



# THE FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

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

## **Birds, Nature, and Cuban Culture**

**January 5-15, 2023**

*Interact with Cuban nature, support Cuban conservationists and help protect Cuban birds!*

Join the Friendship Association and the St. Johns County Audubon Society for an 11-day adventure uniquely designed for curious conservationists, avid birders, and amateur ecologists who want to interact meaningfully with a variety of Cuban nature specialists, biologists, 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 our ongoing efforts to help protect the environment while visiting uniquely beautiful places on the island. Emphasis is on gaining an appreciation of birds, nature, conservation, 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 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.

We should encounter over 110 species of birds, including about 20 of the 27 island endemics.

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

## Tentative Itinerary

**Day 1, Jan 5:** Find your way to our designated airport in Florida. Your guides, **Paul Baicich** and **Soledad Pagliuca**, will meet you there, and brief the group on the adventure to come.

Once we arrive in Cuba, 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 birding around the hotel.

Dinner at **El Romero** Vegetarian Restaurant followed by an informal talk by **Maikel**, who will share with us his projects concerning the conservation of endangered species, especially the Cuban parrot.

**Day 2, Jan 6:** 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 **Odaly's** private restaurant. Return to our hotel for sunset and dinner. Optional informal meeting with local artists.



Chocolate Orchid (*Encyclia phoenicea*)

**Day 3, Jan 7:** Breakfast, check out and drive to Viñales (123 km.). Light lunch on the road and birding in between. Check into **Hotel Ermita** or similar. Sunset birding opportunities around the hotel. Dinner on site.

**Day 4, Jan 8:** 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, visit a tobacco farm or discover the flora and fauna surrounding the hotel, or hang out at the pool. Evening, explore downtown **Viñales** for dinner on your own or at the hotel.



Viñales National Park

photo by James Hill

**Day 5, Jan 9:** 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

**Day 6, Jan 10:** Breakfast with your family. Excursion to the **Finca Agroecológica Rancho Los Pintines** in **Solpillar** to study the swamp environment and catch sight of some endemic 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. We will bring school supplies to the small rural school and possibly meet with the teachers and students. Visit the memorial of the dinner Fidel Castro had with “Carboneros” (carbon workers) on Christmas eve, 1959. Late afternoon drive to **Las Salinas** to observe long-legged waders, raptors, shorebirds and crocodiles at sunset. Dinner in town.

**Day 7, Jan 11:** Early morning drive to **Bermejas**. Search for endemic species: Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove and others. Visit to the **Finca Agroecológica Los Cocos** in Bermejas for lunch. 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 Annie Corveller-Hill

**Day 8, Jan 12:** 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. Afternoon free in Playa Larga to visit the **Patio de Adrián** in Adrián and Ana's backyard for unique photographic bird opportunities or swimming, hiking, etc. Evening good-bye dinner with our local Cuban friends.

**Day 9, Jan 13:** Leave for **Havana** (177 Km). Lunch at the **National 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**. Optional evening at the **National Ballet** or other cultural event.

**Day 10, Jan 14:** Breakfast at **La Espada**. **Walking tour of Old Havana** with historian and Martí scholar, **Rubén Javier Pérez**. 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 Kaml Bullaudy's art studio.



La Habana Gran Teatro Alicia Alonso Photo by James Hill

Dinner at **La Espada** restaurant. Optional cultural activities or bar-hopping.

**Day 11, Jan 15:** Breakfast at **La Espada** and final drive around more key historic sites in Havana. Transfer to airport. ¡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. It's good opportunity to brush up your Spanish.

## **Payments, Cancellations, and Refunds (final payment by Nov 1, 2022)**

**Cost:** \$3,800 (per person, double occupancy). Add \$400 for single supplement (if available). Limited to 10 participants.

Included: membership in the Friendship Association and local membership in the St. Johns County Audubon Society; transportation to and from Cuba from an airport (TBD) in Florida; medical insurance in Cuba; all transportation within Cuba; all hotels and bed and breakfasts; all group meals in Cuba; 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.; visas; personal tips such as Cuban guides, drivers, housekeepers and porters; drinks other than water; extra suitcases and overweight; travel insurance.

\$500 non-refundable deposit due with application.

\$1,700 due September 1, 2022.

\$1,600 due October 1, 2022 (Or \$2,000 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

Or Zelle to [aimisoledad@gmail.com](mailto:aimisoledad@gmail.com) or to (904) 808 2030.

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 the adventure, contact:

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Cuban Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium siju*)