

Havana 500 Year Anniversary

A Look at 500 Years of Architectural Developments & Challenges in Historic Preservation

November 15, 2019 - November 20, 2019

TENTATIVE PROGRAM

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2019

Welcome

Arrival at Jose Marti International Airport (Havana, Cuba)

The group will be greeted at the airport and transferred to accommodations.

Check In & Orientation

Relax and get situated in your accommodations. Enjoy a Welcome Reception, review the program itinerary, and discuss a few important details, including Cuba's dual monetary system, the economic crisis of the 1990s and 2000s known as "The Special Period," and recent political and economic changes on the island.

Welcome Dinner Party

Enjoy some classic mojitos and try a caipiriñisimo (Cuban twist on the Brazilian caipirinha) at a festive dinner party with a few special guests, including the Historian for the City of Havana, Dr. Eusebio Leal (invited).

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2019

Inside the Walled City

A Cuban Dance Experience: Transforming Historical Structures into Cultural Facilities in Old Havana
Music pervades every part of daily life in Havana— spilling out of homes, cars, and businesses. It is a place where people create music on street corners, and where the nightlife rivals New Orleans' live music scene. Participants will get warmed up for the city's amazing musical culture with dance instruction in Cuban-style salsa (known as "casino"). Dance lessons will be given in a colonial house built in 1715, and recently refurbished and re-purposed as the home of a dynamic young dance company.

Architectural Culture Tour of Old Havana

Old Havana, a time machine of architectural treasures dating back over five centuries, preserves more of its colonial legacy than any other city in the Americas. In 1982, UNESCO declared Old Havana a World Heritage Site, a living museum with 144 buildings from the 16th and 17th centuries preserved. This tour, led by Dr. Eusebio Leal, Chief Historian for the City of Havana, will focus on the colonial and baroque periods of Havana's architectural history, as well as the challenges, successes, and failures of Cuba's efforts to preserve its architectural history. A visit to the main plazas and an explanation of the Laws of the Indies promulgated by King Philip II of Spain, which provided instructions for building settlements in the New World, will illustrate the city's earliest planning model which directly influenced the layout of the major plazas.

Birth Home of José Martí

This is a modest residence built in the early 19th century whose fundamental worth stems from it being the birthplace of Cuban national hero José Martí. Architecturally, its interest lies in the fact that it is an excellently preserved example of humble homes of the colonial period, of which there are not many. Restored in 1963 as a National Monument, it houses preserved items and documents that belonged to Martí.

Africa House Museum

The museum, housed inside a magnificently restored 17th-century mansion, depicts Cuba's Transatlantic Slave Trade Era, houses a collection illustrating the 3 major Afro-Cuban religious traditions, as well as showcases various art and artifacts gifted to Cuba from various African nations as tribute to Cuba's contributions to the various African liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2019

Going Beyond the Walls

Urban Development Tour

As the older sections of Old and Central Havana began to overflow, residential and business growth radiated outward. We will tour some of these later neighborhoods to see examples of modern city planning:

- The **Vedado** neighborhood is a mix of middle and upper-class houses and businesses, including Coppelia and Tryp Habana Libre (former Havana Hilton), as well as emblematic constructions such as the López Serrano and Focsa buildings (Art Deco and Modernism), and the Hotel Nacional de Cuba (eclecticism).
- **Nuevo Vedado** is a middle-class residential neighborhood that resulted from the 1950s building boom, known for its Mid-City Modern Architecture. The iconic landmarks of this neighborhood are Revolution Square (home to striking tributes to Cuban revolutionary war heroes), and Colón Cemetery (a necropolis built in the 19th century), and the National Theater, which hosts live music and other performances. Jalisco Park and Almendares Park are excellent examples urban green spaces.
- **Miramar** is an exclusive residential neighborhood built during the 1930s –1950s. Many of the Batista-era mansions house the country's various embassies and diplomatic missions. There are also many wonderfully maintained neocolonial mansions. We will venture further out to visit the National Schools of the Arts, one of the three "Big Projects" of the early years of the Revolution, for a presentation on the architectural design of the school and the social and political dynamic from which it evolved.

Reception with Havana Urban Design & Planning Professionals

Reception hosted by the Director of *Grupo Para El Desarrollo Integral de La Capital* (Group for the Integral Development of the Capital). This organization of urban planners is charged with overseeing the urban development of the City of Havana. We will discuss Havana's issues, challenges, milestones, and accomplishments, with respect to its development and growth.

This activity will be held at *La Maqueta de La Habana*, a museum that houses a scale model of the city of Havana, and the world's third largest scale model. Constructed out of recycled materials, such as cigar boxes, cardboard, plastic, and sand, it was built at a scale of 1:1000 and spans over 144 square meters. It is approximately 22 meters long and 10 meters wide and weighs six tons. A team led by Orlando Martorell worked for eleven years to build this detailed model of the Cuban capital. It is color coded to indicate different historical periods.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2019

A Massive Restoration Campaign

LA CALZADA DEL CERRO: A CASE STUDY

This session will be led by a representative from the **National Center for Conservation, Restoration, and Museology (CENREM)** and the **University of Havana School of Architecture**. The nineteenth century Calzada del Cerro, a rare design of urban planning, is a graceful colonnaded street that stretches more than three kilometers from Old Havana to the neighborhood of El Cerro, a one-time summer retreat for Havana's Creole aristocracy well into the 1920s. The classical-styled mansions line the thoroughfare, each more Italianate than the next. However, in the 1930s the area began to fall into decline. The rich moved out and poor families, even groups of families, began to move in, unable to afford the upkeep. By the 1970s, many of the buildings had fallen into ruin while others had collapsed beyond repair.

In spite of extreme deterioration, jewels of this bygone era remain, including the old Palace of Santovenia, now serving as a home for the elderly. CENREM, with help from the School of Architecture, has undertaken a study of this historic area and has developed an overall plan for its restoration, including the Calzada. We will discuss the study, restoration campaign, obstacles, and accomplishments of this tremendous endeavor.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2019

Adaptive Reuse Projects 🏛️ *Neighborhood Revitalization*

Church & Convent of Our Lady of Bethlehem

The most extensive surviving religious complex in Old Havana, it was completed in 1718 for the arrival of the Order of Bethlehem to Havana. It served as their headquarters until 1842 when the property was confiscated by the Spanish colonial government. The building was then occupied by the vice-captain general and by an infantry battalion until 1854 when the Jesuit Order was re-established in Havana after a century of exile.

Today, the complex houses the Office for Humanitarian Affairs of the City Historian's Office. The original church is now restored and open for visits, and the six cloisters are under restoration as an old people's home, a hostel and a junior high school. The extraordinary Royal Observatory was built in 1858 on top of the tower. The Jesuits were Cuba's first official weather forecasters and used the observatory for the study of hurricanes and other tropical weather patterns. The observatory was the first of its kind in the Caribbean and, over time, became one of the most important weather stations in the Americas. It is currently under restoration as the future Museum of Meteorology and Astronomy.

Muraleando Community Art Project

Since the 1990's, in an effort to confront the physical, economic, and emotional realities of the times, many urban communities in Cuba embraced community street art by covering decaying buildings, walls, and homes with murals, and erecting sculptures made with recycled materials. This particular project adapted an abandoned water tank in a depressed neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana to create a community center and art school for children, changing the local landscape and transforming the neighborhood into a living canvas.

In 2001, the community center opened and the artists began teaching art classes and engaging local youth to help beautify the deteriorating cityscape and the soul of the community. The entire neighborhood—the building walls, alleys, the streets, tops of buildings, any empty space—is the canvas. A guided tour through the neighborhood culminates at the community center where the group can to engage with the teachers, artists, and children who use it. The group will learn about the impact of Cuba's Special Period on the physical environment and the high value placed on community engagement and adaptive reuse projects.

Official Quincentennial Activities

Today marks the 500th Anniversary of the founding of the City of Havana on November 19, 1519. This evening, our delegation will participate in official Quincentennial celebration events, although details on the official activities have not yet been released.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2019

All Good Things Must Come to an End

Check-out & Transfer to Airport

After breakfast, check out of accommodations, and depart for airport.

Frequently Asked Questions

A) **Why Diaspora Travel Experiences?**

We are a full-service consulting company specializing in group travel programs, university faculty-led study abroad, and professional conferences. We have deep personal and professional ties to Cuba. And, over a period of twenty-two (22) years, have established strong relationships in architecture, health, law, academia, and, arts, to name few.

B) **What is the current status of Cuba travel from the United States?**

Due to the U.S. Embargo, tourist travel to Cuba is not permitted. However, travel under 1 of 12 permissible categories is allowed. This Program qualifies under the People to People “general license,” pursuant to 31 CFR §515.565(b), which requires meaningful contact with the Cuban people and a fixed itinerary with scheduled events.

C) **Is Cuba a safe travel destination?**

Despite U.S. economic objectives, by all accounts, Cuba has extremely low violent crime activity, including no gun crime, and is known to be one of the safest destinations in the hemisphere for tourists and residents alike. According to the United Nations, Cuba has the third lowest homicide rate in the hemisphere, just after Canada and Chile. Cuba’s government strictly and successfully enforces the possession of illicit drugs and firearms, making them virtually non-existent among the general population on the island, in great contrast to many of its regional counterparts.

Cuba is not a war-stricken nation, nor is it prone to civil unrest. The U.S. State Department ranks Cuba as a **LOW-THREAT** location for political violence, as political demonstrations, strikes, and protests are uncommon. Also, unlike in the United States, the police force does not use firearms or military equipment against the civilian population.

D) **What is the activity level required to participate in this program?**

Everyone of average fitness should be able to enjoy the program activities. Many of our tours include walking, often on uneven surface, that may be strenuous for some people. The Tour of Old Havana involves walking up to 2-3 miles (over a period of several hours) in a tropical climate. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns regarding activity level. Finally, please consult your physician to see if your health condition is suitable for this trip.

E) **What other expenses should I expect?**

The Program Cost does not include international flights (expect \$380 - \$450 depending on timing and personal preferences), the Cuban Visa (\$50 - \$100), U.S. Passport (\$165), additional meals and transportation based on personal preferences (\$50 - \$100 per day), and gratuities for services consumed.

F) **Will you arrange our flights?**

We will arrange group flights at no additional cost, if requested. If you elect to make your own flights, please make sure to coordinate with us to ensure your transfer is coordinated.

G) **What are the accommodations like?**

We use privately owned boutique hotels (Bed & Breakfast style) that are beautifully renovated and fully staffed with warm and conscientious personnel. We find the level of service to be superior to that of a state-run operation and the money we spend directly benefits families. All accommodations are immaculate, well-decorated, and well-kept. Each bedroom has a private bathroom with 24-hour hot water and air conditioning. Daily housekeeping and linen changes are included.

H) **Who do I contact if I have more questions?**

For the fastest response, please send an email to Info@DiasporaTravelExperiences.com, or call 504-500-2001.

I) **How do I register for the program?**

Once the date is confirmed, we will issue a link with instructions for completing registration and payment.

J) **Are payment plans available?**

We can create payment plans upon request. Also, we offer 6 months interest free financing through PayPal Credit, subject to terms and conditions.