

## **Holguín: option for nature tourism**

by Roberto Escalona Betancourt - Monday, May 06, 2019

<https://vinculando.org/en/holguin-option-for-nature-tourism.html>

### **Introduction**

The island of Cuba stands out internationally for its work in the conservation of nature, one of its greatest attractions, and therefore the preservation of the environment is a responsibility of the Cuban tourism sector.

The country's biota is characterized by more than 200 protected areas identified at the local and national levels, high richness in terms of the composition of flora and fauna species, and a variety of ecosystems, from tropical rainforests to coastal and marine environments.

The Cuban fauna has some 16,500 species described, in a context where some zoological groups show an endemism of more than 90 percent, while the autochthonous flora registers more than 6,300 varieties, in a multicolored panorama and in the most diverse forms.

Regions such as Viñales, Las Terrazas and Soroa, in Pinar del Río; Zapata Peninsula, in Matanzas; Guajimico, in Cienfuegos; Topes de Collantes, in Sancti Spíritus, and the Sierra Maestra, in Granma and Santiago de Cuba, basically concentrate the greatest resources for the expansion of cultural tourism on the island.

However, the holguinero territory, with its condition of being between the regions of the country of greater biological diversity; it counts on picturesque reliefs of great landscaping value; the beauty of its marine bottoms; its speleological attractions, the existence of places of inestimable historical-cultural value; it gathers appreciable riches that can be turned into offers of nature tourism. If to this is included the existence of beaches that attract tourism of stay, propitious conditions are given to offer optionals and products of this cut.

The tourist potential for activities related to nature is located in coastal ecosystems, in the highlands of Maniabón and the mountains of the East. The area is dominated by a tropical climate with average annual temperatures of 24 ° C, with rainfall ranging in the northwest between 800 and 1000 mm and higher humidity conditions towards the east (1000 and 2000).

This sensible variation of the rainy regime, together with the diversity of rocks, types of soils and the conditions of insularity also characteristic of our territory has contributed among other factors to the existence of a high rate of floristic and faunistic endemism, located fundamentally in natural protected areas, proposed and declared, of national and local significance.

The Holguín region is among the territories of the country with the greatest biological and landscape diversity, in which the uniqueness of the landscape and its beaches is perceived, as well as the existence of protected and wild areas of world relevance such as the Alejandro de Humbolt National Park.

Holguín, in addition, is on the axis of the Caribbean migratory bird corridor and has different speleological attractions such as the flooded caverns of Blue Tanks in Caletones.

It is also distinguished by the beauty and naturalness of the seabed and is a place of invaluable cultural values on a local scale, associated with natural and rural sites.

The main options that make up the system of offers of this activity with potential in the territory are nautical walks through sites where natural scenery predominate, contemplative diving by underwater trails, ecological fishing, bird watching, observation of flora and fauna through properly designed trails, as well as low-complexity routes through mountainous areas, speleotourism, in addition to sports activities in natural spaces.

At present, the main areas with aptitudes for nature tourism in the territory are: the Protected Area of Managed Resources: Cayo Saetía and the marine zone, the National Park Alejandro Humboldt, the Natural Park La mensura and the Natural Protected Landscape of Bahía de Naranjo, includes the Northwest Sector of the Cerro de Yagüajay and the marine zone of Bahía de Naranjo.

## **Cayo Saetía and the marine area**

It is located at the entrance to Nipe Bay, considered the largest hunting preserve in the country and with a wide variety of species. In its 42 square kilometers of extension, the islet shows more than half of the territory populated by forests, which in turn serves as shelter for a diverse fauna, with white-tailed deer, zebras and antelopes.

As far as hunting is concerned, this activity is carried out in strict observance of the established regulations, both national and international, to avoid damage to the habitat of the area and to preserve the natural environment.

Under the conception of a Natural Park, Cayo Saetía maintains a virginity not invaded by the hand of man and which allows the conservation of the original flora and fauna to the present day.

Visitors can access the most diverse points of the islet using vehicles suitable for these endeavours, and on their way they encounter wild boars, buffaloes, ostriches, peacocks, zebras, tocororos, antelopes, hutias and wild bulls.

In addition to the above, dozens of varieties of birds have chosen that portion of the archipelago to inhabit, accompanied at times of the year by other species of a migratory nature.

For lovers of diving there are also offers, because a coral reef borders the key, the same that is located on the north coast of the eastern Cuban province of Holguín.

Transparent waters, fine sand and a coast where carmelite rock formations predominate offer a singular attraction, with diverse shades of colors in the 12 beaches of the islet and that constitute an exclusive spectacle of the site.

The tourist infrastructure of the island has 12 air-conditioned rooms, television, restaurant specializing in exotic meats and Creole food.

In the latter establishment tourists can taste a wide variety of dishes made with animals that have their home on the cay, to which are added fish and shellfish caught in the waters that surround it.

## **National Park: Alejandro Humboldt**

Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2001, it constitutes a reclaimed scenario for the practice of the modalities of nature tourism.

The size, altitudinal diversity, complex lithologies of terrestrial forms of the "Alejandro de Humboldt" National Park have resulted in a range of ecosystems and species unparalleled in the Insular Caribbean.

Due to the serpentine, peridotite, karst and pseudo-carsic geology of the region, the "Alejandro de Humboldt"

National Park is an excellent example of the current processes in the evolution of species and communities in ultrabasic rocks that represent special challenges for plant survival.

The "Alejandro de Humboldt" National Park contains the most important and significant natural habitats of the entire insular Caribbean for in situ conservation of terrestrial biological diversity. It has 16 of the 28 plant formations defined by Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean, which is a unique biogeographic province.

It is one of the most important sites for the conservation of endemic flora in the entire Western Hemisphere - almost 70% of the 1,302 species of spermatophytes already described, out of an estimated total of 1,800-2,000, are endemic to the Park.

The "Alejandro de Humboldt" National Park is one of the most biologically diverse terrestrial tropical ecosystems on an island at one point on Earth. The rates of endemism of vertebrate and invertebrate animals found in the Park are also very high.

## **La Mensura National Park**

It is located in the heights of the municipality of Pinares de Mayarí -isolated plateau in the Nipe plateau-, it is included as the second national park of the eastern province of Holguín and one of the three most modern in Cuba.

The vegetable kingdom of La Mensura National Park constitutes an important component of the biodiversity of the Cuban archipelago due to its endemism, danger of extinction and capacity to adapt to the extreme ecological conditions of the place, with 100 species that only exist in this region of Holguín. In addition, its vegetation presents notable differences according to the changes in height, from a dry coastal manigua to a forest of small leaves perennially green.

Higher up in La Mensura National Park is the mountain rainforest, rich in flora and with endemic taxa such as the sabrina (*Juniperus saxicola*). Pines from the Sierra Maestra (*Pinus maestrensis*) also grow, colonizing areas of landslides and finally being inserted into the forest, while a touch of color and biotic richness, no doubt, the butterfly provides day, which is ideal for hiking and bird watching.

The site also promotes the development of environmental culture in the area in Holguín, especially among children, through circles of interest in the eight existing primary schools in the region.

The program of cultural actions favors the rescue of peasant traditions with incidence in the identity of the mountaineer and the knowledge of the regulations established for the functioning of the National Park La Mensura in Holguín.

## **Naranjo Bay Natural Park**

It constitutes one of the unavoidable visits in holguinera land. It covers 1 000 ha<sup>2</sup> with abundant vegetation. On the coast there are mangroves, coastal mangroves and trees endemic to the Cuban coastline, which covers an area of 32 km.

The Park offers tempting recreational options for those who seek the enjoyment of nature: visit the ecotourism trails "Las Guanas" and Peñón-Conuco de Mongo-Viña, respectively, in addition to yacht rides, visit the aquarium to see the dolphin and sea lion show, taste seafood or the taste of Creole cuisine in the countryside.

Those who love outdoor sports, the offers are wide, standing out for their preference the golf training course and

the Rodeo. As an exclusive accommodation offer, the park has a comfortable cabin built on a small key next to the aquarium and two rustic cabins that recreate the customs of the local peasants located on land near the sea.

In addition to these places, in Holguín there are others with great natural attractions, which encourage the development of different activities linked to nature tourism, such as: the Pico Cristal National Park, the Caletones ecological reserve and the marine zone, as well as the Cerros Cárnicos de Maniabón (Silla de Gibara, Cerro Colorado and Los Portales), among others.

The current offer of the tourist product of nature is commercialized in a complementary way to the tourism of sun and beach. It is concentrated in Bahía de Naranjo, Cayo Saetía and Pinares de Mayarí (Parque Nacional La Mensura, Parque Natural Jardín del Pinar).

It is considered that the level of exploitation of these resources and the rest of the areas is not in correspondence with the existing potential bearing in mind that in the region it is possible to segment Nature tourism in three modalities (ecological tourism, adventure tourism and rural tourism).

It is also important to note that 90% of the national tourism entities that make up the Nature Group are present in the region, the potential is also defined within the region, there are courses prepared for the training of guides and other tourism operators, while surveys have been conducted in the territory, market explorations that show the growing demand for outdoor options associated with nature, new options are developed in Bahía de Naranjo, cycle routes are commercialized through natural places such as the Green Route of growing acceptance, procedures have been established at national and provincial level for the compatibility and approval of natural areas suitable for tourist use through a system of trails properly designed and regulated.

The holguinero territory is recognized among the highest percentage of biodiversity of the country endorsed by the study of specialists related to nature. Favourable climatic conditions for the development of activities during most of the year.

Finally, it is good to point out that nature tourism maintains for the region, from the external point of view, an average position, which is supported by a growing increase in the arrival of tourists to the country, favored by an environment of social security and security to the visitor and by the increase in the world tendency to increase environmental awareness and by the knowledge of nature and local traditions.