

# CUBA

January 7 – 17, 2024

**\$4795\***

**11 Days / 10 Nights**

**Single Supplement \$795**

Minimum group size is 8; maximum is 12.

\* Price is for a group of 10 – 12.

Small-group surcharge of \$200 will apply to a group of 8 or 9.



Our *Cheepers!* familiarization tour to Cuba took place in December of 2018, and although we had planned to return in 2019 with a group of birders, tightened travel restrictions imposed by the last administration made us pause in the planning stage. We next considered a tour for 2020, but the Covid 19 pandemic quickly put a Cuba trip, as well as all others, on hold for a few years. Although restrictions were tightened under the previous administration, the Biden administration has taken several steps toward thawing US-Cuba relations. While the measures taken by the US government in 2022 don't fully restore the openings of the Obama era, they do allow us to offer a tour without concern of violating any US laws. Our tour will operate through a ground agent who fully understands all restrictions and works carefully to ensure that we are familiar with all details for legal travel and have followed every letter of the law.

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean, only slightly smaller than England. The island has a wide variety of habitats from coastal mangrove to montane cloud forest and includes important man-made habitats such as rice fields. Bird Life International has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba. Between 370 and 395 bird species have been reported in Cuba, of which 28 are endemic (at least 2 of these are very rarely seen and one is widely considered extinct), 29 are considered globally threatened, and a good number are Caribbean specialties or regional endemics. The island is home to 6 endemic genera and 60 endemic subspecies.

While our tour's focus will be on the avian residents of the island, we won't overlook the rich cultural aspect of a visit to Cuba. We'll enjoy walking tours of Trinidad, Cienfuegos, and Havana, and we'll visit the home of Ernest Hemingway. Stops at a local tobacco farm and the home of the author of the *Birds of Cuba* field guide are included, as well as the local art market at La Terrazas. We'll finish the tour with a leisurely drive through Havana in 1950s-era convertibles and dinner at one of Havana's first privately-owned restaurants, now considered to be Havana's most famous eatery. Along the way, we'll meet locals in their homes, on their farms, and in their shops, giving us the opportunity to connect with the Cuban people.

## DETAILED ITINERARY

### DAY 1, Sunday, January 7 - ARRIVAL

WELCOME TO CUBA! Your guide and driver will be just outside the arrivals terminal at Abel Santamaría Cuadrado Airport in Santa Clara. All guests must book American Airlines flight AA607, arriving at 10:05 AM, to ensure a smooth and timely transfer to Cuba's northern keys. Our first stop today is a traditional Cuban restaurant for a welcome drink and lunch. Privately owned restaurants in Cuba are known locally as paladares. Following lunch, our group will drive from Santa Clara to the beautiful northern Cuba Keys. This is a long but rewarding ride, lasting about 4 hours. As we approach the end of our journey, Odey Martínez, a local ornithologist will join us for the last portion to introduce the Jardines del Rey - Gardens of the King. He is an expert in the region and will be our birding guide for the next two days. Once at our all-inclusive hotel, you will have time to unpack and relax after a busy travel day. Dinner this evening is included at the hotel at your leisure. You may want to connect with other birders or simply enjoy time by yourself as the journey begins.

**O/N Grand Aston Hotel, Cayo Paredon (LD)**

### Day 2, Monday, January 8 - CAYO PAREDÓN GRANDE / CAYO GUILLERMO

This morning starts with breakfast at the hotel before departing for our first day of discovery. Our guide will lead us to a handful of his favorite spots in Cayo Paredón Grande. Target Species: Cuban Gnatcatcher, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Zapata Sparrow, Great Lizard-Cuckoo, Bahama Mockingbird, Cuban Black Hawk, and Oriente Warbler. Lunch today will be back at the hotel with ample time to prepare for the afternoon exploration. This afternoon and into the twilight hours, Odey will introduce many of the winter resident species and a handful of the endemic species as they return to nest for the evening in Cayo Guillermo. Target Species: **American Flamingos, Blue-winged Teal, Greater Yellowlegs, Grey Plover, Piping Plover, Black Skimmer, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Bahama Mockingbird**, and a variety of shorebirds. Dinner this evening will be at your leisure at the all-inclusive resort.

**O/N Grand Aston Hotel, Cayo Paredon (BLD)**

### Day 3, Tuesday, January 9 - CUEVA DE LOS JABALÍES / TRINIDAD

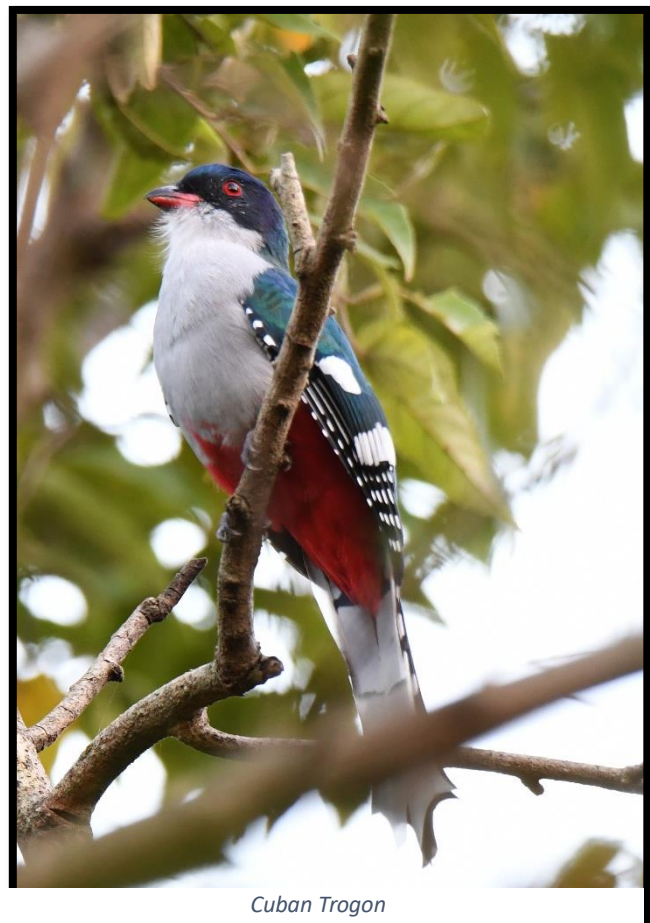
Our last morning in the keys starts on Cayo Coco at Cueva de los Jabalíes for an enjoyable encounter with the endemic **Cuban Tody**, along with other local residents.

Target Species: **Key West Quail Dove, Cuba Tody, Zapata**

**Sparrow, Yellow-throated Warbler, Painted Bunting, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Western Spindalis**, and many others.

We reconvene at the hotel for lunch and a farewell to the keys as we begin our journey to the colonial capital of Cuba, Trinidad. The journey will take approximately 3.5 hours. Upon arrival in Trinidad, our group checks into a lovely casa particular, or Cuban bed and breakfast. Once settled in, you might want to poke your head outside and take in the lovely cobblestone streets of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. For your convenience, dinner this evening will be included at the casa because tomorrow will be an early start. If you don't require much sleep and want to explore, Casa de la Musica is just a few blocks away, where you can find local musicians and dancers showing off their talent for locals and travelers alike.

**O/N Casas Particulares, Trinidad (BLD)**



*Cuban Trogon*

#### Day 4, Wednesday, January 10 - EL CUBANO / TRINIDAD / ANCÓN PENINSULA

This morning we plan to visit Parque El Cubano with a local expert guide. This field trip offers an opportunity to visit one of the best national parks in the region and is less than half an hour from Trinidad. Target Species: *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*,



*Cuban Green Woodpecker*

*Cuban Vireo*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Bullfinch*, *Yellow-faced Grassquit*, *Limpkins*, and even the nocturnal *Cuban Nightjar*.

The group returns to Trinidad this afternoon for lunch in a local paladar. After lunch, a true trinitario introduces the history, culture, and people of Trinidad to you during a walking tour of the city. Along the way, we meet local shopkeepers, special citizens, and have an encounter with a local artist. Later this afternoon, you embark for the Ancón Peninsula with further opportunities to see the aquatic birds that call Cuba home at this time of year. Target Species: *American Flamingos*, *Blue-winged Teal*, *Greater Yellowlegs*, *Grey Plover*, *Piping Plover*, *Black Skimmer*, *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Bahama Mockingbird*, and a variety of shorebirds. Dinner this evening is included at our casa to make it convenient to get a good night's sleep before tomorrow morning's early departure.

**O/N Casas Particulares, Trinidad (BLD)**

#### Day 5, Thursday, January 11 - CIENFUEGOS / CIÉNAGA DE ZAPATA

This morning we rise early, check out of the B&B, and depart for Cienfuegos, a city with French influence. En route to Cienfuegos, we make a key stop on the journey. One of Cuba's most elusive species is the *Gundlach's Hawk*. Recently, our team has consistently spotted them at the Cienfuegos Botanical Gardens, where we will attempt the same. Additional species call the gardens home, making it a worthwhile reason to get started early today. Target Species: *Gundlach's Hawk*, *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Trogon*, and *Antillean Palm Swift*.

Cienfuegos is a unique city in Cuba, where the architecture speaks to its unique French roots. During a brief walking tour, your guide will share the history of the city and introduce you to the residents who have made it famous over the years. Lunch is included today at a local paladar with views of the bay and mountains in the distance, adding to the magical ambience. After lunch, we continue west to Ciénaga de Zapata, passing the infamous Bay of Pigs, where we will check into a local casa particular (B&B) for the next two nights. Ciénaga de Zapata is an enormous protected wetland that is home to a diverse range of avifauna, where more than 170 species have been reported. Dinner this evening is a special treat, as an expert on the national park joins the group for dinner to answer questions and share details about conservation efforts and birdlife in Zapata.

**O/N Casas Particulares, Cienaga de Zapata (BLD)**

#### Day 6, Friday, January 12 - BERMEJAS / CIÉNAGA DE ZAPATA

This morning, our field study starts early with a local expert guide in Bermejas. Perhaps the highlight of today will be the opportunity to discover the world's smallest bird, the *Bee Hummingbird*, which is an endemic species. With that said, Bermejas offers a wealth of species for all bird lovers. Target Species: *Cuban Parrot*, *Cuban Parakeet*, *Gray-fronted Quail Dove*, *Key West Quail Dove*, *Cuban Tody*, *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Ruddy Quail Dove*, and the *Blue-headed Quail Dove*. Lunch is included today, but the location will be flexible to allow the expedition to view as many species as possible. This afternoon brings birding opportunities in Las Salinas and/or Soplillar (depending on recent avifauna activity). Target Species: *Northern Jacana*, *Clapper Rail*, *Willet*, *American Flamingo*, *West Indian Whistling Duck*, *Red-breasted Merganser*, *Zapata Rail*, *Northern Harrier*, *Cuban Crow*, *Cuban Blackbird*, and several additional species. This evening dinner is included at the casa following our busiest day of exploration thus far.

**O/N Casas Particulares, Cienaga de Zapata (BLD)**



### Day 7, Saturday, January 13 - ZAPATA / HAVANA / SOROA

The group will check out of the casa early this morning with a boxed breakfast in hand as we arrive early to enjoy the birds of La Turba. Target Species: **Black-crowed Night Heron, Yellow-crowed Night Heron, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Zapata Rail, Bee Hummingbird, Greater Antillean Nightjar, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.** Following an exciting morning of birding, we reach the outskirts of Havana for a visit to the famous former home of Ernest Hemingway, Finca Vigía. Here, a private guide will walk us through the estate and share stories of the award-winning writer's life in Cuba. Lunch is included today at a farm located on the outskirts of Havana, offering a traditional meal in a warm, tropical setting. After lunch, we continue to the west, arriving in Soroa to check into our accommodations for the next two nights and to rest after a busy travel day. Our hosts at the casa will prepare dinner this evening for ease and convenience.

**O/N Casas Particulares, Soroa (BLD)**

### Day 8, Sunday, January 14 - SOROA | VIÑALES

Viñales offers one of the most unexpected landscapes found anywhere in the Caribbean. This morning we start with a to-go breakfast to get started exploring the valley's bird species. Today we join a local guide as we uncover the many species found in Western Cuba. Target Species: **Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Western Spindalis, Great Lizard-Cuckoo, Cuban Emerald, Olive-capped Warbler, Killdeer, Cuban Green Woodpecker, West Indian Woodpecker, Cuban Bullfinch, and Cuban Pygmy Owl.** Lunch is included at an organic farm with delightful hosts who not only offer delicious local cuisine but also amazing views of the breathtaking Viñales Valley. After lunch, we stop at a local tobacco farm to better understand the cigar-making process and join the family for a cup of homegrown coffee. Then our group will take time to visit the town of Viñales, tour the city center, and enjoy a cocktail after a fulfilling day. We return to Soroa with time to refresh this evening before coming together for dinner at the casa.

**O/N Casas Particulares, Soroa (BLD)**

### Day 9, Monday, January 15 - SOROA | LAS TERRAZAS | HAVANA

One last early morning awaits as we depart Soroa after breakfast for Las Terrazas, in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of Sierra del Rosario, our last birding stop before arriving in Cuba's capital. An expert guide and resident of Las Terrazas will introduce us to the diverse bird life of the area and enlighten us on the fascinating history of this recently restored ecological gem. Target Species: **Cuban Oriole, Cuban Northern Flicker, Cuban Pewee, Northern Mockingbird, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Grassquit** and many others. Next, a local family welcomes us into their home for a cup of coffee and an opportunity to learn more about life in rural Cuba. Lunch is included at a local restaurant in Las Terrazas. If time permits, we may take a few minutes to explore the local art market in Las Terrazas. This eco-friendly community is home to surprising local artists. Late this afternoon, we arrive at the hotel in Havana just in time to check in and refresh after a long and rewarding journey across two-thirds of the island. Dinner this evening is included at a wonderful Italian restaurant for a change of pace.

**O/N Grand Aston Hotel, Havana (BLD)**



*Great Lizard-Cuckoo*

## Day 10, Tuesday, January 16 - HAVANA

Your first adventure in Havana starts with a ride along the Malecon (seaside avenue) aboard the famous Cuban coco taxi (bright yellow tuk-tuk) to begin the morning. Next, your guide will share the history, romance, and architecture that have made Old Havana so coveted for centuries. We visit the four main squares, meet locals, and have lunch at one of our favorite restaurants. After lunch, we are planning to visit the Cuban godfather of



ornithology, Orlando Garrido, in his home, to hear the vast number of stories he has about exploring the birds of the island. If you bring your *Birds of Cuba* field guide along, he will be happy to sign it for you. Late this afternoon, see the



rest of Havana in style in 1950s-era classic convertibles, ending at the famous Hotel Nacional for a tour of their Hall of History and a drink in their gardens overlooking the Malecon. Dinner this evening is included at what many regard as Havana's most famous restaurant, La Guarida. The paladar was one of the first private restaurants allowed by the government, and it was the backdrop for many of the scenes in the

Oscar-nominated "Fresa y Chocolate". After dinner, enjoy a Buena Vista Social Club tribute performance where original band members may pop in to add to the authenticity of the experience.

**O/N Grand Aston Hotel, Havana (BLD)**

## Day 11, Wednesday, January 17 - DEPARTURE DAY

Breakfast is included at the Grand Aston today. Your morning is at leisure before your flights home. Our team will arrange group or individual private transfers, to allow you to book whatever flight is most convenient to return home from Havana. Your transfer will be approximately three hours prior to your flight departure time. Please, be aware that check-out time at the hotel is 11 a.m., so flights before 3 p.m. are most convenient.

**End of tour (B)**

## PRICING DETAILS

Full price for this tour is \$4795 for a group of 10 – 12, or \$4995 for a group of 8 – 9. Single supplement is \$795. A deposit of \$750 is required with the registration form. Full payment is due on or before September 7, 2023 (4 months prior to the start date of the tour).

### Price includes:

- ~ Private services of English speaking guide, driver & air conditioned vehicle with bathroom throughout
- ~ Private arrival & departure transfers
- ~ Activities, entrance fees, and touring as detailed
- ~ Meals as per noted in the itinerary, starting with lunch on day 1 and ending with breakfast on day 11
- ~ 2 domestic drinks (sparkling or still water/juice/sodas/ beer/local cocktails) with included meals.
- ~ Bottled water in the vehicle while touring
- ~ Tips for specialty guides during included activities
- ~ Tips for waiters during included paladar meals
- ~ Services of 2 **Cheepers!** tour leaders (Jim and Cindy Beckman)
- ~ Pre-trip gift box, including customized checklist
- ~ Post-trip photo collection on USB drive
- ~ Post-trip electronic version of the final checklist

### Price does NOT include:

- ~ Gratuities for national guide and driver. Recommended: Guide \$10 USD per person, per day/ Driver \$7 USD per person, per day.
- ~ Airfare to Cuba and related taxes
- ~ Enrollment in the Cuba medical emergency insurance (mandatory by the Cuban government for all travelers to the island). U.S. airlines provide in ticket cost.
- ~ MANDATORY Cuban Tourist Card (same as a visa, this is arranged through the airline)
- ~ Optional activities
- ~ Other expenses of a personal nature such as luggage charges, and shopping

***Cheepers! Birding on a Budget LLC reserves the right to make changes in the itinerary if the need should arise due to unforeseeable circumstances such as weather, landslides, and other natural phenomena, as well as suggestions by local guides in order to take advantage of an unusual birding opportunity. Lodging is subject to change based on availability.***