

MEETING ON CUBAN BIRDING TRIP SCHEDULED FOR SEPT. 16

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BILLINGS – The public is invited to join Jennifer Lyman, Ph.D, professor of environmental science and studies, who will lead a birding, natural history and culture tour of Cuba, February 24 – March 3, 2012.

Dr. Lyman will hold a noon meeting Friday, September 16, 2011, in the RMC Library seminar room for those interested in the tour.

Dr. Lyman will escort the tour, which includes stays in 4-star hotels in Havana, Cienfuego, and Trinidad, accompanied by an English-speaking guide versed in nature, history and culture.

Cost of the tour, which includes air transportation to Cuba and luxury coach in Cuba, is \$3,695 per person, double occupancy (\$500 single supplement). The cost includes hotel accommodation and many meals.

The two-credit trip is for RMC students, but public participants may join the tour for an additional \$95 audit fee.

For this trip the first deposit is due Oct. 17 (1/2 the amount) and the remainder due Nov. 26.

The itinerary for the trip includes:

DAY 1 – Friday, Flight from billings, montana to cankun, mexico

- Overnight at the Courtyard Marriott. Dinner is on your own. (B)

DAY 2 – Saturday / ARRIVAL in HAVANA (dinner)

- Rendezvous at the Cancun, Mexico airport (CUN) in the morning before departing for Havana's José Martí International Airport. You're welcomed at the airport lobby by your Cuba Education Tour guide and professional bus chauffeur.
- Visit a bank or exchange bureau (CADECA) to purchase Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC).
- Private transfer to your hotel located in the heart of Habana Vieja [Old Havana].
- Private check-in with assistance from your guide - followed by a welcome with hotel directors and staff.

- Enjoy a group welcome dinner with your Cuban guide.
- Havana evening entertainment suggestions: Review the best Afrojazz, Cubajazz and Sonjazz at Club La Zorra y El Cuervo [The Fox and the Raven] featuring astonishing performances by island bands and soloists! It's a popular haunt for Cubans and foreign guests.

DAY 3 – Sunday / EXPLORING THE CITY OF HAVANA (b, l, d)

- Morning visit to the National Natural History Museum emphasizing geology, paleontology, botany, and zoology. Considered among the best in Latin American, its exhibits include Cuban flora and fauna, archeological, fossil and mineral samples, and informative materials about Earth's evolution. Museum staff will focus on public education on the environment and ecology.
- Followed by a walking tour of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit four of the five historic plazas that make Havana unique in the western hemisphere. It contains the largest collection of remaining colonial-era architecture. This is a private tour led by your Cuba Education Tour guide.
- Cathedral Square, the most beautiful and private 18th century colonial plaza on the island, named after the masterpiece of Cuban baroque architecture: the Catedral de San Cristóbal de la Habana built by the Jesuit order.
- Square of Arms, an ancient military parade ground for Spanish soldiers, surrounded by impressive buildings such as:
 - Palacio de los Capitanes Generales, former seat of colonial government. Today the building houses the Museum of the City.
 - Palacio del Segundo Cabo, seat of the second authority of the island.
 - Museo de Artesanía at Castillo de la Real Fuerza, the second oldest fortress built by the Spaniards in the West Indies. Today it displays treasures of artistic ceramics by the most prestigious Cuban artists from the middle of the last century to present. The institution is host to the Ceramic Biennial.
- Continue to San Francisco Square, one of the oldest plazas in the historical quarter. The square is named after magnificent Iglesia y Monasterio de San Francisco de Asís dating from the 16th century. The basilica is a striking example of Cuba baroque architecture.
- Tour Plaza Vieja, the only civic square of colonial times. Absent are churches and government buildings, and is in contrast surrounded by opulent aristocratic 17th century residences. Visit an important center for the visual arts.
- Group welcome lunch at La Mina Restaurant where you'll enjoy traditional Cuban dishes and live music!
- Enjoy a rumba performance at Callejón de Hamel, an alley where all the buildings display mural paintings inspired by Afro-Cuban religions.
- Group dinner at La Divina Pastora Restaurante. This seafood house sets just behind the big cannons below Parque Histórico Morro y Cabaña. Near the water on the north side of Havana Harbor, it overlooks Old Havana to the south.
- Evening visit to the Fortress of San Carlos de la Cabaña where Che Guevara established his headquarters after the Revolution came to power.
- Evening highlight: Tonight we witness a most dramatic ceremony – El Cañonazo – the Firing of the 9PM Cannon at the Fortress of San Carlos de la Cabaña. This

enchancing colonial reenactment dates back to 1519 when the city of Havana was enclosed by a tall thick rock wall to ward off attacks from pirates and the English. The cannon firing signaled the closing of the city gates for the night. If you were outside at the time, you were in "vedado" or the forbidden zone. Today Vedado is an important cultural hub and beautiful section of modern Havana.

DAY 4 – Monday / Ernest Hemingway house / urban organic agriculture (B, I)

- This morning visit Finca Vigía [Lookout Farm] where North America's literary giant Ernest Hemingway spent twenty-one of his most important and productive years penning building blocks of English literature. Claimed by both the United States and Cuba as their son, it was Hemingway himself who declared the island his true home. We will also begin our birding inventory, documenting the incredible abundance of species available.
- Lunch at Vivero Organopónico Alamar. Dine on natural food prepared by the staff of this collective. A great opportunity to talk with Cuban farmers about an agricultural system that supplies 40 percent of the city's fresh produce.
- Tour grounds of the Vivero Organopónico Alamar, 15 kilometers east of Havana. It's one of the most successful urban organic farms in Cuba raising ornamental plants, medicinal herbs, and millions of seedlings for neighboring residents and farmers. Established in the 1990s, the Alamar cooperative has about 25 members and provides a range of healthy, organic low-cost food to Havana and environs. (Birding opportunity)
- Visit Centro Cultural Antiguos Almacenes de Depósito San José. This marvelous recent restoration of an old dock warehouse has resulted in a gigantic market exhibiting the wares of hundreds of Cuban artists and craftspersons. You'll find thousands of souvenirs, beautiful paintings, photographic prints, guayaberas (traditional Cuban shirt), woodwork, leather items, jewelry, painted ceramics and handcrafted cigar boxes, to name a few of the many authentic items for sale.

Dinner is on your own.

- Evening highlight: Tonight at 9:00PM we have a Cuban band joining us. You'll learn how to perform and dance to Salsa, Son, Rumba, Mambo and other popular Cuban rhythms from the band members of Grupo Dulce María.

DAY 5 – Tuesday / Las terrazas eco-community-birdwatching (B, I, D)

Day Notes: Cuba is a paradise for birdwatchers with twenty-one endemic species and six endemic genera.

- Early morning departure to Las Terrazas eco-community in the Sierra del Rosario mountain range west of Havana in the province of Pinar del Río.
- Tour a rural village called Rancho Curujey and enjoy a welcome snack while hearing about this self-sustaining community's goals of reforestation, historical preservation, environmental balance and a good life. (Birding opportunity)
- Our introduction to Las Terrazas with a birding hike around the area.
- Afterwards visit its school República Oriental del Uruguay for primary and secondary children and talk with teachers and students who live in this community.
- Visit La Unión farm with a beautiful garden of tropical plants.
- Next meet with local artists and craft workers in their homes and studios.

- Walk the incredible ruins of a French Coffee Plantation built in 1801 worked by African slaves.
- Continue on to La Moka, an ecological hotel with trees growing up through its balconies and ceilings.
- Lunch at a local eatery serving traditional Cuban country cuisine.
- Swim in the fresh waters of the Río San Juan and explore the surroundings of this lush tropical paradise.
- Evening entertainment suggestion: Casa de la Amistad is one of the best settings to listen to great traditional music in a welcoming friendly atmosphere. You'll enjoy the classical son group, La Peña del Chan Chan perform up-tempo salsa and bolero. Dance with Cubans and foreign visitors on the veranda or in the beautiful gardens of Casa de la Amistad's spectacular mansion facilities.
- Dinner at the Taberna de la Muralla – this place is very popular with the locals. It houses the only microbrewery in Cuba and is ever popular with Cubans and foreign visitors alike. On Tuesday nights the famed Buena Vista Social Club performs.

DAY 6 – Eednesday / Boca de Guama / Crocodile reserve / TAINO village / cienfuegos (B, L, d)

- Early morning departure to Cienfuegos – founded by French immigrants at the beginning of the 19th century – renowned for its wealth of stunning historical buildings.
- En route we'll stop at Boca de Guamá. (Birding opportunity)
- Visit a crocodile reserve known locally as Criadero de Crocodilos. This huge operation is managed by the government in the interest of preservation of the endemic *Crocodylus rhombifer* (Cuban Crocodile). The farm is a breeding facility for some ten thousand of this endangered species, and a sanctuary for sixteen other species of threatened reptiles. Observe the highly aggressive reptiles close up from special platforms.
- Later take a boat across the Laguna del Tesoro [Treasure Lagoon] named for the fact it was a hiding spot for 17th century pirates. During the half-hour cruise observe many native and non-native birds in this heart of the noted Zapata marsh. Other fauna includes the jutía (an endemic rodent the size of a cocker spaniel, and the manjuari, a prehistoric fish with lungs and alligator-like head. (Birding opportunity)
- Visit a reconstruction of a Taíno Indian village on a tiny island in the lagoon known as Villa Guamá (named after a 16th century Indian chief who today is a national hero for his efforts from 1522 to 1532 to liberate indigenous people from the Spanish yoke). The village consists of 44 huts of palm trunk and frond construction. It features 26 sculptures of indigenous people created by the noted Cuban artist Rita Longa. Each reflects a daily activity of the first inhabitants of Cuba.
- Enjoy lunch at La Boca (crocodile is on the menu).
- Now we're off to the city of Cienfuegos. Upon arrival your guide will recount the story of the origins of this beautiful cosmopolitan city, known as the "Pearl of the South." Walk its main Plaza Martí where the ceremony of its foundation took place, as do many important events still today.
- Visit such neoclassical buildings as the Cathedral built with donations from wealthy slave owning families – enduring names like Lebranc, Albi, and Terry. Inside the

Cathedral a marvelously rendered stained glass mural of the Twelve Apostles imported from Paris will awe you. The original machinery of the Cathedral's tower clock was also crafted in France and keeps on ticking to this day.

- Evening suggestions: Wander the city's Malecón seawall, and visit numerous clubs offering incredible music in this hometown of cantor Benny Moore! Your guide will keep you posted on current happenings.

DAY 7 – Thursday / CITY OF TRINIDAD DE CUBA (B, L, D)

- This morning explore on foot one of the oldest cities founded by the Spaniards in the West Indies, Trinidad de Cuba, declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It was established in 1514 on orders of the conquistador Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar who traveled to Cuba with Columbus in 1493.
- Tour Plaza Mayor, Museum of Architecture, Museum of the Romantic Era, the main town parish and other amazing sites, some dating back centuries.
- Trinidad is well known for its pottery makers. We'll meet a family that has been passing on the tradition for generations: the Santanders.
- Free time to wander the streets of Trinidad's historical center and examine the oldest architecture in the Americas, and inspect local art and shop for souvenirs. Afterwards we return to your hotel for lunch.
- Stop at a mirador (lookout) over the Sugar Mill Valley, also an UNESCO World Heritage Site, where sugar barons constructed their opulent countryside mansions and huge refineries. (Birding opportunity)
- We'll enjoy a group lunch at the lookout restaurant.
- Check-in to your all-inclusive Brisas Trinidad del Mar Resort. You'll have time for dinner, a swim in the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea, and to enjoy the resort's entertainment amenities. (Birding opportunity)
- Evening is free to enjoy the beach, hotel amenities, and the lively streets of Trinidad.

DAY 8 – Friday / TOPES DE COLLANTES / HAVANA (B, L, D)

- This morning board Soviet Army trucks to climb the peaks of Topes de Collantes in the Escambray Mountains. The Escambrays comprise the island's second highest range, reaching to 3,700 feet atop Pico San Juan. The Escambrays are home to small villages and a true delight for birdwatchers and naturalists alike. Dramatic slopes are swathed in Caribbean pines, ancient tree ferns, bamboo and eucalyptus. (Birding opportunity)
- Upon arrival at Hacienda Codina, an old Spanish coffee plantation, enjoy a traditional Cuban lunch, followed by a walking tour of the area to admire the beauty of the surrounding landscape and the animals and plants it hosts.
- Special farewell dinner and dance show: We'll dine at the outdoor barbecue Restaurante La Barraca on the paradise-like grounds of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba atop a bluff overlooking Havana city and the Caribbean.
- Afterwards attend a musical review at the Cabaret Parisién and relish this colorful dance extravaganza.

DAY 9 – Saturday / goodbye cuba (B)

- Check-out of hotel.

- Transfer to José Martí International Airport for flights home.

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