

## Cycle Cuba



Duration: 9 days

Cuba, described as the pearl of the Caribbean, is a gem of an island known as much for its unique, colourful culture and history as for its golden beaches. Vintage cars, art deco mansions, colonial plazas and Baroque churches, set against a backdrop of salsa music and captivating street-life – and that's just the first day!

Our challenge takes us from Havana, the cultural and historical heart of the island, out west through traditional rural Cuba. The route is stunningly beautiful, taking us through picturesque limestone hills, tropical forests and sugarcane fields, finishing in the renowned tobacco plantations where the world's most famous cigars originate.

This is a challenging yet beautiful ride on hilly roads miles from the tourist track, indulging us with a true taste of Cuba's vibrant culture. You will not forget this island in a hurry!

## DETAILED ITINERARY

## Day 1: Depart UK, arrive Havana

We fly from London to Havana. Transfer to our hotel. After dinner and a detailed briefing, we prepare our kit for tomorrow and get a good night's sleep! Night hotel.

## Day 2: Havana Bike Tour

After breakfast and a bike fitting, we explore Havana, one of Hemingway's favourite cities, by pedal power. This is a great warm-up ride, mainly flat, which allows us to get used to the heat and ensure our bikes are set up comfortably. It's also a great way to discover the landscapes of this unique city; the street life is as captivating as the colonial buildings and former seafront grandeur. After lunch on the coast at Santa Fé, you'll have some free time to explore this vibrant capital and soak up the atmosphere. Night hotel.

**Cycle approx 40km**

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### Day 3: Havana – Las Terrazas

Our first full day in the saddle! We leave Havana's bustle and head west through suburbs before joining the coast, passing the fishing town of Playa Baracoa and Mariel, a small port. Today is a day of two halves – the morning sees us cruising flat roads, mainly along the coast. Once we turn inland, we approach the first foothills of the Sierra del Rosario mountain range and it's not long before we're tackling our first significant hill. The afternoon's route is more undulating as we take quiet back-roads through fields of sugarcane and palm trees; the tranquillity is broken only by the occasional farm vehicle and 1950s Cadillacs. The bumpy, broken road surface adds to the challenge, but the views are stunning – this is a memorable day in beautiful rural Cuba. More climbing takes us on twisting roads towards the densely-wooded Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve, whose hardwood forests are known for abundant birdlife. Our hotel has fabulous views across the reserve. Night hotel.

**Cycle approx 80km**

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### Day 4: Las Terrazas – San Diego de Los Baños

More spectacular scenery awaits us today, with some inspiring views across the lush, tropical forest. We start off with a short downhill – enjoy it while it lasts! – and cross the lake and village before taking a very quiet, undulating back road through the forests of the Sierra del Rosario. The tocororo (Cuba's national bird), with its dramatic black, white, red and blue plumage, is seen fairly commonly along here. We continue through the Reserve, following the crest of the hills; there is very little flat, and our toughest climb sees us gaining some 300m in the space of 4km. The hardest part of the day over, we enjoy a fabulous descent to San Cristobal, which brings us out of the mountains and down towards the central plain. From here it's a fairly flat afternoon as we ride along an old road used only by local traffic; you're likely to be passed by horses and carts, American vintage cars, Chinese bicycles, Russian tractors and Czech motorcycles, all testament to Cuba's story through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. San Diego de los Baños, a sleepy former spa town, is our destination for today. Night hotel.

**Cycle approx 80km**

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### Day 5: San Diego de Los Baños – Mil Cumbres

The distance is shorter today, but don't be deceived – this might be your most challenging day yet! Climbing almost from the start, we cross part of La Guira National Park, once the estate of a wealthy landowner who was forced into exile in 1959. This is a tough start to the morning; though our surroundings are beautiful. A long descent brings us out of the Park and we pass close to the Cuevas de las Portales – home to Che Guevara during the Cuban Missile Crisis. If our cycling pace allows, we'll make time to stop and visit Che's Headquarters before continuing, where a 2km steep climb awaits, known locally as *loma del Americano* (American's hill). Our road takes us predominantly downhill towards La Palma, but the route is scattered with small climbs, some of them steep; there is simply no easy section on today's ride! We break our journey at an artist's home for some traditional country hospitality, and again for lunch, before accepting the inevitable and riding up into the mountains again. Although the highest hills are behind us, it's still a tough ascent up towards Mil Cumbres (literal meaning 'a thousand peaks'), where we stay tonight at a simple eco-lodge in the Cuban forest. This is a beautiful place to

finish a ride that should leave you feeling tired but enormously elated! The small community living here is always delighted to have guests, and an evening here will have a strong cultural flavour, and is often a real highlight of the ride.

**Cycle approx 51km**

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## Day 6: Mil Cumbres – Viñales

Our last day in the saddle will feel considerably less challenging after the last few days – though there are still plenty of undulations! A good freewheel down the mountain sets us off in high spirits, and we follow the undulating route back towards La Palma. A quiet back-road then takes us along the rolling valley floor of the Sierra de los Organos. Yet more varied scenery awaits us; these landscapes are dominated by *mogotes*, steep-sided karst rock formations clad in lush vegetation which rise dramatically from the valley floor. It's an unforgettable backdrop to our ride, which draws to a close as we near the famous tobacco-growing area around Viñales. One final hill takes us to a viewpoint with magnificent vistas across the Viñales Valley. On arrival at our hotel, we enjoy a well-deserved cocktail to celebrate the end of our ride. Night hotel.

**Cycle approx 62 km**

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## Day 7: Viñales – Havana

Today we head back to the city, but first we make the most of our time in this beautiful area. You're in the home of the Cuban cigar, and we enjoy a gentle walk through the countryside famous for producing the world's finest tobacco. The scenery is beautiful, and it's an enjoyable change to be exploring on foot! We visit local fruit and tobacco farmers, earning an authentic glimpse into their traditional way of life – you might even get the chance to learn how to hand-roll a cigar! We then drive back to Havana, where an afternoon's guided tour of Old Havana is yet another highlight. The faded charm and impressive monuments of Cuba's capital forms a real contrast after the natural beauty and small communities we've become used to. We then head out for an evening to celebrate all our achievements of the past week. Night hotel.

**Drive approx 3 hours**

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## Day 8: Depart Havana

This morning is free to relax, or head out and explore more of Havana's sights, or shop for souvenirs, before we transfer to the airport in time to catch our international flight home.

*Lunch and dinner not included*

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## Day 9: Arrive UK

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## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All transport from London to Havana return
- All meals except where specified, and accommodation
- Discover Adventure leaders; local guides/mechanics and cooks
- Vehicle support and backup equipment on the trip
- 21-speed Mountain bike (Trek/Giant or equivalent)
- Entrance to any sites visited as part of the itinerary

## WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- Any meals specified 'not included' in the itinerary
- Travel insurance
- Cycle helmet (compulsory) and water bottle
- Personal spending money, souvenirs and drinks
- Airline taxes: we cap these so £250.00 is the maximum you will pay
- Tips for the local guides and support crew
- Inbound airport departure tax (no tax applied at the time of writing)
- Cuba entry visa
- Fees for any optional sites, attractions or activities
- Any applicable surcharges as per Terms and Conditions



Discover Adventure reserves the right to change the route or itinerary for safety reasons should local conditions dictate.

Please note: This document was downloaded on 16 Apr 2024, and the challenge is subject to change.