

Herp-Watching Adventure in Cuba

A West-Center Tour



“Cuba has an exquisite and unique herpetofauna. Amphibians are represented by 62 species, 95% of which are endemic to Cuba. The Reptile fauna contains 154 species, and 87.5% of endemism. Both groups constitutes the most important part of the land vertebrate fauna in the island”.



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Day 1. Arrival to the José Martí National Airport. Transfer to the hotel.

Day 2. Watching Herps in Viñales National Park. Hotel Rancho San Vicente HB

We will visit Viñales, located in Pinar del Río Province. Viñales is one of the most beautiful landscapes in Cuba. The limestone round shaped mountains known as "mogotes" contains a very typical flora and fauna. Among the invertebrates there is a huge diversity of land snails. The Cuban Giant Slug (*Veronicella tenax*) is another very interesting mollusc with more than 20 cm when fully grown. There are also many reptiles. The Pinar del Río Cliff Anole (*Anolis bartschi*) is a colourful lizard with tones of blue, green, yellow, and orange, which is endemic to the "mogotes". In some rivers we can find the Cuban Stream Anole (*Anolis vermiculatus*), a big lizard that resembles a baby crocodile. The Western Giant Anole (*Anolis luteogularis*) is one of the largest anoline lizards in the West Indies. Very rare, due to an excellent camouflage, is the Western Bearded Anole (*Chamaeleolis barbatus*), which, at the first glance, looks like a true chameleon. **Lunch at Palenque de los Cimarrones. Dinner at the Hotel.** At night we can find many interesting herps, for example the Cuban Giant Gecko (*Tarentola americana*), the Broad-banded Trope (*Tropidophis feicki*), the Giant Trope (*Tropidophis melanurus*), and the Cuban Giant Frog (*Eleutherodactylus zeus*). In the summer nights thousands of the Western Bromeliad Frog (*Eleutherodactylus varians*) and the Cuban Colín Frog (*Eleutherodactylus eileenae*) are calling high in the trees, with a sound resembling that produced by small bells. At night, in the rivers, is also possible to observe the Cuban Water Snake (*Tretanorhinus variabilis*), and the very common Western Giant Toad (*Bufo fustiger*).



Anolis vermiculatus



Anolis allogus



Tropidophis feicki



Anolis allisoni



Eleutherodactylus zeus



Osteopilus septentrionalis

Day 3. Guanahacabibes National Park. Villa Cabo San Antonio FB

The Guanahacabibes Peninsula is the westernmost place in Cuba. It is a beautiful locality with a spectacular sea, four hours from Viñales. The Cuban Rock Iguana (*Cyclura nubila*) is quite common in Guanahacabibes. There is a locally endemic lizard, the Cuban Eye-spot Anole (*Anolis quadriocellifer*). The Guanahacabibes Frog (*Eleutherodactylus guanahacabibes*) only occurs in the peninsula too. A subspecies of the Cuban Side-blotched Curlytail (*Leiocephalus macropus koopmani*) is another local endemism. In the summer months, the wonderful beaches of Guanahacabibes are nesting places for at least three species of sea turtles. Cuba is an island with dwarf and giant animals. Even for a Herp Watching Tour, would be great to take advantage and see the Cuban Bee-Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*), the smallest bird in the world. Other reptiles, like the Spiny Anole (*Anolis loysianus*) and the Yellow-belly Trope (*Tropidophis xanthogaster*) are more difficult to see, but also inhabits the forest of Guanahacabibes. **Lunch in Villa Cabo San Antonio.** We will go in search of herps both during the day and at night (after **Dinner in Villa Cabo de San Antonio**). Due to the karstic nature of



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Anolis quadriocellifer



Trachemys decussata



Anolis equestris



Chamaeleolis chamaeleonides



Bufo deltocephalus



Leiocephalus stuebeli

Guanahacabibes proper shoes are strongly recommended. At night we will visit the entrance of some caves, so extra lights and special care is required. If lucky we will see some individual of the Cuban Boa (*Epicrates angulifer*), the biggest snake in Cuba. Rest.

Day 4. Full day Herp-watching in Guanahacabibes. Villa Cabo San AntonioFB

Day 5. Departure from Hotel María La Gorda to Soroa. Soroa Hotel*HB**

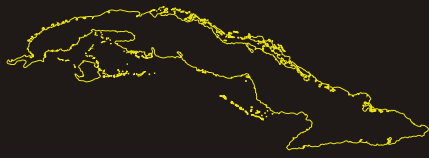
Breakfast in María La Gorda. During the morning we will take some trails in search of lizards and other herps. **Lunch at María La Gorda.** Departure to Soroa. **Dinner in Soroa.** We can also try to find new herps at night. Overnight in Soroa.

Day 6. Full day Herp- watching in Soroa. Soroa Hotel*HB**

Breakfast at the hotel. Full day looking for interesting amphibians and reptiles in Soroa. This locality contains one of the more complex communities of amphibians and reptiles in Cuba, and a big representation of the western species. Soroa is a beautifully forested area, with the famous waterfall of the river Manantiales. In this place we will try to find the Yellow-Striped Dwarf Frog (*Eleutherodactylus limbatus*). There is a huge population of the Cuban Stream Anole (*Anolis vermiculatus*). Up to four species of the genus *Tropidophis* occurs in Soroa (*Tropidophis maculatus*, *T. melanurus*, *T. feicki*, and *T. pardalis*). If lucky, we will find some individual of the Cuban Spiny Anole (*Anolis loysianus*). The Red-Fanned Rock Anole (*Anolis mestrei*) is very common on the abundant cliffs. Bull Frogs (*Rana catesbeiana*), a species introduced in the last century, are very common in the river. Many interesting birds and Monkey Hutias (*Mysateles prehensilis*; a kind of arboreal rodent) are a very interesting additions to this place. **Lunch in the Salto Restaurant. Dinner at Hotel.**

Day 7. Departure from Soroa to the Zapata Swamp. Playa Girón Hotel*AI**

Breakfast in Soroa. Departure. Zapata is about 4 hours driving from Soroa. The Zapata Swamp (Ciénaga de Zapata) is the biggest swamp in the Caribbean. There, it is possible to find most of the endemic birds, and also the Cuban Crocodile (*Crocodylus rhombifer*). We will visit the Crocodile Breeding Centre, a facility created for both the Cuban Crocodile and the American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*). It will be also easy to observe the Cuban Slider (*Trachemys decussata*) and the beautiful Cuban Blue Anole (*Anolis allisoni*), males of this lizard has a gorgeous colouration. **Lunch at Cueva de los Peces**, a beautiful flooded sinkhole with marine fishes on the middle of the forest, because the hole is actually a cave that communicates with the sea several meters far. A good place to see the Saw-scaled Curlytail (*Leiocephalus carinatus*) and the Cuban Striped



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Curlytail (*Leiocephalus stictigaster*). The Zapata's Giant Anole (*Anolis luteogularis calceus*) is also frequently seen in this locality. The Cuban Ameiva (*Ameiva auberi*) is a very common lizard, always fast moving on the forest floor or along the coastal vegetation in search of insects. In the building walls are geckos of the genus *Sphaerodactylus* (Ball Fingered Geckos), particularly the Ashy Sphaero (*Sphaerodactylus elegans*) and the Jamaican Stippled Sphaero (*Sphaerodactylus argus*). At night it is also possible to observe the House Gecko (*Hemidactylus angulatus*), a lizard that was introduced from Africa centuries ago during the slaves transportation. Besides the reptiles, it is also possible to enjoy the Cuban Parrots (*Amazona leucocephala*) and many other birds that often occur around the place. A small diving centre will give you the opportunity to visit a marvellous coral reef. **Dinner in the hotel.** At night we can visit the surroundings of Playa Girón, looking for toads. In the summer days, after rain, they can be heard in the distance. Two big species are there, the Eastern Giant Toad (*Bufo peltocephalus*) and the locally endemic Florentino's Toad (*Bufo florentinoi*). The last species is very adapted to a live in extremely dry coastal conditions.

Day 8. Full day watching herps in Zapata. Playa Giron Hotel***AI

Breakfast at the hotel. In route to Caleta Buena. In the coastal forest we will look for the Richard's Banded Sphaero (*Sphaerodactylus richardi*), a nicely coloured gecko and a locally endemic species. The forest is also the habitat of a different subspecies of the Cuban Giant Anole (or Knight Anole): *Anolis equestris juraguensis*. Caleta Buena is also a good diving centre in which it is possible to enjoy the beauty or the Cuban tropical sea. It is possible to see many land crabs (*Gecarcinus insularis*) in the surroundings of this locality, especially at the beginning of the rainy season (late April) when they perform huge migrations to lay their eggs in the sea. **Lunch in Caleta Buena.** Optional time for swimming, diving, or herp watching. **Dinner in Hotel Playa Girón.** Rest.

Day 9. Departure from Playa Girón to Topes de Collantes. Los Helechos Hotel***HB

Breakfast in the Playa Girón Hotel. Departure to Topes de Collantes. We will spend three hours driving from Playa Girón to Trinidad. Topes de Collantes is located in the Sierra del Escambray, withing the Macizo de Guamuhaaya, in the center part of Cuba. This mountain place has a nice temperature (18-23 degrees Celsius at night in the summer). The forests are crossed by many streams which are the habitat of the central population of the Cuban Long-nosed Toad (*Bufo longinasus durni*), now much endangered by the chytrid fungus and probably in decline. Among the local endemics are the Garrido's Anole (*Anolis garridoi*), the Escambray Bearded Anole (*Chamaeleolis guamuhaaya*), the Escambray-Blue Eye



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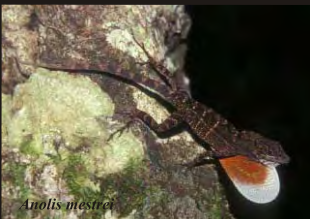
Eleutherodactylus klinckowki



Bufo longinasus dunni



Anolis spectrum



Anolis melleus

Anole (*Anolis ahli*), the Escambray Grass Anole (*Anolis vanidicus*), the Trinidad Flathead Frog (*Eleutherodactylus casparii*), the Trinidad Groin-spot Frog (*Eleutherodactylus emiliae*), and the Cuban Grey Frog (*Eleutherodactylus greyi*). Nights are plenty of frog sounds, especially those of the Cuban Colín Frog (*Eleutherodactylus eileenae*) and the Bromeliad Frogs (*Eleutherodactylus varians*).

Day 10. Full day looking for amphibians and reptiles in Topes. **Los Helechos Hotel***HB**

Breakfast in the Hotel. We will visit Codina, a trail 7 km from Topes. There we will enjoy a beautiful landscape and will have more opportunities to find some of the local endemics. **Lunch in Codina.** Return to the Hotel. **Dinner at the hotel.** Optional frog watching at night.

Day 11. Day 10. Full day looking for amphibians and reptiles in Guajimico. **Villa Guajimico FB**

Breakfast in hotel Los Helechos. Departure to Guajimico. This locality is on the rocky coastal line of **Cienfuegos Province** and there we will have chance to see the Slender Cliff Anole (*Anolis lucius*), the Escambray Spotted Sphaero (*Sphaerodactylus oliveri*), the Cuban Giant Gecko (*Tarentola americana*), the Cuban Twig Anole (*Anolis angusticeps*), the Cuban Cave Frog (*Eleutherodactylus thomasi trinidadensis*), the Cuban Ameiva (*Ameiva auberi*), and many others reptiles. **Lunch and dinner included in the Villa.**

Day 12. Return to Havana.

Day 13. City tour in Havana.

Day 14. Departure from the José Martí National Airport

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