Day 1 Havana
Clear customs and head into the bustling, historic city that lies in a state of crumbling elegance – a living museum that simply must be visited once in a lifetime. Walk the four Plazas of Old Havana and have an atmospheric lunch at a secluded paladar (a private restaurant) or at the luxurious Hotel Saratoga – a Havana institution.
In the evening, dine at La Bodequita Del Medio, home of the Mojito. This was also Hemingway’s favourite spot in the early sixties; the Papa Doble was his tipple and is named after him. Later you could head to one of the salsa clubs for which Havana is famous.

Day 2 Havana
Spend the morning enjoying the Playas del Este, the beaches close to Havana. Santa Maria is the trendiest strip, thrumming with thatched huts selling rum-laced coconut milk. Later, visit the Partagas Cigar Factory or the Finca La Vigia (once Hemingway’s home and now a museum).
Back in Havana, places to see include the Basílica, Revolution Square and the Bacardi building. In the evening, have dinner at the colourful, unpretentious restaurant Mama Inés – the owner was Fidel Castro’s private chef for many years. Afterwards, see the open air cabaret at Havana’s legendary nightclub ‘La Tropicana’.

Day 3 Cuba’s north coast
This length of coastline has some of Cuba’s best beaches with endless stretches of powdery, bone-white sand. Limpid turquoise waters are dotted with groomed resorts, hidden jungle tracks and wedges of undiscovered paradise. Start with Varadero, a 25km runway of pristine sand flanked by sparkling waters and palms.

Day 4 The Northern Cays
This network of small islets is interspersed with turquoise waters and mangrove colonies. The Cays form one of Cuba’s newest tourist resorts. You can spend a heavenly day exploring the beaches, starting with breakfast at Playa Pilar – this is where Ernest Hemingway spent much time, and the beach is named after his yacht. Have a picnic lunch on the beach near Bahía de Naranjo, a nature park where you can swim with the dolphins. Although there is a ‘dolphinarium’, the dolphins can come and go as they please.

Day 5 Cayo Coco
A tropical island in the Jardines del Rey archipelago, Cayo Coco is dotted with lagoons and marshes. The area is home to an array of wild birds including white ibis and a large colony of pink flamingos. The beach at Playa Los Flamencos is a 3km stretch of fine sand and transparent waters where mandarin-coloured starfish float through the shallows. The snorkelling here is fabulous.

Day 6 Cayo Sabinal
Astonishingly beautiful and eerily peaceful thanks to its isolation, Cayo Sabinal was once a hiding place for pirates and smugglers who used to mount attacks on ships navigating the Bahama Channel. You can visit the Fort that was built by the Spanish in 1831 to curb those wayward scoundrels. There are a number of fabulous beaches including Playa Los Pinos, where blankly white sand is backed by woodlands that contain wild deer and horses. Hemingway wrote ‘The Great Blue River’ here. The snorkelling is sublime and you can see starfish beds both at Playa Bonita.

Day 7 Guardalavaca
The market at Playa Pasquero is a good place to amble and grab a Mojito. The surrounding area is a Castaños’s paradise and home to some exotic wildlife, a local guide will show you rare babab-like trees, iguanas, birds and orchids. The island is also home to plenty of dive sites for an underwater adventure. Nearby, Cayo Saetía was once a private game reserve and here you can see ostrich, zebra, antelope and water buffalo roaming freely.

WHEN TO GO?
Cuba is known for its ‘endless summer’, though December to May is the best time to visit for virtually guaranteed dry, sunny days and blue skies. It’s a good idea to coincide your trip with one of the many celebrations and festivals, including the cigar festival in February, the ballet festival in October and the film and jazz festivals in December.

COLOURFUL CUBA
A place of rum, salsa, revolutionaries and vintage cars, Cuba has been standing still in time since the fifties. In recent years, yachts would visit at their own peril, but Cuba has at last flung open its doors – and now is the time to go.