

Cuba

19 March – 1 April 2022



Bee Hummingbird (DB)

**Tour leaders: Mads & Tina Elley
and local guides**

With Fågelguidning AB to the exciting birding destination Cuba.

For 2 weeks we will be touring Cuba, the country on the largest island of the Greater Antilles. Here we will find the Caribbean charme and history along with a varied nature with woodlands, beaches and the famous wetland Zapata Swamp. We will focus on seing all possible endemics and the many Caribbean specialties. Our journey also includes guided sightseeing in the fascinating old city of Havana.

The trip begins at the airport in Havana, from where we drive directly to our first hotel in Viñales. Next we visit Cayo Coco north of the main island, with beautiful beaches and many exciting birds. After a couple of good birding days we drive to the La Belen reserve in the central part of the country before our last birding destination Zapata Swamp. Here we find the smallest bird in the world, Bee Hummingbird. The trip ends with a guided sightseeing in Havana with many historical and cultural landmarks.

For the entire tour we will be accompanied by an English speaking Cuban tourist guide. In each birding area we will also have a local birding guide to ensure the best possible birding experience.

Everybody can join his tour. Beginners as well as the experienced birder can get a high output from this trip.

We expect to see more than 150 species including 27 Cuban endemics and a further 20 found only in the Caribbean islands. Look forward to seeing the smallest bird in the world Bee Hummingbird, the charming little Cuban Tody, Cuba's national bird Cuban Trogon and many other Caribbean birds along with a large number of North American winter visitors.

Program

Day 1 (19 March)

The tour begins at the airport in Havana (José Martí International Airport) in the afternoon (depending on your chosen flight). We will gladly assist in finding flight tickets.

We drive directly to Hotel Los Jazmines in Viñales (about 2½ hours).

Possible species today:

Depending on the time of arrival there may be time to connect with the first Cuban birds like Zenaida Dove, Northern Mockingbird, Grey Kingbird og Greater Antillean Grackle.



Cuban Trogon. The national bird of Cuba (DB)

Day 2 (20 March)

Before breakfast we search the hotel garden for Red-legged Thrush og Cuban Green Woodpecker etc.

In the morning we will walk along a trail to see the first target species for this area, Cuban Solitaire and Cuban Grassquit.

In the afternoon a short drive will take us up to the reservoir Embalse El Salto where we should see Olive-capped Warbler and many water birds.

Overnight Hotel Los Jazmines.



Cuban Green Woodpecker (CAL)

Possible species today:

At the hotel: Red-legged Thrush, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Cuban Bullfinch.
Morning: Cuban Solitaire, Red-legged Honeycreeper, West Indian Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Pygmy Owl, Cuban Tody.
Afternoon: Olive-capped Warbler, Neotropical Cormorant, Osprey, ducks, herons and egrets.

Day 3 (21 March)

This is an all-day drive east to Cayo Coco. Some birding is possible at stops along the way and the flat central part of the island is the best place to see Northern Harriers hunting across pasture lands. On the final section across the causeway to the cays there are many waterbirds, all of which will also be seen during the time on the cays. Overnight Hotel Sol Cayo Coco.



Roseate Spoonbill

Possible species today:

Northern Harrier, Turkey Vulture, American Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret and other herons and egrets.

Day 4 (22 March)

After the long journey the day before, the first morning will be spent not far from the hotel. At Cueva Jabali the local guide has set up drip water feeders and a variety of birds visit, particularly the hard-to-see Key West Quail Dove, Painted Bunting and many more. The surrounding trees and bushes are also productive with the northern race of Zapata Sparrow, Oriente Warbler and many North American warblers. The afternoon takes us to Cayo Guillermo, the best place to see Bahama Mockingbird. Many waders are also present and American Flamingoes are usually present.



Cuban Vireo (DB)

Possible species today:

Key West Quail-Dove, Painted Bunting, Zenaida Dove, Western Spindalis, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, Oriente Warbler, Zapata (Cuban) Sparrow, Bahama Mockingbird, Clapper Rail, Sora,

Northern Crested Caracara, many North American waders and passerines.

Day 5 (23 March)

The morning involves a drive out to Cayo Paredon Grande. The first targets are the small population of Thick-Billed Vireo and the commoner Cuban Gnatcatcher. This is also a good area for Mangrove Cuckoo. In the afternoon there is a short drive to a sewage treatment plant water outfall. It doesn't sound great, but the resulting pool is surrounded by vegetation and holds many waterbirds and landbirds. This is a key place to find West Indian Whistling Duck.



Cuban Emerald (CAL)

Possible species today:

Thick-billed Vireo, Cuban Vireo, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Mangrove Cuckoo, Piping Plover, West Indian Whistling Duck, Magnificent Frigatebird, Great Lizard Cuckoo, Cuban Tody, Cuban Bullfinch.

Day 6 (24 March)

The drive to Camaguey city takes most of the morning and a short tour of the city is followed by lunch in a suitable restaurant. Afterwards the drive to the reserve at La Belen, south of Najasa takes just under an hour so there will be time for a little local birding in the woodland surrounding the accommodation in the heart of the reserve.

Our hotel Finca La Belen is a bit more basic than the other hotels on this trip but

it is by far the one with the best location for birdwatching.



Cuban Pygmy Owl (CAL)

Possible species today:

Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Crow, Cuban Amazon, Cuban Pygmy Owl

Day 7 (25 March)

After breakfast we'll walk in La Belen reserve. Our local guide also knows about the many butterflies in the reserve. Here we have our best chances of species like Giant Kingbird and Cuban Parakeet. Gundlach's Hawk is also present but this is the most unpredictable of the endemics and we may need a little luck to find it. In the afternoon we'll walk close to our hotel looking for Northern Jacana among other species.



Fernandina's Flicker (DB)

Possible species today:

Giant Kingbird, Cuban Parakeet, Plain Pigeon, Cuban Palm Crow, Fernandina's Flicker, Gundlach's Hawk, Cuban Emerald, Limpkin, Northern Jacana and Purple Gallinule.

Day 8 (26 March)

We have time for some birding stops along the way to Playa Larga. This town is well situated for the many excellent birding sites in and around Cuba's best bird watching area, the amazing Zapata Swamp.

As we arrive to Hotel Playa Larga there will be birds to look out for. In the hotel gardens we can see White Ibis, Killdeer, Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Great Lizard Cuckoo. Many Cuban Amazon often gather here before flying to their night roost nearby.



Cuban Amazon (DB)

Possible species today:

Eastern (Cuban) Meadowlark, American Kestrel, Broad-winged Hawk, Great Lizard Cuckoo, Cuban Oriole, Cuban Amazon, White Ibis, Killdeer, Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

Days 9-12 (27 - 30 March)

We have 4 full days to explore this great area. Chances are good that we can find the remaining endemics and specialties like Zapata Wren, Blue-headed Quail-Dove and Bee Hummingbird. The area also gives us the opportunity to catch up on almost all other species we may have missed earlier in the trip.

Our local guide will plan each day according to our wishes and his great knowledge of the area.

We will visit sites like:

-The dry forest near the village of Bermejas where Blue-headed and Grey-headed Quail-Doves occur. Bare-legged Owl and

Fernandina's Flicker should also be seen here.

-Forests around the villages of Soplillar, La Majagua and Los Sábalos where Bee Hummingbird is the main target. All four Cuban Quail-Doves are possible here as well as many North American warblers, vireos, tanagers and thrushes.

-An early morning start to look for Cuban Nightjar and then we'll go deeper into the swamp looking for Zapata Wren, found nowhere else on Earth. The western race of Zapata Sparrow and Spotted Rail are also on the target list.



Zapata Sparrow (DB)

We don't expect to find the last of the endemics. Zapata Rail is very rarely seen and the voice is unknown. It is however in the area and should we have that incredible luck ...

-La Salinas, where the salt lagoons hold many waders, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, American Flamingo, Magnificent Frigatebird, various herons and egrets, two species of pelicans and Cuban Black Hawk.



Cuban Oriole (CAL)

Possible species today:

Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Grey-headed Quail-Dove, Plain Pigeon, Zapata Wren,

Zapata Sparrow, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Amazon, Fernandina's Flicker, Bare-legged Owl, Stygian Owl, Cuban Pygmy Owl, Zapata Sparrow, Cuban Nightjar, Spotted Rail, Yellow-breasted Crake, Sora, Cuban Black Hawk, Brown Pelican, American White Pelican, Anhinga, Double-crested Cormorant, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Clapper Rail, Limpkin, Wilson's Plover, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Willet, Royal Tern, Cuban Vireo, West Indian and Cuban Green Woodpeckers, Tawny-shouldered and Red-shouldered Blackbirds, Cuban Oriole, Yellow-headed Warbler, Red-legged Thrush, Cuban Martin, Antillean Palm Swift, Cuban Pewee, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Cuban Bullfinch and many North American waders and passerines.



Zapata Wren (DB)

Day 13 (31 March)

After breakfast we drive to Havana where we have lunch. We also have time for sightseeing in the old town.

This is our last evening together and we will have a good dinner in a nice restaurant.

Overnight at Hotel Inglaterra in the old town.



Cape May Warbler

Possible species today:

Along the road and in Havana we should see some of the commoner species like Greater Antillean Grackle, Common Ground Dove, Northern Mockingbird and American Kestrel.

Day 14 (1 April)

In the morning we go for another guided sightseeing in Havana. After lunch it is time to head for the airport, depending on the chosen flight.



Common Ground Dove

The trip

Total cost: 33.600 SEK

(around 24.275 DKK - 3.250 EUR - 2.930 GBP - 3.800 USD)

Single room supplement: 2.400 SEK

(around 1.730 DKK - 230 EUR - 210 GBP - 270 USD).

Deposit: 4.800 SEK

(around 3.450 DKK - 465 EUR - 420 GBP - 550 USD).

The price is in Swedish Kroner (SEK). Prices in other currencies are only indicative based on current rates (August 2020). Deposit should be paid no later than 7 days after booking. Final balance no later than 60 days before tour start.

Included in the price is:

- Danish tour leaders Mads & Tina Elley
- English speaking Cuban tourist guide
- Local expert bird guides
- Shared double room (single room available at an additional cost)
- All meals (please notice that lunch is not included on days 3 and 8. On these two days lunch can be bought along the way)
- All transport in Cuba
- Entrance fees in parks and tourist sights
- Bottled water in the field
- Recommended tips for the entire trip (additional tips are always welcome)
- Bird list and trip report

Price does not include:

- Flights to/from Cuba / Havana
- Personal travel insurance. Please notice that you need to show documentation of travel insurance upon arrival
- Personal expenses
- Drinks. (Hotel Sol Cayo Coco is an all inclusive hotel where some drinks are included in the price)

More about the conditions for this trip in Fågelguidning AB homepage (in Swedish):

<https://fagelguidning.se/resevillkor-2/>

Short facts

Tour leaders speak Danish, English and some Swedish.

Cuba has two currencies. Tourists use CUC (Cuba Convertible Peso) which is equal to the US Dollar. At the time of writing 1 CUC (= 1 USD) equals about 6,29 DKK / 8,77 SEK / 0,85 EUR / 0,76 GBP.

Visa and MasterCard are sometimes accepted in larger hotels but most shops, restaurants and smaller hotels only accept cash. Please notice that a 3% transaction fee is normal at cash withdrawels as well as general purchase. American cards (American Express, Diners a.o. AND Visa/Master from American banks) are usually not accepted.

Ask your bank if your card can be used in Cuba.

ATMs are found in larger towns and at the airport. Please notice that both your bank and the ATM may charge a fee.

It is recommended to bring Euros. USD can often be changed but the difficult relations between the two countries may cause problems.

Recommended tips are included in the tour price. You are of course welcome to give additional tips.

Cuba is 5-6 hours after Central European time (See more under "Time zone" further down).

In Cuba both 110V og 220V are used. European plugs are not always useable. Bring an adapter for North American plugs.

March-April is in the driest part of the year with only a little rain. Temperatures at night are 15-20 degrees, day temperatures 25-30 degrees. The air is dry so the heat is not so uncomfortable.

We expect to see more than 150 species incl. 27 Cuban endemics and 20 near-endemics. A good field guide is important since many species are unknown in Europe. The tour leaders bring the recently published: G. Kirwan et al. Birds of the West Indies (2019). Since the field guides are in English we use the English bird names during this trip.

You will receive a bird list on the first day as well as a more detailed trip report after the trip.



Tour day	Destination/activities
Day 1 – 19/3	The trip begins at the airport in Havana. Drive (around 2½ hours) to Hotel Jazmines in Viñales (2 nights).
Day 2 – 20/3	Morning: Walk in the bird rich area in the Viñales valley. Afternoon by a lake nearby.
Day 3 – 21/3	The longest drive of the trip. Around 9 hours with stops to Cayo Coco. Hotel Sol Cayo Coco (3 nights).
Day 4 – 22/3	Morning visit to a drinking place near our hotel. Afternoon: Short drive to Cayo Guillermo.
Day 5 – 23/3	Morning: Cayo Paredon Grande. Afternoon: Wet area by the sewage treatment plant.
Day 6 – 24/3	Drive to La Belen Reserve near Najasa. Lunch in Camaguey. Time for birding after arrival. Hotel: Finca La Belen (2 nights).
Day 7 – 25/3	Morning: In La Belen reserve. Afternoon: Birding the area near our hotel.
Day 8 – 26/3	Drive to Playa Larga, around 6 hours with stops for birding. Hotel Playa Larga (5 nights).
Days 9 - 12 27-30/3	In and around Zapata Swamp. We expect to visit: Forests near Bermejás, Soplillar, La Majagua and Los Sábalos. Salt lagunes at La Salinas. The Zapata Swamp itself.
Day 13 – 31/3	Morning birding around the hotel. Drive to Havana, lunch in the city, sightseeing, farewell dinner. Hotel Inglaterra in the old town.
Day 14 – 1/4	Morning: Sightseeing. Afternoon: To the airport, depending on chosen flights.



The old American cars are still a common sight in Havana

General information.

The above program describes what we will do each day. The program may be changed during the tour because of weather conditions, bird occurrence and/or other unexpected situations. All changes will be made in order to ensure the participants the best possible experience during the tour.



Nær Viñales (CAL)

Travelling in Cuba is always an experience in itself. The country has an exciting history and the Caribbean atmosphere is always present. The main roads are generally good but in some areas the roads are not of European standard. During the long drives (days 3 and 8) there will be stops to stretch our legs and especially on

day 8 there will be time for some birding along the way.

Havana is a modern city but in the old town we see the typical Havana with colonial buildings and the still running old American cars.

The people in general are very friendly and welcoming but the language barrier can make communication difficult especially in the countryside.

Flights.

Please notice that air tickets are not included in the tour cost. You choose and book your own flights. The tour leaders may assist you finding flight tickets upon request. Please check with Fågelguidning AB for times and changes before booking your flight tickets.

The meeting point is in the arrival hall at Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí in Havana. The tour starts here and it ends at the same airport. If you choose the same flights as the tour leaders we can meet at Copenhagen Airport and the tour leaders can assist you with checking in if you wish. Please make an appointment in advance. This goes for the homebound flight as well.

At the time of writing the exact flight schedules are not available. We expect to

arrive to the airport on day one (21/3) late in the afternoon. Meeting time will be announced as soon as we know it. Please notice that special conditions apply if you arrive from the US. We advise to choose flights direct from Europe.

Luggage.

On your flights to and from Havana you are responsible for keeping the airline's rules. It is important that you check the rules for your flights as rules vary between companies. Please also be aware of the custom regulations.

We recommend packing binoculars, camera equipment, chargers, medications and other necessities in your hand luggage. Should your luggage be delayed you will not be missing your binoculars and other things you'll need every day.

The minibus is reasonably spacious but we kindly ask you to consider the amount of luggage. It is a good idea to bring a smaller bag/back pack for the daily excursions.



Mangrove on Cayo Coco (CAL)

Passport and visa.

Please check the rules for entering Cuba in good time before the tour. Pay attention to the expiration date of your passport as most countries demand the passport to be valid for some months after entering the country.

European tourists need a visa (Tourist Card) to enter Cuba. Our travel agent in Havana will take care of this for us.

Travel insurance.

You must have a valid travel insurance covering you in Cuba to participate in tours arranged by Fågelguidning AB. Many have this insurance along with their basic insurances. Ask your insurance company about how you are covered.

The Danish yellow (national) and blue (European) cards are not valid in Cuba. Please notice that you must present proof of a valid travel insurance before entering Cuba.



Traditional farming in the central part of Cuba (CAL)

Health.

The Danish "Statens Serum Institut" gives their recommendations on vaccinations and Malaria prevention:

<https://rejse.ssi.dk/rejsevaccinationslande/c/cuba#!/4week>

We recommend that you consult your personal doctor if in doubt.

There is no Malaria in Cuba but Dengue fever is found in most of the country. Protection against mosquito bites is essential. At the hotels the hygiene is good and the risk of infection is low.

Personal medicine is best kept in your hand luggage. It is always a good idea to bring a small "travel pharmacy" in case of headache, diarrhea, allergies etc. Please also consider the strong midday sun and some insect repellent.

Hotels.

We expect to stay in these hotels:

21/3 - 23/3: Hotel Jazmina in Viñales:

http://www.cubahotelreservation.com/hotel.asp?hotel_code=scthorljazmines

<https://hotelhorizonteslosjazmines.com-hotel.com/en/>

23/3 - 26/3: Hotel Sol Cayo Coco:

http://www.cubahotelreservation.com/hotel.asp?hotel_code=sctsmclubcayo

<https://www.hotelsolcayococo.com/>

26/3 - 28/3: Finca La Belen:

http://www.cubahotelreservation.com/hotel.asp?hotel_code=sctecolabelen

28/3 - 2/4: Hotel Playa Larga:

http://www.cubahotelreservation.com/hotel.asp?hotel_code=scthorplarga

2/4 - 3/4: Hotel Inglaterra (or similar):

http://www.cubahotelreservation.com/hotel.asp?hotel_code=sctgcinqlaterra

<http://www.hotelinglaterra-cuba.com/>

Some hotels have a wifi (usually at a cost), but the connection can be slow and unstable.



Hotel Inglaterra i Havana (CAL)

Food and drinks.

All meals are included in the tour cost.

Please notice that lunch on days 3 and 8 is not included. This can be purchased along the way.

Please tell us about any allergies or any other food related matters we should know about in good time before the tour.

Drinks at hotels and restaurants are not included in the tour cost. Wine and beer is available in most hotels and restaurants. At Hotel Sol Cayo Coco most drinks are included.



Tobacco harvest near Viñales (CAL)

How will the pace be on this tour?

The tour is categorized as A1 which means that knowledge of Cuba's birdlife is not necessary for participating. New bird-watchers as well as the experienced birder will be able to have a high output from this

tour. The pace will be moderate allowing us time to enjoy the birds. The tour leaders will point out birds and identify them as we see them. Read more about the categories here:

<http://fagelguidning.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/F%C3%B6rklaring-kunskap-och-tempo.pdf>

Climate.

March and April generally offers sunny days with pleasant temperatures. The rainy season ends in November but we may see a shower here and there.

Day temperatures may reach 30 degrees with cooler evenings down to 15 degrees. The air is dry so the heat is tolerable.



Havana (CAL)

Clothing.

In nature it is always best to avoid bright colours. We expect day temperatures between 20 and 30 deg. so you'll need the summer clothing. Long sleeves and legs for the cooler evenings also helps prevent mosquito bites.

Good walking shoes are essential.

A hat or cap is highly recommended to protect against the strong sunlight.

Most of our hotels have swimming pools so don't forget your swim suit.

Other equipment.

Binoculars are of course indispensable. The tour leaders bring a telescope and will let everybody enjoy the birds as best possible. If you want to be certain of having access to a telescope all the time you are welcome to bring your own.

This is not a dedicated photography tour but there will be plenty of photo opportunities.

Bring a small bag for the daily walks. Field guide, water bottle and a snack is always good to have at hand.



Open landscape in central Cuba (CAL)

Power supply.

In Cuba we may find both 110V and 220V. It is important to check the voltage before connecting your electric equipment. European plugs will not always fit so bring an adapter for North American plugs with two flat connectors.

Power failures are frequent in some areas. A power bank to charge your phone may be a good idea.

Time zone.

Cuba is 6 hours after Danish/Swedish time (CET).

Cuba has daylight saving time from early March, so local time is 5 hours after CET when we arrive. When we return two weeks later the difference is 6 hours because Europe also will be on daylight saving time by then.

Litterature.

Several field guides cover all the birds of Cuba. The tour leaders will bring "Birds of the West Indies" by Guy M. Kirwan et al. (Lynx 2019).

Many books and homepages about Cuba in general are also available.

This homepage gives good travel advice in English:

<https://www.tourepUBLIC.com/blog/>

Bird list and trip report.

You will receive a bird list on the first day. Every day we will go through the list and note the species we have seen.

The tour leaders will write a trip report and send it to you after the trip.

Our guides.

Mads Elley and Tina Elley have successfully led birding trips in Asia and Africa.

Together they have done many birding trips around the world visiting all 7 continents for bird watching. Both have been birders for more than 40 years. They form an excellent team with a large knowledge of birds, great experience in planning and doing birding trips and are very good at making a group work well together.

During the last 2-3 years they twice visited Puerto Rico and The Dominican Republic, so the Caribbean avifauna is well known.



Mads and Tina Elley will be your tour leaders. Here they are photographed during a birding trip in Cambodia.

Many thanks to

(CAL): Clausjannic Amland-Labuz

(DB): Dave Branagh

for letting us use their pictures from Cuba.

Travel conditions.

Please find further information on the conditions for this tour here:

<http://fagelguidning.se/resevillkor-2/>

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Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or for further information.

See you!

Fågelguidning AB, Mads & Tina!

