



# THE FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

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(A 501 (C) (3) NON-PROFIT CHARITY)

## **Nature, Birding, Hiking, and Culture: a Blended Cuban Experience!**

**Mon. Feb 20 – Thurs. Mar 3, 2022**

*Interact with Cuban nature, support Cuban conservationists and Cuban birds while improving your Spanish!*

This 12-day adventure is uniquely designed for curious conservationists, interested birders, and amateur ecologists who want to interact meaningfully with a variety of Cuban nature specialists, archaeologists, biologists, historians and artists and give support to Cuban civil society. Conservation and conversation come together to deepen our understanding of Cuba and the Cuban people.



Cuban Tody

Join Cuba's national campaign to protect the environment while visiting uniquely beautiful national parks. Emphasis is on gaining an appreciation of birds, nature, conservation, creative eco-tourism, and the work that Cuban naturalists are doing to protect and nourish the environment in Cuba. We will engage in light hiking in protected areas while practicing our Spanish (not a prerequisite) with our Cuban friends who work in the private sector of conservation and avian research. We will also sample the new trends in creole and international cuisine with Cuba's growing "cuentapropistas" (small, independent businesses).

The tour will visit the UNESCO Biosphere Reserves of Las Terrazas; the beautiful Viñales Valley and National Park, with its unique hiking and birding opportunities; the Ciénaga de Zapata, an immense swamp and nature habitat; and, of course, Old Havana with its fascinating urban ecology.

Because Cuba is in transition, and because of possible COVID outbreaks, all dates, activities, and even costs are subject to change.

## Tentative Itinerary

**Sun. Feb 20, Day 1:** Find your way to **Ft. Lauderdale**. Overnight **Days Inn by Wyndham. Ft. Lauderdale Airport Cruise Port**. Briefing meeting with tour leaders, Paul Baicich and Soledad Pagliuca.

**Mon. Feb 21, Day 2:** 10:00 am, shuttle to airport: Jet Blue flight #1499, departure 12:55 pm, arrival 2:05pm. Our Cuban ornithologist, **Maikel Cañizares**, and our Cuban driver, Ronel, will meet us with a comfortable, medium-sized, air-conditioned bus. We will head for **Las Terrazas** (51 Km), part of the Sierra del Rosario UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Birding stops along the way. Visit the **open-air museum ruins of Angerona Coffee Plantation**. Check in to the iconic **Hotel Moka**. Sunset nature stroll and bird spotting around the hotel. Dinner at **El Romero** Vegetarian Restaurant followed by an optional informal meeting with local artists.

**Tues. Feb. 22, Day 3:** Breakfast and easy morning hike in the Reserve at Johan's home in the woods, looking for birds, lizards, and the like. Then drive to **Soroa** (16 km) and botanical garden orchidarium with over 300 species of orchids. Lunch at Odalys' private restaurant. Return to our hotel for sunset and dinner. **Maikel** will share with us his projects concerning the conservation of endangered species, especially the Cuban parrot.

**Wed. Feb 23, Day 4:** Check out and drive to Viñales (123 km.). Light lunch on the road. Check into **Hotel Ermita**. Dinner in town and chance to explore the town.

**Thurs. Feb 24, Day 5:** Early drive to the **Sendero de las Maravillas** to observe some of Cuba's endemic birds, palms, lizards, and snails (easy hike). Lunch at the **Finca Agroecológica Paraiso**. Afternoon, discover the flora and fauna surrounding the hotel, or hang out at the pool. Evening, dinner at the hotel.



*Chocolate Orchid (Encyclia phoenicea)*



Viñales National Park

photo by James Hill

**Fri. Feb 25, Day 6:** Check out early and drive to **Ciénaga de Zapata National Park** (366 km) In **Playa Larga**. Check in to our individual B&Bs, (very near each other) with Cuban families. Dinner at **Tiki restaurant** with **Rosendo Martínez**, outstanding biologist, conservationist, and conversationalist, who will give us an overview of the National Park System in Cuba. We will also meet local Cuban bird expert, **Adrián Cobas**, who will accompany us for some of the Zapata excursions



Our fearless Cuban guides: Maikel, Rosendo, Ronel, Adrián

**Sat. Feb 26, Day 7:** Breakfast with your family. Excursion to the **Finca Agroecológica Rancho Los Pintines** in **Solpilar** to study the swamp environment and catch sight of some special birds. Horseback or horse and buggy to trek around the savanna and then walking in the woods. Lunch at the **Finca** with our guides, **Manso** and **Ningo**, and their families. Visit the **memorial** to the dinner Fidel Castro had with the “Carboneros” (carbon workers) on Christmas eve, 1959.

Sunset trek to **Las Salinas** to spot long-legged waders, raptors, shorebirds and crocodiles.

**Sun. Feb 27, Day 8:** Early morning drive to **Bermejas**. Search for endemic species: Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Grey-fronted Quail-Dove and others. Visit to the **Finca Agroecológica Los Cocos** in Bermejas for lunch with Eddy and Aliuska. Then hike the **Enigma de las Rocas** for a swim in a beautiful limestone sinkhole (cenote). On to **Playa Girón**, site of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Visit the small, but informative museum. Return to Playa Larga for **dinner** at the home of Lele, one of our gracious hosts.



Santo Tomás

Photo by Annie Corveller-Hill

**Mon. Feb 28, Day 9:** Early breakfast and then morning excursion to **Santo Tomás** to visit some of the Zapata Swamp's exquisite tributaries by small pole boats and search for the elusive Zapata Wren and Zapata Sparrow. We will bring school supplies to the tiny, rural school and meet with the teachers and students. Lunch on Maria's patio in **Hondones**. Afternoon free in Playa Larga to visit the **Patio de Adrián** in Adrian and Ana's backyard and photograph up close many of our favorite birds, take a hike or go swimming at the beach. Dinner with our local Cuban friends.

**Tues. Mar 1, Day 10:** Leave for **Havana** (177 Km). Lunch at the **Havana Botanical Gardens** and stroll the grounds. Chance for Eastern (Cuban) Meadowlark. Stop briefly at the University of Havana to visit the small natural history museum with biologists, **Lourdes Mugica** and **Alieny González**, Cuban ornithologists and professors at the University. Sunset cocktails at **Hotel Nacional**. Check in to our apartments in Havana Vieja, with great views of the fort, entrance to the bay, and Malecón. Dinner at **Cinco Esquinas**. **Tues. Mar 2, Day 11:** Breakfast at **Cinco Esquinas**. **Walking tour** of **Old Havana** with historian and Martí scholar, **Rubén Javier Pérez**. Stop at the Office of the **City Archaeologist** for a slide show on the paleontology of avian species in Cuba. Visit Plaza de Armas; Government House; San Geronimo University; Cathedral Plaza; visit **Julio Larramendi** art gallery; Plaza San Francisco; and Plaza Vieja. Lunch at **Lamparilla #361**. Afternoon guided visit at The **National Museum of Cuban art**. Visit Kamyll Bullaudy's art studio. Dinner at **La Espada** restaurant.



Gran Teatro Alicia Alonso, Havana

photo by James Hill

**Wed. Mar 3, Day 12:** Breakfast at **Cinco Esquinas** and final look around Havana. Transfer to airport at 11:30 am. **Jet Blue** flight #1500 departure 3:45 pm to Ft. Lauderdale arrives 5:00 pm. *¡Hasta pronto!*

### **Purpose and goals:**

This delegation is in support of the Cuban people as permitted by the U.S. Treasury Department, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). We have an intense itinerary with a strong focus on meaningful interaction with our Cuban counterparts through formal and informal meetings. Each participant is obligated to keep records for possible review by the US Treasury Dept.

Our goal is to help you understand more about conservation in Cuba, especially with regard to the environment, endangered species, birds, and nature in general, while offering support to Cuban civil society. Another goal is to assist our independent Cuban naturalist colleagues in their work; the delegation will bring optics, feeders, books, and educational materials to Cuba. A good opportunity to brush up your Spanish.

**Tour Leaders:** Along with our encounters with Cuban colleagues throughout the trip, you will be assisted every day by Soledad Pagliuca, experienced traveler, cultural interlocutor, and bilingual tour leader from The Friendship Association, and Paul Baich, bird conservationist, author and seasoned bird guide. Both have led delegations to Cuba multiple times, with an abundance of varied experience.

## **Payments, Cancellations, and Refunds (final payment by Jan. 06, 2022)**

**Cost:** \$3,500 (per person, double occupancy). Add \$400 for single supplement (if available). Limited to a maximum of 14 participants.

Included: membership in the Friendship Association; overnight stay at the motel in Ft. Lauderdale; transportation to and from Cuba from Ft. Lauderdale; Cuban visa; medical insurance in Cuba; all transportation within Cuba; all hotels and bed and breakfasts; all group meals in Cuba; restaurant tips; entrance fees; and tour guides. Since people's drinking habits vary greatly, to be fair, participants are responsible for their own drinks, except bottled water.

Not included: transportation within the U.S.; personal tips such as Cuban guides, drivers, housekeepers and porters; drinks other than water; extra suitcases and overweight; travel insurance.

\$500 deposit due with application.

\$1,500 due November 30, 2021.

\$1,500 due January 06, 2022 (Or \$1,900 for single occupancy if available).

Email or snail mail a COLOR copy of your signed passport (photo and signature pages), [application form](#) and [release from liability](#)

Don't forget to send (unless you already have) your deposit check to:

The Friendship Association  
7265 A1A South, D1  
St. Augustine, FL 32080

All cancellation notices must be received in writing and will become effective as of the date of the postmark. If **you** cancel before one month from departure, you will receive a refund of 50% of the payment you have made so far (excluding the non-refundable deposit of \$500). If you cancel after the last payment date you will lose your entire amount. Leaving a delegation in progress, for any reason whatsoever, will not result in a refund, and no refunds can be made for any unused portions of the trip.

We reserve the right to cancel any delegation for good-faith concerns with respect to the safety, health, or welfare of the participants, major political shifts from either or both governments, or international health crises. If canceled prior to departure, you will be eligible for a full refund except for money already dispersed that may be non-refundable. The Friendship Association cannot be responsible for missed connections to and from Cuba for any reason.

Because of the Coronavirus, there may be unexpected changes in dates. Please be patient.

For more information about:

Fauna and flora, contact Paul Baicich: [paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto:paul.baicich@verizon.net); 443 745-5179

Trip logistics, contact Soledad Pagliuca: [aimisoledad@gmail.com](mailto:aimisoledad@gmail.com); 904 808-2030



Cuban Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium siju*)