

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



NEW YEAR'S IN HAVANA: A FAMILY PROGRAM IN CUBA

DECEMBER 27, 2023–JANUARY 1, 2024

DETAILED ITINERARY

On this family-friendly program to Havana, experience a variety of Cuban art, music, and dance with activities aimed at all ages. Enjoy playing a baseball game with Cubans close to Hemingway's favorite hang-out in Cojimar. Dine at some of the most popular *paladares*, private restaurants run by Cuban entrepreneurs—often in family homes. Learn about the nation's history and economic structure and discuss the reforms driving changes with your Harvard study leader and local guest speakers. Learn how to salsa in a private class—and much more!

Despite the June 2019 changes made to the regulations governing travel to Cuba, it is still possible to travel on a People to People/Support of the Cuban People program. These programs differ from more traditional trips in that every hour must be accounted for. Each day on the HAA program has been structured to provide meaningful interactions with Cuban people or educational or cultural programming. Please note that the Harvard Alumni Association and Distant Horizons intend to fully comply with all requirements of the general license. Travelers must participate in all group activities. Each traveler is required to keep a copy of their final program which could be requested by OFAC officials at any point in the next five years.

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner

Please note that this schedule is in development and is subject to change. Activities and places visited might occur on different days or in a different order than presented below—or replaced with comparable activities. The program will be updated closer to departure.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27 MIAMI / HAVANA

Independent arrivals in Havana.

Drive into town stopping enroute at the Plaza de la Revolución, the most politically important square in Cuba and one of the largest city squares in the world. It has stood witness to many rallies and revolutions that have altered the course of Cuban history. Presiding over the square is an almost 60-foot statue of José Martí.

Enjoy lunch at El Ajibe. The recipe for the delicious chicken served is a closely guarded secret, but we know that freshly squeezed orange juice is part of the secret!

After lunch, enjoy an orientation tour of Havana including a stop at Callejon de Hamel, the site of a huge multi-dimensional Afro-Cuban mural. Here you will learn more about the Santeria religion with Elias Aseff, a local practitioner. Probably the most explicit reference to the African soul in Cuba is to be found in Santeria, which represents the synthesis of the cults of African slaves and the Catholic religion. Elias will also accompany you into a Santeria home.

Check into *Hotel Grand Aston*, ideally located on Havana's waterfront promenade, the Malecón.

In the evening, attend your first lecture and then enjoy a welcome dinner at 5 Sentidos, one of Havana's best private restaurants.

Overnight: *Hotel Gran Aston* (L, D)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28 HAVANA

Begin the day at the Presidential Palace, now known as the home of the Revolutionary Museum. The history of Cuban political development is illustrated here from the slave uprisings to joint missions with the ex-Soviet Union. Part of the museum is the Granma Memorial, which preserves the vessel that brought Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and other revolutionaries from Mexico to Cuba in 1956.

Continue to explore Havana's historical core on a walking tour. Admire the city's many squares and its cathedral, as well as the buildings renovated by Habaguanex, the semi-private entity that manages the restoration of Old Havana. Stop at a ration store to learn about the "ration card" and the role it continues to play in Cuban life. Also admire a scale-model of Old Havana that serves as an excellent introduction to the layout of the city.

Enjoy lunch at La Moneda Cubana, a roof-top paladar in the heart of Old Havana.

After lunch watch a private performance of the dance/musical group Havana Compass. Liliet Rivera is the founder of Cuba Havana Dance Troupe, which is dedicated to the study and choreography of traditional and modern dances. In partnership with percussion artist, Eduardo Cordova, the troupe has created an exciting, diverse performance with traces of Spanish dance form, African-Cuban Jazz rhythm and modern dance.

Continue by bus to the neighborhood of Marianao to learn about a project called Angeles del Futuro (Angels of the Future) in which children aged between 7-15 years are trained in circus skills.

Prior to dinner, enjoy a lecture by Dr. Miguel Coyula on art, architecture, and development in Havana. Dr. Coyula is an architect and architectural historian and is an authority on the history and preservation of Havana. He is also a retired professor at the Faculty of Architecture of Havana where he taught since 1969.

After the presentation, drive to dinner at the home of artist Sandra Ramos who studied

Fine Arts at the Higher Institute of Arts of Cuba graduating in 1993. Her works focus on the recovery of a social and individual memory, linked to the difficulties of the daily life in Cuba.

Overnight: *Hotel Gran Aston* (L, D)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29 HAVANA

After breakfast, meet with Norma Guillard Cabrera, who is featured in the documentary film *La Maestra* (running time 33 minutes) which tells the personal stories of the youngest women literacy workers who went to the mountains and valleys across the island to teach—and found themselves deeply transformed in the process.

Next visit the Museo de Bellas Artes, Cuban Collection accompanied by a curator of contemporary art. The museum's origins date back to 1842 when the San Alejandro Art Academy started its collection, which forms the nucleus of the museum founded in 1913. It expanded greatly after Castro took over in 1959, notably with works from the private collections of Julio Lobo and Oscar Cintás.

Enjoy lunch at the lovely home of curator Milagros Borges Gomez where you can also admire the works of several Cuban artists including Kunta, Ruben Rodriguez, Salvador Corratge, and Orestes Hernandez.

After lunch, drive to Ernest Hemingway's home, which has been lovingly preserved and recently restored by the Cuban government. The house was designed by Spanish architect Miguel Pascual y Bager in 1922 and was inhabited by Hemingway from 1939 to 1960. The house is just as Hemingway left it, with the books on the tables and many of his favorite photographs on display. While it is not possible to go inside the house, the windows are left open for a decent view of the interior.

Continue to a park in Cojimar to participate in a baseball game where we have invited some local Cubans to join us.

En route back to the hotel, make a stop at the famous Copelia to taste some of Cuba's best

ice-cream. The iconic ice-cream parlor serves up to 10,000 customers a day and initially served 26 flavors of ice-cream in honor of the failed attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953.

This evening, enjoy a round-table discussion on the Cuban Economy by Professor Jorge Mario Sanchez. Dr. Sanchez is a macro-economist and professor at the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy at the University of Havana. He has been a visiting professor at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University.

Enjoy dinner this evening at the historic Nacional Hotel. Located on the Malecón and designed by the famous New York firm McKim, Mead and White, the hotel features an eclectic mix of architectural styles. It opened in 1930 when Cuba was a prime travel destination for Americans, long before the embargo. In 1955 the infamous organized crime figure Meyer Lansky managed to persuade then President Fulgencio Batista to give him a piece of the Nacional. Lansky refurbished a wing of the grand entrance hall and added a bar, restaurant, showroom, and a luxurious casino.

Overnight: *Hotel Gran Aston* (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30 HAVANA / PINAR DEL RIO / VINALES

Depart for a full day excursion to the western part of Cuba, with its jungle-covered summits dropping down limestone cliffs to verdant valleys. Drive along one of the new roads in Cuba to the town of Pinar del Rio.

After a drive of just over an hour stop at the Orchid Farm at Soroa, which is maintained by the University of Pinar del Rio. The hilly grounds contain over 800 species of plants, including 200 that are endemic to Cuba, all thriving in the humid climate.

Continue to the Valle de Vinales, Cuba's most famous landscape, located in the province of Pinar del Rio. This area was the last refuge of the Ciboney, the hunter-gatherers who were pushed here by the more advanced Taino. The province's mountainous landscape is riddled with caves, some running for many kilometers,

in which Ciboney burial and cave paintings have been found.

Visit a tobacco farm to learn about the growing of tobacco and the economics of the tobacco industry in Cuba.

After lunch, spend some time exploring the town of Vinales. Arrive back at the hotel in the late afternoon.

Dinner is on your own this evening. We will supply a list of restaurant suggestions and your local guide will both be happy to assist with reservations.

Overnight: *Hotel Gran Aston* (B, L)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31 HAVANA / COJIMAR

This morning, visit NostalgiaCar, a classic car mechanic shop. Here you will meet with the owner of the shop who will talk about his business. After the visit, choose your favorite old car and hop in for a ride!

Your destination is the home and studio of artist José Fuster for a private lunch. Fuster's art is a cherished part of Cuban culture, evoking the nation's African roots from ceramics to whimsical paintings drawn from ordinary life in Cuba. But it is the mosaics that make the visit special—Fuster has turned his neighborhood into one enormous piece of mosaic and the visit to his home is enchanting. Guests can wander among several levels of mosaic animals, plants, and people enjoying an immersive experience before having a typical Cuban lunch.

After lunch enjoy an opportunity to learn about the Cuban musical tradition at an interactive musical workshop. Cuban Afro-Cuban music has its roots deep in the traditions, religion, and family knowledge dating back to the slave ships and before. There are many kinds of salsa music and dance in Cuba but most of these styles are derived from "Son" which will be the focus this morning. Son developed in eastern rural areas of Cuba around the turn of the 20th century, but traces of it date back to the 1700s. Son is a distinctly Afro-Cuban musical style because it uses an African rhythm, Spanish poetic

styles in the lyrics, and the use of plucked instruments.

Next enjoy a private Salsa class. Salsa has its origins in Cuba where the blending of African drum rhythms and Spanish guitar evolved into a variety of Latin American music. Today's Salsa dancing is a rich blend of Latin-American and Western influences.

Return to the hotel, stopping at the John Lennon Park where there is a sculpture of the former Beatles member sculpted by Cuban artist José Villa Soberón. The statue was unveiled by Fidel Castro on December 8, 2000, the 20th anniversary of Lennon's murder who, at one time, banned the music of the Beatles in Havana. The sculpture of Lennon is currently not wearing his signature round-lens glasses, which have been stolen several times!

Before dinner this evening, enjoy a second lecture from your faculty leader.

Depart the hotel for a New Year's Eve celebratory dinner at Café Laurent, a wonderful private restaurant offering a lovely interior and a varied menu. Take the creaky lift five floors for a culinary surprise!

Overnight: *Hotel Gran Aston* (B, L, D)

MONDAY, JANUARY 1

RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

Depart the hotel this afternoon for the airport for your return flight the U.S. (B)