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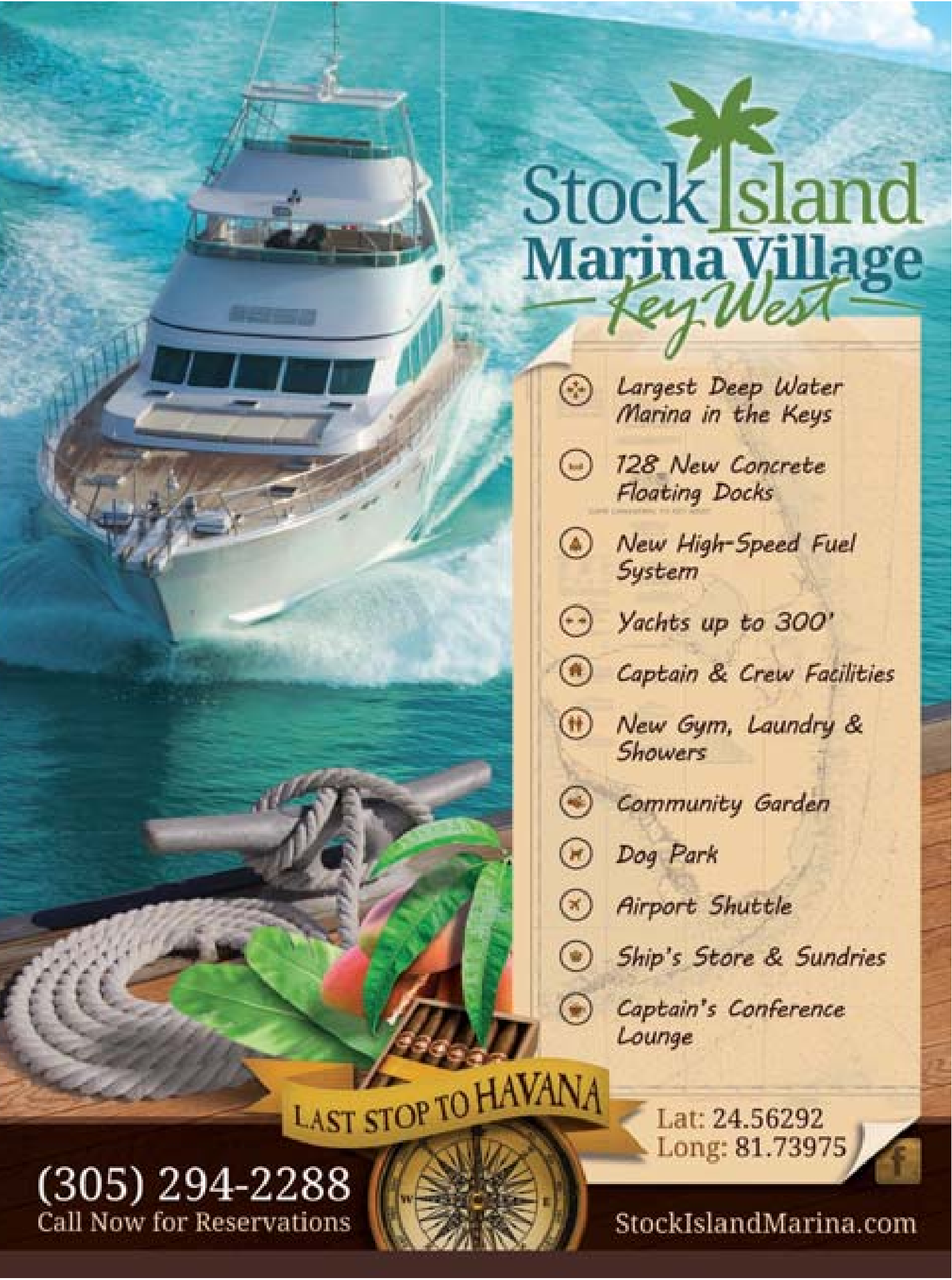
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64th Ernest Hemingway International Billfishing Tournament

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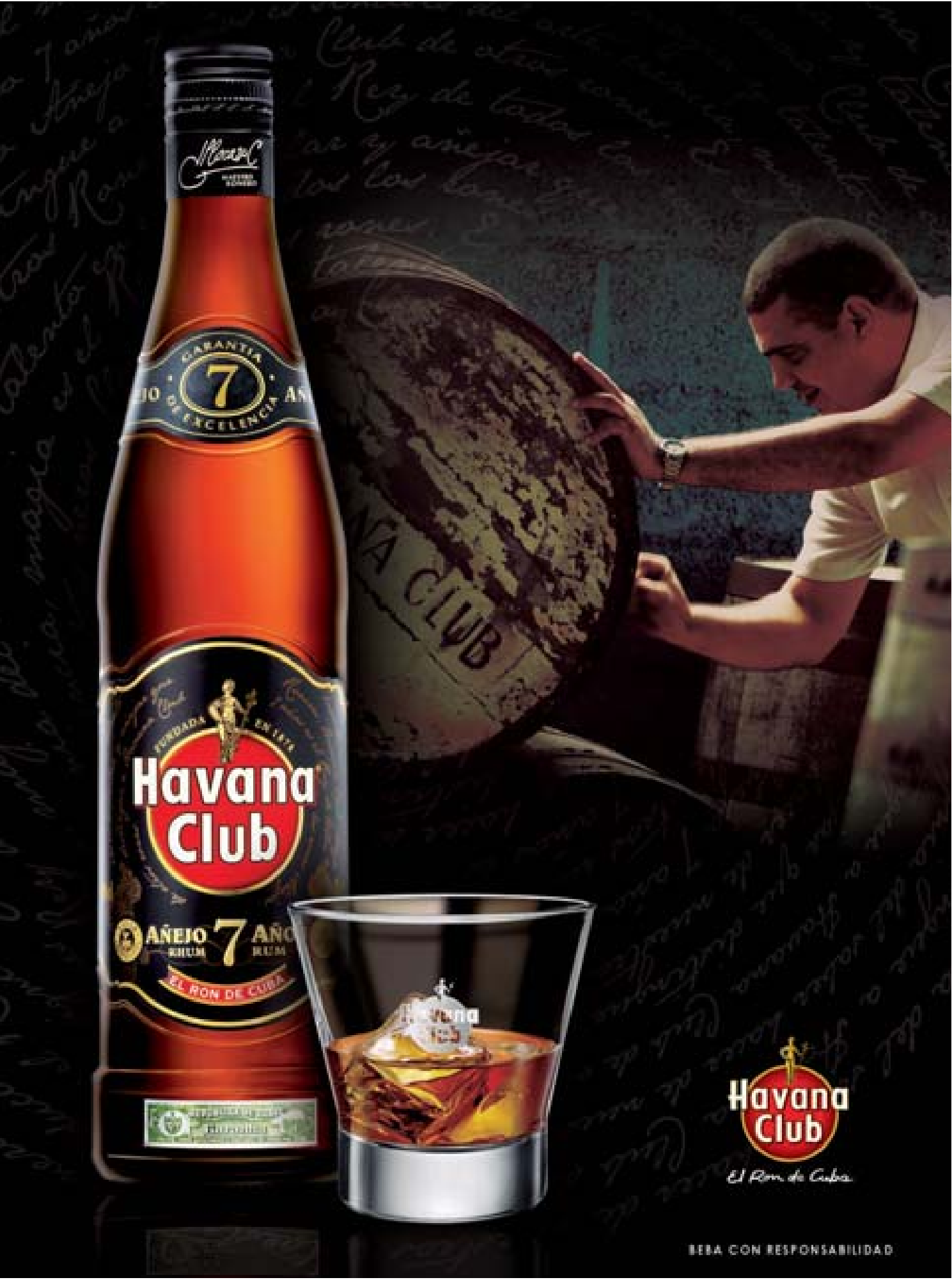
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Letter from the Publisher

Dear Readers,

Cuba is always a great place to visit, and that's even truer this year, as 2014 promises many interesting developments in the country's economy, culture, tourism and society as a whole. And **Cubaplus** is delighted to bring you updates, recommendations and insight into many of these events.

For pleasure boaters, new regulations now allow recreational vessels to remain in the country for up to five years, a period that can be extended, and paperwork for docking in Cuba's marinas has been improved and simplified, with a new website for routine procedures, according to an official announcement.

And now, visitors to Cuba have a new option for cruising around the island: Cuba Cruise, a unique opportunity to experience the history, landscapes, and culture of Cuba in a comfortable and seamless travel environment. In partnership with Viajes Cubanacan, this trip around the island aboard the Louis Cristal cruis ship is a dream come true.

One of the events that both Cubans and visitors look forward to every year is the International Book Fair, which is set for Feb. 13-23 in Havana and until March 9 in the country's other provinces. It is one of the country's most important cultural happenings, featuring literature from 50 countries, author's presentations, readings, music, and more for the whole family, all at the historic Morro-Cabaña fortress complex.

Another annual fiesta holds sumptuous surprises for cigar-lovers: the Habanos Festival, where connoisseurs of the world's best—the habano—can enjoy presentations of new cigars, tastings, visits to tobacco plantations, a sommelier contest and other fine pleasures.

And for those interested in learning about Cuba's achievements in education and education developments internationally, the 9th International Congress on Higher Education, "Universidad 2014," takes place on Feb. 10. This year's theme is "For a Socially Responsible University."

Along with education, health care is one of Cuba's proudest achievements. In this issue we bring you information about Servimed, which has been providing healthcare services to visitors with the highest ethical, scientific, and humanitarian standards for 20 years.

Cubans take anniversaries very seriously and this year the city of Trinidad, a World Heritage site, is celebrating its 500th birthday. It's a place where the ancient and the modern, the sea and the mountains come together; where every corner is brimming with history, and where the hospitality of the people is unforgettable. Its Ancón Beach is one of the best on Cuba's southern coast, and other attractions include the beautiful cays of Cayo Blanco and Cayo Iguana, a major coral reef, and 27 diving spots.

Another city is also celebrating half a millennium of existence: Camagüey. This city's historic district is the largest in the country and is a World Heritage site. Along with its interesting history, architecture and culture, it has beautiful natural surroundings.

When you visit Cuba, it's almost impossible to leave without enjoying its music, traditional and modern, romantic and danceable. In this issue, we bring you an interview with Giraldo Piloto, leader of the band Klimax. One of Piloto's projects is the Fiesta del Tambor, or Havana Drum Festival, which takes place in March, and features top percussionists from around the world. This year's event features an International Percussion Contest and an International Casino Dance Contest, both open to anyone interested in participating.

And we have much more for you in this issue: fashion, fine dining, new developments in tourism, and sports. And one especially intriguing feature for Valentine's Day: the loves of Cuba's national hero, José Martí, the great patriot and poet.

Warmest regards,

Dominic Soave
Publisher

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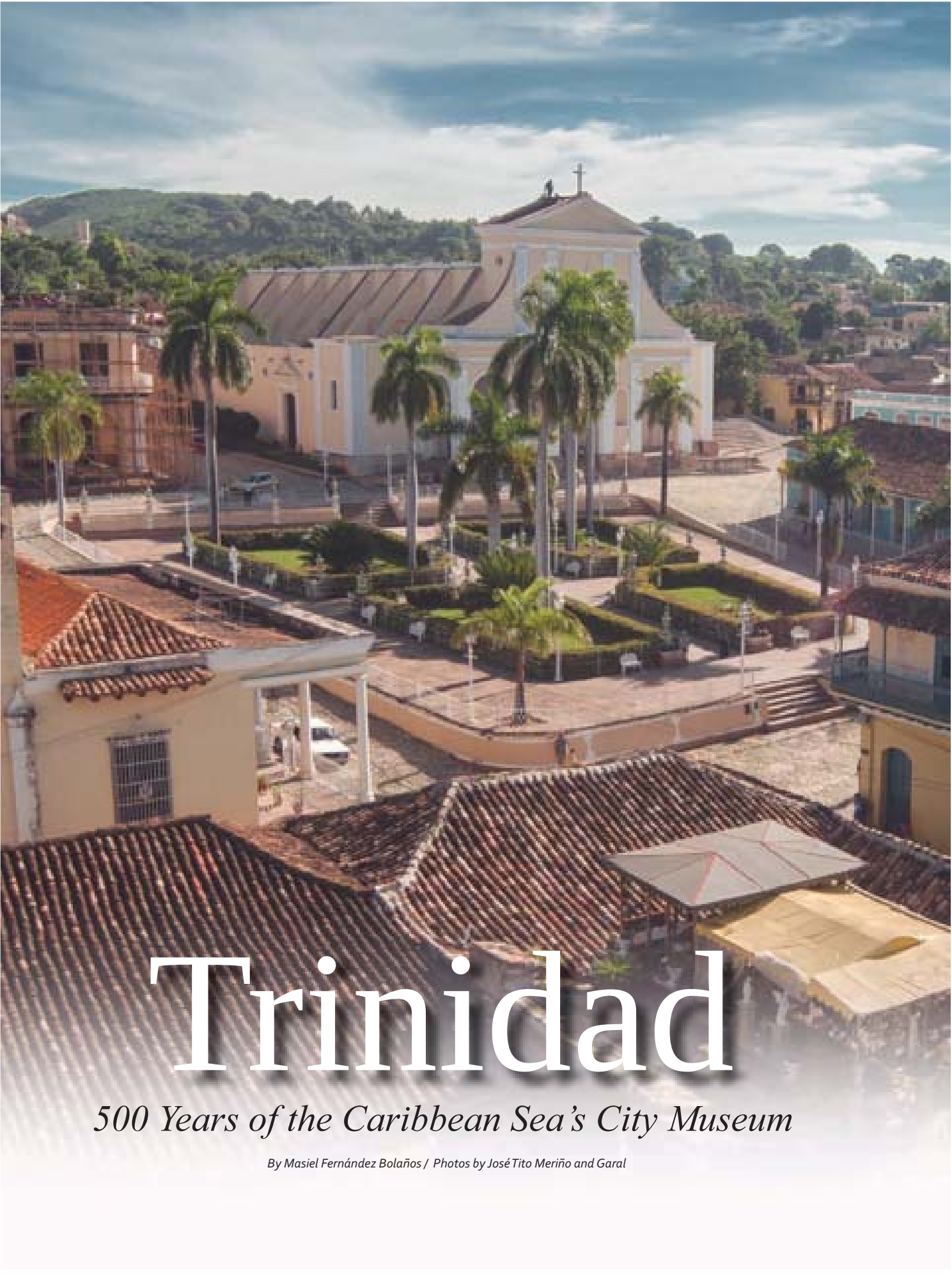


Trinidad

500 Years of the Caribbean Sea's City Museum

By Masiel Fernández Bolaños / Photos by José Tito Meriño and Garal

With the imprint of colonial times that pervades every one of its buildings and its high degree of preservation, this city might seem frozen in time. However, Trinidad, located in the heart of Cuba, enchants every visitor with its intoxicating spirit, a mixture of the enigmatic past and a captivating freshness after 500 years of existence.

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1988, Trinidad stands out as one of the best-preserved colonial cities of Latin America. Its cobblestone streets invite us to wander down its winding paths, up and down gentle slopes and around its curves, as they have been for centuries.

Urban center, sea and mountains come together to offer the attraction of a place that brims with culture, and where the hospitality of its people are unforgettable. Local residents, known as trinitarios, have a reputation for being kind, modest and excellent hosts. They help visitors to feel like a part of this world, with its fabulous legends of pirates, its history of slavery, and its treasures that remain to be discovered behind masonry walls and forgotten colonial courtyards.

A place full of history

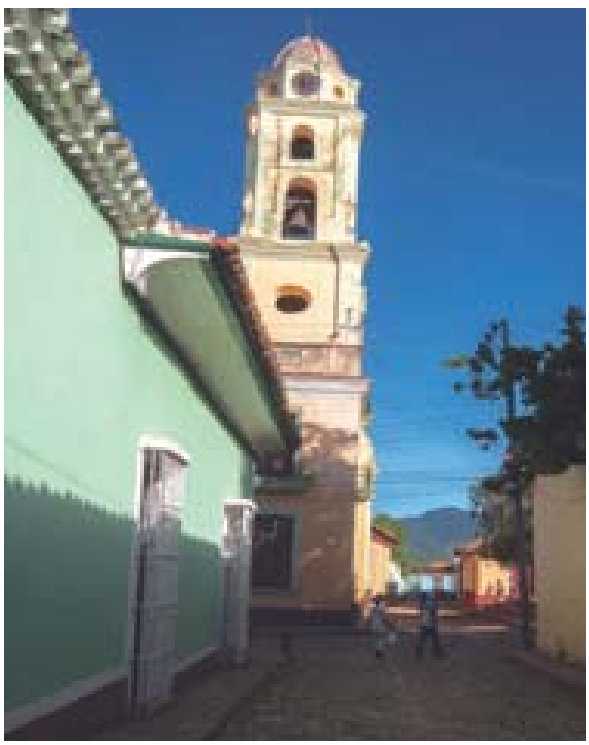
Originally known as La Villa de la Santísima Trinidad, this was the third major settlement, or villa, founded by the Spanish crown on the island of Cuba in early 1514. It was established by the explorer Diego Velázquez de Cuellar and grew rapidly.

One of its most interesting sites is the Plaza Mayor, the oldest main square, and around which the villa evolved. There stands the imposing architectural treasure known as the Iglesia Parroquial Mayor de la Santísima Trinidad, an ancient colonial church, along with former mansions that now house the city's principal museums, where visitors can learn about different facets of this urban center's life since its founding.

Other cultural and recreational centers that are obligatory stops here for enjoying the most authentic music and dance of Trinidad include the Casa de la Musica, Casa de la Trova, Palenque de los Congos Reales and Canchánchara.

Trinidad is not just about contemplating art; it is a place for encountering and sharing in rich popular culture, reflected in its traditional fiestas and its religious and artistic expressions. In that sense, its arts and crafts especially stand out: pottery, jewelry, textiles in natural fabrics, embroidery, and visual arts that are on display and for sale in streets, plazas and galleries.

Restaurants, bars, cafes, and diverse commercial establishments also ensure the enjoyment of a wide variety of services. Tourist transportations services include buses, taxis, and auto rental, and the Bay of Casilda features a port that can receive cruise ships with visitors to Trinidad.



The growth of the non-state tourism sector also stands out, with a network of privately-owned hostels and restaurants that complement the tourism product here, the city known as the top destination in central-southern Cuba.

The city is surrounded by valuable natural heritage that makes this province an ideal setting for enjoying a diverse experience, combining the sea and mountains.

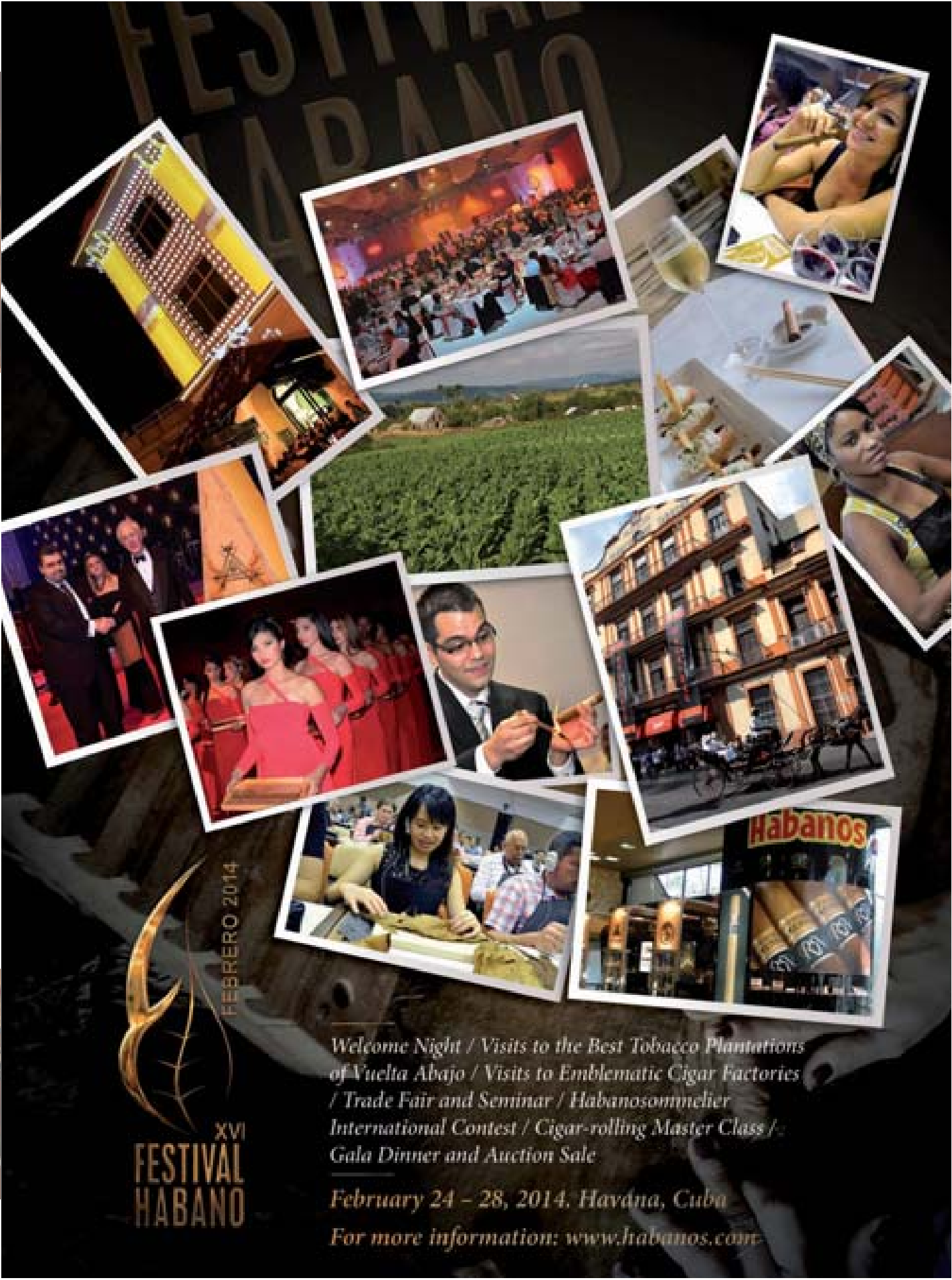
Trinidad's coastline features more than four kilometres of fine sand on the Peninsula of Ancón, and Ancón Beach is considered the best on Cuba's southern coast. Other attractions include beautiful cays such as Cayo Blanco and Cayo Iguana, a major coral reef, and 27 diving spots.

The nearby Valle de los Ingenios (Valley of the Sugar Mills) was also declare a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1988. It is an expansive natural and archeological reserve of the early 19th century sugar industry, which made Trinidad one of the most prosperous cities on the island.

Some of these ancient former plantations include the Manaca Iznaga, Buenavista, San Isidro de los Destiladeros, Guáimaro, El Abanico and Guachinango. One of the most productive sugar mills of its era was the Manaca Iznaga, where an unusual, 45-metre lookout tower still stands, the only one of its kind in Cuba.

Just 20 kilometres from the city of Trinidad and 800 metres above sea level is the Topes de Collantes natural protected area. This natural reserve features five parks: Guanatara, Codina, El Cubano, El Nicho and the Altiplano Topes de Collantes. It is impressing to see its imposing peaks, ample valleys, lush vegetation, endemic flora and fauna, cave systems, beautiful landscapes, and its rivers and streams, where pure, clear waters flow into natural falls and ponds.

Celebrating 500 years is a real occasion, to say the least, especially with such an excellent state of preservation. Like any great hostess, Trinidad is dusting and adorning, and dressing up in its finest to show the world just how authentic it is.■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Touring the tobacco fields of Vuelta Abajo

Cuban tourism's best offer

Text & Photos: Roberto F. Campos

Tobacco and tourism make a considerable combination when traveling to Cuba, especially when taking into account that this is the country where they make the best hand-rolled cigar in the world, the habano. This year, the 16th Habanos Festival is taking place in the Cuban capital Feb. 24-28

As the 16th Habanos Festival draws near, a trip to the tobacco-growing region of the western Cuban province of Pinar del Río is a must: these fields are a very special attraction, and not just for cigar lovers, but also for any traveler who is interested in this country's history and culture.

And every year, participants in the Habanos Festival—some 1,000 people from 80 countries—tour these tobacco fields and chat with growers. This year, the festival is dedicated to the Cuban cigar brands Hoyo de Monterrey, Partagás, Montecristo and Trinidad.

An important journey

One of the legends of these lands is José Gener of Spain, a founder of Cuba's habanos, and at different times of the year, visitors can learn about his life and work while touring his former tobacco farm in Hoyo de Monterrey.

Tour groups are welcomed at the Hotel Pinar del Río, where they can savor a good hand-rolled cigar or two, accompanied by a cocktail made with Guayabita del Pinar, a rum unique to this region.

Shortly after that, the tour continues to Gener's former farm, birthplace of the Hoyo de Monterrey cigar brand in 1860. The farm passed through several hands and is now owned by a family that is giving a new boost to tobacco growing.

The tobacco-growing region of western Cuba is known as Vuelta Abajo, and its climate and particular soil con-

ditions have made it famous worldwide. The tobacco plants used for the wrapper and filler components of a cigar are all over. These leaves must be picked within a month in a harvest process that is very interesting to observe.

As Cuba's tobacco growers explain, 80 percent of the land in Pinar del Rio is in the hands of small farmers who are members of cooperatives: the Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCS) and Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPA). A CCS is a group of farmers who apply together for bank loans from the State, using their land as collateral; a CPA brings together farmers who share their land and other resources, such as tractors, equipment, and supplies. And there is also the UBPC, or Basic Unit of Cooperative Production, in which farmers hold and work state land with usufruct rights.

All over the island, Cuban agriculture benefits from the traditions passed down through generations of farm families, who know best how to make the most of their crops. One example of that is the tobacco plantation of the late Alejandro Robaina, in Cuchillas de Barbacoa. One of Cuba's habano brands is named after this prestigious grower, whose lands are now cultivated by his grandson, Hirochi.

After visiting the fields, tour participants can visit an escogida, where leaves are selected; a despalillo workshop, where tobacco is removed of its stems; and an experimental center, all in the town of San Juan y Martínez, close to the city of Pinar del Río, capital of the province of the same name.

The experimental center is the second of its type in Cuba. It was founded in 1937, and at this time, its experts are working on producing new, more resistant types of tobacco. In 1940, its workers created the Corojo and Criollo varieties, which were grown until 1980. Black, Burley, and Virginia tobacco are also the focus of research as well.

Here, growers refer to their land in terms of caballerías, an ancient unit of measurement (one caballería is equivalent to 13,420 hectares). Around 2,400 caballerías in this province are planted with tobacco, cultivated by some 22,000 producers in total throughout the year, from planting to harvest. Tobacco plantations are located mostly in the areas of San Juan y Martínez, San Luís, Pinar del Río and Consolación del Sur.

For example, in San Juan y Martínez, a little over 300 caballerías is grown, while in Consolación del Sur, that number is 420; in San Luís, 243; and in Pinar del Río, 260.

Nationwide, about 60,000 people are employed in tobacco farming and industry during most of the year, and during "peak" seasons, when more hands are needed, that number can grow to 150,000, many of whom are volunteers. Along with Vuelta Abajo in the west, other principal tobacco-growing areas in Cuba are Partido (Habana) and Vuelta Arriba (central Cuba, which includes Remedios, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spíritus and Villa Clara).

Tobacco is grown all over Cuba, but it is in Pinar del Río where 80 percent of wrapper leaves are grown. And cigarmakers work in some 50 factories throughout the nation, although the leading ones are located in Havana. ■

The program of the Habanos Festival maintains its traditional activities during this unforgettable week, Feb. 24-28:

- Visits to the best tobacco plantations in Vuelta Abajo, Pinar del Río
- Visits to emblematic factories of Habanos
- Trade fair
- Seminar
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Alexandra from Montreal, Canada
Dietetics - Isla de la Juventud, Cuba

"I interned at the beautiful Marival Hotel and resort. The staff who trained me were very nice and so understanding. I got to learn Spanish and I got a lot of career and life experience. I would definitely do it all again if I had the chance."

Ashley from Brantford, Canada
Hospitality Services - Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

"For my internship, I shadowed a Social Worker who conducted interviews and investigations. I really enjoyed working with her and I gained a lot of experience to include in my résumé, which ICS helped me to improve and update."

Shweta from Brampton, Canada
Security/Social Services - Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

"I interned at one of the biggest and most professional theatres in Havana. I learned Spanish at the University and I learned a lot about Cuban culture, theatre and dance. I even learned about theatre lighting through a workshop I did that was taught by a lighting designer. Through ICS it was a really good experience because they took care of everything for me."

Jitske from Amsterdam, Holland
Theatre Internship - Havana, Cuba

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a r i

By Dominic Soave

Would you like to explore Cuba and experience the diversity of its riches like no other traveller before you? Cruising on Cuba Cruise offers a unique opportunity to experience the history, landscapes, and culture of Cuba in a comfortable and seamless travel environment. It really is the best of both worlds.

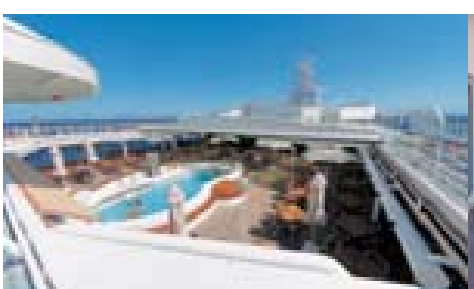
Cuba Cruise has worked closely with local tourism partners in Cuba and has created one of the most in-depth and exciting ways to travel to this enchanting Caribbean island. Docking at a new port every day, travellers can marvel at fabled colonial cities, wilderness nature preserves, and of course, some of the most beautiful beaches in all the world.

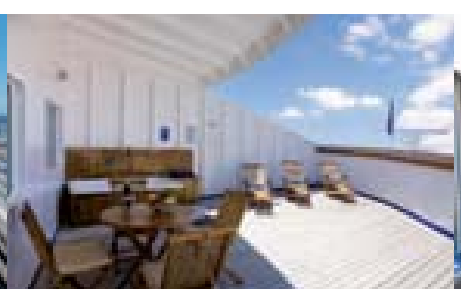
The cruise has daily shore excursions using only the best local guides and operators, ensuring vacationers are exposed to the most authentic sights, sounds and flavours of Cuba. In addition to the amazing UNESCO world heritage sites, national parks and preserves that Cuba offers, travellers will also experience the best luxuries onboard the 48 stateroom ship, MV Louis Cristal. This unique vessel sports a yacht-like modern design and an array of impressive amenities such as spacious staterooms and suites, elegant lounges and restaurants, a casino and open promenades.

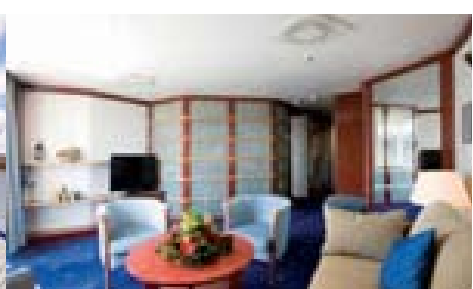
The ship's first port is one of the great historical cities of the world: Havana. The ship sails at sunset out of the harbour and past the magnificent colonial-era forts that guard the entrance. It is truly a breathtaking experience.

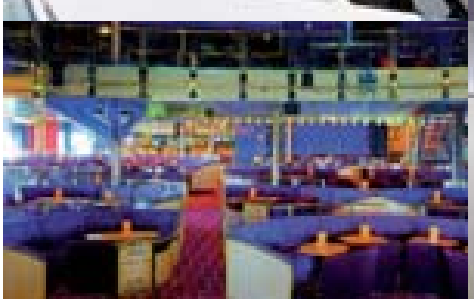
We then have one night at sea while enjoying world-class food and entertainment and preparing for the next port of call, Holguín and Antilla. Christopher Columbus discovered this region in 1492 and declared it to be "the most beautiful land ever seen by human eyes."

Holguín is famous for some of Cuba's most beautiful beaches and a stunning countryside. Passengers can explore the









isolated La Mensura National Park, hike the UNESCO biosphere of Cuchillas de Toa, or the Guayabo waterfalls plunging 200 meters....

Antilla had never seen a cruise ship until the MV Cristal stopped here on her maiden voyage. So happy was the town mayor that he declared a holiday for everyone in the city. People came out and lined the streets to see us arrive.

The ship then heads to the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, one of the most interesting and historically significant places in Cuba. Santiago de Cuba is the island's center for Afro-Cuban culture and a key to Cuba's unique personality. Entering the spectacular port through the channel and seeing Santiago sprawl out on the mountainside is a site one does not soon forget.

From Santiago de Cuba the ship then makes its way to Montego Bay, Jamaica, for its second embarkation point. This is unique in that passengers may embark the cruise itinerary in two different countries, making it easy for visitors to create a trip that suits them and their flights. With passengers arriving during the middle of the cruise for some it means an exciting new group of eager passengers to meet and experience.

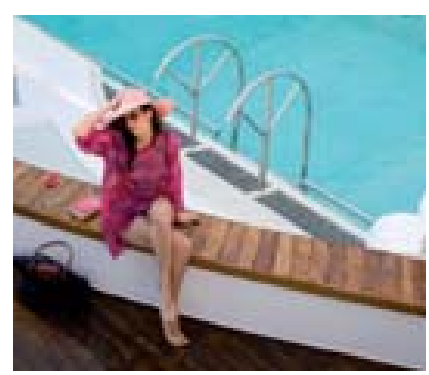
Next stop includes the world-class and historical cities of Cienfuegos and Trinidad. Winding through the entrance to the bay, passengers are greeted with the far-off image of gleaming and modern Cienfuegos. Cienfuegos is a stunning city with modern amenities, a cosmopolitan atmosphere and welcoming public. The cruise offers many different excursions here, both historical and cultural, as this city and Trinidad offer so much.

The last stop for us was the incredible and secluded beach of Punta Frances on the Isle of Youth (Isla de la Juventud). The MV Cristal anchors just off the island and passengers transfer to the beach at Port Frances. This is a glorious beach of pure white sand surrounded by crystal clear warm waters—perfect for snorkeling.

We enjoyed a beach barbecue in the sunshine and listened to live music provided exclusively for passengers. I was excited to find out that while enjoying the sun and sand of this private beach, the ship's waiters wandered the beach to offer us drinks! What a great day!

Then we were off to the final stop back in Havana.

This was an incredible experience and one that I am sure many passengers will enjoy. It allows one to see the beauty of Cuba and its people while enjoying the luxury of the ship. Every day when you wake up you get to see a different part of Cuba. The only downside was that we wanted more!



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Cuba will now allow recreational vessels on pleasure cruises to remain in the country for up to five years, a period that can be extended, according to new marina regulations approved by the Council of Ministers.

These new regulations improve and simplify dispatch paperwork for vessels and makes Cuba's tourist marinas more competitive. According to the rules, yachters who are absent from their vessels for a prolonged period must sign a contract with the pertinent marina to ensure the custody of their vehicles and any services required.

The process of dispatching recreational boats from abroad will be directed by the harbourmaster of the port where the marina is located.

In addition, the Ministry of Tourism will establish a link on its website related to services for and the reception of these vessels. This will provide a way for boaters interested in visiting Cuban marinas to send information ahead of time regarding their vessel, crew, and passengers to facilitate access to Cuba's territorial waters. The website will also provide other services for easier processing.

To prevent harmful environmental effects, the regulation stipulates that in no repair, maintenance, cleaning or painting activities can take place in docking and anchoring areas, and it is prohibited to dump any waste or pollutants into the water.

The regulation also addresses in detail the different requirements that a marina must meet to operate, with specific characteristics for each existing category.

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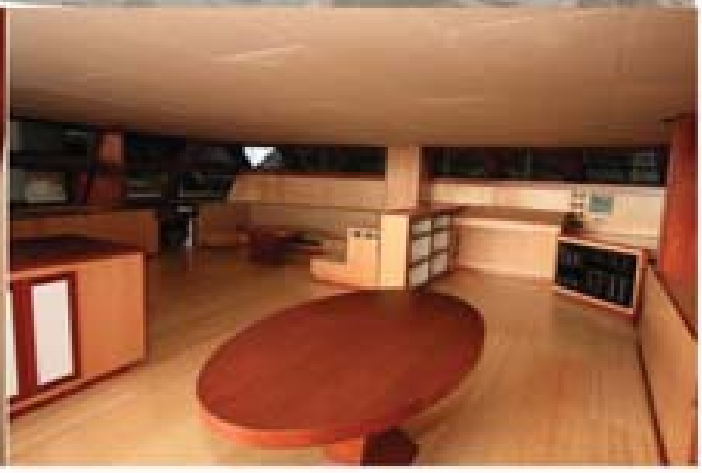

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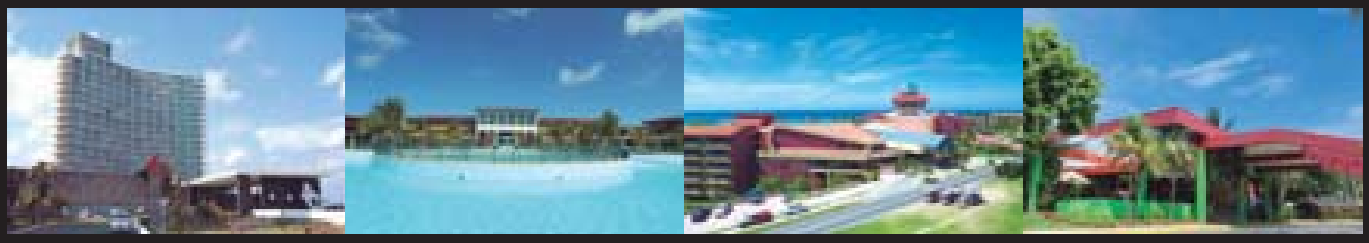
GRAN CARIBE
grupo hotelero

New product lines



Gran Caribe is a tourism business group that is constantly improving its efficiency and effectiveness, both financial and operational, with an eye to increased customer satisfaction. The group offers a variety of products with their own brands and associated trademarks, provided by competent workers in top quality facilities, taking into account environmental protection and the preservation and promotion of Cuba's historic and cultural heritage.

Its purpose is to present customers to its products and services, which are greatly influenced by history, culture, *Cubanía*— what it means to be Cuban—and romantic traditions and settings. The Gran Caribe product also includes offers on the front line of beautiful, warm natural beaches and virgin cays, in close contact with nature, making it possible to satisfy the most diverse interests of its customers.

The Gran Caribe Hotel Group holds to a proven customer-oriented marketing philosophy, keeping product innovation alive, along with the continuing improvement of its services. At the center of its development strategy is positioning the Gran Caribe Hotel Group in different markets with products that are distinguished by an excellent quality/price ratio. For this purpose, it has set out to consolidate its brand, along with new product lines, distinguishing them from competition on the international market by promoting human, historic, cultural and patrimonial values, and guaranteeing the satisfaction of its customers.

CLÁSICO line: This classic product line is one of the strengths of the Gran Caribe Hotel Group. It is represented by four-star hotels, where the spirit of the past endures. Located in cities, these are elegant and traditional hotels, real jewels of unique and diverse architecture, including eclectic and modern styles of the 1950s. They are distinguished by their Cuban hallmark and the universality that only the classics have to offer, where interiors and exteriors merge in perfect harmony with the landscape of their settings, constituting a contemporary reaffirmation of our unique national identity.

CLUB PREMIUM line: This premium product line includes four-star hotels that are located on beaches or cays, and that operate under the All-Inclusive category. The standarization of the offer ensures that customers will feel equally served in any of our facilities, and makes it possible to provide the right quality/price ratio, indispensable for complete satisfaction.

HOLA CLUB line: This product line includes three-star hotels where the natural resource par excellence is the beach, in a setting of natural splendor. Its mode of services is somewhat more informal than the other product lines, because customer needs vary depending on the type of visit that they are making, but without lacking in the elegance and quality that distinguishes the Gran Caribe tourism product.

ENCANTO: This product line's hotels stand out for being unique, refined, and adaptable to every customer, with a combination of a wide range of complementary services. The tasteful décor, with an emphasis on the Cuban quality, constitutes an element of significant importance, given that this line's elegance is based on a mixture of ancient and contemporary designs, without depriving customers of comfort, convenience, and access to the latest technology.■

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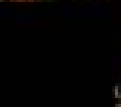

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KEYS

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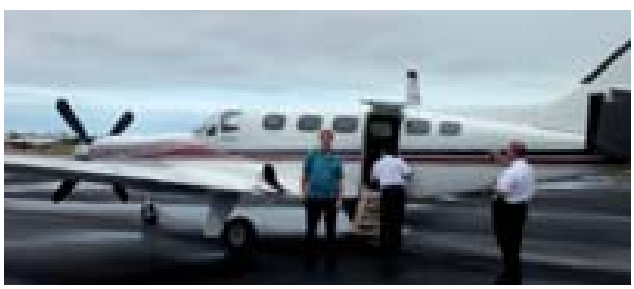
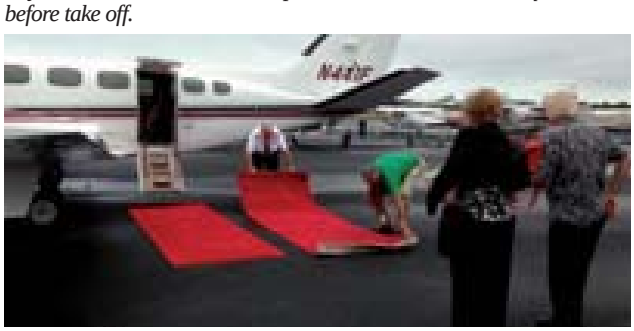
a ana i a i r

Exclusive interview with the organizers of a fabulous event

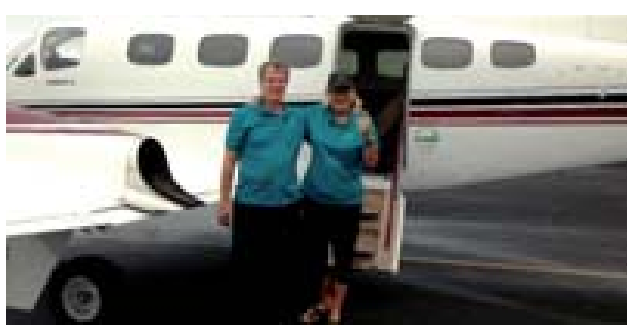
By Dominic Soave



Key West Executive Air Charter pilots check the Cessna Conquest II before take off.



Peter Horton, KW Airport Manager rolls out red carpet as TREE committee members, Jean & Clark Shannon await the flight.



TREE Institute board members Richard Keefe and Carolann Sharkey organize cultural exchanges to Cuba.

The first commercial passenger flight from Key West to Cuba in more than 50 years landed December 30, 2013 in Havana, capping several years of efforts to reunite the two islands.

"U.S. Customs and Border Protection gave the final approval for the flight that morning, and the seven passenger aircraft departed 90 minutes later at 10 a.m.," Key West International Airport Director Peter Horton said.

Federal officials granted Key West a green light to resume flights to and from the island country in October 2011. It took more than two years, however, for the first flight to take off. Charter operators said they had trouble getting all of the required approvals. Capacity issues also made it difficult as Key West is currently only approved to process 10 passengers and crew from Cuba at a time.

Thanks to the dedication of three caring women: Mercedes Costa, liason coordinator, Caribbean Direct International, Sonya Pimentel, VP of Operations for Marazul Charters, and Carolann Sharkey of the Florida Keys Tropical Research Ecological Exchange Institute (TREE Institute), all permits were secured from both the U.S. and Cuban authorities.

The permit from Cuba was the first since the revolution. Marazul Charters have a 30 year history with Cuba travel. Costa started the first cargo service to Cuba 20 years ago.

After a blessing of the flight by Rev. John Baker, Pastor of Key West's St. Mary Star of Sea Basilica, the Cessna Conquest II aircraft, operated by Key West Executive Air Charter departed the Florida island Monday morning.

The plane carried two crew members and seven Florida Keys Tree Institute Committee and board members who organize and participate in a legal, licensed, "people-to-people" cultural exchanges.

The Obama administration reinstituted the cultural exchange licenses in 2011, allowing organizations like the TREE Institute, to take U.S. citizens to the island for educational activities that promote understanding and exchange with ordinary Cuban citizens.

The Key West travelers met with Cubans at botanical gardens, organic farms and cultural centers. "We're doing some really meaningful things to help the people with their biodiverse environment, ecology and endemic species," said Carolann Sharkey, the Institute's trip organizer.

"The Cuban people are full of knowledge about their environment and the use of plants in healing, cosmetics, and medicine. Cubans have maintained and expanded the use of their flora and fauna.

"Many Cubans are 'self –taught' specialists in their own regions. Lack of fertilizers, pesticides, plant accessories and other agricultural farming aids have made the Cuba people very creative. They became organic and green by necessity! With a small amount of help, the TREE Institute has been able to help them continue developing their potential.

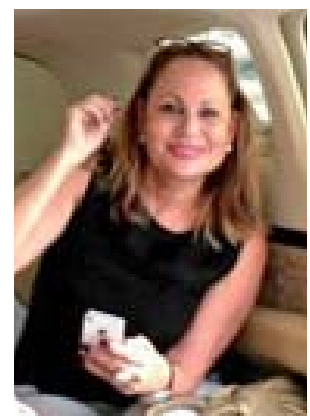
"I never realized the extent that plants could do so much healing!" said Sharkey.

The flight also marked the 100th anniversary of the very first Key West –Havana flight ever in aviation history. On May 17, 1913 Domingo Rosillo el Toro flew two hours and eight minutes from Key West to Cuba, before landing his monoplane on a patch of grass near Havana. Rosillo was greeted by 50,000 Cuban fans who hailed him as a hero.

The Florida Keys TREE Institute is licensed to help U.S. citizens legally go to Cuba on "People-to-People Cultural Exchanges". For more information, contact: info@fktreeinstitute.org.

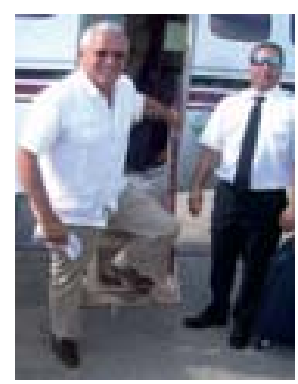
Tree Institute advisor ean Shannon proudly holds inaugural key lime pies to share ith the Cuban people.

Key History in the making.



Sonya Pimentel, irector of perations for Marazul Charters.

Mercedes Costa, liason coordinator C I.



A true Key West Cuba people to people exchange.

Tree Committee member Mayor Craig Cates and Pilot oe amiroult.

a and a rain r

By Adalys Pilar

Cuban scientists are promoting the restoration of popular beaches located east of Havana as part of a project that covers about eight miles of the island's northern coast.

"Initially we are focusing on some 300 meters (of beach) to assess the feasibility of our actions, and the results will allow us to extend our work to other areas," said Magalys Sosa, a specialist from the Institute of Oceanology, which is leading the program.

After investigating and clearing the area involved, one of the first steps was to move sand and build a dune in the Santa Maria del Mar area. Wooden footbridges were built so that beachgoers would not harm the dune, and vegetation was planted in the area, Sosa said.

The Santa María del Mar area has been extensively damaged by wind erosion, causing significant loss of vegetation in the area. As in other coastal areas lacking adequate vegetation, the wind blows the sand inland, eroding the beach.

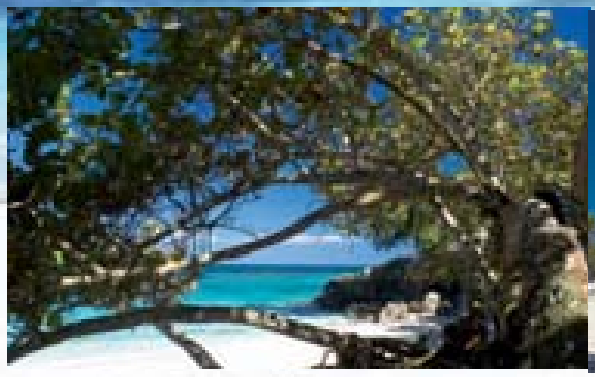
Specialists had to move sand from the back of the beach to the front, and they planted grass and ground covers to stabilize the dune, while sea grape trees were planted farther away, she explained. Causes of damage to the coast include natural loss of sand from beaches, the negative effects of facilities built on the shoreline, and accumulations of waste, dumped mostly by vacationers.

Three wooden footpaths, which are indispensable to protecting the dune, are among the actions taken by members of the ARENTUR group, supervised by scientists from centers attached to the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, Sosa said.

According to Sosa, the goal is to expand the project to about 1 ,200 meters of Boca Ciega beach, also east of the capital, and subsequently to another section of about 1 ,400 meters of Santa María del Mar beach. A total of about eight miles of beaches are to be restored, from El Mégano to Punta Rincón in Guanabo, a strip on the outskirts of Havana that is known as Playas del Este, Sosa said.

"People are now using the footpaths and have seen what we have done there so far. Little by little they are cooperating with ongoing efforts to preserve Cuba's beaches," she added.

Preliminary studies have been made to assess the general situation of all areas involved in the project, and to be able to design possible restoration alternatives.■



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ar in love

By Ciro Bianchi Ross

Where did this man find the time to do everything that he did?

He united the pro-independence forces, founded a political party, and organized the war against Spain. From the age of 17, when he was deported from Cuba after serving prison time and hard labour—as a minor—he lived most of his live in exile. He earned two university degrees in Spain; worked as a lawyer and bookkeeper; taught in schools in several South American republics; and represented those countries at international conferences. Speaker. Journalist always. He created and directed a newspaper, *Patria*, and published several magazines, including *The Golden Age*, for the children of America, filling it with his writing, from cover to cover. He wrote directly in English for U.S. newspapers. He did theatre, wrote a novel. As a poet, he is one of the greatest in the Spanish language, a forerunner of modernism, even though his work could not be classified into any particular school while he was alive.... His complete works—chronicles, articles, essays, letters, speeches, etc.—fill almost 30 volumes of nearly 300 pages each.

Where did this man, who only lived for 42 years, find the time to do everything that he did? Did his political and professional work leave him time for a private life? Did he love?

"Martí was a man who needed warmth and affection. Only in the affairs of love or action was he able to find the right

temperature," says Cuban writer Jorge Mañach in *Martí el Apóstol* (Martí the Apostle), his magnificent biography of Cuba's national hero. Martí had a difficult marriage that produced a son, to whom he dedicated his splendid book of poetry, *Ismaelillo*. However, before and after that marriage, and sometimes in parallel, he allowed other women to enter the fervour of his life as an exile.

Rosario de la Peña, known as "The Muse," or the George Sand of Mexico, was among the first. And Mexican actress Concha Padilla, with whom he experienced a romance of "brusque alternatives of beatitude and blues."

Concha was very jealous and had good reason. Doña Leonor, Martí's mother, did not look kindly upon his romance with Concha Padilla. Many of his friends were also unsympathetic. One of these buddies trained Martí's eyes on a Cuban woman, Carmen Zayas Bazán, refined and elegant, who would stroll down the Alameda and attract the gazes of all the young men. In any case, another actress later entered the life of the exiled Cuban: Eloisa Agüero, a Cuban woman who lived in Mexico and was separated from her husband.

After his turbulent love affair with Concha, Carmen was a haven of tranquility. They became engaged and Martí traveled to Guatemala. There he met María García Granados, the daughter of an ex-president of that country. They were mutually attracted, and he was drawn to that 20-year-old girl with the pale face and the gentle expression, awakening her love.

She asked him to write a poem for her in her private album. Martí did, and María read it with a heavy heart; he talked about friendship in his verses, not love. He tried to take her hand, and she fled into the house. Martí had said nothing to his Guatemalan friends about his engagement to Carmen, and the poem in María's album was more of a cruel revelation than a merciful lie. He travelled to Mexico and returned to Guatemala, married. María died. Years later, Martí immortalized her in his poem "La niña de Guatemala" (The Guatemalan Girl), one of his most celebrated: "...She gave the forgetful one / a perfumed sachet. / He returned, returned married. / She died of love...."

With Carmen, things went well sometimes but almost always badly. Martí managed to return to Havana, where his son was born, but he was deported again, and from then on the couple would reunite once in a while. When they did so, it was under a diplomatic peace in a household strained by financial hardship and the continuous demands made on Martí by his patriotic ideals. One day Carmen left him forever.

She was a woman, and perhaps sensed that another love, "placid and domestic, had replaced elusive love."

Because at that time another Carmen, Carmen Miyares, had appeared in the Apostle's life. And she filled it. She was married to a Cuban, Manuel Mantilla, who was ill with melancholy and paralysis. She was half-Venezuelan and half-Cuban from Santiago; robust, loquacious, friendly.

Much has been said about these romances. Some deny them. He had a father's love for María, the daughter of Carmen, who shared the name of the Guatemalan girl. The resemblance between Martí and the girl Maria is astonishing when comparing their portraits. Was he her father? Martí used to write María Mantilla letters brimming with affection and advice for when he would no longer be alive.

The last of these letters, written weeks earlier, was received by María in New York on May 19, 1895, the same day that Martí fell in battle against the Spanish troops in Cuba. In it, he told her that he carried her portrait over his heart, as a shield against the bullets. ■

T r a r i r ani

The a chanupa , or sacred pipe ceremony.

By Mercy Ramos
Photos: Courtesy of Osmel Francis, José Meriño

It is no secret for anybody that the future of humanity is in the hands of man himself; hence, the need to make the right decisions now and to change our lifestyles to be able to ensure the preservation of the human species and the planet in general in the near future.

That is the sentiment of many people around the world who have become followers of Cubanos en la Red, a rap group that has become an environmentalist project. The mission of this group's members is to raise awareness everywhere about why we need to protect the environment as our only alternative for the survival of future generations our species—human, animal, and plant. In an exclusive interview with Cubaplus, Osmel Francis, manager of Cubanos en la Red, provided an overview of the group, which was created a little more than 10 years ago in Spain with a focus on rap music. However, "our first hit was an environmental song, and since then we have developed two repertories: a commercial one and another with environmental themes," Francis said.

"In 2003 we launched an album called Casiguaguas, the name that Cuba's indigenous people gave to the River Almendares (in Havana), and we began carrying out community work in neighbourhoods on the riverbanks to help clean up the environment," he said.

That is when "our environmental career began," he explained. "In 2004 we won 2nd Place in the National Community Work Award contest." After a little more than two years of international tours, "we returned to our environmental work and extended it to other cities outside Havana, such as Matanzas and Pinar del Rio."

Beginning in 2010, the group devoted itself completely to its environmental project, not just with music, but also with other artistic expressions, and "we were able to get them to designate a venue for us, a little island on Santa Fe beach, in western Havana, that we named La Isla Verde (The Green Island)," he explained.

"At first, it was an illustrative environmental park, and then we began carrying out actions throughout the country, such as cleaning up rivers and the Havana coastline, and reforestation in the countryside, all of it with the collaboration of different government institutions such as Cuba Solar, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Institute of Floriculture," Francis said.

All of this work has been very well-received by the population, which has made it possible to expand the project. "In fact, this year, we are holding the first Mother Earth Festival, which will feature concerts, visual arts expos, and other cultural expressions, along with a conference where different speakers will address issues related to climate change and good living," Francis said.

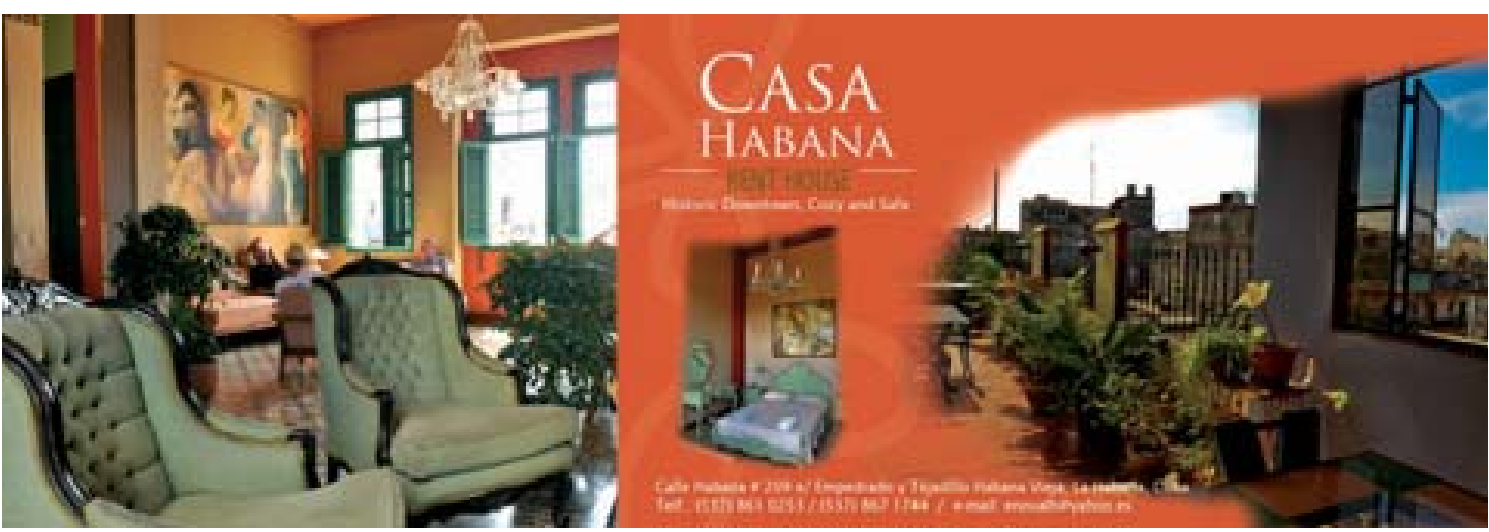
This year, Cubanos en la Red is organizing a contest about the presence of indigenous cultures in Cuba, which will award prizes in the categories of music, audiovisual productions, visual arts, theater, and literature, and a scientific category for children and adults.

The contest is sponsored by the Guatemalan Embassy in Cuba, and its main purpose is to help foster awareness about the indigenous cultures of Latin America and their traditions, many of which are still present in the region's different countries.

The idea is to hold this contest every year, and in 2014 its theme will be Maya cultures.

The Mother Earth Festival will be held April 11-May 15 in several venues around Cuba, including in Havana, Pinar del Rio, Mayabeque and Guantánamo, with the support of different Cuban agencies, such as the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment; the Pro Naturaleza Foundation and others.

"All of this work is designed for people to become aware of the need to change their lifestyles so that we can take care of the world that we live in, and so that future generations can enjoy a better world and preserve not just the human species, but also all living things on the planet."■



While my guitar gently eeps...
(The Beatles)

i a d ri a ra.. *il on canvas. x cm, .*

dri n rini

the gift of artistic talent

By Mireya Castañeda / Photos courtesy of Adrián Pellegrini

Adrián Pellegrini (Havana, 1979) confesses that he is "a person who is inspired by the spirit of the Renaissance." That was something that the great Cuban composer Harold Gramatges noted, when he wrote: "Nothing stops him in his poetic flight."

Pellegrini has an impressive curriculum vitae. He has attained international prestige, first with his painting, but also as a writer, with several volumes of fiction, poetry, and research.

Critics consider his work to be a revolution in the field of abstraction, given the novelty of his concepts and the way that he merges musical codes with color theory. At present, his paintings are valued highly on the international market and are represented by Sotheby's in New York. He is not interested in that fame. "I'm not looking for popularity or fuss; I'm not interested in groups, I've never needed them. I prefer a certain amount of anonymity. I like the sheltering shadows that protect you from unnecessary light, and it is something like a germination period."

A lot of energy and passion are reflected in his work, and were part of the dialogue

that took place for this magazine, as was the humbleness of one of the true *greats.*

Let's try to give our readers a few clues for a better understanding of your work. Family, childhood, studies?

I grew up in the home of two classical musicians. My mother was a cellist, and my father, a classic guitarist. So music undeniably had a major influence on my work; it is so visible that some people say that my artwork rings. I've been painting practically since I was two or three years old, drawing incessantly. Travel also influenced my formation and left their mark; you take in a whole energy, the living and the dead of each place. I would say that the largest influence on me is that of music and the cities, museums, and paintings that I carry inside and that have marked my life.

CONTACT

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Phone: (53 7)206 9127

Cell. (53 5) 305 0925

ssamentis@yahoo.es

d a *il on canvas.* *x* *cm,* .

a

d a *il on canvas. x cm, .*

What is art for you? Do you think that art in and of itself pursues an objective? If so, what are yours?

For me, art is everything. It is the art of living, of the music you listen to, the culture in which you move, the art of culinary traditions. Art is even the way that social disputes are settled. Art, the objective that it pursues, is to beautify reality esthetically and ethically; to reconstruct it, recuperate what is lost, to put the future before you in an ideal way. My personal objectives with art? I don't know if I'm pursuing an objective. I'm a religious person; I think that we religious people live intensely, believe profoundly, and act consequentially. My objective is basically that of knowledge, and I seek it through art.

Do you believe in inspiration?

Inspiration exists, but undeniably you have to be prepared for it to come to you, to see it, to identify it, to smell it, because sometimes it happens and people are not ready to perceive that inspiration has come to them. More than anything, it requires a real state of lucidity.

Abstract painting is sometimes difficult for spectators. How do you view communication with your art?

I think that in the world today there is a lot of superficiality with abstract painting. My painting can be considered within expressionist abstraction, but it has a communication aspect. Human beings are touched by beauty, and when there is beauty in a work, esthetic beauty, harmony of forms and composition, that is attractive, because human beings are esthetic beings, they have it in their seed. I don't see it being difficult for spectators to relate to, because they generally appreciate the beauty, durability, and texture of my work,

and that profoundly satisfies me, and I think it fulfills its role.

You use diverse techniques, multiple materials. Why? A need for other textures, dimensions, other expressions?

Basically I'm a painter who uses the traditional oil technique, because I very much appreciate the beauty, transparency, and fluidness of the material and the history that it has; the shine, and certain conditions of opacity that oil permits in a very special way. I think that I am a person who is inspired by the spirit of the Renaissance, and that spirit lives and will live in me. The variety of material allows some flexibility. Glass has some of that transparent purity, that fragility that incites you to protect. Glass has its own quality; cloth has another; paper comes from trees, and all of its invites you to enter and try to modify it. Man's life is a constant struggle against material to draw out its best form.

Preferred colors and tones?

I have a great predilection for all blue bases, especially pale blue, which has some grey. I like iridescent tones. I work with colors from natural pigments, ground and packaged, but natural, like the way they used to paint before. They are not chemical, synthetic substitutes. That produces a brilliance, a quality of texture and color, a lasting quality, which is what I love in paintings, in the paintings that I have enjoyed and that I try to make myself. I prefer those tones. I even like dark colors mixed with golden colors, with pale pink, but with a certain foggy nuance, a certain nuance of exaltation. Bright, but balanced, contrasted, tonal. I look for harmony; in no way am I looking for a mess in colors. For me, colors have to convey to me my intention, reflection, magic, and a certain mystery that is silent but at the same time lively. An equilibrium that is difficult to achieve.

i id d r *il on canvas. x cm, .*

an a a a *il on canvas. x cm, .*

Do you meditate on what you're going to do, or is it an impulse?

I'm inspired by the present moment; I listen to music, which is an invaluable support, and the forms begin to emerge. Sometimes during certain periods when I am inspired by a certain architecture, a city, an experience, a beautiful woman, I might work on a series with a certain general theme, but the individual work comes about in the moment, as time goes by. I don't work with a plan.

When his exhibition *Epopeya de Gilgamesh* (Gilgamesh's Epic) opened in the Palacio de Lombillo art gallery in Havana's historic district, Pablo Armando Fernández, winner of the National Literature Prize, was inspired for a poem that he titled "Against the adversaries." One of its verses says: "The white of the tapestry in all of its magnitude / is a challenge to Light, between limits, anchored."

It is truly a challenge to try to comprehend the splendid work of Adrián Pellegrini in just a few pages.■

r ri a a *Silver ink on paper. x cm, .*

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Giraldo Piloto

music is what I love

By Mercy Ramos
Photos: Courtesy of Giraldo Piloto

"Music is everything to me. Music unites, it brings you love and allows you to decide what you want to do in life," says the celebrated Cuban artist Giraldo Piloto.

Founder of the group Klimax almost 20 years ago, Piloto is from a family with music in its blood. His grandfather was a musician; his father, a distinguished and well-known composer; his mother, a founder of the Art Instructors' School; and his brother, uncles, cousins and a number of his nephews are also musicians.

"I grew up in a musical environment, and from a very young age I began taking piano classes from my mother. I enrolled in the Alejandro García Caturla Conservatory in Havana, and graduated from the Higher School of the Arts (ENA) in 1980 as a percussionist," he told **Cubaplus** in an interview.

"And that is when my professional life began. First I was a percussionist with the house band of the Tropicana cabaret, and then in 1988 I joined NG La Banda, founded by the talented Cuban musician José Luis Cortes. From 1992 to 1994 I worked as musical director of Isaac Delgado's band, and then in 1995 I started my own group, Klimax.

"The creation of Klimax initially had the purpose of specifically cultivating two music genres: popular dance music and Latin jazz, and not to shine the spotlight on anyone in particular, but to have music as the center of attention.

"In our 18 years of work, Klimax has produced eight albums, some of which have won awards at Cubadisco, the event that is considered as a window to the world for Cuba's recording production."

Award-winning albums include *Nadie se parece a ti*, and *Klimax & friends*, "featuring jazz, which is our banner," and Solo tú y yo, featuring the celebrated Cuban performers Omara Portuondo, Pablo Milanés and Chucho Valdés.

Piloto has collaborated internationally in many other productions, including

Un centímetro de ti, with Willie Rosario (1993), *Lo que me faltó por hacerte*, with Isidro Infante (1998), *Una corazonada*, with Fuerza Juvenil (2000), and *No me mires a los ojos*, with Gilberto Santa Rosa (2004).

Klimax has performed on numerous stages throughout Latin America, in Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Peru; almost all of Europe; and also in the top jazz and world music festivals that are held in Europe and the Americas, including the Montreux Jazz Festival (Switzerland), North Sea Jazz Festival (Holland), Nice Jazz Festival, Vienne Jazz Festival (France), Blues Fest (Ottawa), La Mar de Músicas (Spain), Cannes (France), Roskilde Festival (Denmark), Horsens (Denmark), Salsa al Parque (Colombia) and the Garanhus Winter Festival (Brazil).

In the coming year, Klimax will be touring Norway, France, Finland, Belgium, the United States, and other countries.

"Right now we're preparing a new album, but the top thing on our minds is the Fiesta del Tambor, or Havana Drum Festival, which takes place in March in the Cuban capital." Piloto has been president of this important event for the last 12 years.

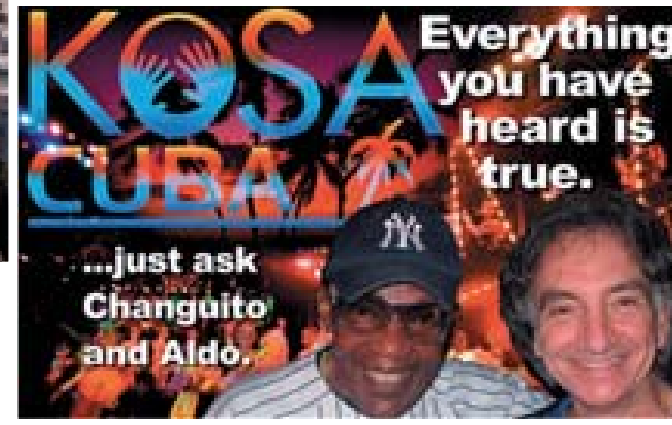
"As in previous years, we are expecting the presence of notable national and international musicians from all over. Past festivals have enjoyed the participation of Dom Famularo, Aldo Mazza, Memo Acevedo, Mike del Ferro, Alex Acuña (trio), Charlie Cooley and Chuck Silverman."

The festival features an International Cuban Percussion Contest, open to anyone who is interested, "and it basically lets people know about some of the new talent that emerges every year in percussion in general," Piloto said.

In addition, and for the first time, the Fiesta del Tambor will also feature an International Casino Dance Contest, open to registration by dancers from Cuba or any other country who want to compete and show off their dancing skills. First prize consists of three nights in a hotel in Havana and another three nights in a hotel in Varadero, Piloto said, adding that many other prizes would be awarded as well.

"Anyone who wants to participate should sign up for the contest, and I guarantee that they will spend some unforgettable days to the beat of Cuban music," Piloto said with a smile.■

rom left to right issy arc a, os uis uintana Changuito , Adel onz lez, liver ald z, and Enrique Pla.



Changuito and Aldo Mazza, president of Kosa.

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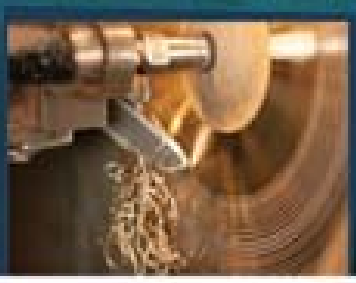

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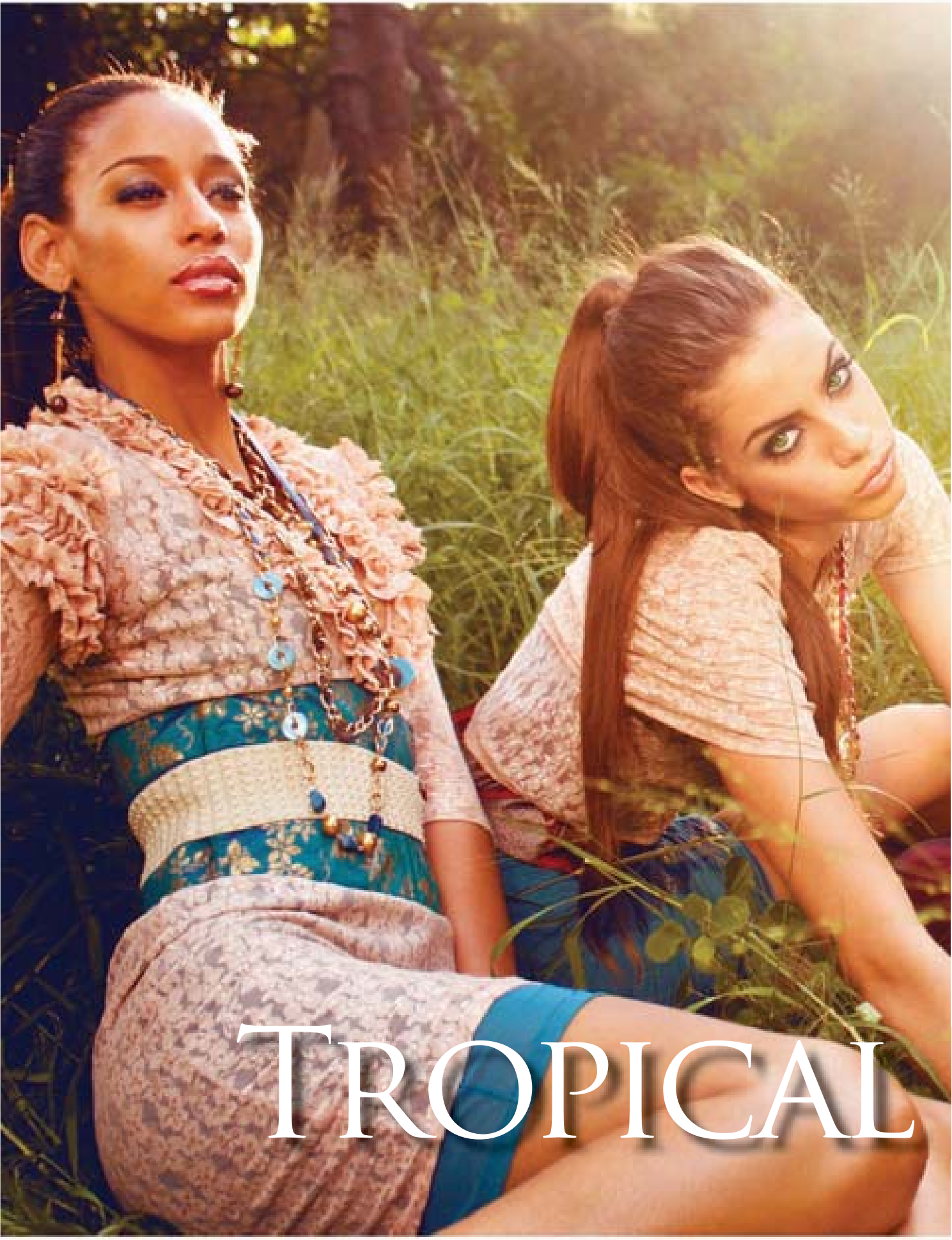
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Fantasy

Roly Rius & Omar Alejandro Collection
shot by Eduardo Rodríguez

By Mercy Ramos
Designer Roly Rius
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Photographer: Eduardo Rodríguez
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On this occasion, we would like to present for your consideration laces, brocades, and very elaborate ribbon work, devoted above all to the young people of today, who are attracted to clothing that is well-made and contemporary, with colors appropriate to the tropics.

The pieces were created by Roly Rius, a talented Cuban designer who has won numerous national and international awards, including at Havana's International Arts and Crafts Fair, the Havana Trade Fair, and Habanabell.

The current collection also includes a Spanish-inspired block, as well as sportswear and formalwear.

With almost 25 years of professional experience, Roly Rius has been a designer for Boga, the center of reference for national fashion, and currently he is the designer for music and dance production company PMM and the famous Tropicana cabaret.

According to Roly, in Cuba there is Cuban fashion. His opinion is based on the fact that there are designers who are inspired by the island's architecture, climate, tropical colors, and surroundings when they make their creations, and the final product is truly Cuban fashion. Accessories by Omar Alejandro, who has been working with Roly for the past 12 years.■

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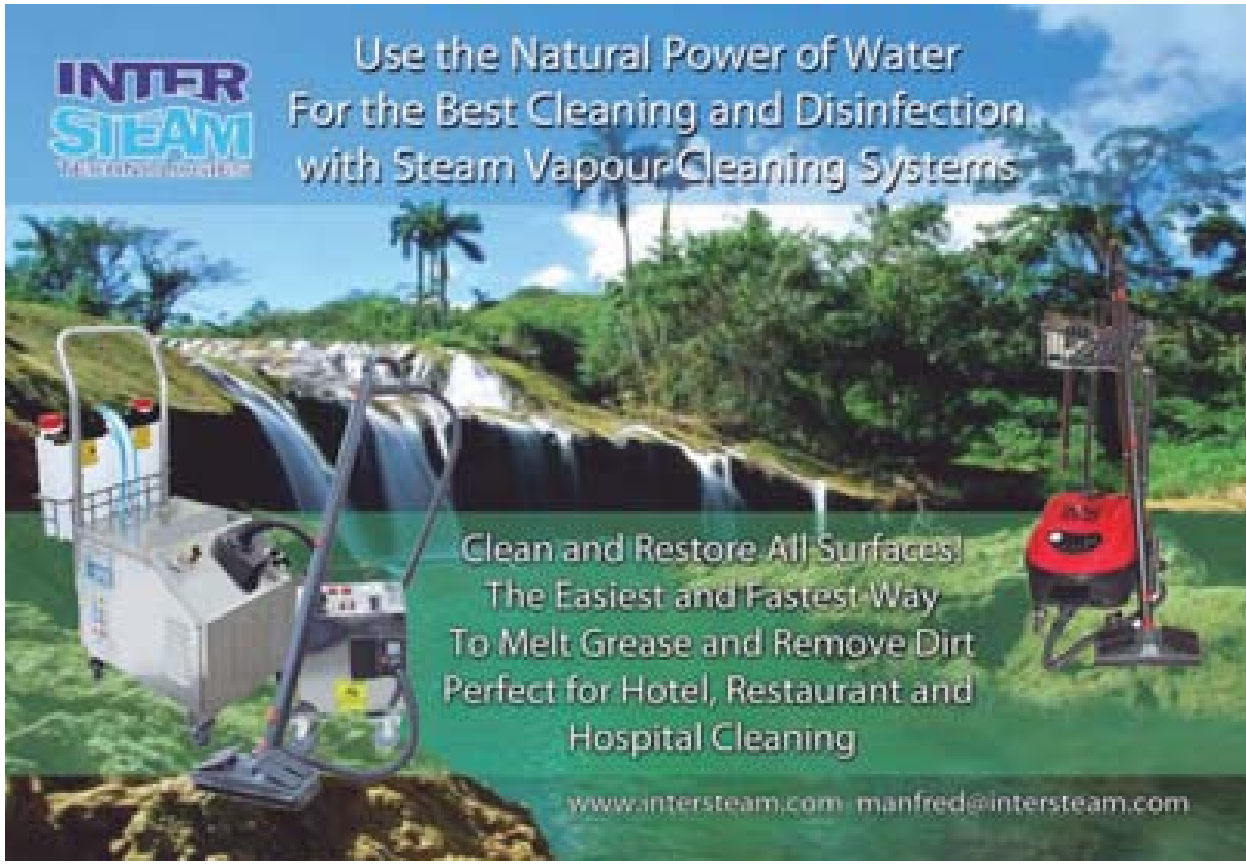

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Photos by: Jorge Pérez and courtesy of the Mesón

Very near to a unique sculpture of Don Quixote on the centrally-located Avenida 23 of Havana's Vedado neighbourhood is the Mesón Sancho Panza. Like the lovable hero, one of this restaurant's virtues is loyalty, in this case to its numerous clients.

Serving them with care and pleasing their palates are goals that are more than fulfilled by this restaurant, whose ambience and menu reflect the richness of Spanish tradition.

Among the many offerings on its menu, one of the most extensive in Havana, some of the dishes that stand out are based on authentic products from the peninsula, such as octopus, boquerones, anguilas, pez platino, manchego cheese, Serrano ham, and paella dishes prepared in the styles of different regions of Spain.

There are also super offers for those who prefer Italian or Cuban cuisine, and a children's meal to ensure that families get what they need, and that children can enjoy proverbially wholesome Mediterranean cooking.

It's not easy to choose at dessert time, either. Sancho Panza's owner, Ana Grethel Sarabia Domínguez, recommends the Dulcinea de Jijona, a turrón nougat bathed in syrup with cream on a sponge cake.

While this establishment offers whatever beverage the diner prefers, the ideal accompaniment on the menu is wine, and the restaurant has a well-stocked cellar of Spanish, Chilean and Argentine wines. Here the house wine deserves a special mention: Sancho Panza, a 2006 merlot made and bottled in Spain especially for this *mesón.*

And on weekend evenings, a flamenco show takes place here featuring well-known Cuban groups of musicians and dancers, livening up the night. Other music groups perform here as well, featuring Cuban and international music and a variety of genres and languages.

The design of Sancho Panza, a paladar or privately-owned restaurant that refreshes the eyes and spirit with its lovely

Spanish décor, lush green ornamental plants, and the burble of a little waterfall into a fish pond, is owing completely to Ana Grethel, who is a member of the Cuban Association of Artist Artisans.

With her restaurant, Grethel is returning to an old family tradition. Her grandfather and father established a popular restaurant called La Rueda in Siboney, in the eastern region of Santiago de Cuba. After the family moved to Havana, Grethel's father, Alfredo Sarabia, devoted himself to planning, designing and building—to the point of "keys in hand"—many of the Cuban capital's best-known restaurants and nightclubs, such as the Andes, La Carreta, Club 21, Club 23, La Zorra y el Cuervo, the Carmelo restaurants on Calzada and 23 streets, Wakamba, and Polinesio, with the additional touch of furniture made in his own factory.

Sancho Panza opened its doors on Oct. 20, 2012, Cuban Culture Day, after two years of work and preparations.

Many of its visitors have become regulars at this beautiful eatery, and according to manager Elisa Gamboa, these preferred customers receive a VIP card for discounts of 10 percent. The 10 percent service gratuity is not included on the bill. In just a little over a year, Sancho Panza has won the loyalty of its diners, which is why they keep coming back for an excellent quality/price/service relationship. It is a reaffirmation of one of the sayings painted on the tiles that decorate the restaurant: "He who sits down at a fine *mesón* is rewarded with good food." (AMR) ■

Sancho Panza Cocktail

This is the emblematic house drink, prepared at its bar in a very pleasant corner of the establishment, with a broad range of beverages and liquors, as broad as the customer likes.

The cocktail includes, in a magnificent combination of colors and flavors, liqueur de menthe, orange and wine, sprinkled with brandy or cognac, and garnished with mint.

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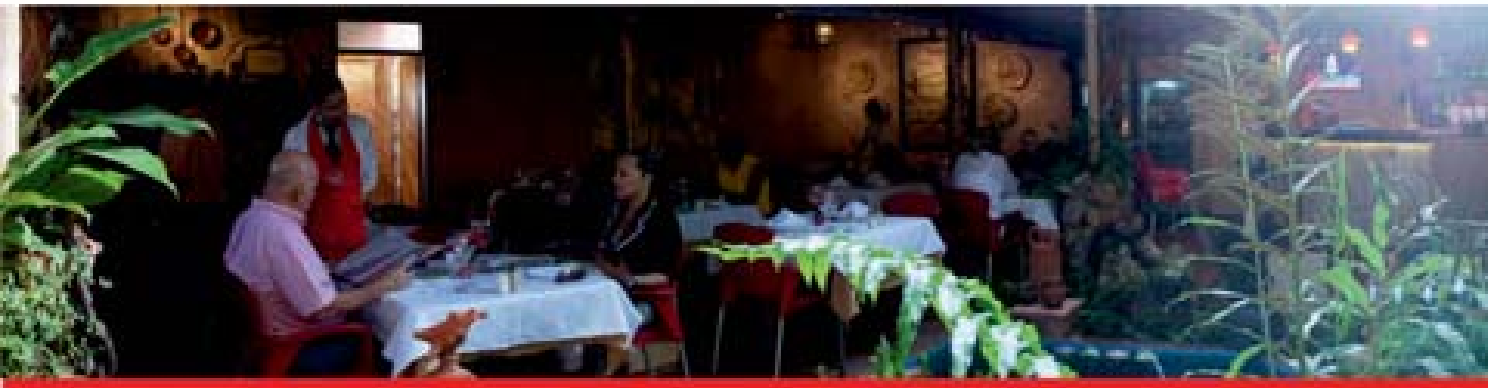

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uamuhaya Mountains in Santi Spiritus, Tope de Collantes, El Cubano park, ootprints of History hiking path, Sept. . Second Place, ature and Society, th Meso American Congress on iology and Conservation Photography Contest.

di ra n an inna ra r

By Mercy Ramos / Photos courtesy Edith Aragón

They say that sometimes a person is born to do a particular activity because of his or her qualities or vocation, and that might seem questionable, but when we're talking about the talented Cuban photographer Edith Aragón, there is no room for doubt. The quality of her work speaks for itself; she was born for this art.

uamuhaya Mountains in Santi Spiritus, Tope de Collantes, road to Trinidad, Trinidad ookout, uly .

uamuhaya Mountains in Cien fuegos, El icho park, Kingdom of Waters hiking path. Tiny drops of ater on a spider s eb, Sept. .

elo , uamuhaya Mountains in Santi Spiritus, Tope de Collantes, at Mi Retiro restaurant, uly .

For Edith, photography is fundamental in her life, and she cannot live without it. Through her photos, she can take a bird, a plant, or a landscape with her without doing the least bit of harm to the environment, and she is a out-and-out champion of nature.

In an interview with **Cubaplus**, Aragón, who is also a documentary filmmaker, told us that from a very young age, she has been in love with geography and animals. Often, on trips to the countryside, she would marvel at the wildlife and lose track of time.

"In photography, what I love the most is nature, although I sporadically make artistic photos with the goal of idealizing a dream," she said.

eft uamuhaya Mountains in Santi Spi ritus, Tope de Collantes, El Cubano park, ootprints of History hiking path, Sept. .

Above Christ of Havana monument overlooking Havana ay, at sunset.

She holds degrees in nursing and business administration (the latter of which she earned in Korea), but her photography work won Edith first prize in the Flora category of the Nature Photography Contest of the Mesoamerican Society for Biology and Conservation this past September in Havana. She also won third place in the same category, and second place in the category Society and Nature. Those prizes come in addition to a number of other awards in photography contests, including the 4th Fotosub National Festival in Cuba, in 2010; the 5th Rosa Elena Simeon Memorial Images of Nature Festival, in 2008; and the Walk for the Environment Photography Contest in 2011.

Above uamuhaya Mountains in Cienfuegos, high ay to El icho park, overlooking the River Hanabanilla, Sept. . irst place in andscape, th Meso American Congress on iology and Conservation Photography Contest.

Edith has also made a number of documentaries, one of which examines Korean immigration stemming from the war. Right now she is busy making a film about the 60 annual international billfish (marlin) fishing tournaments that have taken place in the Cuban capital, with which she will pay tribute to Ernes Hemingway.

She has exhibited her photographs in many national and international venues, including Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and the United States. What most fascinates her is "living in the Cuban archipelago: every cave, every islet, every cove, every mountain in our archipelago has a richness, and that is what makes my photos worth something. The value of my photos is revealing to others what we have in Cuba," emphasizes this well-known artist.■

Photo taken in Santi Spiritus uamuhaya Moun tains, Tope de Collantes natural protected lands cape, on the a atata hiking path, uly .

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For a Socially Responsible University

On Feb. 10, 2014, Havana's international convention centre—the Palacio de Convenciones—will host the 9th International Congress on Higher Education, "Universidad 2014." This day will be the culmination of more than two years of intense work to set into motion one of the most important events on higher education organized in this region, focusing on the most pressing issues for university administrators, professors and students.

Recognized as an academic event that aims for thoughtful, in-depth, and open dialogue between actors in higher education and their societies, in the interest of finding the best solutions for urgent problems faced by countries in the region, the Congress also puts forward new ideas about the most diverse matters related to the international higher education agenda, and contributes to building new networks of knowledge and friendship among participants.

Roots

It was November 1996 and Havana was the venue for the Regional Conference on Policies and Strategies for Transforming Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by UNESCO and the former CRESALC, now know as IESALC, as part of the preparatory meetings for the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education in Paris. When that conference was over, the idea emerged of organizing a unique event that would be a space for debate and reflection on diverse university-related matters, and the first congress was held in 1998.

Actors

"Universidad" has become firmly established as a meeting of professors, researchers, university and other post-secondary students, along with administrators and officials from institutions, organizations and companies related to higher education. High-level delegations come together in Havana, stimulating debate and putting forward their views.

Organized by Cuba's Ministry of Higher Education and universities, the preparatory process is carried out by all universities, starting at the grassroots level to put together a national delegation of considerable size. This process characterizes "Universidad" as an event with broad national participation, and the axis of discussion about higher education in the country.

The agenda

The "Universidad" Congress has a busy agenda, covering the interests of the most demanding participants. In addition to the many options that converge in the event's scientific program, an associated expo takes place at the same time, along with specialized visits to education institutions at all levels, possibilities for

enrolling in one of the short courses offered, and networking opportunities among representatives from more than 60 countries who gather in Havana for the Congress.

In parallel, participants attend meetings and gatherings of rectors and vice-chancellors and participating organizations; sign agreements and letters of intent; and join in other meetings and get-togethers during social activities and the main program's recesses.

Focus of reflection

With the theme "For a Socially Responsible University," the conference "Universidad 2014" holds up the idea that as part of their social responsibilities, universities should place the most serious and urgent problems faced by humanity at the centre of their agenda, orienting all of their knowledge and critical capacity toward the perspective of the loftiest ideals of liberty, social justice, peace, and development.

In consequence, responses to social demands should be based on the university community's reflective, rigorous, and critical capacity and commitment to the community in defining its goals and setting its course of work. These ideas are at the heart of the commitment of Cuba's universities, manifest in their ongoing efforts to improve the quality of their processes of research, teaching, and extension.

Based on these postures, the Congress organizes as its central themes:

- The university's social commitment and its role in sustainable development, intercultural dialogue and the building of a culture of peace.
- Policies, challenges, quality, and perspectives for higher education in the context of the university's social responsibility.
- Internationalization and virtualization of higher education in support of the university's social mission.
- Pedagogical and didactic challenges in training highly qualified professionals who are committed to society.
- Universities for socially responsible management of the environment, energy, sustainable development, and food security and sovereignty, and a role in the face of natural disasters.
- Policies for science, technology, innovation and high-level education in universities and their commitment to development.
- The influence of student, professional, and union organizations in achieving socially responsible universities.

Organization

The Congress is structured into 14 integrated events and four special independent activities that articulate the different perspectives for analysis in each of the themes that are established. The availability of scientific and social activities based on the guidelines set by the event's general program gives participants the assurance of having a large variety of options for attending the activities of their preference.

The professionalism with which the Congress's scientific program is organized is complemented by the facilities provided for this type of event by Havana's international conference center, the Palacio de Convenciones. The organizing committee provides updated information about the event's organization at the website: http://www.congresouniversidad.cu/

Intense preparatory work makes it possible to anticipate the confirmation of participation by authoritative individuals in each of the different issues, using the plenary activities to encourage an enriching dialogue.

Since "Universidad 2012," once the congress is over a selection of the best papers presented are published in the event's magazine, *Congreso Universidad*.

Sponsors

"Universidad 2014" is sponsored by an important group of Cuban and international organizations and entities, which encourage the participation of their members in the organization and realization of the congress.

Universidad 2014

"Universidad 2014" is now a reality, and the number of Cuban and international delegates expected to participate is growing. Very soon, delegates will devote themselves to work and discussion at an event where meeting rooms are full to capacity, and Havana is all decked out to welcome them. ■

Fotosub 2014,

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People who love underwater photography have another great opportunity coming up: Fotosub 2014, which will be held in May in the waters that surround Cayo Largo, a paradise-like little island located in southern Cuba.

Contestants have the chance to win 17 prizes in this photography contests, three in each competing category, and a grand prize for whoever accumulates the most points by category: absolute champion of the event, and best model.

The categories are fish, environment, environment with model, macro, and macro with theme. Participants can compete in several categories, and therefore win several prizes, as long as they follow the rules of the contest.

The last contest, the 14th International Championship of Underwater Photography, was attended by 34 photographers from 18 countries.

The event is organized by the Marlin S.A. Nautical and Marina Business Group, with consulting by the Cuban Federation of Underwater Activities. Cayo Largo, which is located 177 kilometers south of Havana, has 125 kilometers of white beaches with crystal-clear ocean waves and virgin sea bottoms, with plenty of caves, reefs and sandy valleys inhabited by crustaceans, sponges, corals, and a countless number of brightly-colored fish that offer ocean-lovers magnificent, incredible underwater landscapes. ■

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By Mercy Ramos / Photos: José Meriño

Founded more than two decades ago, SERVIMED is today a symbol of Cuba's health system throughout the world, its prestige earned through the services that it has provided people who visit Cuba for healthcare at various accredited institutions that are known for their high scientific and humanitarian standards.

In an interview with **Cubaplus**, Dr. Ileana Reyes, SERVIMED director of sales and operations, said that what is most sought by patients who visit Cuba are precisely those ethical, scientific and humanitarian principles that characterise the country's healthcare professionals.

That statement is based on the opinions of patients themselves. Often they come from countries where the scientific conditions exist for treating their problem, but they come to Cuba for a second opinion, Reyes said.

She explained that today, SERVIMED has numerous programs for treating a diversity of ailments, including addictions (drugs and alcohol), which are provided in the El Cocal and El Quinqué clinics in the eastern province of Holguín; and ophthalmologic services for treating all types of eye problems, including retinitis pigmentosa, cataracts, and glaucoma, etc.

Moreover, SERVIMED provides neurological restoration programs for people affected by vascular and encephalic vascular accidents; children with neurological after-effects of cerebral paralysis stemming from problems at birth; and programs for intensive neurological rehabilitation for people who have lost abilities due to cranial accidents and trauma, Reyes said.

In the specialty of orthopaedics, spinal, knee and other types of surgery are provided, and SERVIMED has

specialists for general clinical/surgical evaluations, she noted.

With respect to plastic surgery, Reyes said that Cuba is in big demand in many countries, although its principal market in that specialty is Canada.

Other programs include the evaluation and treatment of oncological diseases, and "we are initiating steps toward bariatric surgery, which consists of surgical intervention for reducing stomach size for individuals who need to reduce their body weight," she said.

Moreover, SERVIMED also provides monoclonal antibody therapy for lung cancer and head and neck tumours, improving the quality of life of patients who qualify for this treatment. It is important for this therapy to be implemented in non-complicated stages of the disease to obtain the best immunological response, Reyes said.

With respect to cardiovascular diseases, "we are in the vanguard, because our Cardiovascular Institute in Havana recently underwent repairs and updating, and it has modern surgery wards for implementing multiple clinical/surgical treatments," she said.

For access to the services provided by SERVIMED, one can communicate directly via its website, and also through the sales office network that it has in numerous countries in South America, Central America, North America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

"When people choose SERVIMED for treating any kind of health problem, they can be certain that they will be treated properly, because we take care of classifying their cases, finding the right institution in accordance with the health issue, organizing their travel, processing their immigration paperwork and follow-up, and providing transport to the medical center," Reyes said. "That is, SERVIMED oversees everything from the person's departure from their country of origin to their return," she emphasized.■

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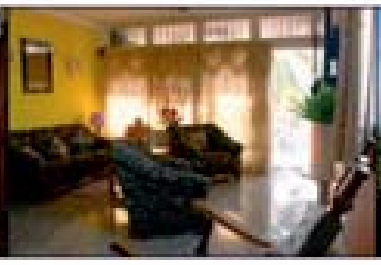

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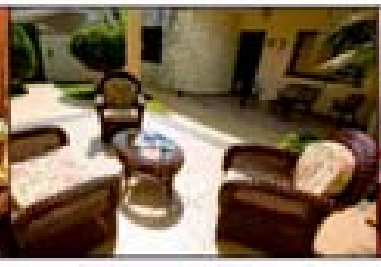

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By Lemay Padrón Oliveros

Absences for different reasons, along with the accelerated rise of young people to the national team without being completely ready for that step, have caused a drop in Cuba's boxing performance in recent years.

The failure by Cuba's boxers to win any gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and the final outcome of just one title at the 2009 World Championships in Milan led to a restructuring of the boxing coaching team. Those changes began to bear fruit with the winning of a pair of titles at the 2011 Baku World Championships and at the 2012 London Olympics.

At first glance, the 2013 Almaty World Championships in Kazakhstan might seem very similar to the 2011 Baku event: Cuba took second place again, and the champions are the same as they were two years ago. However, in both cases, the gold medals won at Almaty had nuances of something more.

Lázaro Álvarez (60 kilograms) was making his debut in a competition at this level, and in a new weight division. His rise, as hoped for by coaches and experts, went practically unnoticed, and they were assessing his weight gain until the last minute.

Julio César La Cruz (81kg), for whom the 2012 London Olympics were a disappointment, made a

comeback and demonstrated his mastery of this sport every time he climbed into the ring, just as he had done before and after the Olympics.

Yasniel Toledo (64 kg) once again finished a step away from a gold medal, but his performance showed that without any flamboyance, he continues to be a sure prize-winner, the type of fighter you don't come across every day.

Arisnoidis Despaigne (69 kg) won every compliment possible. From a last-minute guest, he became the great revelation of the Cuban team, winning a silver medal that is worth much more for his record and above all for his confidence.

Lastly, Yosbany Veitía (49kg) finally returned from a world championship event with a medal. He could have done a little better, but his rival in the semifinals was also a top-notch fighter.

Meanwhile, Olympic champion Robeisis Ramírez was not up to snuff, even though he was competing in another weight division, because up until then he had been doing very well in the 56kg category, and he should have made it to the winners' podium.

In the case of the remaining team members, while they and their coaches logically aspired to better results, their performances were average.

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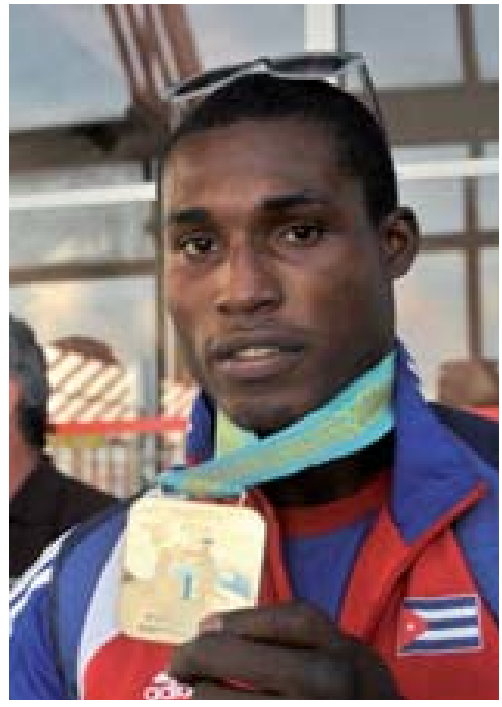
Gerardo Cervantes, Ramón Luis and YohandyToirac were competing at their first world championship event. In the case of Cervantes, he lost to one of the greats in his division. Ersilandy Savón's performance was more or less what was expected: to box well, and if he lost, to do so with his boots strapped on. It is true that the goal was to recuperate the throne, and that was not achieved. While the Kazakh team may have had a little bit of help from the referee, their fighters were very well prepared for this event, and they returned to their longtime position of boxing powerhouse.

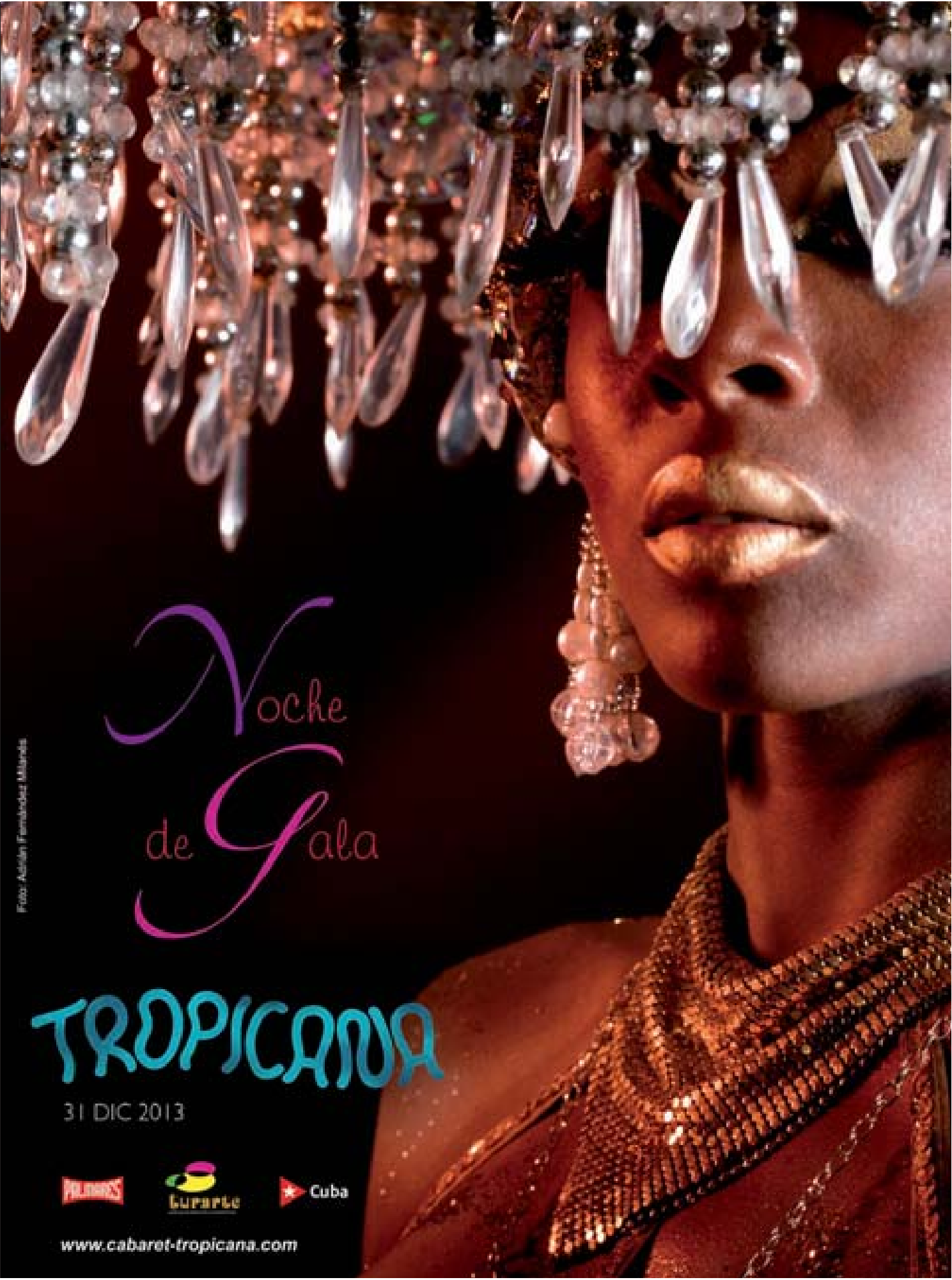
The tendency in recent years has been to alternate at the top: Russia at the 2009 Milan event; Ukraine at Baku in 2011, and now Kazakhstan. However, Cuba is still in the running, and that demonstration of consistency cannot be minimized.

While Team Cuba did not reach its goal, all signs seem to indicate that the coaching team is heading down the right path, and victories are sure to grow in the future.

For the region in general, Latin Americans who boxed in Almaty gave their best world championship performance in the last 30 years, and that included a larger number of countries, because traditionally Cuba has been the only one to shine assiduously.

This time, the Latin Americans won 10 medals, including 2 golds, three silvers and five bronzes, and in addition to Cuba, which won 2-2-1, those on the winners' podium included Brazil (0-1-1), Costa Rica (0-0-1), Argentina (0-0-1) and Venezuela (0-0-1).

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a in n
an encounter of cultures

By Mercy Ramos / Photos: José Meriño and Courtesy of the film's producers

Two cultures that are so different but so close, Cuban and Canadian, will soon be seen on the big screen. In the coming year, filmgoers will be able to enjoy *Eating the Sun*, a movie that began to shot in the first quarter of 2014 in both countries, directed by the talented and well-known Cuban filmmaker Alfredo Ureta.

In an exclusive interview with **Cubaplus**, Ureta told us that *Eating the Sun* is a Cuban-Canadian coproduction by Aurora Films and Canwood Entertainment. It depicts an encounter between cultures, addressing the classic conflicts of a couple grappling with the fact that they were born and raised in very different settings combined with unusual events that place them in extreme situations.

They must leave an ideal world to make a life together, and are invaded by questions and inner ghosts. In a place without contact with the outside world, they must find themselves to emerge from crisis. The obstacles become confused and often we find ourselves asking if the events are really happening or if they are figments of a mind disoriented by the imaginings of a strange world.

In fact, this psychological thriller is based on ancient pre-Columbian mythology about the negative influence brought about by solar eclipses, even on our loved ones, Ureta said. "We are sure that those who see this film will wonder if they really know those who are closest to them," he commented.

Everything is connected in this film, where suggestion plays a central role. "Using the legend, we come to the present, and address contemporary themes. For example, as the characters are on their way to Julia's home in Cuba, they witness a solar eclipse. With the influence of ancestral legends, Julia is affected, and they go through contradictions and conflicts that are sometimes unexplainable for her," Ureta noted.

Filming was done in Toronto, Canada, and in Havana, Girón, and Pinar del Río, in Cuba, "where we will compare, in a certain way, the intense Canadian cold with the island's eternal summer," he said.

Ureta noted enthusiastically that one special feature of this work is that it is the first Cuban film to be shot in English, "a real challenge for us." The two production

Reymel elgado.

Inti Herrera.

companies are planning work for the longer term. "The idea is to establish Cuba as a very attractive set, with good human capital, and to bring in the Canadian experience, work flows, installed technological capacity and good actors, some of whom can insert us into the major markets just with their presence in the film."

Ureta said proudly: "We have a young but very talented cast, hardworking and energetic, including Cuban actress Yoandra Suárez, and with Inti Herrera and Reymel Delgado as executive producers."

Gordon Weiske, president of Canwood Entertaiment, the film's Canadian producer, said that the film's theme and script caught his attention and interest, because it connects the two countries very well. Hence his interest and decision to work on it.

Weiske added that he had worked with Ureta previously and with part of the film crew on other audiovisual projects, including the ones produced during the performances by the celebrated Italian singer Zucchero in Cuba, in December of 2012.

Title: Eating the Sun
Duration: 90 min
Format: Digital Cinema HD 2K
Production year: 2014
Company: AURORA Productions / RTV COMERCIAL/ Canwood Entertaiment
Script and Direction: Alfredo Ureta
Producer: Reymel Delgado
Executive production: Inti Herrera, Reymel Delgado
Director of Photography: Alejandro Pérez
Editor: Michelle Szemberg
Mic Sound Mix: Osmany Olivare
Music: Juan A. Leyva and Magda R. Galban
Talent: DAVID-Canadian actor
JULIA-Cuban actress Yoandra Suarez

Asked for an opinion about Cuban film, Weiske said, "Cuba has some great artistic talent. So if we have a good story, accompanied by good talent and good technology, the final product is sure to be a good film."

Therefore, he added, this is the first of many other projects to come, to our satisfaction, and of course, to that of movie-goers.■

Alfredo reta.

ordon Weiske.

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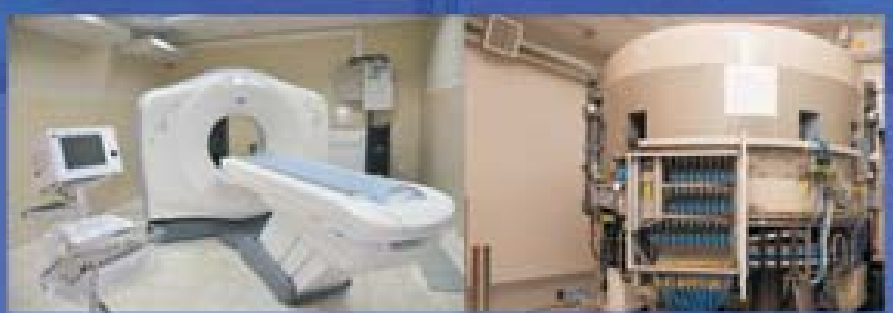

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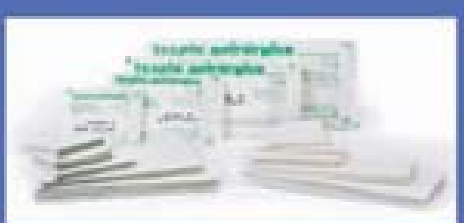

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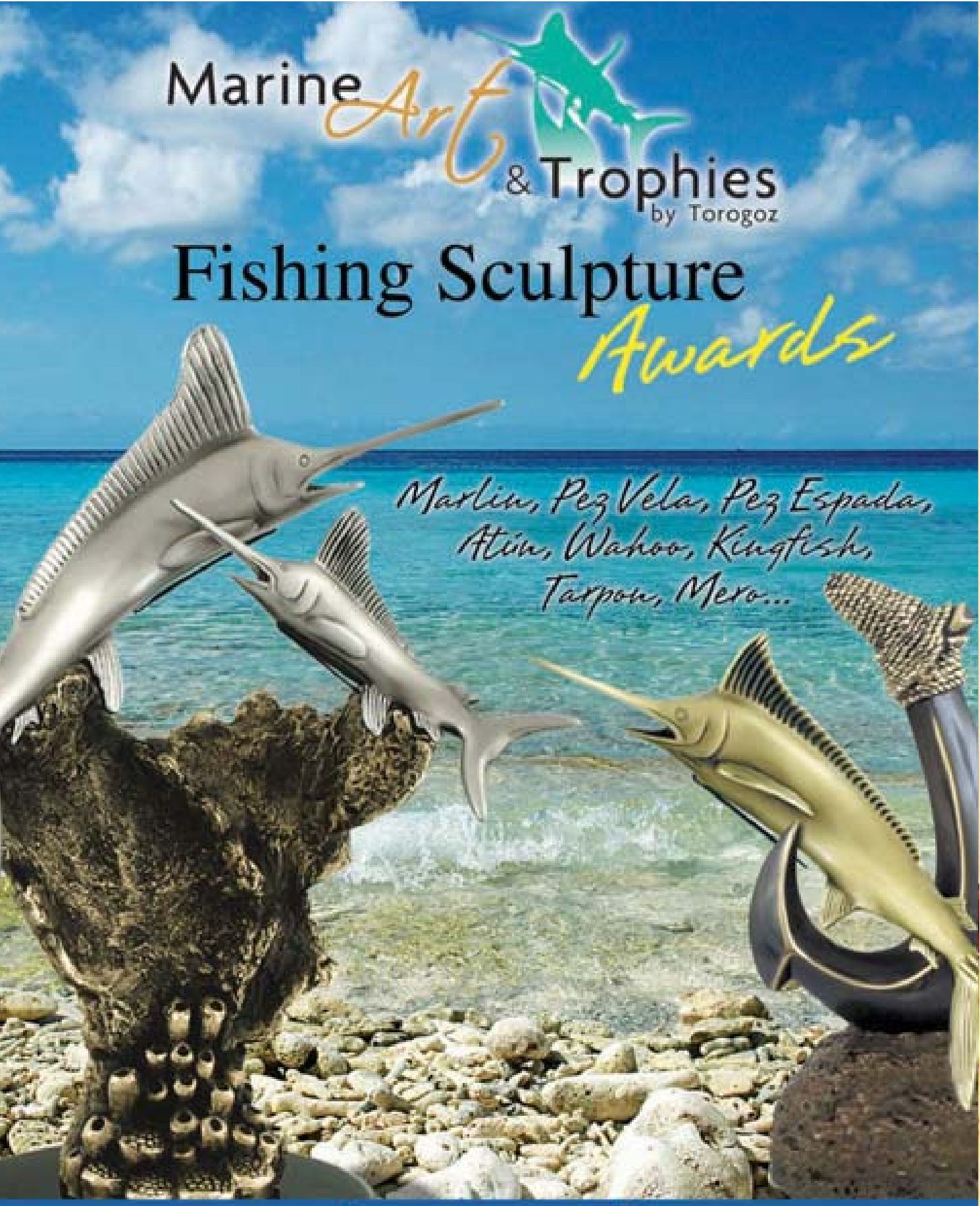

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Collography.
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T
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of Alcides

By Charly Morales Valido
Photos courtesy Alcides Pérez Toledo

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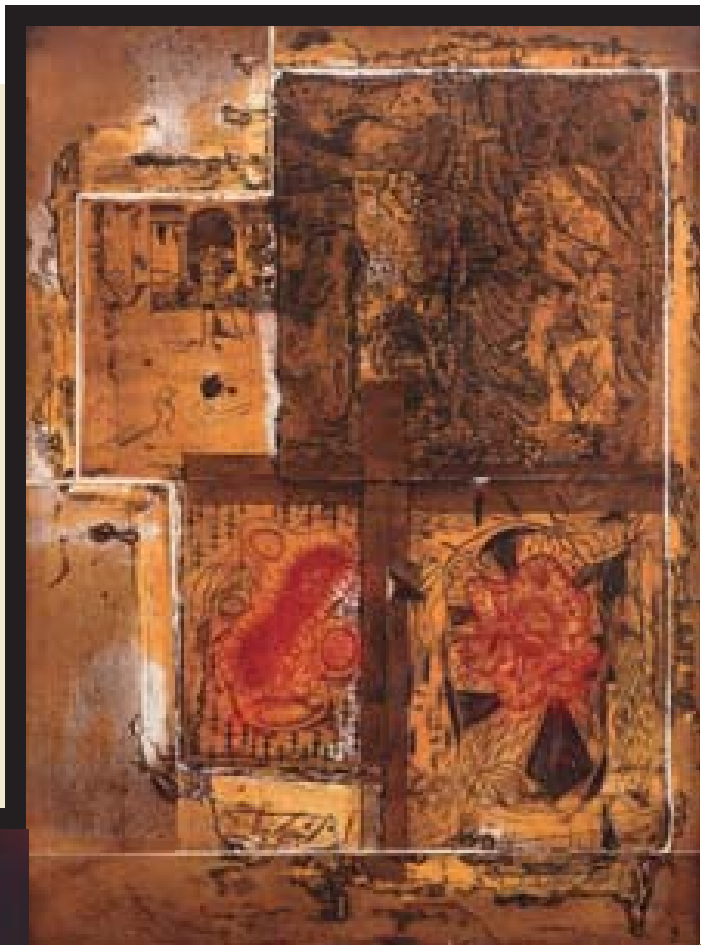

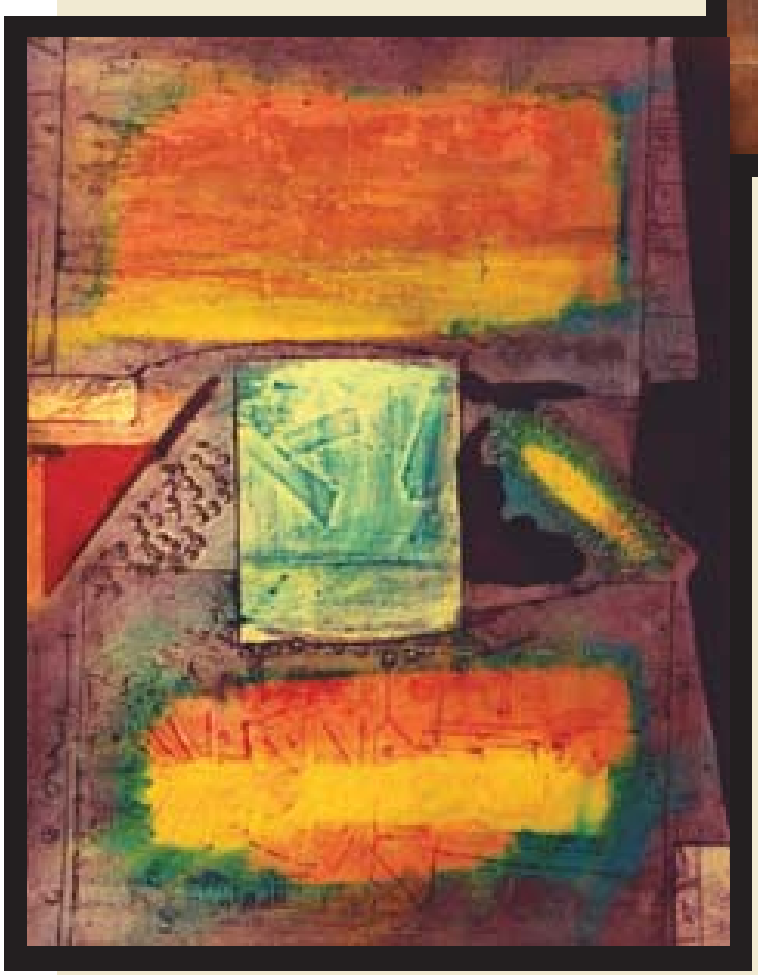

Perhaps it was a happy rhetorical coincidence when curator Nelson Herrera Ysla asserted that "engraving is the terrain best tread" by artist Alcides Pérez Toledo, whose exhibition *Infra-Muros* (which could be translated as Beneath-Walls) precisely vindicates the ground in Havana and the stories—sometimes unknown—that lie under our feet.

"His wanderings seem to be sure and with their own destination," Herrera Ysla suggest in his walking analogy, confirming what for Alcides is a certainty and a provocation: every floor holds the energy of all who walk upon it. And those of his hometown of Havana especially seemed to call to him while he was living in Chile, longing for the footsteps of a city beautiful in its ruin.

The ground as the recipient of so many steps and the eclecticism of architecture with so much

a ada r an
Acyrlic on canvas. x cm, .

vital force inspired this exhibition, with which Alcides returns to his origin, an origin that he never completely left, although he does admit that in the distance, Cuba became "pixelized" for him, like images that become deformed when we try to make them larger.

A graduate of the San Alejandro Academy, where he specialized in painting, Alcides spent the last 15 years teaching at a Chilean university, but without becoming disconnected from the Cuban creative scene: his participation in many solo and collective exhibitions testify to his rejection of creative immobility, the comfortable maturity understood as a repetition of itself.

Infra-Muros was born fortuitously, emerging as revelations tend to do: when he lifted up a canvas that was stuck to the floor of his studio in the Havana municipality of Cerro, the "unconscious engraving" that was made gave him the idea of proposing a reflection on the beauty immersed in the precariousness of his Havana, using as a

i d *Collography. x cm, .*

T *Collography.* *x* *cm,* *.*

mold the possible arabesques of floor tiles, mosaics, and paving stones.

One idea is that human experience is intrinsically linked to the buildings we inhabit. Another could be that each body is a building, with its hallways, pipes, and balconies, which one could restore, but its destiny is ruin. At least, that's how I understood it, and that should be enough, but Alcides cares very much about his public's interpretation. For that reason he makes his techniques work toward an idea, because he knows that art is like certain loves: at first sight, they may be fascinating, but without content, that passion becomes exhausted.

His work ranges from mosaic engravings to more digitalized and colder pieces, to be consistent with his challenge as an artist who is never intimidated by certain esthetic patterns, in virtue of a certain formal maturity. "Art is social upheaval, always in constant vibration, and my idea is to keep experimenting, learning, and making incursions into things that motivate my creativity," he told **Cubaplus**.

He also sets out to maintain an exhibition dynamic in and outside of Cuba; to keep showing,

i i n an r i a *Collography.* *x* *cm,* *.*

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Collography.
x cm,
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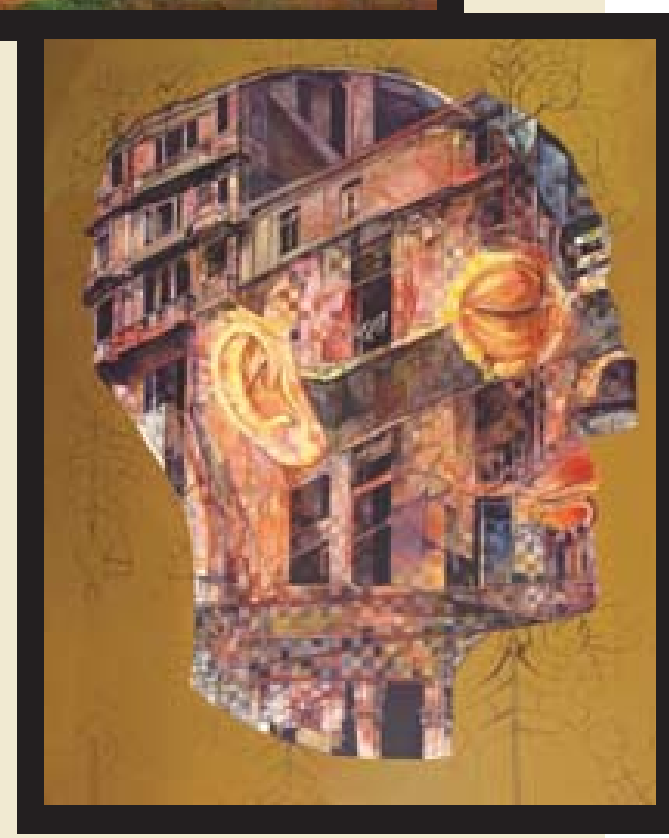
interacting, and proposing, because "nothing is said until the work goes out of the studio and is placed somewhere where it can engage in dialogue," he affirms.

At 37, this admirer of the technical and conceptual solidness of the late artist Belkys Ayón feels that he is going through a very creative stage of his life: the Chilean experience was enriching, but he always knew that he would return to his studio, and one of the reasons is that Cuba and Brazil are Latin American powerhouses of engraving, his favorite technique because of all the experimentation that it fosters.

As a former member of Havana's Taller de Gráfica (Engraving Workshop), Alcides recognizes that the high quality of Cuban engravers places him before a seductive challenge, but he is not worried about that; on the contrary, he views competitiveness as a stimulus for professional growth, and that is why he is advancing toward excellence on a road that he himself is building, driven by the energy that is imprinted, like engravings, on the Infra-Muros of his life. ■



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By Roberto Salomón / Photos by Tito Meriño

Canada continues to be one of Cuba's top trading and investment partners, and has been a traditional and enthusiastic participant in the Havana International Trade Fair, FIHAV. In fact, at the most recent fair, the 31st, Canada's representation grew in space and in the number of companies represented.

In a new pavilion, inaugurated at the fair by Ambassador Yves Gagnon, Canada occupied an area of 630 square meters, almost 100 more than in last year's event, housing 32 stands for 57 companies and organizations. And for 28 of them, it was their first time participating in this type of multi-sector trade show.

The Canada pavilion was one of the busiest and most popular at the fair, given the creativity and versatility of the Canadian economy, something that was well-represented by exhibitors.

Pierre Alerie, vice president of business development for the Canada Commercial Corporation (CCC), attended the pavilion's inauguration and Canada Day celebration.

For more than six decades, the CCC has operated as the international agency of the Canadian government for contracting and acquiring products in markets all over the world. Since the early 1990s, it has established strong working relations with Cuba through the supply of equipment, products and services related principally to the sugar industry, tourism, and other important sectors.

As Cuban Tourism Vice Minister Alexis Trujillo noted on Canada Day at FIHAV 2013, the northern country continued to be one of the top three investors in Cuba in terms of numbers, following Spain and Italy. As of that date, Canada had 12 businesses operating in oil, energy, mining, the paper industry, food and beverages, and tourism.

According to Trujillo, the most important sectors among those investments are in oil, energy, and mining.

Canada is now Cuba's fifth most important trading partner, and it continues to be the largest source of tourists to the island.

Canada s commercial attache in Cuba, M nica Her n, speaks at inauguration of Canadian pavilion at the Havana Int l Trade air.

oreign Trade ice Minister Ileana ez, right, greets Cubaplus publisher ominic Soave and Cubaplus correspondent Mercedes Ramos, Aldo Mazza, KoSA Music Artistic irector and Patricia P rez, Cubaplus staff.

Suffice it to note that in 2012, some 1.071 million Canadians visited Cuba, the equivalent of 37.7 percent of all travelers to the archipelago. The 2012 figure also represented an increase of 6.9 percent over the previous year.

In the area of cooperation, Canada is the number two country working with Cuba, both for the financial amounts accumulated in recent years, and in priorities such as food security, economic modernization, and sustainable economic development, with positive repercussions on the ministries of Agriculture, Energy and Mines, Public Health, Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, and others.

According to Canada's commercial attache in Cuba, Mónica Herón, FIHAV is an important international event for exploring and discovering offers for products and services and for doing business in general.

At FIHAV 2013, the participation of foreign companies grew overall, with a total of 1,400 companies from 65 countries in a total exhibition area of 18,000 square meters. This was 20 percent more than last year's fair, which was the largest in a decade, according to Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment Rodrigo Malmierca, who noted the sizeable delegations from Cuba's top trading partners: Venezuela, China, Russia, Spain and Canada.

Fair highlights included a detailed presentation by Malmierca, who was also president of the event's organizing committee, regarding possibilities for foreign investment in the Mariel Special Development Zone, sparking broad interest among participants.

Another highlight was the inauguration of a 1MW photovoltaic solar park donated by China that supplied a good part of the energy consumed during FIHAV.

As Ricardo Cabrisas, vice president of the Council of Ministers, said in closing remarks at the end of the fair, FIHAV has become the most suitable space for fostering trade and business.■

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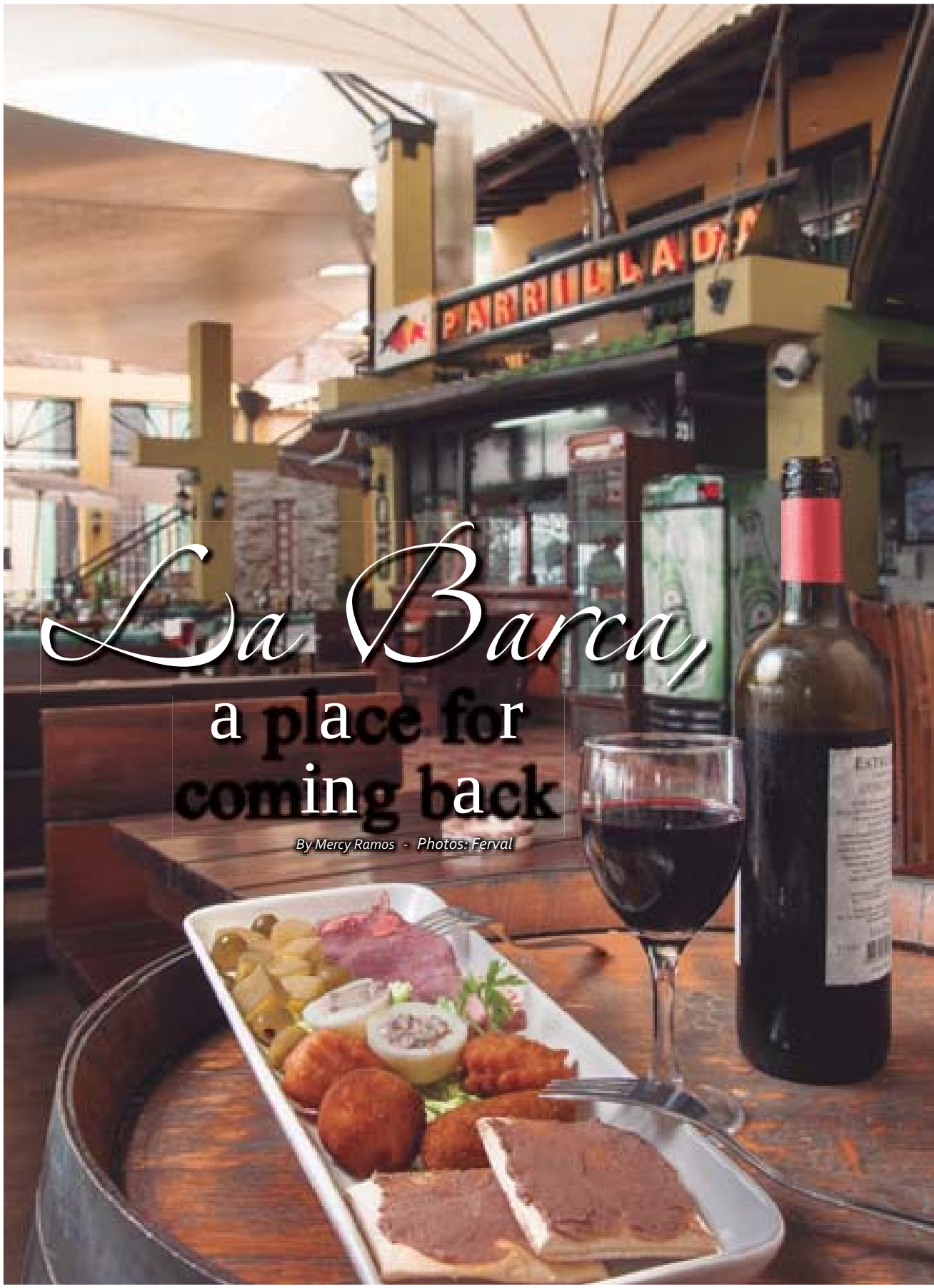


La Barca, a place for coming back

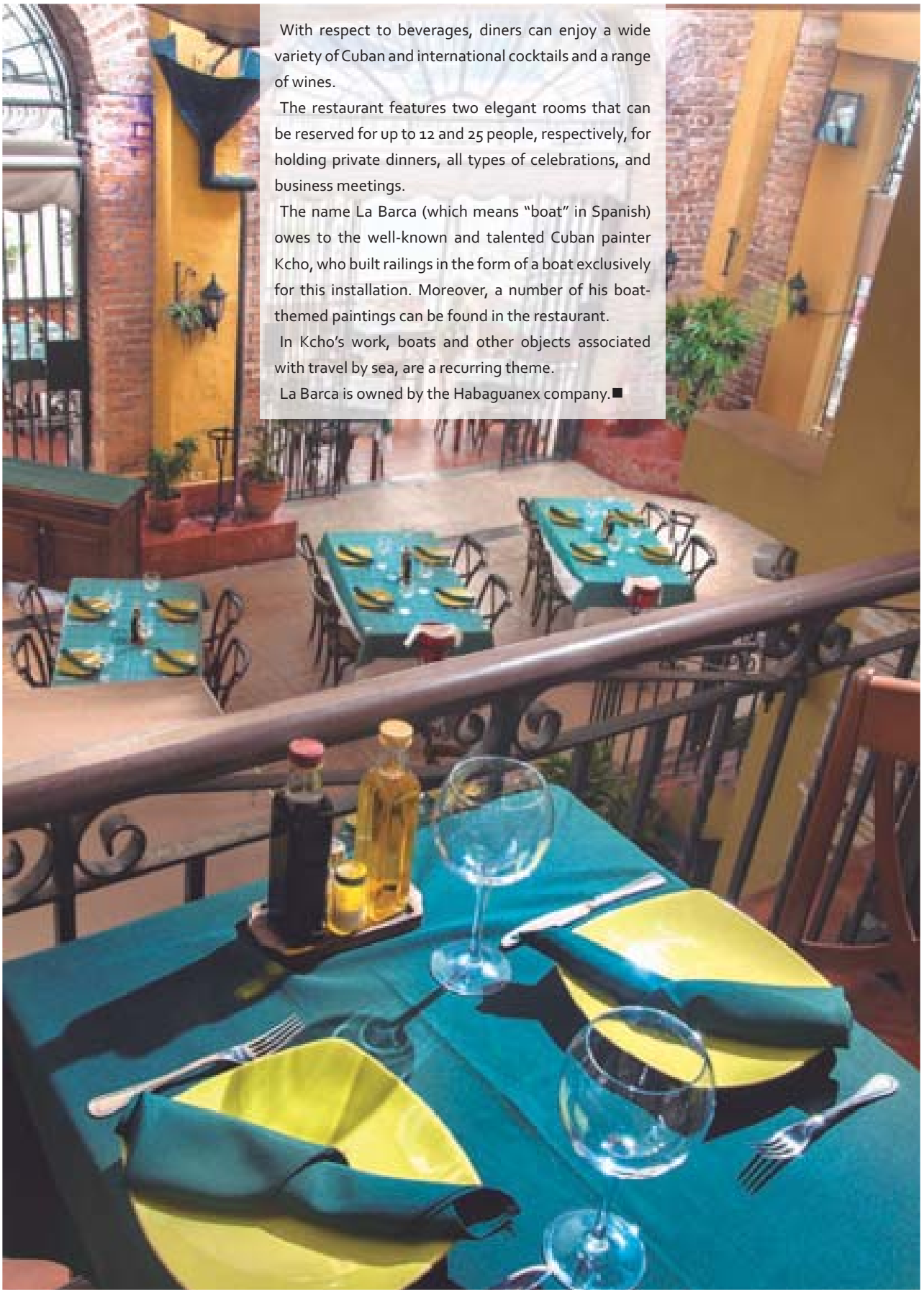
By Mercy Ramos - Photos: Ferval

On the avenue that runs along the Port of Havana, the Avenida del Puerto, stands the Suárez building, from which one can see the arrival and departure of every ship in the bay. It is also the location of the La Barca restaurant, exceptional for its magnificent culinary offers and excellent service.

Formerly the headquarters of various British entities, the Suárez building had fallen into ruin until the Havana City Historian's Office decided to restore and rebuild it, and the La Barca restaurant was opened on July 25, 2008.

With a capacity for 140, La Barca has an extensive menu, specializing in dishes made with (Canadian) AAA Angus beef in a variety of cuts, and Italian cuisine: pasta, pizza—including the Margarita with olives and tuna pizza—all of them very popular. Seafood and different types of fish are also part of the offer.

Currently La Barca has a very special dish, according to Chef William Fernández: the entrecote, a premium cut of beef from the upper rib area, which he personally recommends.



With respect to beverages, diners can enjoy a wide variety of Cuban and international cocktails and a range of wines.

The restaurant features two elegant rooms that can be reserved for up to 12 and 25 people, respectively, for holding private dinners, all types of celebrations, and business meetings.

The name La Barca (which means "boat" in Spanish) owes to the well-known and talented Cuban painter Kcho, who built railings in the form of a boat exclusively for this installation. Moreover, a number of his boat-themed paintings can be found in the restaurant.

In Kcho's work, boats and other objects associated with travel by sea, are a recurring theme.

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Indigenous ingeniousness

By MSc. Domingo Cuza Pedrera

If we were to ask what is the most ingenious food ever invented by human beings, some might find that that debatable or mention several that could qualify. However, I would respond immediate: casabe. Some might find this to be an unexpected or baseless answer, so I would propose that we take a look at the history of casabe, or the "bread of the Indians," an enigmatic and wonderful food.

Casabe is made from bitter yucca, a tuber that is highly poisonous if eaten raw. How did the indigenous people make poison into a food? They achieved a miracle very similar to what the European alchemists sought, with immense desire but without any results; while they were losing sleep over trying to make lead into gold, the Arawak people were able to perform the wonder of making poison into a healthy, versatile food.

This continues to be a mystery, but perhaps no human food has had so many martyrs in its development as casabe. It was the principal food of the indigenous people in many regions of the Caribbean. For its elaboration, first the yucca is grated and then placed in a sebucán, or press, where all of its juice, or "yare," which is poisonous, is removed. Then it is placed on a hot griddle, or burén, and toasted on both sides.

In pre-Columbian times, yucca bread, or casabe, was made in different ways, depending on the yucca variety. For the common people, a thick cake was prepared, about half a finger thick, while for the cacique, or chief, and other important people, it was more refined, thin and white, and was called xauxau. The Spanish conquistadores recognized the value of this food. During the whole period of conquest and colonization, the Europeans had to survive on food made by the indigenous people, fundamentally casabe.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, casabe was a good and frequent replacement for bread. Today, it is still consumed in the eastern Cuban cities of Bayamo and Camagüey. That is why it is common to hear street vendors who sell casabe, or casaberos, who recommend that it be eaten with roast pork for year's end celebrations.

With the humbleness of a truly indigenous element, the casabe is like the grandfather of all Cuban dishes, the genesis of our cuisine. If you are one of the people who still haven't tasted a casabe sandwich, then don't hesitate! Try out this piece of ingeniousness that achieved the impossible: feeding us with something that can kill.■

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Camagüey: i ri and n rar i

By Masiel Fernández Bolaños
Photos by José Tito Meriño and Publicitur

The city of Camagüey, known for its churches, legends and tinajones—large, earthenware vessels for storing water—is a place where the colonial and the modern coexist in harmony, a touch of distinction that has been one of its main attractions for over half a millennium.

Nicknames like "the city of tinajones" (due to the abundance of these vessels, which are still used for everyday purposes), "city of churches" and "the walking city" reflect the historical richness of a city that is the pride of its people and a delight for visitors.

It was founded as a Spanish colonial villa in 1514, a coastal town, with the name of Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe. Two years later, the original town was moved to more fertile ground, and in 1528, in a final relocation, it was moved further inland, between the rivers Tínima and Hatibonico. Over time, its name was reduced to Puerto Príncipe. Camagüey, an indigenous word that means "son of the tree," became its official name in 1903.

Quickly after the town's founding, ranching became the main livelihood for its people, and as livestock

production grew, smuggling became a widespread activity, involving sailors from the British, French and Dutch Antilles. Smugglers evaded the trade monopoly imposed by the Spanish crown, and their commerce became a decisive element in the creation of considerable levels of wealth during that era.

At the same time, pottery-making was developed as an important activity among artisans, whose source of raw materials was the abundant clay found in the soil of the town's surroundings.

According to historians, Camagüey's historic district is the largest in the country, and part of it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008.

The urban area is made up of narrow, winding streets, with colonial-style pavements that inevitably lead to plazas and small squares, where you can find buildings with outstanding historical, cultural and architectural merits.

One of these spaces is Parque Ignacio Agramonte, a park that was first built in 1528 as the Plaza de Armas (main square or parade grounds). It is still the heart of the city's architectural structure, despite the changes wrought with the passing of time.

Another important square is the Plaza San Juan de Dios, one of the city's most symbolic sites. It is the oldest plaza in Camagüey and holds its best-preserved historical sculptures. The main building there is a church, the Iglesia de San Juan de Dios, which holds a life-size depiction of the Holy Trinity in human form, one of few such artworks in the world.

Growing attraction for tourists

Historical heritage featuring priceless artistic value and the natural beauty of its surroundings complement the attraction that Camagüey holds for tourists.

Just 10 kilometres from the city, sunbathers can enjoy the beach resort of Playa Santa Lucía, considered one of top destinations in the region. Experts say it is a place blessed by nature, with more than 21 km of beaches, and it stands out from other beaches on Cuba's north coast

for its colors and proximity to one of the longest coral reefs in the world.

The shallow waters of this beach resort are ideal for all types of nautical activities, and water-lovers can also participate in deep-sea fishing and boat and catamaran cruises on the other side of the coral reef. Scuba diving is one of the biggest draws here, given the 35-plus diving spots, enhanced by the possibility of discovering sunken ships from the 19th and 20th centuries and observing numerous marine species.

The greatest prospects for tourism in the area, in addition to the sustained development of the city of Camagüey, are associated with the cays located to the north. By 2015, some 21,000 hotel rooms should be ready for visitors to Cayo Cruz and Cayo Sabinal.

The predominance of expansive plains that characterize the province of Camagüey do not subtract from the area's notable natural attractions for developing eco-tourism.

Rivers have shaped a spectacular panorama of natural pools in limestone formations; one prime example is the Cangilones pools of the River Máximo. This river's estuary, north of Camagüey, is a refuge for the river's wildlife. Many migrating birds come here to rest after arriving from northern part of the American continent, and it is the largest nesting centre for pink flamingos in the Caribbean.

The people of Camagüey, kind and cultured, treasure a historic legacy that is enriched with the inevitable presence of modern times. With evident pride, they share that legacy with those who choose this city as their destination for enjoying a trip that will always be pleasing, a perfect combination of history and nature. ■

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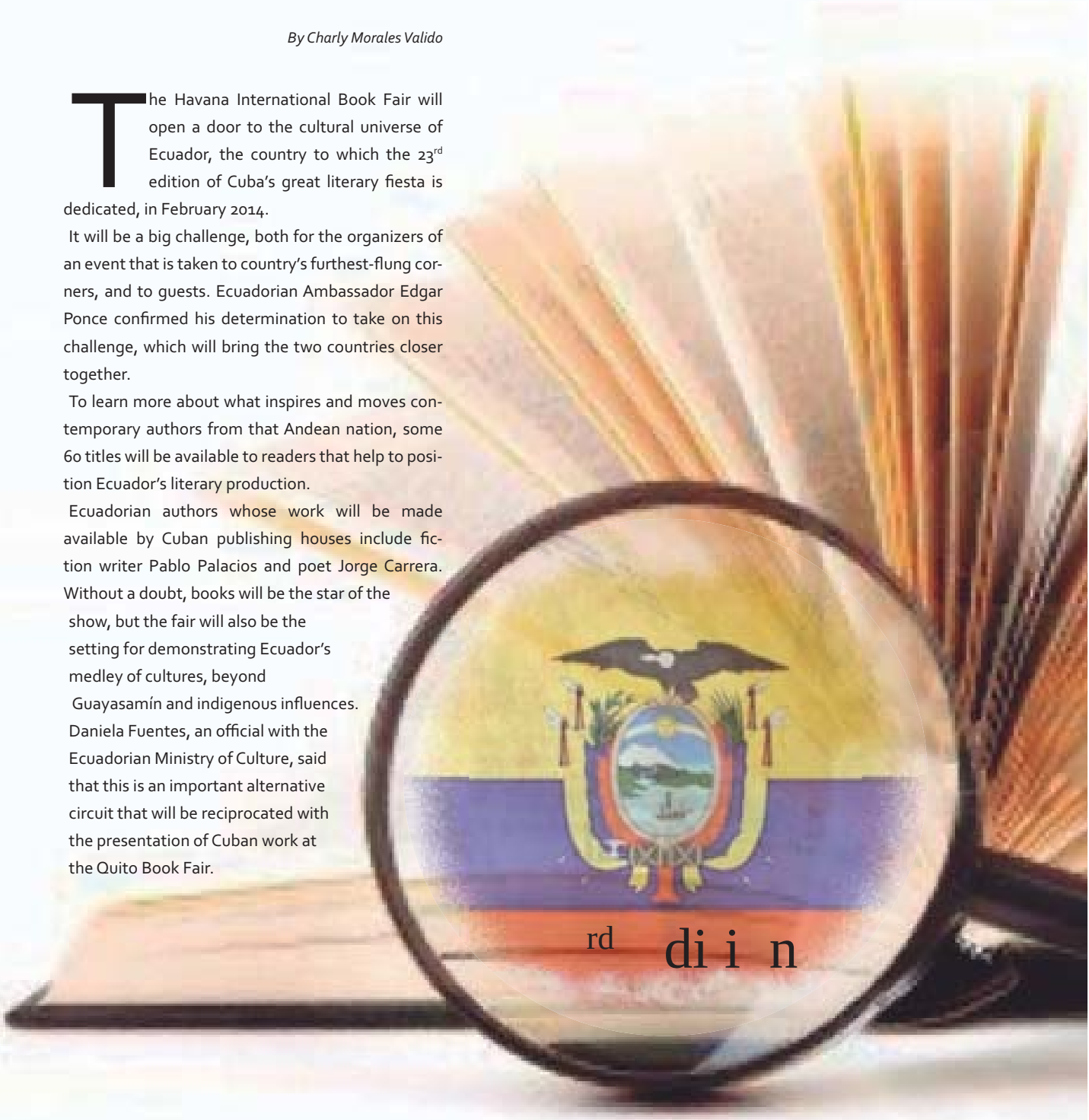
By Charly Morales Valido

The Havana International Book Fair will open a door to the cultural universe of Ecuador, the country to which the 23rd edition of Cuba's great literary fiesta is dedicated, in February 2014.

It will be a big challenge, both for the organizers of an event that is taken to country's furthest-flung corners, and to guests. Ecuadorian Ambassador Edgar Ponce confirmed his determination to take on this challenge, which will bring the two countries closer together.

To learn more about what inspires and moves contemporary authors from that Andean nation, some 60 titles will be available to readers that help to position Ecuador's literary production.

Ecuadorian authors whose work will be made available by Cuban publishing houses include fiction writer Pablo Palacios and poet Jorge Carrera. Without a doubt, books will be the star of the show, but the fair will also be the setting for demonstrating Ecuador's medley of cultures, beyond Guayasamín and indigenous influences. Daniela Fuentes, an official with the Ecuadorian Ministry of Culture, said that this is an important alternative circuit that will be reciprocated with the presentation of Cuban work at the Quito Book Fair.



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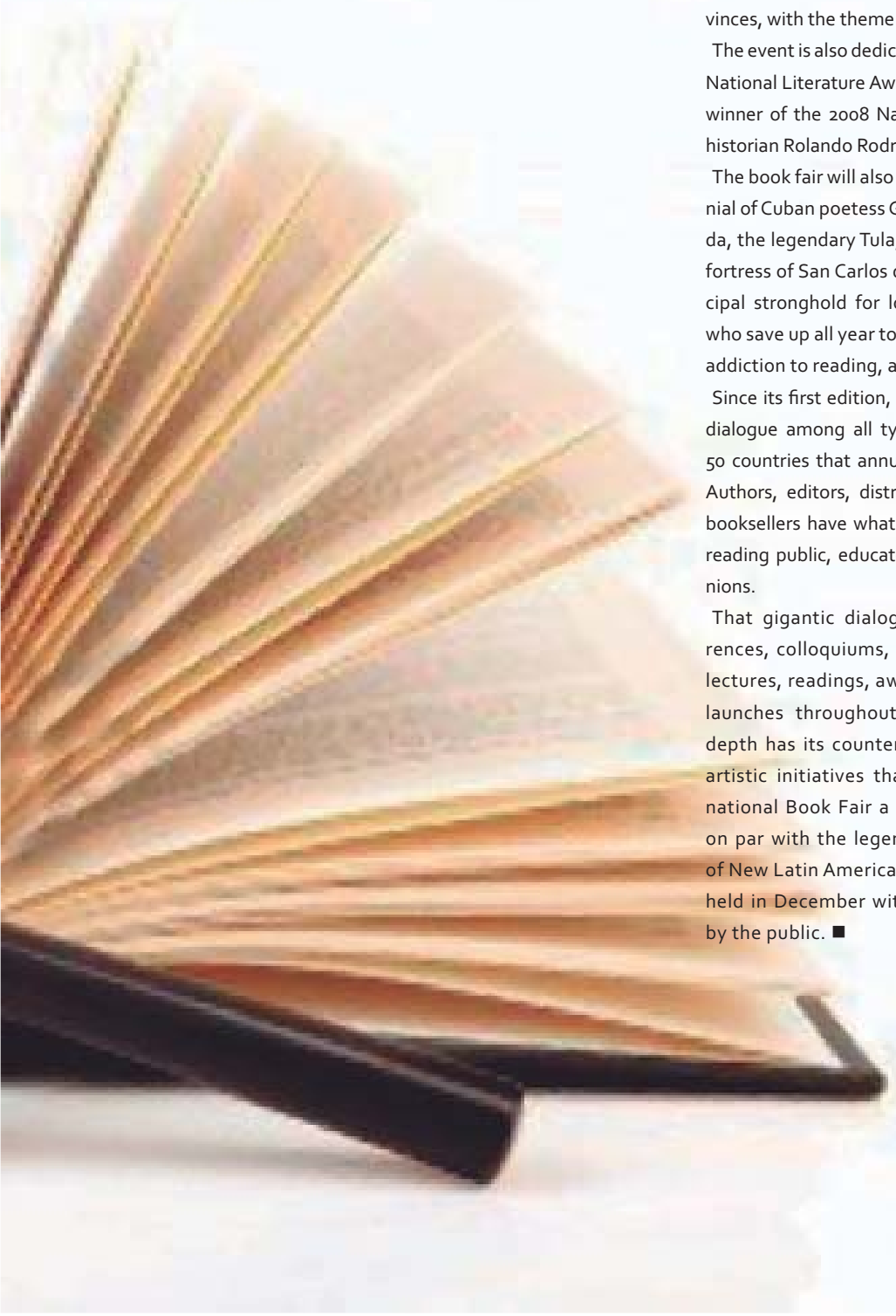
Fuentes was in Cuba several months ago, because the music trade show Cubadisco was dedicated to Ecuador, and in that sense, she appreciated the work by both governments to strengthen Latin America's cultural industries and to propitiate the exchange of content in the interest of genuine integration.



And that is also the idea behind the book fairs, which for several weeks bring back the fragrance of fresh ink, the pleasure of discovering works that can bring surprise or disappointment, and the sure gamble of rereading a classic.

This year's fair in Cuba takes place Feb. 13-23 in Havana and until March 9 in the country's other provinces, with the theme of "To Read is to Grow."

The event is also dedicated to the winner of the 2011 National Literature Award, Nersys Felipe, and to the winner of the 2008 National Social Science Award, historian Rolando Rodríguez García.

The book fair will also pay homage to the bicentennial of Cuban poetess Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, the legendary Tula, and once again the colonial fortress of San Carlos de la Cabaña will be the principal stronghold for lovers of literature, or those who save up all year to spend it on their wholesome addiction to reading, and to reading the best.

Since its first edition, this fair has been a space for dialogue among all types of literature from some 50 countries that annually participate in the event. Authors, editors, distributors, literary agents, and booksellers have what they most desire: a massive reading public, educated and with culture and opinions.

That gigantic dialogue is nourished by conferences, colloquiums, tributes, panel discussions, lectures, readings, awards ceremonies, and book launches throughout the fair. This theoretical depth has its counterpart in concerts and other artistic initiatives that make the Havana International Book Fair a mass cultural phenomenon on par with the legendary International Festival of New Latin American Cinema, which is annually held in December with an extraordinary turnout by the public. ■

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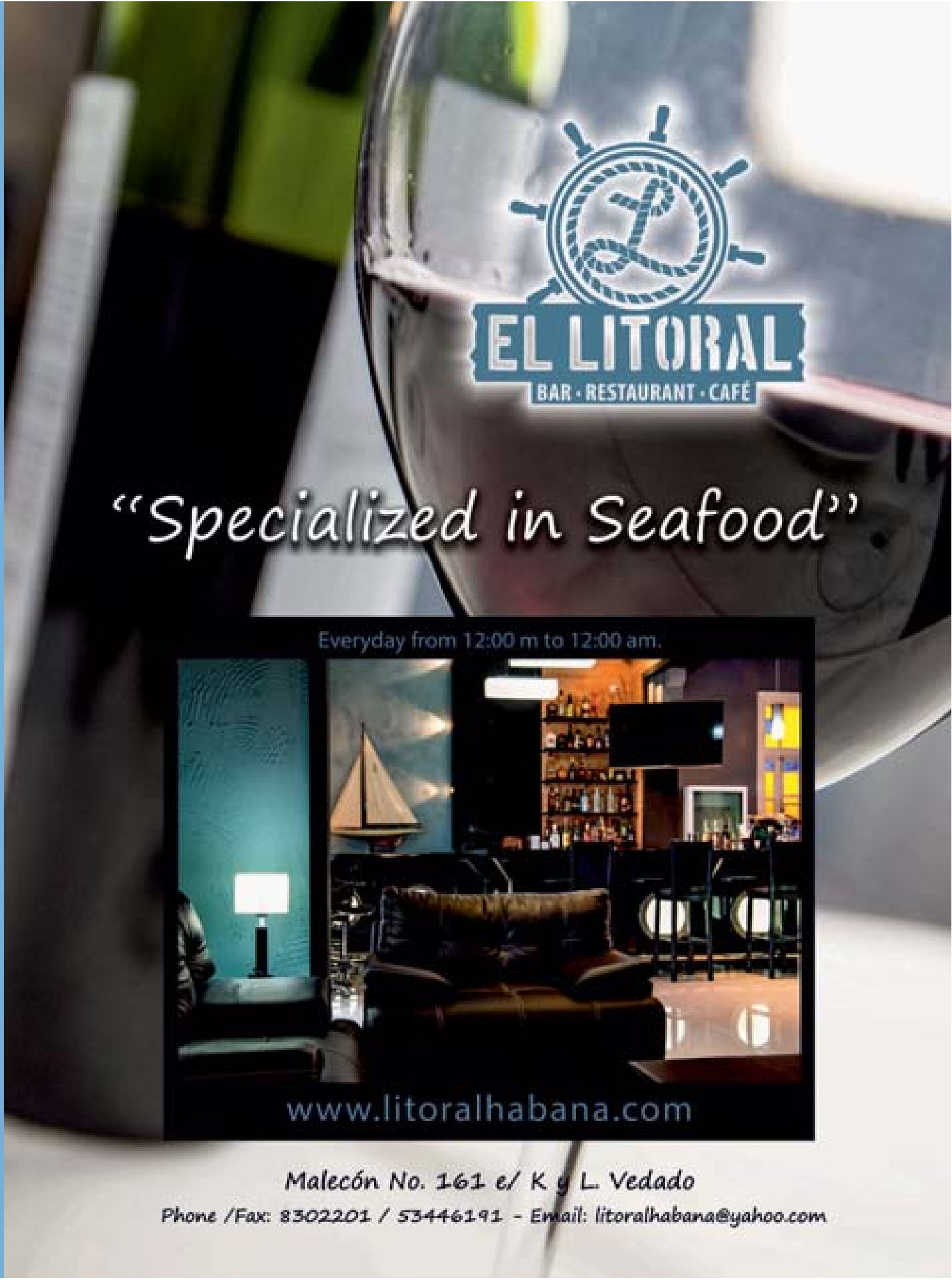
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