Painting the Cuban Landscape

In December 2017 I went to the Escambrey Mountains and Trinidad de Cuba in south-central Cuba with birders and photographers. It was gorgeous, despite the recent ravages of Hurricane Irma. I am returning December 4-11 2018 to this area with a small group of artists who love to work outdoors. We are going with Joni Ellis from Optics for the Tropics, who runs several trips there each year and uses local guides familiar with the regions we visit.

As a participant, you must be able to paint or draw outside relatively quickly (2-3 hours) per location. The emphasis will be on painting the landscape (in any media, including watercolor, oil or acrylic, pencil, pastel) but we also may have some time for painting cityscapes in Trinidad and possibly Havana. There will be plenty of individual time as well.

Photographers are welcome but remember you will be with other artists who cannot work as quickly as you might. If you are a writer or musician
inspired by the outdoors and intrigued by an opportunity to reflect and be creative in the Cuban landscape, this may be a great trip for you, too.

The trip is being planned primarily as a group of 8-10 artists exploring the Cuban landscape together. This will not be a workshop, but I will be available to share my techniques for painting and sketching outdoors with anyone who wants it. I am hoping we will learn much from one another.

**Dates:** December 4-11, 2018  
**Cost:** $1500 ($500 due upon registration)  
Please see the following pages for Itinerary and Registration  
For questions about the art elements of the trip, please contact Jeff Ripple ([jeff@jeffrippleart.com](mailto:jeff@jeffrippleart.com)). For questions regarding trip specifics, contact Joni Ellis ([joni@opticsforthetropics.org](mailto:joni@opticsforthetropics.org))
Itinerary

Tuesday, December 4
Fly to Havana. We then travel on a comfortable bus to Lomas de Banao Ecological Reserve in the Sancti Spiritus Province of south-central Cuba, check in and have dinner. This biological station is well off the radar and features little-explored mountains, waterfalls, tropical forest, rare birds and steep limestone cliffs. We’ll find rivers, lush tropical vegetation, and rustic farms in the foothills. The reserve's highest peak in the Guamuhaya Mountains is just over 2700 feet.

Wednesday and Thursday, December 5 -6
Explore Banao Ecological Reserve, sketch, paint, photograph, journal, swim in the waterfall and hike. If conditions permit, we may journey with our art gear by mule back to nearby mountain peaks. We can also travel by bus down to the little town of Banao (set amid the mountain peaks by a river) and paint street scenes and farms. I am working on possible visits to artists and their studios local to the Sancti Spiritus region, including Ana Theresa Toledo Hernandez and Diego Torres.
Friday, December 7
Depart Banao and head towards Topes de Collantes in the Escambray mountains. We will stop along the way to sketch roadside farms and paint the scenic Sugar Mill Valley. If time allows, we may also stop in historic Trinidad for architectural sketching, photography, and lunch. Arrive at Topes, check in, and meet for dinner.

Saturday and Sunday, December 8-9
Nature is the big attraction of Topes de Collantes National Park. There are several scenic overlooks with views of the mountains (including one that includes the distant coastline near Trinidad de Cuba), trails to waterfalls, grottos, canyons and natural pools with crystalline water, mountainside villages and farms, and lush tropical vegetation and birds, including Cuban parrots. Generally our transport to destinations within the park will be by Russian cargo truck, an adventure in itself.

Some of the world’s finest coffee is grown in this region, so we will be sure to visit the coffee museum for a cup or two. We may also schedule a visit to a local Improv group and the local art museum.
Monday, December 10
Depart Topes for Havana with lunch on the road. After arriving in Havana and checking in, we will have dinner and then visit Fabrica de Arte Cubano, a multi-room gallery, club, and cinema. Very avant garde!

Tuesday, December 11
Depending on when your flight leaves Havana, you may have a few hours to explore Old Havana’s plazas and cobblestone streets before heading off to the airport. The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana in Old Havana has a variety of styles of painting and sculpture ranging from the Colonial to modern. If you are flying out of Tampa, that flight generally departs about 6 PM.

If there is something special you want to see or do, we want to make every effort to work it into the schedule. Just let us know on the form below. We will send more specific information to registered participants about what to bring, lodging, restaurants, etc. as we get closer to the departure date.

All images and painting of Cascada Bella Waterfall at Banao © Jeff Ripple. Photo of Jeff painting at Cascada Bella courtesy of Allison Reeves
Registration Info
The $1500 trip fee
INCLUDES: meals, lodging, ground transportation, guides, and entrance fees.
DOES NOT include: Airfare, visa, guide and driver tips, alcoholic drinks, souvenirs.

Flights from Florida airports
Southwest Airlines is Joni’s favorite because they allow 2 free bags. She prefers Southwest’s Tampa to Havana flight, but you may need to schedule with other airlines based on your location.

Southwest
TAMPA - TPA    Departs 7:00 AM Returns 7:30 PM
ORLANDO - MCO Departs w/layover in Ft.Lauderdale Returns
FT.LAUDERDALE - FLL Departs 12:10 PM/Returns 10:35 AM or 3:50 PM

JetBlue flies from West Palm and Ft. Lauderdale
American and Delta also fly into Havana from other locations

VISA - a tourist visa is required, Southwest has a special deal for a $50 visa that you purchase after you acquire your ticket. Sometimes you purchase it online, and pick it up at the airport when you check in. Other times you buy it at the airport near the gate. ALWAYS print out your confirmation and bring with you.

To reserve space please submit the following registration form with your $500 non-refundable deposit.

Please make checks payable to:
Optics for the Tropics

Mail to: 2205 SE 23rd Place, Gainesville, FL 32641

If you have any questions please contact Joni Ellis at Joni@OpticsfortheTropics.org or 352-262-7300.
Date of program: December 4-11, 2018

Name:
First: _____________________ Middle: ___________ Last: _____________________

Address:
________________________________________________
_______________________________________________

Cell Phone:
____________________________________________

Email:
________________________________________________

Occupation:_______________________________________________

Passport #: ________________________________ Expiration:
____________________________________________

U.S. Citizen? Yes _____ No ______ if not, citizen of:
_____________________________________________

Date of birth: ____________________ Place of birth:
_____________________________________________

Gender (used for matching room mates): __________________

Person to contact in case of emergency:
_____________________________________________

Relation: ______________________________ Phone:
_____________________________________________

Spanish language ability: None _____ Basic _____ Conversational _____ Fluent _____
Assign me a roommate: ________ Do you smoke: No _____ Yes _____

I wish to share a room with:

___________________________________________________________

I prefer a single room with the additional cost of $30 a night. ______
please initial.

List special dietary needs, medical conditions, or special needs I should be aware of.

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Briefly describe your expectations for this program.