

Cienfuegos Province



Carved out of the former Las Villas territory in 1975, bite-sized Cienfuegos is a small, compact province that punches way above its weight. For first-time visitors the myriad of varied attractions are as interesting as they are elusive. Blessed with a manageable mix of rugged mountains, curvaceous coastline and fascinating history, the area shares many of the characteristics of neighboring Sancti Spíritus – but with half the tourist frenzy.

The provincial capital is an elegant and well-maintained city that combines stately neoclassical architecture with an atmosphere that often feels more French than Cuban. But it's not all *savoir faire* and Louis XV furniture. Underneath the Gallic veneer Cienfuegos' soul is unashamedly Afro-Cuban. The proof, for doubters, is in the music. One of Cuba's greatest singers, Benny Moré, was born in the small Cienfuegos village of Santa Isabel de las Lajas in 1919, while a few kilometers to the south, in unsung Palmira, traditional *Santería cabildos* (associations) keep the syncopated rumba beat alive in ancient African drumming rituals.

Rancho Luna is the province's nominal beach retreat, a small, unpretentious scoop of sand popular with vacationing Canadians and travelers on Spanish study programs. Ten kilometers along the coast, congenial Guajimico is one of Cuba's most luxurious campismos, a fully-equipped diving center that offers sunken ships and pillar coral formations to aspiring scuba enthusiasts.

HIGHLIGHTS

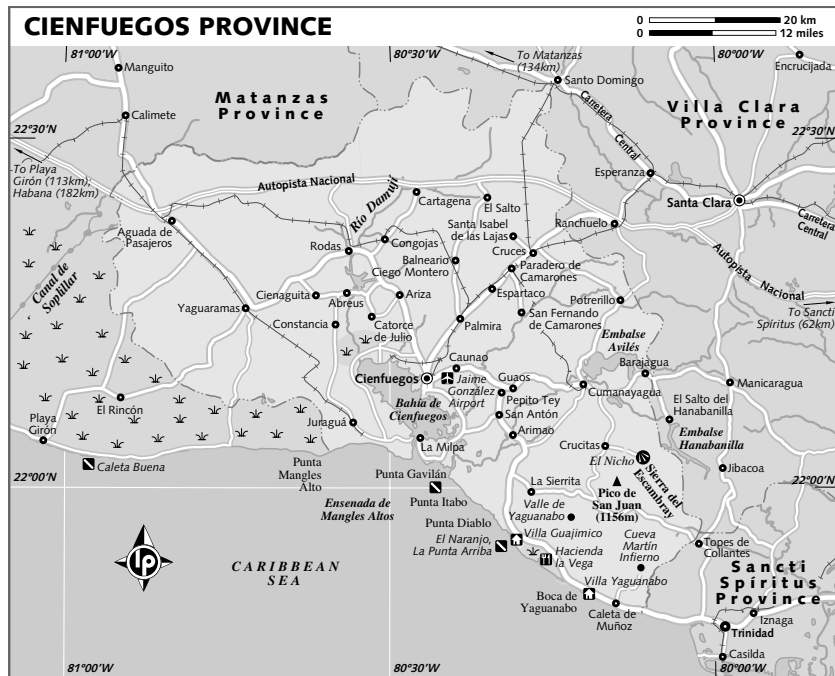
- **Architect's Delight**
View neoclassical finery in Unesco-sponsored Cienfuegos (p259)
- **Benny in Lajas**
Track the legend of Benny Moré in Santa Isabel de las Lajas (p262)
- **Jagua Cruise**
Take a romantic sunset boat ride on the Bahía de Cienfuegos (p262)
- **Cooling Down**
Hike to bracing El Nicho (p269) and cool down in an invigorating waterfall
- **Scuba Cuba**
Glide through coral gardens and shipwrecks near Rancho Luna (p267)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 43

■ POPULATION: 398,569

■ AREA: 4180 SQ KM



History

The first settlers in the Cienfuegos area were Taino Indians who called their fledgling principality, Cacicazgo de Jagua – a native word for ‘beauty.’ In 1494 Columbus ‘discovered’ the Bahía de Cienfuegos (Cuba’s third largest bay, with a surface area of 88 sq km) on his second voyage to the New World and 14 years later Sebastián de Ocampo passed by during his pioneering circumnavigation of the island. With the onset of the era of piracy in the 16th and 17th centuries the Spanish built a bayside fort, the imposing Castillo de Jagua (p268), one of the most important military structures on Cuba’s south coast.

In July 2005 Cienfuegos Province was lashed mercilessly by Hurricane Dennis, which caused extensive damage to buildings, agriculture and basic infrastructure.

CIENFUEGOS

☎ 0432 / pop 139,137

Big enough to offer art, entertainment and action but small enough to retain charm, Cienfuegos is a manageable city of cool

colonnaded buildings that was recently bestowed with a Unesco World Heritage site listing. A lovely curve of water that opens into the Caribbean Sea, the serene Bahía de Cienfuegos is largely responsible for the city’s ‘pearl of the south’ nickname and Punta Gorda, the thin knife of land that slices into its southern waters, contains some of Cuba’s prettiest casas particulares. Easily reached either by bus or car from Habana via the Autopista, Cienfuegos retains a palpable French flavor and with its touched up buildings and congenial hustle-free street-life it provides visitors a glimpse of Cuban culture at its most intimate.

While the city’s 19th-century architecture and tranquil seaside setting help create a pleasant atmosphere, the churn of outlying industry does not. Ringing the Bahía de Cienfuegos is a giant shipyard, the bulk of Cuba’s shrimp fishing fleet, a nitrogen fertilizer factory, a cement works, an oil refinery, a thermoelectric plant and the ghostlike dome of Cuba’s only (unfinished) nuclear power station (the plan was

abandoned in the early ’90s when Soviet money dried up). Fortunately for travelers, the pollution has yet to penetrate the city center.

History

Cienfuegos city proper was founded in 1819 by a French émigré from Louisiana named Louis D’Clouet. Sponsoring a scheme to relocate 40 families from Bordeaux in France the city got off to a bad start when it was destroyed by a hurricane in 1821. Unperturbed the French settlers rebuilt their homes and rechristened their new city Cienfuegos after the then governor of Cuba.

With the arrival of the railway in 1850 and the shift of allegiances in the sugar industry from Trinidad after the First War of Independence, Cienfuegos’ fortunes grew exponentially. Basking in a period of relative economic prosperity in the late 19th century, the local merchants pumped their fortunes into a dazzling array of eclectic architecture that harked back to neoclassicism of their French forefathers.

D-Day in Cienfuegos’ history came in September 1957 when officers at the local naval base staged a revolt against the Batista dictatorship. The uprising was brutally crushed, but the city’s place in revolutionary history was sealed in infamy.

Modern day Cienfuegos retains a slightly plusher and more polished look than many of its urban counterparts. And with the promise of some much-needed Unesco money already in the pipeline, the future for the city’s fine array of 19th-century architecture can only be bright.

Orientation

Despite its haphazard geography, the city is laid out in an easy-to-understand grid system with evenly-numbered *avenidas* (avenues) that run east–west and odd-numbered *calles* (streets) running north–south. Downtown Cienfuegos, or ‘Pueblo Nuevo’, is the area bounded by Avs 46 and 62 and bisected by Calle 37 (popularly called ‘El Prado’). Av 54 is often called ‘El Bulevar’ and is a pedestrian mall stretching from Calle 37 to Parque Martí. Calle 37 (or El Prado), meanwhile, runs 3km south to seaside Punta Gorda (where it’s called Malecón). Rancho Luna is 18km south of the city via Av 5 de Septiembre.

Information

BOOKSTORES

Librería Bohemia (Map p260; ☎ 52 51 63; Av 56 No 3318 btwn Calles 33 & 35)

Librería Dionisio San Román (Map p260; ☎ 52 55 92; Av 54 No 3526) On the corner of Calle 37.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 185)

Asistir (Map p260; ☎ 51 32 65; Calle 37 No 5405 btwn Avs 54 & 56)

INTERNET ACCESS

Eteca (Map p260; ☎ 51 92 66; Calle 31 No 5402 btwn Avs 54 & 56; per hr CUC56)

MEDIA

Radio Ciudad del Mar (1350AM & 98.9 FM)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Clínica Internacional (Map p260; ☎ 55 16 23; Calle 37 No 202, Punta Gorda) Caters to foreigners, handles dental emergencies and has a 24-hour pharmacy.

Farmacia Principal Municipal (Map p260; ☎ 51 57 37; Av 54 No 3524 btwn Calles 35 & 37)

MONEY

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (Map p260; ☎ 51 57 47; cnr Av 56 & Calle 31)

Banco Financiero Internacional (Map p260; ☎ 55 16 57; cnr Av 54 & Calle 29)

Cadeca (Map p260; ☎ 55 22 21; Av 56 No 3314 btwn Calles 33 & 35)

POST

Post Office cnr Av 56 & Calle 35 (Map p260; ☎ 51 82 84); Av 54 No 3514 (Map p260; btwn Calles 35 & 37)

TELEPHONE

Eteca (Map p260; ☎ 51 92 66; Calle 31 No 5403 btwn Avs 54 & 56)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Cubanacán (Map p260; ☎ 55 16 80; Av 54 btwn Calles 29 & 31)

Cubatur (Map p260; ☎ 55 12 42; Calle 37 No 5399 btwn Avs 54 & 56)

Havanatur (Map p260; ☎ 51 11 50; fax 55 13 70; Av 54 No 2906 btwn Calles 29 & 31)

Reservaciones de Campismo (Map p260; ☎ 51 94 23; Calle 37 No 5407 btwn Avs 54 & 56)

Sights

The most interesting sights are clustered around stately Parque José Martí and 3km

CIENFUEGOS

INFORMATION

| | |
|--|---|
| Asistur.....(see 14) | Casa del Batido.....34 B2 |
| Banco de Crédito y Comercio.....1 B1 | Coppella.....35 B2 |
| Banco Financiero Internacional.....2 A2 | Dinos Pízza.....36 B1 |
| Cadeca.....3 B1 | Doña Neli.....37 D2 |
| Clinica Internacional.....4 D5 | D'Prisa.....38 D4 |
| Cubanacán.....5 A1 | Mercado Municipal.....39 B1 |
| Cubatur.....6 B1 | Mini Restaurante Doña Yulla.....40 B1 |
| Etcas.....7 B1 | Paladar Aché.....41 D3 |
| Farmacia Principal Municipal.....8 B2 | Restaurante Covadonga.....42 D5 |
| Havanatur.....9 A2 | Restaurante El Cochinito.....43 C5 |
| Inmigración.....10 C3 | Restaurante Prado.....44 B1 |
| Librería Bohemia.....11 B1 | DRINKING |
| Librería Dionisio San Román.....12 B2 | Bar Terrazas.....(see 28) |
| Post Office.....13 B1 | El Palatino.....45 A1 |
| Reservaciones de Campismo.....14 B1 | ENTERTAINMENT |
| SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES | Cabaret Costasur.....46 C3 |
| Arco de Triunfo.....15 A1 | Café Cantante Benny Moré.....47 B1 |
| Casa de la Cultura Benjamin Duarte.....16 A1 | Casa de la Cultura.....48 B1 |
| Casa del Educador.....17 C6 | Casa de la Música.....49 D5 |
| Catedral de la Purísima Concepción.....18 A1 | Cine Prado.....50 B1 |
| Cementerio La Reina.....19 B3 | Cine-Teatro Guanaroca.....51 D2 |
| Centro Recreativo La Punta.....20 C6 | Cine-Teatro Luisa.....52 B2 |
| Club Cienfuegos.....21 C5 | El Benny.....53 A1 |
| Colegio San Lorenzo.....22 A1 | Estadio 5 de Septiembre.....54 D4 |
| La Bolea.....(see 60) | Jardines de Uneac.....55 A1 |
| Marina Puertosal Cienfuegos (Base Náutica).....23 C5 | Palacio de la Música (Patio de Artes).....56 C5 |
| Museo Histórico Naval.....24 C2 | Polivalente Sports Museum.....57 D3 |
| Nacional.....25 A1 | Salón de Minerva.....58 B2 |
| Museo Provincial.....26 A1 | Teatro Tomás Terry.....59 A1 |
| Palacio de Gobierno.....26 A1 | Tropisur.....60 D3 |
| Palacio de Valle.....27 C6 | SHOPPING |
| SLEEPING | El Embajador.....61 B1 |
| Cubanacan Boutique La Unión.....28 A1 | Maroya Gallery.....62 A1 |
| Hostal Palacio Azul.....29 C5 | One Hour Photo.....63 B2 |
| Hotel Jagua.....30 C5 | Photo Service.....64 B2 |
| EATING | Variedades Cienfuegos.....65 B2 |
| 1869 Restaurant.....(see 28) | TRANSPORT |
| Café Artex.....31 A1 | Bus Station.....66 D2 |
| Cafetería El Rápido.....32 D4 | Cubataxi Depot.....67 B2 |
| Cafetería El Rápido.....33 B2 | Havanautos.....68 D4 |
| | Micar.....69 D5 |
| | Muelle Real.....70 C3 |

south in the Punta Gorda section of town. You can see most of Cienfuegos in a day, but there's often good nightlife worth checking out (see p265).

Start your wanderings in the town center at **Parque José Martí** (Map p260), passing under the **Arco de Triunfo** (Arch of Triumph; the only one of its kind in Cuba) dedicated to Cuban independence. This impressive monument ushers you into the heart of the park, dropping you at the feet of José Martí rendered in marble.

Teatro Tomás Terry (Map p260; ☎ 51 33 61; Av 56 No 270 btwn Calle 27 & 29; tours CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-6pm), on the northern side of Parque Martí, is one of Cienfuegos' most famous buildings. To honor their father, the sons of Venezuelan industrialist Tomás Terry built this 950-seat auditorium between 1887 and 1889 and graced the lobby with a Carrara marble statue of dad. In 1895 the theater opened with a performance of Verdi's *Aida*. Famous artists who have trodden the boards here include Enrico Caruso, Anna Pavlova and Sarah Bernhardt. The seats are carved from Cuban hardwoods and there's an impressive ceiling fresco by Camilo Salaya.

On the western side of Parque Martí is the former Palacio de Ferrer (1918), now the **Casa de la Cultura Benjamin Duarte** (Map p260; ☎ 51 65 84; Calle 25 No 5401; admission free; 🕒 8:30am-midnight) where you can climb up the *mirador* (tower) for killer views (CUC\$1). Check the schedule at the door for live music happenings. On the opposite side of the park is the neoclassical **Catedral de la Purísima Concepción** (Map p260; ☎ 52 52 97; Av 56 No 2902; donations accepted; 🕒 7am-noon). Erected in 1869, it has twin towers and French stained-glass windows. The southern side of Parque Martí is dominated by the red dome of the **Palacio de Gobierno**, where the provincial government, called the Poder Popular Provincial, holds forth (no visitors). The **Museo Provincial** (Map p260; ☎ 51 97 22; cnr Av 54 & Calle 27; admission CUC\$2; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) has benefited from a recent renovation and displays the frilly furnishings of refined 19th-century French-Cuban society, as well as other assorted knick knacks.

Paseo del Prado (Calle 37), stretching from the Río El Inglés in the north to Punta Gorda in the south, is the longest street of its kind in Cuba and a great place to see Cienfueguenos relaxing at their leisure. The boulevard is a veritable smorgasbord of fine

neoclassical buildings and pastel-painted columns and at the intersection of Av 34 you can pay your respects to a life-sized statue of local hero Benny Moré.

Heading south for 3km on Prado, you enter Cienfuegos' aristocratic, waterfront quarter called Punta Gorda. The **Malecón** here shares none of the sexy extracurricular characteristics of Habana's seawall, but it still offers an exquisite vista of what is considered to be one of the world's best natural bays. The architecture is distinct, with bright clapboard homes boasting sun-dappled porches and intricate lattice work. The **Casa del Educador** (Map p260; Calle 35 No 26) is a great example of these beach villas while the **Palacio Azul** (now a refurbished hotel called Hostal Palacio Azul) and the revamped **Club Cienfuegos** highlight the 1920's aristocratic penchant for grandiosity.

The ultimate in kitsch is yet to come. Continue south on Punta Gorda until you encounter the fabulous Moorish-style **Palacio de Valle** (Map p260; ☎ 51 12 26; cnr Calle 37 & Av 2; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9:30am-11pm). Built in 1917 by Alcisclo Valle Blanco, a Spaniard from Asturias, it's an outrageous jumble of tiles and turrets, crenellated edges and scalloped arches. Batista planned to convert the palace into a casino, but today it's an (aspiring) upscale restaurant, with a terrace bar (p265).

The **Centro Recreativo La Punta** (Map p260; 🕒 10am-10pm) has a gazebo on the point's extreme southern tip and is a great spot to watch the sunset. You can grab a beer or mojito at the bar; there's sometimes live music here.

Cienfuegos has a couple of interesting outlying sights including two unique cemeteries, both of which are National Heritage sites. The older of the two is **Cementerio La Reina** (Map p260; cnr Av 50 & Calle 7; 🕒 8am-6pm) founded in 1837 and lined with the graves of Spanish soldiers who died in the independence wars. La Reina is the only cemetery in Cuba where bodies are interred above ground (in the walls) due to the high groundwater levels. It also has a marble statue called *Bella Durmiente*: a tribute to a 24-year-old woman who died in 1907 of a broken heart. It's an evocative place if you're into graveyards.

The **Necrópolis Tomás Acea** (Map p263; Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 2; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 8am-6pm) is classed as a 'garden cemetery' and is entered

DAY-TRIPPER

The village of **Santa Isabel de las Lajas**, a few kilometers west of Cruces on the Cienfuegos–Santa Clara road, was where Bartolomé (Benny) Moré was born on August 24, 1919. Easily accessible in a half-day trip from Cienfuegos, this pleasant village hosts the biannual Benny Moré International Music Festival every other September. Curiosities include a **Municipal museum** with assorted Moré memorabilia and the **Casino de los Congos**, a music venue where you can view *tambores* (drums) and *Santería* rituals in the hallowed confines of where the self-styled *Bárbaro del Ritmo* (p67; Barbarian of Rhythm), allegedly, banged his first drum.

On the way back you may want to stop off briefly in the town of **Cruces** on the Santa Clara road. This settlement was the site of one of the most important battles of the Independence Wars in 1895 – the historic Battle of Mal Tiempo – in which Mambí generals Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez inflicted a crushing defeat on the Spanish forces. A needlelike **obelisk** in the middle of a pleasant colonial park commemorates the great battle. The park was declared a national monument in 1981.

Also worth a visit is **Palmira**, 8km north of Cienfuegos, a town famous for its *Santería* brotherhoods including the societies of Cristo, San Roque and Santa Barbara. Further information can be procured at the centrally located **Museo Municipal de Palmira** (☎ 54 45 33; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sat).

through a huge neoclassical pavilion (1926) flanked by 64 Doric columns modeled on the Parthenon in Greece. This cemetery contains a monument to the marine martyrs who died during the abortive 1957 Cienfuegos naval uprising.

The **Museo Histórico Naval Nacional** (Map p260; ☎ 51 91 43; cnr Av 60 & Calle 21; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Fri, 9am–noon Sun) is housed in the former headquarters of the Distrito Naval del Sur (1950). This important museum covers archeology, natural history, naval history, navigation and art. The museum's central theme is the history-defining failed naval revolt.

Activities

The **Marina Cienfuegos** (Base Náutica; Map p260; ☎ 55 12 41; fax 55 12 75; cnr Av 8 & Calle 35; ☎ 7am–5pm), a few blocks north of Hotel Jagua, organizes fishing trips for CUC\$150 for four people for four hours. There are also two-hour sunset cruises in the bay (stopping briefly at Castillo de Jagua) for CUC\$10 and slightly longer day cruises for CUC\$16. Inquire at Cubatur or Cubanacán for more details (p259).

Nearby, the new **Club Cienfuegos** (Map p260; ☎ 52 65 10; Calle 35 btwn Avs 10 & 12; ☎ 9am–1am Sun–Fri, 9am–2am Sat) has a small beach, with many watersports including kayaking and windsurfing. There's also an amusement park with bumper cars, go-carts and video games.

If you're into billiards or bowling, go to **La Bolera** (Calle 37 btwn Avs 46 & 48; per hr CUC\$1–2; ☎ 11am–2am), where there's an ice-cream parlor and occasional live music. Non-guests can use the splendid **swimming pool** at Hotel la Unión on the corner of Av 54 and Calle 31 for CUC\$5.

Courses

The **Universidad de Cienfuegos** (☎ 55 61 24; Carretera Las Rodas Km 4, Cuatro Caminos) offers Spanish courses for beginners to advanced. The courses last one month and incorporate 80 hours of study (CUC\$350). It also offers courses in 'Cuban Culture' (CUC\$400) and 'Culture and Language' (CUC\$450). The programs start on the first Monday of each month. Contact **UniversiTUR** (universitur@rector.ado.ucf.edu) in Cienfuegos for more details.

Tours

Cubanacán has the best tours in town, and everything from **El Nicho** (p269), costing CUC\$30, to a Benny Moré discovery trip in **Santa Isabel de las Lajas** can be easily organized here.

Festivals & Events

Local festivals in Cienfuegos include the cultural events marking the foundation of the city on April 22, 1819; Carnival in August and the Benny Moré International Music Festival in September of odd-numbered years.

Sleeping

Cienfuegos has a plethora of quality private rooms – your best bet for budget accommodation (see p264). Those at Punta Gorda are more removed, but generally more atmospheric. There are now four classified hotels in Cienfuegos, including the recently restored Palacio Azul.

TOWN CENTER

Cubanacán Boutique La Unión (Cubanacán; Map p260; ☎ 55 10 20; cnr Av 54 & Calle 31; s/d CUC\$80/90; ☎ ☎) This classical gem, in the heart of town, reopened a few years back after a major restoration by Cubanacán. Hidden neatly from the bustle of downtown Cienfuegos the hotel sports a tranquil warren of inner courtyards, marble pillars and a small secluded swimming pool. The 46 antique-furnished rooms have balconies either opening to the street or facing in over a colonial patio lined with mosaics. Chill by the pool and get a relaxing massage for CUC\$5.

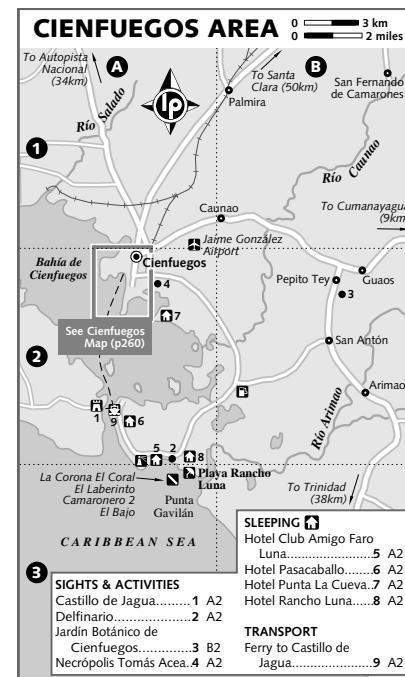
PUNTA GORDA

Hostal Palacio Azul (Map p260; ☎ 7-204-4439; Calle 37 No 201 btwn Avs 12 & 14; s/d/tr CUC\$35/38/51; ☎ ☎) A striking blue palace built in 1921 and reopened as a seven-room (16 person capacity) hotel in 2004. Situated near Club Cienfuegos in Punta Gorda, the hotel's huge rooms are named after flowers and, though not as luxurious as the nearby Jagua, the place oozes character. Other features here include an on-site restaurant called El Chelo and a striking rooftop cupola with kicking views.

Hotel Jagua (Gran Caribe; Map p260; ☎ 55 10 03; fax 55 12 45; Calle 37 No 1; s/d/tr low season CUC\$60/85/119, high CUC\$74/105/147; ☎ ☎) This hotel in Punta Gorda is 3km south of the center. Erected in the 1950s by Batista's brother, it is – along with La Unión – one of central Cuba's top hotels. The 145 rooms are good value and kids aged 12 and under stay for half price. It's a decent choice for families; there are on-site babysitters and dance classes available. A cabaret show (CUC\$5) happens at 9:30pm Tuesday to Friday and 10pm Saturday.

OUTSIDE TOWN

Hotel Punta La Cueva (Islazul; Map p263; ☎ 51 39 56; s/d low season CUC\$17/22, high CUC\$21/28; ☎ ☎) This place is east across the bay from Hotel Jagua via a 3.5km access road that begins



just east of Necrópolis Tomás Acea. The 67 rooms are a bit run-down, but still good value. There's a small beach, but it doesn't compensate for such a removed location.

Eating

TOWN CENTER

Dinos Pizza (Map p260; Calle 31 No 5418 btwn Avs 54 & 56; ☎ noon–3pm & 6pm–midnight) Living up to its reputation for reliable, tasty food, this place has pizzas starting at CUC\$4 (with toppings such as mushrooms, black olives or sausage additional) and lasagna at CUC\$7. The big salads, bruschetta and soups make this a good vegetarian option.

Paladar Aché (Map p260; Av 38 btwn Avs Calles 41 & 43) At the time of writing, Cienfuegos' only operating paladar was situated near the pediatric hospital. Fresh, filling *criollo* (Creole) meals cost CUC\$6 to CUC\$8, depending on whether you come solo or with a *jinetero* (tout).

1869 Restaurant (Map p260; cnr Av 54 & Calle 31; mains CUC\$10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Cienfuegos' best city center dining experience can be found in this elegant restaurant in the La Unión

CASAS PARTICULARES – CIENFUEGOS

Town Center

- Carmen y Felipe** (☎ 51 28 85; Av 60 No 4703 btwn Calles 47 & 49; r CUC\$20; 🚻) Near bus and train stations; private bath, small balcony, hospitable; also at No 4707.
- Casa de Armando** (☎ 51 52 99; Av 60 No 3703 btwn Calles 37 & 39; r CUC\$20; 🚻) Private bath, good location, friendly.
- Deliz Sierra** (☎ 51 66 38; Calle 37 No 3806 btwn Aves 38 & 40; r CUC\$20) Conveniently located on the colonnaded Prado.
- Friendship Home – Armando y Leonor** (☎ 51 61 43; Av 56 No 2927 btwn Calles 29 & 31; r CUC\$20) Colonial house just off Parque Martí; balcony, patio dining, legendary food, chatty hosts.
- José Ramón & Clarita** (☎ 51 86 39; Av 60 No 4730 btwn Calles 47 & 49; r CUC\$20-25; 🚻) Near bus terminal and train station.
- Miriam and Gladys Fernández Portillo** (☎ 51 58 16; Av 54 No 4919 btwn 49 & 51; r CUC\$20) Near bus station, also at No 4923; retired teachers in elegant neoclassical building.
- Pepe and Isabel Martínez Cordero** (☎ 51 82 76; Av 52 No 4318 btwn 43 & 45; r CUC\$20) Interconnecting rooms, meals served, friendly.
- Ulises Jauregui** (☎ 51 98 91; Calle 37 No 4202 btwn Aves 42 & 44; r CUC\$20; 🚻) Flexible set up, interconnecting rooms, share dining room, ideal for groups.

Punta Gorda

- Angel e Isabel** (☎ 51 15 19; Calle 35 No 24 btwn Av 0 & Litoral; r CUC\$20-25; 🚻) Two nicely furnished rooms in waterfront garden, mountain views. Friendly, meals, roof terrace; also at No 22.
- Clara Martha** (☎ 51 70 57; Calle 39 No 1204 btwn Aves 12 & 14; r CUC\$20-25; 🚻) Two rooms, independent entrance.
- Dr Ana María Font D'Escoubert** (☎ 51 32 69; Calle 35 No 20 btwn Av 0 & Litoral; r CUC\$20-25; 🚻) Truly idyllic setting in fine colonial house at end of peninsular. Beautiful garden that backs onto bay. Rooms basic but clean.
- Gloria Borges** (☎ 51 70 14; Calle 37 No 1210 btwn 12 & 14; r CUC\$20-30; 🚻) Spotlessly clean house with pleasant garden and back porch with rocking chairs.
- Jorge A Piñero Vásquez** (☎ 51 38 08; Calle 41 No 1402 btwn Aves 14 & 16; r CUC\$25; 🍷) Meals served, secluded, upscale.
- Jorge de la Peña Castellanos** (☎ 51 90 15; Calle 39 No 1206 btwn Aves 12 & 14; r CUC\$20; 🍷) English spoken.
- Maylin y Tony** (☎ 51 99 66; Calle 35 No 4B btwn 0 & Litoral; r CUC\$25; 🚻) Two rooms with private bath, balcony, sea views and access; friendly, good meals.
- Miriam Aguilera Díaz** (☎ 51 80 85; Calle 37 No 1006 btwn 10 & 12; r CUC\$20) Pleasant abode on Punta Gorda's main drag.
- Vista Al Mar** (☎ 51 83 78; www.vistaalmarcuba.com; Calle 37 No 210 btwn 2 & 4; r CUC\$25; 🍷 🚻) This highly professional casa has even got its own private beach out back with hammocks.

hotel. Although the food doesn't quite match the lush furnishings, a varied international menu makes a welcome change from rice/beans/pork staples offered elsewhere.

Mini Restaurante Doña Yulla (Map p260; Av 54 No 3507 btwn Calles 35 & 37; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6:30-10:30pm) This is among the best of the many Doña Yullas here, with tablecloths, friendly service and an inexpensive Convertible menu. Try the pork steak.

Café Artex (Map p260; Av 56 No 2703 btwn Calles 27 & 29) This place on Parque Martí usually serves espresso and *café con leche* (espresso coffee with milk). The flowering

patio looks out on the park where you can watch the old folk doing their morning aerobics.

Mercado Municipal (Map p260; Calle 31 No 5805 btwn Aves 58 & 60) If you feel like cooking or having a picnic, head to the market for fruits and vegetables in pesos.

Other recommendations:

Restaurante Prado (Map p260; cnr Calle 37 & Av 56; mains CUC\$2-4) Brand new vegetarian place.

El Rápido (Map p260; cnr Av 54 & Calle 35) As always, pizza, sandwiches and snacks (CUC\$1).

Coppelia (Map p260; cnr Calle 37 & Av 52) Ice cream for two pesos a scoop.

For a quick and inexpensive breakfast, check out **Casa del Batido** (Map p260; Calle 37 No 5211 btwn Aves 52 & 54; ☎ 6am-11pm) with wonderful fruitshakes like banana and papaya (one peso) or **Doña Neli** (Map p260; cnr Calle 41 & Av 62; ☎ 9am-10:15pm) for pastries and bread in Convertibles.

PUNTA GORDA

Restaurante Covadonga (Map p260; ☎ 59 64 20; Calle 37 btwn Av 2 & 0) Legend has it that Castro and his guerrillas ate here in January 1959 during their triumphant march to Habana. By all accounts, the food's been going downhill ever since. Excellent waterfront location makes for a relaxing sunset cocktail though.

Club Cienfuegos (Map p260; ☎ 52 65 10; Calle 37 btwn Aves 10 & 12; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-9pm) A new addition to the Cienfuegos dining scene, the upscale, affordable restaurant at the Club Cienfuegos is a local favorite and one of the best in town. You won't pay more than CUC\$10 for a steak and CUC\$6 for a fine paella. The fantastic wraparound dining terrace with sea views makes it memorable. There's also a cafeteria and one of the best bars in town downstairs.

Palacio de Valle (Map p260; ☎ 51 12 26; cnr Calle 37 & Av 2; ☎ 10am-10pm) After a lambasting in the previous edition of this book things at Palacio de Valle seemed to have improved, although they have yet to match the Moorish architecture for decorative flourishes. Seafood dominates the menu downstairs, but if you still aren't convinced on the quality, eat in the La Jagua next door and use the rooftop bar here for a sunset cocktail.

Inexpensive places in Punta Gorda:
Restaurante El Cochinito (Map p260; ☎ 51 86 11; cnr Calle 37 & Av 4; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-10pm, closed Tue) With cheap pork and chicken dishes.

El Rápido (Map p260; cnr Calle 37 & Av 26) Has a nice terrace overlooking the bay where you can eat your CUC\$1 microwave pizza. Bonus: air hockey.

D'Prisa (Map p260; Calle 37) Near Av 34.

Drinking

Bar Terrazas (☎ 55 10 20; cnr Av 54 & Calle 31) This watering hole upstairs at the La Unión hotel is a good central option. Sip a mojito and enjoy fine city views; live music starts at 10pm.

El Palatino (Map p260; Av 54 No 2514) On the southern side of Parque Martí, the easily accessible Palatino is popular on the tour bus circuit. Impromptu jazz sets sometimes

erupt here. Prepare to be hit up for alms at the end of song number three.

The terrace bar at the Palacio de Valle scores for its views and ambiance and no visit to town would be complete without a sunset cocktail in Club Cienfuegos.

Entertainment

LIVE MUSIC

Jardines de Uneac (Map p260; ☎ 51 61 17; Calle 25 No 5413 btwn Aves 54 & 56; admission CUC\$2) It's hard to beat this outdoor patio venue with its Afro-Cuban *peñas* (musical performances) and guest *trovadores* (traditional singer/songwriters) such as Vicente Feliú. Watch out for Cienfuegos' best known band, Los Novos, who play here regularly.

Casa de la Música (Map p260; ☎ 55 23 20; Calle 37 btwn Aves 4 & 6; ☎ shows 10pm Fri & Sat, 5pm Sun) This big, outdoor venue in Punta Gorda hosts everyone from Los Van Van and '70s cover bands to feisty rap groups.

Salón de Minerva (Map p260; Av 52 No 3512 btwn Calles 35 & 37; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10pm Thu-Sat, 3pm Sun) Live boleros, salsa and *trova* (traditional poetic singing/songwriting) are all featured at this popular spot; bring your dancing shoes.

Patio de Artex (Map p260; ☎ 55 12 55; cnr Calle 35 & Av 16) Another recommendable patio place in Cienfuegos, you can catch *son* (Cuba's popular music) in the evenings and live ensembles at the 2pm Sunday matinee.

Café Cantante Benny Moré (Map p260; cnr Av 54 & Calle 37) Traditional music is a staple here. It's a rough peso place not for shrinking violets.

DANCE CLUBS

El Benny (Map p260; ☎ 55 11 05; Av 54 No 2907 btwn Calles 29 & 31; admission per couple CUC\$8; ☎ 10pm-3am Tue-Sun) The entrance fee to this sharp place includes a bottle of rum, two Cokes and enough salsa and sugar pop to make you drop. Nightly cabaret shows to the sounds of the Barbarian of Rhythm.

Two open-air discos with a local vibe are the friendly **Tropisur** (Map p260; cnr Calle 37 & Av 48; ☎ Sat only), with the pink-and-white wall around it (no sign) and **Cabaret Costasur** (Map p260; Av 40 btwn Calles 33 & 35; ☎ Fri & Sat), which you can hear as far away as the Hotel Jagua.

THEATER

Teatro Tomás Terry (Map p260; ☎ 51 33 61; Av 56 No 270 btwn Calle 27 & 29) This architectural showpiece on the northern side of Parque Martí

stages premier performances; the box office is open 11am to 3pm daily and 90 minutes before showtime.

Also check the cultural calendars at the **Casa de la Cultura Benjamin Duarte** (Map p260; Calle 25 No 5403) on Parque Martí, which shows movies daily at 2pm and 8:30pm, and the **Casa de la Cultura** (Map p260; Calle 37 No 5615) on the corner of Av 58.

CINEMAS

Cienfuegos has three movie houses: **Cine-Teatro Luisa** (Map p260; Calle 37 No 5001); **Cine Prado** (Map p260; Calle 37 No 5402); and **Cine-Teatro Guanaroca** (Map p260; cnr Calle 49 & Av 58) situated opposite the bus station.

SPORTS

From October to April, baseball games take place at **Estadio 5 de Septiembre** (Map p260; ☎ 51 36 44; Av 20 btwn Calles 45 & 55), while weekend boxing matches and other sporting events occur at **Polivalente** (Map p260; cnr Calle 37 & Av 48). There is also a small **sports museum** (admission free) here including hockey, fencing and baseball paraphernalia as well as the boots and T-shirt of local boxing hero, Julio González Valladores who brought back a gold medal from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Shopping

Whatever you desire can be found on the stretch of Av 54 between Calle 37 and Parque Martí; known as El Bulevar, it's chock-a-block with stores.

Check out the Maroya Gallery for folk art, Variedades Cienfuegos for peso paraphernalia or Casa del Habano 'El Embajador' for cigars.

One Hour Photo (Map p260; ☎ 55 22 98; Calle 37 No 5217 btwn Aves 52 & 54; ☎ 8am-10pm) Well-stocked with digital camera and lithium batteries, and Agfa film.

Photo Service (Map p260; Av 54 No 3118 btwn Calles 31 & 33)

Getting There & Away

AIR

Jaime González Airport 5km northeast of Cienfuegos receives weekly international flights from Toronto and Montreal. There are no connections to Habana.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 51 57 20) is on Calle 49 between Aves 56 and 58. There are Víazul

buses to Habana twice a day (CUC\$20, five hours, 9:25am and 4:55pm) and Trinidad twice a day (CUC\$6, two hours, 12:25pm and 4:55pm). To reach any other destinations from Cienfuegos, you have to connect in Trinidad, but since the two regular daily departures to Trinidad leave too late to connect, there's a 6:30am minibus to Trinidad (CUC\$10). Tickets must be purchased from the *jefe de turno* (shift manager) downstairs.

For local buses to Rancho Luna (CUC\$1), Pasacaballo (CUC\$1) and Playa Girón (CUC\$4), check the blackboard downstairs. Outside the station, collective taxis may be willing to take you to Santa Clara and Cumanayagua en route to El Nicho.

Astro (☎ 52 54 95) has departures from the bus station to Camagüey (CUC\$13, seven hours, two daily), Habana (CUC\$14, five hours, five daily), Santa Clara (CUC\$3, two hours, two daily), Santiago de Cuba (CUC\$26, two hours, daily) and Trinidad (CUC\$3, two hours, two daily).

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 52 54 95; cnr Av 58 & Calle 49; ☎ ticket window 8am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11:30am Sat) is across from the bus station. Trains are often canceled. When they do run, trains travel to Habana (CUC\$9.50, 10 hours, daily), Santa Clara (CUC\$2.10, two hours, two daily) and Sancti Spiritus (CUC\$5.20, five hours, two daily).

Getting Around

BOAT

When there's gas, a 120-passenger ferry runs to the Castillo de Jagua (CUC\$1, 40 minutes) from the **Muelle Real** (Map p260; cnr Av 46 & Calle 25). It leaves Cienfuegos at 8am, 1pm and 5:30pm and the castle at 6:30am, 10am and 3pm. Two ferries also make this trip from just below the Hotel Pasacaballo (p268).

CAR & MOPED

Club Cienfuegos (Map p260; ☎ 52 65 10; Calle 37 btwn Aves 10 & 12) hires mopeds. **Havanaautos** (Punta Gorda Map p260; ☎ 56 24 91; cnr Calle 37 & Av 16; Hotel Rancho Luna Map p263; ☎ 54 81 43; Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 16) and **Micar** (cnr Av 12 & Calle 39) hire cars.

The Servi-Cupet gas station is on Calle 37 at the corner of Av 16, in Punta Gorda. There's another station 5km northeast of Hotel Rancho Luna.

HORSE & CARRIAGE

Horse carts and bici-taxis ply Calle 37 charging Cubans one peso a ride, foreigners CUC\$1 (though Spanish speakers might be able to 'pass' and pay a peso). It's a pleasant way to travel between town and Punta Gorda.

TAXI

Cubataxi (Map p260; ☎ 51 91 45, 51 84 54; Av 50 No 3508) has taxis 24 hours a day. Citroen/Lada taxis are cheaper than the tourist taxis outside Hotel Jagua. Agree on the price first.

RANCHO LUNA

Rancho Luna is a picturesque beach resort next door to a very small cluster of (Cuban) houses 18km south of Cienfuegos. It has two large hotels, but it's also possible to stay in private rooms here, one of the few resort areas in Cuba where this is allowed. The entire coast is protected by a coral reef and the snorkeling is easily accessible. The local post office is in Hotel Rancho Luna. In the small village facing Hotel Club Amigo Faro Luna you'll find a string of casas particulares and a beach bar.

Sights & Activities

There's a secluded little beach in the crook east of Punta Colorados that's a superb pic-

nic or camping spot; access it from the dirt track just before the lighthouse.

Like most Cuban resort areas, Rancho Luna has its **Delfinario** (Map p263; ☎ 54 81 20; adult/child CUC\$3/5; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) where you can see dolphins jump through hoops or swim with them for a rip-off CUC\$50/33.

Scuba diving is possible with dive centers at Hotels Rancho Luna and Club Amigo Faro Luna, which visit 32 sites within a 20-minute boat ride. Caves, sunken ships, profuse marine life and dazzling coral gardens are among the attractions. From November to February harmless whale sharks frequent these waters. Good **snorkeling** is also possible with **Cubana Náutica** (☎ 54 80 40; dcluna@acuc.cfg.cyt.cu; Hotel Club Amigo Faro Luna, Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 18; dives CUC\$30, open water certification CUC\$365) and **Whale Shark** (☎ 54 80 12; mpsolcfg@ip.etecsa.cu; at Hotel Rancho Luna, Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 16; 1/2 dives from CUC\$30/40, night dives CUC\$36).

Sleeping

Hotel Club Amigo Faro Luna (Cubanaacán; Map p263; ☎ 54 80 34; Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 18; s/d low season CUC\$44/55, high CUC\$52/66; P ☎ ☎ ☎) This intimate resort on a bluff overlooking the sea is the best on the beach. Not all rooms are the same and the newer units in the 200 and 300 block have bathtubs. The pool (with separate children's unit) is sweet and the food buffet is

THE FRENCH INFLUENCE

While the cooks might be gastronomically challenged and the *je ne sais quoi* limited to speculation about the length of Castro's next speech, the Gallic influence in Cuban culture is stronger than most visitors imagine.

Refined French manners first arrived on the island in 1791 when Toussaint Louverture's slave rebellion in the French colony of Saint Domingue (now Haiti) drove 30,000 coffee planters fleeing westward.

'The original coffee growers were almost all cultured, old and rich colonial Frenchmen who had fled from Haiti and Louisiana, and they brought to Cuba the refinements and ideas of Napoleonic France which were expanding throughout the world,' wrote Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz in the prologue to *Coffee: History of its Cultivation and Exploitation in Cuba*, by Francisco Pérez de la Riva, (October 1944).

This initial influx was soon dissipated by the founding of the cities of Cienfuegos and Guantánamo in 1819; the former by French colonists from Bordeaux in a settlement scheme devised by a Louisianan émigré named Louis D'Clouet, and the latter by a second wave of Haitian refugees.

Today both cities retain many vestiges of French building and design, particularly Cienfuegos, known locally as the 'city of columns' for its glittering array of neoclassical architecture.

More subtle influences can also be found in Cuban music. Elements of French Romanzas are traceable in Cuban *trova* while *changüí* and *guaracha* – musical forms native to Guantánamo Province – are the bastardized descendants of the *contradanza* (country dance) and various elements borrowed from French theater.

TOWARD TRINIDAD

Heading east toward Trinidad, postcard views of the Escambray Mountains loom ever closer. At Villa Guajimico the road tracks southeast undulating scenically between the mountains and sea for 30km.

Hacienda La Vega on the main road approximately 8km east of Villa Guajimico is a small Palmares restaurant adjacent to a hacienda surrounded by fruit trees. It's a shady and tranquil spot that is well worth a lunchtime stopover. You can hire horses here and scamper down to a nearby beach called Caleta de Castro.

The **Cueva Martín Inferno** in the Valle de Yaganabo, 56km from Cienfuegos via the shore hamlet of Caleta de Muñoz, contains a 67m stalagmite said to be the tallest in the world. This cave is not open for general tourism but speleologists should contact Angel Graña at the **Sociedad Espeleológica de Cuba** (☎ 7-209-2885; angel@fanj.cult.cu) in Habana. This valley is also a good bird-watching area.

Villa Guajimico (Cubamar; Map p258; ☎ 54 09 46, toll free from the US or Canada 800-645-1179; www.cubamarviajes.cu; Carretera de Trinidad Km 42; s/d/tr low season CUC\$24/38/53, high CUC\$28/46/65; P ☎ 🚗) is one of Cubamar's most luxurious campismos and the 54 attractive cabins and idyllic seaside setting could easily compete with a medium-priced (three-star) hotel. The villa offers excellent scuba diving opportunities, along with bike hire, car rental and various catamaran/kayaking options. It is also a fully-equipped Campertour site.

Around 26km west of Trinidad and 52km east of Cienfuegos **Villa Yaguanabo** (Islazul; Map p258; ☎ 54 00 99; www.islazul.cu; Carretera de Trinidad km 55; s/d low season CUC\$16/21, high CUC\$20/26) has 30 nicely situated Islazul cabins and offers horseback riding, boating on the Yaguanabo River and short walks along the Villa Yaguanabo trail. It has a restaurant, too.

surprisingly good. A long beach is only a few minutes' walk away. The hotel is frequented by groups of Canadians on study programs.

Hotel Rancho Luna (Cubanaacán; Map p263; ☎ 54 81 31; Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 16; s/d low season CUC\$55/70, high CUC\$65/80; P ☎ 🚗) This recently refurbished resort – now linked to the Faro Luna in a Cubanacán *complejo* (complex) – is a favorite of Canadian package tourists, who dig the all-inclusive deal, private beach and big pool. A horse and buggy can be hired for rides along the coast.

Hotel Pasacaballo (Islazul; Map p263; ☎ 54 80 13; Carretera de Rancho Luna Km 22; P ☎ 🚗) A five-story monster sitting on a headland opposite the Castillo de Jagua, this Islazul offering is as architecturally ugly as the rest of the scenery is beautiful. In early 2006 it was closed due to Misión Milagros (p449). Check with the travel agencies in Cienfuegos for updates.

Recommended casas particulares in Rancho Luna:

'Villa Sol' – Diana Gavio Caso (☎ 0152-27-24-48; Carretera Faro Luna; r CUC\$20-30) On the approach road to Hotel Faro Luna. Beautiful house overlooking ocean. Bougainvillea in garden.

Casa de Julio (☎ 51 57 44; Carretera de Faro Luna; r CUC\$25) Last (blue) house on left before Hotel Faro Luna. Nice setting.

Eating

Aside from the hotels, your dining options are limited. Try the beach snack bar or one of the private houses that rent rooms. The Servi-Cupet station 5km north of town serves microwave pizza 24 hours a day.

Getting There & Away

Theoretically, there are local buses from Cienfuegos seven times a day. Alternatively the Jagua ferry to Cienfuegos calls at the dock directly below Hotel Pasacaballo several times daily. A one-way taxi fare to Cienfuegos should cost around CUC\$8 to CUC\$10; bargain.

An even better way to get here is zipping along from Cienfuegos on a rented moped (p266).

CASTILLO DE JAGUA

The **Castillo de Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles de Jagua** (Map p263), to the west of the mouth of Bahía de Cienfuegos, was designed by José Tontete in 1738 and completed in 1745 (long before the city of Cienfuegos was founded). At the time it was the third most important fortress in Cuba, after those of Habana and Santiago de Cuba. Built to keep pirates (and the British) out, the castle

now shelters a small museum and boasts a pleasant bayside view.

You can get to the castle via a round-about road from Cienfuegos, but it's easier to take the ferry from a landing just below the Hotel Pasacaballo. It operates frequently throughout the day, charging one peso one way. Tourists pay CUC\$1. Otherwise, take the ferry from Cienfuegos.

JARDÍN BOTÁNICO DE CIENFUEGOS

The 94-hectare **Jardín Botánico de Cienfuegos** (Map p263; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 8am-5pm), near the Pepito Tey sugar mill, 17km east of Cienfuegos, is one of Cuba's biggest gardens. It houses 2000 species of plants, including 23 types of bamboo, 65 of fig and 280 different palms. The botanic garden was founded in 1901 by US sugar baron Edwin F Atkins who initially intended to use it to study different varieties of sugarcane, but instead began planting exotic tropical trees from around the world.

Only three buses a day pass near Pepito Tey on their way from Cienfuegos to Cu-

manayagua, and a visit to the gardens is only practical if you have your own transport. Coming from Cienfuegos, turn right (south) at the junction to Pepito Tey.

EL NICHU

Waterfalls with small bathing pools and gorgeous mountain vistas: **El Nicho** (Map p258; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 8:30am-6:30pm), just 90 minutes from Cienfuegos via the rough road at Crucecitas, is (was!) one of central Cuba's best kept secrets. You can swim, horseback ride to Hanabanilla (CUC\$2 per hour) and camp here; there's a simple Palmares restaurant. Tucked into the Sierra del Escambray, you'll need a 4WD to reach these chilly cascades (alternatively you can book a tour through Cubanacán in Cienfuegos for CUC\$30). Patient, hardy travelers can get a colectivo to Cumanayagua (CUC\$1) from the bus station in Cienfuegos and then connect with a rough-and-tumble local truck (5:30am and 5pm) to El Nicho. The falls are best (but coldest) from January to April before the rains and Cuban crowds come.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'