

Santiago de Cuba Province



Santiago de Cuba Province is New Orleans melted down with Río de Janeiro, with a sedating dose of the pre-1991 Soviet Union thrown in for good measure. Here in the cradle of Cuba's socialist revolution ration shops give way to rumba parties and slogan-broadcasting political billboards take second place to Carnaval.

Nestled on one of the Cuban archipelago's most spectacular stretches of coastline, the province's mountain-ruffled hinterland mixes eco-retreats with Unesco World Heritage sites and revolutionary graveyards with the shrine of El Cobre, Cuba's holiest pilgrimage site. And that's just the appetizers. For those with a head for heights try a trek up Cuba's highest mountain, Pico Turquino. Others will enjoy the shorter scramble to the summit of rocky Gran Piedra for a glimpse over Parque Nacional Baconao, one of Cuba's six protected biospheres.

Straddled in the midst of all this greenery is Santiago, the island's second biggest city, a sleazy, sultry and highly-charged metropolis where music streams out of hidden doorways and brow-beaten artists muse over their sculptures. Existing for a time as Cuba's illustrious capital, Santiago sold out to more strategically important Habana in the 1550s, leaving embittered locals saddled forever with delusions of grandeur. Some call it the city of heroes, others the city of revolutionaries; or even the uncrowned city of Cuban culture. Whatever your personal impression, Santiago's importance as a nexus point for music, culture, rebellion and ideas has never been in question.

History

Illuminated by a rich cast of revolutionary heroes and characterized by a cultural legacy that has infiltrated everything from music and language to sculpture and art, the history of Santiago is inseparable from the history of Cuba itself.

Founded in 1514 by Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar (his bones purportedly lie underneath the cathedral), the city of Santiago de Cuba moved to its present site in 1522 on a sharp horseshoe of harbor in the lee of the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Its first mayor was Hernán Cortés – Velázquez' wayward secretary – who departed from the deep yet tranquil bay in 1518 en route to Mexico (see p393).

Installed as the colony's new capital, after the abandonment of Baracoa in 1515, Santiago enjoyed a brief renaissance, as a center for the copper mining industry and a disembarkation point for slaves arriving from West Africa via Hispaniola. But the glory wasn't to last.

In 1556 the Spanish captains-general departed for Habana and in 1607 the capital was transferred permanently to the west. Raided by pirates and reduced at one point to a small village of only several hundred people, embattled Santiago barely survived the ignominy.

The tide turned in 1655 when Spanish settlers arrived from the nearby colony of Jamaica and this influx was augmented further in the 1790s as French plantation owners on the run from a slave revolt in Haiti settled down in the city's Tivoli district. Always one step ahead of the capital in the cultural sphere, Santiago founded the Seminario de San Basilio Magno as an educational establishment in 1722 (six years before the Universidad de Habana) and in 1804 wrested ecclesiastical dominance from the capital by ensuring that the city's top cleric was promoted to the post of archbishop.

Individuality and isolation from Habana soon gave Santiago a noticeably distinct cultural heritage and went a long way in fuelling its insatiable passion for rebellion and revolt. Much of the fighting in both wars of independence took place in the Oriente, and one of the era's most illustrious fighters, the great mulatto general, Antonio Maceo was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1845.

In 1898, just as Cuba seemed about to triumph in its long struggle for independence, the US intervened in the Second War of Independence, landing a flotilla of troops on nearby Daiquiri beach. Subsequently, both of the wars' decisive land and sea battles were fought in and around Santiago. The former was played out on July 1 when a victorious cavalry charge led by Teddy Roosevelt on outlying San Juan Hill sealed a famous victory. The latter ended in a highly one-sided naval battle in Santiago harbor between US and Spanish ships that led to the almost total destruction of the Spanish fleet.

A construction boom characterized the first few years of the new quasi-independent Cuban state, but after three successive US military interventions (the last of which in 1917 saw US troops stationed in the Oriente until 1923), things started to turn sour. Despite its ongoing influence as a cultural and musical powerhouse, Santiago began to earn a slightly less respectable reputation as a center for rebellion and strife and it was here on July 26, 1953, that Fidel Castro and his companions launched an assault on the Moncada Barracks. This was the start of a number of events that changed the course of Cuban history. At his trial in Santiago, Castro made his famous *History Will Absolve Me* speech, which became the basic platform of the Cuban Revolution.

On November 30, 1956, the people of Santiago de Cuba rose up in rebellion against Batista's troops in a futile attempt to distract attention from the landing of Castro's guerrillas on the western shores of Oriente. Although not initially successful, an underground movement led by Frank and Josue Pais quickly established a secret supply line that ran vital armaments up to the fighters in the Oriente's Sierra Maestra. Despite the murder of the Pais brothers and many others in 1957–58, the struggle continued unabated, and it was in Santiago de Cuba, on the evening of January 1, 1959, that Fidel Castro first appeared publicly to declare the success of the revolution. All these events have earned Santiago the title 'Hero City of the Republic of Cuba.'

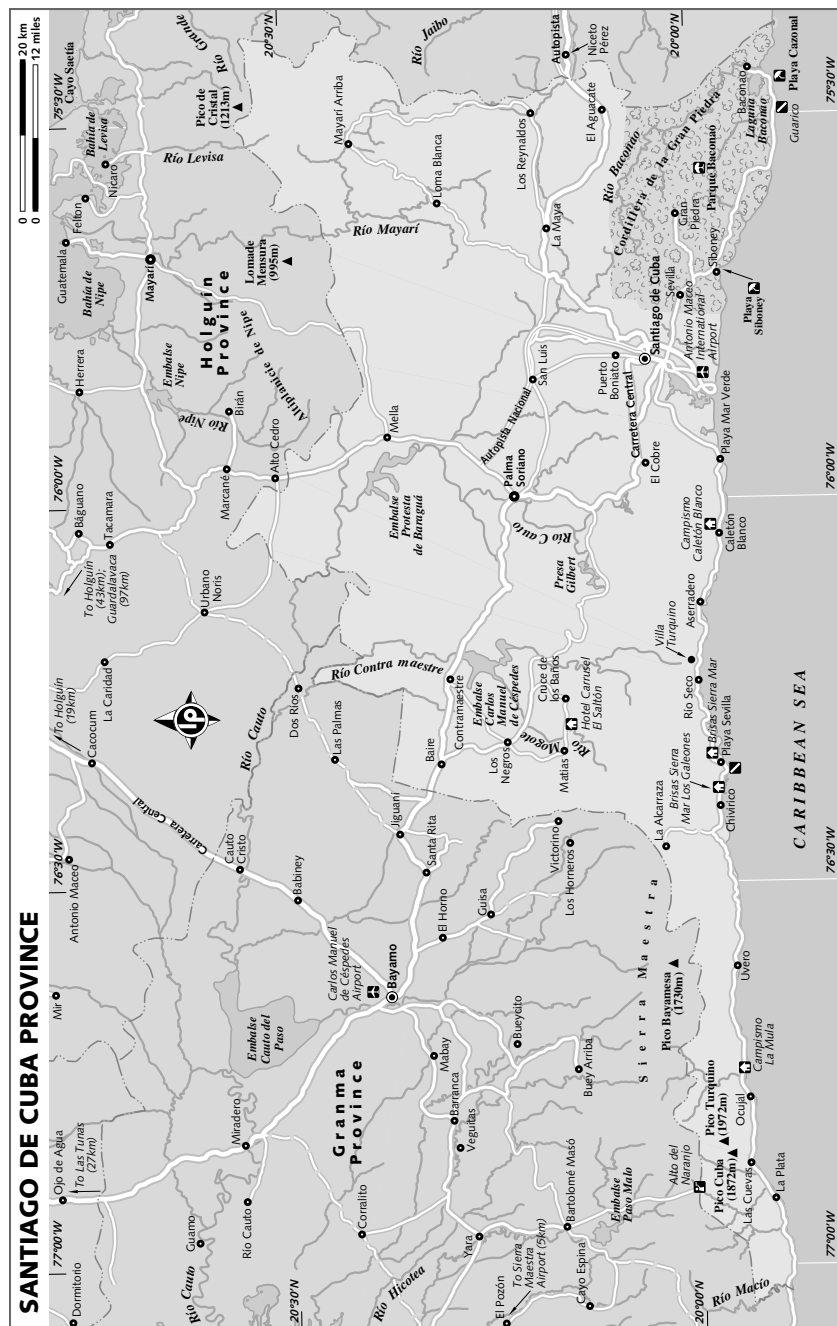
Santiago continued to grow rapidly in the years that followed the revolution as new housing was provided for impoverished workers in outlying suburban districts.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **City of Revolutionaries**
Explore the former homes of Antonio Maceo (p402) and Frank Pais (p402) and round it off with a trip to Moncada Barracks (p402)
- **Spectacular Drive**
Take the coast road west toward Chivirico (p427) amid rolling mountains and crashing surf
- **Get High**
Drag yourself to the top of the hulking mass of Gran Piedra (p419)
- **Pilgrimage**
Pay your respects at the sacred shrine of La Virgen de la Caridad in El Cobre (p424)
- **Eco Tour**
Shower beneath a waterfall at the eco-friendly Villa El Saltón (p425)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 22 ■ POPULATION: 1.04 MILLION ■ AREA: 6170 SQ KM



Further progress was made in the early '90s when a construction boom furnished the city with a new theater, a train station and a five-star Meliá hotel. In 1994 Santiago won the prestigious *Manzana de Oro* tourism award presented by the International Confederation of Tourism Journalists and Writers.

Arts

Santiago de Cuba has a rich cultural history that goes back to the construction of the Cathedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in the 1520s and the formation of a church choir. Two hundred and fifty years later, French planters from Haiti brought opera with them, and regular performances were staged at various theaters throughout the city from 1800 onward. The first Santiago philharmonic society was created in 1832, and in 1851 the Teatro de la Reina opened with a series of French operas. In 1871 *La Hija de Iefte*, by Laureano Fuentes Matons, became the first *zarzuela* (operetta) by a Cuban composer to be staged in Cuba.

Aside from this academic musical culture, the Oriente has developed its own distinctive folk culture influenced by the immigration of French-Haitian plantation owners in the early 1800s. This is the original home of *son* (Cuban popular music), the forerunner of salsa, and almost every genre of Cuban popular music, from Afro-

Cuban drumming to rumba, is alive and well in Santiago de Cuba.

Two of the country's foremost 19th-century romantic poets, José María Heredia (1803–39) and his cousin José María de Heredia y Giralte (1842–1905), were born here, although both spent most of their adult lives abroad.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA

pop 443,926

Santiago de Cuba is the island's second largest city and a glittering cultural capital in its own right. Anyone with even a passing interest in Cuban literature, music, architecture, politics or ethnology should spend at least a day or two kicking through the myriad of assorted attractions here.

Enlivened by a cosmopolitan mix of Afro-Caribbean culture and situated closer to Haiti and the Dominican Republic than Habana, Santiago's influences have tended to come as much from the east as they have from the west, a factor that has been crucial in shaping the city's distinct individual identity. Nowhere else in Cuba will you find such a colorful combination of people, or such a resounding sense of historical destiny. Diego Velázquez made the city his second capital, Fidel Castro used it to launch his embryonic nationalist revolution, Don Facundo Bacardí based his first ever rum factory here and just about every Cuban music genre from salsa

HERNÁN CORTÉS

More famous for the conquest of Mexico than for his short-lived Cuban posting, Hernán Cortés first arrived in Baracoa in 1511 as secretary to the island's first governor Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar.

Settling in Santiago where he took up the position of *alcalde* (mayor) with an office on the site of today's Ayuntamiento (city hall), Cortés' lustful ambition quickly got the better of him in a spate of frenzied gold prospecting using the local Indians as slave labor. 'How many of them died in extracting this gold for him; God will have kept a better account than I have' wrote a horror-stricken Bartolomé de Las Casas. Other historians have been less damning in their criticism claiming that the unspeakably cruel fate of the Indians in Cuba (the natives were all but eradicated inside 50 years) actually influenced Cortés in his more careful treatment of the Mexican natives.

Eager to sponsor a voyage west in search of more gold, Cortés lobbied the vacillating Velázquez – his father-in-law – tirelessly for ships and money. Initially reluctant to help, the bumbling governor finally caved in; though at the last minute he indecisively changed his mind and tried to put a stop to the mission. Fatefully, it was too late. Sailing without official sanction in 1518, Cortés docked briefly in Trinidad where he rounded up an eager army of 500 men for the journey west. Stuffing supplies into 11 ships the flotilla left Habana harbor in February 1519, their destination Mexico. The rest, as they say, is history.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA

INFORMATION	Post Office.....8 G2	Cuartel Moncada (Moncada Barracks).....16 D3
Alliance Française.....1 G3	Sol y Son.....(see 28)	Fábrica de Tabacos César Escalante.....17 A4
Cadeca.....(see 28)	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Iglesia de Santo Tomás.....18 B3
Clinica Internacional	Amusement Park.....9 H4	José María Heredia Statue.....19 H3
Cubanacán Servimed.....2 F3	Bacardí Rum Factory.....10 A2	Moncada Museum.....20 D3
Cubatur.....3 F3	Barra Ron Havana Club.....(see 10)	Monument to Martí and Abel Santamaría.....21 D3
Farmacia Cubanacán.....(see 2)	Casa de las Religiones	Museo de la Imagen.....22 G3
Gaviota.....(see 31)	Populares.....11 H3	Museo-Casa Natal de Antonio Maceo.....23 B3
Havanatur.....4 G3	Casa de las Tradiciones.....(see 40)	Palacio de Justicia.....24 D3
Hospital Provincial Saturnino Lora.....5 D1	Casa Museo de Frank y Josue País.....13 B3	Palacio de Pioneros.....25 G3
Hospital Quirúrgico Gineco-Obstétrico.....6 H1	Centro Cultural Africano.....13 B3	Parque Histórico Abel Santamaría Museum.....26 D3
Inmigración.....7 G2	Fernando Ortiz.....14 G3	Parque Zoológico.....27 H4
Pharmacy.....(see 29)	Clock Tower.....15 A4	

to son first emanated from somewhere in these dusty, rhythmic and undeniably sensuous streets. Then there are the local heroes – Antonio Maceo: soldier; José María Heredia: poet; Frank País: revolutionary; Emilio Bacardí: entrepreneur. The list is long; you can pursue their individual legends further in a rich array of local museums.

Setting-wise Santiago could rival any of the world's great urban centers. Caught dramatically between the indomitable Sierra Maestra and the azure Caribbean, the city's *casco histórico* (historical center) retains a time-worn and slightly neglected air that's vaguely reminiscent of Barbados, Salvador in Brazil, or New Orleans.

SLEEPING	Hotel Las Américas.....28 F3	Meliá Santiago de Cuba.....29 F3	Motel San Juan.....30 H4	Villa Gaviota.....31 H2
EATING	Café Palmares.....32 F3	Cafetería Las Américas.....(see 28)	Cafetería Las Arecas.....(see 49)	Coppelia La Arboleda.....33 D3
Dulcería del Goloso.....34 F3	El Patio.....35 G2	Mercado Agropecuario Ferreiro.....36 F4	Paladar Salón Tropical.....37 G4	Pekin.....38 D2
Pizza Nova.....(see 29)	Restaurante Zunzun.....39 G3	Estadio de Beisbol Guiller món Moncada.....44 F1	Foco Cultural Tumba Francesa.....45 B3	Pista de Baile Pacho Alonso.....46 E1
Teatro José María Heredia.....47 E1	Teatro Martí.....48 B3	La Maison.....49 G3	Photo Service.....50 F3	Bus 212 to Airport & Ciudadamar...51 D1
Bus 213 to Punta Gorda.....(see 51)	Bus 214 401 & 407 to Siboney.....(see 59)	Bus 5 to Jardín de los Helechos & El Caney.....52 G3	Havanautos.....53 A3	Havanautos.....(see 28)
Horse Carts to Train Station.....54 D1	Intermunicipal Bus Station.....55 D2	National Bus Station.....56 E1	Serranos Intermunicipal Bus Station.....57 A3	Servi-Cupet Gas Station.....58 D2
Transtr.....(see 30)	Trucks to Airport & Ciudadamar...59 D1	Trucks to Casco Histórico.....59 D1	Trucks to Casco Histórico.....60 F3	Trucks to El Cobre.....61 F3
Trucks to El Cobre.....61 F3	Turistaxi.....62 F3			

Santiago is also hot, in more ways than one. While the temperature rises up into the thirties out on the street, *jineteros/as* (both the male and female varieties of touts) go about their illicit business in the shadows with a level of ferocity unmatched elsewhere in Cuba. Then there's the pollution, particularly bad in the central district

where cacophonous motorcycles swarm up and down narrow streets better designed for horses or pedestrians. Travelers should beware. While never particularly unsafe, everything in Santiago feels a little madder, more frenetic, a tad more desperate, and visitors should be prepared to adjust their pace accordingly.

Surprisingly compact for Cuba's second largest city, Santiago was kitted out for the new millennium with a cluster of monumental buildings thrown up in the early 1990s including the Golendang Meliá Santiago de Cuba, the Teatro José María Heredia, the dramatic Antonio Maceo Monument, the modern train station on the northwestern side and the flashy new terminal building at Antonio Maceo International Airport.

Orientation

The city's main attractions are in a narrow corridor running east from Parque Céspedes to Plaza de Dolores and Plaza de Marte along Calle José A Saco, the city's most important shopping street (which becomes a pedestrian mall and street fair on Saturday night). The old residential neighborhoods north and south of this strip also contain some interesting sights. Taken together, this is the city's *casco histórico*. The main monuments to the revolution are along Av de los Libertadores.

The big tourist hotels are in Vista Alegre, 3.5km east of the train station, 2km south-east of the National Bus Station and 1.5km southeast of the Intermunicipal Bus Station. Antonio Maceo International Airport is 7km to the south.

Santiago de Cuba is spread out and if you don't have a car, using the public transport can save you a fair bit in taxi fares.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA STREET NAMES

Welcome to another city where the streets have two names:

Old name	New name
Enramada	José A Saco
Calvario	Porfirio Valiente
Reloj	Mayía Rodríguez
Santa Rita	Diego Palacios
Rey Pelayo	Joaquín Castillo Duany
Paraíso	Plácido
Carnicería	Pío Rosado
San Mateo	Sao del Indio
San Félix	Hartmann
San Francisco	Sagarra
San Gerónimo	Sánchez Hechavarría
Santo Tomás	Felix Peña
Trinidad	General Portuondo
José Miguel Gómez	Habana

Information BOOKSHOPS

José A Saco between Hartmann and Porfirio Valiente near Plaza de Dolores has eight bookshops, selling books mostly in Spanish.

Librería Internacional (Map p398) On the southern side of Parque Céspedes. Decent selection of political titles in English; sells postcards and stamps.

Librería La Escalera (Map p398; Calle Heredia No 265; ☎ 10am-11pm) Used and rare books, *trova* ephemera, old seventy-eights, movie posters, the works.

Librería Manolito del Toro (Map p398; Saco No 411; ☎ 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) Good for political literature.

Librería Viet Nam (Map p398; Aguilera No 567; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) A top bookshop; it's also open on alternate Saturdays.

CULTURAL CENTER

Alliance Française (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 15 03; Calle 6 No 253, Vista Alegre; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) French cultural center with photo exhibitions and a French library. Free films are shown here weekly. Native French speakers are in short supply and are encouraged to pursue cross-cultural exchanges with the Alliance.

EMERGENCY

Asistur (Map p398; ☎ /fax 68 61 28; www.asistur.cu; General Lacret btwn Aguilera & Heredia) Below Hotel Casa Granda. They specialize in offering assistance to foreigners, mainly in the insurance and financial field.

Police (Map p398; ☎ 106; cnr Corona & Sánchez Hechavarría)

INTERNET ACCESS

Etecta (Map p398; cnr Heredia & Félix Peña; per hr CUC\$6; ☎ 9am-11pm)

LIBRARIES

Biblioteca Elvira Cape (Map p398; ☎ 62 46 69; Heredia No 262) The city's largest public library and one of the nation's most prestigious.

MEDIA

Radio Mambí CMKW At 1240AM and 93.7FM.
Radio Revolución CMKC Broadcasting over 840AM and 101.4FM.

Sierra Maestra Local paper published Saturday.
Radio Siboney CMDV Available at 1180AM and 95.1FM.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Clinica Internacional Cubanacán Servimed (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 25 89; cnr Av Raúl Pujol & Calle 10, Vista Alegre; ☎ 24hr) Capable staff speak some English. A dentist is also present.

Farmacia Cubanacán (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 25 89; cnr Av Raúl Pujol & Calle 10; ☎ 24hr) Best pharmacy in town, selling products in Convertibles.

Hospital Provincial Saturnino Lora (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 56 51; Av de los Libertadores) With recompression chamber.

Hospital Quirúrgico Gineco-Obstétrico (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 66 49; off Av General Cebreco, Reparto Vista Alegre) Recompression chamber available 8am to 3pm Monday to Friday.

Pharmacy (Map pp394-5; ☎ 8am-6pm; Meliá Santiago de Cuba, cnr Av de las Américas & Calle M) In the lobby of the Meliá Santiago de Cuba, it sells products in Convertibles.

MONEY

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (Map p398; ☎ 62 80 06; Felix Peña No 614)

Banco Financiero Internacional (Map p398; ☎ 62 20 73; Felix Peña No 565; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Bandec Saco (Map p398; cnr Saco & Mariano Corona)

Gran Lacret (Map p398; ☎ 62 75 81; cnr General Lacret & Aguilera; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Cadeca Aguilera (Map p398; ☎ 68 61 76; Aguilera No 508; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8:30am-noon Sun) Meliá Santiago de Cuba (Map pp394-5; cnr Av de las Américas & Calle M) Hotel Las Américas (Map pp394-5; cnr Av de las Américas & Av General Cebreco)

POST

DHL (Map p398; ☎ 68 63 23; Aguilera No 310)
Post office Aguilera (Map p398; Aguilera No 519); Calle 9 (Map pp394-5; Calle 9, Ampliación de Terrazas) Near Av General Cebreco; telephones are here too.

TELEPHONE

Etecta (Map p398; cnr Heredia & Félix Peña; ☎ 24hr)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Cubatur Garzón (Map pp394-5; ☎ 65 25 60; fax 68 61 06; Av Garzón No 364 btwn Calles 3 & 4; ☎ 8am-8pm) Heredia (Map p398; Heredia No 701)

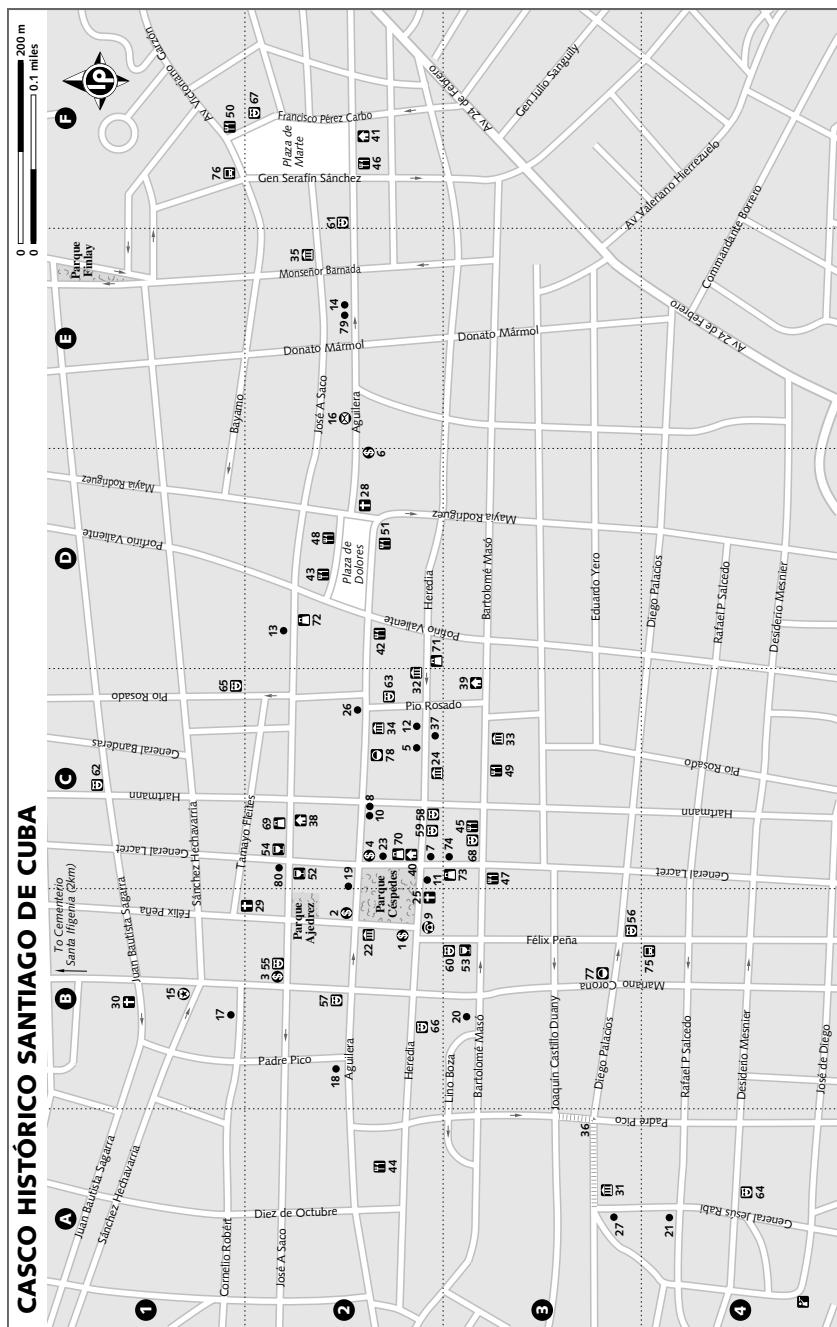
HINTS ON JINETERISMO

Chances are, nine out of 10 of the Cubans who approach you on the streets of Santiago (or most other Cuban cities for that matter) will be *jineteros* or hustlers; out to make a fast buck from your ever-lucrative foreign custom. But to assume that all Santiagueños are so unashamedly opportunistic would be wildly inaccurate.

In common with hustlers the world over, Cuban *jineteros* are best tackled with a mixture of firmness, politeness and patience. Remember that the majority of people in this most accommodating of countries are not *jineteros*. In fact, the average Cuban-on-the-street will view the over-zealous entreaties of their hissing and hassling compatriots with as much irritation as you do.

Here are some helpful tips on how to iron out the rough spots:

- If you need directions, ask a shop worker, a mother, or even a child. Don't wait for the hustlers to find you.
- Helpful phrases include: *no gracias, no necesito nada* (no thanks, I don't need anything); *por favor, no me moleste* (please don't bother me); and *No me interés. Tengo habitación/paladar ya* (I'm not interested. I already have a place to stay/eat).
- More aggressive types might have to hear something more direct like *dejame coño*, which is unequivocal in Cuban terms.
- 'Where you from' is the most common opener and you'll hear it everywhere. Develop some conversation-stopping responses like: Iceland, or Marianao (a tough Habana neighborhood).
- The other common opener is 'what's your name?' Women can respond '*casada felizmente*' (happily married) to good effect, but use your imagination.
- If it's really getting to you, consider staying in a more residential neighborhood (eg Vista Alegre in Santiago de Cuba or Playa Miramar in Habana).
- If it's really, really getting to you, consider visiting Matanzas, Remedios, Sancti Spiritus, Holguín or Guantánamo, all refreshingly hustler-free.
- Learn some Spanish so you can talk to real people, not just those who want to get into your wallet or pants.
- Of course, the easiest way to quit being hassled by hustlers is to hook up with one! If you do hatch a deal ask them plenty of questions and make sure you get your money's worth.



INFORMATION		Museo Arquidiocesano.....(see 25)	ENTERTAINMENT
Asistur.....(see 40)	Banco de Crédito y Comercio...1 B2	Museo de Ambiente Histórico	Ballet Folklórico Cutumba.....55 B2
Banco Financiero Internacional...2 B2	Bancos.....(see 22)	Museo de la Lucha	Cartelera Cultural Office.....56 B3
Bancos.....3 B2	Museo de la Lucha	Clandestina.....31 A3	Casa de la Cultura Miguel Matamoros.....(see 23)
Bancos.....4 C2	Museo del Carnaval.....32 C2	Museo del Ron.....33 C3	Casa de la Música.....57 B2
Biblioteca Elvira Cape.....5 C2	Museo Municipal Emilio Bacardi	Moreau.....34 C2	Casa de la Trova.....58 C2
Cadeca.....6 D2	Museo Tomás Romay.....35 E2	Padre Pico Steps.....36 A3	Casa del Estudiante.....59 C2
Cubatur.....7 C2	Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (Uneac).....37 C2	SLEEPING	Cine Rialto.....60 B3
DHL.....8 C2	Gran Hotel Escuela.....38 C2	Hostal San Basilio.....39 C3	Club El Iris.....61 F2
Etecsa.....9 B2	Hotel Casa Granda.....40 C2	Hotel Libertad.....41 F2	Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente.....62 C1
Islazul Agencia de Ventas.....10 C2	Reservaciones de Campismo.....17 B1	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Coro Madrigalista.....63 C2
Librería Internacional.....11 C2	EATING	Antiguo Carcel Provincial.....18 B2	Foco Cultural El Tivoli.....64 A4
Librería la Escalera.....12 C2	Cafe La Isabelica.....42 D2	Ayuntamiento.....19 C2	Gimnasio Cultura Física.....65 C1
Librería Manolito del Toro.....13 D2	Cafetería Las Enramadas.....43 D2	Balcón de Velázquez.....20 B3	Orfeón Santiago.....66 B2
Librería Viet Nam.....14 E2	Hotel Casa Granda.....(see 40)	Carnival Mural.....21 A4	Patio ARTex.....(see 71)
Police.....15 B1	Municipal Market.....44 A2	Casa de Diego Velázquez.....22 B2	Patio Los Dos Abuelos.....67 F2
Post Office.....16 E2	Paladar Las Gallegas.....45 C3	Casa de la Cultura Miguel Matamoros.....23 C2	Sala de Conciertos Dolores.....(see 28)
Reservaciones de Campismo.....17 B1	Panadería Doña Neli.....46 F2	Casa de la Trova.....(see 58)	Sala Teatro El Mambi.....68 C3
	Pizzas & Cajitas.....47 C3	Casa del Estudiante.....(see 59)	
	Restaurante Don Antonio.....(see 48)	Casa Natal de José María de Heredia.....24 C2	SHOPPING
	Restaurante La Perla del Dragón.....(see 48)	Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción.....25 B2	ARTex.....(see 40)
	Restaurante Teresina.....48 D2	Gobierno Provincial.....26 C2	ARTex.....(see 58)
	Santiago 1900.....49 C3	House Where Castro Lived.....27 A3	Discoteca Egrem.....69 C2
	Supermercado Plaza de Marte.....50 F1	Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Dolores.....28 D2	Galería de Arte de Oriente.....70 C2
	Taberna de Dolores.....51 D2	Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Carmen.....29 B2	Galería Santiago.....(see 25)
	DRINKING	Iglesia de San Francisco.....30 B1	Patio ARTex.....71 D2
	Bar La Fontana.....52 C2	Municipal Market.....(see 44)	Photo Service.....72 D2
	Claqueta Bar.....53 B3		Photo Service.....73 C3
	Kon Tiki Club.....(see 54)		
	Marylin.....54 C2		TRANSPORT
	Santiago 1900.....(see 49)		AeroCaribbean.....74 C3
			Bus No 212 to Airport & Ciudadamar.....75 B4
			Bus No 5 to Caney.....76 F1
			Camiones to Hospital Provincial.....77 B3
			Camiones to Vista Alegre.....78 C2
			Centro Único de Reservaciones.....79 E2
			Cubacar.....(see 7)
			Cubana.....80 C2
			Guarded Parking.....(see 40)
			Transtur.....(see 40)

Gaviota (Map pp394-5; ☎ 68 71 35; Villa Gaviota, Manduley No 502, Vista Alegre) You can arrange visits to Guantánamo naval base here.

Havanatur (Map pp394-5; ☎ 68 72 80; Calle 8 No 54 btwn Calles 1 & 3, Vista Alegre; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Good for transfers.

Islazul Agencia de Ventas (Map p398; ☎ 62 31 24; Aguilera No 308 btwn General Lacret & Hartmann; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri)

Oficina Reservaciones de Campismo (Map p398; ☎ 62 90 00; Cornelio Robert No 163; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 1-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

Sol y Son (Map pp394-5; ☎ 68 72 30; Hotel Las Américas, cnr Avs Las Américas & General Cebreco) Cheap hotel reservations.

Dangers & Annoyances
The historical center of Santiago de Cuba is rife with *jineteros*, all working their particular angle. Solo female travelers will feel it especially, as one guy after another

fishes for conversation, trinkets, beer or *besitos* (little kisses). See p397 for some ideas on how to shake that money-with-legs feeling.

Santiago's traffic is second to Havana's in its environmental fall-out. Making things worse are the motorcyclists bobbing and weaving for position, becoming a real hazard at Santiago de Cuba's many rotaries. Narrow, nonexistent sidewalks and crowded streets can be a pain for pedestrians.

Sights
CASCO HISTÓRICO
Parque Céspedes & Around
Most visits begin on **Parque Céspedes** (Map p398), where a bronze bust memorializes Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the man who issued *El Grito de Yara* declaring Cuban independence in 1868. In daylight it's a hot

SANTIAGO DE CUBA PROVINCE

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and glaring square, but in the evenings it's cool, with music from the nearby Hotel Casa Granda drifting across the park. Some of Santiago de Cuba's most impressive buildings ring this typically tropical space. The **Casa de la Cultura Miguel Matamoros** (Map p398; General Lacre 651), on the eastern side of the square, is the former San Carlos Club, a social center for wealthy residents until the revolution. The neoclassical **Ayuntamiento** (Map p398; cnr General Lacre & Aguilera), on the northern side of the square, was erected in the 1950s using a design from 1783 and was once the site of Hernán Cortés' mayoral office. Fidel Castro appeared on the balcony of the present building on the night of January 2, 1959, trumpeting the revolution's triumph.

In the park's northwestern corner lies the **Casa de Diego Velázquez** (Map p398; Félix Peña No 602). Dating from 1522, this is the oldest house still standing in Cuba. Restored in the late 1960s, the Andalusian-style facade (you'll know it by its enclosed balcony with the fine, Moorish-style woodwork) was restored in the late 1960s, and opened in 1970 as the **Museo de Ambiente Histórico Cubano** (Map p398; ☎ 65 26 52; unguided/guided CUC\$2/5; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-4:45pm Mon-Thu, 2-4:45pm Fri, 9am-9pm Sat & Sun). The ground floor was originally a trading-house and gold foundry, while the upstairs was the personal residence of Velázquez himself. Today, rooms display period furnishings and decoration from the 16th to 19th centuries. Visitors are also taken through an adjacent neoclassical house dating from the 19th century.

You can't miss the imposing, five-nave **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción** (Map p398; 🕒 Mass 6:30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 5pm Sat, 9am & 6:30pm Sun) on the southern side of the park. This cathedral is only the latest in a series of churches on this spot that have been ravaged by pirates, earthquakes and architects. Cuba's first cathedral was built here in the 1520s, originally positioned with its facade facing the bay. The present cathedral with its coffered ceiling, dome and graceful chancel was completed in 1922, while the choir stalls date from 1910. It's believed that Diego Velázquez is buried beneath the cathedral, though this has never been proven and there's no marker. Unfortunately the cathedral is usually closed outside of mass hours. The **Museo Arquidiocesano** (Map p398; ☎ 62 21 43; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun), on the southern side of the cathedral

through an independent doorway, houses a collection of furniture, liturgical objects and paintings including the *Ecce Homo*, believed to be Cuba's oldest painting. Behind the cathedral and two blocks downhill from the park is the **Balcón de Velázquez** (Map p398; cnr Bartolomé Masó & Mariano Corona), the site of an old Spanish fort with lovely harbor views.

Other interesting nearby churches include **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Carmen** (Map p398; Félix Peña No 505), an 18th-century hall church that is the final resting place of Christmas-carol composer Esteban Salas (1725-1803), *maestro de capilla* (choir master) of Santiago de Cuba's cathedral from 1764 until his death; and the 18th-century three-nave **Iglesia de San Francisco** (Map p398; Juan Bautista Sagarra No 121).

On Heredia, east of the Hotel Casa Granda, is a strip of culturally significant buildings, including the **Casa del Estudiante** (Map p398; ☎ 62 78 04; Heredia No 204) and the **Casa de la Trova** (Map p398; ☎ 65 26 89; Heredia No 208), one-time home of composer Rafael Salcedo (1844-1917). In the next block is national monument **Casa Natal de José María de Heredia** (Map p398; Heredia No 260; without/with guide CUC\$1/2; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun), containing a small museum illustrating the life of the romantic poet born here on December 31, 1803. Heredia is known for his lyrical poetry, most notably *Ode to Niagara* (inscribed on the wall outside) and other romantic poems extolling the natural beauty of countries such as – er – Canada. As an independence advocate, Heredia was forced into exile in the US and Mexico, where he died in 1839.

Nearby on Heredia is the **Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba** (Uneac; Map p398; Heredia No 266). The colorful **Museo del Carnaval** (Map p398; ☎ 62 69 55; Heredia No 303; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) displays the history of Santiago's carnival tradition, the oldest in Cuba. Drop in for the talented folkloric dance group performing in the patio (admission CUC\$1) at 4pm Tuesday to Saturday and 11am on Sunday, provided a small audience is present. One block south and a bit west of here is the fun and informative **Museo del Ron** (Map p398; Bartolomé Masó 358; admission CUC\$2; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), outlining the history of Cuban rum; entrance includes a taster of *añejo* (aged rum).

Pío Rosado, the narrow alley running alongside the Museo del Carnaval, leads to the fabulous neoclassical facade of the

Museo Municipal Emilio Bacardí Moreau (Map p398; ☎ 62 84 02; admission CUC\$2; 🕒 10am-6pm). This is one of Cuba's oldest functioning museums, founded in 1899 by the famous rum distiller Emilio Bacardí y Moreau (1844-1922). Downstairs are exhibits relating to the 19th-century independence struggles (including an interesting weapons collection), upstairs are European and Cuban paintings. There are a dozen paintings by the Tejada brothers, including *La confronta de billetes* by José Joaquín Tejada Revilla (1867-1943), a typical work of the Spanish *costumbrismo* school, which sought to portray the customs and life of the common people. Dating from the 1920s, the **Gobierno Provincial** (Poder Popular; Map p398; cnr Pío Rosado & Aguilera), opposite the Museo Bacardí, is the seat of the provincial assembly.

If you're on a magical history tour, be sure to visit the 1906 **Antiguo Carcel Provincial** (Map p398; Aguilera No 131), two blocks west of Parque Céspedes. Fidel Castro and other rebels were incarcerated here immediately after the 1953 Moncada attack. A half-block west on Aguilera is the **municipal market** (Map p398), and to the south are the picturesque **Padre Pico steps** (Map p398) – almost 100 years old and still hosting rousing games of dominoes – leading to the Tivolí neighborhood.

Up the slope to the right at the top of the Padre Pico steps is the place where revolutionaries attacked a police station on November 30, 1956 to divert attention from the arrival of the tardy yacht *Granma*, carrying the M-26-7 (Castro's revolutionary organization) guerrillas. The colonial-style station now houses the **Museo de la Lucha Clandestina** (Map p398; ☎ 62 46 89; admission CUC\$1; General Jesús Rabí No 1; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), detailing the underground struggle against Batista. The view from the balcony is excellent. Across the street is the **house** (Map p398; General J Rabí No 6) where Fidel Castro lived from 1931 to 1933 while a student in Santiago de Cuba. On the next corner is a series of **carnival murals** (Map p398; cnr Rabí & Rafael Salcedo) facing a small park.

Plaza de Dolores

East of Parque Céspedes is the pleasant and shady **Plaza de Dolores** (Map p398; cnr Aguilera & Porfirio Valiente), a former marketplace now dominated by the 18th-century **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Dolores** (Map p398).

After a fire in the 1970s, the church was rebuilt as a concert hall (Sala de Conciertos Dolores, p414). Many restaurants and cafés flank this square. It's also Santiago's most popular gay cruising spot.

Plaza de Marte

Three busy blocks east of Plaza de Dolores is this 19th-century Spanish parade ground where prisoners were executed by firing squad during the colonial era. Today, Plaza de Marte is the site of Santiago de Cuba's *esquina caliente* (literally 'hot corner') where baseball fans debate the sport with wild abandon among monuments to various heroes of Cuban independence. Baseball is the most democratic space we have, Cubans will tell you, and it shows here. A block west is the **Museo Tomás Romay** (Map p398; ☎ 65 35 39; cnr Jose A Saco & Monseñor Barnada; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 8:30am-5:30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat). This is the city's natural sciences museum, collecting natural history and archaeology artifacts, with some modern art thrown in.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA

Tivolí

Downhill from the Padre Pico steps (left) on the edge of the *casco histórico* is the **Casa de Las Tradiciones** (Map pp394-5; General J Rabí No 154) with a free art gallery and a bar; at night some of Santiago's best *trova* happens here. One block west via José de Diego, the street just before the Casa de Las Tradiciones, you'll get a superb **viewpoint** (Map p398) over Santiago Bay.

Rounding the next corner north of this viewpoint, Desiderio Mesnier descends to **Parque Alameda** (Map pp394-5), a popular bayside promenade that opened in 1840 and was redesigned in 1893. Opposite the old **clock tower** (Map pp394-5) and *aduana* (customs house) at the north end of Parque Alameda is the **Fábrica de Tabacos César Escalante** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 23 66; Av Jesús Menéndez No 703; admission CUC\$5; 🕒 9-11am & 1-3pm), a working cigar factory open for visits. The factory shop sells the finished product.

North of Casco Histórico

North of the historic center, Santiago de Cuba turns residential. Even bustling Félix Peña quietsens down as you come upon the 18th-century bell tower of **Iglesia de Santo Tomás** (Map pp394-5; Félix Peña No 308), five blocks north of Parque Céspedes.

Two long blocks northwest of the church is the important **Museo-Casa Natal de Antonio Maceo** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 37 50; Los Maceos No 207; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat). The famous general who fought in both wars of independence was born in this house on June 14, 1845. In his 1878 *Protest of Baraguá*, Maceo rejected any compromise with the colonial authorities and went into exile after further combat. During the 1895 war he was second in command, after Máximo Gómez, and died fighting in western Cuba in 1896. This simple museum exhibits highlights of Maceo's life, including the tattered flag flown in battle.

Another home-turned-museum is the **Casa Museo de Frank y Josue País** (Map pp394-5; General Banderas No 226; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), about five blocks southeast. Integral to the success of the revolution, the young País brothers organized the underground section of the M-26-7 in Santiago de Cuba until Frank's murder by the police on July 30, 1957. The exhibits tell the story.

You can behold a different side of Cuban history at the original **Bacardí Rum Factory** (Fábrica de Ron; Map pp394-5; Av Jesús Menéndez), opposite the train station near Narciso López, on the northwestern side of town. The factory was founded by the Bacardí family in 1838, but after the revolution the company moved to Puerto Rico taking the Bacardí patent with them (they're now suing the Cuban government under the US extraterritorial Helms-Burton law). The Santiago de Cuba product was renamed Ron Caney. Also produced here are quality rums such as Matusalem, Ron Santiago and Ron Varadero. The factory consists of three sections: the production room, the aging storehouse (with 42,000 barrels of rum) and the bottling section. In total, the distillery produces 9 million liters a year, 70% of it exported. The **Barrita Ron Havana Club** (Map pp394-5; Av Jesús Menéndez; ☎ 9am-6pm), a tourist bar attached to the factory, offers rum sales and tastings. There are no factory tours.

Cuartel Moncada

The **Parque Histórico Abel Santamaría** (Map pp394-5; cnr General Portuondo & Av de los Libertadores) is the site of the former Saturnino Lora Civil Hospital. On July 26, 1953, a group of revolutionaries (including female fighters Haydee Santamaría and Melba Hernández) led by second-in-command Abel Santamaría occupied this

hospital during the attack on the adjacent Moncada Barracks. Most of those involved were later killed (and some tortured). On October 16, 1953, Fidel Castro was tried in the Escuela de Enfermeras for leading the Moncada attack; he made his famous *History Will Absolve Me* speech. The **Parque Histórico Abel Santamaría museum** (Map pp394-5; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) opened in 1976 with a photo exhibit on socioeconomic conditions in Cuba during the 1950s.

The **Cuartel Moncada** (Moncada Barracks, Map pp394-5), with a trapezoid footprint from General Portuondo to Paseo de Martí and Av de los Libertadores to Av Moncada, is named for Guillermon Moncada, a prisoner here in 1874 who later fought for independence from Spain during the 'Little War' of 1879. The first barracks on this site were constructed by the Spanish in 1859, and in 1938 the present buildings were completed. On the morning of July 26, 1953, more than 100 revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro attacked Batista's troops here at what was at the time Cuba's second most important military garrison. The revolutionaries had hoped the assault would spark a general uprising throughout Cuba, but things went awry when the driver took a wrong turn and one of the soldiers noticed that the rebels – who were disguised in military uniforms – were still wearing their ordinary work shoes. The **monument** (Map pp394-5; General Portuondo) depicting Martí and Abel Santamaría marks the spot from where the first shots were fired.

In 1960, after the triumph of the revolution, these barracks, like all barracks in Cuba, were converted into a school called Cuidad Escolar 26 de Julio, and in 1967 a **museum** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 01 57; admission CUC\$2, guide/camera/video CUC\$1/1/5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) was installed near gate No 3, where the main attack took place. Bastista's soldiers cemented over the original bullet holes from the attack so the Castro government remade them (this time without guns) after the revolution as a poignant reminder. The museum outlines the history of Cuba from the Spanish conquest to the present, with heavy emphasis on the revolution, and it's one of Cuba's best.

The **Palacio de Justicia** (Map pp394-5; Av de los Libertadores & General Portuondo) also figured prominently in the assault on Moncada, as fighters

led by Raúl Castro provided covering fire from the rooftop. Most Moncada defendants were tried here in September 1953.

Vista Alegre

Broad, dappled avenues lined with bowed trees mark the entrance to Santiago de Cuba's old upper-class neighborhood Vista Alegre, on the east side of town. From near Hotel Las Américas, Av Manduley runs east through Vista Alegre, past a number of stately neocolonial mansions, some of which were converted into schools, clinics, cultural centers, government offices and restaurants after the former owners went into exile in the US. The side streets here are peppered with beautiful *casas particulares* (p408). The **Centro Cultural Africano Fernando Ortiz** (Map pp394-5; Av Manduley No 106; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) contains African artifacts, handicrafts and fine art collected by Cuba's most important ethnologist. It's also open on alternate Saturdays. A block away is the **Museo de Imagen** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 22 34; Calle 8 No 106; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) which is CUC\$1 well spent. From Kodak to Korda, with little CIA spy cameras and lots of historical and contemporary photos, the history of Cuban photography is housed here.

Nearby, there's a large eclectic palace now used as the **Palacio de Pioneros** (Map pp394-5; cnr Av Manduley & Calle 11). Parked in a corner patch of grass, there's an old MiG fighter plane on which the younger pioneers play. The traffic circle at the corner of Av Manduley and Calle 13 contains an impressive marble **statue** (Map pp394-5) of poet José María de Heredia.

Around the corner is the **Casa del Caribe** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 22 85; fax 64 23 87; Calle 13 No 154; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), founded in 1982 to study Caribbean life. It organizes the Festival del Caribe, Fiesta del Fuego every July (see p408) and is also open on concert nights.

A block south is the affiliated **Casa de las Religiones Populares** (Map pp394-5; Calle 13 No 206; admission without/with guide CUC\$1/2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat), with a large, bright collection of all things Santería.

Santiago de Cuba's **Parque Zoológico** (Map pp394-5; Av Raúl Pujol; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is 1km east of Hotel Santiago de Cuba.

Next to the zoo entrance is a fenced-in expanse surrounded by cannons. On this

spot, Santiago de Cuba's Spanish garrison surrendered two weeks after the battle of San Juan Hill in 1898. Continue through the grounds of the adjacent Hotel San Juan to **San Juan Hill** (Map pp394-5) proper, where US, Cuban and Spanish troops faced off on July 1, 1898. Some of the original cannons and trenches can still be seen, and there are numerous monuments (admission free), including a bronze figure of a 'Rough Rider' in the center of the park. There's a whopping view of La Gran Piedra from this hill. A large **amusement park** (Map pp394-5) is down the stairway from the Ferris wheel on San Juan Hill. Built in 1985 by Japanese investors, most of the rides are dormant, but the shaded benches are alluring.

Cementerio Santa Ifigenia

A visit to **Cementerio Santa Ifigenia** (Map p404; Av Crombet; admission CUC\$1, camera CUC\$1; ☎ 8am-6pm) is a stroll through history. The cemetery was created in 1868 to accommodate the victims of the war of independence and a simultaneous yellow-fever outbreak. Among the 8000 tombs here are the graves of many great Cuban historical figures, including national hero, José Martí (1853-95). Erected in 1951, the hexagonal Martí mausoleum is flanked by muses and has a side dedicated to each of Cuba's former six provinces. There's an impressive changing of the honor guard every half hour here.

The mausoleum of those who died during the 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks is nearby, as is the grave of Tomás Estrada Palma (1835-1908), Cuba's first president. To the right of the main entrance is Emilio Bacardí y Moreau (1844-1922), the son of Facundo Bacardí, founder of the famous rum distillery. María Grajales, the widow of independence hero Antonio Maceo, and Mariana Grajales, Maceo's mother, are to the right of the main avenue. Eleven of the 31 generals of the independence struggles are buried in this cemetery, marked by a tower nearby. Across the avenue again is a monument (1906) to the Spanish soldiers who died in the battles of San Juan Hill and Caney. The father of Cuban independence, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (1819-74), is further along on the left.

The tombs of revolutionaries Frank and Josue País are in the middle of the cemetery back from the Martí mausoleum. Like all

persons buried here who died during the struggle against Batista, the País brothers' graves are marked by two flags: the black, white, and red flag of Fidel's M-26-7, and the Cuban flag. The cemetery's newest addition is international celebrity and local musical rake, Compay Segundo, of *Buena Vista Social Club* fame who was laid to rest here in 2003.

Horse carts go Av Jesús Menéndez, from Parque Alameda to Parque Barca de Oro via Cementerio Santa Ifigenia (one peso).

AROUND SANTIAGO DE CUBA

Castillo de San Pedro del Morro

A Unesco World Heritage site since 1997, the **Castillo de San Pedro del Morro** (Map p404;

☎ 69 15 69; admission CUC\$4, camera CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun) stands dramatically on a 60m-high promontory on the eastern side of the harbor entrance, 10km southwest of town via Carretera del Morro (which passes the airport access road). El Morro was designed in 1587 by the Italian military engineer Giovanni Bautista Antonelli to protect the town from pirates, but building didn't actually start until 1633 (it was finished in 1693). El Morro's massive batteries, bastions, magazines and walls are considered the best-preserved 17th-century Spanish military complex in the Caribbean. Inside the castle is a **museum of piracy** plus another room given over to the US-Spanish naval battle that took place in the

bay in 1898. The stupendous views from here take in the western ribbon of coast backed by the Sierra Maestra.

From El Morro you also get a good look at the hamlets of La Socapa and Cayo Granma across the bay, both accessible by ferry from Punta Gorda or Ciudadamar. In **La Socapa** you can hike uphill to the ruins of an old Spanish battery where five cannons, designed to create crossfire with the castle, still stand guard. The only shooting nowadays is by photographers taking in the excellent castle views; for some private beach time, you can explore west along the deserted coast. **Cayo Granma** is a little fantasy island of red-roofed dwellings tucked in a creak of the Bahía de Santiago de Cuba. A short uphill hike to its highest point brings you to the **Iglesia de San Rafael**. Alternatively, you can circumvent the island in 15 minutes.

To get to El Morro from the city center, take bus 212 to Ciudadamar on the Carretera Turística and wend your way south along the coast, following the road up to the castle. A more scenic option is to cut across the sandy beach at **Caleta La Estrella** and connect with a broad trail on the opposite hillside. It's a 20-minute, steepish walk with a dicey bridge crossing and wall scaling once you leave the beach. Buses (20 centavos) and trucks (two pesos) to Ciudadamar leave regularly from Av de los Libertadores (Map pp394-5), opposite the Hospital Maternidad. This bus also stops on Felix Peña (Map p398), five blocks south of Parque Céspedes, where it will be nearly impossible to squeeze on. Public transport thins considerably after 5pm, so go early. A round-trip by taxi from Parque Céspedes to El Morro with a 30-minute wait will cost in the vicinity of CUC\$12.

Theoretically ferries travel a fixed route from Punta Gorda to Cayo Granma (CUC\$3, hourly) via Ciudadamar and La Socapa, but the Ciudadamar leg is sometimes chopped off, in which case you can cross the bay from Punta Gorda. (Bus 213 from Santiago de Cuba terminates here. You can catch it at the same stop on Av de los Libertadores; Map pp394-5).

Jardín de los Helechos

Just minutes from downtown Santiago de Cuba, the lush, peaceful **Jardín de los Helechos** (Map p404; ☎ 64 83 35; Carretera de El Caney

No 129; admission CUC\$1; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a wonderland of 350 types of ferns, 90 types of orchids and lots of tender loving care. The entrance fee gets you a detailed tour (in Spanish) by one of the Centro Oriental de Bioversidad y Ecosistemas staff working on this project. Even in May there will be a dozen types of orchids in psychedelic bloom (best time for orchids is November to January) and the center of the garden has a dense copse-cum-sanctuary dotted with benches. There are unique, handmade artworks and cards on sale.

The garden is about 2km from Santiago de Cuba on the road to El Caney. Bus 5 (20 centavos) leaves from Plaza de Marte (Map p398) in central Santiago, or Calle 3 in Vista Alegre (Map pp394-5) or you can hire a taxi.

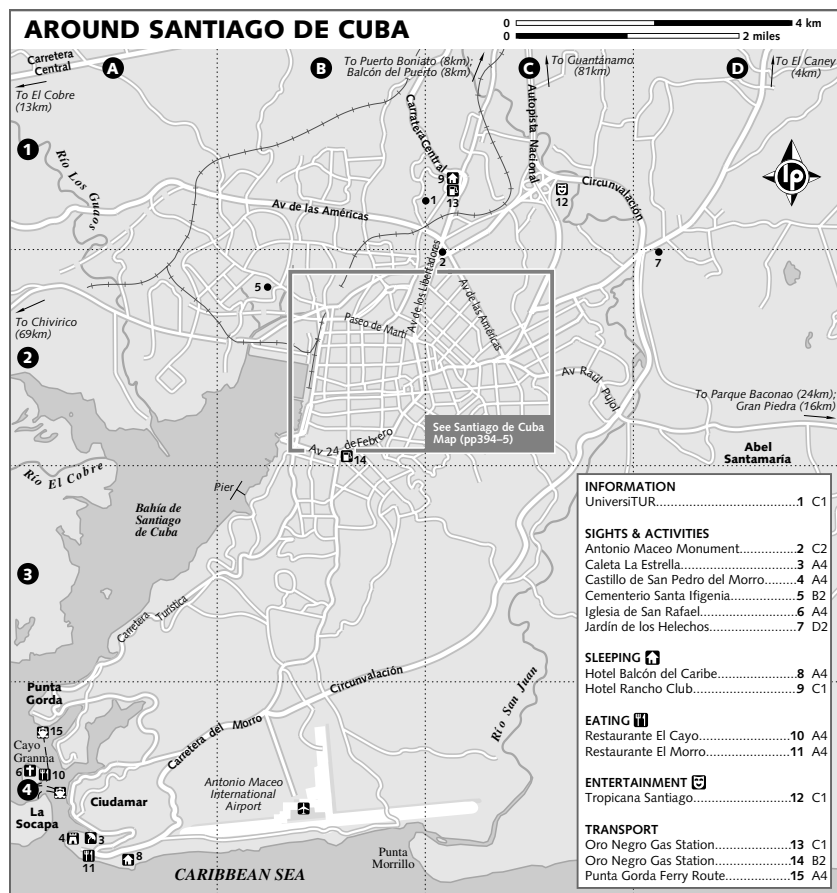
Puerto Boniato

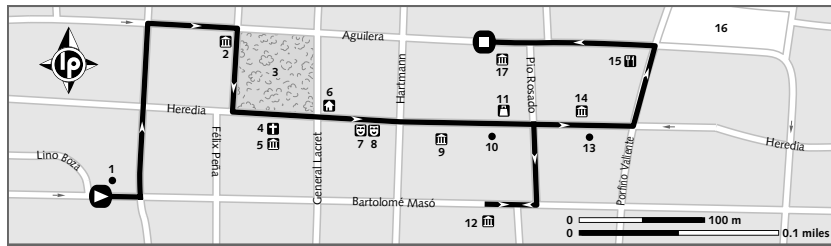
For a sweeping panorama of the Santiago de Cuba basin and a bird's-eye view of the provincial penitentiary, you can't beat Puerto Boniato. It's on the ridge that separates the Santiago de Cuba basin from the province's Valle Central. To get there, go through the underpass near the Oro Negro gas station on the Carretera Central at the northern edge of Santiago de Cuba, and wind around and up for 8km. Over the pass, this road continues on to the Autopista Nacional and Dos Caminos.

Walking Tour

With a song on your lips and a salsa in your step, a short walking tour of Santiago's *casco histórico* is an obligatory rite of passage for first-time visitors keen to uncover the steamy tropical sensations that make this city tick.

Start where the governor did, surveying the sweeping mountains and sparkling bay from the balmy **Balcón de Velázquez** (1; p400), site of an ancient fort. Head east next, avoiding the angry roar of the motorbikes that swarm like wasps in the streets around until you resurface in **Parque Céspedes** (3; p399), Santiago's pulsating heart with its resident *jineteras* and craggy-faced old men in Panama hats who strum their way through old Carlos Puebla favorites with the exuberance of 18-year-olds. The **Casa de Diego Velázquez** (2; p400), with its Moorish fringes and intricate wooden arcades, is believed to be





WALK FACTS

Start Balcón de Velázquez

Finish Museo Municipal Emilio Bacardí Moreau

Distance 800m

Duration Two hours

the oldest house still standing in Cuba and it contrasts impressively with the mighty, mustard facade of the **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción** (4; p400) over to stage right. This building has been ransacked, burned, rocked by earthquakes and rebuilt, remodeled and restored and ransacked again. Statues of Christopher Columbus and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas flank the entrance in ironic juxtaposition. Supposing you're into religious art, the **Museo Arquiidiocesano** (5; p400) – say that three times fast! – is somewhere out back.

If you're tired already you can step out onto the lazy terrace bar at the **Hotel Casa Granda** (6; p410) on the southeastern corner of the park, for mojitos (rum cocktails) or Montecristo cigars, or both. Graham Greene came here in the 1950s on a clandestine mission to interview Fidel Castro. The interview never came off, but he managed instead to smuggle a suitcase of clothes up to the rebels in the mountains.

Follow the music as you exit past the paint-peeled **Casa del Estudiante** (7; p400) and onto the infamous **Casa de la Trova** (8; p400), where come 10pm everything starts to get a shade more *caliente* (hot) with people winking at you lewdly from the overcrowded upstairs balcony.

Dragging yourself upstream on Heredia, you'll pass street stalls, cigar peddlers, a guy dragging a double bass, countless motorbikes. That yellowy house on the right with the poem emblazoned on the wall is

Casa Natal de José María de Heredia (9; p400), birthplace of one of Cuba's greatest poets. You might find a living scribe in **Uneac** (10; p400), the famous national writer's union a few doors down, or plenty more dead legends offered up in print in funky **Librería La Escalera** (11; p396) a bookshop across the street. You can break loose at the corner of Pío Rosado and head to the south in search of the **Museo del Ron** (12; p97) until temptation gets the better of you and you drift off in the direction of Tivoli or Santa Barbara or Reparto Sueño. Stay on the safer path and you'll stumble upon **Patio ARTex** (13; p412) where boleros (Cuban musical ballads) are de rigueur and tourists browse through the CDs. Cross the street next (mind that motorbike) and stick your nose into the **Museo del Carnaval** (14; p400), which aims to demonstrate how Santiago de Cuba lets loose when it lets its hair down (more than usual) every July in the best carnival between here and – oh – anywhere.

At the corner of Porfirio Valiente, turn right and see how far 20 centavo gets you in the atmospherically austere **Café La Isabelica** (15; p411). It's amazing how tranquil **Plaza de Dolores** (16; p401) can be considering the ongoing motorcycle mania. Maybe it's something they put in the ice cream. Grab one and find out. There are benches to relax on underneath the trees while you weigh up if you've still got enough energy to check out the **Museo Municipal Emilio Bacardí Moreau** (17; p401), Santiago's and Cuba's oldest functioning museum.

Courses

Opportunities for courses abound in Santiago; anything from art and music, to literature and architecture. You can either arrange things beforehand, or jump on the bandwagon when you arrive. Following are some useful pointers.

LANGUAGE

UniversiTUR (Map p404; ☎ 64 31 86; vallejo@mercado.uo.edu.cu; Universidad de Oriente, cnr Calle L & Ampliación de Terrazas), arranges Spanish courses. It's also possible to combine instruction in music, literature and history with language studies; for more information see p454. Note that Americans must enroll through Havanatur in Habana (p92).

MUSIC & DANCE

Spanish courses, dancing classes and various other specialist activities can be organized at **Ateneo** (Map p398; Félix Peña No 755) a cultural organization set up in the late 19th century by lawyer Antonio Bravo Correoso. Call by and see what's on offer. Another central option is the **Casa del Estudiante** (Map p398; ☎ 62 78 04; Heredia No 204) where you can organize singing, dancing or percussion lessons under the auspices of Carlos Bourbon of Ballet Folklorico Cutumba fame. There are something like 11 teachers here and classes start at CUC\$8 per hour.

The **Casa del Caribe** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 22 85; fax 64 23 87; Calle 13 No 154) organizes dance les-

sons in conga, *son* and salsa; it's CUC\$10 for two hours or CUC\$5 for one. Resident staff member, Juan Eduardo Castillo can also fix up lessons in percussion. Real aficionados can inquire about in-depth courses on Afro-Cuban religions and culture. These guys are experts and they're very flexible.

Another interesting option is an organization called **Cuban Rhythm** (www.cubanrhythm.com). Take a look at their excellent website and make arrangements beforehand.

Tours

Cubatur (Garzón Map pp394-5; ☎ 65 25 60; fax 68 61 06; Av Garzón No 364 btwn Calles 3 & 4; ☎ 8am-8pm; Heredia Map p398; Heredia No 701) sells excursions to La Gran Piedra, El Cobre, Baracoa and Tropicana Santiago Nightclub (p413).

You can easily arrange a tour on the spot with one of the taxis parked on Parque Céspedes in front of the cathedral. A four-hour tour to El Morro Castle, San Juan Hill and Santa Ifigenia cemetery should cost in the vicinity of CUC\$20 for the car with Cuba-taxi (or about double that in a newer tourist taxi). A similar tour taking in Plaza de la

CUBA'S EXILED WRITERS

In Cuba it is often said that 'every good writer is an exiled writer' and it's true that many of the country's most erudite literary offspring have plied their trade from overseas. Here is a list of some of the country's most notable literary luminaries.

José Heredia

An early champion of Cuban-Canadian relations Heredia's most celebrated work is the lyrical poem *Ode to Niagara* the text of which has been inscribed for posterity on the wall of his birth house (p400) in Santiago's bustling Calle Heredia.

José Martí

El Maestro himself spent less than half his life in the land 'where the palm tree grows', though his jealously guarded remains, housed in an impressive mausoleum in Santiago's Santa Ifigenia cemetery (p403), pay testament to his enduring legend.

Alejo Carpentier

The son of a French father and a Russian mother, Carpentier's claim to Cuban citizenry is, on paper, about as tenuous as Hemingway's. Developing an interest in Afro-Cubanism in his youth he nonetheless produced the most definitive guide to Cuban music in his seminal book *Music in Cuba* published in 1946.

Guillermo Infante

One-time Castro supporter turned dissident, Gibara-born Infante ran off to join the London literati in 1965 where he penned his highly lauded experimental classic *Tres Tristes Tigres*.

Revolución, El Cobre and the Monumento Al Cimarrón goes for CUC\$15.

Festivals & Events

Summer is an exciting time in Santiago de Cuba, with events coming one after the other. The season begins with the **Fiesta de San Juan** (June 24), celebrated with processions and conga dancing by cultural associations called *focos culturales*. Mid-to-late June is also when the **Boleros de Oro** extravaganza happens. It's followed by the **Festival del Caribe, Fiesta del Fuego** (Fire Celebration Festival of Caribbean Culture) in early July with exhibitions, music, and song and dance from all around the Caribbean. Santiago de Cuba's **Carnaval**, held during the last week of July, is the hottest in Cuba, with open-air grandstands erected along Av Garzón. The **International Chorus Festival** is in late November and the **Festival Internacional de Trova** is in mid-March.

Sleeping

BUDGET

City Center

Gran Hotel Escuela (Map p398; ☎ 65 30 20; Saco No 310; s/d CUC\$26/32; 🏠) This old four-story hotel with an impressive lobby and great location has big rooms with fridge and TV. Upstairs units have balconies over-

looking the street. A bit rougher around the edges than the Basilio or Libertad (but still a good choice), this place was recently remodeled as another of Cuba's Escuela hotels where students of tourism undertake their training.

Hotel Libertad (Islazul; Map p398; ☎ 62 83 60; Calle Aguilera No 658; s/d low season CUC\$26/32, high season CUC\$32/38; 🏠 📺) Sparkling Hotel Libertad on Plaza de Marte is one of the best hotels in the Islazul chain and the 18 units were all recently renovated. Throw in a convenient, central(ish) location and clean (if sometimes windowless) rooms and you've got a rock-solid option that's easy on the wallet. The rooftop terrace has mountain views and, unusually for an Islazul hotel, there's Internet available in the lobby. The downstairs restaurant provides a reasonable refuge from Santiago's traditionally lackluster dining scene.

Outside the Center

Hotel Rancho Club (Islazul; Map p404; ☎ 63 32 80/63 39 40; Altos de Quintero; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$26/34, high season CUC\$32/38; 🏠 📺) If you have a car and don't mind being a bit out of the center, the Hotel Rancho Club located 4km north of Santiago de Cuba off the Carretera Central is a winner. The 30 rooms are well kept, the restaurant is good (with city

views to boot!) and the staff are friendly and helpful. They also have big cabaret shows here Friday to Sunday (guests/nonguests CUC\$1/2; at 10pm to 2am) when CUC\$10 gets you two portions of fried chicken, a bottle of rum and four cokes – a cheap, fun party.

Hotel Balcón del Caribe (Islazul; Map p404; ☎ 69 10 11; Carretera del Morro Km 7.5; s/d CUC\$34/42, cabañas with breakfast s/d CUC\$36/48; 🏠 📺) This complex near the Castillo del Morro, 10km south of town, was participating in Misión Milagros (Miracle Mission, p449) and was temporary closed. Check with the Cubatur office on the corner of Heredia and General Larcet as to its current status.

MIDRANGE

Hostal San Basilio (Cubanacán; Map p398; ☎ 65 17 02; hostalsb@stgo.scu.cyt.cu; Calle Masó No 403 btwn Pío Rosado & Porfirio Valiente; r CUC\$46; 🏠) Santiago's newest hotel is the boutique-style San Basilio named rather confusingly after the street in which it stands (the street was renamed Masó after the revolution). Newer fittings and a slightly quieter ambience give this place the edge over the Libertad, though the price moves it into the midrange category.

Villa Gaviota (Gaviota; Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 13 68; Av Manduley No 502 btwn Calles 19 & 21, Vista Alegre;

s/d low season CUC\$38/58, high season CUC\$39/60; 🏠 📺 📺) Sitting pretty in an oasis of calm in Santiago's salubrious Vista Alegre district, Villa Gaviota has emerged from an extensive one-year makeover with a sharper, edgier look. Features include a swimming pool, restaurant, three bars, billiards room and laundry. A good bet if you want to escape the motorcycle madness of the city center.

Hotel Las Américas (Islazul; Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 20 11; cnr Av de las Américas & General Cebreco; s/d low season with breakfast CUC\$44/58, high season CUC\$53/69; 🏠 📺 📺) By far the most popular hotel for groups, this good medium-priced choice has a convenient location (near Vista Alegre and attractions in the center) and lots of facilities (restaurant, 24-hour cafeteria, pool, nightly entertainment, car rental etc). Watch for overcharging in the restaurant.

Motel San Juan (Islazul; Map pp394-5; ☎ 68 72 00; San Juan Hill; s/d low season with breakfast CUC\$44/58, high season CUC\$53/69; 🏠 📺 📺) On historical San Juan Hill, with lots of lawn and a children's pool, this place is great for history buffs and families. Rooms are spread on expansive grounds and have terraces and lots of extras (including radios – rare in Cuban hotels). Drive 1km east of Hotel Las Américas via Av Raúl Pujol to get here.

CASAS PARTICULARES – SANTIAGO DE CUBA

- Arelis González** (☎ 65 29 88; Aguilera No 615; r CUC\$15-20) Central; independent room with TV, fridge; can cook; big house lots of traffic.
- 'Casa Schmidt' – Tania & Sorangel** (☎ 62 31 82; Corona No 656; r CUC\$20) Colonial house, basic bath, private.
- Cecelia Lago** (☎ 65 43 90; Calle San Fernando No 624; r CUC\$20-25) Near the center, but quiet.
- Edgardo Gutierrez Cobas** (☎ 64 25 36; Terraza No 106, Ampliación de Terraza; r CUC\$20)
- Eduardo Halley** (☎ 62 48 78; Heredia No 251; r CUC\$15-20) Right on top of the action, hostel feel, three rooms share one bath.
- Frank Martínez** (☎ 62 45 14; Calle J No 264, Reparto Sueño; r CUC\$20)
- Glenda Díaz Picazo** (☎ 62 08 69; Bayamo No 121 btwn Barnada & Plácido; r CUC\$15-20) Corner of Plaza Marte.
- Gloria Bové Alonso** (☎ 62 38 37; Calle J No 212, Reparto Sueño; r CUC\$20)
- Jorge Souлары** (☎ 64 39 94; jsouлары@hotmail.com; Calle 13 No 309, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$20) Mod house, big, plush rooms, especially one with bathtub.
- Juan Martí Vazquez** (☎ 662-0101; Calle Padre Pico No 614 btwn Princesa & San Fernando; r CUC\$20; 🏠) Patio and roof terrace.
- Lourdes de la Caridad Gómez Beaton** (☎ 65 44 68; Félix Peña No 454; r CUC\$15-20) Friendly.
- Luis Eduardo Halley Pérez** (☎ 62 48 78; Heredia 231; r CUC\$15-20) Old colonial house, central.
- Luisa Gómez Villamil** (☎ 64 34 58; Calle 6 No 353, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$15-20) Two big, airy rooms sharing bath, friendly.
- Magalis Palencia Domínguez** (☎ 64 10 87; Calle 4 No 204, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$15-20) Independent.

- Marlon Romaguera Cala** (☎ 65 40 52; Aguilera No 612, apt No 2; r CUC\$15) Small room, great bed, friendly, others in same building.
- Mery & Tania Gómez** (☎ 664-1970; Anacaona No 107 btwn Aguilera & Taíno, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$20-25) Five minutes' walk from La Maison in Vista Alegre.
- Nardys Aguilera Rodríguez** (☎ 62 24 09; Aguilera No 565; r CUC\$15)
- Natacha Alvarez Pérez** (☎ 65 31 07; Aguilera No 509B; r CUC\$15-20) Central, clean; sweet owner.
- Neñita** (☎ 665-4110; San Geronimo 472 btwn Sanchez Echavaria & Pío Rosado; r CUC\$20-25) Lovely old house dating from 1850.
- Omar & Yasmari** (☎ 62 53 30; José A Saco No 607; r CUC\$20) Street noise, meals.
- Raimundo Ocana & Bertha Pena** (☎ 62 40 97; Heredia No 308 btwn Pío Rosado & Porfirio Valiente; r CUC\$20; 🏠) Two-hundred-year-old house right in the thick of the action on Heredia.
- Ramona & Manuel Tur** (☎ 65 26 24; Corona No 555; r CUC\$15-20)
- René Miranda Leyva** (☎ 64 29 55; Calle 13 No 352, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$20) Big house, ask for Caridad.
- Santiago M Vallina García** (☎ 62 51 62; apt No 2, Aguilera No 563; r CUC\$15-20) Central, ring bell marked 'Carmen.'
- Susanna Carrasquero** (☎ 65 37 39; Barnada No 513 btwn Heredia & Aguilera; r CUC\$15-20; 🏠) Warm hosts.
- 'Villa Doña Isabella' – Isabel González Díaz** (☎ 64 41 24; Calle 6 No 309, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$15-20) Comfortable, near Alliance Française, others nearby.
- Yolanda Elena Pérez Silva** (☎ 64 17 76; Calle 4 No 206, Reparto Vista Alegre; r CUC\$15-20) Colonial house, fridge, safe, nice hostess.

TOP END

Hotel Casa Granda (Gran Caribe; Map p398; ☎ 65 30 21/22; fax 68 60 35; Heredia No 201; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$67/96, high season CUC\$78/112; 🏠) This elegant old hotel (1914), artfully described by Graham Greene in his book *Our Man in Havana*, has 58 rooms and a classic red-and-white-striped front awning. Greene used to stay here in the late 1950s where he enjoyed relaxing on the streetside terrace, while his famous pen captured the nocturnal essence of the city as it wafted up from the bustling square below. Half a century later and – aside from the Che Guevara posters and some seriously erratic service on reception – not much has changed. The hotel's 5th-floor Roof Garden Bar (open 11am to 1am) is well worth the CUC\$2 minimum consumption charge and the upstairs terrace is an obligatory photo stop for foreign tourists on the lookout for bird's-eye city views. There's music here most nights and the CUC\$16 buffet makes a decent blow-out. Steer clear of the downstairs restaurant, one of Santiago's worst culinary disasters.

Meliá Santiago de Cuba (Cubanacán; Map pp394-5; ☎ 68 70 70; Av de las Américas & Calle M; r CUC\$115; 🏠 📺 📺 📺) A mirrored monster in red, white and blue dreamt up by respected Cuban architect José A Choy, this Meliá property outside the *casco histórico* is Santiago's luxury choice, with real bathtubs in every room, city views, three pools, shopping, you name it. The vista from the Pico Real bar on the 15th floor is tops, and there are four good restaurants on site.

Eating

For a city of such fine cultural traditions, Santiago's restaurant scene is still flailing around in the Dark Ages. You'll find no hidden Habana-style eating havens here. Instead get ready for a long jaunt through an inordinate amount of cheap, crappy, state-run restaurants in search of a palatable meal. Good luck!

PALADARES

With all the tourist traffic, you would think there would be more paladares (private restaurants) here, but they come and go (high taxes, owners leaving for foreign shores and law breakers mean places shut down often). As a result, we've listed paladares that are

well established and will still be around when you show up.

Paladar Las Gallegas (Map p398; Bartolomé Maso No 305; meals CUC\$8; 🕒 1-11pm) Around the corner from the cathedral, this place packs them in with meals of pork, chicken and sometimes even *carnero* (lamb). Try for an intimate table on the plant-filled balcony.

Paladar Salón Tropical (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 11 61; Fernández Marcané No 310, Reparto Santa Barbara; 🕒 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) A few blocks south of the Hotel las Américas, this rooftop paladar serves tremendous portions of succulent smoked pork, with the *congrí* (rice flecked with black beans), salad and plantains piled up on the side. The *yuca con mojo* (starchy root vegetable with garlic lime sauce) is especially delicious. It is a good idea to get here early as this place fills up after 8pm with young Cuban women and their 55-year-old sugar-daddy 'escorts.'

RESTAURANTS

Santiago 1900 (Map p398; ☎ 62 35 07; Bartolomé Masó No 354; 🕒 noon-midnight) Set in the former Bacardí residence, you can dine on the standard chicken, fish or pork in a lush dining room replete with a piano-bass-bongo trio. No dish is more than 35 pesos, the service is sufficient and the mojitos ace (six pesos). There are two good bars here (p412).

Hotel Casa Granda (Map p398; Casa Granda, Heredia No 201; 🕒 9am-midnight) One of Santiago's best people-watching spots – where you can read the hand signals but ignore the pleas of the ubiquitous *jineteros* outside – the food in this Parisian-style café is OK, though the excruciatingly slow service can be a little testing on the nerves. Try the burgers, hot dogs or sandwich options and be prepared for a long wait.

Pizza Nova (Map pp394-5; Meliá Santiago de Cuba, cnr Av de las Américas & Calle M; 🕒 11am-11pm) Pizza *deliciosa* (CUC\$5 and up) and lasagna *formidable* (CUC\$8), ravioli and garlic bread (CUC\$1); *mamma mia*, this has to be the number-one option for breaking away from all that chicken and pork. For some inexplicable reason this otherwise venerable establishment is always chock-a-block with nubile *jineteras* hand in hand with their 55-year-old balding foreign sugar daddies.

Café Palmares (Map pp394-5; Calle M; dishes under CUC\$3; 🕒 24hr) A cool courtyard setting under

flowering trees, across from Meliá Santiago de Cuba, is complemented by an extensive menu with many egg, pizza, sandwich and chicken options. Fresh juice and strong espresso make this a good breakfast or post-bar choice.

El Patio (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 32 42; Av General Cebreco; 🕒 9am-11pm) Don't let the name fool you: this is a basement restaurant with little atmosphere, but the food is consistently good and dirt cheap. A pork filet with *congrí* and a little salad costs CUC\$3 and there's a full bar. Come early because they sometimes run out of things.

Cafetería Las Américas (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 59 23; 🕒 24hr) A local hang-out of sorts, on the traffic circle near Hotel Las Américas, this cafeteria terrace does good basics: chicken, spaghetti and pork for under CUC\$2. Inside is the affiliated restaurant with decent full meals of *comida criolla* (traditional Cuban food usually consisting of rice, beans and often pork) for CUC\$5.

Taberna de Dolores (Map p398; ☎ 62 3913; Aguilera No 468) An inexpensive, colorful place on Plaza de Dolores, its drinks are better than its *comida criolla*. But the patio tables are a bonus and it's a good hang-out spot if you can get a table.

Cafetería Las Enramadas (Map p398; 🕒 24hr) It's the usual fried chicken, ice cream and fries at this place in the northwest corner of Plaza de Dolores – a kind of El Rápido in disguise. The terrace is shady, the beers affordable and the hours long; perfect *jinetero* turf. Good place for a hair-of-the-dog or for drowning a hangover in grease.

Pekín (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 91 19; cnr Av de Céspedes & Calle A; 🕒 noon-3pm & 6-9:30pm) Chop suey Cuban-style or fried chicken costs under CUC\$1 at this state-run joint four long blocks north of the Moncada Barracks. Peso pizza is on the corner; join the line.

Cafetería Las Arecas (Map pp394-5; Av Manduley No 52; dishes around CUC\$3; 🕒 10am-1am) Nestled in the garden patio of this mansion turned mod shopping center, this cafeteria has an inexpensive menu with spaghetti, pizzas and chicken dishes. Fish filets start at CUC\$5.50. The fancier dining-room restaurant in the rear part of the main building is open until 10pm.

Restaurante Zunzun (Tocororo; Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 15 28; Av Manduley No 159; 🕒 noon-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) Dine in bygone bourgeois

style in this palace-turned-restaurant. This is one of Santiago's best restaurants in terms of both food and ambience. Exotic dishes include chicken curry, paella or an outrageous cheese plate and cognac. Expect professional, attentive service.

Restaurante El Morro (Map p404; ☎ 69 15 76; Castillo del Morro; 🕒 noon-9pm) Paul McCartney's Santiago restaurant of choice, as his sparkling used plate (now mounted in a glass case on the wall) will testify. How one of the world's most famous vegetarians dealt with the rather meat-biased menu is interesting to ponder. The complete *criolla* lunch for around CUC\$12 includes soup, main course, a small dessert and one drink. The spectacular cliffside location is an added bonus. Keep an eye out for whales breaching offshore.

Restaurante El Cayo (lunch CUC\$6-20) On the eastern side of Cayo Granma, out by the Castillo de San Pedro, you'll find this state-run place, serving seafood for lunch.

Plaza Dolores is a case of nice location, shame about the food. The best of a bad bunch is Restaurante Don Antonio, next to Cafetería Las Enramadas, which offers everything from mixed grill to lobster. Next door is Restaurante La Perla del Dragón, offering chop suey and chow mein with a rather painful Cuban twist. Beyond that is Restaurante Teresina, with inexpensive pizza and spaghetti. These places never seem to have customers. Hmmm.

CAFÉS

Café La Isabelica (Map p398; cnr Aguilera & Porfirio Valiente; 🕒 9am-9pm) Strong coffee in a smoky cantina-type atmosphere. You might get away paying pesos, but foreigners typically pay in Convertibles.

Pizzas & Cajitas (Map p398; B Masó No 260) For fast food visit this place, with coffee and cheese sandwiches in the morning, pizzas in the afternoon, and *cajitas* (take-out) at night (one to 20 pesos).

ICE-CREAM PARLORS

Coppelia La Arboleda (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 04 35; cnr Avs de los Libertadores & Victoriano Garzón; 🕒 10am-11:40pm Tue-Sun) As good as Habana's Coppelia and, as always, in pesos. It closes early if the ice cream runs out. Ask for *el último* (last place) in the line up grouped on the Av de los Libertadores side of the parlor.

Milkshakes are sometimes sold from the outside window.

Dulcería del Goloso (Map pp394-5; cnr Av Victoriano Garzón & Calle 6) This is another good ice-cream pit stop without the queues.

GROCERIES

Supermercado Plaza de Marte (Map p398; Av Garzón; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) One of the better-stocked supermarkets in town, with a great ice-cream selection and cheap bottled water. It's in the northeastern corner of Plaza de Marte.

Panadería Doña Neli (Map p398; cnr Aguilera & Plácido; ☎ 7:30am-8pm) This reliable hard-currency bakery on Plaza de Marte is good for bread.

Municipal market (Map p398; cnr Aguilera & Padre Pico) The main market is two blocks west of Parque Céspedes with a poor selection.

Mercado Agropecuario Ferreiro (Map pp394-5; Nuñez de Balboa) This market is across the traffic circle from Hotel Las Américas and up the side street beside the gas station. The selection here is also surprisingly poor.

Drinking

Claqueta Bar (Map p398; Felix Peña No 654) A hopping local scene marks this open-terrace bar just off Parque Céspedes. There's sometimes live music and salsa dancing in the evening.

Santiago 1900 (Map p398; ☎ 62 35 07; Bartolomé Masó No 354; ☎ noon-midnight) You can choose from two equally atmospheric drinking spots in this old Bacardí palace. Out back is a vine-covered patio buzzing with locals while upstairs is a quieter balcony bar serving food. Tourists pay in Convertibles, meaning they can glide past the red velvet rope at the door.

Bar La Fontana (Map p398; General Lacret; ☎ noon-2am) Could it be the lounge trend has hit Santiago de Cuba? You might think so walking into this cocoon off José A Saco with low stools grouped around individual tables lining the wall. Just don't order any apple martinis; it's strictly peso beer and rum at this cool saloon.

Marilyn (Map p398; ☎ 65 45 75; cnr General Lacret & Saco; ☎ 24hr) This is a local favorite serving shots of rum to standing patrons: more a dive counter than a dive bar.

Kon Tiki Club (Map p398; cnr General Lacret & Saco) If you'd like to touch base with the city's

underworld, try this gloomy place behind Marylin.

Entertainment

For what's happening, look for the bi-weekly *Cartelera Cultural*. The reception desk at the Hotel Casa Granda (p410) usually has copies. Or go straight to the **Cartelera Cultural office** (Map p398; cnr Felix Peña & Diego Palacios). Every Saturday night Calle José A Saco becomes a happening place called Noche Santiaguera, where street food, music and crowds make an all-night outdoor party; beware of pick-pockets.

FOLK & TRADITIONAL MUSIC

The sounds of *tambores* (drums) and *trova* waft all up and down Calle Heredia where a cluster of live-music places can be found. You might head there first for easy-access music, but don't discount the further-flung places, all of which showcase quality players.

Casa de la Trova (Map p398; ☎ 65 26 89; Heredia No 208; admission from CUC\$2; ☎ 11am-3pm & 8:30-11pm Tue-Sun) The most famous of all the city's traditional clubs, in operation since 1968, this venue has a strong claim to be Cuba's definitive and most influential music house. Some complain a recent makeover ruined the atmosphere somewhat – though it didn't stop Paul McCartney coming here to enjoy the ambience a few years back. The program varies from good to very good to excellent. Downstairs for lunchtime shows, upstairs after 10pm.

Casa del Estudiante (Map p398; ☎ 62 78 04; Heredia No 204; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9pm Wed, Fri & Sat, 1pm Sun) Grab a seat (or listen from the street) and settle in for the folksy house orchestra and *trovadores* (traditional singer/songwriters). See also courses (p407).

Patio ARTex (Map p398; ☎ 65 48 14; Heredia No 304; admission free; ☎ 11am-11pm) Art lines the walls of this shop-and-club combo that hosts live music both day and night in a quaint inner courtyard; a good bet if the Casa de la Trova is full, or too frenetic.

Patio Los Dos Abuelos (Map p398; ☎ 62 33 02; Francisco Pérez Carbo No 5; admission CUC\$2; ☎ 10pm-1am Mon-Sat) An intimate club on the east side of Plaza de Marte featuring traditional Cuban music in a mixed local-tourist atmosphere. You get some real pros performing here.

Casa de la Cultura Miguel Matamoros (Map p398; ☎ 62 57 10; General Lacret btwn Aguilera & Heredia; ad-

mission CUC\$1) This culture club in historic digs on Parque Céspedes hosts many musical events, including a *Sábado de la Rumba* (Rumba Saturday) at 11am Saturday; check the *cartelera* (calendar) posted at the door for the week's happenings.

Casa de las Tradiciones (Map pp394-5; Rabí No 154; admission CUC\$1; ☎ from 8:30pm) The most discovered 'undiscovered' spot in Santiago still retains its smoke-filled, foot-stomping, front-room feel. Hidden in the gentile Tivoli district this place hosts some of Santiago de Cuba's most exciting ensembles, singers and soloists taking turns improvising. Friday nights are reserved for straight-up, classic *trova*, so all you Níco Saquito and Trio Matamoros fans should head over then.

Casa de la Música (Map p398; Corona No 564; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 10pm-2am) Similar to those in Habana, this Casa del Música features a mix of live salsa and taped disco. One of Santiago's better venues.

TRADITIONAL DANCE

Ballet Folklórico Cutumba (Map p398; Teatro Oriente, Saco No 115; admission CUC\$3) This internationally known Afro-Cuban folkloric dance group was founded 1960 and currently appears at Teatro Oriente. If you're in Santiago de Cuba on a weekend, don't miss Cutumba's exciting *café teatro*, at 9:30pm every Saturday or at 10:30am for their Sunday morning dance show. They perform such dances as the *tumba francesa*, *columbia*, *gagá*, *gua-guancó*, *yagüetó*, *tajona* and *conga oriental*. It's one of the finest programs of its kind in Cuba.

Foco Cultural El Tivoli (Map p398; Desiderio Mesnier No 208; ☎ 8pm Mon-Fri) Carnival practice for the Sarabanda Mayombe happens weekly at this Tivoli Foco (a show that takes place in Tivoli). Saturdays at 5pm they perform a *mágica religiosa* program of *orishas* (Afro-Cuban religious deity), *bembé* (Afro-Cuban drumming ritual) and *palo monte* (Bantu-derived Afro-Cuban religion) at the nearby Casa de las Tradiciones (above).

Also ask about practice sessions at the studios of the **Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente** (Map p398; Hartmann No 407) and the **Foco Cultural Tumba Francesa** (Map pp394-5; Los Maceos No 501) at General Banderas. Traditional dancing also takes place at other *focos culturales* (cultural shows) around town most evenings.

DANCE CLUBS

Club El Iris (Map p398; ☎ 65 35 00; Aguilera No 617; admission CUC\$3; ☎ 10pm-2am) Just off Plaza de Marte, with a distinctive 1950s sign, this is Santiago de Cuba's hottest disco, still after all these years. The cover includes one drink, but at night it's couples only. Stags can check out the matinee (five pesos) daily from 10am to 4pm.

Discoteca Espanta Sueño (Map pp394-5; cnr Av de las Américas & Calle M; ☎ 10:30pm-3am Fri-Sun) This is the Meliá Santiago de Cuba's house disco; entry is through the hotel lobby to keep out *jineteras*.

Other recommendations:

Ciroa (Map pp394-5; cnr Av Manduley & Calle 13) Local night spot with a band Thursday to Sunday and a 10pm floor show.

Pista de Baile Pacho Alonso (Map pp394-5; admission CUC\$5; ☎ 8:30pm Sat, 5pm Sun) Check out the *charanga* (brass band) orchestra playing al fresco at this place behind Teatro José María Heredia.

NIGHTCLUBS

Tropicana Santiago (Map p404; ☎ 68 70 90; door prices from CUC\$30; ☎ 10pm Wed-Sun) Styled after the original Tropicana in Habana, these Las Vegas-style floor shows feature plenty of babes with strategically placed baubles. After the show, you can dance at a disco in the same complex. Cubatur and most hotels have package tours to Tropicana Santiago for CUC\$35 per person, including admission, one drink and transportation. Saturday night is the best time to go. To get there take the Autopista Nacional northeast of Hotel Las Américas for 3km.

THEATERS

Teatro José María Heredia (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 31 34; cnr Av de las Américas & Av de los Desfiles; ☎ box office 9am-noon & 1-4:30pm) Santiago's huge, modern theater and convention center faces the Plaza de la Revolución on the northeastern side of town. Rock and folk concerts often take place in the 2459-seat Sala Principal, while the 120-seat Café Cantante Niagara hosts varied events. Ask about performances by the Compañía Teatro Danza del Caribe.

Sala Teatro El Mambí (Map p398; Bartolomé Masó No 303) This venue near the cathedral presents Spanish-language plays in the evening and puppet/clown theater for children on weekends.

CUBAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

During slavery in the US, drumming was prohibited, but in Cuba the bongos continued to beat. As a result, when Cuban popular music began to diversify and spread in the early 20th century, Cuban musicians had a whole range of instruments at their disposal.

The strong rhythms in Cuban music are usually provided by the *tumbadora* (conga), a tall barrel-like drum held together by metal hoops. Other drumming implements include the *bongó*, a pair of small round drums joined by a piece of wood; and the *batá*, a conical two-head drum of varying sizes used in Afro-Cuban religious dances and rituals. Folk dances are often accompanied by a single-skinned drum of Congolese origin called a *joca*.

The gourd-shaped rattle called the maraca is made out of dried fruits from the calabash tree. *Chequeré* maracas (a gourd covered with beads) are used in all sorts of Cuban music, from religious rituals to rap. The *güiro*, meanwhile, is an elongated gourd rasped with a stick, although there are also tin *güiros*.

Other percussion instruments include the *cata* or guagua, a wooden tube beaten with sticks and the *claves*, two wooden sticks tapped together to set the beat. The *cajón* is a simple wooden box used to thump out the rhythm.

Acoustically speaking the *tres* is a small folk guitar with three sets of steel double strings. The similar *cuatro* has four sets of double strings. Cuban folk groups often include a West African hand piano or *marímbula*, a wooden box with five metal keys that doubles up as a bass.

The only wind instrument in Cuban folk music is the *botija*, a clay jug with a short narrow neck bearing an opening on the side for blowing. Musicians vary the pitch of the tones by moving a hand along the neck of the jug. During Carnival a small five-note horn called a *corneta china* produces a sharp sound like the bagpipe. Modern instruments commonly used in Cuba include the bass, clarinet, guitar, saxophone, trombone and trumpet.

Cuba is the only country outside Europe with a tradition of street organs. During the 19th century, refugees from Haiti brought the French mechanical organ to Oriente, where Hispano-Cuban *sones*, *boleros* and *danzones* (African-influence ballroom dancing) soon replaced waltzes and mazurkas in the repertoire. The Cubans made the European organ dynamic by adding a second crank that the operator uses to vary the speed at which the boards pass through the machine. Five or six percussionists join an organ-grinder to form an orchestra playing popular Cuban dance music under the control of the organ-grinder, who can innovate stops or breaks.

Teatro Martí (Map pp394-5; ☎ 2-0507; Félix Peña No 313) Another children's show is staged at 5pm Saturday and Sunday at this theater near General Portuondo, opposite Iglesia de Santo Tomás.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Sala de Conciertos Dolores (Map p398; ☎ 65 38 57; cnr Aguilera & Mayía Rodríguez; ☎ 8:30pm) Housed in a former church on Plaza de Dolores, you can catch the Sinfónica del Oriente here, plus the impressive children's choir (at 5pm). Bigger *trova* concerts are also held here by up-and-coming acts like William Vivanco and Ariel Díaz. The *cartelera* is posted on the Aguilera side of the street.

Orfeón Santiago (Map p398; Heredia No 68) This classical choir sometimes allows visitors to attend its practice sessions from 9am to 11:30am Monday to Friday.

Coro Madrigalista (Map p398; Pío Rosado No 555) This choir, across from the Museo Bacardí, is similar to Orfeón Santiago.

CINEMAS

Cine Rialto (Map p398; ☎ 62 30 35; Félix Peña No 654) This cinema, next to the cathedral, is Santiago de Cuba's favorite, showing large-screen films and video.

Cine Capitolio (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 71 64; Av Victoriano Garzón No 256) Videos are also the usual fare here.

Cine América (Map pp394-5; ☎ 65 11 84; Porfirio Valiente No 64; ☎ noon-10pm Fri-Wed) This cinema shows movies, plus has a weekly *peña de rap* (rap concert).

SPORT

Estadio de Béisbol Guillermón Moncada (Map pp394-5; ☎ 64 26 40; Av de las Américas) This stadium is on the northeastern side of town within

walking distance of the main hotels. During the baseball season, from October to April, there are games at 7:30pm Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, and 1:30pm Sunday (one peso).

Gimnasio Cultura Física (Map p398; Pío Rosado No 455 btwn Saco & Hechavarría; ☎ 6am-6:45pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) For a wicked workout drop into this gym with its well-pummeled punchbags, rusty old weights and cold showers. No manicures here.

Shopping

Discoteca Egrem (Map p398; Saco No 309; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) If you're into buying music, look no further than this retail outlet of Egrem Studios; an especially good selection of local musicians.

ARTex (General Lacret Map p398; General Lacret btwn Aguilera & Heredia; Heredia Map p398; Heredia No 304; ☎ 11am-11pm; Patio ARTex Map p398; Heredia No 208; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun) From mouse pads to mumus, the branch of ARTex near Parque Céspedes collects any type of Cuban souvenir imaginable. The other ARTex branches focus more on music, with a respectable selection of Cuban music CDs and cassettes.

La Maison (Map pp394-5; Av Manduley No 52; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Headed for a resort and lack the proper attire? Head here.

ART GALLERIES

A number of galleries in the center sell original paintings and prints. By international standards the prices are reasonable, but always get an official sales receipt to show Cuban customs (see p140). The two below are good place to start. Don't forget to ask about obtaining an export permit.

Galería de Arte de Oriente (Map p398; General Lacret No 656) Probably the best gallery in Santiago de Cuba, the art here is consistently good.

Galería Santiago (Map p398; Heredia) This gallery, below the cathedral on the southern side of Parque Céspedes, is another one with quality art and there are several more galleries along Heredia east of here.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo Service (Saco Map p398; Saco No 422; General Lacret Map p398; General Lacret No 728; Av Garzón Map pp394-5; cnr Av Garzón & Calle 4) There are a few photo services available, including once near Plaza de Dolores.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Antonio Maceo International Airport (☎ 69 10 14; airport code SCU) is 7km south of Santiago de Cuba, off the Carretera del Morro. International flights arrive from Paris-Orly, Madrid, Milan and Rome on Cubana and from Toronto on **Air Transat** (www.airtransat.ca) and **Skyservice** (www.skyserviceairlines.com). **Aero-Caribbean** (☎ 68 72 55; General Lacret btwn Bartolome Masó & Heredia) flies weekly between here and Port Au Prince, Haiti and twice weekly to Santo Domingo.

Cubana (Map p398; ☎ 68 62 58; cnr Calle Saco & General Lacret) flies nonstop from Habana to Santiago de Cuba two or three times a day (CUC\$114 one way, 1½ hours). There's a Sunday-only flight to Baracoa for CUC\$32.

BUS

The **National Bus Station** (Map pp394-5; cnr Av de los Libertadores & Calle 9), opposite the Heredia Monument, is 3km northeast of Parque Céspedes. **Astro** (☎ 62 60 91) buses go to all Viazul destinations for CUC\$3 to CUC\$9 cheaper. There are also alternate day departures to Pilón (CUC\$10.50, 7½ hours) and Niquero (CUC\$10, seven hours).

Passage on Astro buses to Baracoa and Guantánamo are only sold the day of departure (read: if a bus materializes) at the

VÍAZUL BUS DEPARTURES

Destination	Cost (one way)	Distance	Duration (hr)	Departure time
Baracoa	CUC\$15	234km	5	7:30am
Guantánamo	CUC\$6	84km	2	7:30am
Habana	CUC\$51	861km	16	7:05am, 11:30am, 3:15pm, 8pm
Trinidad	CUC\$33	581km	11½	7:30pm

ticket window in the back of the station. Competition is heavy for seats; you're better off traveling with Viazul or taking a truck. Tickets to all other destinations on Astro are sold in Convertibles at the Viazul window beside the station.

Viazul (☎ 62 84 84) buses leave from the same station; see p415 for departures.

The Habana bus stops at Bayamo (CUC\$7, two hours), Holguín (CUC\$11, four hours 20 minutes), Las Tunas (CUC\$11, five hours 35 minutes), Camagüey (CUC\$18, seven hours 35 minutes), Ciego de Ávila (CUC\$24, 9½ hours), Sancti Spiritus (CUC\$28, 11 hours 35 minutes) and Santa Clara (CUC\$33 13 hours). The Trinidad bus can drop you at Bayamo, Las Tunas, Camagüey, Ciego de Ávila and Sancti Spiritus.

TRAIN

The new French-style **train station** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 28 36; Av Jesús Menéndez), near the rum factory northwest of the center, offers trains to the following destinations:

Destination	Cost (one way)	Duration (hr)
Bayamo	CUC\$4	3
Camagüey	CUC\$11	5½
Ciego de Ávila	CUC\$14.50	8
Guayos	CUC\$17.50	9½
Habana	CUC\$30	14½
Holguín	CUC\$5	3½
Manzanillo	CUC\$5.50	5
Matanzas	CUC\$27	13
Santa Clara	CUC\$20	10

The Santiago de Cuba–Habana route listed in the table is for train No 12, the slowest option, which departs Santiago at 8:25pm. Other trains serving this route are train No 2 (aka *locura verde*) leaving at 5:05pm daily and a motor railcar called the *locura azul* to Habana (CUC\$62), which is scheduled to leave Santiago de Cuba at 11:10pm on Monday and Thursday.

Cuban train schedules are fickle, so you should always verify beforehand what train leaves when and get your ticket as soon as possible thereafter. The easiest, most efficient way to do this is at **Centro Único de Reservaciones** (Map p398; ☎ 65 21 43, 65 10 97; Aguilera No 565; ☎ 8:30am-3:30pm Mon-Fri) near Plaza de Marte. You can buy your tickets here and

current schedules are posted in the window. You can also go to the train station where tickets in Convertibles are sold at window three.

TRUCK

Passenger trucks leave **Serrano Intermunicipal Bus Station** (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 43 25; cnr Av Jesús Menéndez & Sánchez Hechavarría) near the train station to Guantánamo (five pesos, two hours) and Bayamo (seven pesos, two hours) throughout the day, but early morning is always better for public transport. For these destinations, don't fuss with the ticket window; just find the truck parked out front going your way. Trucks for Caletón Blanco (three pesos, 45 minutes) and Chivirico (five pesos, 1½ hours) also leave from here; get a boarding pass from the person at the counter and pay as you board.

The **Intermunicipal Bus Station** (Terminal Cuatro; Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 43 29; cnr Av de los Libertadores & Calle 4), 2km northeast of Parque Céspedes, has two buses a day to El Cobre. Trucks to El Cobre leave from Andén No 1 at this station throughout the day. Two daily buses also leave for Bacanao from here (6am and 6:30pm).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A taxi to or from the airport should cost around CUC\$5. You can also get to the airport on bus 212, which leaves from Av de los Libertadores opposite the Hospital de Maternidad. Trucks for the airport depart from here too. Bus 213 also goes to the airport from the same stop, but visits Punta Gorda first. If boarding at the airport, bus 213 is better as it goes straight to town, while No 212 goes first to Ciudadmar. Both buses (20 centavos) turn around at the top of the grade, just beyond the west end of the airport parking lot to the left of the entrances, not in front of the terminal.

TO/FROM THE TRAIN STATION

To get into town from the train station, catch a southbound horse cart (one peso) to the clock tower at the north end of Alameda Park, from which Aguilera (to the left) climbs straight up to Parque Céspedes. Horse carts between the National Bus Station (they'll shout 'Alameda') and

train station (one peso) run along Av Juan Gualberto Gómez and Av Jesús Menéndez.

BUS & TRUCK

Useful city buses include bus 212 to the airport and Ciudadmar, bus 213 to Punta Gorda (both of these start from Av de los Libertadores, opposite the Hospital de Maternidad and head south on Felix Peña in the *casco histórico*), and bus 214 or 407 to Siboney (from near Av de los Libertadores No 425). Bus 401 from here goes to Siboney and Bacanao. Bus 5 to Caney stops on the northwestern corner of Plaza de Marte and at Gral Cebreco and Calle 3 in Vista Alegre. You pay the conductor. These buses (20 centavos) run every hour or so; more frequent trucks (one peso) serve the same routes.

Camiones (trucks) run along fixed routes. From the center to the Moncada Barracks and the Hospital Provincial (near the National Bus Station), hop on along Mariano Corona one block west of Parque Céspedes or on Aguilera. Trucks for Vista Alegre also run along Aguilera; there's a stop in front of the Etesca building. From the Hotel Las Américas to the *casco histórico*, hop on a truck at the Parque de los Estudiantes on the roundabout. Trucks to El Cobre and points north leave from Av de las Américas near Calle M. On trucks and buses you should be aware of pickpockets and wear your backpack in front; bigger packs will not be accommodated on local buses and trucks.

CAR & MOPED

Santiago de Cuba suffers from a chronic shortage of rental cars (Transtur in particular) and you might find there are none available; though the locals have an indefatigable Cuban ability to *conseguir* (to manage, to get) and *resolver* (to resolve, work out). The airport offices usually have better availability than those in town. If you're completely stuck for a car, you can usually rent one at the Hotel Guantánamo, two hours away (p433). With so many cool sites near Santiago de Cuba, demand way outstrips supply for mopeds; a pity. Try the following places:

Cubacar (Map p398; Heredia No 701) On the corner of General Lareet.

Havanaautos Hotel Las Américas (Map pp394-5; cnr Avs de

las Américas & General Cebreco; ☎ 68 71 60; ☎ 8am-10pm); Jesús Menéndez (Map pp394-5; ☎ 62 26 66; cnr Av Jesús Menéndez & General Portuondo); Aeropuerto (☎ 68 61 61; Aeropuerto Antonio Maceo) The Hotel Las Américas office rents mopeds for CUC\$24 per day.

Transtur Parque Céspedes (Map p398; ☎ 68 61 07;

☎ 9am-8:30pm); Motel San Juan (Map pp394-5; ☎ 68 72 06) The Parque Céspedes office is below Hotel Casa Granda.

Guarded parking is available on the street in front of the Transtur office, directly below the Hotel Casa Granda. Official attendants, complete with small badges, charge CUC\$1 a day and CUC\$1 a night.

The **Servi-Cupet** (Map pp394-5; cnr Av de los Libertadores & Av de Céspedes) is open 24 hours. There's an **Oro Negro** (cnr Av 24 de Febrero & Carretera del Morro) on the Carretera del Morro and another is on the Carretera Central at the northern entrance to Santiago de Cuba, not far from the Hotel Rancho Club.

TAXI

Taxis generally find *you* before you find *them* in hassle-heavy Santiago. There's a Turistaxi stand in front of Meliá Santiago de Cuba. Taxis also wait on Parque Céspedes in front of the cathedral and hiss at you expectantly as you walk past. Always insist the driver uses the *taxímetro* (meter) or hammer out a price beforehand. To the airport, it will be between CUC\$3 to CUC\$5 depending on the state of the car.

Bici-taxis (bicycle taxis) charge about five pesos per person per ride, but it's illegal to carry tourists, so they'll drop you a couple of blocks from Parque Céspedes.

See also p407 for information on taxi tours.

SIBONEY

Playa Siboney is Santiago's Playas del Este; an exuberant and undone seaside town situated 19km to the east that is more rustic village than deluxe resort. Guarded by precipitous cliffs and dotted with a mixture of craning palms and weather-beaten clapboard houses, the setting here is laid-back and charming with a beach scene that mixes fun-seeking Cuban families and young, nubile Santiaguénas with their older and balding foreign sugar daddies in tow.

Qualitatively speaking Siboney's small crescent of grayish sand isn't in Varadero's league and the hotel choice (there *is* no

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

Pirates ran amok in the Caribbean during the 16th and 17th centuries and nowhere was their presence felt more than in Cuba.

The island first became attractive to corsairs in the 1530s when Spanish ships laden down with silver from Peru and New Spain, began to converge in Habana harbor to form large flotillas (treasure fleets) which would then set sail eastward for Seville.

For the buccaneers, the booty was too attractive to ignore. In 1554 French corsairs sacked Santiago and robbed and pillaged among a terrified populace for 30 days. The following year Jacques de Sores ransacked Habana, kidnapped its richest citizens and demanded a ransom of 80,000 gold pieces. When the demand wasn't met, he razed the city to the ground.

In order to protect Cuban cities from further acts of terror, the Spanish built an impressive network of forts around the island including Real Fuerza (Habana, 1558), San Salvador de la Punta (Habana, 1589), Tres Reyes de Morro (Habana, 1589), La Jagua (Cienfuegos, 1738) and El Morro (Santiago, 1638). But the edifices did little to repel repeated pirate attacks.

Frequent wars with the British, French and Dutch during the 17th century inspired countless more disgruntled pirates to raise the Jolly Roger and take up arms against the Spanish. Often sponsored by foreign governments, vicious but well-organized groups of buccaneers lay waste to and severely hampered local economies.

Nowhere was safe. In 1664 the portly Welshman Henry Morgan reduced Santiago's Morro Castle to rubble and in 1668 – on the pretext of uncovering a plot to attack Jamaica – he sacked the cathedral of Puerto Príncipe (now Camagüey), a prosperous bourgeois city situated over 50km inland. The British government gave him a knighthood for his pains.

The age of piracy finally came to a close in the early 1700s with the rise of national armies in Europe and the advent of more far-reaching international conflicts.

choice, just one rock-bottom villa) is none too inspiring either. But what Siboney lacks in facilities it makes up for in price, location (it's on the doorstep of Parque Bacanao) and all-embracing Cuban atmosphere. There's a plethora of legal casas particulares here (over 30, which in a settlement of this size constitutes half the village) and a decent sit-down restaurant on a hill overlooking the beach. For those in need of a break from the culture-jamming and street hassle of sweltering Santiago, it makes a good little hideaway.

Sights

The energy fairly bounces off the simple red-and-white farmhouse **Granjita Siboney** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 9am-5pm), 2km inland from Playa Siboney and 2km south of the Gran Piedra turn-off on the road to Santiago de Cuba. It was from here, at 5:15am on July 26, 1953, that 26 cars under the command of Fidel Castro left to attack the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Of the 119 persons involved in the action, six died in combat and 55 were executed after their capture by Batista's troops (19 Batista soldiers were also killed). And so the Cuban

Revolution was born. The house retains many of its original details, including the dainty room used by the two *compañeras* (female revolutionaries) who saw action, Haydee Santamaría and Melba Hernández. There are also displays of weapons, interesting documents, photos and personal effects related to the attack. Notice the well beside the building, where weapons were hidden prior to the attack. In 1973, 26 monuments were erected along the highway between the Granjita Siboney and Santiago de Cuba to commemorate the assault.

The **Museo de la Guerra Hispano Cubano Norteamericano**, adjacent to the Granjita Siboney, displays several objects related to the 1898 American military intervention at Santiago de Cuba. Several scale models of both the land and sea battles are provided.

Overlooking the stony shoreline is an American **war memorial** dated 1907, which recalls the US landing here on June 24, 1898.

Sleeping & Eating

Villa Siboney (☎ 3-9321; bungalow CUC\$23) You're wiser heading for the casas particulares first

CASAS PARTICULARES – PLAYA SIBONEY

Aside from a handful of basic beach bungalows tiny Siboney has up to 30 casas particulares, so you shouldn't have any trouble finding a room.

Ángel Figuredo Zolórzano (☎ 3-9181; Av Serrano No 63; dgarrido1961@yahoo.es; r CUC\$15-20) Seaside location, patio, nicely outfitted room, at end of street.

Evaristo 'Chicho' Caballero Cabrera (☎ 3-9248; Av Serrano No 1; r CUC\$15-20) Colonial clapboard at entrance to town; simple, friendly, great porch.

Javier Francisco Hernández Rotger (☎ 3-9121; Obelisco No 1; r CUC\$15-20) Near beach.

Marlene Pérez (☎ 3-9219; r CUC\$15-20) Seaside apartment with balcony on coast a block south of the post office; has fridge, parking.

Oscar Fábregas Coca (☎ 64 18 00; Av Serrano No 12; r CUC\$20-25; ♿) Blue clapboard-style house with front terrace facing sea.

Ovidio González Salgado (☎ 3-9340; Av Serrano; r CUC\$20-25) Above the pharmacy. Meals, whole house CUC\$35; warmly recommended by a reader.

in this neck of the woods, but if for some reason they're all full there's always the bog-standard Villa Siboney; seven independent rustic cabins on the beach that sleep up to four people. Ask at the *carpeta* (reception desk), below the apartment building beside the commercial center.

Restaurante La Rueda (☎ 3-9325) Palmares operate this place, signposted just up the road from the beach and situated in the former house of Buena Vista Social Club virtuoso Compay Segundo. Born in a small shack on this site in 1907, Segundo (real name Francisco Repilado) shot to superstardom at the age of 90 on the back of Ry Cooder's best-selling album. In his heyday, the classic Cuban singer and guitarist wrote *Chan Chan* Cuba's omnipresent musical soundtrack and a song nearly as famous as *Guantanamera*. The food and view here are good and the service is amiable.

A number of cheap peso food stalls overlook the beach. There is also an open-air bar selling drinks in Convertibles on the beach itself.

Getting There & Away

Bus 214 runs to Siboney from near Av de los Libertadores 425, opposite Empresa Universal, with a second stop at Av de Céspedes 110, near Restaurante Pekín, in Santiago de Cuba. It leaves about once an hour, and bus 407 carries on to Juraguá three times a day. Passenger trucks also shuttle between Santiago de Cuba and Siboney. If you're driving, slow down for the police checkpoint 2km south of Sevilla village on the road to Playa Siboney.

A taxi to Playa Siboney will cost in the vicinity of CUC\$20 to CUC\$25 depending if it's state or private.

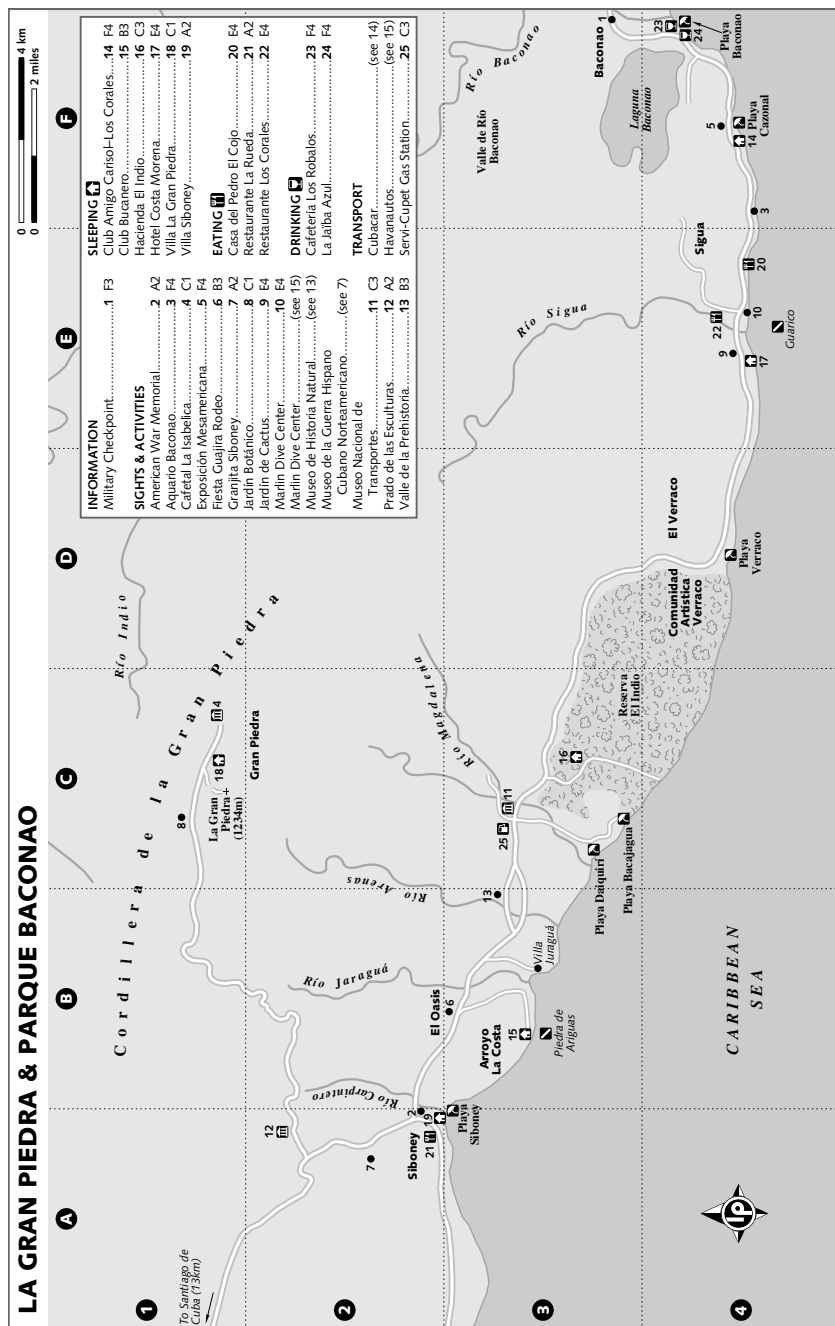
LA GRAN PIEDRA

The Cordillera de La Gran Piedra, a branch of the Sierra Maestra, is a 30km-long barrier separating the Caribbean coast from the Valle Central. It culminates in a gigantic rock 1234m above sea level. Not only does the range have a refreshingly cool microclimate, it also boasts an incredibly unique historical heritage based on the legacy of some 60 or more coffee plantations set up by French farmers in the latter part of the 18th century. On the run from a bloody slave rebellion in Haiti in 1791, the enterprising Gallic immigrants overcame arduous living conditions and difficult terrain to turn Cuba into the world's number-one coffee producer by the early 19th century. Their workmanship and ingenuity has been preserved for posterity in a Unesco World Heritage site that is centered on the Cafetal La Isabela.

Sights & Activities

Near the beginning of the access road to the Gran Piedra, 16km southeast of Santiago de Cuba, is the **Prado de las Esculturas** (admission CUC\$1; ☎ 8am-4pm). Strewn along a 1km loop road here are 20 monumental sculptures of metal, wood, concrete, brick and stone by the artists of 10 countries. Inspired sculpture or cheesy lawn art? You be the judge.

The steep, 12km road up the mountain range itself is beautiful, as the trees close in and the valley opens up below. Between



May and August, feast on as many mangoes as you can stomach. One kilometer before Villa La Gran Piedra and 800m down a muddy road is the **Jardín Botánico** (botanic garden; admission CUC\$3; ☎ 8am-4:30pm Tue-Sun) with orchids (best November to January) and other flowers. Look for the showy yellow, orange and violet *ave de paraíso* (bird of paradise).

Almost anyone can climb the 459 stone steps to the summit of **La Gran Piedra** (admission CUC\$2) at 1234m. The huge rock on top measures 51m long and 25m high and weighs an estimated 63,000 tons. On a clear day there are excellent views out across the Caribbean and on a dark night you can see the lights of Jamaica.

Cafetal La Isabelica (admission CUC\$2; ☎ 8am-4pm) is part of the Unesco World Heritage site bestowed in 2000 upon the first coffee plantations in the southeast of Cuba. Two kilometers beyond La Gran Piedra on a rough road, there's a museum describing the coffee-processing technology of a century ago. The impressive two-story stone mansion, with its three large coffee-drying platforms, was built in the early 19th century by French émigrés from Haiti. There's a workshop, furniture and some slave artifacts, and you can stroll around the pine-covered plantation grounds at will.

Sleeping & Eating

Villa La Gran Piedra (Islazul; ☎ 65 12 05; s/d low season CUC\$30/38, high season CUC\$34/42) This place near the mountain's summit, has 22 one- and two-bedroom cottages. A scenic place with basic facilities, the Villa was as of January 2006 housing patients for Misión Milagros (Miracle Mission; p449). You can check its current status with one of the travel agencies in Santiago.

Getting There & Away

A steep, winding paved road climbs 12km up the mountain's spine. It's not possible to visit by public transport, as the bus arrives only once a week. A taxi from Santiago de Cuba will cost upwards of CUC\$40 for a round-trip.

PARQUE BACONAO

Parque Baconao, which covers 800 sq km between Santiago de Cuba and the Río Baconao, is a mixed bag of attractions; a

Unesco biosphere reserve that is also home to an outdoor car museum, a rather run-down aquarium, and an odd collection of 240 life-size dinosaur sculptures. Some travelers get taken in by this odd succession of sights that lie scattered along the Caribbean coast for 40km east of Santiago; others assume they must be hallucinating and head quickly back into the city.

But the Unesco tag wasn't earned for a museum full of old cars. According to biological experts Baconao boasts more than 1800 endemic species of flora, and numerous types of endangered bats and spiders. Furthermore, sandwiched in a shallow chasm with the imposing Sierra Maestra on one side and the placid Caribbean on the other, the biodiversity of the area – which includes everything from craning royal palms to prickly cliffside cacti – is nothing short of remarkable.

The beaches are smaller here than those on the northern coast and not quite as white, but the fishing is good and there are 73 scuba-diving sites to choose from nearby, including the *Guarico*, a small steel wreck just south of Playa Sigua.

Baconao is also famous for its crabs. From mid-March to early May, tens of thousands of large land crabs congregate along the coast beyond Playa Verraco, getting unceremoniously squashed under the tires of passing cars and sending up a stench as they bake in the sun (see p422).

At the time of writing at least two of the park's isolated hotels had been given over to the Misión Milagros project (p449). Check before you make the long drive.

Sights

A dozen painters have studios where their works are displayed and sold in the small artistic community of **El Oasis** at the turn-off to Club Bucanero, 3km east of the Playa Siboney road.

One of the area's oddest attractions is **Valle de la Prehistoria** (☎ 63 90 39; admission CUC\$1; ☎ 8am-6pm), a kind of Cuban Jurassic Park another 3km along the main road to Baconao. Here giant brontosaurus nibble at trees, woolly mammoths graze on grassy expanses and cavemen slay saber-toothed tigers. Fun for kids of all ages, there are 200 life-size concrete dinosaurs and cavepeople scattered over 11 hectares – even the baths are

THE CRABS OF BACONAO

From mid-March to early May, the coastal highway between Playa Verraco and Baconao swarms with *cangrejos colorados* (red-and-yellow crabs), which descend en masse from the adjacent hills to lay their eggs in the sea. Many pop beneath the tires of passing vehicles, while others are harvested by enterprising Cubans, who consume the eggs as an aphrodisiac. The females are distinguished from the males by a wider breastplate and pinchers of equal size (the male has one claw larger than the other). From May to July the *cangrejo azul* (blue crab) emerges from its holes in humid areas and scrambles toward the ocean as part of a reproductive cycle that exposes the animal to hunters who value its meat. Year-round, the Cubans pursue the green *cangrejo moro* in the sea, using a mask and hook. It's another great delicacy.

in little caves. The dinosaurs were built by inmates from the nearby prison. The **Museo de Historia Natural** (☎ 3-9329; admission CUC\$1; ☞ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) is also here, but kind of a yawn after the prehistoric beasts.

Another must-see in Parque Baconao is the **Museo Nacional de Transportes** (☎ 63 91 97; admission CUC\$1, camera/video CUC\$1/2; ☞ 8am-5pm), adjacent to the Servi-Cupet gas station 2km east of the Valle de la Prehistoria. The museum has dozens of classic cars, including singer Benny Moré's 1958 Cadillac, the car Raúl Castro got lost in on the way to the Moncada Barracks attack, and a collection of 2500 automotive miniatures. The main US landings during the US intervention in Cuba's Second War of Independence took place on June 24, 1898, at **Playa Daiquirí**, 2km down a side road from the museum. This area is now a holiday camp for military personnel and entry is prohibited.

Ten kilometers southeast of the Museo Nacional de Transportes is the **Comunidad Artística Verraco** (admission free; ☞ 9am-6pm), a village of painters, ceramicists and sculptors who maintain open studios. Here you can visit the artists and buy original works of art.

After a couple of bends in the road you burst onto the coast, where the hotels begin. **Jardín de Cactus** (admission CUC\$5; ☞ 8am-3pm),

800m east of Hotel Costa Morena, has 200 kinds of cactus beautifully arrayed along the rocky hillside, with a large cave at the rear of the garden. Keep your eyes peeled for tiny green *colibrí* (hummingbirds) sucking nectar from flowering cacti.

Aquario Baconao (☎ 63 51 45; admission CUC\$7; ☞ 9am-5pm), between the Costa Morena and Hotel Carisol, has dolphin shows (with sultry narration) a couple of times a day. It's a rather tacky spectacle although you can swim with the animals – if you so desire – for CUC\$46.

Every Cuban resort area seems to have an attraction replicating indigenous scenes. Here it's the **Exposición Mesoamericana** (admission CUC\$1), just east of Club Amigo Carisol – Los Corales. Indigenous cave art from Central and South American is arranged in caves along the coastal cliffs.

At the **Laguna Baconao** (admission CUC\$1; ☞ 8am-5pm), a couple of kilometers north-east of Los Corales, there are a dozen crocodiles kept in pens below a restaurant, plus other caged animals like lizards and *jittas* (tree rat). Horses are (supposedly) for hire here as well as boats.

From Playa Baconao, 5km northeast of Los Corales, the paved road continues 3.5km up beautiful **Valle de Río Baconao** before turning into a dirt track. A dam up the Río Baconao burst in 1994, inundating Baconao village. Soldiers at a checkpoint at the village turn back people trying to use the direct coastal road to Guantánamo because it passes alongside the US naval base. To continue east you must backtrack to Santiago de Cuba and take the inland road. Someday this will change.

Activities

The **Fiesta Guajira Rodeo** (admission CUC\$5; ☞ 9am & 2pm Wed & Sun) at El Oasis, opposite the turn-off to Club Bucanero, stages rodeos with *vaqueros* (Cuban cowboys) four times a week. Horseback riding is available for CUC\$5 for the first hour. The rodeo's restaurant serves typical Cuban food from noon to 2pm daily.

Marlin Dive Center (Cubanacán Náutica; ☎ 68 63 14) at Sigua, a 10-minute walk along the beach from Hotel Costa Morena, picks divers up at the hotels at 8:30am daily. Scuba diving costs CUC\$30 with gear. Marlin's open-water certification course is

CUC\$365. There are shipwrecks close to shore here and you can feed black groupers by hand. At the time of writing the diving operations had been moved temporarily to Club Amigo Carisol – Los Corales. There's another **Marlin Dive Center** (☎ 68 60 70) offering similar services at Club Bucanero. The water off this bit of coast is some of Cuba's warmest (25°C to 28°C); best visibility is between February and June.

Hands down the best public beach here is **Playa Cazonal**, with lots of tawny sand, natural shade and a big sandy swimming hole (much of the coast here is clogged with seaweed forests). Turn into the Club Amigo Carisol – Los Corales and then it's a quick left to the beach access road.

Sleeping

MIDRANGE

Hacienda El Indio (Islazul; ☎ 68 62 13; s/d with breakfast low season CUC\$30/40) The former El Indio Hunting Reserve, between Complejo La Punta and Playa Verraco, was converted into the Reserva El Indio 'ecotourism park', after the boundary fence collapsed during heavy rains and most of the deer, antelope, and other hoofed beasts escaped into the nearby hills. These days it's the turf for outdoor types who snorkel, horseback ride and hike in the surrounding area. Individuals stay at Hacienda El Indio. If you want to chill unmolested, this is a good spot.

Hotel Costa Morena (Islazul; ☎ 35-6126; ☞ 68 63 13) This place is at Sigua, 44km southeast of Santiago de Cuba and 17km east of the Complejo La Punta Servi-Cupet gas station. It has attractive architecture, a large terrace right on the cliffs, and a brown sandy beach with good snorkeling 200m away. The hotel was open only to Misión Milagros patients at the time of writing. Check at the Cubatur office in Santiago for more up-to-date information.

TOP END

Club Bucanero (Gran Caribe; ☎ 68 63 63; fax 68 60 70; ☞ 68 60 70) Tucked up against low limestone cliffs with a small scratch of beach, this resort at Arroyo La Costa, 25km southeast of Santiago de Cuba, was hosting Misión Milagros patients at the time of writing. Check at the Cubatur office in Santiago for more up-to-date information.

Club Amigo Carisol – Los Corales (Cubanacán; ☎ 35 61 21; s/d low season CUC\$52/90, high season CUC\$57/100; ☞ 35 61 21) This self-contained all-inclusive resort is a five-minute walk from the area's best beach, Playa Cazonal, near the east end of the coastal road through Parque Baconao. A tennis court and a disco are available. Nonguests can purchase a CUC\$15 day pass, which includes lunch and the use of all facilities. With the Misión Milagros program descending en masse on Bacanao, this was one of the few accommodation options left inside the park.

Eating

Casa del Pedro El Cojo (☎ 35 62 10) The most reliable year-round restaurant out this way – aside from the Fiesta Guajira Rodeo (opposite) – is this place just beyond Sigua on the coast. A simple fish meal in this thatched *ranchón* (a ranch-style al fresco restaurant) costs CUC\$5.

Restaurante Los Corales, reached by turning inland off the coastal road at the Marlin Dive center at Sigua, serves Convertible meals and drinks on an open terrace with excellent mountain and sea views.

Drinking

La Jaiba Azul (☎ 35 00 01) This joint on Playa Baconao, 1km east of the lake turn-off, is a local drinking place.

Cafetería Los Robalos (☎ 35 00 02) Just across the bridge from La Jaiba Azul, this place has a variety of drinks for pesos or Convertibles. Otherwise, the hotels lay on plenty of nightly entertainment.

Getting There & Away

A bus service runs only twice a day along the 40km coastal road from Playa Siboney to Playa Baconao. Bus 407 from Santiago de Cuba goes as far as Complejo La Punta (Villa Juraguá) three times a day; it's a hard hitch from there to points east. Bus 401 to Baconao departs the **Intermunicipal Bus Station** (Map pp394-5; cnr Av de los Libertadores & Calle 4) in Santiago de Cuba, at 6am and 6:30pm. About two hours later it departs Baconao for the return trip. Arrive at the Santiago de Cuba terminal around 4:30pm to get a pass that will allow you to board the 6:30pm bus. Otherwise just ask for *el último* and wait.

When planning your visit to this area, remember that the coastal road from

Baconao to Guantánamo is closed to non-residents.

Getting Around

Havanautos (☎ 68 63 63; Club Bucanero) has cars and mopeds. Cubacar has an office in Club Amigo Carisol – Los Corales (p423).

Servi-Cupet (Complejo La Punta; ☎ 24hr) is 28km southeast of Santiago de Cuba.

EL COBRE

The **Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Cobre**, high on a hill 20km northwest of Santiago de Cuba on the old road to Bayamo, is Cuba's most sacred pilgrimage site. In Santería, La Virgen de la Caridad is associated with the beautiful *orisha* Ochún, the Yoruba goddess of love and dancing, who is represented by the color yellow. In the minds of many worshippers, devotion to the two religious figures is intertwined.

The copper mine at El Cobre has been active since pre-Columbian times and was once the oldest European-operated mine in the western hemisphere (by 1530 the Spanish had a mine here). However, it was shut in 2000. Many young villagers, who previously worked in the mine, now work over tourists in the parking lot of the basilica, offering to 'give' you shiny but worthless chalcopryrite stones from the mine. You'll find that a firm but polite *'no gracias'* usually does the trick. The road to the basilica is lined with sellers of elaborate flower wreaths (20 pesos), intended as offerings to La Virgen, and hawkers of miniature 'Cachitas', the popular name for La Virgen.

HONORING THE BLACK VIRGIN

According to local legend, the black virgin of El Cobre – known to Cubans as 'Cachita' – was first discovered in the Bay of Nipe in 1608 when three fishermen (the three Juans) caught up in a vicious storm spotted a 30cm high wooden statue floating on the water. The object depicted the image of a black virgin and was inscribed with the message *'I am the Virgin de la Caridad.'* In her left hand she carried the child Jesus and in her right, a golden cross.

Saved from the fury of the waves the thankful fishermen took the statue back to the small copper mining village of El Cobre near Santiago where, over the ensuing years, the virgin is said to have performed a multitude of miracles and wondrous deeds. In her honor a hermitage was built in the village and in 1916 Pope Benedict XV declared the virgin of El Cobre to be the patron saint of Cuba.

The current basilica – the only one of its kind in Cuba – was completed in 1927 and in 1998 the still-intact virgin was removed from her revered post and transported down into the city of Santiago where she was ceremoniously crowned and blessed by his holiness Pope Jean Paul II.

Sights

Stunning as it materializes above the village of El Cobre, the **basílica** (☎ 6:30am–6pm) shimmers against the verdant hills behind. Except during mass (8am except on Wednesday, with additional Sunday services at 10am and 4:30pm), La Virgen lives in a small chapel above the visitors center on the side of the basilica. To see her, take the stairs on either side of the entry door. For such a powerful entity, she's amazingly diminutive, some 40cm from crown to the hem of her golden robe. Check out the fine Cuban coat of arms in the center; it's an amazing work of embroidery. During mass, Nuestra Señora de la Caridad faces the congregation from atop the altar inside the basilica.

The 'room of miracles' downstairs in the visitors center contains thousands of offerings giving thanks for favors bestowed by the virgin. Clumps of hair, a TV, a thesis, a tangle of stethoscopes, a balsa raft and innertube sculpture (suggesting they made it across the Florida Straits safely) and floor-to-ceiling clusters of teeny metal body parts crowd the room. The most notable is a small golden guerrilla fighter donated by Lina Ruz, Fidel Castro's mother, to protect her son during his Sierra Maestra campaign against Batista. Ask one of the nuns to point it out to you. Until 1986, the 1954 Nobel Prize won by Ernest Hemingway for his novel *The Old Man and the Sea* was also on display, but in that year a visitor smashed the showcase's glass and carried the medal off. The police recovered the medal two days later, but it has since been kept in a

vault, out of sight and reach. The nuns will fill small bottles with holy water if you ask (bring your own bottle).

Follow the signs through the town of El Cobre to the **Monumento al Cimarrón**. A quick 10-minute hike up a stone staircase brings you to this anthropomorphic sculpture commemorating the 17th-century copper-mine slave revolt. The views are superb from up here; walk to the far side of the sculpture for a vista of copper-colored cliffs hanging over the aqua-green reservoir.

Sleeping & Eating

Hospedaria El Cobre (☎ 3-6246) A large two-story building behind the basilica has 15 basic rooms with one, two, or three beds, all with private bath, at eight pesos per person, plus two 40-bed dormitories at five pesos per person. Meals are served punctually at 7am, 11am and 6pm, and there's a pleasant large sitting room with comfortable chairs. The nuns here are very sweet. House rules include no drinking and no unmarried couples. A hard-currency donation to the sanctuary equivalent to what you pay to stay in pesos is the classy thing to do. Foreigners must reserve at least 15 days in advance.

There are several peso stalls in town where you can get batidos (fruit shakes), pizza and smoked-pork sandwiches.

Getting There & Away

Bus 202 goes to El Cobre twice a day from the **Intermunicipal Bus Station** (cnr Av de los Libertadores & Calle 4), in Santiago de Cuba. Trucks are more frequent on this route.

A Cubataxi from Santiago de Cuba costs around CUC\$20 for a round-trip. A private taxi will be a few Convertibles cheaper.

If you're driving toward Santiago de Cuba from the west, you can join the Autopista Nacional near Palma Soriano, but unless you're in a big hurry, it's better to continue on the Carretera Central via El Cobre, which winds through picturesque hilly countryside.

EL SALTÓN

If you're ready for some full-time relaxing, escape to **Hotel Carrusel El Saltón** (Cubanaacán; ☎ 5-6495; Carretera Puerto Rico a File; s/d with breakfast CUC\$48/60; P ☎ ☎), a beautiful mountain retreat in the Tercer Frente municipality, 75km from Santiago de Cuba in the foothills

of the Sierra Maestra. It's almost lodgelike, with just 22 rooms in wooden buildings nestled into the landscape and no one will blame you if you kick back on your balcony while deciding between a sauna, hot tub, massage or dip in the 30m waterfall (the hotel's defining feature). Horseback riding or hiking into the nearby cocoa plantations at Delicias del Saltón are daytime options or you can just wander off on your own through mountain villages with alluring names like Filé and Cruce de los Baños. The food is passable and the bar has a pool table. Outside a mountain river gushes and the forest trees rustle a few inches from the thatched-roof restaurant.

To get to El Saltón, continue west from El Cobre to Cruce de los Baños, 4km east of Filé village. El Saltón is 3km south of Filé. With some tough negotiating in Santiago de Cuba, you can get a taxi to take you here for CUC\$40 to CUC\$50. Make sure the car is sturdy.

You may hear about a road over the Sierra Maestra from Cruce de los Baños to Río Seco on the south coast. Southbound from Cruce de los Baños, the first 10km are OK, passing through hamlets in coffee-growing country. Then the road goes south, becoming a very rough jeep track with 'oh shit!' slippery, steep sections that can only be covered by a 4WD vehicle in dry weather. In a regular car or in rainy weather, the last 20km to Río Seco would be impossible, although ecotour jeeps regularly use this road. Good luck.

WEST OF SANTIAGO DE CUBA

The coastal region west from Santiago de Cuba is magnificent (see p427) as the mountains and the sea meet in rugged, aqueous harmony reminiscent of Hwy 1 near Big Sur, California. There are countless remote beaches where you can stop along this route. Nineteen kilometers west of Caletón Blanco you'll pass a vacation camp for the Cuban military called **Villa Turquino**. Río Seco and the beginning of the rough road to Cruce de los Baños are 3km west of this camp.

Sleeping & Eating

Campismo Caletón Blanco (Cubamar; ☎ 62 57 97; Caletón Blanco Km 30, Guamá; s/d low season CUC\$15/22, high season CUC\$17/26; P ☎ ☎) Situated 30km

west of Santiago in close proximity to both mountains and beach, Caletón Blanco is one of Cuba's newer and more plush international campismos. Twenty-two bungalows sleep two to four people and there's a restaurant, snack bar and bike rental available. This is also a campervan site. Make your reservations with Cubamar (p92) before arrival.

Brisas Sierra Mar (Cubanacán; ☎ 2-9110; s/d all-inclusive CUC\$80/114; 📞 📺 📺) This isolated place is at Playa Sevilla, 63km west of Santiago de Cuba and a two-hour drive from the airport. The big, pyramid-shaped hotel is built into a terraced hillside with an elevator down to a brown-sand beach famous for its sand fleas. Get into the water quickly and discover a remarkable coral wall great for snorkeling just 50m offshore (dolphins sometimes frequent these waters too). Horseback riding is available and a Marlin Dive Center is on the premises. Families with children will appreciate the special kids' programming daily and guests under 13 stay free with their parents. The hotel is popular with Canadians and gets a lot of repeat visits. Nonguests can buy a CUC\$35 day pass that includes lunch, drinks and sport until 5pm. You might be able to find a ride into Santiago de Cuba from here.

CHIVIRICO

pop 4000

Chivirico, 75km southwest of Santiago de Cuba and 106km east of Marea del Portillo, is the only town of any significance on the south-coast highway. It's a good place to pick up on the nuances of everyday Cuban life, but otherwise there's not much to do here. The deep, clear waters of the Cayman Trench just offshore wash the many beaches along this portion of the south coast.

There's a challenging trek that begins at Calentura 4km west of Chivirico and passes through La Alcarraza (12km), crossing the Sierra Maestra to Los Horneros (20km), from where truck transport to Guisa is usually available. Whether skittish local authorities will let you loose in the area is another matter. Don't just turn up – do your homework in Santiago or Chivirico first. Try asking at Cubatur in Santiago or ask at one of the two Cubanacán Brisas hotels.

Sleeping

Brisas Sierra Mar Los Galeones (Cubanacán; ☎ 2-6160; Carretera Chivirico Km 72; s/d all-inclusive low season CUC\$47/84, high season CUC\$66/112; 📞 📺 📺) This is a small hotel with big surprises like the funky, forward decor, the good food, nice views and great diving. All rooms have balconies, there's a sauna and a small, spectacular beach 100m below the hotel via a steep 296-step stairway. Children under 16 are not accommodated here. All in all, a nice place to relax.

Getting There & Away

Trucks run to Chivirico throughout the day from the Serrano Intermunicipal Bus Station opposite the train station in Santiago de Cuba. There are also three buses a day.

Theoretically, buses operate along the south coast from Chivirico to Campismo La Mula on alternate days, but don't count on it. The bus to Río Macío (the river that marks the border between Santiago and Granma Provinces on the coast road) leaves at 5pm daily, and to Pilón at 11am on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Chivirico's bus and truck station is 700m up off the coastal road from Cine Guamá.

UVERO

The first major battle won by Fidel Castro's guerrilla army took place at Uvero, 23km west of Chivirico, on May 28, 1957, when a government position guarded by 53 Batista soldiers was overwhelmed and much-needed supplies were captured. By the main road are two red trucks taken by the rebels. A double row of royal palms leads to a large monument commemorating these events. It makes a good goal for a day trip on horseback from the Brisas Sierra Mar.

PICO TURQUINO AREA

Five kilometers west of Las Cuevas, which is 40km west of Uvero, is the **Museo de la Plata** (admission CUC\$1; 📞 Tue-Sat) at La Plata, next to the river just below the highway. The access road is very rough, and you should leave your vehicle at the store near the east side of the river and cover the last 800m to the museum on foot. The first successful skirmish of the Cuban Revolution took place here on January 17, 1957. The museum has three rooms with photos and artifacts from the

campaign, and on a clear day you can see Pico Turquino. Marea del Portillo is 46km to the east (see p388). Don't confuse this La Plata with the Comandancia de La Plata, Fidel Castro's revolutionary headquarters high up in the Sierra Maestra (p382).

The well-preserved wreck of the Spanish cruiser *Cristóbal Colón* lies where it sank in 1898, about 15m down and only 30m offshore near La Mula. No scuba gear is available here but you can see the wreck with a mask and snorkel. (Divers from the Sierra Mar Resort are brought here by bus for a shore dive on the wreck.) If you have the time, hike up the Río Turquino to Las Posas de los Morones where there are a few nice pools where you can swim (allow four hours round-trip). You must wade across the river at least three times unless it's dry.

Trekking

The Pico Turquino section of Gran Parque Nacional Sierra Maestra contains 17,450 hectares, including a spectacular trail across the Sierra Maestra and through a cloud forest where daily fogs rolls in, soaking the wild orchids, giant ferns, mosses and pines that grace Cuba's highest peaks. When the veil parts the views are magnificent.

There are several options for this trek, though doing it independently is not one of them: all hikers must be accompanied

by a guide. If your main interest is summiting Cuba's highest peak, you'll want to set out from Las Cuevas in Santiago de Cuba Province. If you're hooked on history and want to hike from Fidel and company's headquarters through and/or across the Sierra Maestra, you should set out from Alto de Naranjo in adjacent Granma Province (p380). If you want a little of both (or want a good, long hike), you can combine the two, starting from either end. The hiking is strenuous either way and onward transport is better from Alto del Naranjo, which may influence your planning. The hike from Las Cuevas can be organized at relatively short notice at the trail head. A good option is to book through **Ecotur** (☎ 65 38 59) in Santiago de Cuba. See p381 for the map of this hike.

The **Pico Turquino Trail**, up Cuba's highest mountain (1972m), begins at Las Cuevas on the south-coast highway, 7km west of Ocuja and 51km east of Marea del Portillo. This trek also passes Cuba's second highest peak, Pico Cuba (1872m). Allow at least six hours to go up and another four hours to come down, more if it has been raining as the trail floods in parts and becomes a mud slick in others. Most climbers set out at 4am (but if you're on the trail by 6:30am, you'll be OK), having slept at the Campismo La Mula, 12km east; self-sufficient hikers also have the option of pitching camp at Las Cuevas

IF YOU HAVE A FEW MORE DAYS

Wedged precariously between escarpment and sea, the coast road west out of Santiago toward Marea de Portillo is a roller coaster of crinkled mountains, hidden bays and crashing surf. This is without doubt one of the most breathtaking drives in Cuba. The views alone are worth the car-hire fee.

Thanks to a recent lashing by a string of hurricanes the road was in a bad state of repair at the time of writing, though it was still passable in an ordinary car. Take particular care when driving past Las Cuevas on the border of Granma Province where you'll need to circumnavigate a damaged bridge by fording a shallow river.

Attractions along the way are numerous. Stop to soak up the Cuban atmosphere in the coastal town of **Chivirico** (opposite) or procure a day pass at the salubrious resort of **Brisas Sierra Mar Los Galeones** (opposite). Treasure seekers should look out for the off-shore wrecks of the Spanish cruisers *Viscaya* at Asseredero and *Colón* at Ocuja, both of which have gun turrets poking above the water, while history lovers will want to pay a visit to the revolutionary shrines of **Uvero** (opposite) and **La Plata** (opposite), the sites of two early victories by Castro's rebel army.

Before setting out be sure to stock up on water, food and gas (there are no gas stations until Pilón, 200km to the west). The road also makes a great (if slightly arduous) cycle ride. You can overnight in Sierra Mar (opposite), Campismo Caletón Blanco (p425), Campismo La Mula (p428) or Marea del Portillo.

visitors center. The CUC\$15 per person fee (camera CUC\$5 extra) that you pay at the visitors center/trailhead includes a compulsory Cuban guide. You can overnight at the shelter on Pico Cuba if you don't want to descend the same day (two days/one night CUC\$30). Alternatively, you can do the entire Las Cuevas to Alto Naranjo three-day hike by arranging to be met by a new team of guides at Pico Turquino (three days/two nights CUC\$48). Add an extra CUC\$5 onto the latter two options if you wish to include a side-trip to Castro's former headquarters at La Plata (p382).

This hike is grueling because you're gaining almost 2km in elevation across only 9.6km of trail – it's hard and hot, but not a killer. Even in August, when Santiago de Cuba Province routinely registers the nation's highest temperatures, the wooded slopes provide plenty of coverage from the glaring sun. Fill up on water before setting out. The well-marked route leads from Las Cuevas to La Esmajagua (600m, 3km; there's water here and a hospitable country family), Pico Cardero (1265m, quickly followed by a series of nearly vertical steps called 'Saca La Lengua', or 'flops your tongue out'), Pico Cuba (1650m, 2km, water and shelter here) and Pico Real del Turquino (1972m, 1.7km). When the fog parts and you catch your breath, you'll behold a bronze bust of José Martí that stands on the summit of Cuba's highest mountain. It was hauled up here by Castro's formidable mistress Celia Sánchez and her father in 1952. You can overnight at either Pico Cuba on the ascent or La Esmajagua on the descent. The Pico Cuba shelter has a rudimentary kitchen and a wood-fire stove, plank beds (no mattresses) or, if those are taken, floor space. It's possible to continue across the mountains to Alto del Naranjo and Santo Domingo (see p382).

Alternatively, walkers with less lofty ambitions can arrange a short four-hour, 6km

trek from Las Cuevas to La Esmajagua and back for CUC\$13 (camera CUC\$5 extra).

Trekkers should bring sufficient food, warm clothing, a sleeping bag and a poncho – precipitation is common up here (some 2200mm annually), from a soft drizzle to pelting hail. Except for water, you'll have to carry everything you'll need; including extra food to share if you can carry it and a little something for the *compañeros* who take 15-day shifts up on Pico Cuba.

Ask ahead if you would like an English-speaking guide (park officials claim they now have at least one). Also ask about food provision at Pico Cuba. Recently dinner was being offered for CUC\$8. Drinks are available for purchase at the trailhead in Las Cuevas. Tipping the guides is mandatory – CUC\$3 to CUC\$5 is sufficient. For competitive types, the (unofficial) summit record by a guide is two hours, 45 minutes. So if you're feeling energetic...

Sleeping & Eating

Campismo La Mula (Cubamar; s/d low season CUC\$9/12, high season CUC\$11/16) On a clean pebble beach at the mouth of Río La Mula, 12km east of the Pico Turquino trailhead, this place has 50 small cabins popular with both Cubans and hikers destined for Pico Turquino. It's a reasonable option on this isolated stretch of coast. The Oficina de Reservaciones de Campismo (see p399) in Santiago de Cuba handles bookings here and it's best to reserve ahead as hurricanes have sometimes caused the cabins to close (in 2005 the roofs were blown off). Should the cabins be closed, they may let you pitch a tent here.

Locals with a big catch may be able to arrange fresh-fish meals; ask around.

Getting There & Away

A bus connects La Mula to Chivirico on alternate days. This is a very hard stretch to hitch a ride.