

# Camagüey Province



Camagüey is cattle country, the island's largest province and home to more cows than people. Aside from large-scale beef production, and an itinerant population of lasso-wielding *vaqueros* (cowboys), the territory also supports a significant industrial infrastructure with the bulk of the factory base located in bay-side Nuevitas, a busy port town which houses a thermo-electric plant, a large cement factory and a thriving sugar export facility.

Further south is Camagüey, the province's labyrinthine capital, a conservative and unashamedly Catholic city, characterized by its signature *tinajones* (clay pots) and weathered collection of colonial churches. In streets so narrow that driving becomes a liability, explorers can choose between a plethora of cool bars and vibrant markets or make a beeline for the gilded auditorium of the Teatro Principal, home of the celebrated Ballet de Camagüey, one of the island's finest professional dance companies.

East of the capital, savannah-like uplands fold gently into the Sierra de Najasa hills, where the little-known Hacienda la Belén reserve shelters several species of exotic animal and provides an important habitat for rare birds. Roads north lead to Playa Santa Lucía, an all-inclusive resort strip that boasts one of Cuba's longest unbroken beaches and harbors some of the country's most accessible diving reefs. For scuba enthusiasts shark-feeding is an underwater highlight, while for wilderness-seekers sweet serendipity can be found on Cayo Sabinal, where development begins and ends with a five-room beach hut.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Colonial Cartography**  
Get lost in Camagüey's wickedly twisted streets (p322)
- **Cuba Safari**  
View wild animals at the Hacienda la Belén Reserve (p332)
- **Long Beach**  
Lap up 20km of unbroken white sand on Playa Santa Lucía (p335)
- **Way-Out Wilderness**  
Escape the all-incs on serendipitous Cayo Sabinal (p334)
- **Free Enterprise**  
Fill up on flavored fruit shakes at fascinating Mercado Agropecuario El Río (p326) in Camagüey



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 32

■ POPULATION: 791,815

■ AREA: 15,900 SQ KM

## CAMAGÜEY

☎ 32 / pop 309,977

The island's third largest settlement, Camagüey is a flat, spread-out city of picturesque churches and languid neoclassical facades that line the narrow, winding streets like Greek temples in pre-Hellenic Athens. Departing from the normal Latin American grid construction, Camagüey was purposefully built in a labyrinthine manner in order to confuse musket-toting pirates who made a habit of attacking the city in the 16th century, despite its supposedly impregnable position 50km inland. It didn't deter British buccaneer Henry Morgan, who duly sacked the magnificent cathedral in 1668 before making off with a hefty booty of gold and jewels.

Some travelers love Camagüey with its secret nooks and crannies (of which there are many, all to be explored). Other travelers are not so enamored by its unsavory reputation for bike thieves and *jineteros* (touts). Located 128km west of Las Tunas and 108km east of Ciego de Ávila, the city's inhabitants – popularly known as 'Agramonteros' by other Cubans, after local Independence War hero Ignacio Agramonte – have a tendency to wear their inherent differences more keenly than their fellow countrymen. You'll find ingrained conservatism here and a strong Roman Catholic tradition most recently exemplified by a 1998 audience with Pope Jean Paul II.

## History

Founded in February 1514 as one of Diego Velázquez' hallowed seven 'villas', Santa María del Puerto Príncipe was originally established on the coast near the site of present-day Nuevitas. Due to a series of bloody rebellions by the local Taíno Indians, the site of the city was moved twice in the early 16th century, finally taking up its present location in 1528.

Camagüey developed quickly in the 1600s – despite continued attacks by pirates and corsairs – with an economy based on sugar production and cattle-rearing. Due to acute water shortages in the area the townsfolk were forced to make *tinajones*, or huge earthenware pots, in order to collect rainwater and even today Camagüey is known as the city of *tinajones* – although the pots now serve a strictly ornamental purpose.

Aside from swashbuckling independence hero Ignacio Agramonte, Camagüey has produced several local personalities of note, including poet and patriot Nicolas Guillén and eminent doctor Carlos J Finlay, the man who was largely responsible for discovering the causes of yellow fever. In 1959 the prosperous citizens quickly fell foul of the Castro revolutionaries when local military commander Huber Matos (Fidel's one-time ally) accused *el líder máximo* (highest leader) of burying the revolution. He was duly arrested and later thrown in prison for his pains.

## Orientation

The irregular street layout makes getting around Camagüey as confusing to visitors as it was to pirates. Luckily, friendly Camagüeyanos are used to baffled travelers asking the way and they've recently put up a series of easy-to-decipher billboards that map out the best historical walking routes.

The train station is on the northern side of town, and several inexpensive hotels are clustered nearby. The city's north-south axis is República, which meets Av Agramonte at the historic La Soledad church. Most of the other hotels, churches and museums are just southwest of the church, in the city center. The Río Hatibonico crosses the southern side of the city center, and the main bus station is on the Carretera Central, about 3km southeast of the river.

## Information

### BOOKSTORES

**Librería Antonio Suárez** (Maceo btwn General Gómez & Plaza Maceo) Carries a large selection of books in Spanish.

**Librería Ateneo** (República No 418 btwn El Solitario & San Martín)

### EMERGENCY

**Asistir** (☎ 28 63 17, 28 65 17; Agramonte No 449 btwn Independencia & República) A 24-hour assistance agency dealing with lost passport/lost luggage/financial difficulties.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Eteca Telepunto** (República btwn San Martín & Ramón Silva, per hr CUC\$6)

### LIBRARIES

**Biblioteca Provincial Julio A Mella** (Parque Ignacio Agramonte; ☎ Mon-Sat)

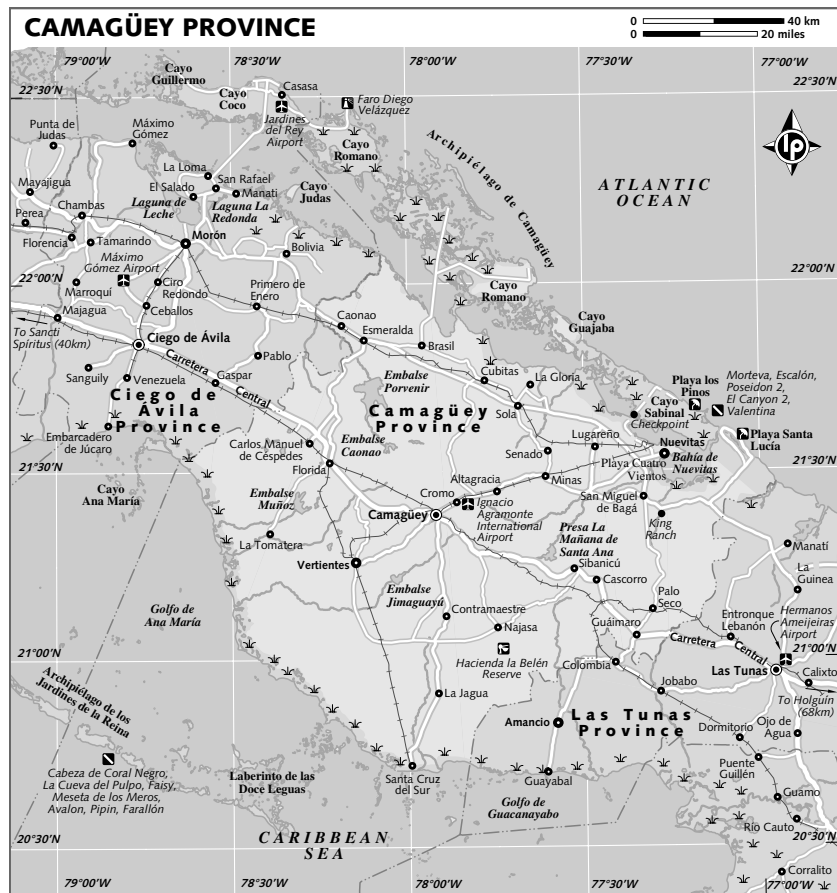
### MEDIA

The local newspaper *Adelante* is published every Saturday. Radio Cadena Agramonte broadcasts in the city over frequencies 910AM and 93.5FM; it's located south of the city by tuning to 1340AM, and to the north, by tuning your radio to 1380AM.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Farmacia Álvarez Fuentes** (Avellaneda No 249; ☎ 24hr) On the corner of Oscar Primelles.

**Farmacia Internacional** (Agramonte No 449 btwn Independencia & República)



## CAMAGÜEY STREET NAMES

To make things even more confusing, locals doggedly stick to using the old names of streets, even though signs and maps (including those in this book) carry the new names. Here's a cheat sheet:

Old name	New name
San Estéban	Oscar Primelles
Estrada Palma	Agramonte
Santa Rita	El Solitario
Francisquito	Quiñones
San José	José Ramón Silva
San Fernando	Bartolomé Masó
Pobre	Padre Olallo
Rosario	Enrique Villuendas

**CAMAGÜEY PROVINCE**

**INFORMATION**

- Parque Martí.....30 C5
- Plaza San Juan de Dios.....31 B6
- UniversiTUR.....32 C3

**SLEEPING**

- Gran Hotel.....33 B4
- Hotel Colón.....34 C2
- Hotel Plaza.....35 C2

**EATING**

- Borjón Don Cayetano.....36 C4
- Caderera Las Ruinas.....37 B4
- Apprential Galería.....38 C4
- El Virral.....40 B5
- (see 33)
- Gran Hotel.....41 B6
- La Campana de Toledo.....42 C2
- La Mandarina Roja.....43 B5
- La Volanta.....44 B6
- Mercado Agropecuario El Río.....44 B7
- Paladar El Cañal.....46 A5
- Panadería Doña Nell.....47 B4
- Parador de los Tres Reyes.....48 B6

**DRINKING**

- Bar El Cambio.....49 B5
- La Bigornia.....50 C3
- La Terraza.....51 C3
- Piano Bar.....(see 33)
- Taberna Bucanero.....52 C3

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- Casa de la Trova Patrio.....53 B5
- Balagás.....54 B5
- libero Americano.....55 C4
- Cine Castañeda.....56 C4
- Cine Encanto.....57 B2
- Estadio Ciudad González.....58 B2
- Salón de Espectáculos.....59 B5
- Salón de Espectáculos.....59 B5
- Salón de Espectáculos.....59 B5
- Salón Polivalente.....60 B4
- Salón Polivalente.....61 B6
- Teatro Principal.....62 B4

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Alba Ferraz.....16 B4
- Casa de Arte Jover.....17 B5
- Casa Finlay.....18 B6
- Casa Natal de Nicolás Guillén.....19 B5
- Casino Campesino.....20 D6
- Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria.....21 B5
- Estudio-Galería Jover.....22 B6
- Hospital de San Juan de Dios.....23 B6
- Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Merced.....24 B4
- Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad.....25 C4
- Mercado Agropecuario El Río.....(see 44)
- Museo Casa Natal de Ignacio Agramonte.....26 B4
- Museo Provincial Ignacio Agramonte.....27 C1
- Nuestra Señora de Sagrado.....28 C5
- Parque Ignacio Agramonte.....29 B5

**SHOPPING**

- Ayer's Bank.....63 C3
- Galeries ACA.....64 B4
- Photo Service.....65 B4
- Tienda El Carriel.....66 B5

**TRANSPORT**

- Airport Bus 22.....67 D2
- Cubana.....68 C3
- El Sereno Parqueo.....69 C4
- Parking Lot.....70 B3
- Regional Bus Station.....71 C1
- Sevi-Cupet Gas Station.....72 C7
- Sevi-Cupet Gas Station.....73 C6
- Train Ticket Office.....74 C2
- Transur.....(see 35)

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**Policlínico Integral Rodolfo Ramírez Esquivel**

(☎ 28 14 81; cnr Ignacio Sánchez & Joaquín de Agüero) North of the level crossing from the Hotel Plaza; they will treat foreigners in an emergency.

**MONEY**

**Banco de Crédito y Comercio** (cnr Av Agramonte & Cisneros)

**Banco Financiero Internacional** (☎ 29 48 46; Independencia btwn Hermanos Agüero & Martí)

**Cadeca** (República No 353 btwn Oscar Primelles & El Solitario; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8:30am-1pm Sun)

**POST**

**Post office** (Av Agramonte No 461 btwn Independencia & Cisneros; ☎ 8am-6pm)

**TELEPHONE**

**Etesca** (Avellaneda No 308) Near Oscar Primelles.

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

**Cubanacán** Gran Hotel (☎ 29 49 05; Maceo No 67 btwn Agramonte & General Gómez); El Colonial Galería (Av Agramonte) Organized tours to Santa Lucía.

**Cubatur** (☎ 25 47 85; Av Agramonte No 421 btwn República & Independencia)

**Islazul** (☎ 29 25 50; Av Agramonte; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 8:30-11:30am Sat) Behind Iglesia de la Merced.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

There have been reports of thefts in Camagüey's narrow, winding streets, mainly from bag-snatchers who then jump onto the back of a waiting bicycle for a quick getaway. Keep your money-belt tied firmly around your waist and don't invite attention.

**Sights & Activities**

Erected in 1848, this former Spanish cavalry barracks just north of the train station became the Hotel Camagüey after independence in 1902 and the **Museo Provincial Ignacio Agramonte** (☎ 28 24 25; Av de los Mártires No 2; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Thu & Sat, 2:30-10pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sun) in 1948. Its collection (one of Cuba's biggest) is heavy on history, natural history and fine arts. There are three paintings by local late-19th-century artist Fidelio Ponce. Notice the big *tinajones* in the courtyard and the 2nd-floor caryatid columns on the crumbling building diagonally across the street.

**Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Merced** (Plaza de los Trabajadores) is Camagüey's most impressive

colonial church and it has a long history. According to legend, a miraculous figure floated from the watery depths here in 1601 and it has been a spot worth worshipping ever since. This structure was built in 1748 and rebuilt in 1848. The active convent in the cloister attached to the church is distinguished by its two-level arched interior, the **catacombs** (where church faithful were buried until 1814) and the dazzling **Santo Sepulcro**, a solid silver coffin.

**Plaza San Juan de Dios** (cnr Hurtado & Paco Recio) is one of Camagüey's most picturesque corners and the town's only plaza retaining its original layout and buildings; make sure you have film for this one. **Hospital de San Juan de Dios** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 8am-4:30pm Mon-Sat) is a national monument with a front cloister dating from 1728 and a unique triangular rear patio with Moorish touches, built in 1840. Until 1902, this was a hospital administered by Father José Olallo, who is being considered for sainthood for his work here. The sprawling San Juan de Dios has filled many functions in years past, serving as a military hospital, teacher's college and refuge during the 1932 cyclone. In 1991 the building reverted to the Centro Provincial de Patrimonio, which directs the restoration of Camagüey's monuments.

**Plaza del Carmen** (Hermanos Agüero btwn Honda & Carmen), 600m west of the bustle of Av República, is Camagüey's prettiest (and least visited). Potted palms contrast with pastel facades and big *tinajones* laze around like Rubens' models. Benches and little incandescent street lamps, plus sculptures dotted about, make it a romantic corner at sunset.

**Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad** (cnr Avs República & Agramonte) is a massive brick structure dating from 1775. It has a picturesque tower and formidable facade, which is good because you probably won't gain access to see the baroque frescoes within as this church is usually shut tight as a drum. Just north of the church is the quaint **Callejón de la Soledad**, a little alley with an outdoor café and live music most nights.

If you visit just one market in Cuba make sure it's the **Mercado Agropecuario El Río**. Hugging the banks of the Río Hatibonico and characterized by its *pregónes* (singsong often comic offering of wares) ringing through the stalls, the choices at

**POET OF THE PEOPLE**

Born in Camagüey in 1902, mulatto poet Nicolás Guillén was far more than just a writer, he was a passionate and lifelong champion of Afro-Cuban rights. Rocked by the assassination of his father in his youth and inspired by the drum-influenced music of former African slaves, Guillén set about articulating the hopes and fears of dispossessed black laborers with the rhythmic Afro-Cuban verses that would ultimately become his trademark. Famous poems in a prolific career included the evocative *Tengo* and the patriotic *Che Comandante, Amigo*.

Working in self-imposed exile during the Batista years, Guillén returned to Cuba after the revolution whereupon he was given the task of formulating a new cultural policy and setting up the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (Uneca; National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists), a body of which he became president in 1961. His modest **Casa Natal** (Hermanos Agüero No 58; admission free; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm) gives visitors a small insight into the man and his books and today doubles up as the **Instituto Superior de Arte** where local students come to study music.

the Mercado El Río are quite amazing for a country worn-down by rationing and discouraged from participating in most forms of private enterprise. Check out the *herberos* (purveyors of herbs, potions and secret elixirs), huge avocados (in season), bundles of garlic and the delicious *batidos* (fruit shakes) served with crushed ice in no-nonsense jam jars. Be sure to keep a tight hold on your money belt.

The spotless **Parque Ignacio Agramonte** (cnr Martí & Independencia) in the heart of the city welcomes visitors with rings of marble benches and an equestrian statue (1950) of Camagüey's hero. On the southern side of the square is the **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria** (Cisneros No 168), rebuilt in the 19th century on the site of an earlier church dating from 1530. This cathedral, like many of Camagüey's churches, was restored with funds that flooded in after the 1998 visit of Pope John Paul II.

Opposite La Merced, on the corner of Independencia, is the **Museo Casa Natal de Ignacio Agramonte** (☎ 29 71 16; Av Agramonte No 459; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10am-5:45pm Tue-Thu, 8am-noon Sun), the birthplace of the independence hero Ignacio Agramonte (1841-73), the cattle rancher who led the revolt against Spain in this area in 1868. In July 1869, rebel forces under Agramonte bombarded Camagüey, and four years later he was killed in action (aged only 32) fighting against the Spanish. Nicknamed 'El Mayor' (The Major), you can hear Silvio Rodríguez' anthem to this hero on his disc *Días y Flores*.

With no shortage of heroes, Camagüey was also where Carlos J Finlay was born. The small **Casa Finlay** (☎ 29 67 45; Cristo btwn

Cisneros & Lugareño; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Thu & Sat) documents the doctor's life and his medical breakthrough that discovered how mosquitoes transmit yellow fever. There's a splendid indoor patio and cafeteria.

Camagüey is full of surprising plazas just off center, like **Parque Martí** (cnr República & Luaces), a few blocks west of Parque Ignacio Agramonte. It is fronted by the Cuban-Gothic **Nuestra Corazón de Sagrado Jesús**. With its ornate stained glass, iron work and triple-spire facade, this church will be a dazzler once it emerges from its scaffold cocoon.

Across the bridge over the Río Hatibonico is the **Casino Campestre**, a large, enjoyable park with lots of shaded benches, a ball-park, concerts and activities. Get one of the ubiquitous bici-taxis to pedal you around.

**Courses**

Señora **Alba Ferraz** (☎ 28 30 30; Ramón Guerrero No 106 btwn General Espinosa & Oscar Primelles) is an enthusiastic local dance and music teacher from the Escuela de Arte (famous for its ballet and music). She offers lessons in salsa and classical dance plus guitar, *tres* (seven-string guitar) and percussion. All levels are welcome (CUC\$5 per hour).

**UniversiTUR** (☎ 29 25 61; omarihe@yahoo.com; Avellaneda No 281 btwn Oscar Primelles & El Solitario; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), can arrange Spanish classes at Camagüey University with accommodation thrown in. Prices and syllabuses are similar to Habana. Drop by or call ahead.

**Festivals & Events**

The **Jornadas de la Cultura Camagüeyana** festival, commemorating the founding of the city, take place during the first two weeks of

February. Rocking **Carnaval** is from June 24 to 29. The 10 days beginning on October 10 are also cultural celebrations, during which many musical events take place.

### Sleeping

Camagüey has a varied selection of places to stay, all reasonably priced. Look for something with a roof terrace, as Camagüey's city views, dotted with steeples and towers, domes and terra-cotta, are a highlight.

### IN TOWN

**Hotel Plaza** (Islazul; ☎ 28 24 13; Van Horne No 1; s/d/tr with breakfast low season CUC\$25/32/36, high season CUC\$27/38/42; 📞 📺) No two rooms are alike in this gracious colonial-style hotel built at the turn of the 20th century, so look at a few for variety. All have sitting areas, TVs and big fridges – at good prices. The lobby is a place to relax, with especially nice staff; despite its queasy color, the lobby bar is the logical chill spot while waiting for nearby train departures. The station is directly opposite.

**Hotel Colón** (Islazul; ☎ 28 33 46; República No 472 btwn San José & San Martín; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$32/38, high season CUC\$36/44; 📞 📺) This recently updated, two-story hotel has color-

ful tile-flanked walls and a stained-glass portrait of Christopher Columbus over the lobby door. There are rocking chairs upstairs and a colonial patio out back, adding atmosphere. This place is a good, sturdy choice.

**Gran Hotel** (Islazul; ☎ 29 20 93; Maceo No 67 btwn Agramonte & General Gómez; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$38/52, high season CUC\$50/58; 📞 📺 📺 📺) For amenities and charm in the heart of the city, this hotel dating from 1939 is the place. The 72 clean rooms are reached by a worn marble staircase or ancient lift replete with endearing attendants and antique gate. There are birds'-eye citywide views from the 5th-floor restaurant and rooftop *mirador* (lookout). An atmospheric piano bar is accessed through the lobby and an elegant renaissance-style swimming pool shimmers out back.

### OUTSIDE TOWN

**Hotel Camagüey** (Islazul; ☎ 28 72 67; Carretera Central Este Km 4.5; s/d with buffet breakfast CUC\$36/47; 📞 📺 📺) About 5km southeast of the center, this four-story, 142-room hotel built in the 1970s was closed indefinitely to house Misión Milagros (p449) patients. Phone ahead to check current status.

### CASAS PARTICULARES – CAMAGÜEY

**Alba Ferraz** (☎ 28 30 30; misleydis2000@yahoo.com; Ramón Guerrero No 106 btwn General Espinosa & Oscar Primelles; r CUC\$20-25; 📞) Two rooms sharing a bath open onto pretty colonial courtyard. Ask about dance and music lessons. There's a roof terrace.

**Alex & Yanitze** (☎ 29 78 97; Ramón Guerrero No 104 btwn General Espinosa & Oscar Primelles; r CUC\$20-25). Huge bath, along with TV and comfortable bed.

**Carmen González Fonseca** (☎ 29 69 30; Ignacio Agramonte No 229 btwn Pobre & Alegría; r CUC\$20-25; 📞) A nice self-contained room on top floor with own terrace and fridge. Extra bonus is a garage.

**'Casa Blanca' – Blanca Navarro Castro** (☎ 29 35 42; San Ramón Apto 201 Altos btwn Heredia & Solitario; r CUC\$20; 📞) Sleeps three, friendly.

**'Casa de Caridad' – Caridad García Valera** (☎ 29 15 54; sracaridad@cubasi.cu; Oscar Primelles No 310A btwn Bartolomé Masó & Padre Olallo; r CUC\$20; 📞) Friendly home, safe, huge garden/patio, meals, next to elementary school (read: early morning kid noise).

**Casa Lancara** (☎ 28 31 87; Avellaneda No 160 btwn Ignacio Agramonte & Jaime; r CUC\$20-25) All mod-cons near the Iglesia de la Soledad.

**'Casa Monolo' – Manuel Rodríguez Jaén** (☎ 29 44 03; El Solitario No 18 btwn República & Santa Rosa; r CUC\$20; 📞) Rooms with private or shared bath, laundry, roof terrace.

**'El Hostal de Elsa' – Elsa Espinosa** (☎ 29 81 04; Bartolomé Masó btwn Triana & Tío Perico; r CUC\$20; 📞) Shared bath, meals, quiet.

**La Rusa** (☎ 28 38 98; liuda98@yahoo.es; Avellaneda No 306 btwn San Esteban & San Martín; r CUC\$20; 📞) Russian lady with two rooms in large house. Serves up a mean borscht.

**'Los Vitrales' – Emma Barreto y Requejo** (☎ 29 58 66; Calle Avellaneda No 3 btwn General Gómez y Martí; r CUC\$20; 📞) Painstakingly restored colonial house, each (darkish) room different; serves meals.

### Eating

#### RESTAURANTS

Camagüey has an excellent selection of restaurants and new ones are popping up all the time (unusual for Cuba). The bars are equally zany.

**La Volanta** (☎ 29 19 74; cnr Independencia & Luaces; dishes 15 pesos; 📞) seatings at 6pm, 8pm & 10pm) An upscale peso restaurant on the southeast corner of Parque Agramonte, housed in a building that dates from 1732. Locals reserve their tables early here to dine on overflowing plates of Cuban food.

**La Mandarina Roja** (☎ 29 02 67; Padre Olallo No 731 btwn San Martín & José Ramón Silva; dishes 15-22 pesos; 📞) noon-3pm & 7-10pm Thu-Tue) For a real peso paladar experience, head to this Chinese-inspired place serving large portions of chop suey, soup or fried rice. The food is as good as it is at any Cuban-Chinese crossover restaurant (which isn't always saying much).

**Bodegón Don Cayetano** (☎ 2619 61; República No 79) One of the best eating joints has to be this place, tucked away behind the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad. Specializing in Spanish fare, this tavern-themed tapas bar has seating options inside or al fresco at wooden bench tables and offers both good service and excellent coffee. Try the chef's special: beef steak in red wine and mushroom sauce (CUC\$5.50).

**La Campana de Toledo** (Plaza San Juan de Dios No 18; meals CUC\$7; 📞) 10am-10pm) This classic Camagüey eatery has colonial digs, shady patio and a serenading quartet. Parador de los Tres Reyes, adjacent, is similar.

**Paladar El Cardenal** (Martí No 309; dishes CUC\$7-8; 📞) 11am-11pm) This old Camagüey standby is popular for a reason: seriously good *comida criolla* (traditional Cuban food, usually rice and beans, sometimes with pork) and lots of it. Try the pork steak, salad, *tostones* (fried plantains) and *congrí* (rice flecked with beans).

**Paladar El Califa** (Raúl Lamar No 49a btwn Cisneros & Lugareño; meals CUC\$8; 📞) noon-midnight) This is an intimate and recently refurbished paladar that is renowned for its huge portions of *uruguayano* (a type of pork fillet) and cordon bleu. One of Camagüey's longest standing eating houses.

**El Ovejito** (☎ 29 25 24; Hermanos Agüero btwn Honda & Carmen; 📞) noon-9:40pm Wed-Mon) With a seriously stunning location on the Plaza del

Carmen, this 'little lamb' restaurant serves just that in a colonial setting: lamb chops, lamb fricassee and the odd steak.

**Gran Hotel** (Maceo No 67 btwn Agramonte & General Gómez; dinner buffet CUC\$12) The restaurant here has superb city views and a palatable buffet; get there early.

**El Colonial Galería** (cnr Av Agramonte & República) This place has a nice restaurant along with a courtyard that holds nightly cabaret.

### CAFETERIAS

**Gran Hotel snack bar** (Maceo No 67 btwn Agramonte & General Gómez; 📞) 9am-11pm) The lively snack bar here, accessible off Maceo, has coffee, sandwiches, chicken and ice cream. The hamburgers are good and the atmosphere is 1950s retro.

**El Vitral** (Hotel Plaza, Van Horne No 1; 📞) 24hr) This place at the Hotel Plaza is a round-the-clock option.

**Cafetería Las Ruinas** (Plaza Maceo) This is an atmospheric colonial patio for taking drinks and snacks.

Never far away is the **Coppelia** (Independencia btwn Agramonte & General Gómez). Can you resist Cuba's ubiquitous ice-creamery?

### GROCERIES

**Mercado Agropecuario El Río** (Calle Matadero; 📞) 7am-6pm) Eat heartily on peso sandwiches and fresh *batidos* (sold in jam jars) at this place above the Río Hatibonico. Also sells an excellent selection of fruit and vegetables.

A large selection of groceries is available at **El Encanto** (Maceo), near General Gómez. For bread in Convertibles, there's **Panadería Doña Neli** (Maceo; 📞) 7am-7pm), opposite the Gran Hotel.

### Drinking

Camagüey, harking back to its pirate past, has some great tavern-style drinking houses.

**Bar El Cambio** (cnr Independencia & Martí; 📞) 7am until you drop) This is a popular hang-out on Parque Agramonte with rough-hewn tables and graffiti-covered walls, à la Habana's famous Bodeguita del Medio bar (much frequented by Hemingway). Check out the interestingly-named cocktails.

**La Terraza** (Av República No 352; 📞) 8am-midnight) Teetotalers need not apply: this open-air peso place is a favorite party spot for getting smashed on peso beer and rum.

### STUDIO VISITS IN CAMAGÜEY

You might not know it, but behind the beautiful grillwork of those grandiose Spanish colonial facades, Camagüey's artists are busy capturing their inspiration in great works of art. One couple worth checking out are Joel Jover and Ileana Sánchez, both of whom are accomplished painters with regular exhibitions and excellent contacts within the Cuban art world. Their magnificent home **Casa de Arte Jover** (☎ 29 23 05; Martí No 154 btwn Independencia & Cisneros) displaying much of their work is in Plaza Agramonte. Joel also runs another studio outlet at **Estudio-Galería Jover** (Ramón Pinto No 109; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Sat) in Plaza San Juan de Dios.

**Taberna Bucanero** (República btwn El Solitario & San Martín; ☎ 2-11pm) This place has Bucanero beer on tap and fake pirate figures crowding out a bar more reminiscent of an English pub.

**La Bigornia** (República btwn El Solitario & Oscar Primelles) This is a new fancy place that attracts a young, well-dressed Cuban crowd. The walls are decked out in lurid purple and a boutique bar-restaurant is overlooked by a mezzanine-level sports shop.

**Gran Hotel piano bar** (Maceo No 67 btwn Agramonte & General Gómez; ☎ 1pm-2am) This atmospheric place has a long wooden bar, vintage jukebox and grand piano; live music happens nightly after 9pm.

### Entertainment

Every Saturday night, the raucous **Noche Camagüeyana** spreads up República from La Soledad to the train station with food and alcohol stalls, music and crowds. A rock or *reggaeton* (Cuban hip-hop) concert takes place in the square next to La Soledad. The Galería ACAA has a bulletin board with the week's cultural events posted.

### FOLK MUSIC

**Casa de la Trova Patricio Ballagas** (☎ 29 13 57; Cisneros No 171 btwn Martí & Cristo; ☎ Tue-Sun) Folk singers jam here, at what most agree is one of Cuba's best *trova* (traditional poetic singing) clubs, tourists or no tourists.

**Galería Uneac** (Cisneros No 159; ☎ 5pm & 9pm Sat) Folk singing and Afro-Cuban dancing happen at this place, south of the cathedral.

### Centro de Promoción Cultural Ibero Americano

(Cisneros btwn General Gómez & Hermanos Agüero) Check out what's happening at this cultural center housed in the former Spanish Club, which hosts tango nights and the like.

### DANCE CLUB

**Sala de Fiesta Disco Café** (Independencia No 208; ☎ 10pm-3am) If you miss the weekly Saturday street shindig try this popular local nightspot.

### THEATER

**Teatro Principal** (☎ 29 30 48; Padre Valencia No 64; admission CUC\$5-10; ☎ 8:30pm Fri, Sat & 5pm Sun) Home of Ballet de Camagüey, Cuba's second most important ballet company (founded in 1971 by Fernando Alonso, ex-husband of famous dancer Alicia Alonso), see these talented, athletic dancers if you can. The theater building, erected in 1850, has impressive chandeliers and stained glass, and is worth a look.

**Sala Teatro José Luis Tasende** (☎ 29 21 64; Ramón Guerrero No 51; ☎ 8:30pm Sat & Sun) For serious live theater, it's this venue with quality Spanish-language performances.

### CINEMAS

For big-screen showings, head to **Cine Casa-blanca** (Ignacio Agramonte No 428). Next door, **Cine Encanto** (Ignacio Agramonte) shows videos.

### SPORTS

**Estadio Cándido González** (Av Tarafa) From October to April, baseball games are held here alongside Casino Campestre.

**Salón Polivalente** (Plaza de la Revolución) This place is nearby Estadio Cándido González, behind the huge Monumento a Ignacio Agramonte, and hosts other athletic matches.

### Shopping

Calle Maceo is Camagüey's top shopping street, with a number of souvenir shops, bookstores and department stores. Look here for consignment shops selling all kinds of peso treasure.

**Galería ACAA** (cnr Ramón Guerrero & Padre Valencia; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Original Cuban handicrafts, photography and art pottery are the strengths in this store. For more personal service you can arrange studio visits with local artists (see left).

Other shops:

**ARTex Souvenir** (República No 381) On the main drag.

**Photo Service** (Av Agramonte 430 btwn República & San Ramón) Sells instant cameras, film and batteries.

**Tienda El Cartel** (Cisneros No 208) For compact discs, check out this store north of Parque Agramonte.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Ignacio Agramonte International Airport (airport code CBG) is 9km northeast of town on the road to Nuevitas and Playa Santa Lucía.

**Cubana** (☎ 26 10 00; República No 400) has daily flights to Habana (CUC\$93 one way, one hour 35 minutes). **Air Transat** (www.airtransat.com) and **Skyservice** (www.skyserviceairlines.com) fly in the all-inclusive crowd from Toronto, who are hastily bussed off to Playa Santa Lucía.

#### BUS & TRUCK

The regional **bus station** (Av Carlos J Finlay), near the train station, has trucks to Nuevitas (20 pesos, 87km, twice daily) and Santa Cruz del Sur (20 pesos, 82km, three daily). Trucks to Playa Santa Lucía (10 pesos, 109km, three daily) leave from here as well: ask for *el último* (last in the queue) inside the station and you'll be given a paper with a number; line up at door No 2 and wait for your number to come up.

Long-distance Astro buses depart **Álvaro Barba Bus Station** (☎ 27 24 80; Carretera Central), 3km southeast of the center. Aside from the normal Viazul routes these buses also call at Baracoa (CUC\$28, 11 hours, alternate days), Manzanillo (CUC\$11, seven hours, alternate days), Matanzas (CUC\$22, eight hours, alternate days) and Cienfuegos (CUC\$16, 4½ hours, alternate days).

**Viazul** (☎ 27 01 94; www.viazul.com) has daily services to the following destinations:

Destination	Cost (one way)	Departure time
Ciego de Ávila	CUC\$6	3:35am, 11:10pm, 4:50pm, 2:25am
Habana	CUC\$33	3:35am, 11:10pm, 4:50pm
Sancti Spiritus	CUC\$10	3:35am, 11:10pm, 4:50pm, 2:25am
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$18	6:20pm, 12:10am, 6:30am, 2:25am
Trinidad	CUC\$15	2:25am

The Santiago de Cuba departure also stops at Las Tunas (CUC\$7, two hours), Holguín (CUC\$11, three hours 10 minutes) and Bayamo (CUC\$11, 4½ hours). The Habana bus stops at Santa Clara (CUC\$15, four hours 35 minutes). For Viazul tickets, see the *jefe de turno* (shift manager).

Passenger trucks to Las Tunas and Ciego de Ávila also leave from this station. Arriving before 9am will greatly increase your chances of getting on one of these trucks.

Private taxi can be hired on Calle Perú outside the bus station, but not to Playa Santa Lucía or Cayo Coco, where they face heavy police controls. Expect to pay considerably more than the bus fare for long hauls.

#### TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 28 32 14; cnr Avellaneda & Finlay) is more conveniently located than the bus station. Foreigners buy tickets in Convertibles from an unmarked office across the street from the entrance to Hotel Plaza. The trains may leave from another terminal nearby, so check on this and arrive early. See p332 for more information on train routes.

### Getting Around

#### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Bus 22 'Albaisa' (CUC\$0.40) runs to Ignacio Agramonte International Airport every 30 minutes on weekdays and hourly on weekends, from the stop facing Parque Finlay, opposite the regional bus station. A taxi to the airport should cost CUC\$5 from town.

#### BICI-TAXIS

Bicycle taxis are found on the square beside La Soledad or in Plaza Maceo. Technically, bici-taxis aren't permitted to carry tourists, but they do; they usually cost five pesos.

#### CAR

Prices start at around CUC\$60 a day depending on make of car and duration of hire.

**Havanautos** Hotel Camagüey (☎ 27 22 39; Carretera Central Este Km 4.5; Aeropuerto Ignacio Agramonte (☎ 28 70 67))

**Micar** (☎ 8-7267/8; Carretera Centro Este Km 4.5 btwn bus station & Hotel Camagüey)

## TRAIN INFORMATION FOR CAMAGÜEY

Destination	Cost (one way) regular/rápido	Distance (Km)	Travel time (hours)	Departure time
Bayamo	CUC\$7	210	5	6:10pm, alt days
Guantánamo	CUC\$13	371	7	12:06am
Habana	CUC\$22	534	7-10	12:25am, 3:55am, 4:34pm, 9:55pm, 11:47pm
Holguín	CUC\$8	209	4	5:11am, alt days
Las Tunas	CUC\$4/10	128	2½	1:50pm
Manzanillo	CUC\$9	217	6	5:40am, alt days
Matanzas	CUC\$16/22	474	8	4:30am, alt days
Santa Clara	CUC\$9	263	5½	12:39am
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$11/16	327	5-7	1:22am, 2:58pm, 1:24am, 3:27pm

**Transtur** (☎ 27 10 15; Hotel Plaza, Van Horne No 1)  
Rents mopeds.

**El Sereno Parqueo** (República No 212; ☎ 24hr) offers 24 hours of guarded parking south of Agramonte for CUC\$2. Another guarded **parking lot** (El Solitario No 22) is to be found west of República, and is convenient for travelers renting private rooms in the surrounding area.

There are two **Servi-Cupet gas stations** (Carretera Central; ☎ 24hr) near Av de la Libertad. Driving in Camagüey's narrow one-way streets is a sport akin to Olympic tobogganing. Avoid it if you possibly can.

## LA HACIENDA LA BELÉN RESERVE

Nestled in the grassy uplands of the Sierra de Najasa, the **La Hacienda la Belén** (☎ 3-4249) is a nature reserve run by the travel agency Ecotur situated approximately 30km east of Camagüey. As well as boasting a fine display of (nonindigenous) exotic animals such as zebras, deer, bulls and horses, the park functions as a bird reserve, and is one of the best places in Cuba to view rare species such as the Cuban parakeet, the giant kingbird and the Antillean palm swift.

There is a swimming pool and restaurant on-site, as well as accommodation provided in a rustic **hacienda** (4-bed w with bath CUC\$15). Treks can be arranged around the reserve by jeep, horseback or on foot. You'll need your own wheels to get there or you can negotiate a rate with a taxi in Camagüey.

## HORSE CARTS

Horse carts shuttle along a fixed route between the bus station and the train station, though you may have to change carts at Casino Campestre, near the river.

## FLORIDA

☎ 32 / pop 53,441

The buzzing sugar-mill town of Florida, 46km northwest of Camagüey on the way to Ciego de Ávila, is a fine place to spend the night if you're driving around central Cuba and are too tired to negotiate the labyrinthine streets of Camagüey. There's a working rodeo, a hospital and an Etecsa telephone office.

## Sleeping &amp; Eating

**Hotel Florida** (Islazul; ☎ 5-3011; Carretera Central; s/d low season CUC\$20/26, high season CUC\$24/32; 🚽) This two-story hotel, 2km west of the center of town, has 74 adequate rooms. The entry drive is potholed which sort of sets the tone for this place, but the staff here are friendly and the price no more than a local casa particular.

Don't confuse this place with the **Motel Florida** (☎ 5-4623), a 15-cabin peso motel 4km east, by the highway at the eastern entrance to Florida.

Next to the Hotel Florida is Cafetería Caney, a thatched restaurant that's better value than the fly-blown hotel restaurant.

## Getting There &amp; Away

A **Servi-Cupet gas station** (Carretera Central) is in the center of town. Passenger trucks run from Florida to Camagüey.

## GUÁIMARO

pop 35,813

Guáimaro earned its place in Cuban history as the site of the assembly of April 1869, which approved the first Cuban constitution and called for emancipation of slaves. The assembly also elected Carlos Manuel de Céspedes as president. These events are commemorated by a large **monument** erected in 1940 on Parque Constitución in the center of town. Around the base of the monument are bronze plaques with the likenesses of José Martí, Máximo Gómez, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Ignacio Agramonte, Calixto García and Antonio Maceo, the stars of Cuban independence. If you're making a pit stop there's a small **museum** (Calle Constitución No 83 btwn Libertad & Máximo Gómez; admission CUC\$1) with a couple of rooms given to art and history. Guáimaro is also famous for its sculpture culture.

There is a Servi-Cupet gas station on your entry into town from Camagüey with an El Rápido snack bar attached. There are also seven legal casas in town. One of the better ones is **Casa de Magalis** (☎ 8-2891; Calle Olimpo No 5 btwn Benito Morell & Carretera Central; r CUC\$20-25) a super upper-floor apartment with, quite possibly, the largest bathroom in any casa in Cuba.

## MINAS

pop 21,708

Minas, 60km northeast of Camagüey en route to Nuevitas, is notable only for the

musical-instrument factory that opened here in 1976. The **Fábrica de Violines** (Camilo Cienfuegos; admission CUC\$2; ☎ Mon-Sat), at the eastern entrance to town, might interest musicians.

## NUEVITAS

pop 40,607

Nuevitas, 87km northeast of Camagüey, is a 27km jaunt north off the Camagüey-Playa Santa Lucía road. It's an industrial town and sugar-exporting port with friendly locals and easy shore access, but not worth a major detour. In 1978 Cuban movie director Manuel Octavio Gómez filmed his revolutionary classic *Una Mujer, Un Hombre, Una Ciudad* here.

## Sights

Nuevitas' only specific sight is the **Museo Histórico Municipal** (Máximo Gómez No 66; admission CUC\$1; ☎ Tue-Sun) near Parque del Cañón in the center of town. It's got the usual stuffed animal collection, and you can hike up the steps in the center of town for terrific views.

Below the Hotel Caonaba is a shaggy amusement park/playground combination kids will like. A bit further along the coast is **Playa Cuatro Vientos**, a local beach, from where you can see two of the three small islands, called Los Tres Ballenatos, in the Bahía de Nuevitas. If you snake along the coast for 2km, you'll come to **Santa Rita** at

## TWO WHEELS ARE BETTER THAN FOUR

With the abrupt ending of 30 years of preferential Soviet oil subsidies in the early 1990s, the Cuban government elected to counter a potential transport catastrophe by purchasing 1.2 million bicycles from China.

Laden down with excess weight and bereft of any of the standard gear/brake components that regular bikers take for granted, these boneshakers were cumbersome machines to say the least. Not that the locals had any cause for complaint. The Cubans have always prided themselves on their mechanical ingenuity and after 40 years of stuffing Lada engines under the hoods of vintage Chevrolets it's easy to see why. In the true spirit of the 'waste not, want not' rationing economy the bikes were quickly stripped down and redesigned a few pounds or so lighter. Pretty soon even members of the government were using them.

'With bicycles we will improve the quality of life in our society', suggested an ecologically reborn Castro who still preferred the convenience of his obligatory black Mercedes to a rebuilt metal coat hanger on wheels.

He had a point. In Cuba the so-called cycling revolution has played a large part in eliminating a culture of idleness and sloth. Almost overnight a transportation system based on fume-belching East European buses and ugly Russian Ladas was transformed into one 99% reliant on pedal power. For eco-watchers the regression was almost admirable.

### CUBA'S LAST WILDERNESS

Carpeted by expansive mangrove swamps and home to an estimated 30,000 flamingos, Cayo Romano is one of Cuba's last true wilderness areas. Largely ignored by contemporary travelers and virtually unvisited, save for the odd binocular-wielding ornithologist, two causeways link this most lonesome and untamed of northern keys with Cayo Coco in the west and Camagüey Province to the south. Ernest Hemingway first championed the island's desolate and barren beaches in his posthumously published Cuban classic *Islands in the Stream* in the early '40s and in 1947 a young Fidel Castro hid out in adjoining Cayo Confites for 52 days training for an abortive plot to overthrow the dictatorial Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. Other than that, not much has ignited the party here since Columbus first rolled by in 1494.

Targeted for future tourist development along the lines of Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo, Cayo Romano – the Cuban government claims – could one day play host to more than 5000 hotel rooms. For the time being, however, equipped with a set of wheels, a large dose of mosquito repellent and a true sense of do-it-yourself adventure, the place is all yours.

the end of the road, a friendly place with a pier jutting into the bay.

En route to Playa Santa Lucía, 4km beyond the crossroads where you join the main highway from Camagüey, is the **King Ranch** (Carretera de Santa Lucía km 35), 1.5km off the main highway (signposted) with a restaurant, rodeo and horses for rent. Tour groups are often brought here for a country-style experience.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Caonaba** (Islazul; ☎ 4-4803; cnr Martí & Albisa; s/d low season CUC\$20/26, high season CUC\$24/32) This friendly, three-story hotel is on a rise overlooking the sea. It's at the entrance to town as you arrive from Camagüey. The rooms have fridges and some have views; but don't expect the Ritz. In summer, you can eat at the restaurant, 200m along the coast from the amusement park. This is a favorite local swimming spot. The hotel also has a terrace bar (open from noon till late).

### Getting There & Away

Nuevitas is the terminus of railway lines from Camagüey via Minas and Santa Clara via Chambas and Morón. The station is near the waterfront on the northern side of town. There should be a daily train to Camagüey (5:15am), and a service on alternate days to Santa Clara (6:35am), but they are often canceled. Trucks are more reliable than buses. Trucks to Camagüey leave around 4:30am and 9am; to Santa Lucía there are trucks at 4am and 1pm.

A Servi-Cupet gas station is at the entrance to town, a block from Hotel Caonaba. There's a Transtur taxi office nearby.

### CAYO SABINAL

Cayo Sabinal, 22km to the north of Nuevitas, is virgin territory, a 30km-long coral key with marshes favored by flamingos and iguanas. The land cover is mainly flat and characterized by marshland and lagoons. The fauna consists of tree rats, wild boar and a large variety of butterflies. It's astoundingly beautiful.

Cayo Sabinal has quite some history for a wilderness area. Due to repeated pirate attacks in the 17th and 18th centuries the Spanish built the **San Hilario fort** here in 1831 to restore order and keep the marauding corsairs at bay. Some years later the fort became a prison and in 1875 it was witness to the only Carlist uprising (a counter-revolutionary movement in Spain that opposed the reigning monarchy) in Cuba. There is also a lighthouse, **Faro Colón** (Punta Matemillo), erected in 1848 and one of the oldest still in operation on the Cuban archipelago. As a result of various naval battles that were fought in the area over the centuries there are a number of classic wrecks resting in shallow waters nearby. Vessels include the Spanish treasure ships *Nuestra Señora de Alta Gracia* and the *Pizarro* and they provide great fodder for divers.

### Sleeping & Eating

Of Cayo Sabinal's 30km of beaches Playa Los Pinos is undoubtedly the best. There are five basic **cabins** (s/d CUC\$25) here as well as the diminutive Restaurante Los Pinos which rustles up seafood right out of the sea – literally. Any other activities are strictly of a do-it-yourself variety. Try hiking, strolling,

swimming, stretching, writing, thinking, philosophizing or meditating. Everything seems to be more accentuated here.

### Getting There & Away

The dirt road to Cayo Sabinal begins 6km south of Nuevitas, off the road to Camagüey. You must show your passport at the bridge to the key and pay CUC\$5. The 2km causeway linking the key to the mainland was the first of its kind constructed in Cuba and the most environmentally destructive. The Playa Santa Lucía tour agencies all offer day trips to Cayo Sabinal from around CUC\$69 including transfers and lunch; ask around in the hotels.

### PLAYA SANTA LUCÍA

Playa Santa Lucía is an isolated resort 112km northeast of Camagüey situated on an unbroken 20km-long stretch of white-sand beach (one of Cuba's longest). The bulk of travelers come here to scuba dive on one of the island's best and most accessible coral reefs that lies just a few kilometers offshore. Another highlight is the beach itself, a tropical gem, still deserted in places, and on a par with Varadero in terms of size and quality.

The area around Playa Santa Lucía is flat and featureless, the preserve of flamingos, scrubby bushes and the odd grazing cow. Aside from a small micro-village that serves as lodging for itinerant hotel workers there are no Cuban settlements of note. History seekers will be disappointed, Trinidad this is not! The swimming, snorkeling, and diving are a different story however, and the large hotels lay on plenty of activities for those with the time and inclination to explore. Packages to Playa Santa Lucía are usually cheaper than those to Cayo Coco and the resorts themselves have a more laid-back and relaxed feel. You're also within easy reach of Camagüey here, which is infinitely more interesting than Morón, Cayo Coco's gateway city.

### Information

Bandec is in the Cuban residential area between the Servi-Cupet at the southeastern entrance to Playa Santa Lucía and the hotel strip. Nearby is **Clínica Internacional de Santa Lucía** (☎ 36 53 00; Residencia 4) a well-equipped Cubanacán clinic for emergencies and

medical issues. Etecsa, 1.5km further along near the entrance to the hotel zone, has Internet access for CUC\$6 per hour and international phone capabilities. For tour agencies, Cubanacán – who own four of the five hotels here – are well-represented. Try their desk in the Gran Club Santa Lucía.

### Sights

Just before the Club Amigo Mayanabo, the **Mar Verde Centro Cultural** has a pleasant patio bar and a **cabaret** (admission CUC\$1) with live music nightly. There's also an ARTex store here with compact discs and Librería Tengo with high-quality art books and photographs for sale.

At the far northwestern end of Playa Santa Lucía, 7km from the hotels, is another white beach with crystal-clear waters facing the mouth of the Bahía de Nuevitas – **Playa los Cocos**. Sometimes flocks of pink flamingos are visible in Laguna El Real, behind this beach. A horse and carriage from the Santa Lucía hotels to Playa Los Cocos is CUC\$6 each way for one or two persons. There's also a bus service from the tourist hotels that leaves each day at 10am. Several restaurants serve seafood, see p337. This is a stellar swimming spot, but mind the tidal currents further out. The **lighthouse** on Cayo Sabinal is visible from here. The hotels sell boat excursions to Nuevitas.

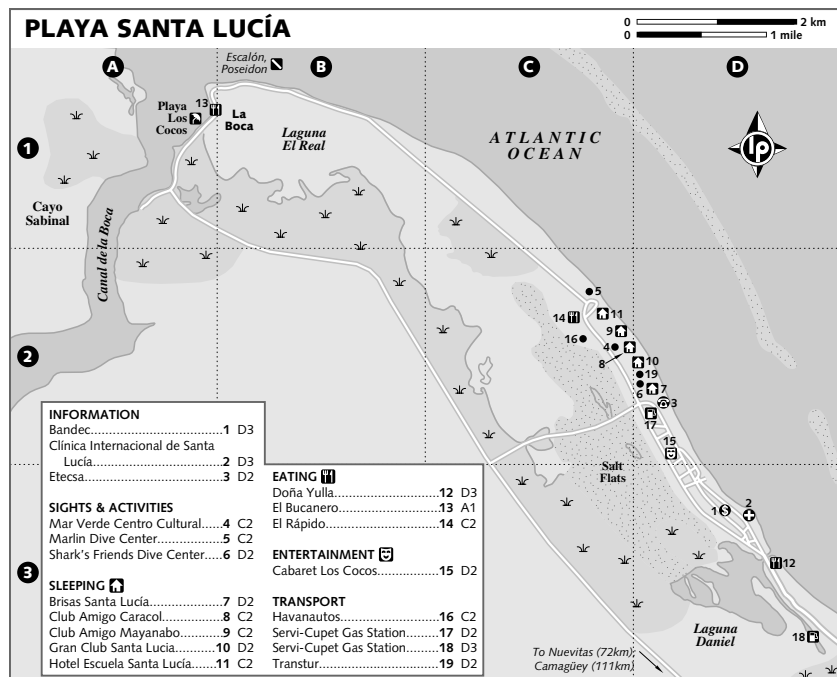
You can access a pristine part of the beach by turning at the sign for Shark's Friends.

### Activities

The 35 scuba sites in the warm waters off Santa Lucía take in the six Poseidon ridges, the Cueva Honda, shipwrecks, several types of rays and the abundant marine life at the entrance to the Bahía de Nuevitas (see above for more information). A highlight is the hand-feeding of bull sharks between 3m and 4m long (June to January).

**Shark's Friends Dive Center** (Cubanacán Náutica; ☎ 36 51 82; [marlin@sunnet.sti.cyt.cu](mailto:marlin@sunnet.sti.cyt.cu)) is a professional outfit with dive masters who speak English, Italian and French. The center, on the beach between Brisas Santa Lucía and Gran Club Santa Lucía, offers dives for CUC\$30, plus night dives (CUC\$40) and the famous shark feeds (CUC\$65) where cool-as-cucumber dive guides chuck food into the mouths of 3m-long bull sharks.





They have boats going out every two hours between 9am and 3pm daily, though the last dive is contingent on demand. Their open-water course costs CUC\$360; a resort course is CUC\$60. They also have snorkeling excursions.

**Marlin Dive Center** (Cubanacán Náutica; ☎ 33 64 04) is a friendly boating and dive outfit with half-day snorkeling trips in catamarans (CUC\$25); a catamaran trip Cayo Sabinal (CUC\$69 including dinner on beach), and a sunset cruise (CUC\$25, including cocktail; at 5:30pm). It does fishing trips for CUC\$204 (maximum four people), including gear, guide and drinks. It's beside Hotel Escuela Santa Lucía.

## Sleeping

The hotel strip begins 6km west of the roundabout at the entrance to Santa Lucía. It's prohibited to rent private rooms in Santa Lucía. Of the resort's five tourist hotels there's only one budget option. Book ahead or be prepared to pay the all-inclusive rates.

**Hotel Escuela Santa Lucía** (☎ 33 63 10; r CUC\$35; 🍷) The one and only budget option in

Playa Santa Lucía, this sweet, one-story motel with 30 nicely furnished rooms, at the northwestern end of the hotel strip beside a public beach, is another of the 'Escuela' training hotels. Every room has a TV and little patio; those in the 200 and 300 block are closest to the beach. It's comfortable and affordable, but book ahead as it often gets full.

**Club Amigo Mayanabo** (Cubanacán; s/d low season CUC\$47/74, high season CUC\$65/100; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) This formerly run-down resort reopened with a facelift a couple of years back. The Mayanabo is closely connected to the Caracol next door.

**Club Amigo Caracol** (Cubanacán; s/d low season CUC\$47/74, high season CUC\$65/100; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) The younger brother of the adjacent Mayanabo, Caracol is a three-star family all-in with 150 self-contained bungalows run by Cubanacán. The newly renovated resort reopened in 2003.

**Brisas Santa Lucía** (Cubanacán; ☎ 36 51 20; fax 36 51 42; s/d low season CUC\$60/100, high season CUC\$75/120; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) This all-inclusive resort has 412 rooms in several three-story buildings.

In all, it covers a monstrous 11 hectares and gets the resort's top rating (four stars). Rooms in the 200 to 800 range are closest to the beach, while those in the 100 block kiss up against the Laberinto Disco. There is special kids' programming. Shark's Friend Dive Center (p335) is on-site.

**Gran Club Santa Lucía** (Cubanacán; ☎ 33 61 09; fax 36 51 47; s/d low season CUC\$65/100, high season CUC\$75/120; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) Freshly painted and gleaming like new (which might account for the 'three star plus' rating), the 249 rooms in this amiable resort-village all have minifridges and balconies or patios and are accommodated in a series of tile-roofed two-story blocks. Prices quoted are for the cheap rooms furthest from the beach with parking-lot views. Discoteca La Jungla is here and there's a fairly cheesy music/comedy show scheduled every evening.

## Eating

Aside from the hotel buffets your choices are limited to El Rápido, opposite Hotel Escuela Santa Lucía, which serves inexpensive fast food on its terrace, and Doña Yulla right before the roundabout entrance to Santa Lucía serving simple, filling meals in pesos. **El Bucanero** (Playa los Cocos), on Playa los

Cocos at the Santa Lucía end of the beach, serves seafood.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Outside of the resorts, nothing much happens here. If you want a taste of something different, stroll east into the micro-village a take a look at Cabaret Los Cocos, a spit and sawdust Cuban place where hotel workers go on their night off.

## Getting There & Around

There's one morning and one afternoon bus to and from Nuevitas (1½ hours, 70km) and one daily bus to Camagüey (2½ hours, 112km). At Santa Lucía, ask about buses and passenger trucks at El Rápido opposite Hotel Escuela Santa Lucía.

**Servi-Cupet** (Playa Santa Lucía strip) is at the southeastern end of the strip, near the access road from Camagüey. Another large Servi-Cupet station, with a Servi-Soda snack bar, is just east of Brisas Santa Lucía.

You can rent cars or mopeds (CUC\$24 per day, including a tank of gas) at the following agencies:

**Havanaautos** (☎ 33 64 01; Tararaco)

**Transtur** (☎ 36 52 60) Between Gran Club Santa Lucía and the Brisas Santa Lucía.

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