

Cuba PLUS

Quarterly Vol. 9 • Fall 2006

Varadero

Awaits You

Havana

A City of Charms

Tropicana

A Splendour of Stars

Cuban

*Medical Advances
In Every Area*



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Contents



Váradero Awaits You 10 / Hostal Conde de Villanueva 16

Cuban Tobacco 21 / Finding My Havana Home 25 / Vimang: Health Through Nature 28

The Flavour of Cuba In Each Sip of Rum 32 / Havana, a City of Charms 36

A Jewel of the Cuban Ballet 40 / Saratoga Hotel, Luxurious and Seductive 46

Jardines del Rey 51 / Beauty and Simplicity, Attributes of Current Cuban Fashion 56

Tropicana, A Splendour of Stars 60 / Cuban Baseball 65 / Baracoa Back to its Roots 70

The Havana of Hemingway 76 / An Ache for Traditions 80

Plants, Herbs, and Flowers to Improve Your Health 82 / An Island That Is All Music 86

A Show Dish 90 / The Corsair's Mojito 92 / Customs And Traditions: El Guayabero 94



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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of *Cuba Plus!* Having been involved in *Cuba* for many years, our team has wanted to share the many beautiful, historical, and cultural facets of this island.

When I first arrived in *Cuba* over a decade ago, my images of *Cuba* were restricted to Fidel and Che, cigars and rum. With the growth of interest in the latino world, I am sure that you know about salsa dancing and perhaps Son music from the Buena Vista Social Club. *Cuba* is now one of the top destinations for Canadians looking to escape winter for a week or two of sun and sand.

Cuba is all this and much more. Endlessly diverse and fascinating, *Cuba* is an island paradise, the largest in the Greater Antilles, providing a broad range of geographical sites of interests. Beaches, healthy coral beds, small island groups or cayos, bustling cities, quaint towns, mountain ranges, jungles and quiet private beaches. *Cuba* is also a very proud nation with its own very distinctive culture, music and food. The Cuban Revolution has brought many benefits to the island and this country is unique in the region for its educational and health systems, its access to culture, the excellence in sports, and the safety and security of its streets.

Cuba Plus will try to show you the treasures, both found in most guide books and those hidden to all but the natives of this island. Our goal is to inform and intrigue everyone interested in *Cuba*.

If you are lucky enough to make some good Cuban friends who will teach you the game of dominoes (for me the essence of *Cuba*), try playing on a makeshift table on a quiet street lit by the light from a streetlamp, drinking cheap rum out of an old plastic pop bottle. Light a cigar, smell the warm Caribbean breeze, and know that you are in a special place.

Happy reading and hope you can visit soon.

John Kim
Editor in Chief



A classical landmark reopens in Old Havana

Saratoga

HOTEL

Elegant, Centrally located,
Distinguished

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 96 Rooms with Internet access | Restaurant Bar Anacaona |
| 40 <i>Patio</i> standard rooms | Restaurant Bar Observation Deck |
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| 3 <i>Prado</i> Suites | and Meeting Rooms |
| | Gym |



Dear Reader,

We are pleased to bring you our new magazine. My objective in founding this publication is to present to you what is available in Cuba that will both educate and entertain.

We hope to reach Canadians who have or are interested in visiting Cuba. We will work in conjunction with the travel industry to promote family oriented vacations to Cuba. We will also cooperate with Canadian solidarity groups that have for many decades supported the struggle and achievements of the Cuban people.

An important aspect for me is to share the many medical advances that have been developed in Cuba through the excellent universities and research institutions and the financial commitment of the Government. Traditional medicines and treatments along with holistic approaches have all combined to the wellbeing of good health. We will include an article in each edition on a medical treatment or process that was developed in Cuba.

We will also present stories about all aspects of Cuba including music, sport, culture, art and dance. We hope our vision becomes yours.

Dominic Soave

Founder & Publisher



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Sun and Sand

Cubapius

Varadero Awaits You

*By María Elena Balán Sainz
Photos: Vladimir Molina*





Varadero is the Caribbean beach of your dreams. With 20 kilometres of fine white sand, its palm trees caressed by cool trade winds, Varadero is considered the premier destination for sun and surf on this, the biggest island in the Greater Antilles.

Located in the western Province of Matanzas about 120 km east of Havana, Varadero is also known for its hospitality, its rich culture and the comfortable and world class hotels and resorts.

This is one of the top vacation destinations for Canadians for good reason. Everything can be found here from the most exclusive resorts with private pools and your very own butler to the best value all-inclusive packages in the entire Caribbean.

Canadians are not alone in choosing Varadero. Tourists from Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain and France fill the hotels and resorts and provide the feeling of a festive Old World cultural exchange. Varadero is

also seeing visitors from Asia, including Japan, China and Korea. While the numbers are currently small, the market is continually growing.

There are more than 50 hotels and resorts in Varadero providing 15,000 rooms for visitors. Managed and operated by prestigious international hotel chains, there is the right place for every kind of client.

Several hotels have gone through complete renovations this year including the Paradiso, Punta Arena, Brisas del Caribe, and Iberostar Bella Costa. Others like the Melia Varadero, Melia America and Tuxpan have had partial renovations.

Among the new facilities opened for tourism are the five star plus Iberostar Varadero, inaugurated in December with the Spanish Iberostar hotel chain, and the Blau Varadero with its innovative architecture and 340 rooms.

This resort destination and the Province of Matanzas offer





almost 80 tourist activities and facilities including scuba diving and sailing trips, carting, an aero club, an ocean view golf course, swimming with dolphins, specialized restaurants, sight-seeing and cave tours. There are plenty of bars and night clubs with the Palacio de la Rumba and the Mambo Club topping the list with great live music and hot DJ's. All of these facilities provide an excellent balance of value, quality and fun.

For outdoor activities, Josone Park possesses beautiful grounds as well as excellent dining facilities, boating and a swimming pool.

A great way of getting around Varadero is by horse drawn carriage or an open top double-decker bus. For those who want more freedom, bicycles, motor scooters and cars are available for rent at many locations.

Adventure Tours

Ask at your hotel about exciting

excursions. There are sea tours on galleons, giant catamarans, jetskis and even submarines. Land trips include jeep safaris of caves, rivers, towns and the countryside. Sport fishing for marlin provides additional excitement.

Nautical Services For All Your Needs

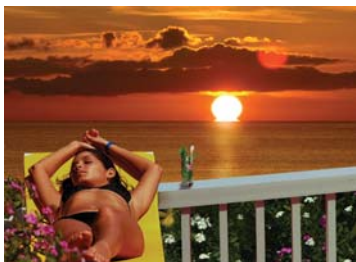
Varadero has the most varied and complete nautical services in Cuba. Leading the way is the Marina Chapelin which offers a full service facility for visiting sailing vessels and cruisers.

The Marina and Nauticas Varadero is run by the Ministry of Tourism and attracts enthusiasts from Varadero resorts, tourists staying in Havana, and visitors from abroad who are looking for a diving, fishing and safari experience.

The Gaviota Varadero Marina is located at the end of the South Highway and is considered one of the best in the area due to the







quality of its water and sand. It has a modern fleet of vessels including catamarans and 35 berths with all services for visiting vessels. This Marina's diving club has highly qualified instructors who can give beginners classes in hotel swimming pools.

Plaza America Center of Varadero

Varadero offers more than just sun, beaches and luxurious hotels. The Plaza America provides the ideal facilities for special events, conferences and incentive travel. With its dedicated group of professionals and its location on the beach, this convention centre can

host all sorts of events from the intimate to the grand.

The Plaza America is operated by the Cubanacan Travel Agency and has close links with the many tour operators working with them as well as the Cuban tour operators Universitur, Cubatur and Havanatur. The biggest shopping mall in Varadero can be found in this centre.

Varadero Awaits You With Its Many Offers

Basking under the tropical sun, this holiday destination awaits you. Anyone who visits Varadero once will want to return to experience again the powder fine white sand and its emerald-blue waters.

Accommodation



Conde de Villanueva Hostal:

*By Madelin Murguía Delgado
Photos: Prensa Latina and courtesy of the Conde de Villanueva Hotel*

Cubaplus

**A
Haven
for
Cigar
Lover**



Amongst the narrow streets of Old Havana near the Plaza de la Catedral sits the Conde de Villanueva Hostel. Located at the corner of Lamparilla and Mercaderes, there are many characteristics that make this boutique hotel unique. Many clients have a particular preference for its worship of the Habano cigar and return every year.

The Habano cigar is present in each step one takes at the Conde de Villanueva. Names of major tobacco producing zones in Cuba identify the nine rooms of the guesthouse, as well as its restaurant and halls. The latter includes facilities for conferences, cocktails parties, and private dinners.

You can stay in refined and well equipped rooms with names referring to *vegas*, or tobacco plantations, in Trinidad, Hoyo de Monterrey, Robaina, de San Juan y Martinez, de San Luis and Remedios.

You can also taste the fine Cuban cuisine of the 19th century at the Vuelta Abajo Restaurant and other specialties at El Corajo cafeteria.

The Conde de Villanueva is located in the historic centre of Havana City which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has declared a World Heritage Site. It is on the exclusive list of guesthouses being operated by the Habanaguex Tourist Company attached to the Office of the Historian of Old Havana .





Its manager Humberto Broches Reyes said that the guesthouse's mainstay is a comfortable tobacco shop called *Casa del Habano* or "Habano House" where clients can buy their preferred cigar, enjoy a drink at the Tasting Bar, and even reserve storage space for their cigars. This is an excellent place to relax with an attractive décor and the earthy scent of cigars and Spanish cedar.

Since the guesthouse is small, they mainly host individual clients who are aficionados of the Cuban cigar world. The repeat visit rate is high with England, Spain, Italy and the U.S. accounting for the most visitors.

The guesthouse was opened in February 1999, during the 2nd Habano Festival, but it dates back to 1712 and faithfully resembles the architecture of the time. Its large, open interior courtyard is full of plants and marvellous stained glass windows and colonial arches. The courtyard

also holds the Julio Larramendi Gallery which is currently hosting the "Historias" exhibition from this famous Cuban photographer's international trips and the promising talent of Canadian Karin Reinecke.

The Guesthouse is named after the former owner of the mansion, Claudio Martínez de Pinillo, who was the Count of Villanueva and was very involved in the growth of tobacco and the use of the railroad system in Cuba.

During the Habano Cigar Festival, the Conde de Villanueva Hostal puts on a wide program of related activities including cigar rolling contests between the five cigar factories in Havana, specialized cigar tastings and a presentation of the Habaguanex Tourist Company.

Whether you stay in the guesthouse during the cigar festival or just drop by for a cigar in the courtyard, the Conde de Villanueva will provide you with a memorable respite from the bustling streets of Old Havana.



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Cuban Tobacco

Pinar del Rio:

Tobacco Growing Land

Cubaplus



Don Alejandro Robaina.

*By Roberto F. Campos
Photos: The author and Prensa Latina*

Pinar del Rio is the western-most of the Cuban provinces. It covers an area of 10,848 square kilometres and was originally named *Nueva Filipina* by the Spaniards in 1774. Apart from its natural beauty, it is proud of producing what is considered by many to be the world's finest tobacco. It is also home to Don Alejandro Robaina who is considered the country's best tobacco grower.

Lush vegetation and virgin nature are evident throughout Pinar del Rio. This attracts both Cuban and foreign visitors to tour the country's leading tobacco producing region.

The tobacco plant, which was "discovered" by the Spanish explorers in the 15th century, had long been valued by the indigenous peoples. Later, it was turned into an industry and

fine tobacco became a symbol for Cuba and the Pinar del Rio region. The region's reputation was enhanced by Don Alejandro Robaina who was the source of inspiration for the "Robaina" brand of Habano cigars.

Many people from all over the world visit Pinar del Rio, particularly in February when Havana hosts the International Habano Festival. The experience can be both recreational and educational.

The mecca of tobacco growing is found in the San Juan y Martínez plains, located south of the capital of the province.

Tobacco plantations, some under the sun and others covered with white cloth (the latter devoted to the growing of the fine tobacco leaves used to wrap the cigar), make these plains of special interest to



visitors. This part of the tour can end at the tobacco selection areas, which is an intermediate process between the plantation and the factory.

When visiting this region, you should visit the Francisco Donatén factory where the cigar process is completed with the hand rolling of the *Vegueros* brand of cigars. Visitors can buy a box of these cigars or any other *Habano* brand at the factory gift shop.

An impressive site is *El Mural de la Prehistoria* (The Prehistory Mural) located in *Vinales Valley*. It was painted on the walls of one of the valley's round topped hills or *mogotes* by Cuban artist *Leovigildo González* and depicts the evolution of mankind.

It is relaxing to stop and view the beautiful *Vinales* scenery, talk to the *campesinos*, or farmers, and enjoy the local food. For those wanting a delicious Cuban

meal, we suggest the roast pork. Ah, don't forget to smoke a cigar after dinner!

There are five important tobacco-producing regions in Cuba. They include *Vuelta Abajo*, *Semi Vuelta*, *San Antonio de los Baños*, *Remedios* or *Vuelta Arriba*, and *Oriente* but the most outstanding of all is the first one, located in the Province of *Pinar del Rio*.

A trip should start in the countryside. There, the nurseries are prepared for sowing the tobacco which requires a great deal of care for the seedlings to grow.

The tobacco harvest begins in October and extends over different phases until early the following year.

Some 70 % of the country's tobacco is harvested in *Pinar del Rio*. Visiting that western Cuban region will give you a complete overview of the industry.

In addition, colorful local characters such as Cuba's best tobacco grower, Don Robaina, put the visitors in contact with local customs and traditions.

Robaina may be 86 years old but he is a very active person by any standard. He is a highly esteemed Cuban who, while having no degree in diplomacy, holds the post of the ambassador of the Habano, a handmade cigar that connoisseurs prize. He is a person who has all the attributes of a good friend, a versatile conversationalist, a Creole wag, and a very hard worker. It is no exaggeration to say that Robaina is

the best tobacco leaf grower that Cuba has to offer.

For his extraordinary contributions, he was awarded the Habano Man of the Year in 2002 for his long list of achievements in the promotion of Habano cigars during his many tours abroad.

Such is his fame that the British pop singer Sting once asked Robaina for his autograph. Sting, who is also a cigar smoker, admires the elderly Cuban as the ultimate craftsman of the Habano.

Robaina was born on March 20, 1919, in Alquizar in the Province of Havana. Since the 19th century, his family has always owned land in Cuchillas de Barbacoa in Pinar del Rio. In bad times they were often forced to leave but they always returned home.

Don Alejandro Robaina's land produces about 12,700 kilograms of top-quality tobacco leaves annually. The land covers an area of 37 acres and is used chiefly to grow tobacco leaves although they also grow beans and raise animals.

"Tobacco is part of my life," says Robaina. "I had the opportunity of being a professional, a medical doctor, to study and leave this but I preferred to be a tobacco grower."





By Egle Procuta

Finding My Havana Home

Easy as it is to be seduced by a moonlit beach cradled by the ocean and palms, there's no denying I'm a big-city girl: born in Chicago, hung out in Paris in my 20s, living in (and loving) Toronto now. I can't go long without the adrenalin of urban hustle and flow. And the city I can least imagine living without, whether in reminiscence or real time, is Havana.

Some of my happiest memories were born during the three months I spent in the Cuban capital several years ago, studying Spanish at the University of Havana's excellent language program for foreigners. Weekdays couldn't dawn quickly enough. I'd jump

out of bed (and how often can you say that about a Monday morning), eager to hit the road for my leisurely 40-minute walk to class. Every day, I'd take a different route through the verdant side-streets of Vedado.

I would stop for a few minutes to watch the proud procession of parents dropping off their children at the schoolyard on *Avenida de los Presidentes*. At a corner fruit market, I'd test my Spanish and pick up some oranges. Halfway to the campus, the morning was heating up already and so was I. Time for a *café cubano* under the canopy of *ceiba* trees that shaded my favourite street vendor.



One of the most endearing — and enduring — compliments I've ever gotten came just around the corner from this coffee stand. A dapper gentleman, well in his 80s, stopped me in my tracks with a gentle, yet mischievous, smile. He raised his straw hat and winked at my skirt, with its bold, bright pattern of daisies. "*Eres una flor que camina.*" "You are a walking flower," said Adelio, who has since become my friend.

I was back in Havana recently after an absence that felt much too long. As the plane eased into its descent, my skin tingled with goose-bumps just imagining the aroma I revisit so often in my mind when I am away. A singular blend of tropical warmth and cigars, it wraps around me the minute I step into the arrivals lounge at José Martí Airport. "Hooray," the spirit cheers from deep down, "she's back in Havana."

As my cab sped into the city, past familiar sights and landmarks, I was plotting out all the old haunts I wanted to revisit. I'd catch a film for two pesos at Cine Yara, the majestic old style movie theatre on La Rampa, then wander out with the strollers, along the Malecón seawall that caresses the edge of the city so gracefully. I'd end up at the harbour, a night cap *de rigueur* at the Dos Hermanos where the gleaming Art Deco bar feels untouched by time. But before all this, there was another place I needed to visit first and foremost.

After leaving my bags at the hotel, I walked over to a modest low-rise building in Vedado. Butterflies nipped at my stomach as I climbed up three flights and knocked at an apartment. Greeted by silence, my heart began to sink. But then, I made out the sound of slipped steps. The door started to open, tentatively at first. But when the young woman realized it was me, her face broke out into the widest grin and she scooped me up into a warm, wonderful hug.

"Does my mother know you're here?" she whispered into my ear. "No," I answered, and Linea snuck away with a conspiratorial grin.

"Mama," she sang out toward a bedroom. "There's someone here to see you."

Mirta's sigh was heavy as she pulled herself out of siesta mode. But as she stepped out into the hallway

and saw me standing there, she sprang awake with a "knock-me over" look that made us both burst out laughing. "*Mi vida,*" she shook her head at me, once she could speak. "Where have you been?"

If I make it sound like Mirta is a long-lost family member, forgive me. This the woman in whose home I lived while studying here. I was lucky to stay in a Cuban household during my months studying Spanish and they became my adopted family.

Recently in Toronto, a Cuban official speculated why Canada, despite being one of Cuba's top trading partners, does not have as high of a profile among ordinary Cubans as some European or Latin American nations.

"Maybe the Canadians are a little bit shy," he wondered.

Fair enough. I certainly felt overwhelmed on my first visit to Havana as I stepped out into its teeming streets, not speaking the language or having any idea really of what I might encounter. My shyness didn't last long, though, thanks to Cubans like Mirta and Linea and Adelio who went out of their way to make me feel welcome.

"*Mi casa es tu casa,*" Mirta would tell me at least once every couple of hours: "My home is your home."



Vimang:

Health Through Nature

By *Marta Gómez Ferrals*
Photos: *Prensa Latina and Ricardo Potts*

Vimang is used in collateral cancer therapy and also shows excellent results in the improvement of the quality of life of terminally ill patients with HIV, systemic lupus, and infertility in women.

About 5 years ago, the Centre of Pharmaceutical Chemistry (CQF) began to produce its latest Cuban product, Vimang, for the international market. At a press conference in Havana, Dr. Alberto Nunez, Director of the CQF, described this natural product as an immune system regulator and a strong anti-oxidant effective against oxidant stress as well as having analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties.



It was reported at that time that comparative studies with similar foreign products showed that Vimang was proven to have certain advantages including in the hepatic and brain protection indexes in those patients taking this formula.

Vimang is now patented in over 20 countries and marketed in more than 50 and is available as a cosmetic cream, flavoured tablets or in powdered form.

Life of the Mango

Now that we know that modern science has proven the remarkable properties of this product, we should talk about its humble origin.

The name, "Vimang," comes from "vida del mango" or "life of the mango," according to the creator of the original formula, a simple farmer named Eleuterio Pérez.

Eleuterio says that his family worked very hard on the land and successfully grew mango trees



Eleuterio Pérez, a humble man and creator of the original formula.

in their native Province of Pinar del Rio. Mango bark extract has been used since colonial times to treat a variety of illnesses.

Using his family traditions and the popular wisdom that was passed down generation to generation from the time of his great grandfather, Eleuterio began experimenting in the 1970's. He worked with the bark of the mango tree, *Mangifera indica* L., and created his own formula and began successfully treating people in the area.

The reputation of Eleuterio's natural product spread from his neighbourhood to the Havana suburb of Arroyo Naranjo where he retired after leaving behind his farm and his career as a lieutenant commander in the Cuban Armed Forces. Today, after science has proven the pharmacological properties of Vimang and years of industrial production, this generous, hardworking, and intelligent man continues to contribute from his home.

Eleuterio considers Vimang a natural restorative and an aid to good health. Apart from showing its



Dr. Alberto Núñez, Director of the Centre of Pharmaceutical Chemistry.

effectiveness against the diseases previously mentioned, this natural product also serves to fight asthma, psoriasis, urinary and prostate disorders.

Apart from his own great knowledge, Eleuterio has received the assistance and support of Cuban scientists in the development of the product. He has worked with specialists to use Vimang to cure women suffering from cervicitis, pelvic inflammation, and leucorrhoea and they have shown positive results in almost a hundred percent of the cases.

Eleuterio says that his natural product does not cure cancer but its effectiveness in the restoration



Mango Bark and a selection of Vimang products.

New Health Tourism Service

Dr. Alberto Núñez, Director of the Centre of Pharmaceutical Chemistry (COF), told us that arrangements with a Health Tourism institution are being made to open an international clinic specializing in Vimang treatments to assist the increasing number of foreigners who not only want to buy the product but also undergo medical treatments with the advances in biotechnology in Cuba.

The use of Vimang along with traditional medical techniques and physical therapy are among the latest Cuban medical treatments to fight stress, aging and improve the quality of life for the elderly.

"This plan is currently being organized," said Dr. Núñez, "and we are already working to enlarge the capacity in the facilities of the retired lieutenant commander Eleuterio Páez, who was the original creator of the traditional medicine, Vimang."

Páez continues working in his Ojo de Agua facility, located in Havana's Municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, to assist a great number of people and the expansion is expected to be completed late this year to start operating in early 2007.

Another important event is a recently completed study with the Sports Medicine Institute. During that study, a group of healthy people took large doses of Vimang to determine its possible effect on the generation of doping substances.

The results showed that neither the drug metabolites were generated nor was the person's steroid profile changed. This is the first step before a further study is carried out with high level athletes to see how this powerful antioxidant can increase an athlete's performance.

Regarding the national consumption of Vimang, Dr. Núñez said that the production of this natural product has been expanded to ten provinces from Santiago de Cuba to Pinar del Rio. The COF Director concluded that the Centre is currently working to begin mass production of Vimang in the City of Havana. The production is within the Traditional and Natural Medicine Program of the Ministry of Public Health and is packaged for sales in Cuban national pesos.

of the immune system helps to increase a person's capacity to fight against that terrible disease.

Vimang in the Therapy against AIDS

Due to Vimang's effectiveness against oxidant stress, a process that damages human health by producing free radicals, Cuban scientists began a study of patients with HIV to see the effect of this natural product.

When mating with cellular components, free radicals damage those organisms and thus reduce the human body's defence systems.

It is said that one of most dramatic causes of oxidant stress is the loss of CD4 blood cells, a type of T-lymphocyte that plays a major role in the immune system. The loss of those cells also contributes to AIDS.

The study previously mentioned assessed the use of Vimang as a nutritional supplement for patients with HIV or AIDS, tracking its levels for possible renal, liver and blood toxicity.

In the initial stages of the disease, patients had a positive response to the treatment, maintaining CD4 blood cell levels above 350 per cubic mm.

Later, during anti-retroviral therapy, it is believed that the restorative powers of Vimang can contribute to an improvement in the patient's quality of life which has been damaged by the collateral effects of the anti-retrovirals.

Though this formula has proven to have a positive effect on HIV positive individuals, more research is planned for the future.

As we can see, Vimang has both proven qualities and a world of possibilities.



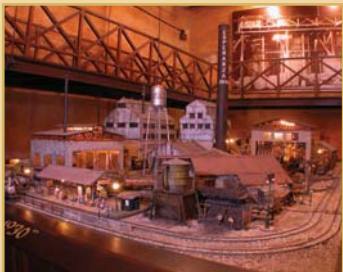
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The Flavour of Cuba In Each Sip of Rum

By Maria Elena Balan Sainz



The explorer Christopher Columbus, discoverer of Cuba, acknowledged 500 years ago that sugar cane grew very well on the island.

In later centuries, it was the African slaves brought to the Caribbean islands who developed the cultivation of cane. Not only was sugar extracted but also the juice that, with time, could be converted into Cuban rum.

This distilled product was born in the Antilles and traveled to Europe and its colonies in America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It also made it to the Royal Palace in Spain and won the preference of the Court. From there it

spread to the most refined places of the European aristocracy but still remained very popular with the common people.

To paraphrase a popular song, *Suavecito*, rum is the most sublime thing to entertain the soul and, from this island of *Son* music, tobacco and aromatic coffee, this drink also comes with a seal of guarantee.

The rum makers in Cuba follow the centuries-old practice of mixing and aging a variety of rums until getting to the essence of what is Cuban, its variety of aromas and colors reflecting this island's mixed peoples.

For the different levels of aging, a variety of barrels are used for specific



periods and numbers of time as if the presence of ancient woods would confer some mysticism to the final product.

An offering of the flavour of Cuba in each sip of rum is *lo maximo* that exemplifies this national and cultural creation.

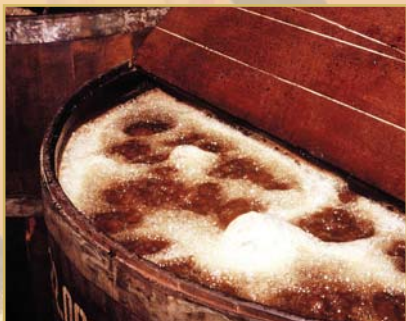
These days, the rum of Cuba constitutes a specific type of spirit within the family of world rums, classified as light and of very high quality with a delicate aroma, a lightly sweet flavour, and appropriate to drink alone or mixed in a cocktail.

Within the fifteen best drinks in the world from the Old Fashioned to the Gin & Tonic to the Manhattan, it says a lot that there are three Cuban drinks. The Daiquiri, the

Mojito, and the Cubalibre - all the original recipes requiring genuine Cuban rum.

The island of Cuba, full of attractions for the millions of tourists visiting each year, also provides for their leisure time with this liquid offering distilled from centuries of tradition.

Plenty of sun, beautiful white sand beaches, and a diverse and fascinating culture work together to provide a unique mixture capable of satisfying the most demanding expectations. For a visitor to Cuba, a glass of excellent rum enjoyed with a fine cigar is not just a trendy activity but a connection to the ancient culture of the region.





THE MUSEUM OF RUM

According to rum experts, crafting a great rum depends on a combination of climate, the land where the cane is grown, the length of aging, and the care taken during production.

Each distillery contributes its brand to the market with its distinct aromas, taste and colour.

The best known rum in this Caribbean country is Havana Club. Made in one of the largest distilleries in Latin America, more than thirty million litres per year are produced.

Honouring this drink in an old colonial mansion, formerly owned by the Count de la Mortera, is the Museum of Rum located at 262 San Pedro at the corner of Sol near

the historical centre of Old Havana. This tribute to rum is celebrating only its sixth anniversary but has received thousands of visitors from over 60 countries. A visitor can discover a part of Cuban culture through the history of its quintessential spirit.

The stages of its production, the facilities of a traditional factory, and the Havana Club Bar to taste Creole cocktails along with the rhythm of live, traditional Cuban music are some of the aspects which you can enjoy in this place.

In addition to buying this world class product, the gift shop offers souvenirs for the visitor who wants a memory of this island of *Son* music, cigars, coffee and rum.





Photo-feature

Habana, a City of Charms

By María Elena Balán Saíenz

Photos: Vladimir Molina



The City of Havana is full of magic, carrying numerous songs of dreams to be fulfilled. It features many attractive neighbourhoods such as Vedado, Regla, Guanabacoa and Miramar.

The original colonial part of this large city is *Habana Vieja* or Old Havana. While only about a square mile in area, it has its own distinct architecture, traditions and even culture. It contains abundant squares, ancient small palaces, stately homes, fortresses, museums, and a small portion of a wall that protected it from attacks by corsairs and pirates in past centuries.

A fourteen block section of the Malecon, or sea-front drive of the city, constitutes the anteroom to enter Old Havana's historic center, another of the major attractions of the city.





Delightful promenades like El Prado offer a passage of architectural, historical and urban significance; Obispo Street is considered to be one of the most symbolic of the city; and *Barrio Chino*, or Chinatown, lined with great restaurants, all of which overseen by the Office of the City's Historian.

Undoubtedly that Office, under the management of Doctor Eusebio Leal Spengler, plays a leading role in the renewal and revival of cultural institutions and the improvement of the inhabitant's everyday lives.

Old Havana is neither a dull museum nor a mere bazaar for vacationers. On the contrary, its essence is its people who provide the friendly neighbourhood settings and preserve the grand appearance of this city within a city.



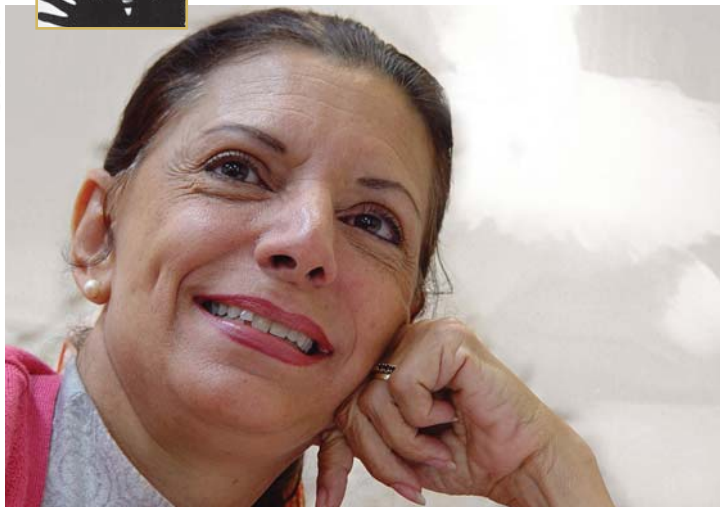


Celebrities



A Jewel

Cubaplius



of the Cuban Ballet

By Yasser Lago / Photos: Prensa Latina





Josefina Mendez was born in Havana on March 8, 1941. She began to study ballet at the age of 7 and joined the Alicia Alonso Ballet Company in the 1950's. A decade later, she was one of the prima ballerinas with the Cuban National Ballet Company. She was appointed *maitre* of the National Company and lived and worked in Havana for many years. We were very saddened at her death this past January but we know that her wonderful spirit will always remain alive in the National Ballet of Cuba.

People who saw Josefina Mendez perform on the stage are well aware of her artistic brilliance and dramatic mastery. Mendez is a beautiful woman, severe and serious, demanding and zealous with discipline but capable of encouraging her pupils with humour and wit.

Many are the virtues of this woman with a prolific artistic career stretching 50 years. This interview will allow us to know more about a person who is considered to be a Jewel of the Cuban Ballet.

Josefina, the child?

- Shy, a dreamer, a little ... sad.

Family influence?

- My uncle on my mother's side was very

fond of the opera and he was partner of the *Pro Arte Musical* of Havana. My mother wanted me to play the piano and have a beautiful figure, so she registered me in that institution.

Pro Arte Musical of Havana?

- It means my first ballet classes, my first performances. There, from the first day on, I started dreaming about being a dancer. Alberto Alonso had much to do with it.

Alicia Alonso and Swan Lake of 1954?

- I had to climb the University Stadium stairs to watch her dance. I was greatly impressed by the softness of that white swan and the ballet music. To be able to perform it, unconsciously, has become a goal ever since.

What about your first exchange with her?

- It was in the middle of a performance (Coppelia) at the Theatre Auditorium. The Secretary of the Academy introduced Alicia's Aunt to me and told her, "look, this little girl looks like Unga" (as Alicia's closest friends called her). I was taken to her dressing room when she finished performing; I was nervous. When Alicia was back, I heard her talking. Her voice had a profound impact on me.





She was told about our being alike. Then she asked if I wanted an autograph. I was stiff. Her aunt said, “yes, kid, give her the program.” I remember after she was done, she gave me a piece of advice, “do not let anyone say you look like me, you should build your own personality.”

The Cuban Ballet?

- My first recollection is of seeing Alicia working, her finesse and cleanness of her legs and feet on the bars. I also remember her working with Fernando Alonso at daybreak; we worked until 1 a.m. during rehearsals for Giselle.

The Alonso Trilogy?

- They are the three strongest links of the chain of the National Ballet, each with its own peculiarities. Alicia represents the dancer; to make the artistic matters, ideas and concepts to work and to constantly evolve. Fernando is the grand master, demanding of excellence and iron discipline. Alberto, the choreographer, was my first teacher. He taught me to use my entire body in dancing and the meaning of having a sense of line. [Ed. Note: Fernando was a *maitre* of the National Ballet, founder and director of the Camaguey Ballet, and was formerly married to Alicia. Their daughter, Laura, manages a Cuban dance company as well. Alberto is a world renowned choreographer and Fernando's brother]

The Neapolitan Character?

- It was my debut as a professional dancer fifty years ago. I had to play a man's role because there were not many men in the company.

A performance to make amends?

- I was part of the *corps de ballet* “*Las Sifides*” (The Sylphs). Alicia, when she finished “*La Muerte del Cisne*” (The Death of the Swan), told the audience that the Cuban ballet would not perform again as long as the Fulgencio Batista's tyranny existed.

The Rose, and Alicia's words at the University Stadium on September 15, 1956?

- Following her public announcement, she brought us together and gave each dancer a flower from her bouquet and told us “do not worry; this is the start of a brilliant future.”

Your incomparable technical and artistic mastery: innate skills or daily hard work?

- There was a time when my technique reached a peak but it was with a lot of hard work, study and analysis. Dancing in front of the mirror was of great help, as well as watching Alicia and listening a lot to Fernando.

Influence on your career?

- Definitely, Alicia Alonso

The greatest award?

- There is no medal for that one: Cuba, my people and the opportunity to dance for them.

Awards in Varna in 1964 are considered to be the first signs, before the world, of the high value of the young Cuban ballet school. What did it mean to you?



- They were all taken by surprise when they saw that Mirta, Rodolfo and I danced differently from other major schools. At the same time, we were proud of it. [Ed. Note: Varna is a city in Bulgaria that hosts an annual international ballet competition]

When did you realize that the nickname “Cuban Jewels” would mark you forever?

- It was after the British critic Arnold Haskell first visited us. He dubbed us that because he watched us teaching members of the ballet school and the company, rehearsing, dancing, and doing everything. Once, talking with Fernando, he said, “you have four jewels in this company.”

Why the “Queen of Tragedy”?

- It was also Arnold Haskell who saw the image of a little sad and shy girl in my performances in festivals. That is the girl you spoke about at the beginning.

Criticism?

- Critics will be infuriated with me but I have never attached much importance to what they say, either in favour or against.

Which audience do you like the most: the one euphorically applauding before a performance ends or the one motionless before a tremendous display of elegant technique and drama?

- I like all types of audiences

Your fans?

- Even after my retirement some years ago, I am immensely satisfied at still having very loyal fans.

Of those you did not perform, which one would you have liked to perform?

- The role of Kitri in the complete Don Quixote. The Company did not prepare that ballet during the period I danced, although I performed the pas de deux and it was one of my standards; I performed that one in Varna.

Do you have any advice for the new generation of dancers?

- They should become dancers when they feel the art in their souls and when they have great discipline.



Tourism

Saratoga Hotel,



Luxurious and Seductive

By Nidia Rodriguez Leon / Photos: Courtesy Saratoga Hotel



The Saratoga Hotel has been famous for its *Aires Libres* or "Open Air" since the 1930s. Rising majestically from the historical intersection of Prado and Dragones streets, it provides a view of numerous Cuban landmarks such as the National Capitol building, the Grand Theatre of Havana, the Partagas Cigar Factory, the white marble Fountain de la India, and Central Park. Restored just last year, the Saratoga is open again under the management of the Saratoga Hotel S.A. joint venture run by the Habaguanex tourist company. The Saratoga was chosen as one of the 60 best new hotels in the world by Condé Nast Traveller magazine.



During its reconstruction, it was possible to preserve only a portion of the facade of the original hotel. The current facility incorporates this facade and accentuates elements of the original building such as the main atrium, the huge windows made of French woodwork and the large porch which provides a charming welcome to visitors.

General Manager Luis Enrique Romagosa informed us that the Saratoga has 96 rooms including seven suites where modern comforts and the luxury of the original época have been combined.

Romagosa referred to the new uses of space in the hotel with seven floors of





rooms and attractive options such as the suites, four on the corners, and three duplexes. There are also two rooms for people with disabilities and twelve for smokers.

In its time, the Saratoga hosted the performances of popular groups such as the prominent Anacaona Orchestra which came into the spotlight in this hotel in the 1930s. Honouring that band, the restaurant-bar on the first floor is named after them.

A superb and magnificent view of Havana Bay and major areas of the city can be enjoyed from the rooftop terrace where the restaurant-bar Saratoga Viewpoint, the swimming pool and the gym are located.

Traditional elements, the latest and most advanced technologies, and expressions of



Cuban culture are combined inside the hotel. Artist Luis Ramirez made the original drawings reproduced on the ceramics in the bathrooms and for the mural under the fanlight of the mezzanine bar depicting the Cuban landscape. The mural itself was painted by architect and painter Juan Carlos Perez Botello who also produced the huge mural in the concert hall in the San Francisco de Asis Convent in Old Havana.

Built in an ideal location, the Saratoga Hotel will entertain the tourist who enjoys visiting cultural sites and experiencing the night life in Havana and those wanting a closer look at the interesting characteristics and idiosyncrasies of Old Havana.

www.hotel-saratoga.com
 No. 603 Pardo, Corner of Dragones
 Tel (53-7) 868-1000 / Fax (53-7) 868-1001
 reserves@saratoga.co.cu
 Rooms w/ breakfast between
 CUC\$ 195 and 230
 Junior Suites w/breakfast between
 CUC\$ 385 and 650



Jardines del Rey

By María Elena Balán Saíenz
Photos: Ferval

Those who have visited the Jardines del Rey Keys say that it was like the Garden of Eden. This spot along the Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago is so peaceful and enchanting that it has emerged as an international tourist destination.

Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo are two of the more popular tourist destinations along this group of interconnected islands. Visitors can find healthy coral reefs and tropical flora and fauna that highlight the natural beauty of this place.

Even today, visiting tourists can find the same dazzling scenery that the Spanish conquerors found when they

arrived around 1513 and named them Jardines del Rey, or the "King's Gardens," as a tribute to the monarch Fernando el Católico.

Ernest Hemingway sailed on his yacht through the area, which at that time was barely explored, and was inspired to write about that magical place in his novel *Islands in the Stream*.

In the 1990's, it was decided to devote the region to tourism which led to hotels and a land access being built.

Jardines del Rey is located in the central province of Ciego de Avila, around 400 kilometers east of Havana. You can get to the Jardines del Rey Keys from the mainland via a 17





kilometre causeway that joins Cayo Coco with the country's road network. Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo and Paredón Grande are also linked with each other by causeways which facilitates access to the keys. Traveling by plane is another option as there is a modern and comfortable international airport with a capacity to welcome a million passengers annually.

This tourist destination, while lesser known than Varadero and Cayo Largo, compares very favourably with its white sand beaches surrounded by one of the world's largest coral reefs.

Although large resort hotels have been built in the region, the natural beauty of this almost virgin area has been preserved. Cayo Coco is home to the El Bagá Natural Park which encompasses the

main ecosystems of the Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago.

You are invited to visit this exciting paradise with its crystal clear waters that encourage diving, ideal exotic vegetation for exploring, and a natural landscape with the flamingo coloured plumage, all under a warming sun.

A PROMISING TOURIST DESTINATION

Experts agree that Jardines del Rey has become one of the most promising tourist destinations in Cuba. Its world class natural attractions have drawn more than a million visitors over the past ten years with most coming from Canada, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy.

Beaches are the main attractions of this tourist resort. Those in Cayo Guillermo are





over 13 km long and Cayo Coco's stretch 22 km. Visitors agree that while those beaches are very long, they can be cozy and intimate as well.

Not only can tourists swim and sun on the beaches, they can also enjoy diving in the tranquil waters washing over rich coral reefs full of varied marine life. Those beaches are the home to over 20 ideal places for diving.

Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo and Paredón Grande have

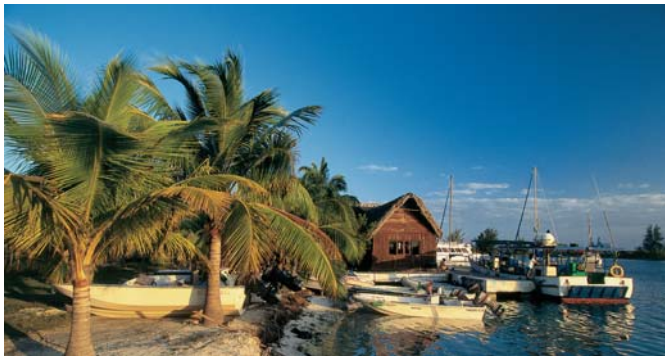
developed tourist facilities and resources including catamaran trips to virgin beaches, nautical sports, yacht tours and sport fishing.

HIKING IN VIRGIN NATURE

The Jardines del Rey keys include another feature that turns it into a major tourist destination - hiking amidst the flora and fauna.

Cayo Coco and the surrounding keys belong to the Buena Vista Biosphere Reserve.





El Baga Natural Park, located around Cayo Coco, has a path that shows the region's unique flora and fauna to visitors as well as features of the traditional culture and history of the area. Dolinas, Sitio La Güira, and Cunagua hill are other paths also found at Jardines del Rey.

At La Silla roadside hotel, tourists can enjoy looking at mangrove swamp ecosystems and the habitat of several pink-flamingo colonies.

The dunes of Pilar beach, unique in the Caribbean for being over 15 metres high, are a singular experience in those keys.

Cunagua Hill, La Redonda lagoon and Florencia town are also interesting locales found in Jardines del Rey.

UNFORGETTABLE HOLIDAYS

Cuba is the largest archipelago of the West Indies, with 110,922 square kilometres of territory. Tourists currently find several places in fashion in that Caribbean country, but the keys continue to be a spectacular destination. You can enjoy an unforgettable vacation at Jardines del Rey, in the midst of the sea, sunny beaches, and virgin nature.





Beauty and simplicity, attributes of current Cuban fashion



*By Marta Barés Gómez
Photos: Prensa Latina*

Current Cuban fashion has successfully entered the third millennium with a combination of its own style and international trends arising from the Caribbean.

It is very common to regard fashion as something variable, autocratic or even boring but if you look at it carefully, then you can see it for what it really is: an economic fact materialized through a long and complex process of production, the end of which can be vague, subtle, and unpredictable.

Clothes and their accessories help to differentiate the style and personality of each



person. It acts as an external decoding of taste, culture, peoples, regions and social levels.

In this sophisticated and complex industry, Cuba has historically shown a high level of achievement. This is evidenced by the current boom in Cuban designers and their many international awards.

Cuban traditions and the torrid summer heat dictate the country's current fashion.

Characterized by the use of natural fabrics, while more expensive they are also fresher and more comfortable. Cotton, gauze, and linen, in light colours, are very appropriate for the endless summer in the tropics.

Handcrafted fabrics are also in fashion again such as crochet, *bobeé* or Richelieu embroideries. Corduroys and other bias cloth are in vogue when people become tired of artificial fabrics and turn to the natural ones.

Pleating is commonly used nowadays. They are currently seen as one of the world trends influenced by the Cuban everyday life.

The *guayabera*, the most famous Cuban shirt, deserves special mention for becoming a

classic. This traditional shirt continues to gain wider international popularity, although ironically, locals do not wear it very often. However, there are daring and modern *guayabera* designs for both men and women and all Cuban fashion designers have several versions in their collections.

Fashion designer Mercy Nodarse stands out with her classical dress gowns, *guayaberas* and other loose-fitting shirts called *habaneras*. Her designs are essential for elegant and cultured Cuban men and women who want to be current with fashion trends that are tied to their roots.

Emiliano Nelson is another popular Cuban fashion designer whose *guayabera* designs are elegantly enriched with lace trimming and openwork embroidery in a unique mixture of beauty and tradition.

The Hollywood star, Danny Glover, who is fond of *guayaberas*, travels around the world wearing them as do several Caribbean and African diplomats who have at least one *guayabera* designed by Emiliano Nelson.

The Cuban traditional dress, part of the national identity, attracts fans from all over the world and originates from a combination of French and Spanish traditions.



Natalia Santos exhibits a remarkably romantic style in her inimitable designs. She was awarded the 2003 UNESCO Handcraft Prize for her unique dresses and clothes which have gained her a privileged position in Cuba and abroad.

The work of one of the most important fashion designers of *La Maison* Fashion House in Havana, Martha Verónica Vega, also deserves to be praised. With more than 20 years of experience, Martha has designed numerous excellent collections.

The multi-award winning Evidio Perdomo from the popular Balenciaga Fashion House has achieved very good results with his designs based on a patchwork theme.

New fashion figures are emerging. That is the case of young and talented fashion designer Jacquelyn Furrero, a devoted follower of her successful predecessors. She has entered the fashion world with unique ideas such as her Trinidad Collection. She incorporates the handcraft skills of craftswomen from the central Cuban region into her revealing and appealing designs full of typical Caribbean colors.



These creative and unique designers help to counteract the standardization of fashion by taking their own roads away from the mechanical imitation of a global product.

Cuba's designers have emerged from their roots and have integrated international trends to create an original, fluid and cosmopolitan style. Apart from being a luxurious part of the contemporary Cuban culture, the designs are gaining an important and well-defined place abroad.





TROPICANA

A Splendour of Stars

By María Elena Balán Saíenz
Photos: Vladimir Molina and Jorge Pérez



If you visit Cuba, don't miss the opportunity to see Havana's Tropicana cabaret, one of the world's most famous night club shows. The glamour and flair of this cabaret has evolved continuously through its 65 years of existence.

The Tropicana show is so popular that about a half million visitors enjoy it annually. The grace of its dancers and the beautiful

Cuban music are outstanding features of this show along with the unique stage where real palm trees are incorporated in its design. Reservations for the show can be made through most hotels in Havana.

The club opened on December 31, 1939 and was originally called the Beau Site. Twelve months later, the name was changed to the Tropicana in reference to a



popular song. The number of nightly visitors now greatly exceeds the original 300 who were on hand on the opening night.

Six and a half decades after its opening, the Tropicana has become an entertainment complex which offers the best of Cuban music, cocktails and food.

At the Tropicana, visitors can find the *Salón Bajo las Estrellas*, or the "Ballroom Under the Stars," a fantastic place where the landscaping is part of the big musical show. Daily audiences of about 1000 people enjoy Afro-Cuban dancing, the music of good local and international singers, and Cuban cigars and rum.

More than 200 dancers perform on Tropicana's stages, dressed in extravagant costumes and dancing with the purest and most genuine Cuban flavour.

The Tropicana also has the *Los Jardines* Restaurant and the bohemian *Café Rodney* which pays tribute to Roderico Neyra. Known simply as "Rodney the Magician," he ran the show in his own distinct style many years ago, contributing to the splendour and fame of this cabaret. *

The *Arcos de Cristal* or "Crystal Arch" Ballroom is another choice that the Tropicana offers to its visitors. Visitors can dance to a live orchestra and enjoy Cuban cocktails and delicious food in this magical place.

Well-known singers such as Nat King Cole, Josephine Baker, Xavier Cugat, Carmen Miranda, Pedro Vargas, Libertad Lamarque, Celia Cruz, Rita Montaner, and Bola de Nieve are some of the stars who have performed at this cabaret.



The Tropicana, known for the beauty of its facilities, the talent of its dancers and the brilliance of its shows, was awarded the National Monument distinction in 2002 from the National Council of Monuments.

HOW DID TROPICANA EMERGE?

The Tropicana cabaret began as a dream during the 1930's when the world was suffering from the Great Depression. An Italian businessman named Victor Correa with extensive experience in show business had the idea of turning the Villa Mina farm, then located in the suburban district of Marianao, into an artistic and musical entertainment center.

Correa wanted to preserve the thick grove of palm trees as one of the main attractions. The palm trees, Cuba's national tree, form a

natural outdoor stage benefiting from the country's tropical climate.

The cabaret was like an exotic tropical version of the Parisian Folies Bergere inserted into the rustic environment of a Havana farm. Few businessmen at that time would gamble on Correa's idea of turning a farm into a nightclub.

Since then, the fame and popularity it has gained has proven that it was obviously a great business and artistic idea.

In the late 1940's, the nightclub was acquired by Martin Fox, then known as one of the biggest gambling czars. Fox decided to remodel and enlarge the cabaret and he was able to do so without changing the under-the-trees stage.

An interesting feature of the renovation involved the stage - it could be





mechanically lowered to ground level at the end of the performance to allow the audience to dance to the music of the orchestra.

Architect Max Borges Jr., who was in charge of the renovation of the Tropicana, thought that the prestigious Cuban sculptor, Rita Longa, could make a figure to decorate the pond at the entrance of the cabaret. Though it may seem paradoxical, Longa chose to sculpt a graceful ballet dancer instead of a cabaret dancer in an extravagant costume.

On December 31, 1949, a sculpture named "Ballerina" was placed at the main entrance of the already famous cabaret.

The Ballerina sculpture has been Tropicana's hostess for 56 years and is a new visitor's first hint that the spirit of dance has no bounds.

La Fuente de las Ninfas, or "The Fountain of the Nymphs," was created by the artist Aldo Gamba and is also part of the sculpture collection at the Tropicana.

The Tropicana cabaret is currently one of the largest and most famous night clubs both in Cuba and the world. Also a favourite of businessmen and cigar aficionados, the Tropicana hosts an event for The International Habano Cigar Festival each year in Havana.

With the same name and similar shows, the Tropicana has been re-created in the city of Matanzas, near Varadero, as well as in the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba.

There are also sister nightclubs in the Canary Islands and Santiago de Chile where Cuban artists from the original Tropicana perform and increase the worldwide popularity of the cabaret show.



The Tropicana

Linea de Ferrocarril Calle 72 No. 4505

At Avenida 43, Marianao

Telephone for Reservations: (53-7) 267-0110

E-mail: reservas@tropicana.palmares.cu

Cuban Baseball:



Olympic-Hearted

By Joel Garcia
Photos: Ismael Francisco



Carlos Tabares, a spectacular outfielder, part of the Cuban team which finished second in the first World Baseball Classic.

Baseball began to be played in Cuba a short time after it was created in the U.S. halfway through the 19th century. Most historians agree that the very first game was played in June 19, 1846 with the New York Nines trouncing the Knickerbockers by a score of 23 to 1.

On December 27, 1874, the Palmar de Junco Stadium in the Province of Matanzas hosted the first official baseball game in Cuba with Habana beating Matanzas 51 to 9.

And thus began the introduction of baseball into Cuban culture.

The economic and social situation of the island in that period was a fundamental factor in the improvement of skills for the first generations of Cubans who practiced baseball. The first seasons were marked by the strong commitment of the players to survive the serious poverty and hunger of the time.

Games ended with a “whip-round” or a public collection of money which often produced a ridiculous amount to be shared. Later, the baseball passion in Cuba started to increase along with the number of people practicing it. They began facing off with the best teams of the period from the U.S. professional leagues. Many players took the field more for winning a contract abroad than for entertaining fans or representing their country in international events.

Over the next several decades, there were numerous exchanges between Cuba and the U.S. This included talented players joining the major leagues and numerous visits and training camps in Cuba.

Life was still difficult for many players both on the island and the U.S. Players were faced with corruption, bought games and racism. For those players and fans who loved baseball for the purity of the sport found that the amateur ranks were a better alternative.

When the Cuban Revolution triumphed, relations with the U.S. started to break down and professional baseball ended with the last game between Cienfuegos and Almendares on February 7, 1961.

Taking its place was the finest amateur league in the history of baseball. The names of the teams and the league match-ups were changed and players had an opportunity to play for the joy of the game and the delight of their fans. This year, Cuba celebrated their 45th National Baseball Series.

Those National Series took root in the population and created special moments for Cubans. The passion for the Revolution itself reached into the game and the teams' fighting spirits and became known as the time of the "hearts on the field."

While being classified as amateurs, Cuban players are as good as the professionals playing in other countries. They have won 23 World Cups, three Olympic titles and 11 Pan American Games in international competitions. All this from a small island that has never encouraged the use or poaching of players from other countries.

Those immensely talented players who have refused the biggest pay cheques and have remained in Cuba for the love of the game have made their families and their country proud beyond words.

The past decade has been a tumultuous and exciting one for Cuban baseball. The defeat in the gold medal round at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games had taken away the breath of many fans and players. They had to settle for the silver. The Athens 2004 Olympics were one of the most anticipated by Cubans. After the initial loss to Japan, the team of young, versatile players rebounded to take the gold medal.



Two exceptional players: Second baseman Yulieski Gourriel and right-handed pitcher Norge Luis Vera.



Rolando Meriño, one of the great players of the Santiago de Cuba team.

Earlier this year, the international elite, both amateur and professional, met in the first World Baseball Classic. This was a tournament that included the top professionals from every baseball playing country. Cuba finished in second place, after Japan, in a bit of a disappointment but still a great tournament that showed that Cuba's passion for their national sport and amateur program was something to be proud of.

Most recently, Cuba was saddened to hear that the secret vote at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) General Assembly held in Singapore had decided to eliminate baseball from the Olympic Games, effective from the London 2012 games. IOC President Jacques Rogge referred to the two main reasons for that decision. Firstly, Major League Baseball had placed obstacles for the participation of their players in the Games since baseball officially joined its program in 1992. Secondly, the anti-doping control of professional baseball did not satisfy the Olympic standards. There may have been one more reason that Jacques Rogge didn't mention: that the ratings and money this competition provides failed to meet their expectations.



Michel Enriquez, the great slugger.



In the face of this decision, the strongest argument Cuban can make is to stay intrepid and brave, being loyal heirs to those who wore their "hearts on the field," and striving for excellence in every national and international tournament in which they compete. In being Olympic-hearted.

The players and fans from Cuba and Asian countries hope that this decision will only be a momentary defeat and that baseball will return four years later in 2016. The Olympic Charter allows for a future vote where baseball will be reinstated if it can garner over half of the votes, something which happened with water polo 69 years ago. We all hope that the return of baseball to the games will also be a return of Cuban baseball to the medal podium.



Rey Vicente Anglada and Victor Mesa, two heroes of Cuban baseball.

BARACOA:

BACK TO ITS ROOTS

*By Marta Gómez Ferrals
Pictures: Vladimir Molina*

Visiting Baracoa, in the Province of Guantánamo, 494 years after its founding continues to be a trip into the past and perhaps a realization of our dreams of the origin of the world.

Even for Cubans, Baracoa is a sort of lost paradise from a bygone era. Located in the eastern part of the country, it is a fertile, undulating, abrupt and overwhelming land. In August of 1511, Royal Governor Diego Velázquez founded the first Cuban village, naming it Asuncion de Baracoa.

This is an especially charming city, surrounded by a green and blue water bay and made up of narrow streets, modest eclectic buildings, an old Spanish fort, and

some more modern and comfortable hotels. But to talk about Baracoa, we have to go back to its roots.

One of the main attractions is simply walking its streets and breathing the fresh air from the clamour of virgin lands and breathtaking nature surrounding Baracoa.

This community of over 81,000 inhabitants - chiefly employed in the small scale development of forest resources such as processing coconuts, growing coffee and cocoa, and producing chocolate and activated charcoal - live in one of the most extraordinary environments in the country.

Thick rainforest foliage and slender pine trees cover Baracoa's mountains and coastal plain. Cuban and international



Coconut plantation, a main staple.



The Miel River.

scientists agree that the most important biodiversity in the Caribbean is found in this territory due to the prevalent flora and fauna.

Timber alone accounts for 130 species including cedar, mahogany, ebony, teak, barlaco, white oak and coconut palm. Three of the four species of palms existing in Cuba grow there and the fauna includes very rare species in danger of extinction such as the almiqui, sparrow hawk, and royal woodpecker.

The *Polymita picta*, a small, bright-coloured snail, is considered by some malacologists (experts in the study of molluscs) to have the most beautiful shell in the world. Baracoa furnishes its unique and exclusive environment.

Baracoa boasts an important network of waterways. Among the most important

ivers are the Toa, which is the largest in Cuba, and the Yumuri, Duaba, Miel, Macaguanigua and Quivián whose waters are crystal clear and unpolluted.

Other well preserved natural resources are Baracoa's small and cozy beaches. Its main beaches, the Yumuri, Barigua, Miel, Duaba, Maguana, Cayo Santo and Mapurisi, are open to the public with some of them emerging from rain-forest areas.

The Capital of Taino Culture

We will stop describing Baracoa's natural beauty to meet with the local historian, Alejandro Hartmann.

"Definitely," says Hartmann, "the Araucanian word 'Baracoa' means 'existence of sea,' and not 'high lands' or 'water lands,' as one would think, taking into account the geography of the place."



Polymita picta, unique to Baracoa.

Apart from being a painstaking and tireless researcher of the history of his territory, Hartmann feels a very deep love for its people, their customs and traditions. That is why we were lucky to have him accompany us while we were writing this article.

It is no wonder that Baracoa has been called the capital of timber, coconut and cocoa since the country's largest reserves of those forest resources are found here. But it also has to be called the capital of Taino culture in Cuba. Most of Cuba's archaeological sites, more than 60, were found in this region. The Tainos, of Araucanian origin, were the most developed indigenous group

living on the Island when the Spanish conquistadors arrived.

The Tainos plowed the land, developed pottery and had a very complex mystical religious system. Hartmann added that the version of Christopher Columbus' diary written by Friar Bartolome de las Casas highlights a large presence of indigenous peoples in the region.

As soon as you arrive in Baracoa, your host will ask you whether you know Baracoa's three lies. Indulge him or her by saying "no," even though you may know the answer. The host will say that there exists an anvil that is not made of iron, a "sleeping beauty" who is not a woman, and a river named "Honey" whose waters are not fresh.



Christopher Columbus' monument.



The Parra Cross is one of the 24 crosses planted by Columbus in the Americas.

The first answer is the famous Baracoa anvil which is really a flat topped mountain which dominates the cityscape and can be seen from a long distance through the sea mists. The mountain is covered by thick vegetation including coffee plantations, ferns, cedars, *ocujes* (*calophyllum antillarum*) and palm trees. There is also a unique palm in the region, the *Coccothrinax yunquensis*, which grows up to eight meters in height. The small plateau, which is over 560 meters high, is the nesting place of Cuban tocororos, green and West Indian woodpeckers, thrushes, and other beautiful singing birds.

The second answer is a group of hills called the Sleeping Beauty which, seen from a distance, looks like a reclining woman. We will explain the legend of the Honey River a bit later on.

Columbus' Cross

"Christopher Columbus planted a cross in a rock at the entrance of that port,

which I think he called the Puerto Santo," wrote Friar Bartolome in the diary, describing the ceremony to erect what is now known as the *Santa Cruz de Parra* in Baracoa on December 1, 1492.

According to historians, the great explorer erected 29 crosses in different places in the Americas but only Baracoa's cross has survived the vicissitudes of time.

Eighteen years after Columbus placed that cross in Baracoa, Conqueror Don Diego Velazquez and the members of his expedition found the cross in the area where they founded the first village. A wild grapevine had stuck to the cross leading people to call it the *Cruz de la Parra* or the "Grapevine Cross."

Historical evidence shows that the symbol was venerated from the very beginning and that Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas used to officiate his masses near the cross.

Anuncio

In 1987, an interdisciplinary commission formed by Cuban experts and Doctor Roger Dechamps of the Tervuren Museum in Brussels certified the cross as genuine. The cross was made of Coccoloba wood, which grows on the coast of the West Indies and Cuba. The Carbon 14 test revealed with 95 percent accuracy that the cross dated between 860 and 1530. This proved that the age of the wood coincided with Columbus' arrival. The cross is on display at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Assumption.

Following the thread of history, when Baracoa lost its position as the capital of Cuba in the 16th century, the village fell to the mercy of pirates and corsairs' attacks for about two centuries and a lucrative rescue trade flourished.

In the 18th century, Spanish authorities decided to put an end to the situation and built a defence system formed by the Matachin and La Punta Forts and the Seboruco de Santa Barbara Castle. These old structures have survived the passing of time with some restorations. The forts are currently the headquarters of a local museum and the castle is a hotel.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the French landowners who escaped from the Haitian Revolution introduced the latest techniques for coffee growing in Baracoa's mountains. The cultivation of cocoa was



The spectacular La Farola viaduct.

also introduced into this region along with the production of honey, wax, sugar cane and coconuts.

In 1878, Baracoa had become an important exporter of coconut products, which were of great value in cosmetics, and a variety of banana locally known as "guineas." Improvements in the cultivation



The first village founded by the Spanish in 1511.

of cocoa and the production of chocolate started to distinguish Baracoa as the land of the exquisite products.

Then, Baracoa suffered through a long period of economic and social impoverishment. The difficult access to its lands and the corrupt governors contributed to the deterioration of the village. After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Baracoa began to overcome that situation.

The only access to the village was by sea or steep mountain paths, some of which are over 1,200 meters high. La Farola viaduct, built by the new Revolutionary Government in the 1960's, is one of the country's most important engineering works. The viaduct goes through the Sagua Baracoa Mountain and its highest point, Altos de Cotilla, is 600 meters above sea level.

Baracoa is a land of refined cultural traditions. Guitar music flourished in the 18th century and was even more developed than in Havana. This village is also the birthplace of popular dances like "Nengon" and "Kiriba."

According to Hartmann, the "plastic" arts (i.e. sculpture and modelling) have always been very good in Baracoa due to the strong influence of the natural colours, its flora and fauna, the impressive landscapes and the impact of the religious mythology of the region.

Returning to the third answer of the romantic legend of the Honey River, here is one version. There was once a

beautiful and cultured young woman who everybody called Miel (Honey) because of her tanned skin and pleasant manners. One day, a sailor watched while she swam in a river. He fell under the spell of her charm and immediately began to court her. Honey also fell in love with the sailor and thinking of the departure of her beloved, she started to enrich the waters of the river in which they first met. The water became sweeter and sweeter. The young sailor began to delay his departure to take dips in the sweet water of the river. He eventually married Honey and never left.

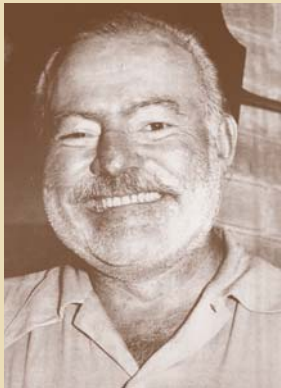
The river was named after this girl and many people will assure you that those who bathe in its waters will marry and stay there forever.



Cacao tree flowers.

The Havana of Hemingway

By *Ciro Bianchi Ross*
Photos: *Prensa Latina*



The Hemingway Monument at El Floridita.

Ernest Hemingway had a special relationship with Cuba that stretched over many decades. He settled in *Finca Vigia* - his "outlook farm," a thirty minute drive from downtown Havana - for the last 22 years of his life. He was shortly to finish the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and soon after was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Wooden African sculptures, a piece of white ceramic from Picasso's workshop, wooden African sculptures, the skull bones of lions, many cats, and 9,000 books he treasured in his life made Gábril Garcia Márquez exclaim after many years: "What a peculiar library this man possessed!"

Hemingway first arrived in Cuba in April of 1928. He was accompanied by his second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, and later travelled from Havana to Key West where he finished writing *A Farewell to*

Arms. He returned in 1932 for marlin fishing in Cuban waters and wrote his first chronicle about Cuba in 1933. Henceforth, he would never dissociate again from "this large, beautiful and unhappy island," as he described it in "Green Hills of Africa."

The Old Man and The Sea is Hemingway's big "Cuban" novel par excellence. Parts of *Islands in the Stream* are located in Cuba. He also mentions the small Caribbean island in many stories and newspaper articles. The location of *To Have and Have Not* is to a great extent also Cuban.

He said once about Cuba that he loved this nation and it felt like home, the place he was destined for.

On Obispo Street

His first home in Havana was the Ambos Mundos Hotel on Obispo Street where he always stayed in room 511. At 5:00

p.m., after a day of fishing, Hemingway would lock himself in his room, order some food and start writing. He did it, handwritten, on his bed and later typed it up almost without corrections. In his interview with George Plimpton in 1958, he said that the Ambos Mundos was a nice place to work.

He would walk down Obispo Street wearing Bermuda shorts and Basque sneakers, usually without socks, and a light shirt. He later brought to mind the characteristic smells of that street in *Islands in the Stream*.

The bustling downtown areas and the proximity to the port where he kept his yacht, Pilar, made him feel at ease at the Ambos Mundos.

But that “anonymous and depersonalised” room, as he said, and the lack of privacy given continuous visits by Hemingway’s friends made

his third wife, Martha Gelhorn, uncomfortable. It was Marty who found *Finca Vigía* and fixed up the little house but Hemingway initially found it unpleasant; it was too far from *El Floridita*.

A Swig of Shallow Waters

El Floridita bar and restaurant is depicted in many chapters of *Islands in the Stream*. While reading those chapters, the reader meets a character dubbed “Honest Liliana.” Actually, her real name was Leopoldina, a Cuban prostitute who “made a living” at *El Floridita* and was Hemingway’s great love. The birthplace of the Daiquiri is *El Floridita* where the prominent novelist created a special Daiquiri he named after himself. He would usually sit on the first stool at the left of the bar where a monument to him now stands.



El Floridita at night.



Hemingway's living room in the Museum at the Finca Vigía.

La Terraza is a restaurant in the sea town of Cojimar near to Havana and one of Hemingway's favourite places. Like in *El Floridita*, he favoured the left corner, next to the window.

"It is a great pleasure to be here," said the author of *Islands in the Stream* referring to *La Terraza*. The flavour and colour of the Daiquiri is accurately depicted in that novel - a swig of shallow waters.

One Lives On This Island

Hemingway wrote a chronicle in 1949 in which he gives his reasons for staying so long in Cuba. Of course he mentioned the Gulf Stream, a site he thought was one of the best and most abundant fishing waters he ever saw in his life, the eighteen types of fruit he harvested, and his coop of fighting cocks. He said many times that he liked to live on this island because the fresh morning air allowed him to work better and more comfortably than in any other place.

He would write standing up during his last years because

that was how "he thought with more clarity." He used to wake up early and stopped writing only when he was sure what he would write next. Having 500 "clean" words in a day satisfied him.

García Márquez stated that *Finca Vigía* was the only house in which Hemingway lived with stability. Mary Welsh, his fourth and last wife, did her best to organize the farm and her husband's life. She complained about the constant visits they had and ordered a three-story tower to be built near the house. The top floor would be Hemingway's work room. He went up once and stayed for fifteen minutes and tried, uselessly, to write a phrase. He came down and never returned to that place to write, saying that he couldn't stand the loneliness.

Hara-kiri with a Gun

"Look how I will kill myself," he used to tell his friends at the *Finca Vigía*. He would place the butt of his Mannlicher Schoenauer 265 shotgun on the floor and the barrel in his mouth. Then



Hemingway's Nobel Prize for Literature.



Hemingway's Special Daiquiri.



Hemingway's yacht at the Finca Vigía.



Mary Welsh, his fourth and last wife in Cuba.



Hemingway's skipper, Gregorio Fuentes, who passed away at the age of 102 years.



Partial view of Hemingway's library.



he used a big toe to pull the trigger. One would hear a click and he would exclaim with a smile, "this is the hara-kiri rifle technique." Unfortunately, this is how he ended his life.

When Hemingway died, his will was read out in Havana. He transferred his properties, including *Finca Vigia*, to the Cuban State. The old writer, who reluctantly refused to receive colleagues at his house, wanted the farm to be turned into a place where young intellectuals and artists could meet and for a botany research centre to be built. Fidel Castro admired Hemingway but only met him once at a marlin fishing tournaments that the novelist had organized. President Castro suggested to Hemingway's widow that the site be turned

into a museum and the offer was accepted.

Rather than being just a museum, *Finca Vigia* is still Hemingway's home. It may seem empty but it is full of life. It is as if Hemingway wasn't dead but absent for a while and he could be back from *El Floridita* or hunting at any time. Then, he would put down his carbine and glance over his mail; normally not answered as evidenced by a rubber stamp in his library that read: "I never write letters." He would have a drink: "A good whiskey will be fine; it is one of the nicest things in life," he once said. Then he would sit in front of his Royal portable typewriter to continue writing the strange and ambitious novel he never finished.



An Ache for Traditions

By Idania Machado
Photos: Prensa Latina

The *Orishas* are deities that inhabit the *Yoruba* pantheon of the magical *Santeria* religion or the *Ocha* Rule in Cuba. They are deities who fall in love, are envious of each other, fight, know the secrets of the forest, control the elements of nature but possess as many imperfections as a normal human being.

Santeria is the most popular religion of African origin being practised in Cuba and was brought here by Nigerian slaves of the *Yoruba* tribe.

Any observant person on the streets of Cuba has seen, at least once in his life, objects near a tree or even openly on a street corner. Bananas tied with a red ribbon, coconuts, eggs, fruit and other objects that seem out of place on the urban landscape - they are the *Ebbó*. Most curious people stop to look while others prefer to cross the street, just in case. *Santeria* believers have

placed these offerings to solve their personal or health related problems.

As a sociological and cultural phenomenon, *Santeria* has many interesting elements. Its beautiful *Patakines* fables about the creation of the *Orishas* and the reasons for their behaviour are a marvellous legacy. Passed down in an oral tradition, it has survived time, colonial dominion and its enemies. *Iyabós*, or initiates in the religion, dressed all in white and wearing bright and colourful necklaces and bracelets, walk among us in our everyday lives.

Experts explain that *Santeria* is a result of the relationship between two cultures and two religions: the Catholic and the African. To practise and protect their religion, the slaves brought from Africa during the Spanish colonization of Cuba had to camouflage their beliefs with those of the dominant class.





The encounter with, and influence of, this Spanish culture led people to look for similarities in the stories of the Catholic saints to allow them to worship their own deities through them.

Either by similarities in garments or in legends, those divinities were combined.

For example, *la Virgen de la Caridad* (the Virgin of Charity), patron saint of Cuba for Catholics, is *Ochún* in *Santería*. *La Virgen de la Caridad* is a mulatta with a golden yellow dress and is associated with sensuality in Cuba. In *Santería*, she represents the saint who conquers with her beauty and her symbolic colour is yellow.

Meanwhile, Santa Barbara has a sword in her hand and is linked to thunder and is dressed in red and white. Slaves adored him in front of their colonial masters but secretly, they were paying tribute to *Changó*, the *Orisha* warrior dressed in red and white, who carries an axe and is the master of lightning.

All that transcultural richness, as it was called by the Cuban ethnologist and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, goes beyond religion and is also part of the national culture finding expression in song and dance.

A MAGICAL WORLD

Santería has 401 *Orishas* but according to the president of Cuba's *Yoruba*

Association, Antonio Castañeda, only about 50 of them are commonly known in Cuba.

It has a system of divination, *Ifá*, in which everything is consulted before making a decision or ordering *Santería* believers to do something.

Orula, the *Orisha* who has the power of divination, is the guru of men and their futures and is the interpreter of the *Ifá* oracle. Natalia Bolívar in her book, *Cuba: Images and Stories of a Magical World*, states that it is *Orula* who speaks to his devotees through a medium called a *Babalawo*, the highest priest in this religion.

There are also the *Santeros*, or clerics, with the men referred to as *Babalocha* and the women *hyalocha*. They rank below the *Babalawo* and consult with conch shells.

The *hyabós*, children of the saints, are those who have held a ceremony that according to the divine mandate, an *Orisha* will rule over them. They must carry out a series of rituals and habits for the rest of their lives. Each year, they must have a party to honour their main saint.

There are many fascinating aspects of *Santería* which continue to coexist with modern reality. A visit to Cuba will be enriched by a brush with this unique and ancient religion.

Traditional and Natural Medicine

Plants, Herbs, and Flowers to Improve Your Health

By Jose Mayo

Photos: Joaquin Viñas and Jorge Pérez

A museum and heritage site is located in La Sierrita (the Little Mountain Range), in the central Province of Cienfuegos, where medicinal and aromatic plants and herbs are cultivated. There, a young doctor and a farmer have joined forces to develop traditional medicine.



The “Museo de Sitio de las Plantas Medicinales en Cuba Gallego Otero” is the only museum in the world dedicated to medicinal and aromatic plants and herbs, reflecting the achievements made in researching natural products in Cuba.

The architect of the unusual facility, located in the foothills of the Escambray Mountain Range, is Dr. Rodolfo Arencibia who has been connected with traditional medicine since he was a student at the Medical Institute of Havana.

“I went deep into the fascinating world of botany in 1991 to discover more about the therapeutic properties of many plants,” said Arencibia.

During that time, he met a farmer named Enrique Otero but popularly known in the area as “*El Gallego*” since his parents were immigrants from Galicia, Spain. He was born in the mountain heights of Guamuñaya, Cuba, and his vast knowledge

and experience from over half a century of treating people with herbs, leaves, roots and fruits have turned him into a practical and popular “scientist.”

That is how Dr. Arencibia refers to him in the 400 plus page book he wrote, *Un Científico Popular*, documenting 200 procedures to fight diseases and recording the biography of this singular man of the countryside and nature.

Dr. Arencibia stated that “the book, recorded on a CD by Gesta publishing house, seeks to promote the good results and the tireless and committed work of *EL Gallego Otero* to cure ailments through natural therapy.” The CD book is available for purchase at the Museum.

He recalled that he had entered the Ecology and Systematization Institute of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment in 2000 to direct a project to organize nearly 20 farm enterprises conducting research on



plants in conjunction with the Ministries of Agriculture and of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration.

But for some years, he has sought to develop the Comprehensive Research and Development Institute of medicinal and aromatic plants, herbs and fruits located in the La Sierrita area, roughly 25 miles from Cienfuegos.

"In that place," he said, "in an area of approximately 136 hectares, there is a vast area dedicated to the production and handcrafted processing of more than 330 species of medicinal plants to treat illnesses as well as herbs used in the preparation of foods and aromatic plants for the perfume and cosmetic industries."

At the same site, the museum was inaugurated in June 2004 and visitors were allowed to see the care needed to cultivate, harvest and prepare natural products.

"In this picturesque facility, the popular traditions are kept as

treasures from the time of our ancestors as well as rescuing about thirty varieties of regional plants in danger of extinction," according to Arenceibia.

He said that there is also a replica of the mud walled, earthen floor and zinc roofed house where the Galician parents of *El Gallego Otero* lived in the Indio Valley, Escambray. Visitors can see their personal effects as well as numerous documents, books and other materials related to botany.

Workshops, seminars and forums are held periodically and have allowed thousands of Cubans and foreign visitors to learn about the agri-technology of plants.

Arenceibia doesn't avoid his office hours if a patient needs him but he prefers researching the secrets of this green world. He asserted that "thousands of people with diverse illnesses frequently visit this place, although it is hard to get here, to





see *El Gallego Otero*. With his homespun wisdom and scientific experience, and inspired by the legacy of Cuban scientist Juan Tomas Roig, he advises them of which plant or remedy is the most appropriate to cure their ailment."

La Sierrita project receives the support of numerous organizations and institutions, he noted.

El Gallego Otero is a noble and humanitarian Cuban farmer who

fought the Fulgencio Batista tyranny, and has devoted over five decades of his life to heal his fellow man with natural products.

"His example of perseverance and desire to expand his knowledge commits us to stand up with him against all odds and unconditionally support him so he can keep on developing traditional medicine to improve the health of all Cubans," concluded Dr. Rodolfo Arencibia.



Museo de Sitio de las Plantas Medicinales en Cuba Gallego Otero

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Free Admission





An Island That Is All Music

Text and Photos: Prensa Latina

Many people from around the world describe Cuba as the island of music. It can lay claim to over 25 different rhythms with the best known being *Son*, *Conga*, *Rumba* and the *Cha Cha Cha*.

There are several reasons for Cuba's prolific production of musical forms. Firstly, its geographic location is a rendezvous point for many different nations and cultures.

Secondly, the culture of revelry and festivities has encouraged the opening of many musical venues and has attracted many musicians and singers into professional entertainment. Thirdly, there is the oral tradition of the percussionists.

A Brief History

During the early part of the 20th century, recordings of Cuban musicians made by



Omara Portuondo, the Buenavista Social Club diva.



*Chucho Valdés, a great pianist and the master of Latin Jazz.
Winner of five Grammy's.*



Francisco Replido, Compay Segundo to the world, another musical personality of the Buenavista Social Club.



Ibrahim Ferrer, the late musician returned to the musical scene with the Buenavista Social Club.



Juan Formell, Los Van Van's director and also a Grammy winner.

U.S. companies flooded the Americas, Europe and other parts of the world. This encouraged an exceptionally broad spread of Cuban music and its popularity started to grow.

The first boom, the first revolution of national music came when the eastern *Son* arrived in Havana during the 1920s. This musical form was marked by profound changes in the types of instruments used, the new dynamic performances, and the new style of lyrics.

Years went by and in the 1950s, according to many experts, a real musical high-point brought forth

two resounding rhythms, *Mambo* and *Cha Cha Cha*.

The music of the brilliant singer Benny Moré, dubbed *El Barbaro del Ritmo* (The Greatest of the Rhythms), became very popular at this time.

Arts schools were created in Cuba after the Revolution in 1959 and world class musicians began entering the entertainment world and Cuba began to reap the rewards.

The *Nueva Trova* or "New Song Movement," spearheaded by Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, appeared on the domestic scene, while musicians



Pablo Milanés.



Silvio Rodríguez.



Celina González, Queen of Campesino Music.



Elio Revé, teacher of several generations of Cuban musicians.

Adalberto Alvarez, the great Cuban musician.



Polo Montañes, the Guajiro Natural.



Benny Moré, the Greatest of the Rhythms.



The late Rubén González, another great Buenavista Social Club Musician.

like the late Elio Reve and Juan Formell introduced the *Shangüi-Shae* rhythm.

Later, Formell created the *Songo*, combining *Son*, *Yoruba* and modern pop and would eventually become the director of the wildly popular Los Van Van orchestra. Chucho Valdes, the winner of 5 Grammy's and counting, formed his band "Irakere" to open the era of latin jazz.

The wave of the music known as Cuban salsa was unleashed in the 1980s. The 1990s witnessed the fusion of *Son*, *Rumba*, latin jazz, rap, pop, Caribbean and other rhythms. The revival of *Son* and the traditional *Trova* took Cuba by surprise as the 20th century faded away.

Singers and musicians who were about to retire united their talents and returned to the stage. Then the Buenavista Social Club musical phenomenon made its breakthrough and brought its musicians back into the spotlight. Old musical

celebrities such as Compay Segundo, Ibrahim Ferrer, Omara Portuondo and Ruben Gonzalez went back to work to show the world the best of Cuban music.

Polo Montañes had sung in small country festivals and venues for many years when he recorded his first disc, "Guajiro Natural." This authentic peasant's simple traditional music rocketed him to world wide fame.

Cuba welcomes the new century with all of its musical reserves full. Its dance music remains successful in Europe and throughout the Caribbean island. Old *Son* and *Trova* performers are engaged in constant international tours. Cuban rhythms may have been fading but they are in fashion again.

Cuba does possess the most abundant source of rhythms and the widest musical diversity on the planet; a source continuously preserved and nurtured.

Our Chef

A Show Dish

By *Ciro Bianchi Ross*
Photos: *Jorge Pérez*



The Aguiar Dining Room is one of the most exclusive and luxurious restaurants in Cuba. It is located on the ground floor of the majestic National Hotel of Cuba and is entering its 75th anniversary of its opening.

The restaurant seats 90 guests and specializes in Cuban and international cuisine with an extensive wine list to match and compliment any course. The

Grand Aguiar Shrimp Flambé, which we are presenting today, is the most popular and delicious item on the menu. This is the restaurant's star dish where the chef prepares the meal at tableside culminating in a classical culinary finish. Juan Carlos Taboada, head chef of the Aguiar Dining Room for the last four years and a remarkable hand at fish and seafood, offers the recipe.

Grand Aguiar shrimps flambé

Lightly fry a tablespoon each of finely diced onion and fresh tomatoes, a teaspoon of minced garlic, 400 grams of raw cleaned shrimps (about 16 jumbo sized) in a tablespoon of olive oil for 3 minutes. Add 3 ounces of Cuban rum and flambé for about 1 1/2 minutes until the flame dies down. Add 6 ounces of white wine and reduce. Then add the bisque sauce to cover the shrimp. Turn down heat and cooked covered for 3 minutes. Then add 4 tablespoons heavy cream, stir and serve.

Garnish with white rice and sautéed vegetables.

(Bisque Sauce)

Prepare a shrimp stock by combining two cups of water, the shrimps shells and heads, a sprig of parsley, one onion cut in half, one garlic glove, and a cup of white wine. Bring to a boil, then simmer covered for 30 minutes, let cool and strain. In a pan, combine 3 ounces of butter, a teaspoon of chopped sweet red pepper and salt and white pepper to taste, then slowly add 3 tablespoons of white flour stirring constantly until a doughy paste is created, then continue cooking for two minutes. Slowly add the stock stirring constantly and cook on low heat for about 30 minutes to the consistency of a sauce.



The Corsair's Mojito

While remembered as a great historical figure, the name of Sir Francis Drake inspired terror on the world seas for over 30 years. People from Galicia, Portugal, the Canary Islands, Puerto Rico, Havana, and Panama feared him. Spanish spies kept watch over his departures from Plymouth and when he was spotted in Europe they would try to warn the settlers of the New World colonies.

It is said that the Spanish built walls and forts around their overseas cities because of the fear inspired by the notorious British corsair. Drake was knighted by the Queen of England, died in 1596, and his remains lie in a tin coffin at the bottom of the Caribbean Sea. It is said that some of his treasures still remain hidden.

His legacy of raids and hidden fortunes can take second place to something else that he left behind during his voyages over the seas of the Americas - Sir Francis created a cocktail he named the "Drake."

The Drake, which was in great demand in the West Indies until the 19th century, is the predecessor of today's Mojito and is said to have curative properties. A character in Ramón de Palma's 1838 novel, *Cholera in Havana*, says "I drink a little firewater Drake with sugar everyday at 11:00 a.m. and I feel perfectly well."

With the passing of time, the firewater was replaced by distilled rum to prepare the cocktail. In 1910, people started referring to the shaken Mojito but it was twenty years until the drink we now know as the Mojito emerged. It was first served at La Concha beach resort west of Havana and then it passed to other bars in Havana. It became more popular until finally reaching La Bodeguita del Medio in the 1940s where it rose to its current fame.

The Mojito may lack the refinement of the Daiquiri, the presence of the President, the baroque style of the Mary Pickford, the haughtiness of the Mulata but it remains one of the top ten Cuban cocktails along with the Saoco, Isla de Pinos, Havana Special, Cuba Libre and Rum Collins.



Drake

In a 6 ounce glass, combine one teaspoon of sugar, the juice of half a lime, an ounce and a half of aguardiente or sugarcane firewater, a piece of ice and sprigs of fresh peppermint. Stir well.



Mojito

(La Bodeguita del Medio)

In a tall glass, combine half a teaspoon of sugar and the juice of half a lime. Dissolve well with a little bit of sparkling water. Add a sprig of fresh peppermint and crush the stem without damaging its leaves. Then add some ice cubes and an ounce and a half of white rum. Complete filling the glass with sparkling water. Stir well. Garnish with a sprig of fresh peppermint.



Cubapius

Mojito

No. 3 (Floridita)



In an 8 ounce glass, combine one teaspoon of sugar, a sprig of fresh peppermint, the juice and peel of one lime, and 3 drops of angostura bitters. Crush well the sprig of peppermint. Add two ounces of brandy and some ice. Complete filling the glass with sparkling water.



El Guayabero

Text and Photos: Prensa Latina



Faustino Oramas, artistically known as El Guayabero, is undoubtedly one of the most well-known and popular Cuban singers. This tall slim man who always wears a straw hat and walks slowly has a quixotic look, full of dreams and magic, which translated into his large musical repertoire. He accompanies himself with a musical instrument known as a “tres,” a traditional Cuban guitar with three double strings.

Faustino was born on July 4, 1911 and though he is over 90 years old, he continues improvising ingenious quatrains, inspired in the most complicated stories of everyday life.

Through his “sones” and “guarachas” (traditional Cuban music), Faustino conveys great Creole fluency, typical of his personality. The jokes and anecdotes with their double meanings always make his audiences laugh.

El Guayabero says with a smile that he does not intentionally do this but that the double meaning is given by those who listen to his music with a bit of malice. Holguin’s minstrel is surely an outstanding figure of the Creole picaresque genre.

In this customs and traditions section we want to review some facets of the life of Faustino, a man who is part of Cuba’s richest Creole folklore.

According to Faustino, when he had no contracts with radio stations or record companies, he would travel from town to town with other musicians. On a tour of eastern

Cuba, they arrived in a small town that was to change its history due to its link with Oramas.

The town was named Guayabero and there lived a beautiful olive-skinned girl who was very interested in the artist.

The minstrel did not know that the beautiful girl was the wife of a member of the rural guard, a repressive police body that abused power in the countryside before the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

The officer was jealous of the musician and threatened to beat him up. Before settling scores, Faustino Oramas and his friends had to leave the town.

Once the fright was gone, that event inspired the artist to create the chorus “en Guayabero mama, me quieren dar” or “in Guayabero mama, somebody wants to beat me up.” After that, Oramas began to be known as El Guayabero. Along with the chorus, the song “In Guayabero Mama” became very famous with the passing of time. It is now very common to hear this song in the voice of this nonagenarian singer. He still makes performance tours of Cuba and abroad.

In the 1960’s, bolero singer Pacho Alonso included the song in his orchestra’s repertoire.

Fame has not caused this minstrel to lose his modesty. El Guayabero, Faustino Oramas, has been decorated with major distinctions but the most valuable for him is the affection his people.

Hasta pronto!



"La Quietud" Playa Bariay, Province of Holguin.

Julio Larramendi was born in Santiago de Cuba on March 25, 1954. He studied chemistry in the USSR and obtained his Ph.D. at the University of Havana in 1980. In 1975 he began to work in a laboratory specializing in technical and scientific photography and acted as its director from 1983 to 1997. Since then, he was worked as a professional photographer and has given postgraduate lectures and workshops on photography both in Cuba and abroad. His photographs have been published in sixteen books and have been used to illustrate Cuban music CD covers, telephone directories and the majority of the pre-paid

phone cards in Cuba. He is a member of the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists, the Cuban Journalists Union, the Cuban Association of Social Communicators, the International Federation of Photographic Art, the Cuban Society of Zoology and adjunct researcher of the National Museum of Natural History of Cuba. He has won numerous awards and has appeared in more than fifty exhibitions in Cuba, Mexico, Sweden, Spain, Costa Rica, Andorra, Argentina, France, Italy and the United States. In November, 2003, the Julio Larramendi Gallery was inaugurated in the Conde de Villanueva Hotel, in Old Havana.

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