



Captivated by Cuba's Charms

CUBA

Have mojitos, Cohiba cigars and a classic getaway Chevrolet at the ready for your romantic escape to Cuba, discover the Caribbean's most colourful and vibrant country

It is little wonder that when Christopher Columbus arrived in *Cuba* in 1492, he declared it “the most beautiful island”. Even today, the fortunate visitors and happy couples that travel to *Cuba* are still blown away by the sheer beauty of the legendary cities. The largest of the Caribbean Islands, *Cuba* is located in the northern Caribbean Sea and is home to over 200 picturesque beaches that are quintessentially turquoise waters and sugar-white sands. If you are seeking seclusion, the southern beaches are less populated, offering plenty of peace and serenity to soak up some rays with your sweetheart.

Cuba is most certainly primed as a romantic haven with old-fashioned romance flowing through the veins of this atmospheric country. You'll be swept up in the sheer romance of *Havana* in seconds. With a frisson of history, cobblestone streets, crumbling colonial casas and plazas, it will have you at hola! If you're an adventurous couple looking for a truly unique destination, *Cuba* certainly fits the bill.

Cultural Legacy

A small nation with a big personality, there is no country quite like *Cuba*. Delve into its unique cultural treasure trove and experience the music, art, invigorating energy and creative spirit of the locals. Cuban culture finds its clearest expression in the nation's love of music. Famous for its fluid form of salsa and the son rhythms popularised by the Cuban band Buena Vista Social Club, the island has become a hotbed of musical and dance talent. Displaying its legendary past proudly in the streets, you'll be enchanted by the abounding architectural heritage and thriving art scene.

Around every corner, expect to see walls splashed with propaganda depicting Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and slogans celebrating the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Progression is visible everywhere alongside the decay, giving the country a rare and unique perspective unlike anywhere else in the world.

Old School Havana

Take a step back in time as you explore the capital city, *Havana*. Famed for its stunning buildings, festival atmosphere and historical memorials to revolutionaries, the city is a must-see for a multitude of reasons. Synonymous with some of the greatest literary figures that found solace here, including Ernest Hemingway and Graham Greene, *Havana* is a hub for artists and musicians alike. Head to Habana Vieja — the oldest part of the city — where you can wonder the intriguing streets, replete with art deco, neoclassic and colonial baroque architecture. *Old Havana* is classified as a UNESCO world heritage site, which comes as no surprise considering the plethora of cultural and artistic offerings. Two of the most famous are Museo de la Revolución and Museo Nacional de Belles Artes.

Music & Dance

Cuba's vibrant music scene best exemplifies its colourful cultural melting pot. The fusion of African



Did you know?

Cigars are called *puros* or *habanos* in Cuba



and Iberian cultures has sparked creative magic on the island, producing irresistible dance styles such as, son, salsa, mambo, rumba and timba. Music moves *Cuba* in a spiritual and physical sense, and dancing is strongly embedded in the culture. *Santiago de Cuba* is a hot destination for dance lovers. The city's distinctive Afro-Cuban cultural influences are on display during July's Carnival — an unforgettable extravaganza with drum-beating parades featuring colourful costumes and son dancing, a precursor to salsa. However, you can sample the sultry hip-swaying nightlife at any time of year. To enhance the experience, consider taking salsa lessons with a local teacher!

Honeymoon activities

Vintage *Havana*, Hemingway haunts, live salsa music and inviting sapphire shores — where in the world could top that for a honeymoon? Cruise along Malecón in a classic 1950's Cadillac and glide past the capital's monumental buildings.



When it's time for lunch, pay a visit to one of the city's exclusive restaurants such as *La Guarida*, or *Café Laurent* with its alfresco penthouse dining. As the days draw to a close, you will witness Cuban nightlife just waking up. Party like a local, allowing the cuba libres to flow and irresistible salsa beats to sweep you of your feet. Spontaneous live music is the norm and a pounding Afro-Cuban rumba is the hypnotic soundtrack of the country.

Where to stay

Paradus Rio de Oro Resort & Spa

Sitting on the finest white sands of *Esmeralda Beach* on the outskirts of *Guardalavaca*, *Paradus Rio de Oro Resort & Spa* offers pure luxury and award-winning hospitality services. Nestled in *Bahia de Naranjo Natural Park*, it faces one of the most spectacular coral reefs in the world.

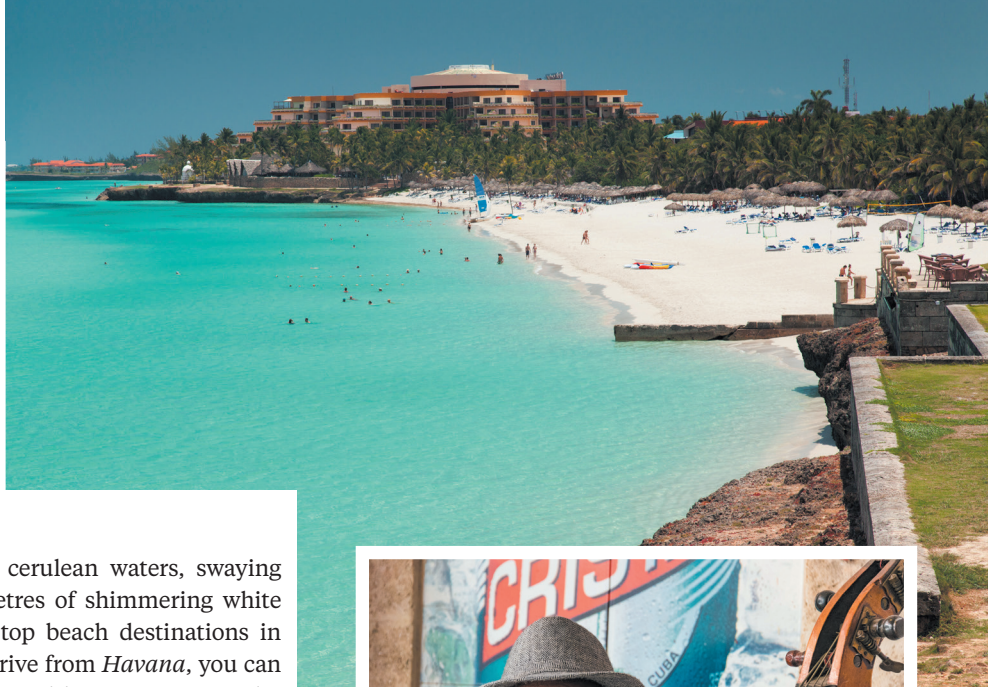
If you plan to get married here, this five-star resort offers a variety of wedding options to match your needs (melia.com).



Hotel Saratoga

With a setting in a magnificent 1880s neo-classical building, *Hotel Saratoga* retains the charm of Old *Cuba* and is located just steps from the National Capitol building. Escape from the bustle of the streets to the hotel's rooftop pool, before a pampering at the spa. Alternatively, hide away in a penthouse suite with an alfresco pool, and lounge on daybeds with bird's-eye views of the ocean (hotel-saratoga).





Castaway Beaches

Varadero, famous for its warm cerulean waters, swaying palms and more than 20 kilometres of shimmering white sand, is considered one of the top beach destinations in the world. Less than two hours drive from *Havana*, you can find a wide selection of sophisticated leisure resorts and a wealth of watersports opportunities. One of our top choices is *Playa Ancón*, a prized ribbon of soft, white sand stretching nearly three miles and often regarded as the finest beach on *Cuba's* southern coastline. It's guarded by the historic town of *Trinidad*, with its old-world charm, sprawling colonial palaces and plazas.



For coconut palms and lashings of rum, *Playa Guardalavaca* situated in the north-eastern Holguin Provinces of *Cuba* easily delivers on the Caribbean dream. *Guardalavaca* is perfect for active honeymooners seeking to explore the marine kingdom with mask and snorkel. Those in search of respite can sail to the eastern tail of the *Jardines del Rey*, long swathes of talcum-white sand and iridescent blue water are waiting to greet you and your darling. We recommend the most beautiful isle — *Cayo Coco*!

Move to the groove

Cuba and is the birthplace of classic dance styles like the *Bolero, Mambo and Cha Cha!*

Unspoilt Naturaleza

Home to some of the richest flora and fauna in the world, sugarcanes, caves and crystal clear lagoons, *Cuba* offers a unique and varied landscape. To experience some of the island's grandest scenery, take to the Sierra Maestra Mountains on a hike and enjoy camping out, forest treks and swimming under waterfalls. To the extreme east is the lush port of *Baracoa*, 'The Town that Time Forgot'. Tread the same ground as Columbus, and add a touch of wild romance to your honeymoon. Trek through thick tropical rainforest, swim in natural waterfalls and stroll hand-in-hand along empty, untamed beaches. Head out west to



the stunning countryside of *Viñales*, where you can ride horseback alongside your true love, exploring the jaw-dropping landscape. This is also a fantastic location for rock climbing, mountain biking and cave exploration trips. Other opportunities include deep-sea fishing for swordfish, marlin and sharks. A visit to a local cigar factory is an absolute must! ♥

