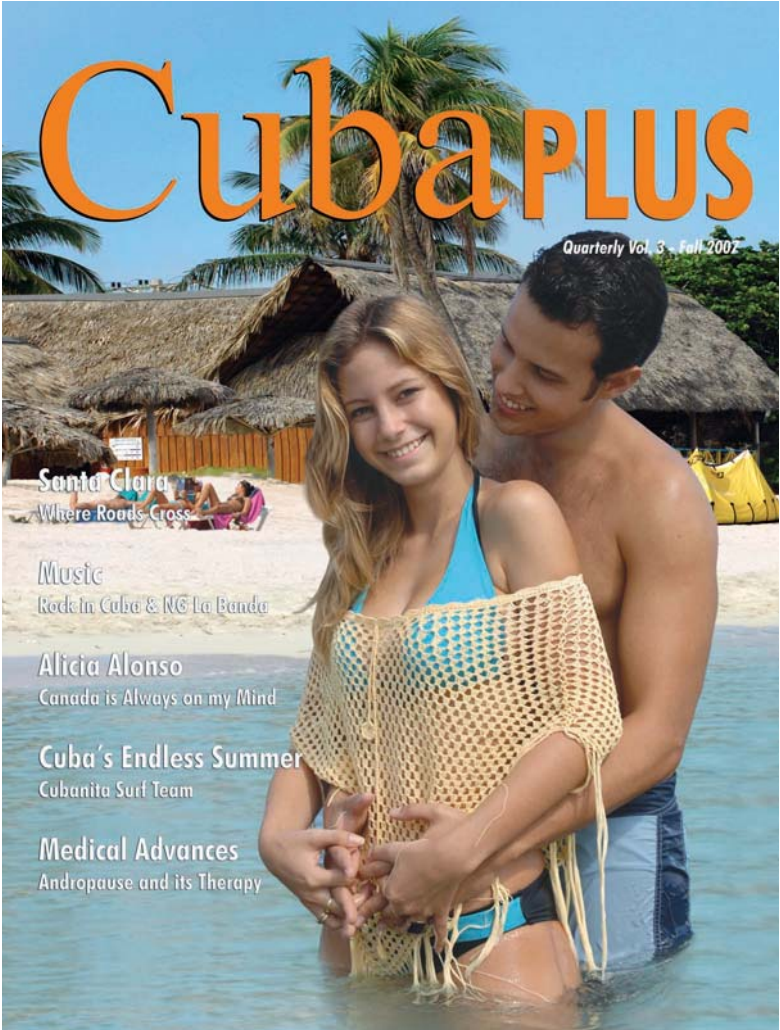
# Cuba PLUS

Quarterly Vol. 3 - Fall 2007



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Cover: Manuel F. Fernández and Ana Mary Macíques at Varadero´s 9th St. Beach. Photo by Alejandro Gortázar.









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# Letter from our Publisher and Business Director

Welcome to another edition of our magazine dedicated to the most relevant places and figures of Cuban society and leisure.

For this September issue we want to offer you a broad spectrum of information on Cuba and its people as well as the great opportunities this country has for Canadians in general.

Alberto and I are really excited with the way the magazine has been circulating in Canada, especially since this is the first time such information has been made available to travelers and people interested in Cuba. Having lived in Cuba for some time now, I have come to know the great advantages this country has and the beautiful people living in it. We want to share all of this with you.

For the first time, a Canadian company, Taina Communications, has signed a five year contract with Prensa Latina, the Latin American News Agency based in Cuba, to produce the best magazine possible for all of you to enjoy.

Having been in the business of news and publications for almost five decades, Prensa Latina, has a highly experienced staff of journalists and graphic designers. Working with Prensa Latina has been greatly fulfilling for us and the exchange of experiences has resulted, with each issue, in new ideas and proposals from both sides.

In this issue and in each of the forthcoming ones, we will have better and more exciting realms of Cuban beauty to offer you.

I hope you enjoy Volume 3 of CubaPLUS Magazine.

Dominic Soave
Publisher

Alberto Leone
Business Director

# Travel Tips for Canadians

On a recent flight from Havana to Toronto, I sat beside Dennis, a retired commercial pilot who was visiting Cuba for the first time. He had chosen Havana to experience Cuban culture and to see the sights in one of the biggest cities in the Caribbean.

While all inclusive packages are still, by far, the most popular type of vacation for Canadians, they can't give you the whole picture. I applaud Dennis for traveling off the beaten path – while he had a good experience overall, he did have some difficulties with the language and with getting around.

Whether you decide to book a week in a Havana hotel or merely want to come in for a day or two from Varadero or Cienfuegos, here is some advice for Canadians traveling on their own.

## What to do in Havana

There are many wonderful parts of Havana to explore – the city's 8 km ocean walk called the *Malecón* and up 23rd street in Vedado with the sloping part near the water known as *La Rampa*. Centro Habana has the *Callejón de Hamel*, an alleyway full of art, music, and dance which is featured in this magazine. Old Havana should be explored along the harbour road where you will find the Dos Hermanos Bar and the nearby Museum of Rum. Crossing through the heart of Old Havana is the pedestrians only Obispo Street with its many fascinating shops and cafes. Prado Street branches up from the *Malecón*, past Cuba's Central Park and the Capitolio building, and has several hotels with sidewalk terraces, ideal for having lunch and watching the passing parade of old cars and interesting people.

## Nightlife

There are numerous cafes, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, piano bars and dance clubs throughout *Havana* – too many to list in this article. We suggest that you visit www.cubaplus.ca and click on "What's On in Havana" to get updated listings of many of the city's best venues. There is something for everyone – whether you want to sit at a table and listen to great Latin jazz, or in a theatre box to catch world class ballet, or at a bar to listen to a talented Cuban trio or quartet, or a full on club to dance to *Salsa* or *Reggaeton*.

## Beaches

The best beach close to Havana is at *Playa del Este* or the East Beaches, a 20 minute drive under the tunnel and about $15 CUC by taxi. Each part of this long stretch has its own name and personality. For a quiet time with a family, you may want to go to Tarara or Megano. For a younger scene and bigger crowds, head for Santa Maria.

## What to Bring to Cuba

Pack everything you might need – don't count on finding it locally. Definitely bring a sun hat and sun block. Bring an umbrella in case it rains and insect repellent in case there are mosquitoes. Bring at least one sweater or a jacket during the winter as the evenings can be quite cool.

Bring all medicines, prescriptions, personal hygiene products, and extra glasses – it may be available in Cuba but it could take hours to find and will generally be quite expensive. Also bring any books or magazines you may want to read and film and spare batteries for your camera. Cuba does have some restrictions on what may be brought in with the basic rule being that personal items required for your trip are allowed and the first CUC$50 (about CDN$ 60) worth of other items are tax free – see www.aduana.co.cu for the full custom rules.

## Using Credit Cards

You can use Visa and Mastercard at most government operated hotels, stores, and restaurants – although you should confirm that they accept credit cards before ordering a meal. Cards issued by U.S. banks, even through their Canadian offices (such as MBNA) cannot be used.

## Changing Money

Cuba recently moved to their Convertible Peso which has been fixed at CUC$ 1.00 = US$ 1.08 or about CDN$ 1.15. Money can be changed at the airport, at kiosks throughout the city, at certain banks, or your hotel. You will get a better rate at the kiosks and banks. The buy/sell spread is quite large so try to change just enough for your trip and reserve CUC$ 25.00 for the airport tax on the way out. You can also withdraw cash

advances from your credit card at most of the money changing venues, with your passport, and about a 3% commission will be charged. Travelers' cheques also have a commission on the Cuban side and can be inconvenient to exchange. Don't bring US dollars as there is a 10% surcharge when you convert.

## Taxis and Transportation

If you are arriving at the Havana airport and must make your own way to your hotel, there are two taxi companies serving the airport. All taxis have meters and the drive in should be around CUC$15 to $25. There is no fixed or flat rate from the airport so insist on the meter. In town, there are several taxi companies with the cheapest taxis being the white Lada Panataxis. Second would be the mostly yellow regular Panataxis whose meters are set at "1" or "L" on the bottom left. The bigger or fancier taxis have a higher meter setting and will cost more. If the driver tells you the meter is broken or has covered it up and pretends that he doesn't have one, he is probably trying to scam you or his company. Insist on the meter and if he doesn't turn it on, tell him to stop the taxi and find another one.

The classic American cars being used as Cuban taxis are, unfortunately, not allowed to carry foreigners. The Grancar rental company does have a fleet of classic cars that they rent with a driver by the hour. Check with your hotel or call 641-7980 in Havana. We don't recommend taking public transportation as the buses are infrequent, crowded and difficult to navigate unless you want an adventure.

Havana is a city of magic and charm, wonderful architecture to admire, friendly people to meet, and nightlife to fulfill every desire. I suggest you learn a bit of Spanish first and then come practice in Havana!

John H. Kim
Editor in Chief

Ciénaga de Zapata

# Nature's

*By Nidia Rodríguez León*
*Photos: Alejandro Gortázar*

The Zapata Swamp Biosphere Reserve is considered to be one of the most important nature reserves in Cuba as well as in the Caribbean for the diversity and wealth of its flora and fauna. This is one of the most spectacular places in Cuba and is distinguished by its natural attractions and beautiful landscapes. The Biosphere Reserve is located lies in the Zapata Peninsula, the largest and least populated municipality on the island, and can be found on the southern coast of Cuba in the Province of Matanzas, about 100 kms directly south of Varadero. It has the most important wetlands in Cuba and one of the best preserved and largest in the Caribbean

# Jewel

*At the crocodile hatchery.*

The municipality, surrounding the Bay of Pigs, has become a great spot for tourism with leisure activities related to nature, eco-tourism, and adventure. Guides are available to show the best places to see the exotic flora and fauna.

This natural paradise was declared by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve in 2000 and a Ramsar Site in 2001 at the Convention of Wetlands of International Importance. The area is flat with unique landscapes like the Treasure Lagoon, one of the largest fresh water natural reservoirs in the country, with an area of 900 hectares and four metres in depth.

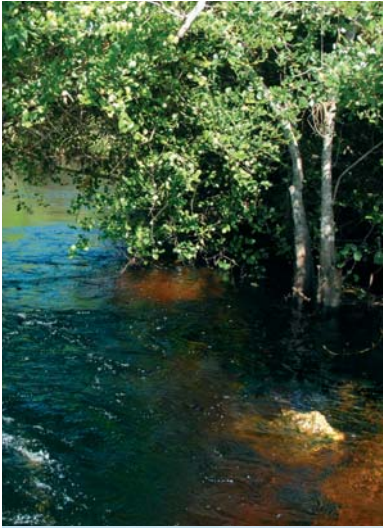
Other important sites are the Hatiguanico and Hanábana river basins and Playa Larga and Playa Girón. There you can find the most important drainage system in Cuba as well as many endemic birds and other migratory flocks that at the end of the year fly to Cuba seeking refuge from the cold winter. Inside the Reserve there are protected areas such as the Montemar Natural Park which covers an area of 5,000 square kilometers. It is a regional, national, and international reserve with a fragile ecosystem and important natural resources. Seventeen different vegetation formations have been identified including swamps and mangrove forests.

Fauna in the area is also important. It is the main habitat of the Cuban *Rhombifer* crocodile with an internationally renowned hatchery for its breeding. Among the fresh water fish species is the primitive *Manjuarí* or Cuban alligator gar which has reptilian features. Families of the community participate in its preservation.

With more than 170 registered species of birds, it has the greatest bird diversity in Cuba. Eighteen of them are endemic species and numerous others are local. The La

*A view of the waters near Treasure Lagoon.*

*On the coast between Playa Larga and Playa Girón.*



*Visitors at the crocodile hatchery.*

Salina and Santo Tomás trails are frequented by tourists interested in bird watching.

Due to its natural charms, this area has numerous and varied offers to visitors including open sea and cave diving, hiking, spotting flora and fauna, and speleology.

The cave system of Zapata Swamp is considered the deepest in Cuba with great flooded caves with channels connecting with the sea. The *Cueva de los Peces* (Fish Cave) is the largest and has become a great place for cave diving.

All along the coast there are more great places for diving, especially along the stretch from Punta Perdices to Playa Girón which is considered the best place for wall diving in the area for the large and diverse colonies of coral growing at the bottom.

Another fascinating show at the swamp is the coming and going of thousands of small crabs that mate and lay their eggs. They can be found at dusk covering many of the coastal roads.

One of the most visited places is Villa Guamá, a replica of an Indian Taino village created by Cuban artist Rita Longa. The village includes small huts, canals, and fishing areas decorated with statues of natives completing their daily chores.

To preserve the environment and to protect its natural resources and the ecosystems, the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA) has established an office at the swamp.

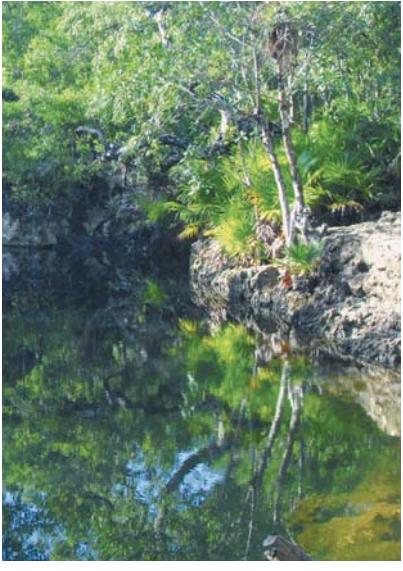
Cuba has made it a high priority to preserve the environment for future generations and, with that end, has established policies to protect its natural resources and to develop sustainable tourism.

*The Cueva de los Peces or "Fish Cave."*


The Zapata Swamp is a historical place famous for the events of April 1961 during the invasion of U.S. trained mercenaries who were defeated at the Bay of Pigs.

The museum located at the Australia sugar mill, from where President Fidel Castro commanded the battle, has all the details of this important piece of history.

*The tourist complex at Villa Guamá.*



## Adopt a *Manjuarí* Fish

This is an environmental education project sponsored by the CITMA office at the swamp with the children and their families from the area participating. Newly hatched *Manjuarí* fry are given to young students from the swamp who feed them and learn about their behavior. They are returned to the wild in June on the occasion of the World Environment Day.

## Korimakao

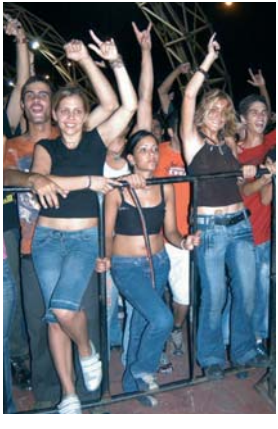
This is the name of a community artistic project from the Zapata Swamp which has the goal of rescuing local traditions and protecting the identity and idiosyncrasies of the region to help in the creation of values and the cultural consciousness of the young people in the area.

*A swimming spot on the coast near Playa Larga.*

*Hipnosis on stage at the amphitheatre on the Malecón.*

# Rock in Cuba

*By Michel García*
*Photos: Lourdes Nogueira & Richard*



Walking up the narrow park in the middle of "G" Street on a Saturday night might just be as common as taking any other big street in Havana. Also called the Avenue of the Presidents, this street starts at the *Malecón* and climbs several blocks into the heart of the Vedado area. I listen to the sounds of the late evening while enjoying the cool breeze from the sea at my back.

Then, little by little, as I get closer to 23rd Street, the park starts to get busier and busier with a crowd of youngsters sitting on benches and on the grass. Some speed around on their skateboards showing off for their friends. At first, you might think that it is just a bunch of kids hanging out in a park but it is more than just that. These are the alternative music and rock fans of Cuba.

Generally called *Rockeros*, they are one of the most underground urban tribes in a country known for and monopolized by *Salsa*. More than 70 percent of the music played on Cuban radio stations is that mix of African and Spanish music. It remains so popular that Cubans say, "we like to put it on our bread."

Being a rock fan myself, but not entirely deprived of the thirst for different types of music, I feel pretty much attached to this group of people and their interesting history.

The rock scene here has one of the most peculiar musical histories in Cuba. To get a deeper insight into the genre's background, there is no better source than Humberto Manduley's book *Rock in Cuba*. Manduley is a journalist, radio program director, and a specialist on Cuban rock.

Rock and roll in Cuba began in the late 1950's with artists covering American songs translated into Spanish. Most of the bands created

during the 1960's and 70's had a short-lived existence, especially due to the lack of support and the country's constant changes.

Then came the golden 1980's and early 90's. Many Cuban bands, influenced mainly by American and British bands, recreated their styles for their fans. These musicians planted the seed for future generations of *Rockeros* with the help of radio DJ's who worked hard on spreading this not always welcomed sound.

Rock lovers of the time gathered at parties where bands could play since there were few venues that would host them. One exception was the unforgettable Patio de María, a cultural centre in Vedado that promoted rock and helped musicians whenever possible.

In the early 1990's Cuba was suffering through a profound economic crisis which was affecting all levels of society. Rock was also hurt but the flow of music information was kept alive. Worn-out copies of magazines like *Metal Hammer*, *Kerrang*, and *Spin* slowly made the rounds among friends and aspiring *Rockeros* until the pages wore out and covers fell off.

Today, *Rockeros* have a better chance of survival. Since playing rock music in Cuba continues to be associated with a bit of rebelliousness and many bands' lyrics contain social criticism, rock, together with genres like rap, have found more space for development and the *Rockeros* crowd grows larger with each passing day.

*The bassist for Cuba´s Hipnosis.*

Who are these *Rockeros*? I talk to them and they told me some of their stories. One girl, dressed all in black, said she started listening to rock when her brother would take her to concerts because their parents would not let them go out at night alone. Then you realize the vast majority of them, if not all, are university students sitting on the grass with their college books in worn out backpacks.

These are not delinquents but educated young people who are striving to achieve their goals while trying to enjoy life on the way.

But where do these people get their music from? Cuba is an island suffering an almost five-decade long embargo established by the US government. So most Cubans just exchange music the "democratic" way – by borrowing, trading, sharing, and copying music onto blank CD's whenever possible.

There is no doubt that rock has finally found its roots in Cuban society. The third Cayman Rock Festival, the most important of its kind in Cuba, was held this past July for three days to promote rock music.

Cuban Rock bands including, Hipnosis and Chlover, played at the José Martí amphitheatre on the *Malecón*, the same venue where Australia's Air Supply and the U.S.'s Audioslave have performed in the past.

Factor VIII from Panama and Crocell from Venezuela also played at the festival at prestigious venues such as at the Ministry of Culture and the famed Salon Rosado de la Tropical.

Even more important was the presentation of the Cuban Rock Agency, a government institution in charge of promoting and organizing concerts as well as producing rock bands. The newly created agency is governed by the Ministry of Culture and the Hermanos Saíz Youth Association, the Festival's organizing institution.

I guess the times when *Rockeros* had no place to go are finally ending and we may be seeing the last bunch of youngsters hanging around at 23 and G Streets instead of going to rock concerts every Saturday night.

*The guitarist for Chlover.*

*The scene at 23 and G.*

Wheels of Fortune:

# How Bi

## Build Bridges Between Cubans and Canadians

*By Egle Procuta*
*Photos: Joan Barrett*

The crumbling, half-abandoned building didn't particularly stand out on the industrial strip in suburban Toronto – until you noticed all the bikes piled up in front. Dozens of them, in all shapes and sizes. And not just bikes, but bicycle parts. Spokes. Tires. Pedals.

It was a Saturday morning, overcast and cool for the middle of May. But garage-sale season had already kicked off in the city. And of the stream of cars checking out the furniture warehouses up and down Caledonia Road, many drivers would pull over and ask the people hauling the bikes out from storage: "Are they for sale?" "How much are they going for?"

And each time, a volunteer from Bicycles Crossing Borders would yell back a friendly reply: "Sorry, they're not for sale. These bikes are heading to Cuba."

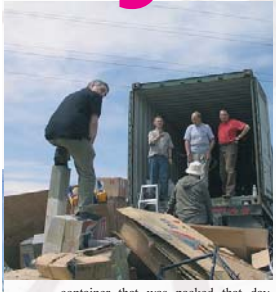
If any of the motorists had bothered to glance over to the adjacent parking lot, they would have noticed everything was being diligently noted and then loaded into a 40-foot cargo container. Several days later, it would be put onto a ship to set sail for Cuba, carrying 7,000 kilograms of gear donated by Canadians: 151 new and used bikes; 278 boxes of bicycles parts.

Many Canadians who have travelled to Cuba know the two countries enjoy a special relationship that runs much deeper than the fun of a one or two-week all-inclusive beach holiday. The warmth and generosity of the Cuban people inspire Canadians to keep in touch long after their return north. There are all sorts of examples of grass-roots exchanges that have developed over the years. *Spirits of Havana*, the uplifting 2001 documentary from the National Film Board of Canada, for instance, tells of how jazz saxophonist Jane Bunnett established a project to help repair musical instruments in Cuba.

Bicycles Crossing Borders is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization that's been working with Cuba for over a decade to promote sustainable transportation. Its premise is beautifully simple: cycling and recycling. BCB collects bicycles that individuals and companies in Canada are set to throw out. Instead of going to landfills, the bikes are shipped to Cuba where – with a bit of TLC and that famous repair ingenuity – they're made road-worthy again and sold to locals at affordable prices.

With the help of the Canadian International Development Agency, a bicycle-repair workshop was set up in Old Havana in 2002. Now, BCB is expanding across the island, with new shops and training centres in Sancti Spiritus, Bayamo and Baracoa. The

# cycles



container that was packed that day arrived within two weeks and was unloaded in Sancti Spiritus. The first distribution of 20 bikes was made to a cooperative involved in organic farming.

Though many committed volunteers keep BCB running strong, there is one man who embodies its heart and soul. His name is Narayana Reddy, but most everybody knows him as Nani. The 52-year-old lives in Toronto, has a day job working as a library assistant at Ryerson University, and spends many hours as a support staff member at Mountain Equipment Co-op. But his *raison d'etre* is harnessing the power of the two-wheeler to help improve people's lives both in Canada and abroad.

"I have a passion," Reddy says, "and when I take something on, I work hard."

The life journey that led to Reddy's attachment to Cuba took him across many continents. He grew up in bitter poverty in India. "My father was an intellectual who couldn't support the family," he explains. After a time in Germany, Reddy came to Canada and studied political science at York University. He developed a strong interest in Central America, becoming fascinated by Mayan history in Guatemala and travelling to Nicaragua as a volunteer to build wells. But of all the cultures in the region, Cuba stood out for him.

"There was something special in Cuba," he says. "What touched me is the Cuban mentality which is similar to where I grew up. They're very bright, committed, and helpful. I felt at home."

One of his stints living in Cuba was a two-year stretch in the early 1990s, a time of great economic challenge on the island known as the "Special Period." Despite the physical hardships he endured and witnessed, Reddy was more impressed than ever – not only by the Cubans' resilience but by their willingness to help others.

"I am a vegetarian, and I had Cuban friends who would cycle 20 kilometres just to bring me vegetables, like a bunch of watercress."

It was during this visit that Reddy began to formulate his ideas about how Canada's bicycles could help Cubans. Because of fuel shortages and the resulting transportation difficulties, Cuba had imported millions of Chinese bikes. But they were very heavy. Nevertheless, Cubans relied on these bicycles, carrying entire families on a single bike and everything from wedding cakes to building materials.

Reddy realized that many of the high-quality bicycles that Canadians were throwing out, in our disposable society, could be put to excellent use in Cuba, especially with strong support from the local government to promote cycling as a viable and healthy means of transportation. And that's how Bicycles Crossing Borders was born.

Of course, the Special Period is long over. But cycling remains a big part of the Cuban landscape and a year-round transportation alternative. And, with the ever-expanding tourism infrastructure on the island, it's not something that is limited to the locals either.

I can't think of a better way to enjoy the hospitality and scenery off the beaten tourist track than a biking expedition. As with most foreign countries where I don't know the local roads, my choice would be to join up with a bike tour. I've heard great things said about a couple of Canadian companies that have been doing this for many years: Vélo Québec (www.velo.qc.ca) and MacQueen's Island Tours (www.macqueens.com).

A perfect option is what I would call a combo-pack holiday. One week of cycling. Then one week on the beach. *Aie caramba*, doesn't that sound fine?

**For more information, visit www.bikestocuba.org**

# Alicia Alonso

## *Canada is Always on my Mind*

*An exclusive interview given by Alicia Alonso on the presentation of the Cuban National Ballet in Ontario this December. After an absence of 29 years, the* Prima Ballerina Assoluta *recalls her ties with Canadian people.*

*By Pedro Quiroga Jiménez*
*Photos: Courtesy of the National Ballet of Cuba*

The headquarters of the Cuban National Ballet (BNC) in Havana is a constant coming and going of dancers, *maitres*, and other participants of the ballet world. They are all preparing for the European tour, mainly to France and Spain.

Despite the hustle and bustle around, its General Director, Alicia Alonso, has found a spot in her always busy schedule to see us and to recall her ties with Canada –a country that on many occasions was a port of call, for its geographic location, on her trips between Cuba and Europe.

The Cuban company has not visited Canada since 1978 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens* (LGBC) in Montreal. 29 years have passed and we are all amazed with the amount of time that has passed since that last visit.

Nevertheless, the reunion with the Canadian public is increasingly approaching. In early December, the BNC will be performing in Hamilton, Ontario. The program for the occasion is the classic *Nuteracker*, with choreography by Alicia Alonso on the original by Lev Ivanov with the music of Tchaikovsky.

**CubaPLUS** *I was looking at old news on your tours over the years and realized that it has almost been three decades since the last time you were in Canada.*

**Alicia** –That much? It seems incredible when so many Canadian dancers, choreographers and personalities have visited us. But even if we haven't had the chance to go we have never been apart.

*You danced on Canadian stages since the 1940's, with the New York Ballet Theater.*

–That's right. And I remember a movie made for television in Toronto when I was returning from my first tour to the Soviet Union. It was the *Black Swan*, with Igor Youskevitch as *partenaire*, in 1958. It was an important historical moment because I became the first dancer from the American continent invited to the now disappeared USSR.

I was later invited in 1967 by the LGBC to dance *Giselle* with Azari Plisetski, directed by Anton Dolin. That time I participated at the inauguration of the Wilfred Pelletier Theatre as part of the World Expo taking place in Montreal.

It was a big event. I had not been in the United States for seven years since my visa was being denied every time.

*There is an article entitled "Pilgrimage to Montreal" that tells about that memorable encounter with your friends and admirers who traveled from the States to applaud you.*

–Exciting! But, actually, there is a terrible story.

I was just returning from a hard tour through Europe and had an accident on my foot. It was swelling and I could barely walk because of the pain. Then, it was the season in Canada, the BNC debut there. I arrived at the airport and the manager who was waiting for us there just raised his hands to his head and screamed "Noooo" [Laughing]. But I told him, "don't worry, I will still dance *Giselle*."

*That was in 1971, after a tour in Spain. You had a fracture of the tibia and a lateral perineum tear. It is said that in Cuba it was all over the press as sad news with headlines like these in the papers, "Alicia Alonso Injured."*

*Your closest collaborators tell us that the phones would not stop ringing at BNC's headquarters and that an eminent Cuban orthopedician, Dr. Julio Martínez Páez, flew to Canada to evaluate your case.*

–A close friend was there and I asked him to put on some bandages where it hurt. Many people asked themselves if I could dance and I did. I always danced *Giselle* on a high, but that time I danced barely touching the ground. It was like floating on the stage since I had my leg almost immobilized with bandages.

*Tell me about your friends there and some other details of your stay ...*

–We made many friends in the world of dance in general, especially with the head of the LGBC who was for a long time in touch with us and kept telling us about what they were doing. I had another friend, Fernan Hall and I can never forget the choreographer Brian McDonald who also visited Cuba. He gave us as a present the ballet *Prologue for a Tragedy* and told us, "this is especially for the BNC. No other company can dance it like Cubans do."

And finally, the work together with Belma Diamante on *Nutcracker*, in Hamilton.

*I wanted to ask you about that, about the staging.*

–They dance that ballet every year and until now they did it with Russian companies. But this year they want to do it with us, with my choreographic version. Diamante is going to take some teenagers from Ontario's ballet schools and combine them in a way that will be a fusion of the BNC with Canadian ballet students.

*Many will ask why the BNC keeps performing the classics.*

–We don't just do classics. The fact is, we cannot deprive the Cuban people or the world of the enjoyment of watching the great classics. How are we going to take them away if they are the marvels of ballet, if it is the base for the rest? We have the honor of being – so it is said – one of the best companies performing the classics, regarding style.

We can dance a romantic ballet like *Giselle*, or *Sleeping Beauty* or *Coppelia* but we later perform modern ballets because we have the tools and the art within us so as to express it in any way.

The great companies of the world are measured by the classics and later by the rest of the repertoire. It happens like that with symphonic orchestras. They are not measured by the popular or modern music they play but by how they interpret the classical pieces.

*The Cuban ballet school has created its own technical, ethical and aesthetic guidelines. Which are its theoretical foundations?*

–You know that all ballet schools in the world have the same principle, because the body is what they work with. Technical movements are demanded equally from a dancer as it is from a pianist.

The first position, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, all those steps exists in all schools, but … what is the difference?

It lies in the accentuation one gives to it musically. Also in the way of using one's body expressively, because even if one uses the body, one can move slower, faster, in a more romantic way and there, lie the styles.

Our school also has something that is very Cuban. Something from the very root. It is the dance between men and women. It is like a continuous conversation between them and it has a sensuality independent from how classic the piece could be.

When you see a BNC show, you can see that it is not a fragmented dance. First, a man dances and stops and then a woman dances and stops. No, you are following a story with two people dancing, a man and a woman. That is something that we promote a lot. We have it as something universal.

The rest is the lightness and the accent of our dance which is upward. If you look at the Russians, you can see their accent is regularly

*This year we have celebrated the 60th Anniversary of the uninterrupted diplomatic relations between Canada and Cuba. What message do you have for Canadians?*

–When you remembered me after 29 years without visiting your country, I could not believe it. It is always on my mind, one way or another. I think that despite all this time, I have not stopped being in Canada, nor Canada in me.

*Prima Ballerina Assoluta* and head of the Cuban National Ballet, Alicia Ernestina de la Caridad del Cobre Martínez del Hoyo was born in Havana where she started her dance studies in 1931 at the Ballet School of the Pro-Arte Musical Society.

She later moved to the USA to continue her studies with several eminent teachers from the School of American Ballet. There she started her professional career in the musical comedies *Great Lady* and *Stars In Your Eyes*.

A year later she became a member of the American Ballet Caravan, the precursor of the New York City Ballet. She joined the Ballet Theatre of New York in 1940 and from them on started a brilliant career on the stage as an interpreter of the great works of the romantic and classic ballet repertoire. At that time she worked with Mijail Fokine, George Balanchine, Leonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, Anthony Tudor, Jerome Robbins, and Agnes de Mille among other important personalities of 20th century dance.

Her concern for developing the art of ballet on her island led her to founding the Alicia Alonso Ballet in Havana (1948), today the Cuban National Ballet.

Her choreography of the classics, *Giselle*, *Grand Pas de Quatre*, and *Sleeping Beauty* are internationally famous and are performed by such companies as the Ballet Opera of Paris, the Prague Opera, and Milan's La Scala Theatre.

Considered by critics, for several decades now, as one of the greatest dancers of all time, she has received many awards in Cuba and abroad. Among them are the US *Dance Magazine* annual award of 1958, the Order of Labor of the Republic of Vietnam in 1984, the Grand Prix de la Ville de París in 1966, and the Anna Pavlova Award from the University of Dance of Paris in the same year. She has been awarded the highest official medals from Mexico, Panama and Dominican Republic.

In Cuba, the Council of State has decorated her with the title of National Heroine of Labor and in December 2000 she received the highest award of the country, the Order of José Martí. She was also appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba and UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador in 2002.

downward. There are times when you are not an expert and you notice it and you say: they dance differently. And Americans are different although the US ballet school is not yet defined.

*Do you have the same inspiration over all those years of creativity? What ideas do you have?*

–I constantly have ideas. The steps and the music come to my mind. Many times people are talking to me and I am thinking and steps and characters appear before me and I cannot listen to what I am being told.

I already have ideas for three ballets. As you know, every two years we have the International Ballet Festival of Havana and in the most recent one I premiered four ballets. I will show these three during the 2008 season, for the 60th Anniversary of the BNC.

*Do you have any titles?*

–Nooo [laughing]. And even if I had them, I would not tell you [laughing].

*After so many years of absence, it might be a curiosity for Canadians to know what is a normal working day for Alicia Alonso.*

–Work, work, and more work. Lots of meetings, many decisions to make, a lot of walks from the office to the rehearsal hall and vice versa. Every day is a very active day for me.

Cuban Medical Advances

# *Andropause* and its Therapy

*By Heidy González Cabrera*
*Photos: Alejandro Gortázar & Jorge Pérez*

Andropause, or male menopause, is something that most men are reluctant to talk about even though it is the natural process of declining virility due to age. The condition is also called Viropause or Androgenic Deficiency in male aging and is the result of low levels of testosterone in the body.

Similar to female menopause, hence its comparison, males start losing sexual potency but maintain the production of spermatozoids so procreation is possible even at an old age.

Symptoms include insomnia, depression, nervousness, anxiety and irritability, a decrease in libido, bone deterioration, circulatory problems, and damage to the skin and hair.

Nevertheless, there are other factors that can have an influence on virility and are confused with Andropause:

**Monotony** – The lack of stimulation caused by a poorly varied sex life can lead progressively to a lack of interest in sexual activities.

There are some people who try to find the solution with a younger partner as a way of temporary or permanent stimulation, without understanding that the important thing is to change the attitude towards sex, independent of the age and nature of the partner.

**Anxiety and Stress** – Work, economic, and domestic problems can reduce the interest in sexual activities between the age of 40 and 70.

Also, repeated and prolonged trips during which the couple is separated decreases the interest in intercourse and effectiveness.

**Loss of a partner** – The "widowhood syndrome" results in the case of an elderly person who is in a period of almost total sexual inactivity. In later stages, if he has a desire for a new partner, he may suffer erectile dysfunction.

**Diseases** – It is obvious that diseases have a negative influence on sexual activity. Many types of afflictions that weaken the body or affect the psyche can damage sexual activity.

Certain types of medications also damage the libido and sexual potency such as those for arterial hypertension, cardiovascular disorders, and mental disorders.

**Alcoholism** – It is one of the factors that have the most negative influence on sexual function. Metabolic and hormonal changes affecting the whole body, especially the central and peripheral nervous system, can cause erectile

dysfunction and depress the libido. Alcohol abuse can cause a decrease in testosterone, extra-pyramidal tremors, alcoholic neuritis, vitamin deficiency, and hypoglycemia.

Small amounts of alcohol can cause a tranquilizing effect and can be favourable for intimacy.

**Performance Anxiety** – Adults older than 50 often have a fear of failure, either erectile dysfunction or not doing it "right." There is a false belief that at that age sexual potency is inadequate for greater demands.

**Prevention and Therapies**

Scientists around the world working in this field share the opinion that we cannot say that the prevention of Andropause actually exists. One can say that the knowledge of the negative factors that influence sexual health and having an adequate comprehension of the physiological events in maturity helps.

The previous statement is acknowledged by Dr. Manuel Licea Puig, Cuban endocrinologist and researcher, who points to what is nowadays considered a controversial therapy, Androgenic Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). This therapy does have certain contraindications and requires medical examinations and tests including prostatic evaluations and the determination of specific prostatic antigens, levels of cholesterol and plasmatic triglycerides, blood cell count, and a study of hepatic function.

As an expert from the Cuban National Institute of Endocrinology, Puig states that in the case of patients with breast or prostate cancer the use of Androgenic HRT has absolute contraindications. Among the relative ones are: prostatic benign hiperplasy (growth in breast volume), alterations of hepatic functions, and sleep apnea.

Regarding the use of the popular Sildenafil (Viagra), it can be seen as an alternative for the treatment of erectile sexual dysfunction (sexual impotency) although it is contraindicated for people under nitrate treatment.

There are several Androgenic medications in different research and clinical stages with the aim of making the lives of aging men better and which offer greater safety. Many long-term studies of HRT are being conducted to establish with greater precision the risks and real benefits of this treatment.

Appropriate therapeutic evaluation and therapy for Andropause is a service, like many other medical specialties, that is offered to foreign patients in different institutions in Cuba.

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# Higher Institute of Art

# *The School of Dreams*

*By Idania Machado*
*Photos: Todd Bennett, Jorge Pérez & ISA Archives*

The day before the try outs for the *Instituto Superior de Artes* (known as *el ISA* or the Higher Institute of Arts in English) I saw the movie *Fame* on TV. If you have seen it, you will know that it may be the worst thing to see the day before an entrance exam. In the movie, you see all the problems that some students have in trying to get into an art school – it made me think about not going.

I remember my father telling me the next day before leaving that I had no business going to *el ISA* and that they only accepted the children of famous artists. I told him that I was at least going to try. We got to the school and, just like in *Fame*, there were young people rehearsing speeches, warming up their muscles and voices. The famous artists with their children were also present (just like my father had told me) and the students from later years were looking at us with an air of superiority gained from experience.

Todd Bennett

I had to present my scene with my mother as counterpart and when my turn came she could not move because of how nervous she was. But I was not ready to lose my chance. I wanted to protect my dream. The same dream that had brought all the students competing for one of the 20 spaces in the acting program.

The same scene has been happening for the past three decades with hundreds of young people arriving at *el ISA* looking for just one chance to continue their studies in music, visual arts, theatre, dance, cinema, or radio and television.

After the test comes the seemingly eternal and stressful waiting period to find out if you have been accepted for one of the privileged spots in the school.

**A Bit of History**

As I was saying, young people have been coming from every corner of Cuba to what was the grounds of the Havana Country Club. This was the most popular leisure spot for the wealthiest people of the city until 1959. Ironically, it was so exclusive that the President of the time, Fulgencio Batista, could not be a member since he was a mulatto.

Three architects, Ricardo Porro, Roberto Gottardi, and Vittorio Garatti, used all of their imagination and creativity to transform the 163 acre property into their dream of a city of arts.

The campus preserves the main building of the former Country Club and some others were added, scattered around the area. These have a different style of design and construction based on the needs of each of the faculties they were to house.

Due to the sheer size of the plan, the entire project was never fully completed but since July 20, 1976, Cuba's great arts university has been graduating students from its many different faculties.

**The Chosen Ones**

To my father's surprise, I found out two months later that I had passed the acting test. The daughter of a rural worker and a teacher was among the chosen ones and would start the best years of her youth and would learn the skills to eventually become a journalist. I wasn't accepted because there were spaces left after the children of famous people got their spots (some of them didn't get in) but because of the ability shown by myself and all the other young people coming from different regions of the country who were admitted.

*Ana María González, Rector of el ISA's.*

One of the best things about *el ISA* is precisely this mix of people from different places and positions since the diversity contributes to their education and interaction is essential for all artists. Each faculty has their own characteristics; people from visual arts and theater are more uninhibited while musicians tend to be more disciplined since they have been immersed in studying their instruments from an early age and they haven't had much contact with other forms of art.

Sharing the same space and even classrooms for general subjects fosters a healthy interaction among the students. So a graduate from any of the faculties ends up being informed in art, in general, and the native Cuban culture as well. This secondary education is delivered spontaneously to the students and allows them to discover, observe, and share.

Todd Bennett

**Why the ISA**

Ana María González, *el ISA*'s Rector, explained to **Cuba**PLUS the schools' significance and creation as well as being the model for teaching art in Cuba. She clearly denoted three main points.

At its foundation, the Cuban artistic education, in its different varieties, was joined into a single system after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. “Today's art education is the result of that consolidation and the level of the 45 year old National School of Arts [*la ENA* in Spanish], which was enriched with academies that already existed before 1959. The level reached by *la ENA* was no longer sufficient for teaching arts and we required a higher level.”

The system, as González explains, is made up of the different arts schools scattered across the provinces, *la ENA*, and the 15 schools for art teachers. In these schools students receive a general education together with the specialized art classes.

“The first of the aspects that enhances the Cuban art university is its staff, made up of some of the members of the island's artistic vanguard. Great artists, many of them still working, are members of the staff. They are creators who consider teaching a social commitment.”

Secondly, the school's teaching budget is aimed towards an education reaching the highest possible level but at the same time providing a humanistic training with the essential

Todd Bennett

interests of the Cuban Revolution: a virtuous, cultivated artist who is also aware of the world's and society's problems and, above all, who could, using his sensibility, contribute to the knowledge and transformation of the different problems."

"Finally, the fact that we have all sorts of art students, like musicians, dancers, actors, and painters, in the same place provides more wealth to all students alike."

According to González, *el ISA* is a school for talented students and not for the elite. Teaching at this higher level aims towards perfection, towards the completion of a cycle in the artist's training.

The Institute, González says, has gone through different stages and while circumstances have caused some difficulties, they have never felt abandoned as an educational and cultural force. Despite the high cost of this type of education, the Cuban State has preserved this educational program.

**Everybody Dreams of It**

While not perfect, *el ISA* is the School, the one we keep mentioning, the one linked to us, the one training us and giving us an education and opening a space to keep learning as human beings.

Every time you see a show with Cuban artists anywhere in the world, a lot of the quality comes from this school. There you can find the piano skills of Jorge Luis Prats and Gonzalo Rubalcaba; the paintings of Bejarano and Rocío García; the new popular singers like Carlos Varela and Polito Ibáñez; and the acting of Marisabel Díaz and Vladimir Cruz (as seen in the movie Strawberry and Chocolate).

But I really shouldn't start a list. There have been hundreds of important artists stepping out the doors of this place. Scattered all over Cuba and the world, they are all graduates of *el ISA*, the school of dreams.

## Information on *El ISA*

*El ISA* is divided into four faculties with five degree courses with 39 profiles in its undergraduate studies. Postgraduate courses are available for Cuban and foreign students and teachers applying for a doctorate in Arts and Sciences. Besides the main facility in Havana there are three more schools in Holguín, Camagüey, and Santiago de Cuba.

Contact information:
Tel: (53-7) 208-8075 / Fax: (53-7) 273-76633
Calle 120, No. 1110, between 9 & 13
Reparto Cubanacán, Municipality of Playa
Havana

# A Walk Through Cienfuegos

**Known as the "Pearl of the South," Cienfuegos is a fascinating city to visit for its neoclassical architecture, well planned streets, and a great number of interesting places to visit.**


Start at the José Martí Park right across from the cathedral. This impressive park is centered around a marble statue of Martí. The park is a great place to admire the surrounding buidings and to listen to live music in the late afternoon from the bandstand marking the spot where the city was founded.


One of the city's most famous buildings is the Tomas Terry Theatre located on the north side of the park. Built with precious woods, it has hosted many important art activities since its foundation in 1889.


Right in front of the bandstand, have a drink at the Palatino Bar (pictured) while admiring the clean and organized architecture of the city center. Head next to the *Casa de la Cultura Benjamín Duarte*, on the corner, where you can climb to the *mirador*, or viewing tower, for a great view of the whole park and surroundings.



Travel east on 54th Ave until 31st St. where the Union Hotel (pictured) is located and for a great place to have lunch. Or head up the block to Dino´s Pizza for some surprisingly unusual and tasty Italian style pizzas.


Continue east on 54th St. and you will find several tables of street vendors with local arts and crafts. If you need to buy souvenirs, this is the place. Go to 37th St. and stop for a minute at the Benny Moré statue. One of Cuba´s greatest musicians, he was born in Cienfuegos and not taking a picture next to his statue would be the same as not having visited Cienfuegos at all.


Head south on 37th St. and walk alongside the bay. This is Cienfuegos´ *malecón*, or ocean walk, and the sight is well worth it. Your goal is to reach the aristocratic area of *Punta Gorda*. Along the way, make a stop at Hotel Jagua and visit the Moorish styled Palacio del Valle (pictured). This is your place for an afternoon snack.

# Everyone's Common Viewpoint

*By Idania Machado*
*Photos: Jorge Pérez*

It is said that a farmer living in the central part of Cuba asked his wife to make him a comfortable shirt to wear while working in the country. The wife followed her husband's wishes but she was far from imagining, at that time, that her original design would become so popular, first among the residents of the area, and afterwards all over the world.

She had created the *Guayabera*, the traditional national Cuban shirt.

Now Cuban designers are dreaming of going global, first targeting the growing number of tourists to the island with the goal of penetrating markets abroad. Nancy Pelegrín is a designer widely known for recreating the traditional *Guayabera*. She also defends it as the national outfit and now presents a very attractive line of different clothes, with her favorite colors of white and beige, for the tropical weather.

Born into a family that combines fashion with music, her father being a singer in the Son Pelegrín Septet who regularly

perform at the Meliá Habana Hotel and the Fashion House *La Maison*, Pelegrín studied at the San Alejandro School of Painting, one of the most prestigious art schools of Havana.

I met Pelegrín at her home-workshop, where she creates her drawings, right after one of her trips to Spain where she worked with her usual styles and produced several collections from discarded fabric. Asked about her fashion views she said, "true fashion arises from everyone's common point of view."

"We all impose trends," says Pelegrín, "first for convenience and also to present ourselves and reveal some of ourselves to society. Each of us has our own wardrobe independent with what is worn at the moment. That is why I say that fashion is in all of us."

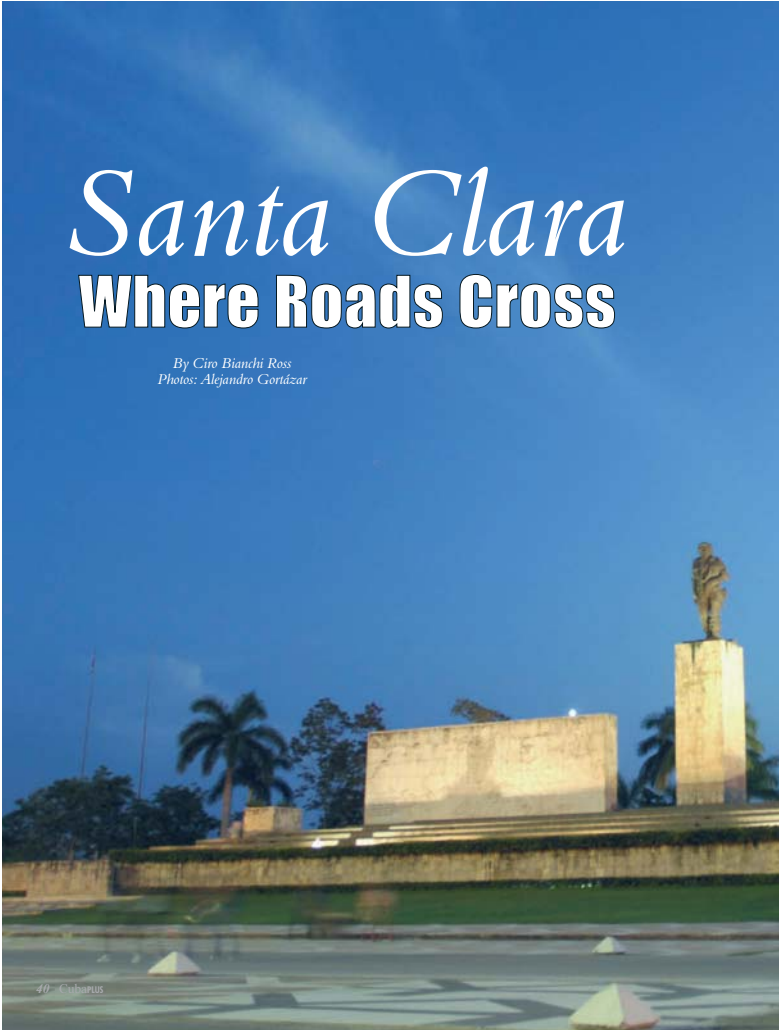
Fabrics, hats, and ecological colors that help us to stay cool make up her line of clothing. These become important to those who wear them since all of us give our personal shape and meaning to the endless relationship between practicality and beauty.

*Pedro Pelegrín, singing with the Son Pelegrín Septet.*

*The designer, Nancy Pelegrín.*

# *Santa Clara*
## Where Roads Cross

*By Ciro Bianchi Ross*
*Photos: Alejandro Gortázar*



*The beautiful Vidal Park.*

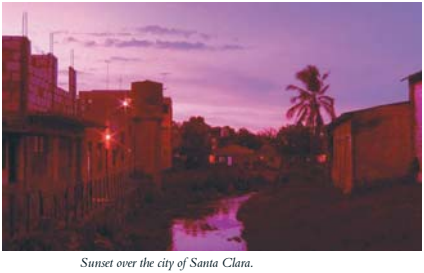
*Mar Azul Beach in nearby Caibarién.*

Enrico Caruso sang at La Caridad Theatre in 1885. The first university opened its doors in 1952. The provincial hospital is now one of the most prestigious in the country. El Mejunje is a one of the country's finest cultural centres. With its clean and straight streets, its horizontal and eclectic architecture, its monuments and bridges, Santa Clara is a city full of life that has the rhythm of Cuba. It is also full of history – this is Che's city.

It was in Santa Clara that Commander Ernesto Che Guevara struck the final blow in the triumph of the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959. The *façade* of the Santa Clara Libre Hotel, just across from the beautiful Vidal Park, still has bullet holes from that famous battle. On the outskirts of the city, you can also see some of the wagons of the armored train that, full of soldiers and weaponry, was derailed by the Rebel Army.

In the memorial square bearing his name rest the bodies of Che and his comrades from the Bolivian campaign.

Santa Clara is the capital of Villa Clara, one of the central provinces of the island and the one with the greatest industrial and agricultural development. It is located 270 km to the east of Havana. Access is



*Sunset over the city of Santa Clara.*

*The town centre in Remedios.*

provided by an international airport, railroad, and the national highway.

The northern keys, Las Brujas, Ensenacho and Santa María, are linked to the mainland by a causeway built some years ago opening the area up to tourism.

But Santa Clara is also the door to other places in Cuba. The blue mountains of the Escambray have some well kept secrets reserved only for ecotourists. Lake Hanabanilla, located 53 km from the city, is an ideal place for black bass fishing. The Elguea baths, 100 km to the northwest, are said to have miraculous powers that can cure the most unbelievable diseases. Some say that former President Franklin D. Roosevelt was planning to visit the baths on his doctors' advice until his life was cut short.

**Historic Remedios**

The nearby city of Remedios, 43 km to the northwest, is one of the great treasures of Cuba and well worth a visit. Remedios was the eighth town founded by Spanish colonizers in 1524. Attacks from pirates forced its inhabitants to move the location twice until they found the current location. The town kept growing until 1689 when, for purely economical reasons, 18 families decided to move inland and founded the city of Santa Clara on July 15 of that year. These new settlers fled Remedios because, according to them, the town was haunted by demons and the priest of the city had found around 800,000 of these creatures. Since not all the people from Remedios wanted to leave the town, those who emigrated returned to sack it and burn it. Still, the town came back to life and became an important cultural center.

In the early 19th Century it was once again ravaged by fire and again rebuilt. Most of the current colonial buildings belong to that period. It has a splendid urban layout that many experts compare to the one in the city of Trinidad. The main square runs between two churches, the *Buen Viaje* (currently closed for repairs) and the San Juan Bautista.

The latter is famous for its artistic attributes: its altar of cedar and gold; the roof of mahogany carved with Moorish styles; and the image of the pregnant Virgin Mary. But this city is mostly famous for its *Las Parrandas*.

**A Unique Party**

The word "*Parranda*" means partying, brawling fun and is used to name the groups of musicians that go out at night to play and sing to have fun.

*The Caridad Theatre in Santa Clara.*

*The Boy with a Boot Monument in Vidal Park.*

Almost 190 years ago, a priest in Remedios named Francisquito started to worry about the growing absence of parishioners to the Christmas masses that started on December 16 and ended on the 24. He had the idea of having some kids, using cans and pans, making such a loud racket at night that people, being unable to sleep, would have no other choice but to go to church. This was, naturally, well received by the young people and some time later each of the city's districts – El Carmen and San Salvador – had its own band of noisy musicians.

With the passing of time they changed instruments and perfected their rhythm until it became known as the sound of parades on Christmas Eve in Remedios. It is not known if Father Francisquito got more followers into his church, but he surely created one of the most appealing and unique parties in the country. Each Christmas Eve, people from one district go to wake up people from the other one and vice versa.

It is, to put it simply, a crazy party. Prepared for over the whole year, requiring hard work and props like no other, it only lasts 12 hours. Dance is not the essential part of it since Cuban music also gives space to European polka. There are no masquerades, disguises or congas, just a celebration in which everyone is involved in some way; from the building of the floats and the square's decorations to the party itself. A line marked on the street divides the center of the city. On one side are the *Sansaries* (from the San Salvador district) and on the other the *Carmelitas* (the "brown" people from El Carmen district). Both sides wait for the church bells to toll 9:00 p.m. on December 24 to start the competition. Parades in Remedios are a sort of war with each district making use of their "weaponry" in the form of rockets and fireworks. Each side with its float, built to symbolize their district, fireworks, and their music tries to win over its rival. Each side puts on several presentations in

*Flower sellers in Santa Clara.*

separate areas until the final one where all the participants give up what they have left and the show becomes pure noise.

The Christmas mass with fireworks flying all over is one of the most fevered folk experiences in Cuba. The lights, fireworks, and the noise is intended to simulate a war between these two districts and usually there is no winner since, at daybreak, both parties declare themselves victorious and triumphantly run around to their music.

**Return to Santa Clara**

There are some fine museums to be found in and around Santa Clara including the Che Museum, the Armoured Train Museum, and a Museum of Decorative Arts. There are also several appealing festivals like the one on Gloria St. every August 16 and a Flower Party on the second Sunday in May. If you want to see the more authentic traditions of the city, the right time would be between November 13 and 19 during Culture Week.

Hotels are comfortable and the best places to eat are at Villa La Granjita and the Santa Clara Libre Hotel. After a good meal, head to Los Caneyes disco for some dancing or El Mejunje for a good show. Other options are to enjoy the abundant flora and fauna at Hanabanilla Lake, waking up in a cabin at Las Brujas Key, or swimming in the crystal clear waters of Santa María Key. There are a surprisingly large number of things to do in this little town in the middle of Cuba.


*The CMHW Radio Station in Santa Clara.*


*An armoured train derailed by Che.*

*The Monument at the Armoured Train Museum.*

# Presence of Che

During the 1980's, sculptor José Delarra wanted to perpetuate Che's memory with some 15 monuments scattered throughout Villa Clara province and in its capital, Santa Clara. One of them is the monument of the battle against the armored train. Che, by causing the derailment of this train, destroyed the last chance Batista had of saving his regime. Another monument is made up of a group of sculptures at Santa Clara's revolutionary plaza. In the adjacent mausoleum lie the remains of Che along with those of his comrades in arms who were with him during the last chapter of his life in Bolivia. The site also houses a museum showing a chronological history of Che's life and an eternal flame.


**The Ernesto Che Guevara Monument**
**Tuesday to Saturday: 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. / Sunday: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**
**Free Admission for everybody, including tourists.**
**Tel: (53-42) 205-686**
**Avenida de los Desfiles, between Circunvalación & Danielito, Villa Clara**

Villa Clara

Remedios

Hotel Los Caneyes
Tel: (53-42) 204-512
Ave. De los Eucaliptos y Circunvalación de Santa Clara
Villa Clara

Hotel Santa Clara Libre
Tel: (53-42) 207-548
Parque Vidal No. 6
Villa Clara

Hotel Hanabanilla
Tel: (53-42) 208-461
Salto de Hanabanilla, Manicaragua, Villa Clara

Carrusel La Granjita
Tel: (53-42) 218-190
Carretera de la Maleza
km 21.5, Villa Clara

Hotel Mascotte
Tel: (53-42) 395-144
Parque Martí
Remedios


El ISA

Callejón de Hamel



Dos Hermanos Bar


La Ferminia

City of Havana

Pinar del Río

Havana Province

Matanzas

Cienfuegos

Santa Clara

Isla de la Juventud

Sancti Spiritus

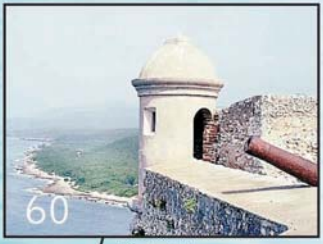

Guayabita del Pinar


Ciénaga de Zapata


Deborah Andollo


Cienfuegos


Santa Clara


Fiesta del Fuego

Ciego de Ávila

Camagüey

Las Tunas

Holguín

Granma

Guantánamo

Santiago de Cuba


Tinajón

# A Map of CubaPLUS

# Cuba's Endless Summer

*By John Kim*
*Photos: Alejandro Gortázar*
*& Courtesy of Yaima Espinosa*


Cuba has always had a romantic side from the birth of the Mambo and Cha Cha Cha to Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*; Tropicana dancers strutting like glamorous birds and exotic cocktails toasting sultry nights.

Adding a new image to our winter dreams is a group of young women who have formed the Cubanita Surf Team.

From their difficult beginnings, the girls decided to band together in October of 2005 to encourage and spread the sport of surfing amongst women. The Team now includes nine members who hit the water on boogie boards, short boards, and one long board. Most are students, either in high school or at university, and two are dolphin trainers at the Havana Aquarium. They are in touch with fellow surfers from Canada, the U.S., Spain, England, and Australia and are happy to receive gifts of board wax and old surf boards – with each new board going to a new surfer.

Surfing in Cuba is relatively new and started three decades ago with surf boards being fashioned from plywood planks. Now Cuban surf board makers, or "shapers" as they are called, toil in humid workshops in Miramar working with scavenged materials.

Surfers now number around one hundred with hot spots being along the north coast where ocean swells are pushed down by cold fronts from Canada. On occasion, hurricanes and tropical storms sweeping by the island will deliver ocean swells that transform into glorious three metre waves.

There are only 30-40 good surfing days a year but when the weather is right, telephone calls buzz all over Havana telling everyone to head to the ocean.

They come barefooted, on bicycles, and the rare car to the "beaches" at 70th Street in Miramar and in Sante Fé, the sleepy little village with wooden shacks just west of Havana. Neither place has any sand but rather the aptly named *diente de perro* – eroded volcanic rock that is as sharp as "dog's teeth."

With limited surfing sites and few days with good waves, the male surfers dominating the beaches were not always kind to the novice women. The founders of the Cubanitas had to learn on their own and struggled with technique and near drownings until they had achieved a level of competence and the begrudging respect of the male surfers. The Cubanitas are now welcomed and this vibe extends to most visiting surfers.

We spoke with two of the founders: Yaima Espinosa who is a former Cuban windsurfing champion and Gisele Martínez a former member of Cuba's water skiing team. They are both 22 years old and are attending a national sports university.

Cuba**PLUS** *Why did you get into surfing when you were the wind surfing champion of Cuba?*

Yaima –Because surfing was my dream. I love the sea, I love the waves. A lot of times I would be practising my windsurfing and I would see people on the beach catching waves and I would say "Oh, that is really nice" and I would want to try it but my coach and my family said "No, now it is only windsurfing because you want to be the champion."So I said okay. When I started university, I said "Okay, now I am finished. Now I want to try surfing."

*Do you remember the first time you were able to catch a wave?*

Yaima –Well, the first time I stood up it

was great. I dream about it all the time. I stood up for maybe only 5 seconds but I felt something in my heart like a pump and I had to ask "what's going on?" I wanted to do it again after I knew that I could really do it. It was really crazy. When I catch a wave, I feel completely clean and pure – my body, my mind, my heart – like I am born again.

*Did anyone teach you how to surf?*

Yaima –No, no one.

Gisele –We learned alone. They would say, okay, okay, wait until after but then they didn't help.

Yaima –I would go to the beach and into the water and no one would say, "hey, take care with the reef, be careful with that." I didn't care, I just went in. Sometimes I would feel scared when I would look around and see that I was all alone but I didn't care, I wanted to try. And when people saw that I was standing up and that I had learned, people said "Oh, okay, now we can say hello, you are in our community, welcome." This happened after a lot of months. I can say that I am still learning. No one showed me anything, what wave was good, what wave was bad.

Gisele –One time I was boogie boarding and my leash broke and I was under a big wave on 70th St. where the reef is very close. There were a lot of strong currents and I grabbed the reef underwater and I could look up and see the waves coming in. It was beautiful even though I almost drowned.

*Do you have a message for any surfers living outside?*

Yaima –We would like people to come visit us and to help us out. Not just for material things but for cultural reasons and to share their experiences, to make new friends and maybe one day, we can have a big competition. For me that is very important. I know that we need certain things like boards, some wax, all that, but that is not the most important thing. It is more important that people come and teach us, share their experiences, and to be our friends.

Learn more about the Cubanitas at **www.havanasurf-cuba.com**


# The Dos Hermanos

## *Bar- Restaurant*

*By Ciro Bianchi Ross*
*Photos: Alejandro Gortázar*

In 1894, the González brothers from Granada, Spain constructed a building on the port road running in front of the Havana harbour and opened their *Dos Hermanos* or "Two Brothers" bar and restaurant. This beautiful wooden bar soon became popular with locals and visitors alike. The latter included Graham Greene, who was a regular customer during his numerous visits to Havana.

In the 1930's the famous Spanish poet, García Lorca, who hailed from the same home town as the brothers, also visited. More than one Cuban film has used it as a location for some of its scenes.

In the famous Cuban novel by Leonardo Padura, *Fiebre de Caballos* or *Horse Fever*, there is a long passage


where the young protagonist sits in the bar receiving wisdom on growing up while surrounded by drunks and interesting women.

In its heyday the bar was mainly frequented by merchant marine sailors docked at port and, during prohibition, by many Americans including Meyer Lansky.

After the Cuban Revolution, the bar was closed for many years until Habaguanex renovated this famous watering hole in 1994.

If you ask anyone from Havana to mention some of the notable bars in the city, they will surely mention this bar-restaurant. Just a few doors down from the Museum of Rum, the *Dos Hermanos* has been a feature of the Port of Havana for more than a century.

A visit to the bar nowadays still provides the smells of a trip at sea and the ambience of a trip back into the time of literary greats, drunken sailors, and gangsters. The entire bar is made of precious hardwoods and its swinging doors give the place additional character.

The menu, of course, contains many dishes including the always delicious Cuban sandwich but the chef recommends the grilled specials featuring pork, beef and chicken stuffed with ham, cheese and olives.

If you are around the port in Old Havana, don't think twice about making a stop at the *Dos Hermanos*. You will enjoy the experience of visiting a place full of history and don't forget to toast Meyer, Graham, and García.

The *Dos Hermanos* Cocktail

In the cocktail shaker combine:
Crushed ice
6 ounces of pineapple juice
1 ounce of red Curaçao
1 ½ ounces of white rum
Shake and serve in a tall glass garnished with pineapple.

Address: 304 San Pedro between Sol & Santa Clara
Old Havana
Open 8:30 a.m. to Midnight with live music
Telephone: (53-7) 861-3514

# Daysi Granados

# *The Face of Cuban Cinema*

*By Idania Machado*
*Photos: Courtesy ICAIC*

This revered actress recalls her visit to Montreal in 1967 during a tour with a musical review. She would never have imagined that so many years later and in the very same city she would be awarded the *Grand Prix Special des Amériques* for her work in Cuban cinema.

She is one of the few actresses who, at the age of 64, has not undergone plastic surgery. She says she is afraid of operations but deep inside she must think she does not need it. She still has a beautiful and enigmatic face – one of those faces that you don't know why it is beautiful. It may be the eyes or the whole ensemble of features.

Daysi has a sense of grace but she can be a Cuban in the full sense of the word when among her closest friends. To Cuba, she is Daysi Granados, the actress of *Teresa*, and to aficionados she is the "face" of Cuban cinema.

And from this year on she may add another prize to her long list of awards and recognitions: the National Movie Award 2007. She is currently starring in Gabriel García Márquez's *Love's Diatribe Against a Seated Man*, a play she hopes to present in US universities.

*Retrato de Teresa ("Portrait of Teresa,"1979)*

**CubaPLUS** *Are you returning to theatre because you like it or because there is less work in movies for actresses your age?*

**Daysi** –Apart from liking it, theatre is a fundamental school no matter how many years of experience you might have. It is hard but it gives you the chance to experiment, test your voice, your body. I return to it every two or three years so as to stay in touch with the audience and it is better than movies to keep myself in shape.

*What do you demand from a director?*

–That he or she knows what to do or has experience. Whenever I work with a director full of insecurities and indecisions, it makes me feel bad.

*Are you the kind of actress that imposes herself, contributes, or just wants to be guided?*

–I read the script carefully so as not to be blind to what I do but I like to pretend I don't know much, that I am like a little child even when I know things. I think of myself as a malleable person and I can't have an idea of what the movie would be because that is the work of the director. I don't like imposing ideas on people.

*You can reach a state of being completely natural, acting in a way that seems that you are not actually acting. How do you prepare your characters?*

–After reading the script there comes a period during which I centre myself on the relationships that I have with the other characters. But I also like practicing spontaneity. Despite analyzing and having an opinion I like improvisation to come from a basis of some guidelines. Not to come just like that but from a clearly established reason and delivering a performance that is similar to real life. Shirley MacLaine once said in an interview that she sometimes used artificial tears because an actor could not tear herself apart all day on the set. The important thing is not that the actor cries but that the audience thinks that he is crying.

*Memorias del Subdesarrollo ("Memories of theUnderdevelopment," 1967)*

*Daysi with her late husband, Director Pastor Vega*

*Do you do the same thing?*

–Her way to reach her audience is very commendable but I like, even when one has to repeat the scene a thousand times, to reach a climax and if one has to cry, one cries, and if you have to turn ugly, you do it, and you scream if you have to. Anything to reach your goal. I would feel fake if I didn't do it that way. And as an audience I am telling you that you feel it when you fake things. Although there are actors who cry their hearts out and are apparently giving their life to the scene, nobody believes them and they don't move people.

*You started at a very young age with a major role. Did you have any idea of what movies were?*

–I started out in an unusual way. I used to perform in an amateur group at my workplace and was chosen to act in my first movie, *La Decisión*. After that, I started to attend an art school. I was a complete novice in acting and in some ways I was a little irresponsible because I didn't realize how important it was to be a movie actress. I was 19 and I didn't value that there was a team working to achieve an artistic end. Now it is something extraordinary to me. When I worked on *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, which was my third movie, I had a completely different idea.

*How do you get along with young actors and actresses who may have the same level of inexperience that you once had?*

–I understand them because one should never forget that

*With Sergio Corrieri in 1967´s "Memories of the Underdevelopment"*

you were young once and thought you were better than everybody else. I don't like giving advice. I think life will teach them as it did with me. Each one of us must find our own path and way to achieve our goal in work. I don't mean to say that if someone approaches me and asks for my help I would not help, but I don't like to call people and tell them "don't do this."

*You are in Memorias del Subdesarrollo and Retrato de Teresa, two movies very famous in Cuban cinema. Would you have liked being in Strawberry and Chocolate also?*

–Of course, since I only worked with director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea once. I also don't feel bad because he did not call me. Now, I am very glad that there is a movie like that one and that it was so successful so the audience can understand one or two realities of Cuba.

*It is said that actors put their own experiences into their characters. To what extent are there points in common between Daysi and Teresa, your character in the first Cuban movie dealing with the problem of male chauvinism in Cuba that started a whole controversy at the time? You, who had four men in your house, your husband and kids, who are in the movie.*

–All of us actors have the potential to develop any kind of character. I have been a worker, prostitute, doctor … If you don't know where to grab on because it is not a character that you know, you have to do some research but if it is someone as ordinary as Teresa, it is not easier since you have to work hard to give authenticity back to the audience. Actually, after being away from the big screen for some time, because I decided to have children and was completely dedicated to their upbringing, it is with her that I came back. It would not have been the same if I had been single. The kind of fuel I had as a human being and being involved in her type of reality gave me an understanding of her.

*Three of the most regular women in Cuban movies are married to directors and participate in their husbands' movies. So far, in your case, do you consider it was a good thing and what limited you as an actress to always work in Pastor Vega's movies?*

–Every time he would write a script he would think of me. He once said in an interview that he liked creating

*With Adolfo Llauradó in 1979´s "Portrait of Teresa"*

characters that would fit me as fashion designers makes dresses for their models. He knew me more than anybody else; he knew how far I could go. There is even a movie that I am not in because there was no character for me and I wanted to have a part even as an extra and he did not let me.

*How are you handling the lack of roles for people of your age?*

–For many actresses that is a defeat. Almost all the stories are around young actresses. But it does not affect me because I have lived a full life. Aging for me is not a burden or a kind of misfortune. I have reached a very pleasant age. Whenever there is a character I like, I will do it.

*Is it true that acting is scary?*

–That fear consistently exists in life. Even to shoot the first scene you are nervous. If someone tells you the opposite, they are lying. For instance, for me theatre means constant fear.

*How do you handle fame?*

–It is kind of a mixed feeling. It is not that one works to become famous, it is because of a spiritual need, but that leads to fame. If no one praises you, you feel bad, but if they do and it is way beyond what you deserve, you also feel bad because you have no privacy. I have a friend who says that actors struggle to become famous and then when they do become famous they wear dark glasses to not be recognized. Fortunately, in this country the people are very respectful and it does not bother you when people say nice things to you. There are no *paparazzi*. Here you can live a normal life.

*Well, it has been said recently that you are the "face" of Cuban cinema. Do you think it is fair or is it too pretentious?*

–Why wouldn't I like it? It is part of my effort and many other people's efforts. It does not mean that I am the only one. I have participated in key moments of Cuban movies and it is the face that is something symbolic. If someone feels bad for that, I am sorry. I like it, yes, I love it.

*You told me that you have no bigger desires. Not even a new love?*

–I don't know now but maybe when I get to be 79 years old. Love is not just sex. I have many friends that now have become closer to me. I have love, lots of strength in my children, in my grandson, in my audience. I had lots of love. I don't know if I will find another one like that one and I don't want to look for it. What for? Besides, I feel free. Love is also binding. It gives you happiness but also deprives you of many other things. And, as I told you, I am living a very full life with my little crack in my heart. I miss my husband with all my heart. Two of my children do not live in Cuba and I miss them, but I have one here … he is my support. So, I have my sad moments … these tears, not like Shirley MacLaine, are because I lack some things, things I have been deprived of suddenly. They are also tears of happiness because I have had lots of love, 42 years of love.

# By Ferval

*Text by Ilona Hernández*

All of us see the same way but not all of us can see the same thing. This results in some people taking photographs while others can only see the printed image. Fernando Francisco Valdés Álvarez can see what we can't.

There are many Fernando's, he has said, so that is how the name Ferval was born and that is the moniker that is well known to photographers and collectors of photographic art.

He was educated as an engineer in food chemistry and worked in that field until discovering photography. He made his first attempts with a borrowed Russian Zenith camera and he "would shoot everything that moved." He

had his start at *Avance*, the newspaper of the Cuban Navy, where he arrived fully passionate about photography. Following that job, he started as a photo-reporter for the Prensa Latina News Agency where he has worked for the last nine years.

He "saw" the subject he was searching for, in his final test as a photo-reporter, while riding a bus and noticing the collapse of a building. "I got there first, before the firemen, and climbed to places I could only have reached due to my young dare-devilish spirit." Since then, he has not stopped looking for the special moment, "the one giving an idea of the passing of time, not the one which freezes time as it has been in photography since its conception."

He achieves this in the following feature on Santiago de Cuba during the *Fiesta del Fuego* (the Fire Festival) celebrated every year in July. "I was suffering from conjunctivitis at the time and it bothered me a lot but I just relied on my instinct," said Ferval.

He was able to capture the dancers, musicians, colours, rhythm, and all the energy of this Caribbean celebration in the most Caribbean of all Cuban cities. Artists and participants from more than ten countries take part in this festival. Let's take a look.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de Cuba

# The Return of the Spectacular Caribbean Mulatto Girls

*By Héctor Miranda / Photos: Prensa Latina*

*Coaches Luis Felipe Calderón and Eugenio George with the team.*

When the Cuban women's volleyball team defeated Brazil 3-2 in the final of the recent Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, they revived the belief of their fans who dreamt of their return to glory that they had a decade ago when they wre known as the "Spectacular Caribbean Mulatto Girls."

When the team finally came together, the Cuban girls showed what they were capable of for the first time in 1978 when they won the World Championship in what is today known as Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Led by trainer Eugenio George, the Cubans ended the long time rule of the Japanese team, known until then as the "Magical Girls from the Orient," but they were stopped right there. Players like Mercedes Pérez, Mercedes Pomares, Lucilla Urgellés, Nelly Barnet, Ana María García, and Imilsis Téllez could not climb the podium at the Olympics in Moscow and left a gap that another generation of players would have to close later on.

Cuba was absent at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles 1984 and Seoul 1988 but returned to Barcelona 1992 with a team full of talent and a fierce desire to win. Coached by Eugenio George and Antonio Perdomo, the experienced and ambitious team consisted of Mireya Luis, Magaly Carvajal, Regla Bell, Mercedes Calderón, Josefina Ofarril, and Lily Izquierdo. They were joined by the promising Regla Torres, a middle hitter who would make history in the years to come.

About this team, Mireya Luis, the indisputable world volleyball star, some years later said: "We were a family. An ambitious family that dreamt of winning it all and that never thought it was impossible. We would get on the court to have fun. To have fun we knew we had to win and we were convinced of winning even when sometimes we started the game behind. That was a great team."

What happened in Barcelona was just the beginning and they were joined for Atlanta 1996 – now coached by Antonio Perdomo – by Ana Ibis Fernández, Idalmis Gato, and Marlenis Costa.

The second gold medal arrived in Atlanta and another in Sydney 2000 with Regla Torres being declared Best Player of the 20th Century by the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB).

*Mireya Luis, former player and now on Cuba´s Olympic Committee.*

*Yumilka Ruiz, captain of the gold medal team at this year´s Pan Am games.*



*Regla Torres, FIVB´s Player of the Century.*

Some other players were cast as rising new stars such as Yumilka Ruiz and Zoila Barros. They started their journey with the return of Eugenio George, who was declared the best coach of the 20th Century by the FIVB and who was the main catalyst of all the Cuban team's triumphs.

To those three Olympic prizes in the 90's, the Cuban team added two World Championships in Brazil 1994 and Japan 1998.

There are not many teams that could collect so many trophies in a 10 year period and give so much joy to their fans but all good things must come to an end. The retirement of some of the best stars initiated the decline of the powerful Cuban team and they had to resign themselves with a third place finish at the Athens 2004 competition.

George ended his term as head coach and was replaced by Luis Felipe Calderón, although he still remained on the coaching team. So began a rebuilding period that brought its first results during the recent Pan American Games.

In Río de Janeiro, Antonio Perdomo returned as the team coach and was assisted by George. Players Rosir Calderón, Nancy Carrillo, and Daymí Ramírez started to shine and the team, and their fans, look forward to more glory at the Beijing Games in 2008.


# The Trade Bridge between Cuba and the World

*By Madelín Murguía Delgado / Photos: Courtesy of the Canadian Embassy in Cuba*

The Havana International Fair (FIHAV) is the largest commercial event in the country and brings together business people from all five continents.

Business people, manufacturers and traders will once again gather at the Havana International Fair (FIHAV) taking place at EXPOCUBA, on the outskirts of the city.

This year's event celebrates its 25th anniversary and will take place from November 5 to 10. Representatives from Germany, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, South Korea, Dominican Republic, Chile, China, Spain, Iran, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Panama, Russia and Venezuela have confirmed their participation.

There are also some planned attendees from different Chambers of Commerce, representatives of unions, and high level delegations headed by governmental ministers.

FIHAV will host rounds of negotiations and commercial meetings between representatives from different regions that will become a commercial bridge between nations - these prospects will develop new businesses and markets.

Sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Cuba, and the Havana Convention Centre (*Palacio de Convenciones*), FIHAV has become the annual meeting ground for international business.

Created as a general trade fair, it includes machinery, technology, consumer goods, raw materials, and services. As with every Fair, prizes will be awarded by the organizing committee to the participating

institutions. One of the prizes is the *Giraldilla*, a symbol of the city of Havana, which is given in different categories such as modular stand design, free design, joint firms, country pavillion, and participation. There is also the Gold Medal awarded for product quality, product design and advertising.

The Fair always has a positive influence on the promotion of Cuban exports as well as strengthening the ties between commercial partners.

During last year's event, some 1,125 companies from 48 countries showed their products and services at the fair and trade negotiation figures reached CDN$ 500 million.


*The entrance to the Canadian Pavilion.*

Over 50 Canadian companies and organizations from all sectors were represented in the Canada Pavilion at FIHAV 2006. The Canada Pavilion was awarded an honourable mention for stand design during the official awards ceremony and received considerable local press coverage during the week-long event.


*Robert Déry, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of Global Operations and Associate Chief Trade Commissioner, at the opening of the Canadian Pavilion. To his right are Alexandra Bugailiskis, former Canadian Ambassador to Cuba and presently Assistant Deputy Minister and Executive Coordinator, Americas Strategy, Raúl de la Nuez, Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade, and Pedro Álvarez, President & C.E.O. of ALIMPORT.*

# Tinajón's Water

*By Heidy González Cabrera*

As if yawning with sleep, the *tinajón* opens its mouth and shows its uniqueness amongst the family of pots. These large earthenware pots are of great appeal for their beauty and will always be connected back to the Province of Camagüey.

Artisans say that this jar has its origins in the Andalusia region of southern Spain and was brought to Cuba by Spanish potters who settled in the town of *Puerto Príncipe*, the original name for Camagüey. The jars were first used to store grain, wine, oil and other liquids but soon became receptacles to gather water.

Although *tinajones* were made on a large scale in the eastern region of Cuba since the 17th century, they are not endemic solely to that area. Its benefits and ornamental beauty were put to good use in other places throughout Cuba such as in Trinidad and Sancti Spíritus.

Even now in the age of refrigerators and freezers, you can still find *tinajones* in Camagüeyan homes. Not only are they used as ornaments in gardens and patios but also for storing the water that is offered to visitors with the friendly warning that "if you drink water from a *tinajón*, you will stay in Camagüey."

The original design has changed little with the passing of time but it has kept the classic shape that all Cubans know: a large belly, bordered geometric lines, and an almond shaped top. The larger ones are located in inner courtyards or at the entrances to houses and, most of the time, with plants and flowers rising from their mouths.

Those same large mouths, their main characteristic since the advent of these pots, have inspired legends of forbidden love affairs – young lovers, who to escape getting caught, would find safe haven inside the big belly of the *tinajones*.

There are other stories like the one from 1875 when a *Mambí* soldier (member of the liberation army fighting against Spanish rule on the island) left the jungle to go see his sick infant son in town. While walking through the San Juan de Dios Square, he was discovered by Spanish troops and led them on a chase until finding refuge inside a *tinajón*.

All the stories may be true or pure fantasy but what is true is that the great size of these jars made imaginations fly.

The design of the *tinajón* has been preserved from generation to generation despite the change in styles of decoration and the use of clay. But time hasn't changed the artistic notion outlined by the first *tinajones* – it remains unmoved and "yawning" for centuries.


# *NG La Banda*

## The Symbol of Cuban *Timba*

*By Beatriz Fernández*
*Photos: Roberto Bello & Lourdes Nogueira*

When José Luis Cortés, aka "*El Tosco*," founded NG La Banda in 1988, he was creating a band that would make history and place Cuban music back in charge of *Salsa*, the music that was almost taken over by musicians from New York and other parts of the Caribbean. Not only was the new sound distinctive but the name as well.

NG, meaning *Nueva Generación* (New Generation), arrived with new concepts and a new way to charge up an audience. Like many new things, it was received with skepticism by some, rejection by others, but acceptance by many.

Destined to become the vanguard of Cuban *Salsa* in the '90s, they had been preceded by Juan Formell's Los Van Van (founded in 1969) and their new sound; the virtuosity of Irakere (founded in 1973) with the great

*José Luis "El Tosco" Cortés.*

Chucho Valdés that could play both great *Salsa* dance music and world class Latin jazz; and Adalberto Alvarez with Son 14. NG rescued popular Cuban music from oblivion and took it to places as faraway as Japan. The main architect of this awakening of popular Cuban music and the drive for international recognition in the late 20th century was the young Cortés.

Graduate of the flute at the prestigious National Arts School and a virtuoso of his instrument, he acquired all the skills for success. He gained enormous experience from his time as a member of Los Van Van and Irakere. When the former developed a respectable brass section, there was *El Tosco*. He was later asked by Chucho Valdéz to play the baritone sax and he helped compose and arrange songs that became famous. He has said several times that NG has characteristics from both of those bands and that after being a member of them, anything could happen.

Now, back to history. In the 1990's, Cuba began to open up for tourism and several new dance and concert spaces were opened for popular bands to play for locals and the ever growing number of visiting tourists. This fact is considered to be a catalyst for the boom of a new form of Cuban *Salsa* later to become known as *Timba*.

*Javier Zalba, El Tosco, Maraca and Germán Vélasco.*

NG initiated this golden period that saw the birth of so many important bands that competed with each other resulting in a flourish of creativity and popularity.

From that time emerged Paulo FG y Su Élite, el Médico de la Salsa, la Charanga Habanera, Klímax, Dan Den, Yumurí y sus hermanos, and many others. Some were musical geniuses while others used charisma to cover up deficiencies in their performances.

But NG was the most aggressive group both musically and on stage. The members of the brass section, with only trumpets and saxophones and no trombones, were known as the "Metals of Terror." Those people were all stars: Carlos Averoff and Germán Velazco, José Murguía, José Manuel "El Greco" Crego, Elpidio Chappotín, Adalberto Laras, Rolando Pérez Pérez, Rafael Jens, José Luis Nuñez, José Hernández, and others.

Despite all of the above, the talent of the musicians and the band's worth was sometimes questioned by their lyrics. Yes, *Salsa* can sometimes be simple and catchy (with the exception of Panamanian Rubén Blades who was able to mix poetry and depth into his lyrics while remaining popular) but the hits from the 1990's were a borderline case between popular and vulgar. At times the lyrics were prosaic and caused angry responses. One has to remember that in those times of Cuban social and economic hardships, many mainstream critics claimed that some of the lyrics were overly crude when they were only referring to controversial topics that the audiences felt comfortable with and that reflected their reality.

**Cortés or *Tosco*?**

José Luis Cortés' nickname, "*Tosco*," means rough and rude and was earned by him, so the story goes, during his student years because of the bulky Russian military boots he used to wear. He was born in a poor area of Santa Clara, in the central part of the island, and started in music since he could not become a fisherman as he wanted. In later years he would not regret having made this choice.

Paradoxically, *Tosco*'s last name, Cortés, means kind, attentive and caring. Many who know him personally know that he is more like his last name than his *nom de guerre*. At some moments he looked disrespectful and a little eccentric in his dress code, especially in his youth, but he is essentially authentic. He likes to talk in sayings and is quite clever. He has not only permeated Cuban culture with his musical legacy but he has also been a supporter of new projects and helps in the development of young talent. As an example, he created the Cortes group of young flute students sponsored by him.

**NG no longer rules**

These days, *Timba* is no longer dominating the Cuban musical environment. Instead, there is that pop fusion of genres and complex rhythms from all over this globalized world – *Reggaeton* is what people seem to like the most. But *Timba* is the common denominator in everything being produced.

NG has kept to their own style and has suffered the loss of many of its founders. Some created their own bands or joined others and some live outside of Cuba. One has to mention its longtime singer Toni Calá, NG's voice, and its great bass player Feliciano Arango.

**What is *Timba*?**

It is the Cuban way of performing *Salsa* with more elements from the rhythms of *Rumba* than *Son*. It does have some elements of *Son* but it is also nourished by popular dance music and *Yoruba* styles. You will hear a lot of rhythms in the percussion, many complex changes in the piano and bass arrangements, and the brass section excels with complicated solos.

But NG La Banda is not just history. The genius of *Tosco* is restless and will someday provide another break-out success.

## Glossary

### From the *Music Dictionary*, by Helio Orovio

**Son:** Vocal and dance genre that constitutes one of the basic rhythms in Cuban music. It has elements from African – mainly Bantu – and Spanish music but already melded into Cuban music.

**Rumba:** Dance and vocal genre born from African-Spanish roots, especially by the African one in its rhythm.

**Yoruba Music:** Expression of singing, dance and percussion originated from the Yoruba people who were brought to Cuba between the 16th and 19th centuries.

*The Camerata Cortés, Tosco´s youth chamber group.*

# A Walk Through Old Havana

**A great way to spend an afternoon in Havana is walking through Old Havana. There are literally hundreds of interesting places to see and visit but here are a few of our favourites.**


Start at the Artisans Fair near the main Cathedral Plaza. From Wednesday to Saturday, you will find hundreds of vendors selling wood carvings, jewelry, clothing, and oil paintings – the latter covering every style imaginable and they are very inexpensive. Make sure to ask for a customs stamp on the back of the painting to avoid problems when you leave Cuba.

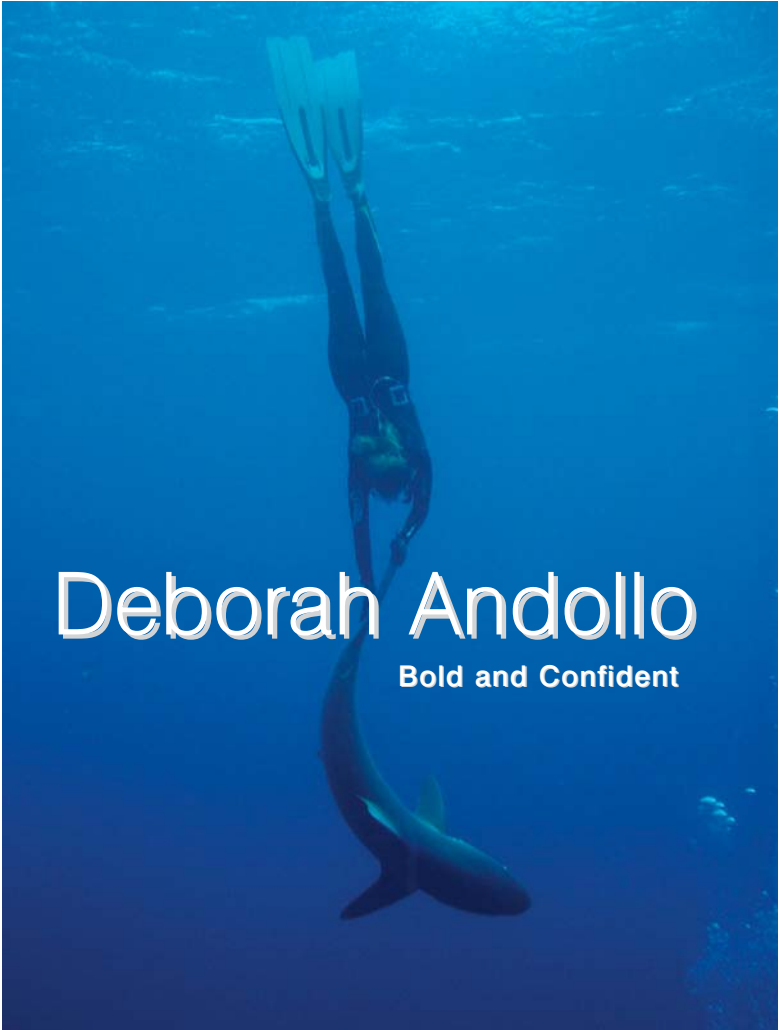

Meander through the Plaza de San Francisco and over to Plaza Vieja, one of the oldest public squares in Havana. At the far corner, you will find the Taberna de la Muralla (Calle San Ignacio at the corner of Muralla). This is a brew pub making great Austrian lager. If you are in a group, make sure to order one of the beer "torres" or towers which holds about 5 pints of beer.


Walk north along San Ignacio to the corner of Amargura to the Hotel Raquel and have a drink in the lobby bar with its incredible vaulted ceiling capped by a stained glass skylight. Pictured is Hanoi, one of our favourite bartenders, and honeymooners Adam and Tatiana enjoying their amazing classic Mojitos.



Keep walking north until you get to Obispo. Wander along the street and check out some of the shops on the way. At the west end, Obispo ends at Central Park where all the baseball fanatics gather. Cross the street and check out the Ingleterra Hotel and the roof top bar for some amazing views.


You can peek into the Grand Teatro and the Capitolio next door. If you want a break from Cuban food, walk past and behind the Capitolio a few blocks until you get to Havana's Chinatown at Zanja Street. Walk through the gates and down the row of restaurants until you get to Tien Tan. The Shanghai born manager produces great Chinese food including fish, lobster and sweet and sour chicken balls with home-made sauce. The lovely and charming waitresses provide great service.


Deborah Andollo
Bold and Confident

*By Lemay Padron Oliveros*
*Photos: Courtesy of Deborah Andollo*

Deborah tosses a few coins into the depths of the ocean calling for the protection of Yemaya, the Afro-Cuban goddess of the sea. She asks for permission to enter her domain and to return victorious. She takes some mouthfuls of air and with the last and deepest one she starts her dive towards a new world record. That was the competition routine of this athlete who first started swimming at the age of four and synchronized swimming at 11. Maybe she was destined for the Big Blue since her birth at the Havana naval hospital, overlooking the waters of the Caribbean Sea.

She spent 12 years in synchronized swimming until the summer of 1991 at which time she started to practice this highly specialized form of diving, a sport that had fascinated her since she first became an athlete.

She started training at depth in February 1992 taking advantage of her 6 litre pulmonary capacity and, as early as May of that year, she registered her first world record. Since then there have been 15 apnea records with her favorites being her numerous free diving marks.

Nowadays, Deborah is the President of the Cuban Federation of Underwater Activities (FCAS) and has been since its creation in February 2006 and is a member of the American Area for the World Underwater Federation (CMAS).

"There are many things we wish to do but we lack the support. Almost everything has been done thanks to the efforts of athletes and trainers. We have the knowledge and the qualified personnel but we are talking about a very expensive sport. During the time I was competing we had much more support," said Andollo.

Regarding the current state of diving in her country, she said: "Right now Cuba is doing pretty well. We have two girls with strong performances who were champions in the Pan American competition and we intend for them to participate in the world competition."

During her time as a competitor she got to know many beautiful places in the Cuban sea and, according to her, she still likes to visit such places as Cayo Esquivel, Villa Clara, and Banco de Jagua, in Cienfuegos. She considers herself very fortunate for having been in such impressive places like Cayo Largo del Sur and Jardines de la Reina: "I have had wonderful experiences there with the beauty of the ecosystem and the people working there."

As for the rest of the world, she dreams about the waters off the Egyptian resort of Sharm El Shaik and in other great places in the Red Sea. Despite her many wonderful experiences in exotic locales, she has a very important message for all those who would like to start in this sport: "It is very dangerous to dive alone; it is an irresponsible way of doing it since one can find a lot of danger out in the sea and the best way to start diving is first taking care of yourself.

Fatal accidents have occurred in this sport because athletes take chances without the proper safety measures. I am sure that having taken the proper measures nobody would have died."

Another important aspect of her present life is her ecological work that starts at home: "I eat fish, but my sensibility prevents me from fishing. I suffer when seeing underwater fishing. I have seven dogs at home and I already have problems with them since I don't have all the time to take care of them. My life has always been surrounded by animals and plants."

**CubaPLUS** *Does Deborah consider herself a bold person?*

**Deborah** –I do consider myself a bold person, in life and sport. It all started at an early age. I think that the attraction I felt towards the sea was always stronger than the fear. I remember two times I almost drowned and people got me, exhausted, out of the water. I used to follow my father into the open sea and I would either sink or hurt my feet with sea urchins but I would keep trying.

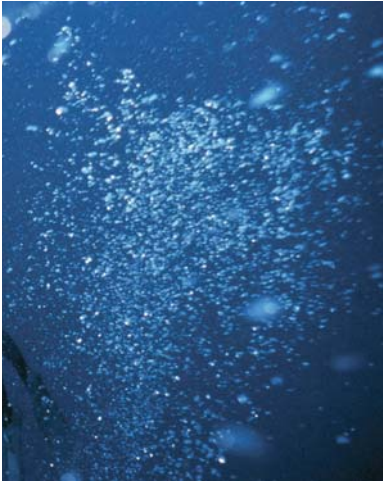
*And confident?*

–One is constantly facing challenges and if I weren't bold and, at the same time, confident, I would not have attained many of the goals that I have reached as an athlete and leading the FCAS. Failure is definitely not in my vocabulary.


**Full Name:** Déborah Andollo López
**Date of Birth:** May 9, 1967
**Pulmonary capacity:** 6 liters
**Static Apnea:** 06:04 min.
**For more information:** www.deborahandollo.com

**World Records:**

**50 m**, Free Diving, May 1992, Varadero
**60 m**, Constant Weight, Nov 1992, Isla de la Juventud
**52 m**, Free Diving, May 1993, Varadero
**61 m**, Constant Weight, June 1993, Cayo Largo
**80 m**, Variable Weight, Feb 1994, Isla de la Juventud
**60 m**, Free Diving, May 1994, Isla de la Juventud
**85 m**, Variable Weight, Nov 1995, Isla de la Juventud
**110 m**, No Limits, May 1996, Isla de la Juventud
**62 m**, Constant Weight, Oct 1996, Sardinia, Italy
**90 m**, Variable Weight, July 1997, Sardinia, Italy
**65 m**, Constant Weight, Dec 1997, Isla de la Juventud
**95 m**, Variable Weight, July 2000, Parghelia, Italy
**115 m**, No Limits, July 2000, Parghelia, Italy
**74 m**, Free Diving, July 2001, Isla de la Juventud
**100 m**, Free Diving, July 2002, Giglio Island, Italy



### Information on Apnea

Deep apnea is the voluntary ability to hold one's breath diving to reach the lowest depth in the water. It is divided into four categories:

### Constant Weight:

The free-diver descends and ascends using his or her fins/monofin and with the use of their arms without pulling on the rope or changing ballast; only a single hold of the rope to stop the descent and start the ascent is allowed.

### Free Diving:

The free-diver dives under water without the use of propulsion equipment, but only by pulling on the rope during descent and ascent.

### Variable Weight:

The free-diver descends with the help of a ballast weight and ascends using his or her strength: arms and legs, either by pulling or not pulling on the rope.

### No Limit:

The free-diver descends with the help of a ballast weight and ascends via a method of their choice. No limit is the absolute depth discipline. Going down with a sled and going back up with a balloon, a diving suit or a vest with inflatable compartments or whatever other means.

*The painter and founder of the Callejón, Salvador González.*

# An Alley *with a Feeling*


*By Antonia Fernández*
*Photos: Ferval*

Seventeen years ago, artist Salvador González started painting Afro-Cuban motifs on the walls of a run down alleyway in Havana. That is essentially how the *Callejón de Hamel*, or Hamel's Alley, was reborn, transforming into a place of colour and feeling. This was appropriate because in the 1940's and 50's, one of the houses in the area was owned by the famous Cuban singer Tirso Díaz. His home was a meeting place for singers and songwriters who, together with Tirso's sons, founded a new style of Cuban music called *filin*. This passionate and emotional way of singing was named after the English word "feeling" and has produced several classic songs known worldwide. It may even be that this small street has the power to inspire. Salvador González certainly believed that.

As a dreamer, he says that he was following the Yoruba saying: "Unhappy is the man who does not listen to the rocks whistling to him."

"I listened to the whistling and the singing of this alley," said Salvador.

He shows his work – a mixture of cubism, expressionism, surrealism, baroque and primitive styles – at his studio-gallery named "Merceditas Valdés" located in the alley. He is not worried that people will think that he is kitschy.

"As a creator, I am self-taught and didn't study in any academy. I mix and I have created my own style. I used to work with leather and metals but I needed another way to express my art and I decided to start my work on the walls of the alley in April 1990."

His international career blossomed after that with a vast program of exhibitions, murals and sculptures. The great mural in the alley is nourished by the lives of the neighbors making it that much more appealing to visitors. Now Salvador has finished another mural on the corner of San Rafael and Hospital Streets, close to Hamel's.

While fascinating on its own, the unique aspect of the alley is the gathering of *rumberos*, or rumba musicians and dancers, which takes place every Sunday afternoon. Anyone who wants to experience what Cuban dance really is must go there. There is never enough space to contain so much joy.

Rumba is a very old style which emerged from the western region of Cuba, mainly in the province of Matanzas, and the urban areas of the Cuban capital. It is a music that originated amongst poor blacks, alienated people who found in this rhythm a way of expressing themselves. It has an irreverent character and three variations of music and dance: the *Guaguancó*, *Columbia*, and *Yambú*.

The *Yambú* is slow and the movements are less aggressive. The *Columbia* is faster and only danced by men and, finally, the *Guaguancó* is pure sensuality and is a dance of conquest. It is synonymous with rhythm, sweat, flirtatiousness, and passion.

To understand Rumba better, we can look to a verse from a poem by Nicolas Guillen, Cuba's greatest folk poet. He created a metaphor for the drum saying: "Even the most refined man in the room answers my call."

And before the drums of the *Callejón de Hamel*, no one escapes or is left unmoved. As Cubans like to say, we all have at least a little piece of us ready for joy and rumba provides all you can handle.

Salvador González Studio
Every day from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
1054 *Callejón de Hamel*
between Aramburu & Hospital
Central Havana

Rumba Sunday
12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m.

Childrens' Theatre
September to June, Third Saturday of the month,
10:00 a.m.

Tea With ...
Last Friday of the month, 9:00 p.m.

Street Theatre
Fourth Thursday of the month, 7:00 p.m.

# The Centenary
# *Guayabita*

The Guayabita del Pinar is already more than a hundred years old. This liquor with an excellent flavour and bouquet is named after one of the ingredients, a small fruit growing wild in the mountains of Pinar del Río, the westernmost province of Cuba. It is made in small batches in the traditional way, with skilled artisans perfecting the flavour and blend.

Before the turn of the last century, the Spanish liquor maker Lucio Garay settled in the capital of the province to begin producing spirits. He wasn't satisfied with the flavours he had created and was determined to make it better. He tried anisette and cinnamon and other ingredients until turning to the Guayabita, a local fruit used by the peasants of the area. It was a very small guava, growing on a 1.5 m high bush and just slightly bigger than a chickpea. After numerous tests, he discovered the perfect formula for the two versions of his product, dry and sweet. It was 1892 and Garay's liquor became famous under the name Guayabita del Pinar.

This unique spirit can be enjoyed in cocktails but the makers recommend having the sweet version chilled and served straight up. It is a drink that will remind you of Pinar del Río and will always encourage a second round.


## Fábrica de Bebidas Casa Garay

Isabel Rubio Sur No. 189
Between Ceferino Fernández & Frank País
Pinar del Río
Tel: (53-48) 75-0892
Admission: Currently free for tours and tastings
Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

*Wood carving of a Ferminia bird.*

# The Flavour of *La Ferminia*

*By Ciro Bianchi Ross*
*Photos: Alejandro Gortázar*

The Ferminia is a bird found exclusively in the Zapata Swamp on the south coast of Cuba but you can find one in the island's capital. This one is not a bird but a luxurious restaurant specializing in Cuban and international cuisine that has attracted Havana's food lovers for the excellence of its menu and service.

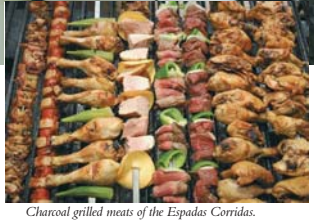
Reading the menu can be a challenge for even the most demanding palate. Let's just imagine a starter salad of smoked salmon with capers and pineapple, followed by a Cuban style breaded lobster as a main dish. Or maybe a combination of lobster, shrimps, mussels, fish fillet, chicken and beef with steamed vegetables that makes up the mixed grill platter of the house. Add your favorite wine from their extensive list and, for desert, a *Bourdalux* cake or a biscuit glazed with fruits with a chocolate sauce for a memorable meal.

La Ferminia is a place where Cuban and international cuisine go together. They have rescued dishes from Cuba's lexicon of historical cuisine and offer them alongside the best of the more modern dishes. The offer for vegetarians is quite appealing. There is a great demand for dishes like the cannelloni stuffed with fresh vegetables as well as for the vegetable stews of the season.

For meat lovers, there is a new and very reasonable offer in the garden patio called *Espadas Corridas*, or the "Running Swords." Grilled on a large outdoor charcoal barbecue, various meats are brought on the skewer and served onto your plate. The first sword has chicken livers wrapped in bacon. The next one has different types of sausages. The next is chicken followed by pork. The last is beef and before you can finish that, the friendly waiters are there asking if you want to repeat any or all of the swords. The offer comes with

*The Cubabella Cocktail.*

*Alexei Agulla, Head Cuisine Instructor.*



*Charcoal grilled meats of the Espadas Corridas.*

**Sta Avenida, No. 18207, at the corner of 184 Street, Playa, Havana**
**Tel: (53-7) 273-6786 & 273-6555 / feminia@ehtsergioperez.co.cu**
**Hours: Noon to Midnight**
***Espadas Corridas* - CUC$ 12.99 per person, Offered most evenings - call ahead if there is rain**

different sauces, a fresh salad sprinkled with Parmesan cheese, and either potatoes or a similar Cuban vegetable. After all this food you should reserve some space for the dessert included with your meal – a lemon cake, caramel flan or an ice cream cake.

La Feminia is located in an eclectic and stylish former home. The original works of art, from important Cuban painters increases the distinction and elegance of this restaurant furnished with spacious private rooms, a patio surrounded by vegetation, and an extensive wine cellar.

Among the offers are *à la carte* lunches and dinners, executive dinners, buffets, banquets, cocktails, and wedding parties.

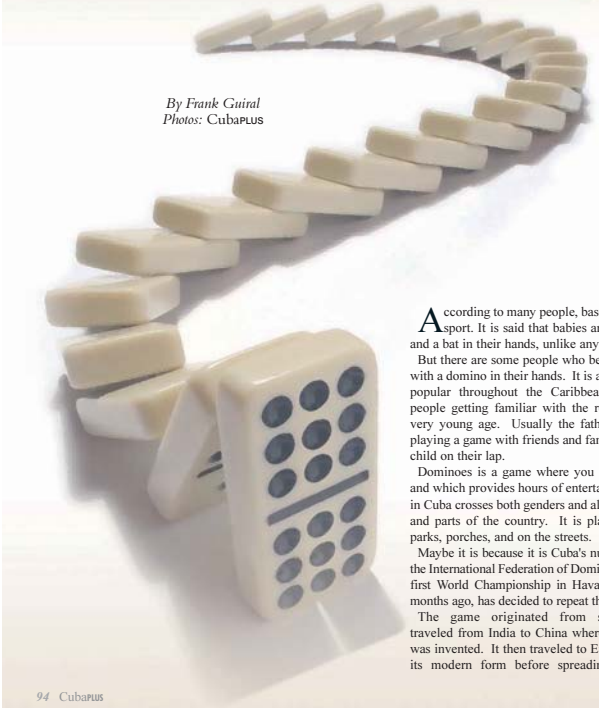
There also many options from the bar. I would recommend the Cubabella, an appealing cocktail that combines white and aged rum.

*The White Salon.*

Customs and Traditions

# Dominoes, Cuba's National Pastime

*By Frank Guiral*
*Photos:* CubaPLUS



According to many people, baseball is Cuba's national sport. It is said that babies are born with a baseball and a bat in their hands, unlike any other country.

But there are some people who believe that babies come with a domino in their hands. It is a game that is also very popular throughout the Caribbean islands with many people getting familiar with the rectangular pieces at a very young age. Usually the father is the first teacher, playing a game with friends and family at home with their child on their lap.

Dominoes is a game where you can make new friends and which provides hours of entertainment. Its popularity in Cuba crosses both genders and all races, ages, religions, and parts of the country. It is played in homes, public parks, porches, and on the streets.

Maybe it is because it is Cuba's number one pastime that the International Federation of Dominoes decided to hold its first World Championship in Havana in 2003 and, some months ago, has decided to repeat the visit.

The game originated from six sided dice that traveled from India to China where the double sided tile was invented. It then traveled to Europe where it took on its modern form before spreading to the Caribbean.

Originally made from bone or ivory, they are now usually made of plastic or hardwoods, like local cedar or ebony.

In the eastern region of the island, people prefer playing with 28 pieces, from the "white" or zero tile to the largest which has six dots. Usually four people play together in teams of two and each player has seven pieces. The alternative way is in a *guerra* or "war" where everyone plays on their own.

In Havana, however, people prefer playing with tiles that go from zero to nine dots, with a set totaling 55 pieces. This makes the game more complicated since rivals take 10 pieces each leaving 15 out of play. In team play, the individual who plays all their pieces or finishes the round with the lowest amount of points on their tiles wins. The winning team scores the points on their opponent's unplayed tiles and the first team to 100 points wins the game.

The game has its own special language with a shut–out being called a *pollo*, signifying the round "egg" or zero points scored by the team. And there is nothing better than winning with a *pollona*, or a "big chicken" where you score more than a hundred points and win in the first game.

The term *fresca*, or "fresh" is often said when a tile with a new number is added to the table – something good players usually avoid.

Beginners and many Canadians are accused of being *bota gordas* for dumping the big tiles instead of playing strategically with their partners. The term is usually said as a friendly insult, especially if the beginner had the luck to win! It certainly isn't any fun for an experienced player to lose against a *bota gorda* but they can be very difficult to play against since there isn't a lot of logic or strategy behind their moves.

In Cuba there is a famous story of a domino game with a sad ending. It happened to a woman who wanted to end the game with a double three but someone played out before it was her turn. The disappointment was said to have killed her. The tiles making up her last game were recreated on her tombstone in Havana's famous Colón Cemetery.

Dominoes may appear to be a simple game of matching tiles but it is really a game of intricate strategy, mathematics, and intuition. For this reason, it is played by more people than baseball and remains Cuba's national pastime.

# Hasta pronto!

**Alejandro Gortázar** was born in Havana in 1973. He began taking photographs in 1994 as a hobby and graduated from the University of Havana in 1995.

He started working as a freelance photographer in 1999 and, in that year, presented his exhibition *Faros Guardianes de las Aguas* ("Lighthouses, Guardians of the Waters") at the Morro Castle in Havana. He has also exhibitted in Spain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

This picture shows one of the most impressive sights of Havana with a ship leaving its harbour. Many photographers are attracted to this spot for the beauty of the sunsets and Cubans like to sit on the seawall to enjoy the magical ambience of the light and the city.

Alejandro has been a staff photographer for **CubaPLUS** since its inception. He is currently working on a book on lighthouses in Cuba but his main photographic interest lies in capturing nature at its best. He uses a Nikon D2X camera

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