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The Big Short Break

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Extract

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SVALBARD ARCTIC ADVENTURE

EXPERIENCE THIS »

RACE OVER THE SNOW AT 60MPH THROUGH EERIE, MISTY VALLEYS AND SPECTACULAR GLACIAL SCENERY, KNOWING THAT YOU'RE MOST LIKELY BEING WATCHED BY POLAR BEARS.





AT A GLANCE

SVALBARD ARCTIC ADVENTURE

SVALBARD



MUST SEE Glaciers calving straight into the icy sea at Tempelfjorden » If you're lucky, the Northern Lights » The effects of global warming, which is altering the climate of the polar regions more rapidly than anywhere else

MUST DO Track polar bears on a snowmobile safari » Drive your own team of huskies » Explore the inside of a glacier

RESTAURANTS/BARS The popular Barentz Pub will serve you the northernmost pint on planet Earth

SOUVENIRS Stunning images from local photographer Herta Grondal

BOOK TO PACK *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* by Barry Lopez

DON'T FORGET… Slippers… it's customary in Svalbard to take off your shoes before entering a home and this goes for hotels and restaurants too. Pack slippers if you don't want to walk around in your socks

PRICE ■■■□□

BEST FOR… WOULD-BE POLAR EXPLORERS » Where? Not many people have heard of Svalbard, though some might recall it as one of the settings for Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* books. First discovered by Vikings in the 12th century, Svalbard – which means 'cold coast' in old Norse – is a remote archipelago in the Arctic Ocean, north of Norway. To give you an idea of just how far north we're talking, Oslo is almost as close to Africa as it is to Svalbard. It is so remote that the Norwegians are building a 'doomsday vault' there which will contain a seed bank for all the world's most important crop plants, designed to preserve them in the event of a global catastrophe. Once a departure point for polar explorers like Roald Amundsen, Svalbard is clearly not your typical weekend destination, but for adventurous souls it offers a surprisingly accessible opportunity to experience untouched Arctic wilderness. Dog-sledding across Spitsbergen, the main island, takes you through frozen landscapes of glaciers, mountains and fjords full of blue icebergs – think the Scottish Highlands during an ice age – or you can go in search of polar bears, which hunt for seal on the pack-ice. Other wildlife includes reindeer, walrus and ptarmigan (snow grouse). Spring is a good time to travel to Svalbard, with a permanent orange twilight glow giving way to midnight sun by late April.

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SVALBARD ARCTIC ADVENTURE

2 HRS FROM UK
3 HRS TRANSFER

4 DAYS
2 DAYS OFF WORK

MAR -15°/-9°; APR -12°/-5°
MAY -5°/-1°

DAY 1 Evening flight to Oslo, connecting to Longyearbyen, the main settlement of Svalbard » If you're travelling in late April or May it will still be light when you land at around 0100 » Overnight in Longyearbyen

DAY 2 Morning dog-sledding trip: meet and harness your husky team for the 3-hour sled ride up the local valley » Afternoon at leisure to explore Longyearbyen

DAY 3 Early start for full-day snowmobile safari, tracking polar bears on the east coast » Drive on the frozen ocean up to the foot of glaciers, past vivid blue icebergs and hopefully catch a glimpse of the exceedingly well-camouflaged bears » Reindeer, Arctic foxes and seals are more common sightings

DAY 4 Morning pick-up in the 'Snow Weasel' (a tracked, all-terrain vehicle) for a trip to explore the ice cave inside the nearby glacier » Lunchtime transfer to airport for flight to Oslo and onto the UK

WHERE TO STAY

SVALBARD ARCTIC ADVENTURE

RADISSON SAS POLAR HOTEL

Originally home to Team USA during the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics, this hotel was subsequently reconstructed in Svalbard and offers a level of comfort you would not expect in the Arctic Circle.

CHARACTER Polar comfort **ROOMS** 95 **FEATURES** Central location; wireless broadband and satellite TV in all rooms; sauna; pub; good restaurant with panoramic views **LOCATION** Longyearbyen, the colourful little town that is the capital of Svalbard

SPITSBERGEN HOTEL

Overlooking Longyearbyen, the Spitsbergen Hotel was once the HQ and officers' mess for the local mining company. Now fully refurbished, it retains the character and feel of a gentlemen's club. *(Far page, middle)*

CHARACTER Old-school Arctic **ROOMS** 88 **FEATURES** Library with fireplace; bar; billiards room; gym; sauna; the best restaurant in town – with views to match **LOCATION** Longyearbyen

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PS SVALBARD IS A TRUE WILDERNESS AND REQUIRES CARE AND RESPECT FROM VISITORS. STRICT RULES ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION MEAN IT'S EVEN ILLEGAL TO PICK A FLOWER.

















HAVANA: SALSA & CIGARS

EXPERIENCE THIS »

DRIVING AROUND HAVANA IN A VINTAGE 1950'S AMERICAN CAR (WITH A RUSSIAN ENGINE) IS A GREAT WAY TO SEE THE CITY. IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE THERE ON MAY DAY, CHECK OUT THE CELEBRATIONS ON THE PLAZA DE LA REVOLUCIÓN.





AT A GLANCE

HAVANA:
SALSA & CIGARS

CUBA



MUST SEE The faded colonial grandeur of Old Havana » The Partagás cigar factory » A six-piece *son* band performing live MUST DO Take an evening stroll along the Malecón – the seafront promenade » Have a mojito on the terrace of the Hotel Nacional » Go deep-sea fishing from the Hemingway marina (where else?) RESTAURANTS/BARS Eat at a *paladar* – small restaurants run from family homes (one of the few private businesses allowed to operate). A good one is La Guarida (Calle Concordia 418, +537 863 7351) SOUVENIRS Hand-rolled cigars bought direct from the factory » Havana Club rum BOOK TO PACK *Our Man in Havana* by Graham Greene DON'T FORGET… Your passport when you go deep-sea fishing – you need it to prove you're not a Cuban national making a run for Florida PRICE ■■■□□

BEST FOR… CHAMPAGNE SOCIALISTS » Divided by 90 miles of sea, and an ocean of mutual political distrust, Cuba and the United States remain stubbornly un-reconciled almost half a century since Castro's revolution. The long-predicted demise of the world's longest-serving leader may transform the Caribbean's largest island, but for the time being it continues defiantly – surviving, if not exactly thriving, as one of the last bastions of communism. Apart from the curiosity value of witnessing the effects of fifty years of a socialist economic model – and a US embargo – a few days in Havana makes an impressively big short break and offers *mucho* bang for your filthy American buck (or slightly more welcome pound). Currently being restored from an advanced state of decay, atmospheric Old Havana is a World Heritage Site, packed with colonial architecture from an era when the city was the 'Key to the New World'. Havana's status may have declined but it still ranks as one of the most interesting places in the western hemisphere, thanks not least to a vibrant cultural scene based on the islanders' Afro-Spanish heritage – anyone familiar with the Buena Vista Social Club will know that *Habañeros* know a thing or two about music. When you've seen the sights, relax on a beach just outside the city or, if you want a real challenge, try to find somewhere that doesn't claim a tenuous connection with Hemingway…

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HAVANA:
SALSA & CIGARS

9.5 HRS FROM UK

4 DAYS
2 DAYS OFF WORK

MAR 19°/27°; APR 21°/29°
MAY 22°/30°

DAY 1 Morning flight from UK, arriving Havana mid-afternoon » Transfer to city centre » Evening to sample live music or open-air cabaret » Overnight at Hotel Nacional or Saratoga

DAY 2 Guided walking tour of Old Havana including the cathedral, theatre, Plaza de Armas and the Museum of the Revolution » Siesta » Tour of a cigar factory and see sights such as El Morro fortress, the Bacardi building and the Capitol building (modelled, ironically, on Washington's)

DAY 3 Day to go fishing, with picnic lunch on board » Evening stroll along the Malecón » Experience more of Havana's nightlife

DAY 4 Morning on the beach » Lunch of fresh lobster salad » Transfer to airport for return flight home, arriving early next morning

WHERE TO STAY

HAVANA: SALSA & CIGARS

HOTEL SARATOGA

A modern reincarnation of the famous old Saratoga hotel, located opposite the Capitol building on the edge of the 'Old Havana' district, the historic heart of the city.

CHARACTER Contemporary colonial **ROOMS** 96 **FEATURES** Prime central location; rooftop swimming pool and bar with great views over the city towards the Bay of Havana; gym; massage room; restaurant; two further bars; 24-hr room service; concierge **LOCATION** Central Havana

HOTEL NACIONAL

A Havana institution, the Nacional occupies a landmark Art Deco building directly on the famous Malecón seafront in the Vedado district, the more modern part of the city. *(Far page, top right)*

CHARACTER Grande dame **ROOMS** 457 **FEATURES** Seafront location; large gardens; two outdoor swimming pools; three restaurants; six bars; live music at the Cabaret Parisién; 24-hr room service; concierge **LOCATION** Central Havana

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PS TOURISTS MUST PAY FOR EVERYTHING IN CUBAN CONVERTIBLE PESOS (CCP). STERLING CAN BE EXCHANGED COMMISSION-FREE, WHEREAS A COMMISSION OF 10% IS LEVIED ON US DOLLARS.





