



Optometry and Eye Care in Cuba

28 April - 10 May 2010

With Beach Extension

28 April - 13 May 2010

'When I read the brochure for this trip, I knew it was going to be the perfect combination of professional visits and tourism. I had been waiting to find such a trip for several years. I was not disappointed. It really was perfect from start to finish. It couldn't have been better.'

Professor Joan Higgins, Cuba: Medicine and Society, Feb 2008



Jon Baines
tours



A misty morning in Vinales Valley

There is only one Cuba. This defiantly communist, vivacious tropical island with music throbbing through its veins is unique. However, Cuba is poised on the brink of transformation as it adapts to the end of the Castro era and the changing face of America. Gain real insight into Cuba's society and world class healthcare system, with a special focus on eye care, on this bespoke study tour. Learn of Operation Miracle and visit local optical specialists, a polyclinic, the Pando-Ferrer Eye Hospital in Havana and a medical training school. Enjoy live music, glorious colonial architecture, beautiful landscapes and the vivaciousness of Cuba.

Leave the chill of London and arrive in balmy Havana. Check into the historic Ambos Mundos Hotel, where Hemingway famously wrote part of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', and enjoy a cocktail and dinner on the patio of La Mina restaurant.

Step out into the colonial grandeur of Havana the next day with Professor Del Castillo, a city historian, award winning architect and board member of Habaguanex – an NGO responsible for the restoration of Havana. Look at the superb restoration work in Old Havana and hear stories about the city and its people. Visit the ornate

Taquechel Pharmacy and Museum and the historic optical outlet, Optica Almendares.

One of the highlights of the tour is meeting Dr Aleida Guevara, Che Guevara's eldest daughter, a paediatrician and an impassioned supporter of social issues. Join her to hear her talk on Cuba's highly successful humanitarian project Operation Miracle, which has provided free eye surgery to almost half a million poor people from 28 Caribbean and Latin American nations.

Visit the Pando-Ferrer Eye Hospital in Havana and hear a talk giving you the background to eye care in Cuba. Afterwards, visit the Partagas Cigar Factory,



A Ministry building in Havana



Almendares optical store in Old Havana (top);
A game of street chequers (above)

where you can buy cigars fresh from the humidor, and spend some time at the Miramar Theatre Project where we will make a donation (see back page of brochure). After lunch, visit Optica Almendares HQ in Miramar and return via the vast necropolis of Colon Cemetery and the delectable Coppelia Ice Cream Emporium.

Next morning, visit the Community Centre for the Elderly and meet the resident Ophthalmologist, before spending the rest of the day at your leisure in Havana. After tapas at Mason de la Flota, accompanied by live flamenco, there is the option to spend the evening watching the legendary Buena Vista Social Club perform.

Drive onto Pinar del Rio, which claims, with justification, to be Cuba's most beautiful area. Green lush valleys dotted with the distinctive 'mogotes' (huge grassy hillocks) provide ideal tobacco growing conditions as well as spectacular scenery. Visit Vinales Valley and take a peaceful boat trip through underground caves before having lunch at Rancho San Vicente restaurant. Explore a tobacco

farm, where the leaves are cured in barns and seedlings transported by ox drawn carts. That night, get close to nature in style at the Moka Eco Lodge.

Drive to the Sierra del Rosario Reserve and visit the sustainable Las Terrazas ecological settlement. You will meet a family doctor and learn about rural eye care, as well as meeting a local artist and having coffee at Maria's house. After lunch, visit the orchid gardens of Soroa and a coffee plantation with spectacular views of the area.

Drive to sleepy Cienfuegos, crossing Treasure Lake by speedboat through mangrove swamps. Arrive in the afternoon and explore the many beautiful colonial buildings, which remain intact in the old heart of the city, on a walking tour.

Visit Cienfuegos Medical School and learn of medical education, before having lunch at the Nautical Club overlooking the bay. Take a boat trip out into the bay and visit a family house on an island. Return for some leisure time before dinner at the gracious Moorish Palacio del Valle down on the seafront (see below), accompanied by a pianist and singer.

Take a scenic train journey to historic Santa Clara, the final resting place of Che Guevara. Visit a polyclinic and explore Che's mausoleum and museum before continuing your journey to Topes de Collantes National Park, a cool, green-filtered world away from the tropical heat of the coast. The high slopes of the mountains are choked with bromeliad-laden trees,



Palacio del Valle in Cienfuegos



giant furling ferns and delicate misty waterfalls. Explore the mountains in the company of Andres Santana, a dynamic naturalist guide with extraordinary knowledge of the medicinal uses of plants, before having a spit roast pork supper in the Park.

Next day, drive to Trinidad, one of Cuba's colonial treasures. Founded in 1514, the town became the centre of the sugar cane boom in the late eighteenth century and huge amounts of money were lavished on fabulous colonial buildings, which remain wonderfully preserved today. Red-tiled roofs, pastel buildings and Baroque churches, winding cobblestone streets and excellent museums fill this tiny city which still moves along at the pace of a mule-cart. Spend a morning under Trinidad's spell and have lunch in the town, before visiting Sugar Mill Valley, which provided Trinidad with its wealth from sugar in its boom period. Drive onto the fishing village of La Boca for sundowners before returning to Topes de Collantes for dinner.

Next morning, drive back to Havana through some wonderful scenery and spend the day at your leisure enjoying the capital city. That night, drive in fabulous 1950s American cars to Hemingway's haunt at La Floridita for cocktails, followed by a farewell dinner at the glamorous Nacional Hotel on Havana's famous Malecon, a seven kilometre long sea boulevard. A leisurely final morning in Havana rounds off your visit to Cuba. Depart in the afternoon or join the three night extension staying in the all-inclusive 4 star Blau Varadero beach front resort at Varadero, famous for its miles of sparkling white sand, soft turquoise water and coconut palms.



Ferns in Topes de Collantes (top); Inside a cigar factory; A colonial square in Trinidad (above)

Itinerary 28 April - 10 May 2010

B = Breakfast **L** = Lunch **D** = Dinner

28 April (Wed) London - Havana D
Am Depart London Gatwick
Pm Arrive Havana. Transfer to the Hotel Ambos Mundos
Eve Dinner at La Mina

29 April (Thurs) Havana B L D
Am Walking tour with Professor Orestes del Castillo through Old Havana, learning about the restoration of Havana and seeing restored hotels and buildings, the scale model of Old Havana and the Taquechel Pharmacy
Pm Lunch El Medina. Visit Optica Almendares in Old Havana
Talk: "Health Care in Cuba and Operation Miracle" Dr Aleida Guevara
Eve Welcome Dinner at El Templete

30 April (Fri) Havana B L D
Am Visit Pando-Ferrer Eye Hospital. Talk: "A Background to Eye Care in Cuba." Visit the Partagas Cigar Factory and the Miramar Theatre and Project
Pm Lunch at El Aljeibe. Visit Optica Almendares HQ in Miramar
Return via Colon Cemetery and the Coppelia Ice Cream Emporium
Eve Dinner at La Dominica

1 May (Sat) Havana B L D
Am Visit the Community Centre for the Elderly and meet with the resident Ophthalmologist
Pm At leisure in Havana
Eve Dinner at Mason de la Flota. Option to visit Buena Vista Social Club

2 May (Sun) Havana / Vinales
Am Drive into Pinar del Rio. Explore the Vinales Valley and take a cave boat trip
Pm Lunch at Rancho San Vicente restaurant. Visit a tobacco farm and visit the tobacco fields
Eve Dinner and overnight at the Moka Eco Lodge

3 May (Mon) Vinales B L D
Am Drive to the Sierra del Rosario Reserve and visit the commune of Las Terrazas, meet a family doctor and learn of rural eye care, visit the local artist houses and have a coffee at Maria's house
Pm Lunch in Casa del Campesino. Visit the Soroa Orchid Garden, coffee plantation and viewpoint

Eve Dinner and overnight at the Moka Eco Lodge

4 May (Tues) Vinales / Cienfuegos B L D
Am Drive to Cienfuegos. Cross Treasure Lake by speed boat
Pm Arrive in Cienfuegos, check into La Union Hotel and have a walking tour of the town.

5 May (Wed) Cienfuegos B L D
Am Visit the Medical School and learn of medical education
Pm Lunch at the Nautical Club. Take a boat trip out into the bay and visit a family house on an island
Eve Dinner at the Palacio del Valle

6 May (Thurs) Cienfuegos / Topes de Collantes B L D
Am Train to Santa Clara and visit the Polyclinic and Che Guevara Museum.
Pm Drive to Topes de Collantes National Park and explore the stunning scenery with a naturalist guide examining medicinal plants
Eve Roast pork dinner.

7 May (Fri) Topes de Collantes B L D
Am Drive to Trinidad and explore the town including Plaza Mayor, Holy Trinity Church and the Romantic Museum
Pm Lunch in Trinidad. Visit Sugar Mill Valley
Eve Sundowners on the coast. Return to Topes and dinner

8 May (Sat) Topes de Collantes / Havana B L D
Am Return to Havana
Pm Arrive and at leisure
Eve Drive by 1950s US cars along the Malacon for cocktails at La Floridita
Farewell Dinner at the Nacional Hotel

9 May (Sun) Havana B
Am At leisure in Havana
Pm Depart Havana for London arriving the following morning (10 May)

Beach Extension

9 May (Sun) Havana / Varadero B L D
Am At leisure in Havana
Pm Depart Havana for Varadero and check into 4 star Blau Varadero Beach Hotel for a three night extension, arriving London on 13 May



A courtyard at La Union Hotel in Cienfuegos

Hotels

Havana – Ambos Mundos Hotel

The intimate Ambos Mundos Hotel was built in the late 1920s and is a lovely hotel in the colonial style with a literary pedigree. In the early 1930s, Ernest Hemingway stayed in room 511 and wrote the first chapter of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls.' The hotel has an excellent location in the very centre of Old Havana's colonial heart.



The lobby of Ambos Mundos Hotel in Havana

Vinales – Moka Eco Lodge

The Moka Eco Lodge is situated in the foothills of the Sierra del Rosario Reserve and blends harmoniously into the surrounding San Juan Valley - a tree grows up through the lobby and its branches disappear through holes in the roof. The hotel has a pool and is surrounded by an eco village which includes organic and vegetarian restaurants.

Cienfuegos – La Union Hotel

The charming 4-star La Union is in the heart of Cienfuegos and its terrace has splendid views of the town and bay. The hotel has elegant, large rooms, a lovely pool, grand hall, and a lively rooftop bar.

Topes de Collantes - Hotel Los Helechos

Los Helechos Hotel is located in the mountains inside Topes de Collantes National Park, with lovely forest views. The facilities include a heated swimming pool.

Varadero Extension – Blau Varadero Beach Resort

This modern all-inclusive 4-star beach resort has superb facilities, easy access to the white sands and sparkling water of Varadero Beach, and excellent customer service.



The white sand beach at the Varadero

Tour Leader

David M. Shannon graduated with a Doctor of Optometry degree from Southern College of Optometry, Memphis, Tennessee in 1986. He divides his time between the family practice Shannon and Carton Ltd in Notting Hill, London and Johnson and Johnson Vision Care where he acts as a professional affairs consultant. David is also the AOP Board member responsible for OT (Optometry Today) and the immediate past chair of their new Education Committee. Currently he sits on the Membership Committee. He has travelled extensively through the USA and more recent adventures include visits to Israel, Hong Kong, Thailand and Taiwan. He recently led a successful Optometry Tour to China.

Project

The Music Fund for Cuba is the only registered UK charity working in Cuba. One of its more ambitious projects is the restoration of the Miramar Community Theatre in Havana: Project Teatro Miramar. The theatre plays a very important role in the local community, providing a much needed cultural centre for all ages, but especially for children and young people.

'This has been our first Jon Baines trip and we have thoroughly enjoyed it. Excellent balance between specialist visits and general tourism and all to a very high standard.'

**Dr Marian and Dr Colin Kenyon,
Cuba: Medicine and Society, Feb-March 2009**



Students at the Miramar Theatre

The fully inclusive cost of the tour is £2,350.00 per person

No Compulsory Single Supplement
Single travellers do not have to pay a single supplement. Jon Baines Tours allows you to opt to share a twin room with a fellow tour participant. However, to guarantee a single room, or if one is not available, you must pay the single supplement.

The cost includes:

- Economy flights on the scheduled services of Virgin Atlantic between London Gatwick and Havana

Upgrade to Premium Economy from £490.00 return (£245.00 each way) subject to availability

- Visa and UK airport tax
- Comprehensive briefing notes
- The services of a tour leader (David Shannon)

In Cuba the cost includes:

- 11 nights' accommodation in twin or double-bedded rooms with private facilities in first class to medium grade hotels

The single room supplement is £185.00

- Full board throughout the tour
- A full programme of professional and cultural visits as per the itinerary
- Admission fees where applicable
- Full-time National Guide
- All transport and airport taxes in Cuba

The cost excludes:

- All personal extras such as tips, portage, laundry, inoculation fees and drinks
- All optional excursions, tours and visits
- Travel insurance

The cost of the Varadero Beach Extension is £380.00 and includes:

- 3 nights' accommodation in twin or double-bedded rooms with private facilities at the Blau Varadero 4 star hotel

The single room supplement is £90.00

- Full board throughout the extension (all meals)
- All transfers

NB Please note that all itineraries in Cuba are subject to change according to local conditions. Due to the nature of the tour places are strictly limited.

About Jon Baines Tours

To travel with us is to dig below the surface, revealing the deeper destination. Of course, you will visit the great historical sites; marvel at the wonders of architecture and engineering; be moved by the riches of culture and art; and experience the most spectacular landscapes in the world. What we also do is make sure that you see the country as it is today, giving you privileged access that independent travel and other tour companies rarely get close to. We give you a variety of experiences, from the sublime to the humble, in the company of intelligent, curious, like-minded people. And while we can be worthy, we also make sure that you have a lot of fun.

Whether your journey is for study or pleasure, we make sure that you travel, understand and enjoy.

'Altogether we had such a marvellous time - we are already thinking about doing it all again next year!'

**Dr Susanne Buttner and Martin
Murphy, Cuba: Medicine and Society,
Feb-March 2009**



A mural in Havana (top); A view across Trinidad; Farm workers in Vinales; The Cuban coastline (above)

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