



TOP 10

HAVANA | CUBA



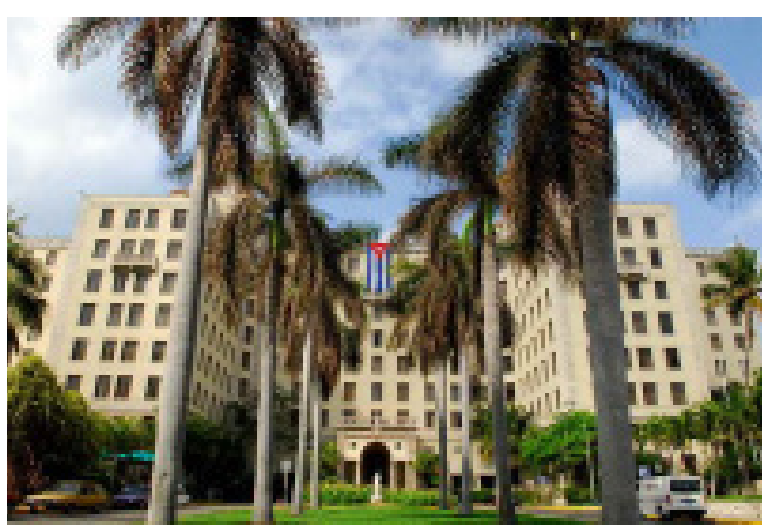
Havana is vibrant, energetic and one of the most popular tourist destinations for Europeans. You'll find the Cubans educated, warm, passionate and playful people. Communism and the embargo have not dampened their spirits and, if anything, made them more resourceful and stronger. Havana's streets are filled with pastel-colored colonial buildings, music drifting out of every door and window. The city also hosts some of the best examples of modern 20th Century architecture in the form of its 1950s hotels, built by foreign companies to accommodate all the Western visitors in those bygone years.



1. STAY AT THE SAME HOTEL AS WINSTON CHURCHILL & AL CAPONE

Stay at Hotel Nacional for some old world claim to fame. Winston Churchill stayed here and the hotel once served as home to Al Capone. The most famous hotel in Cuba, it is a great place to stay. With the stunning architecture, huge gardens and terraces, and the best mojitos in town, you'll immediately feel a part of the Cuban atmosphere. Check out the synchronized swimming show, where the girls resemble Esther Williams and boys look like Johnny Wisemuller. Don't leave without having a cocktail in the courtyard at sunset.

<http://www.hotelnacionaldecuba.com/>



2. GO BACK IN TIME AND ENJOY 1950S CUBA

Step back to the 1950s and visit the Riviera Hotel, built and run by the gangster Meyer Lansky. You'll find a lot of the original fittings and features but the real treat is experiencing the well-preserved mid-century architecture. Though we may not suggest this as a place to stay, grab a drink in the lobby bar or take a dip in the pool, where you'll find a triple-tiered concrete diving platform. Make sure to check out the Oscar Niemeyer sculpture out front before leaving.

<http://www.hotelhavanariviera.com/>



3. EXPLORE PLAZA DES ARMAS

Visit Plaza des Armas in old Havana where book vendors sit selling their goods while playing chess or debating philosophy four days a week. Take a walk around the Captain Generals house, a wonderful museum with artifacts from the 1700s, where you can really get a sense of what it was like when the Spanish first occupied Cuba. Try lunch in the courtyard at La Mina restaurant while the local salsa band plays. We suggest the local special, fresh fish with rice and beans. Finally, grab a Pina Colada and check out the view of the plaza from the balcony of the charming Santa Isabella hotel.

<http://www.cubaheritage.org/articles.asp?artID=319>



4. ENJOY A WALKING TOUR OF OLD HAVANA

Take a walking tour of old Havana, where the streets are full of life, packed with musicians and colorful locals. Start at Cathedral Square to gaze at the wonderful architectural façade of the Colonial Spanish-style church. Sit upstairs at a balcony table at the Patio restaurant, overlooking the square. It's the perfect place for a romantic dinner overlooking the square lit up in the nighttime. Get some shopping in along Calle Obispo. Past the old pharmacy, stop at the music store to pick up some fantastic Cuban music. Finish your walk at the La Floridita for a cool cocktail and a snack. It's Havana's premiere bar and Ernest Hemingway's favorite watering hole.

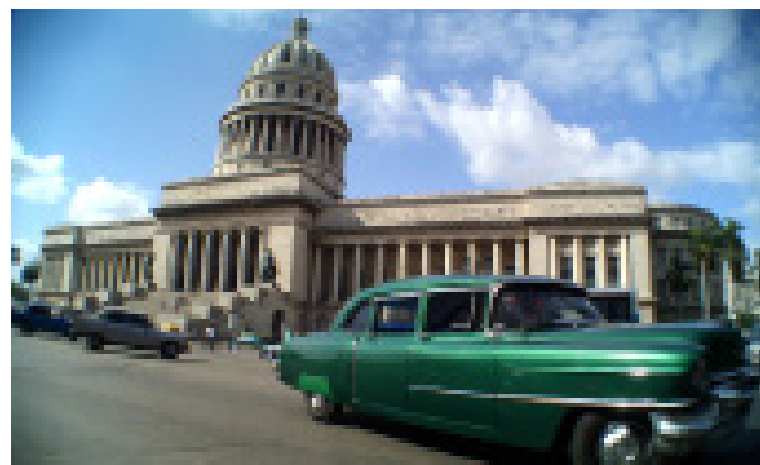
http://www.urbanadventures.com/havana_tour_old_havana_walking_tour



5. SPEND A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Catch the ballet or opera at the beautiful Grande Theatre. The building itself boasts a Neo-Baroque style of architecture and ornate golden hues to marvel at. After the performance, have dinner on the rooftop of the Hotel Ingeltera next door. They serve fantastic Cuban food and offer an incredible view of the entire city. This notorious Neo-Classical style hotel is where Sandra Bernhart had an affair with the Spanish bullfighter Mazzantini, in the late 1800s.

<http://www.balletcuba.cult.cu/>

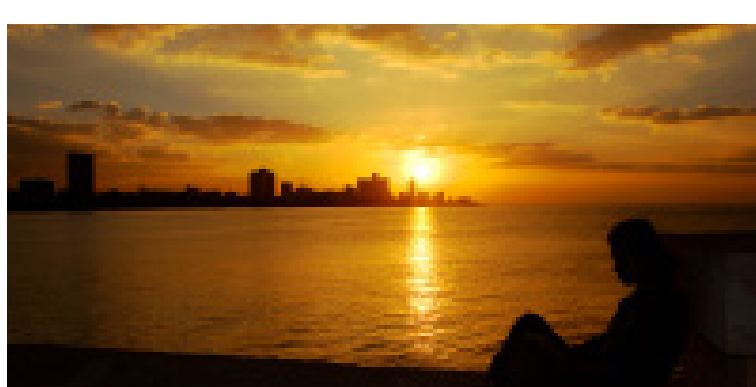


6. TOUR THE CAPITAL BUILDING

Admire the fantastic architecture of the capital building from the outside or pay a nominal admission and enjoy the playful acoustics in the Hall of the Lost Steps. Visit the vast library and enjoy original fine art found throughout the capital building. Outside, have your photo taken with a pinhole camera on the steps of the capital. Afterwards, check out the cigar factory across the road where everything is still created by hand.

7. FIND ROMANCE ALONG THE MALECON

Take a romantic stroll along the Malecon at sunset. Enjoy the surrounding energy as the locals jump in for a quick swim, the men fish, people party, and a few even bring offerings to ancient gods. Kids play on the rocks between the wall and the ocean and lovers meet for romantic encounters.



8. ENJOY A MEAL AT A HIDDEN GEM

Have dinner in old Havana at the famous Paladar La Guarida, where the film Strawberries and Chocolate was filmed. Located on the top floor of a stunningly dilapidated mansion, the restaurant serves up amazing 'nueva cocina' that is up there with Havana's best restaurants.

<http://www.laguarida.com/>

9. VISIT TRIBUTES TO CUBAN ICONS

Visit Plaza des Revolution and the steel silhouette of Che Guavara. The world famous image comes from the iconic photograph by Alberto Gutierrez and commemorates the revolution. While you're there, visit the astounding Jose Marti Memorial, dedicated to the Cuban hero, writer and activist. Take the elevator up and see the views from one of the highest points in Havana. In front of the monument stands a statue of Marti right where Fidel and Che seduced the crowds so many years ago.



10. PICK-UP SOME VINTAGE MOVIE POSTERS

Pop into ICAIC, the Cuban Cinematography Institute and to view their collection of classic 1960s screen-printed movie posters. Forms of art in themselves, they showcase minimalist pop art at its best. They make great gifts and you can take a bit of Cuban art back home with you.

<http://www.cubacine.cult.cu/>