

Cuba's People & Culture Today



Travel with the UNC General Alumni Association to Havana

April 10 to 16, 2016



"Travel to Cuba is not only legal but an enriching opportunity to witness this rich culture at our door step, 90 miles from Key West."

Dear Carolina Alumni and Friends,

We are very excited to invite you to join our People to People program for a unique opportunity to experience Cuba Today.

This program is licensed by the U.S. government to travel to Cuba to engage in cultural exchange activities.

Please join fellow Tar Heels and friends on a week of exploration and discover Cuba Today. During your week, you will visit charities operated by the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, learn about Cuba's people and society, culture and history. This program offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to travel in the time-warp that is Castro's Cuba.

We hope you will join our group!

Doug

Douglas S. Dibbert '70
President,
UNC General Alumni Association



UNC Travelers delivering donations to Catholic Charities in Havana

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Note: the [Blue Text](#) is Hyper-Linked to web sites.

- This 7 Day / 6 Night program offers an overnight in Miami at the [Marriott Courtyard Hotel](#) with orientation dinner prior to departure and five nights at the 5-Star [Hotel Parque Central](#) in Havana, located within the Old Quarter, within walking distance to all of the important historical sites.
- Travel in a private air conditioned coach with your English-speaking Cuban guide.
- Program features expert seminars and talks by renowned English-speaking Cuban experts on various subjects including: the [Roots of Cuban Music](#); [Havana's Colonial Heritage](#); the [1959 Cuban Revolution](#) and [Contemporary Art in Cuba](#). These seminars will paint a picture of the Cuban experience to help you understand the deep relationship that once existed between our two nations.
- Participate in an informative walk-through [Old Havana](#), a step back in time, to observe the neglect and promise of its restoration. It is all here in an afternoon's walk.
- Experience life in the Cuban countryside with an excursion to the western province of [Pinar del Río](#) visiting a rural community, orchid farm, country school and medical clinic. Meet and speak with members of the community.
- Private visits to artist's studios, lunch at the home/studio of [José Fuster](#) and dinner at a private home, a [paladar](#).

Restaurants on the program are chosen to offer travelers a variety of Cuban cuisine and dining atmospheres throughout Havana.

- **Special Event:** a private cooking demonstration to prepare the best known dishes of [Cuban Cuisine](#). Lunch is the prepared meal in the demonstration.
- Visit the [Hemingway Estate](#) outside Havana and a [Santería](#) shrine in a Catholic Church, an example of the interconnection of both religions.
- The program includes full health insurance issued by the Cuban agency Asistur.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Ann-Louise Aguiar '76 | Ann-Louise_Aguiar@unc.edu | (877) 962.3980

Havana & Pinar del Río

ITINERARY

Day 1: MIAMI

Independent flight to Miami. Overnight at the Courtyard Miami Airport Hotel. At check-in you will receive complete instructions for the evening's activities and the departure for the airport. An orientation dinner at the hotel. Overnight at the Marriott Courtyard Airport Hotel. | Meals D

Day 2: MIAMI TO HAVANA

Program representatives will meet you at the hotel in the morning to travel to the airport for check-in and your flight to Havana. All travel documents, visas and flight tickets, will be distributed at the airport check-in. Flight to Havana. Arrive in Havana, clear Cuban Customs, meet your English-speaking Cuban guide. Enjoy an orientation coach tour *en route* to the Hotel Parque Central in Old Havana. At the hotel, enjoy lunch as your luggage is brought to your room, room keys are distributed and program highlights are reviewed. Afternoon free for independent exploration. Your first seminar discusses the **Roots of Cuban Music** by an English-speaking Cuban expert. Cocktails at an artist studio followed by dinner at a private home. Overnight at the Hotel Parque Central. | Meals L D

Day 3: HAVANA

(Download [Map of Old Havana](#) here)

Seminar on **Colonial Havana** followed by walking tour of Havana Vieja (a special guide pamphlet will be distributed) begins at the **Plaza de Armas**, on to the **Palacio de los Capitanes Generales** and ending with a horse and carriage tour of the district. Lunch in Old Havana at a newly restored restaurant. Balance of the afternoon at leisure. Dinner is at one of the best seafood restaurants in Havana, overlooking the harbor, the perfect location for the cannon announcing that the City of Havana is closed. Overnight at the Hotel Parque Central. | Meals B L D

Day 4: HAVANA

Enjoy an informative talk on the **Cuban Revolution of 1959** and a visit the **birthplace of José Martí**. Continuing on to explore the once glorious mansions of modern Havana, the **Colon Cemetery** (a virtual sculpture garden and a testament to the wealth that was once Havana), the grand **Hotel Nacional de Cuba**, the **Rivera Hotel** (built and operated by the Mob in the late 1950s). A private preparation class on **Cuban Cuisine** (a special menu pamphlet will be distributed) lunch will be the



Tobacco Farming in Pinar del Río

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Hemingway Estate

prepared dishes in the demonstration. Following lunch travel to the **Hemingway Estate** (a testament to the author's enchantment with Cuba). Returning to your hotel, visit a **Santería** shrine in a Catholic Church, **The Virgin of Regla** (a black Madonna and white Christ child). Tonight enjoy a reception at the **Hotel Nacional**, sponsored by your General Alumni Association. Then travel in vintage **1950s American cars** to dinner at one of Havana's best known restaurants, **El Aljibe**, (specializing in a *Cuban Creole* menu). Overnight at the Hotel Parque Central. | Meals B L D

Day 5: PINAR DEL RÍO

Visit a local **Farmer's Market** before departing for the countryside of **Pinar del Río**. Visit the community, medical clinic and school. Lunch in the mountains at the **Farmer's House** followed by a nature walk. Return to Havana. Dinner is on your own. Overnight at the Hotel Parque Central. | Meals B L

Day 6: HAVANA

Seminar on Contemporary Cuban Art followed by an expert visit to the **Museum of Fine Arts, Cuban Collection**. Travel outside Havana to the fishing village outside Havana to the home and studio of **José Fuster**, a well known artist of ceramics, watercolors and oil paintings. You can browse his studio before a seafood lunch server "family-style". Following lunch, you will stop at a local charity to deliver humanitarian supplies (more details to follow). Your afternoon is free for the craft markets in Old Havana. Your **Farewell Dinner** is at one of Old Havana's best restaurants. Overnight at the Hotel Parque Central. | Meals B L D

Day 7: HAVANA TO MIAMI

After breakfast we depart for the airport and the return flight to Miami. | Meals B

PROGRAM DATES & RATES

Program dates are April 10 to 16, 2016. (7 Days/6 Nights).

The rate in Double Occupancy is \$4,230pp, for Single Occupancy please add \$350.

Program includes hotels in Miami and Havana; airport transfers; flights between Miami and Havana; private air-conditioned coach and local guide throughout; meals as indicated; all gratuities and the complete program and seminars as described. Flights to/from Miami are not included. Cuban Travel Card (Visa), Cuban medical insurance and Departure Tax are provided.

Please refer to our Reservation & Guest Information Form for more details.

READY FOR ITS CLOSE-UP?



Text Hilary Lewis **Photos** Robin Hill

TROPIC INVESTIGATES

Arriving in Cuba you enter a time warp. Yes, they still drive those 1950s cars, which surprisingly often look as pristine as well cared-for antique vehicles found at a Hollywood production studio. (They're popular moneymakers with tourists.) The "new" buildings are those from midcentury – little has been built following the Revolution and the lean economic times that have existed ever since. So a stroll along the Malecón, the urban waterfront where waves often crest just over the seawall, allows a visitor to reenact what it must have felt like to see postwar modernism when it was fresh and initially juxtaposed with European classicism and Art Deco. In many ways, Havana gives a taste of what the 1950s must have been like in Miami Beach, before the vicissitudes of taste altered the now iconic works of Morris Lapidus, Igor Polevitzky and Norman Giller, to name just a few of MiMo's practitioners.

Flight 207, now departing for **Havana, Cuba**, gate h-4.

President Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro's recent announcement that the two countries would be restoring ties caught more than a few people off guard. But after the news had settled in, many began to see this as long overdue and as leading to a barrel of great opportunities for all involved.

While the process of normalizing diplomatic relations promises to be long and complex, travel restrictions are already being eased and you know it's just a matter of time before one can take a JetBlue non-stop between West Palm, Fort Lauderdale or Miami and arrive in Havana in less than an hour.

Less than an hour. That's how close Havana is. And yet, for 55 years it has been living under an embargo that has kept the entire country – in a way – trapped in amber. Cars that only exist in museums in the U.S. are still everyday transportation in Cuba. Modernist hotels and casinos erected in the heady, pre-revolution days filled with rum, cigars, gambling and conga drums still stand, virtually untouched from an era when Lucille Ball visited and returned to Hollywood with Desi Arnaz in tow.

To visit Cuba today is to be instantly fascinated. How do we know this? Tropic sent two emissaries to have an advanced peek, photographer Robin Hill and Senior Editor Hilary Lewis. What they saw and experienced was a country that – for the most part – seemed ready to move on from a 55-year nap. What they also saw was a country in great

need. Its infrastructure shot, its great monuments from earlier centuries failing to retain the properties of a solid. In this issue, Hill and Lewis look specifically at some of Havana's mid-20th century structures and see great potential. Indeed, the potential for this entire idyllic island is palpable. What happens next is anyone's guess.



Dining room at the Igor Polevitzky-designed Habana Riviera Hotel looks much as it did when Kennedy and Castro were feuding.

John T. O'Connor
Editor-In-Chief



Even peeling paint can't take away from the striking design of the Seguro Médico Building (1956-1958) by Antonio Quintana (Quintana, Rubio and Pérez Beato).

Facing page: The creative Solimar building, designed by Manuel Copado, looks like something out of 1960s Chicago; it's from 1944.

Conflicted feelings are inevitable. Havana is clearly the product of a once wealthy and diverse population. The quality of its architecture, from classical churches and civic structures of prior centuries, to the bold, modern experimental forms that were favored during the 1950s, is superb and could only have been built by moneyed patrons, who no longer populate this capital city.



Despite the end of the economic system of prerevolutionary times, the buildings remain, in part due to a lack of economic resources, which would have been necessary to supplant the look of midcentury with structures of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. However, inevitable neglect has allowed the buildings of all periods to be in perilously fragile condition. So while we are all fortunate that the architectural legacy in Cuba has not been wiped out, it is hardly safe and sound.

Tourism currently accounts for a significant amount of Cuba's access to foreign currency. It's doubtful that Cuba would be willing to risk losing its finest buildings just when far more visitors will be arriving on its sunny shores thanks to changes in American policy. But we've seen time and time again, from Florida to California, the way that the pressure for new development can crowd out the preservation of fine, older buildings. Add to that the structural damage that has been incurred by so many of these already, and the cost of preserving much of Cuba's existing structures seems utterly overwhelming. Seeing former multi-storied palaces, now with lopsided balconies and strewn with clotheslines

and debris, you begin to understand the extent of the decay that has taken place in a half-century. This is especially sad considering how many of the great buildings in Havana pre-date the 19th century. This urban fabric was lovingly used and preserved for centuries. Cuba's past 50 years proves how little time it takes to do severe (and perhaps irreparable) damage to great cities if the resources do not exist (or cannot be applied).

As noted earlier, what is there is at least frequently in its original form. Touring the Habana Riviera Hotel (1957), designed by Polevitzky (with associate architect Manuel Carrera), you





Grandstand by Octavio Buigas (1959) built by the Castro government at the Parque Deportivo José Martí.

have trouble believing a production designer hasn't carefully re-created the late 1950s. The building was originally to be done by Philip Johnson as a casino for Meyer Lansky in 1956, back when the project was to be called the Hotel Monaco. Instead of Johnson's more rectilinear design, albeit with some interesting roof lines that would have felt at home in a design by Felix Candela, the client ended up with a complex that looks like it belongs a stone's throw from the Fontainebleau in Miami Beach. With a dramatic driveway and a pool deck more reminiscent of the Fontainebleau when it was used to film *Goldfinger*, the Habana Riviera is pure MiMo.

Not just before the Revolution, but before the advent of modernism, Cuba was eager to stand out as a sophisticated platform for architecture. In the 19th century and earlier, architects from Italy, France, and certainly from Spain, produced elegant works here. This beautiful mix of buildings makes Havana feel at once European and Latin.

American, as well as European and Latin American, architects benefited from Cuba's prosperity in the 1950s. Johnson and Polevitzky were hardly alone. The former Havana Hilton is now the Habana Libre (it was nationalized following its opening in 1958). Designed and built in 1958 by Los Angeles's prominent Welton Becket and Associates, it has seen some changes, especially in the lobby. But from the street it's still the same sort of strong, midcentury geometry one would have expected from Becket. The American Embassy, designed by Harrison and Abramovitz in 1953, now awaits the US ambassador-to-be, and could easily be exchanged with many buildings in Washington from that time. In 1956, Richard Neutra designed a house for a Swiss client, which is now the home of the Swiss ambassador to Cuba and has been maintained flawlessly. If not for the Revolution, Mies van der Rohe would probably have completed his 1958 design for an office building for Bacardi. Cuba's loss turned out to be Miami's gain, since we got the exquisite 1963 headquarters in Miami designed by Enrique Gutierrez of Puerto Rico.

But Cuban architects produced extraordinary designs themselves. Many of the names will not be familiar to us, but some are renowned. Now that there is a chance that Amer-

A contemporary shot of the Habana Libre Hotel (formerly Havana Hilton) is hard to distinguish from one from the 1950s. Designed by Welton Becket and Associates in 1958.



Facing page: Max Borges Recio's Apartment Building for Ildelfonsa Someillán (1950) features thick, angular balconies with inserted screens.

icans will be able to enter Cuba as tourists, locations such as the famed Tropicana Cabaret will once again be available. Designed in 1951-1956 by Max Borges Recio, it still operates as a nightclub. However, weather permitting, the show takes place outdoors under copious foliage instead of within the architecturally significant glass-arched hall. Many design aficionados may know that space from Henry-Russell Hitchcock's show, *Latin American Architecture Since*

1945, which was hosted in 1955 at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. In March, MoMA will again present a show of Latin American architecture, but this time the period is 1955-1980.

Borges designed many significant structures. From his own home (1948-1950), which looks straight out of the pages of the International Style, to the angled balconies of the Ildelfonso Someillán apartment building (1950), which seems far more at home in Latin America, there are streets aplenty filled with architectural innovation, not just from the 1950s, but earlier. Art Deco, Art Moderne and other styles abound. Post-revolution, innovation persisted in the form of civic works such as schools and ministries, ranging from Brutalism to utterly sensuous, curved modernism.

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stately squares such as the Plaza de Armas and Plaza de San Francisco and boulevards and promenades like Oficios and Paseo del Prado, Havana has the potential to rival European cities in terms of urbanism and architecture. But first, it needs to get a handle on repairing its infrastructure, including such basics as water and power, not to mention finding better ways to proffer tourists more access to Cuba Libres and Daiquiris. Cuba may be ready for its close-up, but it isn't fully ready for prime time. More than a coat of paint is needed. ■

