

Sancti Spíritus Province



With Unesco-nominated Trinidad anchored firmly in its midst and the still-to-be-discovered secrets of Sancti Spíritus town beckoning invitingly nearby, timeless Sancti Spíritus Province has history by the book-load. But it's not all stuffy museums and dusty antique furniture. High up in the crinkled Sierra del Escambray, fern-sprinkled forests and well-trodden nature trails call travelers with more lofty ambitions. You can enjoy hiking or go canyoning off the edge of a waterfall.

Linked historically to the sugar industry and characterized by the ruined mills and vivid patchwork fields of the somnolent Valle de los Ingenios (Valley of the Sugar Mills), Sancti Spíritus is one of Cuba's most compact and oft-visited regions with enough diversity to satisfy most travelers' tastes.

Quiet corners include the seaside village of La Boca, sparkling Embalse Zaza and the dreamy streets and squares of the underrated provincial capital, while those of a livelier inclination can enjoy the fine white sands of hotel-splayed Playa Ancón or the rum-swilling music houses of the *trova* (traditional poetic singing) capital – Trinidad.

Heading north, San José del Lago is a natural-springs resort, where thermal pools compete with massages and mud baths as soothing relaxants, while in the adjoining town of Yaguajay a fine municipal museum honors erstwhile revolutionary hero Camilo Cienfuegos. Hugging the swampy coast opposite the tranquil Bahía de Buenavista, Unesco's beautiful Buenavista Biosphere Reserve, is the least known and most underdeveloped of Cuba's half dozen or so protected natural areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

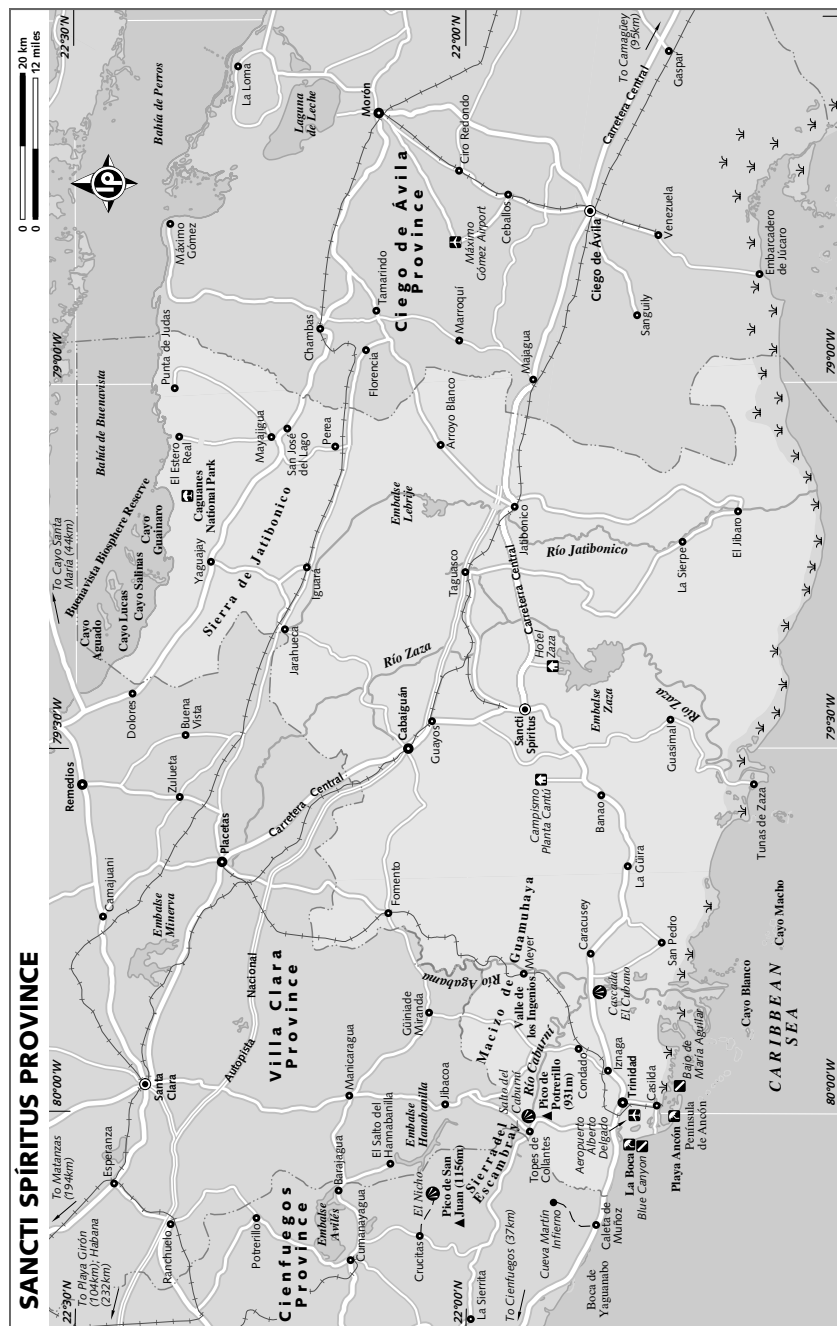
- **The Authentic Trinidad**
Peel off the layers in Cuba's colonial jewel (p292)
- **The Alternative to Trinidad**
Wander unmolested through slow-moving Sancti Spíritus (p287)
- **Northern Exposure**
Go exploring in the Buenavista Biosphere Reserve (p307)
- **Beach Break**
Rent a house in La Boca and stroll the sands of Playa Ancón (p304)
- **Waterfall Wonder**
Take a hike to the Salto del Caburní (p304)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 41

■ POPULATION: 463,258

■ AREA: 6744 SQ KM



SANCTI SPIRITUS

☎ 41 / pop 105,815

For first-time visitors, unassuming Sancti Spiritus often seems like a larger and slightly less frenetic version of Trinidad. Antique Buicks limp asthmatically down cobbled city streets; beves of enthusiastic school children practice stickball in languid Parque Serafin Sánchez; a plaintive and lilting bolero (a romantic love song) briefly interrupts the sleepy tranquility of Av Jesús Menéndez.

Founded in 1514 as one of Diego Velázquez' seven original 'villas', Sancti Spiritus was moved to its present site on the Río Yayabo in 1522. But the relocation didn't stop audacious corsairs, who continued to loot the town until well into the 1660s.

Lacking the historical importance of Santa Clara, Sancti Spiritus has developed into something of a transit town for travelers heading west or east. But a day or two's lay-over needn't be wasted. As well as possessing a thoroughly charming city center, Sancti Spiritus is also famous for the dapper *guayabera* shirt and the *guayaba* (guava) fruit, a crop that is still grown along the banks of the Río Yayabo, from which it derives its name.

Orientation

The bus and train stations are on opposite sides of town. Of the two, the train station is more convenient. It's an easy five-minute walk to the old Puente Yayabo and then another five minutes to Parque Serafin Sánchez in the heart of the town. The bus station is a couple of kilometers east of the center on the Carretera Central (called Bartolomé Masó as it passes through Sancti Spiritus).

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Librería Julio Antonio Mella (☎ 2-7416; Independencia Sur No 29; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Near the post office. There's also a good used bookshop nearby at No 25.

INTERNET ACCESS

Eteca (M Solano; per hr CUC\$6; ☎ 8am-10pm) Kiosk in front of Cine Serafin Sánchez, with phones and one computer (when it works).

LIBRARIES

Biblioteca Provincial Rubén Martínez Villena (☎ 2-7717; Máximo Gómez Norte No 1) On Parque Serafin Sánchez.

MEDIA

Radio Sancti Spiritus CMHT Airing on 1200AM and 97.3FM.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Farmacia Especial (☎ 2-4660; Independencia Norte No 123; ☎ 24hr) Pharmacy on Parque Maceo.

Hospital Provincial Camilo Cienfuegos (☎ 2-4017; Bartolomé Masó s/n) Five hundred meters north of Plaza de la Revolución.

Policlínico Los Olivos (☎ 2-6362; Circunvalación Olivos No 1) Near the bus station. Will treat foreigners in an emergency.

MONEY

Banco Financiero Internacional (☎ 2-7578; Independencia Sur No 2) On Parque Serafin Sánchez.

Cadeca (☎ 2-8536; Independencia Sur No 31; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) Lose your youth in this line.

POST

Post Office (☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) There are two branches: one at Independencia Sur No 8; the other at the Eteca building, Bartolomé Masó No 167.

TELEPHONE

Eteca (☎ 8am-10pm) There are two branches: one at M Solano, in front of Cine Serafin Sánchez; the other opposite Hospital Provincial Camilo Cienfuegos on Bartolomé Masó No 167.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Campismo Popular (☎ 2-5401; Independencia Norte No 201) Off Parque Maceo.

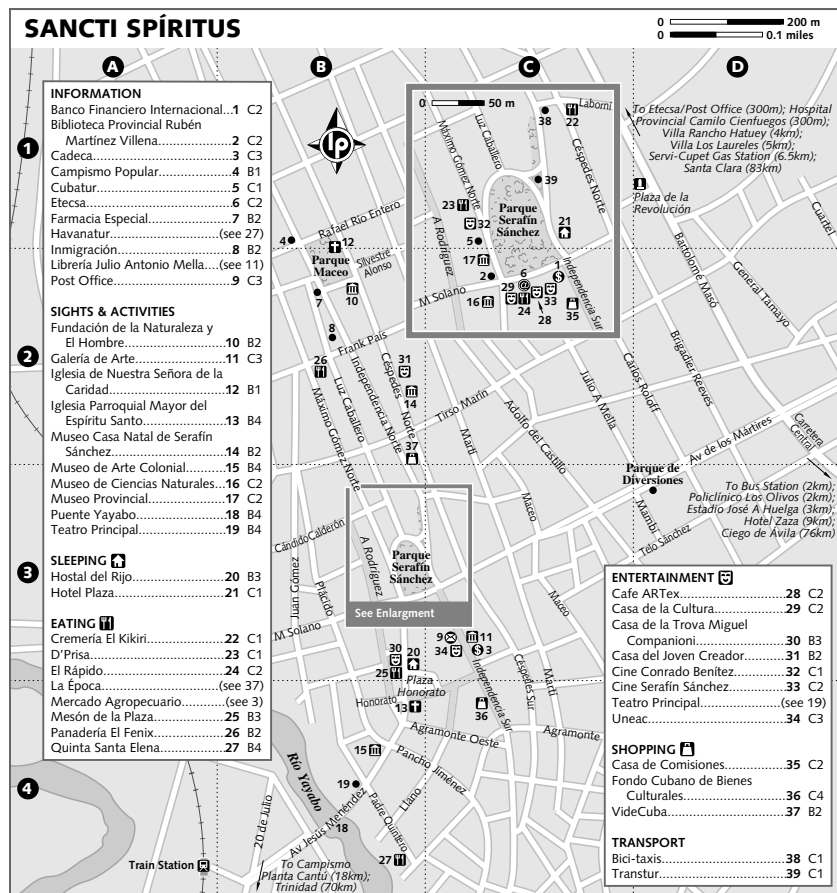
Cubatur (☎ 2-8518; Máximo Gómez Norte No 7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) On Parque Serafin Sánchez.

Havantur (Padre Quintero No 60) Offices in Quinta Santa Elena restaurant (p290).

Sights

The city's most famous sight is the **Puente Yayabo**, a quadruple-arched brick bridge built by the Spanish in 1815, now a national monument. The structure looks more English than Cuban, especially when glimpsed on the ubiquitous postcards. The **Teatro Principal** alongside the bridge dates from 1876, and the old cobbled streets radiating downhill were restored in the late 1980s. Tucked back here, old ladies peddle live chickens, neighbors gossip in front of their coral or lemon-yellow houses and provincial city life thrums along undisturbed by tourism.

Make a quick detour up **Calle Llano**, a quintessential local street with cobblestones,



wrought-iron balconies and wooden beams more reminiscent of Trinidad.

Turning left on Pancho Jiménez you come to the **Museo de Arte Colonial** (☎ 2-5455; Plácido Sur No 74; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 8am-noon Sun), with 19th-century furniture and decorations displayed in an imposing 17th-century building that once belonged to the stinking-rich Valle-Iznaga family. Curve up this same way and you come to the charming yellow **Iglesia Parroquial Mayor del Espíritu Santo** (Agramonte Oeste No 58; ☎ 9-11am & 2-5pm Tue-Sat) on Plaza Honorato. Originally constructed of wood in 1522 and rebuilt in stone in 1680, it's said to be the oldest church in Cuba still standing on its original foundations (although the clock seems to have given out in recent

years). There's a splendid ceiling inside, but this church is often closed; try entering for mass (5pm daily and 9am Sunday).

The most interesting museum in town is the small collection at the **Fundación de la Naturaleza y El Hombre** (☎ 2-8342; Cruz Pérez No 1; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) on Parque Maceo. Here you'll learn the fascinating tale of the 17,422km canoe odyssey 'from the Amazon to the Caribbean' in 1987 led by Cuban writer and Renaissance man Antonio Nuñez Jiménez (1923-98). Some 432 expeditionaries made the journey through 10 countries, from Ecuador to the Bahamas, in the twin dugout canoes Simón Bolívar and Hatuey. The latter measures over 13m and is the collection's central, prized piece. Across from

the Fundación is the handsome old **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad** (Céspedes Norte No 207), with sparrows nesting above the altar.

Four blocks south is pretty **Parque Serafín Sánchez** with hundreds of metal chairs hosting cigar-smoking grandpas and flirty young couples. Your eye will first be drawn to an imposing theaterlike building on the southwest corner that was built in 1929 by the Progress Society and today serves as the **Biblioteca Provincial Ruebén Martínez Villena**. Sport and coin fairs might like the **Museo Provincial** (Máximo Gómez Norte No 3; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm & 8-10pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) on Parque Serafín Sánchez, with its dedicated numismatic and athletic collections. Nearby, the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (☎ 2-6365; Máximo Gómez Sur No 2; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 8-10pm Sat, 8:30am-noon Sun), off Parque Serafín Sánchez, has stuffed animals, shiny rocks and a small planetarium. A few blocks north of the park is the **Museo Casa Natal de Serafín Sánchez** (Céspedes Norte No 112; admission CUC\$0.50; ☎ 8am-5pm). Serafín Sánchez was a local patriot who participated in both wars of independence and went down fighting in November 1896.

The **Galería de Arte** (Céspedes Sur No 26; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) next to the agropecuario (vegetable market), houses 86 works by local painter Oscar Fernández Morera (1890-1946).

Sleeping IN TOWN

Both of Sancti Spiritus' city-center hotels are set in attractive restored colonial buildings and are worth a visit in their own right.

Hostal del Rijo (Cubanacán; ☎ 2-8588; Calle Honorato No 12; r CUC\$46; ☎) This new hotel is in a beautifully restored 1818 mansion. Located on Plaza Honorato, each of the 16 plush, clean rooms are different. Rooms Nos 5, 6, 7 and 9 have balconies with plaza views and one room has disabled access. The teeny rooftop pool is more like a puddle, but the city views are unbeatable. This place fills fast; if you can't get a room, head to the rooftop bar for a sunset cocktail.

Hotel Plaza (☎ 2-7102; Independencia Norte No 1; r CUC\$46; ☎) This is a two-story place has 28 rooms, a mirador and a great parkside location. Formerly an Islazul joint, the Plaza was recently taken over by Cubanacán who have been busy elevating it to match the standards of the Rijo. Huge rooms are well-equipped

with TVs and air-con, and the tiled communal areas are characterized by eye-catching hanging wicker chairs. It makes a good second choice if the Rijo's full.

See the boxed text, p290 for casa particular recommendations.

NORTH OF TOWN

There are two agreeable hotels along the Carretera Central as you head north; either one makes a good choice if you don't want to bother with the city center.

Villa Los Laureles (Islazul; ☎ 2-7345; Carretera Central Km 383; s/d low season CUC\$26/34, high season CUC\$30/38; ☎) This lively attractive motel 5km north of town is popular with Cubans. There are 70 rooms, split between a classic motel block and separate cabins. The big, bright rooms have fridge, satellite TV and hot water, plus a patio/balcony. The in-house Cabaret Tropi has a nightly 9pm show.

Villa Rancho Hatuey (☎ 2-8315/16/17; Carretera Central Km 384; s/d low season CUC\$37/50, high season CUC\$37/55; ☎) This modern Islazul complex is accessible from the southbound lane of the Carretera Central, 4km north of town. The 76 rooms, spread out on landscaped grounds, are popular with government officials and party leaders (you'll know them by their plaid shirts and jeans). People on bus tours are also accommodated here, where all the services you would expect in a midrange hotel are available.

EAST OF TOWN

Hotel Zaza (Islazul; ☎ 2-8512; s/d with breakfast CUC\$27/36; ☎) Overlooking Embalse Zaza, most tour groups overnight at this hotel. The 128 rooms are scruffy around the edges, but those numbered in the 400s have nice reservoir views. The swimming pool (CUC\$3 for nonguests) is refreshing on a hot day and the entertainment – with music loud enough to hear underwater – is a gas. In early September, the Copa Internacional de Pesca de Black Bass (a fishing tournament) is held here and you can organize fishing and boat trips at any time from the upstairs office. The staff are helpful and friendly. Go east 5km on the Carretera Central toward Ciego de Ávila, then south 5km to the lake.

SOUTHWEST OF TOWN

Campismo Planta Cantú (Cubamar; ☎ 2-9698; cabin CUC\$30; ☎) A Cubamar campismo that

CASAS PARTICULARES – SANCTI SPÍRITUS

There are approximately 20 casas to choose from in Sancti Spíritus. Look for the green triangle.

Daymila Díaz Rodríguez (☎ 2-7553; Martí No 111 btwn Sobral & San Cristóbal; r CUC\$20-25; 📍) Central colonial house with pleasant hosts.

Hostal Ana Neira Fabrega (☎ 2-7674; Luz Caballero No 9 btwn Tirso Marín & Parque Serafín Sánchez; r CUC\$20-25)

'Los Richards' – Ricardo Rodríguez (☎ 2-3029; Independencia Norte No 28 Altos; r CUC\$20-25; 📍) Taxi driver. Central, somewhat worn, balcony, distant views.

Martha Rodríguez Martínez (☎ 2-3556; Plácido No 69 btwn Calderón & Tirso Marín; r CUC\$20-25; 📍) Three rooms (two with air-con, one with fan), meals, rooftop terrace.

welcomes non-Cubans, Planta Cantú is a little off the beaten track, so you'll need a car to get to this place near Banao. The cute cabins below the foothills sleep four and are especially good value for groups as you pay one price for the whole unit. Horses can be hired (CUC\$3 per hour). The real draw here, though, is the revitalizing waterfalls of the crystal-clear Río Cayajaná. To reach them, take the fork before the entrance and go until the road ends (about 1km). A worn path leads to the falls and swimming holes. There is a good, level camping spot here. To get to the campismo, go 16km southwest of Sancti Spíritus on the road to Trinidad, turn inland at the sign and go 6km further.

Eating

You'll burn vital calories searching for decent food in Sancti Spíritus. Rest assured, there are only two appetizing sit-down restaurants outside the Cubanacán hotels; plus the ubiquitous – and often life-saving – **El Rápido** (Parque Serafín Sánchez; ☎ 9am-11pm) snack bar.

Quinta Santa Elena (☎ 2-8167; Padre Quintero No 60; dishes CUC\$4-8; ☎ 10am-midnight) This choice riverside patio with bridge views, live music at lunchtime and fair prices is a winning combination. Good portions of shrimp in red sauce or *ropa vieja* (shredded beef) make the Quinta the best choice in town. There's a salad selection for vegetarians.

Mesón de la Plaza (☎ 2-8546; Máximo Gómez Sur No 34; ☎ noon-2:30pm & 6-10pm) Facing Plaza Honorato with nice church views, this Palmares-run restaurant is in a 19th-century mansion that once belonged to a rich Spanish tycoon. It is routinely recommended by locals and has a clean and inviting decor.

Restaurant Hostal del Rijo (Cubanacán; ☎ 2-8588; Calle Honorato No 12) Serves traditional Cuban fare and can rustle up a good spaghetti Bolognese either outside or in the confines of a lovely secluded patio.

Las Arcadas (☎ 2-7102; Independencia Norte No 1) Based at Hotel Plaza, Las Arcadas is another *comida criolla* (Creole food) option and the bar here serves good coffee.

D'Prisa (☎ 10am-10pm) This Islazul-run place is on the west side of Parque Serafín Sánchez and sells cold beer and snacks (CUC\$1 to CUC\$2).

There are also a few street stalls knocking out peso pizza along Av de los Mártires beside Parque de Diversiones. Stand around long enough in Parque Serafín Sánchez and the ice-cream man will turn up with his Mr Whippy-style ice cream-maker or you can trek a block or two north to **Cremería El Kikiri** (Independencia Norte & Laborni) for an instant fix.

Self-catering choices:

Mercado agropecuario (cnr Independencia Sur & Honorato) A couple of blocks from Parque Serafín Sánchez on the corner of Valdés Muñoz.

Panadería El Fenix (cnr Máximo Gómez Norte & Frank País; ☎ 6am-6pm) Sells fresh bread daily.

La Época (Independencia Norte No 50C) Good for groceries.

Entertainment

Casa de la Cultura (☎ 2-3772; M Solano No 11) This place, diagonally opposite the library on Parque Serafín Sánchez, hosts various musical events.

Uneac (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists; ☎ 2-6375; Independencia Sur No 10) Cultural events also occur at this venue, near the post office, which shows movies.

Casa del Joven Creador (Céspedes Norte No 118) Go to this place, near the Museo Casa Natal de Serafín Sánchez, for rock and rap concerts.

Casa de la Trova Miguel Companioni (☎ 2-6802; Máximo Gómez Sur No 26) For folk music, head to this venue off Plaza Honorato.

Café ARTex (M Solano; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10pm-2am Tue-Sun) It has dancing, live music and karaoke nightly and a Sunday matinee at 2pm (admis-

sion CUC\$3). Thursday is *reggaeton* (Cuban hip-hop) night and the café also hosts comedy. Good groups to look out for in Sancti Spíritus are the Septeto Espirituano and the Septeto de Son del Yayabo.

Estadio José A Huelga (Circunvalación) From October to April, baseball games are held at this stadium, 1km north of the bus station.

Teatro Principal (☎ 2-5755; Av Jesús Menéndez No 102) Has weekend matinees (at 10am) with kids' theater.

The city's two main cinemas are **Cine Conrado Benítez** (☎ 2-5327; Máximo Gómez Norte No 13) and **Cine Serafín Sánchez** (☎ 2-3839; M Solano No 7), both on Parque Serafín Sánchez.

Shopping

Anything you might need – from batteries to frying pans – is sold in street stalls along the pedestrian mall on Independencia Sur which recently got a bit of a facelift.

Casa de Comisiones (Independencia Sur No 6; ☎ 9am-4pm) This combination pawn shop–flea market is a riot of Brownie cameras, rhinestone tiaras and vintage jewelry, watches, purses and furniture.

Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales (☎ 2-7106; Independencia Sur No 55) This place has Cuban crafts and paintings.

VideCuba (Independencia Norte No 50; ☎ 9am-9pm) Reload your camera film or replace those well-worn batteries here.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The provincial **bus station** (☎ 2-4142; Carretera Central) is 2km east of town. Astro serves Camagüey (CUC\$7) and Ciego de Ávila (CUC\$3) on alternate days, and Habana (CUC\$16) and Santiago (CUC\$20) daily.

With deluxe **Viazul** (☎ 2-4142; www.viazul.com) buses, you can choose from the following:

Destination	Cost (one way)	Departure
Habana	CUC\$23	2:20am, 6:55am, 8:40pm
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$28	3:10am, 3:15pm, 8:50pm
Trinidad	CUC\$6	5:35am

The Santiago de Cuba departure also stops in Ciego de Ávila (CUC\$6, 76km), Camagüey (CUC\$10, 184km), Las Tunas (CUC\$17,

312km), Holguín (CUC\$21, 393km) and Bayamo (CUC\$21, 464km). The Habana bus stops at Santa Clara (CUC\$6, 83km).

TRAIN

Train travel is tricky out of Sancti Spíritus. Luckily, the **train station** (☎ 2-4790; Av Jesús Menéndez final; ☎ ticket window 7am-2pm Mon-Sat), southwest of the Puente Yayabo, is an easy 10-minute walk from town so you can check schedules and status. The only departures from Sancti Spíritus proper are to Habana (CUC\$14, eight hours, 376km, 9pm alternate days), stopping in Santa Clara (CUC\$4, two hours, 83km), and to Cienfuegos (CUC\$5.50, five hours, 164km, 4am Monday).

Points east are served out of Guayos, 15km north of Sancti Spíritus, including Holguín (CUC\$14, 8½ hours, 9.30am), Bayamo (CUC\$13, 8¼ hours, 394km) and Santiago de Cuba (CUC\$21, 10¼ hours, 8.45am). If you're on the Habana–Santiago de Cuba cross-country express and going to Sancti Spíritus or Trinidad, you have to get off at Guayos.

The ticket office at the Sancti Spíritus train station can sell you tickets for the trains from Guayos, but you must find your own way there (CUC\$8 to CUC\$10 in a taxi but bargain hard).

TRUCKS & TAXIS

Trucks to Trinidad, Jatibonico and elsewhere depart from the bus station. Colectivos (collective taxis) parked outside the station will take you to Trinidad for approximately CUC\$16 for the whole car, but it's technically illegal for foreigners to take them.

Getting Around

Horse carts on the Carretera Central, opposite the bus station, run to the Parque Serafín Sánchez when full (one peso). Bicitaxis gather at the corner of Laborni and Céspedes Norte. There is a Transtur booth on the northeast corner of Parque Serafín Sánchez; prices for daily car hire start at around CUC\$60. The **Servi-Cupet** (Carretera Central) gas station is 1.5km north of Villa Los Laureles, on the Carretera Central toward Santa Clara. Parking in Parque Serafín Sánchez is relatively safe. Ask in hotels Rijo and Plaza and they will often find a man to stand guard overnight for CUC\$1.

DAY-TRIPPER

In a province famous for its lush mountains and archetypal colonial architecture, fishing in a lake might seem like a bit of a cop-out. But – as subscribers to *Angling Weekly* may or may not be aware – Sancti Spiritus is home to the biggest artificial lake in Cuba.

Nearly 50% of expansive **Embalse Zaza** is given over to sports fishing and abundant stocks of largemouth black bass (weighing up to 8kg) attract anglers from around the globe. Fishing excursions can be arranged at the super-friendly **Hotel Zaza** (p289) for as little as CUC\$30 for four hours, or CUC\$70 for a full-day excursion to the equally voluminous **Río Agabama** on the Trinidad–Sancti Spiritus road.

If hooking a line ain't your cup of tea, don't fret. The unique ambience of the lake can be soaked up on a one-hour boat cruise from CUC\$20 for two people.

park this most certainly is not. True to its socialist roots, the city crams carefully restored Unesco buildings amicably in among the ration shops and agropecuarios (vegetable markets). Relaxing contentedly under the colonial eaves, meanwhile, old women in rocking chairs and chirping caged canaries mark the passage of time as they have done for centuries.

With its Unesco price-tag and a steady stream of day-trippers bussed in from Habana and Varadero, hustlers are in the ascendancy here, and many a traveler has been ground down and worn out by the constant unwanted attention. If you feel besieged, you might want to settle for a friendly casa particular in the small towns of La Boca or Casilda, just a quick 4km or 6km jaunt respectively from Trinidad. Alternatively, consider an accommodation option that's just outside the mayhem of the historic center.

History

In 1514 pioneering conquistador Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, founded La Villa de la Santísima Trinidad on Cuba's south coast, the island's third settlement after Baracoa and Bayamo. Legend has it that erstwhile 'Apostle of the Indians' Fray Bartolomé de las Casas held Trinidad's first mass under a Calabash tree in present-day Plazuela Real del Jigüe. In 1518 Velázquez' former secretary, Hernán Cortéz, passed through the town recruiting mercenaries for his all-conquering expedition to Mexico and the settlement was all but emptied of its original inhabitants. Over the ensuing 60 years it was left to a smattering of local Taíno Indians to keep the ailing economy alive through a mixture of farming, cattle rearing and a little outside trade.

Reduced to a small rural backwater by the 17th century and cut off from the colonial authorities in Habana by dire communications, Trinidad became a haven for pirates and smugglers who controlled a lucrative contraband slave trade with British-controlled Jamaica.

Things began to change in the early 19th century when the town became the capital of the Departamento Central and hundreds of French refugees fleeing a slave rebellion in Haiti arrived, setting up more than 50 small sugar mills in the nearby Valle de los Ingenios. Sugar soon replaced leather and salted beef as the region's most important

product and by the mid-19th century the area around Trinidad was producing a third of Cuba's sugar, generating enough wealth to finance the rich cluster of opulent buildings that characterize the town today.

The boom ended rather abruptly during the two wars of independence, when the surrounding sugar plantations were devastated by fire and fighting. Floundering in the years that followed, the industry never fully recovered. By the late 19th century, the focus of the sugar trade had shifted to Cienfuegos and Matanzas Provinces and Trinidad, cut off by the Sierra del Escambray from the other parts of Cuba, slipped into a somnolent and life-threatening economic coma.

Orientation

Trinidad turns on two hubs. The museums and churches of the *casco histórico* (old town) are focused around the Plaza Mayor, while the everyday facilities serving the local people are on, or near, Parque Céspedes. The bus station is west of Plaza Mayor.

Information**BOOKSHOPS**

Librería Ángel Guerra (☎ 3748; José Martí No 273 btwn Colón & Zerquera; ☎ 8am–3pm Mon–Sat)

INTERNET ACCESS

Café Internet Las Begonias (Antonio Maceo No 473; ☎ 9am–9pm; per hr CUC\$6) On the corner of Simón Bolívar. Crowded.

Etecta Telepunto (cnr General Lino Pérez & Francisco Pettersen; per hr CUC\$6; ☎ 7am–11pm) Freshly refurbished Telepunto with brand new computer terminals.

Hotel La Ronda One computer terminal in the lobby can be accessed with an Etecta card.

LIBRARIES

Biblioteca Gustavo Izquierdo (José Martí No 265 btwn Colón & Zerquera; ☎ 8am–9pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat, 8am–1pm Sun)

MEDIA

Radio Trinidad Broadcasts over 1200AM.

MEDICAL SERVICES

General Hospital (☎ 3201; Antonio Maceo No 6) Southeast of the center.

Servimed Clínica Internacional Cubanacán

(☎ 6240; General Lino Pérez No 103; ☎ 24hr) On the corner of Anastasio Cárdenas. There is an on-site pharmacy selling products in Convertibles.

TRINIDAD STREET NAMES

Locals stick to the old street names; this chart should help:

Old name	New name
Gutiérrez	Antonio Maceo
Jesús María	José Martí
Alameda	Jesús Menéndez
Carmen	Frank País
Santo Domingo	Camilo Cienfuegos
Rosario	Zerquera
Desengaño	Simón Bolívar
Boca	Piro Guinart
Gloria	Gustavo Izquierdo
San Procopio	General Lino Pérez
Guaurabo	Pablo Pichs Girón

MONEY

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (☎ 2405; José Martí No 264)

Cadeca (☎ 6263; José Martí No 164) Between Parque Céspedes and Camilo Cienfuegos.

POST

Post office (Antonio Maceo No 418) Between Colón and Zerquera.

TELEPHONE

Etecta (☎ 4129; General Lino Pérez No 274; per hr CUC\$6) On Parque Céspedes.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Cubatur (☎ 6314; Antonio Maceo No 447; ☎ 9am–8pm) On the corner of Zerquera. Good for general tourist information, plus hotel bookings, car rentals and taxis; changes traveler's checks and does cash advances.

Havanatur (☎ 6390; fax 6183; General Lino Pérez No 366)

Paradiso (☎ 6486; fax 6308; General Lino Pérez No 306) Cultural and general tours in English, Spanish and French.

Dangers & Annoyances

Thefts, though still uncommon, are on the rise in Trinidad. Incidents usually occur late at night and the victims are, more often than not, inebriated. Be on your guard, particularly when returning to your hotel/casa after a night out on the drink.

Sights

The Plaza Mayor, Trinidad's remarkably peaceful main square, is in the heart of the *casco histórico* and is the town's most oft-photographed spot.

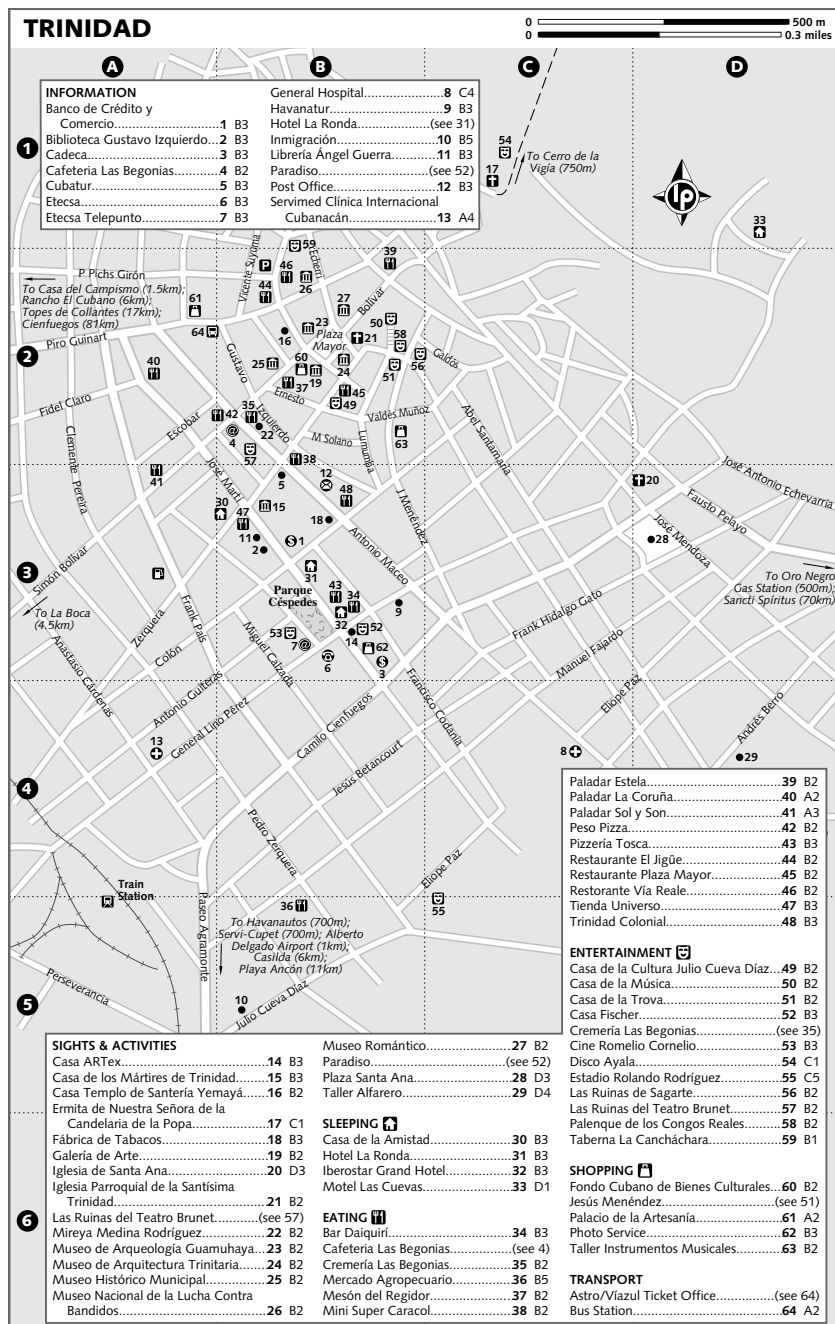
TRINIDAD

☎ 419 / pop 52,896

Quaint, compact and easy to get to know, Trinidad lives up to all of the tourist brochure hype. Declared a World Heritage site in 1988 along with the Valle de los Ingenios, Cuba's oldest and most enchanting 'outdoor museum' is one of the few tourist sites on the island where locals and foreigners can mix in a way that is both relaxed and unguarded. And with more than 300 casas particulares and only three decent city-center hotels, cross-cultural interaction is positively encouraged, creating a kind of Varadero in reverse.

Bumping and stumbling over the cobblestone streets as you enter town you'll quickly see what all the fuss is about. Trinidad's beautifully restored houses and cool, tiled, colonial courtyards combine perfectly with a stupendous natural setting – wedged spectacularly between the Sierra del Escambray and the Caribbean – to create a scene of unrivalled ambience.

There are more museums per head here than any other part of Cuba and with craning mountains and palm-fringed beaches, both within spitting distance, the setting is hard to beat. Added to this Trinidad has a degree of authenticity and intimacy that many other colonial cities lack. Faux theme



The showpiece museum here is the grandiose **Museo Histórico Municipal** (☎ 4460; Simón Bolívar No 423; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu), just off Plaza Mayor, housed in a mansion that belonged to the Borrell family from 1827 to 1830. Later the building passed to a German planter named Kanter or Cantero, and it's still called Casa Cantero. Reputedly Dr Justo Cantero acquired vast sugar estates by poisoning an old slave trader and marrying his widow, who also suffered an untimely death. Cantero's ill-gotten wealth is well displayed in the stylish neoclassical decoration of the rooms. The view of Trinidad from the top of the tower alone is worth the price of admission. Visit before 11am, when the tour buses start rolling in.

The **Iglesia Parroquial de la Santísima Trinidad** (☎ 11am-12:30pm Mon-Sat) on the northeastern side of Plaza Mayor, was rebuilt in 1892 on the site of an earlier church. The venerated Christ of the True Cross (1713), on the second altar from the front to the left, is one of many sacred objects here. Your best chance of seeing it is during mass at 8pm weekdays, 4pm Saturday, and 9am and 5pm Sunday.

Near the church is the **Museo Romántico** (☎ 4363; Echerrri No 52; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) in the Palacio Brunet, the ground floor of which was built in 1740, the upstairs in 1808. In 1974 the mansion was converted into a museum with 19th-century furnishings, a fine collection of china and other period pieces. Pushy museum staff will materialize at your side to guide you for a tip. The shop adjacent has a good selection of photos and books in English.

Another public display of wealth is in the **Museo de Arquitectura Trinitaria** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu), on the southeastern side of Plaza Mayor, showcasing upper-class domestic architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries. The museum is housed in buildings erected in 1738 and 1785 that were joined together in 1819.

On the northwestern side of Plaza Mayor is the **Museo de Arqueología Guamuhaaya** (☎ 3420; Bolívar No 457; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat), an odd mix of stuffed animals, native bones, and vaguely incongruous 19th-century kitchen furniture. Don't make it your first priority.

Admission is completely free at the 19th-century Palacio Ortiz, which today houses the **Galería de Arte** (cfr Rubén Martínez Villena & Bolívar; ☎ 9am-5pm), on the southwestern side of

Plaza Mayor. Worth a look for its quality local art, particularly the embroidery, pottery and jewelry, there's also a nice courtyard and spiffy bathroom.

The **Casa Templo de Santería Yemayá** (Rubén Martínez Villena No 59 btwn Bolívar & Piro Guinart) contains a Santería altar to Yemayá, Goddess of the Sea, and the *santeros* (priests of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería) in attendance are available for consultations. On the saint's anniversary, March 19, ceremonies are performed day and night. Ask about Carnival practices and *parranda* (Afro-Venezuelan dance) in the adjacent courtyard.

Perhaps the most recognizable building in Trinidad is the quaint yellow bell-tower of the former convent of San Francisco de Asís. Since 1986 the building has housed the **Museo Nacional de la Lucha Contra Bandidos** (☎ 4121; Echerrri No 59; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun). The displays are mostly photos, maps, weapons and other objects relating to the struggle against the various counter-revolutionary bands that operated in Sierra del Escambray between 1960 and 1965. The fuselage of a US U-2 spy plane shot down over Cuba is also on display. Here, too, you can climb the tower for good views. It's on the corner of Piro Guinart.

Casa de los Mártires de Trinidad (Zerquera No 254 btwn Antonio Maceo & José Martí; guided/unguided CUC\$1/free; ☎ 9am-5pm) is dedicated to 72 Trinidad residents who died in the struggle against Batista, the campaign against the counter-revolutionaries, and the war in Angola.

There's a tiny **Fábrica de Tabacos** (Antonio Maceo No 403), just right past Hotel Ronda on the corner of Colón; it's too small for full-blown tours but you might be able to take a glance at the deft tobacco rollers making cigars.

Additional sights on the east side of town make a good goal for a stroll around or as you leave Trinidad for points north. Only the shell remains of the **Iglesia de Santa Ana**, but just across the square is a former Spanish prison (1844) that has been converted into a tourist center, the **Plaza Santa Ana** (Calle Camilo Cienfuegos; admission free; ☎ 11am-10pm). The complex includes an art gallery, handicraft market, ceramics shop, bar and restaurant.

Five blocks south is **Taller Alfarero** (Calle Andrés Bero; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), a large factory where teams of workers make ceramics from local clay using a traditional potter's wheel.

Activities

For a bird's-eye view of Trinidad, walk straight up Simón Bolívar, the street between the Iglesia Parroquial and the Museo Romántico, to the destroyed 18th-century **Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de la Popa**, part of a former Spanish military hospital. It's on a hill to the north of the old town, a favorite sunset-watching spot (use insect repellent). From here it's a 30-minute hike up the hill to the radio transmitter atop 180m-high **Cerro de la Vigía**, which delivers broad vistas of Trinidad, Playa Ancón and the entire littoral.

The **Finca de Recreo María Dolores** (☎ 6481, 6394/5; Carretera de Cienfuegos Km 1.5), is a farm and recreation complex along the Río Guaurabo. It rents rooms and hosts *fiesta campesinas* (country fairs; see Casa del Campesino, opposite). It runs sunset boat tours to the beach at La Boca (CUC\$5 per person) and horseback-riding tours to **Ranchón El Cubano** (CUC\$10 per person for two hours). The latter is a pleasant spot 5km from Trinidad with trails to a waterfall and a unique restaurant which specializes in *pez gato* (catfish).

Rent a bike to **Playa Ancón** where you can use the swimming pool or snorkel off the beach. The road out of town is flat and well-paved and the loop via La Boca makes an interesting detour. See p301 for bike rental.

Courses

At **Las Ruinas del Teatro Brunet** (Antonio Maceo No 461 btwn Simón Bolívar & Zerquera) you can take drumming lessons (9am to 11am Saturday) and dance lessons (1pm to 4pm Saturday). Dance lessons are also available with popular local teacher **Mireya Medina Rodríguez** (☎ 3944; Antonio Maceo No 472 btwn Simon Bolívar & Zerquera) who instructs everything from *chachachá* to rumba in her front room. Another option is Paradiso in **Casa Artex** (☎ 6486; paradisotr@sctd.artex.cu; General Lino Pérez No 306) which offers salsa lessons from CUC\$5 for 90 minutes.

The travel agent **Paradiso** (☎ 6486; fax 6308; General Lino Pérez No 306) have incorporated a number of other courses into their cultural program including: Cuban architecture (CUC\$20), Afro-Cuban culture (CUC\$30), Artes Plásticas (Visual Arts; CUC\$30) and Popular Music (CUC\$30). These courses last four hours and are taught by cultural specialists. They require a minimum number of six to 10 people to take place, but you can

always negotiate. At the same venue there are guitar lessons for CUC\$5 an hour and courses in Spanish language/Cuban culture for CUC\$8 an hour.

Tours

Tours to Topes de Collantes (p304) with **Cubatur** (☎ 6314; Antonio Maceo No 447; ☎ 9am-8pm) cost between CUC\$23 and CUC\$43 per person depending on the excursion. The horseback-riding tours to the Ranchón El Cubano include the park entrance fee, swimming, lunch and guide for approximately CUC\$18 (horses are stabled at Finca de Recreo María Dolores, see Casa del Campesino, opposite – you can make your own way there and do the tour for less).

Travel agent **Paradiso** (☎ 6486; fax 6308; General Lino Pérez No 306) has a great-value day tour to the Valle de los Ingenios for CUC\$9 per person and an artist-studio tour in Trinidad for CUC\$10 per person.

If you're staying in a private house, your hosts will know someone renting horses for a trip around the Valle de los Ingenios or Ranchón El Cubano. The first takes in a waterfall and both are through beautiful countryside. Your guide should accept CUC\$7/15 per person for three/six hours. (Note that with a private guide, you have to pay an additional CUC\$6.50 park entry fee for Ranchón El Cubano.) The saddles on the horses are often poor and, unless you're an experienced rider, three hours will be plenty. A tour to Topes de Collantes by private car shouldn't cost more than CUC\$25.

For diving, fishing, sailing and snorkeling tours, see Playa Ancón (p301); any of Trinidad's agencies (p293) can organize the same excursions.

Festivals & Events

The three-day **Fiestas Sanjuaneras** is a local Carnival held during the last weekend in June; rum-filled horsemen galloping through the streets is about the size of it: take cover. The **Semana de la Cultura Trinitaria** (Trinidad Culture Week) is at the beginning of January to coincide with the city's anniversary.

Sleeping

Trinidad has more than 300 *casas particulares* (see p298) and competition is fierce: arriving by bus or walking the streets with luggage, you'll be besieged by hustlers work-

ing for commissions and desperate *casas* owners. With so many beautiful homes and hospitable families renting here, there's no reason to stay somewhere you're not comfortable. The houses around the bus station are convenient for new arrivals, but may not be your best choice for an extended stay, as it's not the nicest part of town.

There are also a few hotel choices in and out of town.

IN TOWN

Casa de la Amistad (amistur@ceniai.inf.cu; Calle Zerquera btwn Martí & Frank País; r CUC\$25) This hostel run by the Instituto Cubano de la Amistad is popular among visitors politically sympathetic to Cuba. It has six clean and well-equipped rooms with brand new showers and TVs, plus a small eating area and patio out the back. It's a first-class budget option in the center of town.

Hotel La Ronda (Cubanacán; ☎ 2248; Martí No 238; r CUC\$46; 📺) Another new Cubanacán acquisition (from Islazul) though not quite up to the standard of the boutique hotels in other cities (although the price is the same!). It's well-located on Parque Céspedes, but the 19 rooms are a little worn and the downstairs restaurant lacks character. There's a good all-day Internet connection in the lobby.

Motel Las Cuevas (Cubanacán; ☎ 4013; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$50/65, high season CUC\$59/75; 📺 📺 📺) Bus tours inevitably stay at this place with city and sea views beyond the Iglesia de Santa Ana, 1km northeast of town. The best rooms are in newer two-story units overlooking the valley. Cueva La Maravillosa is accessible down a stairway, where you'll see a huge tree growing out of a cavern (entry CUC\$1). When there are vacancies, non-guests can use the small pool for a small fee.

Iberostar Grand Hotel (Gran Caribe; cnr Calle José Martí & Lino Pérez; s/d from CUC\$95/120; 📺) Opened in February 2006 as Iberostar's fifth Cuban hotel, the five-star Grand has added a luxury twist to Trinidad's otherwise lackluster hotel scene. Thirty-six classy rooms in a remodeled 19th-century building promise oodles of colonial sparkle. The position, overlooking Parque Céspedes, makes it a great base for exploring.

OUTSIDE TOWN

Casa del Campesino (☎ 6481, 6394/5; s/d CUC\$45/70; 📺 📺 📺) If you're driving or want to get

an early riding or hiking start, consider one of the rooms at the Finca de Recreo María Dolores (opposite), 1.5km west on the road to Cienfuegos and Topes de Collantes. Go for a room overlooking Río Guaurabo (cute porch included). On nights when groups are present, there's a *fiesta campesina* with country-style Cuban folk dancing at 9:30pm, (free/CUC\$5 for guests/nonguests, including one drink). There are boat and horseback-riding tours (CUC\$10 for two hours). One kilometer west of the Casa del Campesino is a monument to Alberto Delgado, a teacher murdered by counterrevolutionaries.

Eating

Since so many *casas particulares* cook for their guests, you will probably end up eating in most nights. Dinners usually cost from CUC\$6 to CUC\$10, depending on what you eat. Vegetarians might find this a better solution than picking around a restaurant or paladar (privately owned restaurant) menu.

PALADARES

Trinidad has three legal paladares and ten times that number in illegal outfits, judging by the number of hissing hustlers you'll encounter around Plaza Mayor.

Paladar Sol y Son (Simón Bolívar No 283 btwn Frank País & José Martí; mains CUC\$8-10; ☎ noon-2pm & 7:30-11pm) The food is good at this popular paladar, and its reputation usually ensures a nightly circle of full tables. The waiting room is elegant, however, and you'll dine in a courtyard to the sound of traditional Cuban music. English is spoken. Skip the fish.

Paladar Estela (☎ 4329; Simón Bolívar No 557; ☎ 2-11:30pm) You can choose the dining room or pretty rear garden to take your meals in this place located above the Plaza Mayor. A large meal served by friendly staff will cost approximately CUC\$8. *Cordeiro* (lamb) served shredded is the house specialty.

Paladar La Coruña (José Martí No 428; ☎ 11am-11pm) A poor third after Sol y Son and Estela. Eager to please and friendly staff at this no-frills paladar serve chicken and pork and occasional fish.

RESTAURANTS

Housed in an attractive array of colonial mansions, Trinidad's state-run restaurants

CASAS PARTICULARES – TRINIDAD

Araceli Rebozo Miranda (☎ 3538, 3389; Lino Pérez No 207 btwn Frank País & Miguel Calzada; r CUC\$20) Two spotless rooms off a lush veranda; plus a roof terrace and dangerously delicious meals. English spoken.

Balbina Cadahía (☎ 2585; Antonio Maceo No 355; r CUC\$20) Two rooms with a patio.

Carlos Gil Lemes (☎ 3142; Martí No 263 btwn Zerquera & Colón; r CUC\$25) Museum-quality colonial manor with beautiful courtyard and shared bath. Friendly.

Carmelina de la Paz (☎ 3620; Piro Guinart No 239 btwn Independencia & Vicente Suyuma; r CUC\$15-20) Colonial house with huge rooms, ceilings to the clouds, roof terrace. Next to the bus station.

'Casa Arandía' – Aurelio Arandía (☎ 3240; Antonio Maceo No 438 btwn Colón & Zerquera; r CUC\$20-25) Gorgeous loft room with two double beds in a colonial house with terrace, views and fridge.

Casa de Ines (☎ 3241; eleusiscu@yahoo.com; José Martí No 160 btwn C Cienfuegos & General Lino Pérez; r CUC\$20; (P)) Big room; kind owners.

Elisa Margot Silva Ortiz (☎ 4332; Piro Guinart No 246 near Gustavo Izquierdo; r CUC\$20) Grand room with balcony, original wood ceilings/floors and sweet sisters hosting.

'Escobar' – Julio & Rosa (☎ 6688; www.trinidadphoto.com; José Martí No 401; r CUC\$25; (P) (S)) Lux colonial house with antiques, patio and roof terrace. English spoken. The owner is an accomplished photographer who runs workshops and courses.

'Hospedaje Yolanda' – Yolanda María Alvarez (☎ 3051; yolimar56@yahoo.com; Piro Guinart No 227; r CUC\$15-20) Good for groups.

Hostal Casa Margely (☎ 2550; Piro Guinart No 360A; r CUC\$20) In front of the Museo Nacional de la Lucha Contra Bandidos. A popular place with a good location.

Hostal Cocodrilo – José Boggiano (☎ 2108; C Cienfuegos No 28 btwn Pedro Zerquera & Anastasio Cárdenas; r CUC\$20) On a busy intersection.

'Hostal El Albertico' – Albertico Duarte Reyes (☎ 3721; Ernesto V Muñoz No 75A btwn Zerquera & Lumumba; r CUC\$20-25) Spacious, quiet rooms and views; you'll eat well here.

Hostal Sandra y Victor (☎ 2216; sandraorbea@yahoo.com; Antonio Maceo No 613 btwn Piro Guinart & Pablo Pichs Girón; r CUC\$20-25) Two rooms each with two double beds, nice outside/terrace space.

Mariene Ruiz Tapanes (☎ 4255; Simón Bolívar No 515; r CUC\$20) Large, clean rooms above Plaza Mayor.

Mireya Medina Rodríguez (☎ 3944; miretrini@yahoo.es; Maceo No 472 btwn Simón Bolívar & Francisco J Zerquera; r CUC\$20-25) One room in a central location. Mireya also offers dancing lessons.

Nelson Fernández (☎ 3849, 4300; Piro Guinart No 228; r CUC\$20) Near the bus station. Upstairs rooms off a roof terrace, good for groups, nice host.

Odalís Valdívía González (☎ 3309; Callejón Smith No 3 btwn Maceo & Menéndez; r CUC\$20) Independent rooms in a back patio. Clean and relaxing.

Ramona Hernández de la Pedraja (☎ 3637; C Cienfuegos No 68 btwn Frank País & Pedro Zerquera; r CUC\$15-20) Quiet room in a colonial house, small patio, friendly.

Rogelio Inchausti Bastida (☎ 4107; Simón Bolívar No 312; r CUC\$15-20) Comfortable, popular, good for groups.

Ruth Martín Rodríguez (☎ 4396; Frank País No 38 btwn Elio Paz & Manuel Fajardo; r CUC\$15-20; (P)) Friendly, one/two rooms in a separate house.

are pleasant on the eye, if a little less impressive on the palate. Food fiends beware. Dishes in these magnificent mansions are often uninspiring and the service infamously inattentive.

Restaurante Plaza Mayor (☎ 6470; cnr Rubén Martínez Villena & Zerquera; dishes from CUC\$3; ☎ 11am-10pm) Offers everything from spaghetti to lobster (CUC\$20). Live trios often strum while you dine here and it's a tranquil spot for dinner.

Trinidad Colonial (☎ 6473; Antonio Maceo No 402; ☎ 11:30am-10pm) Here you'll dine on good

portions of Cuban cuisine in the elegant 19th-century Casa Bidegaray. Meals are reasonable, even if the service isn't, with smoked pork topping out at CUC\$6. The store attached has a good selection of books.

Restorante Vía Reale (Rubén Martínez Villena No 74 btwn Piro Guinart & Pablo Pichs Girón; lunch CUC\$4; ☎ noon-4pm) Break the chicken-and-pork grind at this Italian place with passable pizza and spaghetti lunches. This is a good vegetarian option.

Restaurante El Jigüe (☎ 6476; cnr Rubén Martínez Villena & Piro Guinart; ☎ 11am-10pm) Back on

the chicken trail, the house specialty here is *pollo al jigüe*; it's baked at least, offering savory flavors distinct from the usual grease fry.

Mesón del Regidor (☎ 6456; Simón Bolívar No 424; ☎ 10am-10pm) Crowded at lunchtime with tour groups, but quiet the rest of the time, this restaurant specializes in grilled meats. The café next door is a good place to sit down and write postcards and does the best grilled cheese sandwich in town. Local *trovador* (traditional singer-songwriter) Israel Moreno often drops by during the day with a song.

QUICK EATS

Bar Daiquirí (General Lino Pérez No 313; ☎ 24hr) A lively place off Parque Céspedes with cheap drinks and fast food in Convertibles, the sidewalk terrace here is a popular meeting spot for locals and backpackers on their way back from an all-night salsa binge.

Cafetería Las Begonias (☎ 6473; cnr Antonio Maceo & Simón Bolívar; ☎ 9am-10pm; (P)) Operations center for the backpacker crowd and the best place to meet other travelers, Las Begonias serves sandwiches, hamburgers, espresso and ice cream on clean, glass-topped tables that give out onto the street. There's a bar behind a partition wall, clean(ish) toilets in a rear courtyard, and four or five cheap – but always crowded – Internet terminals at the side.

Across the street is an ever-popular **Cremería Las Begonias** (Antonio Maceo) that doubles up as a Cubatur office and opposite a little old man does a flying trade in **peso pizza** (Bolívar).

Another good peso pizza stall is **Pizzería Tosca** (José Martí No 226) on Parque Céspedes. You can also try looking on the corner of Piro Guinart and Antonio Maceo, not far from the bus station, and also around the Cienfuegos–Paseo Agramonte–Cárdenas intersection on the road south out of town.

GROCERIES

Mercado agropecuario (cnr Pedro Zerquera & Manuel Fajardo; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) Trinidad's agropecuario (vegetable market) is sad, but you should still be able to get basic fruits and vegetables.

Tienda Universo (José Martí) This shop, near Zerquera in the Galería Comercial Uni-

verso, is Trinidad's best (and most expensive) grocery store. Head here for yogurt, cheese, and even nuts and raisins.

Mini Super Caracol (cnr Gustavo Izquierdo & Zerquera; ☎ 9am-9pm) This store has a decent selection of groceries, plus cheap bottled water.

Entertainment

In addition to all the fun stuff mentioned in the boxed text (p300), the following venues serve up good entertainment.

Casa de la Cultura Julio Cueva Díaz (☎ 4308; Zerquera No 406) Presents various cultural activities by night.

Cine Romelio Cornelio (☎ 8pm Tue-Sun) This cinema, on the southwestern side of Parque Céspedes, shows films nightly.

Estadio Rolando Rodríguez (Elio Paz; ☎ Oct-Apr) This stadium, at the southeastern end of Frank País, hosts baseball games.

Shopping

Arts & Crafts Market (Jesús Menéndez) This excellent open-air market situated in front of the Casa de la Trova is the place to buy souvenirs, especially textiles and crochet work – just avoid the black coral and turtle-shell items that are made from endangered species and forbidden entry into many countries.

Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales (Simón Bolívar No 418; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun) Just down from the Plaza Mayor, this store has a good selection of Cuban handicrafts.

You can see local painters at work – and buy their paintings too – at various points along Calles Francisco Toro, Valdés and Muñoz.

Other shopping options:

Palacio de la Artesanía (Piro Guinart No 221)

This store, located opposite the bus station, also sells handicrafts.

Photo Service (José Martí No 192 btwn Camilo Cienfuegos & General Lino Pérez) Servicing all your photographic needs.

Taller Instrumentos Musicales (cnr Menéndez & Muñoz) Musical instruments are made here.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Alberto Delgado Airport is 1km south of Trinidad, off the road to Casilda. Only Aero-taxi charters fly here (see Air, p474).

TRINIDAD TROVA & PUB CRAWL

Trinidad is one of the best places in Cuba to find quality accessible music and a stroll around the atmospheric, and surprisingly deserted, side streets after sunset will uncover all manner of different sounds floating melodiously out of hidden doorways. Here are a few ideas for a nighttime crawl around some of Trinidad's most popular spots (bring Convertible pesos to tip the musicians).

Kick things off at the Artex patio at **Casa Fischer** (General Lino Pérez No 312 btwn José Martí & Francisco Codania; admission CUC\$1), which cranks up at 10pm with a salsa orchestra (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday) or a folklore show (Friday). If you're early, kill time at its art gallery (free) or head to **Las Ruinas del Teatro Brunet** (Antonio Maceo No 461 btwn Simón Bolívar & Zerquera; admission CUC\$1), which has an athletic Afro-Cuban show on its pleasant patio at 9:30pm nightly.

Swing by the **Cremería Las Begonias** (Antonio Maceo No 473), to pick up friends, chug an espresso or fortify yourself with a sandwich before diving into the heart of things. Following Bolívar up towards the Plaza Mayor, you can try the eye-watering *cancháchara* (CUC\$2) at atmospheric **Taberna La Cancháchara** (cnr R Martínez Villena & Giro Redondo). The eponymous house cocktail is made from rum, honey, lemon and water. The local musicians that frequent this popular hang-out are often quite good, and it's not unusual for the upbeat crowd to break into spontaneous dancing.

You can't miss the steps leading up to the **Casa de la Música** (☎ 3414; admission free) beside the Iglesia Parroquial off the Plaza Mayor which are invariably crowded with people taking in the 10pm salsa/dance show. Alternatively, full-on salsa concerts are held in the casa's rear courtyard (also accessible from Juan Manuel Márquez; cover CUC\$2). This place also has *trova* (traditional poetic singing/songwriting) during the day. Next door is the **Palenque de los Congos Reales** (cnr Echerri & J Menéndez; admission free), an open patio with a lively scene and a full menu of salsa and *son* (Cuba's basic form of popular music), heavy on the Afro-Cuban beat. Down the street is the famous **Casa de la Trova** (Echerri No 29; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9pm-2am), which can be exhilarating or bogus depending on the package-tourist-to-Cuban ratio. Local musicians to look out for are Semillas sel Son, Santa Palabra and the terrific *trovador*, Israel Moreno. Finally, a block north brings you to **Las Ruinas de Sagarte** (Jesús Menéndez; admission free; ☎ 24hr) an intimate outdoor club near Galdós with a good house band and a high-energy, low-pressure dance scene.

All-night ravers will have already heard about **Disco Ayala** (☎ 6615; admission CUC\$3; ☎ 10:30pm-3am), a hillside cave near Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de la Popa (p296) that has been converted into a kitschy nightclub with flashing lights and a salsa-disco beat. Admission includes one drink. Mind your step as you teeter back down the hill at 3am.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 2404; Piro Guinart No 224), runs provincial buses to the following:

Destination	Cost (one way)	Frequency
Cienfuegos	CUC\$3	daily
La Boca	CUC\$1	5*
Playa Ancón	CUC\$1	4*
Sancti Spíritus	CUC\$1	twice daily

* departures Sat & Sun only

Tickets are sold at a small window marked '*Taquilla Campo*' near the station entrance. Check the blackboard for the current schedule.

The **Astro/Viazul ticket office** (☎ 4448; ☎ 8-11:30am & 1-5pm) is further back in the station.

It sells Astro tickets to Cienfuegos (CUC\$3, two hours, 81km, daily), Santa Clara (CUC\$6, three hours, 88km, daily) and Habana (CUC\$21, 5½ hours, 335km, daily). Two seats are available to tourists paying in Convertibles on any of these services (the quota on the Santa Clara service is often full, so try to book ahead).

In addition, there are air-con Viazul buses to the following places:

Destination	Cost (one way)	Departure
Cienfuegos	CUC\$6	7:45am, 3:15pm
Habana	CUC\$25	7:45am, 3:15pm
Santa Clara	CUC\$8	2:25pm
Santiago de Cuba	CUC\$33	8:00am
Varadero	CUC\$20	2:25pm

The Varadero or Habana departures can deposit you either at Sancti Spíritus (CUC\$6, one hour 25 minutes, 70km) or Jagüey Grande (CUC\$15, three hours 20 minutes, 182km). The Santiago de Cuba departure goes through Ciego de Ávila (CUC\$9, two hours 40 minutes, 146km), Camagüey (CUC\$15, five hours 20 minutes, 254km), Las Tunas (CUC\$22, 7½ hours, 382km) and Bayamo (CUC\$26, 10 hours, 463km) or Holguín (CUC\$26, eight hours, 463km).

CAR

Private cars can be contracted to Habana (CUC\$20 per person) or Sancti Spíritus (CUC\$5 per person).

TRAIN

The train leaves daily at 9:30am, stopping at Iznaga and Condado, and arriving in Meyer at 10:10am. The return train leaves Meyer at 1:00pm, giving you a few hours to explore the Valle de los Ingenios. It's CUC\$3 for a round-trip. The **terminal** (☎ 4223) in Trinidad is in a pink house across the train tracks on the western side of the station. (For information on train tours, see p304.)

Getting Around

BICYCLE

You can hire bikes at **Las Ruinas del Teatro Brunet** (Antonio Maceo No 461 btwn Simón Bolívar & Zerquera; per day CUC\$3) or you can ask around at your casa particular.

CAR & TAXI

The rental agencies at the Playa Ancón hotels rent mopeds (CUC\$27 per day); as do Transtur at **Cubatur** (☎ 6314; Antonio Maceo No 447; ☎ 9am-8pm) and **Las Ruinas del Teatro Brunet** (Antonio Maceo No 461 btwn Simón Bolívar & Zerquera).

Havanautos (☎ 6301), at Servi-Cupet near the airport, also has a branch at **Club Amigo Costa Sur** (☎ 6112) in Playa Ancón.

Transtur (☎ 6257; cnr Maceo & Zerquera), in the Cubatur office, is also at Hotel Ancón.

Servi-Cupet (☎ 24hr), 500m south of town on the road to Casilda, has an El Rápido snack bar attached. The Oro Negro gas station is at the entrance to Trinidad from Sancti Spíritus, 1km east of Plaza Santa Ana.

Guarded parking (cnr Pablo Pichs Girón & Vicente Suyuma) is available near La Cancháchara (CUC\$1/2 for 12/24 hours). You can also park near Plaza Santa Ana.

A ride in a coco-taxi (egg-shaped taxi) costs CUC\$5 to Playa Ancón. A car costs CUC\$6 to CUC\$8 both ways.

HORSE CART

Horse carriages (two pesos) leave for Casilda from Paseo Agramonte at the southern end of town.

PLAYA ANCÓN & AROUND

Playa Ancón, 12km south of Trinidad, is a luscious ribbon of white beach lapped by the tranquil, blue waters of the Caribbean. For most people's money it's the finest arc of sand on Cuba's southern coast.

In contrast to Cuba's northern keys, Playa Ancón has numerous outside attractions and makes an ideal base from which to explore the architectural treasures of nearby Trinidad and the forested Sierra del Escambray. Not as overwhelmed by tourism as Varadero or Guardalavaca, it's a good vacation choice if you want to mix all-inclusive resort comforts with a hasty escape ticket. It also makes a pleasant bike trip from Trinidad.

Beach bums who want to be near the water, but don't have the money or inclination to stay at one of the resorts, might consider a private home in Casilda or, better still, La Boca. What the travel literature doesn't mention is the sand fleas, they're ferocious here at sunrise and sunset. Be warned.

Activities

From Hotel Ancón, it's 18km to Trinidad via Casilda, or 16km on the much nicer coastal road via La Boca. The Hotel Ancón pool is also open to nonguests.

The old fishing port of **Casilda**, 6km due south of Trinidad, is a friendly village within one paved road that was devastated during the 2005 hurricane season. Nearly 80% of the houses suffered significant damage. On August 17 the **Fiesta de Santa Elena** engulfs little Casilda, with feasting, competitions, horse races and loads of rum. The road from Ancón to Casilda crosses a tidal flat, its abundant bird life visible in the early morning.

FISHING

The **Marina Trinidad** (☎ 6205) is a few hundred meters north of Hotel Ancón. Four hours of deep-sea fishing, including transport, gear and guide, costs CUC\$30 per person (minimum six people). Fly-fishing is also

THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

To the experienced motorist, Cuba's arterial Autopista is no ordinary freeway. Home to vintage Buicks, grazing cattle, onion sellers, hitchhikers, hovering vultures and the odd runaway steam train or two, the road – originally designated to stretch from Pinar del Río in the west to Guantánamo in the east – comes to an abrupt halt at Jatibonico in Sancti Spíritus Province after 650km of badly paved purgatory.

Financed with Soviet money during the 1980s, construction of the island's ambitiously planned Autopista Nacional barely got beyond the halfway stage thanks to the ignominious fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1991 and the resulting demise of Cuba's once illustrious superpower patron.

Indeed so sudden was the Soviet pull out that, even today, lane markings remain unpainted, slip roads end in sugarcane fields and an odd assortment of half-finished bridges dangle like crumbling beacons above the surreally deserted eight lane highway.

possible around the rich mangrove forests of Península de Ancón (CUC\$200 for four hours, maximum two people).

SNORKELING & SCUBA DIVING

Cayo Blanco, a reef islet 25km southeast of Playa Ancón, has 22 marked scuba sites where you'll see black coral and bountiful marine life. Diving with the **Cayo Blanco International Dive Center** (☎ 6205) located at Marina Trinidad costs CUC\$30 a dive and CUC\$299 for an open-water course. The Marina also runs a seven-hour snorkeling-and-beach tour to Cayo Blanco for CUC\$30 per person, CUC\$40 with lunch. There are similar trips to the equally pristine **Cayo Macho**.

Romantic types might want to check out the **sunset catamaran cruise** (cruise CUC\$15) which has been enthusiastically recommended. There is a minimum of eight passengers. Inquire at the marina or ask at the Cubatur office in Trinidad.

SAILING

The **Windward Islands Cruising Company** (☎ US 1-650 838 9585, UK 44 20 7373 9900; www.caribbean-adventure.com) charters crewed and bareboat

monohulls and catamarans out of the Marina to the Jardines de la Reina (p318). You can sail with or without guides, on a partial package or all-inclusive tour. Interested parties should inquire by phone or email: info@windward-islands.net.

Sleeping

All of Ancón's three hotels were badly affected by Hurricane Dennis in July 2005 and were closed down temporarily (power was out for 16 days). Brisas and Ancón are back in business while Costa Sur was due to reopen its doors in June 2006.

Club Amigo Costa Sur (Cubanacán; ☎ 6174; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$35/40, high season CUC\$40/50; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Playa Ancón's oldest and humblest resort, this hotel is at the base of the peninsula, 9km from Casilda. For about CUC\$10 more, you can upgrade to a superior room, which gives you better location and views (but not decor unfortunately). There are also 20 rooms in duplex bungalows which are better still. From here you can scuba dive and ride horses. The hotel faces a rocky shore, but a white, sandy beach is just to the right. Swimming is difficult on the shallow reef. This place is popular with Canadian package tourists.

Hotel Ancón (Gran Caribe; ☎ 6123, 6127; s/d low season CUC\$68/96, high season CUC\$85/127; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) The last hotel on the peninsula, this resort has a lively atmosphere and is on the best part of the beach. The huge, seven-story building leaves something to be desired aesthetically, particularly when juxtaposed with Trinidad's other colonial beauties, but it's decent value and the buffet-style meals are palatable. You can fish, learn to scuba dive or learn the mambo here and nonguests can use the facilities, which is exceptional for a resort.

Brisas Trinidad del Mar (Cubanacán; ☎ 6500/01/02/03; s/d low season CUC\$75/130, high season CUC\$103/160; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Just a few years old, this sprawling resort is Playa Ancón's fanciest. The 241 rooms come all-inclusive and there are all the perks you would expect: massages, sauna, gym, kiddie pool, tennis courts and, of course, an awesome swath of beach. There are wheelchair-accessible rooms here.

Eating & Drinking

Grill Caribe (☎ 6241; 🕒 24hr) Other than the hotel restaurants, there's this place on

a quiet beach 2km north of Club Amigo Costa Sur. It specializes in seafood, such as fish and shrimp or lobster for CUC\$12. Strict vegetarians will be disappointed here. It's a great sunset spot.

Bar Las Caletas, at the junction of the road to Casilda, is a local drinking place.

Getting There & Away

The Trinibus shuttle that used to run regularly from Trinidad to the beach wasn't functioning at the time of research. Your cheapest bet to get to Ancón is by coco-taxi or bike (see p301 for bike rentals).

VALLE DE LOS INGENIOS

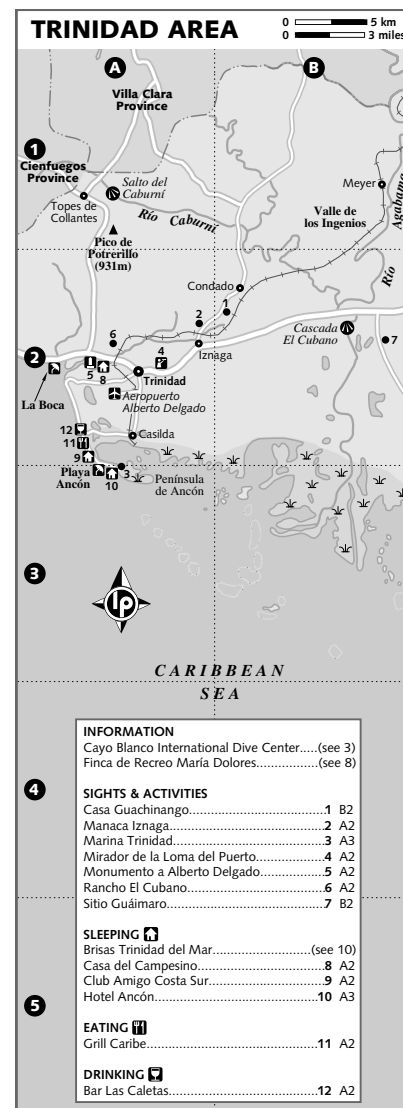
The ruins of dozens of 19th-century *ingenios* (sugar mills), including warehouses, milling machinery, slave quarters, manor houses and other remains, dot verdant Valle de los Ingenios (or Valle de San Luis), which begins 8km east of Trinidad on the road to Sancti Spíritus. Most of the mills were destroyed in the two wars of independence, and the focus of sugar-growing moved to Matanzas. Some sugar is still grown here however, and the royal palms, waving cane and rolling hills are timeless beautiful. A horseback-riding tour from Trinidad (p296) should take in most (if not all) of the following sites.

Sights & Activities

The **Mirador de La Loma del Puerto** is 6km east of Trinidad on the road to Sancti Spíritus. The 192m-high lookout (admission CUC\$1) provides excellent valley views; there's a bar.

The valley's main sight is the **Manaca Iznaga** (admission CUC\$1) 16km east of Trinidad. Founded in 1750, the estate was purchased in 1795 by the dastardly Pedro Iznaga, who became one of the wealthiest men in Cuba by trafficking in slaves. The 44m-high tower next to the hacienda was used to watch the slaves, and the bell in front of the house served to summon them. Today you can climb to the top of the tower for pretty views, followed by a reasonable lunch (from noon to 2:30pm) in the restaurant/bar in Iznaga's former house.

Five kilometers beyond the Manaca Iznaga, on the valley's inland road, is the **Casa Guachinango**, an old hacienda built by Don Mariano Borrell toward the end of the 18th century (now a restaurant). The Río Ay is just below, and the surrounding landscape



is wonderful. To get to Casa Guachinango, take the paved road to the right just beyond the second bridge as you come from Manaca Iznaga. The Meyer train stops right beside the house every morning, and you can walk back to Iznaga from Guachinango along the railway line in less than an hour. You might be able to pitch camp near the casa.

CASAS PARTICULARES

La Boca, a popular getaway, is full of private houses. Right on a small, dark beach, it's prettier than Casilda, but transport is more difficult. It's also insanely crowded in July and August. Casa owners in either town can hook you up with a bicycle.

After Hurricane Dennis 80% of houses in Casilda had to be repaired or rebuilt.

Cristina Hostal – Gustavo Rodríguez

Guerra (☎ 5126; Real No 69, Casilda; r CUC\$20; **P** ☼) This house across the tracks is still renting rooms.

Elsa Hernández Monteagudo (☎ 3236; Av del Mar No 5, La Boca; r CUC\$20-25) Good meals, friendly.

Ruddy Marrero Seijo (☎ 4586; Av del Sol No 75B, La Boca; r CUC\$20-25; **P**) Luxurious terrace, English spoken.

'Villa Río Mar' – Nestor Manresa (☎ 3108; San José No 65, La Boca; r CUC\$20-25; **P**) Two rooms in a large house near the river; friendly.

'Villa Sonia' – Sonia Santos Barrera (☎ 2923; Av del Mar No 11, La Boca; r CUC\$25-30; **P** ☼) If you needed an excuse to stay in La Boca here it is. A beautiful house with a wrap-around porch all to yourself, complete with polished-wood dining area, private kitchen, hammocks, rocking chairs and a thatched gazebo. Situated right opposite the (rocky) beach.

Seven kilometers east of the Manaca Iznaga turn-off, then 2km south, is the **Sitío Guáimaro**, the former estate of Don Mariano Borrell. The seven stone arches on the facade lead to frescoed rooms, now a restaurant.

Getting There & Away

It's easy for those without their own transport to visit the valley. These days, the daily local train from Trinidad (see p301) is more reliable than the 'tourist' train, which goes at the speed of a donkey with a temper to match. When it functions, however, a ride in the reconstructed railway carriage is a sublime experience, taking passengers on a 2½-hour trip through the valley (CUC\$10, 9:30am) over slender bridges and across lush green fields. The train is pulled by steam engine No 52204, built by the Baldwin Locomotive Company of Philadelphia in August 1919. Passengers pay for their own lunch separately at the Manaca Iznaga and visit

the Casa Guachinango. **Cubatur** (☎ 6314; Antonio Maceo No 447; ☎ 9am-8pm) in Trinidad will know when the next tourist train trip is scheduled. Tour desks at the Ancón hotels sell the same train tour for CUC\$17, including bus transfers to Trinidad.

Horseback tours can be arranged at the agencies in Trinidad (p296) or Playa Ancón, or contract a horse and guide privately in Trinidad for CUC\$15 for six hours.

TOPES DE COLLANTES

☎ 42 / elevation 771m

The rugged 90km-long Sierra del Escambray culminates in Pico de San Juan (1156m), also called 'La Caña', in neighboring Cienfuegos Province. The largest settlement in the range is Topes de Collantes, a health-resort town 20km northwest of Trinidad. En route to Topes de Collantes, your car will just about give out as you crest 600m and come upon **El Mirador**, a snack bar (good mojitos), with great views. A few hundred meters along you pass Pico de Potrerillo (931m), the highest peak in Sancti Spiritus Province. Coniferous forests, vines, lichens, mosses and giant ferns flourish in this cool, foggy climate, and Arabica coffee thrives on the slopes.

Topes de Collantes was founded in 1937 by dictator Fulgencio Batista, who built the road from Trinidad. That year he started work on the hideous building that is now the Kurhotel, but it was still unfinished when he lost the 1944 presidential elections. When he seized power anew in 1952, Batista ordered the work to continue and in 1954 it opened as a tuberculosis sanatorium. The sanatorium closed with the revolution and during the early 1960s the building housed militias fighting counterrevolutionaries in the Sierra del Escambray. In 1989 the Gaviota chain reopened the Kurhotel as a spa.

Topes de Collantes has three hotels open to foreigners, plus good unguided hiking and an established camping ground. The **Carpeta Central information office** (☎ 54 02 31; ☎ 8am-5pm), near the sundial at the entrance to Topes de Collantes is the best place to procure maps, guides and trail info.

Activities

HIKING

The most popular hike, and the one most easily accessed on foot from the hotels, is to the 62m **Salto del Caburní** (entry CUC\$6.50), cas-

cading over rocks into cool swimming holes before plunging into a chasm where macho locals dare each other to jump. At the height of the dry season (March to May), you may be disappointed by these falls. The entry fee is collected at the toll gate to Villa Caburní, just down the hill from the Kurhotel near the Carpeta Central (it's a long approach on foot). Allow an hour down and an hour and a half back up for this 2.5km hike. Some slopes are rather steep and can be slippery after rain.

A CUC\$7 per person guide from the Carpeta Central is required to visit **Parque La**

Represa on the Río Vega Grande below Hotel Los Helechos. This park contains 300 species of trees and ferns, including the largest *caoba* (mahogany) tree in Cuba. The restaurant is in a villa built by Fulgencio Batista's wife.

The trail to **La Batata** (admission free), a large cave containing an underground river, begins at a parking sign just up the hill from Parque La Represa. When you reach another highway, go around the right side of the concrete embankment and down the hill. Always keep straight or right after this point (avoid trails to the left). Allow an hour each way. It's possible to swim in pools in the cave.

CAMILO CIENFUEGOS

It's not Che, it can't possibly be Raúl, and it certainly isn't Fidel. If it's your first time in Cuba you could be forgiven for scratching your head momentarily over the identity of that other bearded guerrilla emblazoned heroically onto a hundred different billboards.

Cowboy hat tilted playfully upward, rugged beard left wildly untrimmed, and lips invariably parted in the broadest of Cuban grins; Camilo Cienfuegos cut an impossibly romantic figure when he trotted triumphantly into Habana atop a horse in January 1959. Che Guevara called him '*la imagen del pueblo*' (the image of the people). Raúl Castro trumpeted him as *la vanguardia* (the vanguard); Fidel, meanwhile, preferred to elevate him into a deity of socialist saints alongside the more internationally palatable Che who – by a trick of fate – was given six extra years to prove his revolutionary worth.

Born into a humble Habana family in 1932, Camilo was forced to drop out of art school for economic reasons in his late teens and began working in a tailor's shop to make ends meet. In 1953 he arrived in the US with a friend where he traveled itinerantly between New York, Chicago and San Francisco working as a waiter and dishwasher. Deported for visa irregularities in 1955 he returned to Cuba where he was shot in the leg and hospitalized during an anti-Batista demonstration in Habana. The revolutionary spark was lit.

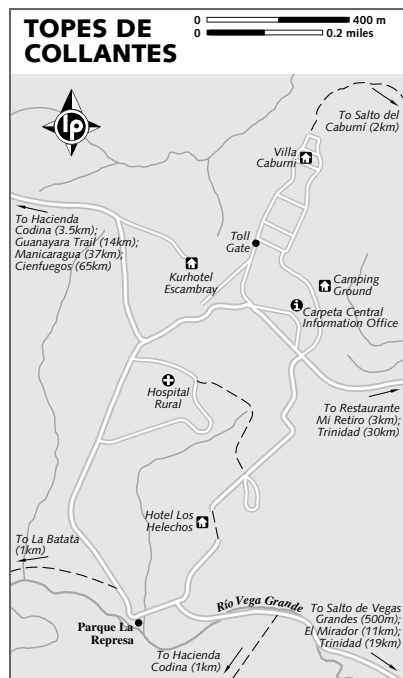
Inspired by news of the Moncada attack (see p41) and aware that 'something big' was being organized in Mexico City, Camilo returned to the US with the intention of reaching Mexico. He became one of the last volunteers accepted for the Granma expedition.

Surviving the landing at Las Coloradas and the battle of Alegría de Pío, he was among only 12 revolutionaries who managed to reach the Sierra Maestra Mountains. '*Nadie se rinde aquí*' (no one surrenders here) he is said to have shouted as Batista's soldiers strafed the panic-stricken rebel party.

In April 1958 his bravery was rewarded when Castro promoted him to the rank of *comandante*, and a few months later Cienfuegos was instructed to lead a guerrilla column on an arduous six-week march to Las Villas Province. His group became the revolution's nucleus in the north of the province while Guevara led the fighting further south, and he was instrumental in ending the stubborn resistance of Bastista's army in the Sancti Spiritus town of Yaguajay.

With the success of the revolution, Cienfuegos became the military chief of Habana, and later the revolutionary army's chief of staff. In October 1959, Castro sent him to Camagüey to arrest the dissident Huber Matos. A week later, as Cienfuegos was returning to Habana, his Cessna aircraft plunged into the sea. His remains were never found and to this day conspiracy theories circulate as to Castro's potential involvement in the tragedy.

Best-loved for his sense of humor and ever-present jovial smile, Camilo was a famous practical joker and one of Che Guevara's closest confidants. Despite rumors to the contrary, Cuban historian Carlos Franqui maintains that Cienfuegos always sympathized with socialism and never harbored any anticommunist grudges. At the time of his death he was the second most popular figure in Cuba after Fidel.



The **Salto de Vegas Grandes** trail begins at the apartment blocks known as Reparto El Chorrito on the southern side of Topes de Collantes, near the entrance to the resort as you arrive from Trinidad. Allow a bit less than an hour each way to cover the 2km. It's possible to continue to the Salto del Caburní, though consider hiring a guide.

Another destination is **Hacienda Codina**. The 3.5km jeep track begins on a hilltop 2.5km down the road toward Cienfuegos and Manicaragua, 1km before the point where these roads divide. There's a much shorter trail to the hacienda from below Hotel Los Helechos, but you need a guide to use that route. However, you might be able to find your own way back, if you wanted to make it a circle trip. Orchid and bamboo gardens, nature trails, the Cueva del Altar, mud baths and a scenic viewpoint are the attractions here.

The least accessible, but infinitely most rewarding hike from Topes de Collantes is the **Guanayara** trail, situated 15km from the Carpeta Central along a series of rough and heavily rutted tracks. For logistical reasons this excursion is best organized with a guide

from the Carpeta, or as part of an organized tour from Trinidad with Cubatur (CUC\$43 with lunch). The trail itself begins in cool, moist coffee plantations and descends steeply to the **El Rocío** waterfall where you can strip off and have a bracing shower. Following the course of the Río Melodioso (Melodic River) you pass another inviting waterfall/swimming pool before emerging into the salubrious gardens of the riverside Casa La Gallega, a traditional rural hacienda where a light lunch can be organized and camping is sometimes permitted in the lush grounds.

CANYONING

Canyoning is one of the newest adventure activities the island has to offer. The burgeoning scene focuses on four main rivers, the Calburni, Vegas Grandes, Cabagan and Gruta Nengoa, and canyoners – who must provide all of their own equipment – travel spectacularly downstream with ropes, wetsuits, helmets and harnesses. The highlight of the trip is said to be a 200m series of vertical cascades over Salto Vegas Grandes. One experienced Canadian outfit offering excursions is **Canyoning Quebec** (www.canyoning-quebec.com) who run eight-day trips into the Sierra del Escambray. Alternatively try asking for Alex at the Carpeta Central information office (one of Cuba's few canyoning guides).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping ground (per person CUC\$3) Self-sufficient campers will delight in this camping ground in a pine copse on a spur road just below the Carpeta Central office. A wacky aviary project of Batista's, the giant, abandoned birdcages make great cooking areas and there's a young, communal atmosphere as it's a popular getaway for university students. Pay the fee at the Carpeta Central. There are no toilets.

Hotel Los Helechos (Gaviota; ☎ 54 03 30/1/2; fax 54 01 17; s/d low season CUC\$29/34, high season CUC\$39/44; 📞 🍷 🍴) Long considered to be a poor relation in the fast-expanding Gaviota group, this simple but amiable, three-story hotel is currently undergoing a long-awaited facelift. The rooms are fitted out in cane and wicker fixtures and the thermal pool, sauna and steam baths add value. The adjoining restaurant bakes some of the best homemade bread in Cuba and there is also a disco next door.

IF YOU HAVE A FEW MORE DAYS

Northern Sancti Spíritus is a largely undiscovered region of gentle hills and coastal mangrove forest that in 2000 was incorporated – along with parts of Villa Clara and Ciego de Ávila Provinces – into Unesco's **Buenavista Biosphere Reserve**. Features of the reserve include 35 archaeological sites, indigenous wall paintings, secluded beaches and a high biodiversity of flora and fauna.

Villa San José del Lago (Islazul; ☎ 2-6390; Av Antonio Guiteras, Mayajigua; s/d low season CUC\$22/28, high season CUC\$25/32; 📞 🍷 🍴) 50km west of Morón, is good base for exploring the area. Situated by a large lake that contains a handful of resident flamingos, the complex is famous for its thermal waters (average temperature 31°C) and varied spa treatments (including acupuncture and mud therapy). There are three swimming pools on-site (one of which is thermal), 67 tourist-class rooms, and a reasonable restaurant. Before the revolution the resort was popular with Americans.

Ask here about excursions to the **Sierra de Jatibonico**, the **Jatibonico River** and the **Caguanes National Park** in Bahía de Buenavista.

Villa Caburní (Gaviota; ☎ 54 01 80; 📞) This place is a veritable rural gem which offers 12 one- or two-story Swiss-style chalets in a small park next to the Kurhotel. The Villa was being used as an overflow for Los Helechos at the time of writing and the prices were the same.

Kurhotel Escambray (Gaviota; ☎ 54 03 04; fax 54 02 28; s/d/tr low season CUC\$40/55/75, high season CUC\$45/65/90) This eight-story place is a horrific architectural monster dreamt up by Batista in the 1930s. Judging by the incongruous Stalinist design of its ugly exterior, the wily Cuban dictator must have sensed that the Russians were on the way. As ugly as it is, friends swear by the facilities and treatment of various ailments this hotel provides.

The only nonhotel eating option nearby is **Restaurante Mi Retiro** situated 3km back down the road to Trinidad which does fair-to-middling *comida criollo* to the sound of the occasional traveling 'minstrel.'

Getting There & Away

It's very difficult to get here without a car (and the steep ascent will test even native San Franciscan drivers) and harder still to get around to the various trailheads.

People wax nostalgic when you ask them about bus service between Trinidad and Topes de Collantes. Theoretically, there's supposed to be public transport, but in practice it rarely materializes. Hitchhikers wait for hours outside the Los Helechos turn-off thumping for lifts back into Trinidad (for

information on the risks associated with hitching see p477).

The road between Trinidad and Topes de Collantes is paved, but it's very steep. When wet, it becomes slippery and should be driven with caution. There's also a spectacular 44km road that continues right over the mountains from Topes de Collantes to Manicaragua via Jibacoa (occasionally closed, so check in Trinidad before setting out). It's also possible to drive to and from Cienfuegos via San Blas on a partly paved, partly gravel road.

NORTHERN SANCTI SPÍRITUS

For most visitors, the province's narrow northern portion is only a transit corridor between Remedios, in Villa Clara Province, and Morón, in Ciego de Ávila Province. It's worth stopping, however, to visit the **Museo Nacional Camilo Cienfuegos** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), at Yaguajay, 36km southeast of Caibarién. In 1989 a 5m bronze figure of Camilo Cienfuegos, reminiscent of Che Guevara in Santa Clara, was placed atop an imposing memorial opposite the Hospital Docente General between Yaguajay and the local sugar mill. The museum directly below this monument contains mementos of the battle fought here on the eve of the revolution's triumph. At that time the hospital was an army barracks that Camilo and his band captured the day before Batista fled the country. A replica of the small tank 'Dragon I', converted from a tractor for use in the battle, stands in front of the hospital.

© 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.'