

## CUBA AND MEXICO – NOVEMBER 2018

### OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 4 November 2018 – 29 November 2018

Tour Duration: 26 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$14,750

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,550

*To visit Cuba is to step back in time and we invite you to do just that on this exhilarating 26-day tour, which also takes in the highlights of Mexico, from the ancient Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza and Palenque, to the world's largest capital, Mexico City.*

Our tour begins in Mexico City. From here we head into the mountains, we take a thrilling jet-boat ride through the Sumidero Canyon before visiting the beautiful colonial town, San Cristobal de las Casas. From here we travel to the jungle ruins of Palenque before continuing to another great Mayan site, the great ruins of Chichen Itza. We finish our stay in Mexico at the lush seaside resort of Cancun before flying onto Cuba. There's no time like the present to visit Cuba, a unique island almost trapped in a time-warp. Who knows what lies in store for this fascinating island in the future? With US-Cuba relations thawing after more than 50 years in the cold, the window of opportunity to visit this fascinating country before it changes, is closing. Unlike many tours to this remarkable destination, we cover the entire island from Pinar del Rio and the enchanting capital, Havana, to Santiago de Cuba at the country's eastern tip. En-route we take in Che Guevara's adopted hometown, Santa Clara, and the fabulous World Heritage-listed town of Trinidad.

**Tour Fitness Level: Moderate**

# CUBA AND MEXICO 2018

## TOUR ITINERARY

### 04/11/2018 Sydney – Los Angeles – Mexico City (D)

Check in at your chosen airport for the domestic flight to Sydney. Connect onto the international flight to Mexico City via Los Angeles. Crossing the International Date Line, we arrive in Mexico City on the same day.

Depart Sydney Qantas QF 11, 11.50

Arrive Los Angeles 06.35

Depart Los Angeles Aero Mexico AM 631, 09.15

Arrive Mexico City 14.50

On arrival in Mexico City we transfer to our hotel.

Gran Hotel Ciudad de Mexico Zocalo

Mexico City

### 05/11/2018 Mexico City (BLD)

We spend the whole day sightseeing in the world's largest city. Among the attractions are the Museum of Anthropology, the National Palace and the great cathedral.

### 06/11/2018 Mexico City (BLD)

Today we head 50km outside the capital to the ancient Aztec city of Teotihuacan, the site of the huge Pyramids of the Sun and Moon. Teotihuacan was once Mexico's largest city and dates back to AD 150. It is considered to be the country's most important archaeological site.

### 07/11/2018 Mexico City – Tuxtla – San Cristobal (BLD)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Tuxtla Gutierrez.

Depart Mexico City Aero Mexico AM 553, 09.50

Arrive Tuxtla Gutierrez, 11.27

On arrival in Tuxtla we board our bus for the journey to San Cristobal and soon begin to head along the Grijalva River valley. Entering the spectacular Sumidero Canyon we board power boats for an exhilarating ride on the Rio Grijalva. After lunch we continue on our journey, driving through picturesque scenery as the road weaves through the mountains before descending to San Cristobal. A small colonial town 2,150m above sea level, San Cristobal is set in a beautiful pine-clad valley surrounded by Indian villages. It was largely undiscovered by travellers until the mid-1960s.

Hotel Mansion del Valle

San Cristobal

### 08/11/2018 San Cristobal (BLD)

Today we explore the mysterious Tzotzil and Tzeltal Indian villages. Despite savage repression, the Indians have shown a fierce determination to survive and maintain their cultures and traditions. We visit a family workshop to see the locals working on magnificent embroidered garments and blankets. Back in San Cristobal we have time to visit the colourful markets.

### 09/11/2018 San Cristobal – Palenque (BLD)

This morning we begin our four hour drive through the mountains to Palenque, stopping en route at the remarkable waterfalls of Agua Azul. The falls are situated in a beautiful jungle setting with dozens of white cascades thundering into turquoise pools.

Hotel Mision Palenque

Carretera Catazaja-Palenque

### 10/11/2018 Palenque – Villahermosa – Merida (BLD)

Early this morning we head directly to the magnificent Mayan site of Palenque. Surrounded by lush jungle, these great ruins are stunningly preserved. Built entirely without the use of metal tools, pack animals or the wheel, this lost city is particularly significant for its architectural inventiveness and detailed epigraphic record: in fact the Temple of Inscriptions is the site's most impressive structure. After fully exploring Palenque we drive to Villahermosa for the short flight to Merida.

Depart Villahermosa Hahn Air H1 2909, 15.50

Arrive Merida 17.20

On arrival we transfer to our hotel where we also have dinner.

Hotel Mision

Merida, Yucatan

### 11/11/2018 Merida (BLD)

With its narrow streets and shady parks, the delightful city of Merida is ideal for exploring on foot – and we begin our walking tour after breakfast. Today is Sunday and the centre of Merida is closed to traffic, with families enjoying the vibrant market and party atmosphere. The colonial architecture is superb and Merida is also famous for producing some of the world's finest Panama hats.

### 12/11/2018 Merida – Chichen Itza – Cancun (BLD)

This morning we begin our journey through the Yucatan Peninsula stopping en-route to explore the extraordinary ruins of Chichen Itza. Ruled by the Mayans from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Chichen Itza is one of the largest and best maintained archaeological sites in Mexico. The stunning El Castillo pyramid, which dominates the centre of the site, is voted one of the seven modern Wonders of the World. After our visit we continue east towards the coast arriving in Cancun late afternoon.

Hotel Park Royal

Cancun

### 13/11/2018 Cancun (BLD)

Lapped by the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea, Cancun has pure white beaches, formed by fossilised micro-organisms rather than sand. Today we have a full day at leisure to relax and enjoy this holiday resort.

### 14/11/2018 Cancun – Havana (BD)

This morning is at leisure before transferring to the airport for our flight to Cuba.

Depart Cancun Cubana de Aviacion CU 153, 15.35

Arrive Havana 18.00

After completing Cuban customs and immigration formalities we transfer to our hotel.

Hotel Plaza (or similar)

Havana

### 15/11/2018 Havana (BLD)

This morning we begin to explore this fascinating city with a tour of old Havana (Habana Vieja). We visit Plaza de Armas and the cathedral before taking in the handicraft markets and enjoying a stroll through the narrow, cobbled streets of the old city. After lunch at the Morro Fortress we tour the new part of the city in 1950s American open-topped cars, visiting the Plaza de la Revolucion and the university.

### 16/11/2018 Havana – Pinar del Rio – Havana (BLD)

No visit to Cuba would be complete without an excursion to the 'tail' of the island, which is in the shape of a shark. This region, Pinar del Rio, is the westernmost province and contains some

spectacular scenery. The beautiful Vinales Valley is the finest tobacco-growing area in the world, and, after lunch, we visit a cigar factory and meet the workers before returning to Havana for dinner.

#### 17/11/2018 Havana (BLD)

Today we head out of central Havana to the delightful fishing village of Cojimar, a 'pilgrimage' for fans of Ernest Hemingway. While living here in the 1940s and '50s, the great author wrote *The Old Man and the Sea* – a simple but profound story that was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953, and saw Hemingway receive the Nobel Prize in Literature a year later. After lunch we return to Havana for some leisure time before dinner.

#### 18/11/2018 Havana – Bay of Pigs – Cienfuegos (BLD)

After breakfast we leave Havana for Cienfuegos via the Bay of Pigs – a large isolated inlet on Cuba's southern coast. It was here that the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion was launched shortly before midnight on 16 April 1961. A group of some 1,500 Cuban exiles, trained and financed by the CIA, came ashore at the Bay of Pigs in an attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro and his revolution. This afternoon the story of the failed operation unfolds and later we continue on to Cienfuegos.

#### Hotel La Union (or similar)

Cienfuegos

#### 19/11/2018 Cienfuegos – Trinidad (BLD)

Known locally as Perla del Sur (Pearl of the South), Cienfuegos traverses a wonderful natural bay and is one of Cuba's glittering gems. Architecturally, this UNESCO city is one of the most interesting and eclectic of all Caribbean settlements and its sense of pervading tranquility contributes to its considerable allure. After lunch we travel through vast sugar cane plantations and mountainous countryside of the Sierra del Escambray, where sheer-walled limestone cliffs are covered in magnificent bougainvillea. Finally we reach Trinidad, the jewel of Cuba's colonial cities. Fantastically preserved, this charming town is a national monument with no modern buildings, few cars and old cobbled streets.

#### Las Cuevas Hotel (or similar)

Trinidad

#### 20/11/2018 Trinidad (BLD)

This morning we take a tour of this fabulous town, visiting the main square and the markets. The afternoon is at leisure.

#### 21/11/2018 Trinidad – Santa Clara – Camaguey (BLD)

After breakfast we leave Trinidad and drive to the national park of Topes de Collantes. We transfer to 4WD vehicles and drive into the Guanayara Reserve, an area rich in flora and fauna. A local guide takes us on a fascinating walk through the forest where we may be lucky and see the exquisite Cuban hummingbird. Continuing through the mountains, we reach Santa Clara, the adopted city of the great revolutionary, Che Guevara. This was the site of one of the most important battles of the revolution and an impressive mausoleum houses Guevara's remains. After a tour of the city we head south to Camaguey.

#### Hotel Gran (or similar)

Camaguey

#### 22/11/2018 Camaguey – Bayamo (BLD)

This morning we enjoy a walking tour through the warren of delightful winding alleys and hidden plazas of Camaguey. After lunch we drive to Bayamo – the 'city of horsecars'. An entirely easy going city that defies its proud historical background as the foundation of Cuban independence, Bayamo is ringed with marvellous colonial edifices. This truly is Cuba trapped in time.

Royalton Hotel (or similar)  
Bayamo

23/11/2018 Bayamo – Santiago de Cuba (BLD)

After breakfast we continue our journey south to one of the most beautiful cities in the Caribbean, Santiago de Cuba. Due to its remote location, few travellers visit this irresistible cosmopolitan city. Known as the home of rum and revolution, Santiago is the second-largest city on the island. It has a rich racial mix, producing some of the most exciting architecture, music and art in the Caribbean.

Hotel Melia (or similar)  
Santiago

24/11/2018 Santiago de Cuba (BLD)

In the morning we explore both the old quarter and the new part of this lovely city, visiting delightful plazas, parks, the Moncada Museum and the magnificent Morro Castle on the cliffs overlooking Santiago Bay. This afternoon we visit El Cobre, the most important shrine for Cubans and most famous church in the country, which is lodged in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra near the old copper mines that give it its name. Pilgrims from all over Cuba come here to pay their respects and ask for protection.

25/11/2018 Santiago de Cuba – Havana (BLD)

After an early breakfast we transfer to the airport for our flight back to Havana.

Depart Santiago Cubana de Aviacion CU 987, 08.30

Arrive Havana 09.55

On arrival in Havana we continue to explore the city and enjoy lunch in a local restaurant. Later we transfer to our hotel.

Hotel Plaza (or similar)  
Havana

26/11/2018 Havana – Mexico City – Los Angeles (B)

This morning we have some free time before transferring to the airport for our flight to Los Angeles via Mexico City.

Depart Havana Aero Mexico AM 452, 16.15

Arrive Mexico City 18.29

Depart Mexico City Aero Mexico AM 630, 21.15

Arrive Los Angeles 23.30

On arrival in Los Angeles we transfer to our hotel.

Crowne Plaza Los Angeles Airport  
Los Angeles

27/11/2018 Depart Los Angeles (B)

After breakfast we embark on a tour of some of the notable sights of Los Angeles including Hollywood Boulevard and the famous 'Walk of Fame'. After a relaxing day in the 'City of Angels' we transfer to the airport for our flight back to Australia.

Depart Los Angeles QF 12, 22.25

28/11/2018 In flight

As we head back towards Australia we cross the International Date Line.

29/11/2018 Arrive Sydney

Arrive Sydney 08.25

On arrival in Sydney we transfer to the domestic terminal for the flight to our chosen Australian city.