

CRUISING



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CRUISING TO AND AROUND CUBA IN 2016

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With the surging popularity of Havana as a must-see travel destination, more and more prospective visitors are seeking out hotel room alternatives as “no-vacancy” signs are flashing everywhere. Enter the burgeoning cruise ship industry as visitors eye a floating room as an attractive alternative not only as a base to visit the capital but as a way to take in the entire island.

In recent years two cruise lines, Thomson Cruises’ ‘Fusion Cuba’ and Celestyal Cruises’, ‘Cuba Cruise’, have had a lock on the Cuban cruise market. Both are experiencing record loads this year with Cuba Cruise even extending their sailing season by month through to the end of April.



In May, for the first time in fifty-seven years, an American line, Carnival Cruises’ Fathom Line, will launch a regular sail from Miami to and around Cuba, for a ‘cultural immersion’ experience. Suddenly several hundred hotel rooms can be seen docking in Havana’s old port and other major port cities around the country.

Thomson Cruises, based in the U.K., has been sailing to Cuba for several years now embarking passengers on their southern sea adventure from Montego Bay, Jamaica. Their cruise includes stops in Cozumel

Mexico, a couple of nights in Havana (for many the highlight of the trip), a stop in Georgetown, Cayman Islands (for those desperate for a good pint and some fish and chips) and disembarkation back in Montego Bay over the course of a seven day cruise (with a couple of days of pure sea travel.)

Departure dates for 2016 include March 1, 15 and 29th and re-start in November (details at [Thomson.co.uk](#)).

The Greece based sailing venture, Cuba Cruise is celebrating its third year of sailing around Cuba with seven day passengers choosing either Montego Bay or Havana as their embarkation and/or disembarkation ports. The difference with the Cuba Cruise is that, in addition to a two night port of call in Havana (select the Tropicana nightclub excursion – you’ll thank me!), the Cuba Cruise also takes in Maria La Gorda, a designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a diver’s dream; Cienfuegos; Montego Bay, Jamaica; and Santiago de Cuba, Cuba’s second largest city and the epicenter of much of the country’s history. Departure dates are available from either Montego Bay or Havana until April 11, 2016 (visit [yourcubacruise.com](#)). Getting to Havana with air only can be tricky and expensive. I suggest looking at Transat Holidays who offers Canadian travellers air and Cuba Cruise packages with departures from Montreal and Toronto (visit [Transatholidays.com](#)).



The new kid on the block this year will be Fathom Cruises’ launch on May 1 of a seven day cruise departing from Miami designed to tap into the pent-up demand from US cruisers hankering for a Cuban experience. The Fathom cruise will also appeal to those wanting to use their vacation time to indulge in cultural exchange excursions. This will involve “cultural immersion” activities such as visits to see minor league baseball games, cigar plantations, elementary schools, artist studios and the like.



The Fathom cruise also takes in stops in Cienfuegos and Santiago de Cuba with a Cuban-culture-packed agenda of on ground activities. The Fathom cruises to Cuba will run throughout the summer into the Fall. Fathom is a new division of Carnival cruise lines (visit [fathom.org](#) for more).

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