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# Havana, Cuba: From Colonial Splendor to Revolutionary Utopia

April 4-12, 2011 (including travel days)

**We** are organizing an “anniversary” tour to Cuba on the occasion of the partial resumption of legal travel for US citizens to the island which is so near, yet for so long has been so far. Ten years ago we, along with our travel partners, offered six trips, and so with this trip we propose a return and perhaps a reunion for some of those early intrepid souls! Taking advantage of direct charter flights from the US, this journey will begin and end in Miami, and will offer a sort of “tale” of these two cities inextricably linked in recent history. Participants will travel on their own to Miami where we gather for our first night for a welcome dinner which will be followed by an introductory lecture on Cuba and the highlights of the week ahead in Havana.



*Havana, Plaza de la Catedral (1777)*

The next day we will fly to Havana as a group. During our 59 minute flight the clock will be seemingly be turned back to 1959, the year of the revolution, and we will be plunged into a different world: absent will be the familiar trappings of our 21st century globalized and homogenous world and evident will be a city whose streets are not clogged with traffic with the exception of specimens of the chrome-encrusted Detroit-produced behemoths of the 1950s. Awaiting us is the largest and

best preserved Spanish Colonial city in the new world!

The 700-mile long island nation of Cuba possesses an intensely rich and layered architectural heritage made so first by



its historically important role in the Spanish Colonial world and then by a continuing vital role in trade and tourism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When the 1959 revolution ended these trends, the island’s heritage remained preserved in a richly layered time warp that is still intact today. The architectural contributions of the revolution are relatively limited but interesting, and the social and economic situations remain a unique, if sobering, contrast to much of the rest of the world. Most recently, there has been a more

focused effort to preserve and restore the colonial heritage for its obvious tourism potential.

The eight-night, nine-day visit to Cuba will focus on Havana, providing a balance of structured time and free time for participants to explore on their own. The sites will also range richly from the colonial period to the many well-preserved Havana buildings from the fifties, a period when more Cadillac automobiles were sold in that city than in any other! We will make a one day excursion out of the city to the UNESCO Biosphere site of Las Terrazas where we will visit an interesting planned community and then see the island's most extensive orchid garden. The tour will be led by Stephen Harby, architect, watercolor painter, and leader of six prior tours to Cuba as well as to countless other exotic destinations. He will be joined by local scholars, architects, preservationists and planners, and other authorities on Havana's twentieth century architecture.

We will be in one hotel for the stay, the Parque Central, well located on the park of that name between Havana Vieja (5 minutes walk to Plaza d'Armas) and steps from the Capitolio and National Theater.

So please join what will be a select group having this unique opportunity to experience Cuba under the "bell jar" of embargo and revolution—a state that will never be able to be experienced again.



*Havana, The Malecon (sea front) with Castillo de San Salvador and Castillo del Morro (below)*

## Itinerary

### Day 1—Monday, April 4, 2011. Miami

Travel independently to Miami. We will gather at a hotel convenient to the airport for drinks at 6pm, followed by dinner and lecture discussion. (D)

### Day 2: Tuesday, April 5, Havana: Arrival Day

At 9 am we check in as a group for our charter flight (operated by Continental Airlines) to Havana to arrive in early afternoon. We will have a hotel-provided box lunch to eat as convenient.

We will be met and taken for an introductory tour of the city including the districts of Miramar, Siboney, Cubanacan, Vedado, Revolution Square, Central Havana and finishing at the Hotel Parque Central. It is well located between Colonial Havana Vieja and nineteenth century Centro and enjoys views of the nearby Parque Central, particularly from its roof-top pool terrace. It will be our home for the next seven nights. Upon arrival we will have a welcome cocktail reception and

hors d'oeuvres while our bags are being delivered to our individual rooms.

The balance of the afternoon is free to explore the neighborhood or have a swim before we gather to depart for dinner at Doña Carmela to be followed by a visit to Castillo del Morro and to la Cabaña fortress to attend the cannon ceremony as we look out over the harbor and twinkling lights of Havana. This ceremony formerly signaled the closing of the harbor entrance which was achieved by raising a chain across



the narrow mouth of the channel. (B, L, D)

Day 3—Wednesday, April 6, Havana: Colonial Period

Lecture – Prof. Carlos Alzugaray – former Cuban Ambassador to the European Union and respected political scientist, Dr. Alzugaray will give a one hour lecture on US – Cuba relations. Lecture will be held on the mezzanine level of our hotel.

Morning guided walking tour of Historic Havana, where we will be led by a professional familiar with the preservation and restoration issues of the city.

We will begin in Colonial Havana, or Havana Vieja. This is the original settlement of the city adjacent to the well protected harbor (note the narrow entrance guarded by two forts) Havana Vieja has recently been intensively restored, and it is still a work in progress. Eusebio Leal, the City Historian realized the strong potential of this part of the city for restoration into hotels, museums, restaurants and shops to cater to the growing tourist market. He established a governmental corporation, Habaguanex, that would do



Havana Vieja, Plaza del Cristo, view of Capitolio (below left) and Catedral (1777) (below right)

everything from design to restoration to operation of the facilities, and in return for providing a portion of the profits to the country would have both autonomy and a monopoly in the area. We will see the five major squares, many projects in progress and the remarkable scale model that has been constructed of the district. Some highlights:

- Plaza de Armas (established 1580's), a scenic tree-lined plaza formerly at the center of influence in Cuba. It is surrounded by many of the most historic structures in Havana as well as important monuments.
- Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (1780's). The palacio currently houses the Museo de la Ciudad.
- Palacio del Segundo Cabo, a former palace incorporating Moorish, baroque and neo-classical elements.
- Plaza de San Francisco, a cobbled plaza punctuated at the center by the Fuente de los Leones and surrounded by buildings dating from the 18th century, dominated by the baroque Iglesia & Convento de San Francisco (1730's).

We will pause for lunch at Cafe Santo Angel where we may hear music performed by the musicians featured in the film, Buena Vista Social Club (or more likely their protegés). Continuing after lunch, we will see:

- Plaza Vieja. This plaza is the oldest plaza in Havana, dating from the 16th century. It served as a market plaza surrounded by aristocrat residences and





Havana, Capitolio (1927), Centro Gallego, (Belau, 1915), below.

apartment buildings. It has recently been restored.

- *Convento de Santa Clara*, which has been restored as the center of preservation and restoration arts, where Professor Rigol was formerly director.
- *Plaza de la Catedral and the Catedral de San Cristobal de La Habana* with its two mismatched towers framing a baroque façade and a main altar made of Carrara marble inlaid with gold, silver, onyx and carved wood.
- *Castillo de la Real Fuerza*, (1558 – 1577), and the former residence of the Spanish captains for over 200 years.

Dinner will be on your own, whether in the hotel's several restaurants or at nearby Prado y Neptuno, a restaurant designed by Roberto Gottardi, one of the three architects who designed the Escuelas Nacionales de Artes in Cubanacan. (B, L)

Day 4—Thursday, April 7. Havana: Eclectic Architecture/Urbanism

Today we will venture outward into Centro, the first concentric ring of development that radiated outward beyond the Colonial core in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Our leader will be Architect Maria

Elena Martin, architect, professor and co-author of the Guide to Havana's Architecture. She will show us:

- *Centro Asturiano (Manuel de Busto, 1918)*—recently renovated to house the Fine Arts Museum and retaining the most majestic staircase in Cuban architecture.
- *Manzana de Gomez*; it was one of the city's first enclosed commercial arcades.
- *Capitolio Nacional (1928)*, a fabulous monumental building, obsequiously similar to the US Capitol, and crowned by a 300-foot high dome. The recently renovated gardens are the work of the famous French landscape architect, Claude Nicholas Forestier.
- *former Centro Gallego, (Paul Belau, 1915)*, currently housing the Gran Teatro de La Habana, home of Alicia Alonso's Ballet Nacional del Cuba.
- *Parque Central and surrounding buildings including the Hotel Plaza (1908)* a remodel and expansion of the Pedroso family residence.
- *Paseo de Marti or el Prado, (Raul Otero, 1926)* a pedestrian promenade remodeled upon the inauguration of Havana's Capitol Building and lined with examples of Moorish-influenced architecture.

Here we may pause and visit to several interiors which may include:

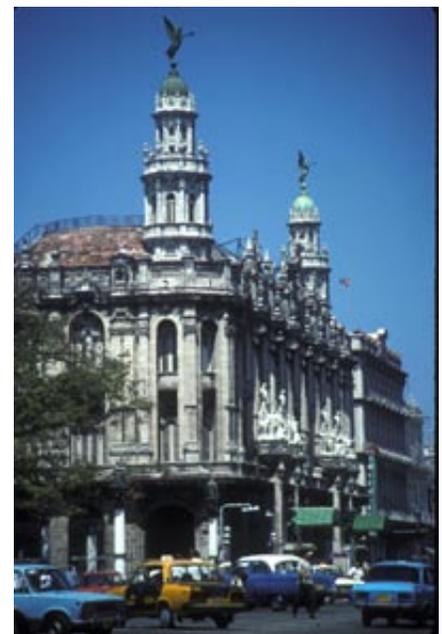
- *Palacio de los Matrimonios*, once home of Cuba's former president Jose Miguel Gomez, and the former *Asociacion de Dependientes del Comercio*, a Venetian neo-classical style building placed in a key corner of the Prado featured in the film *The Buena Vista Social Club*.

We will have lunch at a nearby restaurant. The afternoon is free to facilitate exploration on your own.

Return to hotel with dinner on your own. A list of evening entertainment options as well as Paladares (small informal restaurants operated in private homes) will be provided, including a possible ballet, opera or symphonic performance at the Gran Teatro. (B, L)

Day 5—Friday, April 8. Havana: Cultural landmarks

This morning we have arranged three exclusive private visits to experience three unique Havana cultural institutions: the Spanish Ballet of Cuba, the H. Upmann Cigar Factory, and the Museum of Cuban Art.





Havana, Club Nautico (Borges, 1957), National Art Schools, School of Art, (Porro, 1961-5), (Below)

After lunch on your own, you will be free to explore on your own, and it is suggested that you visit the following Art Deco buildings in Havana, which are near our hotel or a short cab ride away:

- *Bacardi Building*, (Eteban Rodriguez Castells, Rafael Fernandez Ruenes and Jose Menendez Menendez; 1930), located in Las Murallas district. The rich façade design is based on polychrome granite imported from Bavaria and Norway as well as colored brick, terracotta and Capellania stone. The elaborate decoration of the building crown features a bat, logo of the Bacardi company.
- *La Moderna Poesia* bookstore, which offers a selection of architectural books and guides for purchase.
- *America Building*, (Fernando Martínez Campos and Pascual de Rojas, 1941) a theatre complex, consisting of two theatres, a restaurant and some shops in the main floor and residential apartments in the upper floors. Its interiors are very well preserved and retain all the details of the original monumental design.
- *Lopez Serrano Building*, (Ricardo Mira and Miguel Rosich, 1932) and strongly reminiscent of American skyscrapers, it was the highest residential building in Havana for many years.

- *Catalina Lasa's estate in Vedado* with its beautiful and lavish Lalique crystal interiors.

Dinner tonight will also be on your own.

(B)

Day 6—Saturday, April 9. Havana; Post-war expansion districts

Today we will move to some of the outer districts of Havana discovering newer

additions that occurred after World War 2 and also after the revolution.

Our first stop will be at the Cristobal Colon Cemetery, considered to be one of the most elaborate necropolises of the world. Our guide will be Professor Geraldo Rodriguez, who has spent much of his life leading tours in the cemetery. Next we will stop at the Cuatro Camino Market, an open market selling produce and meat to the local citizenry; the stalls are filled with laughter, heckling and wonderful photo opportunities abound. Lunch at the studio of ceramic artist Jose Fuster. The artist will be our host and will show us his Gaudi-esque creations. After lunch we will go to the Cubanacan district to see one of the most unique and interesting projects embodying the optimism of the early days of the revolution:

- *National Art Schools*, (Ricardo Porro, Roberto Gottardi and Vittorio Garatti; 1961-65) in the former affluent neighborhood of Country Club Park (today known as Cubanacan). Only two of the schools were completed, the rest being abandoned and currently awaiting restoration funding recently approved by the Cuban government. After 40 years, the original team of architects reunite again to collaborate on the most



important architecture work from the Cuban Revolution.

After seeing the art schools we will continue to explore in the Cubanacan and nearby Miramar districts, where we will see,

- exterior of Club Nautico (Max Borges, Jr., 1957) may be inaccessible due to its military function.

[Note: Access to the above two sites requires special permission, which can be denied by the authorities without warning]

Our last stop of the day will be to unwind at the beach-side Beaux-Arts Club Havana where we may swim or walk on the beach and will have drinks followed by dinner at El Aljibe, located in Miramar. (B, L, D)



*Las Terrazas, (Girona and Cienfuegos, 1971), Las Ruinas (Galvan, 1971), (below left), Coppelia Ice Cream Parlor, (Girona, 1962), below right*

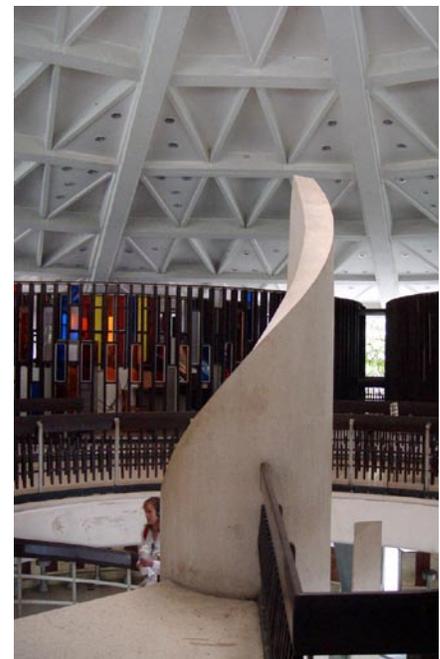
Day 7—Sunday, April 10, Havana/Las Terrazas

Today we set off from Havana for our exploration of other parts of the Island making the relatively easy trip west to the Sierra del Rosarios Biosphere Reserve, so named by UNESCO in 1985 and totaling 61,775 acres. At its heart is the planned community of Las Terrazas that was established in 1971 and houses

1,200 inhabitants. The name comes from the terraces of hardwood trees that were planted two at a time, side by side. Only one will live and the other will be used for charcoal. We will pass through a complex of prefabricated workers' housing both in blocks and in individual cottages as we ascend the hill to our hotel. These were designed by Mario Girona and Osmani Cienfuegos, until recently Cuba's minister of tourism.

We will ascend to the Cafetal Buena Vista for lunch; it was originally the site of a coffee plantation, no longer in operation due to the ravages of deforestation and a large storm whose winds removed much of the topsoil. We will view the platforms and the machinery where the beans were laid out and separated from the hulls of the fruit.

After lunch, we will make an excursion to the nearby Soroa Orchid Garden,



which claims to be the world's second largest and was established in 1943 by Spaniard Tomás Felipe Camacho whose house was at the top and is now a souvenir stand and beer garden. Lath houses shelter the orchid collections. We will return to Havana in the late afternoon for time to relax at the hotel before dinner on your own (B, L)

Day 8—Monday, April 11, Havana.

Today is a completely free day to enable independent exploration.

For those interested in seeing more of the city's architecture, a concentration on the immediately pre-revolutionary period of the fifties is suggested, visting these sites all not far from our hotel:

- *Pabellon Cuba*
- *University of Havana, and the Museum of Natural Sciences*
- *Coppelia ice cream parlor*

- *Havana Libre Hotel and other modernist structures of Vedado neighborhood*
- *as well as the earlier Hotel Nacional (McKim, Mead and White).*

Our farewell dinner party has been arranged at the Paladar and private home of artist Adelaida Herrera where we will sample a wonderful selection of home-made Cuban favorites. (B, D)

Day 9—Tuesday, April 12, Havana: Departure Day

We will bid farewell to Cuba with a stop in Parque Lenin where we will have a box lunch and later visit to see the architecture:

- *Las Ruinas restaurant (Joaquin Galvan, 1971), a curious combination of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra and Paul Rudolph located in Parque Lenin.*

Then we will proceed to the nearby airport for our return charter flight

(operated by Continental Airlines). Return is scheduled for 4:40pm at Miami. Those planning connections should make generous allowance for delays, customs clearance and transfer to domestic terminals. (B, L)  
Adios e buen viaje!

