biosphere Reserve, Zapata National Park. This is the largest and best preserved wetlands in the Caribbean. Located in the peninsula of the same name, the Zapata Park covers an area of over 1,930 square miles. The area is outstanding for the great diversity of its ecosystems, in which more than 1,000 species of plants and 37 species of reptiles. The diversity of bird life is also outstanding: a full 170 species of the 354 bird species reported in Cuba can be found here. The park is considered one of the premier bird watching destinations in the world. Our guide will explain the environmental and educational community program being implemented by the local authorities, as well as give us information about the local flora and fauna.

Enroute to "the pearl of the south" we visit the museum devoted to the "Bay of Pigs". From here we make our way to Cienfuegos where we shall enjoy the next two nights. Overnight in Cienfuegos.

December 25: Cienfuegos
Cienfuegos is one of Cuba's youngest cities, founded in 1819. It has a vibrant youthful population and diverse architecture of neo-classical buildings. We begin our day with a drive to the Cienfuegos Botanical Gardens, which dates back to 1899 followed by a visit to the Palacio de Valle- an architectural jewel, which was originally a private residence of a wealthy sugar baron followed by lunch in a private restaurant. After lunch we enjoy the city's highlights including Plaza Marti, the Cathedral and the Tomas Terry theatre.
Overnight in Cienfuegos.

December 26: Social Cuba, Colonial Trinidad (UNESCO)
After breakfast we visit "Casa de Abuelos", a seniors center, one of the many government run institutions where members organize around cultural activities, eco-excursions and are provided with medical attention and nutritious meals. We then make our way to the graphic society of Cienfuegos. They will host our group by opening their doors to our questions and their artwork. This community of artists carries out important community work by complementing the training of art school students. They also work with children with disabilities to improve their quality of life.

We continue our journey to the charming town of Trinidad, Cuba's best-preserved colonial architecture and an UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the early 19th century, French settlers fleeing a slave revolt in Haiti arrived and cultivated sugar cane, bringing wealth to the region. The town has changed very little over the last 150 years and UNESCO has restored many of its French colonial buildings. Trinidad is a small, relaxed place where you can see Cuban cowboys riding their horses in the streets. After lunch we enjoy a guided visit of the "Miseo Arquitectura Colonial" followed by free time to enjoy a stroll around the beautiful Plaza Mayor or the local artisan street market. Here you can find splendid woodcarvings, fabric art, crochet pieces and straw work.

Dinner will be at your leisure at our hotel before we meet for a night of music and dancing at one of the famous music night clubs in Trinidad. Overnight at Ancon Beach (near Trinidad).

December 27: Health Care, Cuban Percussion, Sunset Cruise
This morning we visit a Cuban Maternity Home, of which there are many throughout the country. These homes were designed to give expecting mothers a place where they can go to receive professional health care around the clock in a homelike environment. From here, we have an opportunity to learn Cuban Percussion led by David Lopez Garabito who has toured with the group Hecho en Cuba (Made in Cuba). After working up an appetite, we enjoy our lunch in town.
After lunch we have free time to explore the local markets or visit "Casa Santander" to learn more about traditional artistic pottery. We return to our hotel in the afternoon where we can relax on the beach before our sunset catamaran cruise followed by dinner at our hotel. Overnight at Ancon Beach.

**December 28: Escambray Mountains, To Santa Clara**

Today we leave for Santa Clara city located right in the center of Cuba. The city was founded in 1689 and was the battlefield for one of the most important victories of Fidel Castro's guerrilla war against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1958. Commander 'Che' Guevara was the undisputed leader and hero of the so-called 'Batalla de Santa Clara'.

Our route will first take us to the Escambray Mountains, Cuba's second highest mountain range, reaching 3,700 ft. The mountains are home to small mountain villages and are a delight for birders and walkers alike. Slopes are swathed in Caribbean pines, ancient tree-ferns, bamboo and eucalyptus. Here we visit a local coffee house where we enjoy an in depth explanation of the coffee production process while sipping on Cuba's finest. We then walk along a natural trail across the local arboretum and visit an art museum before lunch. From here we make our way to Santa Clara, where we will stay for the next two nights. Overnight in Santa Clara.

**December 29: Santa Clara- Revolution Sites**

Today we explore the many highlights of the lively university town of Santa Clara including Parque Vidal, Ernesto Che Guevara's monument, museum and mausoleum commemorating the man and the vital part he played in the armed struggle against General Bastista's dictatorship.

From here we make our way to the armored train park museum and learn how this was one of the biggest turning points of the revolution.

After lunch, enjoy free time to stroll through the busy colonial streets before returning to our hotel. Overnight in Santa Clara.

**December 30: Hemingway’s Home, Classic American Cars & Tropicana Cabaret**

Today we make our way back to Havana. Enroute, we visit the quiet seaside town of Cojimar, the little town that inspired Hemingway or "Papa" to write "The Old Man and the Sea". This is the same location where the writer kept his boat "Pilar" docked during his years in Cuba. We enjoy a daiquiri (one of Hemingway's preferred cocktails) at Las Terrazas de Cojimar Bar, followed by lunch in a private seafood restaurant.

From here, we walk in the footsteps of Ernest Hemingway with a visit to the American writer's former home, Finca La Vigia; an old colonial estate bought by the author in the '40s, where he lived for over 20 years. The house is exactly as Hemingway left it just prior to the Revolution. Visitors are able to walk around the house and view the interior through the windows.

After returning to our hotel in Havana, we have time to relax before stepping back in time with a tour around Havana in our classic 1950's American cars. We stop at the famous Hotel Nacional for a cocktail before dinner. After dinner, our vintage cars will take us to the Tropicana Cabaret to enjoy a performance in one of the most historical open-air night club shows in the world. Here we get a glimpse of the Havana entertainment scene as it was in the 1950's. It will be a late evening and our bus will be ready to take us back to the hotel after the show. Overnight in Havana.

**December 31: Havana- a last glimpse**

Today we enjoy a morning visit to the "Bellas Artes" fine arts museum. After lunch, the afternoon is yours to explore the beautiful colonial city of Havana.
Tonight, we reminisce on all the things we have seen and people we have met at our farewell dinner as we enjoy a performance of the world famous "Buena Vista Social Club".

Overnight in Havana.

**January 1: Depart Havana**

Our Cuban adventure concludes with a transfer to Havana Airport.

The **program fee** is $4500 which like our other programs covers transfers, lodging, food, in country transportation, entrance fees, educational lectures, tipping, and medical insurance, which is required by the Cuban government for while you are in country. The things that are not covered are the three L's: laundry, liquor, and luxuries (souvenirs) PLUS transportation to and from Cuba. Right now you can get there from Mexico, Canada, and Grand Cayman or on a chartered flight. However as we speak, there are negotiations going on for US carriers to fly directly to Havana. By the time we go, I am sure it will be in place.