



Trek through Cuba's second largest mountain range:

EXPLORE ESCAMBRA

12 - 20 October 2024



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Cuba: Explore Escambray

12 – 20 October 2024



Trip overview

Trek overview

Join us on this brand new destination for 2024 as we trek across central Cuba's Escambray mountains!

Discover the old-world charm of the vibrant and buzzing capital city Havana with its iconic architecture and beautifully maintained vintage American cars. Then slip off the tourist trail to discover the island's second largest mountain range.

Spend five days in the Escambray mountains traversing its verdant slopes, swimming in waterfalls and natural ponds and sleeping in rural haciendas and casas along the way.

Round off your trip by stepping back in time with a walking tour of the historic town of Trinidad.

Cuba

This country of the West Indies can be found where the northern Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic ocean meet. It is the single largest island in the region with the second highest population after neighbouring Haiti.

Famous for its cigars, rum, vintage cars and salsa music, visiting Cuba can at times feel like stepping back in time.

It remains one of the world's existing communist states, alongside China, Laos and Vietnam, with the system introduced after a revolution against the dictator Batista. The country became economically isolated from neighbouring USA after developing close links to the Soviet Union, widening further after the Soviet's fall, seeing the trade embargo against the Castro regime continuing for decades.

Today, while Cuba is changing and eager to catch up to the rest of the world, its old-school charm is very much still present.

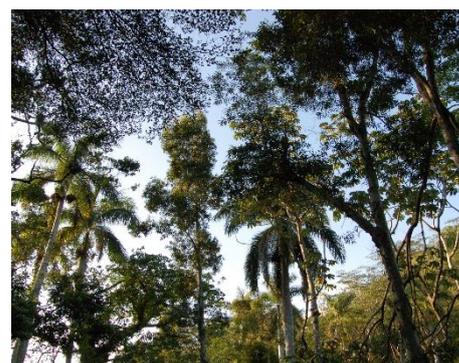
Escambray

The stunning Escambray mountains lie in the south-central region of the island close to UNESCO World Heritage site of Trinidad.

The area was the setting of the Escambray rebellion in 1959-65 and was the planned, but never used, refuge for the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The mountains extend 80km from north to south and 80 km east to west and are divided in two by the Agabama River. On the western side you will find the Guamuhaya mountains and the eastern part is known as Sierra de Sancti Pritus. The highest peak, Pico San Juan, standing at 3,150 ft above sea level.

The nature reserve of Topes de Collantes, where we will be trekking, is located in the south-eastern ranges and is littered with caves, rivers, waterfalls and canyons ready for you to explore.



What is the experience like?

Who accompanies us?

The trip is accompanied by local professional English-speaking guides who have an excellent knowledge of the culture and trekking in the region. The guides are first aid trained and will support you throughout your journey. You will also be accompanied by a team of support staff and a Different Travel Company UK tour manager.

How tough is it?

The trek is rated moderate to challenging for someone of a good fitness level. You will be trekking for five consecutive days, averaging 6 hours each day. The terrain is steep and can be slippery in places. The basic facilities, simple foods and tropical climate can also be challenging for some.

What is the terrain like?

The mountains of Cuba may not be very high but the trails can be steep and very slippery. Some of the steeper paths do have wooden steps but they can be uneven and difficult to navigate. Underfoot the terrain will vary and some sections will be through dense vegetation. This trek is not easy.

What about meals?

Meals are provided as per the itinerary but it's worth noting that Cuba does not have the same variety of international cuisine as we may be used to at home.

It may not be very varied or exciting but you can expect to eat traditional soul foods such as rice, black beans, slow roasted meats, seafood and plenty of tropical fruit.

Please inform us in advance if you have any dietary requirements or preferences and we will do our best to cater to them.

We recommend that you bring snacks from the UK, especially vegetarians/vegans, as the variety can be lacking.

Where will we stay?

You will be staying in a mix of hotels and casa particulares throughout the trip.

Hotels may be very basic and old-fashioned by usual standards but they will be comfortable. Rooms will be based on a twin-share and have ensuite facilities.

Casa particulares are Cuban B&Bs and range from bunk houses with dorm rooms to private rooms in family homes. Spending time at the casas gives you a great opportunity to live like the locals and learn about their way of life.

You will also spend one night camping during the trek. This will either be in shared tents (two to a tent) or on foam mattresses under the eaves of a hacienda.



Practical information

Is there an age limit?

You must be 18+ to join this trek. It may be possible for you to participate if you are 16 or 17 years old if accompanied by a parent or guardian. There is no upper age limit.

Who can take part?

An ideal candidate is someone who is open-minded, positive, flexible and enjoys the challenges of the great outdoors. Adventure travel involves elements of the unexpected so do not expect the standards to be the same as you are used to at home. Remote areas are sometimes unpredictable (be it because of group pace, weather conditions etc.) and itineraries may be altered to allow for this. You must also be willing to train hard for this challenge!

How fit do I need to be?

You should start a training programme at least 9 months before your departure including hill walking while carrying a heavy backpack, general cardio workouts, and exercise to strengthen your legs and core. If you are unfit at the time of booking you should consider starting training 12 months before departure. If you do not already regularly exercise you should aim to start training (including plenty of hills) as early as possible. The best training is hill walking, which will prepare you for the type of terrain you will experience. By the time of departure you should feel confident in your ability to walk up and down steep gradients for many hours per day on consecutive days.

How should I prepare?

Building up your core and leg muscle strength is important so exercises such as squats, lunges, push-ups, planks and crunches will really enhance your training. These exercises can be done at home – no gym needed. You can download a number of free apps, which will help you train and track your progress, e.g. MapMyWalk, C25K (couch to 5k run), MyFitnessPal (for a variety of sports).

You must take your training seriously and arrive as fit as you can be, so you get the most out of this challenge. Attempting to complete the trek without training will make it more challenging than necessary and will be detrimental to your experience, and the experience of your teammates.



Health declaration

We require a medical form to be completed by everyone upon registering, and any pre-existing conditions, medications used and other medical issues must be specified. All your medical details are treated in the strictest confidence.

The information will be securely screened by a qualified medical professional, and details provided to your tour manager and local guides so our staff are adequately informed and prepared to support you during the trip. By completing our booking form you are giving consent for us to contact you confidentially with any follow up questions regarding your health.

If you declare any medical conditions you may be asked to provide more information, or we may request to contact your GP.

In the event that your medical issues at the time of booking represent a concern for your safety and wellbeing, or the safety and wellbeing of others in the group, you may be recommended not to take part. If this happens your booking will not be confirmed and the deposit will be refunded.

We must be informed if any conditions or medication change, or if new conditions develop. If necessary confirmation of fitness to travel from your GP or specialist may be required.

Please note that we will never unreasonably deny participation on a trip nor contravene the Equality Act 2010.

Covid-19

Your health and safety is our top priority so rest assured that we are taking steps to ensure you not only have a memorable experience, but a safe one too.

We constantly monitor and follow the advice of the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) who provide recommendations and advice to British travellers about travel to a certain destination.

Health and safety is our top priority so we will **NEVER** operate a trip in an area where there is clear and present risk to our team members, whether that is due to a health outbreak, political instability, natural disasters or anything else.

If travel restrictions either in the UK or Cuba prevent safe travel we will look to either postpone or cancel your trip at no cost to you.

Please note that at the time of travel there may be enhanced safety and security measures in airports, bag drop may take longer, and you may need to provide a certificate of health or proof of vaccination.

We will inform you about any information pertinent to your travel arrangements.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us on info@different-travel.com.



Trip cost

A £495 registration fee is payable at the time of booking. You can then choose one of the three payment options:

1. **Self-funded:** Pay your own tour costs balance of £2495 by 2 August 2024. You are welcome to fundraise separately for any charity of your choice, but this is not mandatory. Any fundraising undertaken cannot be used for your trip costs.
2. **Sponsorship:** Fundraise **£4990** for your chosen charity by 19 July 2024. This includes your £2495 tour costs balance and a £2495 donation to charity.
3. **Flexi:** Pay your own tour costs balance of £2495 and fundraise £2495 for a charity of your choice by 2 August 2024. Any fundraising undertaken cannot be used for your trip costs.

Trip Includes:

- ✓ Return flights from London (inc. airport taxes)
- ✓ Domestic flights
- ✓ All transport in Cuba
- ✓ Accommodation (hotel (6 nights), camping (1 night) and casas (1 night))
- ✓ Meals as specified in itinerary
- ✓ English-speaking guides and support crew
- ✓ UK Different Travel tour manager

Trip Does Not Include:

- ✗ Visa if required
- ✗ Personal expenses (e.g. drinks, snacks, showers, souvenirs, etc.)
- ✗ Vaccinations
- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Tips (approx. £45-50 per person)
- ✗ Trek kit and equipment



Itinerary

Day 1 (Saturday 12 October 2024):

London – Havana

Depart from London on an indirect flight to Cuba's capital city, Havana. On arrival we will transfer to our hotel for dinner and an overnight stay.

Meals: Dinner

Day 2 (Sunday 13 October 2024):

Havana – Hanabanilla Lake

This morning we will have time to explore Cuba's capital and also the Caribbean's largest city – Havana. Founded in 1519, you will feel transported back in time 50 years or so as we explore the city's colourful and eclectic historic centre. This afternoon we will set off for Hanabanilla Lake, set high in the Escambray Mountains and the starting point of our trek.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3 (Monday 14 October 2024):

Hanabanilla Lake

We begin our day with a hike around the Hanabanilla reservoir – a favourite spot of the former high level Cuban leaders who used to visit the area to rest, walk and fish. The spectacular surroundings provide a wonderful introduction to Cuban endemic flora and fauna as we take a step away from the usual tourist trails.

Trek distance: Approx. 15 km

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4 (Tuesday 15 October 2024):

Hanabanilla Lake – Guanayara

Today we will take a boat across the lake and start trekking across the Escambray Mountains, Cuba's second largest mountain range. We will head towards the Salto de Rocio, a 25m high waterfall, for a refreshing swim before we reach an old hacienda where we'll set up camp overnight. On the way you may see Cuban trogons, hummingbirds and woodpeckers. Tonight you can choose to sleep in your tent or you may prefer to sleep on mats under the eaves of the hacienda.

Trek distance: Approx. 15km

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner



Day 5 (Wednesday 16 October 2024):

Guanayara – Codina

We continue uphill into the mountains today where you'll be surrounded by slopes of Caribbean pines and an abundance of ancient tree-ferns, bamboo and eucalyptus. After a packed lunch at a small farmhouse we head for a second hacienda which we reach in the late afternoon. From there we have a bus transfer to our hotel where we'll be staying for the next 2 nights, making a relaxing stop at a local Coffee House enroute.

Trek distance: Approx. 12km

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6 (Thursday 17 October 2024):

Codina – Caburní – Vegas Grandes – Codina

After breakfast you will have an arduous, mostly uphill trek along the trail known as Caburní – Vegas Grandes. This trail takes you through dense vegetation deep into the heart of the Escambray Mountains until you reach an astonishing waterfall and natural pond, the "Vegas Grandes". This is a great place to swim and relax before we continue to a hacienda for a late lunch before returning to the hotel.

Trek distance: Approx. 13km

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner



**Day 7 (Friday 18 October 2024):
Codina – Mangos Pelones – Javira – El
Cubano – Trinidad**

The last day of our trek is through dry scrub with occasional views of the turquoise Caribbean. After breakfast we drive to the starting point, Mangos Pelones, and head towards another beautiful waterfall, where you'll have a final chance to swim. Then we continue towards El Cubano and complete our trek. Celebrate with a Cuban cocktail before heading to the hotel for a light lunch and a well-deserved afternoon at the beach.

Trek distance: Approx. 13km

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8 (Saturday 19 October 2024):

Trinidad – Havana

After breakfast we check out and enjoy a walking tour of Trinidad, the town is a living museum, with cobbled streets and colonial-style housing. It has changed little in the last 150 years, and is a wonderful place to wander around and soak up the atmosphere of Cuba. We'll have some free time for an early lunch and then set off for Havana where we have dinner and overnight stay.

Meals: Breakfast and dinner

Day 9 (Sunday 20 October 2024):

Havana – London

Depending on the flight time, we may have some free time to explore Havana further, before transferring to the airport for our indirect flight back to the UK which arrives the following day.

Meals: Breakfast

N.B. This itinerary may change due to weather, the ability of the group and so on. We do our best to keep to the itinerary but we cannot be held responsible for changes that occur outside of our control. Your guide and tour leader has the final say in the interest of the group's health and safety.



Before You Go!
Important information to help you prepare for the Trek to the Lost City

Travel practicalities and country information
Trek knowledge
Food and drink
Kit tips
Luggage
Responsible travel and culture
Fitness, health and safety
Altitude
Kit list

Travel practicalities and country information

Visas

As of January 1, 2022, Cuba simplified its arrival process with a new online form called D'Viajeros that registers travellers' immigration and health information. You can digitally fill out the form up to 72 hours before your arrival in Cuba.

Your passport should be valid for a minimum period of 6 months from the date of entry into Cuba. British nationals will also need to buy a tourist card which will allow you one entry/exit for up to 90 days. You can apply via the Cuban Embassy in London and cost can range from £17 - £25 or more.

For other nationalities this may be different, please consult with the Embassy or Consulate of the destination for advice. *(Correct at the time of writing).*

Travel insurance

The Different Travel Company will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip however unexpected things can occur such as delays, medical problems, baggage loss, cancellation by you etc. The purchase of travel insurance is mandatory; you are advised to organise it at the time of booking to ensure you are covered immediately.

Different Travel is an Unregulated Introducer of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

You can find out more here: <https://microsite.campbellirvinedirect.com/differenttravel>

Please note: most travel insurance policies protect you before departure too so it is advised to buy insurance as close to booking as possible as it may protect you against the loss of your non-refundable, non-transferable registration fee if you cancel due to injury, illness etc.

Phone and Wi-Fi access

Be prepared for a digital detox! Cubacel is the Cuban company that provides service throughout the island – but it does not cover the entire territory. Make sure you check roaming costs with your own service provider before travelling to Cuba as it can be very expensive to connect. You may not be able to get connection at all while in remote locations during the trek.

Internet access is scarce and unreliable at best. 3G Wi-Fi was only introduced in December 2018 with 4G following in 2019 but the internet is usually accessible through buying Etecsa Prepaid internet cards.

Most hotels have wifi but in most cases you will need to buy a scratch card which gives you an hour's connectivity for about \$1. For more information [click here](#).

Religion

Historically Cuba was a Christian nation with the majority of people identifying as Roman Catholic. However there has been significant rise in those who say they are not religious in recent years.

Tipping

While tipping is not mandatory, it is recommended and greatly appreciated by the local staff and the trek team. We would recommend allowing around £45-50 per trekker.

Electricity

In Cuba, the American flat pin plugs are the most commonly used but we recommend you bring a universal plug adaptor with you. As the normal voltage supply is either 220v or 110v, lower than in the UK, you may find that devices take longer to charge than at home.

You are recommended to bring a portable power pack (power bank or battery pack) which when fully charged allows you multiple charges of USB-powered devices such as phones. You should buy a power pack with a minimum capacity of 15,000mAh and these are widely available online.

Money

Money in Cuba can be confusing – even to Cubans! The dual currency system was phased out in early 2021 and convertibles or CUC are no longer used. Moneda Nacional, or Cuban pesos (CUP) is now the official currency. However, many places actively prefer you to pay in foreign currencies. At the time of writing (February 2023) the official exchange rate is 29.17 CUP to the pound and 25.71 CUP to the euro. However, the black market rate, used by many private businesses can vary drastically. When making payments always ask upfront what currencies they accept and what exchange rate they use for their published peso prices.

You will need to buy some CUP on arrival but do bring some cash with you also. Euros are the most interchangeable currency and the one preferred by Cubans. You can also use and exchange Canadian dollars and pound sterling. US dollars can be exchanged but they incur additional charges. Do not bring Scottish, Northern Irish, Isle of Man or Channel Island notes as they will not be accepted.

You will require cash for water, tips, drinks, snacks, souvenirs etc. Roughly £150-200 is plenty but it is far better to bring too much cash than not enough.

It is prohibited to leave Cuba with CUP so please exchange any notes you have before passing through immigration. Any drinks, snacks, duty free and souvenirs within the airport can now be paid using a foreign credit card or cash.

Moneda Libremente Convertible (MLC)

The MLC is a currency approved by the Cuban government in 2020 and can be used in certain shops to buy higher-end goods. The currency is completely digital and does not exist in cash. It is mainly used by Cubans with special magnetic cards. You may see some prices displayed in MLC in some state-run enterprises such as cigar shops or airport souvenir stores.

Accessing cash

Cuba is not a destination where cards or ATMs are used frequently. You will find ATMS in Havana and a few large towns but they may be difficult to find, have long queues, run out of cash to dispense or not work at all. Please check with your bank whether or not you will be able to use your card to withdraw money in Cuba as many cards connected to US-backed banks will not work. Credit cards are becoming increasingly popular in Cuba and many state-run businesses prefer this method of payment over cash. Private businesses almost never have credit card machines so having cash is recommended.

Photocopies

Remember to photocopy of all your documents (insurance details, passport, credit/debit cards etc.) and take a copy with you during the trip, stored separately from the original copies. You should also scan and email these documents to yourself and leave a copy with a trusted family member or friend. If you lose any of your documents, you will then have access to a copy with you and online. You may also wish to upload your documents to cloud storage such as Dropbox or Google Drive.

Photography

When taking photographs of the local people, you must ask their permission to avoid causing offence, especially elderly people. In contrast, taking photographs of someone you have become friendly with is usually very welcome.

Language

Spanish is the main language of Cuba and while there are no local dialects the diverse ethnic groups have influenced speech patterns. While you will hear a lot of 'Cubano' some Cubans can speak English. Here are a few phrases to help you:

Hello	<i>Hola</i>
Good day/ afternoon/ night	<i>Buenos días/tardes/ noches</i>
Thank you	<i>Gracias</i>
Please	<i>Por favor</i>
Men (address as)	<i>Señor</i>
Women (address as)	<i>Señora</i>
How much does it cost?	<i>Cuánto cuesta?</i>
Yes/No	<i>Si/no</i>
Can I take a photograph of you?	<i>Puedo tomar una foto de usted(es)?</i>
Where is the toilet?	<i>Donde está el baño?</i>
Excuse me	<i>Disculpe (use 'permiso' when asking to pass)</i>
Left	<i>Izquierda</i>
Right	<i>Derecha</i>
Hot water	<i>Agua caliente</i>
Coffee with milk	<i>Café con leche</i>
A bottle of mineral water	<i>Una botella de agua sin gas</i>

Books

Lonely Planet Cuba ISBN: 9781787013742 £14.99 (next edition due December 2023)

Lonely Planet Caribbean Islands ISBN: 9781787016736 £16.00 (next edition due December 2023)

The Rough Guide to Cuba ISBN: 9781839058011 £16.99

Souvenirs

Typical Cuban souvenirs include rum, lace, wooden carvings, jewellery and cigars. Cigars can be bought throughout Cuba and the official advice is that you buy from the Government shops to guarantee quality and freshness. You can also sometimes purchase cigars directly from the cigar plantations and they can be a lot cheaper than the packaged ones sold in shops.

Trinidad is really well known for embroidery, basketware and pottery. It is also home to some amazing art studios.

In Havana, there is a huge souvenir market at the Almacenes de San Juan (open daily) and also at Calle Obispo in Old Havana. If you buy original art please make sure the studio provides you with a certificate consisting of three copies (blue, yellow and white carbon copies) for export.

Trek knowledge

Accommodation

You will be staying in a mix of hotels and casa particulares throughout the trip.

Hotels may be very basic and old fashioned by usual standards but they will be comfortable.

Rooms will be based on a twin-share and have ensuite facilities.

Casa particulares are Cuban B&Bs and range from bunk houses with dorm rooms to private rooms in family homes. The homes will be very simple compared to your own but the welcome will be warm. Spending time at the casas gives you a great opportunity to live like the locals and learn about their way of life.

You will also spend one night camping during the trek. This will either be in shared tents (two to a tent) or on foam mattresses under the eaves of a hacienda.

Hygiene and bathroom facilities

The hotels have en-suite facilities with flushing toilets and showers although expect water pressure to be low.

If you need to use the toilet during the trek day you must find a private area off the trail. You must never leave used toilet paper on the ground; this must be packed up into a nappy bag or sanitary disposal bag, pop it in your daypack and dispose of it properly at the hotel (please bring your own nappy sacks with you). You should bring one to two rolls of toilet paper for your own use. It may be difficult to purchase more if you run out.

You are advised to bring a small pack of baby wipes and use natural or biodegradable soap/shampoo. You will need to bring your own towel. A highly absorbent but lightweight and fast drying trek towel is recommended.

Weather

Cuba has a tropical climate with the rainy season running from May to October. There is a risk of stormy weather but this usually recedes towards the end of the month. It can feel quite humid through the year and temperatures in October can be between 22°C and 31°C, averaging around 27°C during the day.

However, you must be prepared for variations to this which are out of our control. Please note: the temperatures and conditions above are historically accurate but climate change can impact the seasons so you may experience uncharacteristic conditions during the trip which are out of our control.

The guides will assess the situation and make decisions to ensure the best enjoyment and safety of the group.

Food and drink

Water

Tap water in Cuba is not safe to drink, this includes the tap water at the hotel. You must not brush your teeth or rinse your mouth with any tap water, only use bottled or purified water. Water is provided for your water bottles each day however you may wish to chemically purify this for your own peace of mind.

Water bottle

You will need to bring your own bottles to carry at least three litres of water per day. Some people will bring a 2-3 litre CamelBak hydration system (for effortless access to water while you trek) plus one 1-litre water bottles (e.g. plastic Nalgene or metal Sigg bottle). Some people prefer to bring three 1-litre bottles. The choice is yours. If you're bringing a CamelBak hydration system, a separate 1-litre bottle is essential as it can be used as a backup if your hydration system fails.

Please write your name on all your bottles in marker pen. Please note that 'own brand' and cheap hydration systems are notorious for splitting, leaking or valves not functioning properly. CamelBak and Platypus are the leader in this market because their products are significantly better quality and more reliable.

Keeping hydrated

Electrolyte tablets (e.g. Nuun, High5, PowerBar etc.) are flavoured effervescent tablets which contain salts, sugars and minerals which are naturally lost from your body when you sweat. By adding these tablets to your water it not only offers flavour to your water but it can help prevent dehydration before it begins. Electrolyte tablets are widely available in outdoors stores and online for around £8 for 12 tablets. You may also wish to bring a small supply of rehydration salts (e.g. Dioralyte) which treat dehydration.

Alcohol

Cuba is famous for its mojitos and Cuba libre but as measuring glasses are not usually used the drinks may be stronger than the ones you've tried at home.

Food

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included throughout the trip as specified on the itinerary. Please note that Cuba does not have the same variety of international cuisine as we may be used to at home so the meals on offer may be simple and repetitive.

You can expect to eat traditional soul foods such as rice, black beans, slow roasted meats, seafood and plenty of tropical fruit.

We recommend that you bring snacks from the UK, especially vegetarians/vegans, as the variety can be lacking.

Dietary requirements

The majority of special diets, such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc., can be catered for if we are notified in advance. Please ensure that you notify us of any dietary requirements at the time of booking or as soon as possible. Please note that we cannot guarantee that food preparation will have taken place in a contamination free environment.

Snacks

It is strongly advised that you bring a selection of snacks for energy, a pick-me-up or a little taste of home. Please bring snacks you have tried before (and enjoy!) so they are appetising to you. Items such as sweets, individually wrapped cake bars, protein bars and dried fruit are ideal but don't forget to bring savoury treats also such as salted nuts, Cheddar biscuits or salted crackers.

Kit tips

Discount

When you book you will receive a discount and vouchers booklet. Please check the documents section of your online profile.

Footwear

You need to wear hiking boots during the trek; walking trainers are unsuitable. It is important that your boots are waterproof (e.g. Gore-Tex or eVent), have good ankle support and a good quality sole (e.g. Vibram). You are recommended to try on lots of pairs at a specialist outdoors store such as Cotswold where the staff can advise you on the correct boot and fit for you. Do not leave it to the last minute to purchase hiking boots as you need time to break them in. You should wear your boots on the plane, or carry them in hand baggage, in case there are baggage problems or delays.

Socks

It is important that the socks you choose are high quality, non-cotton and will not slip down in your boots which causes blisters. Never wear cotton socks which absorb sweat making them damp and more likely to rub against your feet, causing blisters. Socks containing Coolmax (a brand of polyester) or nylon have wicking properties which means that it pulls sweat away from the skin for it to evaporate. Good brands to consider include Bridgedale, Smartwool and Brasher.

Trek clothing

You are recommended to invest in trekking gear which can be worn in layers (base layer, warm layer, shell layer) which can be added and removed easily to manage your temperature and the climate. Your clothes should be made of technical fabrics designed to wick sweat away from your body which keep clothes dry and smelling fresh. Merino wool, nylon, polyester, polypropylene and bamboo fabrics are all effective technical fabrics.

Never bring cotton clothing to trek in. Cotton clothing can be hazardous to wear in cool conditions because when sweat is absorbed by cotton fibres (rather than forced to evaporate as with technical fabrics), it leaves clothes damp. Damp clothes make you cold and uncomfortable and could even leave you vulnerable to hypothermia. You can find good quality technical clothing in all reputable outdoors stores. Check the garment label to ensure your garments contain 0% cotton. Good quality Gore-Tex waterproofs are important just in case there are showers. Most people will trek in the same outfit for the duration of the trip and have one or two spares in their kit bag.

Hiking poles

Hiking poles can be very useful on steep ascents and descents, particularly when carrying a heavy pack on uneven terrain. Poles are also very useful for stability. They are not mandatory but are recommended. You should use them on your training walks to familiarise yourself on how to use them. If you bring hiking poles they must fit inside your suitcase/kitbag for the purposes of the international flight.

Sunglasses

These are important even on overcast days. They must offer a minimum of 100% UV protection, and polarized sunglasses are ideal. Taking a spare pair is recommended.

Head torch

This is a vital piece of kit. Petzl is one brand which makes good quality headlamps but there are many head torches available from other companies. Please ensure you take an LED torch as ones with bulbs are not bright enough. Bring your head torch with fresh batteries inside it and take a full set of spare batteries. Do not bring a wind-up head torch as these are unreliable.

Luggage

This trip is different to a standard holiday so you will need the following four luggage items:

1. A small daypack

You are responsible for carrying your own daypack containing essentials for each day. We recommend you bring a 25-30 litre rucksack which **must** have a hip belt and a chest strap. High quality brands to consider when looking for a suitable pack include Osprey, Berghaus and Lowe Alpine (amongst others) and you are strongly advised to visit a reputable store like Cotswold to have your backpack fitted, as they come in a variety of sizes, and some brands offer male and female specific fits. You can expect to carry your personal first aid kit, warm layer, sun cream, packed lunch, three litres of water, snacks, waterproofs, toilet paper, wet wipes and camera. It could weigh 6-8kg when packed, so you should make your backpack selection carefully and ensure it fits correctly and is comfortable. You will not have access to your main pack while trekking.

2. A dry bag/rucksack liner

You are advised to use a lightweight waterproof rucksack liner or dry bag (e.g. Exped dry bag) inside your daypack to keep your belongings dry in rainy conditions. It should be large enough to fit inside your entire backpack. Rucksack covers alone are ineffective at keeping your kit dry in wet conditions and can often blow away in the wind.

3. A soft-sided kit bag or large rucksack

This will hold your trek luggage and will be transported by vehicle during the trek to each night's accommodation and will contain the items you need for the evenings and mornings during the trek (e.g. toiletries, change of clothes, extra snacks etc.) but also anything not required for the trek (e.g. travel clothes, etc.). Some *examples* of kit bags include: Mountain Equipment wet and dry bag, North Face Base Camp duffle bag, Rab Expedition kit bag, but there are many brands and models available in outdoors stores for various prices. A large rucksack with your gear packed inside a lightweight waterproof rucksack liner is suitable too.

If you wish you can use this bag to hold your checked luggage for the international flight; just ensure you bring a small separate bag you can store items in not required for the trek

4. A suitcase (optional)

For the international flights, you may be more comfortable packing all your items (including your empty trek kit bag) into a suitcase. This is entirely your choice. If you bring a suitcase, it will be stored at the hotel along with anything not required for the trek (e.g. toiletries, travel clothes, books etc.).

5. Combination padlocks which should be used to secure your bags during your flights and also to keep zips secure on your kitbag during the trek so zips don't come open in transit and your items fall out.

Sleeping bag

You will spend one-night camping. Sleeping bags are not supplied. A season 1 sleeping bag or a fleece sleeping bag liner should keep you warm enough overnight.

Please note: the expected conditions are historically accurate but climate change can lead to uncharacteristic conditions which are out of our control. The guides will assess the situation and make decisions to ensure the best enjoyment and safety of the group.

Sleeping bag liner

In addition to your sleeping bag or fleece liner you may also wish to bring a silk sleeping bag liner. It adds an extra layer of insulation to keep you warm if it's cool. If it's too warm you can sleep under your sleeping bag liner with your sleeping bag unzipped. A sleeping bag liner also protects your sleeping bag from dirt, sweat and damage. Silk sleeping bag liners are quite expensive if purchased on the high street, so consider eBay where you can purchase directly from the manufacturers (usually Vietnam or China) at a fraction of the price. Make sure you look out for 'pure silk' sleeping bag liners, not 'satin' (which is usually low quality and synthetic).

Responsible travel and culture

Culture Shock

Cuba is very different and as such you may experience a certain amount of culture shock. Some things to note:

- Holidays, studying or working abroad is something most Cubans can only dream about. As a foreigner you are a link to the outside world and as such you may attract a lot of interest and probing questions.
- Avoid discussing politics with locals unless they bring it up first. Cuba remains a communist country and the government does not tolerate criticism. Such conversations may make people uncomfortable. You shouldn't impose your views too critically and showing respect to revolutionary figures Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara can avoid offence.
- Be aware of the dual system at work with many things having an official and unofficial side. There is a black-market culture.
- The dress code in Cuba is very casual.
- Streets can have two names – a contemporary one on maps and street signs and a pre-revolutionary name used by locals.
- Queuing doesn't work as it does at home and you may find that people may not necessarily stand in line. Usually, where there is a wait, you will hear people shout 'Quien es ultimo?' (Who is last?) with a friendly reply of 'yo!' (me!). You are free to go for a walk or take a seat somewhere nearby but keep an eye on the person 'in front' of you.
- Never exchange money with unlicensed traders on the street – forged notes are rampant.
- Don't buy cigars from touts – cigars on the street are usually factory cast-offs and not genuine.
- Do not take photographs of the military or police – this is illegal in Cuba.
- It is considered rude to blow your nose in public.

Begging and poverty

Sanctions are still in place from the USA and this affects the way of life for many here. There are still many serious shortages of consumer goods. You may be approached by people asking for toothpaste, shampoo and toilet paper. As part of our responsible tourism policy we strongly advise against giving anything directly to beggars or offering gifts to children. This can lead to these individuals pestering other travellers or considering that begging is more profitable or beneficial than searching for work or attending school.

Haggling

When shopping for gifts in marketplaces where there are no price tags on items you may be expected to haggle. However, beware, as some consider it impolite for foreigners to haggle at all. You should not haggle hard in Cuba and remember that you should engage with the vendor to encourage rapport before haggling. Pay what you think is a good price for the item, you are not trying to get the lowest price possible.

Environment

We are environmentally conscious and aim to minimise our impact as much as possible. Key points:

- Never leave toilet paper or litter on the trail.
- Don't dispose of fruit peel, cores or seeds on the ground; although they decompose eventually they are unsightly and may attract animals. You can also be fined up to 3,000 pesos for littering.
- Turn off lights when not in rooms.
- Minimise your water usage by having short showers.
- Be considerate of other trekkers.
- Do not buy souvenirs that use shells (including tortoise and snail), black coral, bone, skin, animal parts (teeth etc.) or whole butterflies.

Etiquette

- Always endeavour to be polite and respectful. If you show respect then it will be reciprocated.
- At accommodation, particularly casas keeping noise to a minimum, especially early in the morning and late at night.
- Be respectful to your guides and hosts; don't forget to say please and thank you.
- Be considerate of the feelings of other group members.
- When taking photographs of the local people, it would be wisest to ask their permission. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission, especially in rural areas, can cause offence. Older people, particularly ladies prefer not to be photographed but in contrast, young children are often very keen to be photographed.

Fitness, health and safety

Vaccinations and travel health

Different Travel regrets that we cannot provide medical advice or recommendations. You are advised to seek medical advice at least 8 weeks before travelling to ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up to date. For general information visit www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk or www.travelhealthpro.org.uk but your GP or travel health professional should be the first stop for a consultation tailored to your medical history. Please note that failure to be adequately vaccinated or take necessary prophylactic medication can invalidate travel insurance policies as it is considered that you have not taken necessary precautions.

First aid kit

You should bring a small first aid kit of essential items which is for your own personal use and keep it in your backpack. Suggested items to include: personal prescription medicine, painkillers, blister plasters, insect repellent (50% DEET), throat lozenges for Khumbu cough, decongestant for the dust, anti-histamine tablets, Loperamide (e.g. Imodium), lip balm with SPF, indigestion remedy for unfamiliar food, muscle rub, zinc oxide tape etc. Please keep the contents to a minimum as you must carry it yourself.

Fitness training

You should start training at least 6 months before your departure. The best form of training for a trek is get outside and start walking. If you're not a regular walker, start slowly with short distances then as you get more comfortable, increase your mileage and add in more challenging terrain until you can comfortably walk for several consecutive days, for around 8 hours at a time, on hilly terrain while maintaining a comfortable pace without needing to stop more than frequently than once an hour for a 5-minute rest.

Hill walking while carrying a fully packed backpack while wearing your hiking boots should feature predominantly in your training as this will help prepare your body for the terrain and baggage load you will experience during the trek.

Other activities which can complement hill walking include running, cycling, gym workouts and boot camps etc. Developing your core and leg muscle strength is also important so exercises such as squats, lunges, push-ups, planks and crunches will really enhance your training. These exercises can be done at home; no gym needed.

You can download a number of free apps, which will help you train and track your progress. E.g. MapMyWalk, C25K (couch to 5k run), MyFitnessPal.

Please note that attempting to complete the trek without any training may make the experience unnecessarily difficult and hinder your experience, and also the experience of your teammates. The trek does not require technical climbing skills but it is still a tough trek so it is important to **take your training seriously and arrive in Cuba as fit as you can be**. The local guides, in consultation with your Different Travel tour manager, may advise that if you are not fit enough to continue that you leave the trek.

Zinc Oxide tape

This tape is really useful to prevent blisters. When you feel your boots start to rub against your feet, you should stop and remove any debris from your boots and check your feet. If a hot spot is developing (a red, sore area without broken skin) you can apply zinc oxide tape to the area and it will stop (or slow down) a blister developing. If you are too late to prevent the blister, you should clean the area and apply a Compeed blister plaster instead.

Insect Repellent

Cuba is not a malaria hotspot but there are some biting insects and mosquitoes so it is important to take precautions. It is advised that you take a small bottle of repellent with you (or perhaps share two bottles between the group). DEET is the most effective repellent available. The Department of Health recommends 50% DEET is the **maximum** that you should use on your skin, as higher concentrations are less effective due to their higher oil content which does not stick to the skin as effectively as lower concentrations. Be careful when using any DEET product as it can stain clothes, melt plastic and remove dye from fabrics.

Safety

Cuba is safe but low crime does not mean not any crime. Please take common-sense precautions while travelling to ensure your safety and the protection of your belongings. For example: leave flashy jewellery, watches and accessories at home; keep wallets out of sight stowed in a handbag or backpack rather than sticking out of a pocket; don't leave bags unattended at any time; carry cameras in their cases rather than carrying them openly with the camera strap; split cash into different pockets rather than carrying all your money in one place, especially immediately after you have exchanged cash; and so on.



CUBA: EXPLORE ESCAMBRAY

12 - 20 October 2024



Emergencies and evacuations

In the unlikely event of a serious illness or accident, the local team will ensure you are transferred as swiftly as possible to the nearest hospital. Please ensure your travel insurance covers you for airlifting/emergency evacuations as this can be required to reach casualties on more remote trails in an emergency. You are recommended to bring a credit card during the trip in the event that you need to pay for medical treatment upfront in the event of an emergency.

Last updated February 2023

KIT LIST - EXPLORE ESCAMBRAY

The kit you take on your trek can make the difference between being 'just a trek' or a 'memorable trek'.

Our kit lists are put together with feedback from our own experiences and that of participants who have taken part in our previous trips.

The items on this list do not take into account your personal preferences based on your previous trekking experiences, or individual requirements.

PLEASE NOTE: This list is just a guideline and is not exhaustive or take into account personal preferences.

For information about items on this list please refer to the trip dossier or contact The Different Travel Company on info@different-travel.com

*Please consider eco-friendly or biodegradable options.

ESSENTIAL	SUGGESTED	OPTIONAL
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DOCUMENTS + FLIGHT ESSENTIALS	✓
Passport + copy	
E-Tickets + pre departure info	
Travel insurance	
ATM and credit card (s)	
Cash (£ Sterling)	
Pen for immigration forms	
Sunglasses (preferably polarized)	
Mobile phone + charger	
Camera + spare batteries	

LUGGAGE	✓
Suitcase/large holdall for flight	
Kit bag	
Daypack (25 – 30 litres)	
Hand Luggage (take note of dimensions from airline)	
Combination padlocks	

CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR	✓
Trekking boots: either worn on flight or carried in hand luggage	
Trek trousers	
Non-cotton, technical t-shirts	
Non-cotton long sleeved top/shirt	
Trek socks	
Underwear	
Warm fleece or sweater	
Waterproof jacket and trousers	
Light poncho	
Base layer top and trousers	
Sun hat with brim	
Neck cooling 'Cobber'/cooling towel and Buff	
Trainers/casual shoes for evenings	

HEALTH AND HYGIENE*	✓
Hygiene kit to include: toothbrush and toothpaste, antiperspirant deodorant, wet wipes, shampoo, conditioner, shower gel, nail brush and nail care kit	
Personal first aid kit to include: prescription medicine, insect repellent, ibuprofen, paracetamol, plasters, blister plasters (e.g. Compeed), Imodium, rehydration salts (Dioralyte), antiseptic cream (e.g. Savlon), Anti-histamine cream/tablets, lip balm with SPF protection, zinc oxide tape, nail scissors/tweezers, muscle rub (e.g. Deep Heat), Throat lozenges, decongestant, Vaseline	
Hairbrush/comb	
Travel towel	
Lateral flow tests (min x 2)	
Disposable masks	
Feminine care products	

OTHER KIT	✓
Sleeping bag/fleece sleeping bag liner	
Sun block (high SPF)	
Toilet bag: toilet paper, wipes, hand sanitiser, nappy sacks	
2 ltr water hydration system (e.g. Camelbak)	
1 ltr water bottle	
LED head torch + spare batteries	
Adaptor (US 2 flat pin or Universal)	
Ear plugs	
Casual clothing + shoes for travel/free days	
Hiking poles – to be stowed in hold luggage for flight	
Energy food/snack bars	
Swimwear	
Sleeping bag liner (cotton/silk)	
Bags for dirty washing	
Spare glasses/contact lenses	
Video camera + charger	
MP3 player/ipod	
Portable power bank	
Books/packs of cards	
Travel pillow	