

Philip Levine-January 2023

Day 1 • Sunday • Say hello to the nation of music

- Arrive at Havana's **Jose Martí International** airport (HAV).
- Enroute to your boutique accommodations savor the sights and sounds of one of the oldest and most stunning cities in the New World.
- At your lodging, enjoy a welcome cocktail, freshen up, and get comfortable.
- Arrival dinner at boutique accommodations.
- Evening entertainment options: Groove to live jazz, relax in a lounge, or revel in a dicey dance show – all within walking distance of your lodging.

Day 2 • Monday • Old Havana, architecture, history and art

- Greet the day with tasty breakfast at your boutique accommodations.
 - Get ready for an **American vintage cars tour of Havana**. You will tour of the most important sites of Modern Havana such as the Capitol building, the Grand Theatre, Central Park and Prado promenade. Also, you will discover the Revolution Square, Coppelia Ice Cream Park, Plaza Jose Martí (in front of US Embassy), Malecón seawall, Monument to the Battleship Maine, and Hotel Nacional. You will come to know University of Havana, Cementerio de Cristo Balco, and the Miramar, Central Havana and Vedado neighborhoods.
 - **Fall in love with Old Havana**. “In terms of beauty, only Venice and Paris surpassed Havana,” penned Ernest Hemingway. He was alluding to Havana’s incredible architecture, arts, and, of course, the joie de vivre of the city’s engaging people. Old Havana’s four ancient plazas are full of color and personality, with a mix of palatial buildings, monuments, museums, galleries, churches, lively entertainment, restaurants, and bars.
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- Time flies when you're having rum! Cuba's golden elixir spans nearly five hundred years of brewing. You'll learn the fascinating history and art of distillation of the island's (and Hemingway's) most popular spirit. The **Havana Club Museum of Rum** opened in the year 2000 within a grand private palace. It houses incredible artifacts used in the rum-making process, as well as an expansive Rum inventory, and a chance to sample this liquid ambrosia. Together, they contain the most extensive collection of Spanish colonial-era architecture in the western hemisphere. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, restoration and care of Old Havana's wonders is assigned to the Office of the Historian of Havana – Cuba Explorer's island sponsor. We'll visit **Cathedral Square**, the **Square of Arms**, **San Francisco Square**, and **Plaza Vieja**.
- **Welcome lunch** at the private restaurant **Mojito-Mojito**. Ideally situated in Plaza Vieja, its friendly staff, quaint atmosphere, and delicious food makes it rank high on TripAdvisor. The restaurant's slogan, "A single mojito is not enough." We agree.
- Now we explore Havana's famed arts and crafts mall know as **Centro Cultural Antiguos Almacenes de Depo sito San Jose**. This marvelous restoration of dilapidate dock warehouse has resulted in a gigantic market exhibiting the wares of hundreds of Cuban artists and craftspersons. An authentic Cuban shopping experience!
- Return to your boutique accommodations to freshen up.
- Dinner not included – an occasion to sample Havana's stellar private eateries and taste the diversity of the island's distinctive cuisines.

Day 3 • Tuesday • Capitol building & Hemingway's house

- Greet the day with tasty breakfast at your boutique accommodations.
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- **Can't miss visit** to the recently renovated **Capitolio de La Habana**, home to Cuba's National Assembly. The imposing monument is reminiscent of the US Capitol but taller and less austere; chocked full of grand statuary, breathtaking ornamental details, and jaw-dropping art. The building supports the sixth-largest dome in the world – clad in 24 karat gold plated panels. Inside you'll see the bronze **Statue of the Republic** based on a young Cuban woman. It's the third-largest indoor statue in the world. You will learn all about this magnificent structure from staff who work at the Capitolio.
- We have a special lunch arranged for you at **Ajiaco paladar**. It's TripAdvisor's highest-rated restaurant for genuine Cuba food. Off the beaten path in the sleepy romantic coastal fishing village of Cojimar – the setting for Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," Ajiaco is noted for fantastic service, atmosphere, and scrumptilicious traditional Cuba cuisine. Local organic gardens supply all of Ajiaco's menu ingredients. The result is every dish exudes delightfully fresh aromatic flavors you'll never forget.
- Now we're off to visit **Finca Vigia** [Lookout Farm] where literary bard Ernest Hemingway spent twenty-one of his most productive years becoming a titan of English literature. Claimed by both the United States and Cuba as their native son, it was Hemingway himself who declared the island to be his true home. His house remains just as it was when lived in it. You'll see his eclectic personal objects, thousands of books, manuscripts, and photographs, as well as some animal trophies, bagged on his frequent safaris.
- Return to your boutique accommodations to freshen up.
- Dinner not included – an occasion to sample Havana's stellar private eateries and taste the diversity of the island's distinctive cuisines.

Day 4 • Wednesday • AfroCuban rhythms

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- Sea goddess. Visit the community of Regla across the bay from Havana. Once the site of a 16th-century Aboriginal settlement, today it's a mixed-race village that honors Yemayá, the Black Virgin of the Yoruba religion and patron goddess of Havana Harbor. Regla's rich Afrohispanic traditions are celebrated via music, songs, dances, ritual handicraft, and food. At the Regla Museum, you'll see ancient objects of significance to the Santería religion. When visiting Regla's church, you'll see a shrine to the Black Virgin goddess of Regla (and the oceans), Yemayá, whose roots lie in ancient Egypt.
 - Visit the Museum of Guanabacoa. This museum is an important shrine to Santería, with a small collection but concise. Their rooms are dedicated to the various Santería deities with a particular focus on the orisha Elegguá. You'll see the rare artifacts from the Palo Monte and Abakua religions.
 - Lunch at **Palacio de los Corredores restaurant**.
 - Visit the Afro-Cuban influenced **Callejoñ de Hamel**, one of the shortest but most mesmerizing streets in Havana. See Afro-Cuban religion of Santería, a fusion of African belief systems (multiple saint worship) and Catholicism, portrayed in art, music, and dance. Vibrant murals adorn alley walls in tribute to the culture and religious beliefs of the neighborhood.
 - **Cuban dance lessons** by performers. All great dance is globally inspired. Movements from other countries going back millennia, refined and stylized, turned into something ethereal for our time. If any nation has contributed most to US dance, we think it is Cuba with its rich sensuous African, European, Asian and Indigenous mixes. Dance masters and choreographers of the fantastic Cuban floor shows will help you move with the grace of angels – very wild angels! You'll learn all the best steps this afternoon from tutors who'll turn you into a salsa, mambo, rumba, danzon, and cha cha whiz.
 - Return to your boutique accommodations to freshen up.
 - Dinner at the private paladar **La Calesa Real**, in Old Havana.
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Day 5 • Thursday • Viñales Valley, land of the gods

- Greet the day with tasty breakfast at your boutique accommodations.
- We're off to voluptuous Viñales Valley, an idyllic mountaintop hamlet in the heart of Cuba's celebrated tobacco-growing region. The village sits in the center of an expansive valley surrounded by stunning karst hill formations known locally as mogotes. Mogotes are irregularly shaped steep-sided hills that can rise a thousand feet, and have bases ranging from just a few hundred yards in diameter to more than a mile in width. In commendation, UNESCO lists exalted Viñales Valley's natural wonders as a World Heritage Site.
- We'll hike the fields of Finca Agroecologica El Paraiso organic farm and learn how this family reclaimed a rocky mountainside to grow vegetables, herbs, and exotic fruit trees.
- Lunch at an organic farm Finca Agroecologica El Paraiso. All of its menu selections are cooked up from organic farm-fresh local ingredients. "So incredibly delicious," say many hundreds of TripAdvisor diners.
- Visit a privately-owned small tobacco plantation that produces the rarified leaves for Cuban's world-renowned cigars. We'll meet the owners – the third generation of women – who operate the farm using horses and oxen. They'll give a personal demonstration on how to craft hand-rolled Habano cigars.
- Boat ride through the aquatic veins of Cueva del Indio [Indian cave]. Float on the underground river that runs through a vast limestone cavern. You'll get bat's eye view of mammoth-sized stalactites and stalagmites lining the interior of this mini-mountain karst formation, known as a mogote in Cuba.
- Return to Havana
- Dinner not included

Day 6 • Friday • Fusterlandia/Abel Barroso studio

- Greet the day with tasty breakfast at your boutique accommodations.
- Visit Abel Barroso studio (included)
- We'll feast on a delicious lunch hosted by José Fúster, one of Cuba's most important ceramists and painters. And we'll tour his whimsical studio in Jaimanitas, just outside of Havana (included)
- Return to your boutique accommodations to freshen up.
- Dinner not included – an occasion to sample Havana's stellar private eateries and taste the diversity of the island's distinctive cuisines.

Day 7 • Saturday • Cuban art

- Greet the day with tasty breakfast at your boutique accommodations.
- Art attack. Examine Cuba's greatest visual masterpieces spanning three centuries at Havana's museum of modern art – Palacio de Bellas Artes. Sections are devoted to landscape, religious subjects, and narrative scenes of Cuban life over 300 years. Together the exhibits account for the richness of the island's Spanish, French, Chinese, African and Aboriginal cultural roots. Notable works include those of René Portocarrero and Wilfredo Lam. You'll meet and chat with museum staff and perhaps local artists.
- Visit San Alejandro school
- Lunch not included – an occasion to sample Havana's stellar private eateries and taste the diversity of the island's distinctive cuisines.
- Return to your boutique accommodations to freshen up.
- Dinner at a private restaurant (included)

Day 8 • Sunday • Say goodbye to Cuba – for now

- Greet the day with tasty breakfast at your boutique accommodations.
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- Transfer to **Jose Martí International** airport (HAV) for flights home.
 - We'll miss you and hope you will return soon. In Cuba, we say, "A true friend remembers the song in your heart when you have forgotten the lyrics."
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