

Baracoa

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Baracoa is a municipality and city in Guantánamo Province near the eastern tip of Cuba. It was founded by the first governor of Cuba, the Spanish conquistador Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar in 1511. It is the oldest Spanish settlement in Cuba and was its first capital (the basis for its nickname *Ciudad Primada*, "First City").

Baracoa is located on the spot where Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba on his first voyage. It is thought that the name stems from the indigenous Arauaca language word meaning "the presence of the sea."

Baracoa lies on the Bay of Honey (*Bahía de Miel*) and is surrounded by a wide mountain range (including the Sierra del Purial), which causes it to be quite isolated, apart from a single mountain road built in the 1960s.

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History

The original inhabitants of the island were Taíno. They were eradicated by the Spanish all over Cuba except here and this is the only place where descendants still live. A local hero is Hatuey, who fled from the Spanish in Hispaniola and raised a Taíno army to fight the Spanish in Cuba. According to the story Hatuey was betrayed by a member of his group and sentenced to burn at the stake. It is said that just before he died a Catholic priest tried to convert him so he would attain salvation; Hatuey asked the priest if Heaven was the place where the dead Spanish go. When he received an answer in the affirmative he told the priest that he'd rather go to Hell.

Coordinates: 20°20′55″N 74°30′38″W﻿ / ﻿

Baracoa

— **Municipality** —



A view of Baracoa across the bay



Location of Baracoa in Cuba

Coordinates: 20°20′55″N 74°30′38″W﻿ / ﻿

Country	 Cuba
Province	Guantánamo
Established	1511

Area ^[1]	
 - Total	977 km ² (377.2 sq mi)

Elevation	5 m (16 ft)
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Population (2004) ^[2]	
 - Total	81,794
 - Density	83.7/km ² (216.8/sq mi)

Time zone	EST (UTC-5)
Area code(s)	+53-21

Website	Baracoa.org (http://www.baracoa.org/)
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Cruz de Parra

On 27 October 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba in a place he named Porto Santo. It is generally assumed from his description that this was Baracoa, although there are also claims it was Gibara. But Columbus also described a nearby table mountain, which is almost certainly nearby el Yunque. He wrote in his logbook ... *the most beautiful place in the world ...I heard the birds sing that they will never ever leave this place...*

According to legend, Columbus put a cross called Cruz de la Parra in the sands of what would later become Baracoa harbor.

Around 15 August 1511 (the official foundation day) Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar was appointed the first governor of Cuba and built a villa here and named the place 'Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Baracoa', thus making Baracoa the first capital of Cuba.^[3] In 1518 it received the title of city and the first Cuban bishop was appointed here. As a result several remains of the Spanish occupation can still be seen here, such as the fortifications El Castillo, Matachín and La Punta and the cemetery.

In the 16th and 17th centuries the isolated location made it a haven for illegal trade with the French and English. At the beginning of the 19th century many French fled here from the revolution of independence in Haiti, who started growing coffee and cocoa.

From the middle of the 19th century many expeditions of independence fighters landed here (including Antonio Maceo and José Martí) which greatly helped the independence from Spain in 1902.

Before the Cuban Revolution the only access was by sea, but in the 1960s a 120 km long road from Guantánamo named La Farola was built through the mountains, which was one of the showcases of the revolution. The road had already been planned by the Batista government, but never got built. The highest point of the road is at over 600 m and it passes 11 bridges.



Mount El Yunque on Baracoa bay

Economy

The main products in the region are banana, coconut and cacao. It is Cuba's main chocolate manufacturing area.

Tourism

The remote location at the eastern end of the Cuban island has kept the influence of mass tourism quite low, despite the idyllic location. Baracoa can be reached by bus from Santiago de Cuba (4 hours) or by plane from Havana (2 hours).

To the east the Fuerte Matachín (built in 1802) houses and museums are still there standing. To the west the fuerte La Punta (built in 1803) houses a restaurant, with a smaller beach next to it. And the third fort, El Castillo, on a steep hill with a commanding view of the town and both bays, is now Hotel El Castillo. The other hotels in Baracoa are Hotel Porto Santo, Hotel La Rusa, Hostal La Habanera and Villa Maguana. There are also a few casas particulares. The Catedral Nuestra Señora de la Asunción houses the earrings of the Cruz de la Parra, a cross that Cali is supposed to have brought from Spain. Although it has been carbon dated to approximately that period, it is made from a local woodtype, which means at least part of the story is not correct.



A cabin in the hills near Baracoa

There are two music venues near the central Parque Independencia, the touristy Flan de Queso and the more traditional Casa de la Flana.

Nearby are the rivers Miel and Toa, the latter of which has many waterfalls, the best known of which is 'el Saltadero', which is 17 m high.

The 575 m high table mountain el Yunque (the anvil) is 10 km to the west of Baracoa. It is a remnant of a plateau and because of its isolation it houses several unique species of ferns and palms. The only official and easiest approach to climb it starts at campismo El Yunque (simple lodgings for Cubans only), where a guide is obligatory (about 15 euro).

From Baracoa, it is possible to visit the Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt located about 20 kilometers north.

Salto Fino is the highest waterfall in the Caribbean, located in this municipality, is produced by a sudden drop in the Arroyo del Infierno (Hell's stream), a tributary of the Quibijan river. That river, along with 71 others, flows into the Toa river, which is the largest river in Cuba. The 305-meter-high Salto Fino waterfall is recorded as the 20th highest water chute in the world.

Airport

Gustavo Rizo Airport (IATA: **BCA**, ICAO: **MUBA**) is a regional airport that serves this town. This is a small airport that usually operates with national flights. Located west of the bay near the Hotel Porto Santo and about 4 km (2½ miles) NNW of Baracoa. Although flights are infrequent, Cubana de Aviación flies here occasionally from Santiago de Cuba and Havana, and the fare is very reasonable.

Gastronomy

Baracoa has some very typical dishes, such as Cucurucho, a mix of coconut and lots of sugar and other ingredients like orange, guava and pineapple and wrapped in a palm leaf. Another is Bacán, which is made from bananas and wrapped in a banana leaf. And of course there is lots of chocolate in this cocoa producing region.


Demographics

In 2004, the municipality of Baracoa had a population of 81,794.^[2] With a total area of 977 km² (377.2 sq mi),^[1] it has a population density of 83.7 /km² (216.8/sq mi).

References

- ^a ^b Statoids. "Municipios of Cuba" (<http://www.statoids.com/ycu.html>) . <http://www.statoids.com/ycu.html>. Retrieved 2007-10-05.
- ^a ^b Atenas.cu (2004). "2004 Population trends, by Province and Municipality" (http://web.archive.org/web/20070927111826/http://www.atenas.inf.cu/todo/Estadisticas/TABLA+No_3balance.htm) . Archived from the original (http://www.atenas.inf.cu/todo/Estadisticas/TABLA%20No_3balance.htm) on 2007-09-27. http://web.archive.org/web/20070927111826/http://www.atenas.inf.cu/todo/Estadisticas/TABLA+No_3balance.htm. Retrieved 2007-10-05. **(Spanish)**
- ^a <http://www.baracoa.org/>

External links

- Baracoa.org (<http://www.baracoa.org>)
- Gustavo Rizo Airport, Cubajet (http://www.cubajet.com/airports/baracoa_gustavo_rizo_airport.asp)
- Hotels in Baracoa (<http://www.hotelbaracoa.org>)
-  Chisholm, Hugh, ed (1911). *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Eleventh ed.). Cambridge University Press.

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Categories: Populated places in Cuba | Guantánamo Province | Populated places established in 1511

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