Cuban Culture

LITERATURE, ART, HISTORY AND POLITICS

with Judith White
29 March–13 April 2015 (16 days)
Cuban Culture

For 500 years Cuba has been at the centre of European discovery of the New World, and it remains the great melting pot where Spain meets Africa. Its national identity was forged in poetry, dance and song, and its greatest hero was the writer-warrior Jose Marti.

Cuba is now opening its doors wide to overseas visitors. Your tour begins with an exploration of Old Havana, its colonial architecture, first-class museums and lively cultural scene. Then travel the length of the island to Santiago, the ultimate Caribbean city.

Cuba’s economic poverty is offset by the exuberance of its people and their music. Your itinerary offers a wide range of cultural experiences, with time to relax and take in the allure of this most vibrant of islands.

At a glance

• Explore the wonders of Old Havana, a UNESCO world heritage site
• Discover Cuba’s blend of Hispanic, African and indigenous cultures
• Visit historic colonial towns and tropical landscape throughout the island
• Experience music and dance in Santiago, the ultimate Caribbean city
• Examine the legacy of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the 1959 Revolution

TOUR LEADER
Judith White

Judith White is a former executive director of the Art Gallery Society. She holds a BA (Hons) in modern history and a postgraduate degree in Latin American studies, both from Oxford University, and is a Spanish speaker.

**Itinerary**

**Sun 29 March 2015**  
Australia to Mexico City  
Suggested departure from Sydney on Qantas via Los Angeles or Dallas Fort Worth, connecting with American Airlines to Mexico City to arrive late evening on the same day. Transfer to the airport hotel for your overnight stay.

**Mon 30 Mar**  
Mexico City – Havana  
Early morning flight from Mexico City to Havana to arrive early in the afternoon. On arrival you will be met by your tour leader and transferred to your hotel. Early evening welcome drinks and briefing followed by dinner at a local restaurant and a talk by a lecturer from the University of Havana. 🍷 🍽️

**Tue 31 Mar**  
Historic Havana, Havana  
Begin your Havana stay with a walking tour of Old Havana, a UNESCO world heritage site and the best-preserved colonial city in the Americas. You will meet a local historian and a leading architect, and visit the city museum housed in a superb baroque palacio (subject to renovations).

Lunch in a local restaurant. In the afternoon visit the neighbourhood committee of Central Havana with the opportunity to talk to locals and see how they operate schools, medical centres and food shops. Then take a classic car sightseeing tour including the Jose Martí house and the Martí monument at the Plaza de la Revolución, to learn about the writer, a national hero who was killed in 1895 during the war of independence against Spain. 🍽️

**Wed 1 Apr**  
Fine Art and Cabaret, Havana  
Following a morning talk, visit the National Museum of Fine Art (Bellas Artes) which houses an outstanding collection of Cuban and international art, housed in two superb buildings, and is widely considered the best art gallery in the Caribbean. The Cuban collection, displayed over three floors, embraces colonial and contemporary art, while the international collection ranges from classical to modern and includes a surprising number of European Old Masters. Following lunch by your own arrangements browse the exceptional arts and crafts market of San José right behind the museum then take a Cocotaxi ride to visit the Anthropology Museum of the University of Havana with its remarkable collection.

Enjoy a cocktail in the gardens of the Hotel Nacional before dining at one of Havana’s favourite private restaurants La Guarida, location of the famous Cuban film ‘Fresa y Chocolate’ (Strawberry and Chocolate), nominated for an Oscar in 1992.

Following dinner head to the world-famous Tropicana cabaret to enjoy Cuban music and dance performed by a cast of more than 200 in a tropical garden setting. 🍹 🍽️

**Thu 2 Apr**  
Havana – Santiago de Cuba  
Morning flight from Havana to Santiago de Cuba, Cuba’s second city, the capital of Oriente province and centre of Afro-Caribbean culture.

Following an afternoon at leisure, dine locally and call in at the vibrant Casa de la Trova for an evening of music and dance. 🎶 🔵

**Fri 3 Apr**  
Santiago through the centuries, Santiago de Cuba  
Begin the day visiting the 16th century Diego Velázquez house, built by the city’s founder, Santiago cathedral, the birthplace of the poet José María Heredia and the Santa Ifi genia cemetery where Jose Martí is buried. Take a tour of the Emilio Bacardi museum, founded by the rum baron in the late 19th century and now housing Santiago’s best collection of art as well as a history section that includes many of Martí’s belongings.

After lunch on Santiago bay, drive to the 17th century fortress of San Pedro at the entrance to the bay, where Spain lost the key naval battle of the independence war in 1898, and view the Moncada barracks attacked by Fidel Castro in 1953 at the start of the revolutionary war.

Dinner at your hotel. 🍽️ 🔵 🔵
Sat 4 Apr  Popular culture in Santiago, Santiago de Cuba
Following a morning talk, visit the Centro Cultural Africano, named after the writer Fernando Ortíz who pioneered the analysis of Afro-Cuban traditions, and examine its collection of African art and objects. Then progress to the House of Popular Religions to learn more about Santería, the Cuban belief system that unites West African and Caribbean traditions, and conclude your morning with a tour of the Carnival Museum. Afternoon free to stroll through the city centre.

In the evening (subject to performance schedule) see a performance by the internationally famous Ballet Folklórico de Cutumba.

Sun 5 Apr  Santiago de Cuba – (Bayamo) – Camagüey
Depart Santiago and drive west to visit the basilica of El Cobre in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra. Cuba’s principal place of pilgrimage, it is named after the copper mines that formerly dominated the region’s economy and is the place to which Ernest Hemingway donated his Nobel Prize, later stolen. Lunch stop at the town of Bayamo, capital of Granma province, and the place where Manuel Cepedes declared the start of the war of independence from Spain in 1868, freeing his slaves to join the fight.

Continue to Camagüey. The nation’s third largest city, its centre is built like a maze to foil invaders after it was raided and burned by the Welsh pirate Henry Morgan in the 17th century. Visit the Swiss aid foundation Camaquito which funds cultural activities.

Dine early, then call in at the Café Literario to hear its student orchestra, see a performance by the internationally famous children’s dance and theatre group La Andariega.

Mon 6 Apr  Camagüey – (Sanctí Spiritus) – Trinidad
After breakfast visit the house of Nicolás Guillén, the national poet born here in 1902. Depart Camagüey and drive through Sugar Cane Valley, which is off the beaten track of tourism, to the unspoilt colonial town of Sanctí Spiritus, now home to Cuba’s Medical University.

Slavery in Cuba was at its height in the sugar industry in the early 19th century, when the many thousands of Africans whose influence has contributed so much to the country’s culture were kept in subjugation. From the Iznaga Tower in the Valley their movements were closely watched and you will have the opportunity to ascend the tower with its panoramic views over the canefields.

Continue from here to Trinidad, another UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most beautiful towns on the island. Founded in 1514, it is effectively one big open-air museum with well-preserved Spanish colonial architecture and cobbled streets where transport is still mainly by horse or bicycle.

Tue 7 Apr  History and architecture, Trinidad
Starting in the Plaza Mayor in the heart of Trinidad, visit some of its fascinating museums and galleries, beginning with the pre-Columbian archaeological collection housed in the 18th century Casa Padrón. Take in the Romantic Museum housed in the Palacio Brunet, with its collection of 18th and 19th century fine and decorative art, as well as the Museum of Colonial Architecture.

After a lunch break, call in at the Art Gallery with its fine collection of local work, and visit the pottery studio Taller Alfarero to see ceramicists at work. Take an early evening stroll through town before dinner followed by a visit to the local music bar Casa de la Trova.

Wed 8 Apr  Trinidad – Cienfuegos
Drive along the panoramic coastal road to Cienfuegos. Known as the “Pearl of the South”, Cienfuegos has the Caribbean’s finest collection of French neo-classical buildings, built by immigrants from Bordeaux and Louisiana, and benefited further from Spanish Enlightenment urban planning which has won it a UNESCO World Heritage listing. It has an 18th century fortress, a cathedral and extensive botanic gardens.

In the afternoon stroll over the Plaza Mayor with the nostalgic Terry Theatre where Caruso used to sing, and the 1917 Palacio de Valle, the most famous building in Cienfuegos with Gothic, Venetian and Moorish elements. Dine at the restaurant in the local yacht club.
Thu 9 Apr  Cienfuegos – (Santa Clara) – Havana

Early in the morning, drive to the Santa Clara memorial where Che Guevara is buried along with 29 of his fellow combatants killed in Bolivia in 1967. Their remains were recovered and brought here 30 years later, to be buried on the site of the Cuban Revolution’s final battle, led by Guevara.

Arrive back in Havana late afternoon. In the evening, relax over cocktails in Sloppy Joe’s Bar, the location of the film Our Man in Havana based on the Graham Greene novel.

Fri 10 Apr  Pan Americanism, writers and performance, Havana

In the morning, drive out of town to San Francisco de Paula to visit Finca Vigía, Ernest Hemingway’s house from 1939 to 1960 and the place where he wrote both For Whom the Bell Tolls and The Old Man and the Sea. It’s now a museum operated by the Cuban government.

After lunch back in central Havana, visit the Casa de las Americas, founded in 1959 to foster cultural links with the rest of Latin America. It publishes awards prizes and organises events in literature, the visual arts, performance arts, Caribbean research and women’s studies. You will have a guided tour of its extensive art collection and current exhibitions.

Later, performance schedule permitting, enjoy a rehearsal by the 16-piece orchestra Camerata Romeu, internationally famous for bringing a Cuban flavour, complete with singing and dancing, to a classical repertoire. Evening at leisure.

Sat 11 Apr  Contemporary art, Havana

Begin the day with a guided tour of the Wilfredo Lam Centre for Contemporary Art, Cuba’s finest contemporary museum, named after the outstanding artist. Visit the Taller Experimental de Grabado, Cuba’s leading printmaking workshop established in 1962 by mural artist Orlando Suarez with the support of Che Guevara. You will see printmakers at work and visit the small gallery where prints and etchings are on sale.

After lunch in a local restaurant visit the beautiful Vededo house of Milagros Borges Gomez, private curator and ambassador for aspiring contemporary Cuban painters.

Drive to the fishing village of Jaimanitas on the outskirts of the city to visit the house, gallery and street art project of naïve artist José Fuster, known as the Picasso of the Caribbean. Fusterlandia encompasses 80 houses, a chess park, an artists’ wall, and a theatre and community swimming pool.

Tonight enjoy a dinner and show by the Havana Queens dance ensemble under the direction of Rosario García Rodriguez and Balbina Asprón Chavez – an evening of outstanding performance, from classical ballet to flamenco to modern dance, with characteristic elements of rumba and salsa.

Sun 12 Apr  Havana (Hershey)

Depart after breakfast to drive to the little station where you board the Hershey electric train on the south-east line built more than a century ago by the American chocolate manufacturer. Today it offers a unique travel experience with live music and an open bar on the way through the cane fields, with a stop for lunch in a garden setting before returning to Havana.

With an afternoon at leisure you could visit the rumba session that kicks off after lunch at the Callejón de Hamel. This street is the capital’s centre of Afro-Cuban culture, with its colourful murals, art and craft shops and iconography of Santería. Artist Salvador González Escalona has led its conversion into a major cultural centre, and its Sunday afternoons, with impromptu dancing, are the perfect opportunity to experience Cuban music at its most exuberant.

In the evening enjoy a farewell dinner at the local Club Havana.

Mon 13 Apr  Havana to Sydney

Tour arrangements conclude with a transfer to Havana International Airport, for suggested return flights, via Mexico City, where you can connect with flights to the USA and Australia.
Tour Prices

Per person twin-share  AUD 8,950
Single supplement*  AUD 1,050
Deposit per person  AUD 500
Final payment due  28 January 2015

*Single travellers may request to share. Please advise at time of booking.

Tour code  AG1505

Fitness level  ABOVE AVERAGE

Please see booking conditions for fitness level definitions.

Suggested airline  Emirates/Qantas

Qantas has connections from Australia to Mexico City via Los Angeles or Dallas Fort Worth.

Please contact Renaissance Tours for assistance with airfares and flight reservations.

Tour price includes

- Accommodation in centrally located best available hotels with daily breakfast (B)
- Meals as per itinerary (L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Drinks with welcome and farewell dinners
- Flights from Mexico City to Havana and Santiago to Havana
- Transfers on arrival and departure if travelling on suggested flights
- Comprehensive sightseeing including entrance fees as per itinerary
- Lectures and talks with your tour leader throughout
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers
- Cuban Visa
- Hotel porterage (1 piece per person).

Tour price does not include

- International airfares
- Transfer on arrival and departure if not travelling on suggested flights
- Items of a personal nature, including telephone, laundry, mini-bar etc.
- Airport porterage
- Travel insurance

Your hotels

Havana – Iberostar Parque Central Hotel
Cienfuegos – Union Hotel
Trinidad – Iberostar Trinidad
Camaguey – Hotel Gran Hotel
Santiago – Hotel Melia Santiago

NB. Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted
Terms & Conditions

HOW TO BOOK
Complete, sign and return the Booking Form available from Renaissance Tours with your deposit and page one of your passport.

DEPOSIT / FINAL PAYMENTS
Your deposit is due at the time of booking and is used to pay hotel, airline, performance tickets and/or other deposits. It is non-refundable in the event of your cancellation.

Final payment is due 60 days before departure. Failure to make the final payment by the due date may result in cancellation of your booking and loss of deposit.

Payments are accepted in cash and by cheque, bank transfer, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. A 3% service charge applies for payment by American Express and Diners Club.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

a) Cancellation by You – Cancellation charges will be applied as shown below, calculated from the day written notification is received by Renaissance Tours. In addition to cancellation fees for tours operated by Renaissance Tours as shown below, airlines, hotels and other third parties may impose additional charges.

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<th>Number of days before departure</th>
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<td>60 days or more</td>
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<td>59 – 45 days</td>
<td>25% of tour cost</td>
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<td>44 – 31 days</td>
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<td>30 – 15 days</td>
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<td>Less than 15 days</td>
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The above cancellation charges include applicable GST.

In addition to the above, cancellation charges may apply for additional arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours, such as air tickets, hotels and travel insurance premium. If the reason for cancellation is covered by the insurance policy, you may be able to reclaim these charges.

b) Cancellation by Us – We reserve the right to cancel a tour for any reason (such as failure to reach minimum tour participant numbers). Except for force majeure, we will not cancel a tour less than 60 days before departure. No further compensation will be paid in the event of cancellation by Renaissance Tours. A full refund of monies paid for tour costs will be the full extent of our liability.

Cancellation and/or amendment fees may apply for additional travel arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours.

PASSPORTS, VISAS AND VACCINATIONS
All travellers must be in possession of a valid passport – most countries require a 6-month validity from your date of entry or exit. For some countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, India, Russia), visas are included in the tour cost and will be arranged by Renaissance Tours prior to travel. For other countries, it is your responsibility to ensure you have the appropriate visa(s).

You are also responsible for obtaining all necessary inoculations and preventative medicines as may be required for the duration of the tour.

TOUR PRICES
Prices quoted in our tour information are based on exchange rates, cost of services and applicable taxes at the time of publication. Prices may be subject to change in the event of significant currency fluctuations or the introduction of new taxes, up until final payment is received.

In the event of a price increase, whether because of a currency fluctuation, increase in taxes or a correction in advertised prices, we will advise you and you have the option of accepting the amended prices, inclusions and booking conditions or withdrawing from the tour and receiving a full refund of all monies paid.

Once final payment is received, all prices will be guaranteed and no surcharges will apply.

TRAVEL INSURANCE
It is a condition of travel that you are covered by comprehensive travel insurance for international tours. Your travel insurance can be arranged by Renaissance Tours.

FITNESS AND PARTICIPATION

Most of our tours require a MODERATE level of fitness.

However, in certain destinations (e.g. Silk Road, Central Asia, Outback Australia, tropical destinations) or in certain seasons (e.g. mid-winter, mid-summer) or because of the nature of travel (e.g. remote rail), certain tours will require an ABOVE AVERAGE or CHALLENGING level of fitness.

If you (or we) have any doubts about your level of fitness, you may be required to have a doctor’s appraisal. This would require your doctor to read the itinerary of your chosen tour; including the fitness level, and provide you (and us) with a written confirmation of your ability to participate.

MODERATE
For the overall benefit of the group, all tour members must possess a moderate level of mobility, including the ability to:

- negotiate airports and railway stations without wheelchair assistance
- use combined shower/bath facilities (it is impossible to guarantee walk-in shower facilities)
- undertake walking tours of 1–2 hours duration, including using stairs, walking over cobblestones and other uneven surfaces
- stand for long periods in museums and other sites
- embark / disembark coaches, trains and other methods of transportation without assistance
- handle your own luggage

ABOVE AVERAGE
In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- undertake walking tours of 2–3 hours
- climb staircases of 100 or more steps

CHALLENGING
In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- handle extremes of temperature (e.g. below 0 or above 35 degrees)
- handle extremes of altitudes (e.g. 4000 metres and above)

You can find the full terms & conditions on the Renaissance Tours booking form. They can also be found at www.renaissancetours.com.au/booking-conditions/ or we would be happy to post you a copy on request.
TRAVEL WITH FRIENDS IN 2015

Your travel agent is

Your travel agent is

Renaissance Tours

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