

FOYLES HOSPICE CUBA BIKE RIDE

8 – 16 NOVEMBER 2009

Discover Cuba - the Caribbean's largest and least commercialised island and one of the world's last bastions of communism. Spend 5 days cycling through spectacular scenery and towns and villages which seem frozen in time.

Day 1

London - Havana

Fly London – Havana. Afternoon arrival in Havana and 40 minute transfer to hotel for evening meal and overnight. This evening we dine together and hear more about the challenge ahead.

Day 2

Transfer Havana – Bay of Pigs

Bay of Pigs - Yaguaramos

45km approx.

After breakfast, we transfer (3 hours) to the Playa Giron located on the eastern side of the famous Bay of Pigs in the province of Matanzas. On arrival we have a bike fitting followed by lunch. The Bay of Pigs is important in Cuba's history; it was the location of the 1962 invasion when a CIA backed attempt to topple Fidel Castro's revolutionary government met with strong resistance and was ultimately unsuccessful for the invading force. It remains a key event in the continuing bad relations between Cuba and the USA.

After an early lunch we set off on the first day of our challenge. Today's ride is mainly off-road through Zapata Peninsula National Park and small country villages. The surrounding foliage is lush and fertile and we start to get a feel for rural Cuban life. The route follows the coast and gently undulates all the way to the province of Cienfuegos. Cienfuegos is best known as the site of the historic battle between Fulgencio Batista and Che Guevara's guerrillas. On arrival at Yaguaramos we finish today's ride and take a coach transfer to our hotel in the centre of Cienfuegos.

Terrain: Mainly flat off-road with some undulations towards Cienfuegos

Day 3

Cienfuegos – Trinidad

89km approx.

We set off along an undulating coastal road followed by some short sharp hills through beautiful pasture lands. After around 20km we enjoy stunning views of the Escambray mountains across a valley of sugar cane. The road then sweeps up and over gentle hills and we meet the coast just beyond Guajimico. We stop for lunch after 50km at La Vega farm restaurant. The final 30km is on a flat road which clings to the shimmering Caribbean coastline all the way to Trinidad. There are some hillier sections just before Trinidad.

Terrain: Hilly start and end, gentle undulations for most of the day.

Day 4

Trinidad

48km approx.

Today is a circular route, making the most of being in the area around Trinidad. From the hotel we cycle along a gently undulating road towards the outskirts of Trinidad, straight through town and along the coast. We cycle through the picturesque fishing village of La Boca and stop at the beachside bar for a short break. Our route continues along the Caribbean coast before turning inland towards Trinidad, taking in small villages along the way. Time permitting we visit La Torre de Manaca Iznaga, an old colonial sugar plantation. We cycle back to our hotel in Trinidad for lunch followed by a tour of Trinidad, a "museum town" brimming with colonial

architecture which was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1988. Overnight in Trinidad.

Terrain: Gentle hills.

Day 5

Topes de Collantes - Santa Clara

86km approx.

After a transfer this morning we start with a tough 10km uphill section over mountainous peaks through pine trees and eucalyptus before beginning the descent to Santa Clara. Today is the most spectacular in terms of scenery as we cycle through the national park. Palm trees and other tropical plants slowly replace pine forests. We cycle along the valley floor between impressive mountains before reaching the foothills and pastures around Santa Clara. Santa Clara is a vibrant city, busy with street life. It was the first major place to be liberated from Batista's army in December 1958. Today a number of monuments commemorate this important period of Cuba's history, including a statue to the legendary Che Guevara, where we stop for a group photo.

Terrain: First 10km is steep uphill, then sweeping downhill to Santa Clara and gentle hills towards the end of the day.

Day 6

Santa Clara - Cienfuegos

80km approx.

We're unlikely to encounter much traffic this morning. The terrain is flat with the occasional gentle undulation. We cycle through field after field of sugar cane with traditional houses dotted here and there. We enter the Province of Cienfuegos after 33km. The final stretch takes us straight through the colonial heart of this beautiful Caribbean town and onto the Malecon (sea front). From there we'll enjoy the panoramic views across the Bay of Cienfuegos, our final destination. After a celebratory cocktail and buffet lunch overlooking the sea we say goodbye to our bikes. From there it's a 3 hour transfer to Havana. Dinner and overnight.

Day 7

Havana

Today is free to explore Havana independently or as part of a half day optional tour. It is one of the oldest cities in the Americas with winding streets, spacious plazas and glorious Spanish architecture. There is an air of faded glory about the place with paint peeling off buildings and '50s and '60s American automobiles still dominating the roads. The optional tour includes Plaza San Francisco, Plaza de Armas and Plaza de la Catedral followed by some free time for shopping, a visit to Revolution Square and lunch. This evening we enjoy a celebratory meal.

Day 8

Havana

Free morning to relax by the hotel pool or explore Havana independently. Early afternoon we transfer to Havana airport (30 – 40 minutes approx.) for the return flight to London. Lunch not included today.

Day 9

Arrive London

Arrive back in the UK late afternoon.

Please Note: Cuba is a third world country which is not fully geared up to tourism. You should therefore be prepared for changes to the route and accommodation right up to the last minute.

This is a complex itinerary which may be subject to change

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