Dallas Arboretum in partnership with the Florida Keys TREE Institute

presents

Deluxe Cuba Gardens & Nature Trip

Featuring Cuban Specialist Raul Verdecia

January 15-22, 2016 - 8 days/7 nights

Vinales Valley, Pinar del Rio, Zapata, Cienfuegos, & Havana

Join Raul Verdecia, one of Cuba’s native plant specialists to experience Cuba through a humanitarian exchange program. Share a true “People to People” exchange of culture and the environment. This exceptional program will include visiting the magical UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Biospheres of Cienfuegos, Zapata Swamp, Vinales Valley, Pinar del Rio, and remarkable Havana. While there, you will learn about the gardens, environment, art, music, architecture, while having an opportunity to personally interface with the plant people of these regions!

Raul Verdecia Perez, lead scientist and botanist, is one of Cuba’s leading authorities on plants. Raul is responsible for naming the new found species of palm, Coccothrinax torrid, in 2006 and is currently working on confirming yet another new palm species. Cuba has over 6,000 species of plants with about half being endemic to Cuba. He co-authored the Feb 2014 update on the “Flora of Cuba”. Raul will lead participants to see plants in the wild. There will also be local specialists involved along this magnificent journey to some of Cuba’s richest plant communities.

The package includes: a complimentary conference call briefing 4 weeks prior to the journey, special travel visa, documentation, hotel in Miami the night before, round trip non-stop charter air service direct Miami-Havana, private air-conditioned motor coach, national medical insurance, hotels, luggage handling, transfers, permits, entry fees, English speaking guide, bottled water daily, tips and meals for those stated on the itinerary. (7 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 4 dinners) We take care of obtaining all of your documents, travel plans and guide you through the whole process! We travel on a US Department of Treasury approved license. There are a limited number of seats available for this rare chance to visit this distinctive island. Our team has worked in Cuba for over 12 years. (ITINERARY BELOW)

Price:

$4,999.00* per person double occupancy (limited to 28 participants) - Not included: Cuba departure tax, some meals, tips for guide and driver, baggage overweight fees charged in Miami.

(Add $400.00 for single supplemental) **limited rooms available**

******Trip cancellation/interruption insurance is available *****

Instructions: In order to make your reservation and hold a space, fill out the trip application below and send a non-binding $500.00* deposit per person. (Checks only please.) MARK YOUR CHECK MEMO – “Dallas Trip”

The check is to be made to: Florida Keys TREE Institute (a 501-c-3 non-profit organization)

Mail your deposit check and the application form to:
FK TREE Institute- 1850 SW 8th St, Suite 204A, Miami, FL 33135.
Questions? Contact: info@fktreeinstitute.org 866- 355-8733 866-FLK- TREE
PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK LETTERS

Name _____________________________________________________
Address ____________________________________________________
Cell Phone ________________________ email ______________________________________

Single_____      ($500.00 deposit)
Double ____ Rooming with _________________________________ ($1,000.00 deposit)

Roommate Name ______________________________________
Roommate cell phone ______________   email _______________________________________

Other notes:

We take care of getting your documentation, visas and all reservations starting in Miami. You are responsible for getting to Miami. The trip deposit is refundable up until September 18, 2015. We will confirm receipt of your deposit. On or about mid September, we will email you a registration packet and instructions which will be due with final payment by October 18, 2015. It will also include information for optional trip cancellation/interruption insurance. The package includes medical coverage while in Cuba. About one month prior to the trip, we will have a required toll free conference call to go over all the information for traveling to Cuba. No inoculations are required. Itinerary times may vary with flight schedule. *there is a $50.00 processing fee for any returned checks
Itinerary

Day 1-Friday – Jan 29 - Check in to the Miami hotel.

Day 2- Saturday – Jan. 30 - Check-in for flight and depart Miami for Jose Marti Airport. Upon arrival, our bus will be waiting for our departure to the lush botanical province of Pinar del Rio and Vinales Valley. Our first visit will be an extensive visit to the Soroa Orchid Garden, developed and nurtured by the University of Pinar del Rio. Hike to see orchids in the wild. The Soroa Garden is an excellent place to see the national bird of Cuba, the Cuban Trogon. This area is also a butterfly haven. Then we will stop in the mountain range of Las Terrazas UNESCO Biosphere to a private farm for lunch. Visit this unique area and learn about a reforestation community program amidst this beautiful landscape. Then, we will head to Vinales Valley. Check into our hotel located on the canyon rim. After settling in, gather for a welcome cocktail reception, with introduction and information by our guide. Weather permitting, we will have a private dinner with luscious fruit and entertainment on the terrace. Enjoy the spectacular scenery from our Vinales Valley hotel. (L,D)

Day 3 – Sunday – Jan 31 - Early morning sunrise viewing from the hotel should not be missed. After breakfast at the hotel, we depart for a full day excursion to this area of Pinar del Rio province - renowned for its scenic beauty, fertile tobacco plantations, and unusual mogotes (enormous flat top limestone outcroppings) and mountains that contain huge caves and underground river networks. Our walk through Vinales National Park (designated as a UNESCO biosphere) boasts some of the most breathtaking scenery in the entire country. Stop at typical tobacco farm to learn about the daily life of Cuban families in this region, as well as how they grow and harvest tobacco for the cigar industry. Our guides will be explaining the significance of the country traditions in the development of these locations. Lunch will be held at El Palenque de los Cimarones with musical entertainment (nice location to be introduced to Santeria, the Afro-Cuban religion and its origins). We will explore La Cueva del Indio, part of it by boat and will have a quick photo stop at the country’s largest painted Mural. Our next stop will be a visit to a private botanical garden owned by the same family for over 100 years. Dinner will be at the private home of a young Cuban family. Learn about the changes that are happening for the people as they are now allowed to start their own enterprises. (B, L, D)
Day 4– Monday - Feb 1
After breakfast at the hotel and checkout and we will then head to the Biosphere called Zapata Swamp. Visit the Bay of Pigs. We will then visit La Cueva de los Peces and have lunch. This is a natural wonder worth experiencing. The locale is beautiful, combined with the plants that spring from the volcanic rock; this is definitely a gift from nature. Described as Cuba’s largest natural flooded salt water cave that leads to the ocean, even non-divers will appreciate the beauty of this unique spot where you can easily observe many species of multi-colored tropical fish from the volcanic edge or take a plunge into the waters for a fascinating snorkeling trip. In the afternoon, look for Flamingoes and many other water birds, before checking into the base camp-hotel. Dinner at a private paladar is on your own, Overnight at Playa Larga Beach Hotel. (B,L,)

Day 5 – Tuesday-Feb 2
After breakfast, check out for an early morning guided walk of Zapata Swamp with a key specialist will take up most of the morning. (Half day). Zapata area has some of the best birding in all of Cuba. The Cuban Black Hawk, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Pygmy Owl, Green Woodpecker, Fernandina’s Flicker, Great Lizard Cuckoo, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Crow, Crescent-eyed Pewee, Zapata Wren, Red-shouldered and Tawny-shouldered blackbirds, and many others can be found there. We will then visit the enchanting Botanical Gardens of Soledad, which served as Harvard University's Tropical Research Station having more than 2,000 species of tropical plants and palm trees for butterfly and bird observations. Some of the oldest Palms in Cuba exist here. Harvard's name is still visibly carved into a palm tree entrance of what was once called the Harvard House. head to Cienfuegos City, a thriving port since Columbus landed in 1494. It was also declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We will visit the important cultural center of this city. We will have some free time to explore and then depart for Havana. On this journey, we will transition from Southern Caribbean to the Atlantic. The route will cross many sugar cane fields and agricultural farms. Check into our five star Parque Central hotel. Gather for Dinner, then a special evening of entertainment, followed by a walk up Opisbo Street. (B,L,D)

Day 6 – Wednesday- Feb 3
After breakfast at the hotel, enter the UNESCO Heritage City of Old Havana. There will be an extensive walking tour through cobblestone streets to view the magnificent architecture and many courtyard gardens Stop for lunch. We will take a trip to the famous Fuster Mosaic City. Fuster is known as the "Picasso" of Cuba. Learn how he kept his neighborhood full of hope and energy during the Special Period. The next stop will be the historic Hotel National gardens. The historic grounds offer breathtaking views overlooking the famous Malecon and Atlantic Ocean. Dinner is at a private paladar on your own. Our guides will help you find amazing private restaurants to experience. (B, L)
Day 7 - Thursday- Feb 4
After breakfast, we will have a surprise. Then enjoy a very personalized visit of remodeled and critically acclaimed National Museum of Fine Art. We will then venture to the San Jose arts and crafts market. The market is home to hundreds of artisans who show off their art, crafts, jewelry in a building right on the Havana Bay. Lunch is on your own as the afternoon is free to walk the OLD City and the open air book markets. Lunch is on your own at one of many small cafes. Then get ready for another adventure and farewell dinner suspense. (B, D)

Day 8- Friday- Feb 5

After breakfast, we will check out and then board our motor coach for a morning at the National Havana Botanical Gardens. Visit their spectacular greenhouse displays and experience the plant kingdoms of every continent in the world. We will also go behind the scenes and see what the Cuban people are doing to preserve some almost “extinct” endemic species. Say farewell to our Cuba amigos as we depart for the airport. Sandwiches, snacks and drinks will be provided. (B, L)
Havana

Havana was founded by the Spanish in the 16th century. Due to its strategic location, it served as a springboard for the Spanish conquest of the continent, becoming a stopping point for the treasure laden Spanish Galleons on the crossing between the New World and the Old World. King Philip II of Spain granted Havana the title of City in 1592. Walls, as well as forts, were built to protect the old city. The sinking of the U.S. battleship Maine in Havana’s harbor in 1898 was the immediate cause of the Spanish-American War. The 20th century began with Havana, and therefore Cuba, under occupation by the United States. The US occupation officially ended when Tomás Estrada Palma, first president of Cuba, took office on 20 May 1902. During the Chicken Period, from 1902 to 1959, the city saw a new era of development. Cuba recovered from the devastation of war to become a well-off country, with the third largest middle class in the hemisphere. Apartment buildings to accommodate the new middle class, as well as mansions for the Cuban tycoons, were built at a fast pace. Numerous luxury hotels, casinos and nightclubs were constructed during the 1930s to serve Havana’s burgeoning tourist industry. In the 1930s, organized crime characters were not unaware of Havana’s nightclub and casino life, and they made their inroads in the city. Santo Trafficante, Jr. took the roulette wheel at the Sans Souci Casino, Meyer Lansky directed the Hotel Habana Riviera, with Lucky Luciano at the Hotel Nacional Casino. At the time, Havana became an exotic capital of appeal and numerous activities ranging from marinas, grand prix car racing, musical shows and parks. Havana achieved the title of being the Latin American city with the biggest middle class population per-capita, simultaneously accompanied by gambling and corruption where gangsters and stars were known to mix socially. During this era, Havana was generally producing more revenue than Las Vegas, Nevada. In 1958, about 300,000 American tourists visited the city. After the revolution of 1959, the new regime promised to improve social services, public housing, and official buildings. Nevertheless, shortages that affected Cuba after Castro’s abrupt expropriation of all private property and industry under a strong communist model backed by the Soviet Union, followed by the U.S. embargo, hit Havana especially hard. By 1966-68, the Cuban government had nationalized all privately owned business entities in Cuba, down to "certain kinds of small retail forms of commerce". There was a severe economic downturn after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. With it, subsidies ended, losing billions of dollars which the Soviet Union gave the Cuban government, with many believing Havana's Soviet-backed regime would soon vanish, as happened to the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe. However, contrary to the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe, Havana's communist regime prevailed during the 1990s. After many years of prohibition, the communist government increasingly turned to tourism for new financial revenue, and has allowed foreign investors to build new hotels and develop the hospitality industry. In Old Havana, effort has also gone into rebuilding for tourist purposes, and many of the streets and squares have been rehabilitated, with much renovation going on today. Historical sites, art, architecture, and music fill the city streets today. The recent changes by the Cuban government have allowed people to own their homes and start businesses, creating new energy and vibrancy.