



THE REAL CUBA - steam in paradise



26 Feb to 11 March

This will be the fifth year we have run this unique tour. We travel as much as possible by train, sometimes in our own private railcar, covering large parts of the very interesting Cuban railway system. Rail is by far the most comfortable way of getting around this extremely long island and our previous tours have attracted not only dedicated railway enthusiasts but also non-enthusiast visitors intrigued by our itinerary which always encompasses out of the way places well off the usual beaten track of the package holiday tours. We will have two luxury air-con buses accompanying us throughout our stay on the island so that you will not have to hump your luggage around all day, nor on or off any of the trains (the luggage goes on the bus each day, hotel to hotel); in addition, having two buses means we can offer two different programmes of visits or activities each day, in addition to the train ride, one with a "rail-based" interest and the other with a more general or "cultural" aspect. Each day, each client will be able to choose the activity which most appeals, changing from one programme to the other whenever he/she should so wish. Everyone will return to the same hotel for dinner each evening.

Escape the winter blues for some tropical sun...

Sunday 26 February 2012. We fly from London Gatwick on the Virgin Atlantic flight at 12.10 direct to Havana. Flights are also available from other airports elsewhere in UK but via Paris or Madrid. On arrival, transfer to our hotel in central Havana, in the same street as the Capitolio and next door but one to the opera house, for a three night stay.

Monday 27 February (B,D) Today's "Cultural Programme" will include, in the morning, a visit to a cigar factory and a walking tour of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage site with many buildings and even some whole streets restored; after a break for lunch, one of the buses will go to Ernest Hemingway's house, preserved with all his possessions and looking as if he'd just popped out for a few minutes; on the way back, it will stop at the Rum Museum where you get a free tasting at the end of the visit. Today's "Rail Option": Morning tour by bus of MINAZ steam locos preserved in Havana (four different sites); lunch-time visit to Central Station (snacks available), then to the FCC's Cienaga Workshops, and finishing with a ride along a surviving section of the Waterside Tramroad behind MINAZ 1204, said to be the last tank engine in Cuba in working order. *MINAZ is the acronym for the erstwhile Ministry of Sugar.*

Tuesday 28 February (B,D) In the morning, we will take everyone to the Cristina Station Railway Museum, and then to the Lenin Park ("*Parque Lenin*"), a large area of parkland in the outskirts of Havana which is complete with a lake and a very lengthy circuit of 3ft 0in narrow gauge track with steam trains worked by locomotives recovered from closed sugar mills. It is hoped that refreshments will be available in the Buffet Car. In the afternoon, the railway enthusiasts will go off in one of the buses, hopefully to visit the ACINOX steel works' engine shed or otherwise to go riding a couple of the newly-reinstated Havana area suburban services. Those who want the "Cultural Option" will be taken for an escorted sight-seeing tour of the rest of Havana on one of the new open-top double-deck tour buses.

Wednesday 29 February (B,D) This morning, we will all take the twice-weekly FCC passenger train service from Havana to Cienfuegos, one of the few long-distance trains scheduled to complete its journey in daylight. This will be an opportunity to experience train travel as the Cuban people do. Note to the railway enthusiasts: the train will be loco hauled with carriages with opening windows. At Cienfuegos, we will stay at our favourite Hotel Jaguar, wonderfully located at the end of a short tongue of land jutting out into the bay (Cienfuegos Bay is one of the world's greatest natural harbours). Wait til you see the sun rise tomorrow!

Thursday 1 March (B,D) Cienfuegos is but an hour's drive from Trinidad, another UNESCO World Heritage site, with cobbled streets and classic "Spanish Colonial" style churches and houses, an example of how to live comfortably in a hot climate before Electricity was invented. We will have a walking tour of the town centre. Trinidad also has a station, though the line inland to Fomento was cut several years ago when a hurricane blew over one of the high trestle bridges, but the FCC have established a steam-hauled tourist train operation on the remaining section and we will all go for a ride up the wide valley as far as Iznaga. The working engine in 2011 was MINAZ 1590, newly transferred from the Bartolome Maso Sugar Mill. Railfan Extra: One of the buses will delay its return so that those who want may also ride the railcar service to Casilda, Trinidad's port.

Friday 2 March (B,D) The Culture Option will start with a very attractive boat trip across Cienfuegos Bay to visit the castle situated at the narrow entrance to keep out the English pirates, an excursion of four hours' duration, approximately. After a break for Lunch back at the hotel, there will be a journey by bus to Santa Clara where we will visit the Ché Guevara Mausoleum and the Armoured Train Memorial park before retiring to our hotel, a Cuban style motel recently refurbished to



European standards (thatched huts scattered around parkland which includes a swimming pool), another one of our favourites. *A spectacular military action near S.Clara commanded by Ché, which led to the capture of a double-headed ammunition train, made Cuba's military dictator decide to flee the island and so ensured the success of the Revolution.*

Rail Options: We start the day by visiting five 2ft 6in gauge steam locos preserved in Cienfuegos, and try for a ride on the Park Railway; then charter the ex DB railcar which lives at Cienfuegos (FCC 4232) for trips along two freight-only lines, the Port Branch and the Cement Branch; then by bus to the 14th July Mill which has a working 2ft 6in gauge field system; then by bus to the Santa Clara hotel stopping at the Armoured Train Memorial. If there is time (there might not be), we will call in at another mill, either Australia, now closed and demolished but with the former steam fleet preserved in the old engine shed, or Ifrain Alfonso which is still working and where the cane trains have to cross the six-lane Great Cuban Motorway over an ungated level crossing (photo opportunity). There is also the option of riding the afternoon Cienfuegos—Santo Domingo train (loco hauled, opening windows) instead of the two mill visits. Sleep Santa Clara, Hotel Los Caneyes.

Saturday 3 March (B,D) Same programme for everyone today. We will go in the buses to visit the Heriberto Duquesne Sugar Mill & Distillery where we hope to be shown round the factory. The cane is brought in from the fields on a 3ft 0in narrow gauge field railway system worked by locomotives built by the Brush company in Loughborough in England. We will have a ride out to one of the “acopios” (cane Loading Points) in the Breakdown Train, hauled by a Brush, returning with a string of loaded cane cars after getting some photos. So we should see the entire process, from cutting the cane to spinning the sugar out in the centrifuges, and tasting the rum... In the afternoon, we will visit the former Marcelo Salado mill, near Caibarien, now a Railway Museum and home to the largest and best-kept collection of ex MINAZ steam engines and also a stationary engine which used to power the mill machinery. At least one of the M.Salado engines is in working order and we will return to Santa Clara steam-hauled, a lengthy cross-country journey on rural FCC lines. Note to the railway enthusiasts: a train of molasses tankers has been requested and we will have several run-pasts. Overnight in Santa Clara.

Sunday 4 March (B,D) Today we can all enjoy a first journey in our private charter of the historic Budd railcar, from Santa Clara along the relatively new Soviet-built main line to Ciego de Ávila and then up the northern branch to Morón, a once important railway town formerly the HQ of the Cuban Northern Railroad. The Budd railcar started life in main-line service in Canada. It not only has air-con and tinted windows, and two lavatories with running water, but also a bar area with fridges and a coffee making machine, and the Bar will be open throughout the journey, every day. There is no better way to see the Cuban countryside! Passenger trains on the Morón branch are normally worked by the FCC's 50900 Class Bo-Bo DE built in the USA before the Revolution (GM, 1955) and we have asked to be shown around the railway workshops and engine sheds in Morón. Then we will have a short bus journey to Patria, where the former sugar mill is now a railway museum with a couple of working steam engines. Last time we were there, Patria said that next time we came they would be able to do us a steam train out on FCC lines and we have asked them to take us to Ciro Redondo, a large still-working sugar mill back towards Ciego. C.Redondo used to have an extensive standard-gauge field system and we expect to photograph some USSR-built MINAZ diesels on cane trains. The mill's railway workshops have been privatised(!) as a locomotive and rolling stock repair company and the energetic owner-cum-manager is keen to organise a brakevan trip for us behind one of these Soviet locos.

Cultural Option: De-train at Ciego for an early check-in at the Soviet-built hotel which has a large swimming pool. In the afternoon, a city tour will include a visit to the Provincial Museum, “the best-presented municipal museum in Cuba”, complete not only with a display about the la Trocha, a sort of 19th Century Hadrian's Wall, but even the bell of a locomotive which was blown up by a group of revolutionaries who assaulted the said fortifications in 1896 (Fidel Castro was by no means the first but rather the most successful of a long line).

Monday 5 March (B,D) After a brief visit to the Ciego Locomotive Park (three ex MINAZ steam engines on display), we get a second journey in our private train, east along the main line from Ciego to Camaguey and Las Tunas (131 miles), where we hope to ride the FC Manatí which is run not by the FCC but by the local provincial government. We will travel to Manatí in a train of converted boxcars (!) behind a rare ex-MINAZ 2700 series diesel delivered to the island before the Revolution (GE, 1959). **Cultural Option:** de-train at Camaguey (don't go to Manatí at all) for an early check-in at the newly-refurbished city centre Hotel Plaza; in the afternoon, have a city tour to include the Cathedral and no less than five other Baroque churches.

Tuesday 6 March (B,D) The day will begin with a visit to the FCC's Camaguey Workshop which has always specialised in the overhaul of the USSR-built diesels in the FCC fleet. Then we will board the Budd railcar and continue up the main line to Jovellanos Junction and Cárdenas, and join our buses for a short transfer to Varadero the archetypal Cuban beach resort where we will check-in at a very nice not to say luxurious all-inclusive hotel we discovered last year.

Wednesday 7 March (B,D) Morning rail option: Visit nearby José Smith Comas, another closed mill which has become a railway museum, whence we will have a steam-hauled cane train photo charter out on the FCC line (route still TBC; we have asked for Jovellanos, along a branch the JSC engines used



Holiday information

to work before the mill was closed). We will have runpasts and cab rides and those who can convince the Cuban crew that they know what they are doing may be allowed to drive.

Morning time culture option: stay in the hotel, poolside. The hotel is all-inclusive (free drinks, free lunch, etc). In the afternoon, both option groups will travel by bus to Havana but stopping en route at Hershey, the HQ of the formerly independent Hershey Railway, a vintage USA-style interurban electric railway with wooden poles holding up a flimsy tramway-style overhead wire and which runs across country, through the cane fields. It is a wondrous survival and we will visit the workshops and car sheds and then have a charter formed of two of the original 1920s Brill electric railcars supplied for the opening of the line (Caraballo Branch requested, where the line terminates in the middle of the village street). It isn't difficult to learn to drive the Hershey trains and those who want will be taught to do so. Sleep Havana, same hotel as before

Thursday 8 March (B,D) Last time PTG was in Cuba (March 2011), the Cristina Station Railway Museum told us that one of their steam engines was to be returned to traffic and could be made available for a charter special and this is what we have requested. We will take the train along the route of Cuba's first railway, from Havana to Bejucal (opened 1837) and Güines (reached in 1838) and then continue to the Hector Molina Sugar Mill for a photo session shunting cane cars at the factory.

Cultural Option: Enjoy a short journey on the steam train, say a couple of hours, then go off to the beach in one of our buses (to the Playa del Este); get some Lunch on the beach. Both groups return to Havana by bus in the late afternoon.

Friday 9 March (B,D) Ask any Cuban which is the prettiest part of the island and he or she will invariably say "Viñales, and Pinar del Rio Province in general"—but PTG has never been west of Havana... This year, however, we have found a reason for doing so. The twice-weekly "Up" Pinar del Rio—Havana train not only runs in daylight but is hauled by an MLW, a large and noisy diesel locomotive built in Canada to an Alco design (to the uninitiated, we should perhaps explain that diesel locomotives built by the USA-based American Locomotive Company have a significant following amongst railway enthusiasts worldwide). So today, Friday, we will spend travelling to Pinar del Rio and checking-in to the hotel near the station. We have asked the FCC if they can let us have the Budd railcar for one more day; if they say "no", we will have to go by bus but at least there will be time for a stop in Viñales for some sight-seeing. Either way, it will be a long day but a very scenic journey by all accounts. Sleep Hotel Pinar del Rio.

Culture option: You will stay in Havana and forego the excursion to Pinar del Rio. Two days of free time in Havana - which some might consider a good way to end the tour.

Saturday 10 March (B,D) Today is MLW day, riding the 07.00 Pinar del Rio—Havana train. Carriages with opening windows hauled by an FCC 52400 Class loco. We should be into Havana by 16.30 where we will once again check-in to our hotel near the Opera.

Sunday 11 March (B,D) This evening we fly home, on the overnight flight back to London.

Disclaimers: (1) The Cuban authorities reserve the right to change any arrangements if circumstances should make it necessary, and we cannot promise that everything outlined above will be achieved. However, the Cubans are also good at offering an alternative and we will not have any "empty" days. (2) The PTG tour of Cuba goes off the beaten track and stays away from the tourist resorts. Some of the hotels we are assigned might not be of the standard PTG usually manages to get in other countries. People booking onto this tour are understood to have read these Disclaimers, and to accept the situation. We have always had a good time in Cuba. Our two tour leaders, John and Angelina, both speak Spanish and have both been on all the PTG tours in Cuba; they "know the ropes".

Holiday Prices (per person)

Full 15 day holiday from London Gatwick

£3,299

Own travel to/from Cuba: £2,599

Options

- Single room supplement: £250
- Flight upgrade to Premier Economy: add approx £700 (if available)
- Pre or Post tour nights in Havana or at a beach resort: Price on application

Deposit

£1,000 with flight option or
£750 if booking own flights

Price includes

- Travel and activities as outlined in the itinerary
- Hotel accommodation with breakfast
- Other meals as shown; L=Lunch, D=Dinner
- Services of our Tour Managers (tour is fully escorted from London)

Recommended Flights - Outward

Virgin 12.10 Gatwick to Havana a.16.40

Virgin 20.10 Havana to Gatwick a.08.45 (12th)