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SAN CARLOS DE LA CABAÑA FORTRESS
The San Carlos de la Cabaña is the biggest fortress in America. Built by King Carlos III (hence its name) over a period of eleven years, it is an example of some of the finest European military architecture of its era. The fortress boasts a unique hydraulic system used in France at that time. It also has a dry moat, high walls and a garrison that could hold up to six thousand men. Adapting these various elements meant that the San Carlos de la Cabaña was the ultimate in functionality, modernity and every other dynamic that played a role in the course of potential battles; it is indeed a force that attackers of the 18th Century found formidable, although it has never really been a part of any war. Now, it is home to a stunning array of weapons from all across the world.
LAS TERRAZAS [F2]
Las Terrazas is an area of terraces built in the 1960s to reduce soil erosion and to encourage the reforesting of an area that had been devastated by 19th French colonial plantation owners. The community was structured as a miniature city and became a living proof of sustained development. Now, Las Terrazas is a one-of-a-kind model self-contained eco-community and a popular resort, including the nearby Baños de San Juan.
Cuba's people practice a variety of religions, including, Santeria, a mix of Catholic and African beliefs.
One of Cuba's nicest features is the Vinales Valley, a World Heritage Site famous for it's karst (limestone) landscape.
Cuba is famous for its cigars, but tourism is its largest industry. Canadians seeking Caribbean sunshine are the number one source of visitors, with visitors from Europe being second, and Americans being third. Much of the citrus fruit and sugar produced is shipped to Russia, to pay for oil.
MARIA LA GORDA DIVING [B4]
Maria la Gorda (Mary the Fat) is a diving paradise with crystal-clear and warm waters and a large black coral reserve. The marine fauna includes barracuda, groupers, lobsters, eels, angel fish, crabs, etc.; in May and June the sandy beaches are populated with turtles building their nests; August and September is the time for the whale shark followed by other kinds of shark like hammer head, nurse shark or blue shark.
The Cuban revolution occured in 1959 and was organized by Fidel Castro and a small group of lawyers and intelligencia.
Cuba is the 17th largest island in the world. It has a peculiar biodiversity, unlike any other island or country of similar size. It doesn't have any poisonous animals or plants. It does, however, have one of the world's largest flowers, the solandra grandiflora.
VIÑALES VALLEY (UNESCO World Heritage Site, 1999) [D2]
Viñales Valley National Park is a karst landscape in which traditional methods of agriculture (notably tobacco-growing) have survived unchanged for several centuries. The fertile soil and favourable climate in the Valley lead to the development of stock-raising using slaves from Africa. The cimarrones, or escaped slaves, often found refuge in the caves of the Valley. The Pan de Azucar site contains the ruins of the biggest hacienda, where slaves were taught different trades. The village of Viñales was founded in 1875 as a result of the expanding tobacco cultivation. The region also preserves a rich vernacular tradition in its architecture, crafts and music.
CUBAN CIGARS
Cuban cigars are considered the best in the world. They are highly desired for their exquisite flavour and are made by some of the most skilled cigar manufacturers, or "torcedores" in the country. The Torcedores cigar makers are revered for their skills and are treated as local celebrities. Genuine Cuban cigars are only made in Cuba by two state-run companies, Habanos SA and Cubatabaco. These two companies are responsible for the manufacture, regulation, and distribution of the cigars. The cigars are packaged in boxes labelled Hecho en Cuba.
PARQUE NACIONAL DE GÜIRA [E2]
The national park, 54,000 acres of mountain wilderness, had been the estate of a wealthy landowner and politician who was forced into exile in 1959 and his properties confiscated. His mansion and formal gardens are now in ruins. A river cutting through a mountain formed three joined caves, big and open, the jungle outside the caves is wilderness. Che Guevara lived in the caves in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He figured that if the Americans bombed the rest of Cuba, he'd be ready to lead the fight against the invaders.
PUNTA FRANCES [E4]
Punta Frances is a resort on Isla de la Juventud. The main beach is called Latrobe after a French pirate who buried a massive amount of treasure on the island that has never been found. Punta Frances has an excellent microclimate silver sand beaches and clear waters. It is off the beaten track and popular with the more adventurous visitors.
PARQUE NACIONAL MARINO PUNTA FRANCÉS [E4]
The National Marine Park Punta Frances contains a land with lush vegetation and its wildlife, which includes the tocororo, the cabrerito and the parrot, beaches and compact jungle filled with stony areas, leafy palms and springs of sulphurous waters. Its submarine part includes a coral reef of exceptional virginity and species diversity, with numerous caves and abundant tubular sponges.
OLD HAVANA & ITS FORTIFICATIONS UNESCO World Heritage Site, 1982)
La Havana was founded in 1515 and soon became one of the Caribbean's main centres for ship-building. Its location made the city a perfect gathering point for the annual treasure fleets bound for Spain from Mexico and Peru. Havana became the front door to the vast Spanish colonial empire, and in 1553 it became also the capital of Cuba. In 1762, during the Seven Years War, England seized Havana and held on to it for 11 months, then exchanged it for Florida. Newly recovered Havana was then turned into a strongly fortified city; it was also allowed to trade freely, developing and growing steadily through the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite its turbulent history, the city suffered little damage in the country's wars and revolutions, and stands today much as it was built centuries ago, being the finest surviving Spanish complex in the Americas. During Prohibition in the United States, Havana became a paradise for those who wanted good rum and fine cigars - at least until New Year's Eve 1959, when rebels led by Fidel Castro marched intotown.
The old city centre retains an interesting mix of Baroque and neoclassical monuments, and a homogeneous ensemble of private houses with arcades, balconies, wrought-iron gates and internal courtyards. Havana Vieja is the original colonial city as it developed within the 17th-century city walls, while Vedado is the modern heart of the city that evolved in the early 20th century. Many of Old Havana's finest buildings have been converted into museums, and there are churches, palaces, castles, revolutionary monuments and markets to visit; however, renovations are only slowly extending to residential areas.
Fidel Castro changed the old name, Isla de Pinos, to Isla de la Juventud in 1978.
ISLA DE LA JUVENTUD – ISLE OF YOUTH
Known as La Evangelista (Columbus), Isle of Parrots, Treasure Island, and finally Isla de Pinos (Isle of Pines), the island received its current name by the decision of F.Castro in 1978. Pirate activity in and around the area left its trace in literature; Treasure Island by R.L.stevenson is foudn to be inspired on accounts of this island and its native and pirate inhabitants, as well as long dugout canoes (which were often used by pirates as well as indigenous peoples). The island is a quiet and peaceful place less visited by tourists. The main economical activities are agriculture and fishing, the place is excellent for diving and fishing.
Nueva Gerona, the island's administrative centre, is a quiet town with a church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, some museums and galleries. The nearby Presidio Modelo Museum was the former prison where Fidel Castro was jailed after the failed attack on the Moncada barracks.
MUSEO ERNEST HEMINGWAY (Havana)
One of the Havana's most popular museums is located in villa Finca Vigia, purchased by Ernest Hemingway in 1949; where he spent a large part of the rest of his life. Finca Vigia was the birthplace of many of Hemingway's best works, including For Whom the Bell Tolls and The Old Man and the Sea. The museum features a number of possessions of the author as well as a library containing the author's original collection of books. The Museo Ernest Hemingway has been preserved exactly as the author had left it, giving visitors an insight into the life and times of this Nobel Laureate.
EARLY SPANISH SETTLEMENTS IN CUBA
The first sighting of a Spanish boat approaching the island was in October 1492, probably at Baracoa. Christopher Columbus, on his first voyage, sailed south from what is now The Bahamas to explore the northeast coast of Cuba and the northern coast of Hispaniola. Columbus believed Cuba to be a peninsula of the Asian mainland. He named the land "Juana" (in honour of Prince Juan of Spain), but subsequently altered this name to that of "Fernandina"; which was confirmed by a Royal Decree in February 1515. In spite of this, the island has been known by its original Indian name, "Cuba", since the first moments of its conquest by Spain.During a second voyage in 1494, Columbus passed along the south coast of the island, landing at various inlets including what was to become Guantánamo Bay.
The Spanish began to create permanent settlements on Hispaniola, begining in 1492, but it wasn't until 1509 that the coast of Cuba was fully mapped (and its island character confirmed) by Sebastián de Ocampo. In 1511, Diego Velázquez set out from Hispaniola to form the first Spanish settlement in Cuba, at Baracoa. Subsequently, he established six more villages (villas) by 1515: San Salvador de Bayamo, Santiago de Cuba, Santisima Trinidad (Trinidad), Sancti Spiritus, Nuestra Señora del Puerto del Principe Camagüey) and San Cristobal de la Habana. These are known as "The First Seven Cubn Villages". The capital was first at Baracoa, then moved to Santiago and finally toLa Havana.
RESERVA DE LA BIOSFERA CIÉNAGA DE ZAPATA
These protected wetlands are one of best birdwatching areas in the world (a home to 18 endemic species and the bee hummingbird, the smallest bird in the world), plus it has scuba diving and beautiful beaches. Playa Maquina (aka Caleta del Rosario), just east of Playa Larga, is a beautiful beach with white sand and warm, clear, shallow water. Palm trees and limestone cenotes line the shore. The landscape of the park is similar to the Everglades National Park in Florida.
The Bay of Pigs is where the Cubans defeated an American invasion in 1961. The area has numerous propaganda billboards along the road from Australia to Playa Larga. In the Laguna del Tesoro (Treasure Lake), there is an island named Guamá, once a popular vacation place of Fidel Castro, with a replica of a Taino native village (Aldea Taina) including 32 sculptures depicting native life.
CIÉNAGA DE ZAPATA BIOSPHERE RESERVE [H-J3]
Most of the reserve is covered by marshes and brackish lagoons. It is the main wetland of Cuba with a highly diverse and pristine eco-system. The Zapata Swamps are home to hundreds of plant and animal species. Ciénaga de Zapata National Park is the core part of the Biosphere Reserve with excellently preserved mangrove forests. The Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) offers some of the best cave diving in the Caribbean. A dramatic drop in the seabed has created a huge wall, covered in sponges, gorgonians and coral.
CIENFUEGOS' HISTORIC CEN'RE (UNESCO World Heritage Site,2005)
Cienfuegos was founded in 1819 in the Spanish territory but was initially settled by immigrants of French origin. It became a trading place for sugar cane, tobacco and coffee. The town first developed in the neoclassical style being the first and outstanding example of an architectural ensemble representing the new ideas of modernity, hygiene and order in urban planning as developed in Latin America from the 19th century. In the late 19th century, new function were introduced into this emergent commercial port city, aid the original grid plan was multiplied towards the inland ant along the coast. After the Independence War against Spin, there was new capital entering from North America and rade developed mainly with the United States, the principl market for Cienfuegos.
TRINIDAD AND THE VALLEY DE LOS INGENIOS (UNESCO World Heritage Site, 1988)
Between 1512 and 1519, Don Diego Velázquez founded the first seven Cuban townships, among which was Trinidad. Named in honour of the Holy Trinity, the village became a starting point for the conquest of the American continent, and grew into the most significant city in Spanish America. In the 17th century, cattle, tobacco and contraband were the economic mainstays of a largely Spanish population. Towards the end of the 18th century, the sugar industry was firmly established in the Valle de Los Ingenios and Trinidad prospered.
Trinidad is an outstanding example of a colonial city; it has maintained its historic core, featuring a high percentage of surviving antique buildings and public squares and bringing together architectural, historic and cultural elements of great value. Though the urban layout dates for the most part from the first two centuries of its existence, the current stone buildings are witnesses to the big sugar industry period of the 18th and 19th century. Now that Cubans can buy and sell property for the first time in half a century, it is likely that many of these buildings will be 'spruced up' by new owners.
Castro led the country until 2008, when failing health forced him to turn over dictatorial authority to his brother Raul. The country is slowly opening up after decades of authoritarian socialism. Computers are now allowed, and cell phones have recently been permitted, but the devastation caused by Castro's peculiar version of communism will take many years to overcome. American hostility has also lessened since Obama became president, and Americans can now travel to Cuba without penalty. At the moment, however, there are no direct flights to Cuba from the USA, and the two neighbours do not maintain diplomatic relations.
VARADERO
OCÉANO DE ATLÁNTICO
Peninsula de Hicacos
Bahia de Cardenas
VARADERO [J1]
Varadero came into existence while the rest of the world was fighting WWII but it was only recently that hotels and facilities have grown up to make Varadero one of the most sought after destinations in the Caribbean. It offers a beach with phenomenal caves in a natural landscape that is reminiscent of the days when pirates terrorised the locals. Ambrosio's Cave is about 250 metres long and has 5 galleries that interconnect. The walls of the cave have numerous drawings that make up one of the largest collections of Indian pictographs in the Caribbean. During the slave trade, many runaways hid out in the cave systems.
LEGEND VARADERO LEYENDA
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LA HABANA / HAVANA
SCALE 1 : 10 000
Cartography by Andrew Alfred-Duggan © ITMB Publishing. 2014
STRAITS OF FLORIDA
CENTRO (CENTRAL HAVANA)
LA HABANA VIEJA HAVANA OLD TOWN WORLD HERITAGE SITE
VIEJA (OLD HAVANA)
COMPLEJO DE MUSEOS HISTÓRICOS MILITARES MORRO-CABAÑA
BAHIA DE LA HABANA
LA HABANA REGIONAL MAP
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LEGEND LEYENDA
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Hydrofoils = Kometas 2.5 hours
Catamarans
boats from here to Isla la Juventud? Evidently NO
for 2 boats daily, Sunday?
'least developed corner