



HARVARD

Alumni Association

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

DECEMBER 27, 2024–JANUARY 1, 2025

As diplomatic and economic ties between the United States and Cuba are reformed over the next few years, the landscape of Cuba will dramatically change, making it more important than ever to experience Cuba as it is today.

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

The Harvard Alumni Association is operating this educational program under the General License authorized by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). This program differs from more traditional trips in that every hour must be accounted for. Each day has been structured to provide meaningful interactions with Cuban people or educational or cultural programming. Please note that Harvard University intends to fully comply with all requirements of the General License. Travelers must participate in all group activities.

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27

MIAMI / HAVANA

Independent arrivals in Havana.

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

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

After lunch, enjoy an orientation tour of Havana including a stop at Callejon de Hamel, the site of a huge multi-dimensional Afro-Cuban mural. Here there will be a chance to learn more about the Santeria religion with a Santeria practitioner, Elias Aseff.

Probably the most explicit reference to the African soul in Cuba is to be found in Santeria, which represents the synthesis of the cults of African slaves and the Catholic religion. Accompanied by Elias, enter a Santeria home and learn more about this religion.

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

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

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

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28

HAVANA

Enjoy a morning lecture by architect and urban planner, Miguel Coyula, who will address the history of Old Havana from its architecture to its role in the city's urban development. Dr. Coyula is an authority on the history and preservation of Havana and is also a retired professor at the Faculty of Architecture of Havana where he taught since 1969.

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

Enjoy lunch at Café Havana, a privately owned paladar in the heart of Old Havana.

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

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

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

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

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29

HAVANA

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

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

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

After lunch, drive to Ernest Hemingway's home, which has been lovingly preserved and recently restored by the Cuban government. The house was designed by Spanish architect Miguel Pascual y Bager in 1922 and was inhabited by Hemingway from 1939 to 1960. Today, it hosts a large collection of over 22,000 items including books, records,

furniture, paintings, and stuffed animals. The house is just as Hemingway left it, with the books on the tables and many of his favorite photographs on display. While it is not possible to go inside the house, the windows are left open for a decent view of the interior.

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

En route back to the hotel, make a stop at the famous Copelia to taste some of Cuba's best ice-cream. The iconic ice-cream parlor serves up to 10,000 customers a day and initially served 26 flavors of ice-cream in honor of the failed attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953.

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

Depart the hotel for a New Year's Eve celebratory dinner at Café Laurent, a wonderful private restaurant offering a lovely interior and a varied menu.

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

MONDAY, DECEMBER 30

HAVANA / PINAR DEL RIO / VINALES

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

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

Continue to the Valle de Vinales, Cuba's most famous landscape, located in the province of Pinar del Rio. This area was the last refuge of the Ciboney, the hunter-gatherers who were

pushed here by the more advanced Taino. The province's mountainous landscape is riddled with caves, some running for many kilometers, in which Ciboney burial and cave paintings have been found.

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

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

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

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

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31

HAVANA

After breakfast, enjoy a second lecture from your Harvard Study Leader.

Drive a short distance to NostalgiaCar, a classic car mechanic shop. Here you will meet with the owner of the shop who will talk about his business.

Choosing your car to travel in, drive to the home and studio of artist José Fuster for a private lunch. Fuster has turned his neighborhood into an enormous piece of mosaic art. His vast array of works evoking the nation's African roots from ceramics to whimsical paintings drawn from ordinary life in Cuba: commuters crowded inside creaky, smoke-belching buses, the ubiquitous dominoes games in backyards and street corners,

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

a distinctly Afro-Cuban musical style because it uses an African rhythm, Spanish poetic styles in the lyrics, and the use of plucked instruments.

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

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

In the evening, attend a farewell dinner at Five Sentidos, one of the city's best private restaurants.

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

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1

RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

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