

TRAVERSING **CUBA** MOUNTAINS, COAST & CULTURE





Photography by
Matthew Kadey



More than five decades after a feisty, cigar-loving Fidel Castro spearheaded a successful revolution, Cuba remains a politically-charged land full of contradictions and misunderstandings. Despite a few warts and continued hoopla surrounding politics, Cuba is rapidly gaining cult status among sun and culture seekers as the jewel of the Caribbean. Cyclotourists are also catching on that this island nation 90 miles from Key West, Florida, as the crow flies, provides the perfect mixture of scenery, history, and kind-hearted denizens.

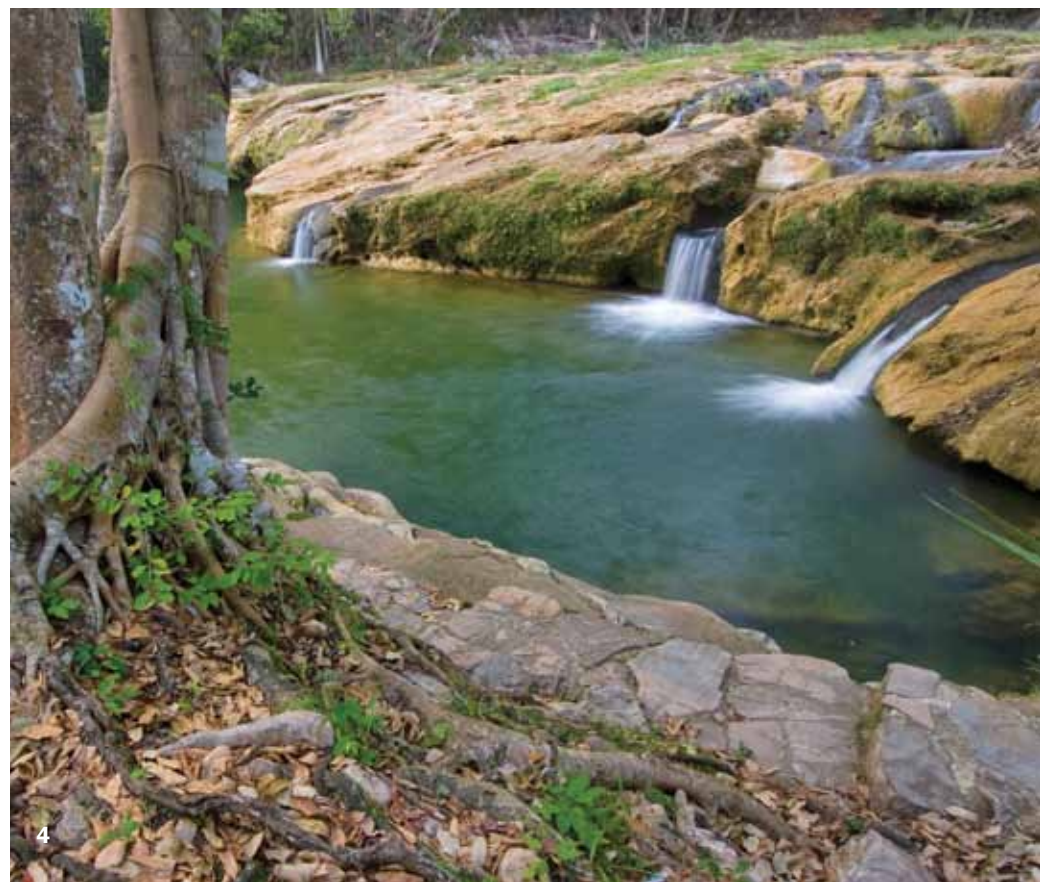
For the cyclist, roads populated only by the occasional 1950s Cadillac chugging alongside an ox cart, numerous and welcoming home-stays, charming cities blissfully free of tourist-oriented kitsch, and a landscape that varies marvelously with each bend in the road, all makes Cuba an intoxicating option for a two-wheeled adventure. Where else do you have opalescent beaches, cathedrals, and mountains cheek by jowl? All in

a caught-in-a-time-warp setting. Even today, many more Cubans, young and aged, use two wheels instead of four.

Spend a couple weeks, or better yet a few months, cycling in the Caribbean's largest country, and soon there will be a little more *cha cha cha* in your pedal stroke as you soak in decaying colonial mansions, passionate domino matches between cigar-puffing grandpas, and jungle-covered peaks under bluebird skies. Cool off after a ride in bathtub-warm seas or refuel on elephantine portions of rice, tomatoes, and chicken dished out by your *casa particulares* host. Spend evenings at the ballpark or sipping mojitos while you get your salsa on and then learn to embrace the pre-dawn cacophony of the roosters.

Above all it's the spontaneity, indomitable spirit, and romantic layers of the people that make Cuba a worthy addition to any cycling bucket list. Someday soon, one only hopes, more U.S. cyclists will be able to discover what made Ernest Hemingway want "to stay here forever."

1. Cuba's most impressive coastal ride is located in the isolated Gamma province. **2.** Tobacco is a major cash crop in Cuba's western Pinar del Rio province. **3.** A rare dry-season downpour brings with it a special gift near Soroa. **4.** The cascading pools at Las Terrazas make for a refreshing post-ride swim.





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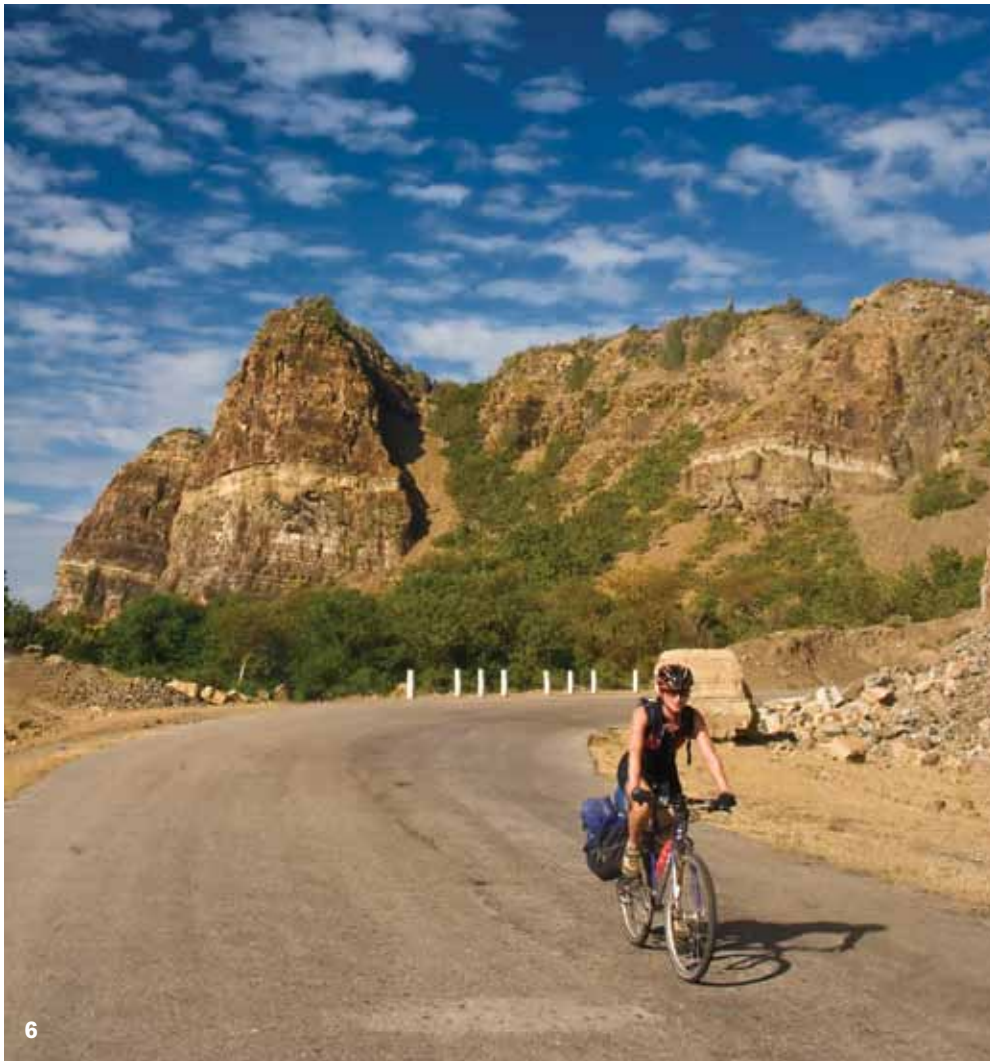
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1. Riding to the seaside town of Baracoa with former Cuban professional cyclist Frank Correa. 2. Cigars and Cuba are synonymous, especially in Havana. 3. New Year's Eve in Cuba means one thing: Pig roast time! 4. Rider Tabi Ferguson soaks in the neo-classical architecture of Cienfuegos. 5. Locals gather up coconuts for thirsty tourists at Playa Ancón. 6. Imposing hills are a constant companion along Cuba's stunning Southeast Road to Santiago de Cuba.

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1. Spectacular limestone *mogotes* dot much of Cuba's Valle de Viñales. **2.** Some of the world's best mechanics, including this one in Trinidad, keep thousands of vintage cars chugging along. Some say Cuba is the world's biggest automotive museum. **3.** A detour is required on the ride to Soroa in western Cuba. Roads can be hit and miss throughout the country. **4.** Street music is omnipresent in Havana.



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1. A fresh seafood dinner is prepared after a long day in the saddle in eastern Cuba. **2.** Rider Tabi Ferguson goes off-road in Pinar del Rio province. **3.** Cuba's Southeast Road is in just rough enough condition to keep the tourist vehicles at bay, but riders are rewarded with one of the most impressive rides in the Caribbean. **4.** School children on the La Farola pass near Baracoa.



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