

Cuba off the beaten track

Jeep expedition

7 days / 6 nights

Hotels and homestays

Isn't it true that when talking about an organized tour in almost all cases the image of passive travel, making long distances while seated in a bus, shows up? Indeed, conventional tours feature this conditions and nothing is wrong with that.

The Off the Beaten Track Jeep Expedition is certainly an organized trip. But what is different about this private tour is the personalized and individual attention, and the great emphasis on outdoors activities.

Cuba's nature and countryside are the main settings for this tour, but it is also interspersed with visits to interesting cities on route. You will be driven along the roads and streets of Cuba and take part in outdoor activities such as swimming in rivers and natural pools and hiking (for participants of all ages). We cannot think of another tour that is so 'off the beaten' path as this jeep expedition. Explore natural wilderness and unfamiliar places, mostly only known by the locals and where hardly a visitor ventures.

This tour generates a feeling of freedom and harmony while exploring Cuba's country and natural surroundings. This is quite a unique tour and may not occur often...certainly not via a coach trip nor during an individual car-drive across the island. After all, you do not easily trespass the farmyard of an unknown family, or take unmarked rural roads that may led to getting lost.

A multilingual chauffeur / guide will drive you through central Cuba. With his knowledge, experience and skills you will have no worries about finding your destination, knowing where to fuel up, fixing a flat tire, or even who to ask for the name of a specific bird or flower.

Day 1 ARRIVAL IN HAVANA

You will be picked up at your hotel at 8am (08.00 hours) by your private chauffeur/guide. The beginning of this tour takes you first over the motorway towards the province of Matanzas, followed by a scenery of dikes, rivers, quarries, palm trees, valleys, caves and traditional farming villages. Next, Canímar River, with a lunch stop at La Arboleda (a kind of recreation center on the riverside). You can ride a horse or sail a boat. The Canímar River has a length of about 19 kilometers, of which 12 are navigable, running to the eastern side of the Bay of Matanzas. The Canímar winds between huge and steep banks that are covered with rich vegetation. An ancient legend tells of the love between a beautiful aboriginal girl and her cacique, Canimao (from the pre-Columbian tribe, Taino). This place was a settlement of the Cuban natives until the arrival of Columbus and is considered one of the richest archaeological sites in Cuba. Sugar was transported across the river during the colonial period and shipped from the Bay of Matanzas to Europe. The ride continues through the interior of the province of Matanzas, a flat area with a rather monotonous landscape of sugarcane cultivation. The journey will bring you through the small villages and the communities of Limonar, Jovellanos and

Jaguey Grande. Today's destination is the Nature Park and wetland, Ciénaga de Zapata, at the Bay of Pigs. Overnight in a Casa Particular (private home), where also your dinner will be prepared and served. **(L) (D)**

Day 2 HAVANA - CIENAGA DE ZAPATA - CALETA BUENA- CIENFUEGOS

Distance by jeep about 170 km

After breakfast, visit a breeding farm of cotorras (a type of parrot) and crocodiles. A trip by boat over Laguna del Tesoro will bring you to the replica of Aldea Taina Guama (aboriginal inhabitants of this area). Afterwards, continue by jeep through the Nature Park, Ciénaga de Zapata, and over country roads and through small villages (Palpite, Soplillar, and Cayo Ramona). See the locals preparing charcoal in the traditional way and recognizable by small and smoldering hills where the wood is burnt. You will get an exclusive look at the lifestyle of the inhabitants of this area, their history, and the flora and fauna. Next, get an introduction to the Bay of Pigs with lunch at Caleta Buena. After lunch, check out the natural pools with the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea and swim or take advantage of the wonderful opportunity to snorkel. The underwater world in the Bay of Pigs has a good reputation among scuba divers and

snorkelers. Hit the road again, mainly along the coast to Juragua, and onwards to the elegant city of Cienfuegos, which is also known as the 'Pearl of the South'. Cienfuegos is a charming, pleasant and spacious city. It was founded in 1819, initially with a neoclassical architecture with French accents. It was settled by French immigrants from Bordeaux and Louisiana about three centuries later than most Cuban colonial cities. This explains the difference in the architecture and appearance between, for example, Cienfuegos and Trinidad. Cienfuegos was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. It is beautiful and unique to experience the peaceful serenity of sleepy villages and the surrounding natural beauty, and then the breathtaking architectural heritage of a glorious city. Overnight and dinner in Hotel Jagua, and evening at leisure. **(B) (L) (D)**

Day 3 CIENFUEGOS - CUMANAYAGUA - EL NICO - TOPES DE COLLANTES

Distance by jeep about 85 km

After breakfast, you will be driven over country roads to El NICO, a beautiful natural area surrounded by the mountains of the Escambray. Take part in a hike on the eco-touristic trails to Salto de Agua, and enjoy the time to swim in natural pools that were created by erosion. Lunch will be served in this lovely area and continue onwards by jeep through the mountains towards the collective, 4 Vientos, with a short stop for an explanation about the local community project. The final destination today is Topes de Collantes, a small mountain village situated at 800 meters above sea level. This day is obviously filled with parts of Cuba's natural resources; the flat province and the marshlands make way for proud mountains and equally proud mountain villages. Cuba has a lot to offer as for culture and history, but Cuba's nature gives the country its three-dimensionality. Stay overnight at the hotel Los Helechos. Your stay includes dinner and you are free to enjoy your evening at leisure. **(B) (L) (D)**

Day 4 TOPES DE COLLANTES - GUANAYARA - TRINIDAD distance by jeep about 50 km

First breakfast and then leave by jeep to Guanayara, following the complex paths of the Sierra del Escambray, and on to La Casa de la Gallega. Originally, this was a farmhouse but with the growth of

ecotourism, it was converted into a restaurant. From here, a hiking trail begins with the poetic name, Centinelas del rio melodioso (Guards of the melodic river), and it runs along the Guanayara River to the El Rocio waterfall. Time to swim in a natural mountain pond and shower under the waterfall. Return to La Casa de la Gallega to rest a little outside in the yard and have lunch. The hike planned for this day has a few difficult spots, but in principle, feasible for anyone with normal and reasonable physical condition and a pair of sturdy shoes. If bridging rivers, descending mountains, and the solid jet of a waterfall are not your activities, you can enjoy a book in the garden of La Casa de la Gallega. At a certain moment, the hikers will arrive through the backyard. Return to Topes de Collantes and visit the La Casa del Café. This region is known for its high quality coffee coming from the surrounding plantations. The construction of this cozy coffeehouse was an initiative by its staff. An extensive coffee menu is offered and one can choose from a simple espresso to all different kinds of mixes such as, for example, coffee with rum (served hot or cold). Later in the afternoon, onwards to the precious and colonial town of Trinidad, located the Caribbean Sea and less than 20 km away from Topes de Collantes. **(B) (L) (D)**

Day 5 TRINIDAD - BANAQ - SANCTI SPIRITUS Distance by jeep about 100 km

After breakfast, time to explore Trinidad more intensively. The colonial city of Trinidad was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It seems as if time has stood still in this open-air museum with a permanent exhibition of colonial legacies. Visit the city museum, Palacio Cantero, as well as other interesting spots. On to the Valle de los Ingenios (Sugar Mill Valley) with the slave tower, Manaca Iznagas. Once, this area was the sugar empire of Cuba, which explains the presence of the colonial houses in Trinidad where the bourgeoisie of those days lived. The safari will continue on to the town of Banao and a visit to the ecological reserve, Lomas de Banao. An explanation of the area in the Visitor Center is followed by a walk along the eco-tourist route, Banao - La Sabina. The lake provides a perfect opportunity to cool down with a refreshing swim. Once on the road again, you will drive to the town of Sancti Spíritus. Founded centuries ago, it has never reached the

popularity of other Cuban cities and many international visitors wrongly bypass the place. As a result, Sancti Spíritus retains its originality and is a nice and quiet colonial town. Your accommodation for the evening will be at Hostal Rijo-Plaza, where dinner will be served and evening at leisure. **(B) (L) (D)**

Day 6 SANCTI SPIRITUS – SANTA CLARA Distance by jeep about 100 km

The journey continues... After breakfast, the tour will take you from the south of the province of Sancti Spíritus, northwards as you travel over rural roads which are lined with tobacco plantations, fields of sugarcane and other crops. Along the way, you will pass several small towns and rural villages. The next stop is at the protected area, Jobo Rosado, followed by a walk through this unspoiled nature reserve. Lunch will be served here as well. Onwards in northwesterly direction, crossing the provincial border on the way to Santa Clara. Check-in and dinner at Hotel La Granjita,

Los Caneyes or América. Evening at leisure. **(B) (L) (D)**

Day 7 SANTA CLARA – VARACERO or HAVANA Distance by jeep respectively 210 & 280 km

After breakfast, a city tour through Santa Clara by jeep. There is also a visit to the mausoleum of Ernesto Che Guevara and his comrades who were killed in Bolivia (1967). After his remains were found and exhumed in Bolivia, El Che was interred here with military honors in October 1997, thirty years after his death. Besides the mausoleum with the eternal flame, there is also a museum dedicated to the life of Che Guevara. The last stretch of the journey along sugar cane plantations and fields of minor crops will return you to Varadero or Havana. Whether you prefer lazing on one of the most beautiful beaches in the Caribbean, or still would like to go off-the-beaten track, but then in the capital Havana, is your choice. Whatever you choose, the driver/guide will drop you off safely. End of our services. **(B) (L)**

Versions

There are two different jeep categories, namely:

- The BYD S6 seats (apart from the driver/guide) four participants and stores their luggage (2 big + 1 small bag); ideal for a family with (two) children or four participants of average size.
- The BAIC BJ40 accommodates the driver/guide + three participants and their luggage. Up to three people can travel comfortably, as well as a family with (one) child.

Inclusions:

- Transportation per jeep/SUV.
- Accommodation in double or single rooms (with private bathroom), in both hotels and in home-stays.
- The meal plan is full-board, except for the first and the last day (included are: 6 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 5 dinners).
- Program (and entrance fees) according to description.
- Local English speaking Guide/driver during all excursions as outlined in the itinerary

Not Included:

- ✓ Gratuities for driver/guide.
- ✓ International flights to and from Cuba, visa fees and medical insurance.
- ✓ Meals or tours not specified at the itinerary
- ✓ Personal expenses

**PRICE PER PERSON
IN DOUBLE ROOM**

from EUR 1.490.-

**DEPARTURES 2017
Private tour**

Every Monday, Wednesday,
Thursday, Friday, Saturday,
or Sunday, from
November 1, 2016 to
October 31, 2017

Remarks

- ✓ A professional chauffeur, and your guide at the same time, will drive the jeep. Jeeps are insured, fuel and other related costs (e.g. parking) are covered.
- ✓ Triple rooms are not bookable on this tour. In case of an uneven number of participants, twin and single rooms should be booked.
- ✓ Given the number of outdoor activities, it is recommended to pack appropriate (sports and swim) clothing and footwear. (Dress codes in the countryside and province are hardly known).
- ✓ One must realize that the accommodation on this tour is mainly basic. Luxury five-star hotels are not or barely operational in these parts, let alone that their luxury fits within the character of this trip. Simple accommodation albeit, but with the necessary facilities, and more luxurious than camping.
- ✓ Che Guevara´s memorial and museum in Santa Clara are closed on Mondays. Therefore, this jeep tour has no departure scheduled on Mondays, so that this closure will not affect a highlight of this program.