

BEST OF CUBA

A NATURE & CULTURAL JOURNEY

FEBRUARY 22–MARCH 1, 2026



Led by David Orban



Immerse yourself in the vibrant nature and birdlife in La Guira National Park, Soroa, Zapata Nature Reserve, Playa Larga, and Havana. Engage with and support Cuban naturalists, birders and private entrepreneurs as you search for endemic bird species and experience the colorful culture of Cuba.

YOUR CZBG HOST: DAVE ORBAN

David Orban is the Director of Animal Science & Strategy at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, where he leads efforts to advance animal welfare, implement evidence-based care practices, and align operations with the zoo's conservation mission. With a background in zoology and previous roles at Disney's Animal, Science & Environment division, Orban brings extensive expertise in animal behavior, research, and enrichment. Since rejoining the Cincinnati Zoo in 2017, he has played a key role in driving innovation in animal care and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Dave played a key role in the renovation of the zoo's "Wings of the World" bird exhibit. He emphasized the importance of understanding birds' unique visual perceptions, including their ability to see ultraviolet light, to enhance habitat design and animal welfare.



Cuban Green Woodpecker

HIGHLIGHTS

- Immerse yourself in the vibrant nature and birdlife in La Guira National Park, Soroa, Zapata Nature Reserve in the company of expert Cuban naturalists.
- Search for endemic bird species such as the Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Vireo and more.
- Discover the best of Havana while meeting and supporting Cuban people from all walks of life.
- Learn about conservation and the ecology of the Zapata Wetlands with a Cuban Naturalist and learn about the vital efforts to reintroduce the endangered Cuban crocodile into its native habitat.
- Gain exclusive insider access to the Zapata Crocodile Farm's breeding and nursery facilities.
- Search for endemics in a variety of habitats: mixed forest, dense forest, mangrove, marsh and open wetlands.
- Possible sightings include Cuban Parrot, Cuban Bullfinch, Bare-legged Owl, the threatened Cuban Parakeet, Fernandina's Flicker and Blue-headed Quail-Dove.



ITINERARY SUMMARY

- Independent arrivals at Jose Marti International Airport, Havana
- 2 Nights in Soroa, TBD
- 3 Nights in Playa Larga, Privately Owned B&B
- 2 Nights in Havana, Grand Aston Hotel
- Independent departures from Jose Marti International Airport, Havana

DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 1 - FEBRUARY 22

ARRIVAL IN HAVANA / TRANSFER TO SOROA

Independent arrivals on flights to Havana José Martí International Airport by 12:00 p.m. Once you've cleared immigration, collected your baggage and cleared Customs, you'll be met at the airport exit by your Cuban guide.

We depart the airport to head west. Your Cuban Guide will lead introductions and provide a welcome briefing with important information for our time in Cuba. Your Cuban birding expert will provide an overview briefing on Cuba's birdlife.

We will have lunch in a *paladar* (privately owned restaurant) and begin observing birdlife. Continue to the town of Soroa, and check in at our accommodations. This evening we'll have our Welcome Dinner in a paladar. *Privately owned B&B Meals: L, D*

About meals: Included meals typically feature three courses, with a limited selection from which to choose. Meals typically include two beverages: House welcome cocktail then a choice of one additional beverage: bottled water, Cuban soft drinks or beer, or a glass of house wine. Coffee (espresso) is not included but may be purchased individually. One of the most enjoyable aspects of dining in a paladar is the personal connection you'll make with the owner and staff, as they share their personal stories. Learn how private enterprise in Cuba functions on an individual level, as well as how the paladar's ingredients are sourced and the chef's inspiration for the food they serve. Several meals are not included in the price so that you can choose from the menu.

DAY 2 - FEBRUARY 23 BIRDING IN LA GÜIRA NATIONAL PARK

We're up and out early this morning, to drive one hour to La Guira National. Following forest trails on foot, we'll cover about a mile. This will be our only opportunity to see the Cuban Solitaire. We'll also look for the Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Warbler.

After lunch in a local paladar, we'll return to Soroa in the afternoon, stopping at **Soroa Orchid Garden** where we may find the Great Lizard-Cuckoo, Cuban Emerald, Antillean Palm-Swift, Loggerhead Kingbird, Greater Antillean Grackle and Cuban Oriole. Dinner is included in a paladar. *Privately owned B&B Meals: B, L, D*



Cuban Parrot



DAY 3 - FEBRUARY 24 FROM SOROA TO PLAYA LARGA

After an early breakfast, we'll depart on our journey (3.5 hour drive) to Playa Larga, where we'll stay in privately owned B&B accommodations. We'll have lunch at a restaurant on the way to Playa Larga.

In Playa Larga, we begin with a presentation by a local Cuban naturalist on La Ciénega de Zapata (*ciénega* = wetland). Known for its size, as well as for being the best-preserved wetlands in the Caribbean, the area is designated as a "Wetland of International Importance" by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 2001. The wetlands are home to 258 bird species, 28 of them endemic, including the endangered Cuban Parrot.

In the afternoon we'll explore one of the several locations we'll visit during our time at Playa Larga. Dinner this evening is on the rooftop terrace of our B&B. *Meals: B, L, D*

DAYS 4 & 5 - FEBRUARY 25 & 26 ZAPATA WETLANDS

Over the next two days, we'll explore different areas of La Ciénega de Zapata, focusing on specific locations depending on daily conditions.

One morning will be dedicated to a special visit to the Zapata Crocodile Farm, where we'll learn about the health and conservation of the endangered Cuban Crocodile. We'll gain insight into the park's broader ecological goals and protected status, with exclusive insider access to the crocodile breeding area and nursing station. This visit highlights the ongoing efforts to preserve Cuba's unique biodiversity and the role of science-based conservation in the region.

Bermeja Wildlife Refuge – A mixed forest habitat where we'll search for the Bee Hummingbird, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Bullfinch, Loggerhead Kingbird, Bare-legged Owl, and Cuban Pygmy Owl. This area is also known for sightings of the threatened Cuban Parakeet, Fernandina's Flicker, and Blue-headed Quail-Dove.

Santo Tomás – With an early morning departure, we'll head to Santo Tomás and board small boats to explore the freshwater wetlands. Here, we'll look for the Zapata Sparrow, Zapata Wren, and Red-shouldered Blackbird just after sunrise.



Cuban Pygmy Owl



Grey-headed Quail Dove

Las Sabanas de Soplillar (Savannas of Soplillar) – A key location for spotting Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy Owl, Fernandina’s Flicker, Cuban Parakeets, and Cuban Parrots. Just after sundown, we’ll also search for the Cuban Nightjar.

Exclusive Visits to Private Properties – We’ll meet a local conservationist who builds artificial nest cavities for Cuban Parrots and parakeets while attracting birds with feeding stations. This area provides excellent opportunities to see the Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Zenaida Dove, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, West Indian Woodpecker, and Yellow-faced Grassquit.

Las Salinas Road – This varied ecosystem, including low dense forest, mangroves, marshes, and open wetlands, is home to the endemic Cuban Black Hawk. We’ll also look for shorebirds, terns, and waders, including American Flamingos, Roseate Spoonbills, and Reddish Egrets.

Optional Nighttime Birding – One evening after dinner, we may venture out to look for species we haven’t yet encountered, such as the Stygian Owl, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy Owl, and Greater Antillean (Cuban) Nightjar. *Privately owned B&B Meals B, L, D*



Havana’s Malecón

DAY 6 - FEBRUARY 27

DRIVE TO HAVANA, HEMINGWAY’S FINCA VIGIA

If we’ve missed the Zapata Wren or Zapata Sparrow, we’ll head out early and try again, then head to Havana. Alternatively, we’ll depart directly to Havana. Our drive will be approximately 3 hours, and we’ll arrive on the outskirts of the city in time for lunch in a paladar.

After lunch, continue to San Francisco de Paula to Hemingway’s former home, Finca Vigia. Continue to Havana and check in at the hotel. After we freshen up, we’ll depart to dinner. We’ve made a reservation, but this dinner is left at your own expense so that you may choose what you like from the menu.

Grand Aston Hotel Meals: B, L

DAY 7 - FEBRUARY 28 HAVANA

We begin our exploration of Havana with a guided walk through Old Havana’s four main plazas, meeting local entrepreneurs along the way.

Our first stop is Plaza Vieja, laid out in 1559 and known for its eclectic architecture, where Cuban Baroque blends with Gaudí-inspired art nouveau. Next, we visit Plaza de San Francisco, facing Havana Harbor. This historic square rose to prominence in the 16th century as a stop for Spanish galleons. It is anchored by the Basilica San Francisco de Asis and Cuba’s first financial district.

Along Calle Obispo, we’ll meet cuentapropistas—self-employed artisans selling handmade crafts, books, and art—gaining insight into Cuba’s unique dual-sector economy, where private and government-owned businesses coexist.

For lunch, enjoy time on your own at one of the many nearby paladars. Continuing through Old Havana, we arrive at Plaza de la Catedral, home to the Cathedral de la Habana, a striking



Oriente Warbler

example of traditional Baroque architecture. In the plaza, locals in traditional attire pose for photos in exchange for a small tip. We then visit Plaza de Armas, Havana's oldest square, where the city was founded, and explore its rich history.

Our final stop in Old Havana is the Almacenes de San José Artisan Market, housed in a reclaimed 19th-century warehouse along the harbor. Here, vendors sell a wide array of Cuban handicrafts, from paintings and sculptures to hats and clothing.

To cap off the day, we board classic American cars for a scenic drive through Havana. We'll pass the recently renovated Capitol Building, the Grand Theater, and Central Park, cruise along the Malecón past the reopened U.S. Embassy, and explore Miramar's Fifth Avenue, lined with historic mansions, many now embassies. We'll stop at Revolution Square, where historic speeches by Fidel Castro, the Pope, and others have drawn massive crowds.

After returning to the hotel for a break, we gather for a special farewell dinner. Finally, we visit the Hotel Nacional, where we'll take in panoramic views from the gardens and explore its historic memorabilia before heading back to our hotel for the night. *Grand Aston Hotel Meals: B, D*

DAY 8 - MARCH 1 DEPARTURE

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for check-in and return flight home. Your transfer time will be confirmed in Havana by your Cuban Guide, and will be scheduled to arrive at the airport approximately three hours prior to flight departure. Please ensure your passport and Cuban visa are in hand for check-in procedures. *Meals: B*

Please Note: This itinerary is preliminary and may be adjusted according to conditions on the day of operation.

February 22–March 1, 2026

\$4,692 per person in a double room
\$4,974 per person in a single room

Deposit: \$1,000 per person

Final Payment Due: October 25, 2025

Cancellation Fees: All cancellations are effective from the date that written notification is confirmed as received by Conservancy Travel

- Up to 120 days prior to tour start date: \$1,000
- 119 to 70 days prior to tour start date: 50% of order total
- Less than 69 days prior to tour start date: 100 % of order total

Register online at

www.conservancytravel.org/CZBG_DHC



INCLUSIONS:

- ✓ Accommodations and activities as described in the itinerary
- ✓ Expert private Cuban cultural guide and vehicle as per itinerary
- ✓ Expert Cuban specialist birding guide
- ✓ Certification of participation in a pre-planned, fully scheduled program of support for the Cuban people travel to Cuba under the U.S. Department of the Treasury general license
- ✓ Meals as per noted in the itinerary (B,L,D)
- ✓ 2 drinks per each included lunch and dinner (local beer, bottled water, soft drinks, house wine if offered by the restaurant)
- ✓ Bottled water while touring with the guide
- ✓ Gratuities for included meals and luggage handling

EXCLUSIONS:

- Cuban e-Visa, charged separately at \$130 per person
- International airfare and baggage fees
- Transfers within the USA
- Passport/visa fees
- Meals not mentioned in the program as included
- Coffee with included meals unless offered by the venue; alcohol other than welcome drinks, live music venue entrance fees, unless specifically noted as included in the itinerary
- Optional activities that are not stated as included in the itinerary
- Tips for hotel housekeeping and live music during meals
- Other expenses of a personal nature
- Travel insurance
- Any other items not specifically mentioned as included
- Gratuity for Cuban Cultural Guide, suggested at \$5-\$10/per guest, per day; Birding Guide, suggested at \$10-\$20 / per guest, per day; Driver, \$5-\$10 per guest, per day.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON A CUBA BIRDING JOURNEY

This itinerary has stays in multiple locations, with fully scheduled days. It is an active journey, involving walking and standing for up to 2 hours at a time and covering up to 2 miles unassisted during half-day tours. Expect 6-7 hours of physical activities daily, embarking and disembarking the motorcoach multiple times. A majority of your time will be spent outdoors. Birding includes walking on paved and unpaved terrain. On birding days, we start early while the birds are active and to avoid the hottest part of the day. On at least one day we will begin travelling well before dawn to reach our destination at or just after sunrise. Some activities, lodgings, and meals will be in historic buildings without elevators, requiring climbing 2-4 flights of stairs.

While bedrooms and private vehicles are air-conditioned, most public places are not. Transportation is by private motorcoach, without a toilet, and involves drives of 2-6 hours between locations, at times on poorly maintained roads. Rest stops occur every 1.5-2 hours on longer drives. Accommodations in Cuba are in the best available hotels, privately-owned inns, or bed & breakfasts, selected based on legal use according to US Department of Treasury OFAC restrictions. In Cuba, flexibility is essential, as itineraries may change based on the day's conditions. Your expert Cuban guide will manage any adjustments needed.

- Cuba has a tropical climate and temperatures during the day can be relatively hot by midday.
- Cuba is prone to power outages that may persist for several hours.
- Hot water is usually available in your rooms for bathing, but on rare occasions availability may be disrupted.
- Bottled drinking water will be provided by your guides.
- You may opt out of some outings when staying at Playa Larga to rest or enjoy some beach or personal time. Be sure to inform your host or guide.

EXPLORING CUBA WITH CONSERVANCY TRAVEL

Conservancy Travel operates OFAC-compliant educational tours in partnership with the Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre. The Antonio Núñez Jiménez

Foundation for Nature and Humanity (FANJ) is a Cuban cultural and scientific nongovernmental institution, dedicated to research and promotion of programs and projects for the protection of the environment as it relates to culture and society. Its main focuses are on stakeholder engagement, poverty reduction and land restoration.



West Indian Woodpecker



Hemingway's Finca Vigia



Cuban Emerald



ACCOMMODATIONS

Best available inn or B&B in Soroa

Privately owned Bed & Breakfast in Playa Larga

Havana

Grand Aston Hotel

The Grand Aston La Habana Hotel is a new hotel located in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. Situated on the Malecón – Havana’s famous waterfront promenade, the hotel combines modern design in an urban oasis of lush gardens.

The hotel offers an outdoor terrace and garden; swimming pool, restaurant, bar, fitness center, 24-hour front desk and room service. WiFi is available in public areas and costs US\$5 per 24 hours. Spa services at the Ubud Spa are available at additional cost.

Check-In: 4:00 p.m.

Check-Out: 12:00 p.m.





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REGISTER ONLINE:

www.conservancytravel.org/CZBG_DHC

